



Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks

RESILIENT COMMUNITIES FUND (NORTH OF SCOTLAND)

Outcome of the stakeholder consultation on
criteria and scope of the fund

January-February 2022



Scottish & Southern
Electricity Networks



INTRODUCTION

Following Storm Arwen, a once-in-a generation weather event which caused extensive damage to our north of Scotland network, many of the communities we serve experienced severe disruption. The damage was unprecedented in some areas, with the north-east region experiencing the equivalent of almost two years' worth of overhead line faults in just one 12-hour period.

The resilience of the communities impacted was greatly tested, and throughout the storm response, SSEN worked collaboratively with local resilience partnerships across the areas affected, taking a multi-agency approach to ensure the safety and welfare of the public.

In recognition of this critical area, SSEN has committed to making an additional £500,000 contribution to the SSEN Resilient Communities Fund which delivers financial grants to community and not-for-profit organisations for support with community resilience projects. This additional contribution will take the 2022 Resilient Communities Fund total to £1 million for the north of Scotland, with the funding round brought forward to February 2022.

We are keen to ensure that the fund best meets the needs of the communities we're looking to support, so we launched a consultation on its scope, criteria and model for distributing the fund. This report sets out the responses to that consultation.



METHODOLOGY

The consultation ran from 21 January-7 February 2022. It should be noted that Storms Malik and Corrie (on 29 and 30 January) took place during this period, impacting a widespread area in our north of Scotland licence area with over 120,000 properties experiencing power cuts.

The consultation document was emailed to approximately 500 local authority, resilience partner and community stakeholders by our regional Customer Relationship Managers. It was also widely publicised on social media channels and featured on SSEN's website.

19 responses were received. These were of high quality, with 17 from knowledgeable stakeholders who were relevant professionals (eg Resilience/Emergency Planning Officers, Civil Contingencies Manager) or volunteer members of community organisations. The other two were from individuals, one of who was a resident of an area affected by Storm Arwen. A detailed breakdown of respondents is shown in Figure 1.

Respondent type	Number of responses
Local Authorities	7
Community Councils	4
Other national statutory organisations (Police Scotland and SEPA)	2
Community or local resilience groups	2
Emergency response partner	1
Fuel poverty charity	1
Local resident	1
Other individuals	1
Total	19

Figure 1: Consultation respondents

Separate to the consultation, a workshop was also held with the independent Resilient Communities Fund panel to seek views on criteria and distribution of the fund.



RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

Question 1: Following Storm Arwen, we have increased the fund by £500,000, meaning the north of Scotland fund will total £1 million for the 2022 funding round. Additional weighting will be given to applications from communities most severely impacted by Storm Arwen, while maintaining funding opportunities across our wider network area.

Are you supportive of this approach and weighting?

17 responses were received to this question.

14 respondents supported the proposed approach and weighting as set out. Another supported the approach of giving additional weighting to storm-impacted communities provided this included all three recent storms and not just Storm Arwen.

Two respondents did not support the proposal. One of these welcomed the increased funding but felt that funding should be targeted at other areas because network assets in recently-impacted communities were now more resilient because they had been repaired following the storms. The other non-supportive respondent commented that the Resilient Communities Fund was insufficient to pay for the backup power solutions they believe should be provided proactively for all affected customers.

Question 2: Recognising the increased amount in the fund this year and the desire to maximise reach and impact of funding, do you suggest any changes to our process to distribute funds, which are currently allocated following a competitive grant application process?

Potential options for consideration:

- a) **No change to current process; fund is open for grant applications from any not-for profit or community organisations up to a limit of £20,000**
- b) **Fund remains open for grant applications from any not-for profit or community organisations, but limit is raised to above £20,000**
- c) **The fund is split, with the majority of the fund allocated for grant applications as above, with a separate pot specifically for larger cross-community projects, open to any not-for profit or community organisations**
- d) **The fund is split, with the majority of the fund allocated for grant applications as above, with a separate pot for larger cross-community projects, open to a limited group of constituted organisations such as local authorities and/or community councils**
- e) **Please also specify any other suggestions for fund distribution.**

16 responses were received to this question. 12 selected one of the options, but support was spread evenly across the five suggestions. Three more evaluated all four options without selecting a preference. Selections and comments are set out in Figure 2. Verbatim responses are in *italics*.

The final respondent stated that they did not support the fund's exclusion of individual customers who had experienced a power cut, or the limit of £20,000 as physical resilience projects supplying backup power solutions would cost considerably more than this.



Option	Respondents	Respondent comments
A	4	
B	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suitable for joint applications from more than one adjacent community.
C	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The limit for individual community projects should remain at £20,000 to ensure a fair distribution of funds to many projects. The term 'larger cross-community projects' may need a clear definition or set of criteria.
D	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>We would be concerned if constituted organisations did not get the majority, or if the funding pot was swallowed up by large projects led at a Local Authority or area level which should perhaps be funded from other public sources.</i> Council <i>Larger cross-community projects can be advantageous where they involve moveable assets, either equipment or knowledge, such as a programme of Community Resilience workshops to give communities across the region the confidence to do their own risk assessment and develop plans, or grants to not-for profit organisations such as Highland 4x4 Response or RAYNET to enhance their region-wide capability.</i> Council <i>We have mixed views around utilising the funds to support authorities who have legislated responsibilities regarding Emergency Response and Resilience eg Local Authorities. Where partnership working is in place this would be acceptable assuming the fund is not replacing budgets of authorities.</i> Emergency Response Team <i>This will allow us to apply for funds on a broader basis that may include developing resilience projects at a household level right across the area as well as those of communities. It may also allow support to be given to the groups or areas who most need support and are not as able to apply for funding themselves.</i> Council
E	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Double to £40,000.
Total	12	

Figure 2: Support for suggested options

Question 3: In recent years, the fund has supported a wide range of community resilience projects. Thinking about any potential changes to the criteria for the 2022 fund, what areas do you think should be particularly prioritised eg funding for physical resilience projects such as communication equipment and back-up power solutions or funding for social resilience projects such as resilience planning and capacity building?

16 responses were received to this question. One simply stated that they agreed, while another proposed that any resilience project should to be eligible. Other responses were narrative and proposed various priorities.



Recurring themes for the **type of provision** were:

- **Physical items**
 - Generators
 - Food (eg dry) and takeaway containers for hot food/drinks prepared in central premises
 - Fitting/upgrading kitchens in community halls
 - Communications equipment such as satellite phones, particularly after PSTN (Public Switched Telephone Network) switch-off (to be completed by December 2025)
 - Blankets and warm clothes
 - Non-mains lighting and radios
- **Services**
 - Routine scheduled servicing/testing for generators
 - Contracts for satellite phones, which may be unaffordable for volunteer groups
- **Planning and training**
 - Community planning and capability for response and resilience
 - Support to organise volunteers into an effective helping workforce.

It's critical that each community does it's own risk assessment, but there is still nervousness from communities about the amount of work involved, liability, etc. Many of these aspects are covered on the Ready Scotland website but still not enough to give communities confidence.

One local resilience group felt that physical projects and equipment should be prioritised ahead of support for planning, however.

Recurring themes for the **basis of prioritisation** were:

- **Location**
 - Community halls
 - Sheltered housing and businesses (backup power)
 - Hard to reach locations that cannot be reached when roads are blocked by fallen trees/distance to key amenities
 - Locations that are routinely very cold in winter
 - Locations with high levels of vulnerability.
- **Type of applicant**
 - Projects run by groups or organisation who have proven capability to deliver in the past.
- **Level of impact on community resilience**
- **Time off supply** during recent power cuts

Other feedback was:

One Community Council proposed that a **wide range of projects** should be supported, as should projects that combined several types of provision:

Funding should be open to wide range of projects. Funding availability for a combination of physical items and/or planning/organisation is a good mix.

A Council proposed that criteria should be flexible enough to assess applications according to their own merit:



Our view is that the current criteria is adequate and should be applied flexibly to support the needs of individual communities.

Question 4: Are there any other factors SSEN should consider in the prioritisation, distribution and delivery of funds in the 2022 funding round?

12 responses were received to this question. These covered a range of suggestions:

- **Prioritisation**
 - Lessons from Storm Arwen
 - *Liaise closely with Local Authorities and Community Councils/community resilience groups to support grant applications and ensure the correct 'must have' equipment is obtained and not just 'nice to have'. Police Scotland*
 - *Communities **most at risk** eg rural communities, SIMD (Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation) areas. Council*
 - ***Preventative measures** for those in need: consider what the impact of continued weather patterns may have on communities and how you can help with the provision of equipment similar to installing external feed for electrical generator on the outside of rescue centres/village halls. Community Council*
- **Timing and eligibility**
 - Clear information on the timing of the application and award process
 - *Extend the deadline for submitting funding applications for this year's fund. Many resilience groups such as ours are in early stages of formation and so are still assessing their needs. An extension until June 2022 would be very helpful. Community Council*
 - *Funding award allocations should be made to communities/others no later than Summer 2022 to ensure that the developments the funds are designed to support are in place and ready for winter 2022/23. Council*
 - *We understand that a constituted community organisation can apply for several different projects within its area (eg a Community Council which covers several settlements can make separate applications for each settlement). If this is not in fact permitted under the current funding rules, this should be changed. Community Council*
 - *Criteria that would permit applications from organisations or communities struggling with fuel poverty. Fuel Poverty Charity*

Further comments to this question were:

- *We would be happy to take up the opportunity offered of SSEN support in terms of coming and talking to the community and/or connecting with other utilities providers. Community Council Resilience Group*
- *Such lengthy power cuts must be consigned to history, regardless of the nature of storms in the future. Individual*



CONCLUSIONS

We have made the following changes or clarifications to the criteria and application process for the Resilient Communities Fund (North) as a result of the feedback we received during this consultation.

You said	We did
Additional weighting should be given to applications for communities impacted by recent	'Projects in areas affected by recent significant storms which resulted in extended power loss' will be one of the prioritisation criteria. We continue to welcome strong applications from all communities.
All of the suggested ways of allocating funds had merit	The £20,000 guideline for applications relating to single communities has been retained as a guideline although exceptional projects above this level will be considered. A limit of £50,000 will apply to multi-year projects or projects relating to multiple communities.
Applications for equipment, services and planning/training should all be considered	No priority will be given to one type of application.
Opinions vary on the timing of the application window but deadlines should be clear	The deadline for applications will be 5pm on 29 April 2022. Awards will be made in July 2022.



CONTACT

Further information about the Resilient Communities Fund:
ssen.co.uk/resiliencefund/

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