

Action in rural Sussex - Community Buildings Service 2013 – 2014

The Community Buildings Service provides important support for the volunteers who run the community buildings that support a healthy voluntary and community sector in East and West Sussex. Each year the Service responds to requests for help or guidance from around 100 of the 300 or so community halls in the two counties, assisting around 50 different halls each quarter, in some cases with long term issues and in others with a variety of smaller problems.

The service provides a “portal” through which communities in Sussex can access the wide range of publications, support and up to date information available from the ACRE Network (Action with Communities in Rural England), of which AirS is the partner for Sussex. That service is sponsored by Aon, long-standing insurers of village halls, and Sussex halls benefit greatly from that national partnership.

In Spring 2014 we ran 10 free training events thanks to funding from Awards for All, lottery funding. At least one was held in each District, enabling a wide range of communities to benefit. Over 100 people attended from 77 different halls and councils, filling over 200 places. Non-subscribing halls have seen what the service offers and since signed up. Topics covered governance, finance and compliance and a pilot networking event for paid Hall Managers. Feedback was excellent.

The Service became subscription based in 2011 and thanks to support from Horsham, Mid Sussex, Lewes and Wealden District Councils and consultancy charges the service has been maintained and adapted, though more geographically focussed. The number of subscribing halls and enquiries from those needing consultancy support has shown there is continued demand to maintain the service.

In 2013/14, 110 subscribers also benefitted in the following ways:

- * Between 46 and 52 halls obtained guidance each quarter, and more obtained publications either on request or via download, some for a small charge, like the ACRE Model Hiring Agreement.
- * 33 hall improvement or new build projects were assisted, from the new £1 million hall at Bolney down to kitchen renewals, insulation, access works and new heating.
- * Nine E newsletters and other updates were issued to subscribers
- * Two workshops were held, at the new Barnham Community Hall and at Horam Village Hall, when delegates heard about the secrets of success in building and running these halls, about running community film shows and renewable energy.
- * Support was given to efforts nationally to establish a new All Party Parliamentary Group to investigate issues facing Village Halls.

Consultancy work included assisting the refurbishment of Warnham Village Hall, work for Mid Sussex District Council establishing a Charitable Incorporated Organisation at Bolnore, Bolnore Village Community Partnership and modern governance arrangements for Crawley Down Community Association (The Haven Centre), preparation of a Business Plan for a new Community Hall at Pease Pottage and for Boxgrove Parish Council.