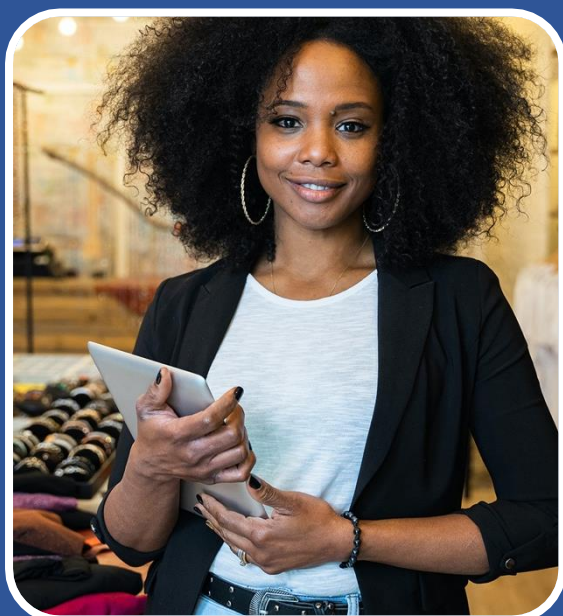
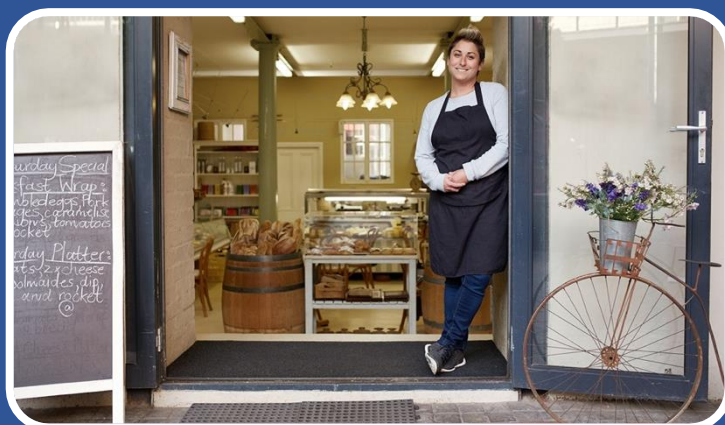


# Bristol City Centre and High Streets Vacant Commercial Property Grant

## Guidance Notes for Applicants



## Section 1 - Introduction to Guidance Notes

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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 the Grant Advisor, Crover: [crover@bristol.gov.uk](mailto:crover@bristol.gov.uk).

You can also email the Grant Advisor 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.

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

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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?

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This grant can support either established organisations, or those who have just started up or are about to start up.

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:**

- be wishing 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 the Grant Advisor for guidance: [crover@bristol.gov.uk](mailto:crover@bristol.gov.uk).

**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 one of this grant scheme's eligible locations. You are creating new 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 one of this grant scheme's eligible locations. Your contract on the previous property ended at least 6 months before you signed/intend to sign the lease on your new property or the reason you terminated your previous contract meets criteria (d) below. You are creating new jobs with fixed contracted hours.

*(c)* Maintaining a second property in Bristol's city centre or high streets – You have a current lease or rental agreement for a second property in one of this grant scheme's eligible locations. You are creating new jobs with fixed contracted hours. You will continue to trade from this property for at least 1 year after you start trading from your new property. If you stop trading from your second property within this period, you will be in breach of the terms of agreement for this grant scheme.

*(d)* Expanding business that is creating new jobs – You have a current lease or rental agreement or had one that ended within the last 6 months for a property in one of this 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 jobs with fixed contracted hours as a direct result of upgrading to your new property.

**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, most 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 £1.3million 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
- 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, staff room equipment, computers used off-site etc.)

If you are unsure if your requested works or equipment are eligible, please email the Grant Advisor, Crover for guidance: [crover@bristol.gov.uk](mailto:crover@bristol.gov.uk)

### **Section 5 - Do my requested works require Planning Permission?**

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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](mailto:development.management@bristol.gov.uk)

Telephone - 0117 922 3000

Website - [www.bristol.gov.uk/planning-and-building-regulations](http://www.bristol.gov.uk/planning-and-building-regulations)

## **Section 6 - How does the Council decide whether to award this grant?**

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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 representatives from relevant Council teams.

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.**

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

## **Section 7 - What happens if I am successful in my application?**

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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.

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 secure a property and extend 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.

### 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 you can provide proof of a signed lease or rental agreement, we can then confirm our offer with a formal Grant Offer Letter.

Offers in principle secure the agreed amount of funding to your application for a maximum of 90 days from the date on our Letter Of Offer In Principle. If you are unable to provide all necessary information within this period, we may withdraw our offer at our discretion and reallocate the agreed funding to other applicants.

### Section 8 - If my application is successful what happens after I accept my grant award?

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Once you sign a formal grant agreement 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 the Grant Advisor will visit you within 1 month to speak with you about your business, your new property and the impact receiving this grant has had for you.

**With your permission we will take photographs and record the audio of an informal interview with the Grant Advisor.** 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 Grant Advisor aware of this.

The informal interview with you will cover the following questions about how you have used your grant award to improve Bristol and the local area:

- How has your business brought something new to the local area?
- What sustainability commitments has your business made in response to the climate emergency?
- How has receiving grant funding helped you to trade and achieve your goals?
- How does your business make Bristol a better place to live for our residents?

The Grant Advisor will also work with you to decide on further questions specific to you and your business that highlight your passions and promote the message you want to share.

The Grant Advisor 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 complete impact forms every six months for the duration of your lease or rental agreement, up to a maximum of three years.**

Impact Forms will ask for you to provide the following financial and employment information:

- Your businesses turnover for the previous six months.
- The amount of money you've invested in the new property in the previous six months.
- The number of paid employees, volunteers, and apprentices you've hired in the previous six months, their average working hours, and if they are Bristol residents.
- The number of jobs you've 'protected' in the last six months that were at risk of becoming redundant if you hadn't have started trading from your new property.
- Whether your business is currently an accredited Living Wage employer.
- Your total number of paid employees, volunteers, and apprentices, their average working hours, and if they are Bristol residents.

### **Section 9 - How is the grant paid to successful applicants?**

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**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. It costs the council money to process invoices. 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 you believe your organisation has a viable model but you are unable to guarantee short term cashflow please contact the Grant Advisor to discuss this further: [crover@bristol.gov.uk](mailto:crover@bristol.gov.uk)

**We expect to receive invoices for all requested items within 90 days of issuing a formal grant agreement.** If you experience delays with contractors or purchases that mean you will not be able to submit all invoices within 90 days, please make the Grant Advisor aware of this.

**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 10 - I've read these guidance notes, how do I apply?

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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 the Grant Advisor, Crover: [crover@bristol.gov.uk](mailto:crover@bristol.gov.uk)

### Closing Date

The closing date for applications is 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 at 12:00 midday, or until all £1.3million of this grant fund has been committed, which ever happens first.