

SALISBURY CITY COUNCIL

Subject : Community Grants - update on grants review and applications
Committee : Communities Committee
Date : 9 February 2026
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1. Report Summary:

- 1.1 This report provides recommendations following the review of existing policy, procedures and processes for awarding community grants. These recommendations will improve transparency, reduce inefficiencies and duplication, increase accessibility to grants from a broader range of organisations and support projects demonstrating a strong link to evidenced needs and issues which are able to demonstrate outcomes and impact.
- 1.2 Councillors are requested to approve recommendations for development of a revised grant policy and implementation of associated streamlined grant procedures, delivered in line with the Community Strategy & Priorities 2026-2029 with phased implementation over 2026 as the system is amended, policy approved and new processes bedded in.
- 1.3 Until adoption of the new grants policy, Councillors will consider new applications for decision in line with existing grants policy. Approved recommendations from this report may be utilised as additional supplementary guidance to support responsive and up to date grant decision making which is responsive to the (currently draft) Community Strategy and Priorities 2026-2029.

2. Background

- 2.1 **New community priorities** (currently in draft) have been developed through engagement, consultation and review of the most recent evidence of needs affecting Salisbury communities.
- 2.2 **Lack of capacity**- evidence demonstrates that small groups/charities/diverse or marginalised groups need support to self-organise and upskill to access community grants funding and broader community networks and opportunities.
- 2.3 **Complex grants process**. The various existing grant streams currently make the process overly complex and confusing for applicants and unwieldy for processing.
- 2.4 **Increased collaboration** is needed with local funding bodies, namely Wiltshire Community Foundation & Wiltshire Council Area boards.
- 2.5 **Special measure exceptional decisions**. Lengthy periods between decision-making committee dates can cause delays to the grant making process. Feedback from applicants suggests this presents a barrier to applying, particularly for time sensitive projects where delays may affect match funding opportunities or feasibility of deliverability of their project.

3. Policy recommendations

3.1 Community priorities 2026- 2029 will set the direction for use of community grants funding for projects which provide value for money and can demonstrate sound community development practice with demonstrable outcomes and impacts. Projects outside of these priorities will not be considered for funding. Current draft priorities (awaiting Committee approval) are as follows:

- Reduce inequality and strengthen community safety and resilience
- Positive futures for children and young people
- Vibrant connected communities

(further detail on priorities is provided in the Community Strategy and Priorities 2026-2029 report documentation)

3.2 Lack of capacity

To mitigate and remove any unintended barriers to groups making grant applications to support their work in our communities, by working in partnership we intend to increase community outreach and engagement activity. This will include development of training opportunities to assist and increase the capacity of marginalised or new/smaller scale organisations. There is strong evidence from the strategy that these groups need additional skills, guidance and support to engage with the community grants programme and associated community activities in Salisbury. This approach is consistent with our strategic aim of empowering communities to help themselves.

3.3 Complex grants process

It is recommended to consolidate separate existing community grant streams into one single grants pot to simplify and improve processes and remove elements that are no longer required. Combining existing small and medium grants processes into one community grant and removal of outdated sports grants and youth bursaries (specific funding streams for these areas no longer apply) will streamline the application process, make it less confusing for applicants and reduce administrative burden.

Additionally, rather than opening windows throughout the year for applications, it is proposed that the grants process follows a rolling programme, where applications are open all year, with processed grants being reviewed at the next available committee meeting.

It is recommended to remove the appeal process for community grants. In the last 5 years of grants reviewed, this facility has never been used. In practice, incoming grants are reviewed by the Head of Communities, any shortfalls in information or mismatches to community strategic priorities are addressed directly with the applicant, allowing them to make corrections to their application in response to published priorities. The Head of Community then reviews against all criteria and undertakes due diligence checks including financial viability checks with RFO support which is followed by reports, recommendations and the decision-making processes of this committee. All the above provide a robust level of scrutiny and transparency providing confidence in the ability to communicate and defend decisions taken without the need for a separate appeal process.

A single point of access for applications and associated documentation is recommended, moving to a web-based platform which will include publication of the new Community Priorities and guidance to applicants on the process for grant applications and decision making.

It is recommended that new community priorities will be adopted to apply to future delivery proposals from submitting organisations to city grants (cultural grants) with an update to associated policy wording to reflect this.

It is proposed that reference to rent reductions is removed from the grants policy as its inclusion adds a layer of complexity which is unnecessary as this has its own stand-alone rent relief policy in place, approved by Full Council in March 2025.

3.4 Increased collaboration

It is recommended to put in place closer scrutiny & collaborative procedures with funding partners (Wiltshire Community Foundation and Wiltshire Council area board) to close loopholes including identifying common areas of interest for effective collaboration, avoiding potential duplication of funding, identifying opportunities for match funding and dovetailing decision making where possible to provide a more streamlined & responsive service to applicants.

3.5 Special measure exceptional decisions

It is proposed to introduce an exceptional process in the case of extenuating circumstances, for example where a delay in decision making would be particularly detrimental e.g. if decisions are time sensitive with match funding at stake. To expedite the process, in these circumstances, it is proposed that authority is delegated to the Head of Communities, The Chair of Communities committee and the Vice Chair to determine if a grant application is approved, with full reporting coming back to the next Communities Committee to ensure Committee retains oversight of all applications made and funds approved.

3.6 Internal process and procedural improvements

This review has highlighted a range of improvements that can be made to make the grants process more efficient. These will be captured in a new procedural document which will include streamlined documentation, improve feedback and re-routing to unsuccessful applicants and improve operational effectiveness of the grants process.

4. Grant Applications update

4.1 The annual budget for Community Development Grants is £25,000 for 2025/2026.

4.2 This committee approved £6,000 of grant expenditure in October Communities committee in addition to a late payment of £3000 for a 24/25 medium term grant paid after end of year bringing expenditure this year to £9,000. There remains £16,000 for allocation by this committee.

4.3 There have been no new grant applications in the last quarter received however there has been an expression of interest for a pending application from Wessex Community Action for an innovative targeted pilot of outreach, engagement, capacity building, training and support for marginalised/diverse communities and a wealth of smaller charities and community groups across Salisbury. Their project expands beyond community grant funding bands (£19,950). As such, the Chair of this

committee has requested they discuss their proposal with members at this stage, with the understanding that a fully developed community application will be submitted as an exceptional bid to be considered for funding from 24/25 funds if possible, prior to the end of this financial year.

4.4 All grants are subject to the terms and eligibility criteria of the Salisbury City Council Grants Policy, which includes reporting of impact via the monitoring process.

5. **Recommendation:**

That committee approve all recommendations within this report namely;

- 5.1 The development of a revised grant policy and implementation of associated streamlined grant procedures.
- 5.2 That approved recommendations from this report may be utilised as additional supplementary guidance to support responsive and up to date grant decision making.
- 5.3 To improve the currently complex grant process by consolidating grants into one fund, removing defunct grant pots, moving to a rolling programme of annual grants, removing the current appeals process and moving to a web-based platform.
- 5.4 That rent reductions is removed from the grants policy as this has its own stand-alone rent relief policy in place, approved by Full Council in March 2025.
- 5.5 That committee note the current grants expenditure position and the expression of interest for approval to submit a full community grants application from Wessex Community Action.

Wards Affected: All

Background papers: N/A

Implications:

- **Financial:** None outside of this grants process.
- **Legal:** None.
- **Personnel:** None.
- **Environmental Impact:** None.
- **Equalities Impact Statement:** Improvements to grants processes and associated support should increase the capacity of marginalised/diverse/smaller groups and charities to engage and make grant applications which support Salisbury communities.