

Rationale for Differentiated Scoring:

1. **Proportionality:** For example, a £500 project does not require the same level of detailed planning, risk assessment, or governance oversight as a £10,000 project. A simpler application and scoring process for smaller grants reduces the burden on both applicants (often small, volunteer-led groups) and assessors.
2. **Efficiency:** Less complex applications can be reviewed and scored more quickly, speeding up decision-making for small grants, which are often time sensitive.
3. **Accessibility:** A simpler process encourages more smaller, grassroots organisations to apply, who might be intimidated by a highly detailed application and robust scoring matrix.
4. **Risk Management:** Larger grants naturally carry more financial risk. A more robust assessment for these ensures due diligence, financial stability, and detailed project planning are thoroughly scrutinised.
5. **Strategic Focus:** Larger grants often fund more significant, impactful projects that require greater alignment with Council priorities and demonstrable long-term benefits. A detailed scoring matrix helps to identify and reward these.

Grant Application Scoring: Tiered Matrices

We'll use three distinct scoring matrices, each designed for a specific grant tier to ensure **proportionality, efficiency, and accurate evaluation**.

Tier 1: Small Grants Assessment (Up to £1,000)

This matrix is simplified for rapid assessment, focusing on direct community benefit and basic project feasibility for smaller, grassroots initiatives.

Total Possible Score: 50 points

Criteria	Max Score	Scoring Guidance (Examples)
Community/Business Need & Benefit (Does it meet a clear local need and deliver positive outcomes for communities or the economy?)	20	<p>0 = No evidence of need/benefit</p> <p>1-5 = Anecdotal/Limited: Relies on assumptions; benefits a very small group or limited effect on business; impact unclear</p> <p>6-10 = Good: Some evidence (e.g., small survey, local data); clear benefit for a reasonable number/range of people or to the success of the business, with clear positive outcomes</p> <p>11-15 = Strong: Robust evidence (e.g., strong community feedback, statistics);</p>

Criteria	Max Score	Scoring Guidance (Examples)
		significant, measurable benefits for many residents or a specifically vulnerable group or measurable increase to the business' economic performance, clearly outlining how lives will be improved.
Project Feasibility (Is it achievable with a clear plan and timeline?)	15	0 = Unclear/Unrealistic 1-3 = Basic: Activities listed, but vague on how; high-level dates only 4-7 = Good: Clear plan, realistic timeline with key activities defined; organisation seems capable. 8-10 = Strong: Very clear, achievable, and logical plan; detailed, realistic timeline; organisation has relevant experience/capacity.
Budget & Value for Money (Are the costs justified and does the project offer good value?)	10	0 = Poor/Vague 1-2 = Basic: Costs listed, but justification missing or vague 3-4 = Good: Clear breakdown, costs seem reasonable for the activity; good use of funds for the proposed outcome 5 = Strong: Detailed, justified budget; excellent value for the proposed outcome.
Alignment with the Council's Priorities (Project explicitly aligns with one or more of Council's Priorities.)	5	0 = No alignment 1-2 = Limited: Addresses one priority generally 3-4 = Good: Clearly aligns with one main priority 5 = Excellent: Strongly aligns with one or more priorities

Tier 2: Medium Grants Assessment (£1,001 - £5,000)

This matrix requires more detail and evidence than Small Grants, looking for developed projects with a wider community reach and clearer strategic alignment.

Total Possible Score: 75 points

Criteria	Max Score	Scoring Guidance (Examples)
Strategic Alignment (Project explicitly aligns with one of Council's Priorities outlined in the fund and demonstrates how.)	20	0-4 = No alignment/Contradictory. Project fails to address any of the Council's priorities or conflicts with them 5-9 = Limited: Addresses one priority generally, but without strong detail or a clear link

Criteria	Max Score	Scoring Guidance (Examples)
		<p>10-14 = Good: Clearly aligns with one main priority, providing some rationale</p> <p>5-20 = Strong: Strongly aligns with one or more key priorities, demonstrating a clear understanding of the Council's vision. <i>If "Climate Action & Energy Efficiency," directly contributes to the Council's "Our Home, Our Future" strategy.</i></p>
<p>Community/Business Need & Impact (Provides concrete evidence of the problem or opportunity the project will address (e.g., survey results, local statistics, community feedback, or business plan.)</p>	20	<p>0-4 = No evidence of need/benefit</p> <p>5-9 = Limited: Relies on anecdotal evidence; benefits a small specific group or limited effect on business, limited; impact unclear</p> <p>10-14 = Good: Some evidence of need (e.g., small survey, local data); clear benefit for a reasonable number/range of people or to the success of the business, with positive outcomes outlined</p> <p>15-20 = Strong: Provides good evidence of community need (e.g., community feedback, local statistics); delivers significant positive impact for a notable number of residents or a specifically identified vulnerable group or measurable increase to the business' economic performance, clearly outlining how quality of life will be improved.</p>
<p>Project Design & Deliverability (Project goals are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART). A clear, step-by-step plan of how the project will be delivered. A logical and achievable schedule for project activities and milestones.)</p>	15	<p>0-3 = Unclear/Unrealistic</p> <p>4-7 = Basic: Activities listed, but vague on how; high-level dates only; organisation capacity implied but not clearly demonstrated</p> <p>8-11 = Good: Clear plan, realistic timeline with key activities defined; organisation has relevant experience and appears capable</p> <p>12-15 = Strong: Very clear, achievable, and logical plan; detailed, realistic timeline with key milestones; organisation demonstrates relevant experience to make the project a success and adequate staffing/volunteers.</p>
<p>Financial Management & Value for Money (Comprehensive breakdown of all costs, clearly justified with supporting quotes where appropriate. Project demonstrates efficient use of funds, maximising impact, and considering long-term sustainability)</p>	10	<p>0-2 = Poor/Vague</p> <p>3-5 = Basic: Costs listed, but justification missing or vague; value for money not explicitly addressed</p> <p>6-7 = Good: Clear budget breakdown, most costs justified; project seems to offer reasonable value for money</p> <p>8-10 = Strong: Detailed, justified budget; excellent value for the proposed outcome; demonstrates efficient use of funds and some</p>

Criteria	Max Score	Scoring Guidance (Examples)
beyond the grant period, where not a one-off event.)		consideration for sustainability
Partnership & Collaboration (Evidence of working with other organisations or community groups to enhance impact and reach.) For a private business to score well in this criterion, they must demonstrate how the grant will also contribute to wider collaborations (with community groups, charities, or other businesses) creating a clear, measurable, and positive impact on the community. This means leveraging their resources (expertise, facilities, funding, Corporate Social Responsibility) to address identified community needs or enhance existing public services.	10	0-2 = No collaboration 3-5 = Basic: Project delivered in isolation, or very informal, limited collaborations 6-7 = Good: Some informal partnerships demonstrated; limited collaboration with other local groups or services 8-10 = Strong: Evidence of meaningful informal or formal partnerships, clear joint working, and/or leveraging resources from other organisations to enhance project reach or impact.

Tier 3: Large Grants Assessment (£5,001 - £10,000)

This matrix requires the most comprehensive detail, scrutinising strategic impact, robust financial planning, detailed risk assessment, and long-term sustainability for significant investments.

Total Possible Score: 100 points

Criteria	Max Score	Scoring Guidance (Examples)
Strategic Alignment (Project explicitly aligns with one of Council's Priorities outlined in the fund and demonstrates how.)	25	0-5 = None 6-10 = Limited: Project generally touches upon one Council priority but lacks clear detail or a strong, explicit link to the Council's vision. If climate-related, it's very general or not directly measurable. 11-17 = Good: Project clearly aligns with one

Criteria	Max Score	Scoring Guidance (Examples)
		<p>or two main Council priorities, providing sound rationale and demonstrating a good understanding of the Council's strategic goals. If climate-related, it shows a reasonable contribution to "Our Home, Our Future."</p> <p>18-25 = Strong: Project strongly aligns with multiple Council priorities, demonstrating a deep understanding of the Council's vision and how the project directly supports it. If "Climate Action & Energy Efficiency," it is a core component and explicitly contributes measurably to Council's "Our Home, Our Future" strategy (e.g., quantified carbon reduction, significant energy savings, biodiversity net gain, enhanced climate resilience).</p>
<p>Community Need & Impact (Provides concrete evidence of the problem or opportunity the project will address (e.g., survey results, local statistics, community feedback, or business plan.)</p>	20	<p>0-4 = None: No evidence of community/business need or anticipated benefits. Impact is unclear, irrelevant, or minimal.</p> <p>5-9 = Limited: Relies on anecdotal evidence; benefits a very small, specific group; impact is vague or difficult to measure.</p> <p>10-14 = Good: Some evidence of need (e.g., small survey, local data); clear benefits outlined for a reasonable number/range of people, with positive outcomes described. Impact is generally clear.</p> <p>15-20 = Strong Provides robust, comprehensive evidence of community need (e.g., detailed needs assessment, extensive consultation, compelling local statistics, strong letters of support from community leaders/beneficiaries). Project delivers substantial, measurable benefits for a large number or strategically important vulnerable groups within the Maldon District, clearly articulating how lives will be improved and aligning with the grant scheme's overall "Quality of Life Matters" theme</p>
<p>Project Design & Deliverability (Project goals are specific, measurable,</p>	20	<p>0-4 = None: Aims, objectives, activities, or timeline are unclear, unrealistic, or illogical. Organisation's capacity is not demonstrated or</p>

Criteria	Max Score	Scoring Guidance (Examples)
<p>achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART). A clear, step-by-step plan of how the project will be delivered. A logical and achievable schedule for project activities and milestones.)</p>		<p>appears insufficient.</p> <p>5-9 points = Limited: Aims are broad, objectives lack detail/measurability. Activities listed but vague on methodology. Timeline is basic. Organisation's capacity is implied but not strongly evidenced.</p> <p>10-14 point = Good: Clear aims, objectives are generally SMART. Activities are well-defined and logical. Realistic timeline with key milestones. Organisation demonstrates relevant experience and appears capable.</p> <p>15-20 = Strong Exceptionally well-defined aims, with clear and SMART objectives. Comprehensive, logical, and innovative plan outlining all key activities, roles, responsibilities, and specific methodologies. Professional, detailed, and realistic timeline with clear milestones, assigned responsibilities, and well-considered contingency planning. Organisation demonstrates a strong track record of successful project delivery, dedicated team (staff/volunteers).</p>
<p>Financial Management & Value for Money (Comprehensive breakdown of all costs, clearly justified with supporting quotes where appropriate. Project demonstrates efficient use of funds, maximising impact, and considering long-term sustainability beyond the grant period, where not a one-off event.)</p>	20	<p>0-4 = None: Budget is absent, highly vague, or contains significant unjustified costs. No consideration of value for money or sustainability.</p> <p>5-9 = Limited: Basic budget breakdown, but justification for costs is weak or missing for key items. Value for money not explicitly addressed; sustainability plan is absent or unconvincing.</p> <p>10-14 = Good: Clear budget breakdown, most costs justified with some supporting quotes. Project appears to offer reasonable value for money. Some consideration for long-term sustainability (e.g., potential for future funding, volunteer training, investment from the business itself).</p> <p>15-20 = Strong: Highly detailed, realistic, and fully justified budget with clear cost</p>

Criteria	Max Score	Scoring Guidance (Examples)
		breakdowns for all items. Multiple competitive quotes for significant expenditure are provided. Demonstrates exceptional return on investment, innovative approaches to maximise impact, and highly efficient use of public funds. A robust and credible plan for long-term project sustainability beyond the grant funding, including clear strategies for diverse income generation, volunteer retention, or integration into existing services.
Partnership & Collaboration For a private business to score well in this criterion, they must demonstrate how the grant will also contribute to wider collaborations (with community groups, charities, or other businesses) creating a clear, measurable, and positive impact on the community. This means leveraging their resources (expertise, facilities, funding, Corporate Social Responsibility) to address identified community needs or enhance existing public services.	15	<p>0-3 = None: No evidence of working with other organisations. Project appears isolated.</p> <p>4-7 = Limited: Project delivered largely in isolation, or very informal, limited collaborations with minimal stated benefits.</p> <p>8-11 points = Good: Some informal partnerships or limited collaboration with other local groups/services, with their roles generally described. Some benefits of partnership are stated.</p> <p>12-15 = Strong: Strong evidence of formal or informal strategic partnerships that significantly enhance the project's reach, expertise, and sustainability. Clear demonstration of how partnerships will leverage additional resources (financial, in-kind, expertise) and avoid duplication. Evidence of meaningful community co-production or engagement in the design and delivery of the project (beyond mere consultation), especially with target beneficiaries.</p>

Key Considerations for Implementation:

Scoring Thresholds:

- Small Grants: A minimum score of 30/50 (60%) for funding consideration.
- Medium Grants: A higher minimum of 45/75 (60%) is appropriate.
- Large Grants: The highest minimum, 65/100 (65%), to ensure only the most impactful and robust projects receive significant funding.
- Weighted Criteria: Notice the weighting in the larger grant matrices (e.g., Strategic Alignment and Community Need are high), reflecting their importance to the Council's overall objectives.
- "Decline" for Missing Information: Make it clear that applications failing to provide essential documentation (e.g., latest accounts, governing document) or a clear budget will be automatically declined before scoring.
- Assessor Training: Crucial for all panel members to ensure consistent application of the scoring guidance across all tiers.
- Feedback: Provide tailored feedback for each tier – simpler, direct feedback for Small Grants, and more detailed, constructive advice for Medium and Large Grants.

This tiered approach provides a clear, fair, and efficient system for assessing grant applications, ensuring that Maldon District Council's investment yields the best possible outcomes for its communities.

Grant Assessment Panels: Composition for Tiered Scoring

Purpose: To quickly and efficiently assess a high volume of smaller applications, ensuring basic eligibility, community benefit, and feasibility. The focus is on enabling grassroots activity.

Officers:

Primary Assessors for Relevant Priority Area (Maldon District Council):

- **Role:** Primary Assessors:
 - Supporting Our Communities – Community Health and Wellbeing Officer/Health Improvement Officer
 - Investing In Our District – Health Integration and Community Manager
 - Growing Our Economy – Lead Specialist Prosperity
 - Protecting Our Environment – Technical Lead: Climate Action
- **Rationale:** Expertise in relevant Council Priority, grant management, and a broad understanding of community needs across the district.

Community Grant Officer (Maldon District Council):

- **Role:** Officer to ensure the reviews process is undertaken in accordance with the processes.
- **Rationale:** Adds a layer of validation, assists with Primary Assessor/s questions, and may have specific local knowledge of the applicant/s.

Process for Grants Panel:

- **Initial Assessment:** Community Grant Officer assess all applications for completeness and accuracy.
- If Small (up to £1,000), Community Grants Officer makes a recommendation to the relevant Primary Assessor, of the relevant priority, on its eligibility and reasoning for approval/decline providing a completed scoring assessment. The Primary Assessor then approves or declines the application. Application this then passed to either the Lead Specialist Prosperity or the Health Integration and Communities Manager for final approval. If a small grant application presents complexity, controversy, or significant uncertainty, it can be "escalated" to the Medium/Large Grants Panel for a full review.
- If Medium or Large, the Community Grant Officer convenes Panel of the Primary Assessors, either in person or virtual.

In advance of the panel, the **Primary Assessors** will undertake an individual assessment and apply the relevant scoring matrix in accordance with the grant amount.

- **Panel Review:** Community Grants Officer reviews the assessment and application, agreeing or querying scores.
- **Primary Assessors:** approve or decline the application.
- **Rapid Decision:** Decisions are made by Officers under delegated authority. Providing proper segregation of duties between those evaluating the bids and the approval of the process for the bids to be evaluated.

Approvals of the grant values are within the Council's Scheme of Financial Delegation for the Lead Specialist Prosperity and Health Integration and Community Manager.

Maldon District Council Members will be provided with a weekly update on the number of applications received, approved or declined, and the overall scoring achieved by each application. This information will be broken down to Ward level.