

Cheshire West & Chester Council's Community Investment Fund Guidance

Introduction

The Community Investment Fund will provide grant funding to organisations and groups to support all age preventative, community-led activity that helps residents earlier, strengthens local resilience and prevents, reduces or delays demand on statutory services.

The Community Investment Fund has been developed to:

- Support preventative and early intervention activity that addresses community and individual needs before they escalate;
- Reduce escalation into statutory services, particularly high-cost services, deliver measurable outcomes for residents and financial benefits for the Council;
- Support Voluntary, Community, Faith, and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) organisations to develop and scale sustainable services and delivery models.

The Community Investment Fund is being introduced to make grant funding clearer, fairer and more consistent. It will strengthen governance and assurance, reduce duplication, and focus investment on measurable outcomes, prevention and value for money.

Priorities and outcomes of the Community Investment Fund

The Community Investment Fund priority themes are:

- Strong Start (Children and Families)
- Healthy and Independent Living (Adults)
- Financial and Community Resilience

The table below shows the detailed priorities and outcomes associated with each priority theme. Applicants are encouraged to consider an approach to reflect the needs and outcomes of the community.

Priorities and outcomes table

Strong Start	
Giving every child the best start in life	Priorities: • Strengthen parenting skills, confidence and capacity, • Enhance children and young people's educational achievement and aspirations, • Promote positive emotional wellbeing and resilience in children and young people. Outcomes: • Parents feel confident and empowered in their parenting role, • Children and young people achieve their full educational potential.
Strengthening families and keeping children safe	Priorities: • Support healthy child development and positive life outcomes, • Improve parental wellbeing and mental health, • Foster strong family relationships and connected communities, • Improve parental experience of services. Outcomes: • Children experience positive emotional wellbeing and resilience, • Children reach key developmental milestones and thrive, • Parents enjoy improved mental health and wellbeing, • Families feel their voices are heard, • Parents feel supported.
Improving life chances and reducing inequality	Priorities: • Increase opportunities and resilience for families experiencing financial hardship, • Support families to achieve greater financial stability and independence. Outcomes: • Families benefit from strong support networks and community connections, • Families are better equipped to overcome the challenges of poverty, • Families achieve greater financial security and stability.
Inclusive communities and opportunities	Priorities: • Children and young people with SEND can participate fully in their communities, • Increased school readiness for children with emerging additional needs, • Improved parental confidence and resilience, • Improved inclusion in education, leisure and community activities. Outcomes: • Children and young people with SEND report increased participation in community, social and recreational activities, • More children and young people with SEND access opportunities that reflect their interests and aspirations, • Children and young people with SEND experience a greater sense of belonging within their local communities.

Healthy and Independent Living	
Promoting Independence and Choice	Priorities: • Support people to gain independent living skills, • Support Peer mentorship, • Enable people to remain active, connected and engaged in their communities. Outcomes: • Remain living safely at home for longer, • Manage their own health and wellbeing, • Maintain daily living skills, • Make informed choices about support, • Retain confidence and control over their lives, • Strong community networks, • Timely information enables people to make informed choices.
Improving Health and Wellbeing	Priorities: • Peer support networks, • Wellbeing groups, • Self-management programmes, • Participate in community activities. Outcomes: • Develop social connections, • Participate in community activities, • Maintain mobility and Reduce frailty, • Better mental wellbeing, • Increased resilience, • Greater quality of life, • More confidence and self-esteem, • Increased sense of purpose.
Employment, Skills and Financial Wellbeing	Priorities: • Activities that enable people to give back and feel valued, • Volunteering opportunities that help people build meaningful relationships and reduce loneliness, • Life skills support. Outcomes: • Maintaining purpose and social connections, • Build support networks, • Feel more connected to their communities, • Build self-esteem and confidence, • Provide daily structure and purpose.
Supporting Carers	Priorities: • Improve carers wellbeing by peer to peer, community and social support, • Support carers to take breaks, • Help to maintain employment, family life and learn new skills. Outcomes: • Feel supported, • Experience less stress and burnout, • Maintain employment and family life,

	Continue caring for longer where they choose to do so.
Financial and Community Resilience	
Personal and financial Resilience	Priorities: - Earlier access to support before problems reach crisis point, - Improved digital inclusion and access to online services. Outcomes: - Reduced reliance on crisis support and emergency assistance including food and energy costs, - Increased ability to manage unexpected financial shock, - Maximised household income through benefits, employment or other support, - Reduced debt and improved financial wellbeing including increased savings, - Improved budgeting, money management and financial confidence.
Family Resilience	Priorities: - Support for families to meet essential costs, - Increased access to practical, emotional and peer support. Outcomes: - Reduced risk of homelessness, family breakdown or crisis escalation, - Improved family stability during periods of financial stress and ability to plan for future challenges, - Reduced experiences of material deprivation, - Improved life chances for children and young people, - Greater ability for families to remain safe, healthy and independent.
Community Resilience	Priorities: - Stronger local partnerships and collaborative working, - Increased community capacity to identify and develop community-led solutions to local need, - Increased volunteering, peer support and community leadership. Outcomes: - Reduced inequality and improved inclusion of vulnerable groups, - Increased use of community assets and local resources, - Increased social value through local employment, volunteering and community participation, - Stronger neighbourhood support networks, social connections and community cohesion.
System Resilience	Priorities: - Earlier intervention that prevents crisis and reduces demand on statutory services, - Improved coordination between public, voluntary and community sector services. Outcomes: - Reduced duplication, gaps and inefficiencies across the local support system, - More seamless referral pathways and a "no wrong door" approach to support,

	• Increased social value generated through community-led and preventative approaches, • Increased capacity and capability within the voluntary and community sector.

Additionally, the Community Investment Fund will incorporate a proportion of the Crisis and Resilience Fund, which is UK Government funding made available to local authorities in England to support low-income households who encounter a financial shock, and to support activity that builds individual and community financial resilience.

Organisations may wish to consider and incorporate the following Crisis and Resilience Fund outcomes in the funding applications:

- Reduced experiences of material deprivation;
- Reduced need for emergency food parcels;
- Increased access to appropriate and quality advice services;
- Increased savings;
- Reduction in priority debt;
- Maximisation of individuals' incomes;
- Decreased need for Crisis Payments and Housing Payments.

How the priorities have been set

The priority areas have been aligned against the strategic direction of Children and Families, Adult Social Care and Public Health. The key strategies can be viewed using the links below:

- the Cheshire West and Chester Borough Plan 2024–28 ([Borough Plan 2024-2028 | Cheshire West and Chester Council](#))
- the Cheshire West and Chester Adult Social Care Strategy – Enabling Great Lives ([ASC-Strategy-Brochure](#))
- the Cheshire West and Chester Health & Wellbeing Strategy – Our Place Plan for the Borough 2026–31 ([Cheshire West Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2026-31](#))

1. Application Process

1.1 How to apply:

Cheshire West and Chester Council will be using a digital platform called ‘Plinth’ to manage Community Investment Fund grant applications, evaluations, awarding and aspects of impact reporting. The Community Investment Fund grant application will be found on Plinth. The link to the application will be shared on the Community Investment Fund webpage once the application is live. The application form must be fully completed at the time of submission, otherwise the application form will not be considered.

1.2 How much funding can be applied for:

The total funding envelope available for the Community Investment Fund in 2026/27 is £897,000. This comprises £425,000 Council funding and £472,000 from the UK Government funded Crisis and Resilience Fund. Funding will be allocated through phased application windows and across the published funding tiers, subject to eligibility, assessment, due diligence, approval and available budget. The application does not guarantee an award.

Funding for 2027/28 will be subject to the Council’s budget-setting process, confirmation of any external funding and approval through the Council’s governance arrangements.

The Council may vary the amount allocated to each phase depending on demand, quality of applications, priority need and the availability of funding.

The Community Investment Fund will be delivered using four funding strands as follows:

Tier 1 – Innovation Fund	
Objective	Build a strong pipeline of projects to test
Tier 1 Grant Value	Below £5,000
Grant Length	Up to 12 months

Tier 2 - Prevention Pilots	
Objective	Fund high-potential prevention pilots
Tier 2 Grant Value	£5,001 - £50,000
Grant Length	Up to 2 years

Tier 3 - Scale and Sustainability Fund	
Objective	Expand successful pilots and discontinue initiatives that are not delivering
Tier 3 Grant Value	£50,001 - £100,000

Grant Length	Up to 3 years
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Tier 4 – Learning and Evaluation	
Objective	Move from grant-making to strategic community investment which could include Seed Funding to Develop Direct Payments support models
Tier 4 Grant Value	Up to £40,000
Grant Length	Up to 12 months

1.3 Who can apply for the Community Investment Fund:

VCFSE organisations and groups will be able to apply where they can meet the published priorities and can demonstrate how their proposal will deliver against the agreed outcomes for Cheshire West and Chester residents within the borough. Applications will be accepted from a single organisation or a partnership of organisations (consortium) with one organisation taking the lead. The organisation applying will need to be able to provide:

- Up to date Annual Accounts;
- A dedicated bank account in the organisation's name where the funds will be received;
- Evidence of Governance Structure/ Constitution or Memorandum and Articles of Association;
- A clear project budget showing the proposed use of grant funding, any match funding or other income, staffing costs, overheads, VAT where applicable, and any in-kind contributions;
- Evidence of appropriate Safeguarding and Equality and Inclusion policies;
- Evidence that Disclosure and Barring Service checks are being completed for staff and volunteers (where appropriate);
- Appropriate level of employee and public liability insurance.

2. What this grant will not fund

2.1 Projects/ activities that are of a political nature or have the primary purpose of religious worship or the promotion of beliefs;

2.2 Projects/ activities that do not meet the priorities and required outcomes listed in this guidance;

2.3 Projects that have already taken place or for ongoing running costs;

2.4 Loans against any losses or debt;

2.5 Items that have already been purchased or are being purchased on behalf of a third party.

3. General Conditions

3.1 Grant funding is one-off and time limited as described in the tiers (section 1.2);

3.2 Grants will be paid as stated in the offer letter and upon receiving a signed Funding Agreement for Grants form which will include the full terms and conditions. The Council may pay larger or higher-risk grants in instalments, linked to agreed milestones, monitoring returns or evidence of spend;

3.3 Organisations must comply with The Equality Act 2010 and provide their Equality and Inclusion Policy;

3.4 Organisations must have in place robust safeguarding policies and procedures which are in accordance with the

[Cheshire West and Chester Safeguarding Children Partnership](#) Child Protection Policies and Procedures and/or

[Local Safeguarding Adults Board \(LSAB\) | Cheshire West and Chester Council](#)

3.6 Organisations must ensure that all staff and volunteers are aware of their individual responsibilities in relation to safeguarding and equality, diversity and inclusion legal duties and will provide copies of the relevant policies as part of their application;

3.7 Successful applicants must be able to provide Cheshire West and Chester Council with monitoring information and provide evidence of how the grant funding has been spent in adherence with the conditions as set out in Funding Agreement for Grants;

3.8 Successful applicants must notify Cheshire West and Chester Council of any changes or deliverability risks to the agreed project. If the project is not started or cancelled or if the organisation ceases operations, any unused grant funding must be returned to Cheshire West and Chester Council.

3.9 The Council reserves the right to withhold, suspend or recover grant funding where the organisation fails to comply with the funding agreement, provides inaccurate or misleading information, does not deliver the agreed activity, spends funding on ineligible costs, or fails to provide satisfactory monitoring or financial evidence.

3.10 Applicants must declare any other funding secured or applied for in relation to the same activity. The Council will not fund costs that are already funded from another source.

4. Decision Making Process

4.1 Community Investment Fund applications will be considered by Cheshire West and Chester Council officers and representatives with community insight after the application window closing date.

4.2 Applications will be assessed against alignment to priorities, desired outcomes, deliverability, value for money and due diligence requirements. Assessment, moderation and decision-making arrangements will include conflict of interest controls and a clear audit trail. Applications that contain all relevant documentation and pass the due diligence check will be considered by a Community Investment Fund Panel.

4.4 All applicants will be notified of the outcome of their application for funding via Plinth, whether successful or not. Unsuccessful applicants will be provided with feedback. Please note that the time frame may vary depending on demand and the evaluation process. All applicants will be informed if there is a delay in the awarding process.

4.5 Successful applicants will need to accept the offer by returning a signed Funding Agreement for Grants form. Payments will be made once signed forms are received.

5. Monitoring and Record Keeping

5.1 Once the signed grant agreement has been received, a monitoring and evaluation form or online system link will be sent to the organisation. For example, this could include quantitative data (volunteer hours, number of people who have accessed the project) and qualitative data (case studies, good news stories, feedback forms, pre/post project surveys). Monitoring obligations will be aligned to the funding tier for each grant and based on the outcomes set out in the application form to ensure agreed outcomes are being met. Impact and return on investment (ROI) will be assessed through a blended approach using appropriate evidence, outcomes, social value information, and community stories.

5.2 Financial Information- the Council will need to see evidence of where grant funding has been spent. All successful applicants must retain information regarding the project and funding for 3 years from the date of our last payment to you.

6. Launch Timescales & Priorities

6.1 The Community Investment Fund will have a phased launch to support invest-to-save, test-and-learn and co-production principles. Rather than launching the full fund

immediately, the Council will progressively increase scale, understand what works, strengthen the evidence base and adjust the operating model if required, before wider roll-out.

6.2 Please see the below table for timescales and the priorities that will be launched first. Please note that dates and priorities can be subject to change. All priorities as displayed earlier in the guidance will be released within the next twelve months, subject to demand, lessons learned from phase one and two, and available funding.

	Priority
Phase One 07/10-04/11 2026 Community Investment Fund open for grant applications.	Strong Start: <i>Inclusive Communities and Opportunities:</i> • Children and young people with SEND can participate fully in their communities; • Increased school readiness for children with emerging additional needs; • Improved parental confidence and resilience; • Improved inclusion in education, leisure and community activities. Healthy & Independent Living: <i>Employment, Skills & Financial Wellbeing:</i> • Volunteering opportunities that help people build meaningful relationships and reduce loneliness; • Activities that enable people to give back and feel valued; • Life skills support. Financial and Community Resilience: <i>Personal and financial Resilience:</i> • Earlier access to support before problems reach crisis point; • Improved digital inclusion and access to online services.
Phase Two 16/11-14/12 2026 Community Investment Fund open for	Strong Start: <i>Giving every child the best start in life:</i> • Strengthen parenting skills, confidence and capacity;



grant applications.	• Enhance children and young people's educational achievement and aspirations; • Promote positive emotional wellbeing and resilience in children and young people. Healthy & Independent Living <i>Improving Health and Wellbeing:</i> • Peer support networks; • Wellbeing groups; • Self-management programmes; • Participate in community activities, Financial and Community Resilience: <i>Family Resilience:</i> • Support for families to meet essential costs; • Increased access to practical, emotional and peer support.

Contact

If you have any questions or accessibility issues, please contact:

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