



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Community Revenue Grants - Options Paper
Date:	9 June 2010
Reporting Officer:	John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470
Contact Officer:	Catherine Taggart, Community Development Manager, ext 3525

Relevant Background Information

The Community Revenue grant is available to eligible organisations delivering wide ranging community development programmes at neighbourhood and area level. While assessment focuses on the range and content of the local service, the grant specifically assists groups with general building costs, e.g. utilities, insurance, administration and equipment.

At the 10 February 2010 Committee, as part of the departmental grants review, Members agreed to extend the Community Revenue grant stream for one year (to enable the stream to be synchronised with the Capacity-Building and Advice grant streams).

Members also agreed that no less than 90% of the new Revenue grant budget would be allocated to groups currently being funded, with the remaining 10% being retained to enable new groups to access the Fund.

At the same meeting Members requested that an options paper be submitted to Committee within two months that would consider the provision of the Community Revenue grant on either an annual or multi-annual basis. This was in response to feedback on the October 2009 Committee decision to move the stream to annual funding.

Following engagement on the issues with Members, officers and a number of affected community organisations, this report presents the most viable options for a way forward. The two main consultation sessions involved 38 community activists and workers who represented 31 community organisations with direct experience of the Revenue grant scheme.

Following debate on the merits and weaknesses of both the multi-annual and annual options all attendees, bar one, voted in favour of the multi-annual option.

This paper is being presented during the final stages of implementation of the new central grants unit, with all confirmed streams of funding opening in autumn 2010 for the financial year 2011/12.

Key Issues

The broad consensus from the workshops was that it was appropriate for the council to move to multi-annual funding for the Revenue grant stream. The workshop participants also urged the Council to ensure that the supporting systems for any multi-annual funding programme would adequately address ongoing access issues, i.e. allow for new applicants to 'break into' the programme. However, it was also agreed that the necessary policy work was not yet in place to support such a move and therefore there was a high level of risk in moving to this approach without substantial preparatory work.

Having considered this, attendees at the workshops arrived at two options:

1. Re-designate the Revenue grant as 'multi-annual' from 2011/12 onwards. Whilst moving quickly to the desired final outcome this option does come with a high degree of risk as it leaves little or no time to put in place the necessary policy framework. There is also a concern that the higher evaluation and monitoring requirements of multi-annual funding may mean that some groups potentially could be unsuccessful in their application.
2. Continue the Revenue grant as an 'annual' stream for 2011/2012 and thus allow the necessary time for the supporting policy development and risk management framework to be put in place. Following the policy work there would then be a carefully co-ordinated move to 'multi-annual' after 2012.

Either option will be implemented in line with the implementation of the new central grants unit and related business improvement initiatives.

Resource Implications

None.

Recommendations

In considering the benefits of both options, officers are minded to recommend that the Committee approves Option 2 as a suitable and viable way forward on the issue.

Decision Tracking

Recommended option to be completed by Catherine Taggart

Time line: October 2011

Reporting Officer Catherine Taggart