
Voluntary and Community Grants Scheme 2026/27 – 2028/29

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Begum
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Assistant Director	Judith Willis – Assistant Director of Community & Housing Services
Report Author	Tara Day Job Title: Community Services Manager Contact: tara.day@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk
Wards Affected	All
Ward Councillor(s) consulted	No
Relevant Council Priority	Economy, Regeneration & Prosperity Green, Clean & Safe Community & Housing
Key Decision / Non-Key Decision	
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report author in advance of the meeting.	

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive Committee RECOMMEND that

- 1) The funding for the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Grants Scheme be agreed for a further three-year period with a total grant pot of £175k per annum**

The Executive Committee is asked to RESOLVE that

- 2) subject to approval of recommendation 1 above, the VCS Grants Scheme be delivered in accordance with Option 2 which entails:**
 - a) Including up to £75k in the total grant funding to be available for a Financial Advice Grant**
 - b) A Grants Panel, comprising elected Members, to be established to consider and make recommendations to the Executive Committee in relation to higher grants (valued at £2k up to £10k)**
 - c) delegated authority being granted to the Assistant Director of Community and Housing Services, following consultation with the Officer Grants panel, to consider and agree decisions on lower grants (valued at £500 up to £2k);**

3) subject to agreement of proposal 2 above, five Members be appointed to serve on the Grants Panel, with appointments to be made in accordance with nominations received from the political group leaders;

4) the Voluntary and Community Sector Grants Policy be approved; and

5) subject to approval of proposal 2b above, agreement of the proposed terms of reference for the Grants Panel be approved.

6) Distributions are passported to bereavement charities following an application process and are funded by receipts from the Recycling of Metal Recovered from Cremation Scheme; these are managed separately from the Voluntary and Community Grants Scheme.

7) Authority be delegated to the Assistant Director of Community and Housing Services, following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Community Spaces and the Voluntary Sector, to passport the distribution of receipts from the Recycling of Metal Recovered from Cremation Scheme.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The current VCS Grants Policy and funding allocation was set up following consideration of a report at the Executive Committee and Council meetings in October 2022, when several options were put forward. The three-year Scheme provided an annual grants budget of £150k. Of this total £100K was available for the Main Grants Pot and applicants could apply for grants between £500 to £10,000. £10,000 of this is set aside for Grants under £2,000, which are all paid in one instalment. Grants over £2,000 are paid in two instalments once satisfactory monitoring information has been received. Grants are currently awarded by an officer panel, who assess the applications against a specific criterion that supports the Council's priorities.

2.2 The remaining £50k was agreed to continue to fund the Financial Advice and Problem-Solving Grant which had been granted to Bromsgrove and Redditch Citizens Advice (B&RCA). This grant was awarded for 3 years from 2023-2026. Performance data covering 2023/24 and 2024/25 are detailed in Appendix 1.

2.3 Appendix 2 shows the grants that have been paid out during the 3 years this policy has been in place. For 2025/26 a total of 46 applications were received with grants being paid to 17 organisations - a summary of these grants and projects are included.

3. OPERATIONAL ISSUES

- 3.1 The current policy has worked well; there were more applications this year from new organisations as well as the more familiar established ones. Having a smaller grants pot works well and the Council had 16 applications for grants for £2,000 or less. Advertising is communicated through a press release, the website and social media. Any previous applicants are notified via email that there is funding available.
- 3.2 Following consultation on 14th April 2025 with Bromsgrove and Redditch Network (BARN) on behalf of the VCS community, it is suggested that the terms of the policy continue to support both specific projects and the overall core costs for organisations. Feedback was also given that Terms of Reference would ensure the Members of the panel were clear on their roles and responsibilities and to declare any conflicts of interest. Maintaining a scoring matrix to enable decisions to be as fair as possible with a clear understanding final decisions are made by the Executive Committee. Panel Members should attend an information and training session with the Grant's Officer prior to serving on a meeting of the Panel.
- 3.10 Further support provided by the Council to the VCS is provided in terms of helping to identify which VCS groups receive funding through Recycling of Metal Recovered from the Crematorium Scheme. In previous years this has been arranged through the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (ICCM) with Local Authorities able to send (with permission of the families) metal parts recovered after cremation for recycling for money which is then gifted back to the Local Authority to be redistributed to the local VCS. A decision was made in 2024 by the then manager to recycle direct, which has generated additional funding. Bereavement charities are invited to make applications for funding and an officer panel considers these and make the awards. This year the Council was able to help three local charities receiving £12k each.

3.11 Options

Option 1 – Continue with the current scheme for a 3-year period with a total grant pot of £175k, which would include £75k being available for the Financial Advice and Problem-Solving Grant – with an Officer panel making the decisions on the grant applications and the Bereavement Charity funding via the Recycling of Metal Recovered from Cremation Scheme.

Option 2 – As detailed above but with a Member panel to award the higher grants and continue with an Officer panel for the lower grant

application decisions and the Bereavement Charity funding via the Recycling of Metal Recovered from Cremation Scheme.

Option 3 – As detailed above but with a Member panel for both the higher and lower grant applications.

Option 4 – As this is not a statutory service, it is determined that the Council no longer funds and operates a scheme.

- 3.12 If Options 2 and 3 are approved, terms of reference for the Grants Panel will need to be approved. The Council has previously operated a Member Grants Panel, and it is proposed that as previously it would comprise five Members and be Chaired by a Councillor who is not a member of the political group in administration a. The Panel would have no decision-making powers but rather will make recommendations about the allocation of the grants for a final decision by Executive Committee.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Should Members wish to continue to provide a VCS scheme it is proposed that the current grants scheme continue, with £90K being made available for the higher and £10k for the lower grants and £75k for the Financial Advice and Problem-Solving Grant. This total funding is an increase of £25,000 compared to the last financial year and can be funded from existing budget.

- 4.2 Other sources of funding are available as follows:

- a) the Redditch Councillor Grant Facility to enable ward councillors to help their local communities;
- b) the Redditch Borough Council Lottery - each pound spent on the lottery is split in the following way – 50% goes to Good Causes, 10% goes to the central fund (this is RBC and will cover lottery costs with the rest reallocated to the VCS through the grants programme), 20% goes towards prizes, 17% goes to the External Lottery Manager (ELM) with 3% VAT (which RBC can claim back);
- c) the Recycling of Metal Recovered from the Crematorium Scheme – the amount available for bereavement organisations will vary year on year dependent on how much metal is recycled – no additional budget is required. The Scheme is managed separately from the Voluntary and Community Grants Scheme as it is a separate funding stream.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The council needs to continue to ensure that it has a transparent and fair grants scheme and ensure that we comply with the 2015 Local Government Transparency Code.
- 5.2 Whilst grant funding and concessions to the VCS are not a statutory function, 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 incurred.
- 5.3 There is further power to make grants to voluntary organisations providing recreational facilities under Section 19 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976. Depending on the option within this report that is approved, a new VCS grants policy will be required.
- 5.4 Local Authorities must comply with the 2015 Local Government Transparency Code and Best Value Duties.
- 5.5 The rules in respect of appointing Members to Committees in accordance with the political balance apply to formal Committees that meet in public (except for the Executive Committee). These rules would not apply to the Grants Panel, which would operate as an Executive Advisory Panel, like the Member Support Steering Group, and which has no decision-making powers. However, it is considered good practice to ensure that all political groups are represented on Executive Advisory Panels.
- 5.6 In addition, in the previous incarnation of the Grants Panel the group was chaired by a Councillor who was not a member of the controlling political group. This arrangement helps to demonstrate the independence and neutrality of the panel when making recommendations in respect of grant funding applications.

6. OTHER - IMPLICATIONS

Local Government Reorganisation

- 6.1 It is anticipated the Scheme will operate until 2028/29 at which point Local Government Reorganisation may have taken place in Worcestershire and the Scheme would operate under a new authority, however it cannot be guaranteed the new authority will continue with the Scheme. Any new authority would need to determine any current and future funding for a Grants Scheme within the Borough. No other

District Council in the County operates a Grants Scheme to this level. Bromsgrove District Council operates a smaller Equalities Grants Scheme worth £10k per annum. The other Districts have Grant Schemes that are available such as rural communities funding, but this is external.

- 6.2 Worcestershire County Council Public Health fund a variety of Voluntary Sector and Community Schemes.
- 6.3 There is a Strengthening Worcestershire fund that is match funded by Worcestershire County Council. This is delivered by the Community Foundation on their behalf, as they must generate match funding to give out alongside the County Council's contribution to grow their investment pot.

Relevant Council Priority

- 6.2 The Grants to Voluntary Bodies Scheme supports work across the third sector that support the Council's vision "A Council which delivers quality services for our communities, residents and businesses" and the Council priorities:
- Economy, Regeneration & Prosperity
 - Green, Clean & Safe
 - Community & Housing

Climate Change Implications

- 6.3 The green thread runs through the Council Plan. It is proposed that, should the scheme continue for 2026/27 and 2028/29, there will continue to be a question on the application form, although not included in the scoring, which would ensure applicants were giving consideration to the impact of climate change.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 6.4 The VCS support many members of the community and add social value. Alongside this, the sector support community relations and cohesion. In submitting funding applications organisations are asked 'who is your target audience and how do you ensure that your proposed project/service will reach them and will be open and accessible to all?' The panel will be required to score this element of the application. Organisations are also asked, where appropriate, to confirm they have an Equal Opportunity and Diversity Policy in place.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 Given the number of organisations applying for this funding, the Council are unable to fund the breadth and diversity of projects versus the number of organisations that apply. However, organisations such as BARN offer support to more inexperienced groups in finding and applying for other sources of funding. There will also be some funding available via the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) for 2025/26 to support the Voluntary Sector and Community Groups with training.

8. APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS

Executive Committee Voluntary & Community Sector Grants Scheme – October 2022.

Appendix 1 – Citizens Advice Performance Data

Appendix 2 – VCS Grants allocations 2023- 2025

Appendix 3 – Grants Policy and Terms of Reference

**Executive
2025**

2nd September

9. REPORT SIGN OFF

Department	Name and Job Title	Date
Portfolio Holder	Councillor Begum	1st August 2025
Lead Director / Assistant Director	Judith Willis Assistant Director Community and Housing Services	8 th August 2025
Financial Services	Deb Goodall Assistant Director Finance and Customer Service	11 th August 2025
Legal Services	Nicola Cummings Principal Solicitor Legal, Equalities and Governance	23 rd July 2025
Policy Team (if equalities implications apply)	Rebecca Green Policy Manager	11 th August 2025
Climate Change Team (if climate change implications apply)	Not applicable	