

**BELFAST CITY COUNCIL
EVALUATION OF CELEBRATE
BELFAST 2006
Final Report – Draft Version 2
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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1. Introduction

This Executive Summary provides an overview of the results of the evaluation undertaken of Celebrate Belfast by Deloitte MCS Limited between 2005 and 2007. Further details on the information provided in this summary are available in the main report.

1.2. Programme Overview

'Celebrate Belfast' was launched in October 2005 with a major opening event entitled "Look Up Belfast". The 15 month programme of events ran until December 2006 and included new and enhanced events and activities centred on the four programme themes of:

- City Hall Centenary;
- Festivals;
- Cultural Quarters; and
- Sporting Activities.

Over 1,000 arts, cultural and sporting events were held during the 15 months. A major partnership with Cork ('Lagan to the Lee') during its year as European City of Culture in 2005 was incorporated into the programme as was the celebrations for the centenary of Belfast City Hall in August 2006.

The programme also incorporated other aspects such as:

- Funding Programmes – the Enhancements Fund, Cultural/ Community Fund and Community Festivals Fund; and
- Training and Skills Development - programmes were delivered by Arts & Business and the Beat Initiative. Skills were also developed through sports master classes and the School of Sport initiative.

1.3. Programme Aims and Objectives

The overarching aim of the Celebrate Belfast programme was to help stimulate economic activity and contribute to the cultural life in Belfast in the following ways:

- increased arts activity;
- increased tourism and economic activity;
- increased community activity; and
- a change in the perception of Belfast as a place to live and visit.

To support these aims, 11 objectives were developed. These were to:

1. showcase Belfast as an international cultural destination with the capacity to host world-class events;
2. develop a programme that will connect to every citizen of the city and attract significant visitors;
3. develop a programme to incorporate cultural diversity and single community events that celebrate different cultural traditions;
4. use the programme as a tool to harness the power of culture and act as a mechanism for Belfast's social and economic regeneration;
5. further develop the creative clusters through the showcasing of Cultural Quarters;
6. use the programme to provide significant opportunities for widespread community involvement and creative learning and development;
7. enhance existing events and integrate new commissions encompassing the four main streams of the year – Festivals, Cultural Quarters, Sport and Centenary;
8. showcase City Hall as a cultural venue and to make it more accessible to a greater number of visitors;
9. strengthen the cultural infrastructure of the city by establishing domestic, national and international partnerships;
10. act as a conduit for increased tourism in Belfast; and
11. leave a cultural legacy.

Supporting the 11 objectives 32 targets were developed as part of an evaluation framework. Details of these targets are outlined in the main report.

1.4. Evaluation

In order to undertake a thorough assessment of Celebrate Belfast, the Council commissioned an independent evaluation of the programme. In December 2005, Deloitte MCS Limited was commissioned to undertake the evaluation process. The overall aim of the evaluation was to establish the extent to which the programme's objectives had been achieved, whether assumptions had proved accurate, what lessons could be learned, and an assessment of the management approach to the project.

The following sections outline the main evaluation findings in relation to:

- key achievements of the programme;
- additional outcomes;

- legacy; and
- future focus.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS OF CELEBRATE BELFAST

EVENTS

- over 1,000 culture, arts and sports events were held during Celebrate Belfast;
- the programme was perceived to be diverse and inclusive, with “something for everyone”;
- new events were created or were brought to Belfast for the first time – the Maritime Festival, Commonwealth Fencing Championships, the European Brass Band Championships, the World Women’s Squash Open and the All Ireland Special Olympics;
- artists and local communities worked together to create over 40 public art projects across the city; and
- more than 80 per cent of those surveyed were happy and satisfied with the event they attended.

FUNDING

- total investment of £3.5 million in Celebrate Belfast by the Council, the Millennium Commission and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland;
- £631,000 of Enhancements funding was provided to 37 organisations;
- £245,000 of Cultural/Community funding was distributed to 41 organisations;
- £64,000 was provided through the Community Festival Fund to 14 festival organisations;
- £383,000 of funding was distributed to 118 groups by the Good Relations Unit; and
- thirty festivals were supported by £1.34 million of funding.

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

- sixty arts, cultural and community festival organisations were assisted through a skills development programme delivered by Arts & Business;
- forty-one trainers, 25 community groups and 500 people participated in the Beat Initiative’s Carnival Skills Development Programme;
- 270 children participated in the School of Sport;

- thirty coaches were trained through sports master classes; and
- 400 young people participated in Midnight Soccer.

INVOLVEMENT

- over 3.68 million people attended events as part of Celebrate Belfast;
- over 268,000 people took part in these events; and
- almost 168,000 people attended sports events as spectators.

TOURISM

- Celebrate Belfast helped to promote Belfast as a place to visit – the programme was promoted internationally by BVCB and Tourism Ireland;
- tourist trail leaflets were developed for the Titanic, Queens, Cathedral and Gaeltacht Quarters;
- a digital trail was developed for the Titanic Quarter – the first of its kind in the world;
- new signage was installed in the Queens, Cathedral and Titanic Quarters; and
- familiarisation visits to each Quarter took place for front of house staff to develop their knowledge of the areas.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS

- The Council investment of £1.9 million into 19 events where the economic impact was estimated by Millward Brown Ulster created a net estimated economic impact of £12.8 million – a £1 to £6.72 return;
- The Council estimates that the total wages contribution of annually and multi-annually funded culture and arts organisations was £12.3 million during Celebrate Belfast;
- Belfast festivals increased their turnover to £4.6 million;
- support for sport generated an estimated £7 million of tourism spend and created 25,000 bed nights in the city; and
- it is likely that a significant economic impact was also generated by all other arts, culture and sport events held during Celebrate Belfast to which a funding contribution was made (e.g. Belfast Festival at Queens) but information is not available to quantify these economic benefits.

CITY HALL CENTENARY

- City Hall was “opened up” to the public;
- record visitor numbers were achieved – almost 60,000; and
- 2006 was the first time City Hall had been used as a cultural venue - approx 40 cultural events were held during the year.

ADDITIONAL OUTCOMES OF CELEBRATE BELFAST

- Celebrate Belfast helped to “open up the City” and make it more accessible. The programme also helped to create a “buzz” and “feel good factor” in the city centre;
- new partnerships were created – locally with other Council areas, and nationally and internationally with Cork, Hefei (China), Liverpool, Scotland, Switzerland and Milwaukee;
- Celebrate Belfast helped to contribute to better relationships, communication, and team work within the Council, by both officers and Councillors;
- feedback from consultations suggest that the Council is increasingly being seen as taking the lead on culture, arts and sports in the City;
- Celebrate Belfast has led to the increased co-ordination of event marketing in the City – a Calendar of Events was created and the establishment of the Festivals Forum has led to better branding and marketing of festivals in the City;
- Celebrate Belfast has attracted positive media support, and coverage of arts, culture and sports events has increased in the press and on radio and television;
- positive feedback about the programme was received from the culture and arts sector and the wider community; and
- operationally the programme worked very well and was delivered successfully by the Celebrate Belfast team with support from the wider Council.

LEGACY

- Celebrate Belfast has helped to create new audiences for arts, culture and sports events in the City;
- the Black Box performance space was opened in Hill Street in April 2006;
- the Titanic Visitor Centre at Thompson Dock was financially supported and will be opened this year;
- successful new events held during Celebrate Belfast can be developed for the future – e.g. Maritime Festival, Belfast Literary Festival;
- partnerships that were developed locally, nationally and internationally; and

- greater skills and capacity among arts, cultural, community and sports groups and organisations.

FUTURE FOCUS

In the future the Council should:

- build on the achievements of Celebrate Belfast;
- maintain and enhance the relationships established and skills developed during the programme;
- continue to support arts, culture and sport in the city to sustain the economic, cultural and community benefits that were realised through Celebrate Belfast; and
- learn from the experiences of the programme – develop more prominent marketing, devise a sponsorship policy and create increased awareness of events taking place in the City.

1.5. Conclusions

The terms of reference required the evaluation to examine the contribution Celebrate Belfast had made to a number of key areas, such as helping to create economic activity, the cultural life of the Belfast and the affect on communities. Our conclusions on each of these areas and other aspects of the programme are outlined below.

1.5.1. Achievement of Aims, Objectives and Targets

The evaluation framework for Celebrate Belfast set out four key aims, which were supported by 11 objectives and 32 targets.

Celebrate Belfast has achieved the majority of these. All the aims were achieved to some extent, 8 of the 11 objectives were achieved, with the rest partly achieved. Of the 32 targets, 22 were achieved, 5 were partly achieved and only 5 were not achieved.

Our conclusion is that the programme has overall achieved what it set out to do.

1.5.2. Contribution to the Cultural Life of Belfast

Celebrate Belfast has contributed significantly to the cultural life of Belfast. Over 1,000 events were held which have in turn resulted in increased audiences and participation levels in cultural and sporting events. In addition several dedicated skills development programmes have helped to increase the capacity of cultural and sports organisations.

The uplift in funding provided to organisations during the 15 months has enabled the enhancement of many exiting events and the creation of new events. Additional initiatives such as

the creation on the Festivals Forum and the Belfast Carnival Consortium, the development of a calendar of events and the increased co-ordination of marketing of events in the city has also been welcomed.

Although it was clear at the outset of the programme that the funding streams provided were for the Celebrate Belfast period only, a lot of expectations and momentum has been created as a result of the funding. Feedback from the consultations noted the need to build on the achievements made during the programme and to maintain skills developed, the networks and initiatives established and the media support gained. However in the absence of increased funding going forward there is the risk that the benefits brought about by the programme may be lost.

Our conclusion is therefore that Celebrate Belfast has contributed to the cultural life of Belfast but that the Council should consider how the achievements of the year can be maintained, particularly in the absence of an uplift of funding for the cultural sector in the city going forward.

1.5.3. Creation of Economic Activity

It has been difficult to estimate the economic impact of Celebrate Belfast as information needed to determine this is not collected at present by all arts, culture and sports organisations in the city. Some information is however available and this provides an indication of the scale of the economic impact:

- it is estimated that of the £1.9 million invested by the Council into 19 events where the economic impact was estimated by Millward Brown Ulster, the net economic impact was in the region of £12.8 million. This equates to a return on investment of £6.72 for every £1 spent;
- in addition the Council estimates that the total wages contribution of annually and multi-annually funded culture and arts organisations was £12.3 million during Celebrate Belfast;
- Belfast festivals currently have a combined turnover of approx £4.6 million a year; and
- support for Sport generated an estimated £7 million of tourism spend and created 25,000 bed nights in the city during the Celebrate Belfast period.

It is also likely that significant economic impact was generated by the other arts, culture and sport events held during Celebrate Belfast to which a funding contribution was made (e.g. Belfast Festival at Queens) but information is not available to quantify these economic benefits.

Our conclusion is that Celebrate Belfast has had a significant economic impact on the City, although the extent to which it has can only partly be determined. We would recommend that going

forward the Council develops mechanisms to capture economic impact information about all events which it funds or supports.

1.5.4. Affect on Communities

Increased community activity was a key aim of the Celebrate Belfast programme and the Council aimed to achieve this by providing funding through the Cultural/Communities Fund and through grants distributed by the Good Relations Unit. Other initiatives also aimed to develop skills among community organisations (the Carnival Skills Development Programme) and young people (School of Sport and Friend Ship project) and to address social issues (Midnight Soccer).

Feedback from the consultations suggested the funding provided was welcomed and did bring several benefits to organisations at a community level. Positive comments were also received about the diverse nature of the programme, its ability to have “something for everyone” and the changed atmosphere brought about in the city centre by the programme of events.

However feedback and information gathered also suggested that lower than expected awareness levels of the programme did affect the local community’s ability to connect with the programme. Several of the consultees interviewed were only aware of and involved in their own local community event and were not aware of or did not participate in the rest of Celebrate Belfast.

Our conclusion is that Celebrate Belfast did have a direct affect on the communities where funding enabled local events to be organised, but that wider awareness and impact of the programme among communities in Belfast, especially outside of the city centre was limited.

1.5.5. Operational Aspects

Celebrate Belfast was delivered by a core team of seven Council officers with input from a wide variety of other Council departments and units. Consultation feedback indicates that this model of working operated well and could be used again in future should a similar programme be organised. In addition funded organisations interviewed were very positive about their experience of dealing with Council officers and welcomed the support they received. There were a number of operational issues highlighted by the consultation process¹ and the Council should consider these as learning points for the future.

¹ see Section 4.4.4 of the main report

Our conclusion is therefore that operationally the programme was delivered successfully by the Council.

1.6. Summary

Overall Celebrate Belfast has been very successful for the Council. The programme was well co-ordinated and managed, and a wide range of events were provided that aimed to interest and include all types of people and visitors.

The programme has achieved the majority of its aims, objectives and targets and in doing so has had a number of notable achievements. The programme has also created legacies for the city and although there are lessons to be learned, the Council has already taken steps to address some of these.

As a final point, we would emphasise the need for the Council to build on the achievements of Celebrate Belfast – to continue to support arts, culture and sport in the city, to build on the skills developed and relationship established and to maintain the momentum created during the programme.