

Vacant Commercial Property Grant

Guidance Notes for Applicants

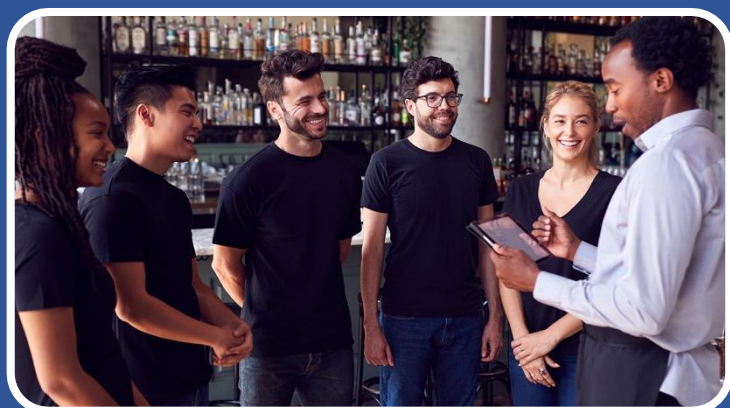
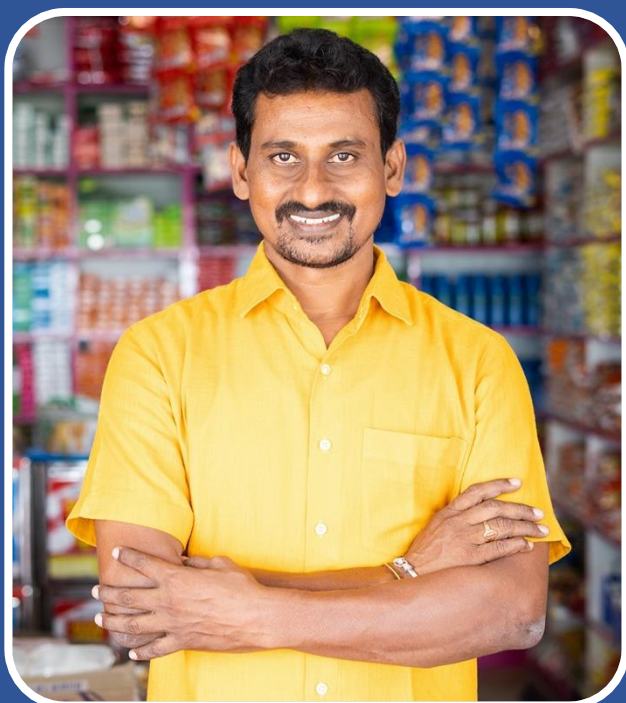


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SECTION 1 - INTRODUCTION TO GUIDANCE NOTES & KEY DEADLINES

This guidance document explains how to apply for the **Vacant Commercial Property Grant**, including:

- Who is eligible
- What the grant can be used for
- The steps involved in applying
- The documents you'll need to provide

Please read this document carefully. If your application is incomplete or doesn't follow the guidance, it could be delayed or rejected.

Need help?

If you need help understanding these guidance notes or how to complete the application form, please email: business@bristol.gov.uk

You can contact us if:

- You'd prefer to **speak by phone** – include your phone number in the email
- You need a **reasonable adjustment** (e.g. large print, alternative format)
- You want **someone else to act on your behalf** – tell us who they are and why

Bristol City Council is committed to making this process accessible to everyone. We welcome applications from individuals and organisations of all abilities.

Application Deadline

The deadline to apply is: **11:59pm on Friday 14 November 2025**

Your application must include:

- A **fully completed** [application form](#)
- A **bank statement** (from the last 30 days) showing access to at least **20% of the funding** you're requesting.
- Photos of the **inside and outside** of the property
- Completed [Minimal Financial Assistance \(MFA\) Declaration form](#)
- A **signed lease or licence agreement** showing the **start and end dates** - (*note: This information is required if you are requesting a **Full Offer**. If you are applying for an **Offer in Principle**, it is not required immediately — See **section 15** for details on **Offers In Principle**).*

Send your application form and all necessary supporting information to: business@bristol.gov.uk

Apply early

If all the available funding is allocated before the deadline, **we may close applications early**.

Trading Start Date

To be eligible for the grant, you must start trading from your new property by: **Friday 30 January 2026**

Claim deadline:

You will have **90 days** from the date of your Grant Offer Letter — or **until Friday 30 January 2026**, whichever comes first — to complete all approved works and purchases and submit your payment claim for the **full grant amount**.

SECTION 2 - WHY IS THIS GRANT BEING OFFERED?

Bristol City Council (BCC) has launched the **Vacant Commercial Property Grant** to help reduce the number of empty commercial properties across Bristol's city centre and local high streets. This scheme forms part of BCC's City Centre and High Streets Renewal Programme.

We aim to support:

- Small businesses and sole traders
- Charities and Community Interest Companies (CICs)
- Community organisations
- Creative and cultural groups

The core objectives of this grant are to reduce commercial vacancy rates across the city's designated high streets and in the city centre, to diversify and enhance the commercial offer in these areas, increase footfall, create new jobs, and make Bristol a better place to live for our residents.

The grant is designed to help you get up and running in a new property — it's not intended to provide ongoing financial support for your business.

The grant is funded by:

- Bristol City Council
- West of England Mayoral Combined Authority
- The UK government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund*

*The UK Shared Prosperity Fund aims to improve pride in place and increase life chances across the UK investing in communities and place, supporting local business, and people and skills.

For more information, visit <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-shared-prosperity-fund-prospectus>

SECTION 3 – QUICK REFERENCE ELIGIBILITY CHECKLIST

The summary below presents the key eligibility criteria, organised by section and the order that they appear in this document.

You (the applicant) must:

- ☐ Be a sole trader, or the owner/director of a small or micro business, charity, or CIC
- ☐ Have the authority to make decisions on behalf of your organisation

Section 4 - Your organisation must:

- ☐ Employ fewer than 50 people
- ☐ Have a turnover of £10.2 million or less
- ☐ Have no more than £5.1 million on your balance sheet
- ☐ Not be one of the prohibited organisation types.
- ☐ Be in good standing with Bristol City Council (e.g. no unpaid taxes or rates)
- ☐ Diversify the high street by offering new or underrepresented services/products

Section 5 - The property must:

- ☐ Be located in Bristol's designated city centre or one of the [46 designated high street](#)
- ☐ Not be a shared-use space (e.g. co-working desk).
- ☐ Have its own Business Rates Assessment, where you are or will be the liable party.

Section 6 - Your legal agreement to occupy the property must:

- ☐ Be a lease or a licence to occupy with a fixed term length clearly stated in the agreement.
(Agreements with rolling or open-ended terms will not be accepted)
- ☐ Have signed the lease/licence no more than 12 weeks before applying

Section 7 - Your organisation must:

- ☐ Be new, returning or expanding (not simply relocating – see Section 7 for full details)
- ☐ Not have started trading from the property before receiving a grant offer
- ☐ Begin trading within 2 months of your stated start date, or by 30 Jan 2026 (whichever comes first)

Section 8 - If applying for £5,000 or more, you must:

- ☐ Create at least 1 new permanent job within 3 months of starting to trade at the new property.

Section 9, 10, 11 & 12 - The items or works you want to fund must:

- ☐ Be capital purchases only (no operational or day-to-day running costs) (section 9)
- ☐ Not have been purchased before the grant is awarded. (section 9)
- ☐ Be bought, installed, and claimed within 90 days of your Grant Offer Letter, or by 30 Jan 2026, whichever happens first.
- ☐ Be procured in line with our procurement rules. (section 10)
- ☐ Be purchased using the bank account used for your business and you must be able to produce a valid professional invoice or receipt for each purchase. **Cash purchases are not allowed.** (section 10)
- ☐ Have landlord and/or planning permission if required (see section 11)
- ☐ Be paid for upfront by your business; you must spend at least £2,500 and be able to wait up to 6 weeks for reimbursement (grants are paid in arrears) (Section 12)

Section 12 continued - Your organisation must not

- ☐ Have received more than £315,000 in public subsidies in the past three financial years

SECTION 4 – WHO CAN APPLY FOR THIS GRANT

This grant is open to a wide range of organisations, provided they meet the legal, financial, and operational criteria outlined below.

Employment and financial eligibility

To qualify, your organisation must meet all three of the following conditions:

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

Eligible organisation types

A wide range of organisation types can apply, including:

- Sole traders
- Small and micro businesses
- Charities
- Community Interest Companies (CICs)
- Community and voluntary groups
- Social enterprises

Most business sectors are welcome — including hospitality, retail, creative industries, and professional services.

Ineligible organisation types and activities

The following types of organisations and business activities cannot apply for this grant:

- Franchises where the franchisor controls key business decisions
- Betting shops and pawn brokers
- Tanning salons
- Amusement or gaming arcades
- Vape shops and tobacconists
- Shisha bars
- Fast food outlets
- Adult or sexually explicit shops or venues
- Organisations primarily for political or religious purposes
- Proscribed or extremist organisations, or those supporting radicalisation or terrorism

This is not an exhaustive list. Bristol City Council reserves the right to update or expand this list at any time.

Good financial standing

To be eligible:

- Your organisation must be in good standing with Bristol City Council (e.g., no unpaid business rates or outstanding debts)
- You must not be:
 - Insolvent or under administration
 - Going through bankruptcy proceedings
 - Listed for strike-off at Companies House

Diversification Requirement

Your business must diversify the local area — that means offering goods or services that are new or underrepresented on that high street or in the city centre. This is a core requirement of the grant scheme.

Whether your proposal meets this requirement will be determined by the Grant Panel, based on:

- The size and nature of the local area
- The number of similar businesses within a 15-minute walk of the property

Note: The Grant Panel's decision on diversification is final. There is no appeals process for this criterion.

SECTION 5 - WHAT PROPERTIES ARE ELIGIBLE?

To qualify for funding, your chosen property must meet certain location, type, and use criteria.

Property Location

To be eligible, the property must be located:

- Within Bristol's city centre (outlined in red on our interactive map), or
- On one of Bristol's 46 designated high streets (outlined in dark blue)

Check your property's location using our [interactive map](#). If your property is just outside the boundary by a few metres, we may still consider it eligible at our discretion.

Not sure if your location qualifies? Then email: business@bristol.gov.uk

Include the full address and postcode in your message.

Eligible Property Types

Most commercial premises are eligible, including:

- Retail units
- Hospitality venues (cafés, restaurants, etc.)
- Leisure spaces (gyms, studios, etc.)
- Offices
- Creative or cultural spaces
- Light industrial or warehouse units (in some cases)

The property:

- Does not need to have a shopfront
- Does not need to be on the ground floor

Ineligible Property Types

The following types of premises are not eligible:

- Shared spaces, such as:
 - Co-working desks or rooms
 - Single floors within multi-storey buildings that have one shared business rates account

Business Rates Requirement

To be eligible, the property must:

- Have its own Business Rates Assessment
- Your business must be **listed as the liable party** or be **in the process of being registered** as such.

SECTION 6 - WHAT LEGAL AGREEMENTS TO OCCUPY A PROPERTY ARE ELIGIBLE?

To apply for this grant, you must have — or be about to sign — a valid lease or licence to occupy for a commercial property.

Accepted Legal Agreements

There are two types of agreements that are eligible:

- A Lease
- A Licence to Occupy

The type and length of your agreement will determine the maximum grant you can apply for:

- Licences: Up to £5,000, depending on the term length
- Leases: Up to £10,000, depending on the term length

(See **Section 8** for full funding details and tables)

Please note: Agreements with rolling or open-ended terms will not be accepted. Your lease or licence must include a clear and enforceable fixed term with a clearly defined **start date** and **end date**. Additionally, Bristol City Council reserves the right to reject any application where the lease or licence agreement is judged by us to be unsuitable — for example, if it lacks sufficient duration, clarity, or security of tenure to meet the aims of this grant scheme. We may request additional documentation to assess the legal validity and enforceability of your agreement and will only accept those we consider appropriate.

Agreement Criteria for Eligibility

To be eligible:

- Your organisation must be named as the sole lessee or licensee
- You must either:
 - Intend to sign an agreement for an eligible, previously vacant property
 - OR
 - Have signed the agreement no more than 12 weeks before applying and have not yet started trading from the property

SECTION 7 – TRADING STATUS OF YOUR ORGANISATION

To apply for this grant, your organisation must meet **one (1)** of the 3 trading status criteria below.

(a) New to Bristol's City Centre or High Street Property Market

- You have **never previously** leased, rented, or owned a commercial property in Bristol.
- You are **establishing your business** in the city for the first time.
- You will create **new paid jobs** with **fixed contracted hours**.

(b) Returning to Bristol's City Centre or High Street Property Market

- You previously leased, rented, or owned a commercial property in Bristol.
- Your contract on that property ended **at least 6 months** before you signed (or intend to sign) your new lease.
- You are **returning to the market** and will create **new paid jobs**.

(c) Expanding an Existing Business

- You **currently operate** from one or more commercial properties and will **continue trading** at those sites.
- You are planning to lease **an additional** property in an eligible location.
- Your business is **growing**, and this new location will allow you to:
 - Expand your services, or
 - Serve more customers
- You will be **increasing the size of your current workforce** and creating **new paid jobs**.

Important: You will not be considered an expanding business and will **not be eligible** if you are simply relocating from one property to another.

To be considered an expanding business you must be **adding a new site** and **creating new jobs** to qualify.

Can I start trading before applying or receiving a grant offer?

No. You must **not** begin trading or operating from the property before:

- You submit your application, and
- You receive a **formal grant offer**

The grant decision process can take **up to 4 weeks** after submission.

You must wait until you receive a formal offer **before starting to trade**.

Please consider this timeline when deciding when to apply, and **plan accordingly**.

When do I need to start trading from the property?

- You are expected to begin trading from the new property within 2 months of the start date provided in your application form, or by **Friday 30 January 2026**, whichever comes first. So, please make sure the date you provide is realistic.
- If you experience delays, you **must contact us immediately** to explain the situation and provide a revised opening date.
- We will review the circumstances and confirm whether your grant offer still stands or will be withdrawn.
- Please note: The Council reserves the right to withhold or reclaim the grant if you do not start trading within a reasonable timeframe.

Final Deadline to Start Trading:

- You must be open and trading from the new property no later than **30 January 2026**.
- This is a **hard deadline**, If you are not trading — or if the Council believes you are unlikely to start — we reserve the right to **withhold or reclaim any grant payments that have been made**.

SECTION 8 – HOW MUCH CAN I APPLY FOR? AND JOB CREATION REQUIREMENT

You can apply for a grant between £2,500 and £10,000, depending on two key factors:

- The type of agreement you have to occupy the property (e.g. a lease or a licence to occupy)

The length of that agreement (**Please note:** Agreements with rolling or open-ended terms will not be accepted. Your lease or licence must include a fixed term with a clearly defined **start date** and **end date**).

If you are applying for £5,000 or more, you will be required to create at least one new job to be eligible. Full details on funding levels and job creation requirements are provided in the tables below.

For those who will be obtaining a Licence to Occupy:

Length of Licence Agreement	Maximum grant available:	Job Creation Requirement:	What can the grant be spent on:
28 days to 6 months	£2,500	Not required – but job creation will strengthen your application	**Fit-out costs only
7-11 months	£3,500	Not required – but job creation will strengthen your application	**Fit-out costs only
12 months or longer	£5,000	Yes – At least 1 new job must be created*	**Fit-out costs and essential equipment

For those who will be obtaining a Lease Agreement:

Length of Lease Agreement	Maximum grant available:	Job Creation Requirement:	What can the grant be spent on:
28 days to 6 months	£2,500	Not required – but job creation will strengthen your application	**Fit-out costs only
7-11 months	£3,500	Not required – but job creation will strengthen your application	**Fit-out costs only
12-23 months	£5,000	Yes – At least 1 new job must be created*	**Fit-out costs and essential equipment
24-35 months	£7,500	Yes – At least 1 new job must be created*	**Fit-out costs and essential equipment
3 years or longer	£10,000	Yes – At least 1 new job must be created*	**Fit-out costs and essential equipment

* **Job Creation Requirements (where applicable):**

- At least one permanent job must be created within **3 months** of starting to trade from the new property.
- A "permanent" job is one expected to last **at least 12 months**.
- Jobs can be:
 - Full-time or part-time
 - Directly employed or self-employed
- All jobs must be for individuals based and legally able to work in the UK

SECTION 9 - WHAT CAN THE GRANT BE SPENT ON?

You must list the proposed items and works you would like funding for in your application. If approved, the Grant Panel will select eligible items from your list, which will be confirmed in your Grant Offer Letter.

**** The grant can be used to cover capital cost only, for example:**

- **Fit-out costs** – making the interior or exterior suitable for trading (this option is available for **all grant applicants, see table above**). This may include:
 - Extension, improvement, or modification of commercial/retail buildings
 - Shop front replacements, plumbing, roofing, windows, doors, rendering, electrical works, flooring, ceilings, etc.
 - Decorating and essential repairs
- **Essential equipment** - items that are necessary to deliver your services (this option **only available to applicants with lease or licence agreements of 12 months or longer, see table above**). For example:
 - Kitchen equipment, cutlery, tables and chairs (if you are opening a café or restaurant)
 - Barbering chairs, mirrors, and clippers (if you are opening a barbershop)
 - Clothing rails, mannequins, and a till system (if you are opening a retail clothing store)
 - Display shelving, fridges, and a counter (if you are opening a grocery or convenience store)

Revenue costs and certain equipment are not eligible. These include:

- Staff wages
- Rent or deposits
- Utility bills
- Insurance
- Business rates
- Promotional or marketing materials
- Computers, phones, tablets (**these items are ineligible even if essential to your work**)
- Equipment **not integral** to service delivery (e.g., cleaning products, consumables, vacuum cleaners, staff room items)

If you are unsure whether your requested works or equipment are eligible, please contact:

business@bristol.gov.uk

Frontage Improvements

If the building's frontage is in **poor or dilapidated condition**, you are expected to allocate a **reasonable portion*** of the grant to improve it (*This is at the discretion of the Grant Panel).

Please include any planned frontage improvements and the costs in your application.

Guidance for Completing the 'Requested Items' Section of Your Application

- **Explain the purpose:** For each item or work you're requesting funding for, clearly describe how it will help your organisation operate or provide services from the grant-supported property.
- **Prioritise essentials:** Focus on a small number of key, high-value items or works that are critical to getting your business up and running at the new premises.
- **Avoid listing low-cost items:** Do not include a long list of minor, low-cost items. These are expected to be covered by your own budget.

- **Location-specific use only:** All funded items and works must be used at, or carried out on, the property supported by the grant. You cannot use grant funds for other locations.
- **Use qualified professionals:** All works must be completed by a competent contractor from a reputable company.

Planning Permission Requirements

If any of the works you are requesting funding for **require planning permission**, you must confirm this in your application.

- We will require proof that permission has been applied for.
- No payments will be made until we receive evidence that planning permission has been granted.
- See Section 11 for more information on planning permission requirements.

When Can I Start Works or Purchase Equipment?

You **must not** begin any works or purchase any equipment listed in your application **until**:

1. You have **signed and returned** your Grant Offer Letter **and**
2. You have received **written confirmation** from us that your grant is active, and you may proceed.

Important: We cannot reimburse costs for any works or purchases made **before** the grant offer is confirmed.

How Long Do I Have to Complete the Works and Purchases?

You will have **90 days** from the date of your Grant Offer Letter — or **until 30 January 2026**, whichever comes first — to:

- Complete all approved works and purchases
- Submit your payment claim for the **full grant amount**

If you experience delays (e.g., equipment delivery issues, planning or contractor delays), you must:

- Contact larry.newman@bristol.gov.uk as soon as possible
- Explain the reason for the delay
- Provide an updated timeline and any steps you're taking to resolve the issue

Extensions may be granted in exceptional circumstances (e.g., supply chain issues or delays in permissions) but:

- Will **not usually exceed 1 month**
- Are granted **at the sole discretion** of the Grant Decision Panel
- Are **not guaranteed**, so timely planning is essential

Selling Items Purchased with Grant Funds

The sale of any items purchased with the grant funding are strictly prohibited for a period of at least 3 years.

SECTION 10 – PROCUREMENT

Procurement and Purchasing Requirements

- Equipment purchased with the grant can be **new, second-hand, or refurbished**.
- Works must be carried out by a **competent contractor** working on behalf of a **reputable company**.
- All purchases must be made using your **business bank account**.
Purchases made using **cash are not permitted** and will be **rejected** from your grant claim.

Unacceptable Procurement Practices

The following are **strictly prohibited** under all circumstances:

- Purchasing goods or services from a supplier where there is a **conflict of interest**, including:
 - A supplier where a **director or owner** is also a **director or owner** of the grant-receiving organisation.
 - A supplier where a **family member** of the organisation's director/owner has an ownership or leadership role.

Invoices and Receipts

- You must obtain a **professional invoice or receipt** for **every purchase** made with grant funds.
- Refer to **Section 17** for the required invoice/receipt information.
- If you cannot provide a valid invoice or receipt, **that purchase will be rejected** from your claim.

Breach of Procurement Rules

Bristol City Council reserves the right to **recover the full grant amount** if any of the above procurement conditions are breached.

SECTION 11 - DO MY REQUESTED WORKS REQUIRE LANDLORD PERMISSION OR PLANNING PERMISSION?

Landlord permission

If any of the works or equipment you wish to purchase require landlord permission to install, you should seek this out and gather written evidence (e.g. a scanned letter or email) from your landlord that they are happy for you to proceed.

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

Note: No grant payments will be made until we receive proof all required permissions have been granted.

SECTION 12 – GRANT PAYMENT PROCESS, MATCH FUNDING & FINANCIAL REQUIREMENTS

How is the grant paid?

- The grant is paid **in arrears** — either in full or in instalments of **£2,500 or more**.
- Payments are made **within six weeks** of receiving an eligible invoice or set of invoices.
- Invoices must **clearly relate to the items** approved in your Grant Offer Letter.

If your business is VAT registered

- If your business is **VAT registered**, we will pay the **net cost (excluding VAT)** of any eligible items, even if VAT is included on the invoice.

How should I pay for the agreed expenditure?

- You must pay for items/works using a traceable method:
 - Debit card
 - Credit card
 - Bank transfer
 - Cheque
- **Cash payments are not allowed**. Any expenditure paid in cash will not be reimbursed.
- All payments must be supported by **bank statements** showing the transaction.

Covering the remaining costs

- Any costs not covered by the grant must be paid by your business using your own funds.
- You cannot use other public funding (e.g., other grants) to cover these remaining costs.

Can I change the agreed items/works after signing the Grant Offer Letter?

- **No**. Once the Grant Offer Letter is signed, the approved items and works **cannot be changed**.

What if the costs of items/works increase?

- We will only pay up to the **maximum amount agreed** in your Grant Offer Letter. Any additional costs must be covered by your business.

What if the costs of items/works decrease?

- If the final cost of the approved items/works is **less than expected**, you will only be reimbursed for the **actual amount spent**.
- **Unspent grant funds** will be **returned to the overall fund** and cannot be reallocated.

Match Funding

To be eligible for this grant, you will need to spend some of your own funds on the fit out or equipment needed to make the property suitable for your business operations (i.e., you will have to match fund our investment). You are expected to match our investment by at least 20%. We will require proof of your ability to **match fund 20% of the total you are applying for**.

- For example, if you apply for £10,000, you must show evidence of at least £2,000 in available funds.
- This proof should be a **recent bank statement** (from the current month). You may redact unrelated information.

Keep copies of receipts, invoices, bank statements that show that you have match funded relevant purchases — we may ask for these later to verify your contribution.

Legal Basis of the Grant – Minimal Financial Assistance (MFA)

The Vacant Commercial Property Grant is issued under Bristol City Council's **General Power of Competence** and is funded by:

- Bristol City Council
- West of England Mayoral Combined Authority
- The UK government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund*

The grant is provided as a **subsidy** under the **Subsidy Control Act 2022** and is classified as **Minimal Financial Assistance (MFA)**.

MFA Rules You Must Follow

- No enterprise or group of enterprises under common control can receive more than **£315,000 of MFA subsidy** from any source or for any purpose within a **rolling three-year period**:
 - The current financial year (to date)
 - The previous two financial years
- You will be required to complete a **declaration form** confirming:
 - The total amount of subsidies you've received within this period
 - That accepting this grant **will not exceed** your MFA limit
- Subsidies that count towards MFA include:
 - Any subsidies that fall within the category of '**Minimal or (SPEI) financial assistance**'
 - Aid given under European Union state aid **de minimis regulations**
 - Subsidies given as small amounts of financial assistance (SAFA) under the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement after 31 December 2020 but before the Subsidy Control Act came into force.

As part of the application process, you will be asked to complete an MFA declaration. We will check this form to ensure you will not exceed the MFA threshold by receiving a Vacant Commercial Property Grant.

Important Reminder

- Please check previous Grant Offer Letters or subsidy documentation to verify the legal basis of other grants you've received.
- If you are unsure, contact the grant provider directly.
- Bristol City Council cannot issue your grant until this confirmation is received.

SECTION 13 – APPLICATION PROCESS AND SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

Permissions and Approvals

Before submitting your application, you must confirm in your application form whether any of the works you're requesting funding for require formal permission.

- If you need **landlord permission**, please include evidence (e.g. a scanned letter or email from your landlord).
- If you need **planning permission** or another type of formal approval, please confirm this in your application and provide evidence that you've applied.

No grant payments will be made until we receive proof that all required permissions have been granted.

To learn more or apply for planning permission, visit: www.bristol.gov.uk/planning-and-building-regulations

Application Form

Once you've gathered the necessary permissions, you're ready to complete your application.

- Download and fill out the full [application form](#).
- Answer all questions and **include all required supporting documents**.
- Type your signature where indicated — we accept digital signatures.
- Email the completed form to: business@bristol.gov.uk

If you need the application form in a different format (e.g. large print or alternative language), let us know — we'll do our best to meet your needs. We do not accept printed application forms by post.

Who should sign the form?

The form should be filled out and signed by the owner or main partner.

Lease or Licence to Occupy

You must include a copy of your signed lease or licence agreement with:

- The **start and end dates clearly shown**
- Signatures from **all parties**

If you're applying for an **offer in principle**, you don't need a signed lease yet — but you **must include the address** of the property you intend to lease or licence. (See Section 15 for more on offers in principle.)

Property Photographs

You must include photos of both the interior and exterior of the property.

Match Funding

You are expected to match our investment by at least 20%. We will require proof of your ability to **match fund 20% of the total you are applying for**.

- For example, if you apply for £10,000, you must show evidence of at least £2,000 in available funds.
- This proof should be a **recent bank statement** (from the current month). You may redact unrelated information.

Keep copies of receipts, invoices, bank statements that show that you have match funded relevant purchases — we may ask for these later to verify your contribution.

Minimal Financial Assistance (MFA) Declaration

Please see section 12 for further details on MFA rules that must be followed. As part of the application process, you will be asked to complete an [MFA declaration form](#). We will then check this form to ensure that you will not exceed the MFA threshold by receiving a Vacant Commercial Property Grant.

Important Reminder

- Please check previous Grant Offer Letters or subsidy documentation to verify the legal basis of other grants you've received.
- If you are unsure, contact the grant provider directly.
- Bristol City Council cannot issue your grant until this confirmation is received.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion:

Bristol City Council is committed to treating everyone fairly, regardless of race, colour, religion, gender, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, national origin, genetics, disability, age, or citizenship status. As part of our application process, we include an online Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Monitoring form. This form is voluntary, anonymous and confidential. Any personal or sensitive information you provide will be used solely for equalities monitoring to ensure that everyone is treated fairly.

SECTION 14 – HOW ARE GRANT DECISIONS MADE?**How your application is assessed**

Once you submit your full application, it will be reviewed in two stages:

1. Initial Review – Grant Advisor

- A Grant Advisor will check your application for eligibility.
- They may also contact you by phone, email, or meet with you to gather any further details.
- If your application is not eligible, it will not progress further. You will be told why your application was declined.

2. Final Decision – Grant Panel

- If your application is eligible, the Grant Advisor will prepare a recommendation for the Grant Panel.
- The panel is made up of Council officers and makes the final decision.

Please note: Decisions made by the Grant Panel are final. There is no appeals process.

When a formal grant offer can be made

A formal grant offer can only be issued after:

- You have secured a signed lease or licence agreement for the property, and
- You have submitted all required supporting documents

Discretionary and competitive funding

- The Vacant Commercial Property Grant is discretionary and based on the merit of your application in comparison to others we have received.
- Meeting the eligibility criteria does not guarantee funding.
- Grant awards depend on the quality of your application and the availability of funds at the time.
- There is no automatic entitlement to funding based solely on the location of a property or because you meet the eligibility criteria.
- Applications may be declined even where eligibility criteria are met, if in the opinion of the Panel the proposal does not meet the grant's objectives, represents an undue risk to public funds, or is not considered value for money.

Diversifying the high street (an essential requirement)

To be eligible, your business must offer goods or services that are not currently available or are underrepresented in the local area.

- This applies to both high streets and city centre locations.

- The Grant Panel will assess 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 panel has full discretion to decide whether your business meets this requirement.
- There is no appeals process for decisions based on this assessment.

How the panel decides how much to award

The Grant Decision Panel will consider several factors when deciding the **amount of funding** to offer, which include:

- The **length** of your lease or licence
- **Number and type of new jobs** being created by the business (e.g., are the roles higher quality permanent PAYE roles Vs lower quality short contract self-employed roles, and whether these roles are full time, or part time).
- The **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 **impact of the items** you plan to purchase (e.g., will it improve the look of the building or attract more visitors?)
- The **type of organisation** (e.g., charity, social enterprise, not-for-profit, sole trader, or for-profit business)
- Whether your business is **new or expanding**

The Council reserves the right to update or change the terms and conditions of the grant at any time without notice

When will I hear back?

- Grants are reviewed and awarded on a **rolling basis**.
- Once all required documents are submitted and any follow-up questions are answered, allow **up to 4 weeks** to receive a decision.
- Processing times may vary depending on the number of applications and panel meeting schedules. Please allow for this when making plans.

Final decisions are made by the Grant Panel and cannot be appealed. There is no obligation to fund every eligible application.

SECTION 15 – CAN I APPLY BEFORE SIGNING A LEASE/LICENCE (OFFER IN PRINCIPLE)

You can apply for a **grant offer in principle** before signing a lease or licence agreement.

This allows you to check whether the property you're interested in would be eligible **before committing** to a legal agreement.

What is an Offer in Principle?

An **Offer in Principle** is a conditional approval from the Grant Panel confirming:

- The property you've identified is eligible
- Which of the proposed works and items are suitable for funding

This gives you the confidence to proceed with securing the property, knowing that grant funding may be available.

What do I need to apply?

You must complete all the same steps as a standard application, **except**:

- You **do not need to submit a signed lease or licence agreement** right away.
- You **must clearly state** the specific address and term length you plan to agree to.

Important: You should already have made detailed enquiries and be confident that you can secure the property quickly (within 60 days) if the grant is approved.

How long does it take?

Applications for an offer in principle are processed in the same way as standard applications:

- Up to **4 weeks** from submission (if all documents are received)

What happens if your application is approved?

If the Grant Panel approves your offer in principle:

- You'll have **60 days** — or until **Friday 14 November 2025**, whichever comes first — to:
 - Secure and sign the lease or licence for the **same property and term**
 - Submit the signed document to us along with any outstanding documents

Important Conditions

- **Offers in principle are property-specific.** They **cannot be transferred** to another address.
- If you fail to provide the required documents within the deadline, or if you choose not to go ahead with the property, the offer in principle will be **withdrawn**.
- Once all final documents are received, we will issue a **formal Grant Offer Letter** for you to sign.

SECTION 16 – FORMAL GRANT OFFER LETTER

If your application is successful and all required documents have been submitted, you will receive a **Formal Grant Offer Letter**.

What's included in the Grant Offer Letter?

The letter will outline:

- Your business details
- The amount of grant awarded
- The items and works you are allowed to spend the grant on
- Key dates and deadlines
- The full terms and conditions of your grant

Please read the letter carefully before signing. Once signed and returned, it becomes a **binding agreement** between you and Bristol City Council.

Important: The terms of the grant agreement **cannot be changed or negotiated**.

Key Terms and Conditions

By signing the Grant Offer Letter, you confirm that you understand and accept the following:

- **Grant clawback:**
The Council can recover part or all of the grant if you break any terms of the agreement.
- **Timeframes:**
Payments may be withheld if works or equipment are not completed or purchased within agreed timeframes.

- **Use of funds:**
You can only use the grant to pay for items on the **pre-approved list** included in your Grant Offer Letter.
This list is final once the letter is signed — no changes can be made afterward.
- **Landlord permission:**
You must have written consent from your landlord for all planned internal and external works.
If you don't, the Council may recover all grant funds paid to you.
- **Legal compliance:**
You must have all required licences and permissions (e.g., planning permission) to carry out the work and trade from the property.
If you're found to be non-compliant, the Council may reclaim the grant.
- **Monitoring and publicity:**
You agree to participate in **six-monthly impact reviews** for up to 3 years or until you vacate the property (whichever is sooner).
This includes providing information about your trading status, job creation, business turn over and other outcomes.
- **Payment terms:**
Grants are paid in arrears. You must wait **up to 6 weeks** after submitting a claim (minimum £2,500 in invoices) to receive payment.
- **Stopping trade early:**
If you stop trading or leave the property before the end of your lease or licence agreement, the Council may seek to recover part or all of the grant.
- **Job creation (for grants of £500 or more):**
You must create the new jobs you committed to in your application within the agreed timeframe.
This will be checked during monitoring visits. Failure to create these jobs could result in all or part of your grant award being clawed back.

Setting up for payment

To receive your grant, you must complete a **Grant Recipient Setup Form**, which is included with your Grant Offer Letter.

Once submitted, we'll register your details with our finance system. Please return this promptly to avoid delays in grant payments.

When can I start purchasing the agreed items?

Once:

- You've signed and returned the Grant Offer Letter, and
- We have confirmed receipt via email

You may then begin purchasing items and starting works listed in your agreement.

Do not start any works or purchases until you receive formal confirmation from us that it's okay to proceed.

SECTION 17 – GRANT CLAIM

When can I claim?

You can claim your grant after:

- You've purchased all the approved items or completed the agreed works
- The items/works have been installed and are operational

The grant is not paid in advance. You must cover the upfront costs and claim reimbursement later.

VAT-registered businesses

If your business is VAT registered, we will reimburse the net cost (excluding VAT) of eligible items.

What to include in your claim

You can submit one full claim or claim in batches of £2,500 or more.

Each claim must include:

1. Invoices/receipts – showing proof of what was purchased
2. Bank statements – showing how and when you paid
3. Photos – of each item installed or work completed at the funded property

Submit your claim by email to: larry.newman@bristol.gov.uk

We aim to make payments within 6 weeks of receiving a complete claim.

Invoice/receipts requirements

Your invoices must:

- Match the items/works listed in your Grant Offer Letter
- Be for at least £100 (we will not process invoices below this amount)
- Be issued by a reputable supplier or contractor
- Be made out to you or your business (it cannot be made out to your supplier)

We accept invoices/receipts in:

PDF, Word, JPEG or PNG formats only. If they are not sent in one of these formats they will be rejected and you will have to resend using the correct format.

We cannot accept:

- Order confirmations, pro forma invoices, quotes, shopping cart screenshots, email threads
- Poor-quality scans/photos (ensure all edges are visible and text is legible)

The invoices you send in must include the following:

- A unique invoice number
- Supplier company's name, address, and contact details
- The customer's name and address (i.e., your business name)
- Description of what was supplied
- Date of supply and invoice date
- Amounts charged (with and without VAT)
- Total amount due

The receipts you send in must include the following:

- Supplier company's details including name, address, and contact details
- The date of transaction showing date, month and year.
- a list of products or services showing a brief description of the product and quantity sold.
- Amounts charged (with and without VAT)
- Total amount due

Important: we do not want you to send in the original receipt, you should send in a clear scan that shows all four corners of the document. Obscured or incomplete receipts will be rejected.

Important: If you receive an invoice/receipt that does not contain all the information listed above, you must go back to the supplier and ask them to update the document, so it includes this information, before including it as part of your claim. We will reject any invoices/receipts that do not conform to all the requirements noted above.

NB: for more information on UK government standards on invoicing see here:

<https://www.gov.uk/invoicing-and-taking-payment-from-customers/invoices-what-they-must-include>

Bank statements

We need to see invoices **AND** evidence that you have paid them. This must be in the form of copies of your bank statements.

Bank statements must clearly show:

- The payment matching each invoice
- The supplier's name
- The date and amount of the transaction

Highlight relevant transactions and feel free to redact any unrelated entries.

If the payment was part of a bulk transaction, provide a breakdown to show which part relates to your grant claim.

Photos of works/items

As well as financial evidence, you also need to provide us with photos of:

- Each item or completed work
- In its installed and operational state at the funded property

Organising your claim

To help us process your claim quickly:

- Use clear file names for invoices, bank statements, and photos
- Highlight matching entries across documents
- For claims with more than 3–4 invoices, use a table like the one provided below in your claim email or as a sperate Word/Excel file:

Invoice number	Date of invoice	Title of bank statement showing this purchase	Photograph of this purchase	Cost of this item (EX VAT)	Cost of this item (Including VAT)	Amount being claimed against this item	Notes
INV001	DD/MM/YY	NUMBER	Photo1.jpg	£xxx	£xxx	£xxx	
				£	£	£	
				£	£	£	
				£	£	£	

Claim timing and deadlines

- You cannot claim for any items purchased before the “claimable from” date listed in your Grant Offer Letter.
- **All claims must be submitted within 90 days of receiving your Grant Offer Letter** or by Friday 30 January 2026, whichever comes first.

Claims received after this deadline will not be paid and the remaining balance of your grant will be forfeit.

Declaration (when submitting your claim)

By submitting a claim, you confirm the following:

“I hereby declare that the information provided in this claim is correct to the best of my knowledge and belief, that I am not in insolvency, I have not been adjudicated bankrupt, nor made any composition with my creditors or that no civil court judgement exists against me. I understand that any false information given could result in repayment of grant monies paid to me in full immediately.

I declare that I have complied with all procurement rules set out in the Vacant Commercial Property Grant Guidance document.

I confirm that I am not involved in any way or connected with any activity that is not suitable to be supported from public funds. I further declare that the financial assistance which is the subject of this claim will be used solely for the purposes agreed in my grant offer letter and proof will be supplied to confirm the amount spent.”

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

Grant payment

We aim to make payment **within 6 weeks** of receiving all the required information to process your claim.

Once your claim is approved:

- The grant will be paid directly into your business bank account.
- You will receive a confirmation email letting you know the claim has been processed and when to expect the funds.

SECTION 18 – PROMOTION & MONITORING

Before you open for trading

Once you’ve signed and returned your Grant Offer Letter, you’ll be expected to:

- Stay in regular contact with your **Grant Advisor**
- Provide **monthly progress updates** until your business officially starts trading from the funded property

Once your business has opened

You must notify your Grant Advisor of your **first day of trading**.

We will then schedule an **on-site monitoring visit**.

What happens at the monitoring visit?

A **Business Development Officer** will:

- Visit your property in person
- Talk with you about your business, the grant's impact, and any jobs created
- Offer support or refer you to additional business services if needed

With your permission, we may also:

- Take photographs of your premises
- Record a short, informal interview with you
- Use your story as a **case study** for the Council's website or promotional materials
(You will also receive a copy to use for your own marketing)

Ongoing monitoring – every 6 months

You'll be required to take part in **in-person monitoring visits every 6 months** for the length of your lease or licence agreement, up to a **maximum of 3 years**.

What we'll ask during monitoring

We'll collect information about your business to help evaluate the grant's impact, including:

- Your business turnover since trading began
- Number of people employed, including:
 - Paid staff, volunteers, and apprentices
 - Average working hours
 - Whether they live in Bristol
- Whether your business is accredited as a **Living Wage Employer**

Publicity expectations

If you promote the opening of your business (e.g., social media, press releases), please:

- Let us know in advance
- Include a **clear credit** to the "Vacant Commercial Property Grant, funded by Bristol City Council, the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority and the UK government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund"

SECTION 19 - I'VE READ THESE GUIDANCE NOTES, HOW DO I APPLY?

Step 1: Complete the [Application Form](#)

The application form includes:

- All the questions you need to answer to be considered for a grant
- A built-in checklist to help you prepare and gather the right documents

Make sure all fields are completed **accurately and thoroughly**.

Step 2: Prepare Your Supporting Documents

Alongside your completed application form, you must provide:

- ☐ **Signed lease or licence agreement** (showing start and end dates)
This information is required if you are requesting a Full Offer. If you are requesting an Offer in Principle, it is not required immediately. However, you must have identified a property you intend to lease or licence, and you must be in a position to sign and submit the signed lease/licence within 60 days of receiving the Offer in Principle, or by Friday 14 November 2025 — whichever comes first.
- ☐ **Photographs** of the interior and exterior of the property
- ☐ **[Minimal Financial Assistance \(MFA\) Declaration form](#)**. This must be downloaded, completed, and signed by the same person who signs the application form.
- ☐ **Proof of match funding** (a bank statement from the past 30 days showing access to at least 20% of your requested grant)

For the purposes of equalities monitoring, we also ask that you fill out the voluntary online form:

- ☐ **Equality Monitoring Form** (submitted online - optional) – click [here](#)

Step 3: Submit Your Application

Send your **application form** and all supporting documentation to: business@bristol.gov.uk

Application Deadline

All applications must be received by: **11:59pm on Friday 14 November 2025**

Applications will not be considered unless **all required documents** have been submitted by this deadline.

Tip: Apply early. If all available funding is allocated before the deadline, we may close the scheme early.

Trading Start Date

To be eligible for the grant, you must start trading from your new property by: **Friday 30 January 2026**

If you're not trading by this date, your grant may be withdrawn or reclaimed.

Claim deadline:

You will have **90 days** from the date of your Grant Offer Letter — or **until Friday 30 January 2026**, whichever comes first — to complete all approved works and purchases and submit your payment claim for the **full grant amount**. If you do not meet this deadline, your grant may be withdrawn or reclaimed.



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