

Guidelines and Eligibility

1. Overview

The Retail, Service, Hospitality & Tourism Growth Grant is funded through the Local Growth Fund (LGF) and administered by Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council as part of a wider suite of Economic Stimulus Funds.

The scheme provides targeted capital investment to support businesses operating within the foundational economy and visitor economy, helping businesses improve productivity, competitiveness, sustainability and long-term resilience.

The fund supports investment that enables businesses to:

- Improve productivity and operational efficiency.
- Enhance customer experience and service quality.
- Create sustainable employment opportunities.
- Safeguard existing jobs.
- Increase sales, footfall and visitor spending.
- Adopt new technologies and digital systems.
- Improve competitiveness and business sustainability.
- Strengthen local supply chains.
- Support sustainable and low-carbon business growth.

The scheme contributes towards **Local Growth Fund Priority 1: More Productive and Competitive Businesses** by supporting capital investment that stimulates business growth, employment and local economic activity.

Whilst productivity and business sustainability remain important objectives, the scheme places a strong emphasis on supporting projects that deliver economic impact through employment creation, employment safeguarding and business growth.

Programme Delivery Period

Funding is available during the 2026/27 financial year only. All approved projects must be fully completed, all expenditure incurred and paid, and grant claims submitted no later than **31 January 2027**.

Applicants must demonstrate at application stage that their project can be delivered within these timescales.

2. Fund Objectives

The Retail, Service, Hospitality & Tourism Growth Grant aims to:

- Support business growth and sustainability.
- Create sustainable employment opportunities.
- Safeguard existing jobs.
- Increase business productivity and competitiveness.
- Encourage business modernisation and digital adoption.
- Enhance the visitor economy and local business offer.
- Increase private sector investment.
- Strengthen local supply chains and local procurement opportunities.
- Encourage low-carbon and environmentally sustainable investment.
- Build resilience within Blaenau Gwent's foundational economy.

3. Employment and Economic Impact Priority

The Retail, Service, Hospitality & Tourism Growth Grant places a strong emphasis on economic impact.

Applicants will be expected to demonstrate how the proposed investment will:

- Create new jobs; and/or
- Safeguard existing jobs; and/or
- Improve business sustainability and resilience; and
- Contribute towards increased economic activity within Blaenau Gwent.

Projects demonstrating higher levels of employment impact relative to the grant requested will receive greater priority during assessment.

Whilst not every project will generate immediate employment growth, applicants must clearly demonstrate how the investment contributes towards improved business performance, increased customer spend, enhanced competitiveness or future employment opportunities.

4. Who Can Apply

Eligible Applicants

Applicants must:

- Be based within Blaenau Gwent.
- Be actively trading.
- Operate on a full-time commercial basis.
- Demonstrate financial viability.
- Demonstrate the ability to deliver the proposed project.

Eligible organisations include:

- Sole Traders
- Partnerships
- Limited Companies
- Cooperatives
- Community Interest Companies (CICs)
- Social Enterprises
- Charities undertaking commercial trading activity
- Limited Liability Partnerships (LLPs)

Eligible Sectors

Retail

Including:

- Independent retailers
- Specialist retailers
- Town centre retailers
- Local convenience businesses

Hospitality

Including:

- Cafés
- Restaurants
- Public houses
- Catering businesses

I gael rhagor o wybodaeth am y cynllun,
cysylltwch â Busnes ac Arloesi, CBS Blaenau Gwent
Ffôn: 01495 369496 E-bost: business@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

For further information on the scheme,
please contact the Business and Innovation Team
Tel: 01495 369496 Email: business@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

- Food and drink businesses

Service Sector

Including:

- Professional services
- Business-to-business services
- Creative industries
- Design services
- Photography
- Printing services
- Trades and installation businesses
- Landscaping businesses
- Home improvement businesses

Tourism and Leisure

Including:

- Visitor attractions
- Activity providers
- Cultural and heritage attractions
- Tourism accommodation providers
- Leisure facilities
- Tourism-facing retail and hospitality businesses

Priority May Be Given To

- Businesses creating employment opportunities.
- Businesses safeguarding employment.
- Businesses located within town centres.
- Businesses enhancing the visitor economy.
- Businesses improving accessibility.
- Businesses investing in digital technology.
- Businesses adopting sustainable business practices.
- Social enterprises delivering economic and community benefits.
- Businesses strengthening local supply chains.

I gael rhagor o wybodaeth am y cynllun,
cysylltwch â Busnes ac Arloesi, CBS Blaenau Gwent
Ffôn: 01495 369496 E-bost: business@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

For further information on the scheme,
please contact the Business and Innovation Team
Tel: 01495 369496 Email: business@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

5. Ineligible Applications

Applications will not normally be supported where:

- The project is primarily revenue based.
- The proposed expenditure is routine replacement with no measurable improvement.
- There is no clear business growth, productivity or economic benefit.
- The project duplicates existing publicly funded activity.
- The project cannot demonstrate additionality.
- The applicant, business, owner, director, partner has failed to comply with terms and conditions of a previous grant awarded by Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council. This includes, but is not limited to:
 - Failure to provide monitoring information.
 - Failure to provide evidence of outputs, outcomes or employment commitments.
 - Failure to respond to monitoring requests.
 - Failure to comply with grant conditions.
 - Outstanding grant recovery, clawback or compliance matters.

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council reserves the right to take previous grant performance and compliance history into account when determining eligibility and awarding funding.

The Council reserves the right to refuse applications that do not clearly demonstrate economic benefit, value for money or strategic fit.

6. Expected Economic Benefits

Applicants must demonstrate how the proposed investment will contribute towards one or more of the following outcomes.

Priority Outcomes

- Creation of new jobs.
- Safeguarding of existing jobs.
- Increased private sector investment.

Additional Outcomes

- Increased customer spend, sales or turnover.
- Increased footfall or visitor numbers.

- Business growth and sustainability.
- Improved customer experience.
- Adoption of digital technologies.
- Improved productivity and efficiency.
- Enhanced visitor offer.
- Improved accessibility.
- Strengthened local supply chains.
- Sustainable and low-carbon business growth.

Applicants will be required to forecast anticipated outcomes as part of the application process.

7. Eligible Expenditure

The scheme is primarily focused on capital investment.

Eligible Costs

Examples of eligible expenditure include:

- Internal non-structural improvements.
- Customer-facing fixtures and fittings.
- Equipment improving service delivery.
- Digital systems and software.
- Point of Sale (POS) systems.
- Booking and reservation systems.
- Customer relationship management (CRM) systems.
- E-commerce platforms.
- IT equipment and hardware.
- Customer experience enhancements.
- Tourism-related infrastructure.
- Accessibility improvements.
- Outdoor customer areas.
- Signage.
- Energy-efficient equipment.
- Sustainability improvements linked to business growth or customer experience.

Limited Revenue Costs

In exceptional circumstances, the following may be supported where directly linked to the implementation of funded equipment:

- Essential software licences.
- Specialist training required to operate funded equipment.

Approval will be at the discretion of the Council.

Ineligible Costs

The following costs are not eligible:

- Salaries and wages.
- General marketing and advertising.
- Consultancy services.
- Rent and utilities.
- Stock and consumables.
- Working capital.
- Structural building works.
- Routine maintenance.
- Decoration and repairs.
- Like-for-like replacement equipment without measurable improvement.
- Statutory compliance works.
- Vehicles.
- VAT and Tax
- Contingency costs.
- Retrospective expenditure.

8. Level of Support

Item	Amount
Minimum Grant	£1,000
Maximum Grant	£25,000
Intervention Rate	Up to 50%

Applicants must provide a minimum 50% contribution towards eligible project costs.

Applications should focus on capital expenditure that supports business growth, productivity, competitiveness, customer experience and employment outcomes.

Applications should normally be limited to a maximum of five capital expenditure items. Where multiple items are included, they should form part of a clearly defined project that contributes to the proposed business outcomes and economic benefits.

Grant awards will be proportionate to the scale of investment, employment impact and wider economic benefits delivered.

Higher Value Grants

Applications seeking larger grant awards will be expected to demonstrate proportionately higher levels of economic impact.

Particular consideration will be given to:

- Number of jobs created.
- Number of jobs safeguarded.
- Sustainability of employment.
- Improvement in business performance.
- Visitor economy benefits.
- Town centre impact.
- Productivity improvements.
- Wider economic benefits.
- Value for money.

Projects seeking higher levels of grant funding without commensurate economic and employment benefits may not be prioritised for support.

9. Application Windows

The Retail, Service, Hospitality & Tourism Growth Grant will operate through periodic competitive funding rounds, subject to the availability of funding.

Details of current funding rounds, including Expression of Interest (EOI) opening and closing dates, application deadlines and available budgets, will be published through:

- Blaenau Gwent Business Hub website and social media channels
- Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council communication channels
- Associated promotional and marketing activity

Applicants should ensure that proposed projects can be fully completed, paid for and claimed by 31 January 2027. Applications for projects that cannot reasonably demonstrate delivery within the available programme timescales may not be progressed.

Submission of an application does not guarantee grant funding.

Where demand exceeds available funding, applications will be assessed competitively and ranked against the published assessment criteria. Funding will be offered to the highest-scoring eligible applications until the available budget has been fully allocated.

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council reserves the right to:

- Open additional funding rounds.
- Amend application deadlines.
- Suspend or close the scheme.
- Vary funding allocations between funding rounds.
- Amend programme arrangements where necessary.

10. Application Process

Stage 1 – Expression of Interest

Applicants will be required to provide:

- Business overview.
- Project summary.
- Business need or opportunity.
- Estimated project costs.
- Expected economic benefits.
- Proposed employment outcomes.
- Project implementation timetable demonstrating completion and claim submission by 31 January 2027.

Stage 2 – Full Application

Applicants invited to proceed will be required to submit:

- Completed application form.
- Three comparable quotations per item.
- Latest financial accounts.
- Management accounts where applicable.
- 12-month cashflow forecast.
- 12-month profit and loss forecast.
- Evidence of match funding.
- Detailed project delivery plan confirming all expenditure can be incurred, paid and claimed by 31 January 2027.
- Employment information where relevant.
- Any additional information requested by the Council.

11. Assessment Framework

Applications will be assessed against the following criteria:

Economic Impact and Employment (35%)

- Number of jobs created.
- Number of jobs safeguarded.
- Sustainability of employment.
- Economic additionality.
- Contribution to the local economy.
- Visitor economy and town centre benefits.

Strategic Fit (25%)

- Alignment with Local Growth Fund objectives.
- Contribution to foundational economy sectors.
- Contribution to visitor economy priorities.
- Support for local supply chains.

Productivity, Business Improvement and Growth (15%)

- Productivity improvements.
- Competitiveness.
- Digital adoption.

- Customer experience improvements.
- Business expansion and growth.

Financial Viability and Deliverability (10%)

- Business sustainability.
- Financial strength.
- Ability to deliver the project.
- Ability to complete and claim the project within programme timescales.
- Realistic procurement and implementation schedule.

Value for Money (15%)

- Outcomes relative to the grant requested.
- Appropriate use of public funds.

Applications will be assessed competitively against the published criteria and available budget.

12. Subsidy Control

All awards will be made in accordance with the Subsidy Control Act 2022.

Applicants will be required to:

- Declare previous public funding received.
- Complete all subsidy control declarations requested by the Council.
- Provide details of support received under Minimal Financial Assistance (MFA) provisions where applicable.

Failure to provide accurate information may result in grant funding being withdrawn or recovered.

13. Decision Process

Applications will be assessed following the closure of each funding round.

Applicants will normally be notified of the outcome within four weeks of the published assessment date.

Funding is discretionary and subject to available budget, programme priorities and the applicant's ability to complete the project within the required programme timescales.

There is no automatic entitlement to grant support and no statutory right of appeal.

14. Payment of Grant

Grant payments will be made in arrears following submission of:

- Signed Grant Agreement.
- Signed Subsidy Control Declaration.
- Invoices.
- Proof of payment.
- Project completion evidence.
- Photographic evidence where applicable.

Projects must not commence until written approval has been received from the Council.

Projects must be completed within the timescales specified within the Grant Agreement.

Regardless of individual project timescales, all projects must be fully completed and final grant claims submitted no later than **31 January 2027**.

The Council reserves the right to withdraw a grant offer where there is insufficient confidence that a project can be completed and claimed within the required programme deadlines.

15. Project Delivery Deadlines

Funding is subject to strict programme deadlines.

Successful applicants must:

- Complete all approved project activities by 31 January 2027.
- Incur and pay all approved expenditure by 31 January 2027.
- Submit all grant claim documentation by 31 January 2027.

The Council may withdraw an approved grant offer where:

- Project delivery is significantly delayed.

- Procurement has not been completed within agreed timescales.
- There is insufficient evidence that expenditure and claims can be completed by programme deadlines.

Any costs incurred after 31 January 2027 will not be eligible for grant support.

16. Monitoring and Reporting

Successful applicants will be required to participate in monitoring activities and provide information for up to 24 months following project completion.

Employment Monitoring

Employment creation and safeguarding will form a key part of post-project monitoring.

Evidence may include:

- Employment contracts.
- Payroll records.
- PAYE records.
- Job descriptions.
- Recruitment records.

Additional Monitoring Information

The Council may also request information relating to:

- Business growth.
- Turnover increases.
- Visitor numbers or customer growth.
- Productivity improvements.
- Additional investment secured.
- Supply chain benefits.
- Sustainability improvements.
- Ongoing business performance.

Supporting evidence may be requested throughout the monitoring period.

17. Procurement Requirements

Applicants must obtain three comparable quotations wherever possible.

The Council reserves the right to require additional procurement evidence to demonstrate value for money.

The lowest quotation will not automatically be accepted.

18. Fraud and Misrepresentation

The Council takes fraud and misrepresentation seriously.

Any applicant found to have supplied false, misleading or inaccurate information may be subject to:

- Withdrawal of grant offer.
- Recovery of grant funding.
- Referral to relevant authorities.

19. Record Retention

Grant recipients must retain all project records, procurement records, quotations, invoices and financial evidence for a minimum period of seven years following final payment.

20. Publicity and Branding

Successful applicants may be required to acknowledge support received through the Local Growth Fund and comply with any publicity and branding requirements issued by Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council.

21. Programme Alignment

The Retail, Service, Hospitality & Tourism Growth Grant forms part of the Blaenau Gwent Economic Stimulus Funds, which also includes:

- Business Start-Up Grant
- Business Development Grant

Together these programmes provide a structured pathway supporting business creation, productivity, growth, job creation and long-term economic development.

22. Key Principles

All projects supported through this scheme must:

- Deliver measurable economic benefit.
- Create and/or safeguard employment.
- Improve productivity, competitiveness or business sustainability.
- Demonstrate additionality.
- Support business growth and development.
- Provide value for money.
- Support sustainable business growth.
- Strengthen local economic activity and supply chains.
- Be capable of completion and claim submission by 31 January 2027.
- Contribute towards a stronger and more resilient Blaenau Gwent economy.