

## **Community Festivals Fund (CFF) 2014/2015 – Summary Evaluation**

In 2014/15 demand continued to be high for Community Festivals funding, with application numbers high and several Councils reporting that they would require additional funding to meet the demand. This was the last year in which the fund was operated under the 26 Council system, and council evaluations indicate that it was a successful one. The positive impact on the communities involved took many forms, including:

- community cohesion;
- skills development; and
- a sense of pride and ownership.

In terms of funding, the allocation to the fund remained at £450k in 2014/15. Unlike previous years, it was decided that re-allocation of any unclaimed or underspent funding would not go ahead due to other budget pressures across the Department; however Councils still managed to provide support for a similar number of festivals. In order to sustain the festivals in their areas, some Councils chose to provide over and above the match funding figure required for the operation of the scheme. A summary of the allocations to each Council is set out in **Table 1**. 25 Local Councils accepted their full allocation while Carrickfergus did not accept any funding.

Due to the staffing and organisational changes made across the Councils as they moved to their new structure in 2015, it has proved difficult to obtain full evaluations from a number of areas. Down, Limavady and Lisburn Councils provided figures only (without further background or analysis), while Armagh, Cookstown, Larne and Magherafelt did not provide any evaluation information. Therefore some figures have been estimated based on claims provided, and all totals below represent a minimum figure. Whilst it is recognised that there were exceptional circumstances at the end of 2014/15 which made it difficult for some Councils to provide responses, all of the new Council areas will be required to provide full returns in future.

In 2014/15, at least 547 applications were made in total to the fund across all local councils in Northern Ireland (as compared to 570 in 2013/14). Of these, 469 (86%) were successful in securing funding, although two did not claim their allocation. This appears to indicate a drop in the application rate, although this is likely to be due to the unreported figures from Councils who did not provide evaluation information, and is not possible to draw a firm conclusion. The number of festivals supported remained similar to 2013/14, when 471 (83%) were supported, despite the decision not to re-distribute funding in-year, so since demand has remained constant, some of these festivals may have received slightly lower allocations, or in some cases Councils provided additional funding from their own budgets.

Estimated attendance figures were provided for many festivals for 2014/15 which indicate that the total number of people attending funding festivals was in excess of 1.357 million. This equates to a DCAL investment of around 33p per person reached by the fund, demonstrating excellent value for money. In addition to this the festivals also provided bookings for many thousands of artists, caterers, and others, as well as large numbers of volunteering opportunities. (Belfast City Council has estimated the economic return on the investment as 1:9.)

Details of these applications, along with the rationale behind the rejections, are contained in the individual evaluation reports prepared by each Council. Summary figures for applications made to each council are set out in **Table 2**.

### **Timing of Letters of Offer**

Letters of offer were issued in February 2014, prior to the beginning of the financial year. This allowed individual Councils to advertise the fund in time to receive and approve applications relating to the early part of the year.

### **Accruals**

In total £285,828.90 was drawn down from the Department by the end of the financial year (March 2015). The remaining balance was accrued into the next financial year (2015/16) for subsequent drawdown. The primary cause for this level of accrual is the Councils' requirement that all paperwork and receipts, etc. be provided by festival organisers prior to payment of CFF funding. As the Councils allow a period of time (variable between Councils) post event for receipt of this, cash for the events taking place in March must be drawn down in the next financial year. This causes an unavoidable delay in relation to the completion of 4<sup>th</sup> quarter drawdown requests for Councils affected. It can also result in a slight variation between the claims projected and the actual figures, given that the actual costs claimed by festivals may not be exactly as predicted.

### **Underspend**

At the end of the year, 7 Councils advised the Department that they were unable to spend all of their allocations, with a total under spend of £11,462.62. Also, Carrickfergus Council advised the Department mid-year that it would not be taking up its offer of £9,400. **Table 3 sets out the details**. This funding was retained by the Department and was offset against budgetary pressures.

### **Outcome**

CFF has again proved successful in 2014/15, with Councils reporting similar levels of uptake and positive impact on the community. A number of Councils have indicated that there was significant demand to justify increased funding in their areas, with increasing numbers of quality applications, and growing festivals. Councils are being forced to reject applications due to oversubscription, or restrict grants e.g. one grant per group per year. They also noted that it was proving difficult for groups to source private sector funding in the current financial climate.

There remains a sense that the fund makes cultural events accessible for everyone, promotes cultural diversity and encourages shared celebration. CFF continues to support the arts and communities and allows festivals to promote and sustain the diverse culture within and across all communities

Councils have been working with communities, not just to raise awareness of the Fund, but to maximise the capacity building and skills development potential within groups, and also the lasting impact which is left by the festivals.

A number of evaluations reported long-term impacts in the form of skills gained through training / volunteering, community cohesion, community groups formed as a result of festival activity (e.g. seniors club and local history group) and increased attendance at other activities/events following the festival (e.g. music groups), greater social inclusion, and even a feeling of increased safety and reduced anti-social behaviour within the area.

Councils are now offering a wide variety of support to potential and successful applicants. This took the form of funding fairs and roadshows, one to one advice, good practice guides, grants workshops and seminars, assistance with application forms, and training and advice on a range of subjects such as child protection, health and safety, food safety, finance, operating a committee, fundraising, event programming, alcohol awareness, stewarding, first aid, risk assessment, audience development, hospitality and good relations. One Council stated that festivals were benefitting from an ongoing community capacity building and events management programme.

In general, Councils have reported high levels of uptake of training offered, and feedback indicates that it is making a tangible difference. Some areas have reported an increase in the numbers of groups being funded following Council assistance, and groups appear to be becoming more proficient at event planning (e.g. forming contingency plans, allowing more planning time, improved programmes). Festivals are also recognising the impact they can have on the wider community and promotion of social inclusion is a strong priority for many of them, with many offering free tickets where possible to ensure that inclusion is encouraged.

Many Councils and festivals are now successfully using social media to promote both the fund and the individual events. They are also advertising the fund through community hubs such as libraries, charitable organisations, umbrella organisations and websites. Councils are also providing opportunities for groups to advertise events on their 'what's on' web pages, which has proved successful, and some have reported that festivals have achieved good media coverage. Some festivals have also come together to advertise collectively, and have built up a 'festivals calendar' together to encourage participation. Marketing of the scheme is a crucial aspect of its success and it has changed in recent years to allow it to reach many more people digitally. Co-operation and partnership working between festivals has many benefits. Groups can save money, reach more people, share ideas and avoid duplication if they work together.

Many festivals, and in some areas all festivals, could not go ahead without funding, and longer or fledgling festivals find the support invaluable. Councils report that the fund has inspired groups to host new events, and helps existing events to grow and build a reputation, thereby attracting a larger proportion of the community, and better quality entertainment (where applicable). Many funded festivals are now becoming established annual events.

A widening spectrum of festivals has been supported through the fund, including a number of new projects. Festival themes included: WW1 commemorations, sport, arts, music, local history, heritage (including shared heritage), culture, languages, community celebrations and family events. They were spread widely across the Council areas, in both urban and rural settings.

Councils have noted that local communities are recognising the benefits to be gained from festivals in their area. Specific benefits reported by Councils included:

- reaching potentially excluded / marginalised groups e.g. rural communities (festivals in small villages or bringing multiple villages together), ethnic minorities, older people, young people, LGBT, people with disabilities, those living in areas of deprivation;
- promotion of social cohesion / improved community relations through bringing communities together in a non-threatening environment (particularly at times of the year when tensions would tend to be high), encouraging interaction, cross-community activity, networking opportunities, and forging links which can be sustained;
- opportunity for groups which would not usually mix to engage with one another, including different traditions and different cultures (not necessarily local), combating sectarianism and racism, promoting respect and tolerance;
- sense of community pride;
- links with schools and interaction between schools / parents / children / local community;
- introducing new experiences and skills to communities e.g. sports, playing instruments, dance, coaching, teamwork, stewarding, and increased awareness of what is available in the local area;
- partnerships / liaison with local businesses and suppliers, local businesses encouraged to remain open, trade boosted;
- festivals are growing and attracting more volunteers, as well as visitors / tourists from outside the local area;
- links formed with PSNI;
- increased capacity, skills development and employability within the community through volunteering and training;
- preserving and promoting cultural traditions;
- promoting use of shared community spaces, public spaces and unusual venues;

### **Lessons learned**

There were a number of ideas which Councils felt had been particularly successful in 2014/15, and also some suggestions for improvements.

In the main, the changes made by many Councils towards electronic applications and social media / online advertising have proved extremely beneficial to the operation of the fund. Councils have noted increased application rates and it was noted that an online application system can alert applicants to potential issues automatically (e.g. any gaps, insufficient funding), which could delay their application

or render them ineligible. An online process also reduces duplication of information, particularly in repeat applications.

In addition, Councils which simplified the process by using only one call for applications also found this to be beneficial.

Some Council areas received a relatively low number of applications considering their population. These areas may wish to consider low cost and wide ranging advertising such as social media to improve awareness.

Councils also noted that non monetary support of festivals (for example, providing banners, barriers, high-vis vests, and access to other Council facilities or equipment) was helpful, particularly to smaller groups, and helped them to meet requirements in relation to safety, publicity, etc.

It was also noted that funding which was used by festivals to purchase such items improved festival sustainability as they could be re-used multiple times. Similarly, investment in training can often benefit the festival for a number of years to come.

Another area which has improved is networking between festivals. This has provided opportunities to take advantage of economies of scale and also to learn from the experience of other festivals, improve programming, and develop a co-ordinated festival calendar. Councils have noted that improving partnership working between festivals will be a priority going forward in some areas, along with, and linked to, encouraging sustainability.

Councils have reported that festivals which have been in receipt of funding for a number of years appear to be benefitting from the assistance and training provided in that they are becoming more aware of the logistics required, and are more aware of the need to make contingency plans and comply with legislation.

A number of Councils have indicated that additional funding to provide training would be beneficial, as currently any additional training must be carried out from within the same pot as festival funding. It is unlikely that additional funding will be available in the near future, and funding will be not be earmarked for training, as different Councils have different requirements in this regard. Councils must decide for themselves how best to meet training requirements, and may find it beneficial to consult with each other. The amalgamation of Council areas may also help to reduce overheads by avoiding duplication.

Councils have noted that festivals require early planning and early notification of funding decisions where possible, which can often be difficult in the current funding climate. Going forward, the Department for Communities will make every effort to make Councils aware of funding figures, and issue letters of offer, as soon as possible, however this is in turn dependent on confirmation of Departmental budget figures.

The main issue which Councils reported was difficulty in obtaining paperwork from groups by the specified deadlines, or at all. Some Councils have addressed this by implementing a policy which specifies that festivals must return all evaluation

paperwork before receiving the final balance of their funding, or that festivals which do not provide evaluation paperwork will be ineligible for future funding. Others have similar rules in relation to completion of training by festival staff.

Another issue reported is that large festivals had been applying for funding for community elements of their programmes, which Councils may need to be aware of and consider the most appropriate approach in their area.

Councils have also noted that they plan to enhance consultation with local businesses after events to gauge the impact they have, which would provide valuable feedback.

Finally, Councils have requested amendments to the claim forms provided, and specifically that they be made more user friendly in excel format. This will be actioned as soon as possible.

**Table 1: ALLOCATION TO DISTRICT COUNCILS 2014/15**

<b>COUNCIL</b>	<b>ALLOCATION (£)</b>
Antrim	13,000
Ards	19,000
Armagh	14,800
Ballymena	15,600
Ballymoney	7,800
Banbridge	11,800
Belfast	72,500
Carrickfergus	9,400
Castlereagh	16,100
Coleraine	11,600
Cookstown	9,400
Craigavon	23,500
Derry	28,400
Down	17,300
Dungannon	14,600
Fermanagh	15,400
Larne	7,800
Limavady	8,500
Lisburn	29,900
Magherafelt	11,100
Moyle	4,300
Newry & Mourne	25,400
Newtownabbey	20,700
North Down	18,900
Omagh	12,900
Strabane	10,400
<b>Total</b>	<b>450,100</b>

**Table 2: SUMMARY OF APPLICATIONS BY COUNCIL AREA**

<b>COUNCIL</b>	<b>APPLICATIONS</b>	<b>SUCCESSFUL</b>	<b>UNSUCCESSFUL</b>	<b>No. Of ATTENDEES</b>
Antrim Borough	7	7 (includes 1 not claimed)	0	15,706
Ards Borough	33	30	3	83,905
Armagh City and District	N/K (7+)	7*	N/K	N/K
Ballymena Borough	12	12	0	55,000+
Ballymoney Borough	15	13	2	13,380
Banbridge District	17	17	0	27,422
Belfast City	75	36	39	591,552
Carrickfergus Borough	0	0	0	0
Castlereagh Borough	21	15 (includes 1 cancelled)	6	12,437
Coleraine Borough	13	13	0	78,168
Cookstown District	N/K (37+)	37	N/K	N/K
Craigavon Borough	11	6	5 (includes one cancelled)	67,950
Derry City	7	4	3	53,200
Down District	25	25	0	30,475
Dungannon & South Tyrone	55	55	0	13,166+
Fermanagh District	28	28	0	64,860
Larne Borough	N/K (7+)	7*	N/K	N/K
Limavady Borough	3	3	0	31,083
Lisburn City	34	29	5	12,106
Magherafelt District	N/K (21+)	21*	N/K	N/K
Moyle District	15	15	0	34,250
Newry and Mourne District	32	27	5	70,547+
Newtownabbey Borough	24	17	7	29,436
North Down Borough	23	23	0	10,690
Omagh District	13	11	2	43,268
Strabane District	12	11	1	18,726
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>547+</b>	<b>467* (+2 not claimed)</b>	<b>73+</b>	<b>1,357,327+</b>

\*A number of Councils did not return their evaluation forms, so some figures have been estimated based on claim forms received. These figures reflect the minimum number of festivals supported.



**Table 3: UNDERSPEND 2014/15**

<b>COUNCIL</b>	<b>DECLINED</b>	<b>UNDERSPEND</b>
Carrickfergus	9,400	
Ards		745.22
Armagh		250
Castlereagh		480.31
Coleraine		66.40
Larne		1115
Newry		469.88
North Down		8,335.81
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,400.00</b>	<b>11,462.62</b>

**Evaluation Completed**

Are there any emerging issues identified?    Yes                       No

No new emerging issues. There were significant delays in obtaining paperwork from some Councils but the situation was unusual in that the Council structures had changed at the end of the financial year. Councils have been made aware that the correct paperwork must be submitted promptly in future.

Signed: Lorraine Morrison



Dated: 17/5/16

**Evaluation Checked**

I am satisfied that there are no emerging issues                     

or

**Comments**

Evaluation agreed.

Signed: Marian Kelly



Dated: 17/5/16