



Subject:	Social Supermarket Fund 26/28
Date:	20 th February 2026
Reporting Officer:	Jim Girvan, Director of Neighbourhood Services
Contact Officer:	Nicola Lane, Neighbourhood Services Manager Margaret Higgins, Lead Officer Community Provision

Is this report restricted?

Yes

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No

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Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.

Insert number

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1. Information relating to any individual
2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)
4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter
5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained
6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction
7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision

After Council Decision

Sometime in the future

Never

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Is this report eligible for call in?

Yes

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No

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1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	To advise members on the outcome of the assessment of applications received through the Social Supermarket Fund 26/28 and seek members agreement in relation to the allocation of financial resources.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	The Committee is asked to:

	<p>I. Note the assessment outcome and agree a preferred allocation model based on the information contained in this report.</p> <p>II. Note that there is no current budget available to support applications to the Social Supermarket Fund 26/28 as this is funded almost 100% from the Department for Communities and confirmation of budget for 26/27 has yet to be received.</p> <p>III. Consider if they wish to release any funds to successful applicants in advance of receiving the DfC LoO so that activity can begin from 01 April 2026.</p> <p>IV. Grant delegated authority to the Director of Neighbourhood Services to issue Letters of Offer on the basis of the agreed allocation model as budget becomes available through the Community Support Programme or other sources.</p> <p>V. Agree that if approval to release some funds is given, officers progress with the funding allocation process including; sending out letters of intent, agreeing programmes of work with applicants based on the recommended funding allocation, processing funding agreements and ensuring all monitoring requirements are implemented.</p>
3.0	Main report
	<u>Background</u>
3.1	In response to recommendations in the Welfare Reform Mitigations report, the Department for Communities (DfC) has operated a Social Supermarket Pilot programme since October 2017. Following positive evaluation of the Programme, funding has been made available through the CSP since 20/21 to all council areas.
3.2	The aim of a social supermarket is to offer a sustainable response to food insecurity by seeking to help address the root causes of poverty rather than simply provide food. This is achieved by providing, in addition to food support, a referral network for wraparound support.
3.3	<p>The key principles that models should take account of are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing support 'beyond food', such as, access to wraparound support services which transition people out of food poverty and respect the dignity of clients. • Maximising existing structures, services, and partnerships to provide wraparound support.
3.4	Members will recall that at the June 25 meeting council agreed to roll over awards to organisations funded in 24/25 into 25/26 and asked officers to review the criteria used to assess applications. A new set of criteria was agreed at October council and full details of these are provided in Appendix ii.
3.5	This matter is normally considered by P&C committee but given the likelihood that no DfC funding will be received until after the beginning of the financial year, officers are presenting it

	<p>to SP&R so that members can consider funding options and whether they wish to release funds in the absence of a DfC LoO.</p> <p><u>Key Issues</u></p>
3.6	<p>The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee granted approval on 19 September 2025 to operate an open call for grant applications to the Social Supermarket Fund for the years 2026/28. Members were advised at this point that because activity is 100% funded by DfC, there was a risk that funding to support successful applications might not be in place from April 26. At October committee, members agreed to allocate an additional £100,000 from council funds to projects in the 25/26 year.</p>
3.7	<p>The Social Supermarket Support Fund was opened on 17 October 2024 for applications and council launched a campaign to advertise and promote the fund. Advertisements were placed in local and regional newspapers and were also promoted across Belfast City Council website and social media. During November 2025, two information sessions were held to advise potential applicants on the process, a total of 23 attended. Officers also answered queries and provided one to one support to groups as requested.</p>
3.8	<p>The 2026/28 Social Supermarket Support Fund received 26 applications totalling £1,123,836 by the closing date of 12 noon on Monday 8 December 2026.</p>
3.9	<p>When an application is submitted, the following process is followed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Receipt and log of applications - Eligibility check of applications (allowing a 5 day response for omitted information) - Prepare and supply applications that have met eligibility criteria to Unit Officers to score against agreed set criteria - Score each eligible application against the set criteria as outlined in the guidance notes - Moderate applications between scoring officers to ensure fairness and consistency in scoring - An independent assessment panel to review a sample of applications. The role of the independent assessment panel is 'to ensure that the scoring of applications has been undertaken in an appropriate fashion and to provide verification or validation of sampled applications and the overall process' (Williamson Consulting, 2012).
3.10	<p>The independent assessment panels were satisfied with the scoring and application of the criteria for the grants and agreed to recommend the unit's recommendations for awards as shown in Appendix i.</p>

3.11	Funding for Social Supermarkets is primarily drawn from the DfC Community Support Programme (CSP) Letter of Offer, which includes a 100% DfC funded funding stream for this work. Council has not yet received a Letter of Offer for 26/27 and Council does not have any budget to support activity that is 100% funded through the CSP in 26/27.
3.12	DfC officials have advised that the current position on the Social Supermarket budget for 2026/27 is that the draft budget is currently out for consultation until 3rd March 26. The Finance Minister has set out several areas where the Executive has previously committed to providing funding to Departments at the level required. For DfC, this includes earmarked allocations for Welfare Mitigations through which the Social Supermarket programme is funded. Allocations to the individual programs within this budget are yet to be finalised. Members should note that for the last number of years CSP Letters of Offer have not been received until July.
3.13	In order to support activity from 01 April 26, members are asked to consider whether they wish to release any funds to successful applicants in advance of receiving the DfC LoO. Based on a likely DfC budget of approximately £780,000, it is recommended that funding is provided to applicants who scored 51.25 and above, which would require total annual funding of £814,000. This would require an approximate annual contribution of £34,000 from council. It is recommended that organisations scoring over 51.25 are funded since using the next score of 61.25 would provide an annual allocation of only £699,000, which is likely to be less than the DfC LoO and would leave some funds unallocated.
3.14	Members should note that payments for all CSP large grants are paid on a 50/50 basis, therefore if members are minded to approve a payment to successful applicants, it is recommended that this is paid on a 50% basis to allow organisations to plan delivery for the first 6 months of the financial year.
3.15	In April 24, when council faced the same scenario, SP&R agreed to fund 21 projects 70% of their allocation in the absence of a Letter of Offer from DfC to fund this area of work, this funding was taken from underspends in the Hardship Programme. In April 25, council agreed to provide bridging support from council funds for 21 projects funded in 24/25 for the first 3 months of 25/26 delivery before the DfC LoO was received.
3.16	Members are also asked to grant delegated authority to the Director of Neighbourhood Services to issue Letters of Offer on the basis of the agreed allocation model as budget becomes available from CSP or other sources.

	<u>Financial and Resource Implications</u>
3.17	The budget received from DfC in 25/26 was £777,811 which has been used to support 19 projects. In November 2025, Council made an additional allocation of £100,000 to support social supermarkets, providing a total budget of £877,811
3.18	Members should note that there is currently no budget available to support this work in 26/27. Letters of Offer will be issued to groups on an annual basis. Officers will bring a paper to committee in February 27 to advise on funds available from DfC and whether any release of funds from council is required. Members agreed last September that although funding is primarily from DfC it would be beneficial for successful applicants to have increased security of funding by operating the Social Supermarket Fund on a two year basis rather than one.
	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications /Rural Needs Assessment</u>
3.19	The 26/28 Social Supermarket Fund open call is being screened for Equality, Good Relations and Rural Needs Implications.
4.0	Appendices - Documents Attached or None
	Appendix i – Assessment criteria 26/28 Social Supermarket Fund Appendix ii – Detail of criteria for Social Supermarket Fund 26/28