

Proposal to reinstate a grant to contribute to funding the Tourism Officer employed by Berwick Community Trust

Does the decision involve new expenditure?	Yes
Is there an existing budget for the expenditure?	No
Are the equalities impacts/an equalities assessment required?	No
Does this require a full Council decision?	Yes

1. Background

a) As part of the budget process for 2024/25, in order to make savings, the Town Clerk proposed that BTC should cease to provide the annual sum of £7500 to part fund the Tourism Officer they employed.

b) It was agreed that the funding would cease to be granted on the basis that

- BTC was the only organisation contributing to the cost (other than the Community Trust itself)
- The Community Trust had not provided any evidence of the outcomes of having the post apart from some figures on increased social media hits.

c) It recently came to light that, despite the budget decision being made in January, no one had informed The Community Trust of this decision.

d) On further investigation it transpires, according to The Trust's Senior Officer, that they had not been asked to make a case for the funding. Despite being an important strategic partner in working for the good of the town, no conversation had taken place with The Trust at any stage in this process. It is the case that there was no discussion about the possibility of funding not being forthcoming, about what was needed to make the case or about the decision to withdraw funding.

2. Post of Tourism Officer

It transpires that the post is funded by around 200 businesses, many of which are emerging or small business. They pay by subscribing to the website at £52 a year.

It remains difficult to measure direct benefits of the post but in terms of activities the post holder meets with new businesses, arranges and hosts meetings between various tourist focused businesses, networks and links with the various festivals and updates social media.

Various examples of extremely positive feedback have been provided from Friends of Castle Parks, Museums Northumberland and individual business owners. They refer to the energy and professionalism of the post holder and the sense that her input is helping to bring together people and organisations which will bring benefits to Berwick.

The social media statistics are measurable and are as follows;

	2023	2024
Facebook	96,628	386,928
Instagram	30,055	62,287
Website	55,667	62,287

3. Recommendation

That Budget and Administration Committee reconsiders the decision made in January to withdraw funding on the basis that our contribution does in fact contribute to an effective post within an important partner organisation which benefits the town. Reinstating the funding would also, in effect, acknowledge that our communication with BCT was not at an acceptable standard. It would also demonstrate a commitment on the part of the Council to promoting tourism, recognising its importance to the economy of the town.

Cllr G Brown 14.07.23