

Public Document Pack

**Democratic Services Section
Legal and Civic Services Department
Belfast City Council
City Hall
Belfast
BT1 5GS**

**HYBRID MEETING OF CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE -
ADDITIONAL ITEM AND REPORTS TO FOLLOW**

Dear Alderman/Councillor,

In addition to those matters previously notified to you, the following item(s) will also be considered at the meeting to be held at 5.15 pm on Wednesday, 14th June, 2023.

Yours faithfully,

JOHN WALSH

Chief Executive

AGENDA:

2. **Restricted Items**

- (e) Belfast 2024 update (Pages 1 - 20)

4. **Positioning the City to Compete**

- (a) Major Events Update (Pages 21 - 34)
- (c) Update on the development of Neighbourhood/Local Tourism (Pages 35 - 44)
- (d) Future of Cultural Multi Annual Grants CMAG (Pages 45 - 104)
- (g) Christmas Programme Update (Pages 105 - 126)

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By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6
of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Document is Restricted

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Subject:	Major Events
Date:	14 th June 2023
Reporting Officer:	John Greer, Director of Economic Development
Contact Officer:	Kerry Mc Mullan, Tourism and Events Development Manager

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	<p>The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on the Major Events programme; including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An update on the Maritime event; • the Way Forward approach to St Patrick's Day 2024-2026 • an update on the bid for the Fleadh Cheoil na h'Eireann • an update regarding the UK and Ireland bid to host the European Football Championships in 2028
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>It is recommended that Members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Note the contents of this report on the Maritime Festival.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Note the contents of the update on St Patrick’s Day including the procurement approach for 2024-2026 – Note the update on the bid for the Fleadh Cheoil, give necessary approval for Officers to continue with the bid process for future years, approve the budget for 2023-24 associated with the bid process (including attendance of a delegation at each event including attendance by Lord Mayor at the Fleadh Cheoil in Mullingar in August), note the costs associated with 2024-25 and 2025-26 – Approve the Letter of Offer for Ards Comhaltas for 2023-2024 activity to a value of £22,000 – Note the update regarding the UK and Ireland bid to host the European Football Championships in 2028
3.0	Main report
3.1	Belfast Maritime Festival 2023
3.2	The Belfast Maritime Festival will take place on 9th & 10th September 2023. The event will deliver a diverse programme of local talent, local produce and local crafts aligning to the Cultural Strategy, with the creative theme ‘Made in Belfast’ incorporating the best of Belfast. This will be accompanied by a strong Belfast brand displayed throughout the site.
3.3	A focal point will be the Made in Belfast Village, showcasing local producers and performers – with concepts such as Performed in Belfast, Distilled in Belfast, Stitched in Belfast, Crafted in Belfast, and Baked in Belfast. In addition, there will be a full programme animating all available public realm from Donegall Quay to the Titanic Quarter. There will be a number of other focal points – visiting vessels along Queens Quay, workshops/community design at Hamilton Dock, with Abercorn Basin hosting a range of street performances. As always, the festival will showcase the heritage sites along the Maritime Mile, from St Joseph’s Church in Sailortown to the recently re-opened HMS Caroline. Titanic Quarter’s STEM sector will offer an insight into industry and innovation within the site.
3.4	A new Governance Structure has been established in partnership with Maritime Belfast Trust and Maritime Harbour Commissioners to ensure a more cohesive approach to event planning and to drive forward the ambition set out in the Maritime strategy. The Programme Board will oversee a number of working groups with Maritime Belfast Trust delivering elements of the festival programme, managed via an SLA. The value of this will be circa £85,000 and this will include delivery of the community co-design piece.
3.5	The 2023 Maritime event has been successful in securing Tourism NI International Events funding to the value of £60,000, to provide international market visibility and enhancement of the event Officers are regularly engaging with TNI in respect of Council obligations under this arrangement.
3.6	Way Forward St Patrick’s Day 2024-2026

	<p>The purpose of this part of the report is to provide Members with a summary of the 2023 event, and the approach on the way forward for 2024-2026.</p>
<p>3.7</p>	<p>Each of the current providers has provided a de-brief to Council Officers. Beat Carnival, Duncairn 174 Trust and Feile An Phobail concluded that their respective offering built upon the pilot of 2022.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beat Carnival, with logistical support from the Council Events team, delivered the city centre parade/pageant. • Duncairn 174 Trust, again with logistical support from the Events staff, delivered the St Patricks Eve Concert at Customs House Square. • Feile An Phobail delivered their city-wide Trad Trail. • Maywe LLP reported a successful project albeit on a lesser budget than 2022. Tales of our City 2023 was a short workshop series combined with a public facing exhibition of stories at 2 Royal Ave from the residents of the city.
<p>3.8</p>	<p>In addition, Council secured £37,000 of TNI Product Development funding to test new Tourism experiences within the City; this included Ceilli Sessions at the Castle and a trad and taster tour. Through the on-going engagement with Ards Comhaltas, in relation to the Fleadh bid, events took place at St George’s Market and 2 Royal Ave.</p> <p>Operationally, there were no issues of note, although feedback from Translink requested consideration on the length of road closures in Donegall square North to accommodate the parade.</p>
<p>3.9</p>	<p>The feedback received on the St Patrick’s Day events has been positive.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The socio-economic survey presented that the overall estimated direct spend for the St Patrick’s Celebrations excluding accommodation was £679,800.00, and the public rating of the events: • 68% gave the Concert a rating of 8- 10, including 32% who rated it as ‘Extremely good’, while 79% rated the Parade between 8-10. • 93% of visitors agreed that the event improves NI’s reputation as a host for events like these, with 97% believing that events like this encourage people to come to Belfast, and 94% said that such events improve their sense of well-being and community. • 92% felt the St Patrick’s Celebrations were inclusive for all people from all cultural heritages. • 67% said that the alcohol free policy had a positive influence on their decision to attend the concert.
<p>4.0</p>	<p>Anecdotally other feedback suggested the 2023 festival provided a more cohesive event programme. The additional programming has further served to enhance the visitor experience and connectivity across the event assets.</p>
<p>4.1</p>	<p>Officers felt that the Parade (Beat Initiative), Music Trail (Feile) and Storytelling initiatives (Maywe) clearly work, and have scope to develop. The St Patrick’s Eve Concert at</p>

Customs House Square (Duncairn) currently requires additional delivery support and as such can present hidden costs, in addition it is unfortunately subject to inclement March evening weather and can result in low attendance numbers with low conversion in tickets requested and on the day attendance. It is possible that this element could be revisited as a series of smaller, indoor performances throughout the City over the celebrations.

4.2 Members should note that the four organisations have made significant efforts to deliver in 2022, and 2023, with the latter year demonstrating event development. It is clear that the initial two years of investment has built foundations for future activity.

4.3 2024 Way Forward

At the April Committee, the Tourism and Events Workplan was presented, and members approved the allocation of £300,000 to St Patricks Day 2024.

4.4 Given the considerable investment Council has, and the wider City initiatives around St Patricks Day, there is an untapped opportunity to promote the City offering to international markets of appeal. From the £300k, £10k of the 2024 budget will be used for the purposes of international marketing. Therefore, it is proposed that £290k is available to support programming, If any successful submissions require logistical support from Council, as has been the case previously, this will be considered when allocations are being determined.

4.5 New Commissioning Approach

Committee were informed at Sept 22 that a new process would be put in place, and therefore a new procurement process is required. A Tender Initiation Request form for a tender for St Patrick’s Celebration Events will be presented at Strategic Policy & Resources on 23 June 2023.

Indicative Timelines:

Task	Timeline
Finalise ITT and Specification	By end of June 2023
Advertise and issue tender docs	First week of July
Tender Close	Mid August (min 30 days advert plus extra days to take into account July holidays)
Evaluation Period	Last two weeks of August
Internal approvals	First week of September
Mandatory Standstill	Mid September
Contract Award Date	Third week of September

4.6 Officers have, in the interim period, drafted a specification which will seek proposals for events and activities for 2024 and beyond.

<p>4.7</p>	<p>It is anticipated that a framework of the events and activities akin to 2022 and 2023 will be established. The number of successful awards from this tender will be determined by the financial asks and the finite resources available.</p> <p>Criteria have been established to ensure alignment to the Cultural Strategy, while other criteria will address value for money and the long-term support of Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Previous Experience of similar scale cultural programmes/projects • Capability and Capacity • Concept and Feasibility • Co-Design & Inclusivity • Financial Sustainability • Partnership Approach • Cost
<p>4.8</p>	<p>It is proposed that the tender will be for a period of three years (1 + 1+ 1) to allow for product development. However, projects will be evaluated on an annual basis. Successful organisations would be expected to co-ordinate activity in support of each other.</p>
<p>4.9</p>	<p>Future Proofing - An Executive Summary - A new approach to St Patrick's Programme in Belfast</p> <p>The Council's in-house Creative Lead conducted a review of the current approach to the delivery of the St. Patrick's Programme, including a bench marking exercise of St Patrick's Day celebrations across Ireland and has made recommendations for an enhanced operating model moving forward.</p> <p>The St Patrick's Programme in Belfast is currently commissioned annually by Belfast City Council (BCC) and delivered by outside providers. The benchmarking exercise has shown that there is considerable scope to develop impact, audience and additional investment. To address this, Council should consider allocation of an Executive work package with responsibility of attracting funding, developing partnerships, enhancing the Programme's international profile, and leading the creative commissioning process. Importantly, this role would also ensure and oversee a staged transition of fundraising responsibility out of the Council taken on by the external suppliers in Year 2 and Year 3. The sustainability of the event relies on broadening the stakeholders involved and of the evolution of a mixed investment model.</p>
<p>5.0</p>	<p>The report suggests that the St Patrick's Programme requires a cohesive creative approach across all elements, supported through the dual roles of a Creative Director responsible for the parade and a Creative Programmer responsible for the wider programme of engagement and events around the city, to develop the creative concept and commission the artists, artworks, and experiences. However, given resource pressures within the unit it is proposed that requirement is fulfilled via submitting organisations nominating a lead Creative Director/Programmer and factored into respective project budgets. This individual will be expected to work closely with Council officials in an oversight capacity for all aspects of programme co-design and creative</p>

	<p>delivery. They will also work with other peers from other successful contractors or delivery partners.</p>
<p>5.1</p>	<p>Using Belfast 2024 as a pivot Belfast 2024 will enable additional investment in the St Patrick’s programme in 2024, potentially allowing for time the additional finance to be sourced for the following years of the tender and will enable development within Council of a collaborative ‘producing’ model for the future. Governance structures put in place for Belfast 2024 will provide a blueprint for ongoing cultural oversight.</p>
<p>5.2</p>	<p>All-Ireland Fleadh Cheoil Na h’Eireann</p> <p>With members approval Council participated in the bid to host the Fleadh Cheoil in 2023 & 2024, however, the event was awarded to Wexford, who have been bidding for the event since 2016. It is anticipated that Wexford will host the event in 2024 and likely in 2025. As Belfast are now invested in a successful bid for future events, there is an expectation that the city will bid again for the 2025 event.</p>
<p>5.3</p>	<p>Normally, bids would be submitted in December. Therefore, for the 2025 bid, it is anticipated that the bid will be required to be submitted by mid December 2023. In addition, there is the expectation of further visits from the committee as per previous years in January & February 2024.</p>
<p>5.4</p>	<p>2024 Bid Review & Lessons Learned</p> <p>The Belfast bid received very positive feedback from all sources. Members of the Ard Chomhairle suggested that the Belfast bid had created a new standard for bids. As well as preparing the bid document, BCC officers also secured a number of letters of support which were appended. Some further correspondence was also sent to senior and influential members of the Ard Chomhairle from the US Ambassador to the UK and Consul General Narain.</p>
<p>5.5</p>	<p>There were specific areas for improvement highlighted by voting members and trusted advisors that are detailed below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More Irish language content within the bid document - More detailed engagement with Provincial Comhaltas - Greater attendance at Conventions - Greater focus on disabled access - More involvement from Ards CCE
<p>5.6</p>	<p><u>More Irish language content within the bid document</u> After reviewing other bids, it is clear that it is not normal to produce a dual language bid document. The other documents do seem to have some key messages in Irish, acting as taglines for the bid document; this was absent from the Belfast bidding document.</p>

<p>5.7</p>	<p><u>More detailed engagement with Provincial Comhaltas</u></p> <p>As well as the four provincial Comhaltas who are voting members of the Ard Chomhairle, a North American Comhaltas and GB Comhaltas are also voting members. In the previous voting cycle, we engaged with the Ulster Provincial Council, GB Comhaltas and North American Comhaltas. Our information confirms that we received support from voting members of these three Comhaltas. The information received to date indicates that the vote was split with the vote being decided by votes from the Chair and General Secretary with the most significant influencing factor being on those votes being the lack of engagement with all 4 provincial councils. This lack of engagement was due to pressures on human and financial resources. Given the weighting and importance of engagement this approach has been revisited for future requirements.</p>
<p>5.8</p>	<p><u>Greater attendance at Conventions</u></p> <p>A breakdown of potential future engagement events in 2023:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All-Britain Fleadh 24-25 June (Stirling, Scotland) • Connacht Fleadh 29 June - 2 July (Ballina) • Leinster Fleadh 6-9 July (Dublin) • Munster Fleadh 13-16 July (Tralee) • Ulster Fleadh 20-23 July (Dromore, Co. Tyrone) • Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, 6-14 August, Mullingar <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ard-Ollamh Award Gala dinner (Wednesday night, 9 Aug) ○ Overseas Reception (Thursday night, 10 Aug) ○ Comhaltas National Folk Orchestra event (Friday night, 11 Aug) • Tionól Ceoil Leo Rowsome, 1-2 September (Monkstown) • Comhaltas Christmas Dinner, December (Dublin)
<p>5.9</p>	<p><u>Greater focus on disabled access</u></p> <p>Accessibility matters will be further considered in revised bid book.</p>
<p>6.0</p>	<p><u>More involvement from Ards CCE</u></p> <p>The Belfast bid is in conjunction with the local Fleadh Executive Committee, Ards/Bangor Comhaltas Branch, who must be seen as fronting the bid. This Comhaltas is made up of volunteers. Previously Committee agreed to supporting the work of Ards CCE via a Letter of Offer (£7,500 CGR approval September 2022).</p>
<p>6.1</p>	<p>Given the feedback from the unsuccessful bid, it is anticipated that the contribution of the Ards Branch requires an uplift from the previous bid. This uplift will take the form of partnering on convention visits, increased performances at conventions and other key engagements. This will of course incur additional expenditure for members of the Ards Comhaltas which in turn should be recognised given their status as a voluntary organisation. As with all funding agreements council will only recognise verified costs and any balance remaining will be returned to council. Members should note that Ards CCE will be asked to provide summary information on their objectives on each occasion e.g. lobbying, research; and report back to Council on lessons learned.</p>

6.2	<p>Members are also asked to note that while this funding will cover the current financial year, the Ards Branch will require a similar funding for 2024-25 and the following year. The full resource requirements are appended at Appendix 2. This provides members with a summary of expenditure associated with the on-going bid process, by year, and also identifies the Ards CCE support, which has been carefully considered. It is anticipated that this expenditure will not be exceeded.</p>
6.3	<p>Council Attendance at future Fleadh events including Mullingar</p> <p>5.2.5 addresses the role of the Ards Branch, and the costs associated with supporting the local Comhaltas throughout the bid process.</p> <p>Members are reminded that the Council, as the key funders of any successful bid, must also maintain a profile at particular events, as outlined in the Costs appended.</p>
6.4	<p>Next Steps</p> <p>Officers are seeking members approval to submit a bid for the event in 2025. While it is unlikely that Belfast will be successful it is normal practice for bidders to continue to bid. Work to the revised Bid book will include inclusion of Irish language, and a greater focus on disabled access. There is also a requirement for a delegation including Lord Mayor to visit the 2023 Fleadh Cheoil in Mullingar in August to show commitment and therefore garner votes. Representatives from Belfast (Council/Ards) are expected at other events.</p>
6.5	<p>Bid to host the European Football Championships in 2028</p> <p>Officers are working closely with key bid stakeholders (Tourism NI, IFA, Central Bid Team and UK Sport) in the interim period, before the official bid announcement in the Autumn. It is further anticipated that preliminary feedback from UEFA on the UK and Ireland bid is imminent and the opportunity to provide clarification to UEFA will have an end of June deadline. Responses will be coordinated in partnership with TNI and the IFA. Further host City briefings from the Central Bid Team are also planned over the Summer months.</p>
6.6	<p>Financial & Resource Implications</p>
	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>There are no financial implications to this report. All expenditure is within existing departmental budgets and approvals.</p> <p>The current events development budget for this financial year is £40,000. Members are asked to note if participation in another bidding cycle for the Fleadh Cheoil is to be undertaken that the current provision within the pre-agreed Events Development Budget may not be sufficient to consider other events development work on other major events bid campaigns.</p>

6.7	<p><u>Equality & Good Relations Implications</u></p> <p>The Cultural Strategy - <i>A City Imagining</i> - carried out an extensive EQIA covering the duration of the strategy 2020-2030. Major events are one of the major outputs of the Cultural Strategy with wide and varied ambition. Promotion of opportunity for all Section 75 groups to be celebrated within the programme is important to it's success.</p>
7.0	<p>Appendices – Documents Attached</p>
	<p>Appendix 1 Breakdown of all costs associated with the future bidding for the Fleadh Cheoil</p>

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Date
2023 - 2024
Aug-23
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2024 - 2025
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Mar-25
2025 - 2026
Apr-25
Aug-25
Dec-25

Event
All Ireland Fleadh
Comhaltas Christmas Dinner
GB Comhaltas Convention
Ulster Comhaltas Convention
Munster Comhaltas Convention
Connacht Comhaltas Convention
Leinster Comhaltas Convention
Bid Book Revision, associated bid materials e.g. video & design work. Other Professional Services
Contingency
2023-24 Total
US Comhaltas Convention
All Ireland Fleadh
Comhaltas Christmas Dinner
Ulster Comhaltas Convention
Munster Comhaltas Convention
Connacht Comhaltas Convention
Leinster Comhaltas Convention
GB Comhaltas Convention
Bid Book Revision, associated bid materials e.g. video & design work. Other Professional Services
Contingency
2024-25 Total
US Comhaltas Convention
All Ireland Fleadh
Comhaltas Christmas Dinner
Bid Book Revision, associated bid materials e.g. video & design work. Other Professional Services
Contingency
2025-26 Total

Location	BCC Attendees	Ards CC Reps & Musicians	Type of Expense	Total Estimated Cost	Estimated Ards CC Cost
Mullingar	BCC x 4	Ards CCE x 13	T & S	£10,000	£8,000
Dublin	BCC x 3	Ards CCE x 16	T & S	£2,000	£1,500
London	BCC x 3	Ards CCE x 13	T & S	£6,000	£5,000
Ulster	BCC x 3	Ards CCE x 13	T & S	£2,000	£1,700
Munster	BCC x 3	Ards CCE x 13	T & S	£2,000	£1,700
Connacht	BCC x 3	Ards CCE x 13	T & S	£2,000	£1,700
Lenister	BCC x 3	Ards CCE x 13	T & S	£2,000	£1,700
				£20,000	
				£5,000	
				£51,000	£21,300
Buffalo, USA	BCC x 2	Ards CCE x 10	T & S	£20,000	£15,000
Wexford	BCC x 4	Ards CCE x 13	T & S	£10,000	£8,000
Dublin	BCC x 3	Ards CCE x 16	T & S	£2,000	£1,500
Ulster	BCC x 3	Ards CCE x 13	T & S	£2,000	£1,700
Munster	BCC x 3	Ards CCE x 13	T & S	£2,000	£1,700
Connacht	BCC x 3	Ards CCE x 13	T & S	£2,000	£1,700
Lenister	BCC x 3	Ards CCE x 13	T & S	£2,000	£1,700
London	BCC x 3	Ards CCE x 13	T & S	£6,000	£5,000
				£20,000	
				£5,000	
				£71,000	£36,300
TBC	BCC x 2	Ards CCE x 10	T & S	£20,000	£15,000
Wexford	BCC x 4	Ards CCE x 13	T & S	£10,000	£8,000
Dublin	BCC x 3	Ards CCE x 16	T & S	£2,000	£1,500
				£20,000	
				£5,000	
				£57,000	£24,500
			Total	£179,000	£82,100

Notes:

House & hotel
Bus return

|

Significant flight costs
House & hotel
Bus return

Significant flight costs
House & hotel
Bus return



Subject:	Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme
Date:	14th June 2023
Reporting Officer:	John Greer, Director of Economic Development
Contact Officer:	Kerry McMullan, Tourism and Events Development Manager

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to update Members on the development of the Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme (the “Programme”) and to seek Members’ approval of the proposed funding model and next steps.
1.2	In April 2022 Members of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee approved the draft tourism plan, <i>Make Yourself at Home</i> together with the Year 1 2022/2023 Action Plan of priorities. This included a commitment to developing a Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Fund for local tourism, recognising this as one of 3 catalyst projects alongside Belfast Stories and Year of Culture 2024. <i>Catalyst 1 - Our Place - Developing Local Tourism</i> : the Tourism

	Plan recognises that Regenerative Tourism is driven by the relationship between people and place, with an emphasis on uplifting the importance of community in the context of tourism and in particular, the relationship between the visitor and the host.
1.3	The Programme provides an opportunity to support the development and roll out of <i>Belfast Stories</i> and align with delivery of the <i>Tourism Plan</i> , <i>Cultural Strategy</i> and Tourism NI's <i>Embrace A Giant Spirit</i> brand and values, to deliver enhanced experiences for visitors and act as a catalyst to support the social, economic and physical regeneration across the city.
1.4	It is envisaged that this will be an iterative, phased programme. Significant work has already been undertaken by the Tourism Development Unit on the initial phase of the Programme (Phase 1: Development), in collaboration with the Belfast Stories and Culture Unit teams.
1.5	In order to maximise synergies and outcomes across key programmes, it is anticipated that the second phase of the Programme (Phase 2: Implementation) will launch once <i>Belfast Stories</i> , <i>the Heritage Audit and Development Plan</i> and <i>the Visitor Experience Action Plan</i> have progressed to a more advanced stage.
1.6	Since 2017, Council has supported 2 neighbourhood tourism organisations (EastSide Tourism and Fáilte Feirste Thiar) to deliver a <i>City Connections</i> programme which promotes cohesion between cultural tourism offers in the east and west of the city. It is anticipated that <i>City Connections</i> will be replaced by the proposed investment Programme, which will be open to organisations across the city. To facilitate the transition, it is proposed that Council continue to support both organisations in this interim period and provide financial assistance to the end of this financial year (31 st March 2024).
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	To progress development of Phase 1 of the Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme, we request Members' consideration of the following:
2.2	Members are asked to approve investment in independent sectoral facilitation to conduct developmental engagement which will identify needs, gaps and opportunities, alignment of the City Connections programme and further inform and the parameters of the Programme (Phase 2).

2.3	Members are asked to approve investment in a 2-year programme to develop and enhance tourism products and experiences across the city, sharing and distributing the benefits of a vibrant tourism sector throughout local neighbourhoods.
2.4	Members are asked to approve interim funding to continue support for the City Connections programme until the end of current financial year.
3.0	Main report
3.1	Strategic Context
	To ensure that an investment programme is developed in a robust and cohesive manner to meet sectoral needs, the Programme will be informed by key interdependent strategic priorities and projects, including <i>Visitor Experience Action Plan</i> , the <i>Cultural Strategy</i> , <i>Heritage Audit and Roadmap for Development</i> , and <i>Belfast Stories</i> , as detailed below.
3.2	Through investment in the development of high-quality tourism products aligned to our core strategic objectives, visitors may be drawn to neighbourhoods beyond the city centre delivering authentic experiences, promoting increased dwell time and spend, uplifting economic growth and capacity in local communities.
3.3	Further opportunity has been identified to enhance and extend the visitor experience and promote a cohesive, expanded visitor journey of exploration beyond the city centre. Creating a regenerative tourism offering that takes into consideration the appeal of neighbourhoods in delivering authentic experiences and the benefits of regenerative tourism.
3.4	As Members will be aware, Belfast Stories aims to create a unique visitor experience that captures the city through its powerful stories. Offering visitors, a new way to see and understand Belfast, it will generate authentic experiences that engender a greater sense of connection and belonging, both for local people and visitors to our city.
3.5	The offer will become the “go to” first stop for visitors to Belfast and the wider NI region, orientating visitors and linking them to other city-based / regional visitor attraction.

3.6	<p>At the current time, the hierarchy of stories / stories framework is still at a developmental stage, however in time and when fully developed this will become intrinsically linked to the Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme parameters. The development phase will enable industry to fully understand the opportunity presented by Belfast Stories and consider experiences that will enhance and support interconnected Visitor experiences and the role that communities can play in the overarching visitor experience.</p>
3.7	<p>Cultural Strategy</p> <p>The ten - year Cultural Strategy for Belfast, <i>A City Imagining</i> states that in order to truly engage with our visitors and ultimately grow market share, Belfast needs to ensure that visitors connect strongly with the city’s people, culture, places and heritage. To help give focus to the challenge of creating unique destination experiences which meet visitor need, the strategy identifies four themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell me more (A city of stories) e.g. character and charm of Belfast, make the visitor feel at home • Not what it seems (A city of contrasts) e.g. intriguing and complex history of Belfast, character of the place • Hidden depths (A maritime city) e.g. waterways, rivers, loughs and shores • Homespun (Made in Belfast) e.g. industrial heritage, cultural venues, innovation, creativity. <p>The proposed Programme will be developed in cognisance of these themes to shape immersive and engaging tourism experiences across the city.</p>
3.8	<p>Heritage Audit</p> <p>It is also envisaged that the Programme will be shaped in alignment with the <i>Heritage Audit and Roadmap for Development</i>, aligning investment that recognises, promotes and protects the city’s cultural heritage in all its dimensions, both tangible and intangible including the plurality of the city’s cultural narratives. Work on this development plan is currently underway and will provide additional understanding of enabling infrastructure and assets that will support the success of Belfast Stories and visitor engagement.</p>
3.9	<p>Tourism Strategy</p>

	<p>In April 2022, Council approved the 'Make Yourself at Home' 10-year Tourism Plan for Belfast, recognising the importance of tourism to the city's economic growth. The <i>Make Yourself at Home</i> Tourism Plan places community at its heart. Respect for the local context, to ensure tourism-derived benefits are shared and inclusive, is evident in all four of the strategic themes - Grow, Position, Experience and Sustain.</p>
3.10	<p>Need has been identified for a specific programme to support the development of neighbourhood-based tourism experiences. Work to date has demonstrated that some areas of the city are more advanced than others in terms of neighbourhood tourism and leveraging the opportunity it presents. Whilst some areas have organisations undertaking work on visitor servicing and tourism development, it is clear that many neighbourhoods currently lack the capacity to bring forward strong proposals that would appeal to visitors.</p>
3.11	<p>The development of a suitable investment programme would be further strengthened by independent engagement with a range of organisations across the city to identify sectoral needs and opportunities and to support and inform future Programme phases.</p>
3.11	<p>Benchmarking research work has demonstrated that neighbourhoods are uniquely positioned to offer the visitor the immersive, authentic experiences they are seeking:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebrating local culture, heritage and enterprise. • Accessing open and green spaces. • Co-creating authentic Belfast experiences, linked to the city's key stories. • Enjoying day to night food and hospitality. • Amplifying and extending the impact of the city's main existing visitor attractions.
3.12	<p>Cities across Europe (of comparable size to Belfast) have successfully implemented ambitious programmes which place communities at the heart of regenerative tourism. Research highlights the importance of uplifting capacity, quality of product and visitor experience in local neighbourhoods beyond the city centre and considers how San Sebastian, Ljubljana, and Berlin have employed local tourism initiatives to develop sustainable growth in visitor numbers and product development (<i>Local Tourism in Belfast: Developing the Offer, Deloitte 2018</i>).</p> <p>Visitor Experience Action Plan</p>

3.13	<p>At the current time, the <i>Visitor Experience Action Plan</i> is at a developmental stage, with a view to driving the effective implementation of the actions set out in the <i>Visitor Experience Plan</i>, which identifies neighbourhood tourism as one of six specific gaps in the city's current visitor experience offering. Once fully developed, the Action Plan will prioritise development activity linked to the Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme parameters to address identified need and drive economic growth, sharing the benefits of the tourism sector with communities across the city.</p>
3.14	<p>Purpose of The Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme</p> <p>The Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme aims to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage in facilitated dialogue with sectoral and community partners across the city to identify needs, gaps and opportunities for tourism offers to drive increased visitor footfall, dwell time and spend in local neighbourhoods. • Provide short term support (over a maximum period of 2 years) to develop authentic and financially sustainable new cultural tourism products, or enhancements to existing offers, which will bring vitality to local neighbourhoods, local residents and visitors. • Encourage the development of plans which build capacity for city neighbourhoods to connect to the broader tourism offer, enabling local communities to become part of the Belfast visitor experience. • Promote enhanced visitor dwell time in the city and extend the economic benefits beyond the city centre. • Extend the journey of visitors to <i>Belfast Stories</i>, encouraging further exploration of its narratives across wider city neighbourhoods.
3.15	<p>Programme Focus and Scope</p> <p>The Programme will facilitate funding of priority outcomes linked to the Tourism Plan and support actions set out under the four strategic themes contained within the <i>Make Yourself At Home</i> Tourism Strategy - Grow, Position, Experience and Sustain. It will also provide a flexible approach to Neighbourhood Tourism within the City, while recognising the differing stages of development and capacity across the city. While it is envisaged that the investment programme may be extended beyond the initial two year period, the first two programme phases will have specific areas of focus:</p>

Phase One - Programme Development

3.16 In this first phase, significant focus will be placed upon scoping and benchmarking work to inform and define programme parameters, aims and projected outcomes, in alignment with interdependent projects. This work has already been progressed by the Tourism Development Unit, in collaboration with the Belfast Stories and Culture teams.

To further shape Programme parameters, we will prioritise the procurement of independent facilitation services to conduct developmental and engagement activity with the sector and across neighbourhoods in the North, East, South and West of the city. This work will include, but will not be limited to, the following:

- Conducting a needs audit and gaps analysis within neighbourhoods.
- Identify visitor needs and opportunities to increase dwell time and spend in neighbourhoods.
- Engage with sectoral stakeholders to build confidence in neighbourhood tourism offers and explore the development of new products and experiences, or enhancements to existing offers.
- Facilitate sectoral dialogue around issues relating to connectivity, sustainability, accessibility and capacity.
- Advise on potential programme linkages to Council's strategic priorities and Tourism NI's Embrace a Giant Spirit brand values and themes.
- Outline opportunities for the alignment and integration of the previous support delivered via City Connections.

3.17 Awareness of the initial phase of the programme will be raised via messaging across the council website and digital channels. Active participation will be sought through an open call to potential partners, stakeholders and collaborators from the city's tourism and community sectors. An audit process will also identify appropriate groups and organisations to shape, inform and benefit from the proposed programme.

3.18 It is envisaged that the engagement activity will achieve the following benefits for participants:

- Promote a greater understanding of the economic and social value of neighbourhood tourism to both communities and tourism businesses.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance understanding of the opportunities presented by <i>Belfast 2024</i> and <i>City Deal</i> programmes to promote economic growth, build capacity and connect communities into the emerging broader tourism offer. • Enable local communities to become part of the Belfast visitor experience • Foster collaborative partnerships and networking synergies to promote the development of clustered tourism offers.
3.19	<p>The work outlined above will further inform the Programme to ensure it is robust and fit for purpose when it is opened during Phase 2 of the proposal. Committee will be updated on the outcomes and learnings resulting from the facilitation work in advance of the programme progressing to Phase 2.</p>
	<p>Within this first programme phase, we also propose to continue support for the City Connections programme until the end of this financial year in its current format.</p>
3.20	<p>Phase Two – Programme Implementation</p> <p>Phase 2 will be scoped in response to the work undertaken in Phase 1, with focus placed upon an open call for projects aligned to council’s <i>Visitor Experience Framework, and Action Plan</i>, which will provide a co-ordinated approach to product and experience development in the city. Phase 2 will also prioritise the development of high-quality tourism products linked to Belfast’s key narratives, which encourage visitors to continue their journey beyond the <i>Belfast Stories</i> attraction and extend their experience across the wider city.</p>
3.21	<p>Investment Priorities</p> <p>The investment priorities for this programme are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Product Development: development of new, high quality local tourism products and experiences or enhancements to existing high-quality offers across the city. • Capacity Building: in collaboration with teams across the Economic Development Unit, the Programme will invest in projects to strengthen community capacity to shape, deliver and contribute to visitor experiences. The ambition is to ensure all parts of the city have the opportunity to benefit from tourism investment.

3.22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is envisaged that applications will be considered for investment in products at one of three distinct phases; concept, planning, operational. <p>Anticipated Programme Outcomes:</p> <p>The Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme will, in the long-term, support the delivery of the Visitor Experience Framework through the development of financially sustainable tourism products which draw visitors into local neighbourhoods, immersing them actively in the locale, promoting increased dwell time and spend in the area and uplifting skill, capacity and confidence in local communities.</p> <p>It is anticipated that the parameters and outcomes of the programme may evolve throughout the lifetime of the <i>Make Yourself at Home</i> Tourism Plan in response to challenges, opportunities and needs identified across the city.</p>		
3.23	<p>A post-programme evaluation report will be brought to Committee, incorporating lessons learned and recommendations to shape future funding initiatives in response to programme outcomes, opportunities and sectoral needs.</p> <p>Timeframe</p> <p>Phase 1 (research and development) of the project is currently underway, with facilitation and engagement activity to commence once investment is approved.</p> <p>It is anticipated that work will continue until March 2024, with a view to Phase 2 (implementation) commencing from April 2024.</p> <p>Further progress reports will be provided to Committee in due course.</p>		
3.24	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>Approval of the Committee is sought for a total investment of £500,000 to support the ambitions of this Programme across a two year period.</p> <p>It is anticipated that budget will be sought from City Deal reserves for the 2023 – 24 and 2025 periods of activity.</p> <p>2023 - 24 (Research and development phase)</p> <table data-bbox="274 1872 935 1908"> <tr> <td>City Connections current funding</td> <td>£50,000</td> </tr> </table>	City Connections current funding	£50,000
City Connections current funding	£50,000		

	<p><i>Committee meeting on 5 April 2023 approved £25k each to Fáilte Feirste Thiar and EastSide Tourism to support City Connections programme of work, 1 April to 30 September 2023.</i></p> <p>City Connections extension of funding, 1 Oct to 31 March 2024 £50,000</p> <p>Independent facilitation services £50,000</p> <p>2024 – 25 (Implementation phase)</p> <p>Investment programme £350,000</p>
3.25	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>The Tourism Plan: <i>Make Yourself at Home</i> has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment (EAIQ) and a Rural Needs Assessment (RNS). Any issues raised during the public consultation have been addressed in the final plan, which was approved at committee meeting on 6 April 2022. No further public consultation will be required for this investment fund.</p> <p>Neighbourhood tourism is one of the outputs of the Tourism Strategy, promotion of opportunity for all Section 75 groups to be celebrated within the programme is important to it's success.</p>
4.0	Appendices – Documents attached
	None



Subject:	<i>A City Imagining</i> Investment Programme: Cultural multi-annual grants
Date:	14 th June 2023
Reporting Officer:	John Greer, Director of Economic Development
Contact Officer:	Chris McCreery, Culture Development Manager

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	<p>The purpose of this report is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Update Members on the investment programme that supports the cultural strategy, <i>A City Imagining 2020-2030</i>. – Update members on the independent review of Cultural multi-annual grants (CMAG) – Seek approval for the opening of the cultural multi-annual two-year and four-year scheme in August 2023 for funding from 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2028. – Seek approval for the continuation of Pathfinder in 2023/24

2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>It is recommended that Members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Note the contents of this report and agree to open cultural multi-annual grants in August 2023 for Arts and Heritage organisations and Events and Festivals for funding from 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2028 subject to final recommendations being agreed by Committee in January 2024 - Approval the continuation of Pathfinder in 2023/24
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p>Background to Cultural multi-annual grants (CMAG)</p> <p>At a meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee on 28 August 2019, a new ten-year cultural strategy for Belfast, <i>A City Imagining</i>, was agreed. As part of this strategy a new investment approach was approved including phased implementation of new funding programmes. Similar to the Belfast Agenda, the recommended investment model for culture proposed a new partnership approach to supporting the cultural sector, with the aim of sustaining and developing accessible cultural activity and infrastructure across Belfast. This investment is central to creating positive cultural, social and economic impacts for the city, delivering on our overall targets for the period, positioning Belfast as a regional driver, and creating the conditions for long-term transformation.</p>
3.2	<p>As included in the strategy, the aims of the cultural investment model are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - support the cultural life of the city by enabling citizens to be active, dynamic and creative agents of change - invest in the cultural and creative sectors skills development and capacity for production and innovation - position Belfast as an international testing ground for new approaches to cultural engagement, development and placemaking - establish Belfast as a cultural destination.
3.3	<p>The first phased implementation of the cultural investment model commenced with the opening of a competitive funding programme for cultural multi-annual grants for the period April 2020 to March 2024. It was agreed that these multi-annual grants would cover two main areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Arts and heritage organisations, which have a year-round programme of cultural activity (<i>Anchor</i> four-year grants and <i>Enable</i> two-year grants)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Festivals and events organisations, which have a festival or event with an audience of 65,000 or more (<i>Imagine</i> four-year grants), or an audience of 10,000 or more (<i>Activate</i> two-year grants) by end of grant period.
3.4	<p>These two strands of funding, Arts and Heritage and Festivals and Events, each with two tiers of investment available (two-year and four-year) replaced previous core multi-annual funding for arts and heritage and previous one-off funding agreements to events and festivals awarded on an annual basis via the Committee process.</p>
3.5	<p>The Arts and Heritage strand of funding is similar to and replaced the established core multi annual funding first implemented in 2013. It was designed to sustain our existing cultural offer covering both programmes and infrastructure. The Festivals and Events strand of funding was a new element and was designed to develop large events and festivals that will help Belfast become a year-round events destination. Furthermore it created a transparent and open process in line with the arts and heritage funding process.</p>
3.6	<p>Plans and process for launch of Cultural multi-annual funding</p> <p>In advance of the new financial year in April 2024, it is planned to launch CMAG in August 2023 with approval of awards and contracts by March 2023. A summary of this timeline is included below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open call for application submissions – early August 2023 • Information sessions for applicants – August 2023 • Submission deadline for application – September/October 2023 • Eligibility check, scoring, officer assessment and independent assessment – Oct to Dec 2023 • Committee Approval of awards - January 2024 • Council Ratification approval of awards - February 2024
3.7	<p>Similar to other grants, Cultural Multi-Annual Grants will be advertised widely. This will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information and application details emailed directly to a GDPR compliant mailing list representing over 370 organisations from across the cultural and creative sectors. • Information shared with sectoral networks, websites and socials including the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and Community Arts Partnership.

<p>3.8</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion through Council communication channels • Three information sessions and one-to-one meetings held in advance of the deadline. <p><u>Criteria for Decision making</u></p> <p>Assessments will be made, and scoring applied under three key areas of criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quality of programme: this includes their vision, content, audience experience and marketing and audience development. - Impact of activity: this includes how the programme contributes to the four strategic themes (A City Belonging, A City Challenging, A City Creating and A City Exploring) and how they will monitor and evaluate that impact. - Readiness for investment: this includes planning, financial management, staff, governance, and environmental impact. <p>Assessments will be made only based on information supplied by the applicant within their submission. This will include the application form and supporting documentation such as business plans and strategies.</p>
<p>3.9</p>	<p><u>Principles of the Assessment Process</u></p> <p>Applications are received and eligibility checked by the Central Grants Unit before being passed to officers for scoring. Officers undertake a thorough assessment of all eligible applications. Applications and assessments are discussed and agreed at an internal moderation panel. An independent assessment panel co-ordinated by Central Grants Unit and chaired by a Senior Managers is then convened. The role of this assessment panel is 'to ensure that the scoring of applications has been undertaken in an appropriate fashion and to provide verification or validation of sampled applications and the overall process'.</p>
<p>3.10</p>	<p>Review of current scheme</p> <p>As part of the evaluation framework for CMAG, it was agreed there should be a summative evaluation of both the monitoring and evaluation process and programme impact carried out by an independent evaluator. In April 2023 Belfast City Council appointed Smith and Kent consulting to carry out a review of CMAG.</p> <p>The first cycle of CMAG coincided with a period of unprecedented change in the operating environment, including the Covid-19 pandemic, which seriously limited the</p>

	<p>ability of festivals, events and cultural sectors to deliver activities and outcomes that would contribute to the overall impact of CMAG and the Investment Programme.</p>
3.11	<p>Due to the challenges of the past four years, the evaluation focused primarily on a process review, exploring what worked well and what could be improved. Specifically, the report sought feedback from grantees, unsuccessful applicants, and key Belfast City Council staff. This included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A survey which was completed by 34 grantees and 8 unsuccessful applicants • Four workshops attended by 23 participants from 20 grantee organisations • One-to-one, semi-structured interviews with a further 11 grantees and three unsuccessful applicants that were also Transition recipients. • Semi-structured interviews and focus groups with key Belfast City Council staff including Central Grants Unit, the Culture and Arts Unit, staff involved in the design or assessment of CMAG and senior management
3.12	<p>This Primary research was supplemented by desk research including CMAG guidance notes and application form, the Cultural Investment Model, CMAG monitoring data, the internal review of CMAG in 2021, the Draft CMAG evaluation framework and the “City Imagining” cultural strategy 2020-2030. Detailed feedback across each area is available in Appendix 1.</p>
3.13	<p>Recommendations from the review</p> <p>The report authors found that “there is evidence that Belfast City Council’s CMAG programme follows a robust process and is designed to support the council’s strategic ambitions as set down in A City Imagining.”. Furthermore, it concluded that in keeping with National Audit Office good practice guidance, there is evidence that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk is managed on a spectrum dependent on the type (restricted project and unrestricted grant-in-aid), value and duration of the grant. • It is not risk averse but balances the risk to the council and the grantee, in particular in relation to Imagine and Activate grants. • It is built on a previous comparator scheme and utilises expertise of those with understanding of the sector and experience of similar grant schemes, including Central Grants Unit. • Uptake of funding was accurately projected, and there is balance, on one hand, between encouraging uptake and minimising administrative burdens and, on the

3.14	<p>other, ensuring that the support is used as intended, and the council is confident that the funding targets and benefits the right organisations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The sector has been engaged in the review of the scheme after both two and four years, which will influence the next cycle of funding. • There is no similar multi-annual strategic fund open to the sector. <p>However, it has not been possible to robustly evaluate whether CMAG has achieved its aims or the extent to which it contributed to A City Imagining outcomes. This is largely due to extenuating circumstances in the external and internal operating environment which meant neither the council nor the sector could operate as planned.</p> <p>The report highlights a range of recommendations intended to further enhance the grant process, impact and evaluation, namely:</p>
3.15	<p><u>Relationship management and support</u></p> <p>The report highlighted the importance of one-to-one relationship management, stating that “staff in BCC should also be supported to take on a more developmental role, including training, time to develop relationships and time in lieu to attend funding events and activities.”. Whilst much of this developmental work was impacted by the pandemic and staff changes in the Culture Unit, the importance of relationship management has been reflected in the new structure of the culture team and its corresponding workplans.</p>
3.16	<p>Respondents also reflected the importance of wraparound support, particularly on areas such as accessibility and environmental sustainability. This support, including establishing a Green Arts Forum and a partnership with the University of Atypical to train disability champions, has been reflected in the Culture Workplan 23-24 which was agreed by members in the April 2023 Committee.</p>
3.17	<p>Several respondents also indicated their desire to build relationships with councillors. To address this need, officers will explore options for information and networking sessions between CMAG clients and members.</p>
3.18	<p><u>Eligibility criteria</u></p> <p>Arts and heritage eligibility criteria including audience and turnover are based on historic baselines. However, the impact of the pandemic has created peaks and troughs, and recent baselines are no longer robust. It is therefore recommended that arts and heritage organisations are allowed to base their application on projections (as per</p>

	festivals and events applicants) with the caveat that historic performance will be used to assess whether projections are realistic.
3.19	Similarly, the pandemic has had an impact on audience numbers over the previous three years. It is recommended that the council analyse recent monitoring returns to consider whether audience eligibility criteria are still appropriate.
3.20	It is recommended that council should consider removing the requirement for a minimum number of volunteers. Instead, it should ensure that it is satisfied that volunteering is considered within the assessment criteria as an indicator of A City Belonging, Challenging or Creating.
	<u>Duration and level of funding</u>
3.21	To manage expectations, the council should agree in advance whether applicants can expect a significant change in funding or should request an incremental increase or standstill and communicate this to applicants. The council should also consider telling applicants the average value of grants made in the first round, and the number and value of grants it intends to make in the second cycle.
3.22	The report stated that council should consider awarding all grants on a four-year basis subject to developing a longer-term project fund of scale that could support new and emerging organisations. Officers are mindful of this feedback and the desire for longer term funding from across the sector. However, such a material change to the scheme would require extensive screening and consultation and will be considered for any subsequent reviews of CMAG.
3.23	The report recommended that the council should review existing project funding with a view to introducing a longer-term project fund of scale that would reduce pressure on CMAG and help support a diverse ecosystem. Officials will all engage with the sector to investigate opportunities for dynamic and longer term project funding.
	<u>Application process, evaluation and monitoring</u>
3.24	The report identified the need to provide support for applicants through information sessions and advice clinics, alongside clear consistent messaging to ensure that all applicants understand the purpose of the fund. These information sessions have been built into the planned rollout of the programme alongside a communications plan to

	<p>announce the dates of opening and closing the grant as far in advance as possible. A more enhanced evaluation process, in consultation with grantees, will be implemented to enable evidence to be collected throughout the next four-year cycle.</p>
3.25	<p>Many respondents across all sectors recommended that the council should change the names of the funds. It is recommended to change the name of the funds to refer to them by their descriptors (E.g. four-year arts and heritage, two-year festivals)</p>
3.26	<p><u>Assessment process</u></p> <p>There were several recommendations relating to the assessment process, including providing applicants with more detail on the assessment process and criteria, using external subject matter expertise to assess at least Imagine applications, providing training to new assessors and reviewing the application form should be reviewed to identify any questions or attachments (such as board minutes) that could be removed or made only applicable to four-year applicants. It is also recommended that the administration of all grants should be migrated back to Central Grants Unit. All of these recommendations will be incorporated into the planned rollout of the programme.</p> <p><u>Transition</u></p>
3.27	<p>The council should consider how it will support any existing Imagine or Anchor client that applies unsuccessfully in the second cycle. However, it is not recommended that the council provides a formal scheme such as Transition. Rather, given the variance in Anchor awards in particular, this should be done on a case-by-case basis.</p>
3.28	<p>Pathfinder for 2023/24</p> <p>In February 2022, £79,768 was agreed in relation to four Pathfinder grants which had been designed to address a specific gap in funding. Members agreed that awards were extended for a further two years from 2022-24. The programme was designed to support those organisations that have a specific development need and are currently not in a position to drawdown core funding from the public sector. Based on monitoring of these awards to date, agreement is sought to continue this scheme for the second of the two years in line with the portfolio of two-year Cultural Multi-Annual Grants 2022-2024.</p> <p>Given that the establishment and future of Pathfinder is directly related to CMAG, officials will continue to assess whether the scheme is still applicable during and after</p>

	<p>the rollout of CMAG. Recommendations on whether to continue the scheme beyond 2024 will be brought to members in late 2023.</p>
3.29	<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>There are no new financial commitments relating to Cultural Multi Annual Grants and will be met with existing departmental budgets for 2023-24.</p> <p>An allocation of £79,768.00 will be made in 2023/24 year to extend the Pathfinder Awards and again this will be met from existing departmental budgets.</p>
3.30	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>The cultural strategy, A City Imagining has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) and a Rural Needs Assessment (RNA). Specific initiatives as required will be subject to a further equality screening.</p>
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	Appendix 1 - Review of Belfast City Council's Cultural Multi-Annual Grants Programme

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A REVIEW OF BELFAST CITY COUNCIL'S CULTURAL MULTI-ANNUAL GRANTS PROGRAMME

Prepared by Smith and Kent Consulting

MAY 2023

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Introduction

Belfast City Council's Cultural Multi-annual Grants (CMAG) programme is now in the fourth and final year of its first cycle.

In April 2023 Belfast City Council appointed Smith and Kent consulting to carry out a review of CMAG.

Due to the challenges of the past four years, not least the Covid-19 pandemic which meant that grant recipients were unable to deliver planned activity and outcomes that would contribute to the council's A City Imagining cultural strategy, the review focuses primarily on the grants process including:

1. What worked well for who, how and why
2. What could be built on or done better for who, how and why

Evidence of impact is also considered where available and reasonable.

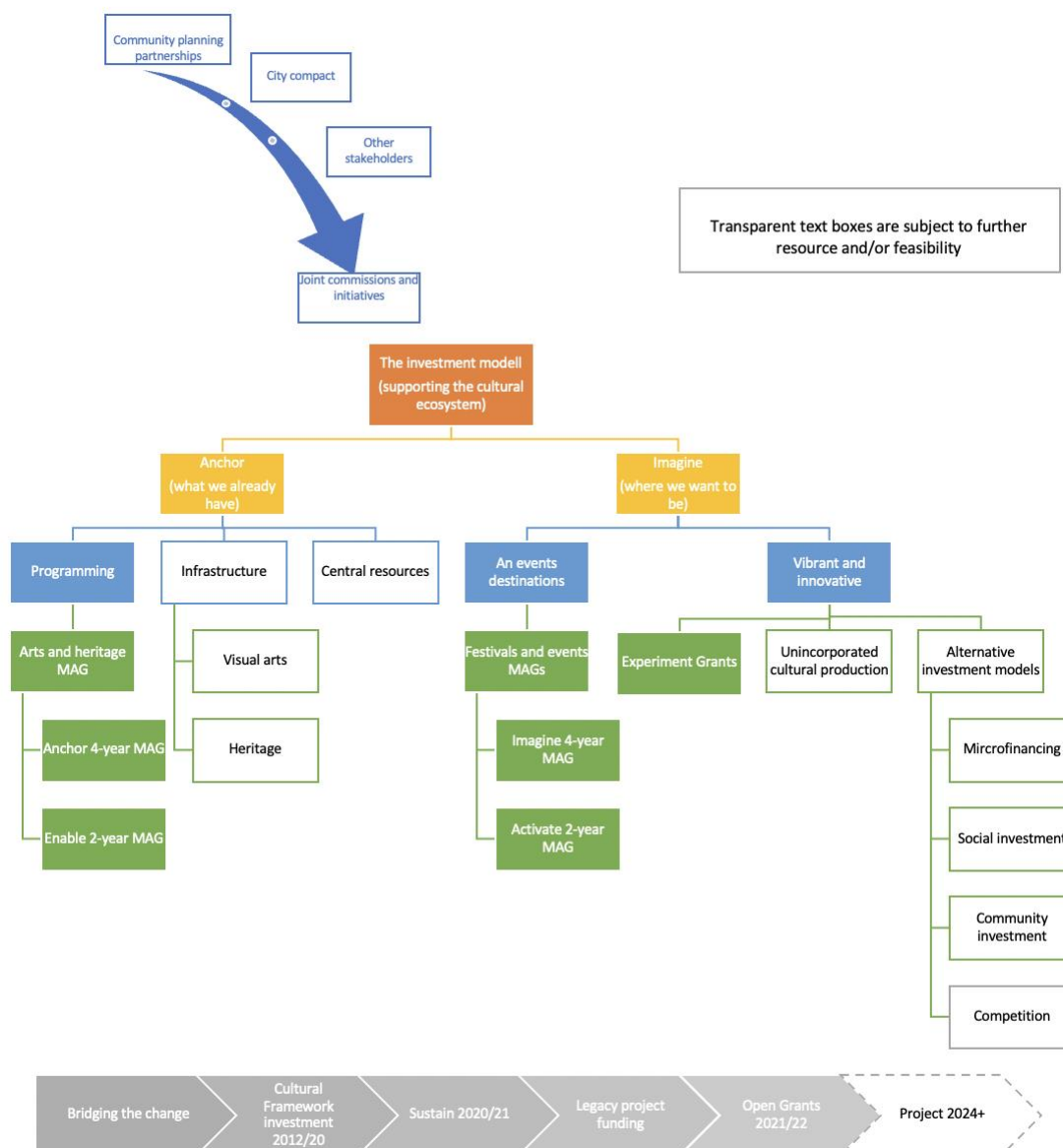
Quotations have been reproduced verbatim.

Background

The Cultural Investment Programme 2020–24

CMAG is one strand of Belfast City Council’s Cultural Investment Programme 2020–24. The purpose of the Investment Model is “to deliver cultural transformation for the city.”

It suggests a range of investment options – long- and short-term; strategic and project – for different beneficiaries – new; existing; growing; unincorporated – and different purposes, which can be broken down in to two broad strands: anchoring what we already have and imagining where we want to be.



Key interdependent strands included:

- phased transition from the previous Core Multi-annual Funding (CMAF) programme
- revisions to project funding to support the transition and lay a foundation for large, longer-term project grants

- new micro-funding and alternative investment in to support strategic gaps and areas of need (such as visual arts, heritage and unincorporated cultural production)
- monitoring and evaluation
- relationship management
- wraparound developmental support

The Investment Programme recommends that each investment strand is “reviewed annually with a minimum focus on financial reconciliation, taking into account delivery across the period, resulting in a decision to continue, discontinue or amend funding”.

A City Imagining 2020–30

The Investment Programme contributes to A City Imagining, the council’s cultural strategy. It states that “evaluation of our existing programme has revealed the need to adapt our one size fits all model” and “a new approach to partnership working [must be] applied to cultural development and investment”. There are also four published investment priorities.

- Anchor: support the cultural infrastructure for a thriving cultural ecosystem
- Activate: empower civic and sectoral engagement, skills and capacity building in order to support inclusive growth
- Experiment: facilitate innovation, catalyst projects and new ideas
- Open: support outward-facing opportunities, including marketing and international cooperation

A City Imagining also aims to establish Belfast as “a unique events destination [with] a Belfast portfolio of festivals and events. This will consist of up to five signature and 12 growth events each year. It will also include continued investment in smaller festivals.” This was based on recommendations from research carried out by Festivals and Events International (FEI). Based on its experience working in other cities and using standard industry classifications, FEI also defined the size and impact of signature and growth festival, including across indicators such as turnover, audience, employment and volunteers and outlined the amount and duration of investment required to support them.

Cultural Multi-annual Grants

Belfast City Council launched its Cultural Multi-annual Grants (CMAG) programme in 2019.

There are two strands of CMAG grants:

1. grants for festivals and events and
2. grants for arts and heritage organisations

There are also two tiers within each grant providing either two- or four-year grants.

The following table summarises the grants that have been made during this cycle. A full list of organisations that received funding is included at appendix 1.

Strand	Tier	Name	Number of grants		Value of grants	
			2019/20– 20/21	2021/22– 22/23	2019/20– 20/21	2021/22– 22/23
Festivals and events	4-year funding for festivals and events	Imagine	4		£635,000	
	2-year funding for festivals and events	Activate	12	15	£480,250	£473,425
Arts and heritage	4-year funding for cultural organisations	Anchor	9		£791,783	
	2-year funding for cultural organisations	Enable	29	27	£566,816	£564,562
Total			96		£3,511,836	

Arts and heritage grants

According to the Investment Programme, “Arts and heritage MAGs are designed to help sustain our existing cultural offer, and in recognition of the current operating environment, they are not required to demonstrate growth.”

Arts and heritage grants are unrestricted, which means that the council does not ask grantees to specify how they will use the funding, as long as it is used responsibly.

Festivals and events grants

The Investment Programme states that “Festivals and events MAGs are designed to develop large events and festivals that will help Belfast become an events destination. Applicants will have to demonstrate how they will grow their audience by the end of the contract period”, up to 10,000 or between 5 (for Activate) and 10 (for Imagine) per cent, whichever is greater.

In addition to arts and heritage activity, festivals and events grants are open to “cultural expression or celebration in the widest sense of culture” such as sports, language and food. This was the first time that the Culture Unit’s multi-annual grants had been open to non-arts and -heritage organisations, and the budget for CMAG was increased by consolidating a number of budgets previously allocated to events and festivals.

Festivals and events grants are restricted as many of the funded organisations also run other festivals, events and programmes of work. This means that organisations must specify how they will spend their funding. However, it can be spent on core costs (attributable to the funded festival or event), and the council allows the grantees to reprofile as required.

Unsuccessful applicants

There were 49 unsuccessful applications for CMAG including 32 for the arts and heritage strand and 17 for festivals and events.

Transition

Transition was an interim funding programme put in place in 2021 to help support organisations that had previously received CMAF funding but who did not make it in to the new CMAG portfolio because they were ineligible to apply or their application was unsuccessful.

There were 11 Transition recipients who received funding alongside support for organisational development provided by an external consultant. Funding totalled £168,000, with grants ranging from £30,000 to £60,000 based on each organisation's CMAF funding deficit capped at council procurement and grant ceilings.

Administration

Belfast City Council grants have been managed and administered centrally by the Central Grants (CGU) since 2011.

The council's Culture and Arts Unit is the budget holder and is also responsible for strategic direction and programme management of CMAG.

Grantees apply for and manage their grants via an online grants portal. The current online grants portal will come to an end on August 2024. Feedback from this review can be used to inform the specification to tender for a new online grants portal. However, in the interim, minimal changes can be made to the system.

Operational context

CMAG grantees received their letters of offer five days before the first Covid-19 lockdown which, according to one grant recipient, "made the original plans obsolete almost immediately". This seriously restricted their ability to deliver planned activities and outcomes. It also damaged the capacity of organisations, for example, through earned income lost, disrupted relationships with audiences, volunteers and other supporters and furloughed staff.

Belfast City Council culture, arts, heritage, events and tourism development functions were also undergoing a significant structural review. In 2019, CMAG was designed and assessed by the Tourism, Culture, Arts and Heritage Unit in partnership with the City Events Unit. In 2021/22, two new units were formed, the Culture and Arts Unit and the Tourism and Events Unit, with management of CMAG retained by the former. Staff from the previous units were redeployed and new staff recruited. No staff members who were involved in the design, initiation or assessment of CMAG are in the Culture and Arts team.

What we did

Feedback from grantees

Organisations that had successfully applied for CMAG were invited to complete an online survey that asked them to reflect on their experience of the application process and administration and management of the grant as well as changes to their organisation over the past four years.

This survey was completed by 34 grantees.

The findings of the survey were then analysed and shared at four workshops. These were attended by 23 participants from 20 grantee organisations. A further 11 grantees took part in one-to-one, semi-structured interviews. The purpose of the workshops and interviews was to dive deeper in to the survey findings and consider what could be done differently in the next round of CMAG. A list of all grantees who participated in workshops or interviews is included at appendix 2.

Feedback from unsuccessful applicants

Organisations that had been unsuccessful applying for CMAG were also asked to complete an online survey. Eight organisations completed the survey, including two Transition recipients, and semi-structured interviews were also carried out with three unsuccessful applicants that were also Transition recipients.

Feedback from Belfast City Council

Smith and Kent carried out semi-structured interviews and focus groups with key Belfast City Council staff including:

- CGU
- the Culture and Arts Unit
- staff from the Tourism, Culture, Arts and Heritage Unit who had been involved in the design or assessment of CMAG
- senior management

Desk research

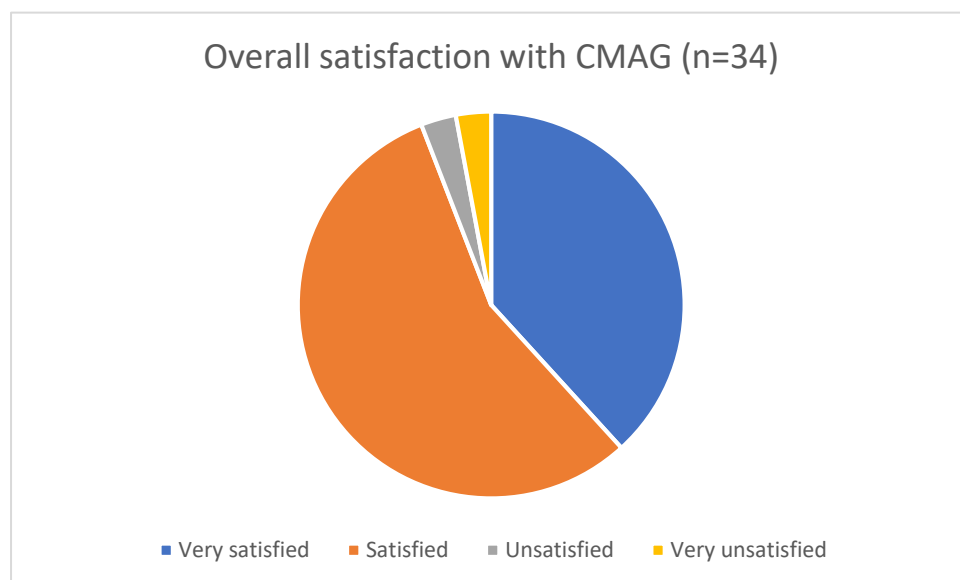
Primary research was supplemented by desk research including but not limited to:

- CMAG guidance notes and application form
- The Cultural Investment Model
- Outline proposal for Transition funding
- CMAG monitoring data
- An internal review of CMAG in 2021
- Draft CMAG evaluation framework
- Draft recommendations for CMAG wraparound support
- A City Imagining cultural strategy

What we learned

Overall satisfaction

According to the survey, 94 per cent of grant recipients were satisfied with CMAG overall, including 38 per cent who were very satisfied. 3 per cent (one organisation) was unsatisfied, and 3 per cent (one organisation) was very unsatisfied.



Levels of satisfaction were also evident in workshops and interviews, with many participants keen to share their appreciation of the council's support.

Overall, festivals and events grant recipients appeared to be more satisfied with CMAG. This may be because arts and heritage grantees were more likely to disagree with the eligibility criteria, particularly when it limited the amount of funding they could apply for, and it is likely there also be a correlation between the amount of funding awarded and satisfaction. (The average Imagine grant was £158,750; the average Anchor was £87,976; Activate, £35,321; and Enable, £20,203.) Unsurprisingly, unsuccessful applicants were also less satisfied.

Within Belfast City Council there was also general satisfaction with CMAG. However, there is also awareness that it is difficult, even unfair to judge its performance at this intersection given the unprecedented environment in which it has operated.

The following sections provide a more detailed overview of the findings across key stages of the grants process.

Main benefits of CMAG

Feedback from grant recipients

"Multi-year funding makes a huge difference to our organisation's ability to plan, develop and react to the unforeseen"

"Moving from project funding to CMAG is not a big increase in grant value but was in terms of application time and reporting."

“Multi annual core funding is always very valuable and we appreciate what we got and the Council's ongoing commitment to multi year funding. It shows trust in the sector and again other funders' could learn.”

Grantees identified the main benefits of CMAG as:

- Unrestricted funds. Many organisations use CMAG as a contribution towards core operating costs, such as staff and rent, that are essential to programme delivery but are difficult to secure through other funding. Even festivals and events recipients tended to refer to the funding as unrestricted as the council permits allocation to core costs. Grantees generally felt that this conveyed Belfast City Council's trust in the sector. This was particularly valued during Covid when the council supported CMAG grantees to rapidly adapt their activities and budgets to better serve their organisation and beneficiaries during a time of crisis.
- Security. Consultees noted that there is no comparable multi-annual fund in NI and even across the UK, only a small number of trusts and foundations provide multi-year grants. The Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI), who is the main funder of most arts organisations, for example, provide annual core funding. CMAG is therefore “the one constant among many different pots” Indeed, some organisations felt that a slight gain in actual funding through CMAG two-year funding was not a substitute for slightly less three- or four-year funding they had benefited from under CMAF (for example, one organisation described a couple of thousand pounds uplift over two years as “bittersweet”).
- Planning. Multi-annual funding increases the relative value of the award by allowing organisations to plan ahead – providing security for staff or enabling them to book artists and events well in advance, for example.
- Reduced administration. Some organisations described how it freed up time and “head space” that would otherwise be spent “scrabbling around” for alternative funding. One organisation reported previously applying for three small grants twice a year; now, two-year CMAG has replaced 12 grants with one.
- Civic endorsement. CMAG was regarded as “a badge of some status”, giving “credibility” and “kudos” – “Our city believes in us, our city backs what we do”.
- Leverage. Other grantees found more time and security allowed them to be “flight of foot to pursue opportunities as they arise” (in that case, including a friends' scheme, corporate sponsorship and US partners). Several grantees found it helped them successfully apply for other funding or actively used CMAG to encourage other funders to “step up”. Imagine grantees in particular appear to have leveraged their status as the city's “signature” events.

CMAG may have been particularly beneficial where their strategic direction aligned with A City Imagining and the ambitions of the fund.

“CMAG funds allowed us to put our strategic ambitions in to action as it allowed us to look over a 4-year period.”

“CMAG has been the icing on a flat cake – we had direction and knew what we wanted – this helped us rise and take it there.”

Imagine festivals and events in particular reported significant development (for example, at least three out of four Imagine festivals expanded their festival duration and reach) despite the extenuating operating environment.

“The strategic development of our festival – without the CMAG investment this would not have happened. It allowed us to grow audiences, develop/employ artists, co-create with citizens, produce innovative audience experiences, experiment during Covid 19, create new partnerships and leverage additional funding.”

Unless funding was used to employ a staff member, other grantees found it more difficult to directly attribute impact to CMAG (as CMAG was “a drop in the ocean” towards their overall programme or funding pot). They were able, however, to identify a myriad of outcomes arising from their overall activity that contribute to the A City Imagining outcomes, in particular A City Belonging.¹

Feedback from Belfast City Council

Belfast City Council’s investment increase from £1.5m per year peak CMAF to £2.5m per year under CMAG. However, CMAG was intended as a “different way” of funding, “greater than the sum of the grants”.

Consultees from Belfast City Council agreed with the benefits identified by grant recipients. Furthermore, they identified:

- A number of organisations received a substantial increase in funding. This included venues and community arts as well as festivals and events.
- A number of organisations that were previously in receipt of short-term project funding, including relatively new organisations, successfully secured CMAG, benefitting from additional security, credibility, leverage and so on.
- “The sector is not static – outcomes and organisations are not static”, and the diversity of organisations funded (in terms of size, nature, length of time established) supported the culture ecosystem in a change from entrenched CMAF and ACNI annual funding portfolios. This was most evident in the festivals and events awards which included, for example, sports and science, and which were more risk aware, assessing “potential as well as quality”.
- Funded organisations became more confident, “It changed how they saw themselves and they flourished”.
- The council trusted its CMAG clients to adapt their programmes to need during the pandemic.
- The council has a “much more coherent narrative” in terms of how and why it invests in cultural organisations.

Council consultees also agreed that Imagine festivals in particular had grown, innovated and increased their reach and reputation.

“It aimed to draw out festivals and events to build them up and grow. There were some surprises in the initial tranche and watching afterwards, the investment seems to have been a catalyst for festivals.”

¹ A City Belonging is about an inclusive city where everyone actively participates in cultural life; A City Challenging is about strengthening residents’ connection to the place they call home; A City Creating is about sector capacity and collaboration; and A City Exploring is about Belfast’s connection to the rest of the world.

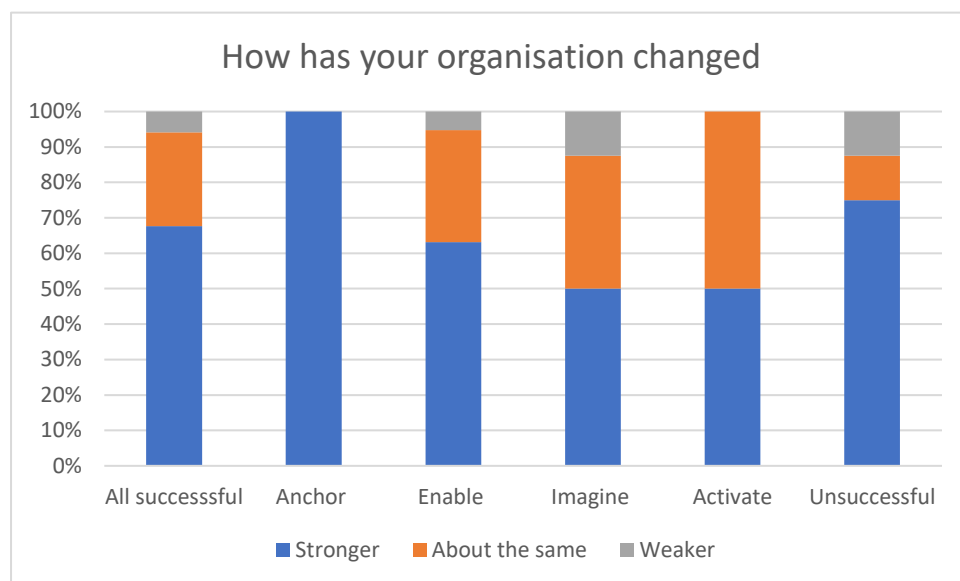
Changes in organisations

In the survey, successful and unsuccessful applicants were asked to consider how their organisation had changed over the past four years.

For most successful applicants, CMAG is a small percentage of their turnover, and while changes cannot be directly attributed to CMAG, it is a contribution to the whole, sometimes exceeding its actual value due to leverage, security and credibility.

“It’s not all to do with CMAG, but it has got something to do with CMAG.”

68 per cent of grantees felt that their organisation had got stronger; 26 per cent felt it was about the same; and 6 per cent (two organisations) felt it was weaker.



Notably, 6 (75 per cent) unsuccessful applicants consider their organisation stronger now; 1 (13 per cent) considers their organisation weaker; and one (13 per cent), about the same. Responses from unsuccessful applicants include organisations that went on to secure 2 Transition grants and 8 other Belfast City Council small grants (Pathfinder, Arts and Heritage Project Fund, Community Festivals Fund) including 1 organisation that got 3 grants and 2 that got 2.

The Covid-19 pandemic was referred to by six organisations. CMAG was referred to only once by a successful applicant that felt a “funding-cut pulled the rug out from under our feet”. Another respondent that felt their organisation is weaker attributed this to escalating operational costs.

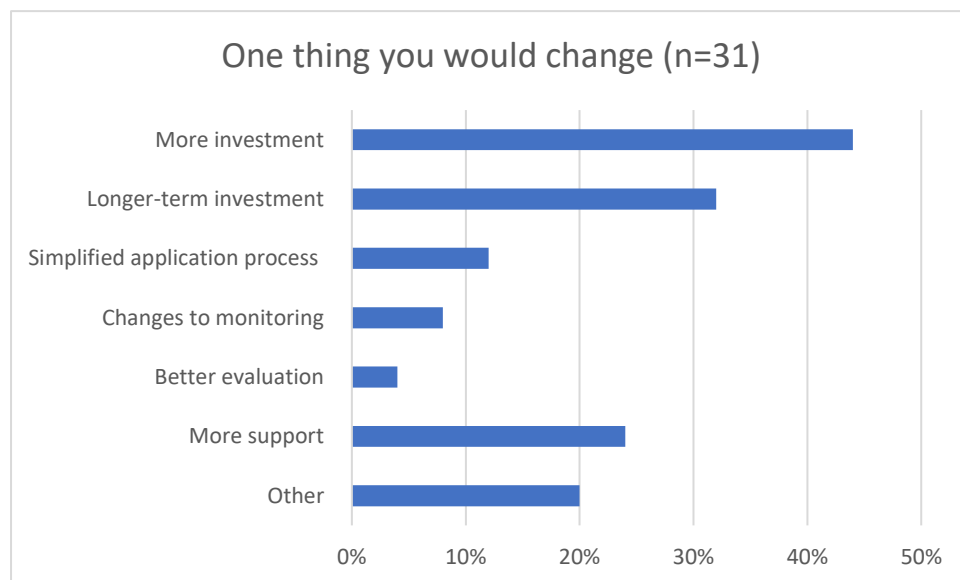
Others attributed their position to changes in funding or turnover (24 per cent) or staff and governance (18 per cent). Four organisations (12 per cent) referred to their programme and its impact. One specifically mentioned Belfast City Council’s Blueprint programme.

“Because we survived the pandemic, didn’t lose staff, furloughed no-one and are making beautiful award winning work and never stopped doing that.”

Key areas for development

Feedback from grant recipients

In the survey, successful applicants were also asked “What one thing would you change about CMAG?”



In general, grantees identified areas to build on, rather than issues to be resolved.

44 per cent wanted more investment, followed by 32 per cent would like longer-term funding.

24 per cent who would like more non-financial support including, for example, sector networking or guidance from their relationship manager.

“it would have been great to feel more connected to the other funded/Anchor organisations. There’s a real opportunity there for a network/sharing of information that BCC well-placed to convene.”

“Other” survey responses included:

- “representation of visual arts in the Anchor grant”
- “When outlining the potential 2-year programme, we are dreaming big, but as additional projects are mentioned in the application, we cannot apply for small BCC grants for these projects as they are not considered “new”.
- “There should be a recognition going forward of the hard work of organisations in the face of these challenges and much was achieved and of the impact that too much change at such a precarious time would have on the sector.”

Feedback from Belfast City Council

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic five days after awards were announced “entirely removed the ambition” of CMAG. The council is conscious of judging a new scheme on atypical years and intends to prepare for a fuller evaluation over the next four years.

Consolidation of budgets through the Investment Programme aimed to contribute to a reduction in the number of grants administered by Belfast City Council overall. The

Investment Programme projected that an average of 47.5 organisations would be funded the CMAG each year based on an annual budget of £2.3m. The actual average number of organisations funded was 54.5 per year (with a budget of £2.5m). By comparison, CMAF funded 56 organisations (with a budget of £1.5m) at its peak. There is some consideration within the council that

“Too many small grants have diluted the impact. Fewer, larger grants to key organisations will have more impact.”

Certainly, while CMAG grantees may have benefited from reduced administration, the Culture and Arts team are concerned that CMAG (alongside a range of other funding) is time consuming and detracts from developmental work.

Developmental work was, however, originally conceived to be integral to, not separate from CMAG.

“the money in itself is not what creates cultural transformation”

“Strategic development needs a relationship outside of the funding transaction.”

Plans to support CMAG grantees with wraparound developmental support were not realised due to “having been in crisis mode for two years” and internal staff and structural changes.²

Another key strand of the Investment Programme was a “root and branch review” of project funding. This was with a view that by 2024, coinciding with a second cycle of CMAG, the council would launch a new, longer-term project grant of scale by

“apply[ing] its learning as a best-practice multi-annual strategic funder to a radical redesign of cultural project grants [...] Having project grants of a similar value and longevity to strategic grants may also redress perceptions that the multi-annual strategic grants are the preferred grant for all cultural organisations, helping to balance supply with demand from within the ecosystem.”

Again, this was delayed due to internal and external pressures and has been identified as a gap.

Guidance notes

The guidance notes provided an overview of the grant scheme and its strategic fit with A City Imagining, the Cultural Investment Model and the Belfast Agenda as well as detailed guidance on how to apply. For example, it describes the section in the application form where applicants have to demonstrate the difference their programme makes as

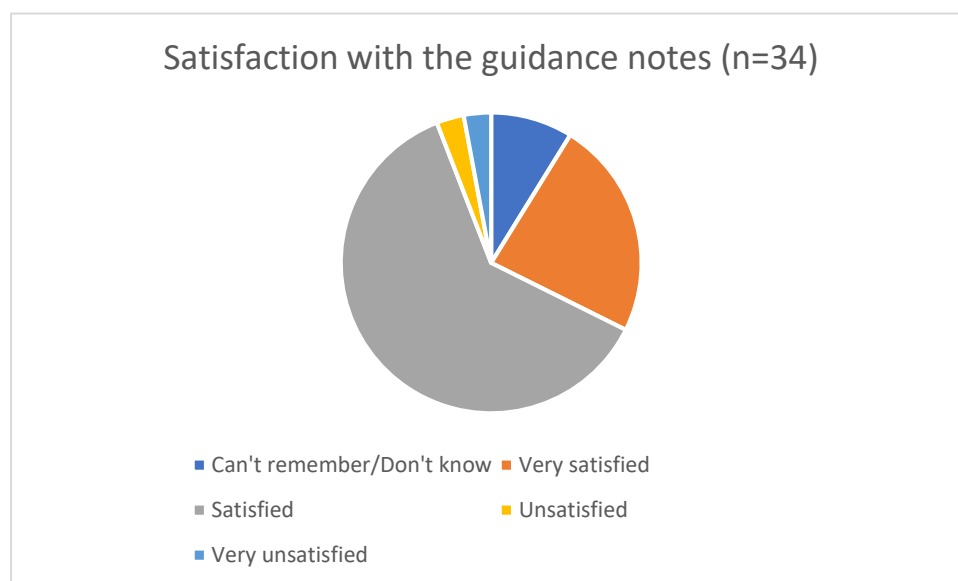
“about the impact your organisation will have on the city, its people, the cultural sector and our place on the world. It is based on the four themes in Belfast’s cultural strategy, A City Imagining.”

A table then summarises how the council anticipates the grants will contribute to each theme.

² Some elements, such as relationship managers, the sector were generally aware of and would generally welcome. Other elements, such as the requirement for Anchor and Imagine grantees to “give back” and “help” Enable and Activate clients are not widely known and may require further socialisation.

Feedback from successful applicants

Among applicants who successfully applied to CMAG, 86 per cent were satisfied with the guidance notes including 1 in 4 (24 per cent) who were very satisfied.



Feedback included that the guidance notes were clear, helpful and comprehensive or concise:

“They helped with interpreting the questions”

“there was clarity of purpose and structure”

“As I remember they were well written and helpful.”

One person was unsatisfied, and one person was very unsatisfied.³ They commented:

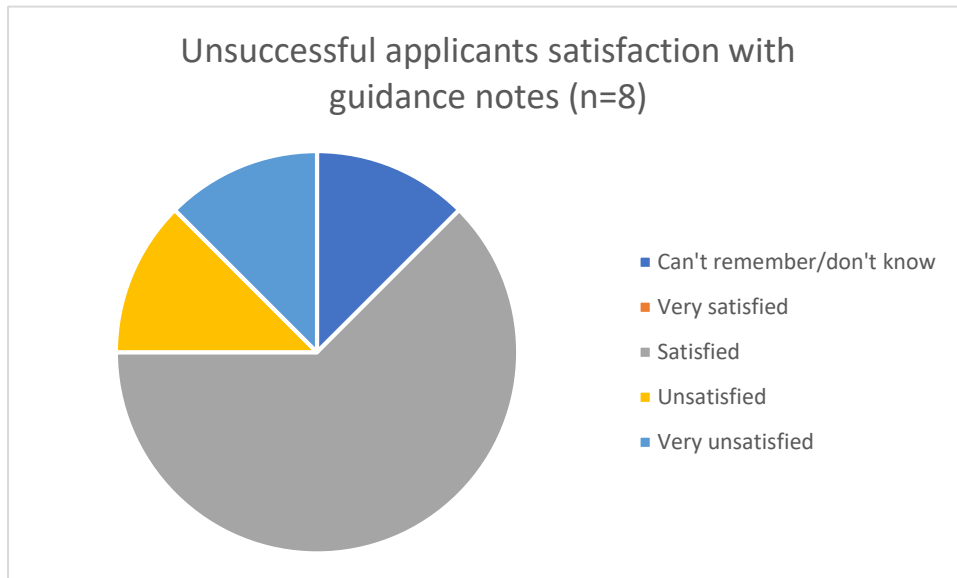
“The notes did not completely reflect the navigation of the form itself”

“The structure of the funding programmes did not make sense in relation to actually delivering the strategy purpose and ambition. The guidelines had elements of unreality, confusion and contradiction including on the principle of additionality: overall the rhetoric was fanciful compared to the actual process in place / results of the process and much of the stated guidance not proportional to the small amount of grant available. There was no consultation on this momentous change and the detail of the process and so the guidelines. There was not adequate engagement by BCC with the sector on the process and its implementation and implications, therefore the guidelines were inevitably distanced from reality and inadequate. There was not adequate engagement by Culture Unit with applicants (our experience) in explaining the process with certainty / clarity. Again: the ‘engagement’ was confused and contradictory – and ultimately different interpretations were applied to different organisations, resulting in disproportionate benefit and disadvantage.”

³ Throughout the surveys, there were a small number of responses that “can’t remember” or “don’t know”. For some organisations, it has been three and a half years since they engaged with CMAG. There may also have been staff changes which mean the survey respondent was not involved in the application.

Feedback from unsuccessful applicants

Among applicants who applied but were unsuccessful, just under two thirds (63 per cent) were satisfied with the guidance notes. 26 per cent (two organisations) were unsatisfied or very unsatisfied.



Feedback from those who were satisfied included:

"I think it covered everything that was needed to complete the application."

"The ambition of the remake of the funding path was clear but the reality of the decisions made did not match what the guidance notes laid out."

Feedback from those who were unsatisfied included:

"The bottom line is this, guidelines, no matter how helpful you may think they are in regard to the arts are inadequate, are a straight jacket and a poor way of moving forward. There is the preoccupation with numbers [...] there has to be another way!"

"Information from City Council relating to funding is deeply inaccessible, deeply technical, and not user friendly for anyone. It is reflective of the overall application process, which calls for a huge volume of information for very small amounts of money in a technical, uncreative way that in no way supports innovation or imaginative cultural activity."

Strategic alignment

During workshops and interviews, feedback on the guidance notes was positive, similar to the survey findings, and suggestions for improvement were therefore limited. (Discussion about definitions of audience is included in the eligibility criteria section below). However, there was evidence that grantees were not clear on the purpose of CMAG. At one workshop, participants suggested "the council needs to share its ambition. What does it want to achieve through CMAG?"; at another, participants wanted clarity on the aims of the A City Imagining strategy; and several participants referred to the themes as "vague" or "airy fairy". While to an extent such confusion could be the result of the passage of time, during

an internal council feedback session, it was also suggested that strategic alignment could be strengthened in the guidance notes.

There is an ongoing role for relationship managers in promoting key messages around the purpose of CMAG and its two distinct strands. The festivals and events strand, for example, was criticised (particularly by arts and heritage applicants) for prioritising tourism over culture despite A City Imagining explicitly aiming to create “a unique events destination [with] up to five signature [Imagine] and 12 growth [Activate] events each year”. Arts and heritage was also criticised for not helping organisations to grow, which was not the aim of that strand.

Fund names

The four funds, Imagine, Activate, Anchor and Enable, took their names from A City Imagining, and they were intended to reflect the purpose of each strand, streamlined with FEI’s classification of Signature and Growth. However, the names have proved, at best, confusing and difficult to remember, and Enable grantees in particular found it “icky”, “patronising” or even “disabling”.

“Imagine and Activate are dynamic and progressive. Anchor and Enable ‘stay there and we’ll give you a hand’ – there’s no sense of forward momentum.”

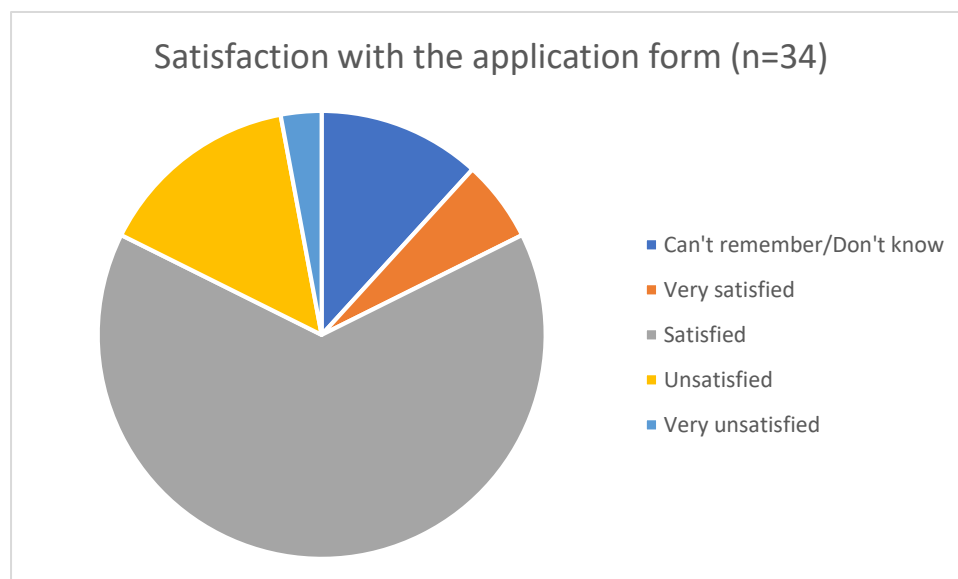
Imagine and Anchor grantees may be more likely to use the name, although some Imagine grantees use the FEI classification of Signature.

Application form

Applications to CMAG are made using an online grants portal. The same portal is used to apply for and manage all other council grants (and, indeed, is used by six other local authorities).

Feedback from successful applicants

Among successful applicants, 72 per cent of survey respondents were satisfied with the application form itself including 6 per cent who were very satisfied.



Respondents reflected that it was clear; straightforward; not repetitive; asked for sufficient detail; and that the online grants portal itself worked well and was user friendly.

"BCC's online system is user friendly and easy to navigate. This made the whole process very straight forward for filling out the form."

"Wasn't over complicated and word count allowed a decent amount of detail to be included"

"While it was a fairly detailed application, the questions and information that needed to be provided seemed clear and the online form allowed for the information to be submitted as needed."

One respondent also commented on strategic fit as "it reflected back to what the city needed".

A number of respondents referred to it as being familiar to other or previous council application forms, which might benefit repeat applicants in particular.

"There was a lot of information required but you would expect it for this level of grants and it was familiar to what the Council usually asks for and the previous multi year funding."

18 per cent (6 respondents) were unsatisfied, including one respondent who was very unsatisfied. The main criticism was that the level of detail required was not proportionate to the value or length of the grant requested. Indeed, in the survey, those in receipt of Enable funding were most likely to be unsatisfied with the application form (21 per cent compared to 14 per cent across the other strands), and this was echoed by Activate grantees in other engagements, indicating that those who were awarded more money and over a longer period of time were more likely to be satisfied.

"I understand that they had to work for a big range of funding and you would want the detail for the very large grants but maybe for the two year funding it could be scaled so there are fewer questions or attachments"

"Many arts organisations now have experience of at least one non-NI funder and that highlight the lack of trust shown by the council the 'marking our homework'."

In other consultation, the application was described (twice) as "a big monster". Some found the guidance on strategic, business and marketing plans too prescriptive, redoing them "to meet the criteria" when they "already have our own plans that work".

It was also noted that smaller organisations may be least resourced to deal with complicated applications and therefore also the ones who might benefit most from longer-term funding.

For some the "stressy" experience of the application was actually tied to the value of having unrestricted, multi-year funding and the "fear of getting it wrong".

It is also likely that those applying in 2019 had a different experience from those applying in 2021 due to the unprecedented operating environment.

"I remember that the level of detail required was very high. To project into the future at that time, especially when Covid and the cost of living crisis were impacting upon"

us, as well as uncertainty about the sustainability of other core funding, it was challenging.”

This issue was reiterated at workshops and interviews, and it may be an ongoing issue as organisations continue to try to predict how audiences, box offices and bottom lines will perform against rising costs and reducing public sector budgets.

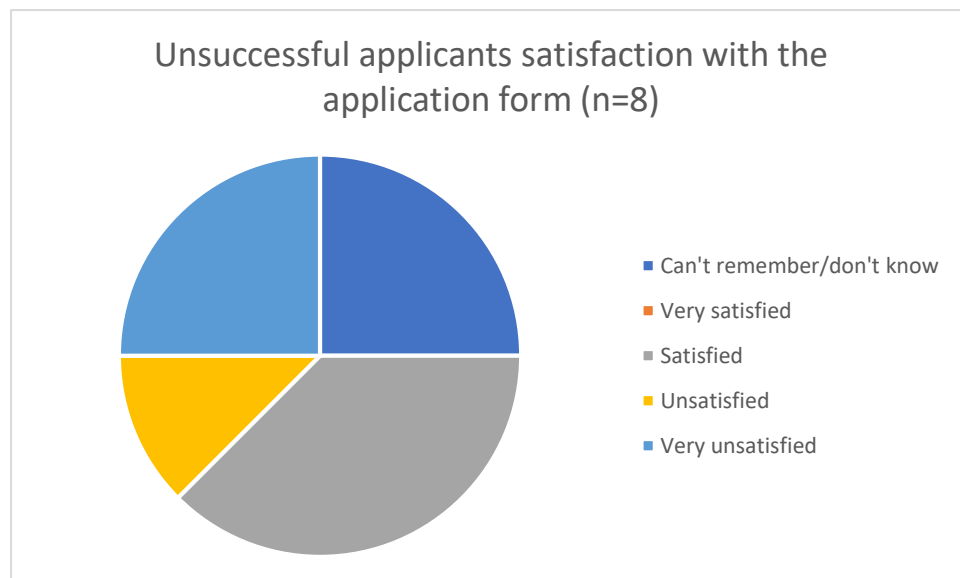
Other unsatisfied survey responses included:

“The questions were overloaded”

“It felt as though we were being shoe-horned into a very specific funding stream that limited our potential for much needed funding”

Feedback from unsuccessful applicants

38 per cent of unsuccessful applicants surveyed were satisfied with the application form and 38 per cent were unsatisfied, including 25 per cent who were very unsatisfied.



Feedback included:

“A LOT of bureaucracy and repetition of answers”

“To much effort is spent in form filling, extremely bureaucratic, frustrating and time consuming.....and for so little return from Council even if a group is successful. If a group engages in a range of complex work then such forms are torture to dill in. Deciding on the worth of an organisation based on a written application especially in terms of this nebulous thing called arts is inadequate.”

Feedback from Belfast City Council

The application form was generally considered appropriate and robust with some consideration that it could be streamlined, particularly for applicants seeking smaller grants.

It was also suggested that the application process should be made more accessible, for example, “interviews for those with ADHD”, similar to the council’s Creative Bursaries and 2024 open call. It is not known whether Section 75 monitoring returns have identified any

differential impact for particular groups at this stage, and proposed changes would benefit from further research, consultation and equality screening.

Only very minor changes, however, can be made to the application form due to the contract with the online grants portal. Changes to the application form will also have ramifications for the online assessment form at the back end.

Eligibility criteria

According to the National Audit Office, funding schemes require balance between, on one hand, encouraging uptake and minimising administrative burdens and, on the other, ensuring that the support is used as intended.

CMAG eligibility criteria was based on:

- input (such as turnover) as an indicator of need for support
- output (such as audience numbers) as an indicator of likely scale of impact
- viability (such as evidence of business planning)

These criteria were agreed with Belfast City Council based on research including:

- analysis of the council's CMAF and other funding inputs and outputs
- benchmarking against other cities and funding
- FEI indicators of "signature" and "growth" festivals and events

The following table summarises the eligibility criteria when the second round of two-year funding opened in 2021. Revisions were made from when the scheme originally opened in 2019 based on the findings of the internal review. These included:

- Activate requirement for a fulltime-equivalent staff member to allow for a staff member "within a partner organisation where there is a clear legal relationship and where a commitment to delivering the festival or event can be demonstrated and measured".
- Enable minimum turnover reduced from £100,000 to £60,000
- Enable minimum volunteer requirements reduced from 12 to 6
- Enable maximum grants available increase from £30,000 to £50,000

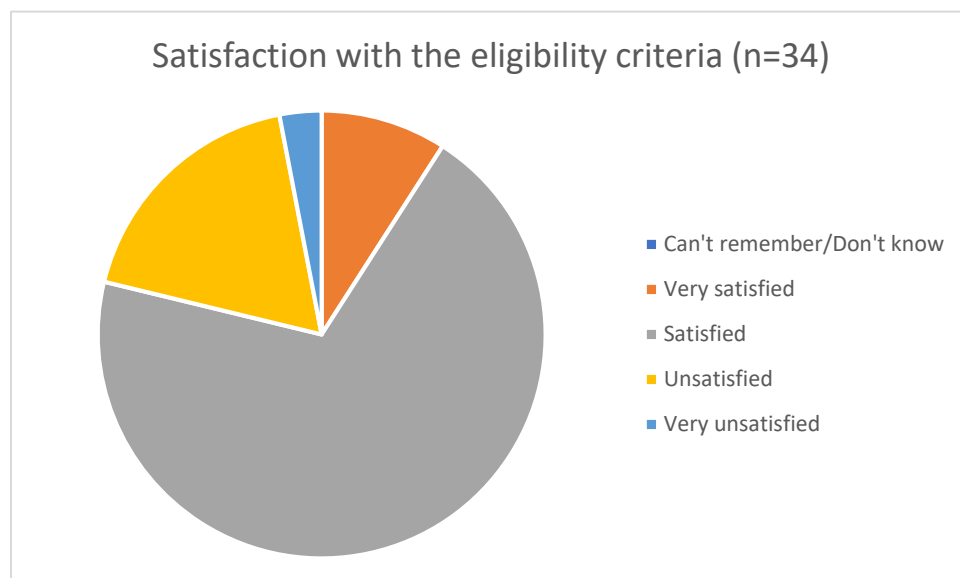
Scheme criteria	Imagine	Activate	Anchor	Enable
Organisation	Cultural		Primary purpose arts or heritage	
Activity type	Festival or event of scale described below	Festival or event of scale described below	Year-round programme not with festival or event of F&E MAG scale	Year-round programme not with festival or event of F&E MAG scale
Turnover	£300k average projected over four years (to 2023/24)	£50k average projected over contract period	£300k actual over last two financial years per annual accounts	£60k average over last two financial years per annual accounts
FTE staff (Section A)	Has or will employ in the first year, 3+	Has or will employ in the first year, 1+. This can be within a partner organisation where there is a clear legal relationship and where a commitment to delivering the festival or event can be demonstrated and measured.	3+	1+
Min. grant	£50,000	£10,000	£30,000	£10,000
Max. grant	£250,000 or 25% of average projected turnover	£50,000 or 25% of average projected turnover	£150,000 or 10% of historic turnover	£50,000 or 25% of historic turnover
Partners	Local, regional, international, media and cross-sectoral	Local and regional	Local, regional, international, media and cross-sectoral	Local and regional
Audience⁴	65,000 by 2023 or projects growth at 10% per year, whichever is greater	10,000 by 2024 or 5% increase per year, whichever is greater	50,000 per year	NA
Audience share	25% from outside Belfast + an out-of-state target	20% from outside Belfast + an out-of-state target	NA	NA
Volunteers⁵	40 per year from 2020/21	12+ per year from 2020/21	20+ per year	6+ per year
Long-term strategy	√	X	√	X
1-yr business plan	√	√	√	√
Marketing plan	Including 2023	1 year	1 year	1 year
DDA compliance	√	√	√	√

⁴ Includes participants, known attendees, estimated attendees and digital attendees

⁵ Includes board members

Feedback from successful applicants

According to the survey, 79 per cent of grantees were satisfied with the eligibility criteria including 9 per cent (3 respondents) who were very satisfied.



Respondents felt that these were “normal”, fair, transparent, reasonable and realistic. One appreciated that it gave them a “push” to finalise plans. Another reflected:

“These limits allowed for organisations to demonstrate that they had the capacity to be able to deliver the scale of activity that would be required”.

There was also recognition that the eligibility criteria were appropriate in signifying that CMAG was not intended as a seed or start-up fund and to indicate that an organisation had the capacity to deliver.

21 per cent were unsatisfied, including one person who was very unsatisfied. This included respondents who felt that the council was prioritising inputs and outputs over outcomes.

“The primary determinant of where an organisation (delivering all year round) was placed in the funding categories was the amount of recent annual income, not the value of what had been delivered, the importance of delivery methodology, proven value for money. This is the worst aspect of unfitness for purpose of the CMAG.”

“There's a discussion to be had about large numbers versus impact and influence.”

“a narrower view that the number of engagements equals impact made breadth of activity (no matter the quality of the interaction) the goal. It glossed over that real impact and legacy can often be found in deeper engagements with slightly fewer people can often lead to greater change in the long term in how someone views the arts or their city.”

During workshops with arts and heritage grantees, eligibility criteria were the most discussed topic and probably the second most vexatious after level of funding. Again, the main concern was that it prioritises outputs over impact. Indeed, there was perception that the council does not assess impact in any other way (under the assessment criteria, up to 33

per cent of marks for festivals and events applicants and 38 per cent of marks for arts and heritage applicants are awarded for quality of impact).

Festivals and events grantees were generally more satisfied with the eligibility criteria. However, there were concerns that continued audience growth was not only not desirable but potentially detrimental to audience experience and, in practice, impossible within a limited market.

Some Activate grantees are currently considering whether the growth targets make the festivals and events strand the right fit for their ambitions and are considering applying instead to Enable. Some Enable organisations also reflected on the dangers of chasing “magic numbers” to secure funding, rather than staying true to their mission and vision.

There was also consideration that the eligibility favoured festivals and events over arts and heritage, even amounting to an “apartheid” that prioritised one-off over sustained provision and deeper impact despite greatest overall investment in arts and heritage (£1,923,161 compared to £1,588,675 in festivals and events).

Audience criterion

There is no audience minimum eligibility criterion for Enable applications, and the minimum for Anchor applications is 50,000. Much of arts and heritage applicants’ discussion of audience targets related to festivals and events criteria, perhaps stemming from the perception that festivals and events had an unfair advantage of being able to request funding based on projection, rather than historical performance. It should, however, be noted, that festivals and events were also required to increase their audience and subject to (in non-Covid times) additional monitoring, restricted funding and financial penalties for underperformance.

Grantees also were unclear as to what counts as an “audience” and wanted this carefully prescribed. Such definitions (including ticketed, non-ticketed, participants and digital audiences) are, in fact, already included in the guidance notes. Those participants who were reminded of this appreciated that these align with ACNI definitions, which means the same figures can be reported to both funders and were cautious that further definitions could mean more counting.

Fairness and transparency was part of the motivation for defining audiences. There was suspicion that some organisations inflated their figures so that they are “a great work of fiction” and several “notorious” (anonymised) examples were provided, including of organisations counting social media impressions.⁶ (A more charitable explanation may be that “The arts sector is a wee bit panicked because they think there is a right and a wrong answer – so they put in crazy numbers that they can’t get and then they are too scared to call and sort it out.”) If used to obtain funding inappropriately, this is, of course, fraud, and can be dealt with in line with the council’s procedure. Festivals and events underperforming in usual times could be subject to financial penalty, while arts and heritage organisations would be dealt with on a “case by case basis”.

Some participants were also concerned that some audiences should be weighted differently, but this tended to differ depending on the nature of grantees’ audiences. For example, some argued that festivals and events audiences tended to only have short-term engagement.

⁶ The guidance notes explicitly state impressions are not audience.

Others contended that ticketed audiences were deliberate: “at least you know they were in the building for that event”.

“you cannot compare theatre audiences with street art or any non ticketed event – its just not fair to do so”

“Street events can't be compared with theatre seats in terms of quality but the impact of street events on accessibility have a huge impact on people who don't have access to theatres. Similar issues occur when establishing the value of workshop programmes in terms of numbers”

There were suggestions that the audience eligibility criteria could be enhanced, for example, with checkboxes to evidence the quality or nature of engagement, which would make it difficult to assess whether an applicant passes or fails the eligibility criteria. Consideration of nature and extent of impact is (as outlined above) also substantially considered in the assessment criteria.

Other criteria

Other grantees who were otherwise satisfied point to the changed operating environment, which might mean that thresholds have decreased, particularly in relation to audience, turnover and staff.

“It has to be recognised that the sector is in a much more difficult place than it was when the original applications went in – e.g., changes in audience behaviour/failure of the NI Executive/cost of living crisis.”

It was noted that engagement, particularly with new beneficiaries, is more difficult post-Covid. However, other groups found they grew their audience online and internationally during the pandemic, and one consultee felt strongly “Covid is over” and “it shouldn’t be used as an excuse” to amend criteria.

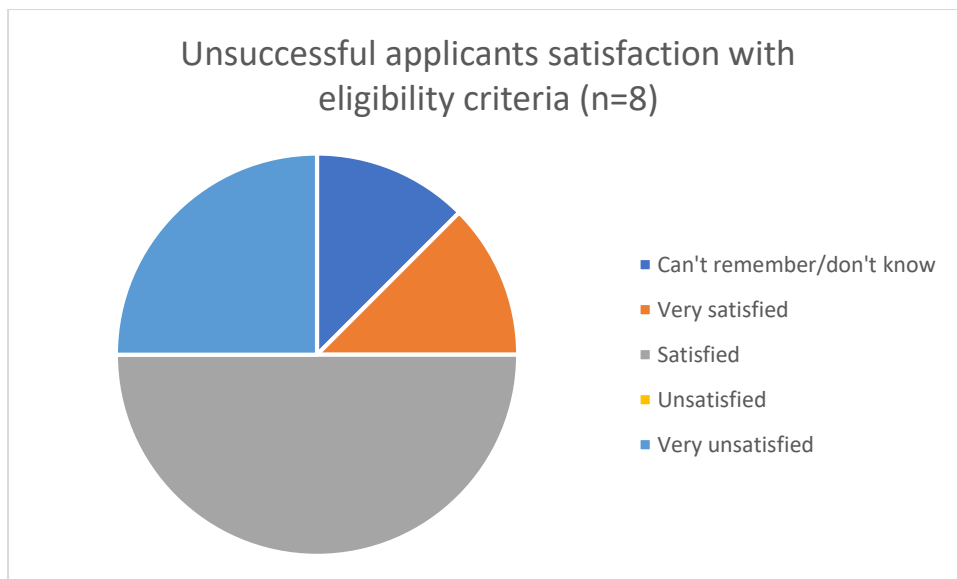
Grantees also questioned why volunteers were included in the eligibility criteria,⁷ noting that the sector has campaigned against pressure to replace paid staff with volunteers.

While most understood the need to have the existence of plans and strategies as part of the eligibility criteria, there was some confusion among a small number of grantees about what time periods these should cover, concerns about the time it takes to develop these and the difficulty of planning in uncertain time.

Feedback from unsuccessful applicants

Nearly two thirds (63 per cent) of unsuccessful applicants were satisfied with the eligibility criteria. A quarter (25 per cent) were very unsatisfied (none were unsatisfied).

⁷ It was based on benchmarks provided by FEI.



Feedback from satisfied organisations considered it to be fair. Other comments included:

“Considering the effort, time and demands they put on an arts group council give a pittance and expect the world. Too much reliance on numbers...mass is thinking with your ass!”

“For such a tiny amount of money, the whole process show a deep distrust of the cultural sector and indicates Council's desire to have a high level of control over the creative process. Projects should and must be allowed to develop creatively rather than specify exact outputs and outcomes before anything has been delivered.”

“It was ok, but wouldn't actually help those the newly made funding system was supposed to support. Like new organisations that will grow Belfast's cultural offering.”

Feedback from Belfast City Council

There was recognition within Belfast City Council that there is a need for eligibility criteria “as a basic assurance they can manage the grant”, and generally the criteria were considered appropriate. There was also recognition that the eligibility criteria are not popular among some of the sector. Discussion on alternative options considered reducing or removing some criteria, especially in response to Covid. A more radical option would be to assess outputs as part of the assessment criteria, which would likely increase administrative burden and may raise applicant expectations with similar results as “a cost–benefit analysis would have to be done at some stage”.

There was some consideration within Belfast City Council that continued growth for festivals and events is untenable and perhaps, undesirable, “breeding a chase of numbers”. However, this remains an ambition of the 2020–30 cultural strategy, and it is presumed that it will culminate when the city’s capacity as an events destination, as defined by FEI, is realised or at the end of A City Imagining.

There was also concern that applicants are “manufacturing audience numbers”, which should be managed through the council’s monitoring, risk management and, if required, fraud procedures.

Consultees also reported that organisations were concerned that they may be penalised for having reserves. Belfast City Council does not currently have a policy on funding organisations with reserves.

Assessment criteria

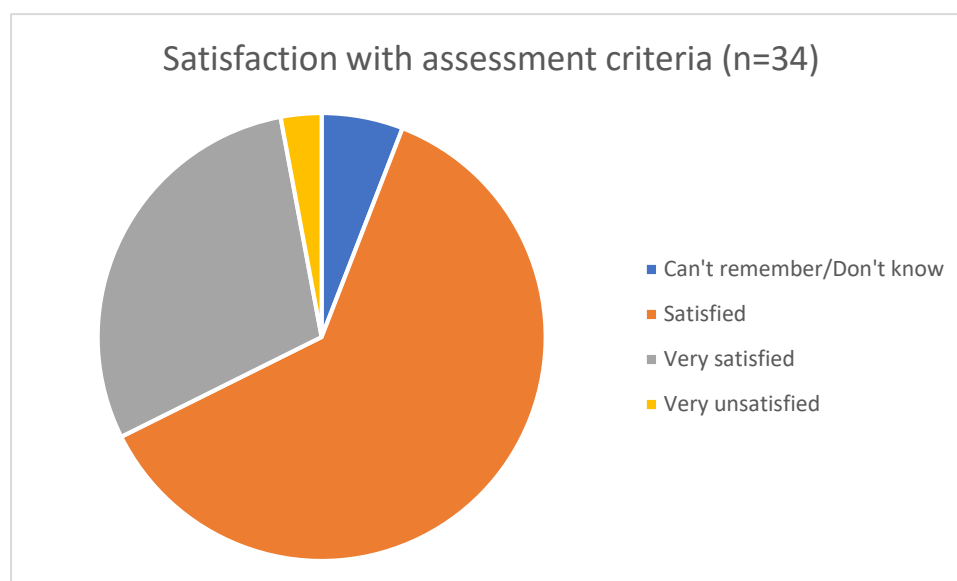
The following assessment criteria is published in CMAG guidance notes.

Quality of programme. This includes vision, content, audience experience and marketing and audience development. It was based on “tried-and-tested” indicators of quality drawn from Manchester Metrics, Liverpool Arts Regeneration Consortium and nef.	30
Impact of activity, including how the activity contributes to the four A City Imagining themes (A City Belonging, A City Challenging, A City Creating and A City Exploring) and how organisations plan to monitor and evaluate that impact.	40
Readiness for investment including planning, financial management, staff, governance and environmental impact.	30

Assessors also have access to guidance for assessing against up to 37 sub-criteria. Grantees do not have access to the full sub-criteria.

Feedback from successful applicants

In the survey, 9 out of 10 respondents (91 per cent) were satisfied with the assessment criteria including 29 per cent who were very satisfied.



Respondents particularly liked the focus on quality and impact; felt that it was fair and transparent; and even suggested that other funders could learn from this approach.

“Good to have significant weight outcome: move us out from a purely ‘delivery’ mindset, to the change we want to see happen as a result.”

“Transparent and impact focused. A lot clearer than other arts funders who are more subjective.”

“It was really useful to have clarity on the scoring in this way”

“logical criteria for effective, impactful arts organisation”

“These are questions which as an organisation we should have answers to.”

“It is pleasing to see so much emphasis on quality. [...] Other funders could follow this”

One person was very dissatisfied.

“assessment was primarily determined by inputs, not the qualities and impacts referred to here. Had these actually been the determining assessment criteria, the process would have been more equitable and more supportive of the Cultural Strategy and the organisations working to deliver on it. Quality of programme and Impact of activity were assessed, it seems, and these were correct criteria – but the result of assessing these was not reflected in the grants awarded because overall the assessment and awarding process did not have a purposeful, joined-up integrity, it was confused by the prioritisation of tourism over Belfast people/artists (for one thing).”

In the workshops, there was some consideration that the quality score should be higher. Participants also would like adaptability and risk management to be included as indicators of readiness for investment (these are considered in the assessment sub-criteria) given the conditions in which they are required to operate (for example, short-term funding, funding decisions made well in to the financial year).

There were also suggestions that (qualitative) track record should be further taken in to account.

“It treats organisations with a longstanding relationship with the council, a longstanding place in the city, as if they have never heard of us.”

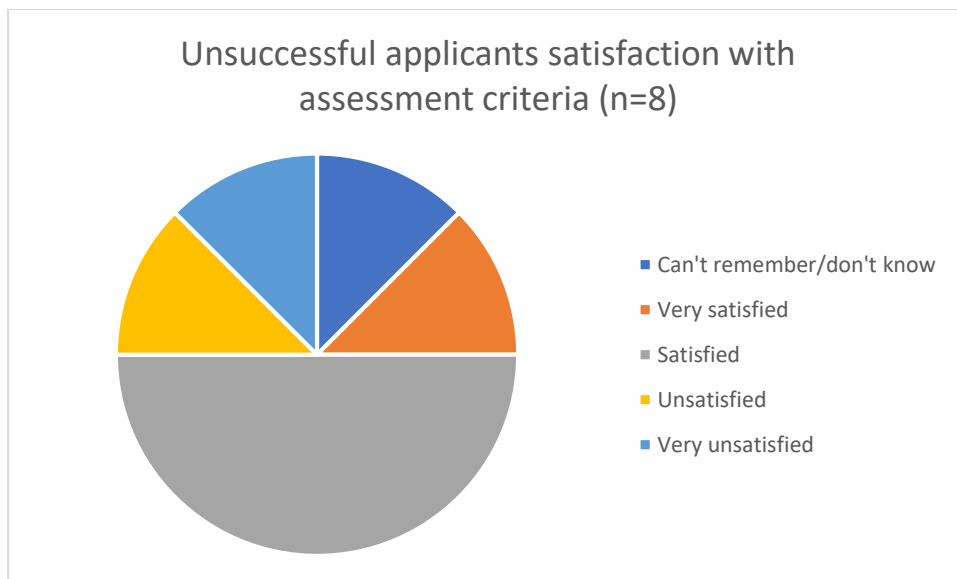
Track record can currently be provided and used alongside other evidence of quality. However, according to the Investment Programme, track record is not otherwise taken in to account in the assessment process as Belfast City Council councillors have stated that newer organisations should not be excluded from strategic grants.

One organisation noted in relation to the environmental sustainability criterion:

“We have [an environmental policy] but festivals can’t not do international travel, and green is not cheap – clean and bio options of everything cost more – but there’s no allowance for this – it costs extra to be good.”

Feedback from unsuccessful applicants

Just under two thirds (63 per cent) of unsuccessful applicants were satisfied and just over a quarter (26 per cent) were unsatisfied with the assessment criteria.



Again, among those satisfied, the assessment criteria was considered fair. One respondent considered

“It all seemed reasonable while it didn't work for us, the organisation has to take some responsibility for that”.

Among those who were unsatisfied, comments included “Assessments are subjective, arts and innovation and outcomes in the arts can't be easily assessed like this”.

Feedback from Belfast City Council

The assessment criteria were generally considered robust, although the themes (A City Belonging, Challenging, Creating and Exploring) were described as “written in poetry, assessed in prose”. One test might be whether the council believes it made the correct funding decisions. One consultee commented, “There is very little [in the CMAG portfolio] I would look at and think, ‘That’s not making a difference’.”

The balance of impact, quality and readiness for investment was also considered appropriate.

“We want to turn the needle for the city and its citizens. We’re not the Arts Council. It’s a fair approach for the council to take.”

“The strategy also made it clear that we are not the Arts Council – it is civic funding. As servants of the city all civic investment must give back to the people of the city.”

There were concerns that “the mechanics of assessment is very difficult”, intensive and time consuming, particularly for a small team, and that a new team could be particularly open to criticism that it lacks knowledge or understanding of the sector.

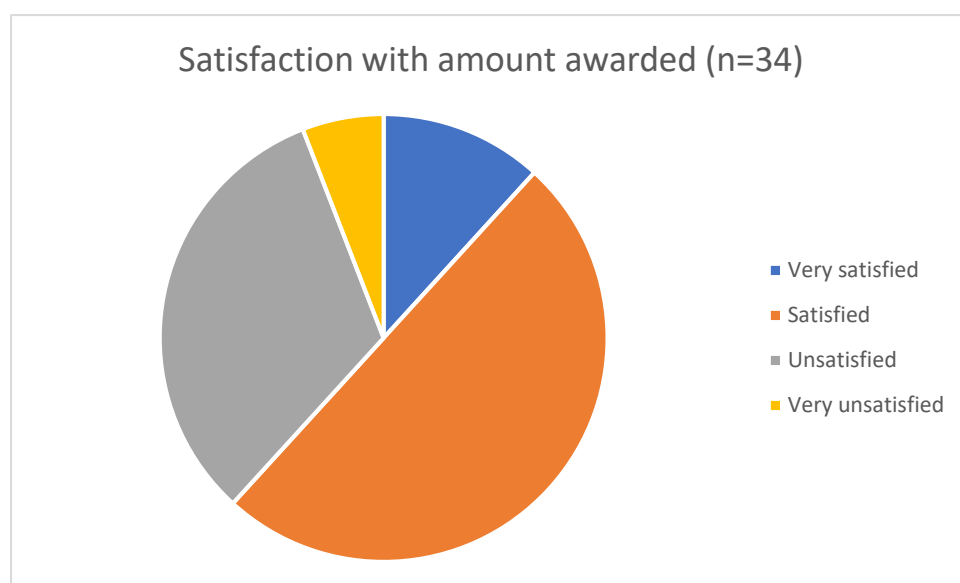
Suggestions for changes included prioritising particular themes, which would require a change in strategic direction. It was also suggested that applicants should be required to quote from supporting documents or refer to particular pages and paragraphs, rather than assessors read all supporting documents “to filter out those with really good documents”. This would put additional burden on applicants, who have asked for a reduced application form, and having robust supporting documentation is a check against organisations that

know what to say in an application form. Nevertheless, reducing the need for some supporting documentation may be a way to streamline the application process without making substantial changes to the online grants portal.

During previous rounds of assessment, assessors benefited from training, which include live testing of the assessment criteria and guidance. There was also external support brought in to carry out assessments. For the Imagine applications, this included a respected, London-based creative producer, which “as someone not from here but who the sector accepts as understanding the context of their art form in Belfast” provided “reassurance and a layer of protection”.

Level of award

62 per cent of those awarded funding were satisfied with the amount they were awarded including 12 per cent who were very satisfied.



Perhaps unsurprisingly, those who were very satisfied tended to refer to a substantial increase in funding, and those who were satisfied tended to refer to having around the amount they requested or at a level that was comparable to or a slight increase on previous awards.

Organisations also reflected that CMAG boosted morale and signalled a change in historic funding trends in keeping with the new strategic direction.

“We had ambitious plans for development of our festival, which was backed by a solid strategic planning process. It was very reassuring to see council bought into our vision. It was also reassuring that the portfolio overall was not based on historical funding allocations and that newer organisations such as ours were given the opportunity to develop”

“Not only was the material difference vital for our ongoing activities/reflected reality, it also boosted staff morale, made us feel more 'credible' as an Anchor organisation, and meant that for monitoring purposes we returned to our application regularly as there was a sense of pride in what we had achieved that we wanted to sustain across the funding period/demonstrate development and long-term thinking.”

Others reflected that the award was appropriate to need.

“We got more than before and almost what we ask for so I think that we were guided to ask for an amount that was realistic.”

“The funding was a substantial step up for us but was necessary to enable the kind of step up in terms of scale of the festival that was being asked of us.”

Some satisfied organisations were also circumspect, reflecting on how the operating environment was also affecting council decisions and budgets.

“while it was not the amount asked for this was very gratefully received when others were cutting funding”

“Understand that it is a competitive market but equally I believe BCC understand that we need to fund some key organisations sufficiently rather than spread funding too thinly to everyones detriment.”

Other grantees were concerned about the need to balance ambition (or simply the desire to for their application to score well) with realism, particularly as inclusion of activities in a CMAG application would mean that they would be ineligible for other Belfast City Council culture funding.

“We put all our soul in to it – all our aspirations – but then when some of those dreams became possibilities, we were not able to look to council for new project funding.”

38 per cent were unsatisfied including 6 per cent (2 respondents) who were very unsatisfied. One organisation described the level of award as “devastating”, continuing:

“This did not deliver on the vaunted ‘move away from Council grants carve-up’ it actually made the situation worse [and] Although our new category is called ‘Enable’, the low level of CMAG awarded was disabling”.

Others felt that:

- their track record was not taken in to account
- the grant didn't reflect either the quality or scale of the work
- the small increase in funding didn't cover inflation
- the award is only a very small percentage of turnover
- there was no allowance made for or additional funding for access requirements
- they would have welcomed feedback on their application
- they did not get the opportunity to revise their programme and targets despite being awarded substantially less than needed to run their programme

“While the amount awarded is a huge contribution to our organisation, we are still struggling to generate enough income to cover the increasing costs of rent and overheads”

Anchor (50 per cent) and Enable (42 per cent) applicants were more likely to be unsatisfied compared to 17 per cent of Imagine applicants and 13 per cent of Activate.

There was also a lot of benchmarking in the responses. Organisations were very aware of how much they were awarded compared to peer art-form organisations or the sector generally. Some considered that particular art forms, specifically visual arts and theatre, did less well, which was attributed to the eligibility criteria prohibiting such art forms being able to apply for the larger grants.

During workshops, consideration of the level and duration of the awards was interdependent. A few organisations would appear to favour the security of longer grants over shorter-term, higher value grants, though higher-value, longer-term grants was the preference overall. And while longer-term funding was generally preferred, there were concerns about “locking in” organisations to “effectively standstill” funding over several years, particularly if an organisation had received substantially less than requested. Proposed solutions included inflation-linking grants, have a mid-point review (for example, in year 2) when the level of funding could be increased or issue “cost of living” grants in exceptional circumstances.⁸

There was also concern that a disappointing result in the first round could create a cycle that would prohibit growth, including ambitions to become an Anchor or Imagine client:

“producing some devastating results and placing organisations on a downwards trajectory that is difficult to recover from for the next four-year grant period”

“Now we can’t afford to make the type of work that would double audiences.”

It was noted that while the council had increased the maximum amount Enable applicants could request in the second round, in reality applicants received a 10 per cent increase on their previous award. One grantee commented

“this new level was not real [...] it was not a real opportunity [It] only reinforces a disingenuous aspect of CMAG that we have experienced in various other ways.”

Others suggested different ways in which applicants could be guided to ask for a realistic amount including:

- Discussion with relationship manager
- Using an average percentage of turnover benchmark⁹
- Using an average grant benchmark¹⁰
- Indication of the number and level of awards the council expects to make¹¹
- Council offers set grants (for example, £10,000, £25,000, £50,000 and so on)
- Applicant does not make a request, rather the council awards based on perceived need and merit

Applicants would also like the opportunity to explain variances in turnover and other indicators or justify exceptional requests, particularly as Covid has affected turnover and audiences.

Overall, consultees felt that there should be more investment through CMAG and, in particular, funding available was insufficient to meet expectations.

⁸ As provided, for example, by Future Screens and Santander.

⁹ This was included in CMAF guidance notes.

¹⁰ This was included in CMAF guidance notes. An average grant was not available for the first round of CMAG.

¹¹ This was included in CMAG guidance notes.

"[There was] A lot of 'think big', 'strategize', 'Belfast is amazing', but then there was the same amount of money. Can't be raising things up like that."

"don't encourage boundless enthusiasm for growth if funding is not the same"

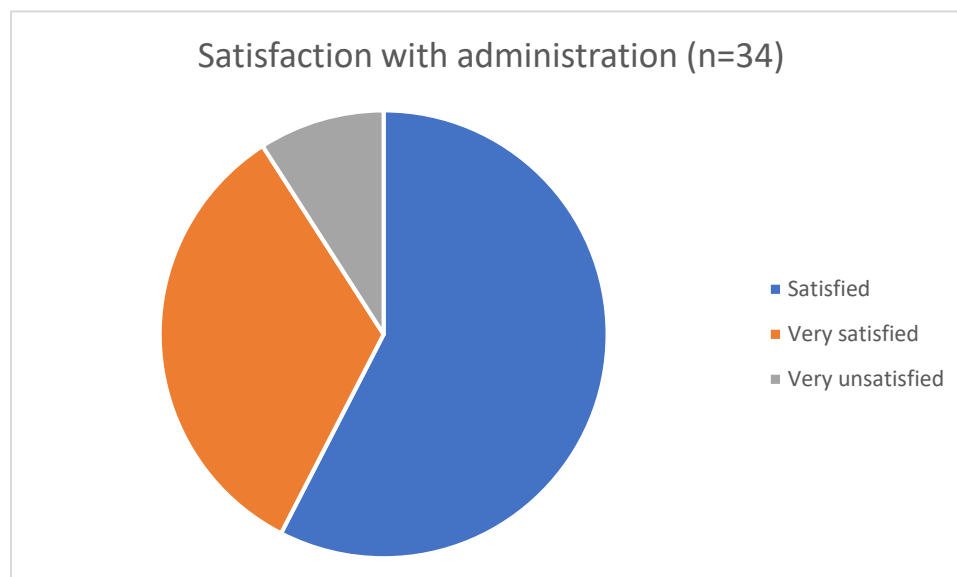
Organisations would also welcome feedback on their applications, particularly if awarded less than requested. Some organisations had requested and got feedback, which was described as useful, but others were unaware that this was an option.

Administration

Project level

In the survey, successful applicants were asked, "How satisfied are you with the administration of your grant, such as when it is paid, how it is monitored and so on?"

Nine out of 10 respondents (91 per cent) were satisfied with the administration including a third (33 per cent) who were very satisfied.



Monitoring was described as "rigorous but not ridiculous" and "allowing funders to keep tabs without being burdensome". Respondents also felt that payments were made promptly, when expected or when needed. This was particularly valued during the pandemic and among festival and events grantees. One festivals and events grantee reflected that "council were mindful of cash flow concerns when raised particularly as there were pinch points during the festival period", although some festivals and events appeared to understand that they were tied to a six-monthly drawdown cycle, which was more difficult for reporting and cashflow.¹²

A few organisations, while satisfied overall, would still prefer faster payments. CGU noted that payments could sometimes take up to three months due to a "bottleneck" in the process of getting sign off from the Culture and Arts team but that this should be prioritised in recognition that "this is core funding, and organisations rely on the funding to run".

¹² Festivals and events grantees can drawdown based on need. Arts and heritage grants follow a six-monthly drawdown cycle.

Arts and heritage grantees may have been more satisfied with administration overall having benefitted from CGU's streamlined process (indeed, one festival reported a seven month delay in payment), and those on a regular cycle of reporting and drawdown "knew in advance when the reports were expected and payments due to be made so could timetable into our Planning".

Grantees also felt that council staff were supportive, again in particular throughout the pandemic or other exceptional circumstances.

"BCC staff are patient and understanding if monitoring deadlines are not met for legitimate reasons."

"We had a sense there was trust between us and the culture team, and they allowed us to get on with the important work."

"The support from staff during 2020 when the challenges from the pandemic were the most severe was greatly appreciated. It was regularly and genuinely committed to supporting its organisations through a very tough time. [...] There was an understanding there of the serious challenges that we faced in being able to delivery anything at all let alone the ambitious plans that we started with."

In turn, CGU reflected that "The sector are professional, very capable – they know what they are doing and are easy to work with".

CGU is proud of the council's reputation as a flexible funder, allowing grantees to reprofile budgets, targets and programmes in response to emerging need and changing circumstance. As is best practice, monitoring forms are now issued at the start of the grant so that organisations know what they have to monitor. However, not all grantees appear to be aware that there is the option to reprofile. Furthermore, the current online grants portal means that targets and budgets that were submitted in application forms automatically populate monitoring forms. This can be particularly frustrating for grantees who were awarded less than requested and subsequently submitted reprofiled targets and budget to the council. They feel they have to repeatedly explain variances, which can make them feel like they are "failing", rather than adapting.

CGU is aware of this and will incorporate the ability to reprofile online in to the specification to tender for the new grants portal. In the meantime, they assure that reprofiles are held "offline" and monitoring is carried out by officers against reprofiles.

Grantees also suggested that monitoring reports could be "softened" by making the language in the monitoring forms "more human" (such as "We appreciate things change ... please provide a wee sentence to explain significant changes").

Overall, most considered monitoring to be "straightforward and not laborious". However, a minority felt that monitoring forms are "time consuming and tricky", particularly reporting on the different categories of beneficiaries, such as volunteers, participants, known and estimated audiences. There was some appreciation that these categories matched with ACNI's reporting requirements and of the "good work" started by Belfast City Council to streamline processes with the arts sector's main funder. Grantees would welcome further

collaboration between funders, although it should also be noted that an increasing number of CMAG grantees are not funded by ACNI.¹³

Other alternatives to monitoring reports suggested were a formal, recorded conversation instead of a form.

At workshops and interviews in particular, participants indicated they would welcome the opportunity to share more qualitative information, such as case studies, anecdotes, quotes and reflections on successes and challenges, in monitoring reports.¹⁴ One consultee described monitoring as

“Disappointingly pedestrian, lots and lots of figures and stats and no capture of impact. A missed opportunity to talk about outcomes internally and externally, locally and internationally.”

However, others stressed that this must be optional, reiterating that they liked the council’s “relatively light-touch” monitoring and already manage extensive monitoring and evaluation demands internally and from other funders.

Three survey respondents (9 per cent) were very unsatisfied with the administration of grants. Two grant recipients reported poor communication and “huge delays” in payments, and the third found

“the monitoring process quite tedious and time consuming, I would much prefer visits to events to truly understand the value of our programming.”

Other festivals and events grantees reported delays in payments during interviews, which may reflect confusion over payment schedules or the anomalous administration during the pandemic.

Programme level

Within the Culture and Arts team, individual officers have a portfolio of CMAG clients. The team is new, with the last officer appointed in April 2023, which has limited their involvement with clients and the programme overall.

At the end of each financial year, there is a financial reconciliation of CMAG. At the end of the 2022/23 financial year, for the first time ever, there were no CMAG accruals as all grantees drew down their funding as planned.

The Investment Programme recommends that grants are “reviewed annually with a minimum focus on financial reconciliation, taking into account delivery across the period, resulting in a decision to continue, discontinue or amend funding”. It further recommends that the council develop an “outcomes-focused [evaluation framework] to ensure that it measures what is meaningful and makes best use of resources, including opportunities to streamline and share data.”

In 2020/21, the council developed a draft evaluation framework. However, this was during Covid and it was considered that “We could not judge CMAG or appear to be assessing the

¹³ Five festivals and events in the first round and six in the second round are not ACNI funded.

¹⁴ Some consultees thought that there was space in the monitoring form to report qualitative information. This may be a throwback to previous CMAF monitoring forms or confusion with other funders’ monitoring reports.

sector on two years of a new scheme that were two atypical years” or “Evaluation at that point would be like kicking a puppy”.

Nevertheless, an annual review is required to adhere to National Audit and Cabinet Office guidance. The sector is also keen that the council is held to account for the performance of their programme as they are held to account in relation to their grant.

“The whole City Imagining strategy was very ambitious. Whether council had capacity internally to deliver is something that they need to question internally.”

“Perhaps they spread things too quickly, rather than taking time and assessing what their impact has been.”

Timing

Applicants felt that the council kept the application open for a reasonable amount of time, although some requested that it was open for “as long as possible”, and some would like earlier funding decisions, particularly those who operate festivals and events near the start of the financial year.

There should also cognisance of other key funding dates. Grantees valued that funding decisions were made in advance of ACNI annual funding. This could mean that applicants were working on the two applications simultaneously, which is a substantial workload, although others suggested that there are benefits, such as having “all the data together” at the same time. The same pros and cons also exist when ACNI and Belfast City Council monitoring cycles coincide.

Consultees also referred to a clash between CMAG and 2024 deadlines.

Developmental support

Wraparound developmental support was a key recommendation in the Investment Programme. It stated that

“Support can take many forms, from training, guidance and other informational support to the tangible provision of goods and services. It can be off-the-shelf or commissioned; sector specific or cross-sectoral with the benefit of cross-pollination; it can build on what already exists and works in the city or can be new and innovative, learning from other cities”.

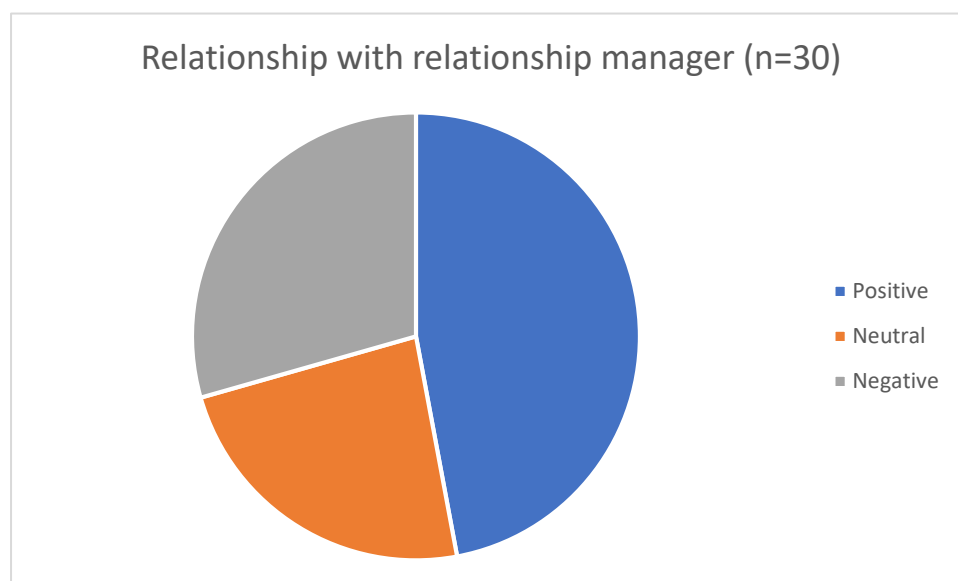
Other potential support needs identified in the Investment Programme included marketing; audience development; digital marketing and audience development; internationalisation; evaluation and impact measurement; reflective practice; innovation; capitalisation; cross-sectoral networking; environmental impact; digital skills; and research and development.

CMAG grantees in particular should benefit from “one-to-one support in the form of and facilitated by their relationship manager.” the Investment Programme continues:

“The relationship should be supportive, built around a shared vision for success, but able to withstand challenge as the relationship manager will continue to be responsible for monitoring performance. The degree and nature of support required will vary depending on the investment strand, amount of investment, perceived risk and needs of the organisation and should be agreed between the relationship manager and organisation at the start of the contract.”

Relationship management

In the survey, successful applicants were also asked to describe their relationship with their relationship manager.



Just under half (47 per cent) gave a positive response, and comments included:

“All officers have been attentive, responsive and interested in the work we have been doing. We would say the relationship has been very good and beneficial for the festival”

“Strong, professional and really valued working relationship”

However, a quarter (24 per cent) gave a neutral response, and just under a third (29 per cent) gave a negative response.

“Since [they have] moved positions, I am not aware of a particular replacement responsible for our client relationship or any monitoring meetings that are important for improving communications between the funder and the client and for the funder to know the extent and impact of the work of the client.”

“Because this has changed, we haven't built much of a relationship and are often not sure who we should be dealing with. There's no real direct relationship beyond having someone to ask questions to if we need information.”

“There have been a lot of changes. Some staff didn't come near us or seemed more about the tourism and I don't feel they got arts. I am not sure who is even there any more.”

During workshops, participants reported their relationship manager changing up to four times or even “every time you sent an email”. This was not a reflection on individual officers, who were singled out for praise, and there was recognition of the extent of change with the council's culture function.¹⁵ Some felt that the council needed to do more to retain staff or

¹⁵ As at May 2023, current Culture Unit team members have been in place for between just over 18 months and under one month.

at least retain corporate knowledge when staff move on and to communicate changes better.

“Relationships are now depersonalised and no different to any other funder that gives us money and gets reports.”

Organisations were also worried that lack of a relationship would put them at a disadvantage going in to the new round of CMAG.

“We want the council to have a depth of knowledge and understanding of what we do [...] A relationship gives context for interpreting an application – that’s hard if you have an officer who has never been in your premises. You’ll be at a disadvantage. They should know you, not an impression of you.”

Relationships with CGU were, however, considered to be “strong and consistent”, and the sector would like more opportunity to meet them in person and get to know “the human person behind the team, because we get on well and know their names but would walk past them in the street”.

Overall, respondents are looking forward to building relationships in the future. There was particular recognition of the need for a dedicated point of contact within council who could help organisations liaise with other departments or link them in to other projects and initiatives happening across the council. This could include helping organisations unlock opportunities such as Section 76 and developer clauses or capitalise on strategic partnerships with sectoral bodies such as thrive, Arts and Business and the University of Atypical. Imagine clients in particular felt that their plans were disrupted when they were not consulted or informed about delays to the year of culture. It was also noted that council departments do not always work together and sometimes appear to “block each other”. Being able to work across different agendas is, however, vital to supporting the sector’s impact and value.

The importance of forums and networking was discussed across all consultation, and there was some consideration that this could substitute (at least partially) for one-to-one relationship management. There was strong recognition of the value of sub-sectoral collaboration, for example, through the Festivals and Visual Arts forums.

“I think that one thing that is starting to emerge is more collaboration between organisations through the festivals forum particularly in recognising how we can work together to improve the lot of festivals.”

“The Visual Arts Forum is the one strategic thing there is for visual arts”

However, others felt that networking should take place on a cross-sectoral basis to allow “cross-fertilisation”.

Others wanted more collaboration within the CMAG portfolio, which might support council’s plans to require four-year grantees to support other organisations. There was also a perception that “Festivals were given a significant boost but didn’t spread it around”.

A few people queried the need for in-depth relationships, pointing to trusts and foundations that increasingly advise grantees not to make contact. They stressed that the relationship must be of mutual benefit and “not too onerous”. Others suggested that if the council does

not have the resource to invest in relationships, it is best not to raise expectation. A minority also appear to prefer to have solely transactional contact with their funders.

Within Belfast City Council, it was suggested that a regular sectoral meeting or cultural forum or a client newsletter could also support relationships.

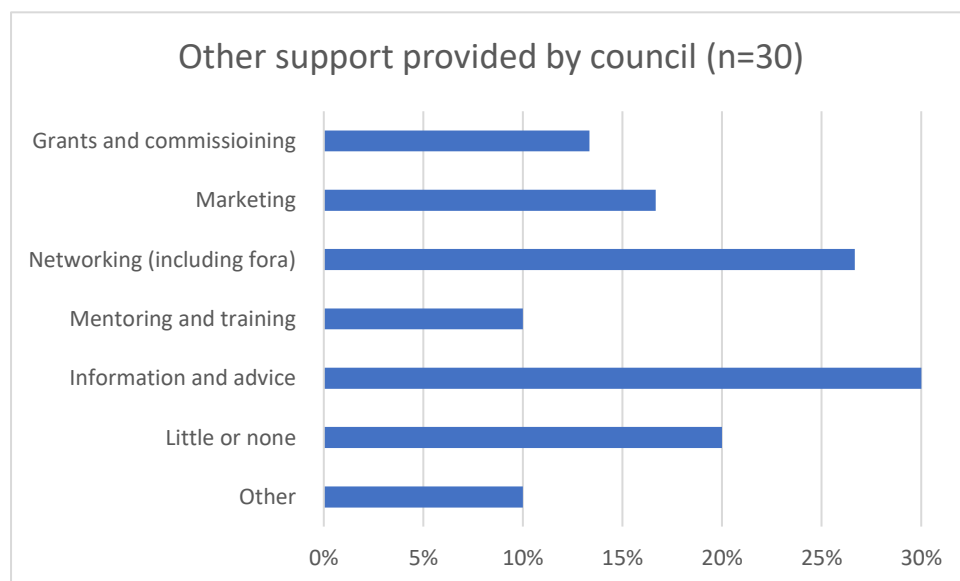
Strong, consistent relationships would help with some misunderstandings that exist about CMAG (from practicalities such as what funding can be spent on, how festivals and events can draw down funding and what other grants CMAG grantees can apply for to understanding of strategic direction and prioritisation), ensuring everyone has the same experience and benefit. Grantees also felt that this would make monitoring and evaluation “more natural” (although from an audit and administration perspective, it is important that a paper trail is maintained).

Both the council and organisations also felt that relationships of mutual trust and understanding would also mean that organisations could be better guided to ask for a realistic amount of funding and that council staff would be better equipped to assess applications and provide feedback.

“A good relationship is vital to guide people about what to cover in their application, to be realistic – ambitious but reasonable – to let people know they can change projects as long as they are not pie in the sky. It is all about trust.”

Other support

Survey respondents were also asked what other support they had received from Belfast City Council. Just under a third (30 per cent) had received information and advice, including from other areas of the council such as economic development, environmental health and capital development. Over a quarter (27 per cent) had been involved in networking, in particular through the Belfast Festivals Forum or Belfast Visual Arts Forum, which were also closely associated with marketing support (17 per cent). However, 1 in 5 (20 per cent) received little or no support.



Other responses included support with accessibility and advocacy.

“it is reassuring to have them as a backbone. I respect the support they give to the arts”

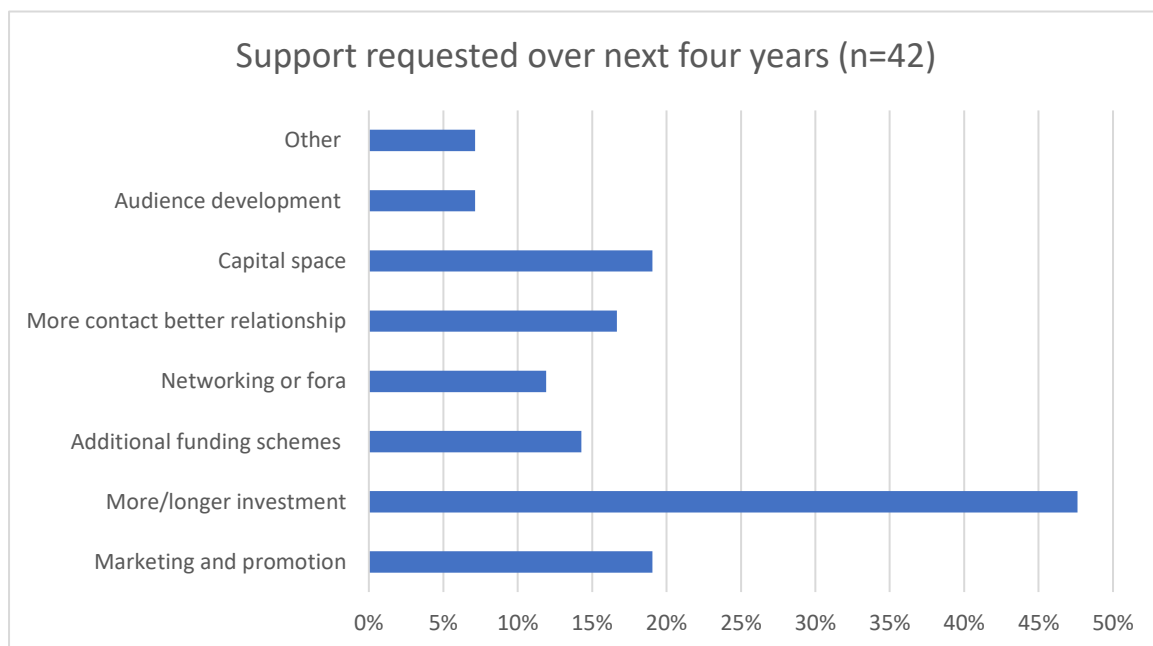
Among those who received little or no support, there was again disappointment that expectations had not been realised.

“Other’ opportunities we were told we would have, at the start of [CMAG] period, have not materialised. Support has markedly reduced from the partner-working operations and relationships that were in place in previous times. The ‘partnership’ with City Council has not been fostered.”

“We were disappointed that there was less of a collaborative relationship with the culture team than we originally expected. it seemed to go back to the traditional funder/client relationship, whereas at the time of application there was promise of more one to one support to develop”

Future support needs

Both successful and unsuccessful applicants were asked in the survey, “How else could the council support you in the next four years?” Unsurprisingly, the most frequent response (48 per cent) was for more or longer-term investment including three- or four-year funding (instead of two). Other responses included support for marketing and promotion (19 per cent) including social media and shared resources (like the Festivals Forum flag fields); support for finding, securing or developing property (19 per cent); and more contact or a better relationship with the council (17 per cent) including staff and councillors.



At one workshop it was described how councillors used to “show up [to events] like showers”. However, this no longer happens, and grantees would welcome the support of staff to help build relationships with councillors, for example, by acting as a liaison for individual organisations or hosting an annual meet and greet.

Grantees would also like Culture and Arts staff to attend more events and activities to get a fuller understanding of what they support. However, they stressed that staff and councillors should also come along to “not just when there is free drink and celebrities” but also

“normal” activities so they would understand “that workshop for 15 people was incredible, that’s what we’re doing for our citizens”.

Within the Culture and Arts team, now it is at full complement and has had some time to bed in, there is a strong desire to experience more events and activities in what they appreciate to be a “strong and diverse arts scene that can hold its own against other comparable cities”.

Transition

While there was resentment in the sector that some unsuccessful applicants were awarded more funding than successful applicants, Belfast City Council considered Transition was an appropriate response to significant strategic change. Some clients had benefited from CMAF core funding for over seven years or even longer via other core multi-annual grants that pre-dated CMAF.

“Transition is a healthy way to manage the change that is needed.”

“It was very healthy and considerate for the council to provide a cushion for those who fell out. But it is important that people do fall out to make changes to pursue the strategy.”

The external developmental support was considered particularly important in helping organisations develop and “ask ‘where next?’” One Transition organisation that took part in this review commented

“The consultant was valuable, they helped me calm down and look at organisational development.”

Funding helped meet programming costs as well as ongoing running costs.

“I know we can’t assume we’ll get a grant, but it did leave a hole especially in terms of outreach – so Transition did help bridge the gap immediately, and I guess it was space for us to get ready for going longer-term without a BCC grant.”

Transition consultees suggested alternative support if CMAG is not attainable.

“We would like to see Transition again – or better would be larger project grants for outreach or engagement if not for the core arts element. CMAG is only small part of our turnover but we really do need to keep up the engagement and outreach piece for the people of Belfast.”

“If organisations cannot get in to CMAG, then could there be some other recognition of standards? A hallmark or some way that even if you cannot get funds, you still get assurance and some mark that you are seen as valuable?”

They would also have welcomed more feedback on their applications.

Two Transition organisations subsequently successfully reapplied for two-year funding in the second round (including one was previously ineligible due to the £100,000 turnover threshold). Two did not reapply. Seven reapplied and were unsuccessful.

Transition recipients also went on to secure other Belfast City Council project grants.

Conclusions and recommendations

There is evidence that Belfast City Council's CMAG programme follows a robust process and is designed to support the council's strategic ambitions as set down in A City Imagining.

In keeping with National Audit Office good practice guidance, there is evidence that:

1. Risk is managed on a spectrum dependent on the type (restricted project and unrestricted grant-in-aid), value and duration of the grant.
2. It is not risk averse but balances the risk to the council and the grantee, in particular in relation to Imagine and Activate grants.
3. It is built on a previous comparator scheme and utilises expertise of those with understanding of the sector and experience of similar grant schemes, including CGU.
4. Uptake of funding was accurately projected, and there is balance, on one hand, between encouraging uptake and minimising administrative burdens and, on the other, ensuring that the support is used as intended, and the council is confident that the funding targets and benefits the right organisations.
5. The sector has been engaged in the review of the scheme after both two and four years, which will influence the next cycle of funding.
6. There is no similar multi-annual strategic fund open to the sector.

However, it has not been possible to robustly evaluate whether CMAG has achieved its aims or the extent to which it contributed to A City Imagining outcomes. This is largely due to extenuating circumstances in the external and internal operating environment which meant neither the council nor the sector could operate as planned.

The following recommendations are intended to further enhance the grant process, impact and evaluation.

Evaluation

A draft evaluation framework was developed by the council in 2021/22. It includes recommendations for performance monitoring and client and programme evaluation, but it was stalled due to the pandemic.

An evaluation process must be implemented to enable evidence to be collected throughout the next four-year cycle. This will enable the council to prove the value of its investment as well as improve its funding practice.

There should also be an annual performance review.

The council should therefore review, revise and implement the framework in consultation with grantees (alongside relevant findings from this report).

There should also be, at least in the interim, the option for grantees to provide narrative feedback in monitoring forms.

Support for applicants

Engagement with the sector during this review indicated that there are misperceptions about CMAG that may have repercussions for applicants. The application process may also be easier for organisations with experience of CMAG or council funding in general.

The council should roll out information sessions and advice clinics. This will also provide an opportunity for the sector to meet CGU and Culture and Arts teams.

Prioritisation of CMAG

There remains a perception that CMAG is “just funding”. On a practical level, staff should be encouraged to block out time for administration that otherwise results in delays for grantees. Staff should also be supported to take on a more developmental role, including training, time to develop relationships and time in lieu to attend funding events and activities.

A dedicated staff member could also be assigned to programme manage CMAG.

Key messaging

There should be clear consistent messaging to ensure that all applicants understand the purpose of the fund. This should also be reviewed in the guidance notes.

There should also be clear and consistent messaging around the administration of the fund. Relationship managers should be a key conduit. There could also be an induction for all or new grantees.

Key messaging should clarify CMAG grantees’ eligibility to apply to other council funding. The council should also consider the interface between 2024 and CMAG and whether 2024 projects and commissions constitute organisations’ core programmes.

Communications should start with the findings of this review including what will and will not be changed as a result and why.

Relationships management

The council should consider the extent to which it is resourced to provide one-to-one relationship management alongside options such as forums, group meetings and newsletters.

Within the scope of resources, relationship managers should develop a bespoke, two-way “relationship contract” with their clients.

The council should also explore options to help organisations build relationships with councillors.

Volunteer eligibility criteria

The council should consider removing this requirement. Instead, it should ensure that it is satisfied that volunteering is considered within the assessment criteria as an indicator of A City Belonging, Challenging or Creating.

Eligibility criteria for arts and heritage applicants

Arts and heritage eligibility criteria including audience and turnover are based on historic baselines. Covid will have created peaks and troughs, and recent baselines are no longer

robust. It is therefore recommended that arts and heritage organisations are allowed to base their application on projections (as per festivals and events applicants) with the caveat that historic performance will be used to assess whether projections are realistic (and potentially level of award; see Level of award recommendation below).

Applicants may need additional space within the application form to explain variances or exceptions.

(While the historic baselines were unpopular among the sector, this recommendation is made on the basis of the pandemic, not popularity.)

Audience eligibility criteria

The council should analyse recent monitoring returns to consider whether audience eligibility criteria are still appropriate.

Staff employment criteria

The following criteria should apply as an indication of capacity and need. Any exceptions should be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

Imagine	Activate	Anchor	Enable
Has or will employ in the first year, 3+	Has or will employ in the first year, 1+	3+	1+

Level of award

To manage expectations, the council should agree in advance whether applicants can expect a significant change in funding or should request an incremental increase or standstill and communicate this to applicants. In so doing, it should consider the desirability of awarding fewer organisations larger grants.

The council should also consider telling applicants the average value of grants made in the first round, and the number and value of grants it intends to make in the second cycle.

The council should consider the feasibility of inflation-linked or mid-term increases for four-year grantees.

Duration of funding

Most CMAG grantees got *de facto* four-year funding. The council should consider awarding all grants on a four-year basis subject to developing a longer-term project fund of scale that could support new and emerging organisations. This would reduce administrative burden on both applicants and the council.

Names

The council should change the names of the funds. The preferred option appears to be to refer to them by their descriptors (four-year arts and heritage, two-year festivals and events and so on).

Timing

The council should notify the sector of when it intends to open and close the grant as far in advance as possible.

Application form

The application form should be reviewed to identify any questions or attachments (such as board minutes) that could be removed or made only applicable to four-year applicants. While this would benefit both applicants and assessors, it should be noted that any changes to the application form will need to be carried through to the assessment form at the back end, which may result in more significant changes than tolerable within the current portal contract.

Assessment process

The council should consider providing applicants with more detail on the assessment process and criteria.

The council should use external subject matter expertise to assess at least Imagine applications.

The council should provide new assessors with training and consider bringing in external support from assessors with experience of similar schemes.

Feedback

Feedback to applicants is available on request. The council should consider offering it to all applicants, resources allowing.

Transition

The council should consider how it will support any existing Imagine or Anchor client that applies unsuccessfully in the second cycle. However, it is not recommended that the council provides a formal scheme such as Transition. Rather, given the variance in Anchor awards in particular, this should be done on a case-by-case basis.

Developmental support

The council should revisit and resource plans for wraparound developmental support for CMAG clients.

It should include support to help clients with accessibility and environmental sustainability.

Online grants portal

Feedback from grantees in relation to online reprofiling should be used to inform the specification to tender for the new online grants portal.

Administration

The administration of all grants should be migrated back to CGU. The process should include reconciliation of all financial and monitoring records.

Project funding

The council should review existing project funding with a view to introducing a longer-term project fund of scale that would reduce pressure on CMAG and help support a diverse ecosystem.

Equality

It is not known whether Section 75 monitoring returns have identified any differential impact for particular groups applying for funding. The council should carry out additional research and an equality screening to identify particular barriers and potential mitigations.

Appendix 1: CMAG grant recipients

Imagine

Arts Ekta

Féile An Phobail

Science Festivals NI

Young At Art

Anchor

Belfast Community Circus School Limited

Crescent Arts Centre

Cultúrlann McAdam Ó Fiaich

Lyric Theatre

Oh Yeah Music Centre

The Black Box Trust

The Duncairn

The MAC

Ulster Orchestra Society

Activate 2020/21–21/22

Belfast Film Festival

Belfast International Arts Festival

Belfast Photo Festival

Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival

Cinemagic International Film and
Television Festival

Docs Ireland

EastSide Arts

Féile An Phobail

Festival Of Fools

Outburst Arts Festival

The Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival

The Odyssey Trust

Enable 2020/21–21/22

An Droichead

Beat Carnival

Belfast Exposed

Bruiser Theatre Company

Community Arts Partnership

Cumann Cultúrtha Mhic Reachtain

DU Dance

Dumbworld

Golden Thread Gallery

Green Shoot Productions

Kabosh

Kids In Control

Linen Hall Library

Maiden Voyage

Moving On Music

New Lodge Arts

Northern Ireland Opera

Open Arts

Photo Works North/Source Magazine

Prime Cut Productions

Queen's Film Theatre

Replay Theatre Company

Strand Arts Centre

Streetwise Community Circus

Nerve Belfast

Tinderbox Theatre Company

Ulster Architectural Heritage Society

WheelWorks

YouthAction Northern Ireland

Activate 22/23–23/24

Belfast City Marathon

Belfast Film Festival

Belfast International Arts Festival

Belfast Photo Festival

Belfast Summer School Of Traditional Music

Cinemagic International Film and Television Festival

Docs Ireland

EastSide Arts

Féile An Phobail

Festival Of Fools

Imagine Belfast

Out to Lunch

Outburst Arts Festival

The Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival

The Odyssey Trust

Enable 22/23–23/24

An Droichead

Beat Carnival

Belfast Exposed

Bruiser Theatre Company

Community Arts Partnership

Cumann Cultúrtha Mhic Reachtain

DU Dance

Dumbworld

Fighting Words Northern Ireland

Golden Thread Gallery

Kabosh

Kids In Control

Linen Hall Library

Maiden Voyage

Moving On Music

Open Arts

Photo Works North/Source Magazine

Prime Cut Productions

Queen's Film Theatre

Replay Theatre Company

Strand Arts Centre

Streetwise Community Circus

Terra Nova Productions

Nerve Belfast

University Of Atypical

WheelWorks

YouthAction Northern Ireland

Appendix 2: Organisations that participated in workshops or interviews

We would like to thank everyone who took the time to share their expertise and experience including those organisations that took part anonymously in the surveys.

ArtsEkta	Maiden Dance
Belfast Exposed	Moving on Music
Belfast International Arts Festival	NI Science Festival
Belfast Photo Festival	Oh Yeah
Circusful	Prime Cut
Cumann Cultúrtha Mhic Reachtain	Queen's Film Theatre
Docs Ireland	Replay
EastSide Arts	Strand Arts Centre
Festival of Fools	Streetwise Circus
Fighting Words	Terra Nova
Golden Thread Gallery	The Beat
Grand Opera House	The Crescent Arts Centre
Imagine	The MAC
Kabosh	Ulster Orchestra
Kids in Control	University of Atypical
Linen Hall Library	Young at Art

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Subject:	Christmas Programme Update
Date:	14 th June 2023
Reporting Officer:	John Greer, Director of Economic Development
Contact Officer:	Kerry Mc Mullan, Tourism and Events Development Manager

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to provide Members with further information on the Christmas event as previously requested.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	It is recommended that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – In light of further information being provided, Members agree on the approach/format to Christmas 2023 – Note the contents of the report in relation to the Lighting Scheme
3.0	Main report

3.1	<p>Christmas Programme 2023</p> <p>On an annual basis, the Council’s Culture and Events Units delivers a series of large-scale public events, which are free to access by both citizens and visitors to the city, on behalf of Belfast City Council. This is further supported by the activity of other teams who support a number of annual programmes and activities and the Markets Unit who manage the delivery of the Christmas Market at City Hall in addition to year-round activity at St George’s and Smithfield markets.</p>
3.2	<p>The purpose of this report is to provide Members with further information and the costing of the various options for the delivery of Christmas 2023. This report follows on from a report to City Growth and Regeneration Committee on 8th March 2023, which focused on an Evaluation of the Christmas 2022 Programme.</p>
3.2.1	<p>At the March 2023 meeting, officers further presented an option to merge the old Christmas switch-on format (preferred option prior to the pandemic) with the city-centre-wide programme used in 2021 and 2022 which would have seen a small stage at Castle Junction/Donegall Place, allowing the audience within Donegall Place to view the lighting of the Tree and Festive Lighting within the immediate City Centre, without the requirement to close Donegall Square North. The entertainment throughout the City Centre could then be programmed</p>
3.2.2	<p>As per Members request, this report will give cognisance to the resumption of the traditional ‘switch on’ event while considering health and safety, community engagement and local organisation involvement, choir competitions, a procession, environmental impact, budget availability, comparison of event feedback of recent Christmas programmes and the extension of the lighting schemes. All of which will assist the forward planning of the future Christmas programme for 2023 and beyond.</p>
3.2.3	<p>At April City Growth and Regeneration Committee, a budget of £122,864 was agreed for the Christmas 2023 programme as part of the in-year work programme for the Tourism unit and It is important to note that the Christmas 2023 programme is the launch pad into the ‘Belfast 2024’ programme and whilst programming will deliver against core thematic alignment, there may also be opportunity for additional budget uplift as part of this.</p>
3.3	<p>Officers have considered and presented three possible programming scenarios and associated budget requirements as below:</p>

3.4

Option 1: Return to the “Pre-Covid” Switch on Style event.

The table below summarises the anticipated expenditure. Forecasts are based on 2019 event costs with an allowance for inflation and additional measures required to facilitate a safe event (as recommended in the external H&S report). These additional measures have distinct cost implications due to the longer build and de-rig period of the event: equipment will be hired for a longer period and will require security for the duration. There will be further road closures to accommodate stakeholders. It is important to note that consultation with both PSNI and Translink is considered in line with event management and the impact of intended road closures to the delivery of their core services and associated cost implications.

Category	Description	Indicative cost
Entertainment	on stage performance, music and show pieces	£18,000
Production	production management, stage, PA, ancillary equipment, screens,	£65,000
H&S, licensing, legal	licenses, first aid, insurance, H&S advisor, stewarding	£24,000
Traffic Management	road closure, parking bay suspension, traffic management contractor	£8,000
Survey	Socio-economic survey	£8,000
Total		£123,000

3.5

Option 2: Continue with a city-centre wide programme of animation and entertainment as per 2021 and 2022:

Costs are based on 2022 event costs, with an allowance for inflation.

Category	Description	Indicative cost
Entertainment	Variety of performer throughout city centre, window animation, parade, small allocation to 2RA	£41,000
Lighting	Lighting projections, displays, lighting for window animation, includes equipment	£26,000
Production	production management, Riser stage, PA, ancillary equipment,	£12,000

H&S, licensing, legal	licenses, first aid, insurance, H&S advisor, stewarding	£20,500
Traffic Management	road closure, parking bay suspension, traffic management contractor	£4,200
Survey	Socio-economic survey	£5,100
	Programming 2 Royal Ave for the evening	£5,000
Total		£115,000

It is important to note that neither of the above two options includes provision for subsequent weekends. Since 2019, there has been an allocation for animation of the 4-5 weekends in the run up to Christmas, funded from non-recurrent reserves. Which is not available in 23/24 financial year.

3.6

Option 3: Combination of a Switch-on event and city-centre wide programme of animation and entertainment as per 2021 & 2022 (as per March Committee report), with an allocation for subsequent weekends.

A solution could be found in taking attributes of the old format, hosted within the 2021/2022 event space. A 'switch on' element, could take place on a small riser stage/platform at Castle Junction/Donegall Place, close to 2RA - allowing the audience within Donegall Place to view the lighting of the Tree and Festive Lighting within the immediate City Centre, without the requirement to close Donegall Square North. A larger PA system would be required for this element. The entertainment throughout the City Centre would be programmed over a two-hour period and would accommodate the parade element delivered in 2022.

3.7

An allocation of the budget would deliver activity at 2 Royal Ave (a success in 2022, and wet weather contingency offering) and weekends in the run up to Christmas, supplemented by other city centre activity. However, to accommodate this expenditure there would be a reduction in the allocation to both entertainment and lighting displays.

Category	Description	Indicative cost
Entertainment	Variety of performer throughout city centre, window animation, parade,	£37,700
Lighting	Lighting projections, displays, lighting for window animation, includes equipment	£15,000

Production	production management, Riser stage, Larger PA, ancillary equipment,	£16,000
H&S, licensing, legal	licenses, first aid, insurance, H&S advisor, stewarding	£15,000
Traffic Management	road closure, parking bay suspension, traffic management contractor	£4,200
Survey	Socio-economic survey.	£5,100
Subsequent Weekends	Programming of 2 Royal Ave from opening weekend, throughout period, with additional weekend animation & music	£30,000
Total		£123,000

3.8

Health and Safety Consultation:

As per Members request, the Events Team have sought independent health and safety advise on each of the above options, the salient findings of this are as follows:

- the traditional Switch On Event in front of City Hall, has a long history and evolved over more than two decades
- The challenges faced over that period have influenced the evolution of the event
- The most recent iterations present a variety of health & safety implications for both the public and staff involved in the build, delivery and de-rig of the event. Similar public civic events, where incidents took place, illustrate the implications on local authorities.
- By contrast the 2021 & 2022 format carries relatively low risk from a health & safety perspective.
- Stakeholders have clearly stated a preference for the more recent format but accept that the ‘traditional’ switch on could still take place with mitigations in place.
- These mitigations will result in additional resources being required to deliver a safe event, which also meets the expectations of stakeholders.

The full report is attached in Appendix 1

3.9

Public Engagement on Christmas (conducted by Thrive)

This provided insight on people's behaviours and how Christmas events make them feel/shape their sense of place, although did not focus on the format of the switch on event.

Some General key findings on how people in Belfast feel about the city centre:

- Everyone repeatedly mentioned how important publicly owned spaces are to keep people coming in and feeling proud of Belfast, a reflection of civic pride in the architectural heritage which exists throughout the city and a desire to preserve it for future generations to enjoy.
- There was a desire to see more public spaces be used throughout the town centre: outdoor seating, green areas, nice places for people to exist without having to spend money. This connected to the panel's desire for the city centre to be a space where many people live, reflecting the diversity of the rest of the county.

3.10

Creative Programming & Alignment with the Cultural Strategy – A City Imagining

Members are asked to note that the newer format compliments the Cultural Strategy – A City Imagining.

Several priorities are actioned via the Christmas Programme. For example, Priority 1 of 'A City Belonging' is to *develop and deliver a co-design model for all cultural programmes* while Priority 9 under 'A City Creating' specifies to *involve creative and cultural practitioners in service design across Council*; In 2021, 33 Belfast based organisations from the cultural, arts and theatre/performance sectors were engaged to take part in this event and provide the animation over the 2 nights, with an additional 2 companies coming in from GB and 1 from Ireland. A smaller number were used in 2022, however, this was only one night.

An action under priority 4 is *further develop the city as a gallery* – something the newer format delivers comprehensively through street art, static window displays, and various lighting initiatives. In a similar vein, Priority 5 (A City Challenging) focuses on placemaking - one action being *'deliver playful city initiative to improve the quality, accessibility and openness of public spaces'* The expansive nature of the Christmas programme of 2021 & 2022 across the City centre, transformed underused public spaces into vibrant, bright, intriguing and theatrical space via music, animation and window dressing.

Pending final decision, and as per Members request the Events Team will work with Culture colleagues in the Belfast 2024 Team to deliver 'community engagement and local organisation involvement, choir competitions and a procession'.

3.11	<p>Environmental Impact:</p> <p>As per Members request, Officers have viewed all options presented through the lens of Environmental Impact. Over the last 5-6 years the events team have tried to remove as much physical infrastructure as possible that lends to creative development and delivers a more organic event creating higher levels of sustainability in increasing employment of local talent performing at the event, creating live hubs of music and animation across city centre. The Events team give cognisance to sustainability throughout and where possible utilise existing power supplies, infrastructure and natural spaces lending to live programming, the footprint for the original format exceeds the current format with additional infrastructure requirements.</p>
3.12	<p>Future Extension of the Lighting Scheme:</p> <p>At March Committee, Members were advised that Christmas Lighting Scheme in 2022 was year 3 of the existing Christmas Lighting Scheme. The scheme was identical to the 2021 programme, with the addition of icicles on Ann Street and the positioning and lighting on 12 additional trees on Donegall place. Feedback on the scheme was positive, however, there continues to be requests for an extension of the scheme to include arterial routes. This also includes lighting projections and additional illuminations across the city.</p>
3.13	<p>The budget for the Christmas lights has remained unchanged in the last three years and the Economic Development division do not have budget available to fund the expansion of the lighting scheme. Members should also be aware that any extension would require a significant lead in time to secure permissions, infrastructure and lighting.</p>
3.14	<p>Financial & Resource Implications</p>
3.15	<p>There are no financial implications to this report. All expenditure is within existing departmental budgets and approvals.</p> <p>However it should be noted, that in relation to Christmas 2024 neither option 1 or 2 allows for subsequent weekend activity. Should there be a desire to integrate this element under options 1 or 2 additional resource would need to be allocated.</p> <p>Any extension of the existing Festive Lighting Scheme would require additional resources.</p> <p><u>Equality & Good Relations Implications</u></p> <p>None.</p>
4.0	<p>Appendices – Documents Attached</p>
	<p>Appendix 1 - Christmas external H&S report</p>

Belfast City Council Christmas Lights Event – Safety Implications

Forward

This Report will consider the safety implications for the Christmas Lights Event with respect to the Stage Format that was utilised prior to 2020 when civic events were impacted by the COVID outbreak and the associated restrictions. It will also consider the safety implications with respect to the Revised Format utilised since 2020 with entertainment being provided at multiple locations in the City Centre.

Introduction

The Christmas Lights Event has been an annual civic highlight over the past number of decades. Until 2020 with the onset of COVID the Event has been hosted at the iconic location of the front of City Hall. Since the early 2000s the Event has coincided with the opening of the Christmas Market. The Christmas Lights Event and the opening of the Christmas Market has been widely viewed as the beginning of the Christmas season.

The Christmas Lights Event Site incorporates a stage and ancillary structures being located on the cobbles to the front of the City Hall grounds, and on the pavement to either side of this area, with the spectators viewing the show from the area to the front of the stage and to the ‘east side’ of Donegall Square North, to the ‘west side’ of Donegall Square North, and on Donegall Place.

History for the Entertainment Arrangements/ Crowd Management Arrangements for the Christmas Lights Event

In the late 1980s the Event attracted a wide demographic audience with a mix of young families to see the ‘switch on’, curious shoppers, and groups of teenagers to see a live band that performed following the ‘switch on’. The numbers attending was not excessive and most of the spectators appeared to enjoy the Event with very few incidents of bad behaviour.

During the 90s the numbers attending increased, and the entertainment on the stage included appearances by performers who had appeared on television talent shows. A greater proportion of teenagers began attending with many behaving in an excitable manner which although generally innocent in nature, was unsettling for the families and young children present.

Unfortunately, in later years groups of youths from differing communities began to attend the Christmas Lights Event and although they were managed by Security Personnel at the Event Site, they arranged fights remote from the Event Site using mobile phones. There were incidents of significant disorder on a number of occasions at various locations including Castle Court.

It was therefore decided that only 'child friendly' acts would be booked for the Christmas Lights Event, and that following the entertainment and the Christmas Lights being 'switched on' there would be two Christmas songs played over the PA and the Event would be brought to a conclusion.

The revised stage offering resulted in the audience again being dominated by young families however numbers continued to increase.

From 2005 onwards a Christmas Market was hosted in the grounds of the City Hall. Initially the Market opened at approximately 7-30 pm at the time of the Christmas Lights 'switch on'. This brought additional numbers to the Event Site and adjacent areas with large queues forming at the entrances to the Christmas Market. The opening time for the Christmas Market has latterly been brought forward to mid-day prior to the 'switch-on'. This addressed the queuing issue.

As stated above, the numbers of spectators attending the 'switch on' itself continued to rise and following concerns regarding congestion in the area to the front of the stage it was decided that the numbers of spectators attending should be managed. The site was enclosed by pedestrian barriers and tickets were issued free of charge upon application in the weeks prior to the Christmas Lights Event. This system worked reasonably well although each year a number of persons who had obtained tickets did not show up at the Event (a problem experienced at many events where tickets are issued free of charge) until the onset of COVID in 2020.

History of Legislative Control of Outdoor Events

During the 1980s safety at outdoor entertainment events was relatively unregulated with very limited Guidance Documentation available.

Following a number of incidents and near misses in the 1980s including fatalities at a festival in Donnington England, the Guide to Safety at Outdoor Events was drafted and issued by the Health and Safety Executive.

The number of outdoor events including civic events in the British Isles increased dramatically during the following years – not all were well planned or well organised.

A number of serious incidents subsequently occurred at outdoor events including over 60 people being seriously injured at the Christmas Lights Event in Birmingham in 2009. There were also incidents at the Christmas Lights Event in Bournemouth in 2009. In 2011 2 people were killed at a civic event in Great Yarmouth where the Local Authority was held culpable for breaches of Health and Safety Legislation.

Since the late 1990s then a number of Safety Guidance Documents relating to Event Safety have been published and the industry has become increasingly more regulated. There has also been a number of documents issued relating to the provision of facilities for persons with access issues.

History of Events on Donegall Square West/ Donegall Place

A number of large-scale entertainment events (other than the Christmas Lights Events have been hosted on the roadways to the front of City Hall in recent years including:

- The Millennium Celebrations on New Years Eve 2000 – A ‘drive in’ stage, generator and associated barriers were located on the cobbles to front of City Hall. No other infrastructure was provided. There was unrestricted access to the Event Site as there were other events taking place in the City Centre that evening. Donegall Square North was closed from 7-00 pm on New Years Eve until 2-30 am on the following day.

- A Radio 1 Live Broadcast on New Years Eve 2001 — A stage was built on the cobbles to the front of City Hall. The Site perimeter was secured using ‘heras fencing’ to manage access (18,000 tickets were issued). Donegall Square North was closed from 5-00 pm on New Years Eve, until 2-30 am on the following day. The pavement to the front of the City Hall grounds was closed for 5 days.
- A Radio 1 Live Broadcast on New Years Eve 2002 — A stage was built on the cobbles to the front of the City Hall grounds. The Site perimeter was secured using ‘heras fencing’ to manage access (18,000 tickets were issued). Donegall Square North was closed from 5-00 pm on New Years Eve, until 2-30 am on the following day. The pavement to the front of the City Hall grounds was closed for 5 days.
- A BBC Live Broadcast 2009 – A stage spanned the grounds of the City Hall and the cobbles on Donegall Square North. A ‘front of house unit’, a universal access platform, camera platforms and tiered seating were built on Donegall Square North. The perimeter of the Site was secured using ‘heras fencing’ to manage access (10,000 tickets were issued). Donegall Square North was closed on a number of occasions mostly after 10-00 pm to facilitate the build. Donegall Square North was closed from 5-00 pm – 3-00 am on the day of the Event to complete the build, conduct the concert and to facilitate the ‘takedown’.
- A Red Bull Formula 1 ‘Show Run’ Event in 2010 – A Formula 1 Garage was built inside the City Hall grounds. Barriers were placed along Wellington Street, Donegall Square North, Chichester Street, and associated junctions, and to an ‘outer cordon’ to secure the viewing areas. Much of the build work was carried out very early on a Saturday morning and the ‘takedown’ work was undertaken very early on the Sunday morning. The roadways were closed from 7 pm until 9-30 pm on the evening of the Event to complete the build and to facilitate the ‘Show Run’.
- An MTV Live Broadcast 2011 – A stage spanned the grounds of the City Hall and the cobbles on Donegall Square North. A ‘front of house unit’, a universal access platform, camera platforms and tiered seating were built on Donegall Square North. The perimeter of the Site was secured using ‘heras fencing’ to manage access (18,000 tickets were issued), Donegall Square North was closed on a number of occasions on the evenings prior to the event mostly after 10-00 pm to facilitate the build. Donegall Square North and Donegall Place were closed from 5-00 pm on the evening of the

event until 5-00 am on the following day to complete the build, conduct the concert and to facilitate the ‘takedown’.

- Red Bull Formula 1 ‘Show Run’ Event in 2018 – A Formula 1 Garage was built inside the City Hall Grounds. Barriers were placed along Wellington Street, Donegall Square North, Chichester Street, and associated junctions’ and to an ‘outer cordon’ to secure the viewing areas. Much of the build work was carried out very early on a Saturday morning and the ‘takedown’ work very early on the Sunday morning. The roadways were closed from 7 pm until 9-30 pm on the evening of the Event to complete the build and to facilitate the ‘Show Run’.
- A concert planned for New Years Eve 2003 had to be cancelled a few hours prior to the Event, due to deteriorating weather conditions. The performances were relocated to indoor venues, This demonstrates that difficult weather conditions can impact on the working environment particularly during winter months.

History of the Road layout to the front of the City Hall Grounds

During the early 1980s there were 4 lanes of traffic flowing from Wellington Street along Donegall Square North to its junction with Donegall Place. Vehicles could either proceed toward Chichester street or turn to the left along Donegall Place. Vehicles proceeding toward Chichester Street also had the option of turning right into Donegall Square East.

During the late 1990s Donegall Place became a ‘one way’ thoroughfare with traffic flowing from Castle Junction toward Donegall Square North. During the 2000s the pavements were widened and eventually traffic was reduced to one lane. Street scaping was undertaken including the provision of street furniture.

In recent years Donegall Square West has been used by Translink as a transport hub with general traffic being largely excluded from the thoroughfare. Buses emerge from Donegall Square West onto Donegall Square North and proceed to other parts of the city. Other bus routes approach Donegall Square North from Wellington Street and from Donegall Place. Closing Donegall Square North for any reason has a very significant impact on Translink operations during operational times.

The roadway on Wellington Street/ Donegall Square North and Chichester Street has been reduced to 3 lanes with the pavements being widened including the provision of car parking and bus stops. One of the lanes is now a dedicated bus lane.

More recently the 'glider' service has been introduced providing a frequent service from the east of the city to and from the west of the city.

Christmas Market

The Christmas Market was first hosted in the grounds of City Hall in 2005. The build for the Market commences in early November with the Market opening on the day of the Christmas Lights Event.

There is much building and stocking activity from very early morning on the Christmas Market opening day/ Christmas Lights Event day, when the stage set up is also taking place.

In recent years the Market has extended with units being located on the pavement on Donegal Square North to the front of the City Hall grounds. Some of these units have been vacated and used as production cabins and dressing accommodation for the Christmas Lights Event.

As stated above the Market initially opened immediately following the 'switch-on' of the Christmas Lights however in an effort to improve crowd management arrangements the opening time for the Market has more recently been moved to mid-day, prior to the Christmas Lights Event. This has proved to have been a success for both the Market and for the Christmas Lights Event.

It should be noted that the pedestrian gates to the front of the City Hall Grounds must be available as emergency exits from the Christmas Market both during the build and 'takedown' and during the Christmas Lights Event.

Structures/ Services Required for a Stage Type Show for the Christmas Lights Event and their Associated Issues

Overview

The build and ‘takedown’ for the Christmas Lights Event differs from the vast majority of other events hosted in the city in that most other site builds/ takedowns and particularly stage builds/ takedowns are undertaken in a secure space with unauthorised persons excluded. There is generally appropriate working space and ‘boneyard’ space (storage space for equipment). There are also appropriate arrangements for lorries to deliver and collect equipment etc. in a secure area.

Stage/ Big Screens

The use of a ‘drive-in’ stage obviates the need for a lengthy build period in an ‘active’ area. The area must be secured prior to the arrival of the stage. The ‘footprint’ of the stage requires the inner lane of Donegall Square North being utilised, with a Road Closure Order being required for the period when the stage is in place. Forward signage etc for traffic is also required in the lead up to, and during the Event. The PA, lighting, ‘backline’ equipment etc. required for the stage set-up can be delivered by truck that would park in the inner lane (now closed) and transferred to the stage area and integrated into the ‘show build’ accordingly. The lorry will then be driven away and will return at some point after the show when the process will be reversed.

The ‘big screens’ will be positioned approximately 25 meters to ‘stage left’ and to ‘stage right’ of the stage using similar methodology.

Issues

The pavement to the front of the City Hall will be closed with pedestrians having to be redirected across Donegall Square North or diverted across the front of the stage via a pedestrian route formed using barriers. Some pedestrians choose to cross Donegall Square North at points other than those designated for pedestrian crossings.

The inner lane of the roadway on Donegall Square North will be closed to traffic to facilitate the ‘footprint’ of the stage, the pedestrian diversion route, and trucks parking whilst off loading and collecting equipment. This impacts on vehicle flow in the area.

Event personnel will be carrying out a wide variety of tasks in a confined area and on occasions close to moving traffic.

There is a limited 'window' for delivering stock to the Christmas Market between the completion of the build to the Market and the opening time of the Market, thus deliveries to the Market are taking place on the morning of the Christmas Lights Event and the associated Site Build.

The pedestrian gates leading from the City Hall grounds onto Donegall Square North are emergency exits routes from the Christmas Market and therefore must be maintained as such.

Control Room/ First Aid Point – Double Stacked Portacabin

In recent years a double stacked 'portacabin' has been located on the corner of Donegall Square North and Donegall Place ('west side'). The ground floor cabin has been used as a First Aid Room and the upper cabin has been used as an Event Control Point.

The 'portacabins' are delivered on a 'flatbed' lorry fitted with a 'hi ab'. The area where the structure is to be located is secured using pedestrian fencing and tape. The ground floor cabin is lifted from the lorry into position by 'hi ab'. The upper cabin is then lifted into position again by 'hi ab' and the access steps are then placed in position. The process has to be reversed when the 'portacabins' are removed.

Issues

Pedestrian access to the area has to be halted when the positioning and removal processes are being undertaken. Pedestrians have to be diverted around the location, however despite the use of pedestrian barriers, tape and stewards' compliance can often be challenging.

Pedestrian access routes in the area of the facility are compromised when the 'double stack' is in position.

Again, Event Personnel on occasions are working close to moving vehicles.

Access Platforms

In recent years access platforms have been built on the 'northern side of the pavement' on Donegall Square North (west side) and Donegall Square North (east side). Each of the build areas are secured using pedestrian barriers, tape, and stewards. The equipment is delivered by truck and built in situ with the process being reversed during the 'takedown'.

Issues

Pedestrian access to the areas where the platforms are located has to be halted during the build and 'takedown' processes. Pedestrians have to be diverted around the locations, however, as stated above despite the use of pedestrian barriers, tape and stewards' compliance can often be challenging.

Pedestrian access routes in the area of the facility are compromised when the platforms are in position.

Again, Event Personnel on occasions are working close to moving vehicles.

The Taxi Rank on Donegall Square North (east side) has to be relocated.

Perimeter Fencing

Stillages of pedestrian fencing are delivered by lorry to various positions around the Site during the early hours of the morning of the Christmas Lights Event. Stillages are 'off loaded' and placed in position using a forklift truck. The units will be collected following the Event set into the stillages and loaded onto a lorry using a forklift truck.

Perimeter fencing including access lanes has to be positioned as to form barrier lines on Donegall Square West, Donegall Square North and on Donegall Square East. In order to keep traffic flowing as long as possible a Road Closure Order for the remaining traffic lanes is implemented as late as possible as to facilitate the flow of traffic that will include vehicles transporting shoppers. Buses have to be diverted with the ensuing challenge of advising the travelling public of the route changes.

Issues

As stated above the timing of the Road Closure being as late as practical prior to the Christmas Lights Event commencing presents a number of challenges:

- The use of a forklift truck on ‘live roads’ using banksmen to deliver the stillages to the respective areas.
- Despite announcements being made and the actions of stewards’ significant numbers of attendees who are in the area, run across Donegall Square North once the Closure Process commences but whilst traffic is still flowing, to obtain prime viewing positions.
- Significant resources are utilised clearing vehicles from parking bays in the Event Site and apron areas in the period prior to the Road Closure.
- The Road Closure is extremely difficult to implement due to cars emerging from alleys etc. again providing a pedestrian/ vehicle interface.
- The barrier lines must be built quickly as to secure the integrity of the Site with patrons either inside of the Event Site or approaching the Event Site, and shoppers leaving the Event Site, thus Event Personnel are carrying and moving barriers with significant numbers of pedestrians in the work areas.
- Some persons without tickets obtain access to the Event Site (an estimate of the numbers is factored into the Viewing Capacity and ticket issue).

Additional Control Measures that could be Implemented

When assessing the implementation of additional Control Measures the practicalities, costs, and what is achievable must be considered. In addition, consideration must be given to the ‘knock on’ impacts – by addressing one issue do we simply move the problem to somewhere else?

The following may be considered:

- A ‘cut off time’ for the delivery of stock to the Christmas Market could be agreed that would provide the traders with an appropriate period of time to complete deliveries on the morning of the Christmas Lights Event/ Market opening day and provide a reasonable ‘window’ for the Event Personnel to locate infra structure prior to the early morning build-up of both pedestrian and vehicular traffic in the Donegall Square North area.

This would require careful coordination between the Christmas Lights Event Personnel, and the Management of the Christmas Market.

- The Control Room could be relocated to a suitable office on the upper floor to the front of the City Hall (a City Hall Office has been used in previous years – the Emergency Control Room located to the rear of the City Hall does not provide a ‘hands on’ view of the Event Site. A First Aid Point could be relocated to a less active area or possibly to a Market Cabin to the front of the City Hall grounds on Donegall Square North.

This would result in perhaps one of the most hazardous operations being obviated but would require appropriate alternative accommodation for the Event Control Point and the First Aid Point being agreed.

- The ‘take down’ for the Stage and associated production equipment, the ‘big screens’ and the accessible platforms that would normally take place following the show would instead be undertaken during the early hours of Sunday morning.

The Event Personnel would ‘break’ the barrier lines immediately after the spectators vacated the Event Site but would not undertake any other activities that required accessing the traffic lanes until the early hours of the following morning.

This would enable the traffic lanes to re-open at an earlier time following the Event. The bulk of the ‘takedown’ work would then take place at a time when pedestrian flow and traffic flow would be minimal.

Unfortunately, there is likely to be an increase in costs as equipment would be hired for a longer period, and Event Personnel would be ‘brought back’ during the early Sunday morning period.

Revised Christmas Lights Format

Following the onset of COVID a Revised Format has been adopted for the Christmas Lights Event. Entertainers have been engaged to perform in shop units and from public spaces, and lighting has been utilised to illuminate the frontages of some buildings. A Christmas Parade comprising of floats and performers navigated its way along a designated route (mostly pedestrianised) through much of the commercial centre of the City during the 2022 Event.

Site Build/ Takedown

The Revised Format is relatively risk free. The site build at the various locations is less complex and can be undertaken without Road Closures and poses limited risk to passers-by. The majority of the performances are located in pedestrianised areas or in areas where there are wide pavements.

Issues

Many of the performance sites rely on the cooperation of building owners and the safety arrangements for the respective buildings (the integrity of the electrical supply, the emergency exiting arrangements etc.).

A short distance of the Parade Route I 2022 traversed active roadways and thus required PSNI attendance for a short period of time.

The Site of the Revised Format covers a large area and thus is less easy to monitor.

Stakeholders

A number of Stakeholder Groups were contacted regarding the Format that might be adopted for future Christmas Lights Events. The PSNI, the Fire and Rescue Service, the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service, the Road Service and Translink all advised that the Revised Christmas Light Format provides little or no issues for their respective organisations. They have also advised that although the Stage Format can present significant challenges, these challenges can be managed. All of the organisations have advised that they recognise the importance of this Civic Event and will work with the Council in its delivery using either Format.

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