



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Cathedral Quarter Cultural Enhancement
Date:	7 March 2008
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Relevant Background Information

The Cathedral Quarter continues to be developed as Belfast's historic heart and a major cultural centre. The development of a new city centre arts centre (the MAC - Metropolitan Arts Centre) within the Cathedral Quarter will address the need for a city centre performance and gallery space and will provide a focus for cultural activity in the area, although it is not envisaged that it will be completed until 2011.

In the interim the Black Box performance space fulfils the need for a city centre performance venue in the Cathedral Quarter and as a temporary performance space to address in Belfast the need for a mid-scale performance venue. It provides a home for the many festivals and other cultural events within the City.

The Black Box Performance space in the Cathedral Quarter was created by Belfast City Council as part of the Celebrate Belfast programme in 2006. This was made possible through a grant obtained by Belfast City Council under the Urban Cultural Programme. The Department of Culture Arts and Leisure and Laganside Corporation also contributed to the project. In 2007/8 Black Box secured Annual Funding for Culture and Arts from Belfast City Council of £13,000.

The Black Box was envisaged as filling the gap in the physical cultural infrastructure pending the completion of major capital developments, and as such has had a strong commitment from DSD, DCAL and ACNI. The need for a temporary venue is now more valid than ever with the current refurbishment programme of the Ulster Hall, the temporary closure for the rebuild of the Lyric Theatre, the pending closure of the Crescent Arts Centre and for a short period the Old Museum Arts Centre.

Key Issues

Belfast City Council has coordinated a group of key statutory stakeholders to address the continued need for venue provision in the Cathedral Quarter. There were concerns that the level of public sector investment has fallen below the level required to support the continued operation of a venue in the area.

The Black Box business plan which was approved prior to its development, was based on an annual public sector financial support of at least £60,000. It was felt that this was an achievable level of support from public sector finances. This is a very low percentage of public sector funding and underlines the high level of earned income amounting to 75% of turn over. An independent review of the finances and management has taken place and this indicates that, while there is room for raising additional revenue and developing sponsorship opportunities, there is a need for continued public sector support of £70,000 per annum to secure the organisation.

With this in mind the statutory partners have proposed a funding plan to provide £150,000 of support over a 3 year period. In meeting this commitment DSD have already made an exceptional additional grant of £50,000 to support Black Box in the 2007/08 financial year.

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI) are currently considering a 2 year funding package to award £25,000 in each of the 2008/09 and 2009/10 years. They have made this conditional of match funding from Belfast City Council. BCC would therefore need to commit £25,000 in 2008/09 and £25,000 in 2009/10 to ensure that this funding is secured.

In the 2008/09 year Black Box have requested financial assistance of £40,000 from Belfast City Council's Annual Funding Scheme, see **Appendix 1** for programme details and Officers assessment of the application. Given the proposition presented by the other major stakeholders and a concern that recurrent funding is not the most appropriate way of funding the organisation for a temporary period of operation, it is recommended that support for the venue is achieved by rejecting the Annual Funding application from Black Box and instead, recommending that a two year funding package is awarded to Black Box for enhancing the cultural infrastructure of the Cathedral Quarter.

It should be noted that should this proposal not be accepted as the way forward on the issue that it will be necessary to consider the Black Box application for Annual Funding for Culture and Arts.

After the opening of the MAC it should be assumed that Black Box will not receive further funding from ACNI or Belfast City Council. Current forecasts from OMAC indicate that the new MAC is due to open in 2011, although the potential to seek an earlier completion date is being explored.

If Members approve the proposal as outlined, this funding would raise £50,000 of the required £70,000 public sector funding. It is hoped that further financial assistance may be possible through other grant sources including the Laganside Events Grants programme now administered by DSD.

Resource Implications

Financial

£50,000 paid in equal instalments over the 2008/09 and 2009/10 financial years. This represents an increase in funding of only £12,000 per annum from 2008/09 Annual Funding, and can be achieved from within existing budgets.

Human Resources

This will be absorbed within the work programme of the Culture and Arts Unit

Recommendations

It is recommended that Members decline the application submitted by Black Box through the Annual funding for Culture and Arts programme and instead offer a two year funding package of £50,000 comprising £25,000 in each of the 2008/09 and 2009/10 financial years.

Documents Attached

Appendix 1 – Summary of Black Box Programme Application received under Annual Funding

Key to Abbreviations

BCC – Belfast City Council
ACNI – Arts Council of Northern Ireland
MAC – Metropolitan Arts Centre
DCAL – Department of Culture, Arts & Leisure
DSD – Department for Social Development

APPENDIX 1

The Black Box

Summary of Programme Application received under Annual Funding

YEAR AND SCHEME	GRANT
Enhancements	£10,000.00
2007/2008 Annual Funding	£13,000.00
Total:	£23,000.00

Purpose of Organisation

The Black Box Trust was formed in 2004 with the aim of delivering a dynamic flexible 300 capacity venue in Cathedral Quarter. Black Box aims to provide a comfortable, diverse and reasonably priced arts experience to Belfast audiences. Their year-round programme covers music, film, literature, comedy, theatre and visual arts.

Between 2005-7, Black Box has received funding from Belfast City Council, Department of Culture, Laganside Corporation, Arts Council Northern Ireland and the Department of Social Development - assisting in the delivery of their arts programme. The Black Box is significant for self-generating much of its income through private hires, self-promoted performances and through its coffee-shop and bar revenue.

Outline of Programme Details

Since its inception the Black Box has entertained Belfast audiences and connected with the best of the city's arts festivals. Out to Lunch kicks off 2008's programme, followed by the Belfast Film festival and May's Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival. Established names in both comedy and live music are increasingly coming in throughout the year.

Summary of the Proposal

Since its inception the Black Box has entertained Belfast audiences and connected with the best of the city's arts festivals. Out to Lunch kicks off 2008's programme, followed by the Belfast Film festival and May's Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival. Established names in both comedy and live music are increasingly coming in throughout the year.

Dates	Confirmed Bookings
5 April	BlastSpace – All ages gig (afternoon)
5 April	The Delawares & Joe Echo (evening)
6 April	Ikon
10-19 April	Belfast Film Festival
23 April	North Down & Ards College Arts Showcase
1-11 May	Cathedral Quarter Arts Showcase
12-16 May	Knights of the Round Table (theatre)
24 May	Eurovision Night
29 May-1 June	Belfast Children's Festival
26 July-2 August	Belfast Pride Week
22-24 August	The Big River Blues & Jazz Festival
25-29 August	The Sonorities Festival
26-30 September	Open House Festival

In addition, Black Box are currently following up with groups, organisations and promoters who used the space most successfully in the last financial year. Bookings are due into the diary from the following but as yet would not be available for print in Belfast City Council communications. A follow-up list can be made available at end of March 2008 for Belfast City Council as required.

Open House Traditional Arts Festival, Channel 4, Northern Ireland Music Industry Commission, Friends of the Earth, Amnesty International, Moving on Music, Fortune Cookie, BBC, British Council, Visonic Audiovisual Festival, TRANS Urban Arts Academy, University of Ulster, Filthy Madonna, Belfast Unbound Burlesque, Queens University, Belfast Telegraph, the Irish Theatre Awards committee, Fix Performance Art Festival, Catalyst Arts, Blackstaff Publishing, Queer Arts Festival, The DOE Environment & Heritage Service, Homespun, Rape Crisis Centre, David Holmes, The Foyle Film Festival, Arts Council of Northern Ireland, BELFEST, Lagan Press, Community Arts Forum, Children's Express, P.L.A.C.E., Housing Executive, Royal Society of Ulster Architects, Kilkenny Arts Festival launch, Creative Youth Partnerships, Belfast Visitor and Convention Centre, Francis McPeake Summer School, the BEAT, Belfast Circus School, Feile, British Red Cross, Icon Magazine, Youthnet, Jigsaw Theatre Company, Flaxart Studios, Factotum Choir and the Department of Culture, Arts & Leisure.

Black Box provide many free and low cost performances and youth events therefore opening up access to those less well off or unable to attend events at 18+ venues in the city. The grant will be used to generate arts programming that is strategically targeted at these groups. In addition, they have undertaken to build audiences in the café which is growing in popularity. Black Box are in discussions to develop film, literature and music clubs in the space that seek to engage with minority groups, community arts groups and charities in the city.

They are committed to encouraging involvement and participation and without the Black Box, a great number of people would simply not have the opportunity to perform. Their interest in nurturing Northern Ireland talent is key to their calendar of events. Black Box promote regular music, literature and film showcases profiling the best of Belfast's arts scene and provide an informal gallery space to visual artists through the café space.

Arts programming is expensive and they try to get the most out of the projects that they have developed and presented themselves or through partnerships with other festivals and arts organisations. Where possible they strive to add value to each art form project by ensuring wraparound activity is a component of an event where appropriate. The grant will be used to build on this activity too. It is strategic in terms of bringing further audiences to their venue and beneficial in providing a broader and more informed arts experience to the audience.

Black Box would like the main space to be used more during the day and again the grant can be used to facilitate some of the following for them:

talks programmes, discussions and debates covering all art forms and issues
growing practical skills workshops – music, theatre and event management
DJ and urban arts academy – targeting youth groups and under 18s
Showcasing excellence in Northern Ireland's creative entrepreneurs – interactive exhibitions, screenings and performances
Networking events – providing a space for groups to generate links and ideas, eg industry 'know-how' events

Public sector funding is vital in fundamentally providing assisted programme funds that attract bigger names to the venue and the city's diverse audiences. Names like: Kila, the Melvins, Nancy Griffiths, Juliet Turner, Seasick Steve, Chuck Palahnuik, and Foy Vance.

Projected Audience Figures

Estimate of numbers of people involved in the proposed programme 2008/09	
AUDIENCE	180,000
PARTICIPANTS	600

Projected Budgets

Income

Earned income	£165,000.00
Other public funding	£50,000.00
Private income	£15,000.00
Belfast City Council Annual Funding	£40,000.00
TOTAL:	£270,000.00

Expenditure

Artistic Expenditure	£60,000.00
Capital Expenditure/Core Costs	
Marketing and Publicity	£19,000.00
Overheads	£122,000.00
Wages/Organisational Development	£69,000.00
'In Kind' Support	
Other Expenditure	
TOTAL:	£270,000.00

Belfast City Council Subvention

A grant of **£40,000.00** requested from Belfast City Council.

Assessment

The organisation's annual funding programme application was assessed as strong in terms of Leadership, Celebration and Economic Regeneration. They form an important part of the cultural infrastructure and support the yearly calendar of festivals. There is heavy demand for the space and there has been a hugely positive response to its development and to the ongoing programme of events. Without substantial commitment from statutory partners they have struggled to develop an extensive outreach programme, but they have engaged with the community and marginalised groups. This is an area they hope to build on. The Management and Governance is good and has benefited from a recent strategic review and Board Development. They have appropriate range of policies and effective financial procedures in place.

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