



Town Centres Improvement Fund

Scheme Document and Guidance Note

July 2024

Overview

In the budget approved by Council in February 2024, £358,000 was allocated to improve Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole town centres, known as the 'Town Centres Improvement Fund'. This is a one-off funding stream for 2024/25 from the additional revenue grant received from government.

Funds will be divided among the three town centres as defined in the current Local Plans as:

Bournemouth - [Town Centre Area Action Plan 2013, page 3](#)

Christchurch - [Christchurch and East Dorset Local Plan 2014, Core Strategy, page 49](#)

Poole - [Poole Local Plan 2018, page 25](#)

The allocation is based on the population of their respective towns:

- Bournemouth £179,000
- Christchurch £60,000
- Poole £119,000

This fund cannot be spent in any other defined centre or high street outside of the three town centres.

Cllr Earl, Deputy Leader of the Council, Portfolio Holder for Connected Communities and Economic Development Officers have engaged with the following stakeholders to discuss the fund and canvas initial ideas:

- Bournemouth Town Centre, Coastal, Christchurch and Poole Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)
- Christchurch Town Council
- Christchurch Town Ward Councillors
- Bournemouth Central Ward Councillors
- Poole Town Ward Councillors

Process and format

Applications will be assessed against their ability to deliver longer term benefits to the town centre rather than a one-off boost to the local economy, and seed funding new ideas that empower partners and unlock new opportunities will be seen favourably. 100% of each grant awarded must be spent on delivering these benefits within the defined area.

An application form and award process has been devised. All projects will be evaluated in line with the criteria in the scoring matrix below. There is no limit to the number of applications that can be received, however the minimum amount that can be applied for is £5K.

This is a revenue fund. Projects that require a capital funding element will need the capital funding to exceed £10K to be eligible to apply. Multiple projects from the same applicant are permitted. Projects can be grouped together as part of one application (e.g. public realm and programme of events).

If total project costs exceed budget available, the successful applications will be selected on their merits, scored using the matrix and in accordance with the priority expressed by the applicant themselves.

Applicants will be required to complete at least one monitoring report to show progress against milestones, and a report at the end to show outcomes and outputs achieved in line with their original application.

Match funding by partner organisations is not mandatory but could help to deliver best value for certain projects. Applicants will be required to identify how their proposal will deliver the aims and objectives of the [BCP Council Corporate Strategy](#) and [High Streets and District Centres Strategy](#).

The grant is not a consideration for a supply and is a non-business activity for VAT purposes. If your organisation is VAT registered and it can recover VAT for grant funded projects, then please ensure VAT is not included in the project costs. It is recommended to seek professional tax advice to establish your organisation's tax position before applying.

Applicants should be aware that BCP Council services may charge per hour for their time/resource. The applicant must liaise and agree costs before submitting a bid. For all successful bids, any costs that appear after submission will need to be taken out of the grant provided to the applicant.

To ensure effective management of the scheme and to help recover its costs, Economic Development will take a fee of £8K. This is in line with the fee the team takes for managing other Government projects.

The £8K will be split across the 3 towns in the same way as the original totals, meaning the total funding available for each town is:

- Bournemouth £179,000 (– Project Management Fee of £4000) = £175,000
- Christchurch £60,000 (– Project Management Fee of £1340) = £58,660
- Poole £119,000 (– Project Management Fee of £2660) = £116,340

Timescales

Deadline for applications is **Friday 2 August 2024**.

It is intended that Cabinet will receive the recommendation to approve projects achieving a grant award on 2 October 2024 after the selection process has taken place, with funds being paid as soon as possible thereafter subject to due diligence and having the necessary information.

Projects should commence and ideally be delivered before 31 March 2025, although a later delivery date will be considered through an exception/change request to the Economic Development team, and all projects must be delivered by 30 September 2025.

The Council retains the right to update the scheme document, initiatives and projects throughout the programme and use its discretion on individual cases. This includes changes to grant award levels and match-funding requirements.

Grant Assessment Scoring Matrix

Scoring criteria

Part 1 – Eligibility

Applicants will only be considered who achieve a “Yes” to all of the following criteria:

Town Centre focused project (as defined in current Local Plans, as defined on p.1)	Yes / No
Business Improvement District (as listed) or Christchurch Town Council applicant	Yes / No
Applicant has consulted with relevant Ward Cllr	Yes / No
Businesses that will not exceed the permitted Subsidy Control threshold of £315,000 in relation to Minimal Financial Assistance (MFA) during this and the two previous financial years (see Appendix 1 to this document)	Yes / No
Projects will be agreed and commenced by 31 March 2025	Yes / No
There is no alternative grant from other sources for this project	Yes / No
It is legal spend / it will not be spent on illegal activities	Yes / No

Part 2 – Application review (scoring)

Criteria	Scoring

Project aligns with the BCP Corporate Strategy	3 – strong alignment / benefit 2 – some alignment / benefit 1 – not clear from application
Project aligns with one of more of the objectives set out in the High Streets & District Centres Strategy	3 – strong alignment / benefit 2 – some alignment / benefit 1 – not clear from application
Clear project proposal and timeline	3 – clear proposal and timeline 2 – further information could be provided 1 – not clear what project/timeline is
Clear breakdown of project costs	3 – clear breakdown of costs 2 – further information could be provided 1 – not clear what cost breakdown is
Milestones are clear and relevant	3 – very clear milestones 2 – further information could be provided but meets base criteria 1 – not clear what milestones are
Collaboration and consultation (Q17)	3 – relevant collaboration has been demonstrated 2 – some collaboration/consultation has been demonstrated 1 – not clear if any collaboration/consultation has been demonstrated
What does success look like – will this achieve evidence of improvements to the town centre environment, public realm, safety, sustainability, etc, and can this be monitored?	3 – Evidence of town centre improvement can be monitored and demonstrated 2 – Some evidence to show improvements will be achievable

	1 – no / little evidence of town centre improvement can be monitored or demonstrated
Project demonstrates innovation/something new*	3 – evidence of innovation, something that has not been done before or for a long time, or uses a new piece of technology, a new collaboration 2 – evidence showing some innovation 1 – no / little evidence of innovation
Project demonstrates long term benefits to the town centre over short term gap filling	3 – demonstrates through projected outputs/outcomes long term benefits to the town centre (metric to be chosen by applicant) 2- some demonstration of projected outputs/outcomes 1 – no demonstration of projected outputs/outcomes
Project demonstrates how grant will empower partner(s) to deliver improvements	3 – clearly demonstrates how the partner is empowered to deliver 2 – somewhat demonstrates how the partner is empowered to deliver 1 – no demonstration of how the partner is empowered
Risk mitigation has been considered and incorporated	3 – credible plan with risk mitigations 2 – reasonable risk register and consideration of mitigations 1 – little/no detail about risks and mitigation

***Innovation: the process of bringing about new ideas, methods, products, services, or solutions that have a significant positive impact and value. It involves transforming creative concepts into tangible outcomes that improve efficiency, and effectiveness, or address unmet needs.**

Recommendation to project review panel

Part 1 - Businesses must achieve 'Yes' response to all criteria in part 1.

Part 2 - Maximum score 33

- Score of 22+ recommended to project board for approval
- Score of 16-22 request further information / review with project board
- Score of less than 16 – will not be recommended for approval

Appendix 1

Subsidy Control and the Subsidy Control Act 2022

Having left the European Union, the UK is no longer subject to EU State Aid rules. In September 2020, the UK Government announced its intent to design a new domestic subsidy control regime that best suited the needs of the UK, representing value for money to the UK taxpayer and complying with international obligations. The Act was introduced to Parliament as the Subsidy Control Bill in June 2021 and came into force on 4th January 2023.

All support and grants will be issued under Minimal Financial Assistance (MFA). According to the “Statutory Guidance for the United Kingdom Subsidy Control Regime” which was published in November 2022 and which public authorities such as the Council must have regard to when giving a subsidy, MFA allows public authorities to award low value subsidies without needing to comply with the majority of the subsidy control requirements. MFA has a financial threshold so no recipient can receive more than £315,000 over the applicable period. The applicable period is:

- The elapsed part of the current financial year (i.e., from 1 April); and
- the two financial years immediately preceding the current financial year

Cumulation rules apply to MFA. This is essential to ensure that the UK is complying with its international obligations. MFA subsidies cumulate with each other and with other subsidies that fall within the category of ‘Minimal or SPEI financial assistance’. This captures all the different low value exemptions an enterprise could receive support from UK public authorities.

For example, the following should all be taken into account during the current and previous two financial years: MFA; SPEI assistance; aid given under the EU State Aid de minimis regulations either before the end of the implementation period of 31 December 2020 or after this date, if by virtue of the Northern Ireland Protocol; and subsidies given as small amounts of financial assistance (SAFA) under Articles 364(4) or 365(3) of the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement after the end of the implementation period but prior to this section of the Act coming into effect.

This prevents enterprises being able to receive many subsidies that are in isolation considered low value, but cumulatively could create distortive impacts on domestic competition or investment or international trade or investment if their combined value exceeds the threshold.

Businesses are required to keep a written record of the amount of MFA received and the date/s when it was received. The written record must be kept for at least three years beginning with the date on which the MFA was given. This will enable businesses to respond to requests

from public authorities on how much MFA they have received and whether they have reached the cumulative threshold.

Further details can be found in the Statutory Guidance [here](#). It is the responsibility of all businesses to declare the amount of subsidies they have received.