



Subject:	Community Ownership Fund – New Bidding Window
Date:	24 March 2023
Reporting Officer:	John Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy
Contact Officers:	Kevin Heaney, Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty Mark Mulholland, Strategic Policy, and Planning Officer

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	To provide Committee with an update on a bidding window, Window 3 Round 2, to apply for the Community Ownership Fund recently opened by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC).
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	It is recommended that the Committee: <ul style="list-style-type: none">note the update in relation to Window 3 Round 2 funding under the Community Ownership Fund;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • that Members agree to share this information with relevant local organisations through their existing area networks if appropriate; and • agree that this information is shared with relevant partners through the Community Planning network.
3.0	Main report
3.1	DLUHC have recently launched a new window to apply for the Community Ownership Fund. Community groups can bid for up to £250k matched-funding to buy or take over local community assets at risk of loss to run these as community-owned businesses. In exceptional cases, up to £1m is available for sports clubs to buy a sports ground at risk of loss.
3.2	To apply, groups should submit an Expression of Interest, and this is always open. If successful, they will be invited to submit a full application during one of the bidding windows. The current window opened on 15 February 2023 and will close on 14 April 2023 .
3.3	To date in NI, DLUHC have supported six projects to date including Ballymacash Sports Academy in Lisburn, St. Columb's Hall in Derry Londonderry, and a parish building in Kilcoo.
3.4	DLUHC have provided a promotional pack which includes key information, links, and materials in case for local authorities to share these with relevant groups or in your wider network. This pack is provided at Appendix A for your consideration.
3.5	<p>Round 2 Changes</p> <p>Having learned lessons from the review of the first bidding round after engaging with applicants and sector stakeholders, DLUHC have made some changes to the eligibility requirements and the design of the programme for Round 2 onwards. These changes are explained in full in the updated prospectus.</p>
3.5.1	<p>A summary of the key changes to the eligibility requirements for the relaunch of the Fund include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an extension for project completion from 6 months to 12 months from the date indicated on the offer letter • allowing the approval of bids for assets with at least 15-year leases and reasonable break clauses, although 25-year leases are still preferable • removing the requirement for projects to have had a community use in the last 5 years, although assets must still have evidence of some past community use

- clarifying and simplifying the eligibility requirements for publicly owned assets and sporting assets.

3.5.2 **A summary of the key changes to the design of the programme include:**

- introducing a two-stage application process by including an always open Expression of Interest (EOI) stage
- moving to three bidding windows per year, meaning applicants can submit a full application once their EOI has been approved, at a time that is right for their project
- Providing more information to successful applicants on what they can expect after receiving an offer letter
- introducing a cap on the number of full applications that can be made for each project. Applicants are now permitted two full application attempts. Application attempts from Round 1 will be disregarded from the cap.

Expression of Interest (EOI) and main application stage

3.6 DLUHC have introduced a two-stage application process for applicants. Applicants first need to submit an EOI form and have this approved before being sent a link to the full application for the Fund. The EOI form will test whether a project is likely to be eligible through a pass/fail assessment based on the eligibility requirements.

3.7 The EOI stage is designed to strengthen the application process by ensuring that applicants are fully aware of the eligibility requirements ahead of submitting a full application to the Fund. The EOI stage will be always open so that applicants can submit an EOI form at a time that is right for their project.

3.8 If applicants pass the EOI stage, they can then apply in any bidding window suitable for the timings of their project. There will be three bidding windows each year to submit a full application to the Fund.

Round 2 Timings

3.9 Window 3 of Round 2 opened on 15 February 2023 and will close on **14 April 2023 at 11:59am**. If applicants apply in this window, DLUHC aim to inform them of the outcome of the application in spring 2023. There will be additional bidding windows in the future, with three windows per financial year. The dates of future bidding windows will be announced in due course.

	<u>Financial and Resource Implications</u>
3.10	None associated with this report.
	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u>
3.11	None associated with this report
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	Appendix A – Community Ownership Fund Local Authority Promotional Pack, 15 March 2023