

WEST NORTHUMBERLAND COMMUNITY BUILDINGS CONSORTIUM
(A Self Help Group Run by Members for Members)

ANNUAL REPORT 2014/15

1 Management Committee.

The Management Committee had the following membership: Mike Wood (Chair) Greenhead; David Easby Wall; Michael Elphick, (Web Site), Slaley; Adrian Hinchcliffe (Secretary); Pam Pryor Riding Mill; Andy Pryor (Treasurer from 15.04.15) Riding Mill; Keith Robson, Slaley; Georgia Shorrock, Gilsland; Matthew Singleton (PAT Testing Coordinator); Liz Stewart (Treasurer to 15.14.15) Greenhead; Roly Taylor, Wall; Margaret Weatherly, Slaley.

The Committee met on four occasions during the year.

Enormous thanks are expressed to the officials and committee for the service given during the year.

Sincere thanks are expressed to Liz Stewart who left the area in April. Liz had been the Treasurer of the Consortium from its inception in 2008. Andy Pryor volunteered to take on this role and joined the Committee in April. Many thanks to Andy for taking on this role.

The following business has been dealt with by the Committee.

2 Membership

Membership stands at 63. During the year Otterburn Sports and Leisure Centre and Prudhoe Community Partnership (the Spetchells Centre in Prudhoe) became members.

3 Communications with Members

One Newsletter was issued in June. The web site www.westnorthumberlandcbc.org.uk continues to be the main method of making information and advice available to members. In addition numerous circular emails have been sent to members on a full range of topics. Individual email enquiries from members are answered as quickly as possible.

Changes in officials at some member Halls are not always notified to the Consortium which means that information and other emails are going to the wrong persons.

4 Role of Secretary

The Secretary's move from West Northumberland has caused the Committee to review the duties undertaken by him. To this end the Committee has agreed that from the 2015 AGM the position of Membership Secretary should be created and the management of the Northumberland Energy Club will be treated as a separate official position. Also, the management of the PAT Testing Scheme could be transferred from the duties of the Secretary if a suitable volunteer could be found.

These changes will require the membership records to be held centrally and accessible to a number of officials. How this can be achieved is being considered.

5 Web Site Operations

Michael Elphick has again managed the development and operations of the Consortium Web Site which is a vital communications tool for the Consortium. The usage of the web site continues to grow and it offers a service to all members to advertise their Halls.

The Committee has been trying to find an understudy for Michael and this need is becoming more acute.

6 Northumberland Energy Club

This Club is owned by the Consortium and is run in partnership with LSI Energy Brokers. Members and non members can obtain quotations for electricity or gas on a 'no obligation' basis. Where a contract is taken out the member is assured of very competitive energy prices and all contract renewal dates are brought together on a common date so that members can benefit from bulk purchasing. During the year the Consortium received net commission of £562 from LSI for contracts taken out.

At 30th June there were 60 live contracts covering electricity and gas but only 35 (covering 24 members) were held by members. This means that 39 members of the Consortium do not hold an energy contract under the Club. The Management Committee has been working with LSI and these members are to receive a mail shot in the near future. It is hoped that these members will take out a contract under the Club.

LSI has developed a 'Switcheroo' aimed at the domestic electricity market. This can identify the best possible supplier/contract for electricity/gas for any customer. The Committee held discussions with LSI on whether to offer the 'Switcheroo' through the Consortium web site. However, the decision was taken not to do this for it was considered to be out of alignment with the purpose and mission of the Consortium.

7 Portable Appliance Testing

The scheme again proved to be very popular with 51 members benefitting from it. The fees charged for the service brought in £1,878 and after expenses (but not including insurance) a surplus of £1,075 was achieved. The fees for testing were held at £30 for up to 50 and 50p for each appliance over 50.

This scheme is only possible due to the volunteers who give their time to test appliances at member halls. Each gives three or four days each year and we are immensely grateful to them. They are:

MALCOLM BRODIE (Bellingham); ALAN BREWIN (Allendale); PAT JOHNSTON (Newbrough); DENIS PEEL (Wylam); MATTHEW SINGLETON (Prudhoe); LIZ STEWART (Greenhead); MICHAEL STOTT (Ovingham); ROLY TAYLOR (Wall); ALAN THOMPSON (Riding Mill); MELVYN WHATMOUGH (Gilsland); DAVID WRIGHT (Slaley); MIKE WOOD (Greenhead).

LIZ STEWART retired from testing on moving from the area but DAVID PENTNEY of Rochester has volunteered to be a PAT Tester and will start shortly.

IT IS DIFFICULT TO FIND THE WORDS TO THANK ALL THE ABOVE FOR WHAT THEY DO. SINCERE THANKS TO YOU ALL.

Even more members have asked to join the scheme in 2015/16. We have had difficulty finding an insurance broker and but for the herculean efforts of Mike Wood we may well have had to abandon the scheme. Many thanks Mike. We now have the necessary Professional Indemnity and Employers Liability Insurance but it has cost almost three times as much as previously. The 2015/16 round of testing started in October 2015.

At the annual review of the scheme in July it was decided to keep to the existing frequency of testing even though some appliances do not now require an annual test. It was also decided to start leaving an invoice at the time of testing.

8 Training Courses

The Consortium had its first venture into putting on training for members during the year. The Committee has always considered that this is an activity that can be successfully taken on by the Consortium. Louise Currie of CAN was asked to organise the courses which she did very effectively including the delivery of some courses.

The courses held, the location and the number of participants are set out below.

Course	Date	Location	Number Attending	Cost £	Training Fees £
Food Hygiene/Safety	14.11.14	Newton and Bywell Community Hall	18 of 20 places	682	180
Web Site Design	26.11.14	Stocksfield Community Centre	6 of 6 places	282	60
First Aid	05.12.14	Newton and Bywell Community Hall	11 of 12 places	696	110
Trustees Responsibilities	10.12.14	Corbridge Parish Hall	12	247	120
Social Media	14.01.15	Riding Mill Millennium Hall	6 of 6 places	282	60
Insurance	21.01.15	Wylam Institute	4	247	40
Risk Assessment	11.03.15	Riding Mill Village Hall	9	247	90
Health and Safety	11.02.15	Corbridge Parish Hall	9	247	100
Total				2,930	760
Net Cost to the Consortium				£2,170	

From the above it can be seen that the courses were significantly subsidised by the Consortium

Sincere thanks are due to the Halls that hosted the training. Not only did most waive the hire fee, they provided refreshments as well. We should also thank Louise Currie of CAN and all the trainers.

Lessons Learned

- In future hold the training over a Spring/Summer period. Many people are put off from travelling in winter and dark nights.
- The media courses were restricted to a small number due to the number of lap tops available and the need to have access to the internet.
- Getting the money in advance and making it clear that once booked the fee has to be paid.
- There was an issue with booking being on a first come first served basis.

9 ESF Grant for Rural Unemployment

The Consortium was approached by Community Action Northumberland (CAN) for a funding application to be made in our name to the European Social Fund. This was for CAN to take on a project at Haltwhistle aimed at dealing with the many issues faced by people who are unemployed and are trying to get back into employment. The Management Committee agreed to 'front' this funding application partly because it would help people in the Haltwhistle area but also because it was to be based at the Leisure Centre, which is a member of the Consortium.

The application was successful and the grant of £13,181 passed through the Consortium's books on the way to CAN.

Julia Plinston, Community Development Manager of CAN will be at the AGM and will present a progress report on the project.

10 Northumberland Community Development Network (NCDN)

The Consortium was approached by NCDN who were making an application to the Peoples Lottery to conduct a project in south west Northumberland aimed at assisting vulnerable adults who live in isolated rural areas. The project is to be based in village halls and the Consortium was asked if it would join a steering Committee if the application was successful. The Management Committee agreed to support this on the basis that it was to be based in village halls and it would benefit some residents in our area.

After a long delay NCDN have been informed that the application was successful and they are now preparing for delivery.

11 Community Action Northumberland (CAN)

The Consortium has a close working relationship with CAN. CAN is one of the 38 Rural Community Councils in England and ACRE (Action for Communities in Rural England) is effectively their national body. ACRE and CAN receives some funding from the Government Department DEFRA. This funding enables ACRE to operate a Village Hall Information Service and for CAN to part employ one person, Louise Currie, to deal with questions and information requests from the Consortia and individual village halls. This relationship works very well and this Consortium is served well by CAN when we need their help and advice.

In 2014 DEFRA proposed to terminate the grants to ACRE and the Rural Community Council network. CAN and other members of the network were able to mount a campaign to change their minds. Over 10,000 letters and emails were received objecting to the proposal and in response DEFRA backed down and the grant for 2015/16 has been maintained.

This is still not the end of the story, for faced with further cuts in public expenditure DEFRA is again looking very carefully at the annual grant to ACRE and the network for 2016/17. No decisions have been made yet but if the grant is discontinued or even reduced, it could have a significant impact on the service that the Consortium receives from CAN.

In this age of austerity and the cutting of grants and public spending CAN has been going through a strategic review which has culminated in a new mission and a new direction. CAN will now focus its attention on assisting organisations and individuals in rural areas and of being a 'rural voice' to influence and tackle rural community needs and issues. In its new role CAN will continue to have a close working relationship with this Consortium and the North Northumberland Village Halls Consortium.

12 Young People in Community Buildings in Northumberland

The report produced by Andy Render had identified the issues that prevent Halls offering facilities for young people on a consistent basis. If ways around these issues could be found then the Halls would be in a better position to offer facilities and the necessary organisation. As a direct result of the report Andy Render had looked for expressions of interest for Halls that were interested in working with 14 – 19 year olds. They would be given additional resources and a package of support. It is known that a number of members have applied.

13 Registration of the Consortium with the Charity Commission

Due to the Consortium's annual turnover in 2014/15 going above £5,000 it was necessary to register the Consortium as a charity. It was agreed to do this after the AGM.

14 The Workplace Pensions – Employers Obligations.

This scheme is applicable only to employees who earn more than £10,000 per annum. This condition is likely to exclude most, if not all, Halls. The start date is varied but is likely to be 1st April 2017.

15 Hall Insurance Issues

The Consortium continues to have a panel of five insurers for insuring village halls and other community buildings. Details of the Insurers can be found on the web site www.westnorthumberlandcbc.org.uk By clicking on 'Members Discounts'. You will be asked for a password which is WNCBC2010 .

The Consortium recommends obtaining a quote from at least two companies on the panel to ensure that your offer is competitive. All companies on the panel give a discount for being a member of the Consortium. Most companies also give discount for holding the 'Hallmark' award and some give an additional discount for locking in for three years.

It is essential that member committees review their insurance cover at least every two years.

The value of the building that you are insuring is very important. The value given to the insurance company needs to be up to date and realistic. The insurance company will apply an index to the value that you state but it is essential to get an actual valuation done by a qualified person from time to time. A minimum period is suggested as ten years. The insured value of your property is important for if it is undervalued and you have a loss, the trustees could be personally liable for any deficiency.

- 16 Hallmark**
Congratulations to Wylam Institute on becoming the first Hall in West Northumberland to achieve 'Hallmark 2'.
Achieving this level means that following an external scrutiny, it has been deemed that the Hall's procedures are good shape. This is good news for the Trustees and users of the Hall and it will mean that extra discounts are available from some insurers when insuring the building.
- 17 Motion Picture Licensing (MPLC)**
In June MPLC gave presentation on their licencing regime. There may be benefit to members by taking out this licence. A report is to be produced and circulated to members.
- 18 Members Needs**
The Committee is keen to hear of the needs of members. The Consortium can only respond to known needs so members are encouraged to identify what they want from the Consortium.

Adrian Hinchcliffe
Secretary
21.10.15