



Backing your business to grow:
High street support –
where to start

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Introduction

Government support for the high street

High streets are absolutely vital to local economies. They're places people rely on to shop, meet and access services, and they support a large share of local jobs. The everyday economy employs 14 million people, including a high proportion of younger people, students, part-time workers and women.

At the same time, many high street and local businesses are also operating under real pressure. Costs have risen and demand has shifted as consumer behaviour and the town centre "offer" changes. Shop closures, vacant premises and crime can reduce confidence and make it harder to attract customers. And recent data underlines the scale

of the challenge. According to the [British Retail Consortium](#), in December 2025 shopper traffic in the UK was down 2.9% year on year, with high streets down 0.9%.

This guide explains what government support is available to help local businesses stay resilient and adapt. It covers local routes such as Growth Hubs, place-based programmes aimed at improving high streets, and support where late payment is affecting cash flow. It also reflects the government's wider focus on the everyday economy set out in the Backing Your Business Small Business Plan, including further action planned on retail crime, licensing and targeted high street interventions.

Who this guide is for

This guide is for UK-based small businesses that rely on local customers, including independents across retail, hospitality and local services. It's relevant if you're trying to keep costs under control, attract and retain customers, make the most of local regeneration or find support that fits around the realities of running a customer-facing business.

What you'll find in the guide

This guide covers:

- the main pressures that high street businesses commonly face
- the government support available both locally and nationwide
- how to find the right local route without spending hours searching
- a short checklist you can use to decide what to do next



The pressures that high street businesses face



High street resilience is often about keeping the basics working while adjusting to what's changing locally.

Most businesses will recognise the main pressures. This section looks at the headline challenges that tend to drive the need for support.

Costs and margins

Rising costs can put pressure on even well-run businesses. Common issues include wages, energy costs, rent and business rates. When costs move faster than sales, businesses can be pushed into short-term decisions that are hard to reverse.

Demand, footfall and the town centre offer

High streets work best when they give people reasons to visit and stay, with the right mix of shops, services, hospitality and community use. UK Government data notes that footfall is still below the levels seen before the pandemic. For many businesses, the challenge is adapting to changing consumer habits and playing a part in creating a local offer that attracts customers and supports repeat visits.

Finding sustainable premises and using vacant space

For local businesses, premises can be one of their biggest constraints. Costs, lease terms and the balance of power with landlords can make it hard to find space that's viable. UK Government data notes that the number of persistently vacant retail and leisure properties has increased in recent years. Turning long-term vacancies into workable opportunities for businesses is one part of making high streets function better.

Getting support that fits how high street businesses operate

Many owners are low on time and find support difficult to navigate. UK Government research has found that delivery models don't always suit high street working patterns. This guide focuses on the routes designed to make support easier to access, starting with local entry points and clear signposting.

Government support available

Below are the main government routes that can help high street and local businesses.

Some are national “front door” services that help you find the right support quickly. Others are place-based programmes delivered through councils and local partnerships.



Business Growth Service

- **What it is:** The Government’s main online starting point for business support. It brings together guidance and routes into support across topics like running and growing a business.
- **How you can use it:** Use it to orient yourself fast. You answer a short set of questions and it points you towards relevant guidance and support based on your stage and location. It’s a good first step if you’re not sure where to begin.
- **Where to find it:** Visit the [Business Growth Service website](#).

Business Support Service (part of the Business Growth Service)

- **What it is:** A support route within the Business Growth Service that offers help by phone, email and webchat, and can triage enquiries and connect businesses to further support.
- **How you can use it:** Useful when you want to talk it through, or you’re short on time and need to know which local or national route is most relevant for your business.
- **Where to find it:** Start at [business.gov.uk](#) and follow the support prompts.

Growth Hubs (England)

- **What they are:** A network of locally delivered business support across England, funded by DBT and delivered in partnership with local authorities. Growth Hubs are local delivery partners for the Business Growth Service and offer a free and impartial point of contact. They work with local partners to provide specific advice and support for high street businesses, co-operatives and mutual businesses.
- **How you can use them:** If you want local, practical help, a Growth Hub is often the quickest route. They can help you navigate what’s available in your area and connect you to relevant schemes and partners.
- **Where to find it:** Start via [business.gov.uk](#).

High street and growth incubators

- **What they are:** Mayoral strategic authorities in Greater Manchester, West Yorkshire and the West Midlands have been given integrated funding to support high streets and their contribution to local growth.
- **How you can use them:** If your business is in one of these areas, watch for local activity linked to these incubators, such as targeted support for high streets and town centres.
- **Where to find it:** You can read more about the plans at [GOV.UK](#).

Pride in Place Programme

- **What it is:** A long-term programme designed to give local communities power and funding to improve their areas, supported by a wider “Pride in Place” strategy and toolkit approach for local authorities and communities. The programme is driven through local neighbourhood boards in participating places.
- **How you can use it:** In places included in the programme, businesses can engage with local boards and local planning so that the needs of high street firms are reflected in priorities and delivery.
- **Where to find it:** Read more about the programme at [GOV.UK](#).

High Street Rental Auctions

- **What it is:** A local authority power intended to help bring persistently vacant commercial properties back into use by renting them out to new tenants, including local businesses and community groups, using a defined process.
- **How you can use it:** If you’re looking for premises or you’ve been priced out of your area, this is worth understanding. It can create new opportunities to take space where a unit has sat empty for a long time.
- **Where to find it:** Visit [GOV.UK](#) for more information.

Small Business Commissioner: Help with late payment

- **What it is:** An independent public body set up to tackle late payment and unfair payment practices. It provides guidance and, in some cases, can help you progress an issue with a larger customer.
- **How you can use it:** If late payment is causing strain on your cash flow, use the guidance to understand your options and decide your next steps. If you have an unresolved dispute with a larger business, you can make an enquiry to the Commissioner’s team.
- **Where to find it:** Visit the [Small Business Commissioner website](#).

Business rates relief

- **What it is:** Relief that can lower the business rates you pay on your property (if eligible). The rules and administration vary across the UK and by local authority, but GOV.UK sets out key types of relief and how to apply.
- **How you can use it:** If rates are a material cost for your premises, it’s worth checking whether you’re eligible for reliefs and confirming how your council applies them.
- **Where to find it:** Visit [GOV.UK](#) for more information.

How to access support

Support for high streets is often delivered locally.

That can make it feel harder to navigate, but it also means the right route is usually close to home. The information in this section is to help you get to the right place quickly and avoid spending hours searching.

1. Start with a local entry point

If you want advice, signposting or help working out what applies in your area, start with the [Business Growth Service](#). It's designed to direct you to the right support based on where your business is and what you need.

2. Be clear about what you need help with

You'll get signposted faster if you can explain, in plain terms, what's putting pressure on your business. Most high street support is designed around practical problems, for example:

- costs, including rent, rates, energy and staffing
- footfall, demand and attracting customers
- premises, including lease issues or finding space
- safety and trading environment
- cash flow problems caused by customers paying late

You don't need a formal plan. A clear summary of the issue and your location is usually enough to start.

3. Look for place-based programmes in your area

Many of the bigger interventions are delivered through local authorities or local partnerships. The detail varies place to place, so the quickest way to identify what applies is usually through your local authority's business pages or via your Growth Hub.

If your area is part of programmes such as Pride in Place, there may be local boards or local planning activity where businesses can feed in and stay informed about what's happening locally.

4. Check premises-related opportunities

If premises are a barrier, it's worth understanding whether your local authority is using High Street Rental Auctions, which are designed to bring persistently vacant units back into use. Even if an auction isn't yet active in your area, knowing the basics can help you spot opportunities as they arise.

5. Tackle cash flow blockers early

If late payment is an issue your business is grappling with, use the [Small Business Commissioner's guidance](#) to work out your next step. It's easier to resolve payment issues early, before they turn into a longer dispute or force short-term decisions.

If business rates are a significant cost, check whether you qualify for relief and how your local authority applies it. [GOV.UK](#) provides an overview of [rates relief and small business rate relief](#).

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Case study

Turning a local idea into a busy neighbourhood business

Mama Bobo Africa is a Nigerian grocery store and restaurant on the Lisburn Road in South Belfast. It's run by Hammy Obikoya, who grew up in Belfast after moving from Nigeria with his family.

The business started as a grocery store on the Ormeau Road, created by Hammy's mother to serve the local Nigerian community. When Hammy joined the family business, the focus shifted from simply meeting a community need to building something that could grow and trade sustainably.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Hammy lost his job and decided it was the right time to put his energy into the business full time. He saw demand rising locally as the Nigerian community in Belfast – including healthcare workers and students – grew. The grocery store expanded, with more products and services designed to make it easier for customers to buy what they needed.

Building resilience through a wider offer

With the store trading well, Hammy decided to open a restaurant alongside it. The aim was to offer a taste of home for Nigerians living in Northern Ireland, while also building a business that could attract a wider local audience.

After opening, he found that the customer base was broader than expected. While the restaurant was popular with Nigerians in the area, it also drew strong interest from local diners looking for authentic Nigerian food. That wider demand helped strengthen the business and make it less reliant on a single customer group.

Using finance to get the business off the ground

To support the restaurant launch, Hammy used the British Business Bank's Start Up Loans programme. He described the application process as detailed but straightforward, and said the advice he received helped him move from a viable plan to taking action. The programme also includes the option of business mentoring, which he planned to take up once the business had settled into a steadier rhythm.

What this shows for high street and local businesses

Mama Bobo Africa's story reflects a form of high street resilience that many small businesses recognise. It's built on knowing your local community, spotting demand and expanding in a way that increases stability.

A few practical points stand out:

- The business started with a clear local need, then broadened its offer as demand grew.
- It added services and channels that made the store easier to use and helped it stay responsive to customers.
- It used finance to turn a plan into a physical business on the high street, with the confidence to keep building once it was open.

For Hammy, the goal wasn't only to open a restaurant, but to build a business that could keep trading through busy periods and adapt as the local market changed.

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High street resilience checklist and next steps

We've designed this checklist for time-poor high street businesses and local business owners. It helps you pin down the biggest pressures, find the right local route to support and take a practical next step without getting lost.

High street resilience checklist

Know what pressure you're under

- You can describe the main issue your business is facing in one sentence, such as rising costs, falling demand, problems with premises or late payment.
- You know what's driving it most, such as energy costs, rent, staffing, quieter periods or a local change affecting footfall.

Get a grip on the numbers

- You know your main fixed costs and when they fall due.
- You have a simple view of weekly or monthly cash flow, including the effect that late payment has (where relevant).

Check what help might apply

- If business rates are a significant cost, you've checked whether you qualify for relief and how your council applies it.
- If late payment is affecting cash flow, you've looked at the Small Business Commissioner's guidance and decided your next step.
- If premises are a barrier, you understand the basics of High Street Rental Auctions and whether they may be relevant locally.

Use local routes

- You've identified your local entry point, starting through business.gov.uk and, in England, the local Growth Hub route.
- You're signed up to receive updates from your local authority or Growth Hub if you want to track opportunities local to you.

Stay connected to your place

- You know which local groups shape the town centre offer, such as local partnerships, community boards or business networks where they exist.

Next steps

1. Choose one issue to tackle first

Pick the pressure that's most likely to affect cash flow or trading in the next three months.

2. Use the quickest route into support

Start at business.gov.uk and follow the prompts to get to the right local route. If you're in England, this often leads to your Growth Hub, which can help you navigate what's available locally.

3. Ask for specific help, not general advice

Be clear about what you need, such as checking rates relief, finding premises options, understanding local programmes or support with late payment.

4. Take one action, then review

Make the first call, submit the first enquiry or check eligibility through the official route, then reassess. If it isn't the right fit, you can move to the next option without starting again.



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UK Government

Backing your business

Discover the guidance and funding your business needs.

Backing your business is a national campaign delivered by Enterprise Nation in partnership with the Department for Business and Trade (DBT). It's designed to help small businesses understand what government support is available and how to use it in practice.

The campaign focuses on four areas that are central to many businesses: exporting, access to finance, digital tools and high street resilience.

Through practical guides, webinars, newsletters and real business stories, **Backing your business** brings together support from across government, including DBT and other departments and agencies.

The aim is to make it easier for small businesses to find relevant help and apply it to real decisions they face as they start, grow or adapt.

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