

BUC Latest News – 10 October 2013

Churches and Charity Law

The Government has now published its response to Lord Hodgson's review of the Charities Act. Of particular significance to Baptist churches is the decision to extend the exempting regulations for churches with an income under £100k; these regulations were due to expire in March 2014. This means that churches with incomes under £100k will not be required to register with the Charity Commission in the near future. The Government says:

We are inclined to take the view that now is not the right time to require smaller exempted charities to register with the Charity Commission. Our main concern is that to do so would impose an unnecessary regulatory burden on several thousand small charities at a time when many may be under pressure. We will set out our specific proposals once we have concluded discussions with the exempted charities representative bodies later this year.

Other particularly noteworthy comments from the Government include:

- They agree that the Charity Commission should not charge the charities it regulates
- They agree that a system of fines for late returns to the Charity Commission should be developed
- They favour the introduction of voluntary registration for those charities that are not required to be registered and will undertake a feasibility study on this
- They welcome the Charity Commission's work to develop more effective partnerships with charity sector umbrella bodies as a means of supporting and improving compliance
- Public benefit is best left to case law rather than for Parliament to attempt to define it in statute
- It should be a matter of best practice rather than a legal requirement for trusteeship to be limited to three terms of no more than three years' service each
- They agree that individual charities should adopt and publish internal procedures for disputes and complaints and that umbrella bodies are ideally placed to support charities with this
- They do not agree that unregistered charities should be required to disclose this fact on correspondence and cheques.

The full report can be found here:

<http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm87/8700/8700.pdf>

Extension of the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme

The Government recently announced changes to the scope and operation of the Listed Places of Worship grant scheme, these changes came into effect on 1 October 2013. From this date, works to pipe organs, turret clocks, bells and bell ropes are eligible for claims under the scheme. More importantly, professional services directly related to eligible building work such as architects' and surveyors' fees are also eligible.

The changes to the scope of the scheme will be accompanied by administrative changes to simplify claiming:

- In any twelve month period, each place of worship may submit one claim using eligible invoices with a value of less than £1000, but more than £500 (excluding the VAT paid). This is in addition to an unlimited number of claims where the value of eligible work carried out (excluding VAT) is £1000 or greater
- Scanned or photocopied invoices are now accepted to support claims
- The scheme will process payment runs each week to deliver a smoother flow of payments to applicants. This will result in most applicants receiving their grant more quickly.

Full details of all changes and how they will apply are detailed here: <http://www.lpwcheme.org.uk/>