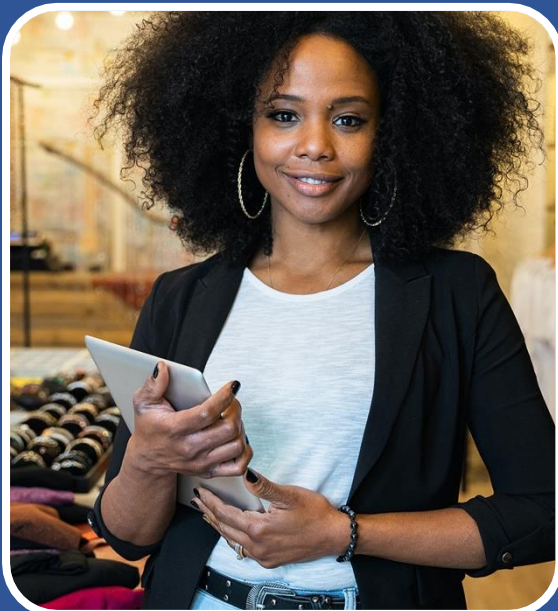


Bristol City Centre and High Streets Vacant Commercial Property Grant

Guidance Notes for Applicants



Section 1 - Introduction to Guidance Notes

These guidance notes have been created to help you understand the aims of this grant before you make an application for funding to Bristol City Council. Please read the notes carefully and ensure you've understood them before starting to write an application form.

Applicants must be either sole traders, or the owner or main director of a small or micro business, charity or CIC and have full control over all business decisions.

Franchise holders are not eligible to receive this funding. Applicants can designate someone to speak on their behalf if this forms part of a necessary reasonable adjustment.

If you would like support to help you understand the guidance notes or complete the application form, please email; business@bristol.gov.uk

You can also email for help if:

- You would find it easier to speak about this grant over the phone. (Please tell us this in your email and include your telephone number).
- You require a reasonable adjustment to make your application. (Please tell us a bit more about this in your email. We will support you if we judge that we are able to).
- You would like someone else to speak with us about this grant on your behalf. (Please tell us a bit more about the situation in your email).

Bristol City Council welcomes applications from people of all levels of ability. We are committed to supporting all eligible organisations through the application process.

Grant awards are paid in arrears. If your application is successful, you must be able to spend a minimum of £2,500 and wait up to six weeks to receive your award payments.

We will continue to work with successful applicants to monitor how the grant has been spent and offer further support to their organisations for up to three years from the date of their Grant Offer Letter.

Closing Date

The closing date for applications is 11.59pm, **Monday 30 September 2024**. You must send your full application to us by this date. This includes:

- Application form with all fields complete
- A financial statement from the last 30 days proving you have access to 20% of the amount of funding you're requesting
- Pictures of the inside and outside of the property
- A complete, dated lease for the new property that is signed by all parties

We will not be able to consider any organisation for this funding if any of the above has not been sent to us by the closing date.

If all the grant funding has been committed before the closing date, we may close the application period early.

Applicants must start trading from their new property by **Friday 31 January 2025** to be eligible to receive this funding.

Section 2 - Why are the Council offering this grant funding?

Bristol City Council wants to reduce the number of vacant commercial properties in our city centre and on our local high streets, supporting the recovery of these areas from the impacts of the Covid pandemic. We will achieve this by funding businesses, sole traders, charities, CIC's, creative and cultural activities, and community groups who can strengthen and diversify these areas, boost footfall, and create new jobs.

The grant is funded by Bristol City Council and the West of England Combined Authority.

Section 3 - What kind of organisations are eligible to apply?

All types of organisations can apply for this funding, including Businesses, Charities, CIC's Community & Voluntary Groups, Social Enterprises, and Sole Traders.

To be eligible your organisation must meet ALL THREE (3) of the following employment & financial criteria:

- Employ less than 50 people
- Have a turnover of £10.2million or less
- Have £5.1million or less on your balance sheet

To be eligible your organisation must meet ONE (1) of the below property criteria:

- Intend to lease or rent an eligible, previously vacant commercial property
- Have signed a lease or rental agreement for an eligible property within the 12 weeks prior to submitting your application, and not yet have started to trade from the property.

You can check if a property is an eligible area by entering the postcode into our interactive map of [Bristol's city centre and 46 local high streets](#).

The map displays the boundaries of the city centre in red, and local high streets in dark blue. At our discretion we may decide that a property slightly outside of these boundaries is eligible.

All types of commercial properties can be considered eligible to receive funding for renovation and/or equipment, including retail, leisure, hospitality, offices and in some cases industrial or warehousing premises. Properties do not need to have traditional shop frontages or be on a ground floor to be considered eligible for this funding.

All eligible properties will have their own Business Rates Assessment, and the applying organisation will be the sole party named on the lease or rental agreement. The grant cannot be used to fund the use of part of a property; for example, a portion of a co-working space, a pop-up or indoor market stall within a separately managed building, the use of a single floor within a multi-storey building with one business rates assessment etc.

If you are unsure whether a property could be considered eligible, please email business@bristol.gov.uk for guidance:

Leases that are for more than 12 months - To be eligible your organisation must meet ONE (1) of the below trading criteria:

(a) New business to Bristol's city centre or high street property market – You have never leased or rented any property in Bristol. You are creating new paid jobs* with fixed contracted hours.

(b) Returning business to Bristol's city centre or high street property market – You previously leased or rented a property in Bristol. Your contract on the previous property ended at least 6 months before you signed/intend to sign the lease on your new property. You are creating new paid jobs* with fixed contracted hours.

(c) Expanding business that is creating new jobs – You have a current lease or rental agreement for one or more properties and intend to lease a new property within the grant scheme's eligible locations. Your business is growing, and your new property will allow you to expand the services your business offers or increase the volume of people you serve AND you will create new paid jobs* with fixed contracted hours as a direct result of upgrading to your new property.

*At least one new permanent job must be created within the first 3 months of you trading at the new property. Permanent is defined as expected to last for at least 12 months. Jobs can be full time or part time and can be employed directly by your company or be self-employed positions. The jobs must be for people who are based in the UK.

Leases between 28 days and 11 months - To be eligible your organisation must meet ONE (1) of the below trading criteria:

(a) New business to Bristol's city centre or high street property market – You have never leased or rented any property in Bristol.

(b) Returning business to Bristol's city centre or high street property market – You previously leased or rented a property in Bristol. Your contract on the previous property ended at least 6 months before you signed/intend to sign the lease on your new property.

(c) Expanding business that is creating new jobs – You have a current lease or rental agreement for one or more properties and intend to lease a new property within the grant scheme's eligible locations. Your business is growing, and your new property will allow you to expand the services your business offers or increase the volume of people you serve.

Some types of organisations will not be eligible to receive funding, including:

Any organisation subject to a franchise agreement that gives control over business decisions to a franchisor, betting shops, pawn brokers, tanning salons, amusement or gaming arcades, tobacconists, vape shops, shisha bars, fast-food outlets, shops or venues wholly or mainly offering material of an adult or sexual nature, businesses or activities for political purposes or gain, for activities promoting religious beliefs or to proscribed organisations or organisations that support radicalisation or terrorism. This is not an exhaustive list. We retain the right to add to it at any time.

Organisations who apply also need to be in good standing with the council, including being fully paid up on any money owed to the council, such as business rates. Applicants or organisations that are in administration, insolvent or where a striking-off notice has been made are not eligible for the grant.

Organisations who apply must send us a copy of a financial statement proving they are able to match the funding they are requesting by 20%.

Section 4 - How much funding is available and what can it be used for?

The council has allocated £1.2million to this grant scheme.

The maximum grant award amounts range from £2,500 to £10,000. The amount you can apply for depends on the length of your lease or rental agreement:

Length of lease or rental agreement	Maximum grant amount
28 days to 6 months	£2,500
7-11 months	£3,500
12-23 months	£5,000
24-35 months	£7,500
3 years or longer	£10,000

This grant can be used to fund structural works to a property and/or equipment your business needs to provide services and trade from the property (Capital Expenditure).

Organisations securing leases for long-term use of 12 months or longer can request funding for both structural works and/or equipment.

Organisations securing leases for temporary or meanwhile use of 28 days to 11 months can request funding for structural works to the property only.

Applicants must be able to explain how each item of works or equipment they are requesting supports their organisation to trade and provide services. Equipment can be either new or second hand/refurbished.

Applicants must confirm whether any of the works they are requesting funding for require planning permission. If they do, we will need to see proof permission has been sought and will not make any payments until we receive proof permission has been granted.

You must not start any works or purchase any requested equipment until you have received and signed your Grant Offer Letter. We are not able to pay for any works already started or equipment already purchased before our grant offer is confirmed.

The council, as a public authority, is subject to the UK State Subsidy scheme, which applies limits on the level of funding a recipient can receive. When completing the Grant Application Form, applicants will be asked to list the sources and amounts of funding they have received.

Here are some examples of costs that are **eligible**:

- The extension, improvement, or modification of commercial/retail buildings.
- Works including replacing shop fronts, new roofs, windows, doors, rendering, stone/brick cleaning, electrical works, floors and ceilings, etc.
- New equipment/shop fittings such as: shelving, racks, storage and display units; food/refrigeration storage; food preparation equipment (ovens etc.)
- New equipment specific to your business/industry that is integral to your business providing services. (Examples include crockery for restaurants, hairdryers for salons)

Here are some examples of costs that are **not eligible**:

- Stock
- Rental or lease deposit or costs
- Business rates
- Staffing costs
- Insurance costs
- Cleaning products
- Computers, phones, tablets, etc
- Promotional and marketing materials or activities
- New equipment that is not integral to your business providing services at the property (such as day-to-day consumables, vacuum cleaners, staff room equipment)

If you are unsure if your requested works or equipment are eligible, please email business@bristol.gov.uk for guidance.

Section 5 - Do my requested works require Planning Permission?

Planning permission is required for works that involve a material change to the external appearance of a building. Examples of this are alterations to the fascia, the windows or the doorway, changes to the type of material used or the installation of awnings, blinds or security shutters. Advertisement consent is required for the display of certain types of signs. You may also require planning permission for change of use to the property.

If you are unsure whether your works require planning permission, you should seek further guidance on planning implications. Please see the contact details below if you'd like to speak to the relevant team within the council for further advice:

Email - development.management@bristol.gov.uk

Telephone - 0117 922 3000

Website - www.bristol.gov.uk/planning-and-building-regulations

Section 6 – How long after I send in my application will it take to receive a decision:

Once we have obtained all necessary application documents from you and all questions relating to your application have been satisfactorily answered, please allow up to 3 weeks to receive a decision from the Grant Panel.

Section 7 - How does the Council decide whether to award this grant?

Applications are assessed by the Grant Advisor, who will work directly with applicants and make an initial decision on eligibility based on your completed Grant Application Form and information you provide via email, over the telephone, or in face-to-face meetings.

If any information you provide leads the Grant Advisor to believe your organisation is not eligible to receive funding from this grant for your chosen property your application will not progress further. You will be given an explanation on why your application has been rejected.

If the Grant Advisor believes your organisation is eligible based on your Grant Application Form and supporting information, they will make a case to the grant decision panel. The panel is made up of Council officers. Decisions made by the panel are final. There is no appeals process.

Grants are discretionary, merit-based, and subject to the availability of funds. There is no automatic entitlement to funding based solely on the location of a property.

Please note, to be eligible for the grant your business must diversify the high street or city centre area you are moving in to. i.e., it must provide goods and/or services that are not present or are underrepresented on that high street. It is at the sole discretion of the Grant Panel to assess whether your application meets this essential requirement. However, this assessment will consider the size of the relevant high street, or city centre area, including how many businesses with a similar offer are operating within a 15 min walk from the property at the time your application is considered.

The Grant Decision Panel will consider several factors when deciding the amount of grant that maybe offered to an applicant, which include:

- Length of lease.
- Number and type of new jobs being created by the business. e.g., are the roles higher quality permanent PAYE roles, or lower quality short contract self-employed roles, and whether these roles are full time, or part time.
- Location of the property address. e.g., is the property within one of Bristol's most deprived areas or a high street with a high number of vacant units.
- The items that will be purchased with the funding e.g., is funding being requested that will help improve the outside of the property and have a positive impact on the area.
- Type of business, e.g., charity, social enterprise, not for profit or private/for profit business or sole trader.
- Is this a new or expanding business.

The council reserves the right to change the terms, conditions, and nature of the Vacant Commercial Property Grant at any time without notice.

Section 8 - What happens if I am successful in my application?

If your grant application is successful, you will enter into a formal grant agreement which will set out specific and general terms and conditions relating to this Grant Award. This agreement will be between you, the applicant, and Bristol City Council. There is no possibility of an applicant negotiating or changing the terms of the grant agreement.

The main terms and conditions of the Grant Agreement are as follows:

- The applicant confirms that they understand the council may seek to recover some or all monies paid to the applicant from the grant award in full or in part if any of the terms and conditions of the grant agreement are breached.
- The applicant confirms that they understand that the council reserves the right to withhold grant payments if works or equipment are not purchased or completed within agreed timeframes.
- The applicant confirms that they understand that the grant can only be used to purchase items listed in their pre-approved list outlined in the Grant Offer Letter. This pre-approved list is final and cannot be amended once the applicant has signed and returned their Grant offer Letter.
- The applicant confirms that the landlord of the funded property consents to all internal and external changes planned. The applicant acknowledges that if the council learns they have failed to gain the landlord's consent, they will be expected to pay back all monies received from the grant award in full.
- The applicant confirms that they have obtained all necessary permissions and licences to make changes to the property, and to offer products and services to the public. The applicant acknowledges that if the council learns they are not compliant with regulations, they will be expected to pay back all monies received from the grant award in full.
- The applicant consents to the Monitoring and Publicity Requirements outlined in section 8 of the Guidance Notes and agrees to complete 6 Monthly Impact Reviews for the 3-year period from the date they commence to trade from the funded property, or until they vacate the property, whichever happens first.
- The applicant confirms that they understand grant award payments are made in arrears, and that they will be required to wait up to six weeks to receive payments from the date they submit a batch of eligible invoices totalling £2,500 or more.

- The applicant confirms that they understand that if they stop trading or vacate the property prior to the end date of the lease as stated in their application form, the council may seek to recover some or all monies paid to the applicant from the grant award in full or in part.

And for Leases that are for more than 12 months:

- The applicant confirms that they understand that they must create the new jobs as they have set out in section 4 of their application form, within the time frames indicated and that council may seek to recover some or all monies paid to the applicant from the grant award in full or in part if this condition is not met. New jobs created will be verified with follow up monitoring visits by the council after the applicant has started trading at the new property.

Grant award offers:

A grant award offer can be made once you have secured a property. In some cases, the Grant Decision Panel can approve your application before you sign the lease for a property and make an offer in principle if required.

Confirmed offers on Secured Properties:

The lease or rental agreement must have been signed no more than 12 weeks prior to us receiving your completed application form. You must not have already commenced trading or running any aspect of your business from this property before a grant award offer is made.

Offers in Principle:

We can confirm in writing if signing a lease or rental agreement on an eligible property would make you eligible for a grant award. Once have provided us with a copy of the lease or rental agreement, signed by all parties and any other documents that may be outstanding we will confirm our offer with a formal Grant Offer Letter.

Offers in principle secure the amount of funding that the Grant Decision Panel has approved for 60 days or Monday 30 September 2024, whichever happens first. If you are unable to provide all necessary information by this date, we will withdraw our offer of grant funding.

Section 9 - If my application is successful what happens after I accept my grant award?

Once you sign and return your Grant Offer Letter you will be required to keep in touch with the Grant Advisor, providing monthly progress reports until you start trading from the property.

Once you start trading from your new property a Business Development Officer will visit you within 3 months to speak with you about your business, your new property, new jobs created and the impact receiving this grant has had for you.

With your permission we may take photographs and record the audio of an informal interview with the Business Development Officer. We may choose to produce a case study to be made publicly available on the council's website, as well as licenced to you for your own promotion. If you do not want to be photographed or be the subject of a case study, please make the Business Development Officer aware of this.

The Business Development Officer will talk to you about your business in general and ask if you have any needs that they are able to support you with, either 1-1 or by referring you to third party providers of professional business support.

You will be required to participate with in-person on-site monitoring visits where you will provide impact data every six months for the duration of your lease or rental agreement, up to a maximum of three years.

During our monitoring visits, we will ask for you to provide financial and employment information, including:

- Your businesses turnover since you opened for trading.
- The number of employees, volunteers, and apprentices, you have employed since opening for trading, their average working hours, and if they are Bristol residents.
- Whether your business is currently an accredited Living Wage employer.

Section 10 - How is the grant paid to successful applicants?

This grant is paid in arrears, either in full, or in batches of £2,500 or more, within six weeks of us receiving an eligible invoice or batch of invoices. Invoices must clearly relate to item(s) detailed in the agreed item list outlined in our Grant Offer Letter.

The minimum amount we will process against any one invoice is £100. If you send us an invoice detailing eligible costs of less than £100, we will not authorise the payment of this

invoice. We have set these thresholds based on our assessment of the costs it is reasonable for the council to incur, and our judgement that viable organisations should generally have a minimum of £2,500 available cash flow at any given time.

If your business is VAT registered, we will pay the amounts for the eligible items in your invoices or receipts minus the VAT element (if included).

We must receive invoices for all agreed items within 90 days of you receiving a grant award or by Friday 31 January 2025, whichever happens first. Any invoices received after these deadlines will not be paid and you will be unable to claim your full award.

The council reserves the right to withhold grant payments if works or equipment are not purchased or completed within the agreed timeframe, and to recover financial assistance in full or in part if the grant agreement conditions are breached.

Section 11 - I've read these guidance notes, how do I apply?

Our application form contains all of the questions you need to answer in order to be considered to receive funding through this grant scheme. The form also contains a checklist to help you compile the supporting information you need to send with your application.

When submitting your application form, you must provide the following supporting documentation:

- [Equality Monitoring Form](#) (This is not seen by members of the Grant Decision Panel)
- Complete lease or rental agreement with start and end date that is signed by all parties
- Photographs of the inside and outside of the property
- Proof of your ability to match fund 20% of the total you are applying for

Your application form and all necessary supporting information should be sent by email to business@bristol.gov.uk

Closing Date

The closing date for applications is 11.59pm, **Monday 30 September 2024**.

You must send your full application to us by this date. This includes:

- Application form with all fields complete
- A financial statement **from the last 30 days** proving you have access to 20% of the amount of funding you're requesting
- Pictures of the inside and outside of the property

- A complete, dated lease for the new property that is signed by all parties

We will not be able to consider any organisation for this funding if any of the above has not been sent to us by the closing date.

If all the grant funding has been committed before the closing date, we may close the application period early.

Applicants must start trading from their new property by **Friday 31 January 2025** to be eligible to receive this funding.