

**Evaluation of the
Community Festivals Fund (CFF)
2021/22**

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1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1. The Community Festivals Fund (CFF) was established in recognition of the positive contribution that festivals can make to communities, the local economy, and wider Government priorities.
- 1.2. The CFF Policy and Guidance Framework (2015) states that festivals must be *'developed from within a community and... must be initiated and led by, or in partnership with a community organisation.'* Festivals must also be culture based.
- 1.3. In 2021/22 demand for the Community Festivals funding fell and the overall target number of festivals of 350 was missed. This was largely due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the restrictions that were in place at the time and the late issue of the letters of offer to local councils due to the uncertainty surrounding the aforementioned matters. All of this is investigated further within this report.

2. Approach

- 2.1. The Department for Communities makes an annual allocation to each Northern Ireland council through a Letter of Offer, specifying their budget for festivals and indicating the conditions which apply.
- 2.2. The CFF budget is divided between the 11 Councils based on population distribution, with a 10% weighting for deprivation. The allocation to the fund for 2021/22 was £369k, which was the same as recent years. This funding is match funded by the local Councils.
- 2.3. Letters of Offer were issued to the Councils on 29 June 2021. The delay was due to the confirmation of available budget and the uncertainty as to whether the fund would proceed due to Covid-19, following the suspension of the fund in 2020-21 due to same. It was accepted that this could cause difficulties for Councils wishing to fund festivals early in the year, however, the delay was outside of the Department's control.
- 2.4. In line with previous years, a decision was made that reallocation of any unclaimed or underspent funding would not go ahead due to other budget pressures across the Department. 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.
- 2.5. A summary of the allocations to each Council is set out below in **Table 1**. All Councils accepted their full allocation.

Table 1: ALLOCATION TO LOCAL COUNCILS 2021/22

This table explains the total amount of funding allocated to each council in Northern Ireland for 2021/22.

Antrim and Newtownabbey received £27,400
Ards and North Down received £31,400
Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon received £42,300
Belfast City received £66,600
Causeway Coast and Glens received £28,600
Derry City and Strabane received £30,000
Fermanagh and Omagh received £23,200
Lisburn and Castlereagh received £27,800
Mid and East Antrim received £26,800
Mid Ulster received £29,000
Newry, Mourne and Down received £35,900

This is a total of £369,000 allocated over 11 councils.

COUNCIL	ALLOCATION (£)
Antrim & Newtownabbey	27,400
Ards & North Down	31,400
Armagh Banbridge & Craigavon	42,300
Belfast City	66,600
Causeway Coast & Glens	28,600
Derry City & Strabane	30,000
Fermanagh & Omagh	23,200
Lisburn & Castlereagh	27,800
Mid & East Antrim	26,800
Mid Ulster	29,000
Newry Mourne & Down	35,900
Total	369,000

3. Strategic Context

- 3.1. The main impact of CFF relates to PfG Outcome 5 – **‘We are an innovative, creative society where people can fulfil their potential’**. Specific indicators are: ‘Percentage engaging in arts/cultural activities’ and ‘Confidence’, both of which are led by DfC.

- 3.2. The CFF also links strongly to the indicator ‘**% of the population who believe their cultural identity is respected by society**’, which relates to Outcomes 7 (We have a safe community where we respect the law, and each other), 9 (We are a shared, welcoming and confident society that respects diversity) and 10 (We have created a place where people want to live and work, to visit and invest). The Executive Office is leading on this indicator.
- 3.3. The CFF also links to **Outcome 4 – ‘We live long, healthy, active lives’**, with the activity potentially impacting on mental health (DoH led) by encouraging social inclusion and equality, and also on the ‘confidence of the population aged 60 & older’ (DfC led) by providing targeted activity.
- 3.4. The current CFF Policy and Guidance Framework places a focus on promoting equality and tackling poverty and social exclusion. The objectives of the fund centre around supporting communities to work together and celebrate their identity, while enhancing community relations, promoting equality and targeting poverty and social exclusion. The Fund also aims to improve the capacity of festivals by providing support and training as well as funding.
- 3.5. Community Festivals can also contribute to ‘A Shared Future’; People and Place – A strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal.

4. Operational Context

- 4.1. The Fund is a competitive scheme and applications are open to all festivals which meet the core criteria of the scheme.
- 4.2. Councils are required to adhere to the Department’s Policy and Guidance Framework on Community Festivals, but are free to develop their own application form and criteria. However, they are required to publish their assessment criteria, application process and procedures for making awards. This allows Councils in different areas to ensure that they meet the needs of the local population in the most effective way.
- 4.3. The Department includes a condition that each Local Authority must provide match funding equal to the amount provided by the Department to support festivals, to ensure that there is a significant pot of funds to support the wide range of festivals taking place.
- 4.4. Each Local Authority determines the level of grant aid to each organisation. Decisions on whether or not to fund a festival and the level of funding are entirely a matter for the Council to decide.
- 4.5. The Department makes payments of Financial assistance on receipt of a certified claim giving details of expenditure incurred in respect of the following:
 - Awards to Community Festivals
 - Contribution to Running Costs (max 10%)

The Department's contribution will be 50% of the claim.

- 4.6. Each Council is required to provide an annual report to the Department, detailing the festivals supported and the awards made, together with an assessment of the impact in the community. This is based on evaluations provided by the festivals themselves.

5. Expenditure Analysis

- 5.1. In total £165,168.85 was drawn down from the Department by the end of the financial year (March 2021). The remaining balance was accrued into the 2022/23 financial year 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 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 4th quarter drawdown requests for Councils affected.
- 5.2. In January 2022, the Department asked the Councils whether they predicted any underspend at the end of the financial year. Three Councils advised the Department that they predicted that they would be unable to spend all of their allocations, with a total underspend of **£29,960**. Table 2 below sets out the details.
- 5.3. In the final quarter of 2021/22 three further Councils advised the Department that they were unable to spend all of their allocations, and two of the previous councils declared further underspends, resulting in a total further underspend of **£20,245.83** at year end. Table 2 below sets out the details.
- 5.4. They cited their reasons for underspend as:
 - a lack of final claims from organisations within the deadlines,
 - cancelled events such as the cancellation of 3 large summer festivals as a result of the pandemic;
 - organisations were unable to deliver projects as planned; and
 - due to the delay in the receipt of the letter of offer from DfC meant that the Council did not open for applications in advance and therefore regular summer events could not be included.
 - There were also less applications overall due to the pandemic.
- 5.5. Previous underspends were £1449 in 2019/20 and £8409 in 2018/19. There was no programme in 2020/21. The current spend for 22/23 CFF funding is on course for a very small underspend.

Table 2: UNDERSPEND 2021/22

This table explains that 6 councils had an underspend of the funding allocated to them.

Fermanagh and Omagh's underspend was £8390

Armagh Banbridge and Craigavon's underspend was £11,139.03

Causeway Coast and Glens underspend was £213,424.71

Lisburn and Castlereagh's underspend was 3345.65

Ards and North Down's underspend was £1229,28

Mid and East Antrim's underspend was £12,677.15

This is a total of £50,205.83 underspent by all councils.

COUNCIL	AMOUNT RETURNED/DECLINED	UNDERSPEND
Fermanagh & Omagh	£8,390	-
Armagh, Banbridge, Craigavon	£10,000	£1,139.03
Causeway Coast & Glens	£11,570	£1,854.71
Lisburn & Castlereagh	-	£3,345.65
Ards & North Down	-	£1,229.29
Mid & East Antrim	-	£ 12677.15
Total	£29,960	£20,245.83

6. Findings - Promoting Equality and Targeting Poverty and Social Exclusion

- 6.1. As part of their marketing and application processes, Councils are required to promote equality and encourage applications from those in poverty and social exclusion. Most Councils addressed these issues during the application assessment process by applying the required weightings.
- 6.2. All Councils advertised CFF in their local press, Council websites and social media, and Council literature. One council's Elected Members notified groups within their constituencies.
- 6.3. Examples of targeted marketing, particularly in areas of deprivation, included:
 - Marketing through secondary or umbrella organisations and partnerships, e.g. NICVA, CAP, Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership, Policing and Community Safety Partnership, Rural Support Network, Community Networks, Visual Arts Forum, Festivals Forum and Community Centres;

- Circulating information using existing community databases, e.g. Community and Voluntary Sector Databases, previous CFF (and other) grant recipients informed, and Community Support Newsletter;
 - Council Officers provided information to groups when they were working with them in other capacities and spoke to those who had not previously applied; and
 - Meetings held in deprived areas and with Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships to promote the fund and explain how to access it.
- 6.4. Community Festivals are an excellent tool for combating social exclusion, overcoming barriers between people and fostering community cohesion. Almost all applications stated that they wanted their event to be as inclusive as possible.
- 6.5. Many festivals offered free events to make them accessible to all and those that did charge kept costs to a minimum to cover costs only. This encourages attendance by those living in poverty or low income families who may not otherwise attend.
- 6.6. Some festivals offered advice at information stands on services for those on the poverty line and Councils also reported that festivals were held in areas of deprivation, encouraging attendance from those who would not normally travel to events or who normally have difficulties accessing services and score highly in the Multiple Deprivation measures in this category. Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council again reported that a holiday meals club for primary school children was a way of targeting families living in poverty, who would otherwise struggle to feed their children during the summer holidays.
- 6.7. Community Festivals allow people to access arts and culture in their own community, in an environment where they feel comfortable. Accessible venues were used by festivals and 'neutral' and 'shared' spaces were chosen to ensure that the entire community would feel welcome. It was reported that this assists in easing tensions in areas of conflict at potentially volatile times of the year.
- 6.8. Many Councils reported that a high number of festivals took place in rural areas helping to reduce social isolation, particularly in older people. In order to reach these areas some festivals reported advertising in local shops and leaflet drops as well as online. CFF gives the local community the opportunity to tailor projects to the needs of their community and can be influenced by information gathering at a local community level, thus reaching more people. In quite a number of cases transport was provided.
- 6.9. Some of the festivals were specifically based on a multicultural or intergenerational theme thereby increasing awareness locally and helping to improve relations in those areas. Schools were also invited to participate in some festivals.
- 6.10. Organisers, volunteers and festival goers all benefit from sharing new experiences, learning from each other, and forming new links. Community Festivals provide a good mechanism for engagement in that they bring people

from different social and economic backgrounds together which in turn strengthens relationships and helps build mutual understanding.

- 6.11. By increasing 'visibility' of different groups within the community and enabling them to share their experiences, stereotypes can be challenged, building trust and understanding. Council examples of this included LGBTQ and BME groups.
- 6.12. Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council reported that many of the festivals acted as a forum within their specific area to promote a shared purpose whereby individuals from different race, religion or political opinion were provided with the opportunity to come together and share a common goal through the development and delivery of the festival event. The festivals delivered by Randalstown Arches Association and the Antrim Festival Group would be the best examples of this.
- 6.13. One Council reported that they have applicants who are actively encouraging those from different backgrounds to take part in the community festival, so they can show case their culture and help others understand why they celebrate the various anniversaries.
- 6.14. Other new themes for this year included A Safe Space to Be Me - a festival supporting mental health; Spectrum Family Festivals – providing a positive celebration for local autistic children and their families as well as raising awareness and understanding with the general public; a Family Health and Educational Day; an All Inclusive Christmas Festival and a number of multi-cultural and multi-ethnic festivals.

7. Findings - Training, support and capacity building

- 7.1. All Councils offered training to their festival applicants, with each Council taking a different approach. Most offered information sessions or seminars as well as one-to-one support from officers during the application process. Other forms of support included guidance notes, workshops, funding fairs, you tube videos and training courses. One Council continues to include a training needs assessment form, along with their application form, which also informs the support delivered through their Community Support Programme. One other Council now asks about training requirements upfront as part of the application process.
- 7.2. Topics covered in training courses included:
 - Health & Safety / first aid;
 - Finance and governance;
 - Funding;
 - Event and project management;
 - Promotion and marketing;
 - Social media and website design;
 - Child protection;
 - Committee skills;

- Food hygiene/licensing requirements;
- Legislation;
- Risk assessments;
- Covid-19 risk assessment and mitigation;
- Registering as a charity;
- Steward Training;
- Identifying innovative ways to engage the local community; and
- Identifying alternative sources of funding.

- 7.3. Belfast City Council continues to hold a regular festivals forum with membership continuing to increase. This forum has helped festivals network, share ideas, skills, resources, staff; as well as avail of free marketing support and free training available throughout the year.
- 7.4. Belfast City Council continues to offer an in-depth de-brief with unsuccessful candidates, including advice on strengthening future applications and alternative sources of funding and support. This year again they held approximately 11 de-brief meetings.
- 7.5. One Council advised that in all Sponsorship Agreements, each Event organiser/organisation is assigned an officer to assist them in all aspects of the Sponsorship process.
- 7.6. One Council reported that ongoing Officer support provides for event development, networking opportunities and partnership working across a diverse range of initiatives that are either a Strategic Event or a Community Festival type activity. Groups can use an Event Plans template from the Council that covers risk assessment and all health and safety issues to adapt for their projects or they can submit their own independent Event Plan.
- 7.7. One Council again reported working with three Community Networks to create a Training Toolkit to help community groups to complete application forms, promote governance and provide a range of information from volunteering to financial management.
- 7.8. Another Council reported that their 'Guide for the Planning & Organisation of Community Festivals & other Events' was extensively updated with input from all relevant Council departments.
- 7.9. Organising a Community Festival also builds capacity for the individuals and groups involved. From preparing and completing a successful funding application through to programme development, budgeting and financial planning, marketing and public relations, human resource management, recruitment of volunteers, site management, health and safety, risk assessment, event stewarding and marshalling and event evaluation, the wealth of knowledge and experience gained by the individuals and groups is invaluable. It develops confidence among the organisers and builds their own skill/confidence/experience base that can be used going forward in future years.

- 7.10. Training has an impact on the quality of applications from community organisations, on how festivals are run, with groups becoming more effective and more sustainable in terms of the capacity of organisers, enhanced quality of events, and maximising opportunities for income generation. Again, whilst most festivals provided some information about the format or subject matter of training offered, they did not report against the required target of supporting at least 80% of capacity requirements and training needs identified during the application process.
- 7.11. Training provided has an impact on the community as a whole, as it is transferable and provides continued benefits throughout the year and for future festivals, therefore increasing sustainability. Informal training and up-skilling can also lead people back into education/workplace.
- 7.12. Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council again reported that Funding Seminars included the issue of Festival Sustainability. Groups were asked to focus on other monetary and non-monetary ways of financing their events into the future. Methods identified included: Fundraising, Sponsorship, Small Admission Charge, Purchasing Equipment rather than renting each year, Upskilling the Community in Festival Activities like face painting, balloon modelling etc. which could be used at future events with no charge incurred. The Council reported that many of the events funded in 2021/2022 implemented one or more of these methods in an effort to make their event more sustainable.
- 7.13. The funding continues to help festivals become more sustainable as equipment, advertising materials and merchandising have now been purchased which can be utilised in future festivals.
- 7.14. In terms of capacity building, some Councils have reported that festivals, which have been in receipt of CFF funding for a number of years, appear to be benefitting from the ability to improve quality, to add value, to innovate to remain attractive, and to then leverage greater amounts through other sponsorship from local businesses and fundraising. This is critical to the ongoing success and sustainability of local events. Examples of established festivals include Randalstown Arches – Randalstown Festival, Coiste Ghaeloideachais Chromghlinne - St Patricks Day Festival, GSPPD (Spectrum Centre), Greater Shankill Winter Festival and the Imagine Belfast Ltd, Imagine! Belfast Festival of Ideas and Politics.
- 7.15. Organisers are becoming more aware of the need to consider other funding streams and introduce additional support. In the current economic climate, this will help festivals to cope with future budgeting, given the demands on public funding.
- 7.16. In the majority of cases the funding has also enabled groups to create strong networks with local agencies, businesses and community groups hence strengthening their resourcefulness and sustainability.

8. Findings - Impact on the community and/or community relations

- 8.1. Councils advised that community festivals develop community cohesion, promote a sense of belonging, a sense of pride, encourage community participation (through a sense of ownership) and promote good relations. Most festivals have a family focus and are as inclusive as possible encouraging the whole community to come together.
- 8.2. Festivals can provide the heart to a community. Their celebratory nature provides attendees with the conditions of freedom and connectedness that acts as the glue that holds the community together.
- 8.3. This has been even more apparent in the 2021/22 festivals due to Covid-19 restrictions with Festival Groups trying to give their local area something to enjoy and an opportunity to come together again post lockdowns.
- 8.4. Festivals promote intergenerational working and knowledge-sharing, not only through activities, but in the planning and development of the festival as a whole.
- 8.5. Community relationships develop during the planning and implementation phases where public, private and community/voluntary sector relationships are forged. The establishment of social networks enhances community cohesion and the building of social capital within a community - schools, churches, community groups, businesses, and local sports clubs can all play a part.
- 8.6. A number of long running festivals have become an expected regular part of community life and a focus for community groups. Many events have a strong focus on local interest / local history / local connections, building a sense of community identity, passing on legends, knowledge and traditions to future generations.
- 8.7. Networking and partnership opportunities also allow relationships to be built with local artists and arts organisations, creating a focus on better quality art/carnival festivals within communities.
- 8.8. One Council specified that groups applying must include a good relations plan with their application, to ensure full and complete community participation for all sectors of society. Two Councils stated that groups in receipt of a grant had to identify how their festival would improve community relations and participation levels, and another advised that their application form and the guidance notes are specifically tailored to monitor the impact on Section 75 groups with the assessment of any impact being monitored through final evaluation reports.
- 8.9. Specific outcomes reported included:

- An increase in cross-community interaction/cohesion between schools, churches, community groups, sports clubs and businesses.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An increase in community spirit and improved health and well-being post Covid-19.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A reduction in social isolation, attracting people who would not normally attend events outside the area.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a focal point for individuals and communities to come together in a non-threatening environment.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased community participation and developing a sense of ownership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved relations with local businesses through sourcing and purchasing items locally.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The easing of tensions at politically volatile times of the year.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in anti-social behaviour.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved local community relations.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased awareness of local issues and developed a strong local interest.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased sense of community and belonging.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased sense of pride by showcasing local area.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a sense of place, connecting the community with the local built environment - visual, cultural, social and environmental.

9. Findings - Cultural expression

- 9.1. Festivals are an expressive way to celebrate heritage, culture and traditions. Arts and culture can be brought directly into communities, reaching new audiences by attracting non-traditional arts audiences.
- 9.2. Councils report that CFF facilitates the public promotion of different cultures and traditions in a positive and engaging manner, therefore providing educational opportunities for the local community at the same time. Communities come together to share experiences and break down barriers in a safe and shared environment, increasing the sense of belonging, inclusivity and acceptance.
- 9.3. Cultural festivals are also a conduit to pass the legends, knowledge and traditions onto the next generation.
- 9.4. Festival themes this year included: Farming / country life; maritime; cultural traditions including Ethnic and Minority groups, Indian, Japanese, Polish, Irish,

Ulster-Scots, etc.; a wide variety of music; a wide variety of art; Commemorations; Intergenerational / Family events; Heritage, history and traditions; Sports e.g. football, Gaelic, sailing, rowing, running, golf, cycling; and seasonal events such as Christmas, Halloween and St Patrick’s Day. They were spread widely across the Council areas, in both urban and rural settings.

- 9.5. Many were held on culturally significant dates – to allow and encourage communities to celebrate safely and with a positive community atmosphere and discourage anti-social behaviour around ‘flash point’ areas and dates. CFF allows cultural events to develop, remain innovative, and to be delivered more professionally.
- 9.6. The variety of festival activity allows for the celebration of cultural expression to be shared with and between communities. Festivals educate individuals through a living experience which helps to broaden horizons and provide a unique insight into one’s own community and the communities of others around them.
- 9.7. One Council reported that with the changing demographics of the area many festival proposals have been keen to involve people and communities from across the migrant population which represent many different nationalities.

10. Other benefits reported

10.1. Additional benefits to communities include:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased footfall leading to economic benefits for local businesses, particularly in the hospitality sector.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased footfall in rural areas.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributes to the sustainability of local arts, cultural and creative industries.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audience development for the arts organisations involved as well as widening access to new audiences.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing non-traditional audiences for the arts through creative, innovative programmes on communities’ doorsteps.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Festivals provide an opportunity for free advertising for local businesses.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributes to raising morale within an area by providing an opportunity to re-engage with the community following Covid-19 lockdowns.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some festivals included a small market for local producers enabling them to sell and showcase their products, thus increasing their income.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in number of visitors to the area, and in particular to areas not on immediate tourist trails.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in tourism by drawing people to Northern Ireland, particularly the larger festivals such as Belfast Tradfest; Imagine Belfast Festival of Politics and Ideas, and Shankill's Winter Festival.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The annual timescale of the festivals provides an incentive for visitors to return.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in local media attention.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributes to community regeneration.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing arts, cultural, and community participation in areas of deprivation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting local tradesmen / musicians / artists (Belfast estimated over 1078 artists contracts and over 389 non artistic).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in the number of volunteers (Belfast estimated 463 in total within their council area).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in local partnership working and developing a cross-community approach.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many Community Festival activities have community fundraising or charitable benefits as a core element and outcome, benefiting a multitude of good causes.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Return to the local economy.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in occupancy rates in local hotels/B&Bs.

11. Value for Money

11.1 In 2021, 324 applications were made in total to the fund across all local Councils in Northern Ireland (compared to 417 in 2019). Of these, 232 (72%) were successful in securing funding. This shows a decrease in the number of applications as well as a decrease in the number of festivals supported, when compared to 2019, when 338 (81%) were supported. The target contained in the CFF Policy and Guidance Framework is 350 festivals per year. This has not been exceeded this year which can be attributed to the Covid-19 pandemic, the restrictions that were in place at the time and the late issue of the letters of offer to local councils due to the uncertainty surrounding the aforementioned matters. Councils reported that all of the above factors contributed to a reduction in the overall number of applications. In particular, a number of large summer festivals could not be supported during this year due to the late issue of the letters of offer at the end of June.

- 11.2 Subsequently the estimated number of attendees overall also saw a decrease on the previous year; approximately 352,888 were recorded to have attended, although again this can be attributed to the Covid-19 pandemic and the restrictions that were in place at the time which limited the number of attendees as well as a loss of attendee confidence. Furthermore, due to the late issue of the letters of offer at the end of June, a number of larger festivals did not apply to the fund, and a number of festivals this year did not return their attendance figures. This however continues to represent value for money for the Department against an investment of £369k, and has the potential to contribute to the PfG target in relation to the percentage engaging in arts and culture.
- 11.3 Details of the applications, along with the rationale behind rejections, are contained in the individual evaluation reports prepared by each Council. Summary figures for applications made to each council are set out below in **Table 3**.

Table 3: SUMMARY OF APPLICATIONS BY COUNCIL AREA

This table explains the total number of festival fund applications received for each council in Northern Ireland and explains how many applications were successful in receiving funding and how many attendees approximately attended the successfully funded applications.

Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council received 21 applications, 17 of which were successful and they had approximately 47,390 attendees.

Ards and North Down Borough Council received 42 applications, 39 of which were successful and they had approximately 40,055 attendees, no attendance given for 1 event.

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council received 14 applications, 9 of which were successful and they had approximately 95,436 attendees.

Belfast City Council received 40 applications, 20 of which were successful and they had approximately 57,739 attendees, no attendance given for 1 event.

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council received 31 applications, 21 of which were successful and they had approximately 12,645 attendees.

Derry City and Strabane District Council received 20 applications, 16 of which were successful and they had approximately 11,264 attendees, no attendance given for 4 events.

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council received 7 applications, 7 of which were successful and they had approximately 36,361 attendees.

Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council received 20 applications, 20 of which were successful and they had approximately 5,912 attendees, no attendance given for 5 event.

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council received 20 applications, 19 of which were successful and they had approximately 7,823 attendees.

Mid Ulster District Council received 39 applications, 39 of which were successful and they had approximately 18,700 attendees.

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council received 70 applications, 25 of which were successful and they had approximately 19,563 attendees.

This is a total of 324 applications, 232 were successful and approximately 352,888 people attended the events.

COUNCIL	APPLICATIONS	SUCCESSFUL	Approx no of attendees
Antrim & Newtownabbey	21	17	47,390
Ards & North Down	42	39	40,055
Armagh Banbridge & Craigavon	14	9	95,436
Belfast City	40	20	57,739 (no attendance given for 1 event)
Causeway Coast & Glens	31	21	12,645
Derry City & Strabane	20	16	11,264 (no attendance given for 4 events)
Fermanagh & Omagh	7	7	36,361
Lisburn & Castlereagh	20	20	5,912 (no attendance given for 5 events)
Mid & East Antrim	20	19	7,823
Mid Ulster	39	39	18,700
Newry Mourne & Down	70	25	19,563
TOTAL	324	232	352,888

12. Lessons Learned

Councils are asked to note the lessons learnt and encouraged to communicate with each other where information can be shared:

WHAT WORKED WELL:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include a training needs assessment form with applications forms to tailor training programmes appropriately
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Belfast Festivals Forum continues to attract a good take-up of new membership by funded festivals, and the benefits of membership were seen through billboard advertising and improved marketing by those festivals.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A tiered grant system.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A requirement that festival organisers all work through the Council's Safety Advisory Group to ensure festivals had completed all necessary risk assessments and had adequate staff and volunteers at the event.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved attendance at Funding Seminars and one to one consultations resulted in a higher standard of applications than previous years.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A high level of knowledge and experience was gained by Council Officers through their attendance at each of the events supported.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support programme to help support and develop festivals for those groups which didn't meet the scoring threshold.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upfront payments assist with cashflow issues with balance paid upon provision of all post-project paperwork.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance at mandatory training for new applicants.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage early drawdown to avoid any non-award of funding. Grants officers worked closely with groups to ensure they would maximise their allocation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Diversionary' events held at locations / times of the year which could be considered contentious.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The use of a You-Tube video as a guide to completing the application form.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging groups to positively market their event.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplification of the grant aid process.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Links between CFF and other council services and publications worked well.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective use of public spaces and animation of them for public benefit, e.g., parks, community centres, halls etc as well as arts venues. Use of more unusual spaces also, maximising potential of public spaces.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grants Officers again worked more closely with the groups with a view to identifying any threats to festivals in advance and addressing them accordingly.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Displaying the Festivals Calendar on the Council website led to requests throughout the year by Tourism Ireland, Tourism NI, Visit Belfast Centre, etc for visitors and locals.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT:

- Again it was highlighted that a longer lead in time would allow better planning and publicity. Especially for those festivals taking place during the early summer months. If funding is available going forward, the Department will make every effort to make Councils aware of funding figures, and issue letters of offer, as soon as possible. Councils are free to advertise and assess applications in advance of confirmation of funding, as long as these circumstances are made clear in any publicity material.
- One Council reported that their only issue this year was underspend. This was in line with the reduction in their own Council grant schemes and was due to a lack of confidence of groups emerging from the Covid-19 Pandemic. They do not envisage this being an issue in the next year.
- A number of councils have reported that the quality of applications continues to vary considerably. This highlights the need for training for new groups.
- A high level of repeat applications indicates that festivals are not becoming less reliant on public funding, this may also reflect the economic climate and the wider funding environment. The current economic climate saw a reduction in funding from other areas e.g., private sponsorship and a greater reliance on volunteers and in-kind contributions.
- Due to the continually changing conditions as a result of Covid-19, a lot of paperwork had to be generated however this has been more streamlined for 2021/2022 with the onus being placed back on the groups via a Covid-19 compliance declaration. The declaration states that the group will run their event in line with the current covid-19 guidance or restrictions in place at the time. The Programmes Unit contacted groups during the course of the year to update them with any relevant information as required.
- One council again reported that due to the limited budget, as in previous years, the threshold for funding was very high and they had to turn away some potentially good festivals which scored well under the criteria.
- Lack of staff resources delayed processes this year due to staff being re-deployed to other departments within Councils due to covid-19.
- Successful applicants were awarded in most cases, a proportion of their request, as in most cases there were budget areas which weren't deemed relevant / necessary / eligible spend to deliver the festival. This meant that in some cases, festival programming had to be reduced to cut back on costs.
- One Council is currently reviewing its festival funding programme at all levels to ensure that the Council's community planning outcomes are achieved moving forward.
- Ongoing issues around organisers returning paperwork in time, despite workshops and support from CD staff, particularly small events.
- One council reported that as their community groups were paid their grant 100% upfront, it subsequently proved difficult to get the claim forms and monitoring & evaluations

<p>returned from the groups involved. Information is still outstanding as a result of this and the difficulty contacting groups due to Covid-19. Lack of staff resources has also delayed this process this year due to staff being re-deployed to other departments within the council due to covid-19.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There continues to be challenges around the uptake of offers of help or guidance at the pre-application stage despite well-advertised opportunities to access this service.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One council intends to plan networking opportunities for festival organisers given the wide geographical area that the Borough covers. This is something that they intend to build upon each year and are planning networking opportunities for festival organisers in order to share ideas and promote good practice examples within the Borough.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Festivals must demonstrate additionality. This could be extremely important in a restricted public funding environment.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One Council reported that there is an urgent need for a review of the questions that need to be asked at application stage, particularly for small one day community fun day type events and they would welcome engagement with the Department on what scope the Council has to vary from the DfC CFF Guidance Framework.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a need for continued development of innovative ideas for enhancing events.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One council reported that the majority of groups continue to seek the maximum award of £5000 and as one of the priorities outlined in the Policy and Guidance Framework was to encourage long term sustainability this is an issue which needs to be addressed in the next financial year.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One council reported that it has been agreed to increase the maximum award of financial assistance available for a Festival Grant from £5,000 to £10,000 effective from 1st April 2022 for festivals attracting in excess of 5000 attendees.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One council reported that many applicant groups still appear to be working in isolation with little or no communication with other groups of a similar nature or working within a similar area. Promotion of greater partnership working between groups and areas needs to be a priority in 2021 – 2022.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One council reported that they are aiming to have open channels of communication with both the organisers of festivals and the Department.

13. Overall assessment

13.1. During 2021/22 as we emerged from lockdown, there was a strong desire to embrace the opportunity to invest in and support our communities. And despite a number of remaining obstacles and challenges due to the Covid-19 pandemic, through this fund, communities have in fact been able to deliver a vibrant, imaginative and responsible programme of festival activity.

- 13.2. Councils have reported that the return of the Community Festivals Fund in 2021/22, following its suspension in 2020/21, has been very much welcomed.
- 13.3. The number of applications to the fund this year was adversely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, due to future uncertainty, the numbers permitted to attend an event and its location, all of which were decreed as per the restrictions at that time.
- 13.4. The overall attendance figures were, as expected, much lower this year due to Covid-19 and the restrictions which it brought. Some events were pitched at a much smaller scale than previous years due to safety concerns.
- 13.5. As a result of a decline in the number of applications, a total of six Councils were unable to spend the full amount awarded. The reasons for underspend have been cited as:
- a lack of final claims from organisations within the deadlines,
 - cancelled events such as the cancellation of 3 large summer festivals as a result of the pandemic;
 - organisations were unable to deliver projects as planned; and
 - due to the delay in the receipt of the letter of offer from DfC meaning that the Council did not open for applications in advance and therefore regular summer events could not be included.
 - There were also less applications overall due to the pandemic.
- 13.6. The Department along with the Councils are hopeful that this would not be the case moving forward into the 2022/23 financial year.
- 13.7. Despite all of the challenges faced this year, there remains a sense that CFF 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. One Council again reported that the fund is a huge asset to the borough and contributes significantly to the cultural and economic fabric of the region.
- 13.8. Councils continue to report that match funding from DfC is critical to the success of the programme and that the majority of festivals could not go ahead without the funding. All evaluations demonstrated that there is demand for continued support, and Councils also reported that grant aid helps festivals to leverage other funding. One Council also reported that the funding provided by the Department supports the rationale for match funding provision by the Council.
- 13.9. There is a continued reliance on CFF funding, and indeed the increased attendance and growing festivals which result from the initial funding may create a pressure for future funding, if the long term community benefits are not to be lost, especially given the current funding climate and the recent funding cuts to the fund over the last number of years.

- 13.10. A high level of repeat applications also indicates that festivals remain reliant on public funding although this may also reflect the current economic climate and wider funding environment with a reduction in private sponsorship and a greater reliance on volunteers and in-kind donations.
- 13.11. The fund has again supported new events, alongside helping existing events to grow and build a reputation. Many funded festivals are now established annual events.
- 13.12. Overall Councils have continued to demonstrate that the fund has promoted equality and good relations. The new festivals themes which have emerged this year are a reflection of this, for example festivals focussing on mental health, family health, autism, and numerous Covid-19 recovery festivals.
- 13.13. Festival activity is extremely varied and CFF makes a contribution to community life across all Council areas and in both urban and rural environments. A number of councils have extensive rural areas and continue to report that CFF manages to reach across all rural settlements.
- 13.14. Council evaluations again indicate a wide range of positive impacts arising from CFF funding, including improved access to and development of arts and culture, increased community cohesion, positive PR for the area, an economic boost to the area, capacity building within communities, and a sense of pride and belonging. In line with the new Policy introduced in 2015, Councils have taken steps to ensure that the Fund reaches those within their communities who might be disadvantaged or excluded which in turns aids the development of arts, culture and community participation in those areas.
- 13.15. One Council reported that the funding received from the Department is essential in adding value to the support which the council provides to local groups. Often local groups would not be able to deliver these much needed festivals, or at least not on the scale that they currently do, without the funding they receive. This particular council is reviewing its festival funding programme at all levels to ensure that their community planning outcomes are achieved moving forward. They state that their Council's vision is of a thriving, prosperous and sustainable City and District with equality of opportunity for all. As a Council their collective purpose is to improve the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of the City and District. This could not be done without the Department's funding.
- 13.16. One Council reported that Grant aid programmes have been the mainstay of the local community & voluntary sector and something which is greatly appreciated by local groups and councillors alike.
- 13.17. Another council again reported that CFF is visible and tangible proof of DfC's interest in and commitment to supporting neighbourhood based arts activity. It is also visible proof of partnership working between local and central government. They stated that many festivals commented on this positive aspect within their feedback.

13.18. Overall the evaluations provided to the Department by the local councils in 2021/22 have demonstrated that, despite the unprecedented times and the many challenges faced, the Community Festivals Fund continues to be a real asset for communities across Northern Ireland.

This table is to confirm that the evaluation has been completed and asks if there are any emerging issues identified.

The evaluation is now completed and there are no emerging issues identified. It is signed by Claire Russell and dated 14th February 2023.

Evaluation Completed

Are there any emerging issues identified? Yes No

Signed: Claire Russell

Dated: 14th February 2023

This table is to confirm that the evaluation has been checked and asks for confirmation that there are no emerging issues identified or if there are issues, to note them.

The evaluation has been checked and there are no emerging issues. This has been signed by John Ball and dated 22nd February 2023.

Evaluation Checked

I am satisfied that there are no emerging issues

or

Comments

Signed: John Ball
Head of Arts & Creativity

Dated: 22nd February 2023