

# Community-Led Housing Early-Stage Feasibility Fund Policy

## 1. Purpose

This policy sets out the framework for the administration and award of the Community-Led Housing (CLH) Early-Stage Feasibility Fund.

The purpose of the Fund is to support community-led groups in developing affordable housing schemes that respond to identified local housing needs by providing financial assistance for early-stage feasibility and project development work.

## 2. Scope

This policy applies to all community-led organisations seeking financial support from the Fund within South Oxfordshire's administrative area.

## 3. Policy Statement

The Council will provide financial assistance through a staged grant mechanism to eligible community-led groups to enable the development of affordable housing proposals.

Funding provided under this scheme is non-repayable, subject to compliance with the terms and conditions set out in this policy.

## 4. Fund Overview

The Fund provides revenue support for early-stage project development costs.

Funding is intended to support projects through key early milestones, including:

- Establishing organisational capacity
- Assessing project feasibility
- Identifying suitable sites
- Progressing towards planning application submission

## 5. Eligible Expenditure

Funding may be used for early-stage project costs, including but not limited to:

- Initial start-up expenses
- Feasibility studies
- Housing Need surveys
- Site surveys
- Design and architectural services
- Costs associated with preparing a planning application

## 6. Eligibility Criteria

To be eligible for funding, applicants must meet the following criteria:

- Must be a community-led organisation or working towards becoming one
- Project must be within the Council's administrative area
- Must aim to deliver affordable housing responding to local need
- Must demonstrate community engagement or support
- Must have or be developing appropriate governance
- Funding must be used for eligible early-stage activities
- Stage 2 applicants must demonstrate potential project viability

The following are not eligible:

- Projects outside the Council's area
- For-profit or non-community organisations
- Retrospective costs
- Activities unrelated to community-led housing development

## 7. Funding Structure

The Fund is delivered across two stages. Applicants may apply for one or both stages.

*Stage 1: Direct Support Grant (up to £2,000)*

Supports early exploration and setup activities.

*Stage 2: Business Development Grant (up to £10,000)*

Supports feasibility, planning, and organisational development.

### 7.1 Stage 1: Direct Support Grant (up to £2,000)

Purpose:

Stage 1 funding is intended to support groups in the early exploration phase of a Community-Led Housing (CLH) project, including establishing an organisation and engaging the local community.

Who it is for:

- Groups at an early stage of considering a community-led housing initiative; and/or

- Groups not yet formally constituted or in the process of forming an organisation

Eligible activities include:

- Membership of national or regional CLH support organisations
- Initial community engagement and public consultation
- Housing Need surveys
- Early-stage design work (e.g. draft architectural drawings)
- Preparation of publicity materials (e.g. leaflets, media advertising)
- Development of a basic website or online presence

## **7.2 Stage 2: Business Development Grant (up to £10,000)**

Purpose:

Stage 2 funding is intended to support groups in developing a viable project, including formalising the organisation and undertaking more detailed feasibility work.

Who it is for:

- Groups who have identified a potential housing need and initial project concept; and
- Groups who can demonstrate that the project is potentially viable and capable of progressing

Eligible activities include:

- Selection and establishment of an appropriate legal structure
- Training and organisational capacity building
- Development of a project vision, business plan, and delivery strategy
- Community engagement and housing needs surveys
- Identification and assessment of potential development sites
- Pre-application planning advice and associated costs
- Preliminary site design and layout work
- Initial viability assessments and financial modelling
- Development of partnerships with landowners, housing associations, or other delivery partners

## **7.3 Progression Between Stages**

Progression from Stage 1 to Stage 2 is not automatic. Applicants seeking Stage 2 funding must demonstrate that sufficient progress has been made to justify further investment, including evidence of community support and initial project feasibility.

## **8. Assessment and Decision-Making**

- Applications will be assessed by the Affordable Housing Team.
- The team will review eligibility, appropriate use of funds, and project need.
- Recommended applications will be submitted to the Director of Housing and Environment for approval. The Director's determination regarding the award of funding shall be final.
- Applications will be assessed and a decision will normally be made within 20 working days of receipt, provided all required information has been correctly submitted.
- Approved applicants will receive a grant offer letter outlining terms.
- Funding will only be released once the signed agreement is returned.

## **9. Monitoring and Compliance**

- The Council will monitor all grants to ensure appropriate use.
- Grants must be spent within 12 months unless agreed otherwise.
- Unspent or misused funds may be recovered.
- A 6-month extension may be granted where justified.
- No grant funding will be released until the grant award letter has been duly signed and returned to the Council.

## **10. Contact Information**

For further information, contact:

[affordablehousingteam@southandvale.gov.uk](mailto:affordablehousingteam@southandvale.gov.uk)