

Financial Assistance Policy

1. Title

This policy sets the basis for providing financial assistance to external organisations within the Council area. It sets out the rationale for such funding and the basis on which it should be provided, monitored and evaluated.

2. Statement

Council endorses the production of this policy which aims to ensure Council meets its legal, regulatory and moral obligations in use of financial assistance and also facilitates the development of community structures and activities within the Council area.

3. Aim

The overall aim of financial assistance is to enable Council to maximise the impact of its work across the Council area for the benefit of local residents.

The objectives of the policy are to:

- Maximise the impact of and outcomes from all Council funding.
- Seek to address needs which are clearly demonstrated and fall within, or are compatible with, Council priorities.
- Increase community engagement and voluntary participation in addressing areas of common concern.
- Enhance the sustainability of community based activities and provision.
- Support community based work which addresses the needs of those who are most deprived.
- Support the development of mutual respect, understanding and appreciation of diversity and shared cultural experiences.
- Ensure fairness, transparency and value for money in all Council's Financial Assistance Practice.

4. Scope

The policy provides a framework within which Council Officers can manage Council's designated Financial Assistance Programmes. It sets out the rationale for such funding and the basis for determining which funding programmes will feature in any particular financial year. The policy refers to Internal Guidance Manual which provides substantially more detail on how the Financial Assistance Programme should be run by Council Officers. This includes standards for the application process, the assessment and selection process, appeals process, construction of a letter of offer and the information required to verify the suitability of applicants. The manual also includes information on risk management, monitoring and evaluation of grant use. A further Applicant Guidance Manual sets out the process in simplified form for those applying for grants.

It is the responsibility of all Council Officers involved in Financial Assistance decisions and processes to fully observe the procedures set out in the guidance manuals and to ensure that applicants also observe the relevant procedures and requirements. Approval from senior management must be sought before any deviation from these procedures and any variation in the procedures used to assess or provide Financial Assistance will be considered to be a disciplinary offence.

The policy specifically seeks to address a number of issues highlighted during an internal audit in 2017/18. It takes a different approach to previous Financial Assistance work in that it will focus on outcome measurement rather than on vouching and input assessment. While it is recognised that much more can be achieved through focusing on outcomes and that this is much more administratively effective, it is also clear that care must be taken to protect Council from any risk of fraudulent activity. For this reason, all applications will be assessed for risk level and the monitoring and evaluation approach will be dependent on the risk identified. In general, more innovative projects, applicants without a track record, or applications involving larger sums of money, such as capital projects, are likely to be scored as higher risk and require a greater level of monitoring and vouching.

For the first time Council will adopt an on-line system for applying for financial assistance. This will also minimise administrative effort, simplify the application process and reduce nugatory effort by applicants who are not eligible to apply.

5. Related Policies

The policy should be read in conjunction with:

- NMDDC FAP Guidance Manual (which incorporates Risk Management, Monitoring and Evaluation and process maps).
- NMDDC FAP Applicant Guidance.
- Council's Conflict of Interest Policy and Procedures (September 2018).
- Council's Procurement Policy and Procedures.

6. Policy Owner

This policy is owned by Janine Hillen, Assistant Director, Community Engagement.

7. Contact details in regard of this policy are:

Any information in relation to the policy, its operation or the associated guidance manuals should be referred to the Programmes Unit.

8. Policy Authorisation

- SMT authorised on - 5th March 2019
- Active and Healthy Communities authorised on - 21st March 2019
- Council Authorised on - 1st April 2019

9. Policy Effective Date

- 8th April 2019

10. Policy Review Date

"The policy will be reviewed in line with the Council's agreed policy review cycle i.e. every 4 years (as per Council's Equality Scheme commitment 4.31), or sooner to ensure it remains reflective of legislative developments."

11. Procedures and arrangements for monitoring the implementation and impact of the policy

The policy will be implemented during the financial year 2020-2021. It will be reviewed to consider whether any changes need to be made to ensure its effective implementation. The review will take into consideration the views of applicants, Council Officers and elected members and will seek to ensure that the policy is as efficient and effective as possible in delivering Council's primary vision of Financial Assistance.

12. Equality Screening

An equality screening have been conducted.

The outcome of the equality screening is that the Policy is not subject to any Equality Impact Assessment.

13. Rural Impact Assessment

Due regard to rural needs has been given and a Rural Needs Impact Assessment has been completed for the revised policy.

14. Version Control

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