Best Start in Life Community Grants Programme 2026-2027
Grants Criteria

On behalf of Sefton Council Early Years Service, Sefton CVS is pleased to launch the Best Start in Life Community Grants Programme.

The purpose of the grant programme is to commission community and voluntary sector organisations to deliver activities that contribute to the outcomes and priorities set out in **Sefton's Best Start in Life Plan.**

Funding should support children aged 0-5 and their families, with a particular focus on reducing inequalities and improving school readiness outcomes.

Funding and Administration

Grants are available in two tiers: **Small Grants (between £2,500 - £5,000)** and **Medium Grants (between £10,000 to £15,000)**

As set out in the Best Start in Life (BSIL) plan, applications must demonstrate how they contribute to **one or more** of the following BSIL priorities:

Priority 1: Information and Support
Families receive good quality information from pregnancy onwards and know where to access support.

Priority 2: Positive Transitions
Children and families experience smooth transitions between services, early years settings and school.

Priority 3: Every Contact Counts
Families receive timely and effective support whenever they engage with professionals or community services.

Priority 4: Joined-Up Working
Services work collaboratively to deliver coordinated support for children and families.

Priority 5: Nurturing Relationships
Families are supported to build strong, secure and nurturing relationships that promote child development.

Priority 6: Early Help and Reducing Inequalities
Families can access the right support early, particularly those experiencing disadvantage or barriers to engagement.

Priority 7: Childcare and Inclusion
Children, including those with SEND, can access inclusive opportunities that support their learning and development.

Key Timescales

Closing date for applications: Thursday 3 December 2026
Grant Panel: Wednesday 9 December 2026
Grant Acceptance Letters Returns: Friday 18 December 2026
Projects Commence: Monday 4 January 2027
Projects End: Wednesday 30 June 2027

Criteria

1. Community groups, residents' groups, voluntary organisations, faith-based groups, and social enterprises working in, or providing services to the residents of Sefton that provide appropriate services.

2. Grants from **£2,500** up to **£15,000** are available for these projects and returns and spend must be completed by **30th June 2027**. Any unspent funds after this date will be subject to repayment.

3. Organisations involved in the project for which the grant will be used must all:

    - Be a constituted body and have a bank account with a minimum of two signatories.
    - Follow an open access policy.
    - Be non-political.

4. In alignment with the BSIL priorities, applications must address the following areas;

    1. Child and Family Impact
    The project must:
    - Improve outcomes for children aged 0-5 years.
    - Promote children's communication, language, social-emotional or physical development.
    - Support school readiness and the achievement of a Good Level of Development.
    - Strengthen parental confidence and skills.

- Contribute to reducing inequalities for disadvantaged families.

2. Reach Priority Families
Priority will be given to projects targeting:

- Families living in areas of deprivation.
- Children with emerging or identified SEND.
- Families experiencing isolation.
- Families from underrepresented communities.
- Parents with limited access to services.
- Children at risk of poorer educational or health outcomes.

3. Community-Based Delivery
Projects should:

- Be delivered within local communities based in Sefton
- Build on community assets and strengths.
- Work alongside Family Hubs, Early Years settings and existing community networks.
- Encourage peer support and community resilience.

4. Partnership Working
Applicants must demonstrate:

- Strong links with relevant local services.
- Effective referral pathways.
- A commitment to information sharing and collaborative working.
- How they will contribute to Sefton's wider Best Start in Life network.

5. Activities funded should have clear and specific outcomes to be achieved within a defined period of time.

6. Delivery of funded projects should not be dependent on groups securing further additional funding.

7. These grants cannot fund political activities, religious activities, or the promotion of personal objectives.

8. Groups are required to take reasonable steps to ensure that their activities can be made available for as broad a range of people as possible that positive measures are put in place to remove any barriers to access.

9. All organisations must have safeguarding policies in place.

10. Organisations awarded a grant must have the appropriate public liability and employer's liability insurance for the activities that they provide if necessary.

11. Applications must be submitted on the Best Start in Life Community Grants Programme application form. If the application form is not fully completed, then the application will not be considered.

12. Funding will not be awarded for activities that have already taken place.

13. Organisations and individuals receiving funding will be required to take part in the monitoring and evaluation process and provide feedback when requested.

Further Information for Applicants

I. The deadline for applications to be received by is **Thursday 3 December 2026.**
II. The Best Start in Life Community Grants Programme is a limited fund and not all applications meeting the criteria will be able to be supported.
III. We recognise the venue in which a project is based can sometimes be owned or managed by another organisation subject to additional safety requirements. In this instance, we encourage groups to state this in their application.
IV. Grant funds awarded will need to have been spent before **30th June 2027 and likelihood of unspent funding will need to be notified to us and returned as soon as you know it will not be spent so we can redistribute to other groups**
V. The decision to award a Grant, rests with the Grant Panel (the panel will include representatives from Sefton Council's Early Years Service). All decisions are final and there is no appeal process.
VI. All successful applications will be notified within two weeks of the application deadline date.

For all questions or inquiries please contact: **bsilgrant@seftoncvs.org.uk**