



COST OF LIVING

ENERGY RELIEF GRANT

GRANT DISPERSION – IMPACT EVALUATION

July 2023

Supporting the third sector

The increased cost of living combined with the spiralling energy costs has had a significant impact on people's lives, local businesses and particularly, small charities and social enterprises, voluntary groups and village halls, already facing significant challenges in running services and activities with limited resources.

Not for profit organisations such as charities and social enterprises are particularly vulnerable to rising energy costs due of the nature of the services they run and, how they generate income. They can't simply put up their prices like a private business might do. Committees running community centres and village halls have been struggling with the dilemma of increasing their hire charges and losing current bookings or, absorbing costs to avoid activities being stopped.

In our engagement with members at the beginning of the year, it became clear that the exponentially rising energy costs was having a detrimental impact across the wider sector and, without support, they would be forced to significantly reduce services/ activities or even close completely. This would have a devastating impact on people and communities, further exacerbating the impact of the financial crisis on the most vulnerable in our communities.

Building from previous work with Scottish Borders Council around the creation of Warm Spaces in Berwickshire, the Cost of Living - Energy Relief Grant was another joint response to crisis, aimed to alleviate the impact of inflation and the increased cost of energy on the local third sector.

This document is a summary report on the energy relief grant dispersion. The aim is to reflect on this joint approach while providing information on how the grant was allocated. Most of all, it highlights the importance of supporting the third sector to continue delivering valuable services and activities in our communities.



Juliana Amaral
Chief Executive Officer

A Collaborative Approach

In response to the crisis, a partnership between Live Borders and Borders Community Action was formed. With the cost-of-living crisis having an impact on everyone in our communities, it was important to act promptly, in order to offer support at a critical time for organisations.

Live Borders launched another support fund to help children and young people with membership and other costs associated with joining a sports club. Both organisations worked together to design a set of specific criteria so that organisations could benefit from the right fund.

The collaboration meant that the funding application was designed to direct applicants to each appropriate fund, thus avoiding the risk of duplication and ensuring that information about grants and support available was consistent.

COST OF LIVING SUPPORT ✦

SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITY GROUPS & ORGANISATIONS

AVAILABLE THROUGH A PARTNERSHIP
BETWEEN THE BORDERS TSI AND LIVE
BORDERS TO ASSIST COMMUNITY GROUPS
AND ORGANISATIONS OPERATING IN THE
SCOTTISH BORDERS WITH THE IMPACT
THE COST OF LIVING CRISIS IS HAVING ON
EVERYONE ACROSS OUR COMMUNITY.




APPLY BY
12 MAY





Administration of the grant

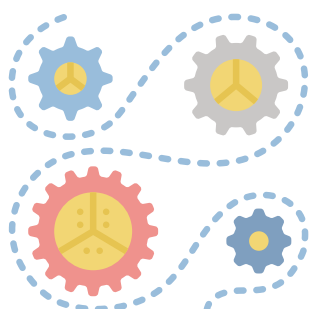
The process of applying for and receiving the grant was intended to be fast and efficient.

A set of specific criteria was created to ensure grants were allocated based on evidence of need and in line correct protocols such as governance documentation, annual accounts and legal structure.



The total amount of £50,000 available for distribution was agreed to be dispersed in two ways:

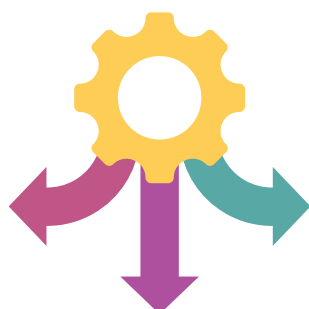
- up to £500 to support local constituted and non-constituted groups to enable their activities to continue using hired spaces.
- up to £1000 to organisations facing hardship with the increase running cost of energy for their own venue.



The grant application was designed to facilitate information being captured, while ensuring due diligence was in place and for decisions to be made in timely fashion. Applicants were required to provide evidence of energy increase to support their narrative in the application:



- For groups hiring space : regular usage and an increase in hiring costs e.g. invoices or a letter from the venue provider.
- For organisations running a space: evidence the increased energy costs, e.g. a recent copy of a bill or a letter from the energy supplier.



Finally, applications were cross referenced with governance and annual accounts documentation, as well as evidence of energy increase costs. Awards decisions were made according to the energy increase amount, evidence of financial need and the impact on the group/ organisation.

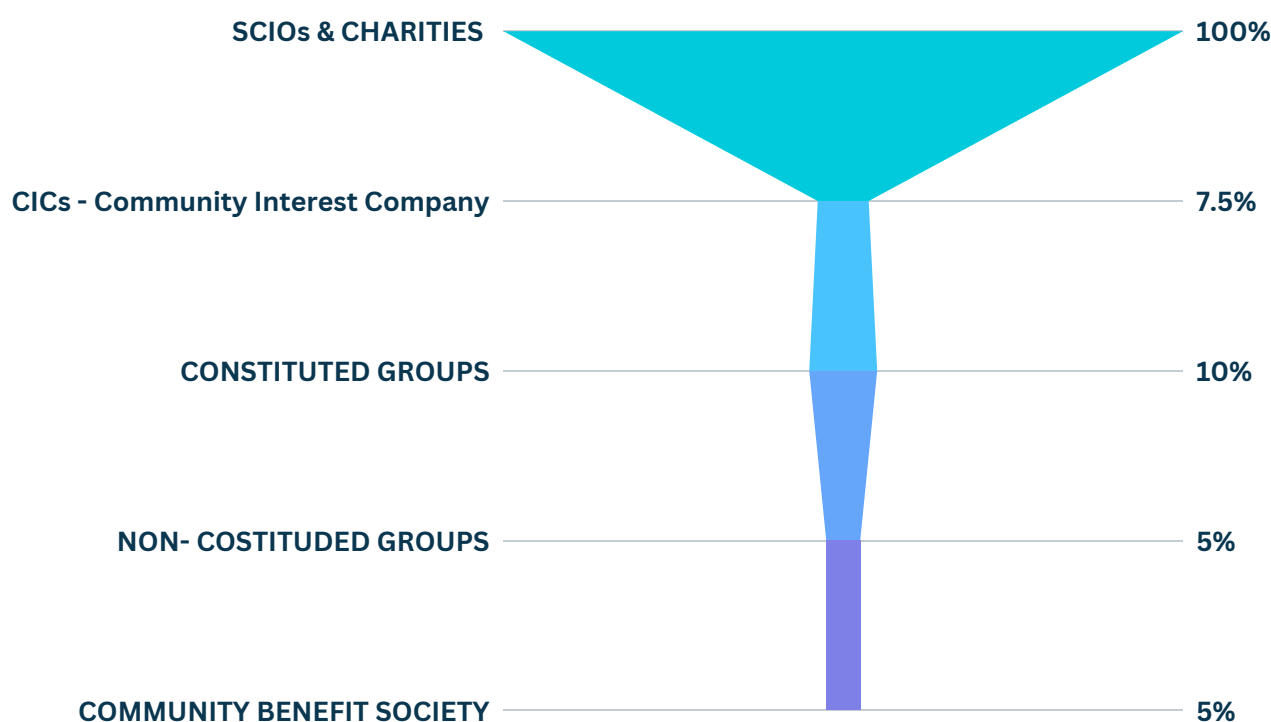
Grant Applications

A total of **62 grant applications** were received.

A total of **9 applications were declined** for not matching the fund criteria or inability to evidence energy cost increase.



The organisations who benefitted from the grant varied in size of organisation/ community group, legal structure and scope of activities provided for community benefit.



The lowest award made was £250 with 20 organisations obtaining the full £1000 amount requested. The timescale for panel's assessment and decisions on applications was of 7 working days.

The assessment panel met on a weekly basis to ensure applications were processed and grants were dispersed promptly. Liaison with Live Borders meant funding was not duplicated and groups were signed posted to the right fund.

NB: At the point of writing this evaluation, some payments were still pending due to acceptance grant offer letter not being returned by organisations.

Reach

The grant benefitted a wide range of community groups and organisations across the Scottish Borders with a varied spread across the 5 localities:



The activities provided by these groups and organisations varied from social, environmental and health needs, benefitting people of all ages and abilities. It is estimated that more than 825 people benefit from activities such as:

Dementia Day Care	Carpet Bowling	Music tuition	Tai-Chi	Toddler group	Youth Services
Childcare & holiday club	Free Food	Carer' support group	Repair shop		Film Club
Yoga	Community Cafe	Out of School club	Badminton		Knit & Natter
Meditation	Reuse Hub	Armed Forces & Veteran's support	Sewing	Equine Assisted Learning	WRI
Circuit training	Carpet Bowling	Scouts	Crafts	Taekwondo	Table tennis
Choir	Befriending	Youth Activities	Girl guiding	New Age Kurling	Coffee Morning
Community Shop	Children clothes and toys swaps	Men's Sheds	Youth Activities	Carers' support	Lunch clubs
Mum & Toddlers groups					Citizens Advice
	Waste refill shop	Digital sessions	Leadership skills	Ukraine and Meet & Eat sessions	Gentle exercise classes
					Tennis Coaching
					Equine Assisted Therapy



Impact

Relief grants can have a significant impact on charities, especially during times of crisis or when they are facing financial challenges, as it has been the case with our energy relief grant. Here's what the organisations are saying:

"To support our hirers we have held off with any increase to our hire charges, we will now continue to do so for longer with the aid of this grant."

"Our fuel costs have increased dramatically this year, especially as we have a purely electric setup for all heating and hot water. At current prices, due to increase this month, it costs £18 per hour to heat the hall at maximum output (17kW at 62p/kWh). Additional funding has allowed us to absorb this further anticipated increase in energy costs, without passing this on to our users, some of which would become non-viable."

"Our energy bills have increased considerably and we are facing the prospect of cutting back on supplying food at our drop-ins as well as potentially limiting the number of evenings we are open"

"This year alone we have experienced an increase in hall hire, and an increase in Instructor fee so each class is under number pressure. We are reluctant to increase the price from £4 per week, the grant will enable us to continue."

"Over the last two years we have seen an increase in all our costs especially utility. In addition to this finding funding to cover these costs is getting harder. We had to carry out a restructure of the organisation last year to enable us to be financially viable but it also meant that we were not able to support as many young people as we had."

"Our electric bills from 1st April 2023 will increase from £1126 to £3195 treble which will mean a significant increase for hall activities."

"Without additional support we would have had to cut back on tutors & staff hours and reduce the number of groups. Funding for heat & light are difficult to raise and support in this area is very welcome."

"The Cost of Living Grant will make it possible for us to raise our charges without pricing out our users."

"The price increase impacts our ability to offer free services to our members as we need to utilise more of our free reserves and/or fundraising monies towards utilities rather than service delivery. "

"We have not increased our charge to families at this difficult financial time, however the increased overhead from energy costs does mean that we have less in the budget for activities for the young people."

"All our suppliers have increased their costs, but our customers budgets have decreased, all these factors have a negative impact on us as a Social Enterprise. "

"Keeping costs down ensure the activities are available to all but absorbing the increased fuel costs is not something we can do indefinitely"

Energy Relief Beneficiaries

Berwickshire Swap
 Borders Carers Centre
 Cadrona Village Hall
 Association
 Cheviot Youth
 Cockburnspath Community
 Enterprise Ltd
 Coldstream Community
 Centre
 Connect Berwickshire
 Denholm Village Hall
 Duns Community Nursery
 Duns Tennis Club
 Ednam Village Hall
 Eildon West Youth Club
 Escape Youth Services
 Firstlight Trust
 Foulden Village Hall
 Galashiels Men's Shed
 Galashiels Scouts Group
 Gavinton Village hall
 Girl Guiding Hawick – Friends
 of Guiding
 Hawick Congregational
 Church
 Hawick Men's Shed
 Hawick Saxon Band
 Hawick Senior Citizen's Assoc.

Heads Together
 Hermitage Hall
 Interest Link
 Jedburgh Gentle Exercise
 Lanton Village Hall
 Lindean Village Hall
 Makerstoun Village Hall
 Peebles Community Trust
 Peebles Scouts Group
 Peebleshire Youth Trust
 Riddlel Fiddles
 Rowlands Youth Group
 Roxburgh and Berwickshire
 CAB
 Skirling Village Hall
 Southdean hall
 St Abbs Community Trust
 St boswells Village Hall
 St Mary's Hall Cappercleuch
 Stable Life
 Stichill Short Mat Bowling
 club
 The Community reuse Store
 Traquair Village hall
 Tweeddale Youth Action
 Weigh greener CIC
 Whitsome Village Hall
 Yeltholm Community Shop



Making a difference

This is excellent news and our Committee will now be able to move forward more confidently with programme activity, we were very concerned would need to be curtailed.



We are delighted, and gratefully thankful, at Hermitage Hall that we have been awarded £1,000 for cost-of-living support towards our significantly increased electricity costs.

Huge thanks for this funding award. This is a considerable relief and comes at a time of great expense and worry!!

Lessons Learned



What worked well

- The local community development intelligence about activities and services in communities continued to be an added strength in local fund dispersion.
- Liaison with Scottish Borders Council and other partners for information sharing in order to avoid duplication.
- Bureaucracy was reduced and the application process simplified as most organisations were known by the Borders Community Action team. As a membership organisation, governing documentation may already be logged into Borders Community Action database. This also helps community development officers to run a 'health check' on applicants, offering further support as identified.
- The energy relief grant enabled our development officers to obtain an overview of the range of energy suppliers and discrepancies in rates. This information enabled them to discuss these discrepancies and offer comparison examples, as well as connection with another similar organisation when this was suitable.
- Applications were processed on a weekly basis with payments being made within 7 days, once documentation and evidence was obtained.
- One indirect outcome of this approach was the recognition that the Village Hall grant is no longer fit for purpose, particularly in light with significant crisis such as the impact of COVID and current inflation. Village Halls were not able to use the existing grant for energy relief support due to the restrictive criteria of the fund. Borders Community Action is now working with the Federation of Village Halls to review the fund.

What could have been better

- The initial plan was to develop a joint funding application with Live Borders however, due to differences in systems adopted by each organisation, this was not possible.
- Publicity about the funds available could be better, particularly around the energy support grant offered by Live Borders and Borders Community Action. Although a joint press release was put together, the information shared was still confusing for groups and organisations looking to apply for funding.
- The fund deadline was extended twice to ensure organisations were aware of the fund and had opportunity to apply. We noticed reduced take up from organisations in localities where community development work was not very present due to Borders Community Action re-structuring as a new organisation.



THANK YOU



The Cost of Living - Energy relief support scheme was only possible due to the partnership work with Scottish Borders Council as part of our joint response to the cost of living crisis. A special thanks to Bavs for agreeing to hold the funds while Borders Community Action was getting set up as a new organisation.



In collaboration with:



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