



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 2020/21¹.

In Kent there are 3,147 active voluntary organisations with 9,004 employees and 11,304 volunteers².

Locally, the Ashford Volunteer Centre (AVC) has 262 voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) groups registered with 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 (2019)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 corporate plan and support its communities to thrive. This was demonstrated by the VCS in its rapid response to the Covid 19 pandemic, and the subsequent cost of living crisis. From food banks and warm spaces, help with shopping and befriending services, mental health and

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, January 2023

³ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/835686/Value_of_Charity_-_Oct_19_-_published.pdf

wellbeing support to debt and financial advice, the VCS is playing a vital role in keeping Ashford residents healthy and safe.

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
 - Event Reset Grants
 - Community Amenities Grants
- Crisis/Emergency Grants and Loans
- In-kind Grants (Foregone Income)

3. Corporate Priorities

The Corporate Plan 2022 – 2024 was developed in consultation with a range of local stakeholders to agree the priorities the council should focus on. A long term ambition and three themes, each with a set of objectives, were the outcome of this work.

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 corporate objectives as listed below.

Theme	Objectives
Green Pioneer	GP1: Reduce reliance on fossil fuels in line with our carbon neutral targets
	GP2: Increase biodiversity and encourage sustainable lifestyles
	GP3: Reduce the amount of waste produced from homes and business
Caring Ashford	CA1: Homes and neighbourhoods in the borough meet the needs of local people of all ages, incomes and abilities to live sustainably and safely
	CA2: Local people have access to life-long learning to ensure they have knowledge and skills to take up local employment
	CA3: Reduce health inequalities and improve the wellbeing of local people
	CA4: Communities celebrate their heritage and the diversity of their population to build a more connected community and strengthen social Responsibility

Targeted Growth	TG1: Increase productivity and job opportunities and the establishment of sustainable, knowledge based and creative industries in the borough
	TG2: Enable the improvement of digital infrastructure to support the growing needs of business, voluntary sector and residents
	TG3: Strengthen local supply chains and increase the resilience of the local economy
	TG4: Support growth in the visitor economy
	TG5: Stimulate vibrant, accessible and sustainable Town Centres for residents, visitors and business

4. Types of Grant

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

Revenue Grants		Community Grants Fund			Crisis/Emergency Grants and Loans	In- Kind Grants (forgone income)
Strategic / Service Grants	Member Grants	Capital Grants*	Event Reset Grants	Community Amenities Grants		
For operational (running) and maintenance costs or delivery of a specific service. Up to 3 years agreement.	Each Ward Member has an allocation of funding (agreed annually) to award to local organisations / projects within their own ward that benefits residents in that ward or adjacent ward. 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.	Revenue funding to help deliver community events and festivals. Up to £1,000.	One-off grant for projects up to £10,000 to improve community spaces across the borough. Within the UKSPF Ashford Urban Area, this supports internal and external works. In the REPF Rural Area this supports works to external areas. Projects should not have been funded by ABC or Government already.	Short term (up to 1 year) to fill funding 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	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

*Applicants can only apply for a capital grant once every three years unless there are exceptional circumstances.

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
- 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

- Reduces greenhouse gas emissions and/or increases biodiversity
- Encourages more active and healthier people and communities
- Delivers improved facilities for the local community
- Creates opportunities to learn about or participate in local arts, heritage and culture
- Provides advice/mentoring for vulnerable people
- Creates opportunities for multicultural and/or intergenerational activities

Section B

- Increases knowledge and skills
- Reduces loneliness and isolation
- Improves community engagement
- Increases understanding of other cultures and faiths
- Increases personal wellbeing, independence and resilience
- 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, the HMG and Levelling Up logos. 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 by end of July prior to the next financial year to enable funding requests to be accommodated in budget setting timeframes.

Applications will be assessed by the relevant Assistant Director.

Funding awards will be decided as follows:

Applications for funding of up to £25,000 for 1 year by the Assistant Director

Applications for funding between, £25,000 and £50,000 or for more than 1 year by Director

Applications above £50,000 by the Senior Management Team

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.

In exceptional circumstances funding may need to be approved by the Cabinet. In this instance the applicant will be informed of the date the report will be presented to Cabinet.

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 Councillor's own ward or adjacent ward, for example, a local primary school activity or local sports club used by them in a neighbouring ward.

National Charities cannot be funded.

Organisations that have already received a grant in the same year from an alternative council fund (excluding crisis/emergency grants) for a service or project may not apply for a ward member grant for the same service or project.

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 internet.

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.

Event Reset Grants

The completed application can be submitted at any time throughout the year.

An in principle decision will be notified to the applicant within 4 weeks of receiving a completed application.

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 In-Kind Funding (foregone income)

For use of council owned property, at a reduce rent, 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.

For occasional use of meeting rooms at reduced or no cost, applicants must gain the agreement of the Property Building Services Manager.

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 Overview and Scrutiny Committee will receive an annual report on funding to the Voluntary and Community Sector in July each year. Any issues will be highlighted in the report for consideration and any recommendations for change to be made to Cabinet.

This policy will be reviewed every 3 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>

13. Communities Amenities Grants Eligibility Maps

Rural England Prosperity Fund Boundaries

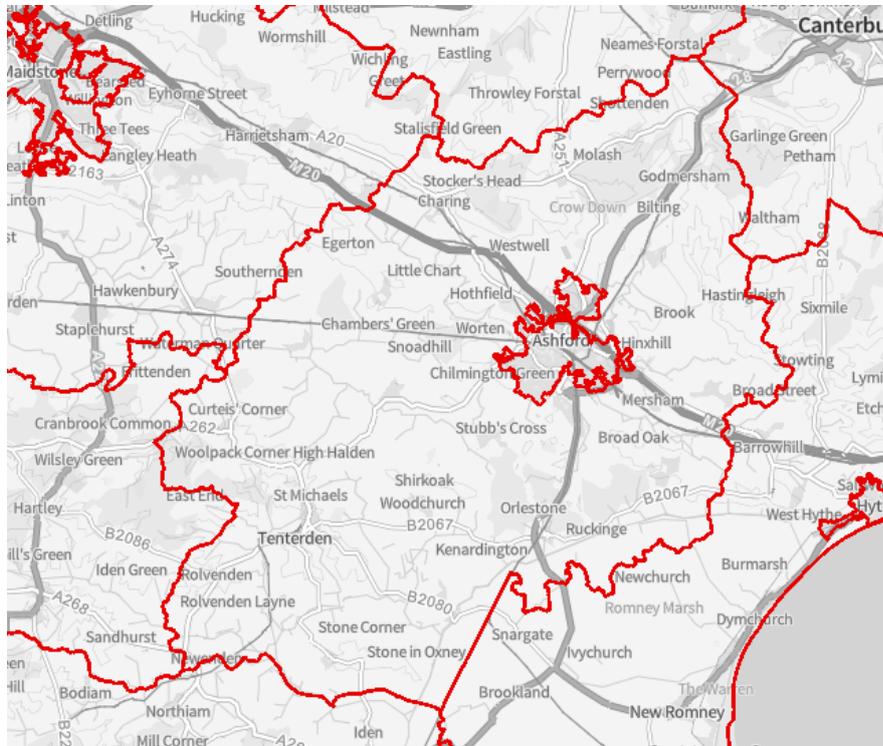


Figure 1. Defra, Rural England Prosperity Fund boundaries, magic.defra.gov.uk, June 2023

Ashford Urban Area

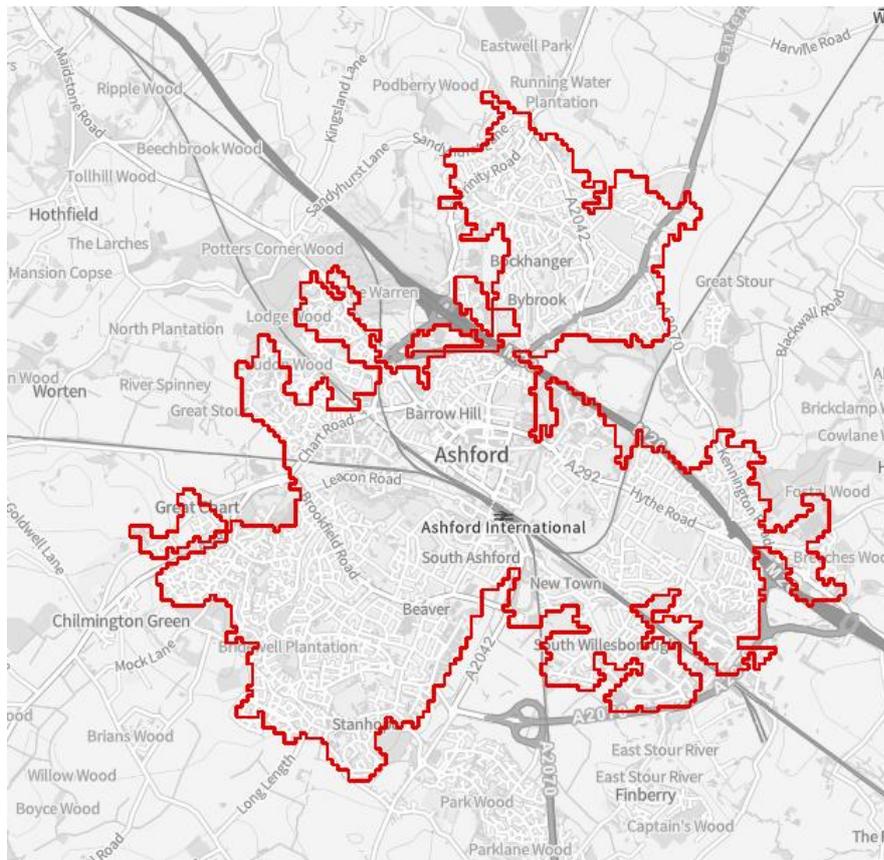


Figure 2. Defra, 'Ashford Urban Area' - applications within this red line will be eligible for UKSPF grants, magic.defra.gov.uk, June 2023