**Longford County Council**

**Occupation of Vacant Commercial Premises Incentive Scheme**

**January 2024**

**Introduction**

Longford County Council (hereinafter referred to as ‘the Council’) is providing a Business Incentive Scheme to encourage the use of vacant industrial premises. The Council is aware of the current challenges facing businesses in County Longford and the difficulties for new businesses to gain a foothold during recessionary periods. The purpose of the scheme is to give an incentive to both landlords and new aspiring business owners/leasers to occupy vacant premises by lowering entry costs through a grant related to the level of rates payable on the property.

By encouraging the occupation of vacant premises the Council will also support the improvement in appearance and attraction of the commercial properties and thereby will contribute indirectly to increased footfall for existing businesses.

This scheme sets out the mechanism, eligibility and conditions for new industrial/manufacturing businesses to receive financial assistance from the Council for the purpose of locating in premises which have been vacant for a period exceeding 6 months.

This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis.

**Aims of the Scheme**

To encourage and support a qualifying business that might occupy vacant industrial premises registered on the Local Authority Register of Vacant Premises (produced annually by the Council’s Income Generating Unit).

To facilitate the development of new industrial services that will revitalise commercial centres in the County.

To support new business creation as a means of generating new vibrancy in Longford Town and other urban centres within the County.

To demonstrate the serious commitment of the Council to contribute to economic development, regeneration and recovery in the County.

**Competition Clause:**

Potential displacement will be a primary concern in determining the eligibility of any application to the scheme. The executive may deem a project to be ineligible if it has the potential to lead to displacement of existing enterprises.

**Eligibility**

The Scheme will be available to:

* a newly established industrial business
* an existing industrial business relocating or expanding from outside the County
* an existing business maintaining current location and expanding into a new location

The Scheme is applicable to the use of existing rated industrial properties that are listed as vacant on Longford Local Authorities Register of Vacant Properties, produced by 31st January each year.

The following prerequisites apply to the subject premises:

* There are no outstanding enforcement proceedings or monies due to the Council under the Planning & Development Acts 2000-2014 or the Derelict Sites Act 1990.
* There are no outstanding or current commercial rates, or any other local authority charges owing on the subject premises for which the grant is sought.

The qualifying uses under this scheme are industrial businesses.

Conditions to the above include the following:

* The proposed use is in accordance with existing planning permission on the premises.
* The proposed use must not generally include any of the uses or types of business in attached Schedule A. The Council may at its discretion award a grant to a premises included in Schedule A where, in its opinion, there may be a specific local need for that type of premises.

**Qualifying Applicants**

The following requirements apply to all applicants:

* The applicant must be the owner or lessee of the subject premises.
* The applicant must have a current Tax Clearance Certificate at the time any Grant becomes payable.
* The applicant must sign up for Standing Order payments of any charges due to the Council.
* The application must be accompanied by a lease agreement (if applicable) whereby the parties agree to a minimum three year lease period, which can be a rolling lease renewed annually OR a copy of the Land Registry entry showing ownership details.

The following conditions will lead to immediate disqualification and/or cessation of grant aid under the rules of this Scheme:

* Failure to remain current on any charges will result in the immediate cessation of the Scheme and the removal of supports.
* Changes to the uses or any of the requirements stated above for the applicant that materially alter the original application for grant aid.

**Incentive Details**

Grants may be paid by the Council to qualifying applicants in respect of the rates struck for the subject premises as follows:

For an industrial/manufacturing business with a minimum of 10 jobs and up to 50 jobs, a flat rate of 25% rebate for 3 years would be agreed once the job target is met after year 1.

For an industrial/manufacturing business with 50 jobs upwards, a flat rate of 50% rebate for 3 years would be agreed once the job target is met after year 1.

A maximum of three months grace to pay any outstanding rates &/or comply with documentation requests in the first year (where the promoter has failed to comply with terms of the scheme as laid out in the letter of offer), reduced to two months for the second year & one month in respect of the third year can be extended to members of the Scheme at the discretion of the Council.

This scheme only makes provision for payment of a grant towards the costs associated with the occupation of qualifying vacant properties and does not mitigate in any way the obligation of qualifying applicants to discharge all fees associated with other approvals which may be required to be obtained from Council i.e. planning fees, s.254 licences, and development contributions.

**Application**

The initial application, to be submitted within six months of occupation of the property for which the application is being made, must be accompanied by the following:

* Fully completed and signed Application Form, Consent for Disclosure of Information Form and Supplier Set Up Form.
* Evidence of unit vacancy exceeding 6 months.
* Evidence of ownership and occupation of unit (e.g. Land Registry Certificate) **OR** 3 year lease agreement (this can be a rolling one year lease renewable annually).
* Evidence of permissions/consents for proposed use of leased premises (normally a part of the lease agreement).
* Revenue Commissioners Tax Reference No. **OR** PPS No. to enable us to obtain up to date Tax Clearance Certificates prior to making Grant payments.
* A copy of a recent bank statement showing the Account Name and Address, Account No., IBAN, Sort Code and BIC (it is not necessary to provide a copy of any transaction details) to confirm details and enable the Council to make Grant payments into it.
* Evidence that an expanding business is continuing in its current location as well as in the new premises **OR** that a move to new premises from an existing location will result in increased employment for other forms of business.
* All obligations, including commercial rates or any other charges due to the Local Authority are up to date.

**Effective period for operation of Scheme**

This scheme will be available up to and including 31st December 2024.

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

The Scheme will continue to apply to an approved applicant for 3 years even if the scheme is subsequently withdrawn or amended.

**Assessment of Applications**

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 which could lead to disqualification or refusal 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 subject to the availability of the necessary funds to implement this Scheme.

Details of the Scheme together with an Application Form will be available to view and download online at [www.longfordcoco.ie](http://www.longfordcoco.ie) or can be obtained from the County Council offices in Great Water Street.

Completed application forms with attached documentation to be submitted to Michael Nevin, Head of Enterprise, Longford County Council: mnevin@longfordcoco.ie

**SCHEDULE A**

**Uses and types of businesses not generally covered by the Scheme**

Takeaways

Amusement arcades or premises with gaming machines

Head shops

Betting offices

Nightclubs/Private members clubs

Moneylenders (excluding banks, building societies and credit unions)

Discount stores

Adult-themed shops

The above schedule is not necessarily an exhaustive list.

**Note:** A final decision on eligibility to qualify for the scheme will rest with Longford County Council in each case. The decision of the Council is final.