



Guidance for Empty Unit Activation Grant

The Empty Unit Activation Grant is designed to support Croydon-based micro and small businesses to bring vacant commercial units back into active use.



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Accessibility

We are committed to ensuring that all eligible businesses can access this funding opportunity.

If you require support to complete your application, please contact the Economic Development Team via conciergebusinesssupport@croydon.gov.uk. Reasonable adjustments and guidance can be provided where needed.

Are we the right funder for you

We support projects that will deliver clear economic and community impact through the reoccupation and activation of vacant commercial units in Croydon.

This programme focuses on bringing empty spaces back into use, increasing footfall, and supporting the growth of independent local businesses. Funding is limited and demand is expected to be high, therefore not all applications will be successful.

This fund is suitable for businesses that:

- Are ready to occupy a vacant commercial unit in Croydon
- Require capital support to make the unit operational
- Can demonstrate a clear, deliverable plan and long-term sustainability

What We fund

We fund projects that will deliver clear and immediate impact in activating vacant units and contributing to Croydon's local economy.

We will prioritise a limited number of high-quality applications that strongly align with the programme's objectives, including reducing vacancy, increasing footfall, and supporting local enterprise.

- **Costs:** Grants support capital costs only, including refurbishment, fit-out, and activation of vacant units. Ongoing operational costs (e.g. rent, salaries, utilities) are not eligible.
- **Amount:** Grants of up to £10,000 are available per business. The total programme fund is £100,000, supporting up to 10 projects.
- **Time:** Projects must be ready to proceed, with works starting within one month of receiving funding and completed within an agreed timeframe.
- **Businesses:** We support micro and small independent businesses located in, or moving into, Croydon. Chains, franchises, and national brands are not eligible.



We fund projects that are



- A strong fit with the programme objectives
- Clearly contribute to the activation of vacant commercial units
- Align with priorities to reduce vacancy, increase footfall, and support local economic growth
- Ambitious and deliverable
- Bring forward high-quality, well-planned uses for empty units
- Create a positive and lasting impact on the local area
- Demonstrate a clear understanding of the market, location, and customer base
- Contributing to wider economic impact
- Increase footfall and activity in town or district centres
- Support local employment and enterprise growth
- Enhance the vibrancy and attractiveness of the high street
- Community-focused and locally relevant
- Respond to the needs and character of the local area
- Provide benefits to local residents and businesses
- Contribute to a diverse and inclusive local economy
- Collaborative and well-connected

We do not fund projects that are



- Chains, franchises, or national brands
- Businesses that are not based in Croydon
- Businesses that cannot demonstrate a viable plan to occupy a vacant unit
- Ongoing operational costs (e.g. rent, utilities, salaries)
- Costs not directly related to fit-out, refurbishment, or activation
- Projects without the required three quotes for works
- Projects that do not involve a vacant commercial unit
- Projects that are not ready to proceed within the required timeframe
- Proposals that do not demonstrate clear economic or community benefit
- Activities that fall outside the scope of commercial unit activation



Eligibility Criteria and Project requirements

This fund is intended to support independent micro and small businesses that will contribute to the vitality and sustainability of Croydon's local economy.

Applicants must:

- Be a micro or small independent business, demonstrating the capacity to operate sustainably
- Be currently operating within Croydon, or planning to relocate into the borough
- Not be part of a chain, franchise, or national brand, ensuring that funding supports the growth of local enterprise and distinct high street offer

We are particularly interested in businesses that enhance the diversity, character, and resilience of Croydon's town and district centres.

Project Requirements

Projects must demonstrate that they are ready, deliverable, and capable of achieving impact within a short timeframe.

Applicants must:

- At least 50% of employees must be Croydon residents. Where possible, recruitment should be supported through local employment initiatives such as One Croydon employment programmes (e.g. Trailblazers, Connect to Work) to maximise local benefit.
- Applicants must have secured, or be close to securing, a lease on a vacant commercial unit in Croydon. Evidence such as heads of terms or a signed lease may be required.
- Proposed refurbishment and fit-out works must begin within one month of receiving grant funding, demonstrating readiness to deliver and activate the unit without delay.
- Applicants must provide a minimum of three itemised quotes for all proposed works. These quotes will be reviewed and validated by the Council's appointed surveyor to ensure costs are appropriate, competitive, and represent value for money.

Projects should also:

- Clearly outline the scope of works, including refurbishment and fit-out activities
- Demonstrate how the unit will be made fully operational and open to the public
- Include a realistic timeline showing key milestones from start to completion

Preference will be given to applications that show a high level of preparedness, planning, and ability to deliver quickly, ensuring that vacant units are brought back into use without delay.



Application Process

1. Expression of Interest (EOI)

Applicants are required to submit an initial Expression of Interest by email. This should provide a concise overview of your business and proposed project.

Your EOI should include:

- A brief overview of your business, including what you do and your target market
- Details of the proposed vacant premises you intend to occupy
- An outline of how the grant funding will be used (e.g. fit-out, refurbishment, equipment)
- The expected impact of your project, including how it will contribute to footfall, local economy, or community benefit

The Expression of Interest is intended to be a short, high-level summary to assess initial eligibility and suitability.

Following submission, suitable applicants will be contacted by the Business Concierge team, at conciergebusinesssupport@croydon.gov.uk. This may include a site visit and/or meeting to better understand the proposal, assess readiness, and provide guidance on progressing to the next stage.

2. Full Application

Applicants who are successful at the EOI stage will be invited to submit a full application.

The full application will require more detailed information, including:

- Comprehensive business details, including trading history and operations
- A detailed activation proposal, outlining how the vacant unit will be refurbished and used
- A clear project timeline, including key milestones from start to completion
- A full budget breakdown, supported by a minimum of three quotes for proposed works
- Financial and viability information, such as accounts or forecasts demonstrating sustainability

At this stage, applicants will be expected to demonstrate that the project is well-developed, deliverable, and represents value for money.



3. How Applications are Assessed

All applications will be assessed by the Council's Economic Development Team against a set of core criteria to ensure funding is awarded to projects that deliver the greatest impact and are ready to proceed.

- Applications must clearly demonstrate alignment with the objectives of the fund, including bringing a vacant commercial unit back into active use, supporting the vitality of Croydon's high streets, and contributing to the growth of independent local businesses.
- Impact: Applications will be assessed in line with economic and community benefits of the proposal, including its potential to increase footfall, support local employment, and enhance the diversity and attractiveness of the area. Strong applications will show wider benefits beyond the individual business.
- Deliverability: We will consider whether the project is realistic, well-planned, and ready to proceed, including a clear timeline, evidence of readiness to start within one month, and confidence in delivery within the proposed timeframe.
- Financial Viability: Applications must demonstrate a sustainable business model, with realistic financial projections and evidence that the business can continue operating beyond the grant period.
- Value for Money: We will assess whether the proposed use of funding is appropriate and justified, supported by competitive quotes, and delivers a strong balance between cost and expected impact. Funding decisions will be made based on a balanced assessment across all criteria.

4. Refurbishment Works

The grant process begins with applicants submitting a completed form, basic building plans, budget estimates, evidence of quotes, and any required permissions. Once received, Ayer Associated check eligibility. Eligible applications then undergo a technical review to assess feasibility, regulatory compliance, and contractor suitability, followed by a financial assessment to confirm realistic. The Council makes the final approval decision, after which successful applicants enter into a grant agreement outlining costs, contractors, milestones, and reporting duties. Funds are released either upfront in part or through milestone payments tied to verified progress. Works are monitored to ensure compliance and proper use of funds, with applicants providing progress updates and statutory certificates. The process concludes with a final inspection, verification of deliverables, issuance of any remaining payment, and closure of the project file.



Refurbishment Works (Steps)

1. Application Made

Applicants are required to submit a complete application to Croydon Council. Submissions must include:

- a completed application form;
- outline building plans, which may include simple sketches and/or a basic scope of works;
- detailed budget cost estimates supported by evidence of quotations; and
- details of any permissions obtained or required, including planning permission, change of use, listed building consent, and/or building regulations approval.

Upon receipt, the Council logs the application and assigns a unique application reference number.

2. Initial Eligibility Check

Following receipt of an application, the London Borough of Croydon undertakes an initial eligibility assessment to confirm:

- applicant eligibility, including individual or business status and location;
- compliance with the relevant grant criteria (e.g. new tenant or existing tenant requirements); and
- completion of all required identification and verification checks.

Where an application does not meet the eligibility requirements, it will be rejected and the applicant notified accordingly. Eligible applications will proceed to the next stage of assessment.

Decision:

Application not eligible – application rejected and applicant notified

Application eligible – progresses to technical review

3. Technical Review

Eligible applications are referred to the Council's appointed delivery partner, Ayer Associates, for technical assessment. This review focuses on the feasibility, compliance, and deliverability of the proposed works, including:

- buildability considerations, including structural integrity, fire safety, and party wall matters where relevant;
- background and due-diligence checks on proposed contractor(s), including Companies House and relevant trade body checks, and any potential conflicts of interest;
- compliance with planning use class, planning policy, building regulations, and listed building requirements where applicable; and
- environmental and sustainability considerations.



A non-invasive site survey may be undertaken, with recommendations for further specialist assessment if required.

Output: Technical evaluation report.

4. Financial Assessment

Ayer Associates undertakes a financial review to assess the robustness and affordability of the proposed project. This includes:

- reviewing the scope of works and associated budget to confirm that costs are realistic and appropriate;
- consideration of any additional funding required to ensure that works can be completed in full and in compliance with relevant standards; and
- assessment of overall value for money through a cost-benefit appraisal.

Based on this assessment, a recommended grant amount is determined.

Output: Financial evaluation report.

5. Approval Decision

Croydon Council reviews the assessment outcomes and makes a final funding decision.

Decision:

Approved – application proceeds to grant agreement

Rejected – applicant notified with reasons

Waitlisted – application held subject to funding availability

6. Grant Agreement and Contracting

For approved applications, Ayer Associates prepares a grant agreement setting out:

- the approved grant amount;
- the appointed contractor(s) undertaking the works;
- delivery milestones and interim payment arrangements; and
- monitoring and reporting requirements.

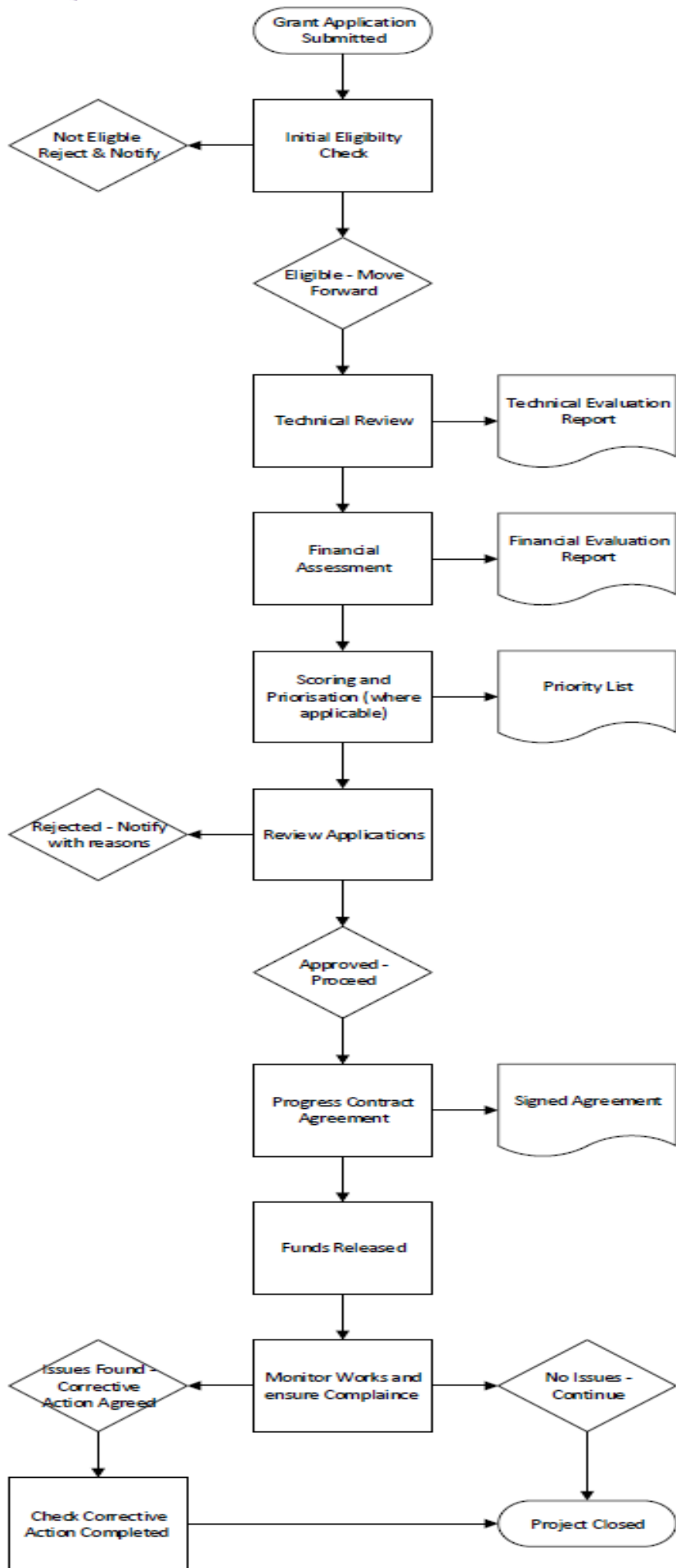
The applicant must formally accept the terms and sign the agreement before any funding is released.

7. Disbursement of Funds

Grant payments are released in line with the agreed payment structure, which may include:

- a partial upfront payment, where applicable;
- staged payments linked to agreed milestones and supported by valuation certificates issued by Ayer Associates; and
- a final payment upon satisfactory completion of the works and issue of a practical completion certificate.

Output: Funds released.





Grant Conditions

Successful applicants will be required to comply with a number of conditions to ensure that public funding is used appropriately, delivers the intended outcomes, and represents value for money.

- Funding must be used strictly for the approved purposes outlined in the application, specifically for capital works such as refurbishment, fit-out, and activation of the vacant unit. The grant cannot be used for any unapproved costs or ongoing operational expenses.
- All proposed works will be subject to review and verification by the Council's appointed survey / delivery partner, who will assess the scope, costs, and suitability of the works to ensure they are appropriate and represent value for money.
- Applicants must demonstrate readiness to proceed, with all funded works required to commence within one month of receiving the grant, and be completed within the agreed project timeframe.
- Recipients will be required to maintain clear and accurate financial records and must provide evidence of expenditure, including invoices, receipts, and proof of payment, upon request. Payments may be subject to verification, and the Council reserves the right to audit the use of funds.
- Applicants must also engage in monitoring and reporting requirements, which may include providing updates on project progress, completion outcomes, business performance, and evidence of impact such as job creation or increased footfall.
- As part of the grant agreement, successful applicants may be required to acknowledge the support of Croydon Council in promotional materials, signage, or public communications where appropriate. The Council may also request access to the premises for site visits during and after project delivery to verify progress and outcomes.
- Failure to comply with any of the above conditions, including misuse of funds, delays without reasonable justification, failure to cooperate with appointed surveyors, or failure to provide required evidence or reporting, may result in the withdrawal or recovery of grant funding, either in part or in full.

Submission Guidance

Applications for the Empty Shop Unit Activation Grant will open in April 2026.

All applicants are required to submit an initial Expression of Interest (EOI) by email. This should provide a concise overview of your business and proposed project, enabling the Council to assess initial eligibility and suitability for the programme.

Expressions of Interest must be submitted to: conciergebusinesssupport@croydon.gov.uk

Your email should clearly outline:

- A brief overview of your business, including the nature of your products or services



- Details of the vacant unit you intend to occupy, including location and lease status
- An outline of how the grant funding will be used, including proposed refurbishment or fit-out works
- The anticipated impact of your project, including contribution to local footfall, employment, and high street activity

Please include the following in the subject line of your email:

Empty Shop Unit Activation Grant – Expression of Interest – [Business Name]

The Expression of Interest stage is intended to be a short, high-level submission. Applicants who demonstrate a strong fit with the programme will be contacted by the Council's Economic Development Business Support Team and may be invited to progress to the full application stage.

FAQs

Question	Answer
How much funding can I apply for?	Up to £10,000 per business.
Do I need a lease before applying?	You must have secured, or be close to securing, a lease on a vacant commercial unit. Evidence may be requested.
Can I apply for multiple units?	No, applications are limited to one unit per business.
How long does the process take?	Applicants will be notified following assessment of EOIs and full applications. Timelines may vary depending on demand.
What can the grant be used for?	The grant can be used for capital costs only, including refurbishment, fit-out, and activation. It cannot be used for rent, salaries, or utilities.
Can I apply if my business is not yet trading?	Yes, start-ups can apply if they demonstrate a clear and viable business plan.
Do I need to provide quotes?	Yes, a minimum of three itemised quotes is required. These will be validated by the Council's appointed surveyor.



Question	Answer
When do the works need to start?	Works must begin within one month of receiving funding.
What happens after I submit an Expression of Interest?	Suitable applicants will be contacted by the Economic Development Business Support Team and may be invited to submit a full application.
Will I receive the funding upfront?	Payment arrangements will be confirmed upon approval and may be subject to verification of works and expenditure.
What happens if my project is delayed?	Delays must be communicated to the Council. Unjustified delays may affect funding.
Do I need to recruit locally?	Yes, at least 50% of employees must be Croydon residents, with recruitment encouraged through local programmes (e.g. Trailblazers, Connect to Work).
Can I apply if I already occupy a unit?	No, the fund is for vacant commercial units only.
Will I need to report on outcomes?	Yes, successful applicants must provide monitoring and impact information.

Further Support

For further information or support with your application, please contact:

conciergebusinesssupport@croydon.gov.uk