Version 1 – 26/10/26

GBE Local Grant Schemes 26/27 - Frequently Asked Questions

Can advisory partners or collaborators complete an application on behalf of an applicant?

Advisory partners or collaborators may review, comment on and support the development of an application. However, responsibility for the content of the application and the final submission remains with the applicant organisation. Applicants are responsible for ensuring that all information provided is accurate, complete and meets the requirements of the scheme.

Will applications be assessed as they are submitted?

No. Applications submitted within the application window will be assessed after the closing date.

Is there an advantage to applying early?

No. Applications submitted before the deadline are assessed alongside all other applications received during the application window.

Are grants awarded under a subsidy scheme?

For applicants not subject to the Windsor Framework subsidy provisions, funding is awarded under a subsidy scheme and is separate from Minimal Financial Assistance (MFA). Applicants must still declare relevant previous subsidies and public funding received.

Community Fund

Can single-building projects apply?

Yes. Projects such as solar installations on churches or community buildings may be eligible if they meet all relevant scheme requirements.

Do I need to be an organisation whose sole purpose is delivering energy projects?

No. Eligibility is determined by the organisation type, governance arrangements and whether the proposed project meets the scheme requirements.

Can organisations that have previously received Community Energy Fund (CEF) or GBE Community Fund funding apply again?

Potentially. Funding cannot be used for activities that have already been funded. Any new application must demonstrate a distinct funding requirement and involve new eligible activities.

Are shared ownership projects eligible?

Yes. Shared ownership arrangements can be eligible where the community organisation meets the ownership requirements set out in the guidance.

Can I apply if planning permission is still being secured for Stage 3?

Yes, provided the relevant planning requirements are satisfied before a Grant Funding Agreement is entered into.

Are community engagement costs eligible under Stage 3?

No. Stage 3 supports eligible capital expenditure only.

Can Stage 3 funding support heat network projects?

No. Stage 3 capital funding is currently focused on eligible power generation technologies listed in the guidance.

Can reduced energy bills alone count as community benefit?

Reduced energy costs may contribute to community benefit. However, projects that demonstrate broader social, economic or environmental benefits are likely to provide a stronger overall case.

What level of community engagement is expected at Stage 1?

Stage 1 applicants are not expected to have undertaken extensive community engagement. Applicants should provide whatever evidence of engagement or support is available at the time of application, and demonstrate this in their application.

Is geothermal technology eligible?

No. Geothermal technologies are not eligible under the current scheme.

Are heat pumps eligible?

Eligible heat pump projects must meet the specific requirements described in the guidance.

Can battery storage be added to an existing solar installation?

No. Battery storage must form part of a new eligible clean energy project.

Are grants paid in advance or in arrears?

Grant funding is normally paid in arrears. Payments will only be made once GBE has verified the claim and evidence of eligible expenditure that has been incurred and paid.

For Stage 1 grants only, organisations facing genuine cashflow constraints may request an payment on invoice of up to 25% of the grant award in limited circumstances. Any such request must be supported by appropriate financial evidence and will be considered on a case-by-case basis. These payments are only available where eligible work has been completed and a liability has been incurred, but the expenditure has not yet been defrayed. Advance payment arrangements are not available for Stage 2 or Stage 3 grants

Do all funds need to be claimed by March 2028?

Yes. Funding must be claimed by the deadline set out in the guidance and Grant Funding Agreement.

Can unitary councils apply?
No, unitary councils cannot apply to the GBECF but can apply to the Partnerships grant.

We want to do a feasibility study for solar arrays and batteries. Can we get a proposal and quote from a specialist consultancy and submit this for funding?
Yes. Feasibility studies are eligible Stage 1 activities where they are necessary to assess the viability of an eligible project. We would expect three quotes to be considered to ensure value for money, and if this is not possible, justification why.

What permission would we need from the Department for Education to progress a school solar project?
GBE cannot advise on any permissions, approvals or agreements that may be required from the Department for Education or other third parties. Applicants should satisfy themselves that they have, or can obtain, all permissions, consents and agreements necessary to deliver the project.

Can you please confirm that Type B projects need to demonstrate innovation?

Type B projects do not need to involve a completely new or untested concept. However, applicants should clearly explain what additional activity, service, approach or outcome the project will deliver and how it will support the local energy transition.

Projects that simply replicate an existing service or activity without a clear rationale, added value or explanation of local need may be less competitive. Applicants should describe why the proposed approach is needed, how it differs from existing provision in their area, and the benefits it will deliver to the community. Type B projects include community energy advice services, bulk-buy retrofit initiatives and energy efficiency programmes

Please can you confirm the level of detail required for a Stage 1 project plan? Will a simple 10-line Gantt chart be sufficient?
Project plans should be proportionate to the size and complexity of the project. As a minimum, they should clearly show the key stages, milestones and expected timescales for the funded activity during the requested grant period. Depending on where you are located, The Local Net Zero Hubs, Welsh Government Energy Service, or Advice NI may be able to support the development of project plans.

For eligible Stage 1 technologies, can Heat Pumps be combined with Heat Pump-Fed Heat Networks, or does a technology marked with an asterisk need to be combined with another eligible technology?
Both heat pumps and heat pump-fed heat networks must be combined with another eligible technology. Combining only a heat pump with a heat pump-fed heat network would not meet this requirement. Applicants should include at least one additional eligible technology within the project that isn't marked with an asterisk.

Is it possible for an organisation to submit more than one application?
The application process allows multiple sites to be included within a single application where there is a clear rationale for progressing them together, and we would encourage this to ensure value for money. However, organisations may submit more than one application, provided each application relates to a separate project and independently meets the scheme requirements. Applications will be assessed on their individual merits.

Are wave, tidal or plug-in solar projects eligible for funding?

Wave and tidal technologies may be considered within the hydropower category, while plug-in solar may be considered within the rooftop solar category. Applications involving these technologies would be assessed against the same eligibility requirements and assessment criteria as any other project. Applicants should ensure they can demonstrate a credible route to delivery, strong community ownership and benefit, value for money, and appropriate management of project risks.

If we apply for a Stage 1 grant now and the project proves feasible, when would we be able to apply for Stage 2 (and potentially Stage 3) funding?
This is the only application window right now, and no commitment to future rounds of funding has yet been made. Any future application would be subject to the eligibility requirements, assessment criteria and funding availability applicable at that time. .

We would like to submit letters of support from potential project partners as part of our Community Fund Stage 1 application. How do we do this?

There is currently no functionality within the application portal to upload letters of support. However, applicants may reference relevant partner support, commitments or

stakeholder engagement within their application responses where appropriate. If further evidence is required, letters of support and other supporting documentation may be requested as part of the due diligence process before any grant award is made.

Partnerships Grant

Can Stage 1 funding be used to identify and establish a community partner?

Yes. Where a Local Authority has not yet established a partnership with a community organisation, Stage 1 funding may be used to identify and develop a suitable partnership.

Any organisation brought into the project as the community partner would need to meet the programme's eligibility requirements.

Does a Stage 1 application need to identify a specific site?

Before applying to Stage 1, applicants must have identified either a prospective site or a credible shortlist of sites for the proposed project.

Applicants are not required to have selected a single final site. However, they should be able to explain the site or sites under consideration and why they are suitable for further development through the Partnerships Grant.

Can the grant fund work exploring Virtual Power Purchase Agreement (VPPA) arrangements?

Yes. Eligible feasibility and development activities may include exploring the legal, commercial and technical aspects of VPPA arrangements where these are relevant to the proposed project.

Is there a requirement for a Local Authority to own 50% of the project?

No. The requirement is for the community organisation to own at least 50% of the project, or to demonstrate a credible pathway to achieving at least 50% community ownership where ownership is being secured during project development.

There is no requirement for a Local Authority to own 50% of the asset.

Can a project be developed on privately owned land or buildings?

Yes. Projects may be located on privately owned land or buildings, provided they otherwise meet the programme requirements and landowner consent.

What does the "no cross-boundary projects" requirement mean?

Projects should be located within the geographic area covered by the applicant Local Authority or Combined Authority.

For Combined Authorities, projects may span multiple constituent Local Authority areas within the Combined Authority geography. The restriction is intended to prevent a single application covering projects across separate Local Authority or Combined Authority areas.

How should applicants demonstrate additionality?

Applicants should explain:

- what would happen without the grant;
- any alternative funding options considered;
- the barriers preventing the activity from proceeding; and
- how the grant will enable additional activity or outcomes that would not otherwise occur.

This information helps demonstrate why public funding is necessary and how the project delivers additional benefits.

Can a Local Authority partner with a council-owned CIC, charitable trust or similar organisation?

Potentially, yes.

The programme does not prohibit partnerships with organisations that have a close relationship with the Local Authority. However, applicants should clearly explain the relationship, governance arrangements, management of conflicts of interest, and how the partnership delivers additional value and value for money.

Can a Town or Parish Council act as the community partner?

Town and Parish Councils are not eligible community partners under the Local Partnerships Grant. Town and Parish Councils remain eligible applicants under the GBE Community Fund where they meet the relevant eligibility requirements for that scheme.

Are Type B projects eligible for the Partnerships Grant?

Type B projects are not eligible under the Local Partnerships Grant.

Can the Partnerships Grant support the development of shared ownership opportunities with commercial renewable energy developers?

Yes. The programme can support feasibility and development activity associated with shared ownership opportunities involving commercial renewable energy projects.

Are legal advice, stakeholder engagement and commercial negotiations for shared ownership arrangements eligible activities?

Yes. Eligible activities may include legal advice, stakeholder engagement, commercial negotiations and the development of shared ownership arrangements where they support the objectives of the project.

Can we bid without a project in mind, funding partnership development for our area and mapping, prioritising opportunities and assessing sites that could lead to a future feasibility study?

No. Applicants must have identified a project opportunity and either a prospective site or a credible shortlist of sites before applying.

Stage 1 funding can support feasibility work, site assessment, option appraisal, partnership development and the further refinement of project proposals. However, the fund is not intended to support open-ended area-wide opportunity mapping where no project opportunity or prospective sites have yet been identified.

Applicants should be able to describe the project opportunity they wish to explore and the site, or shortlist of sites, that will be assessed through the funded work.

Can the grant cover the costs of procuring a community energy group? We will need to comply with the Procurement Act when appointing a group to put solar on the council's land or buildings.

Yes. Stage 1 funding may be used to identify and establish a suitable partnership where a community partner has not yet been identified. Applicants remain responsible for complying with any procurement, governance and legal requirements that apply to them.

For Local Authorities that have a functioning partnership with a Community Energy Group but not a formal Memorandum of Understanding, and a project in mind that is suitable for Stage 2 (i.e. ready for detailed development work), how can they meet the criteria?

For Stage 2, applicants are expected to have a formal partnership arrangement in place with their Community Energy Group. If a Local Authority and Community Energy Group are currently working together informally, they should ensure that appropriate partnership arrangements are established and evidenced before submitting a Stage 2 application. Applications should clearly demonstrate the nature of the partnership, the roles and responsibilities of each organisation, and the commitment of both parties to developing and delivering the proposed project.

Could Stage 1 mapping and gathering background information to identify sites be eligible, without a specific site in mind but with a view to identifying a shortlist of sites to take forward into Stage 2?

Applicants should have identified a prospective site or a credible shortlist of sites before applying to Stage 1. Stage 1 funding can then be used to assess, compare and refine those options, including site assessment, feasibility work and option appraisal, to determine which opportunity should be taken forward.

The fund is not intended to support entirely open-ended site searches where no prospective sites have yet been identified

When does the fund close?

Applications must be submitted by **11:55pm on 12 November 2026**.

In the webinar, the assessment criteria weighting adds up to 112.5%.

Thank you for highlighting this. This is a drafting error in the slide deck. The assessment criteria weightings total 100%, and the Partnerships guidance document has this accurately displayed.

Is there an expectation that the Local Authority will make an investment in the ultimate project?

No. There is no requirement for a Local Authority to invest in the final project. However, applicants should clearly explain the proposed partnership arrangements, project ownership structure and route to delivery.

Does the site identified need to be a council-owned site? Presumably the impact of the project will diminish if it is not.

There is no requirement for projects to be located on Local Authority-owned land or assets. However, the programme is designed to support partnerships between Local Authorities and community organisations, and applicants should clearly explain the Local Authority's role in the project and why the proposed site represents an appropriate opportunity for the partnership.

Is there likely to be any benefit to cross-authority partnerships being part of a Stage 1 application?

Applications are assessed against the published assessment criteria and there is no specific assessment criterion relating to cross-authority partnerships. However, where partnership arrangements involve additional organisations or stakeholders, applicants may wish to explain how these arrangements support project governance, delivery and oversight.

Projects should be located within the geographic area covered by the applicant Local Authority or Combined Authority

Could a Local Authority apply for a Stage 1 feasibility project and a Stage 2 development project?

Yes. As set out in the guidance, a Local Authority may submit one Stage 1 application and one Stage 2 application, provided that each application relates to a separate project. Any Stage 2 application should demonstrate the level of project maturity and development required for that stage of funding.

Is it reasonable to assume that the requirements for making a community fund stage 3 application are what a stage 2 partnership fund application should fund?

In broad terms, the purpose of a Stage 2 Partnerships Grant is to support the development work required to bring projects towards investment readiness. Community Fund Stage 3 is intended for projects that are already fully developed and ready to build, so the evidence, studies, business cases, partnerships and project development activity needed to reach that point may be suitable activities for Stage 2 Partnerships funding. However, applicants should develop their proposals based on the published Partnerships Grant guidance and assessment criteria, rather than working solely backwards from Community Fund Stage 3 requirements.