

ASK Capital Grant Programme 2025/2026

CATEGORY: Business Support Grant

Information for Applicants

**ASK Capital Grant Programme
2025/2026**

Version Number	Author	Purpose/Change	Date
1.1	Economic Development	Grant Guidance Document	10 Sep 2025
1.2	Economic Development	Grant Guidance Document	16 Oct 2025

SECTION 1 – APPLICATION GUIDANCE

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to businesses wishing to apply for grant funding under the Ask Capital Grant Programme ('the programme'), following successful completion of the Ask Mentoring programme.

1. INTRODUCTION

Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council has developed an 'Ask Capital Grant' which is designed to help local businesses implement recommendations made through the Ask Mentoring Programme. The programme aims to support the continued development and growth of local businesses.

2. PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES

The programme is designed to help local businesses act on recommendations made by their Ask mentor following successful completion of the Ask Mentoring Programme. Recommendations will be accepted where demonstrable small-scale capital support will enable business growth through (but not limited to) innovation, resilience and digital enablement.

- Provide grants of up to £1,500 to local businesses toward essential capital (equipment, apparatus) purchases.
- Support 40 businesses to improve productivity and sustainability through capital investment.
- Support 40 businesses to overcome small-scale financial barriers to growth.
- Enable 40 businesses to grow and contribute to the prosperity of the borough.

3. FUNDING

CASH OR CHEQUE EXPENDITURE WILL NOT BE ELIGIBLE FOR THE PURPOSES OF THIS FUND.

Businesses can apply for between £500 and a maximum of £1,500. **Please note that the grant will cover 80% of the eligible costs up to a maximum value of £1,500.** The total cost of the capital project must be a minimum of £625. There is no upper limit to the total project value, but maximum funding remains at £1,500.

Applicants who are VAT registered will have their grant assessed on the net cost of eligible works, non-registered on the gross cost.

Applicants **must** demonstrate a minimum contribution of 20% of the overall project costs – See examples below:

VAT registered applicant

Project Cost (ex VAT)	Grant Rate at 80%	Applicant Contribution*
£500.00	£400.00	£100.00
£850.00	£680.00	£170.00
£1,500.00	£1,200.00	£300.00
£2,500.00	£1,500.00**	£1,000.00

*VAT recoverable through HMRC.

Non-VAT registered applicant

Project Cost (inc. VAT)	Grant Rate at 80%	Applicant Contribution
£600.00	£480.00	£120.00
£1,020.00	£816.00	£204.00
£1,800.00	£1,440.00	£360.00
£3,000.00	£1,500.00**	£1,500.00

** Based on maximum grant

Demonstrable evidence of match funding will be required.

This is a competitive process, and all grants awarded will be determined based on merit by the Council's assessment panel.

The Council will base any Letter of Offer on the cost of the lowest quotation or the quotation offering the best value for money. Successful applicants will be paid funding on 80% of the procurement submitted, or of the final price of the capital expenditure; whichever is the lowest amount up to a maximum of £1,500.00

Grant aid will **not** be payable on any:

- Works started or completed;
- Invoices or receipts dated; or
- Expenditure incurred or paid,

prior to a formal Letter of Offer for Ask Capital grant funding being issued.

Grant aid will only be payable if an applicant has accepted their Letter of Offer by signing and returning the Form of Acceptance within 14 days.

4. WHAT THE PROGRAMME WILL FUND

The appropriate capital expenditure required will be recommended by the Ask mentor, however, a programme grant will only be confirmed once a Letter of Offer has been issued by the Council and accepted by the applicant. Examples of eligible expenditure include but aren't limited to:

- Digital tools – e.g. CRM systems, licenses, or AI applications
- Specialist equipment to support growth or innovation
- Strategic digital marketing and SEO linked to growth
- Website or eCommerce development that supports transformation
- Export enablement tools or market-entry resources
- IT infrastructure upgrades that support resilience
- Computer equipment, e.g., computer, laptop, printer
- Software (as an outright purchase only)
- New equipment / machinery
- Mobile machinery e.g., scissor lifts, forklifts, ride-on lawn mowers

Note: This list is not exhaustive as capital grant funding recommendations are provided by Ask Mentor-identified growth needs only. A Council Officer can speak to you about your individual project.

5. WHAT THE PROGRAMME WILL NOT FUND

Examples of ineligible costs include

- Second hand equipment, including refurbished equipment.
- Servicing of existing equipment.
- General maintenance or refurbishment works.
- Capital Improvements, building works, refurbishments of any property (commercial or residential) or any project that requires Building Control permission or planning permission.
- Purchase of port-a-cabins, pods or any other building.
- Labour costs not directly associated with the installation of purchased equipment or build of e-commerce websites.
- Projects that have already started prior to a Letter of Offer.
- Any resource items, such as marketing materials, information websites (with no online purchasing capabilities), training courses, feasibility studies.
- Motorised vehicles, including vans, lorries, cars, boats, bikes, quads or any other form of motorised mobile vehicles that can be used as a means of transport.
- Any activity or action that is a statutory requirement of your business including fees, (e.g. for Health and Safety purposes such as Personal Protective Equipment) or the responsibility of another government department.
- Business running costs, such as staff costs, wage subsidies, rent, rates, utilities (inc. telecoms), insurance, stock.
- Bank interest charges, referral fees and foreign currency transaction charges.

- Consumable items used by businesses that are replaced regularly because they wear out or are used up (for example, high-visibility vests for staff, printer ink).
- Equipment related to the provision of additional bed space for existing accommodation providers.
- Staff Uniforms or clothing, including personal protective items.

- Routine social media content or general office supplies.
- Retrospective purchases (anything bought before a Letter of Offer is issued).
- Vehicles, fuel, alcohol or hospitality.
- Professional fees.

Note: This list is not exhaustive as capital grant funding recommendations are provided by Ask Mentor-identified growth needs only. A Council Officer can speak to you about your individual project.

6. WHO CAN APPLY

The programme is open to all businesses who have **successfully completed** an Ask Mentoring programme assignment and providing they:

- Have been referred by an ASK mentor and have a demonstrable need for funding support.
- Are a registered Micro or SME business and are actively trading in the Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough area.
- Are not in receipt of other public funding for the same purpose - you will not be grant eligible until you have confirmed this within the application.
- Have completed and signed a de minimis declaration and have not exceeded the funding thresholds.
- Can provide 20% match funding of total eligible project costs.
- Applicants must be aged 18 or above at the application deadline.
- Only one application can be accepted per business per financial year as per your letter of offer date.
- Applicants must complete their Capital Grant project and submit their grant claim within 2 months of receiving their Letter of Offer.

7. WHO CANNOT APPLY

The following will **not** be eligible to apply for funding:

- a. Business that have not successfully completed their Ask Mentoring or have not been recommended for an Ask capital grant by an approved Ask Mentor.
- b. Sports clubs
- c. Public organisations
- d. Political organisations
- e. International organisations
- f. Home businesses that are not operating as a registered business.
 1. If operating as a registered business from a residential address, you will be required to provide evidence of your registered business to that address.

NOTE: The Council reserves the right to enhance or revise the eligibility criteria at any stage during the Programme.

8. PROCUREMENT GUIDELINES

In order to demonstrate value for money, it is expected that applicants use the most economically advantageous quotation of each item to demonstrate best value on the market for the project item. Funding will be awarded on the cheapest quotation/ price provided. If your preferred supplier is not the cheapest, please explain why. We may not be able to accept the cost of your preferred supplier, and this may reduce the grant for the item to the cheapest quote. The following are not acceptable reasons for using a more expensive quote:

- the location of the supplier;
- the fact that the applicant has bought from a supplier before; or
- any offers the supplier makes to the applicant about future service or maintenance of equipment.

For each item or service up to £4,999.99, applicants must provide evidence that they have obtained at least two price checks to demonstrate value for money.

Internet Quotations/Price Checks

The applicant should complete the on-line ordering screen to the point where payment details are entered. The price quoted at this point should include delivery and for example any discounts.

Where the cost of any individual item or service exceeds £4,999.99, applicants must obtain or seek the minimum number of formal quotations as outlined in the procurement thresholds in the table below. The thresholds apply to individual items

or services, not the total project cost. While it is recommended to use a single supplier where possible, it is acceptable to use multiple suppliers for different elements of the project (e.g. machinery, control software), where this offers better value for money.

Note: Quotations should be 'like for like'. Failure to comply with this condition may result in the application being reduced or rejected.

Number of Quotations Required		Quotation Thresholds (£) (Exc. VAT)
1	Minimum of 2 price checks (email, written or online) must be provided to demonstrate value for money.	Up to £4,999.99
2	Minimum of 3 written* formal quotations (internet quotes not permitted)	5,000.00 – 14,999.99
3	Minimum of 4 written* formal quotations (internet quotes not permitted)	15,000.00 – 49,999.99
4	Public Advertised Tender Council Approval*	Above 50,000.00
As part of our local sourcing ambitions, the Council encourages businesses to source services from suppliers based inside the ANBC Borough where possible.		

*Further guidance for procurement can be obtained on request.

Conflict of Interest – Quotes from Family/Extended Family Members and Mentors

If quotations are being sought or provided from any member of an applicant's family or extended family, then the relationship must be advised to the Council's responsible officer, prior to any procurement activity and declared in writing on the procurement documentation.

In addition, applicants must sign a Conflict-of-Interest Declaration, which is attached to the Application Form, to the effect that:

- (a) Competitors quotations will not be shared with quoting family member; and,
- (b) That applicants will strictly adhere to the Council's procurement policy.

NOTE: Quotations from Ask mentors (or extensions of that organisation) that have successfully provided a business with mentoring services will not be permissible.

Please note: As part of Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council's audit and fraud prevention checks, Council Officers, and Programme auditors **may undertake supplier verification checks** to verify quotation(s)/ invoice(s) at grant application and claim stage. Any quotation/invoice that cannot be verified by the supplier will be passed to the Council's Internal Audit Department for further investigation.

9. FRAUD AND CORRUPTION

The Council is committed to the prevention and detection of fraud and the promotion of an anti-fraud culture.

The Council operates a zero-tolerance attitude to fraud and corruption, whether from internal or external sources. The Council requires staff and individuals/organisations that it deals with, to act with honesty and integrity, to safeguard the public resources and to report all suspicions of fraud and corruption.

Every case of alleged or suspected fraud will be thoroughly investigated in accordance with the Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy, and where appropriate, referred to the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). The Council will also seek to recover any loss suffered as a result of fraud and if appropriate, will take civil, and/or disciplinary action.

10. HOW TO APPLY

Your Ask mentor will complete a short referral form on your behalf. If deemed eligible you will be invited to complete a short application form and provide the relevant quotations as per procurement guidelines.

All applicants must submit the following essential information:

1. A completed application form;
2. Required minimum number of price checks or written quotations in line with Council's procurement policy.

Any queries in relation to the application should be directed to your local Council Officer.

11. APPLICATION ASSESSMENT AND FUNDING ALLOCATION

Each application will be assessed on its own merit. Funding will be awarded based on the outcome of this assessment and procurement provided. Funding will be awarded on the cheapest quotation/ price provided. See section 8 for full details.

Applications must meet all the following criteria to be considered for funding. Each criterion will be evaluated on a PASS/FAIL basis:

- i. Successful completion of an Ask mentoring assignment
- ii. Recommended for funding by their Ask assignment Mentor
- iii. Eligibility check
- iv. Value for Money (demonstrated through provisional procurement).
- v. Need for the project.

Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council reserve the right to enhance assessment criteria in the event that the number of applications exceeds the funds available.

The decision of the Council is final and there is no right of appeal on the decision made.

INCOMPLETE APPLICATIONS WILL NOT BE ASSESSED.

It is therefore critical that applicants complete **all** sections of the application form and submit the required supporting documentation.

12. SUCCESSFUL APPLICATIONS – YOUR ‘LETTER OF OFFER’

Successful applicants will be issued with a Letter of Offer. This agreement will set out the terms and conditions associated with the grant funding which must be adhered to:

- The amount of grant awarded / grant reserved for your scheme;
- The terms and conditions associated with the grant; and
- Time bound completion date.
- Signed Letters of Offer must be returned within 14 days of receipt.

All projects must be completed as soon as practically possible after receiving a Letter of Offer, and by the end date stated in your Letter of Offer.

Letter of Offer extensions will only be considered in exceptional circumstances and are at the discretion of the Council, with no right of appeal on the decision made.

NOTE: Do not commence any work or pay deposits until your Letter of Offer has been signed and returned to the Council. The Council will not fund any element of the project that has commenced prior to the signed Letter of Offer being returned.

13. PAYMENT OF THE GRANT

CASH OR CHEQUE EXPENDITURE WILL NOT BE ELIGIBLE FOR THE PURPOSES OF THIS FUND.

Payment of grant will be made via direct BACS payment. No cash or cheque payments will be made.

Bank Account

All match funding must be available from or lodged in the same bank account to which the Grant Aid will be paid. All expenditure incurred by the applicant for implementation of the project must also be made from this bank account.

Changes to the Project

The Grant Aid shall be used only for the purposes of capital expenditure as defined in the Applicant's application, procurement and set out in the Letter of Offer. Any intended changes to the capital expenditure item, indicated supplier or the timescales to delivery must be notified in writing in advance and approved by the Council.

Level of Assistance

The amount of Grant Aid payable will be strictly as specified in the Letter of Offer. Any cost overruns will be borne by the Applicant.

Grant Aid shall be paid in arrears* on receipt of a properly completed official claim form as provided with the Letter of Offer. No other types of claim form will be accepted. Final Claim forms must be submitted to Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council within 28 days from the agreed end date for the project.

*Under exceptional circumstances the Council may consider issuing an advance payment of up to 50%. This is at the discretion of the Council and only on receipt of a signed Letter of Offer, and evidence of match funding.

Claim forms must be accompanied by evidence to support the eligible expenditure incurred. This means that the Applicant must, as far as possible, provide original documentation for all expenditure included on the claim for payment of Grant Aid as follows:

- invoices or receipts
- electronic or original bank statements; (the electronic print-out includes the applicant's name, address and bank account number)
- serial numbers for equipment if applicable
- Photographs of items purchased

- For expenditure to be considered as eligible, payments must have been debited from the Applicant's bank account.

Where an applicant purchases goods or services from outside the United Kingdom;

- Invoices in Euros should be claimed in sterling and the date of calculation will be the date the currency transaction clears the applicant's bank account.

14. PRIVACY NOTICE

The Ask Capital Grant Programme collects personal and business data to process applications, award grants, and evaluate programme impact. This is done under the legal basis of performance of a public task. Data will be handled in line with council retention policy and may be subject to audit. Information will not be shared externally unless legally required or part of audit/funding reporting.

You have rights to access, correct, erase, or object to your data. For more information or to raise a query, please contact the Council's **Data Protection Officer**:

T: 028 94 463113 | E: DPO@antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk

For further detail, view the full Ask Programme Privacy Notice [through this link](#)