

Report of Neighbourhood Support Fund Assessment Panel

BAP Meeting on Wednesday 7th February 2024

Introduction

This paper outlines the recent work undertaken by the Assessment Panel for the Berwickshire Area Partnership, Neighbourhood Support Fund. It gives a brief description of various activities and a review of recent applications. It goes on to make recommendations for consideration by the BAP.

Berwickshire Neighbourhood Support Fund 2022/23

Berwickshire Area Partnership, Neighbourhood Support Fund, Assessment Panel (NSF AP) met for the second full meeting of the financial year, at 11am on Wednesday 17th January 2024. Only £50.2k was available for distribution through the Neighbourhood Support Fund during 2023/2024. Following the awards made in the first round of funding this year circa £14.4k remained (an additional £4.5k was ring fenced for an earlier approved award). In summary we had circa £14.4k available to distribute between five projects, together seeking a total of £15.4.

It is clear that more applications are being made by communities taking on activities that were in the past provided by SBC and other statutory bodies. Communities are willing to take on these roles, commit a lot of time and effort and save SBC a great deal of money. This needs to be recognised and volunteers deserve to be supported adequately through the NSF.

It is unfortunate, therefore, that the NSF was halved this year. As a result, many deserving applicants from both rounds, will have been disappointed that their strong applications did not receive support. It is hoped that this situation can be reversed when setting the NSF budget for next year.

Panel Membership

We are pleased that two new members have joined the Assessment Panel this year: Nicky Seed and Bob Hope. Having been a party to the development and implementation of our assessment process over the past four years, and Chair

of the Assessment Panel since its inception, I feel it is time to stand down. This will be my last report as Chair of the Assessment Panel.

There is always a need to recruit additional members and attain a full complement of panel members. Anyone interested in joining the panel should contact Gillian Jardine GJardine@scotborders.gov.uk or James Purves JPurves@scotborders.gov.uk for further information.

Attaining full delegated powers for the Assessment Panel

At its meeting on 4th March 2021 the BAP agreed to the following recommendation:

“We recommend the creation of a sub-subcommittee of the BAP with full delegated powers to undertake the assessment of applications and subsequently make awards.”

At the BAP meeting 9th June 2022 our recommendation that “the Neighbourhood Support Fund – Assessment Panel receives full delegated powers to make and communicate its decisions to applicants” was again endorsed by the BAP.

At the BAP Meeting on Thursday 9th February 2023, we reiterated this request. We continue to feel that it would be beneficial to uncouple the work of the Assessment Panel and the BAP and move to three equally spaced application periods on an annual basis. We could then publish these dates well in advance and deal with applications more timeously.

We have over the last three years proved that we can undertake the role of an Assessment panel fairly and robustly. None of our recommendations have ever been overturned and our processes have been widely praised. It is therefore time for the Assessment Panel to be given full delegated powers.

Recommendation 1

We seek BAP support to request that SBC agree that:

1. The Berwickshire Neighbourhood Support Fund – Assessment Panel receives full delegated powers to make and communicate its decisions to applicants.

2. The NSF assessment process moves to a cycle of three, equally spaced, funding rounds each year, with the prospect of applicants receiving a decision within four weeks of the closing date for applications.

Assessment of Applications

I have outlined the assessment process many times, as I have recorded in my reports over the past three years. Suffice to say we have a very robust system of assessment that recognises the need for: transparency; appropriate declarations of interest; applications to comply with the published Eligibility Criteria and blind marking of all applications. We have managed throughout to achieve a strong measure of agreement on applications and move relatively smoothly to a consensus and agreement on our recommendations.

The minutes of the assessment panel meeting held on Wednesday 17th January 2024 can be seen in **Appendix 1** below. These minutes includes a brief description of each application and some individual feedback from our deliberations. Our recommendations are summarised in the minutes.

Recommendations 2

It is recommended that BAP approve the awards detailed in Appendix 1 - MINUTES of Meeting of BERWICKSHIRE NEIGHBOURHOOD SUPPORT FUND ASSESSMENT PANEL held via Microsoft Teams on Wednesday 17th January 2024 11.00.