

Item

COMMUNITY GRANTS 2024-25



To:

Councillor Rachel Wade, Executive Councillor for Communities,
Community & Environment Scrutiny Committee, 18/01/2024

Report by:

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Wards affected: all

Key Decision

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This is the annual report for the Community Grants fund for voluntary, community, and not for profit organisations. It provides an overview of the process, eligibility criteria and budget. Appendix 1 and 2 detail the applications received with recommendations for 2024-25 awards.
- 1.2 The report also provides an update on the work of the Grants Team carried out to date in 2023-24.

2. Recommendations

The Executive Councillor is recommended to:

- 2.1 Approve the Community Grants to voluntary and community organisations for 2024-25, as set out in Appendix 1 and 2 of this report, subject to the budget approval in February 2024 and any further satisfactory information required of applicant organisations.

3. Background

3.1 **The priorities and outcomes** for the Community Grants fund are as follows:

Priorities - All applications must demonstrate how the funding will reduce social and/or economic inequality, by removing barriers for City residents with the highest need, to enable them to access one or more of the funding priorities:

- Sporting activities
- Arts and cultural activities
- Community development activities
- Reducing poverty activities
- Legal and/or financial advice
- Employment support or
- Capacity building of the voluntary sector to achieve the above

Primary Outcome - Reduce social and/or economic inequality for City residents with the highest need

Strategic Outcomes - As well as the primary outcome activities must achieve one or more of the following strategic outcomes:

- Improved health and wellbeing
- Communities come together and bring about change
- More people have better opportunities to gain employment
- Stronger voluntary sector in the city

3.2 **Grant application process** - The 2024-25 Community Grants programme opened on 1st August 2023 for applications and closed on 2nd October 2023. Promotion and publicity of the grant fund included a press release, newsletter articles, emails, posters in areas of the City with the highest levels of deprivation and targeted conversations.

3.3 This year we have been able to monitor how information about the Community Grants scheme has been accessed. The Community Grants webpage was viewed 414 times between 1 August and 2nd October 2023 (the application window). This includes 144 views that were tracked from the physical posters advertising the 'small grants' scheme, that were displayed in key locations in the City, following the introduction of a trackable URL. On that basis we will continue to invest in a blend of digital promotion and traditional methods, including posters.

- 3.4 A range of activities has been undertaken to support organisations to understand the funding criteria and requirements needed for a successful application, including:
- attending organisation's committee meetings, one-to-one meetings
 - a slot at the 'Support Cambs' Funding event, which was attended by 25 City based groups
 - a webinar held jointly with Cambridge Council for Voluntary Service (CCVS) (16 attendees and a further 24 views of the recording)
 - Application Guide and Help Notes detailing the priorities, outcomes and eligibility criteria and giving guidance on requirements, question by question
 - funding templates and signposting to other funding providers
- 3.5 All applications were assessed against the same assessment matrix developed around the priorities and outcomes used in previous years, ensuring a consistent approach. These assessments were then moderated by strategy officer meetings informing the award recommendations detailed in Appendix 1 and 2. The Executive Councillor attended a meeting with officers to review the process and outcomes.
- 3.6 **Awards for up to £2,000** – Following the pilot of a simpler 'small grants' application process for 2023-24, this approach continued for the 2024-25 funding round. There were 24 applications for lower amounts of money (1 was subsequently withdrawn), which was the same as for 23-24 and an increase compared to 22-23. A significant number of applications were from groups new to the Grants Team, and several applicant groups are planning activities for people from minority ethnic communities. Funding for the 'small grants' comes from the main Community Grants budget.
- 3.7 Where no (or reduced) funding is proposed, it will be due to one or more of the following reasons:
- the organisation was ineligible
 - there were concerns about group governance and/or financial diligence
 - there were concerns about the overall quality or viability of the project
 - there was poor alignment with the grant scheme priorities and/or outcomes
 - identification of need for the activity was not sufficiently evidenced
 - there was insufficient evidence about how City residents in greatest need would be targeted to benefit from Council funds
 - the proposals were the remit of another service or organisation such as the County Council, Health, Housing etc

- the organisation had high reserves and did not explain why those reserves could not be used to fund the activity
- the group did not explain how they would measure impact and/or the intended impact was unclear

3.8 Due to the cost-of-living crisis, the funding has been closely aligned towards activities addressing economic inequality, as per the grant fund primary outcome, supporting as many City residents in need as possible to ensure the Community Grants fund has the greatest impact.

3.9 Those applicants where no award is recommended, will receive feedback and signposting to alternative funding and support.

3.10 **Making grant awards** – grant awards will be made as deeds or signed underhand (i.e. signed by the recipient and the Community Funding and Voluntary Sector Manager) where appropriate by delegated authority to the Director. This gives the Council the ability to execute grants as deeds where it is felt proportionate to the risk or where particular thresholds were met – such as over a certain financial value. It also allows the majority of grants which are lower risk and of lower value, to be signed under hand.

4.0 2024-25 Funding Position

4.1 There is a budget of £1,126,820 available for Community Grants for 2024-25, subject to approval of the Council's budget in February 2024. An inflationary increase of £94,000 was applied to the 2023-24 budget and a further 3% has been added for 2024-25, in recognition of the challenges faced by the voluntary and community sector and the people they support, as a result of the cost-of-living crisis.

4.2 A total of £1,609,050 of Community Grants funding has been requested (excluding Area Committee grants as this funding window is later in the year and the data is not yet available).

4.3 The total value of all the proposed activities (excluding DRR) is £5,776,597 an increase of £901,324 from 23-24. £4,167,548 is proposed match funding from other sources. The majority of activities are also supported with additional, unquantified 'in kind' contributions such as volunteer time.

4.4 £70,000 of the Community Grants budget is allocated to Area Committee Community Grants as in previous years (see paragraph 4.10).

- 4.5 The inflationary uplift has enabled some grants to be maintained at previous levels and other awards to be increased where the application was able to demonstrate a strong need.
- 4.6 A small events budget has been utilised for appropriate activities enabling the Community Grant fund to cover more projects or for an increased amount. Other budgets have also been utilised where possible to maximize the value of the 2024-25 Community Grants fund. This is highlighted in Appendix 1.
- 4.7 The Grants Team was also able to identify a small number of activities which had already started or could start in 2023-24. Those activities will be funded through an underspend in the 2023-24 Community Grant budget, further alleviating the pressure on the 2024-25 Community Grants budget. These activities are highlighted in Appendix 1.
- 4.8 The Community Grants fund continues to accept Discretionary Rate Relief (DRR) applications that meet the funding priorities, outcomes and eligibility criteria. DRR applications represent good value for money with this budget having to find only 40% of any award made under the Business Rate Retention Scheme. For 2024-25, the Council is able to apply a small level of 'retail rate relief' to some eligible organisations, thus reducing the impact of DRR awards on the Community Grants budget. Any underspend will be identified as early as possible and the funds reallocated in year to other activities that meet the grant funding criteria.
- 4.9 If the recommended awards are approved the main Community Grants budget will be spent in full¹.
- 4.10 **Area Committees** - the Area Committee grants round has been widely promoted and following the closing dates for applications, assessments will be undertaken. As Area Committees are paused, a summary of the funding allocations will be sent to ward councilors for information and will be discussed with the Executive Councillor for Communities. The final proposals will then be referred to the Community Funding and Voluntary Sector Manager for approval under delegated authority.

¹ The total value of awards made will be £1,057,100 This is £280.00 over budget. It is anticipated that this will be balanced by in year returns which we routinely have. However, in the unlikely event this does not materialise, the difference will be met from other areas of the Community Funding budget.

The chart below shows the amount available by area²:

Area Committee	2024-25
North	£24,633
East	£23,289
South	£15,202
West Central	£6,876
Total	£70,000

5.0 Grant Funding update for 2023-24

- 5.1 **United with Ukraine Community Grants Scheme** – Following receipt of central government funding, a £100,000 fund for community groups supporting refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine was launched in October 2022. There has been high demand for the scheme, resulting in the funding pot being increased to £200,000.
- 5.2 The scheme is open 10 months of the year, enabling groups to apply when it suits them. This approach can be taken as the funding can be spent across a number of financial years and is therefore not restricted by the Councils accounting rules in the way General Fund grants are. A decision on whether to award a grant is made within 4 weeks of the Team receiving all the information they need to make that decision. The Team can take this approach as officers have delegated authority to make awards of up to £5,000.
- 5.3 During 2023-24, the United with Ukraine grant scheme criteria has been amended with two funding tiers being introduced. Community groups or small groups of residents can apply for a grant of up to £2,000 (Tier 1), while constituted not-for-profit organisations with a track record can apply for a grant of up to £5,000 (Tier 2). This manages the risk to the funding pot, whilst being responsive to feedback that higher levels of funding were needed to make an impact on the issues being addressed.
- 5.4 Groups working with Ukrainian refugees are identifying multiple needs that require the delivery of more than one activity. The grant scheme was amended to allow groups with a track record of delivery with the Council to hold more than one grant, thereby increasing their offer to the people they are supporting.

² These figures have been calculated using population figures from the 2021 census and benefit population taken as an extract from the Low-Income Family Tracker.

5.5 As of 1st December 2023, a total of £103,684 has been awarded as follows:

Priorities & Funding Total	Bids	Small Grant Offers	Budget Remaining	% Budget
£200,000	£138,160	£103,684	£96,316	48.16% remaining
Navigating life in the UK	£4,108	£4,108		2.05%
Promote community cohesion and integration	£52,883	£40,031		20.02%
Deliver money advice and management	-	-		0.00%
Support access to employment	£13,700	£12,567		6.28%
Increase confidence in speaking English	£20,000	£10,000		5.00%
Enhance wellbeing, including activities for children	£47,469	£36,978		18.49%

29 grant awards were made to 15 community groups to date, who in turn have supported over 2,800 beneficiaries.

5.6 **Coronation Celebration Grants** - grants of up to £500 were available for community groups celebrating the Coronation of Their Majesties King Charles III and Queen Camilla. Coronation Grants were awarded for events and activities spread across Cambridge, with a total value £14,316 awarded to 34 groups, with over 4,500 participants. Events included community picnics, garden parties, tea parties and street parties; a window box competition; a royal themed silent disco; cake competitions; sports and play activities; live music and the creation of commemorative artworks. The report can be found here:

<https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/media/12639/king-charles-coronation-report-2023.pdf>

- 5.7 **2022-23 Community Grants Annual Report** – The Grants Team has prepared a report summarising the awards that were made for 2022-23, highlighting some of the achievements of funded groups and illustrating the impact of the Community Grants fund. The report can be found here: <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/media/rcsg410b/community-grants-annual-report-2022-2023.pdf>

6.0 Community Grants Review

- 6.1 Phase 1 of the Community Grants review was approved by Committee on 30th June 2022 and saw the introduction of a ‘light touch’ small grants application process for awards of £2,000 and under for 2023-24. Proposals on further improving the small grants scheme will be brought to Committee in June 2024.
- 6.2 Proposals around the introduction of longer-term funding agreements will also be brought to Committee in June 2024.

7.0 Community Rights

- 7.1 The Grants Team has responsibility for managing the ‘Community Right to Bid’ process, which has been in place since 2012. Local community and voluntary bodies, along with parish and town councils are able to identify land and buildings that provide an important service in their community. These community organisations can nominate such assets for inclusion on a register of assets of community value, which is maintained by the City Council. If an asset on the register comes up for sale, community organisations may have up to six months in which to raise capital and bid to buy the asset, before it can be sold on the open market. Examples of eligible assets include local shops, pubs, community centres, libraries, playgrounds, swimming pools, and markets.
- 7.2 In 2023 to date, the Council has received two nominations for assets to be added to the ‘List of Assets of Community Value’. These nominations were accepted and therefore the Elfleda Road and the Peverel Road allotments are ‘Assets of Community Value’.

7.3 **Former Library, Mill Road** – The Council received notification from the owner of the former Library on Mill Road that they intended to dispose of an ‘Asset of Community Value’. This triggered a moratorium period in which several interested, qualifying groups notified the Council of their intention to bid to purchase the building. Due process was followed, the owner selected a preferred bidder and the moratorium period ended on 5th February 2023, thereby enabling the owner to sell to whomever they chose.

8.0 Implications

- a) **Financial Implications** - Set out in section 4 of the report.
- b) **Staffing Implications** - There are no staffing implications.
- c) **Equality and Poverty Implications** - Equalities Impact Assessments were carried out as follows:
 - January 2015 on the implementation of the Community Grants Fund
 - June 2018 on the review of funding for anti-poverty projects
 - January 2022 on the current Community Grants Fund
 - A further EIA will be carried out to inform the proposals being brought to Committee in June 2024.
- d) **Environmental Implications** - Organisations funded via the main Community Grants fund are expected to have or develop an environmental policy.
- e) **Procurement Implications** - The Council’s approach to grant aid through the Community Grants is via an application process rather than through the direct commissioning of services.
- f) **Community Safety Implications** - Some of the funded projects will have a positive impact on community safety.

9.0 Consultation and communication considerations

Applicants were notified when this report was published detailing recommended awards, giving an indication of proposed funding from April 2024. This adhered as closely as possible to the Compact framework to give three months’ notice of funding changes. Officers will continue the process of award notification, signposting and support, and implementing and monitoring awards.

10.0 Background papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

11.0 Appendices

Appendix 1 – Main Community Grants 2024-25 Award
Recommendations

Appendix 2 – Small Community Grants 2024-25 Award
Recommendations

12.0 Inspection of papers

If you have a query on the report please contact Julie Cornwell,
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