

Clare County Council

Long Term Vacant Property Incentive Scheme

1. Overview

An attractive commercial area contributes significantly to a location's competitiveness from a retail and economic growth perspective. Vibrant streets and buildings encourage people to feel welcome, increasing footfall, street activity and property values whilst also encouraging a longer stay by shoppers and visitors. They also enhance community pride and a sense of place complementing the work of active community groups and Clare County Council.

The Long Term Vacant Property Incentive Scheme seeks to encourage businesses to occupy long term vacant commercial premises that have been previously occupied for commercial rates purposes. The purpose of the scheme is to give an incentive to business owners to occupy vacant premises by lowering entry costs through support and a grant related to the level of rates payable on the property. The scheme applies to all rated commercial properties in the county that have been previously occupied for commercial rates purposes.

By encouraging the re-occupation of vacant premises that were previously occupied and now vacant, the Council will support the improvement in the appearance and attraction of commercial locations and thereby will contribute indirectly to increased footfall for existing businesses.

It is hoped that any incoming retail or office use or other uses 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. It is important to ensure that the character of prime retail streets is protected and enhanced. An over concentration of non-retail uses within the area can fragment the continuity of retail frontages, and lead to an erosion and dilution of retail character and ultimately a reduction in the attractiveness of the area as a shopping destination.

2. Objectives of the scheme

- i. To encourage new businesses to occupy commercial premises, preferably street level retail units that were previously occupied and then have been vacant over two years.
- ii. Reduce the negative visual impact of empty commercial properties.
- iii. Generate and support new business outlets to attract increased footfall and benefit all outlets.
- iv. Support existing enterprises to grow and develop their product/service offering.
- v. To provide limited financial assistance to make it more attractive for new businesses to establish in areas where there are several vacant premises.
- vi. To promote job creation and employment.
- vii. To deliver on the commitment of the council to contribute to economic development, regeneration and recovery in the county
- viii. To achieve long term occupation of commercial properties. Occupation of less than one year will not qualify for grant aid under this scheme.

3. Details of the Long Term Vacant Property Incentive Scheme and Business Set Up Supports.

In addition to the grant aid potentially available for occupying long vacant properties, the council also provides business supports through its local enterprise office. Set out below are details of these supports, which vary depending on how long the business is in operation, together with the vacant property incentive scheme detail.

3.1 Business Start Package

Designed for new start up enterprises or those relocating which have been trading less than 12 months or for business expansions.

- i. Confidential One to One business advice.
- ii. Free participation on a "Start Your Own Business" training course.
- iii. Free mentoring support up to maximum of 6 hours (type of mentoring support provided subject to the specific needs of the enterprise).
- iv. Access to loan funding for amounts between €2,000-€25,000 from our partners Microfinance Ireland – Local Enterprise Office will assist with the application process.
- v. Access to Planning Advice Clinic.

- vi. **Long Vacant Property Incentive** - Grant of 75% of commercial rates payable in year one up to a maximum of €3,750, and 50% of commercial rates payable in year two up to a maximum of €2,500 and 25% of commercial rates payable in year three up to a maximum of €1,250, where a commercial property that was previously rateably occupied and which has been vacant for over two years previously is now rateably occupied by the claimant.
The grant applies to the extent there is a net increase in occupation in the county, (relocation from one property to another equivalent property does not qualify). The rates payable on the property from the time of occupation have to be fully discharged before any grant is payable. Actual occupation of less than 1 year will not qualify for the scheme

3.2 Business Plus Package

Designed for existing business trading longer than 12 months.

- i. Confidential One to One business advice.
- ii. Free mentoring support up to maximum of 6 hours (type of mentoring support provided subject to the specific needs of the enterprise).
- iii. Subsidised training courses to help develop owners/employees.
- iv. Access to loan funding for amounts between €2,000-€25,000 from our partners Microfinance Ireland – Local Enterprise Office will assist with the application process.
- v. Access to Planning Advice Clinic.
- vi. **Long Vacant Property Incentive** - Grant of 75% of commercial rates payable in year one up to a maximum of €3,750, and 50% of commercial rates payable in year two up to a maximum of €2,500 and 25% of commercial rates payable in year three up to a maximum of €1,250, where a commercial property that was previously rateably occupied and which has been vacant for over two years previously is now rateably occupied by the claimant.
The grant applies to the extent there is a net increase in occupation in the county, (relocation from one property to another equivalent property does not qualify). The rates payable on the property from the time of occupation have to be fully discharged before any grant is payable. Actual occupation of less than 1 year will not qualify for the scheme

4. Eligibility

- i. The Scheme will be available to new businesses or those expanding into a new location.

- ii. The scheme is applicable to the use of previously rateably occupied commercial properties and which has been vacant for a minimum of 24 months at date of application and having met the councils criteria to be treated as a vacant property for rates purposes for such a period.
- iii. Three years is the maximum allowed for the grant regardless of the time the premises has been vacant.
- iv. In year 4 the full amount of the rates due must be paid in that financial year.
- v. The grant applicant must be the rateable occupier of the property in question.
There are no outstanding commercial rates, owing by the applicant in respect of any property. There are no other outstanding charges due to the council by the applicant.
- vi. Actual occupation of less than 1 year will not qualify for the scheme.

5. Application and Grant Claim

The initial application for the long term vacancy scheme is submitted at the commencement of occupation and must be accompanied by the following:

- I. Completed application form.
- II. Evidence of unit vacancy from landlord and availability for letting over the two year period immediately prior to occupation.
- III. Evidence of ownership and occupation of unit (i.e Land Registry Certificate) or lease agreement.
- IV. Confirmation of permissions/consents for proposed use
- V. Confirmation of payment of contributions (if applicable), rates and local authority charges that may be outstanding by the applicant.

Claim must subsequently be made in writing by the close of March each calendar year following the first year of occupation. (Note if occupation commenced mid-year, the claim is made together with the following calendar years application)

The scheme may be the subject of review and amendment at any time by Clare County Council.

6. Assessment of Application

Each application will be assessed in accordance with this Scheme. The Council will interpret each application on face value according to its own discretion. The Council may request further information before or after the evaluation of an application. The Council may communicate to the

applicant those aspects of the application that could lead to disqualification or declination of a grant. The Council may accept an amended application following a request for more information or amendments to the original application.

Any grant aid awarded on foot of a successful application will be further subject to the availability of the necessary funds to implement this Scheme.

The decision of the Council is final.

The scheme may be the subject of review and amendment at any time by Clare County Council.

Details of the Scheme together with application form are available to view and download online at www.clarecoco.ie. or can be obtained from **Revenue Section** ,Council Headquarters, New Road, Ennis, Co. Clare.

Appendix 1

Clare County Council
Comhairle Contae an Chláir

Long Term Vacant Property Incentive Scheme

APPLICATION FORM

Company/Business Information

Name of Occupier of the Property: _____
Contact Person: _____
Address: _____

Phone: _____
Email: _____

Parent Company/Business Information (if applicable)

Company Name: _____
Contact Person: _____
Address: _____

Phone: _____
Email: _____
Website Address: _____

Current Business (if applicable)

Type of Business

Total Number of Employees:

Address of Existing Business:

Phone:

Email:

Information Required for Newly Occupied Property

Type of Business

**Total Number of Employees:
(in new premises)
(indicate full-time/part-time)**

**Opening Hours of Business:
(days/times)**

Address of Existing Business:

State if Property is Owned or Leased

Phone:

Email:

Rent/Lease Agreement Details (if applicable)

Name of Landlord _____

Address of Landlord: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Length of Lease Agreement: _____

Copy of Lease Agreement:

Commercial Rates Details

How long has the property been vacant: _____

Name of previous business: _____

Date of Commencement of Occupation _____

Rateable Valuation of Property _____

Property No/Account No: _____

Does the property need to be re-valued ?* _____

Amount of Rates due for a calendar year _____

*It is the responsibility of the applicant in consultation with their landlord to have the property revalued where there has been a material change in circumstances in regard to the property.

Disclosure of Information – Freedom of Information Act

Clare County Council wishes to advise applicants that, under Freedom of Information Act 1997, as amended, the information supplied in the application form may be made available on request, subject to Clare County Council’s obligations under law.

You are asked to consider if any of the information supplied by you in this application should not be disclosed because of sensitivity. If this is the case you should, when providing the information, identify same and specify the reasons for it’s sensitivity. Clare County Council will consult with you about sensitive information before making a decision on any Freedom of Information request received.

However, if you consider that none of the information supplied by you is sensitive, please complete the statement below to that effect. Such information may be released in response to a Freedom of Information request.

Name of Applicant (in block capitals)

_____ hereby agrees that none of the information supplied is sensitive, and any or all, of the information supplied, may be released in response to a Freedom of Information request.

Signed: _____

Company/Organisation’s Name (if applicable): _____

Position: _____

Date: _____

Declaration by Applicant (s)

We apply for the appropriate grant (75% Year 1, 50% Year 2 and 25% Year 3) in accordance with the Town Centre Long Term Vacant Property Incentive Scheme for the premises at

On behalf of

I/We have read and understood the scheme for vacant properties and agree to comply in full therewith. I/We certify that all information provided in this application, and all information given in any documentation submitted in support of the application is truthful and accurate.

Name: (in block capitals):

Signed: _____

Date: _____

On behalf of (Company/Organisation's Name):

Position: _____ **Date:**

For further information, please contact:

Please enclose the following in order to be assessed for the grant:

- 1) Copy of Rent/Lease Agreement from Landlord/Letting Agent
- 2) Tax Clearance Certificate
- 3) Evidence of unit vacancy from landlord and availability for letting over the two year period.
- 4) Confirmation of planning permissions/consents for proposed use
- 5) Confirmation of payment of contributions (if applicable), rate and local authority charges that may be outstanding by the applicant.