

Capital Grants (CG) Policy

(revised September 2015)



Introduction

To help achieve our corporate objective to support local communities we offer grants to voluntary and community organisations towards projects that will benefit our residents.

Applicants apply online through the council's website, where the full procedures are available.

What type of project will the scheme fund?

We're looking to fund projects that support community initiatives and facilities. They must take place in the district or within a three-mile radius, if significant numbers of our residents will benefit.

We will only fund capital expenditure (excluding vehicles) from this scheme like buying, building, replacing or making improvements to long term assets (buildings, play areas and equipment). To us a long-term asset must have a life of more than 12 months and must remain the property of the organisation we are funding.

We won't give grants towards loans, mortgages and revenue costs like maintenance, rent, clothing or salaries. We can award grants for certain repairs, but it depends on the scale and nature of them, so we recommend applicants contact the grants team on 01235 540525 before applying.

We usually only accept applications for projects that haven't already started, however in exceptional circumstances (like a major funder pulling out or unforeseen additional works) then we may make an exception.

Organisations cannot apply to this scheme for projects we've awarded grants to before.

Who can apply to the scheme?

Any community-based organisation with a signed constitution, including non-profit businesses, community interest companies and parish and town councils can apply.

We will not consider projects for private individuals, businesses, improvements to residential buildings or any that usually fall to other public sector/statutory bodies to provide or will primarily benefit organisations under their remit. For example, we won't fund projects to improve roads and footpaths; schools, academies, forest/free schools or health services.

We're committed to promoting equality and diversity, and welcome applications from organisations who represent minority or vulnerable groups.

What are the minimum and maximum amounts for the scheme?

Organisations can request a minimum of £1,000 and up to 50 per cent of their total project costs. In exceptional cases, like a major funder pulling out of a project that offers significant benefit to our residents we will consider a request for more than 50 per cent.

To request an exceptional amount applicants must get approval from us (via the grants team) before submitting an application. The online application system won't allow requests for over 50 per cent without our approval.

We will not award more than the amount requested.

The maximum an applicant can request is the budget available for each round of applications, which we'll publish on the council's website before and after each round of awards. In reality however, we are very unlikely to commit all of the available funding to a single project.

We award our grants as a percentage of the total project costs you give on your application, but will include a maximum amount we will pay. If a project ends up costing less than expected we will pay the awarded percentage of the final cost, however if it costs more we limit our award to the maximum amount agreed.

Opening and closing dates

We'll usually open for applications three times each financial year (if there is sufficient budget available), except in a district council election year, when we may only open twice.

We'll advertise the provisional opening and closing dates each November and will confirm them after the annual budget-setting meeting.

We'll open each round of funding for a minimum of six weeks and will usually make decisions within 12 weeks of the closing date.

Where possible we will avoid opening over school holidays.

Scheme eligibility criteria

Applicants must provide:

- a copy of the latest statements for any bank/building society accounts in the name of the organisation
- two quotes for the project or a professional estimate for any building work
- a breakdown of the budget for the project including all the sources of funding.

They must also confirm:

- they have a signed constitution and could provide it on request (except parish or town councils, churches or similar organisations that are governed by a central body and therefore don't have their own constitution)
- the project won't start before a decision has been made, which is usually 12 weeks from the closing date (unless otherwise agreed with the grants team before applying)
- they have all the necessary consents such as planning permission, listed building consent, Diocese faculty etc. and could provide these on request
- they will provide additional information to help us evaluate their application on request.

Applicants requesting more than £10,000 must also provide:

- copies of any necessary planning, listed building, Diocese faculty and other relevant permissions
- their most recent financial accounts or their working budget and financial plan for the year if they're a new organisation
- a project plan including ongoing maintenance arrangements.

Applicants requesting over £25,000 must also provide:

- evidence of ownership of the property or a lease with at least ten years remaining, including a copy of the Land Registry title documents.

We can decide to accept applications that don't meet all the above criteria and will do this on a case by case basis. Applicants must give clear reasons why they can't meet a particular criteria for us to consider an exception.

Projects awarded up to £10,000 must complete within 12 months from our award date. Projects awarded over £10,000 must start work within 18 months of our award date, and must complete within 36 months.

If there's any unexpected delays to the project, applicants can request one extension of up to 12 months, giving the reasons for the delay. We must receive these requests at least one month before the end of the original grant term.

We'll send reminders for outstanding grants three months before they expire and will return any unclaimed awards to the council's general reserves after the expiry date.

CG panel (known as the grants panel)

The council will appoint up to nine councillors to a capital grants panel at the first annual council meeting each year. The panel will match the political balance of the council where possible.

Procedure at meetings of the panel

The panel will conduct all meetings in accordance with the rules of procedure set out in parts 4 and 5 of the council's constitution.

Declaration of interests

Councillors and officers will declare any interests in accordance with the rules of procedure set out in parts 4 and 5 of the council's constitution.

Any officer of the council with a pecuniary interest in any application will take no part in the process and will register their interest, as required by the employee's code of conduct policy.

Decision making

Grants team

The grants team will review the eligibility of every application before using the scoring matrix in appendix one to suggest scores to the panel. They will also flag any issues with their scores.

Head of service

The council's head of corporate strategy and the cabinet member for grants (using delegated powers) will decide:

- if we'll accept requests for over 50 per cent of the total project cost
- if we'll accept applications that don't meet all the eligibility criteria
- whether to give extensions to the term of any grant
- whether to amend award percentages beyond what was originally agreed, as requested by applicants. Increases will stay within the 50 per cent maximum limit for the scheme.

CG panel

Please note: panel members can't vote on an application if they have a pecuniary interest, sit on their board of directors/trustees, management committee (or council, in the case of applications from town or parish councils), or if they submitted the application on the organisation's behalf.

In these cases, members can make representations on those projects, before excusing themselves from the panel while they vote on the scores and make their award recommendations for that application.

During the meeting the panel will:

- consider officer evaluations for all applications, including their suggested scores, other comments/issues, special conditions
- ask any questions of the officers and applicants on the projects/organisations applying

- review the officer's suggested scores, using the approved scoring matrix in appendix one and vote on final scores for each application (once they have voted on a score they cannot change it).
- For each application, all panel members will put forward a score for each criteria, giving reasons for their suggestions. The Chairman will note all the scores per criteria and confirm the most common among them, which will become the agreed score. In the case of a tie, the chairman has the casting vote. Once they have agreed scores for all the criteria, they will vote to agree the final, total score for that application
- recommend awards and special grant conditions to the cabinet member for grants, in line with the award matrix in appendix one
- recommend how to split the available budget between priority applications if there isn't enough to award the usual percentages set out in appendix one. The panel won't recommend funding any non-priority projects unless there is budget left over after awarding the recommended amounts to the priority projects.

Even if an application scores enough points, the panel can recommend not funding it if they:

- have serious concerns around the management of the project now or in the future
- believe the applicant has sufficient unrestricted reserves to fund the project themselves
- have serious concerns about the financial viability or appropriateness of the project
- believe the project doesn't meet the criteria or help deliver the council's strategic objectives.

Cabinet member for grants

The cabinet member for grants will:

- consider the recommendations of the panel and decide what grants to award
- approve any amendments to the policy and scoring criteria, to make sure it continues to meet the needs of the community (via ICMD).

If the cabinet member doesn't agree with any of the panel's recommendations, those applications will go to the next full cabinet meeting for decision.

We'll publicise all the grants we award through our council newsletters, website and in the media.

Standard conditions for all grant awards

We'll include the following standard conditions on all CG grants:

- organisations must formally accept the grant offer and agree to meet any conditions by completing and returning a grant acceptance form for under £10,000 or grant agreement for over £25,000.
- organisations must submit evidence that they've spent the grant on the project we awarded it for

- projects awarded less than £10,000 must complete within 12 months of the award date, unless we give an extension to the term
- projects receiving more than £10,000 must start work within 18 months of the award date and must complete work within 36 months of the award date, unless we give an extension to the term
- organisations must consult the grants team before making any significant changes to the project, to ensure the grant is unaffected
- the organisation must acknowledge the council's support in any publicity on the project receiving a grant.

We'll include the following standard condition on all grants over £25,000:

- organisations must register a restriction or charge on the registered title in the council's favour with the Land Registry, before work starts on the project, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the council.

We may add extra conditions to any grant if we consider it necessary.

The head of corporate strategy has delegated authority to remove any agreed grant conditions following a request from the applicant.

We will confirm applicants have met all the conditions before making any payment. Failure to meet all the agreed conditions may delay payment or, in extreme cases, result in us withdrawing our grant offer.

Payment of grants

We will only pay towards costs incurred after our decision date.

We pay the grants in two stages, half when we receive a signed acceptance form for awards under £10,000 or, for awards over £25,000 when their grant agreement is in place and we have confirmation they have placed a charge or restriction in our favour on the registered title. We pay the balance when the project completes, upon receipt of evidence of expenditure.

In exceptional cases like property purchases, we may make a single upfront payment, which officers will recommend as part of their evaluation.

If the project costs less than expected, we'll reduce our final payment accordingly and, if necessary, request back some of the first payment (the minimum amount for us to request repayment is £500).

Appendix one - scoring and award matrix for CG applications

Scoring matrix:

| Criteria | 0-3 points | 4-6 point | 7-10 points | 11-14 points |
|------------------------------|---|--|--|---|
| New facilities or activities | The project doesn't directly allow any new activities or facilities to take place | The project replaces existing facilities or allows existing activities to continue | The project improves an existing facility or activity | The project will provide a new facility or will allow new activities to take place |
| Community benefit | The project doesn't offer a direct benefit to the community | A single sport or interest group will benefit | More than two groups or where the project has a significant impact on the health or wellbeing of one group | The whole community could benefit (it's open to and appeals to a wide range of the community) |
| Funding the project | They haven't said how they'll fund the rest of the initial or ongoing costs | They know how they intend to raise some, not necessarily all of the funding needed for the initial costs but have no plans for the ongoing costs | They have identified funding for all the initial costs and have a maintenance plan in place | They have secured or raised the other funding for the initial project and have plans in place for the ongoing costs |

Award matrix:

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| 0-14 points | Low priority, no funding |
| 15-28 points | Medium priority, award up to 75 per cent of the amount requested (budget permitting) |
| 29-42 points | High priority, award full amount requested (budget permitting) |