

| COUNCILLOR COMMUNITY GRANT FUND | |
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| Executive Summary | <p>This report presents the Terms of Reference for the Councillor Community Grant Fund, which allocates £4,000 per councillor each year to support small-scale community projects within their ward. It sets out eligibility criteria, funding limits, and a clear application and approval process.</p> <p>The report also establishes governance and financial controls, including officer checks and a Councillor Review Panel operating under Cabinet delegation, to ensure transparency, propriety, and compliance with council policies and audit requirements.</p> |
| Options considered | No alternative options are presented in this report. Other potential structures for administering and reviewing the Fund were considered but were discounted, as they did not offer the same level of efficiency, effectiveness, and governance as the proposed arrangements. |
| Consultation(s) | <p>No external public consultation has been undertaken, as the report relates to the establishment of internal governance and operating arrangements for a councillor-led discretionary grant scheme.</p> <p>Internal consultation has taken place with Finance, Legal Services, and Democratic Services to ensure the proposed Terms of Reference are compliant with the Council's financial regulations, governance framework, and audit requirements.</p> |
| Recommendations | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To approve the Councillor Community Grant Fund Terms of Reference and its appendices as set out at Appendix A. 2. To delegate authority for the operation and administration of the Fund in accordance with the approved Terms of Reference. |
| Reasons for recommendations | To enable the Councillor Community Grant Fund to operate with clear eligibility criteria, governance arrangements, and financial controls, providing assurance over the appropriate use of public funds while supporting local community projects within each ward. |
| Background papers | Budget & Council Tax 2026-27 |

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| Wards affected | All |
| Cabinet member(s) | Lucy Shires Portfolio Holder for Finance, Estates & Property Services |
| Contact Officer | Daniel King Assistant Director Finance & Assets |

| Links to key documents: | |
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| Corporate Plan: | A strong, responsible and accountable Council |
| Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) | The proposals are consistent with the approved budget and do not generate savings or additional expenditure beyond the existing financial provision. |
| Council Policies & Strategies | Councillors' Code of Conduct |

| Corporate Governance: | |
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| Is this a key decision | No |
| Has the public interest test been applied | N/A |
| Details of any previous decision(s) on this matter | Budget provision for the Councillor Community Grant Fund approved as part of the Council's annual budget setting process on 18 February 2026. |

1. Purpose of the report

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the operation of the Councillor Community Grant Fund through the adoption of clear Terms of Reference.
- 1.2. The report sets out the governance, eligibility criteria, financial controls, and decision-making arrangements for the Fund.

2. Introduction & Background

- 2.1. The Councillor Community Grant Fund forms part of the Council's approved budget and is intended to enable Councillors to support small-scale projects and initiatives that provide direct benefit to their local communities, this Fund allows each Councillor access to £4,000 for the 2026/2027 financial year to support such projects.
- 2.2. In order for the Fund to operate effectively and in compliance with the Council's financial regulations, and governance framework, clear Terms of Reference are required.
- 2.3. This report brings forward the proposed Terms of Reference, including arrangements for member oversight, officer assurance, and the role of a Councillor Review Panel operating under delegated authority from Cabinet.

3. Proposals and Options

- 3.1. It is proposed that the Councillor Community Grant Fund operates in accordance with the Terms of Reference set out at Appendix A. These define

eligible applicants and projects, funding thresholds, ineligible expenditure, and the application process.

- 3.2. The proposed arrangements include governance checks and consideration by a Councillor Review Panel prior to the approval and release of funding. This provides assurance that awards are consistent, transparent, and compliant with financial and legal requirements.
- 3.3. Other alternative methods for administering the Councillor Community Grant Fund were considered; however, these were not taken forward as feasible options. The proposed approach was considered to offer the most effective balance of efficiency, consistency, member involvement, and appropriate governance and financial control.

4. Corporate Priorities

- 4.1. The proposed governance and operating arrangements for the Councillor Community Grant Fund support the Corporate Plan priority of maintaining a strong, responsible and accountable Council. The Terms of Reference provide a clear and transparent framework for decision-making, setting out eligibility criteria, funding limits, roles and responsibilities, and appropriate financial and governance controls.
- 4.2. The inclusion of governance checks and a Councillor Review Panel operating under delegated authority from Cabinet ensures that grant awards are made consistently and in accordance with the Council's financial regulations, legal obligations, and audit expectations. This approach balances local member discretion with corporate oversight, providing assurance over the appropriate use of public funds and supporting accountability to residents and stakeholders.

5. Financial and Resource Implications

- 5.1. The Councillor Community Grant Fund is funded from existing reserves provision approved by Council on 18 February 2026.
- 5.2. There are no additional staffing or resource implications arising from the proposals, as administration will be delivered within existing officer capacity.
- 5.3. Appropriate financial controls are set out within the Terms of Reference to ensure funds are used solely for approved purposes.

Comments from the S151 Officer:

Adequate reserves are available to support delivery of the Councillor Community Grant Fund in 2026/27. The use of reserves to support this was considered and agreed as part of the Council's 2026/27 budget setting process.

6. Legal Implications

- 6.1. The proposed Terms of Reference provide a clear framework to ensure grant awards are made lawfully, transparently, and in accordance with the Council's powers and responsibilities.
- 6.2. The arrangements include provisions relating to conflicts of interest, decision-making, and governance to minimise legal risk.

Comments from the Monitoring Officer

The proposed Terms of Reference appear appropriate and provide a lawful governance framework for the operation of the Councillor Community Grant Fund. No legal issues are noted arising from the proposals set out in this report, subject to the scheme being operated in accordance with the Council's Constitution, Financial Regulations, and Members' Code of Conduct.

7. Risks

- 7.1. There is a risk that without clear governance arrangements, the Council could be exposed to financial, legal, or reputational risk. This is mitigated through the proposed Terms of Reference and officer oversight.
- 7.2. If the Terms of Reference are not approved, the Councillor Community Grant Fund cannot operate, and community projects may not receive funding.

8. Net Zero Target

- 8.1. The proposals relate to governance and administration and do not directly impact the Council's Net Zero targets.
- 8.2. Individual projects supported by the Fund are not yet known and therefore environmental outcomes or such projects at this stage are also unknown.

9. Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

- 9.1. The proposed arrangements do not introduce any adverse equality impacts and are consistent with the Council's Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Strategy.

10. Community Safety issues

- 10.1. The proposals do not directly impact community safety.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The proposed Terms of Reference provide a clear, proportionate, and well-governed framework for the operation of the Councillor Community Grant Fund. They ensure transparency, financial propriety, and consistency while enabling councillors to support local community initiatives.

Cabinet is asked to resolve:

1. To approve the Councillor Community Grant Fund Terms of Reference and its appendices as set out at Appendix A.
2. To delegate authority for the operation and administration of the Fund in accordance with the approved Terms of Reference.