



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Community Service – Grant Aid 2009/10.
Date:	11 February 2009
Reporting Officer:	Marie-Thérèse McGivern Director of Development ext. 3470
Contact Officer:	Catherine Taggart, Community Development Manager ext 3525

Relevant Background Information

Community Services offer a range of grants as set out in the policy 'A Guide to Grant Aid for Community Organisations', which was agreed by Council in January 2004. The grant categories within this Policy are:

- Revenue Grant
- Capacity Building Grant
- Advice Services
- Community Development Project Grant
- Summer Play Schemes
- Community Chest.

Grants might be sub-divided into 2 primary categories:

1. Small Grant: This includes Project Grants, Summer Play Schemes and Community Chest awards. These grant schemes are subject to application and are allocated competitively against agreed criterion. The grant programme for 2009/2010 will operate within current procedures in advance of any agreed changes proposed by the Development Department Grant Aid Review.
2. Large Grant: This includes Revenue, Capacity Building and Advice Services grants. Pending the outcome of the Departmental Grant Aid Review, in 2007 Committee agreed to extend current funding contracts by one year to 31 March 2009 to all groups currently in receipt of Revenue, Capacity Building and Advice Services grant. In reaching this decision, Committee was mindful of the pressures this may have on community groups currently not funded under these grant programmes, particularly new groups. Committee instructed staff to monitor and respond proactively where possible, for example, via signposting to other grant resources both internal and external and associated application support. This support has been ongoing.

Furthermore, the Committee agreed to allocate an additional £50,000 to the Revenue Grant budget in order to facilitate a call for applications which would be restricted to newly constituted groups with premises or to groups who had extended their premises since the original grant decision in 2004.

Committee also agreed to extend the current contract for the Play Resource Centre in line with other grant recipients.

As part of the Change Management Plan a review was initiated into the increased number of grant streams now managed by the Department.

This review sought to:

- align grant programmes with the revised Departmental Strategy and impact towards targeted outcomes
- recommend any necessary changes to systems and processes to ensure good corporate governance and consistency across the Department
- maximise ease of access for recipient groups.

The Department hopes to finalise the Departmental Grant Aid Review, and the subsequent consideration of recommendations by Committee, in time to affect all grant support from April 2010. This will include procedural changes and marketing of the programme in the period up to September 2009.

Key Issues

Community Services Large Grants

Given these awards include support for core costs, groups are nervous around their advance planning for overheads, including staff salaries. We do not now have sufficient time to advertise and assess applications for any of the 3 large grant types to allow for Committee decisions in line with the expiration of current grant contracts.

This paper intends to inform the Committee on any risk associated with the further extension of all current contracts for all 3 categories to 31 March 2010. The revenue estimates include sufficient funds to cover all resource implications. The priority risk associated with this proposal is the likelihood of allegations from the sector of an ongoing limited access to BCC community grants. We have therefore assessed risk on each grant category and summarise below.

- Advice & Information

Historical information would suggest a low likelihood of claims of restricted access. Given our consortium approach to grant distribution in this category, any new expression of interest from a generalist advice provider can be signposted to the relevant geographical consortium.

The primary risk with this grant category will continue to be related to appeals for support from 'specialist' advice providers. The DSD policy, which informs our grant allocation and is the source of significant grant leverage, indicates that Local Government advice support should be generalist in focus. The ongoing delay in Central Government's 'Open Doors' pilot initiative has contributed to ongoing confusion in this area, however, Council does not have access to any additional resource to

bolster the grant fund. We would therefore suggest that we must continue to focus our support on generalist provision and continue to signpost requests from specialist providers to the relevant Central Government Department.

The new structure for the service will provide us with a dedicated (part-time) officer resource to extend our support to the consortia. Our relationships here continue to be positive and all stakeholders have agreed with the recommendations of our independent review that, in principle, this funding period will allow us to refine target outcomes and systems in order to streamline any future support. We will also keep under review advice services, particularly in the area of debt and redundancy, as there may be a requirement to fund more resources in this area.

- Capacity

Again, historical experience would suggest a low probability of claims of limited access to this grant category. The primary risk with this programme continues to be clarity around strategic focus and related target outcomes and the need for a robust monitoring & evaluation framework. The Voluntary and Community Unit, DSD, are developing a policy document which will set the regional strategy in relation to support for Support Organisations in the sector. This policy, which has been continually delayed, will inform our strategic vision in this area.

This interim 12 month period will facilitate the completion of both DSD regional policy and our own Departmental strategic review. This will address the issue of limited strategic focus. In the interim, officers will revise the current systems to incorporate the agreed FGS McClure Watters procedural recommendations and will include SMART indicators and associated outputs, results and impact targets for recipients. All recipient groups will be monitored against required business plans.

- Revenue

An assessment of risk in this grant category would suggest that a one year extension to current recipient groups will present the most significant likelihood for challenge on the grounds of restricted access. This is based on historical experience and expressions of interests from Councillors and community groups.

This risk however has been significantly limited by our supplementary allocation in December 2007 when the Development Committee agreed a one-off additional allocation to Revenue Grant of £50,000 to allow new applications from groups which had established, or had acquired premises, since the 2003-2004 open call. A total of 10 Revenue Grants were received by the submission date of 1 March 2008 and, after assessment, 4 new grants were recommended for funding to the cumulative amount of £19,927.

Any proposed extension of current contracts should therefore include both the original successful groups and the 4 additional groups agreed in 2008.

- Independent Centres

We currently provide financial support to 6 independently-managed centres via contracts which again expire on the 31 March 2009.

1. Carrickhill Residents Association – Carrick Hill Community Centre
2. Connswater Community and Leisure Ltd – Ballymacarret Recreation Centre
3. Denmark Street Community Association – Denmark Street Community Centre
4. Lower Shankill Group Welfare Committee – Percy Street Community Centre

5. Lower Ormeau Residents Action Group – Shaftesbury Community & Recreation Centre
6. Roden Street Residents Association – Grosvenor Recreation Centre

The same issues apply to this category as to the larger grant awards above. This category is further complicated by ongoing negotiations to transfer responsibility for the recreation-focused Centres to Parks & Leisure and negotiations on new lease arrangements for some of the Centres via Legal Services.

Estimates for 2009/10 include sufficient funds to cover the necessary resources to extend contracts for a further 12 months. All awards will continue to be subject to receipt of business plans and appropriate monitoring returns

Resource Implications

Financial

The financial estimates include all associated costs.

Human Resources

There are no additional staff resource implications resulting from this report

Recommendations

Committee are asked to note the contents of the report and, pending their consideration of the Departmental Grant Aid Review, agree the following:

1. To extend all current contracts for all 3 categories for one further annual period to 31 March 2010. Individual awards will be inflated by 3%
2. To extend the current contract for the Play Resource Centre in line with other grant recipients
3. To extend financial support to the community-managed facilities for one year to 31 March 2010. Individual awards will be inflated by 3%. The award in respect of management of the Ballymacarrett facility is dependant on the outcome of a committee decision to extend the lease on these premises. This award could therefore be pro rata to the lease period.