

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL

**POLICY FOR GRANT GIVING TO
THE VOLUNTARY AND
COMMUNITY SECTOR (VCS) 2023 -
2026**



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CONTENTS

1.	Introduction	2
2.	Scope	2
3.	Purpose of Grant Funding	2-3
4.	Available Funding	3-4
5.	Who Can Apply	4
6.	What Will and Will Not Be Funded by a Grant	4-5
7.	Risk Considerations in Grant Giving	5-6
8.	Grant Conditions	6
9.	Assessment Process	6-8
10.	Assessment Timescales	9
11.	Monitoring	9

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Redditch Borough Council supports Voluntary and Community Sector organisations because we believe that a vibrant Third Sector is vital to our community.
- 1.2 Under Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council has the power to incur expenditure which in its opinion is in the interest of and will bring direct benefit to its area or any part of it or all or some of its inhabitants. The direct benefit accruing must also be commensurate with the expenditure to be incurred. The Council needs to continue to ensure that it has a transparent and fair grants scheme, ensuring that we comply with the 2015 Local Government Transparency Code.
- 1.3 There is further power to make grants to voluntary organisations providing recreational facilities under Section 19 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976.

2. SCOPE

- 2.1 This Policy applies to the allocation of grants to Voluntary and Community Sector organisations through the Council's VCS Grants Programme. It does not apply to any other means of financial support from the Council that may be available under other schemes.
- 2.2 There may be other VCS Grant funding opportunities available which can be facilitated by the Council on behalf of another organisation (one example of this would be the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management Recycling of Metals scheme) where parts of this policy would be relevant.
- 2.3 This policy will be utilised by Officers to guide decision making around the VCS Grants Programme. Officers may apply discretion to the policy in exceptional circumstances if it is deemed appropriate.

3. PURPOSE OF GRANT FUNDING

- 3.1 Redditch Borough Council is committed to supporting Voluntary and Community Sector organisations to help them deliver projects and activities which have a positive and beneficial impact on the local community and its residents.
- 3.2 The Council's VCS Grants Programme will make financial contributions to support certain Voluntary and Community Sector groups in Redditch that actively assist the community to enjoy a better quality of life.

3.3 Funding will only be provided where it is demonstrated that a defined and positive impact will be made. Organisations must demonstrate an outcome focussed approach and that their project and/or activity will clearly support one or more of the Council's Strategic Purposes which are:

- Run and grow a successful business.
- Finding somewhere to live.
- Aspiration, work and financial independence.
- Living independent, active and healthy lives.
- Communities which are safe, well maintained and green.

Periodically, the Executive Committee can review the amount available to the VCS through the Programme and how this may be allocated.

4. AVAILABLE FUNDING

4.1 In 2023-24 the amount of VCS Grant funding was approximately £150k. In 2024-25, it will again be £150k and in 2025-26 it will be £150k. This includes £50k which is ring fenced for a grant in respect of Financial Advice and Problem Solving category, leaving a total of £100k for the Main Grants Programme.

4.2 Due to the pandemic and the cost of living situation, it had been previously agreed that the policy would set aside £10k from the Main Grants Pot for projects specifically related to Mental Health, leaving a total of £90k in the Main Grants Pot.

4.3 Following a short review of the policy it has been agreed that Mental Health related applications will be incorporated within the Main Grants Pot.

4.4 The review also took into consideration applications made under the policy in 2023/24 within the main grant pot and noted a surge in smaller applications. It has therefore been agreed that a separate £10k pot specifically for projects seeking grants between £500 and £2k be included within this revised policy. This ensures smaller initiatives receive enhanced consideration and more opportunity in the competitive bidding process. The remaining £90k will be used for higher grants over £2k and up to £10k.

There are separate application forms for each size of grant, and these have been amended to take account of the changes made to this policy.

A review of the changes made for 2024/25 will be carried out in January 2025, before the 2025/26 Grants scheme is launched, in order to ensure that the policy continues to provide best value for both the Council, its residents and the VCS community.

- 4.5 VCS organisations can bid for funding for core costs, project, salary, events, and equipment costs.
- 4.6 VCS groups may only submit one application to the Financial Advice and Problem Solving Grant category (if applicable) and one application to the VCS main Grants Programme. A further application may be made to the VCS main Grants Programme if it is in partnership with another VCS organisation(s).

5. WHO CAN APPLY

- 5.1 To be eligible to apply for a grant, an organisation must be able to prove to that:
- it is voluntary, non-profit making and operated with no undue restrictions or limitations on membership;
 - it is not a statutory organisation;
 - they have a clear legal identity - they can demonstrate effective management of the organisation's business;
 - it has a bank account in the name of the organisation that requires the authorisation of at least two people who are unrelated to each other and who do not live in the same household to make payments or withdrawals of any kind from the account;
 - any proposed project and/or services are undertaken in the Borough of Redditch, and/or will be wholly or principally for the direct benefit of residents in the Borough of Redditch;
 - it actively promotes equality issues within its structure and operations;
 - it meets all legal requirements;
 - any previous grants received from Redditch Borough Council have been spent in accordance with the grant award conditions attached to them; and
 - it does not have more than 12 months' worth of expenditure in reserves or savings.

6. WHAT WILL AND WILL NOT BE FUNDED BY A GRANT

- 6.1 The following highlights what types of applications will or will not be funded.

What will be funded:

- Grant applications will only be considered for projects and activities that will be undertaken in the Borough of Redditch, and/or will be for the direct benefit of its residents.
- Grants may be given to fund core costs of VCS groups, direct delivery of projects/activities and revenue or capital projects (excluding structural purchases i.e. building or building works).

- The Council encourages joint/partnership applications from more than one voluntary sector organisation.

What will NOT be funded:

- Grants will NOT be awarded to any organisation if it is deemed to be a political party, has the nature of a political party, or is engaged in campaigning for a political purpose or cause.
 - Funds will NOT be provided for the furtherance or propagation of a faith promoted by any organisation which is, or is deemed by the Council to be, of a religious nature. This does not exclude applications from faith-based groups who want to deliver community based projects.
 - The programme will NOT fund structural purchases, i.e. buildings or building works.
 - Grants CANNOT be used for retrospective funding; that is to replace money that has already been spent, or to cover items or services that have already been bought.
 - No ongoing commitment should be given to the funding of salary costs or the project. This is a one off payment.
 - The Council reserves the right to not fund VCS organisations that have outstanding debts to the Council.
- 6.2 Any grant awarded must only be used for the approved purpose, i.e. applicants must be able to demonstrate how the funding will be spent as outlined in their grant application and they will have to retain evidence of actual expenditure and provide this for future monitoring purposes.

7. RISK CONSIDERATIONS IN GRANT GIVING

- 7.1 The Council has a clear duty to ensure that best use is made of its resources. Risk is considered in this process in relation to failure to achieve best use of Council resources.
- 7.2 The Council does understand however that the creativity and innovation of the voluntary sector can carry risks for non-delivery, for example where a new idea does not work out as intended but will use the general principle of requiring a lower level of risk the higher the amount of funding provided. Maximum levels of funding will only be provided where the risk of non-delivery is very low.
- 7.3 In order to achieve an appropriate balance between managing risk and supporting innovative ideas or new organisations, a grant limit of £2,000 will apply to:
- organisations that have been in existence for less than one year; and
 - organisations that do not have audited accounts.

Any project or activity proposals above this amount will require the group or organisation to:

- have a good track record of delivery;
- be in receipt of a range of funding streams;
- be registered with either the Charity Commission or Companies House, or other appropriate government regulator; and
- have a set of their latest audited accounts.

Evidence of all the above will need to be provided through the application process.

7.4 Payment schedules will also support the monitoring of accountability for use of public money whilst appreciating the possible cash-flow issues that may be experienced by voluntary and community sector organisations. The general principle will be that a payment schedule of frequent monitoring and instalments is agreed with Grants Team staff. General guidelines for payment schedules are:

- Grants of £2,000 or less will be paid in full in advance of the project being delivered. Payment will be made to successful applicants within 1 month of approval with monitoring information required once the project or activity is successfully delivered;
- Grants over £2,000 will be paid in a minimum of two equal instalments. The timings of and the number of instalments will be agreed by the group/organisation and the Grants Team at the start of the project and all subject to satisfactory monitoring.

8. GRANT CONDITIONS

8.1 Information on the conditions that will apply to a grant will be made available to all applicants before they apply. Monitoring information will be required on all grants (see section 10).

8.2 All grant offers will be subject to the grant recipient accepting the grant conditions. A full set of grant conditions and monitoring requirements will be agreed with grant recipients before the final grant award is made. No changes will be made after this time.

8.3 Monitoring will be signed off by the VCS Grants Officer before each payment is due, with any concerns being discussed with the Head of Community Services. It may affect a VCS organisations ability to receive future funding if they do not submit satisfactory monitoring returns when required.

8.4 VCS Groups will not be able to carry any unspent funding into the following financial year. All funding should be spent with the year the grant is awarded.

- 8.5 VCS groups must have delivered their funded activities by the end of the grant funding year (i.e. 31st March).
- 8.6 Any funding which is not allocated will be returned to the Council budget at the end of the financial year.
- 8.7 The Head of Community Services will have delegated authority for final approval of all applications received in the scheme. Their decision is final and not subject to any appeal process.

9. ASSESSMENT PROCESS

- 9.1 All opportunities for Voluntary and Community Sector grant funding from Redditch Borough Council will be openly advertised using a minimum of:
- Notice of the opportunity on the 'Voluntary Sector Support' section of the Redditch Borough Council website.
 - Through the usual Council communications channels including the local press.
- 9.2 Information provided to grant applicants will include:
- the amount of money that is available in total;
 - the minimum and maximum amount of money that is available to each applicant;
 - clear information on the purposes for which funding is offered;
 - clear information on eligibility criteria;
 - details of the full assessment criteria against which applications will be judged;
 - a full list of conditions that will apply to the grant;
 - the deadline by which applications must be submitted; and
 - the date by which applicants will be informed of the outcome of their application.

Grant application forms will be made available in paper (upon request) and electronic formats.

- 9.3 Applicants must complete a standard application form and provide any relevant supporting documents (or electronic links to those documents). This is to ensure objective assessment of all grant applications. The Council will not award any grant to an organisation whose application has not been formally assessed.
- 9.4 All grant applications will be assessed using pre-selected assessment criteria. The details of the assessment criteria will be made available to all applicants before they apply for funding. The assessment criteria will be chosen as relevant for the funding opportunity, but as a minimum will include:

- clear outline of how the purposes for which the grant is made available will be met;
- the outcome(s) that the proposal will achieve;
- the structure and delivery plan that will support the achievement of the stated outcomes;
- the clarity of the proposal's financial outline;
- the organisation's ability to successfully manage finance, evidenced by submission of accounts, bank statements and cash flow forecasts as appropriate;
- the approach to health and safety, duty of care, and other appropriate best practice requirements including safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, and the organisation's ability to successfully manage these on the project; and
- the sustainability of work after the period of grant support.

9.5 All assessment criteria will be based on meeting need within the community. There will be no pre-determined demographic allocation of funds. Some funding opportunities may be restricted to a particular delivery area, e.g. to a specific ward, but only where this is to address a specific identified need.

9.6 In the first instance, all applications will be reviewed by the VCS Grants Officer to ensure they are eligible for scoring. Applications may be screened out at this stage if they: ask for an amount of money that is outside the upper and lower limits set for this grant programme; do not meet the eligibility criteria as set out under "who can apply" in this policy; and/or the application does not meet the guidelines as set out in "what will or will not be funded" section of this policy.

9.7 Grant applications will then be assessed by a panel of Officers. This panel will consist of a minimum of three officers with the VCS Grants Officer providing a supporting role to the panel. This would also be the case for any schemes which the Council is facilitating on behalf of other organisations. A scoring matrix will generally be utilised to score applications. A copy of the matrix will be made available in the Guidance Notes for the Programme.

9.8 If two or more applications have the same score in the main VCS Grant Programme Grant process, firstly the application with the highest scores for scoring elements 5 (project plan), then element 7 (outcomes) and then finally element 4 (target audience) will be approved.

9.9 If two or more applications submitted are similar in nature or the Grants Panel consider them to be duplication, the Grants Panel will implement

the process detailed in 9.7 to determine which application should be awarded funding.

- 9.10 Unsuccessful applicants will be offered feedback (upon request) on the strengths and weaknesses of their application.
- 9.11 Complaints against the process used to award a grant will be dealt with using Redditch Borough Council's complaints procedure. The Head of Finance and Customer Services will handle the initial complaint. There is no right of appeal as to the decision itself.

10. ASSESSMENT TIMESCALES

- 10.1 There will be a minimum of three weeks from announcement of the grants opportunity to the closing date for applications, and a maximum of 12 weeks from the closing date for applications to applicants receiving notification of the outcome. The length of the bidding process will be proportionate to the type and value of the grant.
- 10.2 Approval timescales will be indicated year on year in conjunction with launch & deadline timescales for the current Grants programme. These will apply to projects commencing 1st April of the following year – allowing successful applicants to place the project into their delivery calendar and to apply for match funding grants and giving unsuccessful applicants feedback and enough time to secure funding from alternative channels.

11. MONITORING

- 11.1 All grant funded projects will be monitored with applicants obliged to submit details of how the project is progressing.
- 11.2 Monitoring requirements that will apply to a grant will be commensurate with the amount of money awarded and will be agreed by the Grants Team with the funded organisation before final confirmation of a grant award is made.
- 11.3 Receipts and other monitoring information may be requested by the Council as proof of spend within six months of the grant being received by the organisation.
- 11.4 Regular monitoring of the project will enable the Council to make sure that the outcomes and effectiveness of the funding as well as the funding expenditure are all consistent with the original funding proposal.
- 11.5 The Council reserve the right to withhold future payments and reject any further applications if they are dissatisfied with how grant funding has been used.