

CRITERIA

LUTON INNOVATION & COLLABORATION FUND

WORK & SKILLS: PHASE 4

A FUND BY THE FAIRNESS TASKFORCE

MANAGED BY
BEDFORDSHIRE AND LUTON COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION

ON BEHALF OF
LUTON BOROUGH COUNCIL





As part of Luton Borough Council's groundbreaking **Fairness Taskforce**, and thanks to funding received from **The National Lottery Community Fund**, BLCF are working with local partners to deliver a fund to address the actions identified by the Fairness Taskforce, shaping future work within the sector. The Luton Innovation & Collaboration Fund welcomes the opportunity for innovative projects with a strong emphasis on collaboration.

Introduction

Luton's 2040 vision is built on a commitment to tackle inequality so that everyone in Luton can thrive and no one has to live in poverty.

To achieve this, Luton Borough Council aim to improve outcomes for all residents and ensure people have real influence over the town's future.

The **Luton Fairness Taskforce**, launched in November 2021, brings together community groups, public services, and local organisations to identify and remove the barriers that hold people back. It is rooted in Luton's strong civil society, supported by key partners across the town, and backed by the council at the highest level.

The Taskforce provides a trusted, collaborative way to take action on issues that matter most to local people, especially those whose voices are often underrepresented.

Examples of work already delivered include:

- Creating welcoming community spaces to tackle loneliness, offer energy advice, and support 10,000 residents, alongside a Food First Network.
- Running employability days connecting major employers with young people from Black African, Black Caribbean and South Asian communities.
- Launching a £250k fund to support community-led innovation and develop new local networks and hubs.
- Supporting youth-led research on fairness and justice in the criminal justice system.

The Fairness Taskforce is a key strand of the Luton 2040 Vision for a healthy fair and sustainable town, to achieve this, there is a focus on "Jobs, Safety, Homes" and supporting those below the deprivation line according to the multiple needs index. This along with feedback from participants at the September review "Fairness Taskforce at the end of year 1 of the community lottery fund" has helped to reshape the Taskforce with a more focused, in-depth approach to system change. Allowing the Taskforce to work on targeted key themes first and make a more substantial impact.

Over 2026-2027, the Taskforce will focus on the themes of:

- Financial Resilience
- Work and Skills
- Community safety
- Isolation and wellbeing

The Taskforce is prioritising co-design and co-creation, working more closely with departments across Luton Borough Council to better connect with existing workstreams and acting as a direct bridge between community voice (particularly the voice of residents and the VCFSE sector) and strategy. The Fairness Taskforce exists to ensure a "town built on fairness and social justice" ensuring everyone has a meaningful voice and impact.

Under this approach goals for the Taskforce are able to be defined more clearly and outcomes identified in how to feed back into the directives of the themed action plans and network at a systemic level.

The programme forms part of Luton's ambition to end poverty by 2040 by supporting residents furthest from the labour market to improve their economic resilience, increase participation in education, training, volunteering and employment, and access opportunities that improve long-term life chances.

How much can organisations apply for?

For this round of the fund, which is focused on **Work & Skills**, there is a **maximum pot of £110k** available in total. Priority will be given to those groups who attended the previous Work & Skills Fairness Taskforce events, which took place on 15th April and 15th July 2026.

Projects can be supported over a **10-month** period from **November 2026 to August 2027**. Level of awards available is as follows:

Awards from £5,000 up to £30,000. Groups applying must show a willingness to engage with other local groups to show added value and collaborative work. Priority will be given to applications from newly formed partnerships/collaborations with new innovative project ideas. Innovation can include trying new ideas, working with new partners, building on approaches that have worked elsewhere, or finding new ways to help people overcome barriers to work, training and skills.

A maximum of 15% of the grant can be used for core costs, such as rent and utilities. The rest should be used for project or activity delivery costs. Groups will be asked to provide a detailed budget against any request at full application stage, which shows how figures have been calculated. If you have any queries, please contact us at grants@blcf.org.uk

Strategic Alignment

Projects should aim to reach the 20,000 Luton residents currently living in destitution (see *Appendix 1 for more information*).

Projects should also demonstrate how they contribute to Luton 2040 by helping residents improve their life chances, reduce barriers to participation and move towards greater economic independence. (*see Appendix 2 for further information*).

Fund Priorities

Funded projects should contribute to one or more of the following:

- Reducing poverty and inequality.
- Supporting residents build skills, confidence and employability.
- Increasing participation in volunteering, training and employment.
- Improving opportunities for residents facing the greatest barriers.

All funded projects must support **at least one** of the priority beneficiary groups listed below and provide activities that improve people's work and skills.

1. Community-Based Pathways into Skills, Meaningful Activity and Employment

-Projects should support residents who face barriers to participation and employment through practical, community-based interventions.

- Helping residents build confidence, resilience and motivation.
- Supporting people to overcome barriers that prevent them from participating in training, volunteering or employment.
- Delivering work-readiness, personal development or employability activities.
- Providing volunteering, peer support or community-based opportunities to develop transferable skills.
- Delivering support within communities experiencing higher levels of deprivation.

2. Inclusive Employment and Employer Engagement

-Projects should focus on creating stronger links between employers and residents who face barriers to employment.

- Working with employers to create more inclusive opportunities.
- Supporting fair recruitment, onboarding and retention practices.
- Creating work experience, placements, volunteering, apprenticeship or employment opportunities.
- Developing partnerships between employers and local communities.
- Providing support that helps people sustain employment.

3. Local Skills Progression and Employment Pathways

-Projects should help residents move closer to learning, skills development and employment.

- Skills training linked to local employment opportunities.
- Access to accredited or non-accredited learning.
- Mentoring, coaching and peer support.
- Activities that connect residents with employers, training providers and employment services.
- Support to help residents take their next step towards work or economic independence.

Priority beneficiary groups

Each project must focus on **one or more** of the groups identified:

- Young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET).
- Economically inactive residents seeking to move closer to employment, skills or meaningful activity.
- Residents from South Asian communities facing barriers to employment, progression or economic participation.
- People with lived experience of offending or who are at risk of reoffending.
- Residents experiencing:
 - Long-term unemployment
 - Low confidence and self-esteem.
 - Mental health challenges.
 - Social isolation
 - Family or relationship breakdown.
 - Caring responsibilities.
 - Multiple and complex barriers to employment.

We fund

All projects or initiatives must be for the benefit of the local community **in Luton**.

You need to be able to demonstrate that you have:

- A constitution or other governing document.
- A committee of at least 3 unrelated Trustees / Directors (no-one with 'significant control').
- A proposed project which has not already been funded by BLCF (or separately applied for BLCF funding).
- Relevant, up to date policies in place, specifically safeguarding policy (for work with children / adults at risk) & equality, diversity & inclusion / equal opportunities policy.
- Considered how your proposal ensures that people of different backgrounds, ages and abilities are included (fair and equitable).
- A new formal partnership/collaboration established with at least one other organisation, for applications over £10,000.
- Identified who the lead partner will be (if a partnership project), and have good financial management and health, without large free / unrestricted funds.
- A clear strategy for when funding ends.

If your organisation is a social enterprise (including CICs) there is specific guidance available [here](#).

We do not fund

For details on what we DO NOT FUND please visit our website here:

[Apply For A Grant | Bedfordshire & Luton Community Foundation](#)

Supporting documents

We require a full budget breakdown and project plan for the project or activity. You must also upload the following supporting documents with your application:

- Annual accounts - most recent signed annual accounts and / or management accounts, which have been audited / independently examined where required.
- Governing documents - constitution, memorandum and articles, articles, or set of rules.
- Bank statement - dated within 2 months, in the name and correct address of the organisation applying with at least 2 unrelated signatories.
- Equal opportunity policy.
- Safeguarding policy.
- Trustees and directors (names, roles, confirmation of any related trustees / directors and any other potential conflicts of interest).

Should you require any support with any of the above please contact us in the first instance on grants@blcf.org.uk using the subject line 'Luton Innovation & Collaboration Fund' enquiry.

Monitoring & evaluation

Successful applicants will be asked to complete monitoring reports during their award timescale. To help us understand how your project is progressing and the difference it makes locally, we ask all funded organisations to share the following set updates during their award period.

Monitoring requirements will be proportionate to the size of the award and may include:

- **Regular data reporting** on the people you support (beneficiaries)
- **A short interim update** halfway through your project
- **Project visits** from BLCF staff (and fund partners when appropriate)
- **An end-of-award report** that shows how the award was spent (with receipts), what you achieved, the impact on your community, and what you learned along the way

You will need to tell us about the project outcomes, impact, important issues, and lessons learned.

Before beginning the project, we suggest you decide:

- Who will write your end-of-grant report
- How you plan to track your progress
- What information you'll collect, for example:
 - **Numbers (quantitative data):** how many people took part, goals achieved (e.g. employment, improved wellbeing)
 - **Stories and case studies:** feedback from participants or volunteers, changes in skills or confidence
 - **Learning:** Learning – feedback from project participants, what went well, what would you do differently etc.
 - **Feedback** from partner organisations

Additional information

The deadline for **applications** is **2nd October 2026** at **midday**. BLCF will then review and assess applications to put forward to panel, those eligible that best demonstrate how they meet the priorities for the fund and meet the eligibility.

All applications are thoroughly assessed, including due diligence checks (more information [here](#)). Only applications which clearly meet the fund's criteria will be presented to panel. We reserve the right to decline or accept any application according to the grants panel's decision.

We advise putting in your application as soon as possible as we reserve the right to close the fund early, should we receive an overwhelming number of applications.

The decision panel is due to take place in early November 2026, with the aim of relaying decisions to applicants within 7-10 days of the panel date.

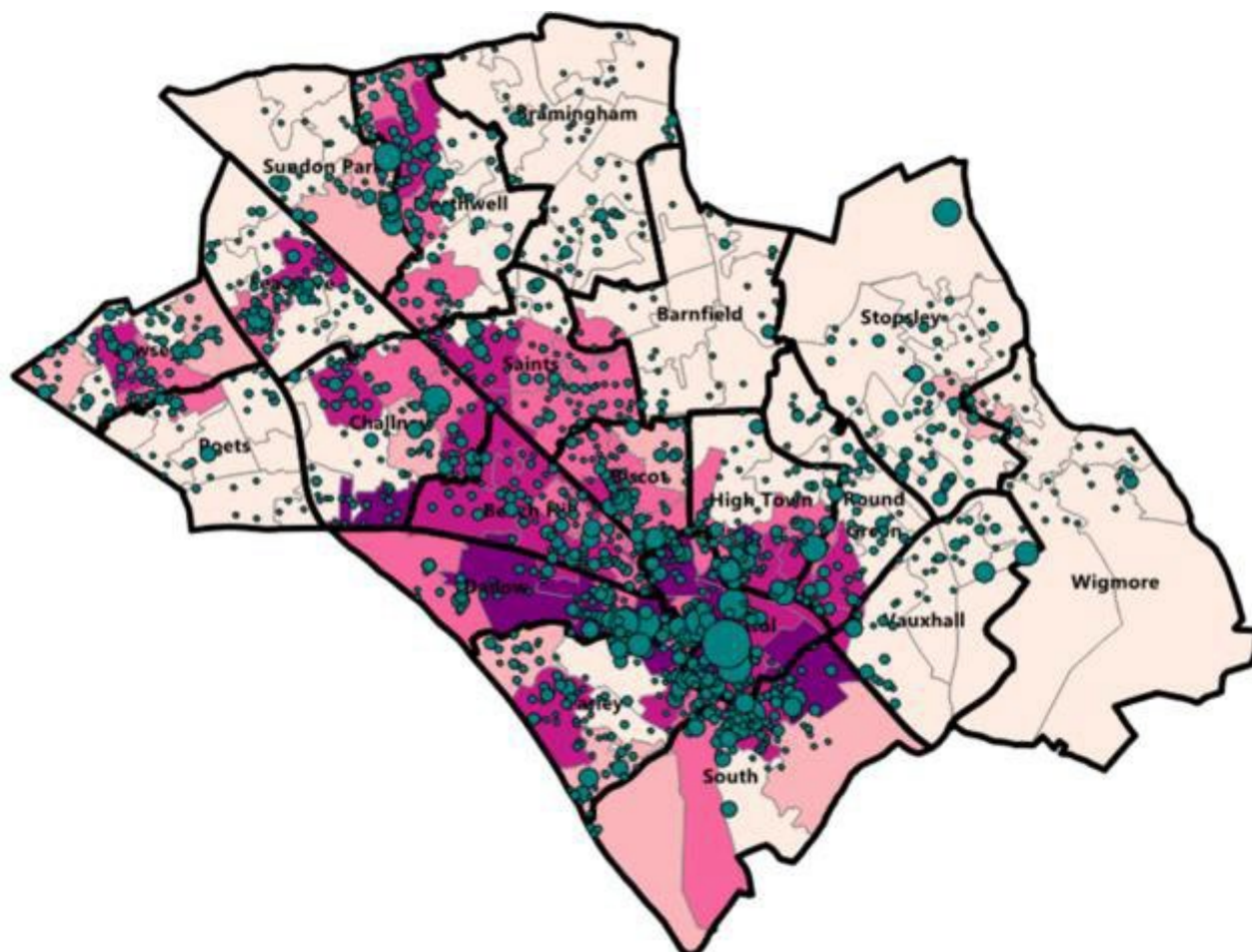
We encourage all applicants to explore other funding sources. Your local Community Voluntary Service (CVS) can provide funding advice. For Bedfordshire CVS, visit www.cvsbeds.org.uk

Equal opportunities

We commit to promoting equal opportunities and valuing diversity regardless of any protected characteristics. If you have any queries, please contact us at grants@blcf.org.uk

Appendix 1

A.1 Map demonstrates the number of destitute households from 2024 MIS and dots showing LIFT (Low Income Family Tracker) destitute household locations.



Postcode of LIFT destitute household - larger dot equates to more households.

Appendix 2

Strategic Alignment further information...

Strategic Alignment:

Projects funded through this programme should demonstrate how they contribute to:

Luton 2040

Supporting the ambition to:

- End poverty in all its forms by 2040.
- Increase inclusive economic participation.
- Improve life chances for residents experiencing disadvantages.
- Reduce inequalities across communities and neighbourhoods.
- Enable more residents to access good-quality employment and sustainable incomes.

Get Britain Working

Supporting national objectives to:

- Increase labour market participation.
- Reduce economic inactivity.
- Remove barriers preventing people from entering and sustaining employment.
- Strengthen links between employers, communities and local employment support.
- Help people move into good work, skills development and long-term economic independence.

Inclusive Growth and Neighbourhood Delivery

Supporting:

- Place-based approaches focused on deprived communities.
- Earlier intervention and prevention.
- Community-led engagement.
- Stronger connections between residents, employers, skills providers and local support services.
- Sustainable progression into meaningful activity, skills and employment.

Community Focus:

Projects should demonstrate an understanding of local needs and explain how they will engage residents who are least likely to access mainstream support.

Connecting Residents to Wider Support:

Projects should identify residents who may benefit from wider skills, employment or support services and help them access appropriate opportunities.

This may include:

- Community outreach and engagement.
- Understanding residents' needs and aspirations.
- Referrals to relevant local services.
- Working collaboratively with other organisations and employment support providers.
- Tracking progress and outcomes.

Partnership, Alignment and Added Value

Applicants must demonstrate how their proposed activity complements and adds value to existing local provision rather than duplicating services already available within Luton.

- Demonstrate a clear understanding of the wider employment, skills and poverty reduction landscape across Luton.
- Align with existing local strategies, programmes and investment priorities, including the Luton 2040 vision, Skills and Employment initiatives, Neighbourhood Delivery programmes and other relevant partner-funded activity.

- Work collaboratively with local partners to create coordinated pathways for residents and avoid duplication of provision.
- Show how their activity complements other funding streams, including those supported through Luton Rising, helping to create a joined-up system of support for residents and communities.
- Maximise opportunities for shared referrals, co-location, joint delivery and progression pathways where appropriate.
- Contribute to collective outcomes that support inclusive growth, economic participation and poverty reduction across the borough.
- Ensure delivery against a social impact framework and employment outcomes.

Applicants should clearly describe how they will engage with existing local networks, services and funded programmes to ensure residents experience a seamless journey through skills, employment and wider support services.

Projects should demonstrate how their activities contribute to a coordinated system of support that helps residents move towards economic independence, supports inclusive growth, strengthens opportunities within Luton's neighbourhoods, and advances the shared ambition of ending poverty by 2040.