

EVALUATION OF THE COMMUNITY FESTIVALS FUND 2008/2009

Background

The Community Festivals Fund (CFF) was established by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) in February 2006 in recognition of the contribution that festivals can make to communities, to the local economy and wider Government policy priorities.

The primary purpose of the CFF is to improve the capacity of community festivals and make them less reliant on public funding by providing support and training in addition to funding towards the cost of events. The Fund enables community organisations to celebrate their cultural identity and to strengthen community relations.

With effect from 1 April 2006 the CFF was administered by the Northern Ireland Events Company (NIEC) on behalf of DCAL. However, under the Review of Public Administration, there was a recommendation that the CFF should transfer to Local Government. During 2007 DCAL began discussions with the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) with a view to devolving the delivery of the CFF to district councils.

There was a clear rationale for community festivals to transfer to Local Government. NILGA's vision for new Local Government indicates "the central purpose of Local Government is to develop vibrant and cohesive local communities, in which all citizens have a voice and opportunities to shape the services which contribute to their quality of life". It would also put decision making on the funding of festivals much closer to the communities involved and enable the tailoring of the policy to best suit local needs.

Following Executive agreement Minister Poots made a statement to the Northern Ireland Assembly on 4 December 2007 announcing the transfer of delivery of the Fund to district councils with effect from 1 April 2008.

As part of the transfer process, DCAL gave an undertaking to carry out a review on the operation of the CFF in its first year of delivering by district councils. The findings of the review will help to inform the future delivery of the Fund.

Executive Summary

It is evident that the transfer of delivery of the CFF to district councils has been very successful and DCAL would like to thank the councils and NILGA for their co-operation and contribution to this process. The Councils, being closer to the communities they serve, have been able to be more responsive to local needs and consequently many more festivals have received support and evaluations would suggest that the quality and sustainability of these events have improved.

The clearest illustration of the success of the transfer is the fact that eight times more festivals were funded in the first year of the Fund being administered by the district councils compared to the previous two years when the Northern Ireland Events Company administered the fund. This shows a very high level of demand for the Fund amongst new and emerging community festivals in all parts of Northern Ireland.

It is DCAL's intention that the CFF should continue to operate and be delivered by the district councils. The Department will continue to monitor the evaluations that the councils provide at the end of each financial year to assess if systems can be improved further, so that community festivals can continue to thrive.

Evaluation of 2008/2009

The overall budget for the Fund for 2008/09 was £450k per annum and DCAL made a specific grant to each district council. The allocation for each council was determined on the basis of population distribution, with a 10% weighting applied for deprivation as measured by the Noble Multiple Deprivation

Measure. It is a requirement of the award that the district council must match the CFF allocation from its own budget, effectively doubling the pot of money available to Festivals through the Fund. The allocation may be used to cover grants to festivals, the provision of training and development opportunities for festival organisers and administrative costs incurred by the district councils.

In 2008/2009, 25 of the 26 district councils accepted their allocation in full. One council, however, was offered £6,800 but accepted a slightly lower amount of £5,000. A summary of allocations to each district council is set out in Table 1.

In total, 409 applications were made to the CFF in 2008/09 across all district council areas in Northern Ireland. Of these, 348 (85%) were successful in securing funding and a summary of applications by district council area is set out in Table 2.

Councils were asked to drawdown funding on a quarterly basis and provide projections for the subsequent quarters. However, as councils claim on the basis of incurred expense and only draw down from DCAL when payments have been made to individual festivals in practice the majority of drawdowns occurred in the latter part of the 2008/09 financial year. In total £273k was drawn down from DCAL by the end of March 2009 and £177k was accrued into the 2009/10 financial year.

Two district councils indicated that the funding they received was insufficient to cover the needs in their areas and that, if available, they would welcome an increased CFF allocation from DCAL in the next financial year.

In 2008/09 eight district councils advised DCAL that they were unable to spend all of their allocations, with a total underspend of £14,555 across those councils. District councils that were oversubscribed were asked by DCAL to express an interest in receiving a further allocation for the 2008/2009 year. Subsequently £13,270 was re-allocated to 4 district councils that expressed

an interest in receiving an additional allocation and details of this are included at Table 3.

Assessment criteria for funding

DCAL provided the district councils with the CFF Policy and Guidance Framework, which contains broad assessment criteria for the Fund. Each district council is required to publish its assessment criteria, application process and procedures for making awards. The broad assessment criteria are as follows:

- strong community participation.
- opportunities for people to improve skills or receive training.
- promotes social inclusion and improves community relations.
- contributes to community regeneration.
- attracts visitors to the area.
- provides opportunities for development - this includes capacity-building, links with other organisations and diversity of activities.
- maximises non-public sources of income (e.g. through commercial sponsorship, donations, ticket sales, advertising revenue etc).
- demonstrates value for money.

In order to deliver the Fund's aims and objectives, festival organisers must demonstrate how their event addresses these criteria.

Through robust assessment processes and post event evaluations, the district councils have satisfactorily demonstrated that the assessment criteria were met by those festivals that received funding. Evidence from the district councils would indicate that the majority of unsuccessful applications were due to the organisers not being able to provide sufficient overall funding or appropriate supporting paperwork.

Analysis of types of festivals funded by local councils since April 2008, indicates that councils are responding to local needs. While there are

similarities in the types of festivals supported, with music, fun days and culture being particularly common, there is also considerable variety. Rural and agricultural festivals in Craigavon, youth in Lisburn, walking in Moyle, motorsport in Magherafelt and environmental in Ards are among some of the other types.

Table 4 gives details of the types of festival supported by the CFF in 2008/09. These are not presented in any particular order because it has been difficult to consistently categorise events across all council areas as individual festivals may have a range of events that fall into more than one of the categories indicated.

Summary of Evaluations by Councils

Evidence would suggest that the transfer of the delivery of the CFF to district councils has been a success. The councils reported that value was added to existing festivals and they were able to fund events and activities that were previously not supported. Councils reported that significant contributions had been made to the local economy and that in particular the hospitality and retail sectors had benefitted from the increased numbers of participants and tourists/visitors. There was a strong focus not only on cross community events, but also on cultural diversity events to maximise the involvement of ethnic minorities. Many of the councils reported that there was an increased sense of community spirit, a “feel good” factor and a sense of pride in the community.

In terms of improving community relations, considerable efforts were made to ease tensions in areas of conflict at volatile times of the year, by running family friendly events, for example on 11th July bonfire night. Contributions were also made to events where beacons were lit rather than bonfires to provide a safer more environmentally friendly event.

Training

Training/Workshop sessions were provided by district councils on a wide range of issues relevant to the organisation and delivery of community festivals. These included:

- Application process
- Risk assessments
- Certain aspects of event management
- PR and marketing
- Child protection
- Health & Safety
- Stewarding & Marshalling
- Recording data to assess economic benefits etc.
- Reducing dependency on grants

In particular the training on application processes was very beneficial, as there were relatively few applications that failed due to processing errors. Many of the other training topics will help the events organisers to run more professional events and maximise non public sources of income. The training provided also makes a significant contribution to increasing capacity within communities and the skills and knowledge developed can be put to good use in many other areas.

Timing of Allocation of Funding by DCAL

The timing of the notification from DCAL on the amount of allocation to each council was queried by one council that felt that the funding should be allocated earlier. In response DCAL advised that the Department needs to have a clear picture of each council's total expenditure in the year, before it can determine the allocations for the following year. However, as the delivery of the Fund by district councils beds in, DCAL will endeavour to issue letters of offer at the earliest opportunity.

Table 1: ALLOCATION TO DISTRICT COUNCILS 2008/09

DISTRICT COUNCIL	DCAL ALLOCATION (£)
Antrim	12,300
Ards	18,000
Armagh	13,700
Ballymena	15,600
Ballymoney	6,800
Banbridge	10,600
Belfast	77,300
Carrickfergus	9,700
Castlereagh	15,800
Coleraine	14,200
Cookstown	8,500
Craigavon	22,600
Derry	31,200
Down	16,500
Dungannon	12,800
Fermanagh	15,000
Larne	8,000
Limavady	8,900
Lisburn	28,400
Magherafelt	9,900
Moyle	4,400
Newry & Mourne	25,400
Newtownabbey	20,400
North Down	18,600
Omagh	13,100
Strabane	12,400
Total	£450,000

Table 2: SUMMARY OF APPLICATIONS BY COUNCIL AREA

COUNCIL	APPLICATIONS	UNSUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL
Antrim Borough	4	0	4
Ards Borough	21		21
Armagh City and District	7	0	7
Ballymena Borough	19	2	17
Ballymoney Borough	8	1	7
Banbridge District	8		8
Belfast City	24	3	21
Carrickfergus Borough	4	0	4
Castlereagh Borough	18	3	15
Coleraine Borough	7	2	5
Cookstown District	9	1	8
Craigavon Borough	13	8	5
Derry City	3	0	3
Down District	29	2	27
Dungannon & South Tyrone	41	2	39
Fermanagh District	28	1	27
Larne Borough	5	1	4
Limavady Borough	6	1	5
Lisburn City	24	1	23
Magherafelt District	31	11	20
Moyle District	17	3	14
Newry and Mourne District	31	11	20
Newtownabbey Borough	33	7	26
North Down Borough	3	0	3
Omagh District	9	1	8
Strabane District	7	0	7
total	409	61	348

Table 3: RE-ALLOCATION OF UNDERSPENDS 2008/09

District Council	Additional allocation £
Ballymena	960
Londonderry	6,400
Limavady	3,120
Lisburn	2,790
Total	13,270

Table 4: TYPES OF FESTIVAL SUPPORTED IN 2008/09

Music	Dance	Cultural	Funday
Heritage	Drama	Agricultural	Sport
Arts	Mayday	Craft	Environmental
Rural	Storytelling	Youth	Mixed
Motorsport			