Policy for Funding the Voluntary and Community Sector

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1. Background

In 2022 the voluntary sector contributed around £20bn to the UK economy and employed over 950,000 workers, about 3% of the total UK workforce. 16.3 million people volunteered through a group, club or organisation in 2020/21[1].

In Kent there are 3,041 active voluntary organisations with 8,303 employees and 14,317 volunteers[2].

Locally, the Ashford Volunteer Centre (AVC) has 1122 voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) groups linked to them. Other organisations, not registered with AVC, include; 40 Parish Councils and 2 Community Councils in the borough, Parent & Teacher Associations at schools and national organisations that work in the borough but are registered elsewhere.

The Value of the Charity Sector[3] states that the charity sector is large and increasingly important, and that Charities are particularly well placed to respond to social challenges facing the UK, such as increasing social and income inequality. Charities add value in five areas:

- Direct recipients – those people who receive the services of the organisation
- Employees – the sense of fulfilment from working in a sector that helps others is of greater importance than salary expectations for some VCS employees
- Volunteers - Charitable work can bring substantial benefits to volunteers, mainly in the form of enhanced well-being and health benefits. Volunteering and charitable activities have been shown to increase life satisfaction and levels of happiness. Volunteering also increases skills and employability, especially for marginalised groups of society
- Donors - create and derive value directly linked to the services provided but also may derive value from a range of less tangible impacts on themselves including everything from their social standing to tax relief to emotional wellbeing, explaining why people often donate to causes linked to events in their lives, rather than based on any formal analysis of the highest returns for their money
- Wider public - The charity sector contributes to fostering economic and social cohesion at the community level and charities make wider contributions through their participation in public and private debates relevant to their services, in providing an alternative point of view from private and public sector organisations and an alternative means by which people can engage with that point of view

2. Introduction

The Council recognises and supports the valuable role of the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in helping resident's access activities, services and advice in areas such as health, welfare, sport, recreation, culture and education.

Working closely with VCS in Ashford helps deliver and add value to the council's own services, meet the objectives in its borough plan and support its communities to thrive. This is demonstrated daily through the projects and activity taking place across the borough and through the visible support and advice afforded to several likeminded organisations.

[1] https://www.ncvo.org.uk/news-and-insights/news-index/uk-civil-society-almanac-2022/#/
[2] Headline analysis of the voluntary & community sector in Kent, KCC, December 2023
[3]https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/835686/Value_of_Charity_-_Oct_19_-_published.pdf

The council provides financial and in-kind support to ensure there is a vibrant VCS across the borough that often reaches out to residents who otherwise maybe unaware of or unable to access services or activities.

This policy is for Councillors, Officers and the VCS to:

- Guide the allocation of funding, ensuring decisions are consistent, fair and transparent.
- Provide a more coordinated funding service to the VCS.
- Ensure value for money.
- Strengthen the VCS by fostering a sustainable approach to funding.

There are 4 main categories of funding to the VCS:

- Revenue Grants
    - Strategic/Service Grants
    - Member Grants
- Community Grants Fund
    - Capital Grants
    - Community Event Grants
    - Community Amenities Grants
- Crisis/Emergency Grants and Loans
- Foregone income

3. Borough Priorities

The Borough Plan 2024 – 2028 was developed in consultation with a range of local stakeholders to agree the priorities the council should focus on. The draft plan was then put out to consultation, inviting residents and the wider community to have their say. A long-term ambition and three themes, each with a set of objectives, were the outcome of this work:

Planet – Working to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and creating places for nature will be at the heart of everything we do.

People – Listening and serving the Ashford community is our philosophy; we will make best use of available resources to build an equitable and fair society.

Place – We are planning for the future of our community and to make Ashford a place people are pleased to call home and love to visit.

The long-term ambition for the borough is:

To be a thriving, productive and inclusive borough by 2030 and beyond; a vital part of Kent and the South East where local businesses, social enterprises, communities and the public sector provide collective leadership to promote shared prosperity, happiness and wellbeing.

Applications for grant funding must demonstrate how the activity, project or service will contribute to achieving one or more of the council's borough objectives as listed below.

Theme	Objectives
Planet	Reduce the use of fossil fuel
	Encourage nature and the enjoyment of natural places
	Reduce waste
	Thriving, mixed use town and village centres

Place	Communities that are friendly, safe, inclusive places to live
	The establishment and growth of new and existing enterprises
	Visitors spend more time and money in the borough
People	Mixed tenure housing that is affordable to local people
	People have more active, healthy and enriched lifestyles
	A well skilled local workforce
	A resilient community

4. Types of Grant

The table below sets out the type of grants and the amount of funding available.

Revenue Grants		Community Grants Fund			
Strategic / Service Grants	Member Grants	Capital Grants	Community Events Grant	Community Amenity Grants	Crisis/Emergency Grants and Loans
For operational (running) and maintenance costs or delivery of a specific service. 3 year agreement.	Each Ward Member has an allocation of funding (agreed annually) to award to local organisations / projects across the borough up to a collective total of £5,000 in any one financial year. Minimum grant £100.	One-off grant for capital projects up to £10,000. Value of grant must not exceed 50% of total project costs E.g. Equipment, furniture purchase, building refurbishment, improving open space. Applicants can only receive one grant within a 3 year period, unless there are exceptional circumstances.	Revenue funding to help deliver community events and festivals. Up to £2,000 for smaller events and up to £5,000 for larger events.	One-off grant for projects up to £10,000 to improve community spaces across the borough. In the REPF Rural area, this supports work to external areas. Projects should not have been funded by ABC or government already.	No revenue budget allocation however short term (up to 1 year) funding may be agreed to fill gap not covered by organisations reserves or other funding sources. Up to £10,000. In exceptional circumstances a loan maybe considered up to £25,000

There may also be occasions whereby the council provides premises for the operation of an organisation at either a low or no rent or allows occasional use of a premises free of charge e.g. meeting rooms. No revenue budget is allocated, and in-kind support is not expected to have ongoing or significant budgetary implications but would be expected to have a mutual benefit to the council and organisation.

5. Who can make an application

The following organisations are eligible to submit an application for funding:

- Not-for-profit organisations with a formal charitable status.
- An unincorporated organisation with a constitution and a formally appointed voluntary management committee.
- A parish council or community council (on condition that the funding is for something that provides additionality).
- A faith-based organisation where the project is open to the wider community and does not have any religious bias or religious recruitment attached to the project.

6. Exclusions

The following are not eligible to submit applications for funding:

- Individuals
- Sole Traders
- Organisations that are aimed at generating profits primarily for private distribution
- Organisations that can pay profits to directors or shareholders
- Community Interest Companies (CICs) limited by shares
- Mainstream public services e.g. health, education (additionality may be funded e.g. Parent Association activity but core services should be funded elsewhere).
- Churches/faith groups to fund their core purposes e.g. religious instruction and recruitment
- Political Parties
- For Community Amenities Grants, projects that have already received funding by ABC and/or Government are not eligible
- For Community Amenities Grants, facilities that are managed directly by ABC, where the upkeep of the property/equipment is ABC's responsibility, are not eligible

7. Eligibility criteria

The council will only fund projects or services where there is a clear financial need due to lack of available funds and will not fund projects or services that have already been delivered or work that has already been carried out.

Organisations applying for funding must fulfil all the criteria below.

- Operate in Ashford borough and serve the borough's residents
- Are non-political
- Have a bank or building society account in the organisation's name (requiring two unrelated signatories)
- Have relevant insurances in place e.g. public liability insurance, buildings insurance
- Have relevant safeguards and policies in place i.e. risk assessments, health and safety policy, safeguarding policy
- Have effective management/governance arrangements in place
- Promote equalities within their structure and operations
- Have support for their project from an Ashford Borough Council Ward Councillor or the Portfolio Holder
- Are providing a service(s), project(s) or facilities that are open to any resident in the borough (or have a clear, non-financial justification for targeting or prioritising a client group)

- Do not have more than 12 months' worth of expenditure in unrestricted reserves or savings
- Have no overdue debts owed to the council

8. Funding priorities

All applications for funding must contribute towards achieving the council's corporate priorities by meeting at least one of the following funding priorities in both section A and section B.

Section A

a. Reduces greenhouse gas emissions and/or increases biodiversity
b. Encourages more active and healthier people and communities
c. Delivers improved facilities for the local community
d. Fosters good relations between communities
e. Provides advice/mentoring for vulnerable people

Section B

a. Increases knowledge and skills
b. Reduces loneliness and isolation
c. Improves community engagement
d. Increases understanding of other cultures and faiths
e. Increases personal wellbeing, independence and resilience
f. Demonstrates value for money

* Community Amenities Grants must meet priority 'C' in Section A.

9. Grant conditions

Any funding award is made in agreement to the following conditions:

Where required the applicant will enter into a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the council. The SLA will be appropriate for the level of funding awarded and the complexity of the project /service funded.

Funding can only be spent on the project/service as described in the application and for no other purpose.

It is the responsibility of applicants to comply with all relevant regulations and legislation.

If expenditure on the grant-aided aspect of the project/ service is less than stated in your application, the grant amount paid to you may be reduced.

Any unspent funds must be returned to the council.

Not for profit / charitable organisations to register with the Ashford Local Lottery

Details of how the funding was spent, evidenced with copies of receipts must be received by the council within 1 year of the firm offer of funding.

Applicants will, when requested, report to a relevant committee / panel either in person or by writing regarding how the funding was spent and the outcomes achieved.

Any publicity materials, advertisements, press releases and programmes relating to the project/event/service for which the funding has been awarded will credit Ashford Borough Council through use of the council logo and the words “supported by Ashford Borough Council”.

For Community Amenities Grants, A plaque will need to be produced and installed (to be paid for by the applicant) which will credit Ashford Borough Council and the UK Government through the use of the words “supported by” and the council logo and the HMG logo. Applications will need to demonstrate this has been planned.

The funding received will be acknowledged in the applicant’s annual report and accounts which cover the funding period.

The council reserves the right to use details of the project/service that received funding in its own publicity.

Any changes to use / retention of equipment or assets must be agreed with the council. No equipment or other assets purchased with the funding can be sold without the council’s prior written permission.

Any details later proved to be incorrect may prejudice a subsequent application and could result in a requirement to repay any funding awarded.

10. Application process and decision making

All applications for funding to be submitted on the correct form.

10.1 Revenue Grants

Strategic/Service Grants

Applications for funding must be received as specified on the council’s website.

Applications will be assessed by the Head of Policy and Performance in consultation with any relevant officer.

Funding awards will be decided as follows:

- Applications up to and including £100,000 by the Management Team

The Head of Policy and Performance has delegated authority to enter into agreements in line with these approvals.

Applicants will be notified that their application is complete and is being considered within 4 weeks of date of submission. If any further documentation is required, the 4 weeks will commence from the date the additional documentation is received.

Applicants will be informed of the funding decision within 6 weeks of receiving the notification of receipt of their application.

Member Grants

Enquiries can be made directly to the Ward Member on an ongoing basis throughout the year. The Ward Member will provide an application form and on completion sign off the form and pass to the Scrutiny and Partnerships Manager to process.

The grant will normally be paid within 15 working days of receipt of a fully and properly completed application form.

It is at the discretion of the Ward Member which local projects and services to fund as long as it is legal, does not conflict with council policy/priorities and directly benefits residents in the borough.

National Charities cannot be funded.

In election years, the fund account will be closed at the end of February. No allocations will be permitted between 1 March and the election date, presuming it takes place before the end of May. In all other years, the cut off will be 31 March.

10.2 Community Grants Fund

Capital Grants Fund

The completed application form to be submitted online by one of the deadlines, published on the council's website.

Fully completed applications will be considered by the Community Grants Panel. Applicants may be required to attend the panel.

Applicants will be notified of the decision of the panel within 1 week of the panel meeting.

Community Event Grants

The completed application can be submitted during the timeframe specified on the council's website. Fully completed applications will be considered by the Head of Policy and Performance.

Applicants will be notified of the decision within 4 weeks of the application deadline.

The application will be passed to the Safety Advisory Group for consideration. On agreement of the Safety Advisory Group confirmation of funding will be made.

Community Amenities Grants

We advise applicants to contact ABC to discuss a proposed project before submitting an application.

The completed application form to be submitted online by one of the deadlines, published on the internet. This will include the requirement to evidence a fully costed quote for the works or items, Planning Permission where required and recent photos of the facility showing its condition.

Fully completed applications will be considered by the Community Grants Panel. Applicants will be required to attend the panel.

Applicants will be notified of the decision of the panel within 2 days of the panel meeting.

10.3 Crisis / Emergency Grants and Loans

Applications will be acknowledged within 2 weeks of receipt.

The applicant will be notified of the decision within 6 weeks of the council receiving the application.

All decisions for crisis / emergency funding will be made by a Director and the Chief Executive.

10.4 Foregone income

For use of council owned property, where there is a mutual benefit, the applicant must gain the written agreement of the Assistant Director of Environment, Property & Recreation who, in

consultation with the Director of Place, Space and Leisure and the Director of Customer, Technology and Finance, will agree the terms under which the property can be let.

11. Monitoring and Review

All grant funding provided under this policy should be reported to the Funding & Partnerships Officer so a central record can be maintained and reported on.

Applicants will be required to provide updates of their project or service as set out in the conditions of the grant offer. This includes confirmation that any equipment or assets purchased remain in their ownership and used for the purpose the grant was awarded.

The council's grants spend will form part of the Annual Performance report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in July each year.

This policy will be reviewed every 4 years.

12. Complaints

Decisions on grants will not be subject to appeals.

Any complaints regarding an application for funding should be made by following the council's complaints procedure.

https://www.ashford.gov.uk/contact-us/complaints