



Party launched a new co-operative in church

Above: Shirley Hobbs with her grandchildren Harley and Ivy; right: the inside of St Michael's after the transformation

FAMILIES joined in a free Harvest party to help launch a new community venue.

The co-operative St M's Events was launched within St Michael's Church in Paulsgrove, at a Harvest party that attracted around 200 local residents. It included a samba band, urban line dancing and children's craft activities.

The launch came after a £460,000 refurbishment of the church building, so that it can offer a warm, welcoming space for wedding receptions, parties and community activities throughout the week. Building work took place over the summer to create a space that can be the hub of the local community.

The Harvest party involved a barbecue in the garden, with hay bales and music; autumn craft-making activities; and dance performances and workshops from Waterlooville studio 'Fit'n'Funkey'.

Paulsgrove residents were invited to sign up as members of the new co-operative St M's Events. Membership involves discounts and vouchers to all St M's Events

activities, along with opportunities to develop and shape something creative in the community.

St M's Events has been set up as a co-operative so that community groups can share in the running of the space. Corinne Wincott has been employed as events and community project manager, to support and encourage those groups that would like to be involved.

The £400,000 grant was awarded from the Big Lottery Fund after the church listened to around 500 local residents to discover what they wanted to see in Paulsgrove. The feedback from locals was that people wanted better and more attractive facilities where they could celebrate important events and showcase their community.

The survey was part of the church's three-year 'Proud to be Paulsgrove' campaign, which has included a local photography competition, community hog roasts and



superhero activity days.

The building project involved the creation of three separate community areas within the church, alongside the main worship area. These are designed to be flexible and attractive, so they can be used by a variety of different groups during the week. The church can now host everything from music performances to cake-baking, from dance classes to toddler groups.

The funding from the Big Lottery Fund was spent alongside funding from the Council for Social Responsibility, our diocese's social transformation charity. The church has ambitious goals of reaching more than 1,000 residents in the first two years, recruiting 100 new volunteers, and inspiring the creation of 10 new community groups.