

Annual Report 2018/19

Management Committee: Thanks must be extended to the 8 current members of the management committee of the West Northumberland Community Buildings Consortium (WNCBC). The members of the committee are (in alphabetical order): Mike Barlow, David Blackett, Jill Bungay, David Easby, Neville Gray, Sarah Hallberg, Vicky Herod and Roly Taylor. The committee has held four Ordinary Meetings in this year, plus the AGM.

All members of the committee have contributed greatly to the work and running of WNCBC over the course of the year, but particular thanks must be extended to the following people:

- **Roly Taylor** for continuing to manage the PAT scheme
- **All our volunteer PATesters** who give up their valuable time to test all halls who are signed up for our PATesting service
- **Neville Gray** for stepping into the role of Treasurer for WNCBC

WNCBC would also like to extend its formal thanks to the halls that have hosted WNCBC meetings, training sessions and other WNCBC events over the past year.

Partnership with CAN: Thanks must also go to **Louise Currie (CAN)**, who has provided both administrative and advisory services to WNCBC itself, as well as providing advice to many of its member halls.

Membership: There are currently 64 members of WNCBC and thanks must go to all those members who have already paid their renewal fees (which become due in October each year).

Sustainability and the benefits of joint working: This year has been the second year of the partnership between WNCBC and Community Action Northumberland (CAN) and the relationship continues to work well for both partners, adding to the overall sustainability of both organisations.

Working jointly in this way has brought a good number of benefits (some expected, some less so) to both organisations. CAN continues to benefit from its increasing involvement with individual halls and WNCBC benefits both from the expertise of a dedicated village halls adviser as well as the administrative function that Louise and CAN provide.

Newsletters and bulletins: This year, members have received 2 full newsletters (Autumn/Winter 2018 and Spring/Summer 2019) and 16 smaller informational bulletins. We are finding that this method works well for getting information out to our members quickly and efficiently. Copies of the full newsletters are available on the WNCBC website, if you haven't already seen them. Although initially sent out to the three or four main contacts specified on the renewal paperwork, in reality all members of the committees of WNCBC's member halls are welcome to sign up to receive the newsletters and bulletins. If you would like to sign up to receive them, please email the WNCBC secretary and you will be added to the list of subscribed senders.

- WNCBC Website www.westnorthumberlandcbc.org.uk
- Sarah (Secretary) sarahwncbc@btinternet.com
Tel 01434 240767

Summer Gathering: This year, for the first time, WNCBC held an informal Members' Gathering, which took place on 20th June at Kirkwhelpington Memorial Hall. The event was primarily intended as an opportunity for the trustees of our member Halls to get together in a relaxed, informal setting, whilst being presented with interesting and informative speakers on topics which are particularly relevant to Village Halls and Community Buildings. It was obvious from the number of attendees that the concept is one which appeals strongly to our membership and as a result, WNCBC has decided to run the Summer Gathering as an annual event.

The speakers for the evening were Julia Plinston (CAN) and Sarah Littlefear (Northumberland Archives) who talked about the initiation of a 'Village Halls Heritage Project' – the aim of which is to work towards a publication detailing the histories of the Halls and Community Buildings involved. There was a lot of interest from the halls present at the meeting and it was clear from the outset that this is an area about which our members feel very engaged. We have also subsequently received some very positive feedback from some of the attendees – and in turn, would like to thank all the representatives who attended and made the evening such a success.

Training: Over the last few years, CAN has offered a programme of training courses for Consortium members. The training has been arranged in alternate years and last year, as you will be aware from WNCBC bulletins and newsletters, the programme included Trustee Training, Health & Safety, and Risk Assessments.

Starting this year, however, CAN has been managing training differently - being more 'demand-led', which makes training much more straightforward to organise. In September this year, it arranged financial training for WNCBC members. Two separate but interlinked training sessions, 'Looking After the Money' and 'Easy Accounts' were delivered by Peter Bryan (a colleague of Louise's from Tees Valley) and were fully subsidised by WNCBC. This event was highly successful, with 23 participants from 14 different halls taking part. Informal feedback has been that it has helped enormously and not only increased understanding about managing charitable money, but the Easy Accounts package itself has saved the treasurers hours and hours of work!

Food Safety training is never far from people's minds and Louise has already had interest from 16 people in the membership who have indicated they would like to attend a course. Training will therefore be arranged, and details will be circulated to all members once known. It is worth noting that one Hall in the membership has arranged a dedicated in-house Food Safety session for all its trustees – the session is taking place later this month.

Trustee Responsibility also remains an essential and popular session, and Louise delivered this to a group of four 'neighbouring' halls in October. This not only significantly reduced the cost for each hall, but had the added benefit of bringing the four halls together to share ideas, diaries and support for each other. The session has triggered them to think of arranging a joint Health & Safety session in the near future. If you and your trustees think it would be beneficial for you to make a similar arrangement with your neighbouring halls, please contact Louise directly.

- Louise (CAN) louise.wncbc@ca-north.org.uk
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Portable Appliance Testing (PAT): Once again, Roly Taylor has managed an efficient and highly successful PAT programme over the 2018/19 year. As mentioned in this year's Financial Report, there was a significant apparent reduction in overall costs for the PAT service in this financial year, due to the fact that there was only one insurance renewal premium in this financial period, coupled with the fact that there were no additional training or maintenance costs. There are likely to be increases to the cost of training new recruits and maintenance of the existing PATesting equipment in the forthcoming year, but as it stands, the service is currently self-sustaining.

Testing for the 2018/19 period began in October 2018 and was completed in August 2019, with a total of 60 venues being tested. WNCBC is extremely grateful to all its volunteer testers, without whom the service simply could not run. Current information on the PAT programme and dates for testing is available on the WNCBC website.

WNCBC Website: Over the course of the last year, Sarah Hallberg (WNCBC Secretary) has taken over the task of updating and consolidating the WNCBC website. There are still a small number of pages which need to be updated, but a significant proportion of the website is now current. Please note that the new WNCBC/CAN Website Portal Project (see information below) will affect the information held on the WNCBC website for individual halls, so this will be updated once the portal becomes live. **Michael Elphick** although no longer on the committee, has continued to assist with various queries and with the updating of the map which details where our member halls can be found. Huge thanks must go to him for his continued involvement and willingness to help 'behind the scenes'.

WNCBC would like, if possible, to recruit someone who would take up the mantle of website co-ordinator, but Sarah has agreed to continue updating the site for the coming year if no volunteers come forward. Once the Village Hall Website Portal (see below) is up and running, maintenance of the existing WNCBC website is likely to become very much easier and faster.

WNCBC/CAN Website Portal Project: Last year CAN, in conjunction with WNCBC, explored the idea of creating a website 'portal' which would allow halls to create their own good-looking and easy-to-use hosted websites, without the costs that would be incurred when setting up a website and registering an individual domain name. The service would be maintained by CAN with help from WNCBC and would simply involve a small annual maintenance cost to the participating halls. Questionnaires were circulated to all members (a huge thank you to all who replied). As a result, the portal project is going ahead and is to be trialled by WNCBC. If successful, the opportunity will be opened up to halls in the North of the county.

The process is underway, and we have just received a full proposal from the website designer for creation of the portal. Once this has been inspected, approved and amended, WNCBC will be able to apply for funding to meet the costs of setting the portal up. It is expected that the application will be submitted during the next few weeks and, assuming the application is successful, creation of this service will therefore occur during the course of the coming year. Members will be updated via WNCBC's website, newsletters and bulletins.

The Northumbria Police Rural Village Hall Project: *"The Village Hall Project aims to improve police engagement with Rural Communities by introducing volunteers who reside rurally. Those residents that volunteer are provided with information and guidance on policing matters that will help to build trust and confidence within those communities to report crime, intelligence and promote safeguarding."* (from The Northumbria Police's Rural Village Hall Toolkit).

Following the introduction of the Rural Village Hall Project at last year’s WNCBC AGM, a healthy number of WNCBC members signed up for the project, which was to be trialled in the West of the county before being rolled out to the whole of Northumberland.

Following initial meetings and the provision of training to those halls who had signed up, progress has been necessarily slow as it has taken some time for the police to get the official ‘toolkit’ approved and published. The project has now, however, been assigned two officers to act as both dedicated liaisons and co-ordinators (people who have signed up for the project should by now be receiving regular emails from the police) and the project falls under the same banner as ‘Farmwatch’. As of mid-September, the ‘toolkit’ has been approved and released to those halls who have signed up for the project. Further details and a link to the toolkit, which explains the project in some further detail, will shortly be added to the WNCBC website.

Members’ Needs Questionnaire: With two questionnaires being sent out over the course of the year (about the Website Portal and about the Village Halls Heritage project mentioned above), we took the decision that a further questionnaire might lose impact, and on that basis, we did not send out the Members’ Needs Questionnaire. However, WNCBC is very keen to hear about the non-IT needs of its members and it would very much like to hear about any feedback from its members or about any services the members feel WNCBC might be able to offer or any issues it can otherwise assist them with.

Annual Report prepared by:

Sarah Hallberg, Secretary, WNCBC, Northumberland. 05/11/19

Louise Currie, Community Action Northumberland. 03/11/19

Accepted:

Please print name:

Date: