

Kilkenny County Council

Internal Audit Report  Review of Amenity Grants

Date: 19th December 2019

Report Distribution

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Audit Committee Members

Local Government Auditor

Summary

Amenity Grant Scheme funding is available to support Resident Associations and Community Groups wishing to undertake Environmental type community initiatives which contribute towards the betterment of their local Environment. The Amenity Grants Scheme covers general improvement works and environmental initiatives, such as the purchase of small garden equipment, litter pickers, estate name stones, repair works and litter clean-ups.

Objectives

The objective of the audit is to provide reasonable assurance that adequate procedures and key controls are in place in the administration of the grant scheme. Internal Audit understands that it is essential that the council supports the good work being carried out by the various community groups throughout the county. However, due to the limited resources available, it is important that the budget allocated to this area is allocated fairly and the money is spent on eligible projects only.

Approach

A total 150 grants totalling €127k were paid in 2018. Internal Audit reviewed a sample of 30 grants issued totalling €29k. Internal audit met with the staff who administer the grants. The grant files and the financial transactions were also reviewed.

Scope & Limitations of scope

Internal Audit reviewed 30 grant payments issued in 2018.

Audit Risk

- Guidelines not being applied correctly.
- Grants paid for ineligible projects.
- Inadequate authorization controls
- Lack of transparency.
- Insufficient backup documentation received.

Co-operation of Management and staff

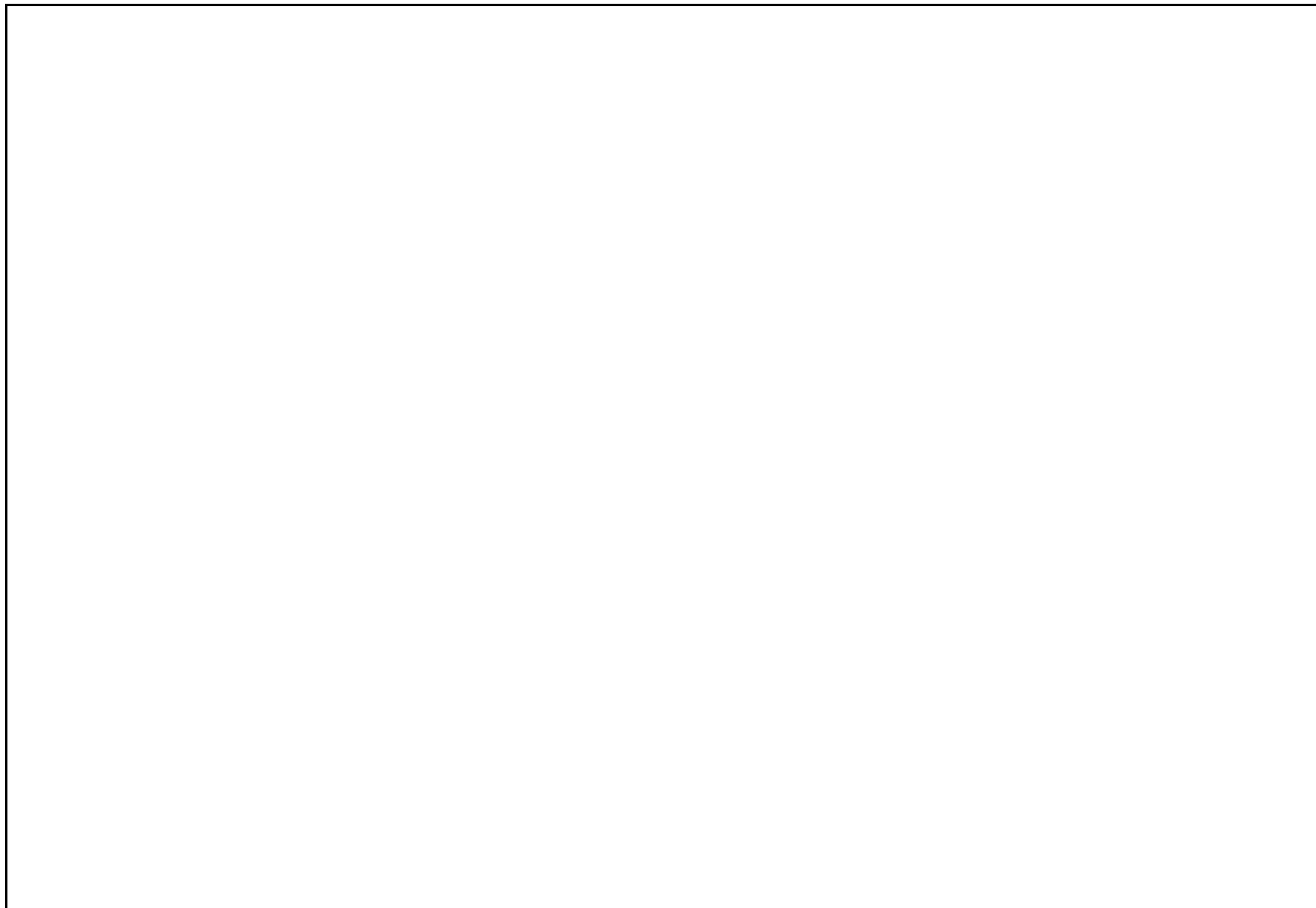
Internal Audit received full co-operation from Council Management and staff throughout the course of this review and would like to thank them for their assistance.

Findings and Recommendations

<i>Finding</i>	<i>Implication</i>	<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Management Action Plan</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The application form (<i>Appendix A</i>) specifies the requirement for each group/association to have adequate insurance for the works being carried out. A copy of an insurance policy is not submitted with application. 16 clubs including GAA, athletics, shooting and social clubs received grant funding in 2018 of over €11k. These clubs would have other sources of funding through subscriptions etc. The allocation of funding to these types of organisations reduces the amount available to community groups/resident associations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential insurance claims against council if accidents occur when carrying out works in which grant was approved. Reducing grant funding available to community groups/resident associations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Management should ensure that all resident groups receiving a grant are adequately insured with the council indemnified on the policy. Clubs with income from subscriptions should be excluded from qualifying for grant aid. Only works carried out on publicly owned property should qualify for grant aid. 	<p><i>Evidence of insurance is not sought from groups, but rather they are asked to confirm on the form if insurance is in place. Most indicate that insurance is in place but this is not checked. The issue of insurance is one which could prevent many groups from participating in the scheme. Parks/Environment will review this issue.</i></p> <p><i>Clubs are advised that if a membership fee or other charge is levied then they are ineligible to apply. In this regard, the number of applications from clubs/sporting organisations has greatly reduced as a result in recent years. 3 applications from clubs</i></p>

<i>Finding</i>	<i>Implication</i>	<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Management Action Plan</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some towns/villages have 3-4 different community groups with each group receiving a grant. For example, Stoneyford, received four grants to four different community groups totalling €2,295. These four grants were paid to the same bank account. Under the assessment criteria, Stoneyford should only have received €900 as a “small village with population under 500” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unequal allocation of funding to towns/villages in the county. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Council must ensure that qualifying criteria are not being manipulated by towns/villages making applications in different names. The maximum funding for each town/village should not be exceeded where there are more than one community group in the area unless in special circumstances. 	<p><i>were received and approved this year on the basis that they confirmed their facility was available to all free of charge.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grants totalling over €3k relating to 2017 were paid from 2018 budget. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2017 spend understated in accounts. Negative impact on 2018 budget. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An accrual for unpaid grants should be carried out year end and the expenditure posted to the year in which it relates. 	<p><i>This is increasingly common as groups realise they can maximise the grant funding for their respective areas, but requesting a separate bank account from each group might help eliminate this. In some cases the same person applies under three or four different group entities. Parks/ Environment will review this issue.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are no on-site inspections undertaken to ensure the works are 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential for grants to be paid for ineligible works. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal Audit accepts that due to lack of resources and materiality of the grant amounts, all 127 	<p><i>This is now being done.</i></p> <p><i>Noted and agreed to carry out inspections of a sample</i></p>

<i>Finding</i>	<i>Implication</i>	<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Management Action Plan</i>
<p>carried out are actually the works specified in the application.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Housing Dept. administer estate management grants with a budget of €60k in 2019. The conditions and qualifications for both grants are similar. Traditionally, estate management grants were for LA housing estates only. However, in recent years, the councils housing policy was to promote a mix between private and social housing in all estates so the traditional LA estate no longer exists. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Possible misuse of public funds Inefficient use of resources. Possible duplication of work. 	<p>grants can't be inspected. However, a sample of grants could be formally checked each year. This should be specified on the application form so applicants are aware that their work could be inspected therefore improving compliance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Management should investigate if it would be more efficient to administer both grants in one department, which would reduce the amount of administration required. 	<p><i>of grants approved this year.</i></p> <p><i>Noted. This proposal was mooted with Housing in the past and it can be raised again.</i></p>



Appendix A – Amenity Grant Application Form

AMENITY GRANTS SCHEME, 2019

Closing Date – Friday, 15th March, 2019

1. Name of Applicant Body _____

2. Description of Project _____

3. Location of Project (Please ensure “before” photographs are attached or emailed to lisa.bourke@kilkennycoco.ie)

4. If this grant is sought for maintenance of open spaces within a private housing estate (**strictly one application per estate**), please indicate the number of houses, apartment etc within the estate

5. Approximate total cost of proposed project? _____

6. Amount of Amenity Grant 2019 being sought? _____

7. Date of commencement (anticipated) _____

8. Date of expected completion _____

9. Name, Address, Telephone and email to which correspondence is to be sent

Email: _____ Telephone No. _____

10. Will the amenity be available free of charge for the use and enjoyment of the general public? (**this grant is not payable to private clubs where a membership fee is applicable for use of the facilities**)

11. (a) Have you received an Amenity Grant before? _____

(b) If so, please give details _____

12. (a) Has grant assistance been received or sought for this proposal from any other source?

(b) Do you intend to apply for funding for this proposal from another source?

13. Have you obtained planning approval to the scheme where necessary?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If the answer to the above question is yes, please quote the planning reference number

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Position Held _____

10. Will the amenity be available free of charge for the use and enjoyment of the general public? (**this grant is not payable to private clubs where a membership fee is applicable for use of the facilities**)

11. (a) Have you received an Amenity Grant before? _____

(b) If so, please give details _____

12. (a) Has grant assistance been received or sought for this proposal from any other source?

(b) Do you intend to apply for funding for this proposal from another source?

13. Have you obtained planning approval to the scheme where necessary?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If the answer to the above question is yes, please quote the planning reference number

Signed: _____ **Date:** _____

Position Held _____

Footnotes:

If successful in your application, receipts relating to purchases and payments must be submitted prior to grants being paid out.

Completed application forms should be returned to:

Lisa Bourke, Parks Department, Kilkenny County Council, County Hall, John St., Kilkenny.

Tel: 056 7794441 E-mail: lisa.bourke@kilkennycoco.ie Webpage: www.kilkennycoco.ie

Please read attached notes carefully.

Grants for Works of Public Amenity:

Memorandum of Information for Voluntary Bodies Etc.

1. BASIC CONDITIONS

- For a project to qualify under the scheme, the facilities to be provided/maintained must be available for the use and enjoyment of the general public.
- The facilities must be accessible free of any charge, club membership fees or admission fees.
- Satisfactory arrangements for future management and maintenance must be made i.e. there must be an on-going commitment to maintaining the project.
- Only works which start after grant approval has been received from the Local Authority are eligible, works which have started prior to the awarding of the grant are not eligible for inclusion in the scheme.

2. TYPE OF SCHEME THAT WILL QUALIFY

The scheme is intended to improve outdoor community facilities, to protect or improve natural or man-made amenities and enhance the appearance of the area concerned. Works that will qualify include:

- Improvements to or maintenance of parks and open spaces
- Means to access areas of recreational or amenity value
- Works for the conservation or protection of natural or manmade amenities
- Scenic walks, nature trails etc.
- Planting of trees, shrubs, plant containers etc.
- Purchase of plant and machinery for the maintenance of open spaces e.g. mowers, strimmers etc

3. SUBMISSION OF APPLICATIONS TO LOCAL AUTHORITY

Application forms for Amenity Grants may be obtained from and returned to the Lisa Bourke, Parks Department, Kilkenny County Council, County Hall, John Street, Kilkenny. The application **must** be accompanied by the following:-

1. A detailed estimate/quote of the cost of the works proposed
2. "Before" photographs of the location of the proposed works.
3. A detailed description of the proposed works.
4. Where structural works are involved – a scale drawing and a brief specification.

The Local Authority will need to be satisfied as to the eligibility and suitability of the scheme generally, arrangements for management and maintenance and the ownership of the land. Works will also be assessed on their safety. Where works are proposed near a road or a road junction the Council's Area Engineers will have to be satisfied of its suitability and safety prior to any grant being considered.

N.B. In some cases a local group may wish to be satisfied about the eligibility of a project before detailed plans are prepared. Where this question arises it is open to the group to seek approval in principle to the project from the Local Authority before going any

further.

4. COST ESTIMATES: DESIGN OF SCHEMES ETC.

It is important that cost estimates should be as accurate and realistic as possible. If a group requires assistance, the Parks Department of the Local Authority are available to advise.

5. MAINTENANCE ARRANGEMENTS

The Local Authority will have to be satisfied about arrangement for the future maintenance of schemes carried out with grant assistance. Promoting bodies will be expected to have ownership or effective control of the land and/or building affected and to be legally constituted to ensure continuity of responsibility.

6. PLANNING PERMISSION

Applicant bodies are reminded that where planning permission is required for any project proposed to be carried out under the scheme, such permission must be obtained before the work can be legally commenced. The Local Authority will advise on the procedure to be followed.

7. CHANGES TO APPROVED GRANTS

If for any reason an applicant body proposes to carry out works which are different from or at a different location to those approved, written agreement must be obtained from the Parks Department, Kilkenny County Council before works begin. Grants will not be paid where the works or location of works are different from those approved without the prior written agreement of the Parks Department.

8. PAYMENT OF GRANTS

Approved grants **will only be paid on submission of paid invoices for works completed together with "after" photographs of the site(s).** "Before" and "After" photographs can be submitted via email to: lisa.bourke@kilkennycoco.ie

Footnote:

The group/association must have Public Liability insurance in place for all works to be carried out by themselves. If the group/association employs a contractor, the contractor must have their own public liability insurance in place. Kilkenny County Council will not reimburse costs for public liability insurance under the application.

The Kilkenny County Council must be satisfied that the project can be undertaken safely by the group and that it will not pose any hazard to either the group themselves or the general public during construction/planting works or during later use of the site.

NB. All groups/applicants should have a minimum number of members to ensure they are representing the local area effectively. **A minimum number of 5 would be acceptable. Associations or groups with only a single member will not be considered as effectively representing their area and only in exceptional circumstances will a grant be considered.**

DATA PROTECTION CONSENT FORM

Data Protection Acts 1988 & 2018 as amended

I, _____ consent to the collection and processing of the data provided by me by Kilkenny County Council and the sharing of this data with the Revenue Commissioners for the purposes of making payments to me for services provided and tax compliance.

Any personal information which you provide may be shared/exchanged with the Revenue Commissioners in accordance with the law and will be used by Kilkenny County Council and the Revenue Commissioners to carry out our legal obligations, in relation to compliance with relevant tax legislation.

Kilkenny County Council will treat all information and personal data you give us as confidential. We will retain your data for no longer than is necessary for the purpose of making payments to you and in accordance with the Council's Retention Policy.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Name: _____

(in Block Capitals)

☐ I do not consent to my data being processed, shared and stored by Kilkenny County Council for the purposes outlined above.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Name: _____

(in Block Capitals)