

Belfast City Council response to the Big Lottery Big Thinking Consultation

Introduction

Belfast City Council welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Big Lottery Fund Big Thinking Consultation. Belfast City Council is the largest local authority in NI with over 2,672 employees at 100 sites across the city and an annual expenditure of approximately £140M. The council is responsible for providing and delivering an extensive range of services while playing a key role in improving the quality of life of our citizens by helping to make Belfast a better place to live in, work in and visit.

Belfast City Council's response is based on its role as civic leader for the city of Belfast. The council welcomes the funding support opportunities that the Big Lottery will offer through its imminent 2009-2015 strategy particularly in a strained economic environment for all sectors of the city and region.

Belfast City Council has to date had a direct involvement in the Big Lottery Fund and was one of the short listed landmark applications in 2007 through its bid for the Giants Park development. Regrettably the bid was unsuccessful, however the city of Belfast is currently benefiting from a very significant £25M Big Lottery investment with respect to the Connswater Community Greenway project.

This project will greatly enhance the leisure, environmental and well being assets of this part of our city and it would not be possible without Big Lottery support particularly in the current economic climate. Belfast City Council endorses this and is grateful to the Big Lottery for this city development support.

Belfast City Council recognises the growing importance of the Big Lottery as an organisation that seeks to respond to local needs and really make a difference, particularly for large scale, high profile and iconic programmes. The Council endorses the mission, values and equality and additionality principles adopted by the Big Lottery.

Coordinated Belfast City Council response

UK 1.1

Do you agree that the theme of transitions provides a useful starting point for our funding?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. No opinion

UK 1.2

Do you agree that the theme of isolation provides a useful starting point for our funding?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. No opinion

UK 1.3

Are there any other themes you would suggest?

- Belfast City Council holds a general consensus that the transitions theme is a good and relevant theme for the Big Lottery strategy, particularly in the ever changing economic and social climate that we are living in currently. The council welcomes the fact that transition can be addressed in both a positive and negative sense
- Within it's scope Big has identified areas of low employment or those coping with a legacy of conflict or lack of mutual respect. The fund aims to make a major difference to the quality of life and subsequent choices or opportunities across society, all of which clearly have linkages to the council's own actions around good relations. Both Big and Belfast City Council have an opportunity to share best practice in how aims and objectives are structured and implemented.
- With respect to the isolation theme, Belfast City Council would encourage Big to support the categories of age in terms of young and older people. Within the council's own corporate planning objectives these categories have been identified and prioritised. The council has also detailed how it will promote the position of those with disabilities in its Disability Action Plan. Each year the council consults on a series of actions undertaken to deliver upon its statutory duty under the Disability Discrimination Act. Belfast City Council welcomes the Big Fund's Disability Action Plan and Section 75 Equality Scheme. Both the Council and Big share a common set of aims to devise proactive initiatives, practices and programmes in support of their schemes. There therefore exists an opportunity for both organisations to work together in a practical way in areas such as joint consultation exercises, the sharing of qualitative data and sharing of best practice.

With respect to other themes for consideration, council through its Good Relations unit would recommend the inclusion of ;

- securing shared city space
- transforming contested space
- developing shared cultural space
- building shared organisational space

Council believes that partnership working with the Big Lottery with respect to these themes could provide access to customer fora as yet inaccessible and undeveloped by Belfast City Council.

- With further consideration of the isolation theme, Council encourages the Big Lottery to consider enabling activities which target pockets of isolation within economically advantaged communities as recommended by Mike Morrissey in the Council's commissioned policy research. This argument sits against the argument of consistently channelling funding into areas which have consistently been poor performers on either the social, economic or environmental front.
- Council also recommends widening the isolation theme to become "isolation and exclusion". Exclusion adds a wider dimension and would enable funding to help address more deep rooted societal and differentials within communities and between people. By widening the definition the theme would cover a wider range of individuals and groups who may not necessarily be isolated but who could be excluded from or unable to take advantage of opportunities that are available to

others due to poor education, lack of positive role models, discrimination and vote generational issues.

- Council also recommends that given the scale of the Big budget there could be a stand alone entity for regeneration/capital projects that would address both transition and isolation but in a big, iconic and legacy leaving way.
- Council, through its Environmental Health Service, would add that health and well being is one of the greatest quality of life issues and isolation particularly amongst older people and in the current financial climate, is a recognised and growing issue. The Council currently provides a wide range of services within communities which impact or have the capacity to impact on people's health, safety and wellbeing. These include leisure services, community services, environmental health, good relations, community safety, city development, parks and open spaces, services for children and young people and older people, economic development, regeneration, culture and arts, etc.

UK 2.1

Do you agree we should have a greater focus in our funding to benefit those in need?

- a. Yes — it is important that funding goes to those most in need**
- b. No — the balance is about right as it is**
- c. No opinion**

UK 2.2

Tell us if you think BIG should have a difference focus

Belfast City Council supports Big's plans to adopt a mix of funding approaches including targeted funding with which to:

- Focus on people with multiple needs
 - Target those people who have not been able to get help from the state or elsewhere
 - Improve the quality of life such as refugees
 - Target pockets of deprivation
- Belfast City Council welcomes Big's plans to explore how loans might be used as part of a package of support to encourage longer-term and more entrepreneurial approaches and thereby reduce grant dependency. Council also supports the intention to widen Big's use of endowments or annuities to provide sustained funding for communities, akin to its existing activities with the Northern Ireland Building Change Trust.
- In reviewing its approach to funding Big acknowledges that its best results have often come partnership working across sectors, where projects encourage people to achieve what was not previously possible working alone. Big intends to use its influence to encourage and broker links between grant-holders and partners in the voluntary and community sector, public and private sectors.
- In support of funding review Big has established an Intelligent Funders Forum, bringing together the major trusts, foundations, and public sector organisations. Significantly Big is also favourable to developing less formal mechanisms for sharing

information and learning. Belfast City Council fully agrees with this intelligent funding approach.

- In outlining its plans Big is arguably indicating a clear willingness to work with bodies such as Belfast City Council. It recognises the period 2009 onwards, partly because of the Review of Public Administration, as one that will continue to bring major changes in the way health; education and council services will be administered.
- In this respect Big's commitment of £10 million to a 10-year expendable endowment through the Building Change Trust again indicates why Belfast City Council – Departments/Services within BCC should consider developing links with Big at a strategic level driven by objectives/themes established in our own Value Creation Mapping Structure.
- While Belfast City Council agrees on Big's aim for a greater focus on funding those in need, the council believes it is important that there are meaningful and effective ways of identifying those in need and in particular pockets of need and deprivation. The council would also encourage flexibility to enable creative project ideas which address local population need which may be camouflaged by statistics. As one of the UK's regions with the fastest economic growth rate in recent years NI could lose out. It is acknowledged that as soon as statistics are generated they are out of date and in light of the present economic climate, areas in need can flux. A heavy weighting in areas of need can be disadvantageous as there is a "persistence of poverty" trend. The Big Lottery may wish to consider themed funding according to population category: Young Women, Older People etc. This approach would permit a good project in an affluent area. It addresses a local need.

UK 3.1

How can BIG best help build lasting partnerships and networks that support communities and people most in need? (Pick top two)

- a. Insist on partnership approaches for larger bids**
- b. Support voluntary and community sector organisations to build alliances with each other**
- c. Support voluntary and community sector organisations to build alliances with other sectors**
- d. Other (please specify)**

- BCC fully believes in a partnership approach to funding for greater impact. Using the evidence and experience of others to inform funding decisions and keeping up to date with emerging need is that of an intelligent funders approach.
- In its provision of background information Big positively highlights Partnership working as one of the more sustainable legacies of its funding. Big highlights the importance of using less formal mechanisms for sharing learning and information. Big clearly recognises and Belfast City Council agrees that it makes sense to call on other organisations expertise and networks in getting money to the right place. To promote this approach Big has established an Intelligent Energy Funders Forum, bringing together the major trusts, foundations and public sector organisations. Belfast City Council welcomes this.

- BCC believes that partnerships can be better facilitated where the funding strategy complements the political/strategic framework within which partner organisations exist. Accessing external funding incurs additional workload to any organisation, no matter its size or structure. Therefore partnerships will only deliver where there is an incentive to collaborate.
- From a Parks and Leisure perspective council would encourage voluntary and community sector organisations to build alliances with the statutory sector particularly where assets are involved in new project development.
- The impact of the Review of Public Administration and the new health structures will also see an enhanced role for local government in reducing health inequalities. The Council will be working in partnership with all sectors, including the new Public Health Agency and others to provide high quality, efficient services that meet the real needs of communities, and in particular the most deprived communities. Belfast Community Safety Partnership, led by Belfast City Council currently works in partnership with many private, public, community & voluntary groups and funds projects that are delivered throughout the city. Therefore efforts should be made to contribute to the existing and already developing structures and partnerships to ensure that the impact of funding and support is maximised rather than creating new additional structures and arrangements.
 - Given the changing circumstances in Northern Ireland the flexibility of BIG Lottery funding will be an important element of support. However it is important that sustainability issues are considered at early stages of project development. The Environmental Health Service would support the concept of providing support for development work with projects; however, again this should be viewed as a value-added role maximising existing structures and support mechanisms.
- Belfast City Council suggests that Big does insist on partnership approaches to larger bids centred on the building of alliances. In doing so BCC should also work with Big with the aim of enabling Big to contribute to our Wider Good Relations Objectives.
- Overall council would select options a) insist on partnership approaching to larger bids and c) supporting organisations to build alliances with other sectors

UK 3.2

How can we get better at engaging with the private sector?

- Belfast City Council's experience would show that local area partnership working is a strong way to greater engage the private sector (in catchments areas). The council would propose a proportional representation approach on larger bid boards for membership to preserve private involvement. This has worked and continues to work in relation to the EU funded Peace and Interreg programme implementation in NI and the border counties.
- A further council view on private sector involvement improving is if corporate social responsibility was stronger including support to release staff to participate in community projects and in particular consortia led projects.

UK 3.3

Are there opportunities for joint funding that Big should take up?

The recent Barroso NI Taskforce on Europe has identified that NI has not engaged or benefited from EU funding programmes as much as other EU regions. An obstacle to many potential bids to secure additional resources for regeneration, business development, environmental and social inclusion projects has, and continues to be that of match funding. Should Big not consider an innovative approach in using some lottery funding to help lever in other financial opportunities that are offered through EU programmes. This would encourage inter regional cross border and trans-national project delivery involving grass roots levels.

UK 4

After 2012, when over 60-70% undertaking ends, should we continue to guarantee that a percentage of our funding goes to the voluntary and community sector?

Yes, Belfast City Council believes that Big should guarantee a percentage funding to the voluntary and community sector. This sector will continue to suffer financially throughout the economic downturn and in light of reduced European funding within NI, given for example the restrictions within the Peace III programme. While local government is well placed it works for communities in need and has a duty to respond to citizens and deliver quality and effective services, it does not have the resources to provide wide scale funding to the sector.

UK 5

Over and above giving out grants, what would make Big a better funder in the way we work?

Belfast City Council would welcome all of the above outlined proposals for improvement in the way Big gives out grants. Big clearly has a desire to remain an intelligent funder and to build upon its relationships across the voluntary and community sector. Big's desire to ensure capacity building and support across the sector will hopefully result in a positive impact upon Belfast City Council's own efforts in grant provision and engagement in areas such as Peace III, Arts and Culture and Good Relations.

Belfast City Council would encourage Big to work in partnership with other key funders in a more strategic way to collectively identify and prioritise areas for funding and really make a collective difference.

This would prevent competitive bids across the NI region competing for the same resources for similar things.

Belfast City Council also recommends that Big proactively distributes information on other funding streams to projects.

Belfast City Council would also propose linking local government with Big to promote best practice and share learning such as providing detailed case studies through the Improvement and Development Agency of Beacon Schemes to build on what works.

UK 6

Should we aim to fund fewer projects, but fund for a longer period? Or have we got the balance about right?

- Belfast City Council welcomes the fact that Big enables kickstarting or piloting new concepts and approaches but also offers those organisations who have the capacity to project plan further into the future and manage larger scale funding to do so.
- In the current economic climate it is important that Big maintains its approach to funding small projects given that so many funding streams have ceased, particularly for the voluntary and community sector. Having said this, Belfast City Council also supports the larger scale iconic project support by Big for projects that would not otherwise get off the ground.
- Big should also show leadership to encourage sustainability thereby avoiding the situation where projects with proven results fold due to lack of funding.

UK 7

Do you think Big should take more risks with our funding to promote innovative solutions?

- Belfast City Council would welcome this as it would allow projects to happen that mainstream funders would not necessarily support but that are innovative and likely to succeed with Big pump priming.
- A risk taking process would need to be carefully managed, be open and transparent and have a support system provided to ensure projects have the best opportunity for success
- The Big Lottery could also consider enabling project promoters to work beyond the UK to identify and implement successful approaches adopted in other countries handling the same issues. Perhaps Big could establish an R&D short term stage fund.

UK 8

Are there areas beyond those described in Big thinking, where you think it is important to operate at a UK level, rather than at a country level?

- Many of the issues identified under the themes Transition and Isolation are not particular to the devolved areas but are experienced commonly across the UK. The UK pot should reflect this.
- Belfast City Council remarks that Scotland's Big is being used by the Scottish Government to assist in a range of socio economic policies. Belfast City Council may explore this at a later stage with Big in order to review best practice in areas associated with Council activities particularly with relation to the Stormont Assembly.

UK 9

Which ways of increasing public involvement do you think would work best for BIG? (Select two)

- Public membership of decision-making committees**
- On-line surveys/forums**
- Local decision-making panels**
- Public voting on projects via television, radio or the internet**

- e. **Citizens panels or juries**
- f. **More public involvement in the development of projects**
- g. **Mix of all of the above**
- h. **Other (please specify on the next page)**

- To increase local involvement you have to increase local engagement and communication. To this end the programme needs to be visible at the grass roots level- not just to those organisations who have funding officers/ members of wider networks or are tuned into funding streams. Therefore the Lottery needs to have people to work alongside local authority community teams, walk the neighbourhoods and dropping into community facilities/ delivering roadshows to promote the opportunities the funding can bring. The daily chore of many community organisations is simply at matter of survival. There needs to be dedicated support to assist organisations to get to the point where they are capable of applying. In terms of the wider public and their involvement, there may be opportunities for those who have already accessed the programme to act as peer mentors for other groups new to it?
- Belfast City Council has its own tried and tested ways of engagement/developing public involvement. The most effective way in which to arguably adopt a partnership approach, considering what type of response would best result in practices that could/would complement Belfast City Council's future initiatives. The question does perhaps underline that through working in partnership, Belfast City Council could exploit mechanisms employed by organisations such as Big in delivery of our own – soon to be enhanced through new duties – customer engagement objectives.
- In relation to the options outlined above, Belfast City Council feels that public voting is not yet a proven medium to equitably award funding UK wide. In NI especially, public voting could be viewed as biased and non representative. This option would have to be restricted to specific types of funding such as People's Million. Council would favour local decision making panels, citizen's juries, and more public involvement in the development of projects.

UK 10

BIG is not restricted to distributing Lottery money alone. Are there other sources of funding that BIG would be the right organisation to manage, either on our own or in partnership?

Belfast City Council is not aware of any other funds that Big could potentially manage unless there are unknown private sponsorships type funds available but not widely promoted. It would be helpful to have a central repository database in the UK of all funding available and/or a funding advice service or one stop shop which covered all aspects of funding and funding sources. The funding arena is currently a maze which puts off many inexperienced potential applicants.

This resource would lead to and facilitate a more joined up approach to funding.

NI 1

Under the themes of isolation and transition, what are the emerging issues and areas of need in Northern Ireland? What are the gaps in what BIG or others have funded?

- Belfast City Council endorses both themes and feels that the theme of transitions is particularly appropriate in the local context, specifically in relation to shared space, interface projects, community safety, reclaiming communities, travellers etc. Council believes that exclusion should also be addressed explicitly within the two themes.
- Belfast City Council would encourage Big to incorporate the four priorities of Councils Good Relations Strategy with in its target areas namely securing shared city space, transforming contested space, developing shared cultural space and building shared organisational space.
- The Council believes that due attention should be given to the impact of the current economic climate on the population with Belfast being named as one of the four UK cities likely to be more affected
- Equally the council believes that the Big programme in NI should support the integration of new communities and add value to the current good relations, Peace III, cross community programmes being delivered across the city.
- Further areas that Belfast City Council would encourage Big to consider with respect to its NI programme is the fact that the city of Belfast has a very large proportion of young people (26%) and endeavours should be made to make them proactive citizens.
- Finally the NI programme must take cognisance of the findings of Belfast City Council's poverty study with respect to areas of great need in the city.

NI 2

In the future, we assume that demand will continue to exceed the funding we have How can we better manage demand for our programmes?

Please rank the following options from 1 to 5, with 1 as the Highest and 5 as the lowest:

- a. Only support projects that we already fund I**
- b. Only fund new projects**
- c. Only fund themed programmes linked to BIG outcomes**
- d. Introduce area based allocations (for example, an allocation based on the population size in a area and taking account of a relevant measure of disadvantage) H**
- e. Introduce more specific priorities (based on need)**

If you think there are other options, tell us what they are

Belfast City Council recognises that Big now has a shrinking fund compounded by a reduction and changes to voluntary and community sector funding from other sources. Belfast City Council also recognises that the demand for Big's open programmes has grown to unprecedented levels.

This underlines the importance of Big as a funder in NI and across the UK and the importance and relevance of Big as a potential partner for Belfast City Council in future activities.

Continued demand is evidence of success: in terms of publicising the programme and also that it has tangible impacts on the community. In terms of managing demand, there should be credit given to projects which demonstrate efficiency (facilitate holistic approaches, engage a range of organisations in its delivery, can impact on a broad population base/number or have considered sustainability or are truly iconic/innovative). Equally the small grants programme should be continued as it enables a larger no of organisations to benefit, facilitates pilot projects and can lever further funding/mainstreaming.

Belfast City Council would encourage Big to provide absolute clarity at the call and application stage of the Big fund regarding eligibility criteria and pre application advice. This is essential for applicants in order to reduce the volume of applications from a current “apply anyway” culture impacting on demand, expectations and available resources.

NI 3

In future programmes should we focus more resources in Northern Ireland on development and support activities?

- a. No, retain the current level of support**
- b. Yes, increase levels of support and development**
- c. Yes, include support and development activities in all new programmes**

If you think there are other options, tell us what they are

Yes, Belfast City Council agrees that Big should explore ways to provide more development and support activities. This would skill and empower the community and voluntary sector. A healthy and vibrant sector can only be a good thing for Belfast City Council in its own engagement activities and endeavours. It would be a positive development to help applicants, particularly those in areas of poor community development infrastructure and expertise, to articulate projects and ideas that could be of immense support to struggling neighbourhoods.

Development support is crucial to embryonic organisations or those new to the Big Lottery programme. Belfast City Council suggests that projects having completed a Big Lottery application and delivery process could act as mentors to those new at the game. This would transpose learning and facilitate solutions to issues being exposed as well as acting as a source of reassurance. It may even permit a reduction in activity which funders could view as ineligible.

NI 4

What role should BIG play in supporting the development of skills for the voluntary and community sector?

Belfast City Council would welcome support to develop the skills and professionalism of the voluntary and community sector will be a worthwhile investment for the future of the sector to affect real change to the quality of lives of residents and communities.

Big quite rightly identifies that over the next few years there will be major structural as well as policy reviews affecting the delivery of services and support for communities across Northern Ireland. Economically Northern Ireland is changing, with a growing migrant population and demographic changes affecting the context within which both Big and Belfast City Council operate. Within this changing environment Big wishes to find ways in which to contribute to the new and emerging structures at local authority level, and to work with partners in the new community planning process.

This again demonstrates a clear willingness to work with Belfast City Council. Specific programmes such as Big's Improving Community Buildings programme and the Building Change Trust can help to improve community planning. Big wants to be able to contribute to new and emerging structures at local authority level, resulting from the Review of Public Administration, and to work with partners to ensure a fuller engagement across the voluntary and community sector in Community Planning. This again demonstrates a strong desire on the part of Big to work with Belfast City Council. This desire for partnership working could be of immense benefit towards enhancement of our good relations strategy and other corporate initiatives under Development.

Belfast City Council proposes that Big considers more use of loan funds for community organisations to permit them to move from a grant seeking entity to a self sufficient community. This may not necessarily result in the creation of a social enterprise but could enhance the service delivery/efficiency of a voluntary organisations e.g. investment in modernisation/physical enhancements to a building which would facilitate a larger/more diverse user base.

NI 5

How can BIG funding best support Community Planning?

- With the Review of Public Administration community planning is an important part of the new structures in Northern Ireland and Big wants to ensure that it supports and works with those involved in community planning. Big has invested resources in the Building Challenge Trust, to support longer-term changes in the voluntary and community sector across Northern Ireland.

Big has a track record of allocating budgets to specific geographical areas and working with partnership to develop local delivery plans. Big wants to contribute to new and emerging structures at local authority level, and to work with partners to ensure that they can fully engage in Community Planning.

All of this demonstrates Big's strong desire to play a significant role in shaping the post RPA landscape. Belfast City Council commends Big for its approach to date and proposes to work with Big to explore how Big can play a role with Belfast City Council in making RPA bring success for Belfast City Council, Big and the voluntary and community sector. The Neighbourhood Renewal partnerships could be used as possible pilots for agreed partnership projects, programmes and delivery.

- Community Planning is still at embryonic stages in NI. 'Big' could assist NI to draw on the experiences of other regions as a starting point perhaps enabling the community / voluntary sector to undertake exchange practices

- BCC feels the need for training and development or support regarding participants and engagement of the community with service provision and the practical role of the councils with funded activities
- BCC recognises that some funding streams are closed to local government. There is potential for innovative and developmental funding to be made available to support the community planning partnerships and to test and develop community planning outcomes (e.g. safer, healthier etc) and structuring (e.g. engagement mechanisms, partnership and governance arrangements etc). It may be worth considering for certain 'Big' projects to include a requirement for a strategy/voluntary partnership particularly at local level. In support of community planning, it would also be helped to establish more specific outcome criteria similar to those detailed for Scotland and Wales within the 'Big' consultation document