

Chorley Shop Front Improvement Grant **Guidance Note**

What is the Chorley Shop Front Refurbishment Grant?

Chorley Council's **Shop Front Improvement Grant** provides financial support to landlords or potential tenants of VACANT retail properties to encourage investment in the visual appearance of a shop frontage, and/or to make the property more attractive for letting purposes.

This fund is managed by Chorley Council and the following criteria apply:

1. The property must be **VACANT**
2. The property must be situated either within the defined town centre boundary, or within district/local centre boundaries as shown in the Chorley Local Plan 2012-2026
3. For applications regarding a food related business, whether from the landlord or the incoming tenant, the business itself must have a minimum Level 3 Hygiene Rating.
4. Projects which are only for signage will not be supported.

What is the financial support for?

The Shop Front Improvement Grant is for comprehensive capital works (rather than routine maintenance) to improve the visual appearance of a **VACANT** retail property. Works may include new windows (as part of an overall scheme), exterior treatments, lettering, fascias, signage (only as part of a bigger scheme) and lighting on the principle ground floor trading elevation of the property. First floor will also be considered where appropriate. Physical improvements to a shop entrance to improve disability access are also eligible for grant support. The grant may also pay towards the planning and building regulations application fees where relevant.

The lowest value net quote(s) will be used to calculate the eligible project costs and the 75% grant intervention, in order to achieve best value for the programme.

Am I eligible for support?

Please note: This is a discretionary grant and your initial grant enquiry will be carefully considered by the Council before a full Shop Front Improvement Grant application can be progressed. The Council will consider how a project will add to the Chorley retail offer, or to the visual appearance of the borough, and assess any reputational risk to offering grant assistance. All enquiries will be considered on a case by case basis. ***For this reason you should always speak to Council Officers prior to completing a grant application.***

The funds can support small and medium enterprises (SMEs) acting as independent retailers moving into a vacant property located within the designated areas, or the landlord thereof. An SME is a company which employs fewer than 250 persons (full time equivalent), and has a turnover of

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less than 50 million Euros and/or has an annual balance sheet of less than 43 million Euros. No more than 25% of the company's capital or voting rights may be held by a parent company which is not itself an SME.

In order to comply with EU state aid regulations Chorley Council is unable to provide financial support to companies in the transport sector, or those involved in the production of agricultural equipment.

Please note: An offer of grant assistance from this scheme must be in place before you commence or pay for any works that you require grant funding for. This grant scheme is not available retrospectively to fund work which has already been carried out and/or paid for.

Is this State Aid?

Yes. The Shop Front Improvement Grant uses public money and therefore this constitutes state aid as defined in the European Commission regulations. It will be given to SMEs under the EU de minimus rules. This means that an SME can receive up to 200,000 Euros of state aid over a rolling three year period. More information on this issue is available from <http://www.bis.gov.uk/policies/europe/state-aid>. You will be required to provide details of any state aid received during the last three years on the grant application form.

How much can I apply for?

The award of financial assistance is discretionary and all applications will be considered by a Grant Panel. Any grant award will be calculated on the lowest of any quotes provided.

Businesses may apply for up to 75% of the total eligible **net** project costs, up to a maximum grant of £10,000.

Applicants should ensure that no grant project work is commenced or paid for prior to an application being approved and a grant offer letter issued.

All grants are paid on defrayed expenditure, i.e. the grant payment can only be claimed from the Council once the project has been completed and the contractors have been paid. Evidence of this will required.

Are there any standard conditions to receiving the grant?

Grant assistance is subject to receiving where appropriate, a satisfactory business plan and cashflow forecast that demonstrates the viability and future sustainability of the business.

There must not be any environmental health, business rate enforcement or legal issues outstanding with Chorley Council at the time of the grant application.

Grant assistance is *conditional* on the applicant checking whether any statutory permissions are required for the work being undertaken.

How do I apply?

In the first instance please contact the Council's Business, Development and Growth Department to discuss your project. Tel. 012357 515300 or Email edu@chorley.gov.uk

Once the project work has been identified, you will be asked to formally request financial support using the appropriate grant application form. In addition you will be asked to send:

- If you are a new start business, a business plan and 3 year cash flow forecast are required. If you are an existing business, a copy of your most recent financial accounts and/or management accounts are required. Additional information may be requested at grant appraisal stage. *Note: If your end of year accounts are due for submission to Companies House, or are to be produced for your own purposes within a month of making this application, you will be required to supply these accounts either as draft accounts, or provide these as soon as finalised, so they can be considered as part of your application.*
- Confirmation of a submitted application for building regulations or planning permission (if required).
- Landlord's permission to do the project work (if applicable).
- Evidence of funding (e.g. Bank statement or letter from Bank) to deliver and pay for the project.
- Two written quotes for a project with a total net value less than £10k; 3 written quotes for a project with a total net value more than £10k.

What happens next?

After you have submitted your completed application form and all supporting documentation your application will be appraised and a decision made by the Grant Panel within four weeks. This timescale may change during periods where there is a high volume of applications.

The Council Officer who has been supporting you with your application will contact you with the decision of the Grant Panel, and if your application has been approved will provide you with a formal letter offering grant assistance. This grant offer will be subject to a '5 Day Call In Period' where the grant panel decision is open to scrutiny by councillors. Therefore, it is at your own financial risk if you commence work before the 'Call In Period' has ended. Any work carried out or paid for prior to the date of your grant offer letter will be deemed ineligible.

Payment of grant

The grant is paid on defrayed expenditure, ie grants will only be paid to the applicant when:

- All works have been completed to the satisfaction of Council Officers.
- The Council has inspected the original copy of the contractor's invoice(s) and seen proof of applicant's payment of the invoice(s).

Once the above is in place, the grant can be claimed and will be paid within 30 days.