

To All Village Hall Secretaries in Northumberland

Our ref: AH/SA/NorthumberlandHallmark

21 February 2007

Dear Village Hall Secretary/Parish Council Clerk

A Quality Standards Scheme for Village Halls

Regular readers of Northumberland Community News will have seen in our December 2006 issue the arrival of Louise Currie in the role of Community Initiatives Officer, a new post within Community Action. Louise will organise and assist in the delivery of a range of new opportunities for Parish Councils and Community Buildings Management Committees within the County, building upon and strengthening information currently available to them.

One of the key tasks in the community buildings area of her work is to develop and support 'health Checks' of community buildings.

This will be progressed in the following way:

All halls are invited to request a Village Hall Management Health Check List which they can use as a self assessment guide and an aid to improving the management of their hall. The Check List will be free of charge to the management committees of participating community buildings and village halls.

It is envisaged that halls completing the Health Check will identify areas in which they may benefit from further training. Community Action will aim to address these areas with a number of training programmes.

Recently ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England) have developed a new quality standards scheme for community buildings which they call the Village Hall Hallmark Scheme. This scheme has three levels:

- Level 1 assesses whether the hall is complying with the requirements of its charitable status
- Level 2 assesses compliance with legislative issues
- Level 3 examines the role of the hall in community and how it interacts with its users and the wider community

Community Action Northumberland are one of only 15 Rural Community Councils in England to be piloting this scheme and see it to be beneficial seen to be beneficial to halls in two main ways:

- It provides funders and other organisations interested in halls with a benchmark for a well managed hall
- It gives village hall volunteers confidence that they are running the hall in the correct way.

Participation in either the Health Check exercise or the Hallmark Scheme is entirely voluntary.

The Health Check exercise will be useful in re-assuring committees that they have a well managed charity or in identifying areas needing improvement and highlighting training needs.

The Hallmark Scheme will achieve similar results but will be an accredited scheme. Participating halls will reach a level of achievement through self assessment and to achieve accreditation will be assessed by a panel of "visitors" who will be drawn from fully trained volunteers from other halls in Northumberland.

Alan Hedley, Village Halls Adviser and Louise Currie, Community Initiatives Officer will be attending a training day at ACRE's headquarters towards the end of March which will assist them in launching the Hallmark Scheme in Northumberland shortly afterwards.

In the meantime halls interested in obtaining a free copy of the Health Check List and/or participating in the Hallmark Scheme should email northumberlandhallmark@ca-north.org.uk. On your email could you please give your name, position on the management committee (i.e. Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer or Trustee), postal address and a contact telephone number.

If you want to discuss the Scheme you can talk to Louise Currie or myself at CAN's Morpeth office, 01670 517178.

Thank you for reading this letter

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