

Appendix A - Bid Criteria for Parish and Town Councils

1. Introduction

The Love Your Bus Grant Fund supports Parish and Town Council projects aimed at increasing bus service patronage and aligning with Essex County Council's goals of fostering:

- A strong, inclusive, and sustainable economy.
- A high-quality environment.
- Health, wellbeing, and independence for all ages.
- A good place for children and families to grow.

Grants of up to **£50,000** are available for revenue-only projects in the 2025/2026 period, supported by the Department for Transport's BSIP+ funding. Total funding available: **£500,000**.

2. Eligibility Criteria

- **Who can apply:** Parish and Town Councils only.
- **Bus service requirement:** Services must operate at least **80% of their mileage within Essex County Council's administrative area** (excluding Southend and Thurrock).
- **Number of bids:** Each council can submit up to **three bids**. Collaborative applications with neighbouring councils are encouraged.
- **Transport Provider support:** Letter to provide support from bus company operating the service and their commitment to meet the data-sharing requirements as outlined in application guidelines
- **Support from County Councillor** – Written or email confirmation from the local County Councillor endorsing the project.

3. Project Requirements

- **Funding type:** Revenue projects only.
- **Capital projects are not eligible.**
- **Ineligible uses:**
 - Projects that financially benefit the applicant signatories.
 - VAT or taxes that cannot be reclaimed.
 - Gambling-related activities.
 - Core funding without improved outcomes.
- **Examples of eligible projects:**
 - Increasing passenger numbers.
 - Expanding service frequency or stops.
 - Marketing (e.g., leaflets, maps).
 - Community engagement events.

4. Collaboration Guidance

Councils serving the same bus routes can collaborate to maximise impact. In such cases:

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- **Lead Council:** One council must act as the primary applicant, managing the application and funding.

Examples of collaborative projects include joint marketing campaigns, service enhancements, and community events.

5. Evaluation Criteria

Applications will be assessed based on:

- Alignment with **Love Your Bus** objectives and Essex County Council's strategic plans (e.g., improving access to education, healthcare, and reducing car journeys).
- Evidence of **community engagement** in project design and delivery.
- Demonstrated support from the local **County Councillor**.
- Sustainability plans to maintain benefits beyond grant funding.

6. Funding and Financial Requirements

- **Maximum grant:** £50,000 per project.
- **Reserves transparency:** Applicants must justify unrestricted reserves with a formally ratified reserves policy.
- **Cost breakdown:** Clear project costings, including supplier estimates, must be provided.

7. Project Monitoring and Reporting

- **Quarterly reports:** Applicants must submit progress updates to the Funding Officer.
- **Final outcomes:** A comprehensive report on grant usage and benefits must be submitted by **31 May 2026**.
- Essex County Council reserves the right to audit projects and claw back funds if delivery expectations are not met.

8. Application Process

1. **Submit application:** Include all required details and supporting documentation (e.g., County Councillor support letters).
2. **Deadlines:**
 - Applications close: **14 February 2025**.
 - Project delivery and funding use must complete by **31 March 2026**.
3. **Decision-making:** Awards are determined by a panel, and decisions are final.