

To receive a report on the Grants Policy and consider any actions and associated expenditure

Report to: Policy and Finance Committee

Date of Report: 10.05.26

Cllr Writing the Report: McCaw

Cllr Recommendations

1. **Remove or heavily restrict the Chairman's power to refuse applications before committee hearing.** All applications that meet basic eligibility should be placed on the agenda for full P&F discussion.
2. **Shorten or abolish the 12-month reapplication ban** for refusals based on documentation, scoring, or technical non-compliance. Replace with a shorter cooling-off period or none at all for Community Chest.
3. **Replace the formal scoring matrix with a simple pass/fail eligibility checklist** for Community Chest applications (retain scoring only for Festival Fund).
4. **Introduce a risk-based, light-touch safeguarding option:** For low-risk events (garden parties, coffee mornings, Christmas lights, etc.) allow a one-paragraph "basic safeguarding statement" instead of a full policy or named officer.
5. **Publish an annual transparency report** listing every Community Chest application received, the outcome, and the exact reason (with the 12-month rule clearly explained where it applies). This would reduce perceptions of arbitrary "blocking on technicalities."
6. **Increase the Community Chest budget allocation** (currently modest) given the Council's healthy general reserves (over £1.93 million as at 31 March 2025).

These changes would directly address the examples above, reduce officer and member workload on minor technical issues, and better deliver on the policy's own objective of supporting local initiatives.

Report Summary

Saltash Town Council's Policy & Finance (P&F) Committee has rejected or deferred several Community Chest applications on grounds of non-compliance with the Grants Policy, even when members expressed support for the underlying community initiatives.

The **key request made here** is to **significantly relax the rules** - particularly the Chairman's pre-hearing dismissal power, the rigid scoring/compliance thresholds, the automatic 12-month reapplication ban, and the one-size-fits-all mandatory requirements (e.g. formal safeguarding policies for low-risk events). These rules create unnecessary barriers for small-scale, resident-led projects and undermine the policy's stated purpose of supporting "initiatives in the local community."

The 12-month ban is **explicitly stated** in the current Grants Policy (Section on Application refused and Automatic Refusal): after a Chairman refusal that is not successfully appealed, or after a full Committee refusal, applicants "cannot reapply or submit a further grant request for the same or a similar project for a period of 12 months." The 2022 rejection of CC263 (Tamar Tolls Action Group) for failing to meet criteria and scoring thresholds is directly cited in 2025 minutes as precedent for enforcing this ban on non-compliant applications.

Chairman pre-hearing dismissal (refusal before the full committee considers the application) is **currently permitted** under the policy: **it should not be**. This power allows one person to block applications before they are heard by the committee, with only a 30-day appeal window. Relaxing or removing this would be a high-impact change.

Specific Examples from P&F Minutes

- **CC287 Pillmere Association (Christmas light switch-on / community event)** Members "expressed disappointment, as they were keen to support this valued community event." Concerns were raised about non-compliance with the Grants Policy. The application was **refused** on those grounds alone. Alternative funding sources outside the Council were suggested. **Outcome:** Refused; signposted elsewhere.
- **CC285 Oaklands Community Centre** Members "expressed general support for the initiative." However, the application was **not originally granted** because certain financial reports/bank statements were not available. While the application was later approved in November 2025, the delay was unnecessary and placed unfair pressure on the applicants.

These cases illustrate the problem: even popular, low-risk community events are blocked or delayed over technical compliance issues rather than merit.

Why the Current Rules Are Too Strict (and Should Be Relaxed)

- **Chairman pre-hearing dismissal power:** Currently allowed, but should be removed or severely limited. Applications should be heard by the full committee unless they are clearly ineligible on basic statutory grounds. This single change would prevent one person from acting as gatekeeper.
- **12-month reapplication ban:** Explicitly written into the policy. It applies after Chairman refusal (if not appealed) or Committee refusal. This ban is overly punitive for technical or documentation issues and should be shortened (e.g. to 3–6 months) or removed for low-value applications.
- **Scoring matrix and competitive assessment:** The policy uses a formal scoring system and judges applications “competitively.” This should be relaxed to a lighter eligibility checklist for Community Chest (as opposed to the larger Festival Fund).
- **Mandatory requirements (especially safeguarding):** The application form requires a safeguarding policy/officer “if your project involves working with children/young people/vulnerable people.” In practice this is being applied broadly, even to informal events where parents/guardians remain responsible. A simple “basic safeguarding statement” option for low-risk events would be far more proportionate.
- **Overall philosophy:** The policy is written as if every applicant is a large organisation. For a £1,000 maximum Community Chest pot aimed at “small scale community projects,” the burden of proof is disproportionate.

Signature of Cllr: G McCaw