

To: Cabinet
Date: 17 June 2026
Report of: Helen Bishop, Director of Communities and Citizens' Services
Title of Report: Grant allocations to Community and Voluntary Organisations 2024-25

Summary and recommendations	
Decision being taken:	To highlight to Cabinet the positive impact of Oxford Community Impact Fund 2024-25
Key decision:	No
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities
Corporate Priority:	Support Thriving Communities
Policy Framework:	Support Thriving Communities

Recommendation(s): That Cabinet resolves to:
1. Note the social value and economic impact of the fund – see appendices 1-4

Information Exempt From Publication	
State in here what information is to be exempt from publication – where it is, attach it as an appendix and name the appendix as you describe it here	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not applicable

Appendix No.	Appendix Title	Exempt from Publication
Appendix 1	Oxford Community Impact Fund Grant Allocations to	No

	Community Groups 1 April 2024-31 March 2025	
Appendix 2	Charts indicating the reach of communities of identity, geography and interest by funded projects 2024-25	No
Appendix 3	Funding leverage as reported in the grant monitoring form for Big Ideas grants 2024/25	No
Appendix 4	Examples of how the funding criteria were met and delivered	No
Appendix 5	Risk Assessment	No
Appendix 6	Equalities Impact Assessment	No

Introduction and background

1. Oxford Community Impact Fund provides funding to community groups, organisations and individuals to deliver programmes for wider community benefit.
2. The fund aims to help deliver the following key interconnected pillars, in line with the Council's Corporate Strategy 2024-28: Support thriving communities; Enable a strong, fair economy; Pursue a zero-carbon Oxford; Deliver good, affordable homes; Deliver a well-run council.
3. Oxford Community Impact Fund started in April 2022 and, in the reporting year 2024-5, comprised four strands:

Strand	Current Annual Cost (to 31 March 2025)
Strand 1: Grants for essential services: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advice services • Domestic abuse helpline 	£501,000 budget per year <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. £448,000 3. £53,000
Strand 2: Grants for rent <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modern Art Oxford • Fusion Arts • Barton Advice Centre • Agnes Smith Advice Centre • Film Oxford • Rose Hill Advice Centre • Donnington Doorstep Family Centre 	£82,887 budget per year <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £50,000 • £8,837 • £8,100 • £7,250 • £5,000 • £3,000 • £700
Strand 3: Big Ideas grants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 36 strategic partners – 3 year funding arrangement contracted from 1 April 2022- 31 March 2025 	£338,000 budget per year
Strand 4: Small and Medium grants – 100+ per year <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Round 1 	£84,000 budget per year <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. £24,000

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Round 2 • Round 3 	5. £44,000 6. £16,000
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Table 1

The Grant assessment process

4. Grant applications submitted to the Council are initially scored by officers with an understanding of the area of work to be funded. The scores are then checked for consistency of approach by the grants team who add a balance score based on the overall impact of the work and the likelihood of funding being available from alternative sources. The grants team then recommend funding amounts based on the budget available, overall scores and the applicants' response to the question: "Please let the panel know which elements of your project you would be able to deliver if you receive 10 - 20% of your request". They also ensure a balance between the areas of activity, types of activity and people supported – see Appendix 2.
5. See Table 2 below for the breakdown of Big Ideas and Small and Medium Grants from 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025 and Appendix 1 for the list of grantees:

Grant	No. of grants awarded	Grants budget allocated
Big Ideas	36	£338,000
Small and Medium Grants Round 1 2024-25	62	£24,000
Small and Medium Grants Round 2 2024-25	46	£44,000
Small and Medium Grants Round 3 2024-25	47	£16,000
Total	191	£422,000

Table 2

6. For grant agreements from 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2028, recommendations were approved by Cabinet for grant commitments for more than one year on 5 February 2025: Big Ideas, grants for rent and essential services. See minute 120 Minutes of the Cabinet Meeting 5 February 2025: [Committee Minutes](#)
7. On 5 February 2025, Cabinet also streamlined the criteria for application for grants from 2025-28. Currently, there are only two criteria which are as follows:
 - Criterion 1: Reducing inequalities in the city – score up to 60%
 - Criterion 2: Attracting other funding of at least 70% (leverage) – score up to 40%
8. As agreed by Cabinet on 5 February 2025, Small and Medium grant recommendations (up to £3K per application round per year) are sent to the Deputy Chief Executive – City and Citizen's Services for approval, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities.

External funding support

9. In addition to the funding above, officers also hold grant advice sessions throughout the year to support organisations and individuals to increase income and secure external funding via grants, Oxford Lottery and other income generation including Match My Project. Officers provide one to one and group advice and write letters of support.
10. In 2024-25, 44% (up from 30% the previous year) of Big Ideas grantees were signed up to [Oxford Lottery](#), which is administered by Oxford City Council (The Council), and collectively raised over £20K.
11. [Match My Project](#) enables community groups and grantees to advertise their projects on a website, which businesses can then choose to support. In 2024-25, 56% (up from 20% in the previous year) of Big Ideas grantees signed up to Match my Project with several benefitting including 200 hours of social value volunteer time.
12. The Council facilitates applicants in receipt of Big Ideas funding to meet in person at the 'Big Ideas Network' to enable shared learning and evaluation, project collaboration, fundraising and the pooling of resources.
13. Feedback is sought and acted upon throughout the application process including improvements to the application and monitoring forms and offering briefings in the evening as well as during the working day. Grantees have welcomed actions taken to streamline processes and share external funding opportunities.
14. Grants reporting is undertaken annually by the Council, and guided by the criteria used to assess grant applications.
15. Total beneficiaries reported by Big Ideas grantees are over a million – whilst some people will have benefitted several times and from different projects, this is still a high figure for a city with a population of c.165,000.
16. The availability of funding has been promoted widely. As a result, there has been a significant increase in applications with over 21% of Small and Medium grants being awarded to new applicants in 2024-5.

Equalities, Diversity & Inclusion

17. Increasing Equality, Diversity and Inclusion is a key priority for The Council and underpins its [Thriving Communities Strategy](#). Therefore, demonstrating how the funded activities have helped to reduce inequalities and increase diversity, inclusion and access in the city is one of the mandatory grant reporting requirements.
18. This criterion, along with engagement with the Big Ideas Network and grant advice support sessions, has enabled organisations to get to know, collaborate with, and increase support for marginalised communities in Oxford. This has, in turn, led to organisations adapting their services to reduce barriers and better meet community needs e.g. helping those who might otherwise be left behind to develop their skills.

Environmental sustainability and zero carbon Oxford

19. In January 2019, Oxford declared a climate emergency and, in autumn 2019, Oxford became the first UK city to hold a Citizens Assembly on Climate Change. As such, as mandated by Cabinet on 15 December 2021, up until 31 March 2025, it was also mandatory for Oxford Community Impact Fund's grantees to report on the

environmental impact of proposed activities, mitigation measures to offset this impact and, where applicable, plans to increase biodiversity and contribute towards a zero-carbon Oxford.

20. This criterion has encouraged increased awareness of environmental sustainability within the funded organisations and communities they serve and led to many undertaking further training and internal policy development and monitoring in this area.
21. Grantee organisations have played their part in reducing waste, with most focussing on reuse, repurposing and recycling – see Appendix 4 for examples.
22. Grantees have also made a conscious effort to reduce energy usage and carbon emissions e.g. by replacing radiators, fixing the roof and turning devices off when not in use, reducing food waste and encouraging everyone to use public transport, bicycles or to walk wherever possible.

Leverage and match funding (attracting additional funding)

23. Oxford Community Impact Fund provides seed funding to enable grantees to generate, raise and earn significant additional income to pay for the full cost of sustaining their organisations' public benefit – see Appendix 3. The Council also supports organisations to access additional external funding through tailored individual funding advice sessions, Match my Project and Oxford Lottery. When appropriate, officers also provide letters of support for external grant applications.
24. In 2024/25, Oxford Community Impact Big Ideas and Grants for Rent Funding of £397,037 for Big Ideas grantees represented just 2% of the £25,828,698 overall delivery costs for Big Ideas programmes – see Appendix 3. The remaining 98% was paid for by earned income from: trading activities (£2,561,759); donations, legacies and grants (£14,109,010); charitable activity (£8,761,244) and other income and investments (£396,685).
25. The seed funding to Big Ideas grantees helped them to raise/generate significant additional money which they used to help pay for fundraising, programme and staffing costs so they could provide preventative support to people who would otherwise be likely to need more statutory services at a greater cost in the future. 25 grantees reported that Oxford Community Impact Fund funding was instrumental in them raising additional funds, 7 reported it may have assisted and only 3 reported that the Oxford Community Impact funding did not lever additional funding.
26. However, accessing funding is very competitive and the availability of funding is declining whilst needs are continuing to rise. The ability to maintain and increase levels of seed funding is critical to the future delivery of preventative programmes in the city, however this remains challenging in the current financial climate. Different business models are beginning to emerge including mergers, and introducing charges and pay what you can donations for activities which had previously been free at the point of access.

Partnership working and cross-sector support

27. Demonstrating partnership working is one of the voluntary criteria in the Oxford Community Impact Fund. This criterion, along with engagement with the Big Ideas network, has led to a wider range of different types of partnerships developing including more cross-sector working and support of grassroots organisations. This

has, in turn, led to wider strategic thinking, better reach and delivery and reduced costs e.g. via sharing knowledge, skills and resources, – see Appendix 4 for examples.

Health and wellbeing

28. Oxford Community Impact Fund includes a voluntary criterion to support organisations whose activities are beneficial to the physical and/or mental wellbeing of Oxford's residents.
29. The fund has maintained several programmes to support the emotional wellbeing and mental health of a wide range of people including young people, older people, people with disabilities, older single men, Global Majority-led groups, LGBTQIA+ communities, vulnerable people, and parents, who are more susceptible to feelings of depression and isolation – see Appendix 4 for examples.
30. The fund has also supported activities like dance and sports, including swimming, bicycle riding, walks and football, which have increased physical fitness as well as providing social connections and interactions between participants.
31. Overall, the programmes funded by Oxford Community Impact Fund have helped to develop and foster a sense of community between residents through their attendance at regular activities. This has led to a greater sense of belonging, improved confidence/self-esteem and decreased instances of loneliness.

Innovation

32. Oxford Community Impact Fund continues to encourage funded organisations to test new ideas and processes, piloting new technologies and/or service delivery that could result in better quality, social benefit, value-for-money and community reach.
33. Funding has supported a range of innovative ideas that can be tested, adapted and replicated by others. See Appendix 4 for examples.

Inclusive economy

34. Oxford Community Impact Fund included an inclusive economy criterion as a lever to increase opportunities for disadvantaged communities/groups to have a fairer share in the city's wealth economy. This has helped encourage paying the Oxford Living Wage to become standard practice in most organisations. Initiatives such as offering apprenticeships/internships and work experience; sharing space, skills or equipment; contracting locally and supporting independent businesses are some of the activities the funding supports. See Appendix 4 for examples.
35. Most of the organisations use local suppliers and contractors for services, wherever possible, which is therefore a source of income for local businesses and vendors too.
36. In addition, several organisations are working with volunteers/freelancers, providing opportunities for professional growth and development. Providing training and capacity building and support services to migrants/asylum seekers and parents, helps with employability, as they look to integrate in the wider Oxford community. Students also receive mentorship through internships and work experience and placement opportunities.

37. With most organisations offering subsidised tickets for events/training or discounts for meeting spaces through measures such as ‘pay what you can’, this has encouraged greater participation by those people who could not previously afford it.

Community impact and empowerment

38. The Council has recognised the importance of locally based organisations who foster tolerance and provide opportunities for people to engage in community activities, leisure, culture and social connectivity. There is a real impact on the well-being of citizens and families in healthy, well-connected communities, and the Oxford Community Impact Fund has been particularly useful to many organisations to enable them to leverage in other funding.

39. At the same time, a variety of approaches to community empowerment have championed the importance of allowing communities to determine their own direction. Councils have sought to transfer power to communities including by creating alternative funding mechanisms and piloting co-production, joint bids and participatory grant making which changes the nature of the relationships between councils and communities.

Criteria and weighting for assessing the 2025-28 grant allocations

40. Grantees have fed back that they welcome actions taken to streamline grant application and monitoring processes. They also welcome the decision taken by Cabinet on 5 February 2025 to streamline the criteria for application to just the following for 2025-2028:

Equalities, diversity and inclusion

Financial Leverage

Implications of Local Government Reorganisation

41. The implications of the report have been considered in relation to Local Government Reorganisation and the guidance [Financial decisions before local government reorganisation - GOV.UK](#) has been followed.

Financial implications

42. The grants budget is considered annually as part of the budget setting process and aligned to the grant funding pool as stated in Table 1

Legal issues

43. There are no specific legal implications arising from the contents of this report. However, any future decisions relating to the acceptance, allocation or expenditure of grant funding will need to be taken in accordance with the Council’s Constitution, procurement requirements and, where applicable, the Subsidy Control Act 2022 and Public Contracts Regulations 2015.

44. The Council must also continue to have due regard to its duties under the Equality Act 2010 in relation to the impact of any service changes or funding allocations on protected groups. (AK/20301/9//3/2026)

Level of risk

45. See the risk assessment (Appendix 5)

Equalities impact

46. See the Equalities Impact assessment (Appendix 6)

Carbon and Environmental Considerations

47. Carbon and Environmental Considerations are part of the grant assessment and monitoring process.

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Background Papers:

List the background documents and, if possible, link to them.

All background papers must be listed in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act and The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012. This includes, any material which discloses facts or matters on which the report or an important part of it is based and which have been relied on in the preparation of the report. Each document must be listed and a copy of each document made available to members and the public on request, (or they should be directed where to find it if it is already published on the Council's website). All confidential, exempt, copyrighted and published works are EXCLUDED from this requirement.

- 1 Cabinet Report 5 February 2025 – Grant Allocations to Community and Voluntary Organisations 2025-6 – pp. 361-426 ([Public Pack](#))[Agenda Document for Cabinet, 05/02/2025 18:00](#)
- 2 Minutes of the Cabinet Meeting 5 February 2025 – see minute 120: [Committee Minutes](#)
- 3 Cabinet Report Cabinet Meeting 15 December 2021 – pp.253-314 ([Public Pack](#))[Agenda Document for Cabinet, 15/12/2021 18:00](#)
- 4 Minutes of the Cabinet Meeting 15 December 2021 – see minute 80: [Committee Minutes](#)