



Title of Report:	Town Centre Experience Fund 2023
Committee Report Submitted To:	The Leisure & Development Committee
Date of Meeting:	18 April 2023
For Decision or For Information	For Decision

Linkage to Council Strategy (2021-25)	
Strategic Theme	Improvement and innovation
Outcome	Council facilitates towns and villages in the Borough to continue to provide quality environments which evolve to meet the needs of their citizens, businesses and visitors to them
Lead Officer	Head of Prosperity & Place

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	£24,000
Included in Current Year Estimates	YES
Capital/Revenue	revenue
Code	31275
Staffing Costs	n/a

Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	EQIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	Yes/No	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:

1.0 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to seek Council approval to move the Town Centre Experience Fund from an open/close programme to a rolling programme for applications. This will allow for efficiencies in the fund allocation process for both applicants and council officers.

2.0 Background

The Town Centre Experience Fund (TCEF) is open for grants up to a maximum of £2,000 per applicant (total programme fund is £24,000). In February 2023 Council approval the continuation of the annual TCEF grant. The current programme opened on 12th April 2023 with a closing date 26th May 2023.

Groups of traders/town centre stakeholders are encouraged to work together to introduce new experiences, activities, marketing or event development for their respective town centre. See **Annex A** for guidance notes.

In summary, the eligibility criteria is as follows:

- All applicants must be based within the settlements of Ballymoney, Ballycastle, Ballykelly, Bushmills, Coleraine, Cushendall, Dungiven, Garvagh, Kilrea, Limavady, Portrush and Portstewart.
- They must also be actively trading commercially or a constituted organisation.
- The lead applicant must have a business bank (or other financial institution) account for the sole purpose of their business/organisation – i.e. separate from personal finances.
- Businesses/organisations may only make one or be involved in one application per year.

3.0 Proposal

Lessons learnt from previous programmes indicate that it is important that applications are assessed in a timely manner as proposals from interested groups tend to be timebound. Oversight by the Funding Department on the assessment process will ensure that the council policies and procedures are adhered to and funding awards made accordingly. In light of the decision making process a rolling programme has been proposed and an information report will be brought to Leisure & Development Committee on completion of allocation of the TCEF.

4.0 Recommendations

It is recommended that the Leisure & Development Committee recommends to Council that the TCEF moves from an open/close programme to a rolling programme for applications in 2023/24.



Town Centre Experience Fund

Grant Guidance Notes

Deadline for Submission of Applications

12 noon on Friday 26 May 2023

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1. Introduction

The Town Centre Experience Fund will provide funding to support local town and village centre based retail businesses or organisations, to create, develop or support experiences and initiatives to assist in creating vibrant and sustainable town centres.

The project will open for grants, up to a maximum of £2,000, and groups of traders/town centre stakeholders will be encouraged to work together to introduce new experiences, initiatives, activities, marketing or event development.

You may find it helpful to discuss your project with a member of staff within Council's Town & Village Management Team before submitting your application:

Catrina McNeill

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1.1 Purpose of Grant Programme

The Town Centre Experience Fund is aimed at the 12 towns and villages of Ballymoney, Ballycastle, Ballykelly, Bushmills, Coleraine, Cushendall, Dungiven, Garvagh, Kilrea, Limavady, Portrush and Portstewart. It's about bringing different ideas together and developing cohesive thinking around activities which can improve the town centre experience. These could be commercial, community or cultural experiences which will contribute to the vibrancy of the town centre and generate more engagement in the town.

This funding will support local businesses/organisations to create a new experience for their town centre. Groups of traders/town centre stakeholders are encouraged to work together to introduce new experiences, initiatives, activities, marketing or event development for their respective town centre.

The sustainability of the retail sector across our towns is important to the town centre offer, and the pandemic has increased the need for additional experiences within our town centres. This grant will provide funding to develop initiatives to assist in sustaining and encourage visits to our town centres.

1.2 Strategic Fit

Prosperity & Place:

Economic Development Strategy has 6 Emerging Themes with the ambition to deliver a green, connected and fair economy in the Causeway Coast and Glens.

A Renewed Place – Town /village renewal that places accessibility and vibrancy at the core.

Community Planning Outcomes:

All people of Causeway Coast and Glens will contribute to and benefit from a thriving economy built on a culture of growth, entrepreneurship, innovation and learning.

Outcome

- The Causeway Coast & Glens area provides opportunities for all to contribute to and engage in a more prosperous and fair economy.
- The Causeway Coast and Glens area attracts and grows more profitable businesses.

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- The Causeway Coast and Glens area drives entrepreneurship and fosters innovation.

If your application is successful, you will be contractually obliged to provide information to Council's Economic Development Officers. This will include monitoring progress and expenditure incurred, discussing challenges or obstacles and fulfilling the reporting requirements stipulated in the Letter of Offer.

Please do not apply if you cannot fulfil these requirements.

1.3 Level of Grant Award

The Town Centre Experience Fund can provide funding of up to 100% costs up to a maximum of £2,000. Match funding is not a requirement. Applicant businesses/organisations must be in a position to pay for items and claim the money from Council retrospectively.

This is a competitive process and all grant awards will be determined on the basis of merit. Applicants are advised that organisations that have been successful in securing Council funding in the past will not automatically be guaranteed funding in the future. Council reserves the right to reduce the amount of funding awarded if we do not consider that the amount applied for represents value for money or if there are insufficient funds available to meet the request.

Please Note: Successful applicants will have to provide all evidence requested once the project expenditure is complete. This will include original receipts, business bank statements, or any other documentation deemed necessary. This list is not exhaustive. If requested documentation is not supplied, payment will be withheld. Please do not apply for funding if you cannot supply these items.

1.4 General Principles

In line with Council's Grant Funding Policy, the overarching principle for all Council grant funding is that of meeting local needs which have been identified and prioritised by Council or by others and acknowledged by Council. Any activity that cannot be shown to meet the following basic requirements will not be provided with funding:

- Have a clearly identified need.
- Can deliver outcomes which meet this need.
- Be undertaken by a credible, viable business/organisation with the capacity to deliver the project as stated.
- Reflect the statutory remit of Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council aligning with the Council's Corporate Plan, the relevant Service Plan and meets the specific criteria of the fund.
- Applicants must demonstrate their commitment to promoting Good Relations and Equality of Opportunity.
- In the interests of transparency, equality and accountability, all eligible applicants will have a right of appeal should their application be rejected.

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- While all applications are treated on the basis of merit, Council would particularly welcome applications from young people, women and under-represented groups from Section 75 groupings.

All projects must be completed, paid in full, cleared the business bank account and claimed before Friday 29 March 2024. There is no provision for extending this deadline.

1.5 Who can apply?

The initial criteria for application are as follows:

- All applicants must be based within the town centre of Ballymoney, Ballycastle, Ballykelly, Bushmills, Coleraine, Cushendall, Dungiven, Garvagh, Kilrea, Limavady, Portrush and Portstewart. They must also be actively trading commercially or a constituted organisation.
(Note: please refer to the following link for confirmation – https://wayback.archive-it.org/11112/20190702191515/https://www.planningni.gov.uk/index/policy/development_plans/devplans_az/northern_2016/northern_library.htm)
- The lead applicant must have a business bank (or other financial institution) account for the sole purpose of their business/organisation – i.e. separate from personal finances.
- Businesses/ organisations may only make one or be involved in one application per financial year.
- Be able to provide evidence of partnership working with other local groups/organisations for the purposes of developing the proposed project/application seeking funding.

Only applicants that meet these criteria can apply to the Town Experience Fund.

1.6 What can be funded?

Examples of expenditure that can be funded through this grant include:

- New equipment linked to creating a new event for the town.
- Creating new marketing and promotional material.
- Implementing a significant marketing campaign which will lead to increased footfall.
- Development of an initiative or event which will lead to more engagement within the town.
- Development of an initiative and/or environmental improvement project to dress the main retail hub area.

1.7 Who cannot be funded?

This funding programme will not award grants to the following:-

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- Businesses/organisations whose address is outside the main retail town/village centres of Ballymoney, Ballycastle, Ballykelly, Bushmills, Coleraine, Cushendall, Dungiven, Garvagh, Kilrea, Limavady, Portrush and Portstewart.
- Political Organisations
- Businesses/organisations yet to commence trading
- Any business where there are ethical or reputational considerations – e.g. gambling, money lending, adult entertainment, tobacco products or cannabis products not authorised as medicines, debt factoring, hire purchase financing; pyramid schemes; projects which have as their objective the promotion of political or religious views; illegal or immoral activities.
- Any other business that the Council may from time to time deem to be ineligible.

1.8 Exclusions

In general, the following will not be eligible for funding:-

- Retrospective expenditure where services/items have already been obtained and paid
- Applications received after the closing date as specified
- Costs that are not auditable e.g. cash payments unsupported by an approved petty cash system
- Costs towards ongoing running costs (e.g. electricity, rent, rates, insurance etc.).
- Building costs
- On-going Licence Fees
- Loan Repayments
- Mobile Assets e.g. bicycles, cars, vans, lorries, boats, trailers, horse-boxes, diggers
- Second hand equipment including refurbished equipment
- General maintenance or refurbishment works
- Servicing of existing equipment
- Consumable items that are used by the business and replaced regularly because they wear out or are used up e.g. printer ink, high-vis vests for staff, hand sanitiser
- Costs towards banking charges and / or repayment of debt
- Costs that can be claimed back from elsewhere e.g. VAT.
- Activities which are party-political in intention, use or presentation
- Salary costs
- Alcohol, gratuities, gifts and prizes
- Purchase of stock for general trading purposes
- Statutory Fees

2.0 How to answer the questions

Applications for financial assistance from Causeway Coast and Glens for 2023-24 should be submitted online at www.causewaycoastandglens.gov.uk/grantsandfunding

Guidance on completing the application online is provided via the web-site link.

**All sections must be completed as fully and concisely as possible.
Please note maximum word limits per question.**

3.0 How we assess and score your application

Every application that is received will be assessed for the following:

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- To ensure that the business/organisation is eligible to apply to this particular grant programme.
- For reassurance of each applicant's capability to deliver the proposal, and
- How well the proposal meets the aims of the programme fund to increase engagement and footfall.

An acknowledgement receipt will be electronically issued to you once your submission has been received. The Funding Unit will assess your application for eligibility. If your application is eligible to apply for grant aid from the Town Centre Experience Fund, it will be forwarded to the relevant service area for a full assessment and scoring against the stated criteria.

3.1 Eligibility Assessment

The assessments in respect of Part 1 of the application form are awarded a pass or fail eligibility rating.

If the business/organisation, based on the information supplied, is able to satisfy the Council of their eligibility to draw down the grant, they will progress to the next part of the process.

If the business/organisation, based on the information supplied, is not able to satisfy the Council of their eligibility to draw down the grant, they will be advised of specific omissions / shortcomings and how these can be addressed to help prepare them for any future funding requests.

3.2 What if an application is not eligible?

If your application is not eligible, you will be notified immediately and the reasons will be outlined to you. Your application will not proceed to assessment and scoring.

If a business/organisation is not eligible for funding through the Town Centre Experience Fund, businesses may wish to contact Council's Town & Village Management Team who can help signpost to other sources of support.

3.3 Assessment and Scoring

If the business/organisation, based on the information supplied, is able to satisfy the Council of their eligibility for the Town Experience Fund they will be scored according to established assessment criteria shown in the table below.

0 Unacceptable	Nil or inadequate response. Fails to address the question or demonstrate an ability to meet the requirement.
1 Very Poor	Response is partially relevant but generally very poor. The response addresses some elements of the requirement but contains insufficient/limited detail or explanation to demonstrate how the requirement will be fulfilled. An unacceptable response with serious reservations.
2 Poor	Response is partially relevant but generally poor. The response addresses some elements of the requirement but contains insufficient/limited detail or explanation to demonstrate how the requirement will be fulfilled. A response with reservations.

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3 Average	Response is relevant and average. The response addresses a broad understanding of the requirement but may lack details on how the requirement will be fulfilled in certain areas.
4 Good	Response is relevant and good. The response is sufficiently detailed to demonstrate a good understanding and provides details on how the requirements will be fulfilled. Good supporting evidence supplied.
5 Excellent	Response is completely relevant and excellent overall. The response is comprehensive, unambiguous and demonstrates a thorough understanding of the requirement and provides details of how the requirement will be met in full.

All questions will be scored out of 5 and weighting will be applied as detailed below;

1. Please provide a detailed description of project including venues/ locations/ dates and times?
2. Describe the need for your project and outline your evidence of this need?
3. What are the outcomes set for the project (e.g. increase in footfall, increase in dwell time, increased spend in towns)?
4. This grant aims to promote/ encourage collaborative working, with this in mind please detail the partners you plan to work with to achieve your project objectives?

	Criteria	Score out of a possible 5	Weighting	Possible Score
1	Detailed description of the project		X2	10
2	Demonstrate how your project aligns to the strategic priorities detailed within section 1.2. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Renewed Place, • The Causeway Coast & Glens area provides opportunities for all to contribute to and engage in a more prosperous and fair economy. • The Causeway Coast and Glens area attracts and grows more profitable businesses. • The Causeway Coast and Glens area drives entrepreneurship and fosters innovation 		X3	15
3	Clear and realistic outcomes set for the project e.g. increase in footfall, increase in dwell time, increased spend in towns		X4	20
4	Clear and concise evidence of a collaborative approach to achieve the project objectives		X1	5

Applications must score at least 65% in order to avail of funding.

Applicants will be ranked according to score obtained and available funding allocated to highest ranking applications. Applicants who fail to achieve a score of at least 65% will be advised that they have been unsuccessful.

3.4 How decisions are made?

When the scores are finalised, the applications will be presented to the Leisure and Development Committee for consideration and recommendation to full Council for approval.

It will be at this point, that the successful/unsuccessful applicants will be notified.

3.5 What happens if an application is successful?

If an application is successful, Council will issue a Letter of Offer which is a legal agreement with the business to deliver on the proposals outlined in their application form.

Signed Letters of Offer must be returned within 14 days of receipt.

If successful, businesses can avail of support that will explain the processes and procedures that relate to programme monitoring, submitting a financial claim, requesting a change to programme, promoting Council's support for the programme, monitoring and evaluation requirements and the process of verification.

Council funding is normally paid retrospectively. Grants can be released in two instalments – 50% of the grant will be awarded upfront if the business can demonstrate that it does not have sufficient reserves, followed by remaining 50% once evaluation/financial claim is verified satisfactorily.

Businesses are required to submit an end of funding evaluation report. Council Officers may also arrange post-project site visits.

3.6 What happens if an application is unsuccessful?

If an application is not successful, officers from the Council will be available to go through the application with the business and provide practical developmental support to address areas of concern.

An Appeals Process / Review Procedure is also available if an application is unsuccessful. The purpose of this is to ensure that the decisions taken and procedures followed for individual applications are applied fairly and consistently.

The Review will provide an independent process through which an applicant will have the opportunity to demonstrate to the Review Panel that either:

- the outcome was unreasonable or
- that the proper procedures were not followed

Appeals on any other grounds will not be considered.

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3.7 Grant Application Assessment Schedule

The Town Experience Fund will be open for applications according to the table below:

Opening Date: Monday 17 April 2023	Closing Date: Friday 26 May 2023 at 12 noon No late applications will be accepted under any circumstances and all required supporting documentation must be supplied at time of submission or the application will not be considered.
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The Town Experience Fund will follow this seven step administrative process:

Step 1	Open call for applications is made
Step 2	Applications are submitted online
Step 3	Applications are assessed
Step 4	Results of the assessment process are ratified by Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council
Step 5	Notification of funding is issued to applicants
Step 6	Letters of Offer are issued and are accepted
Step 7	Staged payments granted retrospectively to successful applicants on submission of all required documentation to verify expenditure and outcomes.

3.8 Application Process

All applications for financial assistance from Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council for 2022-23 should be submitted online via Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council's online Funding Hub at: www.causewaycoastandglens.gov.uk/grantsandfunding

It is the responsibility of each applicant to ensure that their application is submitted prior to the advertised time and date of closing. Applications received after the closing time/date will not be considered for funding. No exceptions will be made and there is no recourse to appeal.

The deadline for submissions to Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council's Town Centre Experience Fund is 12 noon on Friday 26 May 2023

Data Protection Act

- We will use the information you give us on the application form during assessment and for the life of any grant we award you to administer and analyse grants and for our own research.
- We may give copies of this information to individuals and organisations we consult when assessing applications, when monitoring grants and evaluating the way our funding programmes work and the effect they have. These organisations may include accountants, external evaluators and other organisations or groups involved in delivering the project.
- We may also share information with other government departments, organisations providing match funding and other organisations and individuals with a legitimate interest in applications and grants, or for the prevention or detection of fraud.
- We might use the data you provide for our own research. We recognise the need to maintain the confidentiality of vulnerable groups and their details will not be made public in any way, except as required by law.

Freedom of Information Act

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives members of the public the right to request any information that we hold, subject to certain exemption that may apply. This includes information received from third parties, such as, although not limited to, grant applicants, grant holders and contractors. If information is requested under the Freedom of Information Act we will release it, subject to exemptions; although we may consult with you first. If you think that information you are providing may be exempt from release if requested, you should let us know when you apply. For further information please visit the Information Commissioner's Office at www.ico.gov.uk

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