



The Future of YOUR Local Government Association

A consultation to seek information on the requirements of the 11 new councils

“The existence of a strong local government association appears to be a significant feature in countries where local government influence is greatest. Such associations can represent local government interests and lobby central government on issues of concern to councils. In addition local government associations can also provide a range of support services to councils.”

Review of Public Administration in Northern Ireland, First Consultation Document, 2003, pg.30

Contents

- A. Introduction and context
- B. Proposals for future products and services
- C. Proposals for a revised constitution
 - C1. Proposals for a framework of involvement
 - C2. Proposals for new financial arrangements

The Future of YOUR Local Government Association

A. Introduction & Context

What is the Northern Ireland Local Government Association – NILGA?

NILGA is the representative body for Local Government in Northern Ireland. For the last 12 years, it has been actively supporting the members and officers of our 26 member councils. NILGA continues to be a strong voice for local government, representing the sector not only by bringing new investment into Councils and lobbying for them, but by determining regional analysis of what can improve the sector and sustain local government.

NILGA coordinates elected members from our constituent councils to engage on key issues which they can collectively and demonstratively influence, benefitting the councils / citizens they represent, and leveraging in additional resources to the sector.

Like local government associations in other regions and countries, NILGA's coordination provides benefits, learning, knowledge and opportunities for councils – e.g. on bodies such as the UK Local Government Association and the Committee of the Regions. In the first instance, this has brought a direct benefit in that staff and expertise are drawn on to look at issues as wide ranging as providing services of councils more efficiently, to new investment tools for councils, from workforce and elected member development to achieving for 2015 one of our most significant Enterprise Awards for all parts of our rural and urban enterprise network.

Examples of success:

- **Successful lobbying for councils to be given the General Power of Competence**
- **Successful lobbying for government departments to input more substantially into the community planning process**
- **Ensuring the £47 million package for reform, previously £0.**
- **Maintaining the Exchequer Grant worth £11+ million p.a.**
- **Winning the European Entrepreneurial Region Award for 2015.**

NILGA is an axis for elected member interaction between central and local government on key issues such as local government reform, transfer of functions, planning, waste management and European programmes. We enable local government to work regionally, to drive a local government – local people - policy agenda, and to respond effectively to central government many, many, policies and strategies, presenting a strong case and supported by councils themselves.

It's a recipe that works. In recent years NILGA's credibility in government and in terms of external relations makes it – and our constituent councils – a force to be reckoned with, supporting the realisation of local government in NI which is ready for change and equipped for the future.

Regionally and nationally, (across all of NI, cross border and UK) NILGA coordinates and enhances elected member development, encouraging members to grow their competences and confidence as effective corporate and constituency councillors, through peer support and provision of high quality training.

So - what next?

Local government is changing fundamentally. The first major reform in over 40 years is changing the number, shape, size and functions of councils in Northern Ireland. This is an extremely volatile period for councils and for elected members. Changed councils means a changed NILGA, whose expertise and services must come together to be the contemporary, efficient, effective organisation that you require.

The Association and many of its constructive partners such as Chief Executives, elected members, senior staff of councils, regional business and community organisations are keen to embrace a radical change to the constitution, to the membership criteria and to the products and services we provide. Looking beyond April 2015, and towards the next Local Government elections, it will be a time of great opportunity, challenge and innovation. Fundamentally we serve local people who participate in good local government.

For all of the above, that's why we're asking you, as the 11 new councils, what you believe your local government association should be, what you believe it should do, what you think it should provide, and how you think it should be constituted.

Beyond structures and institutions – why do it? Here are some wider questions to ask first.

1. Is it beneficial for the 11 councils to work together, within a regionally co-ordinated elected member body, to analyse and develop a consensus approach to issues that affect the local government, and to present a dynamic case to government on these issues?
2. Is it beneficial to come together as members and officers in a strong network, for events, information, new investment, and to promote the qualities and development of local government, as 11 councils and in the company of relevant bodies outside of Northern Ireland – such as the four Associations which exist in Wales, Scotland, Republic of Ireland and England?
3. Should we work together in a regional, member led forum, to share policy and investment discussion, to learn from each other to improve services provided, and to build a framework for elected member development that provides councils and communities with a corps of capable, competent, knowledgeable councillors who are effective in representing their interests?
4. Should councils work together to ensure the workforce is treated equitably, both regionally and nationally, and learn from best practice and what to avoid, beyond NI?
5. Is it beneficial for all 462 elected members to have access to other parts of the 'local government family' across these islands and further afield? Would it be helpful to share learning and understanding, and to work together to address issues that affect local government on a larger scale?
6. Should you maximise the benefits available to your council from national and European policy and funding – including negotiating on new funding as a NI region of Councils, to get more from Europe that is available directly to governments, without the need to work with government departments and managing authorities (such as SEUPB)?

If your answer to some or all of these questions is yes, then it's likely that you'll want to be a member of & owner of the future local government association in NI.

The 11 new councils, once operational, will be larger in size and capacity than the 26, and so although the fundamental need for a local government association may not change, the emphasis of what is provided, how services are provided, by whom, and in what format, is likely to change to a large degree.

We acknowledge that what the new councils may require in the early days of operation of the new council may change radically over time, and that it will be necessary for the future local government association to remain responsive to these changing needs and to plan ahead. NILGA has prepared diligently since 2011 on this matter, and its operational design is fit for 2015 and beyond.

The Northern Ireland Local Government Association is therefore asking you as a Council, to consider the following questions and ideas, and to respond to Karen Smyth k.smyth@nilga.org at the NILGA offices by 31st December.

NILGA's Chief Executive is working through presentations and thorough consultation with each of the shadow councils to discuss your requirements for a future local government association. The CEO is responding to any queries or requests, through this process, at individual member level through to corporate level. Please ask him if you need anything more.

B. Proposals for Future Products and Services

What's on offer?

A Strategic Approach

NILGA currently offers a number of products and services to the 26 councils. These stem from the three key corporate themes of the Association agreed by Councils:

- Building and Sustaining a Strong Local Government Sector in Northern Ireland
- Supporting the Delivery of Strong and effective Local Government
- Bringing investment and innovation into Councils, so they can deliver high quality services at an affordable cost.

Q1. Do you believe that these three strategic themes are the correct focus for the future local government association? Please outline any additions or amendments you feel may be necessary.

It is important that councils determine the *right* regional structures, products and services. As part of the development of a plan for a new local government association, NILGA will analyse the responses to this consultation exercise and as a result of views received, will present a cohesive suite of service provision to offer to the 11 councils, in time for April 2015.

The proposals below give options for what could be provided by the future local government association, but these must be affirmed as necessary and valuable to the sector, by the future members – the 11 councils currently operating in shadow mode.

Representation, Lobbying and Access

Credibility and success is currently strong. NILGA asserts that it is vitally important to maintain a strong voice for local government as a sector. Even though councils are increasing in size and capacity, and decreasing in number, it will be necessary to ensure that local government speaks with one voice on the critical issues that affect councils. The future local government association can ensure that councils and 462 members are supported to provide the sector with that voice.

- Providing and supporting the representation - derived from councils – regionally, nationally and in Europe, on strategic policy areas including negotiations on Structural Funds.
- Communicating strongly on key policy issues as an arm of government, while retaining the sector's independence
- Lobbying for councils to have greater power and influence
- Lobbying Assembly committees and government departments
- Working closely with councils to develop sector wide views on key issues
- Engaging actively with government and other partners to ensure the local government voice and experience are part of the policy design, planning and service delivery of functions which councils are required to perform, and for greater local decision-making power.

Q2. Do you believe that a regional approach is needed by local government through an LGA in relation to representation and lobbying?

Policy Support

- Presenting evidence to Ministers, government departments and Assembly committees, putting forward a case for the sector on critical policy issues
- Presenting policy development arrangements to deliver increased focus on councils' agreed priorities, such as more local input into and delivery of the next Programme for Government.
- Engaging actively across the sector to ensure a holistic approach to policy development
- Working closely with councils to support them to develop sector wide approaches to key issues such as local government reform, planning, waste management, regeneration, the economy and urban and rural development
- Supporting councils by facilitating and assisting in the development of consensus policy views and responses, strengthening the capacity of the sector to engage in government policy development processes.
- Maintain a system of policy working groups and local government spokespeople on key issues. Since 2011, NILGA has focussed attention on five main policy working groups:
 1. Reform and Modernisation
 2. Planning
 3. Waste, Health and Environment
 4. EU Policy and Practice
 5. Agriculture and Rural Economic Development.
- Hosting and facilitating policy events to provide time and space for local government to develop views, and to enhance its competence and capacity on key issues.

The future holds a host of issues for local government in Northern Ireland that will require councils to work closely together: **further devolution proposals**, proposals to pass **new functions** to councils, a LG Reform Financial Impact Review, a new Programme for Government, a first ever Programme for Local Government, continued austerity, new European structural and non-structural funds programmes, new financial mechanisms, additional pressures on the rates and whatever a renewed and reviewed Assembly may bring.

Q3: Do you believe that the future local government association should deliver timely and relevant policy information, support and guidance for a strong local government sector in Northern Ireland?

Q.4. Should a system of key issue, council led, senior officer supported, working groups be maintained (subject to the priorities of the councils) by the Association?

Elected member development and peer mentoring

NILGA asserts that it is vital to be proactive about elected member development as part of local government exhibiting strong, competent, confident corporate and civic leaders.

NILGA seeks to ensure that elected members are facilitated to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and resources to undertake the roles and responsibilities required of them. These roles and responsibilities have changed through local government reform, and will continue to change, as local government in Northern Ireland continues to develop into its full potential. At present, NILGA provides an Elected Member Development Charter, to which most councils have signed up.

It is extremely important that at a regional level a programme addressing the needs of members is developed with members for members, with resources gained from non-council bodies (such as Sector Skills Councils). This puts members in NI on a level par with members in neighbouring jurisdictions like Wales. Proposals include further development of the Councillor's Guide, the continuation and enhancement of an elected members political skills framework, a Charter to develop the individual needs of a member, linked to his or her constituent, party (if applicable) and corporate requirements, specialised and ongoing training for members, particularly on new powers and functions, including peer mentoring from councillors in other regions and a telephone / tablet "app" to ensure that you record, access and develop your training needs over time – not just as a workshop at a single point in time.

Q5: Do you view Elected Member Development as important to the development of local government as a sector; and do you believe that this work at regional level should be led in partnership – including securing funds to do such training - by the local government association?

Investing in local government - enhancing the sector and sharing good practice

NILGA has earned a reputation for delivering key policy, investment, information and support at regional and sub regional levels on a diverse range of matters.

As the post April 2015 environment becomes clearer for councils and their communities, a local government association should evolve to ensure that it meets the needs of councils and continues to build and sustain the sector.

Led by councils, supported by parties and with a national peer network throughout these islands, NILGA has been successful in driving regional investment gains for councils, including the 2015 Enterprise Award, £47 million in additional funding to cover the costs of local government reform and over £50 million (year on year) protection of the resources element of the General Grant.

Councils and their support bodies can become more agile - to anticipate and be informed about rapidly changing financial, political and socio-economic conditions, to maximise opportunities for their citizens. Initial steps were taken by councils through the Improvement, Collaboration and Efficiency Programme, which had some success, but a number of limitations which were highlighted by Martin Horton in his review of the programme.¹

Councils can indeed work together better, with robust regional governance arrangements for shared services, ensuring local government remains efficient and effective. The principles of co-design and co-delivery of services are growing in importance. The 11 councils will be the primary implementers of local government services, and it is proposed that the future local government association facilitates the development and implementation of the partnership and improvement work of the sector by supporting the necessary robust regional political governance to take forward work best done in partnership, including for new shared service requirements. This is co-ordination and utilisation of expertise, together with the communication which has to follow. NILGA and its successor seeks to bring this together – with the strategic influence, input and service delivery done by the Councils.

New improvement and sustainability work can be undertaken, is facilitated by the local government association, driven by council officers and members alike, but not weighed down by heavy administration. Rather, using existing architecture, adapted, this can be a task and finish, dynamic initiative, drawing on expertise from inside and outside of NI, on demand. **The demand is led by the Councils**, for example:

- Investment initiatives
- Regional procurement and buying power
- Accountable, local sourcing of contracts for local small businesses
- Good practice guidance and advice
- Access to peer review
- Benchmarking and policy support
- Relevant capacity building and training

It is envisaged that a partnership with *direct involvement of members and local government Chief Officers* (with specialist delegation) would be a flexible, lean body, with menu-driven advice and services, with membership derived from local government and bringing regional practical and political excellence to the 11 councils, enabling them to prosper, collaborate, compete, - much more so than in isolation, or with a “member only, officer only” approach. We realise that there is a huge clear distinction and distribution of role and it is establishing a

¹ <http://www.nilga.org/getattachment/c90d08be-3475-4710-bd5f-f8e3a8a72350/Improvement,-Collaboration-and-Efficiency-%28I-C-E-%29.aspx>

new relationship, fit for 2020 – that can bear fruit for all in the sector. The partnership will enable the protection of local identity, whilst raising standards, and ensure that councils have every opportunity to develop and sustain the very best services and ideas within the heart of every community.

Q6: Do you view investment and improvement as important to the development of local government as a sector and do you believe that this work should be further consulted upon in partnership by the local government association?

Workforce, Employment and People Development

Local government in Northern Ireland has some 10,000 staff. NILGA has provided nominations and support for:

- **NIJC** - the Northern Ireland Joint Council for Local Government Services.
- **JNC** - the Joint Negotiating Committee for Chief Executives of Local Authorities in Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland Joint Council for Local Government Services (NIJC) has been the representative body concerned with employment conditions for most of the 10,000 council employees in Northern Ireland and is made up of an Employers' Side and a Trade Union Side. The Employers' Side is nominated by NILGA; seven are elected councillors and seven are chief executives of district councils. The Trade Unions' Side has 17 members from relevant unions.

NIJC is part of a network of 10 regional bodies across local government in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, which work with the National Joint Council for Local Government Services (NJC). Together they recommend the terms and conditions of service for over 1.4 million local authority employees.

The functions of the NIJC include:

- Applying decisions prescribed by the NJC and making recommendations to the NJC, as it deems appropriate.
- Consideration of any matters referred to it by the NJC.
- Consideration of any matters relating to Councils and their employees in Northern Ireland.

An example of success is the recent engagement with colleagues and extensive lobbying at EU level that successfully halted proposals for the unnecessary extension of financial services liquidity rules to defined benefit pension schemes which would have cost up to €960m to pension funds in the UK alone.

The Joint Negotiating Committee for Chief Executives of Local Authorities in Northern Ireland consists of representatives of the district councils in Northern Ireland as employers and representatives of Chief Executives of those local authorities.

The JNC has an independent Chair. The Employers' Side consists of five elected councillors nominated by NILGA. The Association of Local Authority Chief Executives (ALACE) nominates the Staff Side, representing Chief Executives.

It considers the salaries and conditions of service of chief executives of local authorities in Northern Ireland and makes recommendations to local authorities on these matters. In doing so, the Committee must have regard to any decisions or recommendation of the *national* negotiating body, the Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) for Chief Executives.

NILGA has played a valuable part in supporting, facilitating the membership of the NIJC and JNC (NI) which are currently under review. It is proposed that the future local government association as the statutory instrument continues to provide the regional governance, oversight and coordination of future regional negotiating arrangements aligned to the wider people and organisational development (POD) proposals. It is also proposed that Northern Ireland maintains contact with national and European structures in relation to workforce and employment matters, to ensure we have access to contemporary thinking, benchmarking, consistency of approach and good practice advice.

Q7: Do you view workforce, employment and people development as important to the development of local government as a sector; and do you believe that an elected member co-ordination role and related support should be part of the work of the local government association?

Providing Effective and Innovative Communication and Engagement

- **EU and International**

NILGA provides regional European programme support services to Members sitting on committees of EU Structural Funds funded programmes and who have been appointed seats on EU Programme and institutional bodies.

NILGA's European service supports capacity building for all Local Government Members on the Monitoring Committees, Working Groups and Steering Committees of EU funded programmes to ensure that the local government sector is fully engaged and actively participating in the process.

In addition, NILGA provides guidance and assistance to the two Committee of the Regions representatives from Northern Ireland as well as to our representative on the Council of Municipalities and Regions.

NILGA European priorities have included:

- Delivery of regional initiatives including winning the 2015 European Entrepreneurial Region Award achieved by NILGA, for NI;
- the co-ordination of information on investment priorities for all Councils which ensured that council priorities were at the fore when Structural Funds were being decided upon;
- Contribution to the UK Partnership Agreement (Northern Ireland Chapter);
- Developing "Council Direct" funding models in Europe to avoid managing authority audits, that is, working with partner countries to open new doors for Councils (for example on the Small Business Act 2014);
- Policy lobbying on subsidiarity – that is – getting more decisions, investment and powers devolved to local government, and supporting campaigns such as Cities and Regions.

These high level policy matters have very directly taken on board strategic and operational work carried out successfully by existing Councils. WLGA (Welsh Local Government Association) is offering a direct service, in Brussels, tailored to NI Councils through NILGA, including policy and regulation and funding advice, CAP reform alerts, rural and urban economic development opportunities, and more. This is COUNCIL led – not a national or departmental team, and will be available from April 2015.

Q8: Do you view engagement in European structures and programmes as important to the development of local government as a sector; and do you believe that this should be part of the work of the local government association, fully complementing the work done by specific councils?

- **UK and Ireland**

NILGA works closely with other Local Government Associations, particularly those in Scotland, Wales, England and the Republic of Ireland on issues which face local government across the board. Working collaboratively, we have concentrated on developing Programmes for Local Government, exploring the potential of additional devolution, the optimisation of spend and the minimisation of bureaucracy, how local democracy can be strengthened.

- **Regional**

NILGA has established a good reputation as a responsive and robust point of contact for local government in Northern Ireland, and is in frequent contact with government departments, Assembly Committees and other regional organisations, supporting local government to communicate and engage effectively in regional policy conversations.

The Local Government (NI) Act 2014 has legislated for a Political Partnership Panel, which will be a central-local forum of Assembly Ministers and elected members designed to enable discussion of issues that will affect local government. NILGA has already met with the representatives from the 11 councils who have been nominated to attend the Panel.

These members – appointed from the new councils – together with the NI Executive are keen to ensure that NILGA provides a joint secretariat to support them to work better as a team, and to ensure that the Panel becomes a negotiation body rather than an advisory group. Support from the regional local government association would provide commonality with other regions e.g. WLGA provide support in Wales and COSLA provide support in Scotland.

Q9: Do you view participation of the 11 councils in the Political Partnership Panel as important to the development of local government as a sector; and do you believe that this should be part of the work of the local government association?

- **Sector Wide**

NILGA has been successful in developing the ability and capacity of local government to work in a unified manner on key issues, assisting councils to have focussed discussions and supporting the development of consensus policy positions. This has been invaluable during the Review of Public Administration and Local Government Reform Programme. Councils

have been supported to work together more effectively and share good practice, e.g. in relation to sustainable development, shared services, planning and waste management.

As the role of local government increases in importance, the ability for the 11 councils to work as a team, when appropriate, will be vital. There are a series of challenges facing the sector and effective regional sector-wide facilitation, communication and engagement will be necessary to explore local government positions on issue such as the use of the general power of competence, potential further transfer of functions, and use of the New Burdens Doctrine in Northern Ireland

Q10: Do you value the ability to have sector wide discussions and the establishment of - where possible - consensus positions on key issues; and do you believe that this should form part of the work of the local government association?

Conferences, Awards and Promotional Events

Since 2002, NILGA has successfully developed a series of annual awards and events to promote local government activities. Every year, NILGA has hosted a large conference to share good practice and to develop local government thinking on key issues. We also work with a number of partner organisations including SOLACE and the Local Government Staff Commission to deliver a high profile Local Government Awards ceremony, celebrating the best work of councils in Northern Ireland. Costs are kept to a minimum due to the sponsorship these events have been able to attract over the years, from high profile businesses such as Asda and BT.

Other high profile projects, such as the annual Ulster in Bloom awards are organised by NILGA in partnership with a number of sponsors and partners, and attract a huge amount of publicity for local cities, towns, villages and businesses, assisting in the regional tourism offer.

Q11: Do you value regional local government-run conferences, awards and events to inform, promote and celebrate the work of the sector; and do you believe that this should form part of the work of the local government association?

Strategic Migration Partnership

The Northern Ireland Strategic Migration Partnership (NISMP) works to ensure that Northern Ireland is knowledgeable about and in a position to plan services around, factual data regarding new, legal, economic migrants. It has developed a Community Planning Tool and other materials for councils, to assist in community engagement.

NISMP seeks to support the provision of factual information and objective analysis regarding planned economic migration to help meet skills and labour needs to support future economic growth.

It provides a regional advisory, developmental and consultative function, enabling our partners and stakeholders to develop an appropriate Northern Ireland migration policy structure. This will help ensure that council's needs and concerns in respect of immigration are recognised within the constraints of UK wide strategy.

At no cost to councils, NILGA provides a secretariat and development role for the Partnership reflecting the importance of local government input into NISMP processes and outcomes.

In 2015 NISMP aims to achieve the following:

- 1) Supporting councils with their legal obligations
- 2) Creation of a Northern Ireland local government data centre with Queen's University Belfast (see below)
- 3) Development of a regional immigration strategy for NI
- 4) Racial Equality Strategy development support
- 5) Supporting local government in specialist elements of the developing community plans which are reflective of the unique demographics of each area
- 6) Monitoring impact in council areas of the implementation of the UK Immigration Act (2014)

- **Funding opportunities for the period from April 2015**

NISMP is currently working with the European Asylum Migration and Integration Fund (Home Office) to secure additional financial assistance which will enable targeted work with councils on migration and minority ethnic issues relating to community planning and community cohesion

NISMP is working with OFMdFM to secure additional financial support to extend the migration Community Planning Tool regionally.

NISMP is in negotiations with the Home Office and OFMdFM on how to support population change across council areas (e.g. input into Draft Racial Equality Strategy and uptake of Social Investment Fund).

Q12: Do you support regional local government planning and data provision on migration, and do you believe that support of the NISMP should form part of the work of the local government association, provided at no cost to councils?

C. Proposals for a revised constitution

A number of changes to the NILGA constitution are proposed, to ensure a fit for purpose local government association can be developed in advance of April 2015. These proposals fall into two main groups: suggested changes to improve elected member involvement in the local government association, and a number of proposed changes to current financial arrangements. ***The existing '26 council NILGA' structures are summarised at Appendix 1.***

C.1. Proposals for a framework of involvement – the constitution

Proposed Framework

To change the existing framework, a revision to the NILGA constitution will be required. The following changes are proposed, to strengthen the relationship between councils, members

and the future local government association. ***A flow chart of the procedures required to re-establish NILGA is attached at Appendix 2.***

Full Membership

Membership of the Association would be open to all District, Borough and City Councils in Northern Ireland. It is proposed that the Full Members Group would be formed from members nominated by the Councils to the Association, **with eight full members sought from each Council with the exception of Belfast, from which ten members shall be sought (total 90).**

Executive Committee

The Executive Committee would be composed of the office-bearers of the association, plus 23 ordinary members, derived from Full member nominations from member councils.

The Association would, in conjunction with the regional d'Hondt process and political parties, ensure that **two members from each council (three from Belfast)** are represented on the Executive.

Additionally:

Two mentor Chief Executives drawn from the 11 council Chief Executives, would attend as advisors.

Representatives of the Political Partnership Panel (PPP), as determined under the Local Government (Northern Ireland) 2014 Act, who are not already members of the Association's Executive, would be invited to attend Executive meetings to ensure strategic communication, at times determined by Councils and the Executive.

It would be the function of the Executive Committee:

- (i) to agree following debate and reports, the operations and key work plan of the Association;
- (ii) to recommend strategic, policy, investment and other relevant matters to the Full Members Group, and receive and act upon initiatives and proposals derived from this Group, and from member councils;
- (iii) to consider, and advise the Association on, any matter which the Secretary of the Association presents to the Committee;
- (iv) to agree appointments to outside bodies with reference to direction of the nominating officers
- (v) To make recommendations to the Association on any proposal to change the Association's constitution.

Working Groups

The method of formation of these groups would remain unchanged; however a discussion will be needed as to the issues to be covered by these groups, further to the changes and additions to the functions of council; and the aspirations of the 11 councils.

The working groups should formally report back to councils and the association on a monthly or quarterly basis as appropriate, and all substantive decisions should be brought forward as recommendations to councils and the Association.

Outside Bodies

All councillors would be entitled to be invited to participate in and be nominated for regional bodies, as co-ordinated by the Association.

General Benefits for All Councillors

All councillors would be entitled to be beneficiaries of the Association, receiving relevant information on the work of the Association, as well as to offer views at all times & attend an annual review / conference of the Association.

Advice

The local government association should be free to seek or receive advice from organisations, individuals, officer groups within and external to the local government sector, and should assist in supporting such groups as agreed to be appropriate and necessary. The association will need to work particularly closely with the Chief Executives and professional officer groups within local government.

Q13: What are your general and / or specific views on the proposals for a framework of involvement?

C.2. Proposals for new financial arrangements

Subscriptions

It is proposed that subscriptions to the local government association change from the current system, where each council pays highly varying subscriptions directly related to the estimated penny product. The proposal is to move to a 'banded' system as used in neighbouring jurisdictions using the most recent population figure for each council, with subscription amounts specified in February each year. It is intended that this 'banded' system will enable greater equitability between the member councils.

The investment sought from your council for 2015-16 is £85,950 which represents a reduction of 29.8% from 2014/15. This is linked to the proposed population bands which are as follows:-
Band A population greater than 300,000
Band B population greater than 145,000
Band C population greater than 110,000

Each council would be entitled to participate in an Audit and Risk Management Working Group which would meet at least twice yearly from June 2015.

Q 14: Are you generally supportive of proposals to move to a banded system for subscriptions and have you specific comments on estimated costs?

Dissolution

Should relevant circumstances arise, the Association seeks to ‘wind up’ fully, fairly, swiftly and in a compliant manner. It is proposed that councils take full ownership of the Association and this – again – would be in direct parallel with other LGAs. It’s proposed that the following dissolution clause is included in the revised NILGA constitution.

If at any meeting of the full membership a motion for the dissolution of the Association shall be passed by at least two thirds of members from the member councils, where at least seven of such member councils are represented at the meeting, the NILGA Executive, Chief Officer upon request and up to four appointed senior officers from member councils shall realise the assets and pay the liabilities of the Association through a dissolution group. The group shall make arrangements whereby the member councils both existing and past shall distribute / discharge the Association’s net assets / liabilities fairly and equitably.

All member councils shall be entitled to a share in the Association’s assets and liabilities on a proportionate basis, to be determined in a schedule drawn up, **owned & agreed by the member councils** and administered by the group, defining the outcomes associated with any investment coming to the Association and / or its potential cessation.

Any sums which are or may in the future become due and payable to officers and/or employees of the Association including salary, wages, pensions, redundancy, as per terms and conditions of their fellow local government employees and the relevant Policies of the Association existing at the date of the passing of the motion for dissolution, shall be paid from the Association’s assets, with any outstanding balance administered by the group, met by the member councils and in accordance with the Constitution.

The terms of this clause which exist as at 1st April 2015 shall apply proportionately, fairly and equitably to all member councils who form the Association after 1st April 2015.

Q 15: Do you support the development of the proposed dissolution clause as per other LGAs?

Councils are respectfully asked to consider any or all of the above questions and formulate a response by 31st December 2014. After this date, a report to all Councils will follow and proposals will be sought for agreement.

Appendix 1: Existing Framework

Full Membership

Currently, the Northern Ireland Local Government Association is comprised of 156 members nominated by the 26 district councils according to council size, and using a proportional system for nomination – either the d'Hondt system or another proportional system of the council's choice. These members meet every two months, at 'Full' meetings, which are used to discuss key policy issues. Usual attendance is between 50-80 members, depending on location and discussion topic.

Executive Membership

An Executive Committee is drawn from the Full membership, using the d'Hondt system. We endeavour to ensure that all councils are represented at the Executive, and have appointed a number of additional members to ensure this is the case. The Executive meets monthly and is the steering group for NILGA. Since members are appointed to the Executive by their party, there has been an ongoing issue of whether members represent council or party. A clearer link between council and the Executive Committee of the future local government association would be advantageous.

Working Groups

A number of policy working groups are drawn from the full membership of the association, with Chairs and Vice Chairs appointed using the d'Hondt system. Those parties eligible through the constitution to appoint an office bearer are also entitled to participate in the appointment of Chairs and Vice Chairs, and to fill the remaining committee positions. Parties are also requested to appoint substitute members to ensure continuity of attendance at meetings.

The Chairpersons of these groups have also been operating as de facto local government spokespersons on relevant issues, and this has worked well in ensuring the sector is appropriately represented in the media.

Representation on Outside Bodies

NILGA is a point of contact for a large number of organisations which seek representation from local government. There are currently over 100 members representing the sector in bodies as diverse as the EU Committee of the Regions and the Board of the Ulster Orchestra.

These appointments are made using the d'Hondt system and nominees are currently drawn from the NILGA Full membership. This has worked relatively well, but does not access the knowledge and experience of all council members, and it may be that experts in a field are excluded from representing local government due to the fact that they are not currently a NILGA member.

Appendix 2: Reconstituting NILGA

An “at a glance” guide

Further to the 2014 Local Government Elections, and at an appropriate time, the 11 councils will be requested to make nominations to the local government association, using d’Hondt or another proportionate method. Ten members are to be appointed by Belfast council, with eight members from each of the other councils. *This should be done as a separate exercise* to other council appointments, and it should be noted that these positions are not ‘Positions of Responsibility’ as NILGA is not a public body.



After these nominations are made, each party with five or more representatives on the membership is eligible to appoint an ‘Office Bearer’. Office Bearers are appointed by the party Nominating Officer.



Each party Nominating Officer is then requested to attend a ‘nomination day’ meeting with the NILGA Chief Executive to nominate members to the NILGA Executive and make other appointments. Nominations to the Executive Committee are made from the 90 council-appointed members.

NB - Some party Nominating Officers delegate this responsibility to the NILGA Office Bearer for their party.



The 23 Executive positions are to be taken by three members from Belfast and two from each of the other councils. These appointments are made through the parties. ***It is imperative that each Council is represented on the Executive, and this will be a default position.*** Members who are particularly interested in becoming a member of the NILGA Executive Committee should make this known to their party Nominating Officers in advance of the nomination day, the date of which will be made known to councils.

NB: Representatives from councils who have been nominated to the Political Partnership Panel will also be invited to attend NILGA Executive meetings.



Party Nominating Officers will also be requested to nominate Chairs and Vice Chairs of Working groups, members of European Steering and Monitoring Committees and members of Outside Bodies. It is possible that in the early days of the new organisation, there will be an incomplete picture in relation to required working groups. In this event, a d’Hondt list of places for Chairs and Vice Chairs will be created, to be reviewed at the next AGM.

All members of councils will be eligible to be appointed to outside bodies on behalf of NILGA.