



## Belfast City Council

### Vacant to Vibrant Capital Grant Scheme

#### Guidance Notes

Please read these guidance notes before you complete your application form. If you have any queries or wish to discuss your project with a member of staff before submitting your application, please contact us, email [vacanttovibrant@belfastcity.gov.uk](mailto:vacanttovibrant@belfastcity.gov.uk).

The Vacant to Vibrant pilot capital grant scheme is open for two years from Summer 2022. You may apply until all the available funding has been spent, however, we may close the application process early, depending on the number of applications we receive.

Application Pack Contents	
Document Type	Who Should Complete
Application Form	To be completed by all
Business Plan Template	To be completed by applicants seeking Grants 1 & 2
Business Proposal Template	To be completed by applicants seeking Grant 3 only
Property Owner Consent Form	To be completed by businesses/organisations

**Upon submission of the completed application form, applicants will be assigned a unique reference number which will be sent to their chosen email address which will represent their place in the queue. Grants are awarded on a first come first served basis and this grant scheme will close when the available funding has been fully awarded. Once we receive the completed application with all necessary supporting documents, we will begin assessment. These guidance notes will set out what supporting documentation is required in order to meet eligibility criteria.**

Please note, if it is discovered that an applicant is missing supporting documents which are required to assess eligibility, then Belfast City Council will issue a clarification to the email provided outlining what documentation is required. The applicant will then have 5 working days from date of clarification email to provide the requested documents. Failure to submit within 5 working days will render your application null and void and if you wish to be considered further you will have to resubmit a new

application, forfeiting your place in the queue. Upon resubmission, a new unique reference number will be issued.

**Please note that business/occupier/property owner will be required to match fund 10% of any awarded grant to be deemed eligible for grant funding.**

Your application including all supporting documentation should be sent by email to [vacanttovibrant@belfastcity.gov.uk](mailto:vacanttovibrant@belfastcity.gov.uk)

## INTRODUCTION

Belfast City Council is developing a programme of work in response to the rising number of vacant premises across the city centre. As part of the Future City Centre Programme, through the Addressing Vacancies priority area, a toolkit has been developed to provide a range of interventions that will aim to reduce vacancy and support economic recovery. The Council is now keen to deliver pilot schemes that will provide immediate support and help to further understand what support mechanisms are most impactful for long term success. One element of this is a vacant premises pilot capital grant scheme: 'Vacant to Vibrant'.

Belfast City Council is funding a two-year pilot capital grant scheme in Summer 2022 to incentivise both property owners and potential occupiers (including start up retail, independents, Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SME's), social enterprise, leisure, hospitality and the cultural and third sectors) to bring vacant spaces in Belfast City centre back into use and support the revitalisation of the city centre.

Through this capital grant, property owners, businesses and organisations wishing to renovate or repurpose a vacant space within the city centre boundary (**See Annex A – Belfast City Centre Boundary Map**) can apply. The capital grant scheme will fund both external and internal improvements to buildings, expansions or repurposing of vacant spaces, and other associated capital set-up costs required to bring a vacant space back into use for long term occupation.

As well as encouraging and diversifying use of vacant premises, this pilot capital grant will improve individual properties, contribute to higher quality streetscapes and greater city centre vibrancy, sustain jobs, and help create new employment opportunities, and support city centre regeneration.

In order to understand the demand for the scheme, as well as the wider challenges and barriers preventing the uptake of vacant space, Council encouraged businesses/organisations and property owners to submit an Expression of Interest over the course of February 2022. The feedback received from this exercise has helped shape the grant process.

For this pilot scheme, we have a total funding pot of £700,000 to cover the following capital costs:

- Smaller financial support to pop-up shops and meanwhile test space
- Larger grants to encourage uptake of vacant units
- External capital works to façade to improve look and feel of the high street
- Internal capital works to make a vacant property fit for purpose and support long term occupation
- Diversification of property's unoccupied space to help existing businesses survive

## AIMS OF THE GRANT SCHEME

1. Incentivise occupation of vacant spaces for new businesses/organisations to reduce the number of vacancies in the city centre.
2. Provide support for existing businesses/organisations wishing to repurpose vacant space to expand or diversify their offer to reduce the number of vacancies in the city centre.
3. Improve the vibrancy and animation of the city centre to encourage people to live, work and visit.
4. Increase the number of SME's, start-up retail/ businesses and the cultural and third sectors accessing vacant space in the city centre supporting them to grow, sustain jobs and create new employment opportunities, either directly or indirectly.
5. Support and enhance the existing offer in the city centre.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE GRANT SCHEME

Successful applicants will need to demonstrate how the funding will contribute to the key objectives of the grant, through **three** or more of the following:

1. Occupy a vacant premises and bring it back into permanent (2+ years) or temporary (meanwhile or pop up for minimum of 4 months) use.
2. Encourage the establishment of businesses/organisations in the city centre and support existing businesses to diversify into unoccupied space.
3. Make external and/or internal improvements to vacant premises to support long term occupation.
4. Enhance the streetscape with high quality external works and activation of ground floor space
5. Contribute to the vibrancy of the city centre and increase footfall in the area.
6. Make the city centre more diverse and attractive with unique/distinct businesses/organisations.

7. Create new and local employment either directly or indirectly.
8. Promote sustainability within their project through for example, the use of recycled materials, adoption of zero waste principles, use of clean energy etc.

## LEVELS OF AWARD

The funding brackets below are proposed as a stimulus to businesses/occupiers and property owners to bridge a viability gap and should not be considered a fully comprehensive funding package. Grants 1&2 are deemed larger grants to encourage uptake of vacant units while grant 3 relates to smaller financial support to pop-up shops and meanwhile test space

**Grant 1.** Applicants seeking funding for a space with a footprint **up to 150 sq. metres** could access a grant of up to £15,000 with 10% match funding from business/occupier/property owner.

**Grant 2.** Applicants seeking funding for a space with a footprint **above 151 sq. metres** could access a grant of up to £25,000 with 10% match funding from business/occupier/ property owner.

**Grant 3.** Applicants seeking to test space in the city centre for **1 year or less (minimum 4 months)** can access a grant of up to £2,500 with 10% match funding from business/occupier/owner.

Please note, footprint size should only include space actively used by the business/organisation i.e., total floor area of the property that is utilised for the occupier's commercial/active uses and is not inclusive of the property's gross measurements incorporating storage/utility space etc. If you are applying as an existing business diversifying unoccupied space within a property, this is the footprint size relating to the unoccupied space you are transforming **only**.

Please ensure when completing the application form that you apply for the correct type of funding that relates to the active footprint of your property. If Belfast City Council deem that you have applied for the incorrect grant through follow up inspections, then funding will be recalculated and applied to the correct funding bracket.

## WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO APPLY?

Property Owner	Business/Organisation
<p>A property owner wishing to renovate or repurpose a vacant space within the Belfast City centre boundary (<b>See Annex A – Belfast City Centre Boundary Map</b>).</p> <p>Property owner can apply on behalf of themselves and their proposed tenant, as a way to incentivise occupation of their space. They will need to provide evidence and proposed lease arrangements on foot of the improvement works being undertaken (Grants 1&amp;2 require a minimum lease period of two years, while grant 3 requires a minimum lease period of 4 months) and have the occupier complete the relevant viability templates to support the proposal.</p> <p>Property owners are encouraged to identify a suitable tenant before applying (and should contact the City Regeneration and Development Team if having difficulties) however applications may be considered from property owners of vacant premises seeking tenants to occupy their premises subject to improvement work being undertaken. These applications will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis however, to incentivise the uptake of the vacant space, it is anticipated that a conditional offer may be made available. If property owners are unable to secure a tenant within 9 months, then they will only be able to access 60% of the total grant available within the relevant funding bracket. Property owners must make every reasonable effort to secure a tenant within this 9-month period, including serious</p>	<p>A business/organisation wishing to renovate or repurpose a vacant space within the Belfast City centre boundary (<b>See Annex A – Belfast City Centre Boundary Map</b>).</p> <p>This includes start-up retail, independents, Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SME's), social enterprise, leisure, hospitality and the cultural and third sectors. Businesses will need to provide proof through provision of a company number and three months bank statements relating to the business. A business or constituted organisation that can be either not-for-profit or community based.</p> <p>If an organisation is a constituted not-for-profit organisation it must supply a signed copy of the organisation's constitution. It must be signed and dated as adopted by the chairperson at the time or by the current Chairperson to confirm it is your group's constitution.</p> <p>Business/organisation must provide evidence of tenure and permission from the Property owner to complete the works. For the purposes of the application, we will accept written consent from the property owner through the Property Owner Consent Form template provided but if grant is awarded then we will require a copy of the lease agreement prior to any grant being paid, (Grants 1&amp;2 require a minimum lease period of two years,</p>

consideration of any matchmaking efforts made through the scheme and accommodation for lease agreements for two years if seeking Grant 1 or 2 or 4 months if seeking Grant 3.	while grant 3 requires a minimum lease period of 4 months).
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### **Eligibility Criteria**

**(only property owners/businesses/organisations which meet the below criteria are eligible to apply)**

1. The property must be a vacant premises or vacant space within a premises, that is located within the Belfast City centre boundary (**See Annex A – Belfast City Centre Boundary Map**).
2. The business/organisation must be an existing registered business/organisation or social enterprise that has been actively operating for at least 3 months as of date of submission of application.
3. The property must not have been in occupation for a period of 12 months at the time of application (properties that have been occupied by temporary meanwhile use/pop ups are acceptable).
4. Must submit the relevant template within the application pack to demonstrate viability. Grant 1 and 2 will require completion of the two-year business plan, while Grant 3 will be required to complete a Business Plan Proposal template for the duration of the proposed lease period.
5. Properties at ground floor vacancies are priority, but we may also consider upper floor improvements if the occupier’s ground floor activities extend into upper floor uses, where they deliver a meaningful and measurable impact on the street character and vibrancy. Projects proposing to target upper floor units **only** will not be considered unless they can clearly demonstrate that the proposal will have a positive impact on the street character and vibrancy of a street or area.
6. Have the ability to deliver the scheme within 9 months of Letter of Offer.

## **WHAT COSTS ARE ELIGIBLE FOR FUNDING?**

Please see the following list of capital expenditure that qualifies for funding - this list is not exclusive and alternative improvements may be considered in line with the aims of the scheme. Examples could include:

### **External Improvements**

- Shop Frontage enhancements
- Repair/restoration of architectural elements
- Signage, painting, and lighting
- Installation of new or replacement of Awnings and external furniture
- Removal of shutters and replacement with toughened glass
- External CCTV
- Access improvements

### **Internal Improvements/Fitting out vacant premises**

- Upgrading internal fixtures and fittings
- New or upgraded equipment including point of sale technology
- Access improvements
- Internal lighting
- Catering equipment
- Customer facilities
- Improved security features
- Furniture required for the delivery of the project

## **ORGANISATION OR TYPES OF ACTIVITY NOT ELIGIBLE**

**Non eligible businesses include (but are not limited to).**

- Multinational corporations
- Pay day loan shops
- Betting/ gambling shops
- Charity shops
- Pawn shops
- Vape shops
- Adult shops

- Budget/Pound shops
- Projects which are of a party-political nature
- Projects which promote a particular religion

**We do not fund businesses / organisations that are:**

- Closing an existing unit in the city centre to open an alternative premise (unless evidence can be provided to demonstrate current premises is not fit for purpose).
- Seeking Grant 1 or 2 and are unable to provide evidence of property owner agreement (written consent) and lease /proposed lease arrangements for a minimum of **two years** (template included in Application pack).
- Seeking Grant 1 or 2 and are unable to provide a two-year business plan (templates included in Application pack).
- Seeking Grant 3 and are unable to provide evidence of property owner agreement (written consent) and lease /proposed lease arrangements for a minimum of **4 months** (template included in Application pack).
- Seeking Grant 3 and are unable to provide a business proposal (templates included in Application pack).
- Not a registered business, social enterprise, or charity; and have not been operating for at least the last 3 months.
- Not prepared to share learning from their project with us and other relevant groups.
- Businesses/Organisations that are not willing or cannot show effective financial control
- Are outside the Belfast City centre boundary area.
- Do not propose to activate ground floor frontage. Above ground floor will only be considered if the applicant can clearly demonstrate that the proposal will have a positive impact on the street character and vibrancy of a street or area (these will be assessed on a case-by-case basis).
- Could displace existing businesses nearby with same offer
- Are multiple proposals for the same space (**only one application can be submitted per property**).
- Have no distinct benefit to the Belfast City Council area.
- Are seeking funding for works that have already taken place or are already under way at the time of the assessment.
- Require additional revenue or capital funding from Belfast City Council or other public sector organisations to complete the project.
- Proposals that contradict that of Belfast City Council policy.



- Do not provide an outline project budget.
- Are unable to commit to opening the business/organisation a minimum of 30 hours/week (Grants 1 +2) and 18 hours/week (Grant 3) unless a reasonable rationale can be provided that will be determined on a case-by-case basis.
- Propose the purchase of land/property or for land/property which is to be sold within 12 months from the receipt of final payment of grant aid and could result in full repayment of grant to Council.
- Are seeking to occupy a property that has been in leased occupation within the last 12 months (occupation by pop ups/meanwhile use is acceptable).

The Council will have ultimate discretion in determining the types of business/organisation that are eligible for grant funding assistance. This will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

### **WHAT COSTS ARE NOT ELIGIBLE FOR FUNDING?**

The following costs are not eligible for funding:

- Rent, rates, utilities or other running or administration costs
- Professional fees such as Planning or Building Control or for specialist advice on bringing the premises back into use
- Any costs which someone else is paying for, whether in cash or in kind
- Routine repairs and maintenance to buildings or ongoing maintenance costs
- Maintenance equipment or office equipment which is not essential to the project
- Any transport that is necessary for the project
- Running costs for the building/proposal after the project is complete
- Funds to build up a reserve or surplus, whether distributable or not
- Loan repayments
- Donations to general appeals
- Work that has already taken place or is underway prior to an offer of funding
- Costs representing poor value for money
- Items purchased outside of Council procurement guidelines (see section on Council Procurement below)
- Recoverable VAT
- Insurance costs
- Cash expenditure
- The cost of any consumable items e.g., masks/ gloves/ visors/ alcohol
- Costs that are not auditable (e.g., cash payments)

- Debt, retrospective costs
- Websites or training costs
- Purchase of stock for general trading
- Overheads allocated or apportioned at rates in excess of those used for any similar work you carry out
- Costs which are not clearly linked to the project
- Costs that are already covered by other funding or income sources
- Costs related to private or unfunded pensions
- Amounts for gifts and donations, including vouchers

The Council will have ultimate discretion in determining the types of costs that are eligible for grant funding assistance. This will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

## HOW DOES FUNDING WORK?

	<b>Property Owner</b>	<b>Tenant</b>	<b>Property Owner with no confirmed Tenant</b>
Allocated Funding from Council	70% Upfront	70% Upfront	60% Upfront
Allocated Funding from Council	30% Completion	30% Completion	40% Completion and Tenant secured

The pilot scheme is expected to be delivered across two years, through a total funding pot of £700,000 until the committed funding pot has been fully awarded at which stage the Council reserves the right to review the grant process. Once we receive completed applications with all necessary supporting documents (See Section ‘Supporting Information Checklist’), we will begin assessment.

Eligible property owners, businesses and organisations can seek funding to complete external capital works to façade and improve the look and feel of the high street; internal capital works to make the property fit for purpose and support long term occupation; and diversification of property’s unoccupied space to help existing businesses survive.

Funding to successful applicants will be paid out in two instalments: 70% of the grant will be offered further to successful submission of all application documentation (See Section ‘Supporting Information’) to the satisfactory standard of the panel. We will pay the remaining 30% once we have received a satisfactorily completed monitoring form with all requested evidence/ documentation verifying spend against the Letter of Offer requirement.

Property owners without a secured tenant will only be able to access 60% of the total grant available within the relevant funding bracket, for example, if the footprint is less than 150 sq. metres, the maximum grant the property owner can access initially is £9,000. If a tenant is secured within 9 months, they may be eligible to draw down the remaining 40% of the funding available within the relevant bracket (subject to funding availability and tenant meeting grant eligibility). Property owners must make every reasonable effort to secure a tenant within this 9-month period, including accommodation for lease agreements for two years (or minimum 4 months if seeking support through Grant 3), and serious consideration of any matchmaking efforts made through the scheme.

Applicants will need to score at least **75%** of the marks available at assessment. Applications of this nature will be assessed on a case-by-case basis and offers will be made at the discretion of the panel.

The fund will cover eligible costs only (See Section 'What Costs are Eligible for Funding'). Please note equipment purchased must be new and must meet any environmental or licensing standards. Please ensure you review the list of identified eligible and non-eligible costs.

Applicants cannot start any work or purchase any items of equipment until they receive their Letter of Offer. Work or purchases made prior to receipt of the Letter of Offer will not be eligible.

Works, including the successful application for any and all Statutory Approvals must be completed within 9 months of the Letter of Offer.

### **Applications can be submitted by either the property owner or business/organisation**

Applicants should be aware that information on applications and claims for payment for Grant assistance is stored on computer in accordance with the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018, and that such information may be subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000; in addition this shall include any applicable national implementing Laws as amended from time to time including (i) the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Law Enforcement Directive (LED) and (ii) Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 to the extent that it relates to processing of personal data and privacy; and (iii) all applicable Law about the processing of personal data and privacy; If you are awarded a grant, Belfast City Council does not provide insurance for any activity you undertake. We strongly advise you to consult an insurance broker or advisor about the possible insurance requirements for your proposed activities.

Please note that financial assistance provided under this scheme may be considered as State Aid and successful applicants may be required to complete a State Aid declaration form.

## GENERAL PRINCIPLES

The Vacant to Vibrant pilot capital grant scheme is funded by Belfast City Council. It is a prime responsibility of Government to ensure the proper and efficient use of and the accountability for public monies. To this end, applicants will be required to provide relevant supporting information when applying for funding.

Following completion of the scheme, applicants will be required to engage in an evaluation process which will aim to demonstrate the effectiveness and impact of the project on their business and on the wider business environment.

The person responsible for the project and application must be aged 18 or above at the application deadline. You may be asked to provide evidence of this at some point if you are awarded a Letter of Offer.

The Council accepts no liability in respect of any loss, damage, charges, or expense which are incurred by any applicant and are attributable to any delay in payment under the Scheme or due to any suspension, reduction, or cancellation of funding.

It is anticipated that grant offers will be made following the successful completion of the approval process, and your project, if you are successful, cannot commence until you receive a formal letter of offer from the Council. Projects must be completed within 9 months of the Letter of Offer, with all works finished, paid and through the bank account by this date.

Applicants will be responsible for leading and conducting relevant stakeholder engagement: applications must demonstrate engagement to date in securing and supplying agreement from all directly affected stakeholders, including landlord and adjacent businesses or residents.

If you wish to discuss your application with a member of Council staff prior to submission, please email [vacanttovibrant@belfastcity.gov.uk](mailto:vacanttovibrant@belfastcity.gov.uk) and a member of our team will contact you.

## RISKS AND INSURANCE

The applicant, his/her/its agent(s) and/or contractor is/are responsible for all risks in connection with public or employer liability associated with any works funded by a grant under the Scheme.

The Council do not and will not accept liability or responsibility in respect of any grant-aided work carried out; accordingly, the applicant cannot and should not rely on the payment of grant monies by the Council as any proof or guarantee that the contractor engaged to execute the works has completed said works to a proper standard prior to payment. All successful applicants should satisfy themselves that all work has been carried out to a satisfactory standard and meets all statutory requirements.

Ongoing and future inspection, maintenance or repair of any items purchased/works completed under the capital scheme are the responsibility of the applicant. The Council accepts no responsibility, financial or otherwise, for expenditure or liabilities arising out of any work carried out by or on behalf of an applicant under the scheme. Any financial commitment incurred by the applicant which exceeds the amount of any approved grant, shall be the sole responsibility of the applicant.

It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that it is appropriately insured (including satisfactory building, contents and public liability insurance). The applicant must confirm that insurance is in place as part of their application

## STATUTORY CONSENTS

Applicants must comply with all statutory obligations associated with their capital proposals e.g. disability considerations, environmental health, licensing, adhering to latest COVID-19 guidelines, etc. For proposed applications which include works that require statutory approvals e.g., planning permission, building control approval, it is the applicant's responsibility to ensure they have all necessary approvals in place – **applicant must note the specific requirement for delivery of their projects is, that projects must be completed within 9 months of the Letter of Offer. Please ensure this time constraint is taken into consideration when developing any proposal.**

Applicants are expected to adhere to conservation area guidelines when completing works on properties. This includes, but is not limited to materials used, paint colour and signage.

Letters of offer may be issued in advance of full approval, but payment will be strictly conditional on applicants having necessary approvals in place and providing satisfactory copies of same to the Council. For advice and guidance on these please contact:

- Planning: E-mail: [planning@belfastcity.gov.uk](mailto:planning@belfastcity.gov.uk)
- Building Control: Email: [buildingcontrol@belfastcity.gov.uk](mailto:buildingcontrol@belfastcity.gov.uk)
- Licencing: Email: [buildingcontrollicensing@belfastcity.gov.uk](mailto:buildingcontrollicensing@belfastcity.gov.uk)

## PROCUREMENT GUIDANCE

The council's procurement thresholds must be complied with where grant funding is used to purchase goods or services. If you intend to purchase (or contribute to the purchase) of any goods or services costing £3,000 or over with this grant you **should make every effort to provide 3 price checks / quotations**. The following guidelines must be complied with:

Total Estimated Cost	Action & Minimum Number
£0 - £3,000	No quotes required but needs to represent value for money
Over £3,000 to £8,000	At least 3 companies invited to provide written quotations
Over £8,000 to £30,000	At least 4 companies invited to provide written quotations

Quotes from suppliers should be sought as per the guidance outlined above

- Quotes must be sought from suppliers who can realistically supply the good/service i.e., suppliers who normally stock the item.
- Where there is limited competition in the market for the good/service you are procuring (i.e., niche/specialist items) resulting in you being unable to request the minimum number of quotes required, then this should be documented, and an explanation provided.
- You or a business that you are an owner/partner/director of, are excluded from quoting for the supply of goods/services/works to a project that you may be offered funding for
- Where possible quotes should be from suppliers who are Belfast based.
- Quotes should be 'like-for-like', particularly where goods/services are specific e.g., awnings etc. Quotations for the same make and model of products are acceptable and should be obtained where possible. All quotations must meet the specification provided and demonstrate 'like for like' comparison in order to verify value for money.
- You should ensure that all costs are quoted and accounted for, e.g., delivery and installation should be part of the quote.
- Email quotes are acceptable and the covering email from suppliers must be provided.
- Quotes must contain the supplier's full details.
- If VAT is applicable to the items quoted, this should be clearly noted on the quotations to establish total project costs.
- The lowest quotation should be selected with corresponding costs detailed on the application form. If the lowest quotation has not been accepted as a result of quality considerations the applicant must provide a clear rationale for this.
- Details of the quotes received must be listed in the application form. Quotes in other currencies should be compared using the rate of exchange through [www.x-rates.com](http://www.x-rates.com)

If applying through the capital scheme for building works - copies of any relevant statutory approvals (e.g., planning permission/ listed building consent (where applicable) /advertisement consent (where applicable) must be provided before any grant payment can be made. If a business receiving grant funding is later held to account for any breaches relating to those improvements, the funding can be held back or if paid then claimed back from the recipient.

## EVALUATION PROCESS

The assessment process will be completed in two stages. The following criteria will be used to assess the quality of Applications that have met the basic eligibility criteria.

**Stage 1:** In the first instance all applications must satisfy all basic eligibility criteria through completed application form with all supporting information supplied (See Section 'Supporting Information Checklist'). The total marks available at this stage is 70/100. This assessment will be completed by a panel of Belfast City Council officers. Applicants will need a score of **45/70** marks available at this stage in order to progress to the next stage of assessment.

**Stage 2:** Successful applications will then be recommended for assessment of their Business Plan (Grant 1 and 2) or Business Proposal (Grant 3), which must be submitted using the template provided as part of this application pack commensurate with grant level to demonstrate affordability and long-term sustainability. The total marks available at this stage is **30/100**. This is assessed by an independent third party on a **PASS/FAIL** basis and applicants will be eliminated should they fail to satisfy the assessment criteria of this element. To assist applicants with their submission it is considered that a pass mark for this section is **18/30** (further detail below). Dependent on its nature, if there is data missing from relevant template documents that would be required for a robust assessment of viability, the assessor may notify the applicant and allow up to two working days for the data to be provided. Failure to provide outstanding information will result in applications being recorded as incomplete and therefore having failed Stage 2.

***It should be noted that it is the ultimate responsibility of all applicants to satisfy themselves that all appropriate information has been provided and should not assume that assessors will request additional information or notify you of any omissions.***

A minimum score of **75** across the two assessment stages will be required to be eligible for funding.

Stage	Title	Score Weighting (out of 100)	Description
1	<b>Definition and Deliverability</b>	10	Definition of the project is in line with the scheme's aims and objectives, eligibility criteria and capital expenditure guidance. Statement of deliverability and consideration of all necessary approvals (landowner; planning etc.)
	<b>Property Proposal</b>	40	Location and activation of vacant property. Commitment and evidence of long-term operation and maintenance of the capital works. Note Belfast City Council will not be responsible for the any maintenance and management costs post-project completion
	<b>Project Proposal</b>	20	Evidence of efforts made to ensure the investment will improve the area and be a long-term success
2	<b>Viability</b>	30	Business Plan/Proposal Assessment <b>Please note, this is assessed on a pass/fail basis</b>

### **Viability (Business Plan/Proposal Assessment)**

Applicants that successfully pass Stage 1 of the assessment will be recommended for Stage 2, assessment of viability. This will be based on the submission of the relevant template commensurate with grant level to demonstrate financial viability and long-term sustainability.

The relevant templates have been provided as part of the application pack. You must complete these in line with the grant level you are applying for and submit as part of your application.

Grant 1 & 2	Grant 3
Business Plan Template	Business Plan Proposal Template

### **Business plan/proposal scoring guidance**

Given the need to ensure the probity for any grant awarded, businesses will be required to submit a business plan/proposal reflective of the level of grant requested and would refer applicants to information below to ensure that they complete appropriate templates and to familiarise themselves with assessment criteria.

### **Scoring Matrix**

Associated business plans/proposals will be scored and weighted using the attached matrix.



	Score	Rationale
<b>Excellent</b>	<b>5</b>	Excellent plan/proposal that meets the requirements. Response is clearly detailed, and all relevant sections are completed to a very high standard. Information/figures provided also provide clear evidence of a comprehensive approach to achieving stated goals and ability to remain viable in the longer term.
<b>Good</b>	<b>4</b>	A good plan/proposal that meets the requirements with good, convincing supporting information and figures. Demonstrates good understanding on requirements needed to ensure viability for a defined period and capacity to achieve stated goals.
<b>Acceptable</b>	<b>3</b>	Plan/proposal generally meets requirements but with minor reservations in one or more elements. Demonstrates reasonable understanding and suggests the ability to achieve stated goals but lacks sufficient detail to award a higher mark.
<b>Poor</b>	<b>2</b>	A plan/proposal with reservations. Limited detail and supporting information/figures across differing elements. High risk that the proposed approach would be viable or achieve stated goals.
<b>Very Poor</b>	<b>1</b>	A plan/proposal with serious reservations. Required information/figures are missing from specific elements. Unable to fully assess the viability of stated goals.
<b>Unacceptable / no response</b>	<b>0</b>	Plan/proposal fails to supply appropriately detailed information/figures in virtually all elements.

### Marking and applied weights for Grant 1 & 2 applicants.

Assessment will be completed across 4 main headings using scoring matrix and individual weights applied, e.g., if for Vision and business Idea, the response scores a 4 out of 5 then that translates to a score of 8 out 10 marks.

Headings and weight applied, including elements assessed.	Max marks available
<b>Vision and business Idea x2</b> Elements assessed: Business Goals Product/Service Details Key Selling Points Future Plans	10 marks
<b>Marketing x1</b> Elements assessed: Market Research Sales Justification Action Plan Competitors Pricing Marketing, Advertising, Promotion	5 marks

<b>Operations and Legal issues x1</b> Elements Assessed:  Staff Premises Capital Expenditure Stock and Suppliers Insurance Legal Issues	5 marks
<b>Finance to include attached 2-year financial projections x2</b> Elements Assessed:  Funding Sales Projections Revenue Expenditure Capital Expenditure Financial Projections Summary & Analysis	10 marks

A score of 18 or more across all headings will equate to a pass and resulting award of 30 marks will be allocated. Please also note:

***An assessment of poor or below in more than one heading will result in a score of 0 for assessment of business plan and subsequently marked as having failed assessment.***

**Marks and applied weights for Grant 3 applicants:**

Assessment will be completed across 2 main headings below using scoring matrix and with individual weighting applied, e.g., if for Vision and business Idea, the response scores a 4 out of 5 then that translates to a score of 20 out of 25 marks.

<b>Headings and weight applied, including elements assessed.</b>	<b>Maximum marks available</b>
<b>Executive Summary x1:</b>  Elements Assessed:  Executive Summary Business Details	5 marks
<b>Vision and business Idea x5:</b>  Elements Assessed:  The Business Idea Business goals Pricing, marketing strategy and competitors What makes the business different Legal Requirements	25 marks

A score of 18 or more across both heading will equate to a pass and resulting award of 30 marks will be allocated.

***Please also note: An assessment of poor or below in any one heading will result in a score of 0 for assessment of business plan and subsequently marked as having failed assessment.***

Stage 1 Assessment Criteria	Score Range	Weight
<b>Definition and Deliverability</b>		<b>(Total:10)</b>
Project meets a minimum of 3 or more objectives of scheme and deliverability criteria		10
<b>Property Proposal</b>		<b>(Total: 40)</b>
<b>Property Activation</b>	<b>10:</b> Vacant Ground + Upper floors	10
	<b>6:</b> Vacant Ground only	
	<b>2:</b> Upper Floors only	
<b>High vacancy area</b>	<b>10:</b> Street with above average vacancy (23%)	10
	<b>6:</b> Identified problematic cluster area	
	<b>2:</b> Street with low vacancy	
<b>Location/Prominence</b>	<b>5:</b> High prominence in Primary Retail Core (PRC) – see Annex B below for reference	5
	<b>3:</b> PRC/ High prominence in wider city centre	
	<b>1:</b> Low prominence in wider city centre	
<b>Impact on Streetscape and Vibrancy</b>	<b>5:</b> Significant external improvements	5
	<b>3:</b> Minor external improvements	
	<b>1:</b> Internal improvements only	
<b>Vacancy Duration</b>	<b>5:</b> 3+ years	5
	<b>3:</b> 2+ years /Property expansion and use of vacant space	
	<b>1:</b> Less than 12 months	
<b>Quality of Works</b> Assessed against statement of quality	<b>5:</b> High quality of works	5
	<b>3:</b> Average quality of works	
	<b>1:</b> Low quality of works	
<b>Project Proposal:</b>		<b>(Total: 20)</b>
<b>Occupier</b>	<b>5.</b> Local Independent/SME/Social Economy/Arts and Cultural	5
	<b>3.</b> Anchor /New to Market	
	<b>0.</b> Other	
<b>Occupier Proposal</b> (*Unique/Distinct defined as providing something different/additional to that which currently exists.	<b>5:</b> Unique/distinct* offer for the city	5
	<b>3:</b> Somewhat unique/distinct offer for the city	
	<b>1:</b> Less unique/distinct offer for the city	
<b>Economic Benefit</b> Proposals that will create new and local employment (directly or indirectly)	<b>2.5:</b> 5+ new jobs created and/or volunteering opportunities	2.5
	<b>2:</b> 2-5 new jobs created and/or volunteering opportunities	
	<b>1:</b> 1-2 new jobs created and/or volunteering opportunities	
<b>Vibrancy</b> Weekly operating hours of occupier	<b>2.5:</b> 30+ / 18+ hours	2.5
	<b>2:</b> 30 / 18 hours	
	<b>1:</b> -30 / -18 hours	
<b>Sustainability</b> Proposals that promote sustainability e.g., use of recycled materials, zero waste principles, clean energy	<b>2.5:</b> Indication of sustainability	2.5
	<b>0:</b> No indication of sustainability	
<b>Investment</b> Any additional investment applicant is making into premises to ensure long term success	<b>2.5:</b> Indication of additional investment	2.5
	<b>0:</b> No additional investment beyond 10% contribution	

Stage 2 Assessment Criteria	Score Range	Weight
<b>Viability (Business Plan Assessment)</b>		<b>(Total 30)</b>
<b>Grant 1&amp;2 Applicants: Business Plan Assessment</b>	<b>Max 10:</b> Vision and business Idea	30
	<b>Max 5:</b> Marketing	
	<b>Max 5:</b> Operations and Legal Issues	
	<b>Max 10:</b> Finance	
<b>Grant 3 Applicants: Business Proposal Assessment</b>	<b>Max 5:</b> Executive Summary	30
	<b>Max 25:</b> Vision and business Idea	

## HOW DECISIONS ARE MADE

All applications are checked for completeness and eligibility against the guidelines. We regret that we are unable to progress ineligible applications.

As per the Outline of Process adopted for these grants, if, following application submission

1. The declaration page is not signed (please note that a scanned digital signature OR typed name is satisfactory given current circumstances),
- or
2. There is verification missing specific to eligibility and evidence of eligibility cannot otherwise be found via other means, the organisation will be contacted via [vacanttovibrant@belfastcity.gov.uk](mailto:vacanttovibrant@belfastcity.gov.uk) and given 5 working days from date of email clarification, to supply only related and specified information back to us within a reply email. If verification is required during the Viability assessment, the assessor will require a return of information within two working days.

Belfast City Council may not be able to fund all successful applications as there may be more applications than there is funding available. However, all eligible applications will be considered carefully and assessed.

Note: In order to ensure that there is no duplication of applications, and to ensure a fair distribution of the grant Council reserves the right to refuse any application that is deemed to be a duplication or directly aligned with another application.

Applicants must not place any reliance whatsoever on the support of Belfast City Council until formally notified in writing and your authorised signatories have executed and returned a funding agreement

with which you will be provided by Belfast City Council should your application prove successful. Accordingly, any expenditure that you incur and/or to which you commit (including that which you have incurred or committed to in relation to the preparation of your proposal for funding) prior to formal notification and execution and return of the funding agreement is incurred and/or committed entirely at your own risk.

## WHAT HAPPENS IF APPLICATION IS SUCCESSFUL?

If an application is successful, the Council will issue a Letter of Offer, which is an offer to the successful organisation to deliver on the proposal outlined in their application form.

Signed Letters of Offer must be returned by email within **14 days of receipt**. If the signed Letter of Offer is not received by the Council within this 14-day period, the offer of grant funding will be withdrawn without further notice and the application will be rejected. You must use the same email address to return the Letter of Offer as was used to submit your application form.

When you receive your Letter of Offer it must be signed by an actual signature by authorised signatory for your organisation scanned and returned by email. If you cannot get access to an electronic signature, please contact us well in advance of the deadline for assistance. At this stage, applicants can proceed to purchase the items as outlined in their Letter of Offer, and monies can then be claimed back from the Council. Applicants cannot start any work or purchase any items or equipment until they receive their Letter of Offer.

## PAYMENT

We will pay 70% of your grant when we receive your signed letter of offer (Property owners without a secured tenant will only be able to access 60% of the total grant available within the relevant funding bracket and can draw down the remaining 40% should they secure a tenant within 9 months). We will pay the remaining 30% once we have received a satisfactorily completed monitoring form with all requested evidence/ documentation verifying spend against the Letter of Offer requirement, including:

- Electronic invoices for each item purchased
- Copy of bank statements showing payment for each item being paid from the bank account

If the requested documentation is not supplied, payment will be withheld. **Please do not apply for funding if you cannot supply these items.**

Payment of grant will be made to applicant via direct BACS payment. Cash payments by applicants are not acceptable and will not be eligible for any refund from the Council.

Applicants are responsible for paying the contactor(s) and claiming back VAT, if applicable, within six weeks of completing your project.

Successful applicants will be awarded funding on the basis that they are committed to a minimum lease period commensurate with the level of funding (minimum of 2 years for larger grants and minimum of 4 months for smaller grants). **If for any reason applicants awarded with funding are unable to fulfil their lease period, they must notify Council immediately, and may be subject to clawback proceedings. Clawback will be commensurate with the length remaining on the lease, e.g. if lease is broken after 1 year then applicant will owe 50% of grant back; after 18 months applicant would 25% of grant back etc. If the lease is broken before 12 months, it's calculated by months. If the grant was applied for by the property owner, they will have 6 months to find a replacement tenant to satisfy the remainder of the lease period before clawback proceedings are initiated.**

## WHAT HAPPENS IF APPLICATION IS UNSUCCESSFUL?

**The Council's decision on whether to award funding is final and there is no appeals process, however if your application is unsuccessful you can contact an officer for feedback and advice on future funding applications.**

The applicant can submit a new application however there is no guarantee that it will be successful. This will mean starting the process from the beginning with a new unique reference number assigned.

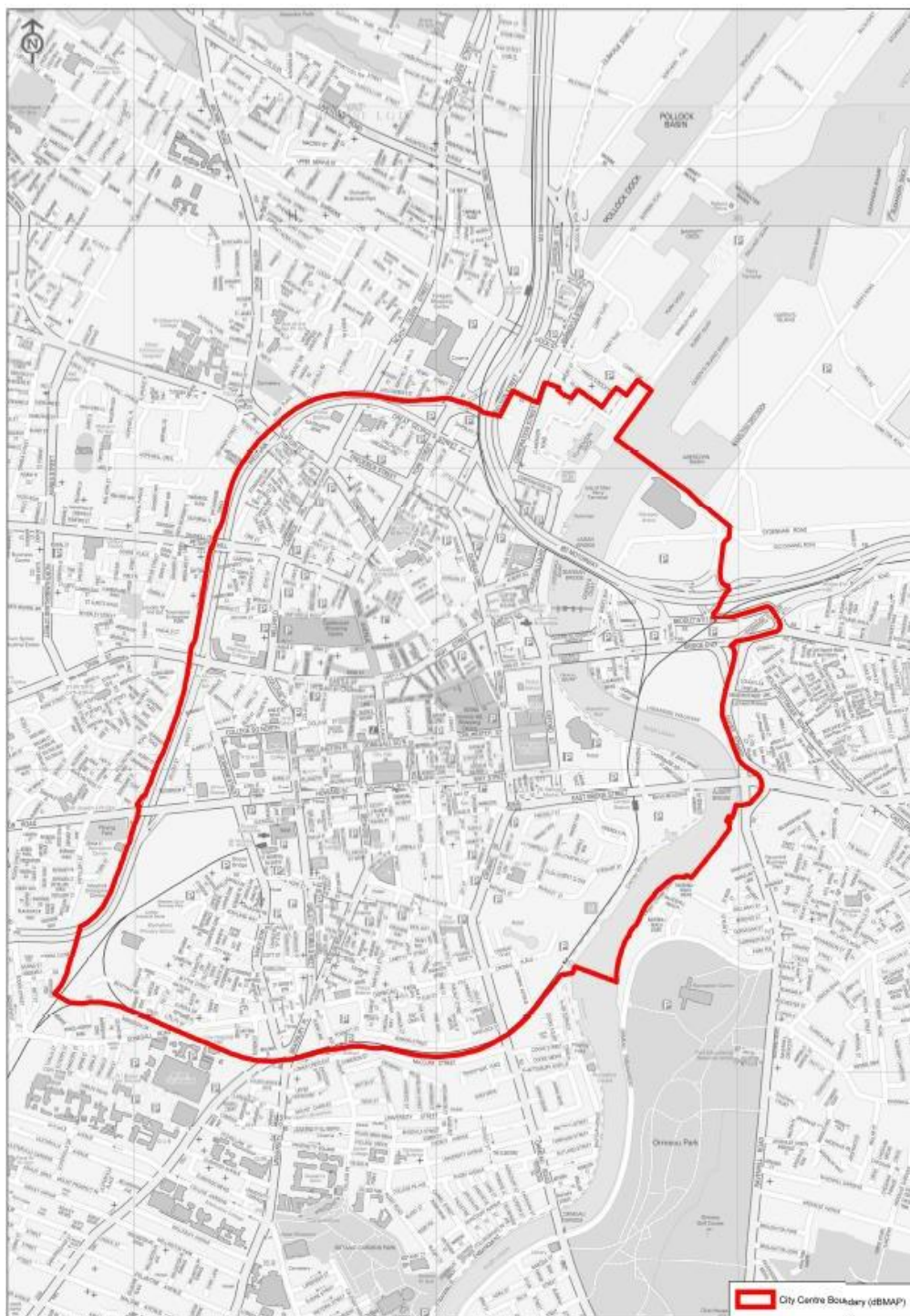
If you believe the funding process has not been followed correctly or your application has been deemed ineligible incorrectly, you may request a review within seven working days of receiving your Letter of Outcome via email to [vacanttovibrant@belfastcity.gov.uk](mailto:vacanttovibrant@belfastcity.gov.uk). A Senior Council Officer will review the process and accuracy of the decision and respond to your review request. The Senior Council Officer's review decision is final.

## MARKETING AND PROMOTION

You must acknowledge our support by including logos on all printed materials associated with your programme of work. We will give you more information about logos etc if your application is successful. For information on Belfast City Council branding and logos please refer to [www.belfastcity.gov.uk/brand](http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/brand). Please get in touch in advance so that we can help you promote your project. If you are awarded Vacant to Vibrant funding, we may use details and photography of your project in council communications including case studies, media releases, social media, presentations and publications – for example City Matters residents' magazine. Email us on [vacanttovibrant@belfastcity.gov.uk](mailto:vacanttovibrant@belfastcity.gov.uk) if you have a query.



## ANNEX A: BELFAST CITY CENTRE BOUNDARY MAP

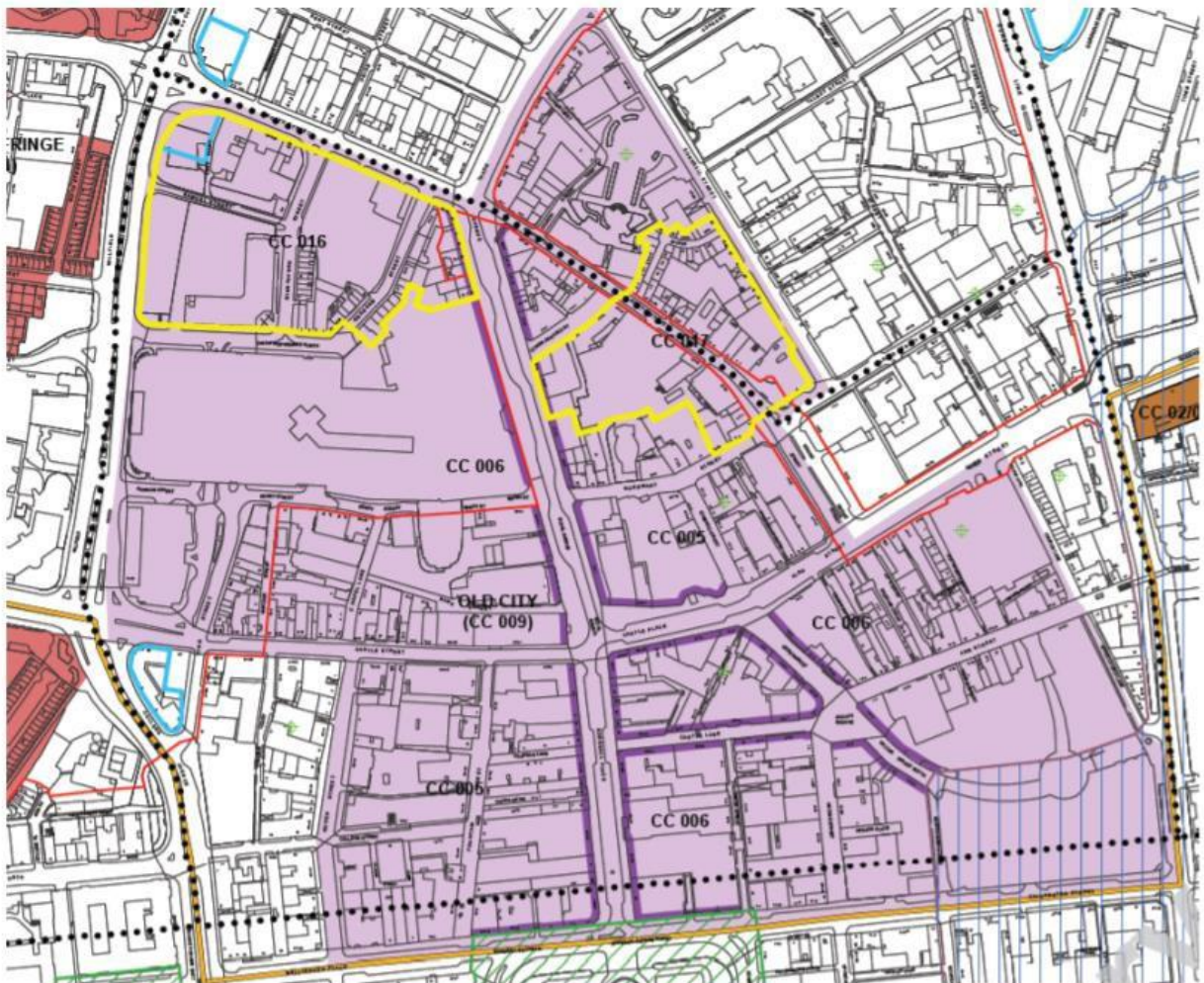


### City Centre Boundary Description:

Belfast city centre's geographical boundary limits extend from Belfast Clarendon Dock in the north east of the city, travelling clockwise parallel to the M3 motorway east to the Short Strand, then in a south westerly direction along the Ormeau Embankment to Bradbury Place in the south of the city, then continuing clockwise in a westerly direction to Broadway Road, following the Westlink carriageway in a north-by-north westerly direction and finishing at Nelson Street.



## ANNEX B: BELFAST PRIMARY RETAIL CORE AREA MAP



### Primary Retail Core Description:

The Primary Retail Core within Belfast City Centre defines the main focus of retail activity and retail investment during the Plan period. It includes the main retail outlets along Donegall Place/Royal Avenue and extends westwards to Millfield/King Street/Queen Street and eastwards towards Bridge Street/Church Lane and Victoria Street. The Primary Retail Core also contains banks and professional offices within Royal Avenue, Wellington Place and Fountain Street, civic buildings, dispersed cafes and pubs and restaurants between Ann Street and High Street and off North Street.

If you seek additional clarity around your property's location within the boundary, please contact the team by emailing: [vacanttovibrant@belfastcity.gov.uk](mailto:vacanttovibrant@belfastcity.gov.uk)