

Community Investment Grant Fund Review 2013

Introduction

The Community Investment Fund grant scheme started in 1998 and has approved £13 million of grants to nearly 300 community projects across the district. These projects vary from new swings in a play area to new community buildings. Generally the scheme supports projects that show they will enable new activities to take place that will benefit a wide proportion of the community. Applicants need to provide evidence of local need for the project by providing evidence that the local community support the project.

This review considers grant awards made from 2007/8 to date.

The scheme currently has two parts; over £15,000 and under £15,000. The over £15,000 scheme opens once each year with a maximum award of £100,000 and the under £15,000 scheme opens twice a year with a maximum award of £15,000 (both schemes also have a maximum award of 60 per cent of the project costs). The under £15,000 scheme also has a maximum project cost of £50,000 that is intended to direct larger projects to the over £15,000 scheme.

All awards are made as a percentage of the total costs of the project and therefore any reduction in the project costs result in a reduction of the actual amount paid. Awards are offered for a period of one year and are extended if evidence of project progression can be provided. Details of the grant policy and procedure are attached at appendix one.

Financial Analysis

Since 2007/8, we have awarded 137 projects grants totalling £5,466,122, 97 of these projects (71 per cent) are now complete. The table below gives detailed information about the actual amounts paid against the grants offered.

year	budget £	awarded ¹ £	paid £	% of award actually spent	no. projects funded	no. projects completed	% projects completed	
2007/08	1,000,000	802,042	585,254	73	21	16	76	
2008/09	1,000,000	1,553,317	1,438,789	93	35	33	94	
2009/10	1,000,000	852,000	826,805	97	14	14	100	
2010/11	500,000	463,932	447,226	96	13	12	92	
2011/12*	500,000	544,550	395,044	73	20	15	75	
2012/13	500,000	367,669	332,157	90	15	9	60	
2013/14	1,000,000	882,612	0	0	19	0	0	
Total	5,500,000	5,466,122	4,025,275	74	137	97	71	
2011/12*	Four projects were withdrawn (Cholsey Parish Council, Berinsfield Early Years, Oxfordshire Association for Young People, Shiplake Memorial Hall) and one project is still in progress, Wallingford Rowing Club.							

¹ Note: Where the awarded amount is higher than the budget figure this is due to carry forwards from previous years.

The results show a good performance rate against the amount of grants that are awarded. The lower performance rate shown in 2011/12 is primarily due to the withdrawal of the Cholsey Parish Council grant which was replaced with funding from the council's new homes bonus scheme and one project that is still in the process of claiming its grant. There are six outstanding projects from 2012/13 this includes two projects that are currently in progress, one that has withdrawn and three that are yet to commence. All of the 19 projects funded in 2013/14 have yet to claim their grant awards.

Analysis/post award evaluation of completed projects

We recently sent questionnaires to 16 of the over £15,000 awardees to ask if the activities envisaged at the time of application were being achieved. Of the 16 projects funded ten fully met the scheme objectives to increase usage of the facilities, four only partially met the scheme objectives and two of the projects have not yet returned their monitoring information.

The four projects who are only partially meeting the scheme objectives consist of two churches, one village hall and one sports pavilion. We will write to these organisations with suggestions about how to increase their activities and usage.

From a financial perspective of the 16 organisations four have considerable reserves (varying from £45k to £70k) but two organisations indicate serious financial problems that could lead to closure of their facilities. Again, we will write to these organisations and sign post them to appropriate advice services.

Four organisations have taken out loans to complete their projects but the organisations suffering financially are not burdened by loan repayments so this does not justify the reason for their financial problems.

One issue of particular note is the high cost of gas and electricity that the community facilities are facing despite energy saving initiatives being installed such as solar panels and ground source heat pumps. These instances will be investigated further.

Alternative funding for projects

Our funding offers a maximum award of 60 per cent of the total project costs so this means that organisations seek funding from other sources to raise the balances required to complete their projects.

We have analysed where this alternative funding tends to come from and this is shown in the table below:

funder	amount £	number of projects funded (from the 16 analysed)
Lottery funding	375,000	3
WREN/TOE/BIFFA	260,000	6
OCC, Village Hall Fund	30,000	4
Loans	640,000	4
Section 106 funds	0	0

We have noted the lack of section 106 funds and will work more closely with the planning department so that grant funded projects have access to section 106 money when appropriate.

Customer survey

We have also consulted with all grant applicants from the last three years to ask them about our service. The result of this survey is attached at appendix two of this report.

The results have been analysed and the action plan below created to improve the grants service.

CIF Customer feedback - action plan			
number	action	reason	deadline
1	we will publicise the dates of our grant workshops more widely and well in advance of our grant deadlines	to raise public awareness as 47% of those consulted were not aware of the workshops	31/12/13
2	we will continue to train our grants officers in charity governance and financial matters	17% of those consulted found the grants officer advice fairly useful and we would like to increase this per centage	31/12/14
3	investigate why some respondents did not find it beneficial to speak at the CIF committee.	11% of respondents did not find it beneficial speaking at the CIF committee	31/12/13
4	investigate why some respondents do not think the council has a fair and transparent decision making process.	14% of respondents disagreed with the statement that the council has a fair and transparent decision making process	31/12/13

CIF Panel Feedback

This review also included a questionnaire to councillors who sit on the CIF Grants Committee. Some of their suggestions are listed below along with officer comments:

councillor comment	officer response
change the name of the scheme to Community Grants Fund or Communities Grant Scheme	officers agree with this proposal to change the name of the scheme and suggest it is renamed the Communities Capital Grant Scheme
consider increasing the under £15,000 scheme to under £25,000	officers do not agree with this proposal as there is no evidence to suggest projects are not able to progress without a higher level of funding
consider increasing the £100,000 maximum award	officers do not agree with this proposal as there is no evidence to suggest projects are not able to progress without a higher level of funding
consider removing the two year rule	officers do not agree with this proposal as this

for organisations	restriction ensures grant funds are shared more widely
review the protocol about ward members being on the panel and debating projects in their own wards.	democratic services officers will improve the information to brief councillors prior to the panel meetings and discourage councillors who have general interests in particular projects in their own wards
investigate new school academies to check eligibility to the scheme	<p>academies, free schools and technology colleges are set up as charitable companies; they have two layers of governance: the members of the trust and the board of governors</p> <p>funding for academies comes primarily in the form of a grant, known as the General Annual Grant (GAG) paid by the Education Funding Agency (EFA)</p> <p>the current policy states that because education is a function of Oxfordshire County Council we will not accept applications from schools</p> <p>officers suggest that we amend the policy to state that we will not accept applications from schools, academies or free schools</p>

Restrictions

Currently the requirement for restrictions on the title deeds of land or premises is determined by the Grants Panel and the relevant cabinet member and it is based on a risk assessment by the grants officer.

The table below gives the general approach that is currently used. The exception to this approach is for some church projects where it is very difficult to prove ownership and often the title of the land has never been officially registered.

grant award £	evidence of ownership ie. conveyance	award letter/ conditions	formal agreement	formal agreement, certificate of title and a restriction for 10 years
1,000 – 14,999		√		
15,000 – 25,000	√	√		
£25,001 - £50,000	√	√	√	
50,001 – 250,000	√	√	√	√

Recommendations

1. That the Community Investment Fund Grant Scheme is renamed the Communities Capital Grant Scheme.
2. That the current policy is amended to include 'that because education is a function of Oxfordshire County Council we will not accept applications from schools. We will also not accept applications from academies or free schools.'

Appendix 1

Community Investment Fund Grant Policy and Procedures Rules



Introduction

The council has a corporate objective to support local communities and their representative bodies to create opportunities to localise service delivery. It aims to offer grants to voluntary and community organisations who are delivering projects and services that support its own objectives or of those in need.

The Community Investment Fund grant scheme is funded on an annual basis from interest earned on investments. The council considers the amount to be made available to the grant scheme at its annual budget setting meeting based on investment income earned in the previous financial year.

The scheme is split into two parts; one for awards of over £15,000 and one for smaller awards of under £15,000.

The scoring criteria and policy and procedure rules will be determined from time to time by the cabinet. Details of the application procedure will be included in the application forms held by the head of corporate strategy.

What type of project will the scheme fund?

The council seeks to support a variety of community initiatives. Applications for funding towards a wide variety of different community projects can be made. Only capital expenditure, such as spending on buildings, extensions or equipment will be considered under this scheme. Repairs and maintenance work does not fall within capital expenditure. Applications for revenue funding to cover such things as salary costs, heating or rent will not be considered under this scheme. Retrospective projects will not be considered unless exceptional circumstances can be shown.

Who can apply to the scheme?

Any constituted community-based organisation, including parish and town councils, may apply. The council will not fund public sector bodies, such as Oxfordshire County Council or Primary Care Trusts. Because education is a function of Oxfordshire County Council, we will not accept applications from schools. Businesses and individuals are not eligible to apply for a grant.

The council is committed to promoting equality and diversity and welcomes applications from all sectors of the community, regardless of race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age, status, religion or belief.

What is the maximum award from the scheme?

Community Investment Fund – over £15,000 scheme

The maximum award from the over £15,000 scheme is **£100,000** (or 60 per cent of the total project cost). All grants awarded will be based on a percentage of the total project cost.

Community Investment Fund – under £15,000 scheme

The maximum award from the under £15,000 scheme is **£14,999** (or 60 per cent of the total project cost). The total project cost must be less than £50,000 (excluding VAT). All grants awarded will be based on a percentage of the total project cost.

Scheme eligibility criteria

Applications will only be considered if organisations/projects meet the following eligibility criteria:

- are a properly constituted charitable or non profit making organisation
- has secured all appropriate planning and listed building consents
- provides two years audited accounts (six months of bank statements for new organisations)
- provides a minimum of two quotations for all work, equipment and fees relating to the project
- provides an access audit (if the request for a grant award is towards building work to enhance an existing facility)
- the project has not commenced
- ***the organisation has not received a CIF grant in the previous two years***
- ***the organisation either owns or has a lease on the land or property for a minimum of 10 years at the date the application is made (where relevant)***

Decision making

Under £15,000 scheme

The relevant cabinet member will make decisions on awards for grants from the Community Investment Fund of between £5,000 and £15,000. These decisions will be published as individual cabinet member decisions.

The head of corporate strategy will make decisions on awards for grants from the Community Investment Fund of between £1 and up to a maximum of £4,999 in consultation with the relevant cabinet member. These decisions will be published to all councillors.

If any officer of the council has a pecuniary interest in any application being determined under this scheme the decision will be referred to a strategic director or the chief executive.

Over £15,000 scheme

The relevant cabinet member will make decisions on applications for grants from the Community Investment Fund in consultation with the Community Investment Fund Panel (CIFP), as delegated to them by cabinet on 14 February 2011. If, for any reason, the cabinet member does not agree with the CIFP then the decision will be referred to full cabinet for consideration.

Community Investment Fund Grants Panel (CIFP)

The council will appoint a CIFP of a maximum of twelve councillors, (accommodating up to three vacancies) and in accordance with the political balance of the Council to consider the applications received. No member of the cabinet shall be a member of the CIFP. CIFP members must attend all meetings to be eligible to vote on any application in order to make recommendations from the CIFP to the relevant cabinet member.

The CIFP will visit each site that is subject of an application to the scheme.

The CIFP will consider a detailed evaluation report and receive a presentation from officers including a recommendation on the scores, based on the approved scoring criteria (appendix 1) for each application to the scheme.

CIFP members will not be able to vote on applications within their own ward, but will be able to make representation on applications in their own ward.

The CIFP will determine the final score for each application using the approved scoring criteria attached at appendix 1.

The CIFP will decide a 'cut off' score and any applications scoring less than the 'cut off' score will receive no award.

The CIFP will determine the award amounts to those applications scoring above the 'cut off' score appropriate to the budget available.

The CIFP will consider its advice to the relevant cabinet member in relation to the applications that have been submitted, including whether an application **should not receive** an award for any of the following reasons:

- there is serious concern as to the managerial capability of the applicant;
- ***the applicant has sufficient reserves to fund the project themselves***
- there is serious concern as to the financial viability of a proposed project;
- there is uncertainty as to whether the proposed project complies with the grant awarding criteria

The relevant cabinet member will determine the applications in the light of the above advice.

Applications will normally be considered in June each year (unless an election has taken place when it will be September).

Procedure at meetings of the CIFP

Meetings of the CIFP will be conducted in accordance with the Rules of Procedure set out in Parts 4 and 5 of the Council's Constitution.

Declaration of interests

Declarations of interests by councillors and officers will be conducted in accordance with the Rules of Procedure set out in Parts 4 and 5 of the Council's Constitution.

If any officer of the council has a pecuniary interest in any application being determined under this scheme they will take no part in the CIFP process and register their interest as required by the employee's code of conduct policy.

Standard conditions of all grant awards

- grants will not be payable towards any costs incurred before the grant award decision date
- projects must commence within one year of the date of the grant being awarded
- evidence that all funding is in place to complete the project must be provided to the grants team prior to commencement of work and the release of any part of the grant award
- council staff must be allowed to enter and inspect the work being carried out, by arrangement, subject to them abiding to any necessary health and safety requirements
- requests for information to assist us in monitoring the success of your project must be supplied to the grants team as required
- A plaque, supplied by the council, must be displayed in a prominent position to acknowledge grant awards of over £5,000

Scoring criteria

Assessment methodology for capital grant applications

The council has a corporate objective to support local communities and their representative bodies to create opportunities to localise service delivery. It aims to offer grants to voluntary and community organisations who are delivering projects and services that support our own objectives or of those identified as being in need. All applications will be assessed using the scoring system shown below.

Local issues up to 80 points

Scores of up to 20 points are available for each of the four categories shown below:

<p>Broadening the range</p>	<p>Is this more of the same or will the project enable new activities to take place?</p> <p>This will involve an assessment of the added value that the proposal brings. To score points a project must include evidence to show that a wider range of people will use the facility.</p>
<p>Community participation</p>	<p>To what extent has the relevant community been consulted and participated in putting the proposal together? Is the project identified in a local parish plan?</p> <p>A community need does not have to be geographically based and participation is not a headcount – the relevant community will vary in size dependent upon the project being proposed.</p>
<p>Meeting a local need</p>	<p>How well is this evidenced/detailed?</p> <p>Need and demand are different - this is about a proven lack of something that the project provides.</p>
<p>Community benefit</p>	<p>Who will benefit? This will go beyond a simple number count, to take account of the imbalance in size between different communities.</p> <p>Community benefit also includes wider social, economic and environmental benefits that contribute to the achievement of sustainable development and energy saving in the district.</p>

Viability of project**up to 60 points**

Scores of up to 60 points are available dependent on the viability of the project.

Viability	<p>Is the project reasonable and appropriate for the area? Does the project deliver best value for money? Is the project likely to secure full funding and progress within 12 months? Will the organisation be able to manage the project now and in the future?</p>
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Finance**up to 15 points**

Scores of up to 15 points are available dependent on the percentage of the project costs requested:

Up to 20 per cent of the project costs	15 points
21 – 40 per cent of the project costs	10 points
41 – 60 per cent of the project costs	5 points

Summary of scoring system

The maximum score is 155 made up as follows:

Assessment factor	Maximum points available
Local issues	80
Viability	60
Finance	15
Total	155

Summary of scoring system for under £15,000 capital grant scheme

Applications to the under £15,000 capital grant scheme will be determined as detailed in the Community Investment Fund Policy and Procedure Rules and scored as follows:

Total points score	Award (subject to budget availability)
120 - 155	100 per cent of requested amount
91 - 119	80 per cent of requested amount
90 or less	No award