



West Devon

Village Halls Audit Analysis Report

June 2024

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS



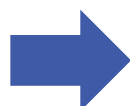
West Devon's Village Halls need a system wide funding approach that includes consistent investment, including capital funds to remain sustainable in the long term.



The future sustainability of West Devon's Village Halls would be significantly strengthened by a county-wide, funded, specialist infrastructure support service. This would enable training in the key areas of grant applications, fundraising, governance, succession planning, diversifying income streams, accessibility, environmental improvements and marketing their halls in a digital age.



A resourced county-wide network of Rural Community Connectors would provide specialist capacity building, training, and support, as well as enabling peer support networks.



Greater access to reasonably priced and reliable Broadband is needed if our Village Halls are going to remain financially sustainable.



Village Halls are ideally placed to become rural health hubs. Reducing rural health inequalities, supporting the health prevention agenda, and providing community led place-based access to health and care services.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Devon Communities Together (DCT) began carrying out the first ever audit of Village Halls across Devon in September 2022. The programme was funded by Devon County Council Public Health, One Devon NHS and DEFRA.

Our key goals were:

- ✓ to create a new and unique Community Asset Map of Devon's Village Halls
- ✓ to update our intelligence on the legacy impact that covid has had on Village Halls
- ✓ to establish an unprecedented central data set of information and intelligence around the activities and sustainability of the Devon Village Hall Network
- ✓ to further understand the contribution Village Halls make in Devon's rural communities and the impact they have, and the challenges that they are currently facing
- ✓ to enable communities, Village Hall custodians, local service providers and policy makers to make informed decisions about the sustainability, capacity, potential new uses and audiences for Devon's Village Halls and optimise their use as valuable rural community hubs
- ✓ to gain a better understanding of current support needs

2. CONTEXT

Devon Communities Together (DCT) has been supporting the Village Hall Network in Devon since 1961, with the aid of Defra Grant Funding. DCT is a member of our National Network ACRE's (Action with Communities in Rural England) Specialist Community Buildings Adviser Team with access to a broad range of specialist resources and information around the following key areas of Village Hall governance:

- Funding applications
- Community consultation & engagement
- Health & wellbeing projects
- Social enterprise and community business
- Energy advice and oil buying schemes
- Community and neighbourhood planning, inc. affordable housing
- Community transport
- Environmental projects
- Volunteer management
- Village hall governance
- Digital inclusion

12% of the audited halls are located in West Devon and this report draws on the data from these 39 Village Halls.

59% of the 39 audited West Devon Village Halls are Members of DCT enjoying the benefits of free/discounts on training sessions, support with funding applications, model policies and newsletters including funding opportunities, largely funded through DCT membership fees, DEFRA and Devon County Council grant funding. DCT's Community Buildings Specialist Advice Service is on hand to support Member Village Halls with any questions or issues that might arise. Membership also gives halls a presence on the DCT Village Hall Network website page <https://www.devoncommunities.org.uk/community-buildings>



2.1 What is a Village Hall?

A Village Hall is a charitable community facility. Village Halls are charitable because they are held on trust to be used for purposes set out by the Recreational Charities Act 1958 with the object of providing facilities for recreation or other leisure time occupation in the interests of social welfare and to improve the conditions of life for people of the village. Many Village Halls were built after the First World War. Set up in a concerted national effort to develop social and educational provision in rural areas and have adapted their community roles over the years.

The object clause of community centres is generally wider and can cover a more extensive variety of activities or be restricted to a particular section of the wider community.

Village Halls are run by a management committee generally made up of between 5 and 12 Trustees. The committee are responsible for hiring out the building, fire and general risk assessment, data protection and safeguarding. They are also responsible for finances such as setting hire charges, fundraising, grant applications etc. and they report annually to the Charity Commission.

A Village Hall charity will usually have a second set of trustees, appointed to hold the land or property on behalf of the charity. These are the holding (or custodian) trustees. Their sole function is to hold the title to the property.

Surprisingly, Village Halls have no consistent Government Funding, despite the vital role they play in our rural societies. Available national funds/loans over recent years include:

- Village Hall Improvement Grant Fund provided £3m nationally between 2019/2022.
- The Platinum Jubilee Village Halls Fund is providing £3m 2023/2025.
- Capital grants are being offered for energy efficiency measures to qualifying Village Halls through Groundworks.
- ACRE continues to offer the Rural Community Building Loan Fund.

13 of Devon's Village Halls have benefitted from some **£201,218** worth of DEFRA funding (delivered by ACRE) since 2019.

During Covid, additional funding was made available to halls. This enabled Village Halls to survive the long period of inactivity and in some cases, carry out building works that had been planned for when finances allowed. This funding has skewed the optimism that some halls express in their financial security, particularly those audited at the beginning of the project.

DCT supported Devon Village Halls throughout the Covid period, but it was a difficult time for hall committees.

DCT conducted a Village Hall survey during Covid. Some of the findings can be seen below:

- Total number of **87** respondents
- **56** out of the **87** were members of the DCT village halls network.
- **86** out of **87** respondents were fully/partially closed. Most are fully closed.
- A total number of **40** out of **87** respondents had applied for funding, **33** had been successful/awarded grants from diverse sources.

2.2 Key issues

- Concerns about covid secure risk assessment management and reopening guidance.
- High probability of being at a point of failure should the lockdown continue for more than 6-12 months.
- Detrimental effects of closing village halls on community life/individual wellbeing.
- Further assistance needed to apply for grants and funding to offset costs such as insurance and post covid costs.

DCT has hosted an online portal via the DCT website since 2005, with a facility for individual Village Halls who are members of Devon Communities Together to promote their halls and revenue generating facilities.

3. METHODOLOGY

DCT has carried out **39** Village Hall Audits in West Devon, this equates to **92%** of all of West Devon's Village Halls. All have been visited onsite in order to gather intelligence and insight from the community volunteer custodians managing the halls.

The audit takes a comprehensive look at a range of different aspects of current Village Hall capacity and sustainability such as:

- Financial status
- Digital connectivity
- Governance
- Purpose & use
- User demographic
- Accessibility
- Heating & ventilation
- External space

The audit was co- designed with a wide range of stakeholders and was promoted via the DCT website, social media channels, local press, radio and television. The data gathered is both qualitative and quantitative, providing a clear picture of the status of the West Devon's Village Halls. By formulating the data into percentages, the impact or need of our Village Halls can be clearly demonstrated. By reviewing the qualitative data, we get a better understanding of Village Hall committees experiences. Between October 2023 & April 2024 we created an interim Devon report as well as a report for each of Devon's Districts. These have been sent to all participating Village Halls in that area as well as funders, District Councils, Dartmoor National Park Authority and other stakeholders and interested parties.

4. KEY AUDIT FINDINGS

From the West Devon Village Hall Audit, we've learned that:



10% of Village Halls have less than 3 months running costs in reserve



49% of Village Halls have no Broadband connection



44% of Village Halls in West Devon earn over half of their income from bookings



76% of Village Halls in West Devon are empty for over half the time



46% of West Devon Village Halls would like to offer their communities access to healthcare



23% of Village Halls in West Devon would like business training/support with grant applications

3 West Devon Village Halls chose not to engage with the audit. Reasons include feeling that the audit wouldn't be beneficial as they were a small very busy hall, to the committee feeling so stretched that they didn't have the time or energy to engage with us. The halls that DCT has audited are diverse in age and stature, but all are run by committees made up of local volunteers.

As you read this report, please consider the following:

What would happen to our rural communities if they had nowhere for people to meet?

Based on the audit data, it's clear that Village Halls in West Devon offer their rural communities social, recreational, physical and mental wellbeing activities on their doorstep. With an ageing population, such local opportunities to socialise/exercise/be creative can be a lifeline to reduce loneliness and social isolation. With so many closures of rural pubs, shops and post offices the social interactions that used to naturally take place when queuing for your pint of milk no longer happen. Without a Village Hall, the last of these social lifelines would be lost.

5. KEY PURPOSE OF VILLAGE HALLS

Village Halls provide facilities for recreation, social welfare activities and they undoubtedly improve the lives of the local people they engage. The role of these local assets varies according to the needs of their community but have similarities in the fact that they aim to support their communities, reducing rural isolation and loneliness.

5.1 Key Findings

- ✓ **76%** of Village Halls provide physical activities
- ✓ **69%** of halls put on regular social activities
- ✓ **8%** of Village Halls told us they provide a post office or library service
- ✓ **8%** have a community shop, market, community fridge or food bank
- ✓ **13%** of halls regularly hold learning opportunities in the form of talks or workshops

How do Village Halls support their communities:

"There is something on most weeks. It is the social hub of the community."

"Continue to be there for the community, get people involved in things. Over the years the whole community thing has been lost a bit and we want to bring it back."

Village Halls try to be inclusive:

"There is something on most weeks. It is the social hub of the community."

"We have regular consultations with the community to find out what they want."

"We offer monthly free coffee and cake mornings."

"Take boxes of food to people in the community."

"Lunch club for children during school holidays."

"The hall provides Christmas lunch, delivering to people who can't get to the hall."

Village Halls support their community's wellbeing:

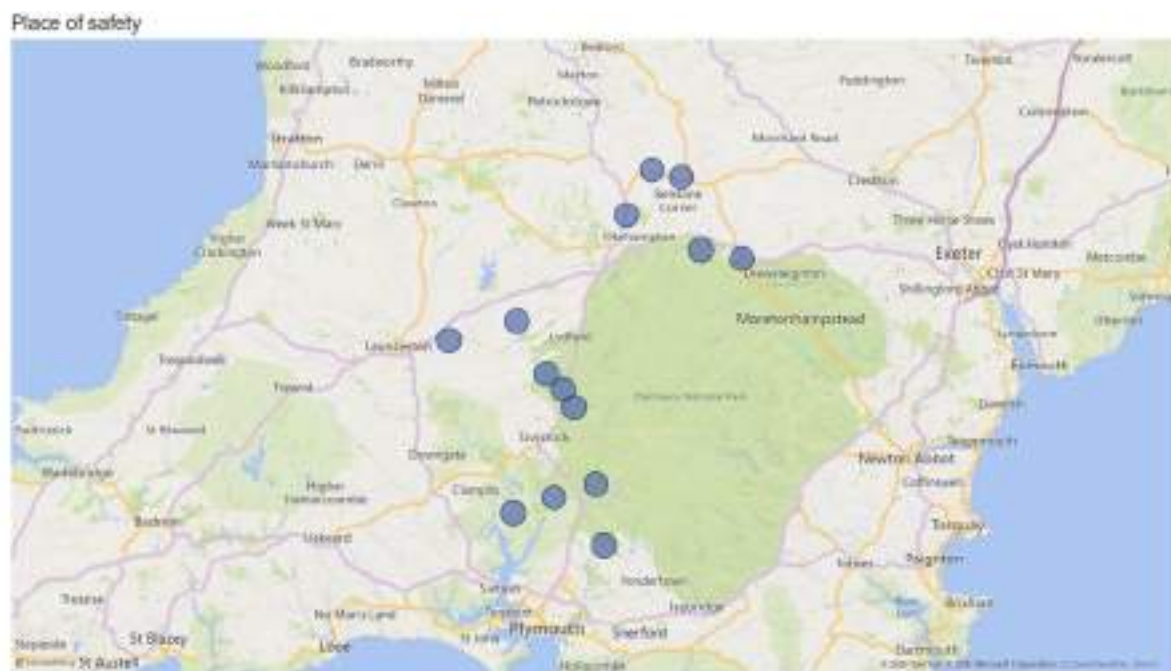
"Already have a warm space, the hall is open most mornings for this."

"The overarching aim of the village hall is to enhance the quality of life for our residents and the surrounding neighbourhood. This will be achieved by encouraging social interaction and promoting physical/ mental health and general well-being through educational, recreational and leisure activities."

“Bringing community together improves wellbeing.”

Village Halls are designated places of safety in an emergency:

36% of West Devon’s Village Halls are designated places of safety in an emergency (see map below). This means that the hall can provide hot drinks, warmth and a safe space for the community if for example a flood event occurs.



5.2 Evaluation of Key Findings

The following analysis is taken from the audit findings data bank. This demonstrates that West Devon’s Village Halls provide their communities with physical, social and learning opportunities. They also act as a village focal point when other vital services no longer exist and help to retain a sense of community in our villages and rural hamlets.

5.3 So, what does this tell us?

Village Halls are the last community asset in many of West Devons rural locations. With the closure of village shops, post offices, pubs and withdrawal of the mobile library service, Village Halls are in many cases the only place for people to meet. Our halls often step in to fill the gap when local facilities can no longer survive. At a time when loneliness is rife in our society, West Devon’s Village Halls really are vital to the mental wellbeing of many in our rural communities, particularly as populations age and an increasing number of people live on their own.

5.4 Recommendations

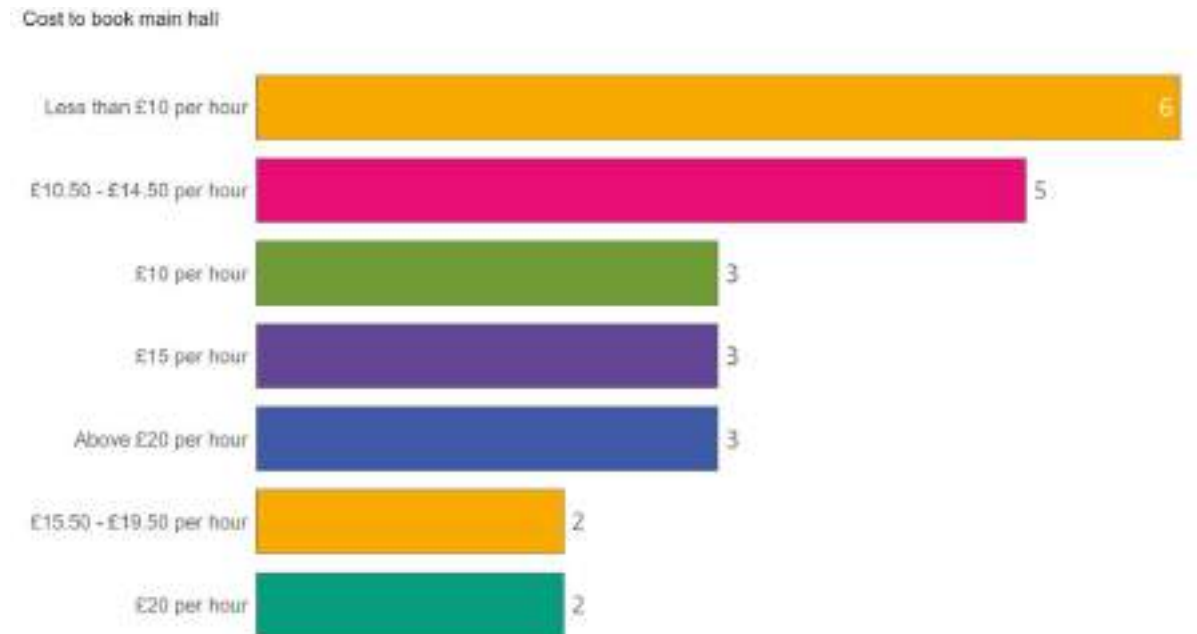
1. Our Village Halls need training and support to continue their current offer, building and adapting for the future.
2. They need support in providing those lost services to their community.
3. Hall committees need help in engagement to find out what their community needs/wants from its Village Hall.
4. Working together in hubs is one way that hall committees can feel less isolated and more supported in their efforts, but these hubs need to be backed up with formal training and advice sessions.

6. FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

6.1 Key findings

44% of West Devon's Village Halls earn more than half of their income from hall bookings. Other income sources include fundraising events, donations, grants, and in some cases solar feed in tariffs.

58% of Village Halls in West Devon charge less than £15 an hour to hire their Hall.



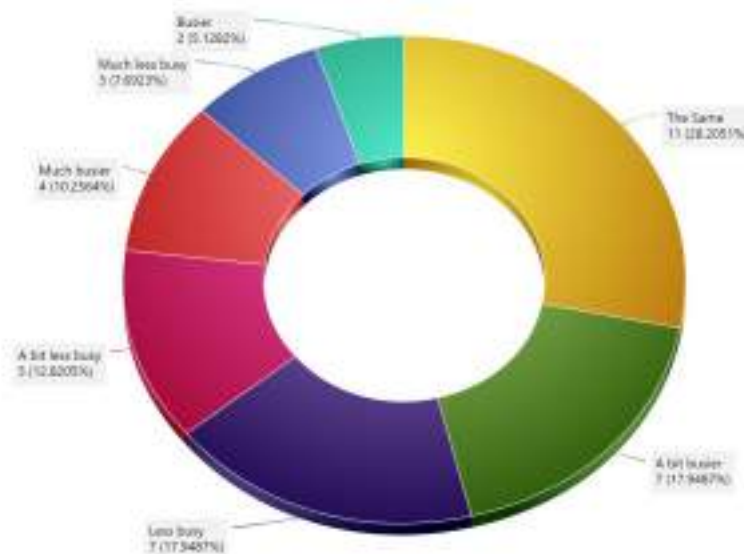
76% of Village Halls in West Devon are booked for less than 50% of the time despite hall committees being keen to take on more bookings. This demonstrates that hall committees need help to promote their community assets, perhaps attracting bookings from outside their immediate locality.

Percentage of time is the hall booked (opening hours)



38% of West Devon’s Village Halls are less busy than pre-Covid. In some cases, behaviours changed over the Covid period, and some halls found that groups folded as the organiser decided they didn’t want to carry on or sometimes groups restarted, but the local enthusiasm had waned during the period of inactivity.

Hall use compared to pre-covid



8% of West Devon’s Halls rely on local community fundraising events for more than half of their income. This shows real community support for their halls both in running these events but also in attending them to support their halls financial health.

41% of West Devon’s Village Halls rely on grants for up to a quarter of their income. Halls may successfully apply for funding (if they fit the funds criteria) but to be successful they need volunteers with the right skill set and capacity to research and correctly complete the necessary applications. Halls with an energised, well skilled committee are much more likely

to apply for grant funding than a hall committee that feel like they're struggling with the day-to-day administration of their community asset.

Confidence levels re future sustainability:

33% were confident in their financial sustainability. This is partly due to covid funding providing a financial buffer, something that many halls have never experienced before.

28% were neither confident nor unconfident.

10% were worried about their future financial sustainability (they have less than 6 months running costs and no reserves).

(Without covid funding, these figures would look much less positive as day to day running costs increase without a similar increase in revenue).

6.2 Evaluation of key findings

The following analysis is taken from the newly established audit findings data bank. This demonstrates that West Devon's Village Halls rely heavily on bookings for their income. Almost half of Devons Village Halls have not returned to pre-Covid levels of activity and their confidence in financial sustainability is skewed by Covid funding (audits started in November 2022).

- West Devon's Village Halls are currently significantly underused. These community assets need bookings to remain solvent, but most halls sit empty for the majority of the time.
- This underuse means that we have a real opportunity to shape the future use of these community assets. By enabling Village Halls to provide a space for community healthcare and other community services that our rural communities find difficult to access.

"Would like more usage to bring in more income to address fuel price increases."

"Would like to attract more bookings but the issue is lack of volunteers/need for clerk and caretaker input on minimal hours (12 hours/week)."

With no regular consistent funding for Village Halls, Hall Committees can feel rather isolated and undervalued as they try to navigate the post Covid era with all the behavioural change that encompasses.

"Trying to get more people to use it. There has been a reduction in groups using it."

With many costs increasing, West Devon's Village Halls that could previously survive with just local bookings are finding that a different more entrepreneurial approach is needed. There is clear evidence of need for investment in additional capacity building and business planning support services aimed at Village Hall committees.

There is appetite for environmental improvements (in part to reduce Hall running costs) but the financial outlay is often too high and access to funding and specialist advice and support is very restricted.

“If we can get solar panels installed, we can guarantee our charges won't increase for 10 years.”

A minority of Village Halls across Devon have a diverse range of ways to generate revenue including:

- 9% from long term rental income (flats, workshops, school/pre-school, sheds, car park spaces)
- 6% of halls receive income from 100 clubs/membership fees
- 4% from dividends on shares
- 3% of halls receive income from hire of equipment (tables, crockery, marquee, stage)
- 2% from car park donations

23% of Halls said they needed business support training or help with capacity and capability building and grant funding applications and fundraising.

In January, February and March 2024 DCT held Enterprising Halls training sessions with 65 halls attending from across Devon. Attendees wanted help to develop the use of their halls and had the opportunity to attend some “deep dive” sessions of their choice on areas such as governance, sustainable energy use, funding bids and creating a business plan.

The following quotes show how necessary grant funding is to sustain the future of our Village Halls:

“We did the Enterprising Halls workshops. It was really helpful doing this”

“Want a hall that is fit for purpose for the next 50 years. Want to be able to look after all groups. Improve the disabled facilities and have things for the youth. We need funding to be able to do this.”

“Parish council have to fund the balance of running costs.”

6.3 So, what does this tell us?

The Financial sustainability of Devon's Village Halls is a varied picture. Many are struggling to make the material changes that their buildings require and an over reliance on bookings for their income means that Halls are often only just surviving financially. Significant Covid funding has skewed the financial picture, but in the long term, halls financial sustainability needs to come from a range of areas. These vital community assets could offer their communities so much more if they were given the right support to do so.

6.4 Recommendations

1. West Devon's Village Halls need a system wide funding approach that includes consistent grants including capital funds to remain sustainable in the long term.
2. Halls in West Devon also need a county-wide funded infrastructure support service including training in grant applications, fundraising, diversifying income streams and marketing their halls in a digital age.

7. DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY

7.1 Key Findings

49% of Village Halls in West Devon do not have Broadband.



15% of West Devon Village Halls have digital devices. This figure shows that technology hasn't been seen as a priority. It may also be due to poor connectivity.

34% of West Devon Village Halls have a sound system. This is pleasing data as it helps those with hearing disability to enjoy Village Hall events.

36% of Village Halls in West Devon have a projector. This is useful technology for a variety of activities such as meetings, virtual exercise classes and film shows, so 50% is quite a low figure.

5% feel that their Broadband does not work well so they can't rely on connectivity for events or bookings.

How well the WiFi works



The map below shows Village Halls in the South Hams that have internet access. The red dots show where the download speed is slow. A good download speed refers to how quickly you receive information online and is needed for video calls, streaming films etc.

Internet download speed

● Fast ● Medium ● Slow



47% of West Devon Village Halls access their Broadband via copper cables (ADSL) with **26%** using a fixed wireless network. A fixed wireless network is faster and more reliable than ADSL.

Type of Broadband



16% of Halls with Broadband have a fast upload speed. This refers to how quickly the broadband allows data transmission. A fast upload speed is needed for posting content online, video calls, sending emails and sharing large files over Cloud based services such as WeTransfer, Dropbox or Google Drive.

Halls with fast internet upload speeds



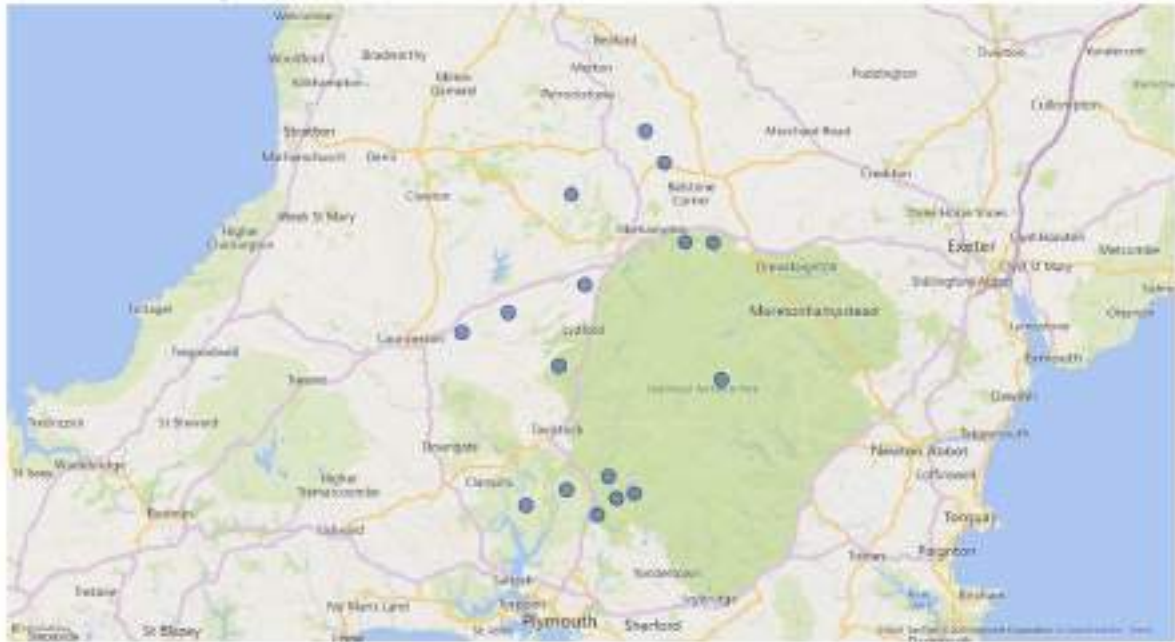
44% of West Devon Village Halls have poor mobile phone reception.

Mobile reception



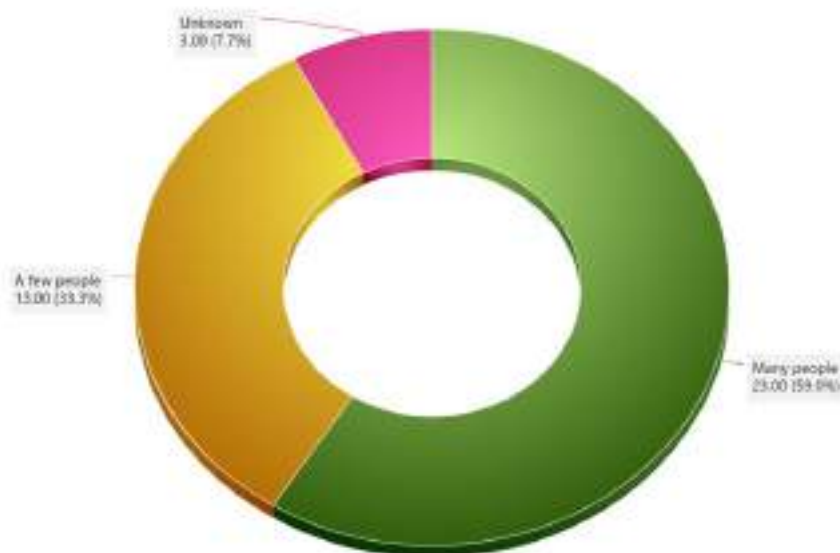
The map below shows the location of halls in the South Hams with poor mobile reception. Few halls have landlines as the halls are often unoccupied, so mobile reception is really important.

Halls whose mobile reception does not work well

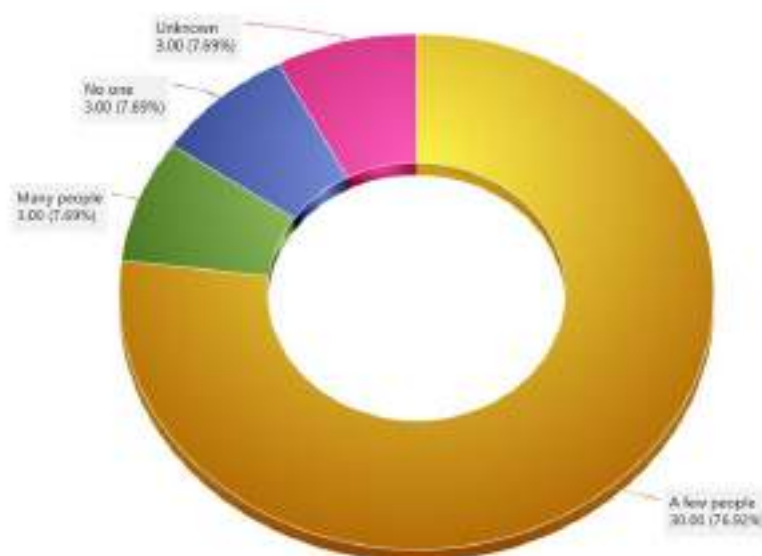


15% of West Devon Village Hall Committees struggle with digital skills. This means that a lack of basic IT skills is holding some halls back from advertising their events on social media and potentially reducing their revenue from bookings. These halls may be unable to maintain a web presence, putting them at a disadvantage in this digital age.

Adequate digital skills



Excellent digital skills



7.2 Evaluation of Key Findings

The following analysis is taken from the audit findings data bank. This demonstrates that West Devon's Village Halls suffer from poor connectivity and committee digital skill levels. The fact that just 15% of West Devon's Village Halls have digital devices

demonstrates that technology just hasn't been a priority. Mobile reception is also a problem for many of Village Halls in West Devon, leaving them isolated and often unattractive to young people.

It's important for Village Halls to offer people digital connectivity:

"Getting broadband, an added attraction, have lost bookings due to lack of Wi-Fi."

"No Wi-Fi at the hall at the moment so limits other options."

Digital skills and therefore digital confidence are lacking in many hall committees. Wouldn't it be great for Village Halls to offer digital upskilling to help those in our communities that are digitally excluded?

"Would like to set up village buddies Facebook page so people can help each other with things like taking people to appointments and have the hall as a hub for this."

As bookings provide the majority of revenue for Village Halls, it's important that potential audiences can find halls when looking for a venue:

"We need to get a bit more modern, maybe get a website."

"We need to start using Facebook and get a website. Currently only advertise in Parish magazine and on posters."

7.3 So, what does this tell us?

Digital connectivity in West Devon's Village Halls is varied and inconsistent. Generally, there is a recognition from hall committees that they need to get online to increase their visibility and be more attractive as bookable spaces. There are a lot of good ideas and intentions, but lack of good connectivity currently make some of these impossible.

7.4 Recommendations

- 1. Greater access to reasonably priced and reliable Broadband is needed if our Village Halls are going to remain financially sustainable.**
- 2. There is a training need to upskill hall committees' digital skills to enable them to market their halls online and maintain a web presence. Audiences today expect connectivity whether they're meeting socially or for business. Digitally connected Village Halls can be community hubs for a wide range of activities and services.**

8. HEALTH AND WELLBEING

8.1 Key Findings

West Devon's Village Halls offer an incredible range of activities and opportunities for people to share time together. Sports, exercise classes, parent and baby classes, health visitors' clinics, dance classes, U3A, coffee mornings, support groups to name just a few. These local activities are generally reasonably priced and can be a lifeline particularly to people who may not have their own transport or access to public transport. Hall committees are happy to try and offer residents what they want/need but knowing exactly what that is can be a stumbling block. Accessibility can be an issue for our halls and was welcomed as part of the audit process. Simple changes can make a big difference to people with specific needs or mobility issues.

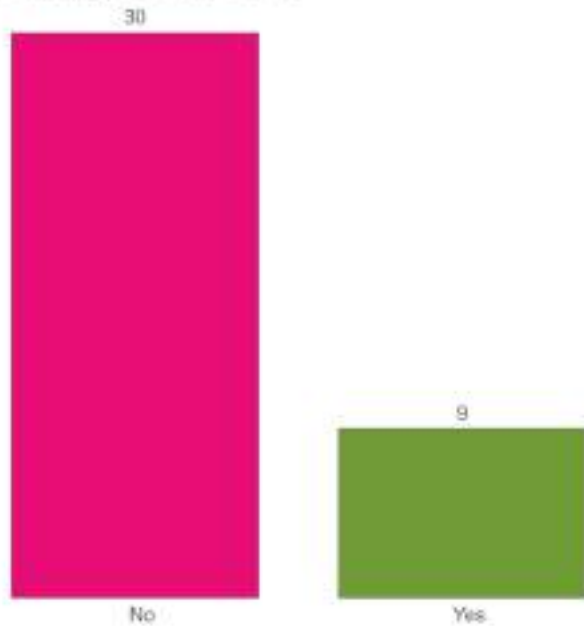
77% of West Devon's Village Halls have not had an accessibility audit. This is probably due to the cost implications, but it does mean that vulnerable members of society may be missing out on health and wellbeing activities on their doorstep. If people feel that getting into the building or using its facilities will be too difficult, their approach will be not to engage. Supporting hall committees to increase accessibility can benefit those hardest to reach in our communities.



The Village Hall audit accessibility questions looked at wheelchair access, lighting, signage, hearing loops and contrasting colours between walls and door frames.

An example of an accessibility quick win is having some chairs with arms so that people with less mobility can push themselves out of the chair. As seen in the graph below, just **23%** of halls could offer this, but many hadn't even considered it.

Is there a choice of furniture including chairs with arms?



Another easy way to make a hall more accessible is to put a bench near the door of the hall. If someone with mobility issues has walked from the carpark, they may need a place to stop and rest before navigating the hall entrance. A bench enables this to happen and can be used by passers-by as well.

As part of the audit, we asked if halls would be interested in offering a variety of different activities that could benefit the health and wellbeing of their communities.

Rural isolation and loneliness contribute negatively to the health and wellbeing of many in our villages and countryside. According to WHO, loneliness carries an equivalent, or even greater, risk of early death as smoking, excessive drinking, physical inactivity, obesity, and air pollution.

The chart below shows interest in offering online medical appointments. This would involve a confidential space being set up with suitable IT equipment, Broadband and a trained digital buddy to help those less digitally able members of our community.

46% said they would be interested in offering online medical appointments, giving digitally excluded residents an alternative way to access health services.

One West Devon Village Hall offered online medical appointments around the covid period as the hall had better Wi-Fi than the rest of the village, but this wasn't continued post pandemic.

A structured approach needs to be taken if halls are going to offer these services. Dundee Volunteer and Voluntary Action's ran a pilot offering video consultation appointments with primary or secondary care services where hubs provided a device, Wi-Fi and a private, COVID compliant space. This pilot recognised the importance of having regular appointment sessions, so that people knew what was available when.

Halls interested in providing online medical appointments



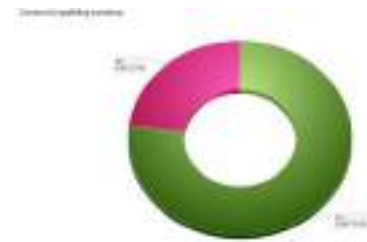
As the bar chart below demonstrates, access to healthcare varies across the district with **62%** reporting that healthcare was moderately accessible. In areas where it's difficult to see community health practitioners or access primary and secondary healthcare professionals, enabling online appointments in a local Village Hall could be a real asset to both healthcare providers and local people.

What is the hall's perception of access to health care

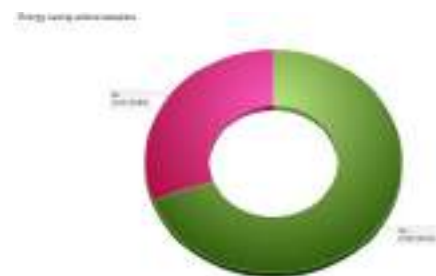


We can see the willingness of hall committees to support their communities in whatever way is needed, but further support is needed to enable this to happen:

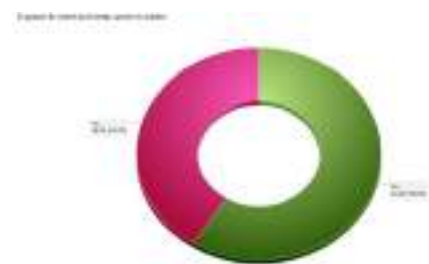
77% of halls have capacity to offer **community upskilling workshops**



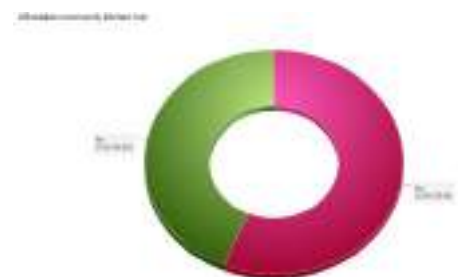
62% of halls have capacity to offer **energy saving advice sessions**



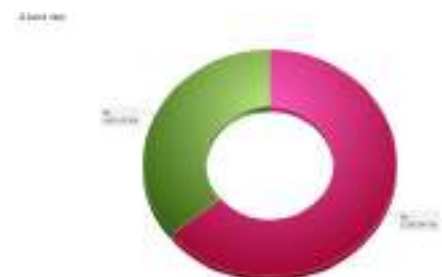
59% of halls have capacity to offer a **warm hub**



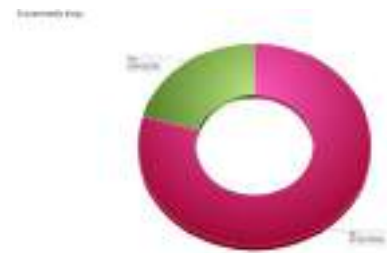
44% can offer an affordable **community kitchen hub**



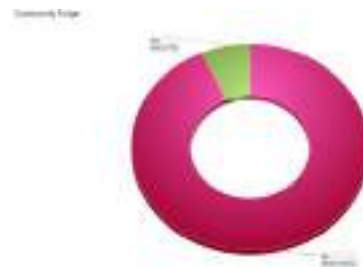
36% of halls have capacity to offer a **lunch club**



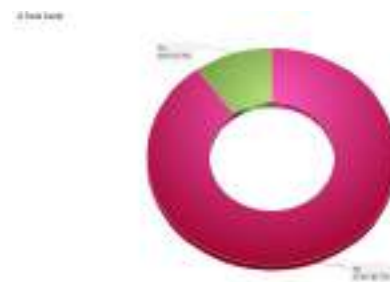
20% of halls have the capacity to offer a **community shop**



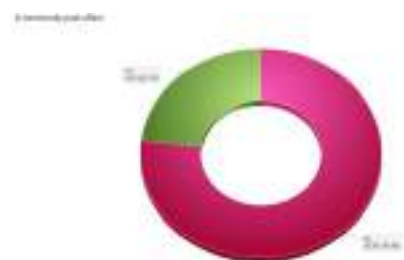
10% of halls have the capacity to offer a **community fridge**



10% of halls have the capacity to offer a **food bank**

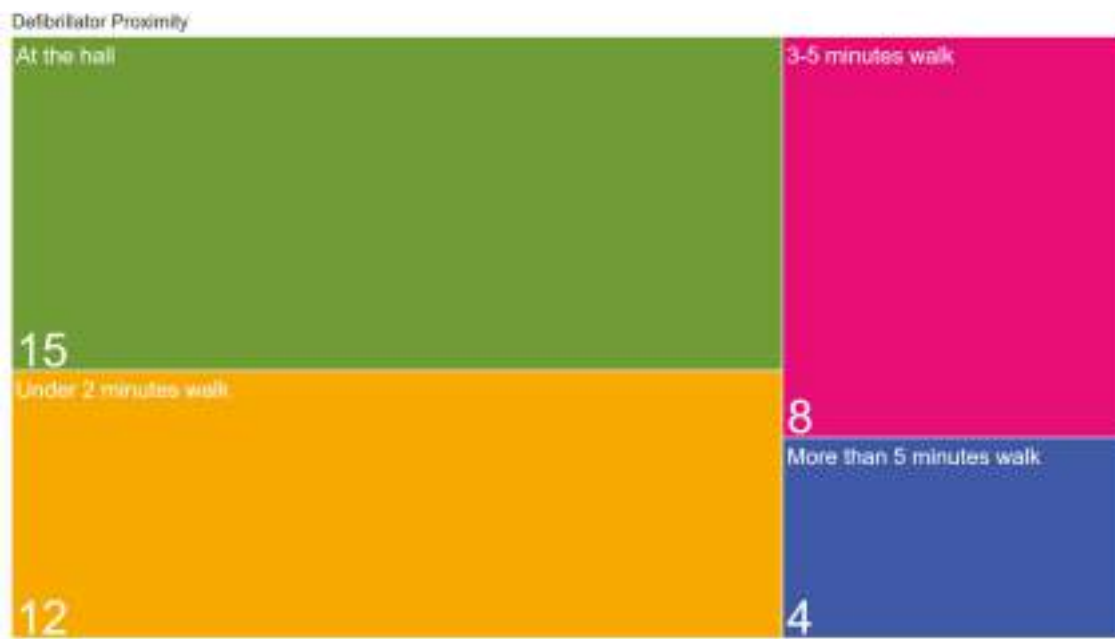


23% of halls have the capacity to offer a **community post office**



The last few category figures are lower as these services are often available in a nearby location already.

38% of West Devon Village Halls have a defibrillator on site, helping to support the health and wellbeing of their communities. This is a great example of how an education campaign, backed up by funding can support real behaviour change.



8.2 Evaluation of Key Findings

The following analysis is taken from the audit findings data bank. This demonstrates that West Devon’s Village Halls provide a wide range of health and wellbeing services to their communities. Until recently many Village Halls hadn’t really considered their role in the health and wellbeing of their communities, they just provided activities that people wanted and enjoyed the fact that they were well received. Covid, to some extent, helped society recognise the importance of local amenities and shone a light on the importance of good mental health in particular. Devon’s Village Halls already offer links with social prescribers, mental health clinics, and grief support groups.

Some thoughts from audited South Hams Village Halls can be found below:

“Already running mental health clinics (3 days). Various keep fit clubs/activities. Shared Lives use centre for meetings”

“There is something on most weeks. It is the social hub of the community. a lot of people even if they don’t use the hall, use our good dog walking area. We have a recreation field and allotments.”

8.3 So, what does this tell us?

Village Halls, where able, are stepping in to provide services that are being lost in rural communities. Without this, our villages risk losing all facilities and places to meet and socialise.

Accessibility is an area that halls could improve on, particularly if training and funding support were offered. The audit demonstrated the huge range of activities, classes and support groups that Village Halls accommodate, but in some cases, these aren't accessible to everyone due to the limitation of the building.

West Devon's Village Halls have great potential to be community health hubs, offering access to community health practitioners as well as primary and secondary healthcare practitioners.

8.4 Recommendations

- 1. Halls are keen to provide a venue to support their communities, so external organisations should consider using South Hams Village Halls to offer place-based support where possible, helping hard-to-reach members of society to engage.**
- 2. West Devon Village Halls need advice and funding to make their buildings more accessible so all members of the community can engage with their Village Hall.**
- 3. West Devon Village Halls are ideally placed to become rural health hubs. Reducing rural health inequalities, supporting the health prevention agenda and providing community led place-based access to health and care services.**

9. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

9.1 Key Findings

Village Halls in West Devon provide many activities and support groups for children, young people and families. Some halls provide their preschool with a venue and others support their local school. Many West Devon Village Halls have said they would like to attract a younger audience, but at times struggle to do so. This is due to a number of factors such as a lack of suitable volunteers, not knowing what to offer and lack of suitable equipment/Wi-Fi to entertain a young audience.

23% of West Devon halls have provision for children during school hours including primary school bookings, preschool, parent baby and toddler groups and holiday clubs.

44% of halls have provision for children out of school hours including youth clubs, young farmers, scouts, guides and brownies.

The chart below shows the percentage of halls that offer children and young people’s activities by demographic. Youth clubs are an area for potential growth and anecdotally, a section of the community that halls are keen to support.

Halls providing service to children, young people, or families



The map below shows the wide geographical spread of activities that halls across West Devon offer children, young people or families.



9.2 Evaluation of Key Findings

The following analysis is taken from the audit findings data bank. This demonstrates that West Devon's Village Halls provide a variety of activities for children and young people, but they also recognise and aspire to do more, particularly for teenagers.

West Devon Halls would like to have a younger demographic enjoying their facilities.

"Attracting younger people is an issue, the demographic using the hall is older people."

"Hard to get a cross over between the two groups in the community. There is a younger group and we don't seem to be able get them to join."

A minority of West Devon Halls are used by their local preschools and schools.

"Preschool currently use building during daytime."

"School use us for dancing and fencing."

"The hall provides a lunch club for children during school holidays."

Village Halls in West Devon recognise that teenagers may not be well served by their halls.

"A lot of the current hall users are pre-school, school age or physically active adults. Would like to attract teenagers – Youth Club."

Other Village Halls are managing to support their local teenagers. 13% of West Devon halls offer youth clubs. 5% offer martial arts classes.

“Our Halls support parents by providing local activities and groups for children and young people to be part of.”

“We offer Scouts; Guides; Toddler groups; Beavers; Children's Ballet; Karate and Funky Fitness.”

“The school uses the hall for dancing and fencing, Young farmers and girl guides.”

9.3 So, what does this tell us?

West Devon’s Village Halls recognise that our children and young people need to be provided for in their locality, just like any other demographic. With play areas often no longer under local authority jurisdiction, Village Halls with the outdoor space to do so, are stepping up to fill the gap in service provision. As hall committees tend to be older people, finding the right activities to offer can be a challenge but with other local volunteer support, it is achievable.

9.4 Recommendations

1. West Devon’s Village Halls would benefit from youth work support to enable them to give their local young people access to age-appropriate entertainment.
2. Hall committees could be supported in public consultation to establish what their communities want their Village Hall to offer.
3. As the Devon Children’s Services Family Hub Strategy is being developed to create a network of local place-based Family Hubs across Devon to support families of children and young people aged up to 19 or up to 25 for young people with special needs or disability, Village Halls are ideally suited to being mini link hubs or spaces for outreach. As Family Hubs don’t require a referral, anyone can access the services. Family Hubs are community based and needs led, so Village Halls could provide that network of services in an easily accessible location.

10. PLACE BASED COLLABORATION

10.1 Key Findings

Collaboration, where organisations use Village Halls in West Devon to provide local services to local people is of real benefit to rurally isolated areas. Collaboration happens in our halls but could be used so much more and with great effect for both the service provider and service user.

West Devon halls are currently used for First Aid tuition, local area support services and were of course invaluable during covid as vaccination centres. Health services such as mental health clinics, mobility rehabilitation and blood donation currently use West Devon Village Halls as appointment locations.

Parish and District Councils use our Village Halls. The Post Office, community shops and Library Services use West Devon Halls as central locations.

Devon's Village Halls are used by the Commoners Association, Villages in Action and for school meetings.

10.2 Evaluation of Key Findings

As the above list of services demonstrates, place-based collaboration is happening in West Devon's Village Halls. Unfortunately, it tends to be informal, irregular and relationship based. These are only limited examples of local partnership & collaboration. It isn't currently seen as the norm for our Village Halls, which is a missed opportunity.

The following analysis is taken from the audit findings data bank. This demonstrates that although some collaboration is taking place in West Devon's Village Halls, it's limited and could be much more effective if a more consistent approach was adopted.

10.3 So, what does this tell us?

The rates charged by Village Halls tend to be considerably lower than their commercial counterparts, so it makes good business sense for private and public organisations to use Village Hall space. As already stated, Village Halls want to increase their bookings, particularly during the day. Greater collaboration between West Devon Village Halls and local organisations would be beneficial for all parties: Local authorities/businesses get economical space to hire, local people receive accessible support/health care and Village Hall space is used more regularly, increasing revenue.

10.4 Recommendations

1. Access to reasonably priced and good quality Broadband will help West Devon's Village Halls to attract business bookings.
2. Training in how to promote Village Halls in West Devon, particularly online, will help halls to be more visible to potential audiences. This opportunity to benefit rural communities, many of which have lost their rural services could be supported by Community Connectors, funded centrally with a focus on growing place-based collaboration and digital skills. Accessing services can be difficult for people in rural locations particularly if they don't have their own transport. By using a local, trusted venue, bringing services closer to their homes, rural isolation and health inequalities can be reduced, particularly for those who are hard to reach in our communities.
3. As mentioned in section 9 above, Village Halls are ideal locations for Family Hubs, making place-based collaboration a smart choice for service users and providers.

11. ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Many West Devon Village Hall committees are keen to improve the green credentials of their halls. With a large number of halls built just after the World War One, their construction doesn't naturally lend itself to environmental sustainability, however retrofitting is happening, improving insulation, heating efficiency and energy creation.

11.1 Key Findings

28% of West Devon Village halls are interested in getting solar panels.

8% of halls openly stated that they can't improve their environmental sustainability due to lack of funding.

49% of committees have already or are planning to retrofit their halls to be more environmentally sustainable. For example increasing insulation, fitting secondary or double glazing etc.

10% of halls have made changes to reduce their water usage.

Unfortunately, finances/funding is often a stumbling block:

"Would like to improve our environmental credentials but it's funding dependant. Need to look at heating and insulation."

"Plans to do loft insulation and replace the windows. Lighting and heating was done with the covid money."

"Have applied for National Lottery Community Fund to install solar panels and batteries. Have already put in water recycling tank which is used for flushing toilets."

Other challenges that West Devon Village Halls face:

"Have looked at solar but the roof space doesn't allow to put up enough panels to make it economically viable."

"We have a leaking roof so we are replacing the roof so one of the quotes we have is for an insulated roof. We would like to fit solar panels and batteries. We need to insulate the walls but we are concentrating on the roof. We are interested in having energy saving surveys done. Would like electric charging points installed."

Despite some challenges, halls are planning the following environmental improvements:

“Thinking of having solar panels and creating an energy hub.”

“Have already put in water recycling tank which is used for flushing toilets. The water bill is now 1/2 what it used to be.”

11.2 Evaluation of Key Findings

The following analysis is taken from the audit findings data bank. This demonstrates that although most halls are keen to improve their environmental credentials, there are often roadblocks that make these improvements difficult. Improving environmental sustainability is important for Village Hall Committees and for their communities.

11.3 So, what does this tell us?

The key motivation for halls addressing climate change and sustainability is to reduce energy costs, which can be the main expenditure for buildings. The main barriers for halls in reducing their energy costs is funding the work and the fabric of the building (older buildings). Halls that said they wanted to make improvements said that they were looking at funding options to pay for major capital works such as fitting solar and batteries, fitting EV points and updating heating systems.

11.4 Recommendations

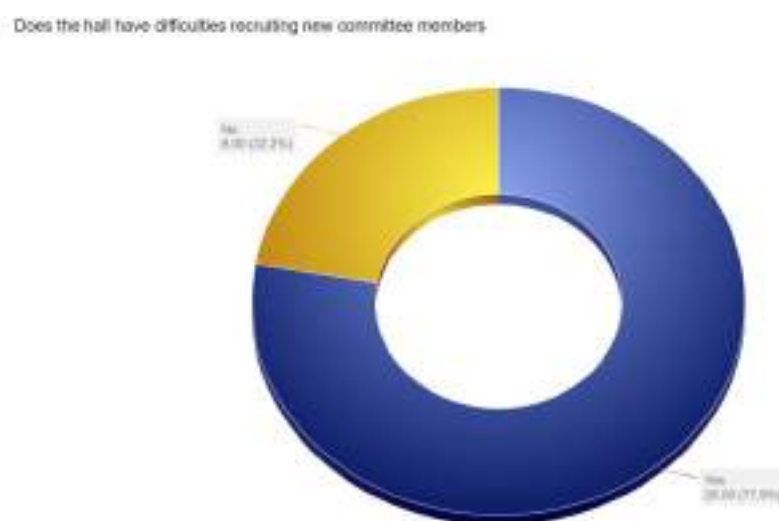
- 1. West Devon Village Hall committees need training/support to conduct energy audits on their halls, so that the right environmental improvements for their building can be carried out.**
- 2. Halls need support with topics such as insurance, listed building consent and Electric Vehicle charge points from a neutral source.**
- 3. For West Devon’s Village Halls to become more environmentally sustainable, they need accessible funding.**

12. FUTURE SUSTAINABILITY

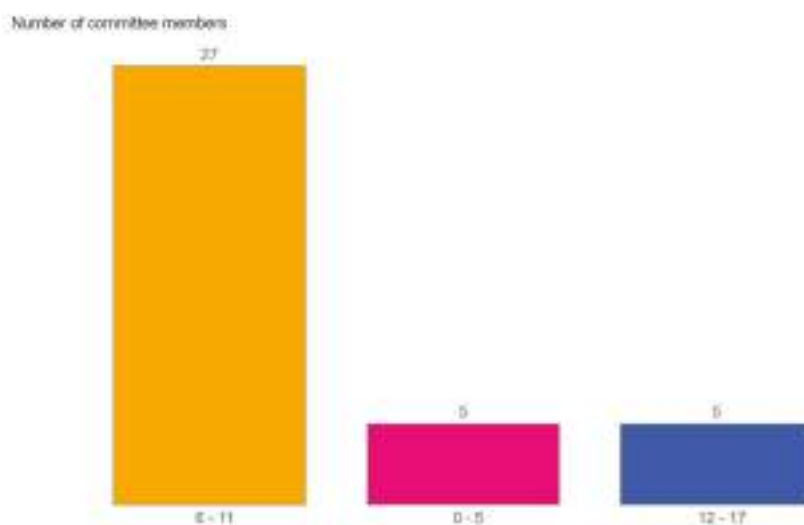
The challenges that halls face are wide ranging but there are a number of common themes that effect many of these community assets. Many halls are still trying to find their way in the post covid era, where peoples behaviours have changed and community cohesion in certain respects seems to have lessened.

12.1 Key Findings

78% of halls have difficulties recruiting new committee members. This makes running events and even the day-to-day management of the hall hard work.



14% of halls have 0-5 volunteers which is a low number even for a very small Village Hall. The bar chart below shows the number of volunteers.



Quotes referring to these difficulties can be found below:

"People at busy, don't want the responsibility. Lives are different now."

"Apathy and age of population is the cause of people not having the confidence to volunteer. People not willing to commit."

"Modern times, people do not have the spare time or are not prepared to give their spare time."

"Would like younger people to step up to the mark."

"People are very busy and don't want to volunteer."

Some Hall Committees are finding that running their halls with so few volunteers is a real challenge:

"All old fuddy-duddies on committee and young people can't be doing with them."

"No-one coming in to replace those that have got to an age when they want to step down."

Village Hall buildings can be a challenge. Many hall committees find it difficult to maintain an older building with issues such as damp, poor insulation, planning restrictions etc.

"We need to sort out the penetrating damp and rising damp."

"We have a leaking roof so we are replacing the roof."

"Storage room needs a new floor to stop the damp to make better use of the area."

Lack of hall revenue means that some halls are struggling financially.

"We want to finish the extension although costs are moving faster than we can."

Rising energy costs have contributed to halls financial struggles:

"(Would like) More usage to bring in more income to address fuel price increases."

Societal changes since covid create challenges for our halls:

“The population is changing, people moving in don't talk to their neighbours.”

Lack of bookings is a challenge for West Devon's Village Halls:

“We would like to have an increase in the uptake in what we have here. The main barrier is the lack of the car park. We are allowed to use the car park at the pub but if it a busy night at the pub there is no space in the car park.”

“Would like more local people to use it. Would like it well used everyday.”

12.2 Evaluation of Key Findings

The following analysis is taken from the audit findings data bank. This demonstrates that most halls have difficulty recruiting trustees / volunteers / committee members. Common themes are difficulty in recruiting younger trustees as they don't have the time, no interest in becoming a trustee, concerns over responsibilities, some people volunteer for all committees in the village, trustees are getting older and want to step down.

Maintaining older buildings, particularly making them more energy efficient is problematic without funding support. Rising energy costs and less bookings than halls would like, creates a challenging financial situation.

12.3 So, what does this tell us?

Village hall committees in West Devon are struggling, and this is exacerbated by a lack of volunteers, particularly younger people. As the buildings get older, maintenance demands increase. With high energy costs and in many cases poorly insulated buildings, day to day running costs can spiral out of control. Without sufficient bookings (**44%** of halls rely on revenue from bookings for over half of their income) the cost of hall upkeep can feel unachievable and with no consistent funding, in some cases it is unachievable.

12.4 Recommendations

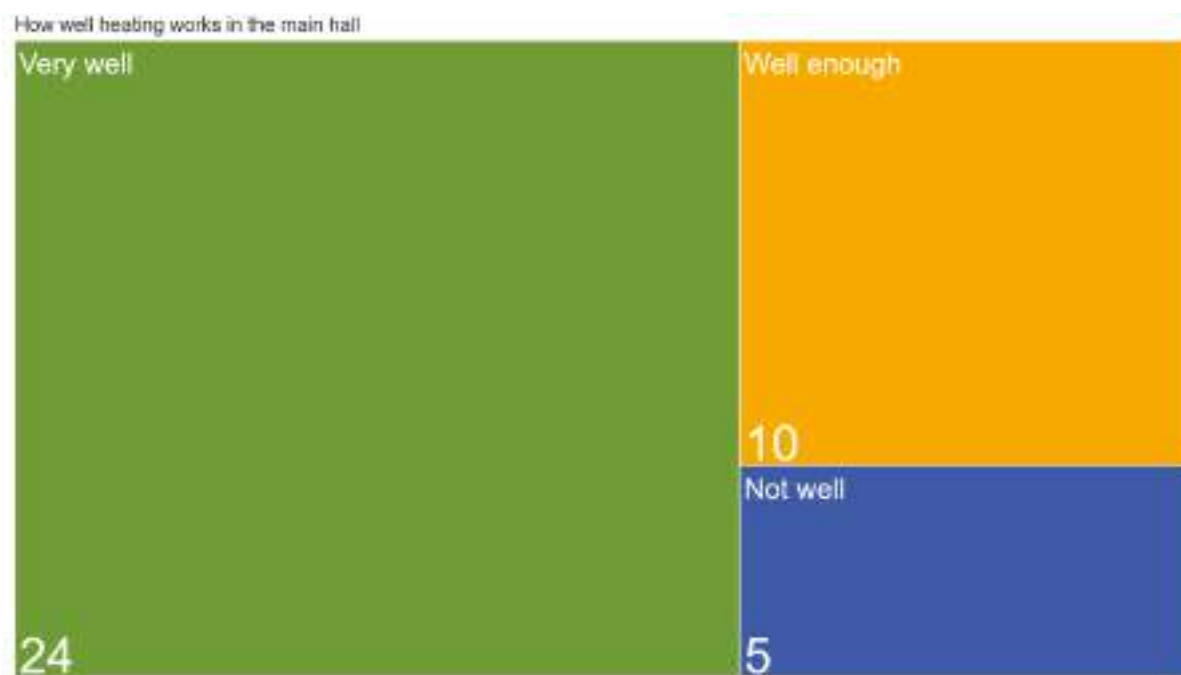
1. **West Devon Village Hall Committees need to understand what their communities want from their Village Hall. The way society accesses entertainment is very different today, we can binge watch TV, game remotely with people we've never met and choose thousands of films from the comfort of our armchair. These changes mean that Village Halls need to reassess what they offer their communities, and they need support to poll local opinion.**
2. **Training in volunteer recruitment and succession planning would also be beneficial, but a change of Village Hall activities may bring forward new volunteers.**
3. **Consistent funding needs to be made available for the capital costs of running these buildings and the scope of activities need to broaden both to support rural communities but also to increase booking revenue to provide financial sustainability for these vital community assets.**
4. **A resourced county-wide network of Rural Community Connectors would provide specialist capacity building, training and support.**

13. IS THE HALL FIT FOR PURPOSE?

As with any building a Village Hall has a job to do. We want to ascertain if Village Halls (in general) can offer their communities what they need. This encompasses both the building (internally and externally) and its governance.

13.1 Key Findings

28% of halls plan to improve heating/insulation. These improvements help the cost of heating halls, but also help the environment.



As you can see from the bar charts below, West Devon's Village Halls rely quite heavily on electricity (58%), gas (14%) and oil (12%) for their heating systems. Interestingly solar (4%) and air source heat pumps (4%) are growth areas and would be even more so if funding support was made available. Please note that halls often have more than one heating method.

Type of heating



8% of West Devon halls without Wi-Fi are planning to get it, Wi-Fi will make their halls more attractive to a variety of audiences.

Being a warm and welcoming space is an important attribute to a Village Hall.

“Hub every Thursday for coffee and warmth. Very focused on being a welcoming community space and continuing its work.”

“Thursday evenings we offer a warm space.”

“Provide an attractive venue. Everyone who comes here says what a nice space it is.”

31% of halls are planning to make improvements to the buildings such as extensions, toilet renovations, kitchen upgrades, increased insulation, improved accessibility, new roof or floor.

“We hope to get solar panels and an extension to the building.”

“We plan to improve the play park and put in allotments on village hall land.”

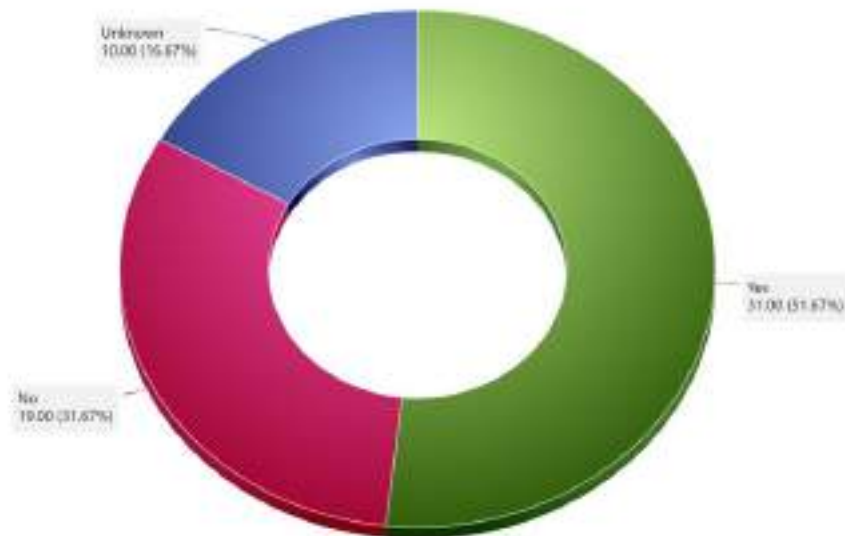
“Would like to change the kitchen location and change it for the meeting room, this is a long term goal. Realistically want to do the insulation and windows, leak in roof needs fixing.”

Welcoming everybody to Village Hall events is really important, so accessibility and equality and diversity need to be considered. Section 8 Health & Wellbeing has some data referring to accessibility. A lack of volunteers (see section 12 Challenges that Halls face) negatively impacts halls ability to be fit for purpose. As Deborah Clarke from ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England) said in The Village Hall Survival guide “You can have a building, but without local people to run and manage it, then it’s just an empty shell”.

“Young people do not know how or even want to volunteer. They have work and no time for volunteering. People want paying for doing something. No-one coming in to replace those that have got to an age when they want to step down.”

Good governance is an important aspect in halls being fit for purpose. As the bar chart below demonstrates, **54%** of West Devon’s Village Hall committee members have an up-to-date copy of their governing document, enabling them to understand what their roles and responsibilities are.

Do all committee members have an up-to-date copy of the governing document?



According to the 2004 Charity Commission Village Halls and Community Centres Report: *“The charities that thrive are those in which trustees are pro-active in understanding their responsibilities and in ensuring that their charity provides activities that meet local needs.”* The report also states *“Active vibrant governance and an active vibrant village hall go hand in hand. Our research revealed a clear identifiable link between the ability to attract users, their ability to attract trustees and other volunteers, and their ability to generate funding.”*

The bar chart below shows that **24%** of halls have an up-to-date business plan and **5%** have a business plan that needs to be updated. **71%** don’t have a business plan, suggesting that some training/support is needed to help these committees to focus on the hall’s future sustainability.

Does the hall have a business plan and has it been updated post Covid?



The bar chart below show which policies West Devon Village Halls have. Just **46%** of halls have a Safeguarding policy and **28%** have a Complaints policy.

Policies in place



13.2 Evaluation of Key Findings

Hall committees are trying hard to fund capital improvements, both structural and environmental, to their Village Halls. These improvements help to provide a suitable, inviting space with economical/sustainable heating. West Devon Village Halls should be open to all, so accessibility for those with mobility issues or visual/auditory impairment needs to be considered. Hall committees often don't know how to support these individuals but do their utmost to make everyone as welcome as they can. As stated above; *Active vibrant governance and an active vibrant village hall go hand in hand*. Having an up-to-date governing document that the hall committee buy into, has an important function.

The following analysis is taken from the audit findings data bank. This demonstrates that halls can struggle to keep their buildings fit for purpose due to financial pressures, lack of volunteers, accessibility constraints and governance challenges.

13.3 So, what does this tell us?

Our Village Hall committees in West Devon work extremely hard to provide for their communities. With ageing buildings, it can be challenging to keep halls structurally and materially fit for purpose, particularly when energy prices increase, and your hall is poorly insulated. Old buildings can be retrofitted to improve their carbon footprint and reduce heating bills, but all these improvements have a cost attached. Lack of manpower also adds to committee pressures as it's often the same people doing all the volunteer roles in a community.

13.4 Recommendations

1. **Funding is needed for structural and environmental improvements.**
2. **Training/support would be valuable for increasing an understanding of accessibility needs.**
3. **Further training support is also needed to help committees to create/update their governance.**

14. IN CONCLUSION

This report is drawn from data collected during 39 face- to- face Village Halls Audits conducted by Devon Communities Together Community Buildings Team between September 2022 and March 2024.

The quantitative and qualitative data demonstrate how vital West Devon's Village Halls are to the communities that they serve. Halls step up, where possible, to fill the void when village post offices, pubs and shops disappear. They provide a safe space for members of our society who are rurally isolated and sometimes lonely. This social isolation, exacerbated by covid and lack of public transport is an issue that negatively impacts people's health and wellbeing, decreasing life expectancy and increasing the likelihood of stroke, heart attack and depression.

These community assets, survive because of the tenacity of volunteers. We rely on their goodwill and community spirit to maintain and improve our Village Halls. Their efforts often unrecognised and unappreciated, despite the vital role they play in our rural communities.

As the way society enjoys its recreational time changes, so the Village Hall offer needs to change. Halls need to be able to offer themselves as health hubs, family hubs, digital hubs, youth hubs. For this to happen, there needs to be capital investment for structural improvements and environmental upgrades. Funding needs to be made available for training in digital skills, marketing, accessibility, and governance. By employing Community Connectors, place-based collaboration can be structured rather than ad hoc and digital skills training can be facilitated to support members of our rural communities who are digitally excluded.

DCT has learned that by creating a Village Hall Asset map, halls can be found by searching certain criteria, making sourcing the right hall for your activity much easier. The Asset Map was created from the audit data and will be maintained initially through any changes being communicated to DCT for amendment. The Village Hall Asset Map can be seen [here](#).



The live link to The Village Hall Asset Map can be found here <https://www.devoncommunities.org.uk/projects/village-halls-community-buildings-audit>

We've also learned that our community buildings support service is an invaluable resource to many Devon Village Halls. By listening to hall committee members, we recognise that enabling Village Halls to form clusters provides real peer support. DCT has helped to create clusters in the past, but the audit has reminded us how important that listening ear and supportive discussion can be. DCT will now be supporting new Village Hall clusters to form, encouraging lessons learned to be shared and collaborative thinking to be encouraged.

DCT would like to thank all the West Devon Village Halls that took part in this audit. The findings show what an invaluable resource Devon's halls are to their communities and what a wide range of activities and support networks can be accessed through your doors.

Charlotte Squire

Project Manager

June 2024