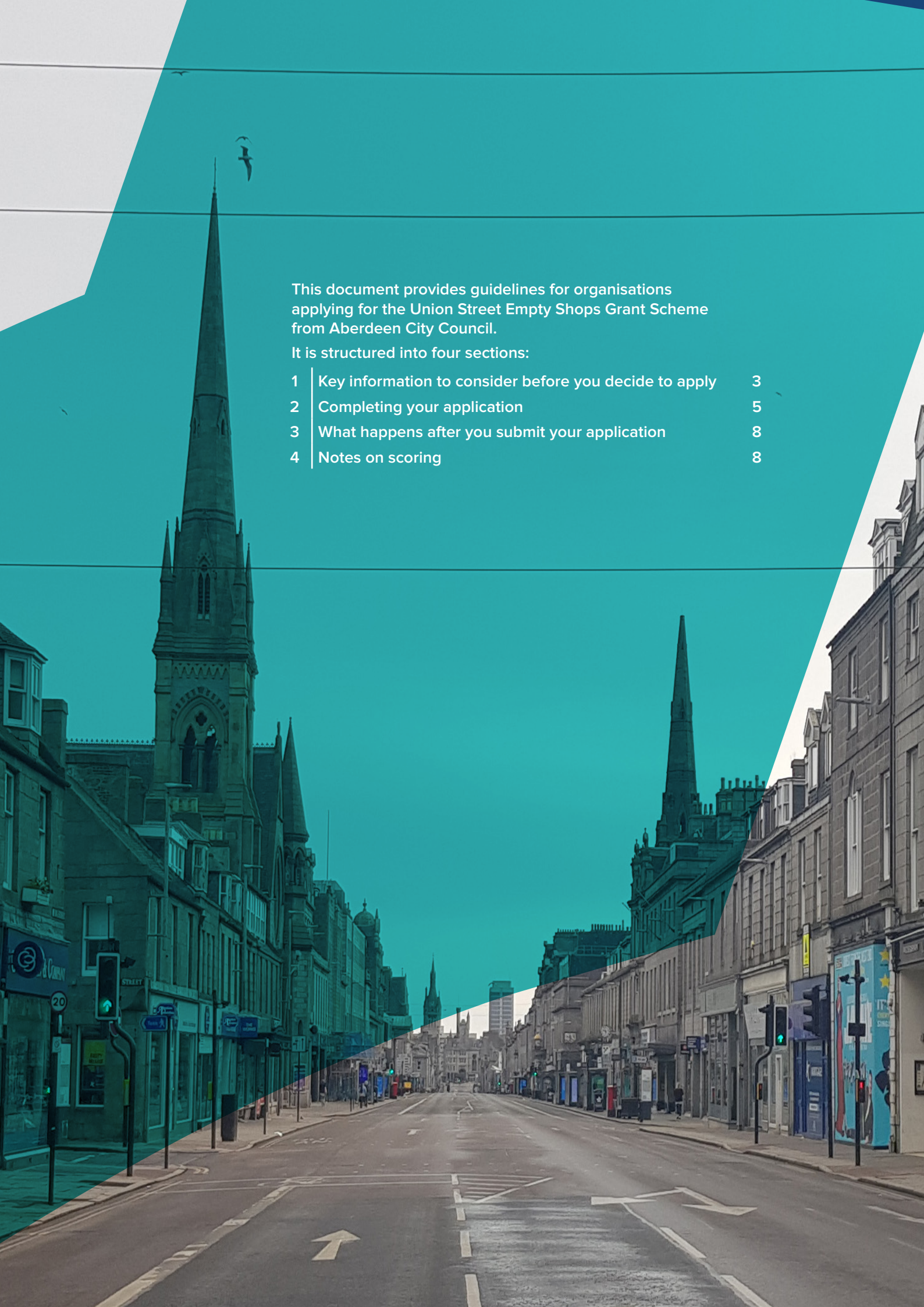




# Union Street Empty Shops Grant Scheme Application Guidance





This document provides guidelines for organisations applying for the Union Street Empty Shops Grant Scheme from Aberdeen City Council.

It is structured into four sections:

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## KEY INFORMATION TO CONSIDER BEFORE YOU APPLY

**Applicants must contact the funding team prior to submission to discuss the project idea and application. To contact a member of the team please email [unionstreet@aberdeencity.gov.uk](mailto:unionstreet@aberdeencity.gov.uk)**

**The core objectives of the Union Street Empty Shops Grant Scheme are to:**

- Reduce the number of vacant shops on Union Street through supporting eligible physical works required for internal reconfiguration for new uses – be that retail, cultural, hospitality or office space
- Leverage private investment in vacant shops on Union Street to bring them back into use
- Support new business start-ups and entrepreneurs, and create new employment opportunities, through enabling the provision of suitable premises on Union Street

### a) Who can apply for the Union Street Empty Shops Grant Scheme?

Applications will be considered from:

- property owners, or their representatives, of vacant Union Street premises. Where the application is made on behalf of the owner, evidence will be required that the contact person is able to act on behalf of the owner and can enter into a legal agreement with Aberdeen City Council regarding the grant. It is expected that property owners applying have a new tenant for the premises lined up, or are in the process of securing a new tenant.
- prospective or new leaseholders of a Union Street premise which is currently vacant, where trading or operations have not yet begun. Where a new leaseholder/tenant is making the application, it is a requirement that the property owner provides a supporting letter to indicate consent for the grant application.

Leaseholders who are new or expanding business owners will be prioritised. Applications from existing businesses moving from elsewhere within the city boundary will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Ineligible businesses include, but are not limited to, large national chains (ie. Tesco, Boots, Starbucks), betting shops, sex shops, pawn brokers, tanning salons, tobacconists and vape shops. Where the leaseholder applying is a registered charity or not-for-profit organisation, Aberdeen City Council would need to be satisfied that the new venture adds to the amenity of Union Street.

### b) How much funding is available?

The Union Street Empty Shops Grant Scheme offered by Aberdeen City Council totals £1 million, with grants available to be paid from now until 31 March 2026 or until such time as funding has been fully allocated.

Grant awards from this Fund will offer up to 50% of project costs for eligible physical works and reconfiguration with a maximum award amount of £35,000 per premises. Remaining project costs should be met by the applicant and/or private investment or sourced from alternative public funds.

Only one application per premise may be submitted over the duration of the scheme.



**c) What can the funding be used for?**

This fund will support project costs for eligible internal physical works and reconfiguration of ground floor vacant Union Street units to enable reoccupation, new commercial activity and support new employment opportunities.

Funding can be spent on capital investment costs only. Revenue or operating costs are not eligible.

Eligible project costs include:

- internal reconfiguration to support new retail, office, work, exhibition space or similar
- 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
- installation of fixtures including slat walling and shelving or fittings such as display units or business equipment (fittings only considered where essential for new business operations)
- business equipment where it is specific and integral to the new business operations (*discretionary*)
- internal improvements as recommended on the building’s Energy Performance Certificate
- accessibility improvements above and beyond those required to meet legal requirements

The fund should be used to complete works which enable the space to become functional, rather than to deliver a bespoke fit-out.

Architect fees and professional costs associated with the capital expenditure may be included (with 10-12% of total project costs considered maximum). Irrecoverable VAT can be included as an eligible cost.

External works and improvements (including replacement windows and doors, signage and frontages, exterior upgrades) and residential conversions are not eligible project costs under the Union Street Empty Shops Grant Scheme. This is a non-exhaustive list and additions may be made at any time.

**d) Is consent required?**

Consents required could include Planning Permission, Listed building Consent and Building Warrant Approval. 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. Please contact [pi@aberdeencity.gov.uk](mailto:pi@aberdeencity.gov.uk) for pre-advice about obtaining these consents through the Council.

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

**e) When can applications be submitted?**

Applications will be accepted until 30 September 2025, or until such time as funding has been fully allocated. Therefore early applications are strongly encouraged. All grants must be paid out by the Fund end date of 31 March 2026.

**f) Who allocates the funds?**

All applications will be assessed by the Project Team with consideration given to:

- meeting eligibility requirements and minimum application guidance;
- demonstrating value for money;
- demonstrating strategic alignment with the Grant Scheme objectives and priorities.

A final award decision on applications recommended for funding will be made by the Project Review Panel including Chief Officers.

**g) Who will see my information?**

Please see [link](#) for our data privacy notice.

# COMPLETING YOUR APPLICATION

The link to download an application form can be found [here](#).

## Section 1 – Applicant Details

Please provide information about who is making the request for funding. Note the sections for further information from an owner/landlord applicant or a new/prospective tenant applicant.

A due diligence check will be carried out, including a check on to-date payment of business rates, and we ask for some organisational background information to enable this. We may ask for additional paperwork and references to be provided to ensure applicant eligibility or to enable us to prioritise applications.

## Section 2 – Works Proposal

### 2.1 Description of Works

Please provide a Project Title which can be used to refer to the application throughout the assessment and approval process. The Project Title should include the address of the Union Street property for which the application is being made.

All other fields should be completed. Please refer to section (b) above.

### 2.2 Works Overview

Please provide a summary of the proposed works covering the bullet points directed.

## Section 3 – Funding

### 3.1 Expenditure

Please provide a full breakdown of expenditure for the Project. This can be based on estimates if quotes have not yet been sought. Please ensure familiarity with Section 10 of the application and guidance (public procurement) when seeking quotes.

Follow the format of the tables provided. Table 1 should detail the breakdown in full, line by line, of ALL expenditure expected to complete and deliver the Project.

Table 2 should breakdown spend across the Grant Scheme and the additionally sourced funding; and across the three financial years (if relevant). Please refer closely to the eligible costs under the Grant Scheme as detailed in section (c) above when completing this table.

Funding is available for 2023/24 and 2024/25 and until the end of 2025/26 financial years. If your Project will complete in 2023/24 then please only detail spend against this financial year.

Please note for successful bids, evidence of quotations will be sought at issuing of Grant Agreement. All applicants should be aware that they will be required to share evidence of all costs incurred during the Project at reporting stages, and failure to provide satisfactory evidence of costs incurred and adherence to public procurement rules may result in deduction of grant.

### 3.2 Additionality

Please explain the impact of the Grant Scheme on the Project, for example de-risking a new venture or accelerating the project timeline.

### 3.3 Payment Arrangements

Grant funding for approved projects will be paid in arrears, in agreed instalments on production of invoices as detailed in the Grant Agreement.

Final instalment of the funding award will only be payable on production of certificates at Project end (completion certificate; renewed Energy Performance Certificate; end of Project report).

If these arrangements will not support delivery of your project, please give an explanation as to why and suggest a proposed milestone and funding release schedule for consideration. Please note that 'advance works' milestones will only be considered on an exceptional basis.

#### 4.0 – Strategic Alignment

In this section you should indicate and explain how your project aligns with Aberdeen City Council strategic policies and action plans. A number of relevant interventions have been outlined and you should detail which, if any, your Project will deliver on.

The relevant interventions are adapted from [Aberdeen City Council's Local Outcome Improvement Plan](#), [Net Zero Aberdeen Routemap](#), [City Centre Masterplan](#) and [Union Street Empty Shops Action Plan](#).

It is not essential that the Project delivers on any of these interventions, but those that do will be allocated additional points at the assessment stage.

#### 5.0 – Equality and Diversity

Provide information about how your project is open and encourages diversity and how it removes potential barriers allowing for equal opportunity. Describe ways in which your organisation does, or will, consider and seek to improve the impact on the people connected with the project be that employees, customers, suppliers and the wider community.

If your organisation has an equality and diversity statement or policy, please attach this in your application submission or refer to Aberdeen City Council's Diversity and Equality Policy.

#### 6.0 – Project Deliverability

##### 6.1

We need to know that the project as described is deliverable and has a good chance of success. Please provide details of who will project manage the works and their experience of delivering similar projects. If known please include who will be contracted to deliver the works, confirming their capacity and capability to do so.

##### 6.2

It is important that you have robust processes, especially around project finance that will enable you to submit reports which include a breakdown of eligible grant-funded expenditure against total expenditure. Please describe how you will approach this. We also need to know what your governance structure is.

##### 6.3

Please give the expected timeline for the project to include dates from initial application through to quotation and appointment of contractors, start and end dates for works, and finally the expected occupation of the unit.

##### 6.4

Please give details about how the property will be used on completion of the Project. Details from the Business Plan of the new tenant should be provided, or it can be attached in full to the application.

Details of the lease being offered to the new tenant should be provided, or a copy of the lease can be attached to the application. Given the fund objectives, a lease at commercially-attractive rent levels, of minimum term 5 years and offering incentives such as a rent-free period will be scored highly at assessment stage. Where the term is less than 5 years, justification should be given.

#### 7.0 – Risks

Please describe what you perceive to be the main risks to your Project and what mitigation plans you have in place. If a Risk Register has been completed for the Project please include this as a supporting document.

At a minimum we are expecting each project to consider cost contingencies and expand on:

- Cost increases
- Material availability
- Time delays
- Contractor availability and/or Business Recruitment
- Meeting costs not covered by the Grant Scheme ie. revenue and maintenance costs

### 8.0 – Documents and Statements

Alongside your application form, you should submit the following documents and confirm on the application that you have done so:

- Proof of ownership (mandatory if landlord applicant)
- Proof of lease
- Supporting Letter indicating consent of the grant application and work as proposed in Section 2.3 from landlord (mandatory if tenant applicant)
- Proof of additional project funding secured (mandatory – a signed confirmation letter or similar)
- Equality and Diversity Policy
- Risk Register
- Business Plan
- Any other supporting materials – information about your Organisation, a marketing plan, relevant consultation, stakeholders/partners information or evaluation of previous projects

### 9.0 – Procurement

Please see link below providing information on procurement and thresholds: [How to do business with Commercial & Procurement Shared Services](#)

### 10.0 – Public Subsidy

Provide a breakdown of all public funding received by the organisation in the last 3 years. This is to ensure the public subsidy threshold has not been exceeded. Please see [link](#) for more information.

### 11.0 – Declaration & Use of Your Information

Please read the Data Protection statement and declaration carefully and sign and date the form before submitting by email to [unionstreet@aberdeencity.gov.uk](mailto:unionstreet@aberdeencity.gov.uk)



## WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

All applications will be assessed by officers within the Project Team (see notes on scoring below) with the final decision on fund allocation at the discretion of the Project Review Panel including Chief Officers.

The Project Review Panel will meet monthly to make funding decisions and applicants will be notified of the outcome thereafter.

Grant agreements will be issued to successful applicants as soon as possible.

Unsuccessful applicants will be provided with feedback on their submission and, where this can be addressed, have the right to reapply within the Project timescale.

## NOTES ON SCORING

Applications received to the Grant Scheme will be scored against the core objectives as detailed at the beginning of this Guidance, and funding awards prioritised accordingly.

The most recent Union Street 'walkabout' survey in May 2023 found 42 vacant ground floor units. The Grant Scheme offers funding for the specific purpose of reconfiguring these vacant units for a new use; providing capital funds that a new tenant may not have available to do the works required; de-risking (to an extent) lease commitment by new tenants; and sustainably enhancing the 'stock' of units on Union Street to allow new ventures, be they retail, cultural, hospitality or office space, to embark on trading.

The vast majority of Union Street ground floor units are privately owned. The match funding element of the grant award aims to leverage private sector engagement and investment in Union Street, acting as a catalyst for regeneration and reactivation of spaces which subsequently will increase interest and footfall on the street.

The Grant Scheme is borne from the Council's Empty Shops Action Plan. Therefore applications to the fund which will support delivery of the Plan's programme areas (distinctive Aberdeen; culture and heritage; net zero Union Street; enterprising Union Street) will be scored highly. Key outcomes which will be measured include the m2 of floor space improved; number of new jobs created; and the reduction in CO2 emissions from the improved units.

With support in promoting and raising awareness of the Grant Scheme from city stakeholders, including Our Union Street, we encourage a collaborative approach to applications between landlords and new tenants. Sustainable new ventures on Union Street, supported by commercially attractive rent levels and flexible lease terms, will ensure impact from the Grant Scheme and score highly.

The Grant Scheme is being offered over the 2023/24 and 2024/25 financial years and until the end of 2025/26 financial years. Interest and applications will be evaluated and monitored during this period and there is scope that the Fund conditions and priorities may change. It is hoped that the Fund will result in a reduced number of vacant units on Union Street and consequently, increased footfall and a revitalised city centre offering.



