

Document Control

Policy Title	Grants
Document Reference	CS-FIN03 V2.2
Policy Summary	The purpose of this document is to provide a framework within which Council can manage, administer and monitor all council grants following a robust, fair and consistent process.
Review Requirements	For October 2026
Document Owner/Job title	Head of Finance
Document Owner is responsible for ensuring that it is reviewed in line with the requirements of the Council's Policy Review Procedure and is kept up to date.	
Council Approval Date	27 th August 2025

Version Control Record

Version Number	Version Date	Author(s)	Comments
1.0	March 2016	Community Development	Policy established
2.0	August 2024	Head of Finance	New policy developed
2.1	June 2025	Head of Finance	Update authorisation thresholds
2.2	August 2025	Head of Finance	Further update thresholds

Consultation

	CLT	HOST	SCC	Unions
Date completed	-	-	-	-

Screening

Reference No	339
EQIA Required?	Yes No

The current version of this document is available to all individuals accessing the Council's information and other associated assets and is published on the Council's intranet.

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Chapter 1 Policy Statement

1.0 Introduction

The Council recognises the value of activity that contributes to the priorities of the Council's Corporate Plan and is committed to supporting organisations and individuals in their contribution to making a positive difference working towards a sustainable Borough – socially, environmentally and economically.

The Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 makes provision for the Council to provide grant contributions for the development of trade, tourism, leisure and cultural activities.

In 2015/16 the Department for Social Development introduced a Code of Practice aimed at reducing bureaucracy in grant funding to the voluntary and community sector.

This policy and associated procedures set out the framework within which the Council should manage, administer and monitor its grant programmes. It has been written in line with good practice on internal control and takes account of local government and internal audit recommendations.

1.1 Policy Scope

All revenue and capital grant funding administered by Council falls within the scope of this policy and associated procedures.

The policy will be applied by the Council and its Committees, Partnerships, Forums, Advisory Panels and Officers who have delegated authority to award grants on behalf of the Council and all Council directorates which have responsibility for managing the Council's grant schemes.

Chapter 1 covers the Grants Policy for the administration of Grants and is subject to Council approval, the remaining chapters are procedures and are subject to periodic management review.

This policy applies to all external organisations and individuals who apply to the Council for grant aid.

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1.2 Policy Objectives

The objectives of the policy are to ensure:

1. Council continues to invest in organisations and/or individuals which contribute to the Council's corporate priorities.
2. Grant processes are robust, fair and consistent.
3. There is an efficient and effective framework for grant management that allows budget holders to make decisions in line with the scheme of delegation and within appropriate timescales.
4. Improved customer experience to include the development of a digital grants management system.

1.3 Policy Statement

Council will provide support to Borough life by providing grant funding opportunities that will contribute to the achievement of the Big Plan and Corporate Plan priorities and outcomes.

These grant schemes will be developed within the governance framework that is robust and fair, delivered in a consistent and timely fashion. Each scheme will be approved by Council in advance of launching detailing, among other things:

- Objectives of scheme
- Frequency of calls
- Conditions of grant
- Timescales
- Evaluation criteria for applications including but not limited to marking frame and details of evaluation panel
- Monitoring process for supported projects and programmes
- Sample letter of offer
- Arrangements if grant call oversubscribed.

Council grants are awarded following a competitive application process, whereby applications are assessed against set criteria.

The process for grants application, delivery and administration should follow a standard process as set out in Chapters 3 and 4, which can be enhanced to meet the conditions which Council may be required to meet from other external funders.

Officers will apply the approved grants process to deliver, manage, administer the grants programme, issue letters of offer and award decisions using the following delegation thresholds (which are in line with those set out in the Purchasing and Payments Policy):
The outcome of the grants scheme may be presented to Council for noting.

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Grant amount up to	Minimum Grade
£1,000	Scale 6
£3,000	SO2
£5,000	PO2
£25,000	PO4
£100,000	PO11
Unlimited	DO4

Council will be working towards standardising Letter of Offer and reporting templates.

1.4 Definitions

The following definitions are used in this policy:

Term	Acronym	Definition
Letter of Offer	LoO	Letter of offer for recipients of grants detailing terms and conditions of offer.
Grant		A grant is defined as a sum of money awarded by the Council, for a particular project, event, activity, or the purchase of equipment as a result of a competitive application process.

1.5 Associated Policies

The following policies are associated with this policy:

Ref	Policy
325	Purchasing and Payments
123	Procurement
311	Budgeting
284	Anti-fraud, bribery and corruption
92	Data Protection
301	Lands
66	Safeguarding
116	Conflict of Interest
TBC	Policy for the loan of equipment to grant/non grant aided groups

1.6 Relevant legislation

- Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972

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- Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014
- Recreation and Youth Services Order (Northern Ireland) 1986
- Account and Audit Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015
- Local Government Finance Act (Northern Ireland) 2011

Chapter 2 High Level Process

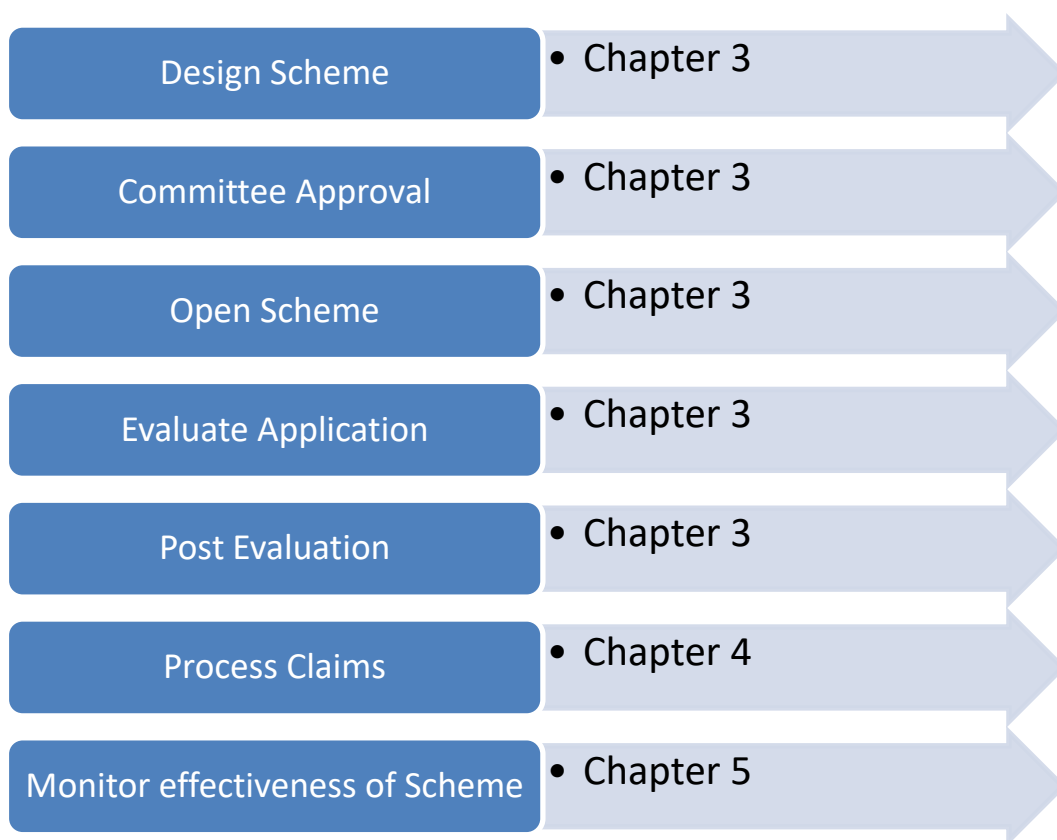
2.0 Annual Grants Timetable

To assist groups/individuals to forward plan and prepare adequately to make an application, the Council will publish on the Council website in advance of each financial year a timetable detailing when each grant scheme will be opening and closing throughout the year.

This timetable may be subject to amendment, for example, where grants are co-funded or dependent on the availability of external funding.

2.1 Grants Scheme Life Cycle

A summary of the grants scheme life cycle is detailed below:



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2.2 Grants Referencing

Grants will operate the following standardised referencing system:
Financial Year – Scheme number – applicant number – claim number

For example;

Grant Reference number	2025-0027
Applicant Reference number	2025-0027-002
Claim Reference number	2025-0027-002-01

The Finance Service will publish a register of grant schemes on ANDi which will allow managers to complete details of each scheme, which will enable unique referencing. These reference numbers should be used when constructing filing systems and documents

Claim numbers will then be used as the unique 'invoice' number when processing payments.

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Chapter 3 - Designing a Grants Scheme

3.0 Introduction

The grants framework sets out the procedures for which Council should design, manage, administer and monitor its grant schemes.

It has been written in line with good practice on internal control and takes account of local government and internal audit recommendations.

The Council is committed to distributing available funding fairly, efficiently and effectively. This Framework outlines the Council's approach to providing grant funding to external bodies to assist in the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan, strategic priorities and outcomes.

The grants framework should be applied to all external organisations and individuals who apply to the Council for grant aid, detailed in the scope of this policy.

3.1 Objectives of scheme

When planning your grant scheme clear guidance for applicants should be provided. The objectives of the scheme should be clearly detailed and defined. Information requested for assessment should be based on the objectives of the scheme.

3.2 Grant criteria

Grant criteria will vary depending on the grant scheme and purpose of the fund. Grant criteria will be clearly detailed in grant guidance documentation.

Details of who is eligible to receive Council grants will be specified in each specific grant scheme criteria.

Grant Schemes should clearly state the terms and conditions specific to the scheme taking into consideration the conditions of this policy. It should be clearly demonstrated through the guidance notes issued as part of a grants application pack, what will and will not be accepted to support applications.

3.3 What the Council will not fund

Specific details of exclusions will be detailed in each specific grant scheme criteria. However, the following exclusions will apply as a minimum:

- Projects, events, activities undertaken or equipment purchased outside the specified award period
- Projects, events, and activities where the primary benefit is outside the Borough
- Events, projects or activities which conflict with any Council run project, event or activity
- Organisations not legally established in the UK
- Projects, events, activities not compliant with the Council's aims and objectives

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3.4 Supporting documentation

The Council's grant application forms are designed to collect only the information considered essential to support a particular application. All supporting documentation must be submitted by the grant deadline date or will be deemed ineligible.

This information may include:

- Constitution or statutory registration (e.g. Charity number, company number) as appropriate;
- A list of office bearers/Board of Governors;
- Audited accounts, financial statements or bank statements as appropriate.
- Safeguarding policy (if applicable);
- Organisation chart;
- Rental Agreement/Lease or evidence of premises ownership;
- Public liability insurance;
- Risk Assessments;
- Business Plan;
- Event Management Plan; and
- Application for the use of Council Land.

The above list is not exhaustive. Details of the supporting information required by each grant scheme will be detailed in each application pack and should be closely referred to.

3.5 Compliance

In advance of Grants Schemes being presented to Parent Committees for approval, the Grant Scheme must be sent to the Policy Screening group for screening. Grant schemes will only need to be re-screened should there be any significant changes made to schemes before re-running a grant scheme.

When designing a grant scheme, it is important that the following compliance areas are considered.

3.5.1 Use of Council Land

Where applicants are applying for a grant to hold an event on Council land, a separate application for the use of Council Land must be submitted through the Council's Compliance - Lands Section. The Lands section must be contacted by the applicant in advance of the grant application being made.

Where applicable, grant guidance documentation should include information on how to make a request to use Council land. The Council's Land and Property policy Section 10 must be adhered to [Land-and-Property-Policy--November-2023----final--002- \(33\).pdf](#)

3.5.2 Data Protection

In administering its grants, the Council will ensure that it complies with its obligations under the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR. The Council will ensure that personal information is collected fairly and lawfully, is accurate, adequate, up to date and not held

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for longer than is necessary. The personal information on the grant application will only be used for the purposes for which it is collected i.e. administering the grant, and for any other purpose for which the applicant has consented e.g. to receive information on other Council grants.

3.5.3 Safeguarding

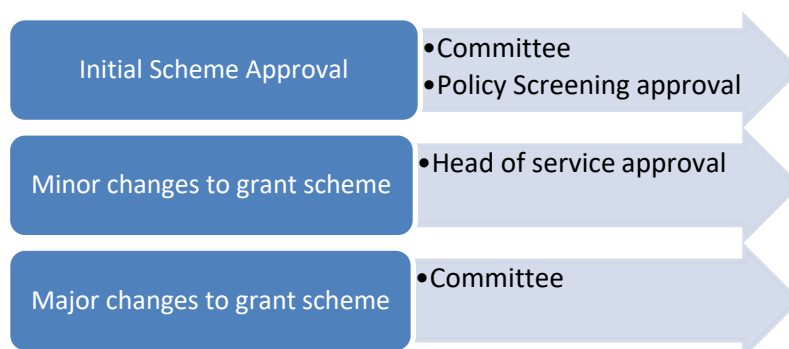
Individuals and organisations working with children, young people and/or adults at risk must have an extant policy for the protection and safeguarding of children, young people and adults at risk that ensures good practice guidelines are followed. Where a current policy is not available a requirement exists to adhere to the Ards and North Down Borough Council's Safeguarding children, young people and adults at risk, a copy of which will be provided.

3.5.4 Section 75 Monitoring

In order to comply with Section 75 requirements, the Council introduced and have in place section 75 monitoring for all applicants, from April 2017.

3.6 Approval of Scheme

Once a scheme has been developed, approval will be required to be sought as detailed below:



3.7 Open Scheme

3.7.1 Frequency of calls

The frequency of the calls for each particular scheme should be clearly stated when publicising the scheme and clearly state that all are subject to budget availability.

For example, a scheme may be:

- One off
- Annual
- Semi-annual – twice during the financial year
- Multi-annual – spanning over more than one financial year.

3.7.2 Period of grant awards

The award period will depend on the availability of funding, including matched funding from

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Government and therefore some funding award periods will span multiple financial years.

Details of the award period for each grant scheme will be detailed in each application pack.

3.7.3 Publicising Grant Opportunities

All Council grants will be publicly advertised in the local press when available, on the Council's website and through social media. Council will host a Grants Roadshow at the beginning of each financial year to publicise grants offered by Council throughout the financial year.

Each service will also promote their grants via their service led directory.

3.7.4 Duration of grant calls and closing dates

All grants will normally remain open for application, for a minimum of three weeks. Under exceptional circumstances this timeframe may be reduced.

All grant calls will have a specific closing date and time, which must be adhered to by all applicants. Applications received after the closing date and time will not be scored by the assessment panel.

Exceptions will only include rolling grants, whereby the award period will remain open until the programme budget is fully exhausted.

3.7.5 Support for applicants

Council officers will provide support for applicants via a Grants roadshow at the beginning of each financial year where all services that offer grants across Council will be available. In addition, and where required, additional grant workshops will be delivered and/or supporting online videos produced to advise potential applicants on the purpose of the grant and the application process.

Each grant scheme will have a central point of contact for enquiries.

3.7.6 Availability of grant documentation

Grant documentation (grant application and guidance) will be made available on the Council's website or can be requested by contacting the relevant Service. Grants documentation in alternative formats and languages will be made available upon request.

3.7.7 Timescales

A Timeline of grant should be included in the Guidance Notes:

Scheme advertised	< insert date >
Scheme open	< insert date >
Date of Assessment	< insert date >
Award and regret letters	< insert date >

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issued	
Letter of acceptance received	< insert date >
Completion of grant period	< insert date >
Claim to be submitted	< insert date >
Monitoring Form to be Submitted	< insert date >
Close of Scheme	< insert date >

3.8 Evaluate Application

3.8.1 Application assessment process

All grant applications (as a minimum):

- received will be acknowledged in writing (which includes email)
- fully completed and signed applications received by the closing date and time will be assessed against the criteria detailed in the application pack by an assessment panel;
- assessment panels will apply a minimum pass mark of 50%; marking criteria will be detailed in the grant criteria and supporting guidance notes; details of a situation where the amount of grant funding exceeds the available grant budget will be outlined in the grant criteria and supporting guidance notes; and
- all applicants will be informed in writing of the outcome of the assessment process.

3.8.2 Conflicts of Interest

Any Council officer, Elected Member or Independent Member who has a Conflict of Interest in any grant application under assessment will not be permitted to take part on the grant assessment panel.

This includes those who have a direct or indirect interest in the application.

All assessment panel members will be required to complete a Declaration of Interest Form (Appendix 1, Declaration of Interest Form) in advance of the assessment process to demonstrate they have no conflicts of interest in any grant application under consideration.

3.8.3 Arrangements if grant call oversubscribed

Council grants are awarded following a competitive application process, whereby applications are assessed against set criteria.

Grant criteria will vary depending on the grant scheme and purpose of the fund. Grant criteria will be clearly detailed in grant guidance documentation including what will happen in the event of the fund being oversubscribed. This may include a percentage reduction to all successful applicants, or allocation of funds to successful applicants until the maximum available funding is reached, ie. based on ranked scores.

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3.9 Post Evaluation

3.9.1 Letter of offer

The Council will issue a Letter of Offer (LoO) to all successful applicants, which sets out the details of the project and conditions of the award.

The LoO will specify as a minimum:

- The purpose of the grant
- The grant period
- The payments and claims process
- The reporting period
- The conditions of the offer, to ensure that all grants awarded have been properly spent and accounted for
- Publicity requirements
- A requirement to advise the Council immediately, should any issue arise during the period of the award that prevents the achievement of the agreed objectives and targets.
- Project specific terms and conditions Treatment of surpluses
- Standard terms and conditions

3.9.2 Letter of offer Acceptance

Applicants are required to sign and accept the Councils' Letter of Offer within four weeks of the date of the LoO. Unless otherwise specified, the period of the award will commence from the date that the signed and accepted Letter of Offer is received by the Council.

Where grants are awarded for a two or three year period a LoO will be issued with a fixed sum offered for the first financial year and provisional sums for subsequent year(s).

3.10 Appeals process

Unsuccessful applicants will be informed in writing (in hard copy or by email) of the outcome of their application and the reasons clearly stated.

Appeals can only be made where an applicant can evidence that the process of assessment was not followed in accordance with the criteria detailed in the application pack.

The aim of the appeals process is to ensure a fair and transparent process for the assessment of grant applications. Grants will be assessed based on the criteria set out in the guidance notes as part of the Grants Application Pack.

The Council grants schemes are application led and only those which demonstrate that they meet the required criteria may be awarded funding. The Council will ensure all grants are awarded in line with Ards and North Down Grants Policy objectives to ensure:

1. Council continues to invest in organisations and/or individuals to deliver projects within the borough which contribute to the council's corporate priorities.
2. Grant processes are robust, fair and consistent.

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3. There is an efficient and effective framework for grant management that allows budget holders to make decisions in line with the scheme of delegation and within appropriate timescales.
4. Improved customer experience to include the development of a digital grants management system.

If an appeal has been made and the applicant can evidence that the process of assessment was not followed in accordance with the criteria detailed in the application pack the appeal will be escalated to the formal appeal stage.

Formal Appeal

The formal appeal must clearly state the grounds for an appeal. The Head of Service for the awarding grant will convene an independent assessment panel. No new information, other than the information contained within the original application will be considered by the independent panel. The appeals panel will assess an application according to the criteria stated in the guidance notes and score the application accordingly.

The decision of the independent appeals panel is final and binding.

3.11 Publicity post award

Grant recipients are required to:

- Acknowledge the Council's grant support in all press releases and publicity material including social media
- Include the following statement on all printed material "Supported by Ards and North Down Borough Council"

Where grant recipients do not comply with the Council's publicity requirements, 10% of the total grant awarded may be withheld.

3.12 Grant retention

10% of the award may be withheld until the applicant has submitted all financial claims and monitoring information.

3.13 Claw back

The Council reserves the right to claw back any advance payments made to the applicant:

- that it subsequently deems to be ineligible expenditure; or
- in excess of need.

If this situation were to arise the applicant will be advised of the nature of the ineligible expenditure and the amount to be clawed back. The applicant will be invoiced for the amount of grant to be reimbursed.

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Chapter 4 Managing a Grants Scheme

4.0 Claims

Claims will be required for the full value of the grant amount awarded by the Council, including any advance payment.

All claims must be summarised on grant claim form (Appendix 2, Grant Claim Form) and must be supported by receipts, invoices and bank statements. Scanned documents, photographs or printed on-line bank statements will be accepted however proof of original claim documentation may be requested as part of the claim process.

Once verified all payments will be made by bank transfer. Applicants will be notified separately of any expenditure which has been disallowed.

4.1 Issuing of grant advances

Depending on the amount of grant awarded advance payments can be issued by the Council where a specific written request is submitted demonstrating the need for the payment. The need for an advance payment may require a projected cash flow for the life of the project, along with an up-to-date bank statement.

For awards:

- up to £500 the full amount can be paid in advance;
- up to £3000, up to 50% can be paid in advance; and
- up to £10,000 up to 30% can be paid in advance; over £10,000 an agreed payment schedule should be put in place and detailed in Letter of Offer.

Subsequent payments must only be made following satisfactory verification of interim claims.

How surpluses are dealt with should be outlined in your grant scheme but any funds carried forward should not exceed the lesser of £3000 or 10% of the annual award.

For multi-annual awards there can be no carry over at the end of the award period.

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Chapter 5 Monitoring and Evaluation

5.0 Monitoring of grants

The Council is required to monitor the progress of all projects, events and activities supported through grant aid.

Reporting will be proportionate to the size of the grant awarded and should follow the objectives of the award and any agreed performance KPI's.

The Project Evaluation Report template will specify the minimum reporting requirements; however some Council Services may introduce additional monitoring fields which will be detailed in the LoO.

Management should monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of each grant scheme and report this to Council on an appropriate frequency. These reports will consider the following items as a minimum;

- brief details of the scheme and its timeline
- number and value of applications
- level of support required by applications
- number and value of applications awarded support
- number and value of applications refused support
- issues encountered during scheme administration
- summary of benefits (drawn from project monitoring)
- evaluation of scheme against objectives
- suggested amendments for future schemes.

Appendices

- Appendix 1: Declaration of Interest
- Appendix 2: Grant Claim form
- Appendix 3: Standard Terms and Conditions (For individual and for organisations)

Standardised Documentation (in progress)

Documents to be standardised (in progress)

- Application Form
- Letter of Offer
- Project Evaluation Report