

Community Wellbeing & Housing Committee

7 January 2025



Title	<i>Annual Grant Awards 2025/2026</i>
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	<i>Appendix A</i>
Exemption Reason	Appendix A contains 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	<p>Committee is asked to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consider the recommendations of the Grants Panel regarding the proposed recipients of the 2025/2026 community grants, and make a recommendation to Council. 2. Consider the recommendations of the Grants Panel regarding indicative grant funding for the 5 core funded organisations for 2026/2027. 3. Note the other support that Spelthorne Borough Council provides to the voluntary/charity sector. 4. Note the proposal that 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.
Reason for Recommendation	Agreement to award grants for 2025/2026 is sought to:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enable several 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 can support. The cross-party Councillor Grants 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. Some are fulfilling roles that were previously provided by statutory services. 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 is required to determine which agencies should receive a grant. 	<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 27 February 2025

- 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.

Subject to confirmation by Council at the budget setting meeting in February, the baseline grant funding budget for 2025/2026 is **£231,200**.

- 1.2 As in previous years, it is proposed that the underspend from the Council grant budget at the end of the financial year 2024/25 is carried forward to the grant budget in 2025/26. A carry forward of £1585.00 has been applied, making a provisional budget of **£232,785**. **These figures could be subject to change following the budget meeting in February.** 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 2024/25.

- 1.3 The cross-party Grants Panel met in November and December 2024 to assess the applications. Appendix A provides a list of the funding requests from organisations for the financial year 2025/2026 and the Grants Panel recommendations.
- 1.4 Recommendations allocating £232,715 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 2025. It is proposed that any surplus budget will be ring-fenced for projects which arise later in the financial year.
- 1.5 As agreed by Council on 18 July 2024, the five core funded organisations (Voluntary Support North Surrey, Citizens Advice Runnymede and Spelthorne, Homestart, Age UK and Shopmobility) were also given an indication of proposed funding for the financial year 2026/2027.
- 1.6 Appendix B details the voluntary organisations that have free use/low-cost use of Council owned buildings. A report regarding Discretionary Business Rate Relief is due to go to Corporate Policy and Resources Committee in February 2025. This may have a financial impact on some charities as they may have to pay higher business rates.

2. Key issues

- 2.1 Applications for Council Grants are welcomed on an annual cycle. This year grant applications were open from 3-30 September 2024. Applications are considered for awards granted for the subsequent financial year. This report relates to applications for 2025/2026.
- 2.2 Demand for funding far outstrips the available budget. 37 applications were received, with funding requests totalling £478,281 exceeding the budget by £245,496
- 2.3 Of the 37 organisations that submitted applications the Grants Panel recommended either partial or full funding being awarded to 19.
- 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 September was publicised widely using social media, the Council website and via Borough Councillors. It was also communicated via Voluntary Support North Surrey and Spelthorne Partnership Assembly attendees. There was a feature on grants in the Borough Bulletin earlier this year. 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 core funded organisations (listed in 3.2) continues to measure performance. Feedback from users of their services

was also sought to ensure that the service they were providing was effective and funding was being used as intended. These organisations receive ongoing support due to crucial services they provide in the community.

- 2.8 The Grants Panel met on 6 and 7 November 2024 and 5 and 18 December 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. Options analysis and proposal

- 3.1 Option 1 is to approve the recommendations of the Grants Panel. The benefit of this is that the recommendations have been made by the Panel based on extensive discussion and further research.
- 3.2 Option 2 is to propose amendments to the recommendations of the Grants Panel.
- 3.3 Option 3 is not to approve the recommendations of the Grant Panel. The disadvantage of this is that there could be potential delays to the grants being awarded.

4. Financial management comments

- 4.1 The community grants provisional budget for the 2025/26 is proposed as £232,785. This includes a 2% inflationary uplift on 24/25 and a carry forward of £1585.00 from 2024/2025. 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 2024/25. This budget is subject to confirmation at the February Council meeting.
- 4.2 Citizens Advice Runnymede & Spelthorne (CARS) also receive an additional £40,000 funding from Housing Options, funded through a 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.
- 4.3 Rentstart will also receive £55,000 funding in 2025/2026 from Housing Options, funded through the Homelessness Prevention Grant. This is to employ the staff to provide the service. Rentstart is very important to the Housing Needs Team as it is the only consistently reliable way of assisting clients to move into the private rented sector.

5. Risk management comments

- 5.1 Identified risks include:
- (a) Council may decide in February 2025 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.

6. Procurement comments

- 6.1 Although there are no procurement issues. The Council will require up to date service level agreements in relation to each grant given.

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.

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 cannot deliver, 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 and hard copies were available upon request. No hard copies were requested this year. Everyone submitted an e form.

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 are asked to engage with the councils Climate Change & Sustainability specialist where appropriate 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 27 February 2025, personalised letters will be sent to applicants advising them of the outcome of their applications. This will be completed by early March 2025. Signposting to other avenues of fundraising will also be included in the correspondence where appropriate.
- 11.2 All qualifying grants will be paid in April 2025.

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 (Exempt) –Overview of Grant Requests and Recommendations
2025/26.**

Appendix B - Details of Spelthorne Buildings in Community Use.