

Cambridgeshire Village Halls and Community Buildings Survey 2017 Results Report



Undertaken by Cambridgeshire ACRE and funded through Support Cambridgeshire



Introduction

During October and November of 2016, Cambridgeshire ACRE carried out a comprehensive survey of community facilities across the County. A link to the survey was sent by email to 200 known community buildings and the survey was heavily promoted via social media and direct mail.

At the closing date of 9 December 2016, a total of 124 surveys were returned giving a return rate of 62%. This compares favourably with other community buildings surveys completed within the Rural Community Council network which have typically had return rates of between 55% and 61%.

There has been a good response from across the County, as shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1:

District	No of Community Buildings asked to respond	No of Surveys returned	Response Rate
Cambridge City	2	3	150%
East Cambridgeshire	32	18	56%
Fenland	19	15	80%
Huntingdonshire	56	28	50%
Peterborough	17	12	71%
South Cambridgeshire	74	48	65%
<i>Countywide</i>	<i>200</i>	<i>124</i>	<i>62%</i>

The survey results provide Cambridgeshire ACRE, and its Support Cambridgeshire partners (Hunts Forum of Voluntary Organisations and Cambridge Council for Voluntary Service), with a unique picture of community facilities across the County and where we can, collectively, better support volunteer management committees going forward. The results demonstrate the vibrancy of community facilities across Cambridgeshire and show them to be a vital asset for the delivery of community services and as key 'hubs' for bringing communities together.

The remainder of this report will look at the questions asked and the responses received, draw some conclusions about what the data tells us and consider the actions to be taken to improve Cambridgeshire ACRE's service offer and delivery to community facilities.

Section 1: Governance

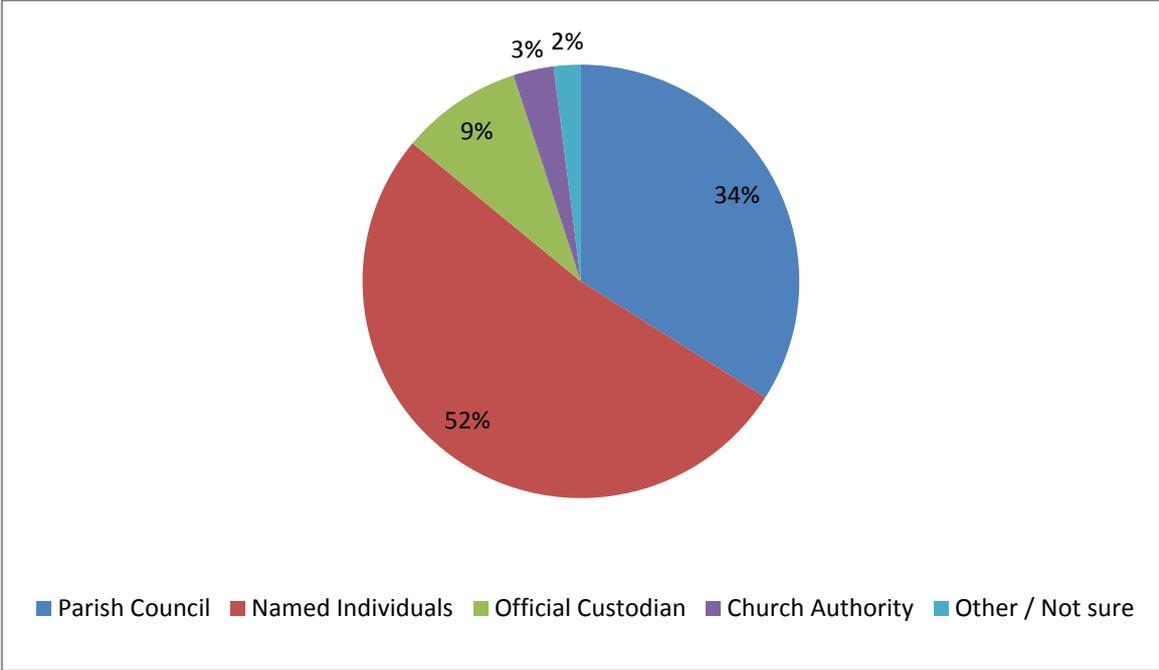
Charity Registration

87% (108 out of 124) of community buildings in the County are registered charities.

As the majority of charitable community buildings are unincorporated trusts, they will have holding or custodian trustees who are appointed to hold the land and property on behalf of the charity; but have no legal responsibility for managing the charity. They can be individuals (holding trustees), or a corporate body (custodian trustees) such as the parish council or the Official Custodian for Charities (a corporation created by statute to hold land on behalf of charities).

Chart 1 below shows who acts as the holding or custodian trustees of the charitable halls/buildings in Cambridgeshire.

Chart 1:



It is somewhat concerning that over half the charitable halls (some 52%) have named individuals acting as their holding trustees. This can create problems and expense for the charity as time goes by. It is not unknown that over a period of time the number of individual Holding Trustees reduces in number and the charity is then hit with legal costs to appoint new Holding Trustees. In some cases the reduction in the number of Holding Trustees goes unnoticed, with the result that there is no one living who holds the title to the land/property. It is because this situation could arise, and the ongoing costs to the charity, that it is recommended that either the Parish Council or the Official Custodian is used to hold the title on behalf of the charity.

Charitable village halls / community buildings will also have managing trustees who have the legal responsibility for the day-to-day management and financial control of the charity and its land and property.

85% of charitable halls state they have a separate management committee and in 96% of cases this is a committee comprised of users, elected representatives and co-opted members acting as trustees.

Incorporation

Just 15% (19 out of 124) of the community buildings responding to this survey are incorporated, either as a company limited by guarantee, a charitable incorporated organisation or an industrial and provident society.

The main disadvantage of being an unincorporated trust is that charity trustees, either individually or collectively, may be sued for breach of contract or non-payment of village hall debts and could incur unlimited personal liability. However, the Charities Act 2011 gives the Charity Commission the power to relieve trustees from personal liability for breach of trust or duty where they have acted honestly and reasonably and ought to be fairly excused.

Even with this in mind, some community buildings take the decision to incorporate. This is sometimes appropriate where the scale of the operation of the charity has become large with several employees and a variety of contracts, where a village hall undertakes major building works or where a village hall charity has a large non-charitable trading operation. For 'traditional' community buildings, there is probably no need to pursue incorporation unless embarking on one of these scenarios, as it can be a costly business.

Interestingly, 12% of community buildings (15 out of 124) were unsure of their incorporation status.

Registration of land and property with the Land Registry

59% of community buildings (73 out of 124) own the freehold to the land they are situated on; 20% are leasehold. Over a fifth (21%) are unsure of their land ownership status.

The Land Registry maintains and develops the register of title to freehold and leasehold land in England and Wales. Registration of unregistered land which is not being transferred or vested in the Official Custodian, is voluntary and is worthwhile as a registered title is proof of ownership without recourse to myriad documents some of which may be difficult to read or understand. Registration will also give the village hall a better chance of preventing a third party from claiming a right over the property. Community Building Committees who are not sure about the registration of the land and property they occupy should be encouraged to establish this.

Conclusions

The vast majority of village halls and community buildings in Cambridgeshire are charitable in nature. Some trustees do not appear to be aware of the pitfalls of having named individuals as the holding trustees for their charity and there does appear to be some lack of knowledge around governance, incorporation and land ownership. Cambridgeshire ACRE will need to look to address this going forward.

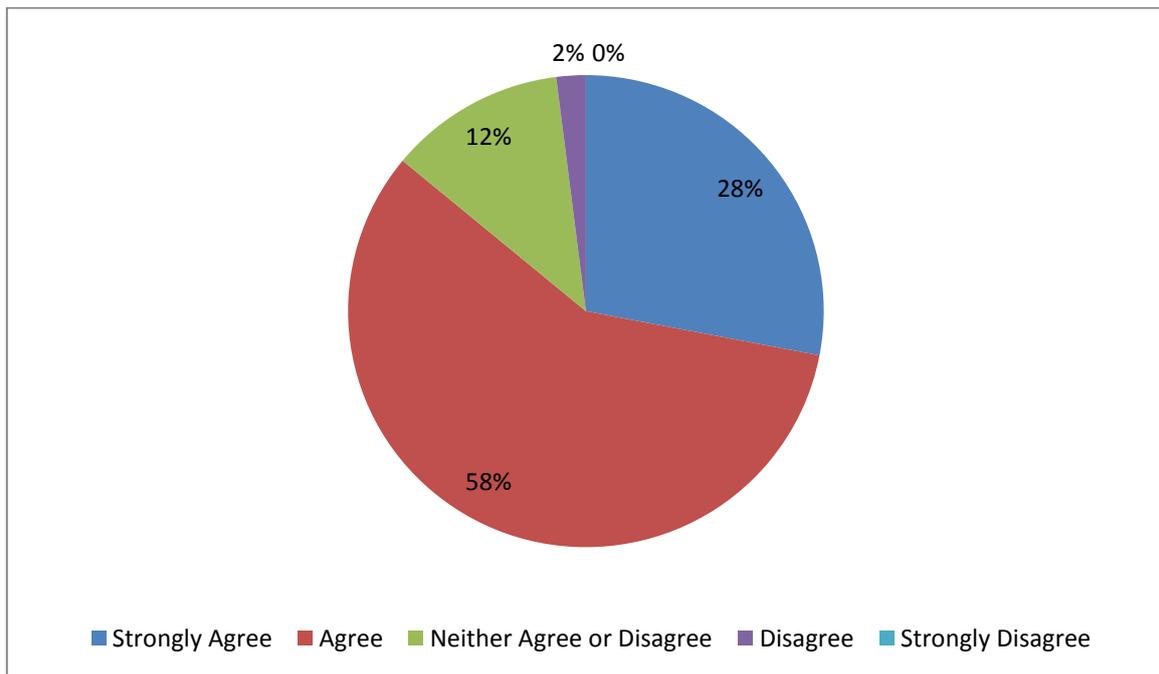
Section 2: Your Committee

This section of the survey sought to establish the views of those who run community buildings as to their level of knowledge, skills and effectiveness.

How well informed are the County's Community Building Management Committees?

Chart 2 below indicates the differing levels of agreement with the statement "My committee is well informed about matters affecting the running of village halls / community buildings."

Chart 2:

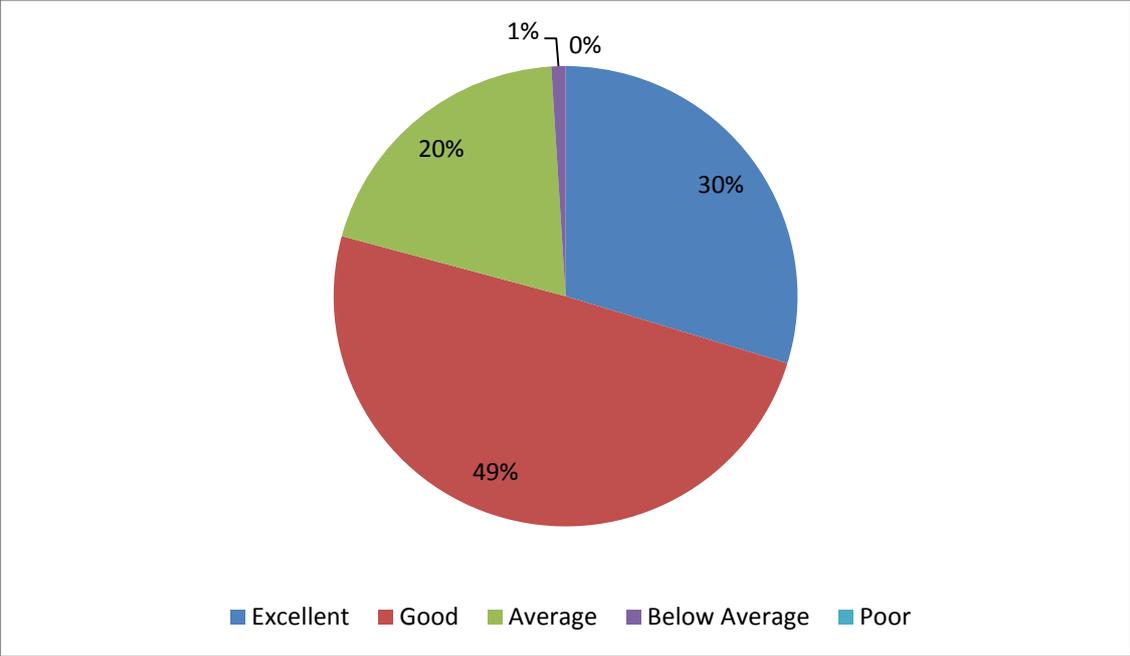


86% of respondents (104 out of 124) indicated either agreement or strong agreement with the statement "My committee is well informed about matters affecting the running of village halls / community buildings."

How good are the skills of the County's Community Building Management Committees?

Chart 3 below indicates the rating respondents have given to the skill level of their Management Committee.

Chart 3:

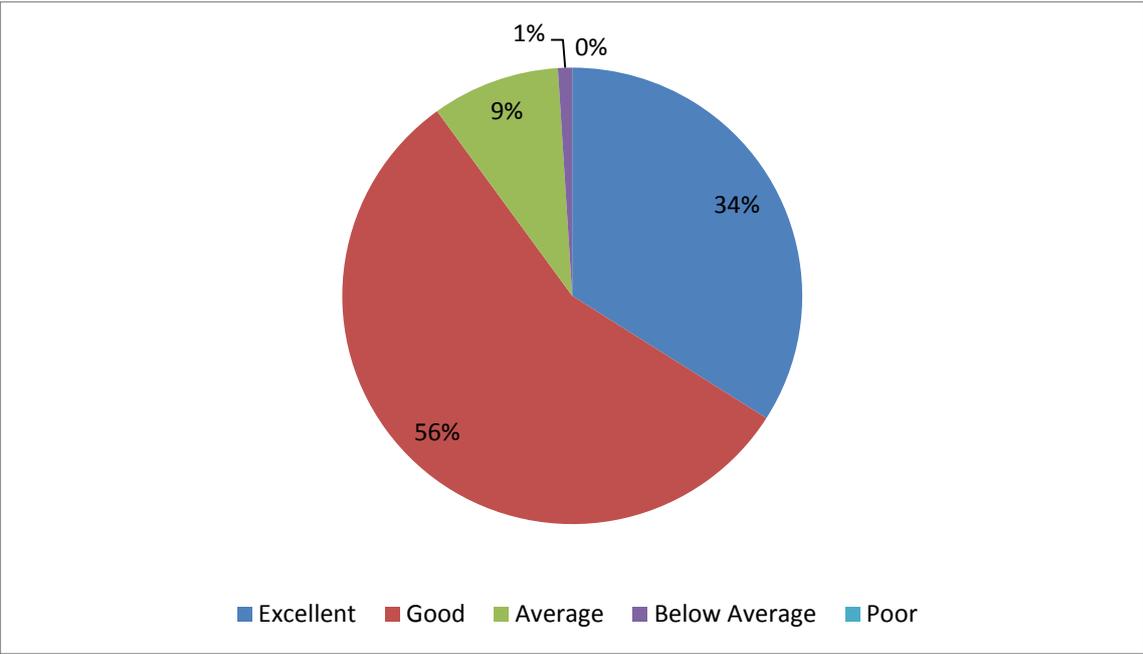


79% (96 out of 124) of respondents rated the skill level of their management committee as “Good” or “Excellent”.

How effective are the County’s Community Building Management Committees?

Chart 4 below indicates the rating respondents have given to the effectiveness of their Management Committee.

Chart 4:



90% (109 out of 124) of respondents rated the effectiveness of their management committee as “Good” or “Excellent”.

Conclusions

These questions have produced an interesting array of responses as they are a ‘self-assessment’ of knowledge, skills and effectiveness. Well over three-quarters of respondents believe their committees are well-informed, have good skill levels and are effective building managers.

This self-assessment can be contrasted with data collected by Cambridgeshire ACRE’s Community Buildings Advice Service which receives an average of 240 requests for advice and support each year. This suggests there are many instances where management committees find they need additional support from an external body.

Main issues affecting Community Buildings in Cambridgeshire

Out of the 124 community buildings responding:

- 44% (55 out of 124) have an issue with funding to support the facility
- 41% (51 out of 124) have difficulty recruiting sufficient volunteers to run the building and its activities
- 30% (37 out of 124) have problems recruiting new trustees
- 8% (10 out of 124) have issues with matters relating to governance
- 15% (19 out of 124) list other issues including maintaining and keeping the facility in good order, lack of wider community usage of the facility.

Conclusions

The issues of most concern to management committees concern funding, and recruiting people to support the hall/building, either in the role of trustee or to help with practical activities at the venue. Interestingly, the issue which trustees rate of being of least concern to them – governance – is actually the very issue that Cambridgeshire ACRE finds to be at the root of most of the problems it is asked for assistance in resolving.

Training

Respondents were asked to rank a series of potential training topics by those they would find most useful. The topics were ranked as follows:

- Ranked 1st: Health & Safety
- Ranked joint 2nd: Governance *and* Applying for funding
- Ranked joint 4th: Accounting for Village Halls *and* Capital Build Project Management
- Ranked 6th: Business Planning

Other suggested topics for training include the employment and management of staff and trustee induction on roles and responsibilities.

Conclusions

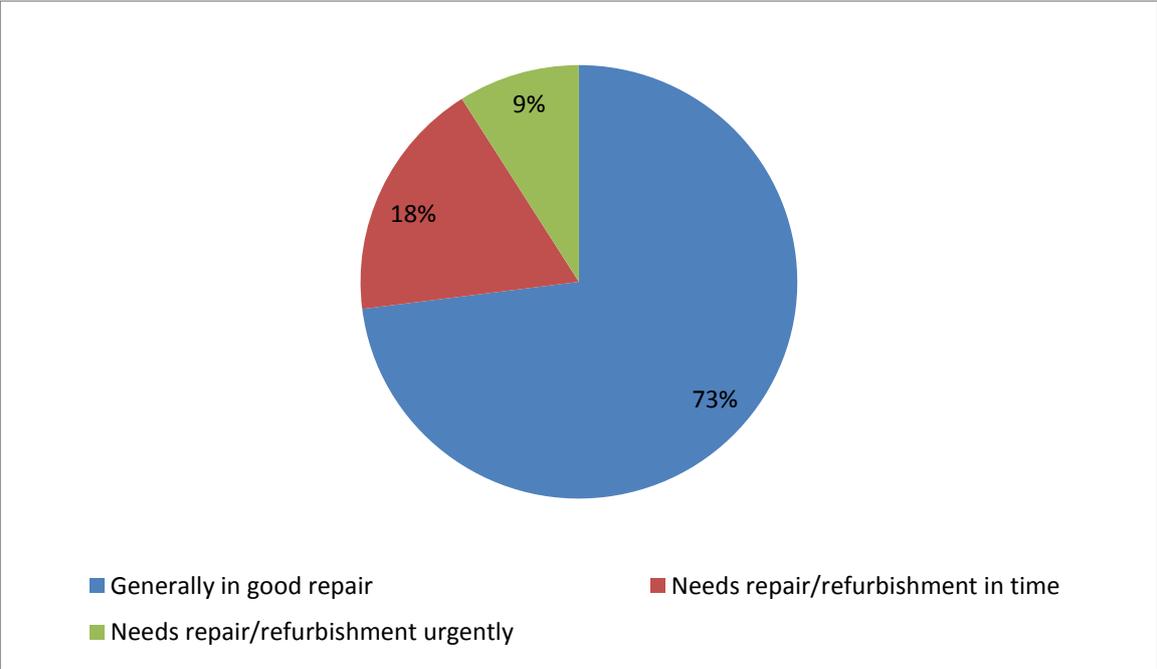
Respondents ranking of training topics will be used to inform the training programme delivered by Cambridgeshire ACRE over the course of 2017.

Section 3: Hall / Building Condition

Overall condition

Respondents were asked to rate the overall condition of their hall or building. Chart 5 below shows the results:

Chart 5:

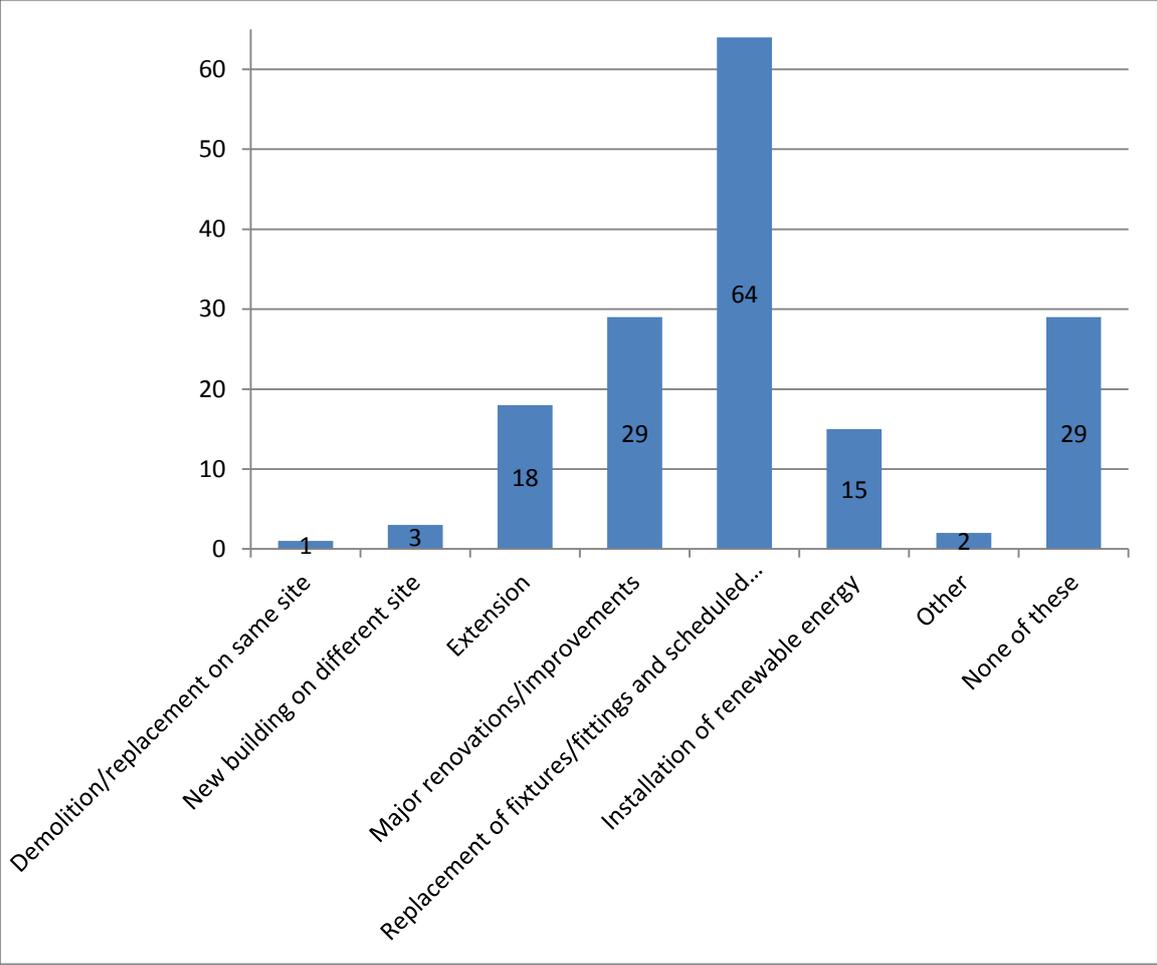


73% (91 out of 124) respondents indicated that their hall/building is generally in good repair. 18% (22 out of 124) felt their hall would need repair/refurbishment in time but 9% (11 out of 124) indicated that their hall/building needs urgent repair/refurbishment.

Planned works

Respondents were asked whether they had any works planned for their hall/building. Respondents could indicate that they had more than one type of work planned at their hall/building. Chart 6 below shows the number of halls planning each type of works:

Chart 6:



The results demonstrate the village halls and other community buildings in Cambridgeshire are undergoing a constant programme of capital works to maintain and improve facilities for local people.

Less than a quarter of buildings (23% or 29 out of 124) have no improvements or renovations planned. This may well be because they are relatively new-build halls/buildings.

3% of halls (4 out of 124) either plan to demolish their existing hall and rebuild on the same footprint or to build a new hall at a different location within their community.

Conclusions

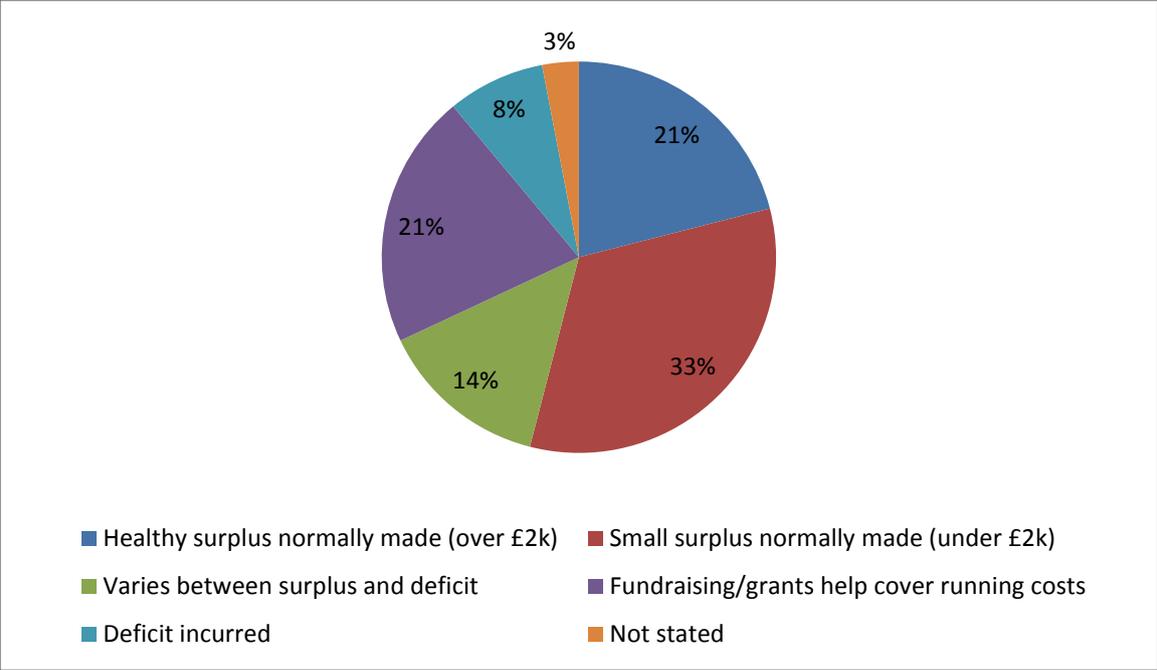
Village halls and community buildings come in a wide range of shapes and sizes. Some are new or relatively recently built and some are much older, being built in the early part of the last century. What they all have in common is a need for constant upkeep and improvement. Management Committees must factor in a rolling programme of repairs and renovations in order to keep their halls and buildings in the best condition for use by their communities. Cambridgeshire ACRE can help in this by signposting committees to potential sources of funding.

Section 4: Finances

Do hire charges and rental income cover the hall or building’s running costs?

Respondents were asked to indicate the level to which hire charges and rental income cover the hall or building’s running costs. Chart 7 below shows the results:

Chart 7:



Just over half of halls (54 out of 124) are making a surplus each year. A further 14% find their financial results vary between surplus and deficit each year and a further 21% rely on fundraising and grants to help meet the shortfall between hiring income and running costs.

Financial Viability

84% of respondents (104 out of 124) believe their hall/building will remain financially viable for the next 5 years.

15% (18 buildings) aren’t sure of their building’s viability and 2% (2 buildings) don’t believe their buildings will still be operating in 5 years’ time.

Conclusions

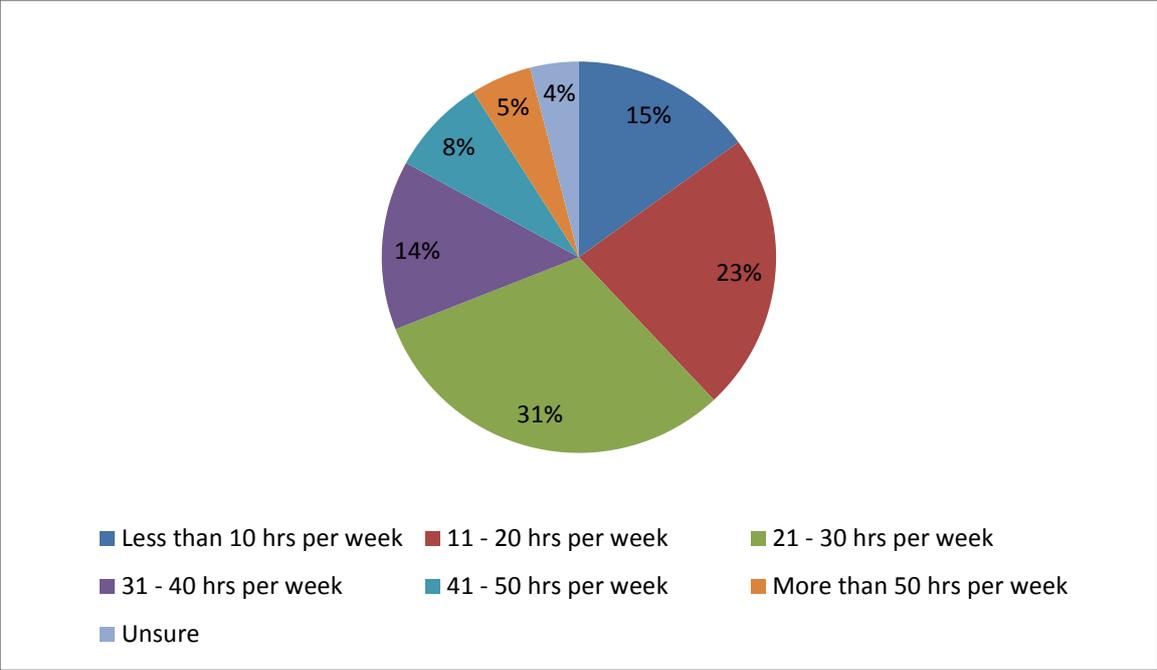
Over half of all halls and buildings in Cambridgeshire are self-sustaining through hire fees alone. A further fifth have to undertake additional fundraising in order to make ends meet. Only a small proportion (8% or 10 out of 124) run at a deficit each year. This is concerning as their reserves will soon run out if they dip into them repeatedly. In terms of longer-term viability, the clear majority are confident their hall/building will remain viable over the short to medium term. Cambridgeshire ACRE can offer advice on business planning and accounting for village halls and we must ensure management committees are aware of this so they can work towards long-term financial viability.

Section 5: Hall/Building Usage

Number of hours per week hall/building is in use

Respondents were asked to indicate how many hours per week the main space within their hall/building was used. Chart 8 below shows the results:

Chart 8:



27% buildings (27 out of 124) are in use for more than 31 hours per week. Another 31% (38 out of 124) are in use for between 21 – 31 hours per week. 38% buildings (46 out of 124) are in use for less than 21 hours per week.

Conclusions

Nearly two thirds of halls/buildings (58% or 65 out of 124) have their main space in use for more than 21 hours each week.

Services delivered from village halls/ community buildings

We sought to understand which services are currently being delivered from village halls/community building. Where services are not current being delivered, we then sought to understand whether the hall/building might have a space suitable for delivery and, if so, whether its management committee felt there was the capacity to take on delivery of this service. Table 2 below shows the results:

Table 2:

Service		Service currently delivered from hall/building	Where not currently delivered, hall/building has suitable space for delivery	Where not currently delivered and hall/building has a potentially suitable space, hall/building has capacity for delivery
Doctors' Surgery	%	2	19	52
	No.	2	23	12
Clinic (Baby)	%	2	35	53
	No.	2	43	23
Nurse / Other Clinic / Flu Jabs	%	5	37	50
	No.	6	46	23
Chiropody	%	0	37	52
	No.	0	46	24
Blood Transfusion	%	3	37	46
	No.	4	46	21
Emergency Response Facility	%	11	25	35
	No.	14	31	11
Parish Council Meeting	%	71	12	33
	No.	88	15	5
Parish Council / Community Office	%	22	14	29
	No.	27	17	5
IT / Resource Centre	%	8	21	46
	No.	10	26	12
Library	%	6	15	39
	No.	8	18	7
Lunch Club	%	24	28	37
	No.	30	35	13
Club for people with disabilities /special needs	%	11	38	49
	No.	14	47	23
Voluntary Care Scheme	%	1	26	50
	No.	1	32	16
Day Care	%	2	16	40
	No.	2	20	8
Meals on Wheels	%	0	17	38
	No.	0	21	8
Community Shop	%	1	11	36
	No.	1	14	5
Farmers' Market	%	5	23	29
	No.	6	28	8

Service		Service currently delivered from hall/building	Where not currently delivered, hall/building has suitable space for delivery	Where not currently delivered and hall/building has a potentially suitable space, hall/building has capacity for delivery
Post Office	%	2	9	27
	No.	3	11	3
Community Café	%	16	25	45
	No.	20	31	14
Polling Station	%	77	8	20
	No.	95	10	2
MP's Surgery	%	11	38	45
	No.	14	47	21
Job Vacancy Display	%	2	26	44
	No.	3	32	14
Public Information Noticeboards	%	56	11	50
	No.	70	14	7

Conclusions

Cambridgeshire's village halls and community buildings are used as the location for the delivery of a wide range of community services.

Many form the hub of local democracy, being used as polling stations (77% or 95 halls) and as the venue for their local parish council to meet (71% or 88 halls).

Village halls and community buildings are somewhere local people look to for public information and support with 56% (70 halls) having public noticeboards, 22% (27 halls) being the base for their parish council or community office and 11% (14 halls) offering a venue for the local MP to meet with constituents.

Village halls and community buildings also offer a venue for community social events. 16% (20 halls) host a community café, 24% (30 halls) host Lunch Clubs, and 11% (14 halls) provide a venue for a club for people with disabilities or special needs.

Halls are also used as resource centre for furthering people's knowledge with 8% (10 halls) providing IT/Resource Centres for their communities and 6% (8 halls) offering a library.

Village halls and community buildings are currently less well used for health and social care services. This is most likely because they were not designed with this purpose in mind. However a small number are being used as a venue for GP surgeries, nurse and baby clinics, as well as day care centres for older people.

We asked respondents whether their hall/building would have a suitable space for delivering any of the above services and, if so, whether they would have the capacity to take on such service delivery.

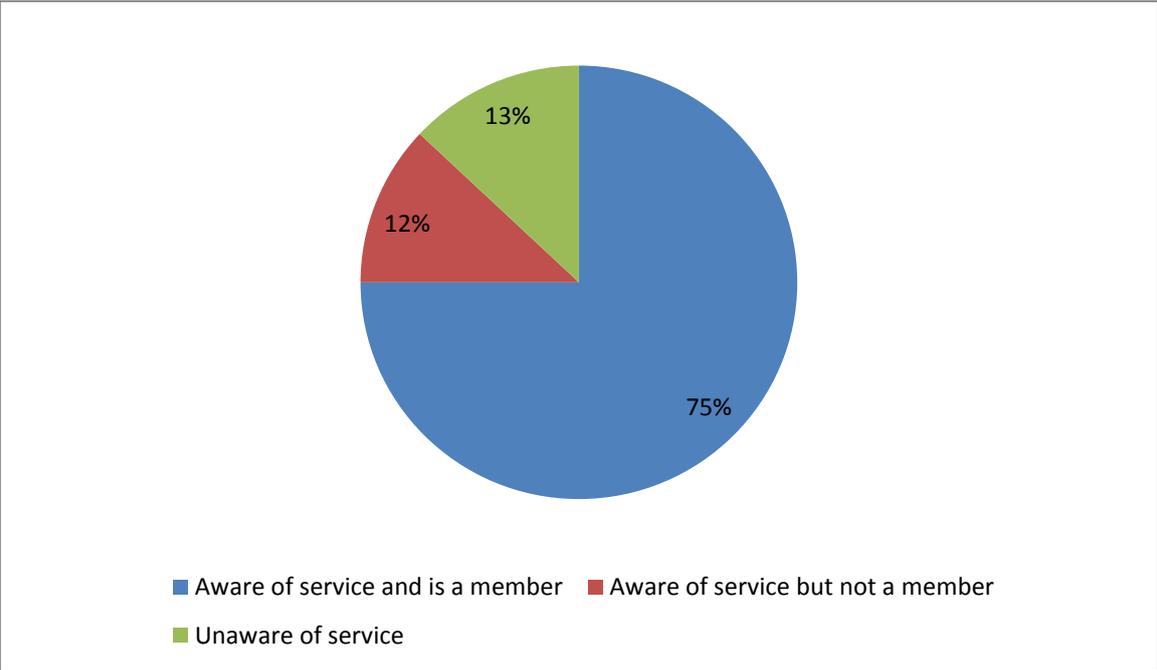
Whilst many felt their hall/building could be adapted to provide space for health care services and social care services, they had considerable doubts over their capacity to take on delivery of such services. This links back to Question 12 where we asked about the main issues affecting the running village halls / community buildings, where 41% respondents (51 out of 124 halls) stated they had issues finding the necessary volunteers to run activities at their halls and Question 18 where we asked about usage and where the answers revealed that many halls are operating at near capacity, with over a quarter (27% or 27 out of 124 buildings) being in use for more than 31 hours a week already.

Section 6: Support from Cambridgeshire ACRE

Awareness of Cambridgeshire ACRE’s membership service

Respondents were asked whether they were aware of the community facilities advice service provided to Cambridgeshire ACRE members and also to indicate whether they were a member or not. For those who are aware of the service but have chosen not to be members, we sought to understand the reasons why. Chart 9 below shows the results:

Chart 9:



75% of respondents (93 out of 124) were aware of the community facilities advice service provided to Cambridgeshire ACRE members and had chosen to be members. 13% (16 out of 124) of respondents indicated they were unaware of the service provided. The remaining 12% (15 respondents) indicated that although they were aware of the service, they had opted not to be members. Most respondents did not give a reason for this, but two indicated that it was because the hall was Parish Council owned and run and the Parish Council itself was a member.

Other organisations of which village halls/community buildings committee are members

We asked whether respondents were members of any other organisation providing support services to community facilities. 93% (115 out of 124) aren’t members of any other organisation, but 7% (9 halls/buildings) are. Two each are members of NCVO, Cambridge CVS and Hunts Forum of Voluntary Organisations. 3 halls/buildings are members of Community Action Peterborough.

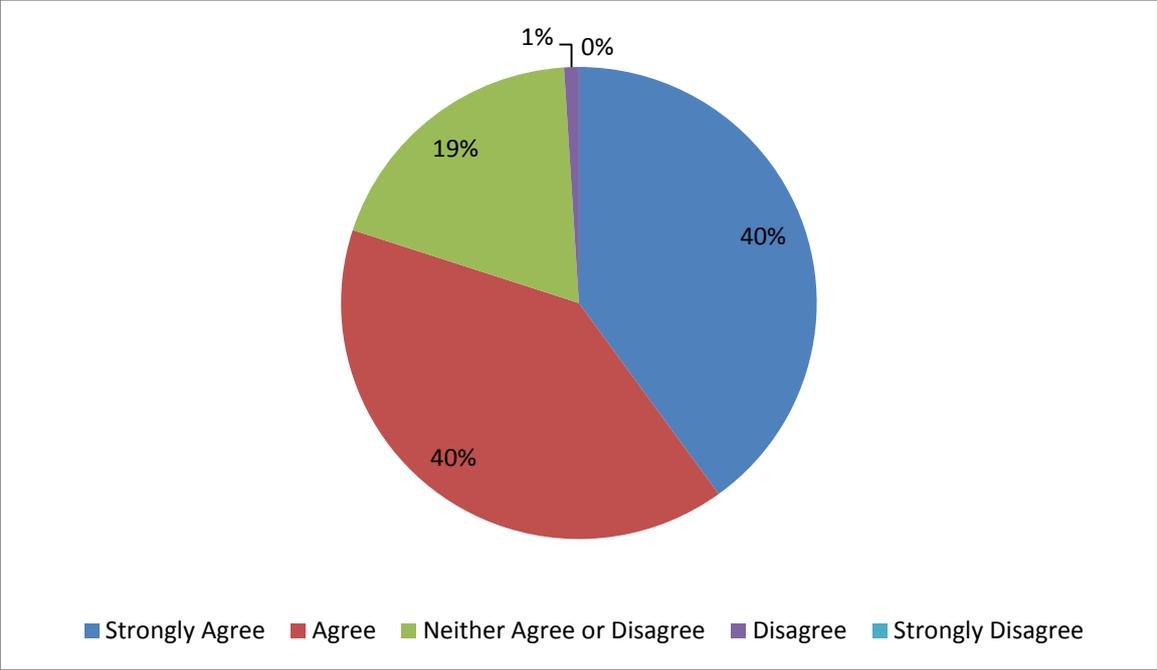
Conclusions

The heavy reliance Cambridgeshire village halls and community buildings place on support from Cambridgeshire ACRE to advise on hall and building issues shows not only how important it is that Cambridgeshire ACRE provides a high quality service but how continuing to improve and develop this service offer is important for the continued well-being of the County’s community facilities.

Cambridgeshire ACRE’s understanding of the needs of village halls / community buildings

We asked respondents to rate their agreement with the statement “The needs of village halls and community buildings are well understood by Cambridgeshire ACRE.” Chart 10 below shows the results:

Chart 10:



Conclusions

80% of respondents (100 out of 124 halls) believe Cambridgeshire ACRE understand the needs of village halls and community buildings. However, the fact that one fifth (20% or 24 halls) do not positively agree suggests there is still more Cambridgeshire ACRE can do to engage, and sustain a better dialogue, with those who run the County’s village halls and community buildings.

Preference for training times

Knowing that Cambridgeshire ACRE intends to increase its training offer to village hall and community building management committees, we asked respondents to indicate which days/time they felt their committee members would be able to attend.

53% (66 out of 124) would be able to attend training sessions on weekday evenings; 51% (63 out of 124) would be able to attend training sessions on weekdays during the day. Only 12% (15 out of 124) would wish to attend training sessions at weekends.

Conclusions

When planning future training sessions, Cambridgeshire ACRE will seek to arrange them for weekdays, split between daytime and evening, to enable the maximum number of hall representatives to attend.

Section 7: Actions to be taken

Taking on board these survey results and the conclusions drawn, Cambridgeshire ACRE will undertake the following actions in response:

- 1) Develop our service offer for village halls and community buildings to facilitate them gaining a better understanding of their governance. Particular areas of focus will be developing advice to hall and building committees on vesting their property in the Official Custodian to prevent issues regarding holding trustees in future; helping halls understand their incorporation status and when this might be appropriate; and helping committees to understand whether their property is freehold or leasehold.
- 2) Provide an objective third party assessment of the knowledge, skills and effectiveness of their hall or building management committee through the roll out of the Hallmark Quality Scheme.
- 3) Develop and deliver a training programme for village halls and community buildings that includes sessions on:
 - a) Understanding the governing document for your village hall or community building.
 - b) Accounting for village halls and community buildings.
 - c) Health & Safety for village halls and community buildings.
 - d) Hiring and Licencing for village halls and community buildings.
- 4) Consider producing best practice guidance on how village halls and community building should induct new trustees onto their management committees.
- 5) Provide regular signposting to funds available for repairs and refurbishments that may be suitable for village halls and community buildings and to provide assistance to committees in making strong funding applications.
- 6) Contact village halls and community buildings who are not currently aware of Cambridgeshire ACRE and its community facilities advice service and introduce the service and what it can offer them, recruiting new halls/buildings into membership.
- 7) Continue to support village halls and community buildings to consider how they can extend the range of community services delivered from their premises by producing factsheets/case studies (which list the things to consider and offer peer mentor support) on:
 - a) Running a clinic from your village hall/community building.
 - b) Running a lunch club at your village hall/community building.
 - c) Running a library at your village hall/community building.
 - d) Running a community café at your village hall/community building.