



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Community Festivals Fund
Date:	16 January 2007
Reporting Officer:	Marie-Therese McGivern, Director of Development ext. 3470
Contact Officer:	Tim Husbands, Managing Director Belfast Waterfront & Ulster Halls ext. 1400 Siobhan Stevenson Culture and Arts Manager ext. 3586

Relevant Background Information

Attached (**Appendix 1**) is a letter received on 20 December 2007 regarding the transfer of Community Festivals Funding to Local Authorities. This funding was previously administered through the Northern Ireland Events Company on behalf of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL).

The letter indicates a transfer of funds totalling £450,000 to Local Authorities for funding of Community Festivals in local authority areas. It is indicated that under the proposed mechanism for distribution of funds Belfast will receive £77,300 which is 17.17% of the fund.

The Council has in the past considered proposals to develop the potential of Belfast as a City of Festivals. A Festival Policy was adopted by Council in October 2004 and options for a specific festivals fund have been explored.

Belfast as Northern Ireland's creative and cultural hub has a larger number of festivals based events than other parts of Northern Ireland. This includes a large number of ethnic festival and other community festivals which draw from a catchment area for audiences and participants from well beyond the local authority boundaries. This has been reflected in the allocation of funds administered under the Community Festivals Fund in previous years by the Northern Ireland Events Company who had allocated approximately 50% of the total fund within the Belfast Local Authority area.

Key Issues

There are several issues which are of concern regarding the proposed distribution of funds:

- 1) There is no proposed transfer of funds to local authorities for staffing resources to support the distribution of funding. The total resources allocated to the Northern Ireland Events Company for the fund in 2006/7 was £550,000 which included administrative costs of £100,000 and covered the employment of a Manager and two Community Festivals Officers.

- 2) Members will be aware that in order to ensure funding is in place for April 2008 funding schemes would normally be advertised in October/November 2007. Full details and a Letter of Offer on the transfer of funding has not yet been received. There is therefore unlikely to be adequate time to ensure funding applications can be assessed, processed and made available by April 2008.
- 3) It is a condition of the monies that Local Authorities will be required to contribute match funding to support community festivals. If the full level of match funding is not made DCAL will retain any surplus funds. It has, however been indicated that, in the first instance, Culture and Arts/ Good Relations funding administered under existing criteria would be eligible as match funds. There may, however, be a requirement to source additional fund for the scheme from Council sources.
- 4) It is anticipated that there will be considerable demand for the Community Festival Fund within the Belfast area. Belfast has over 50 cultural festivals including regional events plus additional sporting festivals. The allocation of £77,300 to Belfast is considerably less than the awards made through the NIEC within the Belfast area in previous year. (In 2007/08, of the £293k administered in Community Festivals Fund, grants over £146k (50%) were in Belfast). The funds proposed may prove inadequate to administer the fund and meet the anticipated demand for funding.
- 5) Further to this funding DCAL has also made available transitional funding for a number of community festivals in the Belfast area. In 2006/07 this totalled an additional £145k. In 2007/08 a further £50k was allocated. There is, as yet, no indication that any arrangements are in place to do this in the coming financial year. This will have implications for the viability of several community festivals.

It is clear that the funding level proposed falls short of the resources provided to Belfast under previous arrangements. The funds proposed may prove inadequate to administer the fund and meet the anticipated demand for funding.

Internal challenges

The possibility of the fund present several administrative challenges for Belfast City Council:

1) Centralised Festivals Fund

Good Relations, Culture and Arts and Community Services have all grant administration responsibility within areas relating to Community Festivals. In addition, the Events section has taken a lead on the St Patrick's Day main event and in discussion with Orangefest.

The possibility of a centralised Festivals Fund has been discussed in the past as part of Festival Policy development however, although this was left unresolved after cross party briefings on the issue.

2) Financial Resources

In addition to the issues outlined above, match funding will be required for the Community Festivals Fund. At present DCAL has yet to finalise the full administrative process. It has, however been indicated that in the first instance Culture and Arts/ Good Relations funding administered under existing criteria would be eligible as match funds. There may, however, still remain a requirement to source additional fund for the scheme from Council sources.

3) Staffing Resources

Staffing resources will be required to administer the fund. In excess of 25 and potentially up to 50 applications are likely to be received and will require assessment. Successful applicants will require administration and monitoring and evaluation. It is unclear how the resources are to be allocated – there is likely to be a regular draw down of funds but it is not yet detailed what level of reporting /feed back to DCAL/NILGA will be necessary. The Local

Government Auditor will be required to review processes.

4) Timescale to administer funds

Various timeframes are possible depending on when Council receives final approval to go forward with a grant scheme. It is not possible to follow current Council procedure and have funding available by April 2008, although alternatives such as through a delegated authority may allow for a more rapid turn around of grants. The requirement for an appeals process is also indicated in the guidance from DCAL which may further delay availability of grants.

Immediate approval for officers to develop and advertise a grant scheme, from which recommendations would then be brought back for approval would allow funding to be available in June at the earliest, however, Members may wish to review and agree the criteria for such a fund at a future Committee, this would result in funding not being available until July at the earliest.

Resource Implications

Financial

Resources of £77,300 will be required to provide match funding for the Community Festivals Fund some of which may be provided through existing funding.

Human Resources

There are implications for additional staffing resources required to administer any proposed fund.

Recommendations

It is recommended that a response to the letter from DCAL regarding the proposed transfer of funding is made indicating that the allocation to Belfast as outlined is inadequate given the previous percentage of allocation to funds in the Belfast area.

It is further recommended that the response should highlight issues relating to the resources for administration and the short timescale and seek clarification on other transitional funding that may be available from Government sources.

Documents Attached

Appendix 1 - Letter received from DCAL 20 December regarding the proposed transfer of Community Festivals Fund to Local Authorities.

Key to Abbreviations

DCAL - Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure
NILGA – Northern Ireland Local Government Association

Appendix 1