

Report of the Finance Officer & Responsible Finance Officer

Grants

Background

1. Since its formation, Berwick Town Council has awarded grants to support community groups organising events and community projects. Events supported include Spittal Gala and Seaside Festival, Tweedmouth Feast, and the Film and Literary Festivals.
2. Over time, the administration of awarding and paying grants has evolved. For example, it became a requirement that the recipient of a grant provided evidence that the grant had been spent for the purpose set out in their application before they received any funds. In some cases, such as this, the evolution reflected best practice and the requirements of the audit process.
3. This evolutionary process saw the gradual adoption of the principle that BTC funds would be granted to support what might be characterised as the infrastructure of an event, such as toilets, marquees, costs of permissions, insurance and similar, but would not be used to pay for entertainment, food or drink.
4. In November 2015, formal guidelines were adopted specifying that event grants should only be awarded for insurance and advertising and that the maximum grant should be no more than £1000.

Current Situation

5. Despite adopting new guidelines in 2015, Councillors have chosen to continue to award event grants that do not correspond with the guidelines, approving grants both for purposes other than those specified in the guidelines and that exceed the maximum.
6. In part, this is because to do otherwise would be to deny several organisations funding and would lead to the cancellation of regular events that form part of the annual calendar of the town. In particular, such events rarely spend significant sums on advertising or insurance.

Recommendations

7. That the committee recommends council recognise the current unworkable situation and asks staff to undertake a review of grant criteria
8. That committee recommends to council that, in the interim, Council should suspend the guidelines adopted in November 2015 and agree to consider applications on an ad hoc basis,
9. That council delegate to the committee the power to devise a new scheme of grant funding for events and community organizations, including a power to devise categories of events based on their impact on tourism or regeneration, as well as their contribution to the communities of Berwick upon Tweed.