Vacant Premises Improvement Grant -Third Sector 2026/27

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Guidance Document

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Introduction

Vacant Premises Improvement Grant Third Sector

The Vacant Premises Improvement Grant for Third Sector is a grant scheme aimed at supporting new and existing, formally registered, Third Sector groups (with fewer than 250 employees) located within Falkirk District's town centres. The fund will help address the issue of vacant town centre unit space, stimulate new start-up activity and support Third Sector expansion. This will help improve amenities, increase footfall and contribute to re-shaping and creating vibrant town centre environments.
The three main routes to apply to the fund are as follows:

- **Third Sector landlords who own vacant units can apply where they have an identified tenant interested in the premises.**
- **Third Sector Start-Ups who want to lease an empty high street property to establish a new charitable, community or social enterprise activity location can apply.**
- **Existing Third Sector Groups seeking to expand into a new location or larger property in high streets can apply.**

Any other variations of the above three routes will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

About this guide

This guide will help you successfully complete your Vacant Premises Improvement Grant application. It is important that you refer to all available guidance whilst completing your application. This will help avoid delays in processing your application.

Making an application

To apply for the Vacant Premises Improvement Grant the applicant must make an initial enquiry outlining the project to CommunityDevelopment@falkirk.gov.uk. The outline case will be assessed and if suitable for the fund, the applicant will be given access to the online application portal. Applicants provided access to the portal are strongly encouraged to gather all required evidence, and compile their responses offline, ahead of moving their final submission into the portal form.

Funding panels will decide on grant application outcomes and will be held on an as needs basis.

The final deadline for submitting applications will be February 2027. Please note that this fund may close early if demand is high and the fund becomes fully subscribed.

How is funding paid?

For our Third Sector applicants, where an applicant organisation has demonstrable limited capacity in their reserves to meet the costs of the project, the Vacant Premises Improvement Grant will be paid in instalments:

- for completed elements of project work, verified through site visits or photographic evidence.
- issued only on receipt of a claims form, accompanied by official invoices from the project suppliers.
- Accompanied by any relevant statutory consent and/or compliance evidence for that element.

No payment will be released prior to the provision of full property lease or ownership evidence.

These payments are limited to up to 75% of the agreed cost line (proportions will align to the agreed match funding percentage for each project)

Where any advance is issued, the organisation must subsequently provide organisations bank/credit-card statements showing defrayal of the sums within 30 days. No further instalment claims will be processed until full defrayal evidence of prior claim amounts is received.

All applicant payment of project costs must be made using the organisations official bank account or organisation credit/debit card. Personal accounts payments or cash transactions will not be reimbursed.

Final claims will not be processed until any remaining statutory evidence is received e.g. Warrants, Inspections etc.

All project claims must be submitted by the 19th March 2027.

What funding is available?

The grant can cover up to 75% of your eligible project costs.

VAT treatment

VAT is not an eligible cost except where it is non-recoverable by the applicant. Applicants must not include VAT they are able to reclaim from HMRC.

Funding Limits

Grant awards will range from £2,000 up to a maximum of £25,000 (at 75% intervention rate)

Match funding requirements

Applicants must have secured the remaining 25% (or more) through other funding sources.

When planning your finances, remember that you are responsible for any project and delivery cost that fall out with the funding agreement.

Match funding must be fully evidenced at the point of application.

In-kind contributions (e.g. donated services/equipment/materials) may be accepted as match *only* where formal confirmation of commitment, including market value detail, is provided by the donor(s).

Illustrative example contributions at the maximum 75% intervention rate are set out in the table below.

Figures are illustrative only and rounded to the nearest pound. Actual grant awards will be calculated as a percentage of evidenced eligible project costs, subject to the agreed intervention rate and overall grant limits.

Total eligible project costs (approx.)	Maximum Grant Award (up to 75%)	Applicant Match Funding (min 25%)
£2,667	£2,000 (minimum award)	£667
£5,000	£3,750	£1,250
£10,000	£7,500	£2,500
£15,000	£11,250	£3,750
£20,000	£15,000	£5,000
£25,000	£18,750	£6,250
£30,000	£22,500	£7,500
£33,333	£25,000 (maximum award)	£8,333

Limits on awards

Only one successful application per Third Sector group may be approved over the duration of the scheme.

Preparing an application

Initial Engagement

Applicants must engage with a Community Development Worker. They will discuss the project which the applicant wishes to apply for funding. The Community Development Worker will help the applicant identify the potential funding opportunities and determine whether the Vacant Premises Improvement Grant would be an appropriate funding programme.

Eligibility

To apply for the Vacant Premises Improvement Grant, you must meet the following requirements:

- **Organisation:**

  The applicant must be a formally registered, constituted, non-profit organisation that meets the following:

  Must have fewer than 250 employees.

  Whilst no annual income limit has been set, priority weighting will be applied to applicants with income under £1,000,000 in the previous accounting year.

  Must not be in debt to Falkirk Council at the time of application.

- **Location:** The vacant property must be in the following town centre areas:

  - Falkirk
  - Grangemouth
  - Denny
  - Bo'ness
  - Bonnybridge
  - Larbert/Stenhousemuir

  Consideration will also be given to outlying retail cluster areas.

  The premise location must be viable and not subject to known future change which may impact beyond the required minimum lease term (12 months).

- **Property Details**: The property can be on the ground floor, basement or first floor and the area must have been vacant for a **minimum of one month.** Priority will be given to ground floor vacant units.

  Funding is primarily intended to support new occupation or reoccupation of vacant premises by new tenants or owners. However, support can be considered for projects that bring vacant floors within premises already owned or leased by an applicant back into active use, provided there is a strong case demonstrating local impact and all other eligibility criteria are met.

- **Funding Limit:** Third Sector Groups can receive up to 75% of eligible project costs, up to a maximum of **£25,000**
- **Application Limit:** Third Sector Tenants/Landlords can only be awarded one grant.
- **Item Limit:** Applicants can apply for a **maximum of ten individual items** per grant application.
- **Grant Project Start:** Third Sector Groups must not have commenced any of the activities for which they are applying for funding. No supplier invoices should be received and no supplier payments made before the grant award date.
- **Bank Accounts**: applicants must have a named Charitable Organisation bank account. All transactions relating to the grant must be conducted through this account.

- **Project Completion:** Applicants must complete works for which they applied for funding by Feb 2027.
- **Grant Claim:** Applicants must submit their Claims for Grant and appropriate evidence as detailed in 'Grant Claim' section below by 19th March 2027.
- **Localised Town Centre Community Benefit:** For all funding applications applicants must explain how occupying the vacant unit will benefit the local Town Centre and wider community.
- **Ineligible Third Sector Groups:** These include, but are not limited to:

- large nationally governed organisations with significant national-level income or resources.

- We cannot support premises that are to be used primarily for the practice of faith-based worship activities or for political purposes.

Eligible Projects

The Vacant Premises Improvement Grant will be used to complete works that enable the vacant premises to become functional, rather than deliver a bespoke fit out. The fund will support eligible project costs for eligible internal and external works and reconfiguration of vacant units to enable reoccupation, new community activity, and support new employment opportunities.

Funding can be spent on capital investment only. Revenue or operating costs are not eligible, except for, directly related architect fees and professional costs (10% of the total eligible project costs considered maximum).
Eligible costs include:

- internal reconfiguration to support new Third Sector community use – for example retail or social enterprise space, co-working areas, advice or wellbeing projects or similar, including room partitioning.
- installation of permanent WC and kitchen facilities
- upgrade of heating, lighting, plumbing, electrics and sales points
- permanent flooring
- installation or upgrade of fixtures including slat walling and shelving or fittings such as display units.
- internal improvements as recommended on the building's Energy Performance Certificate
- accessibility improvements above and beyond those required to meet legal requirements.
- installation of commercial grade equipment necessary to enable unit reoccupation and proposed tenant activity
- external works and improvements (external windows and doors, signage and frontages, exterior building upgrades)

Information

Funding is not available for projects that have already started or for supplier invoices dated before award date or expenditure made before the application decision. Ensure your project and expenditure are planned accordingly to qualify for funding.

For projects that require Local Authority Approval, the applicant must be able to demonstrate they are engaged with appropriate council services.

Application Form

To apply for the **Vacant Premises Improvement Grant**, the Community Development Team will assess your project outline, and if eligible will provide you with a link to the on-line application form. Please review the supporting guidance material.

Evidence

All application forms must be supported with the following evidence:

- **Signed Constitution/Articles of Association**
- **Evidence of Property Ownership/Proposed Ownership**
- **Evidence of Proposed Lease**
- **Financial Evidence for the Applicant**
- **Evidence of secured match funding**
- **Landlord Approval for Tenant Applications**
- **Local Government Consent (if applicable)**
- **Quotation Evidence for the works (2 per item)**

You must ensure you provide all the evidence relevant to the project. If you do not, this will delay your application.

Organisation evidence

The required evidence of incorporation depends on the type of Third Sector Group. Below are the accepted forms of evidence:

Organisation Type	Evidence of Incorporation
SCIO/Registered Charity/Charitable Trust	**Charity Registration Number** **Signed Constitution**
CIC (Community Interest Company)- limited by guarantee	**CIC Registration Number** **Signed Articles of Association**

Newer Third Sector Organisations

Any applicants that are Start-Up organisations (operating less than 12 months) are required to provide a full business plan including, initial 12-month cash flow projections.

Evidence of Property Ownership/Proposed Ownership

The following evidence is required:

- **Title Deeds of Property to prove ownership** Applicable to:

- All Third Sector Landlord Applicants that currently own vacant premises and have an identified tenant they intend to lease to.
- Applicants that intend to purchase vacant premises (Third Sector Landlords that intend to purchase vacant property must have an identified tenant at time of application or alternatively the applicant intends to operate their organisation/activity from the vacant property).

If title deeds are not available at application stage as premises not purchased yet, they are required to be submitted before any grant instalment can be paid.

Evidence of Proposed Lease – minimum 12 month term

- **A draft premise lease/expression of interest** between Landlord and Third Sector Tenant to be submitted at time of application (excludes applicants that intend to purchase the vacant premises and operate their organisation/activity from it)
- **A signed copy of the premise lease** between Landlord and Third Sector Tenant to be submitted before any grant funds can be paid out (excludes applicants that go on to buy the premises after the grant award and operate their activities from it).

Financial Evidence

Applicants are required to provide the following documents:

- 12-month Cash Flow (required for all applicants)
- Latest independently verified Financial Accounts (required only for applicants operating more than 12 months)
- Up To Date Management Accounts (required only for applicants operating more than 12 months)

Landlord Approval for Tenant Applications

Tenant Applicants must provide Landlord approval evidence for the works they propose to carry out as detailed in the grant application. The following evidence is accepted:

- Signed and dated written confirmation from the Landlord on headed paper or
- Email from Landlord's business email address sent directly to CommunityDevelopment@falkirk.gov.uk (please note a forwarded email from tenant applicant will not be accepted)

The letter or email must detail the works the Landlord is approving, and this should match the grant application.

Local Authority Consent

Consents required could include the following:

- Planning Permission
- Listed Building Consent
- Building Warrant Approval

- Relevant licences, consents and permits required to operate your activity.

You must obtain any relevant consents and meet any other legislative requirements prior to commencement of works. This will be a condition of the Grant Agreement and formal approval documentation will be required before any Grant Payment is made.

Statutory consent fees are eligible for grant funding where they clearly relate to the Project.

Quotation Evidence

For project expenditure that you wish to fund using grant claim monies you are required to provide **two formal** quotations from different suppliers for each item. These quotations should meet the following requirements:

- Dated within 3 months of the application.
- Quotations to be addressed to the applicant organisation.
- Supplier name, supplier address, VAT registration number (if applicable), description of works, net cost and gross cost is visible on the quotations.

Appraising your application

A Community Development Worker will visit the applicant at the vacant property as part of the appraisal process. Regular appraisal panels will be held to ensure that the application is appraised consistently.

You will initially be informed of the outcome of your application by email, so please ensure the email address you provide is up to date.

Appeal Process

Unsuccessful applicants may appeal the decision within 14 days of receiving the rejection email, stating the grounds for their appeal to CommunityDevelopment@falkirk.gov.uk. The appeal will then be reviewed by the Council and a decision relayed to the applicant within a further 14 days.

Project Execution

On receipt of approval, applicants should proceed with the project as detailed in the grant award. You are now authorised to proceed with works as specified in the grant award.

Payment and Receipts

Applicants must obtain supplier invoices and pay for all works on completion.

• **Supplier Invoices**: Ensure you obtain formal dated invoices with VAT registered numbers (if applicable) on headed paper from your suppliers and include your organisation name and address.
Handwritten invoices or receipts are not acceptable.

Methods of Paying Suppliers

1. By Credit Card:

- Payments made using an **organisation credit card** are eligible if the credit card has been repaid using the organisations own bank account. You must provide the credit card statements and the groups bank statement showing this transaction as evidence of project expenditure.
- Payments made using a **personal credit card are not eligible** and will be excluded from your Claim for Grant Payment.

2. Organisation Debit Card/Bank Accounts:

- Use the Organisation bank account for all transactions. Payments made from personal bank accounts are not accepted.
- You must provide the organisations bank statement showing this transaction as evidence of project expenditure.

Note: Cash payments are ineligible for grant reimbursement as they do not meet our audit trail requirements. Such payments must be excluded from the Claim for Grant Payment.

Changes to Project Specification and/or Costs:

- If your project costs are lower than anticipated in your grant application, the grant payment you receive will be reduced proportionally.
- The grant payment cannot be increased beyond your original grant award if your project costs exceed your initial estimates.
- The grant is awarded solely for the specific project and associated expenditures detailed in your grant application.
- If you wish to make changes to any of the expenditure within your grant application, you must first seek prior written approval from Falkirk Council. Please contact CommunityDevelopment@falkirk.gov.uk in advance of any changes.

Grant Claim

The grant amounts must be claimed by 19 March 2027

Applicants can submit a claim for grant payment after:

Note: VAT that is reclaimable from HMRC is ineligible for grant and must be excluded from claims. The applicants VAT declaration must be completed on all claim submissions.

1. A project element has been successfully completed as per the grant award.
2. Evidence of completion via arranged site visits, or photographic evidence has been provided.
3. A formal suppliers invoice has been received.
4. The necessary evidence of defrayal (bank/card statements) for any prior instalment(s) has been provided.
5. Statutory evidence (where applicable) e.g. planning permission, in relation to the completed project element has been evidenced.

Defrayal Evidence

Bank Statement Requirements:

A complete bank statement must be provided, showing:

1. The organisation name
2. The sort code
3. The account number
4. The invoice being debited from the bank account (supplier name must be visible and amount must match)
5. Cheque/ Credit Card Payment

A claim for grant payment form must accompany all instalment claims.

- Evidence of spend, including:
    - Copies of invoices from all suppliers.
    - Copies of the organisations bank statements, showing supplier payments leaving the organisations bank account.
    - Photographs of completed works.

Fair Work First & Net Zero

All Third Sector organisations applying to this programme are expected to be working towards compliance with the Scottish Government's Fair Work First approach and contribute towards Scotland's journey to Net Zero by 2045. This will not be achievable for all grantees within the project period, but efforts to work towards these measures will further evidence Falkirk Council's commitment to tackling poverty, promoting fair work, and contributing to a just transition to Net Zero.

- Payment of at least the Real Living Wage to all directly employed staff aged 16 and over.
- Appropriate channels for effective workers' voice, such as trade union recognition or other formal mechanisms appropriate to the organisations nature, size and scope.
- Investment in workforce development.
- No inappropriate use of zero-hours contracts.
- Action to tackle the gender pay gap and create a more diverse and inclusive workplace.
- Offering flexible and family-friendly working practices.
- Commitment to not using fire-and-rehire practices.

Applicants are encouraged to:

- Show how their activities contribute to reducing carbon emissions, and/or
- Demonstrate steps their organisation is taking towards a credible plan for reducing greenhouse gas emissions in line with Scotland's 2045 Net Zero target.

Subsidy Control

Applicants must ensure that all proposed projects comply with UK subsidy control law.

- Falkirk Council, as a public authority, is required to comply with the Subsidy Control Act 2022, which took effect on 4 January 2023, when awarding any funding or support. Where a provisional decision is made to fund your organisation and the Council considers that the support may constitute a subsidy, you may be asked to provide further information to allow assessment of the subsidy position.
- To complete this assessment, additional clarification or documentation may be requested prior to any grant award.
- No funding decision will be finalised until a subsidy-compliant route has been identified. Any provisional award will remain conditional on the subsidy control position being satisfactorily resolved before funding is committed.
- Falkirk Council cannot provide legal advice on subsidy control. It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure their project is compliant. The Council will, however, be happy to discuss potential subsidy exemptions or streamlined routes where appropriate following any approval in principle.

For more information on the Vacant Premises Improvement Grant and other support available to Falkirk Third Sector organisations please contact the Community Development Team: CommunityDevelopment@falkirk.gov.uk

Falkirk Council website: Community funding - Falkirk Council

The Vacant Premises Improvement Grant programme is funded by the UK Government's Pride in Place Impact Fund and is delivered by Falkirk Council.