

WEST NORTHUMBERLAND COMMUNITY BUILDINGS CONSORTIUM

Minutes of the Management Committee held at the Newton and Bywell Community Hall on 19 November 2008.

- 1 **Members Present** Mike Wood (Chairman), Malcolm Caisley, Michael Elphick, Adrian Hinchcliffe, Pam Niven, Pam Pryor, Keith Robson, Elisabeth Stewart

Representatives - Community Action – Northumberland - Jane Hart.

- 2 **Apologies for Absence – Norman Hooks.**

- 3 **Minutes of the Meeting held 16 September 2008.**

These were approved and signed by the Chair.

- 4 **Matters Arising from the Minutes**

(a) Discretionary Council Tax for Charities

Mike Wood reported that he had attended a consultation meeting with representatives of the County Council. Also present were representatives of Community Action Northumberland. The meeting had been called to obtain comments on proposals for the determination of whether charities would qualify for the discretionary element of Council Tax. The Council are proposing to use a claim form and points system. Members will have to complete the form and gain points depending upon their answers to several questions.

At the meeting Mike was able to challenge some of the points which the County were consulting on. One of these points was that those charities with cash balances were to be penalised. This was challenged on the basis that cash balances are required as a cover for routine operations and for future known or unknown refurbishment or rebuilding. The County had promised to review their proposals in the light of the comments received. Nothing further had been heard since the meeting.

Action

It was agreed that the Secretary on behalf of the Consortium should again write lobbying letters to the Leader and Chief Executive on this issue and copying in some of the local Councillors.

(b) Progress with the Constitution

Mike Wood reported that he now had all the necessary signatories. He had noticed that an error had occurred in the typing of the document and the word ‘Buildings’ was missing on the first page of the constitution in section (c) Objects. It was agreed that this omission was material to the meaning of the paragraph and should be included. The Secretary would arrange for this. The meeting also agree that the original copy of the Constitution bearing the signatures would be held by the Secretary.

Action The Secretary to amend sheet one of the Constitution and to retain the original copy of the Constitution bearing the signatories.

(c) Newsletter

A Newsletter had been issued in October and it was agreed that a further one would go out in December.

Action

The Secretary to issue a Newsletter in late November or early December.

- 5 **Membership**

It was reported that there were now 31 members. A review took place of the potential membership and it was agreed that there are up to a further 30 community buildings that would be eligible for membership. It was agreed not to take any further recruitment action until early in 2009.

- 6 **Insurance Offer – Progress and Issues.**

(a) Contact with the Insurance Companies

The Secretary reported that a list of the members had been sent to the Insurance Companies. Two had asked if they could have the names and addresses of the members so that they could write and introduce themselves. Following discussion it was thought that we do not have the specific agreement of members to releasing this information and therefore under the data protection act we could not do this. However, it was noted that some of this information is already in the public domain on the Charity Commission web-site, but not all Community Buildings may be registered.

One of the Insurance Companies had requested the postal code of each Community Building so that they could mark them on their geographical information system. It was agreed to release this information for it would not transgress the data protection act.

Action

- 1 The names and addresses of members will not to be released.
- 2 Postcodes of the Community Buildings to be released

(b) Anecdotal Information on Insurance

Two members reported that they had saved considerable amounts on their premiums this year. One had saved £400 on a previous premium of £1,200 and another had saved £1,000 from the premiums of two halls.

(c) Value of Buildings for Insurance Purposes

The Secretary reported a poor response to the question he had circulated on how members establish the insured value of their Buildings. Most seemed to use the Insurance Company index to increase the value.

(d) Trustees Indemnity

The question of whether the Trustees should be indemnified through insurance was raised. Jane Hart commented that this may depend upon the constitution of each Community Building. In law charities are not allowed to expend resources on indemnifying Trustees unless the constitution provides for it.

There was a general discussion about assessing the risk to trustees which every Charity should do. Some risks can be mitigated by insurance but it was considered important that charities do this periodically.

(e) Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)

In relation to the discussion at (d) above reference was made to the new status of CIO which is now provided for in Charity law. This status enables charities to become incorporated thereby limiting the liability of Trustees and without having to register under the Companies Act. Jane Hart commented that a model constitution for CIO is now out but it is early days and more information is needed about the status and what it involves. The meeting agreed that we should keep this under review.

7 Initiatives for the benefit of Members

(a) Emergency Lighting and Fire Alarm Systems

The guidance receive from the Northumbria Fire Brigade (via Louise Currie) is that fire systems and emergency lighting should be maintained professionally once per annum. Guidance from the companies is that it should be twice per annum. Community Building management committees will have to decide the frequency of these checks that they wish to undertake. Their own risk analysis may direct them to an appropriate one. The point was also made that some Community Buildings do not have a fire alarm system.

(b) Fire Extinguishers

All Community Buildings must have fire extinguishers and there is a requirement to have them inspected once per annum. Anecdotal evidence from some members indicated that many different companies are in use for this service. It is clear that a significant part of the cost of the service is travel to each Community Building. One member commented that the arrangements in place in their locality is that the contractor that is used inspects the extinguishers in three other establishments at the same time to keep the cost down.

(c) Possible Consortium Initiatives for (a) and (b) above.

It was thought possible that the Consortium could approach the companies that are currently in the market for these services to see if they will offer a benefit to members. It may be that it will be necessary to group Community Buildings together so that several can be 'serviced' at the same time to avoid travel.

It was considered that the management Committee have inadequate knowledge of the needs and arrangements of members for these two requirements and that more knowledge is needed before contractors can be approached. The following was agreed:-

Action

- Members of the Management Committee would email Mike Wood with details of the arrangements for their Community Buildings and the names of the contractors that they use.
- This issue will be mentioned in the next Newsletter with a request for members to put forward these details for their Halls.

(d) Testing of Portable Appliances

The requirement here is that all portable appliances used in Community Buildings must be tested and certified for electrical safety every twelve months and a green sticker placed on the appliance to indicate that it has been tested and has passed. If they fail the test a red sticker should be attached to the appliance and they must be taken out of use. It was also pointed out that any appliances that are brought in to a Community Building by a user have also to be subjected to the test before they can be used and this should be in the conditions for the hire of the Building.

The electrical tests can be carried out by a person who has attended an appropriate training course and has the necessary equipment. Training courses can be arranged by the Consortium working with Community Action Northumberland. The equipment could be purchased by the Consortium and one member produced an advert from the internet which priced the equipment at £449 plus VAT.

Action

It was agreed that more information was required from Members before an agreed approach could be formulated for this item. This would be done through the Newsletter.

(e) Electrical Installation Inspection

All Community Buildings have to have their electrical installation inspected, tested and certified every five years. This is clearly another area that a joint approach could be negotiated by the Consortium. This too would be mentioned in the next Newsletter.

(f) Electricity

The Secretary stated that he would shortly be shopping around the market to see what contracts are available for the supply of electricity. The current supplier to their Community Building had given notice of 160% rise on the kilowatt price from next February. He said that he would learn from this exercise and would see whether there are any points that can be passed on to members of the Consortium.

8 Web- Site

Mike Wood reported on progress with developing a web-site for the Consortium. The model to be used is that of Rural Click and Simon Bland has agreed that we can develop through Phases 1 and 2 without any charge. It does mean that we will have to develop the web- site ourselves.

There was discussion on a domain name. Firstly it was agreed that the Consortium would acquire its own domain name and that this would cost around £7. The length of the domain name was considered important. The full name is too long to be the domain name and therefore it was agreed that it would have to be shorted to an acronym. A number of variations were considered but the final decision was left to Mike Wood.

Action

Mike Wood to progress the development of the web-site and to identify and pay for an appropriate domain name.

9 Treasurer's Report

Elizabeth Stewart reported that the Bank Account was now fully operational and that the Consortium had a balance of £310. The Bank had also set up an exemption from paying tax on interest. It was pointed out that a number of officials, including Community Action - Northumberland had incurred expenses but had not yet claimed.

10 Next General Meeting for Members

The Committee thought that this should be organised in the spring or summer of 2009. The Committee also supported a suggestion put forward by Norman Hooks that the main topic for the meeting should be a presentation on energy efficiency in Community Buildings including the use of the new renewable technologies.

11 Alan Hedley

It was noted that Alan Hedley has now left Community Action-Northumberland on redundancy caused by a reduction in funding. The Management Committee were very much aware of the contribution that Alan had made in the formation of the Consortium and many of the Community Building and other organisations throughout Northumberland. They considered that huge thanks should go to Alan for his contribution including his wealth of knowledge which had benefited the voluntary sector for over a decade.

Action

It was agreed that the Secretary should write to Alan expressing our thanks for what he has achieved.

- 12 Community Action Northumberland**
Jane Hart said that Community Action Northumberland were to conduct a strategic review of the activities that they undertake. They would like to hear from the Consortium on the level of support and service that they would like from CAN in the coming years.
Action
It was agreed that the Secretary would compile a suggested statement from the Consortium which would be circulated to all Management Committee members for agreement before despatch to CAN.
- 13 The National Lottery**
Jane Hart drew attention to a consultation that is being conducted by the National Lottery to determine what the shape of their future funding policies should be and who should be the beneficiaries. Views are requested between 17 November 2008 and 27 February 2009.
Action
It was agreed that the Secretary would publicise this through the Newsletter.
- 14 Licensing of Music in Community Buildings**
Alan Hedley had consulted the Secretary on some options for change which were proposed for 2009 in the licensing of public buildings for the playing and recording of music. The option which meant least change for Community Buildings was supported. The outcome of the consultation has not been released.
- 15 Tynedale Community Guide**
The Secretary had been in touch with the Hexham Courant to ensure that the Consortium was listed in the 2009 guide. Members commented that they thought the structure of the guide was poor and some said they had requested entries that had not appeared.
- 16 Membership of the Management Committee**
Pam Niven stated that she may have to resign due to coming off the Committee of her Community Building. Following discussion, it was noted that members are on the Management Committee of the Consortium in their own right and not as representatives of their Community Building. Members encouraged Pam to remain as a member of the management Committee of the Consortium until the next AGM.
- 17 Length of Meeting**
The meeting had lasted 3 hours and 15 minutes and members considered that this was too long. It was agreed that future meetings had to be more focused and should last no longer than two hours. It may help if the main presenters could circulate notes of their items with the agenda to avoid unnecessary discussion at the meeting.
- 18 Next Meeting of the management Committee**
Will be held on Wednesday 21 January 2009 at the Slaley Commemoration Hall commencing at 9.30am.

Signed

Date