

Village Halls and Entertainment

A raft of cuts in red tape will make it easier for village halls to be the social heart of their communities, says Community Action Northumberland (CAN) The charity says major changes to Government regulations on entertainment licensing, which came fully into force from April 6, have reduced the burden on community buildings.

It says village halls now face less paperwork when it comes to putting on the events, plays, performances and social evenings which pull communities together. The charity, part of the ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England) Network, runs a dedicated advice service for village hall management committee members.

Research by ACRE, the national voice for England's rural community councils, shows that alongside traditional activities such as youth clubs, WI, gardening clubs and whist drives, village halls are hosting newer crazes such as Pilates and Zumba and have seen a rise in exercise and keep fit classes.

ACRE has produced a new guide 'Entertainment in Village Halls' which steers management committees through the rules and regulations on licensing, music copyright, cinema, events and more. It is available from CAN's Village Hall Adviser Louise Currie

The main piece of legislation affected by the changes is the Licensing Act 2003, which introduced a single system to regulate the provision of entertainment to the public (or in private where a charge is made with a view to profit), the sale or supply of alcohol, and the provision of late-night refreshment.

ACRE campaigned for changes to this legislation, significantly bringing about the introduction of the Legislative Reform (Supervision of alcohol sales in village halls) Order 2009.

The Government recently made further significant changes to entertainment licensing in line with its policy to remove unnecessary regulations and burdens on the voluntary sector and business, and in particular to cut red tape to encourage the performance of live music.

Louise said: "It's great news that the Government has reduced the red tape that takes up so much time for the 80,000 volunteers who run England's village halls. Village halls play an increasingly important role in our communities, serving as a social centre, arts centre, sports centre and, in some cases, providing space for doctors' surgeries or shops. They are often the hub of community activity providing a space for groups and services that otherwise wouldn't exist and especially valued by older people, who are can be isolated in rural communities with no transport. We hope changes in legislation will encourage more halls to put on entertainment that brings communities together."

The National Rural Touring Forum (NRTF), which represents touring schemes and arts development agencies that help local people to promote events in rural venues, has welcomed the reduction in red tape. NRTF Development Director Ralph Lister said: "Village halls play an invaluable role in facilitating arts events in rural communities and any relaxation of current legislation is to be welcomed."

Louise Currie