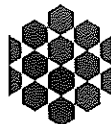


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*MT to progress  
+ report to dev committee*

4 December 2007

Dear Chief Executive

**Transfer of Community Festivals Fund to Local Authorities**

You may be aware that Edwin Poots, Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure made a statement today in the Northern Ireland Assembly about his plans to transfer funds to the 26 Local Authorities to administer community festivals from 1 April 2008.

By way of background I would explain that the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure has policy responsibility for the Community Festivals Fund and currently awards to festival organisations are made by the Northern Ireland Events Company through an open application process. The current Community Festivals Fund budget for distribution to festivals is £450,000.

Under the Review of Public Administration, the work of the Northern Ireland Events Company was to transfer to the Northern Ireland Tourist Board on 1 April 2008. As community festivals do not fit readily with NITB's tourism development remit the Minister agreed that the Community Festivals Fund will not transfer to NITB.

It was envisaged that the Community Festivals Fund would transfer to Local Government under the Review of Public Administration and this remains the position in Arlene Foster's paper on The Emerging Findings and Next Steps. There is a clear rationale for community festivals to transfer to Local Government as they play an important role in promoting social cohesion at community level.

With the agreement of the Northern Ireland Executive, the Department will now proceed to transfer funds to the 26 Local Authorities to administer community festivals from 1 April 2008. No Transfer of Functions legislation is required as Local

Authorities already have statutory powers to fund local events and some Councils are already involved in funding festivals.

The proposed mechanism for transfer of funds is through a Specific Grant along similar lines to that currently operated by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to award grant to District Councils for their community relations programmes. DCAL will retain overall policy responsibility and Councils will be asked to take account of the Department's Policy and Guidance Framework on community festivals, a copy of which is enclosed. Councils will have considerable flexibility to develop their own application processes and funding criteria consistent with the ethos of devolving decisions to local level. Also, it will be entirely for Councils to decide which festivals should be funded and to what extent.

The Minister has decided that the budget for community festivals should be distributed among the 26 Local Authorities on the basis of population distribution, with a 10% weighting applied for deprivation as measured by the Noble Multiple Deprivation Measure. The proposed allocation to each Council on this basis is set out in the attached table. I would wish to make it clear that these are indicative allocations at this stage and will not be finalised until the draft budget has been approved by the Assembly early in the New Year.

You will also wish to note that the Minister proposes to make it a condition of grant award that each Council should provide match funding to support community festivals. If any Council decides that it does not wish to support community festivals to this extent, any surplus above the level of match funding provided will be retained by the Department and will be available for distribution to other Councils.

We would expect to issue the detailed Letters of Offer to each Council in the New Year after the budget has been approved. However I hope this letter gives you sufficient advance notification so that you can plan ahead and have procedures in place to administer funding to community festivals from 1 April 2008.

I will be liaising with NILGA on the detailed arrangements for this transfer but should you have any queries in the meantime I would of course be happy to discuss these with you.

The Department is also writing to festival organisations to advise them of the new arrangements.

Yours sincerely



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