

2022

County Supported Branches

Guide for Counties

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ROYAL BRITISH LEGION

The Membership Council is aware of the increasing difficulty in finding Branch Officers, particularly Treasurers. This has often resulted in the loss of branches because they were unable to form a compliant committee or to 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 (Objects as defined by the Royal Charter), the Membership Council introduced the County Supported Branch.

This governance model replaced sub-branches and allowed 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 branch to retain membership, to stay active within community and to retain the standard.

The key features are as follows:

- 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

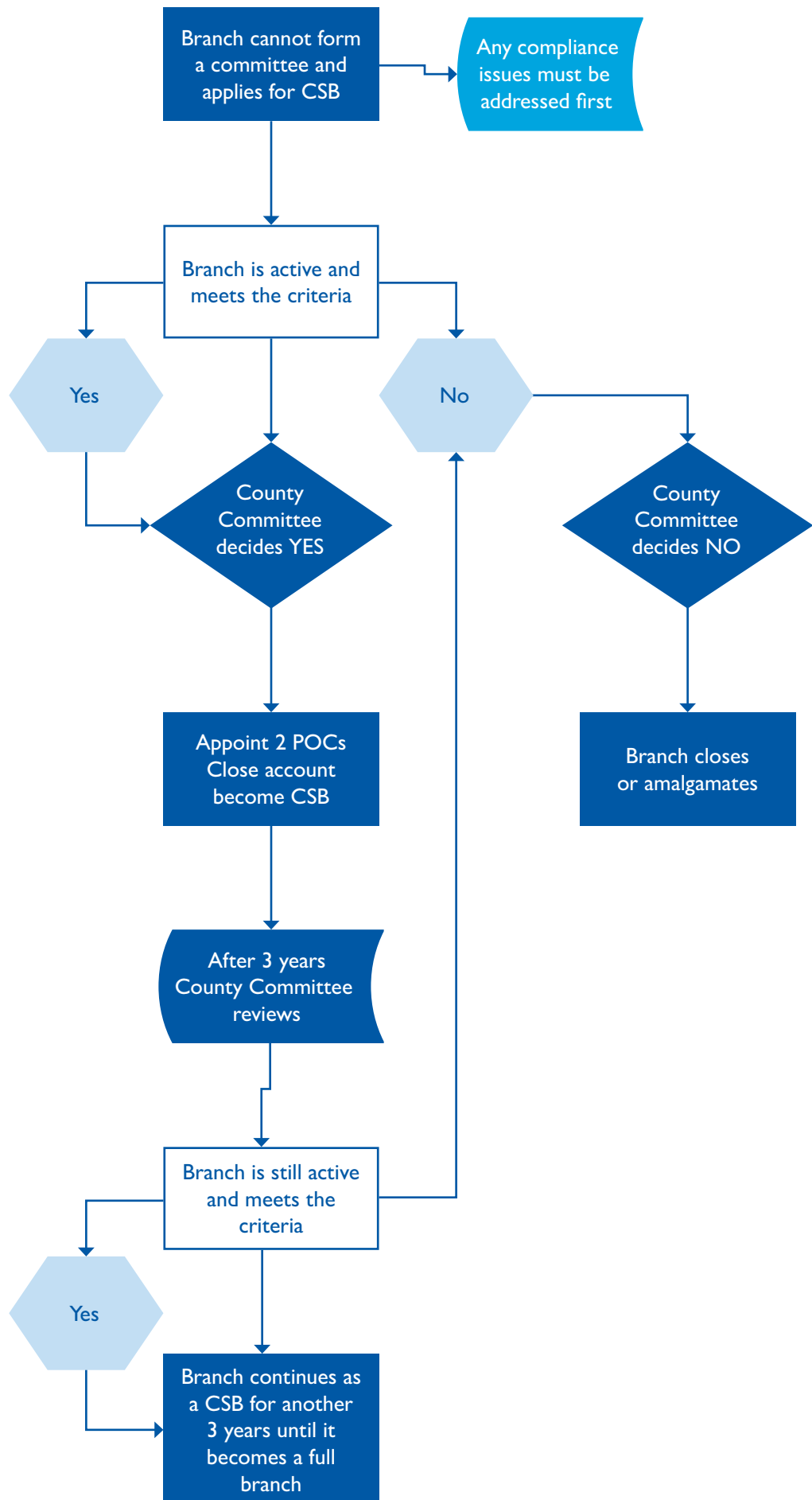
of expenditure that the PoCs and County Treasurer are authorised to process without seeking Branch approval.

- 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 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. In the judgement of the County Committee, 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.



Steps to become a CSB

Who	Action
Responsibilities of County Treasurer for CSB Funds	<p>The CSB has no bank account or Treasurer of its own, all accounting of income and expenditure of the CSBs funds is done by the County Treasurer on behalf of the CSB.</p> <p>The key points to bear in mind are as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. When the Branch's application to become CSB is accepted by the County Committee, you need to let the MSO and the Finance Department at Head Office know as soon as possible – please email Financesupportdesk@britishlegion.org.uk. This is also the email to be used for the final set of accounts which must be completed before the Branch becomes CSB. The Finance Department will identify any restricted funds held by the Branch and advise how these should be disposed of. The Branch will also then be marked as a CSB on Care.2. You will need to get in touch with the outgoing Branch Treasurer and get them to make out a cheque to the value of the funds currently in the Branch's bank account(s).3. When you receive this cheque, you will need to pay the money into the County account and set it up as an earmarked fund on LOMAS.4. The outgoing Branch Treasurer will also need to provide you with a set of final, independently examined accounts. Keep a copy for your records and forward these on the Finance Department at Head Office.5. The Branch Treasurer will need to close the Branch bank account. There is a template letter included in this guide which you can provide them with to help with this process.6. When the Branch bank account is closed, either the Branch Treasurer or the bank directly will need to provide you with confirmation of the account's closure and the final bank statement showing a nil balance. You will need to take a copy of these for your records and then pass this on to the MSO so that they can inform the Membership Services and Finance departments at Head Office.7. You and the PoC for the CSB will need to agree with the Branch membership the limit above which expenditure needs the approval of the membership.

Steps to become a CSB

Who	Action
<p>Responsibilities of County Treasurer for CSB Funds.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. When the Branch receives any income, they should pass it on to you with a covering letter explaining where it came from, or you should enable the PoC to pay the money directly into the County account, making sure they inform you when they have done this and what the money was for. 9. In order to gain access to the Branch funds, you will need to supply the PoC with the Drawdown form (included) which the PoC will need to fill in and submit to you each time that they need to withdraw money from the Branch funds. 10. You will need to provide each CSB under your care with a report on the state of their finances at least twice a year (to coincide with their two Branch meetings). 11. Together with PoC you will authorise the branch BFI withdrawals where appropriate.
<p>Responsibilities of County Chairman/ Committee</p>	<p>After approving an application for Branch to change to CSB status, although the County Treasurer will have the most hands-on involvement with the CSB, the County Chairman and Committee are strongly encouraged to maintain involvement.</p> <p>The Membership Handbook states that County Committees must give guidance to Branches without interfering in their day-to-day activities unless a Branch falls short of its Charter obligations, in which case those obligations should be enforced. This is also true for County Committees and CSBs.</p> <p>The County Chairman should mentor the CSB's PoCs, offering guidance on how to keep the Branch membership engaged, and advising on opportunities for activities (i.e., joining a stall at a County show or similar). Where the Chairman is not able to do this himself, they should delegate this task to other members of the Committee.</p> <p>The County Committee must seek regular reports on Branch activity from CSBs under their jurisdiction in the same way as they do with their other Branches. Every three years, the County Committee will review the CSB status and approve extension, recommend return to full branch status or a closure if the branch is inactive.</p>



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.

