

Councillor Community Grant Scheme – 2023/2024

Every South Oxfordshire District Councillor has a budget of £5,000 to award to projects. The aim of the Councillor Community Grant scheme is to fund community projects and initiatives that will deliver better outcomes for South Oxfordshire residents as well as contributing to the achievement of the council's Corporate Plan priorities.

Basic rules of the scheme

- Projects must benefit the communities in the councillor's ward
- The minimum grant is £250 and the maximum £5,000 for each councillor (budget permitting)
- For wards with multiple councillors, applications may be considered by all ward members together to determine funding
- The total project cost of applications for capital projects must be £15,000 or less, (revenue projects have no such maximum).
- A councillor can fund up to 100 per cent of the total cost of a project (budget permitting)
- The project must complete within 12 months of the award decision
- Any unallocated budgets at the end of the financial year will return to the council's general reserves
- The scheme will usually be open for two rounds (budget permitting)
- Councillors will make their decision within four weeks of receiving an eligible application from officers, or can hold applications until each round closes, then make their decision within four weeks

Who is eligible?

- Town/parish councils and parish meetings
- Town/parish councils can collaborate with local unconstituted groups and apply on their behalf
- Not for profit preschools and PTAs for local authority run schools or Academy's, can apply for non-statutory elements of the education programme
- Local 'not for profit' organisations, this can include a company limited by guarantee which does not distribute any surplus it makes to its member, whose primary purpose is to **benefit** the residents of South Oxfordshire who can:

- Provide with their application a copy of a recent bank statement in the name of the organisation applying (no more than two months old)
- Provide on request a copy of the organisation's detailed financial records e.g. income/expenditure/reserves for the most recent complete financial year– or projections for new organisations
- Provide on request a copy of their governing document (like a constitution, set of rules, articles of association etc) that demonstrates they are a 'not for profit organisation' and the project they are applying for matches the organisation objectives
- Confirm their organisation has named officers, members or trustees on a management committee/board.

To mitigate against any misuse of a grant or to the council's reputation from this relaxed criterion to apply for a grant, officers will request the governance and financial documents mentioned above for every fifth application, and any organisations who have not received council funding in the last 12 months.

Who is not eligible?

- Other local authorities/public sector bodies (for example Oxfordshire County Council, NHS trusts). Please note: Town/parish councils and parish meetings are eligible to apply
- Groups who raise funds on behalf of or will improve/create facilities that will predominately benefit an ineligible organisation
- Individuals (this includes making any payments to individuals on behalf of community groups)
- Profit-based businesses (private businesses)
- Political and lobbying groups
- Organisations who operate a grant scheme of their own or who budget for giving grants/donations in their annual budget. Please note: Town/parish councils and parish meetings are eligible to apply
- Nationwide organisations (except where they have a local constitution and/or local bank account. We may also make exceptions if a project clearly relates to a local hub/branch of the organisation)

What kind of work/services can we fund?

We will fund projects that deliver better outcomes for South Oxfordshire residents as well as contributing to the achievement of the council's Corporate Plan priorities (2020-2024):

- protect and restore our natural world
- action on the climate emergency
- improved economic and community well-being
- homes and infrastructure that meets local need.

Applications should focus on projects that deliver a clear and demonstrable **benefit** to the people and environment of South Oxfordshire, specifically in the ward of the district councillor(s) considering the request.

South Oxfordshire District Council accepts no liability or responsibility for any of the projects funded by this grant scheme or any activities that take place as a result now or in the future.

Appropriate projects could include, but are not limited to:

- Replacement equipment or improvements to community centres/halls
- Initial design/creation of a community newsletter, walking routes/tourist trails, community website or digital archive (but not ongoing publishing, maintenance or hosting costs)
- Improvements to community facilities for older people and minority groups (for example accessibility improvements and hearing loops)
- Buying and installing community play and exercise equipment
- Buying equipment the community can use like anti-flooding equipment, marquees/gazebos, defibrillators, equipment banks or IT equipment. (All equipment must remain the property of the organisation funded)
- Community festivals and event costs, subject to government guidance regarding COVID-19 - <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus> ([organisations must present the council with a plan on request for how they will manage their event in a COVID safe way](https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus))
- Initiatives to improve the energy efficiency of community buildings, for example of a community centre/hall
- Energy audits
- Improvement of sporting facilities or activities to encourage healthy communities
- Sustainability projects to protect and restore our natural world, such as tree planting projects (with the appropriate permissions in place) or improving biodiversity within your community
- Initiatives to reduce rural loneliness and isolation
- Volunteer training costs, or specialist equipment, that would enable more volunteers help or take on more responsibilities within an organisation
- Personal protective equipment (PPE) for groups (not individuals) to meet the requirements for a community initiative e.g. COVID response
- To support extra-curricular mental health activities for school students and environmental education projects (e.g. forest schools, outdoor planting).
- To purchase equipment for preschools e.g. cycle racks, a defibrillator
- One-off hire costs (for example, excavator hire for a project or coach hire for a specific, one-off trip)
- One-off revenue costs, like feasibility studies, consultancy fees and seed funding for new organisations. Please note we will not fund costs that relate to other council services e.g. planning applications or building regulation fees

- One-off major repairs, like repairing a section of flat roof or major boiler repairs (but not routine servicing) to community buildings

Applicants must make sure they have all necessary permissions in place **before** applying for funding including planning, listed building, licensing, landlords etc.

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 we will not fund?

- Retrospective funding for work/projects that will complete before our decision is made (We will consider projects that have started; however, we will not be able to fund any retrospective costs.)
- Projects that do not demonstrate a clear benefit to the community in which they are taking place
- Statutory activities/requirements that either the council or another public-sector organisation is responsible for delivering, such as schools, public highways, public rights of way and road safety measures. We will consider activities that a parish council has the powers to deliver, but not a statutory duty to provide
- Recurring revenue costs, like salaries, rent, rates and maintenance (like boiler servicing). We will consider salaries for a one off pilot projects – lasting no longer than 3-6 months.
- Costs that relate to other council services e.g. planning applications or building regulation fees
- Ongoing or regular hire fees (for example, weekly hire of a cricket pitch roller or regular hire/lease of vehicles for a community transport scheme)
- Alcoholic refreshments
- Clothing, including uniforms and sports kit
- Projects that specifically benefit private businesses
- Political activities, lobbying or campaigning
- Projects that don't align with the council's equalities objectives and/or the Equality Act 2010.

Opening and closing dates

The scheme will usually open in June and will have two rounds (budget permitting) the second of which will close in February each year. We will publicise the dates on our website.

In the event there is an unexpected by-election for a district councillor, we will hold any new applications for that vacancy during the pre-election period (as long as the scheme will still be open when the post is filled). If not, applications will be considered (along with any still in progress) by the next elected ward member in the area the project benefits. If

there is only one councillor in the ward, then the Cabinet member will consider the application (s). In these instances, the decision may not be made in 4 weeks.

Application and Award Process

1. Organisations apply using the council's online grants management system ('the system'), accessible from our website www.southoxon.gov.uk/grants. They will select all the wards they wish to apply to when completing their application. Applicants should read the guidance notes on our website before completing an application.
2. Council officers will check the eligibility of the application (including the additional checks if required) and liaise with the applicant, if necessary, to establish eligibility.

If eligible, officers will prepare a short summary of the application for the councillors including key information from the application, concerns and any recommended payment terms and/or special conditions and send it to the councillor's southoxon.gov.uk email address.

If an application is not eligible the community enablement team will discuss the issues with the applicant (if they can be resolved) and return the application to them for resubmission once the issues are resolved. Please note, we can only do this whilst the scheme is open. If the issues cannot be overcome, they will reject the application on eligibility grounds. They will also notify the ward councillors of the reasons why any applications that aren't eligible could not go forward.

3. The district councillor/s will review the summary provided by the community enablement team, and if appropriate (multi member wards), will discuss with the other ward members, to make a decision.
4. Councillors will reply to grants@southandvale.gov.uk using their official council email address confirming:
 - their award decision
 - the reasons behind the decision
 - any pecuniary interests relating to the application – see process below
 - any other conflicts of interests relating to the application – see process below

The councillor/s can request additional information (via the community enablement team) before making their decision if necessary.

Applications can only be considered for the amount requested by the applicant and not based on the remaining ward budget available.

5. Once the community enablement team receive the councillor's decision by email, they will save it on the grants system, publish the decision on the council's website (in summary once the scheme closes) and either;
 - a. send a grant offer letter to the applicant that will include our standard (and any special) conditions and a grant acceptance form they must complete and return
 - b. inform the applicant that they were unsuccessful.

6. The applicant must sign and return the acceptance form to the community enablement team, confirming they will meet all our conditions and give the bank details for their organisation.
7. On receipt of the acceptance form the community enablement team will release the grant payment in line with the offer letter, following agreement from the relevant head of service. **All payments must be made by BACs to an account in the name of the organisation making the grant application.**

Process for dealing with conflicts of interest and changes to councillors

Declaration of interest	When a declaration of interest is declared, officers will consult the service manager and if necessary, the section 151 officer and monitoring officer. If as a result a conflict is confirmed, and there is no other ward councillor who could fund the project, the council will not be able to determine the application. In multi councillor wards, the councillor declaring a conflict of interest, would not take part in the decision making.
Pecuniary interests	When a pecuniary interest is declared, officers will consult the section 151 officer and monitoring officer. If confirmed, and there is no other ward councillor who could fund the project, the council will not be able to determine the application. In multi councillor wards, the councillor declaring the pecuniary interest, would not take part in the decision making.
Changes to funding requests, when the original councillor is no longer in post	Will be considered by the Community Enablement team in line with the policy in consultation with the head of service and/or Cabinet member

Standard conditions

- The organisation must spend the grant on the project listed in their application and within 12 months from the decision to award a grant or they will return the funding
- If requested, the organisation will return a proportionate amount of the grant if the project costs less than expected or they receive additional funding towards the project. The minimum request will be £150.
- The funding is non-transferrable unless agreed by the council in writing in advance of any spending. Any unspent funds will be returned to the council upon request. The minimum request will be £150.
- The organisation will comply with all relevant statutes and regulations related to its status, objectives and delivery of its core activities

- The organisation must have appropriate policies in place to safeguard children, young people and vulnerable adults, and comply with equalities, GDPR, COVID safety, and any other relevant legislation.
- The organisation must consult the community enablement team before making significant changes to the project/work covered by the grant and officers will confirm with the councillor(s) that they agree to these changes before responding to the applicant.
- The organisation will acknowledge the council's support in any press, publicity or promotion of the project.
- The organisation acknowledges the council accepts no responsibility or liability for this project or the facilities it provides now or in the future.

Monitoring the grants

- The grants system will record all applications, decisions and remaining balances. We will publish grants awarded on the council's website.
- The community enablement team will monitor every grant awarded to ensure spending is appropriate.
- If the awarded project has not started by the expiry date (12 months from the award date) and is unlikely to do so in the next three months, the organisation must repay the grant in full to the council. If the project has started but is not complete the councillor(s) can, at their discretion allow a single, three-month extension to the grant, by which time work/spending must be completed.
- If the project experiences delays due to COVID, organisations can request in writing a limited extension which will need to be approved by the Head of Service.
- All grant repayments will return to the council's general reserves.
- Any councillor budget not awarded by 31 March will return to the council's general reserves as carry forwards are not be allowed.
- If repayments are necessary, the community enablement team will liaise with the organisation to recover the funds, keeping the relevant ward councillor informed.
- Future applications to the councillor grant scheme could be at risk if organisations have not completed and submitted the project monitoring form.

For more information about the scheme, advice on potential projects and other possible funding sources please contact the community enablement team on or 01235 422405 or grants@southandvale.gov.uk.