



Committee
Thriving People

Date
16 July 2026

Subject: Community Grants Programme 2026-2028

Report by:

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Contact Officer:

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Executive Summary:

This report seeks approval to establish a Community Grants Programme for 2026/27 and 2027/28, with a budget allocation of up to £4 million from Council reserves.

The programme will build on the Council's existing grant activity and provide four funding routes: the Councillor Initiative Fund, Community Action Fund, Community Facilities Fund and Community Environment Fund.

A formal review will take place when £2 million has been awarded, allowing Members to consider impact, demand and affordability before further delivery is confirmed.

The report provides further details of the structure of the programme including award values, application process and eligibility criteria.

Appendices to Report

- Not applicable

RECOMMENDATION(S):

- (a) That committee approve the delivery of a Community Grants Programme as detailed within this report.**

- (b) That members recommend to Thriving Council committee to approve the allocation of up to £4,000,000 from the Reprioritisation (Investment for Growth) Reserve to deliver the Community Grants Programme across 2026/27 and 2027/28.**
- (c) That members recommend to Thriving Council committee to delegate authority to approve spend of the £4,000,000 to Thriving People Committee, with a formal review when £2,000,000 has been awarded or during 2027/28 Q1, whichever is sooner.**
- (d) That members approve the continuation of the Councillor Initiative Fund in 2027/28. £36,000 funding from the Community Grant Scheme Reserve to be approved under delegation by the Chief Finance Officer (S151).**
- (e) That committee approve the delivery of the Community Environment Fund. £50,000 funding from the Environment & Climate Change reserve to be approved under delegation by the Chief Finance Officer (S151).**
- (f) That members recommend to Thriving Council committee to approve the allocation of up to £86,400 from the Community Grant Scheme Reserve for staff costs to deliver the Community Grants Programme across 2026/27 and 2027/28.**

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Since June 2023, the Council has operated a Community Grants Programme made up of various funds. The grant funds operated by the Council have become well established with communities, parish and town councils, voluntary and community organisations and other eligible applicants across the district.
- 1.2 Between June 2023 and February 2026, the programme awarded 130 grants with a combined value of £1,355,442. Further awards from the previous programme are still being progressed, so these figures will continue to increase.
- 1.3 The programme has supported a broad range of activity, including community buildings, local activities, feasibility work, cultural activity, sport and physical activity, environmental projects and projects supporting health and wellbeing. It has also provided an established brand and delivery route which communities now recognise and understand.
- 1.4 The continued delivery of a community grants programme will directly support community projects and activity that will contribute towards the Council's Corporate Plan objectives.
- 1.5 The Council's Community Grants Programme has already demonstrated strong demand and clear community value. Continuing to enhance the programme for 2026 to 2028 will enable the Council to support more practical, community-led projects across West Lindsey, maintain momentum from the previous grant funding work and provide a clear route to invest in community projects.

2. Community Grants Programme 2026-2028

- 2.1 The Community Grants Programme will start in the 2026/27 financial year and run until the end of 2027/28, subject to available budget.
- 2.3 Recognising that we have an established community grants programme brand with distinct funds for revenue or capital projects, the programme will be delivered through four funds.
- 2.4 Each of the four funds is designed to meet different community and project needs:

Fund	Purpose	Award Values
Councillor Initiative Fund	Small grants for community activities and projects supported through Ward Councillor allocations.	Up to £1,000 per project.
Community Action Fund	Revenue grants for community activities and projects aligned to Corporate Plan objectives.	£1,000 to £20,000 with exceptional strategically important projects considered up to £50,000.
Community Facilities Fund	Capital grants for community facilities and assets which provide wider community benefit.	£1,000 to £75,000 with exceptional strategically important projects considered up to £100,000.
Community Environment Fund	Small grants for community environment, biodiversity, tree planting, green space and carbon reduction projects.	Small awards of £200 to £1,000 Larger awards of £1,000 to £5,000.

2.5 The following graphic helps to visualise the four funds making up the community grants programme:



2.6 To support organisations seeking grant funding, a community funding front-door approach is taken. Organisations are able to complete a short expression of interest form or contact officers directly with their funding request and are then directed to the most appropriate fund.

2.7 During the application process, officers continue to work closely with organisations offering advice and support.

3. Fund Details

3.1 Councillor Initiative Fund

The Councillor Initiative Fund is currently operating and has a budget to run until the end of the 2026/27 financial year. This report proposes continuing this fund until the end of the 2027/28 financial year which would align to the delivery timeline of the entire community grants programme.

- 3.2 The existing application process and eligibility criteria would be maintained, with an additional £1,000 allocation for each Councillor for 2027/28, creating a total additional allocation of £36,000.

3.3 Community Action Fund

The Community Action Fund will provide revenue grants for community activities and projects. Existing eligibility criteria will be maintained, with applications expected to align to relevant Corporate Plan objectives such as cultural activity, environmental impact, health and wellbeing, neighbourhood planning, sport and physical activity, skills and support for vulnerable residents.

- 3.4 The minimum grant value will be £1,000 and the maximum grant value will be £20,000, with no match funding requirement. Applications above the maximum may be considered by exception for strategically important projects up to £50,000.

3.5 Community Facilities Fund

The Community Facilities Fund will provide capital grants for community facilities and assets. This can include community buildings, village halls, play areas, sports facilities, green spaces, public realm, churches and schools.

- 3.6 The minimum grant value will be £1,000 and the maximum grant value will be £75,000, with no match funding requirement. Applications above the maximum may be considered by exception for strategically important projects up to £100,000.

3.7 Community Environment Fund

The Community Environment Fund will provide small grants for community environment and carbon reduction projects. Along with supporting Corporate Plan objectives, this fund will specifically support the aims of the Council's Environment and Sustainability Strategy 2024. The fund will support activity such as energy efficiency, carbon reduction, biodiversity and nature recovery, tree planting, green spaces and climate engagement.

- 3.8 The fund will deliver small and larger grant awards. It is anticipated most awards will be small grant awards. Small awards will be between £200 and £1,000. Larger awards will be between £1,000 and £5,000. There will be no match funding requirement.

4. Eligibility Criteria

4.1 The Council has well established eligibility criteria for community grant funds to ensure effective and safe delivery of grant funding to community projects. The following are key eligibility criteria used for Council community grant funds.

4.2 What community grants cannot be used for:

- Anything illegal
- Support to lobbying or campaign groups
- Anything that will bring the Council into disrepute
- Anything party political, including supporting political organisations
- Anything contrary to the Council's financial regulations or Council policies
- Anything that an organisation or local authority has a statutory obligation to deliver
- Projects based/operating outside of West Lindsey unless they provide significant benefit to communities within West Lindsey
- Anything that has already been spent or committed before receiving a grant (known as retrospective funding)

4.3 Eligible organisations

The following organisations can apply to funds within the community grants programme:

- Business*
- Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)
- Community Interest Company (CIC)
- Constituted Community Group
- Faith Organisation*
- Parish Council
- Parish Meeting
- Public Sector Organisation
- School or Academy*
- Social Enterprise
- Town Council

* Projects delivered by these organisations must be for wider community access and benefit and not to support normal school/business activity or to promote faith or religion.

4.4 Organisation requirements

To be eligible for funding, organisations must have the following:

- Constitution or similar governing document (excluding Parish/Town Councils)
- Bank account in the same name as the organisation
- Relevant policies/safeguards if the project involves children, young people or vulnerable adults

During the application process we also request additional supporting information such as quotes, data, letters of support, confirmation of other funding and photo/video.

4.5 Grant Funding Agreement

Grant funding agreements are used with all community grant funds. Grant funding agreements provide standard terms and conditions along with any specific conditions for individual grant awards.

5. Grant Award Process

5.1 The community grants programme will use established review practice and introduce additional Ward Member input as part of the assessment process.

5.2 The following review process will be used for the Community Action Fund, Community Facilities Fund and Community Environment Fund:

1. Eligibility Check

Officers will check eligibility of the organisation and project against the relevant fund criteria. Ward Member(s) will be notified of new applications.

2. Application Scoring

Officers will score applications against project criteria and make a recommendation.

3. Ward Member Review

Application form, completed scoring and officer recommendation will be shared with Ward Member(s) for comments and input, except where there is a conflict of interest.

4. Panel Review

The Community Grants Panel (operating as a Member Working Group supported by officers) will make a final decision on grant awards, considering officer recommendations and Ward Member input.

5.3 Community Grant Panel meetings will take place at a frequency to meet the demands of the programme. This can be monthly meetings to ensure applications are reviewed promptly and to support quick delivery of community projects.

5.4 The application scoring phase will include consideration of key areas including:

- Management & Deliverability
- Environment Impact
- Project Accessibility
- Community Benefit
- Consultation and Evidence of Need
- Projects Costs and Funding
- Sustainability
- Plans, Priorities and Strategies

5.5 The existing award decision-making process for the Councillor Initiative Fund will continue to be used.

6. Geographic Scope

6.1 As part of establishing the programme, other funding programmes and future council investment have been considered. The main focus of the Community Action Fund and Community Facilities Fund will be to support projects delivered in areas outside of Gainsborough, recognising the separate Pride in Place Programme for Gainsborough and other future Council investment.

6.2 There may be projects that deliver some activity within Gainsborough where wider resident access and district benefit can be demonstrated. For example, a community group may use a venue in Gainsborough but be able to demonstrate impact for residents from other locations.

6.3 The Community Environment Fund will be available across the whole of West Lindsey recognising its role in supporting the Environment and Sustainability Strategy district wide.

7. Finance

7.1 To deliver the Community Grants Programme, this report proposes allocation of budget from Council reserves. This section of the report details the specific allocations for approval per fund.

7.2 Councillor Initiative Fund

To continue delivery of this fund to the end of 2027/28, an allocation of £36,000 from the Community Grant Scheme Reserves is proposed.

7.3 Community Action Fund and Community Facilities Fund

The proposed budget allocation for these funds will be delivered in two stages:

Stage	Proposal
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Stage 1 – Initial Delivery	Allocation of up to £4 million from Council reserves
Stage 2 – On-going Delivery	Review when £2 million has been awarded

At the point of awarding £2 million from these funds or by 2027/28 Q1, a review of impact, external factors and the Council's financial position will be completed. The review will inform the decision to continue, pause or end delivery of these funds.

7.4 **Community Environment Fund**

To deliver this fund, an allocation of £50,000 from the Environment and Climate Change Reserve is proposed.

7.5 The following summarises the proposed budget allocations:

Fund	Source	Amount
Councillor Initiative Fund	Community Grant Scheme Reserve	£36,000
Community Action Fund and Community Facilities Fund	Reprioritisation (Investment for Growth) Reserve	£4,000,000
Community Environment Fund	Environment & Climate Change Reserve	£50,000
Resources	Community Grant Scheme Reserve	£86,400
TOTAL		£4,172,400

8. **Resources**

8.1 The scale of the proposed community grants programme will require additional delivery capacity within the Council's Localities and Community Service. To successfully deliver the programme officers will need to provide active promotion, applicant support, eligible assessment, project scoring, panel administration, payment processing, monitoring, evaluation and impact reporting.

8.2 It is proposed that the Community Grant Scheme Reserve is used to support staff resourcing within Localities and Community Services. Up to £86,400 will be allocated to support staff resource costs. This represents an 18 month fixed-term post, at the top of band 9.

8.3 This approach will help ensure the programme has sufficient officer capacity and resilience to make it accessible to applicants, managed effectively and delivered within timescales.

9. **Communication and Marketing**

- 9.1 A communications and marketing plan will be developed to support the launch and delivery of the community grants programme. The primary aim will be to ensure eligible organisations are aware of the funding available, understand the eligibility criteria and have sufficient information to submit good quality applications.
- 9.2 Promotion will include using channels such as the Council' website, social media, parish/town council newsletter, resident newsletter and voluntary & community sector forums. Officers will attend external events as appropriate to further promote the programme.
- 9.3 Launch activity will include online or in-person briefing sessions where potential applicants can attend to learn about the programme criteria, application process and ask project specific questions.
- 9.4 On-going communication will be used during delivery of the programme to share successfully projects, demonstrate community impact and encourage geographic reach.

10. Timescale and Launch

- 10.1 Subject to committee approval, the community grants programme will launch in August 2026. This will include publication of fund criteria, application process and initial communications.
- 10.2 The final closing date for applications will be in November 2027, subject to remaining budget. The programme may close earlier if all funds are awarded.

11. Alternative Options

	Option	Rational for not recommending
1	Do not deliver a community grants programme.	Without a continuation of a wider community grants programme, the council will not be able to support community project delivery which can

		contribute towards Corporate Plan objectives. The benefits and community impact from community grant funding would not be realised. Community projects in West Lindsey may not be able to proceed without funding support from the Council. Alternative sources of funding can be limited.
2	Deliver the Community Grants Programme with different funds compared to those proposed in this report.	The proposed funds in this report build on the grant programme brand already established since 2023. The funds proposed allow for various community projects to be supported with appropriate governance processes. The funds proposed in this report have already been delivered so the processes, governance and working knowledge of their delivery is already in-place. This enables an immediate launch and fast-paced delivery of the programme.
3	Commission an external organisation to deliver a Community Grants Programme.	Due to the budget value being proposed any external commissioning of programme delivery would require extensive planning for a procurement process. Any procurement process would add additional setup time to delivering community grant awards. It is expected the costs of external commissioning for the scale of this programme would exceed the cost implications of additional staff resource proposed in this report. This may reduce the total amount of budget available to issue as grant awards to projects. The Council has staff with experience of community grant programme delivery. External commissioning may lead to a loss of engagement and relationship development with organisations.

ASSOCIATED IMPLICATIONS

Legal:

The community grants programme will be delivered in accordance with the Council's constitution, financial rules and subsidy control requirements. Standard grant funding agreements will be used for all grant awards and will be reviewed to ensure they are proportionate to the value, nature and risk of projects supported.

Financial: FIN/59/27/TPE/AP

Approval to use earmarked reserves is subject to release by:

- The Chief Finance Officer (Section 151) - Delegated power to approve spending up to a value of £50,000.
- Thriving Council Committee – Must approve spend greater than £50,000

The following proposals require recommendation to Thriving Council Committee for approval:

- a. The council agreed to utilise £8m from reserves for member priorities. This report is requesting usage of £4m from this reprioritisation allocation for the delivery of the Community Action Fund and Community Facilities Fund across 2026/27 and 2027/28.

Description	£
Allocation Approved for Reprioritisation	8,000,000
RIBA Stage 3 Alliance Leisure	(273,700)
Community Grants Programme 2026-2028	(4,000,000)
Remaining Balance:	3,726,300

- b. Approval of the allocation of up to £86,400 from the Community Grant Scheme Reserve for staff costs to deliver the Community Grants Programme across 2026/27 and 2027/28. This is based on an 18 month fixed term post at band 9.

The following proposals may be approved under delegation by Chief Finance Officer (Section 151):

- a. The continuation of the Councillor Initiative Fund in 2027/28, £36,000 to be funded from the Community Grant Scheme Reserve.
- b. The delivery of the Community Environment Fund, £50,000 to be funded from the Environment & Climate Change Reserve.

Staffing:

For the delivery of the programme, it is proposed to allocate funds to support staff resourcing within Localities and Community Services. Officers will work with People Services and the Leadership Team to establish the most appropriate resourcing options.

Any staffing arrangement will be developed in consultation with Human Resources, Leadership Team and Finance and will follow relevant Council's procedures. Where fixed-term posts are created, the duration, funding source and end of contract implications will be clearly identified before recruitment.

LGR implications:

Not applicable.

Equality and Diversity including Human Rights:

The community grants programme will be delivered in accordance with the Council's Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy. Organisations applying for funding will be required to demonstrate how their project provides community benefit and will be accessible to the communities they intend to support.

Grant funding agreements include appropriate requirements to ensure organisations funded meet relevant standards.

Data Protection Implications:

Information collected whilst delivering the community grants programme will be managed securely and in line with the Council's policies. A Communities Privacy Notice is in place which references grants for community projects and services.

Climate Related Risks and Opportunities:

The community grants programme will provide direct opportunities to support community-led projects that can have an impact on environment, biodiversity, nature recovery, tree planting, carbon reduction and climate engagement.

Specifically, the Community Environment Fund will focus on this area of impact.

Section 17 Crime and Disorder Considerations:

There are no direct implications, however some funded projects may have a direct or indirect impact on reducing crime, disorder or anti-social behaviour. Examples may include projects that provide youth activity, community cohesion, support for vulnerable residents, safety/security improvements and improved public spaces.

Health Implications:

There are no direct implications, however some funded projects may have a direct or indirect impact on health and wellbeing. This may include projects that support physical activity, access to community facilities, social connection, volunteering, cultural activities, access to green spaces and support for vulnerable residents.

Health and wellbeing outcomes will be captured during any project evaluation work.

Risk Assessment:

Not applicable.

Title and Location of any Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:

Not applicable.

Call in and Urgency:**Is the decision one which Rule 14.7 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules apply?**

i.e. is the report exempt from being called in due to urgency (in consultation with C&I chairman)

Yes☐**No****X****Key Decision:**

A matter which affects two or more wards, or has significant financial implications

Yes**X****No**☐