

West Sussex minibus charity win coveted Queen's Award for Voluntary Service

Her Majesty The Queen has just announced that 193 outstanding UK volunteering groups have been honoured as recipients of the prestigious Queen's Award for Voluntary Service. In West Sussex one of four successful winners was the Community Minibus Association (West Sussex).

This unique UK national honour recognises the outstanding contributions made to local communities by groups of volunteers; it has an equivalent status for voluntary groups as the MBE has for individuals.

The West Sussex minibus charity has been providing friendly transport to villages and isolated communities since early 1976. The organisation is distinctive in that it is run entirely by unpaid volunteers, in a variety of different roles; drivers, passenger escorts, booking staff, fleet managers, divisional organisers and many others who ensure the day to day running of the charity. The service operates across rural West Sussex, using 13 minibuses with centres located in Ashington, Billingshurst, Five Villages (south of A27), Petworth, Pulborough, Storrington, Steyning and Wisborough Green.

The organisation will receive a certificate signed by The Queen and an exclusive commemorative crystal, presented by Her Majesty's representative in West Sussex, Mrs Susan Pyper, the Lord-Lieutenant, at a special ceremony arranged by the Lieutenancy office.

Honorary Secretary Rodger Hunt and his wife Barbara, representing the charity, attended a garden party at Buckingham Palace on 24 May where they met the Queen and other winners of this year's award.

Mrs Pyper said, "I am absolutely delighted that four of our outstanding voluntary organisations in the County have been selected as winners of this most prestigious award. I hope that their success will act as a spur to our many other voluntary organisations in West Sussex to encourage them to seek formal recognition of the excellence of their work.'

Chairman of West Sussex minibus, Alistair Sheppard OBE said: "We are extremely proud and honoured to receive this award, which coincides with our 40th anniversary this year. Our tremendous group of unpaid volunteers help to maintain essential support to local communities across rural West Sussex. Passengers enjoy our friendly service and look forward to meeting both new friends and old during their trips. This award is a tribute to all the dedicated work by our volunteers, past and present."

Twenty-four groups from West Sussex have now won the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service, over the fourteen years since it was created by Her Majesty to mark the occasion of her Golden Jubilee in 2002.

– Ends –

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Note to Editors

About the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service

In 2002, in celebration of Her Majesty's Golden Jubilee, the Queen's Golden Jubilee Award for Voluntary Service by Groups in the Community was established. Its purpose is to recognise groups of individuals who are giving their time freely for the benefit of others. It is the highest honour that can be bestowed upon groups of this kind and is equivalent in status to the MBE. As such, the Queen's Award not only serves to provide recognition of volunteer groups, but also demonstrates the high respect in which volunteering is held.

The Award is overseen by the Civil Society Honours and Awards team at the Cabinet Office.

Groups must be nominated for the Award – self nomination is not permitted. A group (two or more people) can be nominated if it is based in the UK, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man. The group has to have been volunteering for the benefit of people in the UK or overseas for at least three years and more than half its members must be volunteers who have the right of residence in the UK. Groups solely concerned with fundraising for charitable purposes are not eligible. Further details on entrance criteria and the nomination process are available on www.gov.uk/queens-award-for-voluntary-service