

October 2018

Thursby is a small village on the eastern edge of Allerdale district, 6 miles south of Carlisle. Thursby Parish Hall provides a well-used venue with lots of opportunities for people to socialise, keep fit, and learn new skills. When the old hall was rebuilt in 2010 the committee were keen to also establish the highest standards of good practice to ensure that this vital community asset was well-maintained. They agreed to do this through the Hallmark Quality Standard, the only quality mark available for village halls. In October 2018 they became the first Hall in Cumbria to be awarded Hallmark level 2.

Background

Thursby Parish Hall, an old 1922 ammunition hut, was no longer fit for purpose. In 2010, following a complete rebuild project, it was replaced by a well-designed modern and spacious facility for the community. The rebuild project, including fundraising and grant applications was led by the volunteer Parish Hall Committee.

As well as asking how the project benefits the local community, all grant funders approached also wanted evidence of good management practice. If a committee applying for funds does not appear to know their role, aims and objectives, how could funders justify their support? Ad hoc practice makes a committee vulnerable to making mistakes, being accused of poor practice, or even operating illegally.

The Parish Hall committee used this prompt to review their practice and contacted ACT for help. Members of the committee now regularly attend ACT's Community Building Events, which have been very helpful in providing good practice examples and templates. For instance, a new Hire Agreement was one of the first major updates, which the 'traditional' hirers took on board extremely well.

As confidence amongst the committee grew, they became interested in pursuing Hallmark - the only nationally recognised quality standard designed specifically for Community Buildings



Secretary Peg Eastwood receives the Hallmark 2 Award from ACT's Fran Richardson

The Project

In 2016 the management committee worked diligently through the Hallmark 1 checklist, which focuses on charity administration and management. Initially somewhat daunted, they used the checklist as an internal audit, to see how their existing practice measured up, and to identify areas which needed work.

When they felt ready, the team applied to ACT for a Hallmark 1 assessment which involves a visit by two trained peer assessors, who are also village hall committee members elsewhere in the county. The committee at Thursby could see the advantages of accreditation, including arguably the most tangible benefit, a reduced insurance premium.

Thursby successfully achieved Hallmark 1 in April 2017 having demonstrated the charity is managed by a well-organised committee using sound governance and financial processes.



Thursby Parish Hall

The hall is maintained to a high standard as a matter of routine and effective procedures are in place for those hiring the facility.

Secure in the knowledge that they had the fundamentals in place, the committee progressed to Hallmark 2, which focuses on health, safety, security and licenses.

What has been achieved?

Following a successful assessment visit Thursby Parish Hall was awarded Hallmark 2 in October 2018. This is the first such award in Cumbria and is testament to the dedication of a small number of people, committed to managing the charity effectively and providing an excellent facility for their local community.

Chair of the committee, Ruth Francis described some of the positive changes made “We have more user-focussed communication methods; storerooms are labelled; a plan of vital services (water, electric, emergency points etc.) is given to hirers; and cleaning products are kept in a secure cupboard to meet COSHH regulations

“These changes were fairly straight forward to implement and had little cost implication. Our aim in being involved in the Hallmark process is to ensure a vital community asset will stay in good shape, physically and financially, for generations to come.”

ACT champions community and rural issues

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The Learning

Peg Eastwood, Parish Hall secretary, has been involved in the process from the beginning. She says the biggest learning points for them are:

- Hallmark gives halls a very clear template to start from and helps to focus action. Elements can be reviewed individually; tackle one thing at a time. Do share actions between people on the committee, because this can't and shouldn't be the work of only one person.
- Some elements require a bit of extra time and thought to make sure the whole committee knows what is going on and why. For instance policies (Health & Safety, Data Protection etc), Don't rush, but keep it on your agenda and make progress when you can.
- If you get stuck, get help from ACT or the Charity Commission, and build relationships with people like your insurance company, so they know what you're doing.
- Let hirers know that you are doing this to provide the best possible service for them. Most are not interested in how the hall works, they just want it to carry on. Make sure they know the hall is run by volunteers; this comes as a surprise to many and may prompt them to get more involved or better appreciate the work done behind the scenes.
- Effective communication, both within committee and with outside parties is key.

Contact Details

For further details, email Thursby Parish Hall Committee: atphmc@gmail.com, with the subject 'Hallmark query'.

Or contact your local ACT Development Officer (see below for details).