Policy Screening Form

Policy Title: Financial Assistance Policy

Brief Description of Policy (please attach copy if available). Please state if it is a new, existing or amended policy.

This is the second revision of the Council's Financial Assistance policy and there are three Applicant Guidance Manuals accompanying the policy. It was initially screened in November 2014 and then December 2015.

Since then there have been regular calls for applications on an annual basis for both revenue and capital grants. The Financial Assistance Policy Working Group which consists of Officers and elected members from each of the parties meet to review criteria before the first call for any new financial year.

Papers including the proposed changes were prepared and presented to the Council's Leisure and Community Services Committee in December 2016, October 2017, October 2018, and October 2019. Workshops were held with community groups to highlight the changes and the Applicant Guidance Manuals contained a section identifying the changes since the previous year. All of the changes are summarized and attached on p.2.

Foremost in the minds of those operating the policy should be a desire to address the Council's primary purposes and objectives in the most efficient and effective manner.

Typically this will involve providing financial assistance to a range of external organisations which can do things that the Council may not be able to do, may be able to do them better than the Council, and in some cases, at lower cost.

The purpose of the Applicant Guidance Manuals are to set out the funding programmes available, the eligibility criteria, the process for making applications, and guidance on making a successful application.

Intended aims/outcomes. What is the policy trying to achieve?

The Financial Assistance Policy for Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council details the process by which Council offers financial support to those organisations and individuals who can contribute to delivering the priorities set out in the Corporate Plan. The Applicant Guidance Manuals provide guidance in relation to the application process.

The most significant change from previous policies across the three legacy Councils was the move towards focusing on achieving maximum outcomes rather than focusing on how funding is utilized. It is recognized that this cannot be done at the expense of good grant governance and must work hand in hand with good financial audit and governance practice. However, work in assessing, monitoring and reviewing grants must be commensurate with the level of funding and focused on achieving maximum impact.

Vouching will continue to be a feature of monitoring in most cases but must be commensurate and risk based.

The Applicant Guidance Manuals set out the funding programmes and describe the process for considering eligibility and assessing applications.

A broad generic approach applies to all programmes however it is important to note that larger amounts of funding should inevitably require a more rigorous process.

The effective utilization of risk assessment and a sound monitoring process which leads to end of project evaluations and genuine feedback to future assessment processes will maximize the impact of any Council spend.

> Most evidence/documents will only be requested if an application is successful, although applicants are asked to ensure these are available when they apply.
> The application process continues to be operated through an online application process.

Policy Framework

Has the policy been developed in response to statutory requirements, legal advice or on the basis of any other professional advice? Does this affect the discretion available to Council to amend the policy?

> The policy has been developed taking into account good financial audit and governance practice. However it had also been developed as a result of an extensive consultation exercise undertaken across the Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Council areas. An extensive community consultation, both on a face to face basis and through an online consultation was conducted and the views of key networking and support organisations were also sought. When the first version of the policy was finalised further targeted information sessions were made available to all potential applicants, and Council Members.
> All subsequent amendments to the policy and procedures were followed by Information Sessions delivered to potential applicants, and the amended Applicant Guidance Manuals highlighted any changes since the previous year.

Are there any Section 75 categories which might be expected to benefit from the policy? If so, please outline.

> A whole range of organisations representing a cross section of section 75 categories will be able to access funding through the Council's financial assistance policy. The Council believes that the policy should improve the relationship between community organisations and develop inclusion and cohesion. It should reinforce peace by developing relationships across generations, religious/political groupings and between people from different ethnic backgrounds.

Who initiated or wrote the policy (if Council decision, please state). Who is responsible for implementing the policy?

Who initiated or wrote policy?	Who is responsible for implementation?
Robert Stockley	The Council is responsible for implementation.

Are there any factors which might contribute to or detract from the implementation of the policy (e.g. financial, legislative, other)?

> The amount of funding available.

Main stakeholders in relation to the policy

Please list main stakeholders affected by the policy (e.g. staff, service users, other statutory bodies, community or voluntary sector, private sector)

> Officers responsible for operating the policy, elected members, organisations/individuals accessing funding, external funders.

Are there any other policies with a bearing on this policy? If so, please identify them and how they impact on this policy.

>

Available Evidence

Council should ensure that its screening decisions are informed by relevant data. What evidence/information (both qualitative and quantitative) have you gathered to inform this policy? Specify details for each of the Section 75 categories.

Section 75 category	Evidence
Religious belief	This policy has been developed as a result of an extensive consultation exercise undertaken across the Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Council areas.
Political opinion	
Racial group	
Age	To ensure maximum participation, consultation events were organised in each Council area with afternoon and evening sessions in each area. Two were held in Banbridge Town Hall, two in Armagh's Market Place Theatre and two in Craigavon Civic Centre. Through the three Councils, all community groups and other voluntary sector organisations on the Councils' Database were notified about the events. In addition adverts were placed in seven local newspapers. Those contacted were given the opportunity to contribute by a number of methods:
Marital status	
Sexual orientation	
Men and women generally	
Disability	
Dependants	
	• Through a link to an online questionnaire –this provided an opportunity to offer detailed information about current organizational needs and future priorities. The organisations that participated in this online questionnaire deal with issues which include disability, youth, early years, school children, older people, women, good relations, ethnic minorities and faith.
	• Through the six public consultation exercises - these were facilitated by Williamson Consulting and sought to focus specifically on views relating to the current Grant Aid programmes, future priorities and principles and any other information groups wished to contribute,
	• By e-mail directly to Williamson Consulting
	• By telephone to Williamson Consulting.
	In addition, face to face meetings were held with network organisations in the area.

	There was little disagreement about the key issues and groups consulted tended to provide similar responses, suggesting that the consultation is likely to be representative of the wider sector.
	Following the first review of the policy which resulted in a number of amendments, workshops were held with community groups highlighting the changes.
	Following subsequent amendments to the policy and procedures, workshops were held with potential applicants highlighting the changes and a section was included in the Applicant Guidance Manuals detailing the changes.

Needs, experiences and priorities

Taking into account the information gathered above, what are the different needs, experiences and priorities of each of the following categories in relation to this particular policy/decision?

Section 75 category	Needs, experiences and priorities
Religious belief	A whole range of organisations representing a cross section of section 75 categories will be able to access funding through the Council's financial assistance policy. The organisations that participated in the original online questionnaire when originally developing the policy deal with issues which include disability, youth, early years, school children, older people, women, good relations, ethnic minorities and faith. The Council believes that the policy should improve the relationship between community organisations and develop inclusion and cohesion. It should reinforce peace and help to develop relationships across generations, religious/political groupings and between people from different ethnic backgrounds.
Political opinion	
Racial group	
Age	
Marital status	
Sexual orientation	
Men and women generally	
Disability	
Dependants	
	There is a specific good relations grant available to facilitate all organisations working at community level to deliver on the ground activities and actions which impact positively on Good Relations on an intra-community or cross-community basis.
	Although rural needs is not a section 75 category a common theme that arose through the community consultation was that of rural isolation and the difficulty of connecting people with provision. This usually centred on transport needs, particularly for young people and older people. The policy initially sought to address this need by introducing a rural linkages grant. However, due to lack of uptake and the ability of applicants to apply for the same costs through the Community Development grant programme, the Rural Linkages Grant was closed.

1. What is the likely impact on equality of opportunity for those affected by this policy for each of the Section 75 categories?

Category	Policy Impact	Level of impact (Major/minor/none)
Religious belief Political opinion Racial group	There is a specific good relations grant available to facilitate all organisations working at community level to deliver on the ground activities and actions which impact positively on Good Relations on an intra-community or cross-community basis. The changes since the last review have no impact on the Good Relations grant programme.	none
Age	During the original consultation, transport needs for older and younger people in rural areas was raised as an issue. This was originally addressed by the introduction of the Rural Linkages Grant. One of the changes since the last review was to withdraw the Rural Linkages Grant.	The mitigating factor was that the transport needs could equally be met by applying to the Community Development grant programme and having a Rural Linkages grant programme was of no benefit.
Marital status Sexual orientation Men and women generally Disability Dependents	The policy has been developed as a result of a wide community consultation and comments received from organisations that represent a broad cross section of section 75 consultees. These comments have influenced the final policy. One of the overarching application principles is that the process will be inclusive and fair so that all sections of the community can apply for financial assistance if they are involved in meeting the needs which are the Council's priorities. Steps have been taken to advertise availability of funding as widely as possible. Steps continue to	none

	be taken to make the application process as user-friendly as possible and to minimise bureaucracy. The changes agreed since the last policy review are largely aimed at managing the budget, removing duplication, providing greater consistency and clarity, minimising the financial impact on groups of legislative changes, improving flexibility on grant spend, and reducing risk with some of the larger grant awards.	

2. Are there opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity for people within the Section 75 categories?

Category	If yes, provide details	If no, provide reasons
Religious belief		The policy has been developed as a result of a wide community consultation and comments were received from organisations that represent a broad cross section of section 75 consultees. These comments have influenced the final policy. One of the overarching application principles is that the process will be inclusive and fair so that all sections of the community can apply for financial assistance if they are involved in meeting the needs which are the Council's priorities. Steps have been taken to advertise more widely and this is constantly under review. All organisations will benefit as a result of the financial assistance policy as changes continue to be introduced to ensure that the application process is more user friendly and bureaucracy is minimised.
Political opinion		
Racial group		
Age		
Marital status		
Sexual orientation		
Men and women generally		
Disability		
Dependents		

3. To what extent is the policy likely to impact on good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion, or racial group?		
Category	Details of Policy Impact	Level of impact (major/minor/none)
Religious belief	There is a specific good relations grant available to facilitate all organisations working at community level to deliver on the ground activities and actions which impact positively on Good Relations on an intracommunity or cross community basis.	
Political opinion		
Racial group		

4. Are there opportunities to better promote good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?		
Category	If yes, provide details	If no, provide reasons
Religious belief		No, as stated above there is a specific good relations grant available to facilitate all organisations working at community level to deliver on the ground activities and actions which impact positively on Good Relations on an intra-community or cross community basis.
Political opinion		
Racial group		

Multiple Identity

Generally speaking, people fall into more than one Section 75 category (for example: disabled minority ethnic people; disabled women; young Protestant men; young lesbian, gay and bisexual people). Provide details of data on the impact of the policy on people with multiple identities. Specify relevant s75 categories concerned.

Organisations representing any one or more of the section 75 categories will benefit from a policy which has as one of its overarching principles the need to be inclusive and fair. All sections of the community can apply for financial assistance if they are involved in meeting needs which are the Council's priorities.

Disability Discrimination (NI) Order 2006

Is there an opportunity for the policy to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people?

Yes, for those organisations that represent disabled people and meet the criteria for funding.

Is there an opportunity for the policy to encourage participation by disabled people in public life?

Yes, as above.

Screening Decision

A: NO IMPACT IDENTIFIED ON ANY CATEGORY – EQIA UNNECESSARY

Please identify reasons for this below

B: MINOR IMPACT IDENTIFIED – EQIA NOT CONSIDERED NECESSARY AS IMPACT CAN BE ELIMINATED OR MITIGATED

Where the impact is likely to be minor, you should consider if the policy can be mitigated or an alternative policy introduced. If so, an EQIA may not be considered necessary. You must indicate the reasons for this decision below, together with details of measures to mitigate the adverse impact or the alternative policy proposed.

This Financial Assistance policy and the accompanying guidance manuals operated as a pilot project for six months and the policy was reviewed again following this period. The policy was developed as a result of a wide community consultation and comments were received from organisations that represent a broad cross section of section 75 consultees as detailed above. These comments have influenced the final policy. One of the overarching application principles is that the process will be inclusive and fair so that all sections of the community can apply for financial assistance if they are involved in meeting the needs which are the Council's priorities. Steps have been taken to ensure the availability of funding is promoted as widely as possible. All organisations will benefit as a result of the financial assistance policy as changes have been introduced to ensure that the application process is more user friendly and bureaucracy is minimised.
During the consultation, transport needs for older and younger people in rural areas was raised as an issue. The introduction of a rural linkages grant sought to address this. However, as uptake was extremely low, and because groups could apply to other programmes for the same costs, the rural linkages grant was withdrawn with no impact on the intended beneficiaries.
Organisations have been made aware of all the changes to the policy and procedures through information sessions which are delivered at the opening of any calls for applications. The Applicant Guidance Manuals also specifically highlight any changes since the previous year.

C: MAJOR IMPACT IDENTIFIED – EQIA REQUIRED

If the decision is to conduct an equality impact assessment, please provide details of the reasons.

Timetabling and Prioritising

If the policy has been screened in for equality impact assessment, please answer the following questions to determine its priority for timetabling the equality impact assessment.

On a scale of 1-3 with 1 being the lowest priority and 3 being the highest, assess the policy in terms of its priority for equality impact assessment.

Priority criterion	Rating (1-3)
Effect on equality of opportunity and good relations	
Social need	
Effect on people's daily lives	

The total rating score should be used to prioritise the policy in rank order with other policies screened in for equality impact assessment. This list of priorities will assist the council in timetabling its EQIAs.

Is the policy affected by timetables established by other relevant public authorities? If yes, please give details.

Monitoring

Effective monitoring will help the authority identify any future adverse impact arising from the policy. It is recommended that where a policy has been amended or an alternative policy introduced to mitigate adverse impact, monitoring be undertaken on a broader basis to identify any impact (positive or adverse).

Further information on monitoring is available in the Equality Commission's guidance on monitoring (www.equalityni.org).

Identify how the impact of the policy is to be monitored

This policy will be subject to ongoing monitoring.

A copy of the screening form for each policy screened should be signed off by the senior manager responsible for that policy. The screening recommendation should be reported to the relevant Committee/Council when the policy is submitted for approval.

Screened by	Position/Job title	Date
Robert Stockley	Financial Assistance Programme Manager	18.2.20
Approved by	Position/Job Title	Date
Seamus McCrory	Head of Community Development	5.3.20

Please forward a copy of the completed policy and form to:

mary.hanna@armaghbanbridgecraigavon.gov.uk

who will ensure these are made available on the Council's website.

The above officer is also responsible for issuing reports on a quarterly basis on those policies "screened out for EQIA". This allows stakeholders who disagree with this recommendation to submit their views. In the event of any stakeholder disagreeing with the decision to screen out any policy, the screening exercise will be reviewed.