Autumn Newsletter 2026

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Four Years Old!

It is now almost exactly four years since we launched Midhurst Community Hub at the Grange Centre on 22 November 2022. It seems a good opportunity to reflect on what we have achieved, what we are developing and some of the challenges ahead.

As you will know, the Hub has two strategic aims:

1. **To enable independence.**
2. **To build community.**

1. Enabling Independence

Our weekly Advisory Service, based at the Grange Centre, is central to this objective.

Opening times:

- Saturdays: 10.00 am – 1.00 pm
- Mondays: 2.00 pm – 4.00 pm

The Service has now helped **275 clients with more than 400 separate issues and cases**.

The range of support we offer is extensive, including:

- Benefits advice and assistance with claims for Universal Credit, Personal Independence Payment (PIP), Carer's Allowance and Attendance Allowance.
- Problems with utility providers.
- Safeguarding concerns.
- Debt issues.
- Blue Badge applications.
- Damp and mould problems in social housing.
- And much else besides.

Recent successes

Examples of the help we have provided to clients recently include:

- Raising safeguarding concerns on behalf of vulnerable parents.
- Recovering a substantial sum from a bank for a client who had been scammed.
- Helping several clients with HMRC tax forms, as older people's pension income can bring them within the tax threshold.
- Securing a grant to enable a client to re-establish his business.
- Successfully negotiating compensation following unfair dismissal.
- Securing the withdrawal of court action for eviction.

These examples illustrate the importance of having accessible, independent advice and support within our local community.

Our Projects

Midhurst Community Lunches

Our FREE cooked lunch takes place every Monday and now attracts an average of 50 guests each week. It provides not only a good meal but also an opportunity for people to meet, socialise and enjoy one another's company.

Midhurst Area Primary School Recycled Uniform Hub

We make re-laundered and recycled primary school uniforms available FREE of charge to parents through the schools in Midhurst, Stedham and Easebourne. This helps families with the cost of school clothing while also supporting reuse and reducing waste.

Projects we are reshaping

Not every project develops quite as we originally envisaged. Two initiatives are being adapted in the light of experience.

In Touch

This telephone befriending service was designed to support people experiencing loneliness and isolation. However, we have found that older people can be wary of receiving telephone calls, even when these have been arranged in advance.

We are therefore looking at developing the service into face-to-face sessions. The challenge will be to address the associated transport difficulties.

Work Connections

This one-to-one work-readiness training initiative has not yet really got off the ground. Nevertheless, we remain convinced that there is a significant need for it, particularly in the light of current Government announcements about support for young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs).

2. Building Community

Our second strategic objective is to build a stronger and more connected community. We normally pursue this through two Community Forums each year.

The Forum held last May commissioned two projects following a series of discussions exploring the extent of local support available to older people, children and families.

Two Forum projects under development

Living Long and Happy Lives

This project aims to provide advice and information for older people, with one central message: *plan early*.

It is being led by Yvonne Gravely, Midhurst County Councillor and WSCC Cabinet Member.

Midhurst and Villages Parent Support

This initiative will provide fortnightly discussion sessions for parents of young children at the Grange Centre. It is being led by Midhurst Primary School and Family Support Work.

Both projects need time to develop, and progress will be reported to the next Community Forum in May 2027.

Hub Governance: Learning and Evolving

Organisations should never stand still. They need to learn, evolve and continually look for ways to improve. The Hub is no exception.

We are delighted that Dame Shelagh Legrave has joined the Trustee Board and has taken on the role of Treasurer, working alongside the local accountancy firm Goodale & Mardle, who maintain our accounts.

Following some recent IT difficulties, we have also commissioned Disking as our IT support contractor. In addition, we retain the services of a part-time freelance administrator.

Even an efficient charity such as the Hub sometimes needs to buy in the expertise and support it does not have in-house. This is particularly important when remembering that the Hub otherwise operates entirely through the commitment of around 40 volunteers.

Let Sleeping Dogs Lie (aka LGR!)

It is something of a relief that the reshuffle occasioned by Andy Burnham becoming Prime Minister appears to have put Local Government Review (LGR) in West Sussex on hold, at least for the present!

Looking Forward

It is increasingly evident that the cost of living and other pressures are having a significant impact on families. The cases coming to our Advisory Service are becoming more complex and frequently involve health problems and family circumstances as well as financial difficulties.

This is happening at a time when the Government is financially constrained, as are local authorities, many of which are struggling with debt. Households, of course, face similar pressures.

It would be comforting to think that the voluntary sector could simply take up the strain. However, changes in society — including later retirement ages, demographic shifts, the demands of caring for children and parents, and changing expectations of retirement — all contribute to the pressures on voluntary organisations. Finding people willing and able to take on leadership and trustee roles is an increasing challenge.

When funding is under pressure, there is a natural tendency for organisations to protect their own budgets and pass costs on to others. This is ultimately a fruitless approach and does a disservice to local taxpayers and to the clients, customers and patients who depend on public services.

The need for collaborative partnership working has therefore never been greater. Alongside this, we must put greater emphasis on prevention and the principle of investing now to save costs and difficulties later.

A good example of this approach is the collaborative work of the Chichester Local Community Network, which brings together staff from Chichester District Council, West Sussex County Council, the NHS and the voluntary sector. It is a commendable example of partnership working.

The work of this Network, together with progress on the Community Forum's two projects, may well provide the focus for our next Midhurst Community Forum, likely to take place in May 2027 (date to be confirmed).

A Thought to Leave You With

I leave you with a quotation from the psychologist Carl Gustav Jung:

"Great innovations never come from above, they come invariably from below, just as trees never grow from the sky downwards but upward from the earth."

— Modern Man in Search of a Soul

It is a thought that seems particularly appropriate to the work of a community organisation such as ours. Real change and innovation so often come from people working together at a local level.

A Personal Thank You

Finally, I would like to thank everyone who has engaged with and supported Midhurst Community Hub since its launch in 2022.

I am now standing down as Chair, although I shall remain involved with the Hub. I very much hope that we will find a successor soon.

It has been a privilege to help establish and develop the Hub over these past four years, and I am enormously grateful to our volunteers, supporters, partners and everyone who has helped make it what it is today.

If becoming involved as the next Chair is of interest to you, or if you have any questions or comments about this newsletter, please do get in touch.

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