



DCAL COMMUNITY FESTIVALS FUND CONSULTATION – DRAFT BELFAST CITY COUNCIL RESPONSE

June 2015

1. Do you agree with the objectives of the Community festivals fund?

We broadly agree with the objectives of the Community festivals fund and appreciate the benefit it has brought to Belfast to date. However, we believe that the fund may be more effective if the objectives are further consolidated and reflected throughout the policy and guidance framework. For example, economic impact is highlighted in the aims and general principles sections of the framework, but this is not an objective of the fund.

Clear, focused objectives would allow councils to design their funding schemes to align more strongly with DCAL objectives, which would in turn attract stronger applications and help manage the expectations of festivals that are not a good fit with this already oversubscribed fund. This is in keeping with the recommendations from DCAL's review of the fund in 2012.

Notwithstanding the above concerns, we would welcome more focus on improving the quality of festival provision in the objectives of the fund and throughout the policy and guidance framework.

2. Do you agree with the definition of a community festival?

Belfast City Council is a member of and provides funding and secretariat support to the Belfast Festivals Forum, a proactive and voluntary collective of over 100 festival organisers and agencies that work together to build on the existing strengths of our festivals.

The forum charter defines a festival as “a programme of cultural performances, exhibitions, competitions or other inter-related activities, or an occasion for celebration marked by a series of organised events.” We would not therefore consider a single event with several elements to be a festival.

As well as a definition of a festival, the council would welcome a definition of “community” and clarification as to whether this includes communities of interest as well as of geography and identity.

3. Do you agree with the targets for the Community festivals fund?

While we broadly agree with the objectives of the fund, the prioritisation of festivals taking place in the top 10 per cent most deprived wards in each council area may exclude a number of previous grant recipients that have demonstrated strong need and demand for the funding and run excellent, engaging festivals. This includes festivals targeting people living in areas of deprivation, but taking place, for example, in the city centre.

We would also welcome clarification as to whether all events at the festival need to target people who are socially excluded or whether this can be a targeted element of the festival programme.



Belfast City Council already advertises the fund widely, including via the Belfast Festivals Forum, the council's grants mailing list, the council website and local newspapers. We also run funding clinics in community venues across the city. Further targeted advertisement of an already oversubscribed fund may raise expectations that cannot be met through the current budget.

It is anticipated that we will fund approximately 26 festivals in this financial year. More funding would be required in Belfast if DCAL estimates that each council area should fund 31 festivals, making up the total of 350.

The Belfast Festivals Forum works together to deliver joined-up planning, programming, promotion and management of festivals across Belfast, including by sharing knowledge and expertise and organising training, mentoring and skills development. We welcome further initiatives that can help develop the skills of our festivals, while recognising the expertise that already exists.

However, it is not known how the target of 80 per cent of all training needs identified by funded festivals will be measured or whether this can be supported by the council. It is presumed that the "necessary timeframe" refers to before the festival. We currently aim to notify applicants four weeks before their festival can begin whether their application has been success. This is a very short window for training at a time when festival organisers will be busiest. Many festivals are also run by a very small staff or volunteers who may not be able to commit their time to training, and this requirement may actually present a barrier to festivals that are most in need of training and support, particularly if there are to be financial penalties.

It is also difficult to plan and budget for training that cannot be identified until after we have accepted the letter of offer from DCAL.

Therefore, while we welcome the commitment to developing sector skills, we would prefer that there is no target against this, at least initially, to allow councils to further develop training in line with the needs of festivals in their area. Further guidance on how this should be measured and evaluated, including a sample training needs analysis, would also be welcome.

4. Do you agree with the general principles of the Community festivals fund?

Councils and funded festivals should be required to demonstrate measurable impact in keeping with the objectives of the fund. For example, economic impact is not an objective of the fund, yet it is identified within the aims and general principles.

While we welcome initiatives to make festivals more sustainable, this may not be achievable in the current economic climate. Furthermore, the requirement on festivals to identify and attend training and develop a fundraising plan may not be commensurate with the value of the grant (in Belfast City Council currently, the minimum amount a festival can request is £2,500, but festivals may be awarded less than this amount). Equally, festival organisers may not have the time or skills to develop plans, and this would be a barrier to those festivals most in need of support.

5. Do you agree with the assessment criteria?

The desirable criteria of "attracts visitors to the area" may not be appropriate to many festivals where the primary objective is building capacity and social capital within their own area.



It is not clear what is meant by “diversity of activities” in a development context. If this is to be included, we suggest that it will require further clarification.

6. Do you agree with the exclusions of the fund?

We agree with the stated exclusions. We also consider that the council should be able to add further exclusions with the agreement of DCAL.

7. Do you agree with the proposed administration of the fund?

As noted above, Belfast City Council already provides advice, assistance and training through the Belfast Festivals Forum. A target of “80 per cent of funded festival training needs met” may not be feasible and may even prove counterproductive in this context: we consider that there should be some mechanism for assessing need and responding to that.

We consider that councils should have the flexibility to stipulate which training and consultancy providers should be used, while ensuring that all appropriate procurement requirements are adhered to.

8. Any other comments?

This is a very competitive fund, and Belfast City Council would welcome more funding to meet the need and demand for community festivals that exist within the city. If there are additional and, in particular, targeted requirements for the council to provide training and skills development, the council should also be given more resources to support the administration of the scheme.

The events supported are critical to the animation of neighbourhoods across our city and the council would be keen to support the continued development of the scheme, in line with the comments raised above.