

Central Bedfordshire Village Halls & Community Buildings Survey 2017

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Central Bedfordshire Council and BRCC carried out a survey in 2017 in order to gain as comprehensive and accurate a picture as possible of the Village Halls and Community Buildings in the area.

Number and coverage of halls

There are 159 community halls (of which we are aware) across Central Bedfordshire, equating to one hall per 1,754 residents, and covering nearly every civil parish with a population of over 150. Based on responses received, 90% can seat at least 50 people.

Condition and investment needs

While most halls are in good repair, 34 respondents identified the need for external or internal repairs/refurbishment over the next 5 years or so. At least 10 new builds are envisaged (in some cases replacing an existing building on the same site), and a further 17 major refurbishments. Cost estimates for these vary greatly, the maximum being £1,800,000.

Usage levels and viability

The median usage level for main halls would appear to be around 21-22 hours per week, although larger halls with a number of spaces may have weekly lettings of up to 60 hours. Halls with low levels of lettings may struggle for financial viability, while those with high levels may find it difficult to accommodate increases in demand brought by population growth. Many halls have the capacity to take on the provision of additional services and activities.

The vast majority of hall committees are optimistic that they will be viable for the next 5 years – some of these require subsidy or fundraising in addition to hire income. For many halls it is not realistic to put large sums of money away for major refurbishment costs.

Governance, management and support needs

Most halls are owned freehold by a charitable trust, generally an unincorporated association (as this is not a legal entity, Holding or Custodian Trustees are required to hold the asset on behalf of the charity). These will generally be managed by some form of Committee. While Committees generally feel that they are well run, many face significant challenges in recruiting trustees/committee members and volunteers; maintaining and/or refurbishing the building; and in fundraising and marketing. There is an ongoing need for advice, information and other support services, and to promote the existing services that are available.

Recommendations

- Continue to update and maintain the Community & Village Halls database
- Ensure that Hall Committees (and Town and Parish Councils) are aware of existing Section 106 funds available to meet investment needs
- Include option to transfer to 3rd party organisations within the CBC model for new community buildings
- Work with halls that are unincorporated associations to review their legal status as required
- Ensure that CBC departments are aware of the potential for halls as venues for service delivery

- Raise awareness of the local advice and support services available for community buildings

Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of this survey was for Central Bedfordshire Council and BRCC to gain as comprehensive and accurate a picture as possible of the Village Halls and Community Buildings in the area, with particular respect to the following:

- Condition and investment needs
- Size and facilities
- Level of usage and available capacity
- Governance and management arrangements
- Support needs
- Up to date contact details

This would help to inform future investment in community facilities and the provision of support services, as well as enabling an up to date directory to be produced of facilities for hire by residents.

Scope and definition

This survey specifically examines buildings in Central Bedfordshire that are available for hire to a variety of local community groups or residents, for a variety of purposes. Sole use halls have been excluded.

Village halls and community buildings come in many shapes and sizes, and with a variety of titles – this reflects their widely differing original purposes, whether educational, religious, social or sporting, or a combination of these. However, broadly speaking, halls fall into the following principal groups:

- The ‘traditional’ Village Hall (typically, pre or just post First World War Memorial Halls, Reading Rooms, Meeting Rooms etc.)
- Recently constructed Halls, generally located on the newer housing developments (some are placed within community hubs comprising medical facilities, shops, library access points etc.), e.g. Cranfield, Silsoe
- Church Halls hired out for general use (possibly with restrictions)
- Social Clubs and sports related Halls
- Miscellaneous halls (such as Scout Huts, small libraries, Working Men's Clubs, some school halls etc.)

Methodology

A database of 159 village halls and community buildings was compiled by the BRCC Community Buildings Advisor from the following sources:

- BRCC's database of Central Bedfordshire halls
- The audit produced by Neil Allen Associates for the CBC 2013 leisure survey.
- The Community and Voluntary Service (CVS) database of member organisations.
- An additional register of community buildings compiled by Social Care Health and Housing at CBC

All facilities with verified email address were invited to respond via Survey Monkey. In addition, the CBC website publicised links to the survey. After the initial survey, further emailed reminders were sent out to non-responders and Parish Councils were also asked to circulate their local halls with the survey link.

To date full or partial responses have been received from 90 halls (after some correction for duplicates and abortive attempts), consisting of 65 Village Halls, 12 church halls, 2 social clubs and 11 other facilities. This represents a 56.6% response rate, which is within the range of other surveys conducted by the RCC network (quoted in Cambs 2017 as between 55% and 61%). ACRE quotes a response rate of 24% in its 2009 national survey.

At the time of writing, the survey remains open so that halls can be identified, responses logged and then added to the ongoing database.

There seems to be a hard core of 'hard to reach' halls that don't have an email or internet presence and tend not to respond to contact.

For comparative purposes, other studies referred to are:

- ACRE Community Buildings in England 2009 (ACRE 2009)
- North Herts. District Council: Community Halls Strategy 2011 (NHDC 2011)
- Central Bedfordshire Leisure Strategy: Neil Allan & Associates 2013 (CBC 2013)
- Cambridgeshire Village Halls & Community Buildings Survey 2017 (Cambs. 2017)

With regard to the design brief for new halls the following publications have been used:

- ACRE Information Sheet 23
- Sport England - Village and community hall (Design Guidance Note).
- Stanhope Wilkinson Associates Oxford. Presentation to RCC's on designing a community building (2017)
- Plan, Design & Build – an ACRE publication

1. Capacity

1.1 Numbers and Locations

At the time of writing, our database includes 159 halls consisting of 72 village Halls, 36 church halls, 23 sports related and social clubs, 28 other facilities. This equates to one hall per 1,754 Central Bedfordshire residents (ONS 2016).

From this data it is apparent that every civil parish in Central Bedfordshire with a population of over 150 has a building available for hire by the community – except Ridgmont and Hockliffe, where new halls are planned. The smaller parishes of Tingrith, Battlesden, Astwick and Edworth do not have halls. Larger communities with over 2,000 residents seem to have at least two community buildings.

1.2 Size and Capacity

Findings

46% of main halls hold between 50 and 100 people, with 38% able to hold between 100 and 200 people.

30% of halls responding indicated that they had a second hall, with most (67%) of these holding between 10 and 50 persons. Over twice as many had a small meeting room, although given that most (67%) of these also held between 10 and 50 people, there may not be much size difference between a meeting room and a second hall. Overall, just under three-quarters of those responding had at least one space to hire out in addition to the main hall.

Hall capacities are defined by the Fire Officer and are dependent on range of factors.

Answers to Q7 What is the seating capacity of your Hall?

	UP TO 10	10 – 50	50 - 100	100 - 200	200+	Total
Main Hall	1 (1%)	7 (9%)	37 (46%)	30 (38%)	5 (6%)	80
Second Hall	1 (4%)	16 (67%)	7 (29%)	0	0	24
Small Meeting Room	15 (31%)	33 (67%)	1 (2%)	0	0	49
Other	4 (57%)	3 (43%)	0	0	0	7
Total						80
Skipped						16

Conclusions

A second space available for hire provides a vital second income stream for the hall. This enables a hall to be let to two users at the same time (typically, a larger function in the main hall and a committee or class also being held in the smaller room or second hall). It is essential that the layout of any new hall or extensions to an existing hall provide sufficient space for a range of concurrent activities to meet the needs of the community.

The building gross area of each hall was not requested in this survey. However figures for 55 halls are given in the CBC 2013 leisure survey (average 289 sq. m. per hall) and are unlikely to have changed significantly since that date. Based on this, an overall average square meterage per resident for CBC can be estimated as 0.17 sq. m. per resident.

1.3 Facilities

Findings

Since halls must comply with increasing legislation relating to accessibility, the vast majority of halls offer a disabled toilet, disabled access and baby changing facilities. Just under a third have a hearing loop. Just over half have a garden or external play area (Ofsted requires that pre-school groups have a garden, play areas and safe facilities within the building and its grounds).

Nearly all halls have a kitchen. 30.38% have Wi-Fi, and it is expected that this will increase over the coming years.

Answers to Q8 Please indicate which of the following facilities are available

Answer Choices	Responses (%)	Responses (no.)
Kitchen	96.2%	76
Disabled toilets	88.61%	70
Disabled access	88.61%	70
Baby changing facilities	73.42%	58
Hearing loop	29.11%	23
Wifi	30.38%	24
Burglar alarm	20.25%	16
CCTV	21.52%	17
Garden and/or play area	50.63%	40
Total Respondents		79
Skipped		17

Conclusions

Many halls were built in an era when many of the above facilities were not required or unheard of, and they generally have limited funds for new facilities. Investment in refurbishment to current standards will help halls to attract users from as many groups as can be accommodated, increasing their sustainability in the longer term.

The ideal hall should include at least the following:

- main hall (with or without stage)
- subsidiary hall or meeting room
- kitchen (fitted to commercial standards)
- disabled toilets and disabled access
- baby changing facilities
- wi-fi and a hearing loop
- a garden and external play area
- site security (CCTV/burglar alarm)
- adequate car parking (this was not covered in the survey)

2. Condition and investment needs

2.1 Condition

Findings

Committees felt that generally their hall was in good repair (Q9). External condition was good in over two thirds of responses and internal condition good for exactly two thirds.

This means however that 34 halls responding identified the need for external or internal repairs/refurbishment over the next 5 years or so (8 for external, 11 for internal and 15 for both). Few of these were reported as being urgent (3 halls for external, 3 for internal and 2 for both). (It should be noted that this question asks for the respondent's own assessment of the hall's condition rather than a professional opinion).

Answers to Q9 Please rate the overall external and internal condition of the building

	Generally, In Good Repair	Will Need Repairs / Refurbishment Over The Next 5 Years Or So	Needs Repairs / Refurbishment Urgently	Total
External	55 (70.51%)	18 (23.08%)	5 (6.41%)	78
Internal	52 (66.67%)	21 (26.92%)	5 (6.41%)	78
Skipped				18

Conclusions

It is a duty of the Managing Trustees to ensure the adequate maintenance of the building and to plan for refurbishment/extensions, so that the hall is fit for current and potential use.

Management Committees should be aware not only of current maintenance issues but also have in place a plan for future capital expenditure. This provides a guide to managing current expenditure and an indication of future funding requirements.

Given that many halls are decades old (over a hundred years in some cases), and that they have limited funds, it is not surprising that there are needs for repairs/refurbishment, as well as entire new builds in some cases. General wear and tear from everyday usage also implies that the hall needs to be constantly kept up to standard.

Many Halls seems to have a rolling program of routine maintenance and the replacement of fixtures and fittings in order to keep the hall in a good condition for their users. It is concerning, however, that some halls seem unaware of the hall condition and may not be addressing future repair/refurbishment issues.

2.2 Capital works needed and/or planned

Findings

Respondents were also asked (Q12) to identify whether various capital works were needed and/or planned, and what the likely cost would be. In all some 60 hall committees planned to undertake improvements to their hall, cost estimates range from several million to a thousand pounds.

Answers to Q12 Are any of the following needed and/or planned?

Answer Choices	Responses (%)	Responses (no.)
Demolition and replacement of the existing hall on the same site	9.59%	7
Build of a new hall on a different site	9.59%	7
Extending the existing hall to accommodate growing usage	12.33%	9
Major renovations / improvements to the basic facilities in the existing hall (e.g. the roof, car park, toilets, kitchen, etc)	30.14%	22
Replacement of any fixtures / fittings at the existing hall (including regular maintenance)	45.21%	33
Improvements to insulation and/or energy efficiency	15.07%	11
Installation of renewable energy sources at the existing hall	15.07%	11
None of the above	17.81%	13
Other (please specify)	26.03%	19
Total		73
Skipped		23

The following halls/groups plan either to demolish and replace their existing hall, or build a new hall on a different site:

- Arlesey Village Hall (cost not specified)
- Biggleswade Scout Group (cost not specified)
- Flitwick Village Hall (cost not specified)
- Hockliffe Village Hall (£750,000)
- Maulden Village Hall (£750,000)
- Potton - Hall 4 All (£1,800,000)
- Shillington Village Hall (cost not specified)
- Stondon Village Hall (cost not specified)
- The Heathfield Centre – Caddington (£1,000,000)
- Whipsnade Village Hall (£300,000)

It is known that Ridgmont are active in requiring a new hall, but haven't responded.

Those halls wishing to either extend or undergo a major renovation include:

- Ampthill Town Cricket Club (£250,000)
- Brogborough (£10,000)
- Caddington Sport & Social Club (£75,000)
- Leighton Buzzard Rugby Club (£300,000)
- Lidlington (cost not specified)
- Marston Moretaine (£12,000)
- Moggerhanger (£250,000)
- Northill (£150,000)
- Peter Edwards Hall, Slip End (£70,000)
- Shefford Baptist Church (cost not specified)
- Stondon (£250,000)
- Sutton (£18,000)
- Tempsford (£30,000)
- The Roundabout Club, Sandy (£2,500)
- The Weatherley Centre, Biggleswade (£30,000)
- Upper Caldecote Methodist Church (£50,000)
- Westoning (£1,000,000)

Some halls are also considering this as an alternative to replacing or rebuilding their hall (above).

Halls wishing to update fixtures and fittings (estimates range from £1,000 to £9,000) are:

- Ampthill Baptist Church
- Arlesey WI Hall
- Biggleswade Scout HQ
- Caddington Sports and Social Club
- Clifton
- Cranfield
- Cropredy Hall (Dunstable)
- Eversholt
- Harlington
- Harlington Parish Hall
- Kensworth
- Leighton Buzzard Rugby Club
- Lidlington
- Lidlington Church Hall
- Linslade Community Hall
- Maulden
- Methodist Church Hall
- Northill
- Old Warden
- Parkside Hall
- Sandy Baptist Church
- Shefford Baptist Church.
- Slip End
- Stondon
- Sundon
- Sutton
- The Forster Institute
- The Peter Edwards Hall (Slip End)
- Toddington VH
- Upper Caldecote
- Westoning
- Whipsnade

Halls wishing to improve energy efficiency or install renewable energy sources are:

- Caddington Sports & Social Club
- Clifton
- Cropredy Hall (Dunstable)
- Eversholt
- Forster Institute
- Haynes VH
- Heathfield
- Houghton Conquest
- Leighton Buzzard Rugby Club
- Lidlington
- Maulden
- Old Warden
- Potton (H4H)
- Slip End VH
- Stondon
- Westoning

Other required improvements included:

- Hearing loops
- Disabled ramps
- New floors
- Electrical rewiring
- Replacement LED lighting
- Sound proofing
- Grounds landscaping

All responses to these two questions are attached as Appendix 3 & Appendix 4.

Conclusions

The current investment needs of community buildings in Central Bedfordshire (as identified by respondents) vary from £1,000 to over £1m, and could collectively total over £10m. There may be opportunities to meet some of these needs from Section 106 or CIL funding, as an alternative to building new community facilities.

2.3 Risks and insurance

Findings

Most halls were not aware of any significant environmental risks (Q10), whereas 5 cited risks such as flooding from playing fields, poor car park drainage, being in a flood plain, flooding from ditches and overhanging trees as threats.

Only 71.43% of respondents gave the rebuilding costs of their hall (Q11) and had had it reviewed within the last three years.

Church halls seem to be covered by an umbrella policy for all similar churches e.g. Methodist Chapels or Baptist Chapels.

Answers to Q11 re-building costs

	Responses (%)	Responses (no.)
What are the re-building costs of your building for insurance purposes (if known)?	71.43%	45
Name of Insurance Company	84.13%	53
When was this last reviewed?	82.54%	52
Total		63
Skipped		33

Conclusions

Risk assessments should be part the everyday activity of the hall committee. Once a committee have carried out a risk assessment, then suitable action will need to be taken to lessen this risk and mitigate any potential outcome. Bearing in mind that most halls are in rural location, it is not surprising that flooding is one of the major environmental risks.

Managing Trustees have a duty to ensure that their hall is adequately covered for insurance purposes. There are many insurance companies who offer specialist packages for village halls and community buildings, typically including at least Public Liability, Employee Liability, Trustee indemnity, Fidelity cover and Buildings and Reinstatement cover. There are severe implications if the hall is underinsured.

Bearing in mind that reinstatement cost will be constantly rising in line with property values, it is most important that halls review these regularly. If a claim must be made for rebuilding the hall and for instance it is only insured for three quarters of its value, then the insurance company will only pay out three quarters of the rebuilding cost – the Managing Trustees will need to find the difference.

A number of independent valuers offer inexpensive 'desktop' valuations, without visiting the property. Halls should take advantage of this service to keep insured amounts up to date.

3. Level of usage and viability

3.1 Financial viability

Findings

The majority of halls are able to cover their running costs annually with hire charges and rental income alone (Q14).

A small proportion vary between surplus and deficit, and nearly a quarter require fundraising activities and or grants (for example from their parish/town council) just to cover running costs, rather than for specific projects. Another small proportion are losing money most years, which must be threatening their long-term viability.

Answers to Q14 Do the hire charges and rental income of your Hall cover its running costs (including maintenance but not major repairs)?

	Responses (%)	Responses (no.)
Yes, a healthy surplus is usually made (over 20% of Income)	7.04%	5
Yes, a small surplus is usually made (less than 20% of Income)	47.89%	34
It varies between surplus and deficit	8.45%	6
Fundraising and / or grants help cover running costs	22.54%	16
No, a deficit is incurred most years	8.45%	6
Other (please specify)	5.63%	4
Total		71
Skipped		25

The vast majority of hall committees are optimistic that they will be viable for the next 5 years (Q15). Halls who are unsure include Arlesey, Haynes Mission Hall, Whipnade, Potton, Cropredy Hall, Everton, Lidlington, The Heathfield Centre, Kensworth, Hockliffe, and Haynes VH. Southill VH committee don't think they will be viable over this period.

Answers to Q15 Does your committee believe that your Hall will remain financially viable over the next 5 years?

Answer Choices	Responses (%)	Responses (no.)
Yes	81.94%	59
No	1.39%	1
Unsure	16.67%	12
Total		72
Skipped		24

Conclusions

A major aim of the managing Committee is to provide and maintain a facility for the current generation of users and for future users. The main source of hall income is from hire charges, this, coupled with cost control, should ensure the sustainability of the hall.

Typically most halls manage to cover at least their running costs from letting income, although periodic refurbishment and maintenance costs may lead to a deficit being made. Any surplus is usually retained in a Building Reserve, for future major repairs and capital projects. It is not generally realistic to put away sufficient reserves for major refurbishment, so, where substantial investment is required, committees usually also have to seek outside funding or embark on fundraising activities.

Halls that don't achieve a regular surplus, or at least break even, and aren't in receipt of financial assistance, will eventually exhaust their reserves and the hall will not be viable.

Halls who are either unsure about their viability or think they won't be survive over the next five years, need to be addressing the problem now. Committees need to consider the following: how to increase bookings; whether hire charges could be increased; what costs could be reduced. BRCC can provide support in addressing these questions.

3.2 Usage levels

Findings

The median usage level for main halls would appear to be around 21-22 hours per week. Second halls (where they exist) are let for slightly less on average, and meeting rooms are generally let out for 10 hours/week or less of 11 hrs per week.

Larger halls with a number of spaces may have weekly lettings of up to 60 hours.

Answers to Q16 In a typical week, for how many hours in total is each meeting space in use?

	10 Hours or less	11 - 20 Hours	21 - 30 Hours	31 - 40 Hours	41 - 50 Hours	Over 50 Hours	Unsure	Not Applic.	Total
Main Hall	9 (13%)	21 (31%)	19 (28%)	10 (15%)	6 (9%)	3 (4%)	0	0	68
Second Hall	5 (22%)	8 (35%)	7 (30%)	3 (13%)	0	0	0	0	23
Small Meeting Room	21 (60%)	9 (26%)	3 (9%)	1 (3%)	0	1 (3%)	0	0	35
Other	3 (50%)	1 (17%)	1 (17%)	1 (17%)	0	0	0	0	6
Total									68
Skipped									26

Conclusions

Weekly income for halls is dependent on letting levels; this in turn can be restricted by available space and facilities. Halls with second and third rooms, which can be let concurrently with the main hall, achieve vital additional income streams (although maintenance costs are correspondingly higher). Accordingly, halls with only one main space to let may find it difficult to achieve a sustainable level of income.

According to ACRE, by 2009 average hall usage had tripled over the previous twenty years and that the average rate was 36 hours per week. The above figures show that most halls in Central Bedfordshire are still well used. While high usage levels are desirable for any hall, it is still important that there should be some level of availability for new or one-off hirers, rather than halls operating at full capacity. This may be a factor in considering the need for new buildings or extensions.

It is a useful exercise for committees to estimate potential hall time available against actual bookings to identify any shortfall. Having done that the Committee could direct its marketing at filling quieter periods. For instance, if halls are booked throughout the week by local groups, then committees may want to promote use of the hall by others at weekends. Use of the internet and hall booking sites can access non-local demand.

3.3 Potential for additional community uses

Findings

Halls already provide the venue for a wide range of services and activities for the local community. This section of the survey seeks to identify the potential for other uses that might help to retain or increase service delivery within local communities while also increasing the viability of the hall.

The majority of halls already assist the functioning of for local democracy by hosting Parish Council Meetings and Polling Stations, and nearly half have Public Information Notice Boards.

Relatively small numbers currently host health & social care services, or retail or catering facilities such as a Community Shop, Farmers' Market, Post Office or Community Café. Of those that don't, high proportions indicated that they could deliver these in the future. However, many halls would not be suitable or would not have space.

Answers to Q17 concerning use of halls as a point of access for residents to access health, social care or other services in the community

	Already Delivered	Could Be Delivered In Future	Neither (Hall Not Suitable / No Space)	Total
Doctor's Surgery	2 (4%)	15 (28%)	36 (68%)	53
Nurse / Other Clinic /Flu Jabs	4 (6.35%)	39 (62%)	20 (32%)	63
Emergency Response Facility	16 (27%)	24 (41%)	19 (32%)	59
Parish Council Meetings	35 (55%)	26 (41%)	3 (5%)	64
Parish Council Office	4 (7%)	17 (31%)	33 (61%)	54
Library / IT Resource Centre	1 (2%)	22 (40%)	32 (58%)	55
Lunch Club	12 (19%)	43 (68%)	8 (13%)	63
Day Care	6 (11%)	22 (39%)	28 (50%)	56
Community Shop	0	15 (29%)	36 (71%)	51
Farmers' Market	2 (4%)	20 (40%)	28 (56%)	50
Post Office	2 (4%)	13 (25%)	37 (71%)	52
Community Cafe	7 (12%)	36 (62%)	15 (26%)	58
Polling Station	41 (61%)	21 (31%)	5 (7%)	67
Public Information Notice Boards	27 (46%)	25 (42%)	7 (12%)	59
Total				72
Skipped				24

Conclusions

Many community buildings have the capacity to take on the provision of additional services and activities, and this should be considered when thinking about future delivery of (say) community health services and day opportunities. Some halls may be suitable for this purpose, other may require adaptation.

4. Governance and management

4.1 Legal status

Findings

The majority of Halls (63.75%) in Central Bedfordshire are unincorporated associations, the 'traditional' legal form for village halls (reflecting the fact that their structures were set up some years ago). Their governing documents will typically be an Indenture or Conveyance, a Trust Deed, or a Charity Scheme.

An unincorporated association is not a legal entity in its own right and so cannot own land (see also 2.2), enter into contracts (e.g. for building works or refurbishment), or be sued (e.g. if a contract is broken or for non-payment). This means that the Charity Trustees are personally liable and potentially open to legal action.

13.75% of halls are Charitable Incorporated Organisations (CIO), the newer model now recommended by the Charity Commission – whether because they are new or have converted to this form. This body has an existence in law and hence can hold title to Trust property, such as a hall. A CIO can be a party to a contract and can be sued for non-performance. This new governing structure reduces the potential liability for Trustees, provided they have acted with due care and diligence as a Trustee.

The 20% of Halls with other governing structures are mainly church halls run by Diocesan groups and Parochial Church Councils or equivalent.

Answers to Q3: What is the legal status of your Hall?

Answer Choices	Responses (%)	Responses (no.)
Company limited by guarantee (governed by a Memorandum and Articles of Association)	2.5%	2
Charitable incorporated organisation (CIO – new form recently introduced)	13.75%	11
Unincorporated association or charity (governed by either a Constitution/Trust Deed or Rules and Regulations)	63.75%	51
Other (please specify)	20%	16
Total		80
Skipped		16

Halls currently run as unincorporated charities may wish to consider converting to the CIO model in the following circumstances:

- if they are entering into building contracts for extensive works

- If they wish to seek funding from a body which stipulates that grants can only be made to a legal entity.
- some banks prefer to deal only with an incorporated body, if financial support will be required.
- if Trustees and potential Trustees are concerned about potential personal liability when acting on behalf of the Charity.

ACRE has a number of Model documents relating to the CIO conversion process, available through BRCC. For existing halls, with charity land the process, will require legal assistance, again BRCC can refer individual cases to the ACRE partner solicitors. There is a cost implication for the hall, which can amount to at least several thousand pounds, so in most cases it will only be worth going through the process if the financial benefit is clear.

4.2 Holding or custodian trustees

Findings

Trusts are established where an asset is held on behalf of a third party: a hall Charitable Trust holds the building and its accompanying land on behalf of (say) local residents. Since most Trusts are unincorporated associations, which are not legal entities (see above), the hall and land in these cases must be held either by Holding Trustees (an individual or individuals) or a Custodian Trustee (an incorporated body such as a Parish Council or the Official Custodian), as stipulated in the Governing Documents of the Trust. Holding or Custodian Trustees have no legal responsibility for the day to day management and financial control of the charity (this responsibility falls to the Managing Trustees or the management committee).

The disadvantage of having individual Holding Trustees (as opposed to a Custodian) is that, when they pass on or move away, the original Trust document needs to be updated with the new Holding Trustee(s), which can be a lengthy and costly process. However, under half of the halls responding have an incorporated body as Custodian Trustee.

Answers to Q4: If your Hall is a registered charity, who is the holding or custodian Trustee(s)?

	Responses (%)	Responses (no.)
Official Custodian for Charities at the Charity Commission	15.19%	12
Parish or Town Council	10.13%	8
Individual trustees	44.30%	35
Church authority	11.39%	9
Not a registered charity	8.86%	7
Other (please specify)	10.13%	8
Total		79
Skipped		17

Conclusions

It is somewhat concerning that nearly half the charitable halls have named individuals acting as their holding trustees. In this situation, it is not uncommon for the gradual reduction in the number of Holding Trustees to go unnoticed until there is no one living who holds the title to the land/property, resulting in ongoing costs to the charity. It is recommended that either the Parish Council or the Official Custodian is used to hold the title on behalf of the charity.

One issue that can arise where Parish or Town Councils are Custodian Trustees is that these bodies come to believe that they should become involved in the day to day management of the Hall, which is beyond their statutory powers as Custodian Trustees.

One advantage of the CIO model (above) is that, as a legal entity, it can own land and property and there is no need for Holding or Custodian trustees.

4.3 Legal ownership

Findings

Most halls are owned freehold by the hall Charity (57.69%). Leasehold halls, the majority of which are leased from the Parish or Town Council, amount to 16.67% of responses.

Nationally ACRE 2009 found that 73% of Halls are owned by local community groups. Both figures reflect the fact that Halls have been funded or built by local residents as a response to the needs of that community.

Answers to Q5 What is the legal status of your Halls ownership?

	Responses (%)	Responses (no.)
Freehold	57.69%	45
Leasehold	16.67%	13
Unsure	11.54%	9
Other (please specify)	14.10%	11
Total		78
Skipped		18

Conclusions

Hall committees should be aware of the legal ownership of their halls. Governing documents, can come in many forms; documents may have been set up many years ago and are not always readily to hand. However, new trustees should have access to these documents as part of their induction process.

It is widely believed that most village halls are run by or owned by the local parish or town Council. In fact, very few are, they are quite separate organisations. That is not to say that they hold different views on how to serve the community, both should work together to look after and provide for local needs.

4.4 Management

Findings

Nearly 60% of halls are run by a Board or committee of Managing Trustees. This reflects the fact that most halls are independent organisations. (We have previously found that many committee members are not aware that they are in fact Managing Trustees for the Charity, so it is possible that some respondents have included them in the second option 'Management committee on behalf of the trustee or another organisation'.)

Answers to Q6 Who is your Hall run by?

	Responses (%)	Responses (no.)
Board or committee of Managing Trustees	58.23%	46
Management committee on behalf of the Trustees or another organisation	18.99%	15
Parish or Town Council (or a sub-committee of the Council)	6.33%	5
Parochial Church Council	12.66%	10
Other (Please specify)	3.80%	3
Total		79
Skipped		17

Conclusions

Most halls are still run by, and for the benefit of, local community groups. Managing Trustees have a close link to their communities and are usually long serving residents.

Hall committees' membership consists of representatives from their user groups, elected members at the Annual AGM and co-opted members. Governing documents normally specify the numeric composition of each type of member; precedence being given to user group representatives.

New members of the hall Management Committee automatically become managing Trustees of the Charity (a fact not always fully appreciated). There is a correct procedure for inducting new members, recommended by the Charity Commission. A managing Trustee is not the same as being just a committee member. New trustees need to be aware of this, and in no doubt as to their position. The induction process whilst making Trustees aware of their responsibilities should not

deter new members. It will be seen later that recruiting new trustees is one of the main concerns for existing committees.

4.5 Committee skills and effectiveness

Findings

Hall committees consist of local residents, with a long-term interest in serving their community. They are all unpaid volunteers and although they may have many years of dealing, with hall affairs, they are not trained in the intricacies of say Health & Safety Legislation or Charity Law.

The vast majority of respondents rated their committee as ‘good’ or ‘excellent’ in managing their Hall.

Answers to Q18 How would you rate the skills and effectiveness of your committee in managing your Hall?

	Responses (%)	Responses (no.)
Excellent	35.21%	25
Good	53.52%	38
Average	8.45%	6
Below average	1.41%	1
Poor	1.41%	1
Total		71
Skipped		25

Conclusions

The responses are a subjective assessment of what the committee think about their own skills and effectiveness. Bearing this in mind, it is a key task to provide support and information to those committees who see themselves as average or under par.

Committees may be competent in dealing with the issues which arise from day to day running of a hall. For more technical areas they may require support.

4.6 Challenges

Findings

The biggest area of concern is to do with finding people to run the hall. Nearly half of respondents identified the recruitment of new trustees to sit on the management committee as a ‘major challenge’, as did over a third concerning the recruitment of volunteers to assist in the running of

the building. Only around a fifth of respondents in each case did not see these as a challenge. (Governance in itself was not seen as a big issue, in keeping with the findings in 4.1 above.)

Keeping the hall well maintained and refurbished and improving energy efficiency; and generating income through hires and fundraising; were also seen as challenges by the vast majority of respondents.

Answers to Q19 What are the main challenges facing your Hall committee at present?

	Major Challenge	Minor Challenge	Not A Challenge	Total
Recruitment of new trustees / committee members	30 (47%)	20 (31%)	14 (22%)	64
Recruitment of volunteers to help run the building	22 (35%)	27 (44%)	13 (21%)	62
Governance issues (Fulfilling trustee and legal responsibilities)	1 (2%)	24 (39%)	36 (59%)	61
Maintaining / refurbishing the building	23 (35%)	33 (50%)	10 (15%)	66
Improving energy efficiency	21 (34%)	27 (44%)	13 (21%)	61
Marketing / generating hire income	14 (22%)	33 (51%)	18 (28%)	65
Funding / fundraising	23 (35%)	33 (50%)	10 (15%)	66
Total				69
Skipped				27

Conclusions

Hall committees, as part of the management process should be aware of not only current day to day issues, but also able to identify and consider solutions to those areas in which their hall could be challenged. The challenges identified in this survey are in keeping with the ACRE findings in their national 2009 survey.

Many halls survive on the donated free time of their volunteers, including caretakers, cleaners, handymen, booking clerks, secretaries and others. The larger halls are able to pay for cleaners, caretakers and booking clerks, but this extra cost cannot be carried by the smaller halls. In some cases the work involved may be placing an increasing burden on a dwindling number of volunteers, many of whom will be advancing in years.

The difficulty in recruiting committee members may be due to the perception of the ‘village hall committee’ and/or the responsibilities of being a Charity Trustee. Hall management and governance will suffer where committees are decreasing in size and not bringing in ‘new blood’.

For those financially marginal halls, who report either a consistent deficit or swing between surplus/deficit sourcing extra finding is a major concern. Given that heating is a major cost, energy efficiency could also make a significant difference.

5. Support Needs

5.1 Advice and information needs

Findings

This part of the survey asked about the usefulness of advice and information under certain thematic areas, and how committees would like to receive it. As expected, applying for funding was seen on average as the most useful, followed by marketing and promotion and heating or energy efficiency. All topics were seen as very or quite useful by at least two thirds of respondents.

Email / web-based was by far the most popular means of receiving information and advice.

Answers to Q20 Which advice and information topics would be useful to you / your committee?

	Very Useful	Quite Useful	Not Useful	Total
Governance	10 (18%)	33 (59%)	13 (23%)	56
Policies & Procedures	9 (16%)	35 (63%)	12 (21%)	56
Insurance/Risk assessments	14 (25%)	27 (48%)	15 (27%)	56
Licensing (Alcohol, Premises Licence & Music Licence)	11 (19%)	27 (47%)	19 (33%)	57
Financial management / accounting	9 (16%)	31 (53%)	18 (31%)	58
Health & Safety / safeguarding	12 (20%)	37 (62%)	11 (18%)	60
Applying for funding	32 (52%)	28 (45%)	2 (3%)	62
Marketing & promotion	21 (36%)	24 (41%)	14 (24%)	59
Heating / energy efficiency	21 (34%)	27 (44%)	13 (21%)	61
Access to specialist legal advice (e.g. charity law, employment)	14 (25%)	27 (47%)	16 (28%)	57
Total				67
Skipped				29

Answers to Q21 How would you most like to receive advice and information?

	Responses (%)	Responses (no.)
Email / web-based	89.86%	62
Printed / posted	31.88%	22
Telephone	4.35%	3
Face-to-face	13.04%	9
Training seminars / workshops / conferences	28.99%	20
Total		69
Skipped		27

Conclusions

Hall committees need to be given sufficient information to manage their hall, as the breadth and depth of knowledge required is significant. Committee also need to be kept aware of changes in legislation and current best practice.

This response shows that advice and information are valued by committees. BRCC can provide ACRE Information Sheets on the above topics, as well as periodic newsletters informing committees of current issues and changes in legislation. Funding advice is available through BRCC's partners: CVS Bedfordshire or Community Action Bedfordshire.

Advice and information will predominantly be provided online. However, there remain some halls that aren't easily accessible online (these halls can't be contacted for a booking by email or by via a website to promote their hall), to whom information can only be remitted by posted hard copy.

The contact person for a hall committee would normally be the secretary. Any information given, either electronically or by hard copy should be raised or referred to at the next committee meeting under the item 'correspondence received'. Secretaries may circulate information sheets for consideration by trustees in advance of meetings. Decisions can then be made quickly.

Contact details for hall trustees frequently change, especially after AGM's. Therefore it is important that these changes should be relayed back to BRCC. Databases and contact lists can then be updated.

The responses above will also provide a guide for future topics for occasional training sessions or forums for community building committees.

5.2 Awareness of BRCC advice service

Findings

Nearly two thirds of halls said that they were aware of BRCC's advice service, although not all had chosen to become a member in order to access the service. Those who had chosen not to join gave as the main reasons either that their Parish Council was already a members or that they were part of another umbrella organisation that provided relevant information.

Answers to Q22 Are you aware of the advice service provided by BRCC?

	Responses (%)	Responses (no.)
No	35.71%	25
Yes - and my hall / building is a member	42.86%	30
Yes - but my hall / building has chosen not to be a member at this time (please explain why below)	21.43%	15
Total		70
Skipped		26

Conclusions

BRCC needs to target the halls that are unaware of the advice and information that they can receive. BRCC's basic membership package is now free (from 2018), so there is no particular reason for hall committees not to join.

5.3 Other useful services

Findings

The additional services found to be potentially most useful to committees were energy audits, accessing an online booking system, online promotion and block insurance.

Answers to Q23 Which of the following other services would be useful to you?

	Very Useful	Quite Useful	Not Useful	Total
Access to online booking facility for hirers	17 (29%)	16 (27%)	26 (44%)	59
Other online promotion opportunities	12 (22%)	23 (42%)	20 (36%)	55
Web design	11 (20%)	21 (37%)	24 (43%)	56

Feasibility study for new build	9 (17%)	13 (24%)	32 (59%)	54
Energy Audits	16 (29%)	18 (33%)	21 (38%)	55
Block insurance	12 (22%)	17 (31%)	26 (47%)	55
Independent Examination of Accounts	7 (12%)	21 (36%)	31 (53%)	59
Total				63
Skipped				33

Conclusions

These findings are consistent with the challenges explored in Q19 and Q20.

An online booking and invoicing system might save the need for a bookings person, who may be paid – again reducing hall costs. Control and cost reduction in the areas of energy and insurance are a major concern for halls. BRCC can signpost halls to specialists in these areas, such as:

- Hallmaster: an online booking, invoicing and payment system for village halls.
- Insurance broker Norris Fisher offers a specialist package for Halls, they will assess the requirements of halls and offer guidance on insurance issues.
- Utility Aid provides energy price audits for halls and aim to reduce gas/electricity bills by a significant factor. They do this by bulk buying energy and reselling it to halls

BRCC can carry out feasibility studies for new community buildings on a chargeable basis.

6. Recommendations from the survey

1. Continue to update and maintain the Central Bedfordshire Community & Village Halls database

The database that has been refreshed by this survey exercise should continue to be updated and maintained by BRCC, with particular attention given to capacity; usage levels; and condition / investment needs. This will ensure that there is an up to date evidence base to inform the need for investment in community facilities when new housing developments are considered. Ward Councillors and Town / Parish Councils should be asked to assist in providing data where there are gaps.

2. Ensure that Hall Committees (and Town and Parish Councils) are aware of existing Section 106 funds available to meet investment needs

As the survey has indicated, investment is required now to ensure that all local communities in Central Bedfordshire have reasonable access to a building available for hire. Where funds towards community facilities have been secured from developments across Central Bedfordshire, those managing existing facilities with investment needs will need to be made aware. Fully costed proposals will be required in order to inform requests for Section 106 funding towards refurbishment or new build projects.

3. Include the option to transfer to 3rd party organisations within the CBC model for new community buildings

When a community building is built as part of a new development, CBC will generally enter into discussions with a view to transferring the asset to the local Town / Parish Council. However, lower-tier Council ownership is still unusual for community buildings, and CBC should also consider transferring new buildings to an alternative existing third party organisation, or to a trust set up for the purpose.

4. Work with halls that are unincorporated associations to review their legal status where required

The unincorporated association model has served community and village halls perfectly adequately over the years. However, where significant contracts or other financial risks are required (e.g. in connection with major building works), it may be advisable to convert to the Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) model in order to minimise the personal risk to trustees.

5. Ensure that CBC departments are aware of the potential for halls as venues for local service delivery.

It is clear that most halls have available capacity and are suitable for a range of alternative uses that could enable services to be delivered at a more local level. This is likely to be particularly relevant to SCHH and Assets.

6. Raise awareness of the local advice and support services available for community buildings

BRCC and other infrastructure support organisations can provide a range of advice and support to hall management committees. This is not always well known due to funding reductions and turnover of committee members. Opportunities should be taken to promote these services more actively.

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