

D1367/08

6th November, 2008

Minister G. Campbell, MP, MLA,
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure,
Interpoint,
20-24 York Street,
BELFAST.
BT15 1AQ

Dear Minister

COMMUNITY FESTIVAL FUND

Thank you for your correspondence of 30th September in response to Belfast City Council's request to increase the level of funding contribution to the Community Festival Fund for Belfast.

In administering the fund this year Belfast City Council made a single call for festivals that were due to take place between 1st October 2008 to 31st March 2009, with the total fund available for distribution being £177,570. In response, the amount requested by organisations was £197,362, nearly £20,000 in excess of the level of funding available. After a full assessment against the established criteria, twenty-four applications were received, with twenty-one organisations being awarded a grant. Of the total grant fund, 82% was awarded, with the remaining held back as contingency in account of the appeal process. The applications from the successful organisations will result in festivals being widely hosted across Belfast's communities.

It should be noted however, as both the timescale for implementation, and the fact that the single call for this fund was by necessity made during a quiet time of traditional festival activity, that a normal level of call on the fund could be anticipated to be much higher, since the main period for community festivals in Belfast is during spring and summer.

Belfast City Council undertook an extensive communications campaign to raise awareness of the Community Festivals Fund, and provided direct support through the delivery of training and information sessions throughout the city. Council have been impressed with the number and quality of applications received.

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It is notable that all successful applicants met the criteria to a high degree. Indeed, the new scheme has created a high level of interest, with new festivals representing approx 50% of total applications received. Audience and participant figures are estimated to be in the region of 70,000, which is a very positive contribution to audience development, cultural tourism and the wider economy. These positive benefits have been achieved for a spend of £2.32 per head, offering extremely good value for money.

Belfast is statistically the most deprived council area in Northern Ireland, in terms of health, education, skills and training, with interface areas recording consistently high rates of social, economic and environmental disadvantage.

Community Festivals in Belfast create memorable opportunities for audiences to engage in a wealth of new experiences in a celebratory atmosphere. While both community and arts festivals in Belfast are currently enjoying much success, there is still a vast potential to be realised in terms of audience reach, social inclusion and social and economical impact for the city. With additional support and investment, this sector has the real potential to offer so much more.

We estimate a minimum of 86 applications for the Community Festival Fund will be received in the 2009/2010 financial year for Belfast. This is based on an assessment of the previous levels of festivals' activity, our experience of the current Community Festivals Fund, and the increased interest in community festivals development. Taking all this into account, there is a clear need and demand for an increased allocation, and we believe that Belfast City Council presents a justifiable and 'value for money' case for increased funding.

In DCAL considering further this request, it would be helpful for a decision to be made before Belfast City Council's Community Festival Fund scheme re-opens again for the period 2009/10. The Council's intention is to open the fund again in January 2009, for festivals that will take place between 1st April to 31st June 2009, and to this end I look forward to hearing from you in the near future.

Yours sincerely

MARIE-THÉRÈSE McGIVERN (Ms.),
DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT.