



## ECONOMIC INCENTIVE SCHEME FOR VACANT PROPERTIES IN URBAN AREAS

Waterford City & County Council is offering incentives to attract new retail and other businesses within the core retail area of the City Centre, towns and village centres of Waterford (as defined in the City and County Development Plans) in order to bring vibrancy and vitality to the city and town and village centres and to address vacancy in these areas.

The Executive may, on a discretionary basis, provide support to businesses outside the city, town, village centres in exceptional cases. See Section 10.1 for the information and factors to be taken into consideration by the Executive in determining as to whether or not it is appropriate to consider a business outside the city, town, village centre. The decision of the Executive is discretionary and final.

### Purpose of the scheme:

It is intended to ensure that any incoming retail, office or service use will respect and enhance the multifaceted character of the area and will allow and encourage a diversity of uses to increase its overall attractiveness for shopping, leisure and business purposes.

There will be a strong presumption in favour of grant-aid for higher order comparison retail outlets including fashion outlets – both multiple and independent stores, 'lifestyle stores', flagship stores, niche and specialist retailers such as home furnishings, beauty products, jewellers and bookshops.

It is Waterford City & County Council's policy to support economic growth within the city and county. The aim is to attract a variety of retail, service and office-based businesses that will create opportunities for all citizens.

The following businesses (a) would be considered for the scheme:

#### a) Eligible categories of business

- Cosmetics / beauty products
- Specialist Health Food shops
- Shoe shops
- Toy shops
- Hi-tech / High-end electronics
- Music shops
- Specialist (hobby) shops
- Artisan / Craft Shops
- Giftware/Interiors
- Fashion businesses and shops
- High end retail - globally scaled
- Shops offering a unique experience

#### b) Ineligible businesses\*

- Amusement arcades/ bookmakers/ betting shops
- Catalogue shop
- Discount shop
- Fast food outlet/ cafe/ restaurant/ takeaway
- Mobile phone/ Internet shop
- Newsagents/ convenience store
- Off license
- Night club/ pub
- Head/ Grow Shop
- Vaping
- Adult shop
- Hair dresser/ Beauty salon/ nail bar/ tanning studio
- Supermarket

\* In exceptional circumstances and where an application is of a high standard which demonstrates economic benefit to the area and where it does not cause displacement to existing businesses, consideration may be given to applications from the businesses classified as ineligible above.

In addition, the following factors will be considered when determining eligibility for Grant Aid:

- The number and proximity of similar outlets/ services already operating in the area
- The scale of the proposed outlet
- The physical impact of the proposed use on the internal structure of the building in which it will be located
- The quality of the shop front design and associate signage, which should be of high quality and be in accordance with the guidelines produced by Waterford City & County Council.

c) **Any non-retail business** which applies for grant aid under this scheme, will be judged on the anticipated economic impact they may have in the area e.g. number of jobs being created, attracting improved footfall to the area and enhancing the overall attractiveness of the city/town/ village centre.

d) **Waterford Cultural Quarter** - in addition, location specific supports will be considered for Waterford Cultural Quarter. Preference will be given to applicants that support the production and retail of arts, crafts and creative / cultural enterprises; and which incentivise the community of WCQ to showcase their production methods as well as selling products.

## Use of property

- a) Proposals should be restricted to lands zoned city/ town/ village centre use as set out in the relevant development plan.
- b) Applicants for the scheme should establish and demonstrate that the proposal is consistent with any grant of planning permission on the property/unit.

## Status of property to qualify for Economic Incentive Scheme for vacant property

In order to qualify for this scheme, the property must be vacant for at least one month on the day the application form is submitted.

## Businesses relocating to a similar sized premises within the eligible areas will not qualify for grant relief under the scheme

The operation of the Economic Incentive Scheme for vacant properties shall not result in the displacement of a business from one property to another and/or from the same property.

However, should a proposed business or retail use type be able to adequately demonstrate that they require a larger premises that will have a positive economic impact, consideration will be given to the inclusion of such a proposal under the terms of this scheme.

## Level of Funding

**Rates Incentive:** Successful applicants will be eligible for up to three years rates free (up to a maximum of €5,000 per annum), subject to the applicant continuing to trade.

**Start-up Grant:** In addition, a Start Up Grant will be provided over three years on a step back basis to contribute towards fit out and overheads. The grant will be paid each year on production of proof of expenditure.

Year 1: €3,000  
Year 2: €2,000  
Year 3: €1,000

ECONOMIC INCENTIVE GRANT		
Retail Incentive	Start-up Grant	Soft Supports
Rates Relief provided for 3 years  (maximum €5,000 per annum)	Year 1: Fit-out contribution €3,000  Year 2: Fit-out contribution €2,000  Year 3: Fit-out contribution €1,000	Site identification and market data  Training, mentoring, networking, marketing

**Soft Supports:** A package of soft supports will also be provided to successful applicants:

- Assistance in identifying suitable property
- LEO supports including mentoring and training etc., where eligibility criteria are met.
- Networking with local businesses, where possible.
- Marketing support via Shop Waterford
- Advice on reducing the business carbon footprint.

Under the scheme, participants will also receive advice from the Climate Action Team as to how to keep energy and resource costs low. This is part of the Council's overall efforts to help all businesses across Waterford reduce their carbon footprint.

## **'De minimis' Aid:** The Economic Incentive Scheme counts as De Minimis State Aid.

Small amounts of aid to one undertaking, i.e. less than €200,000 in any rolling 3-year period, are considered to be so small as to have no appreciable effect on competition or trade and, under the De Minimis rule, these are exempt from the general ban on State aid. However, De Minimis payments to one undertaking under a number of measures or schemes have to **cumulatively** observe the €200,000 limit.

### **Qualifying Costs for Start Up Grant**

The eligible qualifying costs applicable for the Start Up Grant under the Economic Incentive Scheme for Vacant Properties in Urban Areas are fit out/shop front improvement costs and overheads within the three-year period of the agreement. Any reasonable costs associated with either of the above will qualify for grant relief subject to receipt of valid invoices and verification/ approval that costs were incurred.

### **Other Qualifying Criteria**

Applicants who have previously benefitted from other economic incentive schemes administered by the Economic Development Department of Waterford City & County Council will not be eligible for this scheme, unless they can demonstrate significant economic benefit to the urban area in terms of job creation of increased footfall.

### **Effective period for operation of Economic Incentive Scheme for Vacant Properties in Urban Areas**

The scheme will be effective from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2026 until the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2026. Only complete applications received by this end date will be considered.

### **Assessment of Applications**

All applications will be assessed under the above Guidelines & Criteria and on the basis of their completed Application Form. Any Grant awarded will be further **subject to the availability of the necessary funds** for this scheme. It shall be a condition of the scheme that:

- (i) An application for the Scheme is made on the online Economic Incentive Scheme Application Form.
- (ii) The scheme shall apply to the authorised planning use of premises only.
- (iii) All applications will be reviewed on an individual basis and acceptance onto the Scheme will be at the sole discretion of Waterford City & County Council.
- (iv) An entitlement to the Start Up Grant under this Scheme is personal to the Qualifying Occupier entitled thereto and shall not be capable of being assigned or shared with any third party. Any provision in an agreement or lease for the assignment or sharing of such entitlements shall be void.
- (v) Failure to continue to meet the criteria of the scheme may result in the cessation of the scheme.

### **Consideration will only be given to supporting businesses at locations outside the city/town/ village centre where:**

- The scheme will support new uses in vacant and underutilised Protected Structures within settlements generally, irrespective of the location.
- The proposed business would not be more suited to enhancing the retail/ leisure/ service offering within the city/town/village centre
- The proposed location cannot detract from footfall within the city/town/village centre and must outline details of their catchment area to demonstrate this
- The business cannot compete with an existing business based in the city/town/village centre of the area or the closest town/village centre and must be able to demonstrate that they would not be in competition with an existing business
- The applicant must demonstrate that there are no suitable premises within the city/town/village centre for the business and the adjacent town.
- The applicant must demonstrate that if the business cannot open in their preferred location that employment opportunities will be lost to the area
- The applicant must demonstrate that the skills/resources required to operate at the preferred location are not accessible at an alternative location in the city/town/village centre.
- The availability of car parking within the city/town/village centre will not be considered in evaluating any application and should not form part of the rationale to locate in an out-of-town location.

Locations eligible under the Economic Incentive Scheme are zoned:	
Level 1	Waterford City Centre – Core Retail and Town Centre Core
Level 2	Dungarvan & Tramore - Town Centre Core
Level 3	Town Centre Core: Ardmore, Ballymacarbry, Cappoquin, Dunhill, Dunmore East, Kilmacthomas, Kilmeaden, Lismore, Passage East, Portlaw, Stradbally, Tallow, Sean Phobal/ An Rinn
Level 4	Town Centre Core: Aglish, Annestown, Baile Na nGall, Ballinroad, Ballyaneen, Ballyduff Lower (East), Ballyduff Upper (West), Bawnfune, Bunmahon/ Knockmahon, Cheekpoint, Clashmore, Clonmel Environs, Clonea Power, Crooke, Fenor, Heilbhic, Kill, Knockanore, Lemybrien, Maoil na Choirne, Piltown, Rathgormuck, Tournaeena, Villierstown

**Appeal Mechanism:** The Director of Economic Development of Waterford City & County Council is responsible for approval or not of the grant scheme subject to the Guidelines & Criteria for the Waterford City & County Council Economic Incentive Scheme.

Should any body/individual wish to appeal a decision, they may do so by stating in writing the entire basis for their appeal and this appeal should be addressed to:  
Chief Executive, Waterford City & County Council, City Hall, The Mall, Waterford.

The decision of the Chief Executive in respect of such an appeal will be final, conclusive and binding on all parties.

**Application Forms** are to be completed and submitted online.

General queries regarding the scheme should be directed to:

Julie Walsh  
 +353 (0)87 420 6999  
 [juliewalsh@waterfordcouncil.ie](mailto:juliewalsh@waterfordcouncil.ie)  
 Economic Development Department, 35 The Mall, Waterford. X91 DN23  
 [Economic Development Grants - EIS](#)

**Freedom of Information:** Applicants should be aware that, under the Freedom of Information Act 2014, information provided by them in this Application may be liable to be disclosed. Applicants are asked to consider if any of the information provided by them in their Application should not be disclosed because of its' confidentiality or commercial sensitivity.

If Applicants consider that certain information is not to be disclosed because of its' confidentiality or commercial sensitivity, Applicants must, when providing such information, clearly identify such information and specify the reasons for its' confidentiality or commercial sensitivity.

If Applicants do not identify information as confidential or commercial sensitive, it is liable to be released in response to a Freedom of Information request without further notice or consultation with the Applicant.

Waterford City & County Council will, where possible, consult with the Applicant about confidential or commercial sensitive information so identified before making a decision on a request received under Freedom of Information.

