

2022

County Supported Branches

Guide for Branches

rbl.org.uk



ROYAL BRITISH LEGION

Over the years you have told the Membership Council of the increasing difficulty in finding Branch Officers, particularly Treasurers. This often resulted in the loss of branches because they were unable to form a compliant committee or meet the necessary compliance levels by returning their annual accounts or MS1 forms.

To enable these branches to continue to deliver the charitable aims of the Royal British Legion in their communities, the Membership Council introduced the County Supported Branch. This governance model replaced sub-branches and allows branches to continue their charitable activities. The scheme was piloted in 2016 and rolled out nationally in July 2018.

What is a County Supported Branch?

A County Supported Branch (CSB) is a method of operating for Branches that are struggling under the traditional compliance requirements. It enables a branch to retain membership, to stay active and within community and to retain the standard.

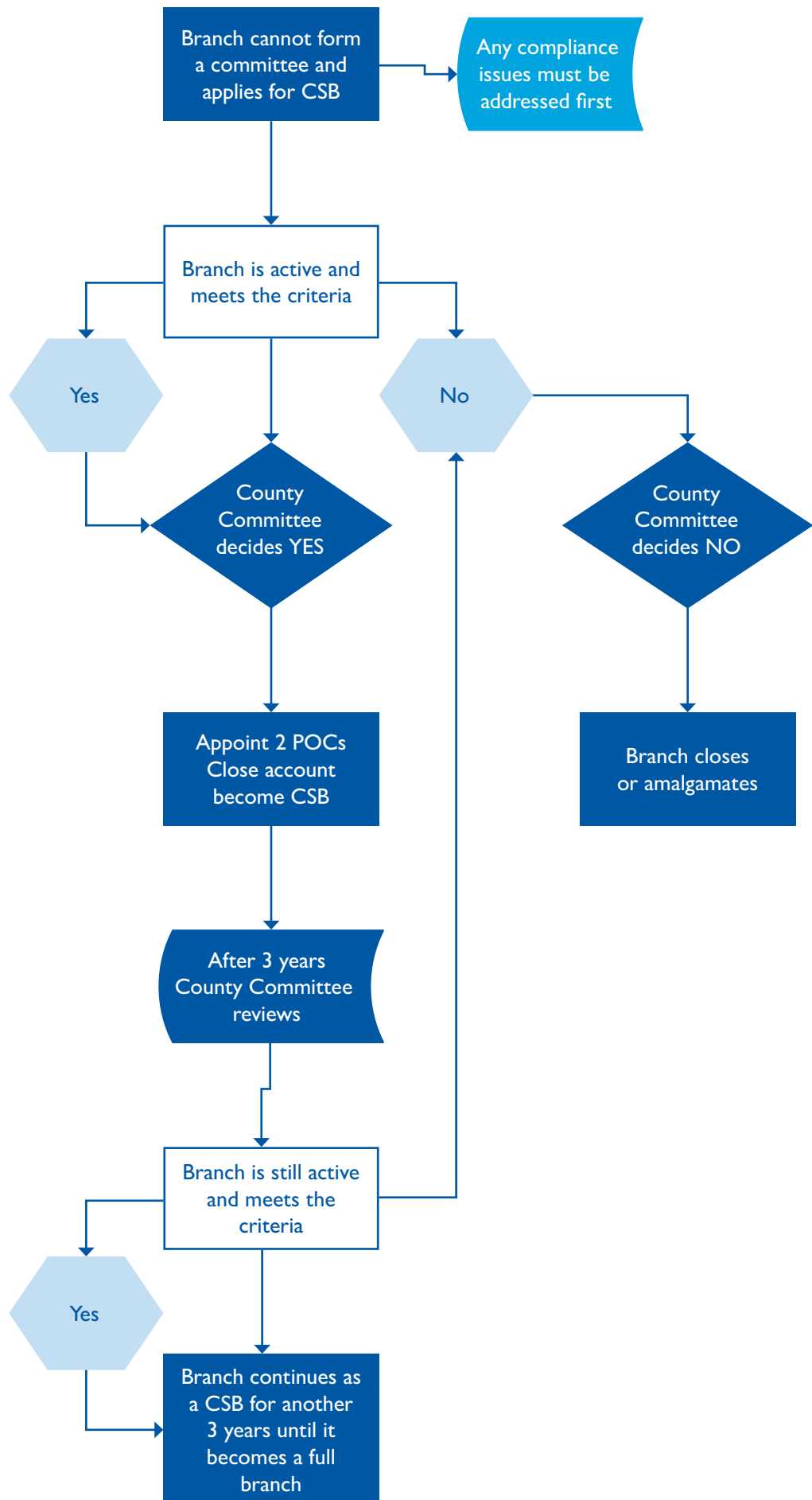
- Instead of a traditional committee, the Branch will only need to elect two people to act as a Point of Contact (PoC)
- The PoCs must have and frequently use email addresses
- The PoCs will act as the link between the Branch and the County/ RBL HQ.
- The CSB's funds will be administered by the County Treasurer as an earmarked fund in the County accounts. CSBs will not have their own bank account.
- The Branch membership will retain the right to decide how their funds are used (within RBL rules)
- At AGM (or a special meeting of the Branch membership) the Branch sets the limits of expenditure that the PoCs and County Treasurer are authorised to process without seeking Branch approval.

- The Branch will retain its Standard and continue to organise and partake in activities in their local community
- The Branch is obliged to hold a minimum of two meetings a year, one of which will be the Branch AGM.

Eligibility criteria

Whether or not a Branch can become a CSB is a decision that rests entirely with the County/ District Committee. The decision needs to be noted in minutes or communicated in writing to the MSO. It can be a temporary or a permanent solution and it is up to the County Committee how many CSBs they are prepared to take on. The following Eligibility Criteria Guidelines have been created to guide County Committees when deciding about whether to take on a Branch as a CSB.

- The Branch is not able to function in its present form for a specified reason [e.g., unable to form a committee, unable to recruit a Treasurer].
- The Branch is unable to fully comply with RBL compliance requirements (governance and financial).
- The Branch is active in their local area and closing would result in a tangible loss of RBL representation in their local area
- There is no likelihood of potential Committee members coming forward, even if the Branch were to face closure
- The branch is continuously meeting at least one of the following:
 1. The Branch is actively trying to **recruit** new members
 2. The Branch is providing **comradeship**
 3. The Branch is parading its **Standard** and is visible in the community
 4. The Branch is committed to delivering the **Branch Community Support** activities
 5. The Branch is delivering on wider **charitable objectives** as specified in the Royal Charter
- Each County Supported Branch will be reviewed by the County Committee every three years to ensure that it still meets the eligibility criteria



Responsibilities of Outgoing Branch Officers

| Who | Action |
|----------------------------|--|
| The Branch Treasurer | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Must turn over all funds to the County Treasurer. This includes making over a cheque for the full amount in the Branch's bank account. 2. Is required to compile a final set of accounts in the same way as required for the end of the Field Financial Year. This has to be sent to Finance or emailed to financesupportdesk@britishlegion.org.uk 3. Will close the Branch bank account. The County Treasurer can provide the Branch Treasurer with a template letter to assist with this. 4. Once the bank account has been closed, the Branch Treasurer must provide the County Treasurer with the confirmation of the closure of the account and the final Bank Statement showing a nil balance |
| The Branch Secretary | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Must hand over any hardcopy paperwork relating to the Branch that they may hold (e.g. minutes of meetings). 2. Any hard copy membership listings must be destroyed using a cross cut shredder. If the Branch Secretary doesn't possess a cross cut shredder then any hardcopy listings should be given to the MSO for destruction in confidential waste. 3. Any assets of the Branch (i.e. laptops, gazebos, promotional items, etc.) should be accounted for and the Branch Secretary should ensure that the Branch Asset Register is up to date and handed over to the PoC. |
| The Branch Standard Bearer | <p>If the Standard Bearer is going to continue in that office, then they should retain the Branch Standard. However, if they are not going to continue in that office then they should hand the Standard, along with any other Standard Bearer equipment that is the property of the Branch, to the PoC.</p> |

Terms of Reference for Points of Contact

The purpose of the Point of Contact (PoC) is to provide the link between the Branch and the County/Head Office. This will mainly be achieved through regular communication with the relevant MSO, largely through electronic media.

The duties of the Point of Contact include:

- Act as the point of contact for receipt of correspondence issued by the County Committee, staff, the Membership Council and Board of Trustees and to ensure that all correspondence received is communicated to the Branch for appropriate action.
- Act in a timely manner with requests from County and National level, as well as being the key liaison between members of the Branch and the County representatives.
- Arrange the AGM and one other meeting required as a condition of being a CSB.
- Liaise with local authorities/other organisations about local Remembrance activities.
- Encourage members to arrange and take part in activities to promote the RBL in the local area.
- Ensure that the any Branch activities comply with charity law and the requirements of the Charity Commission as regulator.
- Ensure the Branch does not breach any of the requirements or rules set out in the Royal Charter and Membership Handbook and that it remains true to the charitable purposes and objects set out there.
- Receive regular updates from the County Treasurer on the state of the Branch's finance and communicate these to the Branch membership at meetings.
- Together with County Treasurer sign off and BFI withdrawals.

General Finance rules – Use of RBL Funds

With the transition to County Supported Branch status, it is vital that Branch PoCs be aware of the rules contained within the Membership handbook regarding the dos and don'ts surrounding the use of a RBL Branch's funds.

What follows are some key points but the full text can be found in the Membership Management Handbook.

1. Reasonable expenses from CSB funds are allowed for Branch business including the purchase of relevant equipment.
2. All funds held by RBL Branches, including CSBs, are charitable funds and as such fall within the responsibility of the Board of Trustees. They do not "belong" to the Branch. Should a Branch cease to exist, the funds remain an asset of the RBL.
3. The MSO is obliged to inform Head Office of any donation received by a Branch of more than £5000 (but these funds will be retained at local level).
4. Branches are permitted to use Branch funds to undertake Remembrance events, but a Branch must attempt to secure services at little or no cost. Expenditure must be reasonable and proportionate. Local Authorities must be encouraged to bear the cost of any Civil Act of Remembrance (i.e., Remembrance Sunday Services), even if the RBL assists in the organisation.
5. If a Branch is made aware of a beneficiary requiring support, they must encourage the beneficiary to get in touch with the Contact Centre. The Branch can make a payment to Head Office to support an individual case but cannot make payments directly to a beneficiary.
6. No funds may be expended on the upkeep/maintenance of War Memorials unless the Memorial is owned by the Branch.

7. No fundraising activity should run at a loss as expenditure incurred would not qualify as charitable. All surplus funds should either be donated to the Poppy Appeal or Branch funds (depending on the stated purpose of the fundraising activity. The donor must always be clear about what they are donating money for).
8. Any funds raised specifically for Welfare may only be used for that purpose in accordance with the Royal Charter. A Branch must not “hold” funds when they can be used to provide support to our beneficiaries. Donations are given in the expectation that they will be used for charitable work, not for being held in a Branch account. It is suggested that any considerable funds are forwarded to the Poppy Appeal or the County Welfare Fund.
9. Branches may not make donations to other Charities unless permission has been granted by the External Grants Team or the Board of Trustees. RBL members may not raise money for other charities whilst declaring themselves to be RBL members (i.e. by wearing the RBL membership badge, whilst standing at a RBL branded stand).
10. Social events must not be subsidised by the CSB. Expenditure incurred and income received may pass through the CSB’s earmarked fund in the County account but must be earmarked for that purpose only. Surplus funds left over after the event must either be transferred to Branch funds or the Poppy Appeal.
11. A PoC or County Treasurer who misuses or misappropriates CSB funds could, after due process, be held personally liable to repay those funds to the CSB.
12. Any funds held in Trust at Head Office may only be used for the purposes specified within that Trust document. Please ensure that if applicable, your Branch is fully conversant with those terms. Any such funds must be declared when applying for CSB status.
13. If a Legacy is left to a CSB this must be referred directly to the Legacy team at Head Office as they have the legal expertise to deal with it. Failure to refer to Head Office could result in the loss of the Legacy. If a Legacy is £5000 or less, the funds will be transferred directly to the CSB’s funds. If it is a larger amount then the Legacy will be held in Trust at Head Office and its funds can be accessed with help from the Area Manager.
14. Branches, including CSBs, must not subsidise RBL Clubs in any form. To do so would be a misuse of charitable funds and might result in the PoC being required to personally reimburse the Charity. The County Treasurer will always refuse a request to use CSB funds to subsidise a RBL Club, even where a Branch AGM has voted to use Branch funds in this way.
15. Branch Property Trusts are not assets of the Branch but are separate Trusts linked to the Branch and usually require their funds to be used for the benefit of beneficiaries in a specific geographical area.

If you are ever in doubt about whether a payment should be made using Branch funds, please seek advice from the County Treasurer/MSO first.

