

**Eccles Community Hall Organisation (ECHO)
recognised with Queen's Award for Voluntary Service for 2015
- the MBE for volunteer groups**

A voluntary group from Eccles which works in the community to bring an empty town hall back into community use has been honoured with the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service, the highest award a voluntary group can receive in the UK.

ECHO was established in July 2010 by a group of local people determined to refurbish a ballroom and associated facilities which had lain unused since local government reorganisation in 1974. The group is independent of Salford City Council; it has negotiated a 25 year lease and become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation. Grant aid and much hard work has enabled the volunteers to bring the elegant, late Victorian, hall with its sprung floor, together with an adjacent cafe, back into community use. ECHO's aim is to encourage use of these facilities by groups and individuals throughout the area and to promote an interest in the arts, culture and the local heritage of Eccles. The hall now hosts a wide variety of concerts, meetings and events and provides a venue where friendships can be nurtured and local people can regain a sense of pride in their town.

Several trustees from ECHO attended a garden party at Buckingham Palace on 28th May where they met the Queen and other winners of this year's award.

ECHO is one of 187 charities, social enterprises and voluntary groups to receive the prestigious award this year. The number of awards handed out to groups have increased by over 60% from 2014, due to an increase in high quality applications, showing that the voluntary sector is thriving and full of innovative ideas to tackle community challenges.

The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service is the highest award given to local volunteer groups across the UK to recognise outstanding work in their communities. The awards were created in 2002 to celebrate the Queen's Golden Jubilee and winners are announced each year on 2 June – the anniversary of the Queen's Coronation. Award winners this year range from Ablaze, a charity helping to raise academic achievement amongst disadvantaged young people in Bristol to a volunteer rescue boat service on Loch Lomond.

ECHO will receive the award from the Lord-Lieutenant of Greater Manchester later this summer.

The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service Committee Chair, former broadcast journalist Martyn Lewis CBE said:

"I warmly congratulate all of the inspirational voluntary groups who have been rewarded for their community work with a Queen's Award for Voluntary Service. The judging panel for this year's awards were struck by the quality and breadth of all the successful groups. The thousands of volunteers who give up spare time to help others in their community and to help solve problems demonstrate the best of democracy in action."

Minister for Civil Society, Rob Wilson, said:

"I would like to congratulate all groups who received this year's Queen's Award for Voluntary Service, in recognition of their fantastic achievements. The hard work and commitment that goes into the work of these organisations is surpassed only by the passion and motivation of the individuals who volunteer. I hope these groups continue to inspire others to get involved and make a positive impact so that we can continue to build a bigger, stronger society."

Notes to editors

1. ECHO is based at Eccles Town Hall, Church Street, Eccles M30 0LH
Further information can be obtained from their website ecclestownhall.org
or by phoning 07931 815 802
2. Lord Lieutenants are the monarch's representatives in their lieutenancy.
There are 98 Lord Lieutenants who cover all areas of the UK.
3. This year there were 187 winners of The Queen's Award Voluntary Service from across the UK. More information on the winners can be found at the London Gazette <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/>
4. Any group of two or more people that has participated in voluntary work for more than three years can be nominated for the award. Full details on how to nominate are available at <http://qavs.direct.gov.uk/>
5. Nominations for the 2016 awards close on 18 September 2015