

Community Wellbeing and Housing

16 January 2024



Title	Annual Grant Awards 2024/2025
Purpose of the report	To make a decision and a recommendation to Council
Report Author	<i>Lisa Stonehouse Community Development Manager</i>
Ward(s) Affected	All Wards
Exempt	Appendix A- Overview of Grant Requests and Recommendations 2024/25 Appendix B- Details of Spelthorne Buildings in Community Use.
Exemption Reason	Report- <i>Not Applicable</i> Appendix A and Appendix B- Appendix A and B both contain exempt information within the meaning of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 and by the Local Government (Access to information) (Variation) Order 2006 Paragraph 3 – Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) and in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.
Corporate Priority	Community
Recommendations	Committee is asked to: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. To note the recommendations of the Grants Panel regarding the proposed recipients of the 2024/2025 community grants.2. Make a decision and recommendation to Council3. Note the other support that Spelthorne Borough Council provides to the voluntary/charity sector.4. Any underspend from the Council Grants and Better Neighbourhood Grants budget will be carried forward to the next financial year.5. Note the potential changes to the Discretionary Rate Relief Policy. Please see 4.6.
Reason for	Agreement to award grants for 2024/2025 is sought to:

Recommendation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enable several existing charities and voluntary organisations to continue to provide support, assistance, and other essential services for Borough residents. • enable new organisations to begin to provide services that are required in the Borough.
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1. Summary of the report

What is the situation	Why we want to do something
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council has a community grants budget. Grants are allocated annually to charities and voluntary groups. Due to the budget constraints the Council is facing the Council needs to make choices within the budget available and prioritise which voluntary groups and charities it is able to support. The cross-party Councillor Grant Panel have reviewed the applications and have made a recommendation to Committee regarding the agencies that should receive grants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charities and voluntary groups have a crucial role within the borough. They provide services to improve every aspect of resident's lives, especially in the current cost of living crisis. Our community grants are essential to enable these groups to operate.
This is what we want to do about it	These are the next steps
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A decision from Committee regarding the agencies that should receive a grant is required. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once the Committee has made the decision. A recommendation will be made to Council. The final awards will be subject to the Council budget

	setting meeting on 22 February 2024.
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- 1.1 This report outlines the recommendations of the Grants Panel and seeks a decision from the Committee for the allocation of the proposed grant awards to charities and community groups/organisations who provide services for Spelthorne residents.
- 1.2 Subject to confirmation by Council at the budget setting meeting in February, the baseline grant funding budget for 2024/2025 is **£226,700**.
- 1.3 As in previous years, it is proposed that the underspend from the Council grant budget at the end of the financial year 2023/24 is carried forward to the grant budget in 2024/25. A carry forward of £26,000 has been applied, making a provisional budget of **£252,700**. **These figures could be subject to change following the budget meeting in February.**
- 1.4 The cross-party Grants Panel met in December 2023 and January 2024 to assess the applications. This report contains the list of organisations proposed by the panel to receive grant funding for 2024/2025. **Appendix A** sets out an overview of the funding requests and the Grant Panel recommendations. The Grants Panel met on the 6 and 13 December 2023 and 5 January 2024.
- 1.5 Recommendations allocating **£252,015** in grant funding have been proposed and, if approved by Community Wellbeing and Housing Committee (CWHC) and subject to the Council budget setting meeting in February, will be paid in April 2024. It is proposed that any surplus budget will be ring-fenced for projects which arise later in the financial year.
- 1.6 The report also details various benefits awarded to voluntary organisations such as free use of council facilities etc. A report regarding Discretionary Business Rate Relief is due to go to Policy and Resources Committee in the next few months. This may have a financial impact on some charities.
- 2. Key issues**
- 2.1 Applications for Council Grants are welcomed on an annual cycle. This year grant applications were open from 2-31 October 2023. Applications are considered for awards granted for the subsequent financial year. This report relates to applications for 2024/2025.
- 2.2 Demand for funding far outstrips the available budget. 40 applications were received, with funding requests totalling £470,813 exceeding the baseline budget by £218,113.
- 2.3 Of the 40 organisations that submitted applications the Grants Panel recommended either partial or full funding being awarded to 25.
- 2.4 To ensure the Panel had sufficient information to make an informed decision, applicants were asked to provide evidence of the need that their service fulfils in Spelthorne. They were also asked to explain why their organisation was best placed to meet that need, and to outline how the grant would be used. Additionally, applicants were asked about their approach to important issues such as safeguarding children and adults at risk.

- 2.5 The application period in October was publicised widely using social media and the Council website. Voluntary Services North Surrey also promoted it via their communication channels. In addition, the timeline was shared with previous applicants to ensure maximum publicity.
- 2.6 Applications were received from charities and a variety of voluntary organisations and community groups. Many of the groups provide crucial services to the community and enhance wellbeing among residents.
- 2.7 Regular monitoring of the top 5 funded organisations (listed in 3.2) continues to measure performance against their Service Level Agreement (SLA) or contract. Feedback from users of the service was also sought for these organisations to ensure that the service they were providing was effective and funding was being used as intended.

3. Options analysis and proposal

- 3.1 The Grants Panel met in December 2023 and January 2024 to consider the applications and to allocate the proposed awards. Information on the applications, financial checks and background on the organisations was circulated in advance to allow panel members time to consider all options. These were discussed fully during the panel meetings.
- 3.2 Following the Grants Panel meeting, the proposed grant support for the top 5 funded organisations was agreed and is listed below. These organisations receive ongoing support due to crucial services they provide in the community.
- 3.3 Citizens Advice Runnymede & Spelthorne (CARS) receive an additional £40,000 funding from Housing Options, funded through Homelessness Prevention grant. This is to reflect the demand for specialist assistance in the areas of housing, debt and welfare support advice. In addition, a further £46,000 has been allocated from the Housing budget to fund a case worker specifically to cover Spelthorne. This is a contractual arrangement. Without the financial support, Citizens Advice Runnymede & Spelthorne would not be able to deliver their services. The demand for their service continues to increase due to the cost-of-living crisis.
- 3.4 Subsequent consideration was given by the Grants Panel to the remaining 35 applications. If an application was unsuccessful the applicants will be directed to other sources of grant funding. The list of the Grant Panel's recommendations is itemised in the attached **Appendix A – Overview of Grant Requests and Recommendations 2024/25**.

4. Financial management comments

- 4.1 The community grants provisional baseline budget for the 2024/25 is proposed as £226,700. This includes a 5% inflationary uplift on 23/24. This 5% increase and budget is subject to confirmation at the February Council meeting.
- 4.2 As in previous years it is proposed that the underspend from 2023/24 will be transferred into the Council grant budget for 2024/25. If approved, a carry forward of £26,000 from 2023/24 will be added giving a final total of **£252,700**. Further funds may also be available if Councillors have not awarded the

Better Neighbourhood Grants within their wards by the end of the financial year 2023/24

- 4.3 The Grants Panel recommended that a total of **£252,015** in grants should be awarded for 2024-25.
- 4.4 The surplus of £685.00 will be ring fenced for requests arising during the year subject to consideration by the Grants Panel and approval by Committee.
- 4.5 **Appendix B** details 'support in kind' provided by Spelthorne BC to voluntary organisations and charities located in the Borough such as reduced rental costs etc.
- 4.6 There are potential changes to the SBC Discretionary Rate Relief Policy which may have an impact on several voluntary organisations/charities. A report will be going to Policy and Resources Committee in the next few months.

5. Risk management comments

- 5.1 Identified risks include:
 - (a) Council may decide in February that the grant budget will be reduced. This would result in approving a reduced number of grants and could result in community services being cut. This will have a huge impact on the community and could damage the reputation of the Council.
 - (b) The grant support may not be effectively utilised for the intended purpose i.e. to address those community needs set out at application stage.
- 5.2 It is difficult to mitigate for insufficient budget, but monitoring arrangements referred to in 2.7 will be undertaken to ensure that any potential problems are identified as soon as possible.

6. Procurement comments

- 6.1 N/A

7. Legal comments

- 7.1 Further to 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 to all or some of its residents.
- 7.2 Several of the organisations have Service Level Agreements. They may require updating following the grant awards.

8. Other considerations

- 8.1 Spelthorne Borough Council support the voluntary sector to address the rising unmet need in the community. Financial support for this sector is essential to complement Council services.
- 8.2 The voluntary sector offers services to a diverse range of communities. It often delivers outcomes that the public sector find hard to deliver on its own, such as one-to-one support, dedication to a specific group or cause, expert advice, and other non-statutory services.
- 8.3 Other public bodies such as Surrey County Council and the North-West Surrey Alliance also see the voluntary sector as important providers and, in some cases, fund them separately.

9. Equality and Diversity

- 9.1 Some providers supported by grant funding represent or advocate for minority groups, user groups, and faith communities. Care was taken by the panel when reviewing applications to ensure a fair mix of organisations supporting all aspects of our communities benefited.
- 9.2 To encourage applications from all sectors of the community, a word version of the form was made available on the Council's website and hard copies were available upon request. No hard copies were requested this year. Voluntary Support North Surrey were able to assist a visually impaired applicant to apply.

10. Sustainability/Climate Change Implications

- 10.1 The Grant Panel's aim is to support a cross section of voluntary organisations. This includes encouraging applications from organisations committed to sustainable practices. Successful applicants will be asked to engage with the councils Climate Change & Sustainability specialist to ensure that they receive information and advice about energy conservation projects and funding.

11. Timetable for implementation

- 11.1 Following agreement by Committee, and subject to final confirmation of the budget by the Council on 22 February 2024, individually tailored letters will be sent to applicants advising them of the outcome of their applications. This will be completed by early March. Personalised signposting to other avenues of fundraising will also be included in the correspondence.
- 11.2 All qualifying grants will be paid in April 2023

12. Contact

- 12.1 The contact for queries relating to this report is Lisa Stonehouse
L.stonehouse@spelthorne.gov.uk

Background papers: There are none.

Appendices:

**Appendix A - Overview of Grant Requests and Recommendations 2024/25.
(Confidential)**

Appendix B – Details of Spelthorne Buildings in Community Use (Confidential)