



## Strategic Policy and Resources Committee (SHADOW)

<b>Report to:</b>	Shadow Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Reconstitution of Northern Ireland Local Government Association</b>
<b>Date:</b>	19 December 2014
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Suzanne Wylie, Chief Executive Designate
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<b>1</b>	<b>Relevant Background Information</b>
1.1	In-line with the local government reform process and the creation of 11 new councils, the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) are seeking to reconstitute itself from 1 April 2015, and has issued a consultation document on this basis (copy attached at Appendix 1). Responses are sought by 31 December 14. Members will appreciate that this is a significant consultation document as it seeks to redefine the future role of a local government association within NI and its relationship with constituent councils.
1.2	The Chief Executive of NILGA, Derek McCallan recently gave a presentation to the Transformation Committee setting out proposals on the future of the Association.
<b>2</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>
2.1	<p>The consultation document outlines proposals in relation to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The strategic themes which will underpin the future activities of NILGA;</li> <li>b. Proposals in relation to the types of products and services to be provided by NILGA to member councils;</li> <li>c. Proposals in relation to a revised constitution for NILGA which will come in affect from April 15;</li> <li>d. Proposals for new financial arrangements (including subscription fees)</li> </ol> <p>The detailed proposals covering each of the aforementioned are set out below for Members consideration. A number of specific questions are posed by NILGA as part of the consultation.</p>
	<p><b>(a) Strategic Themes</b></p> <p>NILGA are proposing to retain the following three corporate themes, previously agreed by 26 Councils:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building and Sustaining a Strong Local Government Sector in Northern Ireland</li> <li>• Supporting the Delivery of Strong and effective Local Government</li> <li>• Bringing investment and innovation into Councils, so they can deliver high quality services at an affordable cost.</li> </ul>

## (b) Future Products and Services

Set out below is a summary of the products and services which NILGA propose to provide to member councils.

- **Policy Support** – provide relevant policy information, support and guidance to councils; formulating local government responses on key policy issues and engages with central government (i.e. Ministers, government departments and the NI Assembly). Establishment of member led working groups on specific policy issues (i.e. Reform and Modernisation; Planning; Waste, Health and Environment; EU Policy and Practice; Agriculture and Rural Development).
- **Elected Member development and peer mentoring** – supporting the development and implementation of a regional capacity building programme for elected Members which will take account of their continually evolving role. Peer mentoring will be a key element of this support.
- **Investing in Local Government – enhancing the sector and sharing good practice** – provision of advice and support in relation to investment and improvement including the establishment of some form of partnership arrangement with involvement of members and local government Chief Officers.
- **Workforce, Employment and People Development** – NILGA to continue to provide the regional governance, oversight and coordination of future regional negotiating arrangements e.g. the Northern Ireland Joint Council for Local Government Services (NIJC) and the Joint Negotiating Committee for Chief Executives (JNC) or any replacements which may be brought forward.
- **Providing Effective and Innovative Communications and Engagement** – Provision of regional European programme support and services to elected Members sitting on committees of EU Structural Funds programmes and who have been appointed seats on EU Programme and institutional bodies.  
  
Provision of secretariat support to the recently establishment Regional Political Partnership which is a central-local government forum comprising of Assembly Ministers and local government elected Members. Enable discussions to take place on key issues that may affect local government.
- **Conferences, Awards and Promotional Events** – facilitating the organisation of regional conferences and award events for local government.
- **Strategic Migration Partnership** – Provision of secretariat and development support to the Northern Ireland Strategic Migration Partnership which supports local government planning and data sharing on migration.

## (c) Proposals for a revised Constitution

The following changes are being proposed to the NILGA Constitution

- **Full Membership** (90- elected Members proposed) – membership will be open to all councils who will nominate members on the Association. Eight members will be sought from each Council with the exception of Belfast whereby ten members will be sought. It should be noted that Belfast CC currently has 17 Members on NILGA.
- **Executive Committee** (23 Members proposed) – will comprise of NILGA Office Bearers plus 23 elected Members derived from the full member nominations from member councils. The Executive Committee will comprise of two members from each council and three from Belfast (NB. Belfast currently has three members on NILGA Executive.). It should be noted that these positions will be appointed by Party Nominations Officers and not councils.
- Local government representatives on the Partnership Panel will also be invited to attend Executive meetings. It is proposed that two Chief Executives drawn from the 11 councils

	<p>would attend as advisors (NB – this is similar to current practice).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Working Groups</b> – method for formation of working groups is not proposed to change; however, it is proposed that working groups should formally report back to councils on a monthly or quarterly basis as appropriate and that all substantive decisions should be brought forward as recommendations for council's consideration.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>(C.2) Proposals for new financial arrangements</b></p> <p>NILGA propose to introduce a new financial model (i.e. banded system) for how council subscription fees are to be calculated linked to population size as set out below:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Band A population greater than 300,000 (£85,950)</li> <li>• Band B population greater than 145,000 (£47,950)</li> <li>• Band C population greater than 110,000 (£42,750)</li> </ul> <p>On this basis, NILGA are proposing that the Council's future subscription would be £85,950. Whilst the paper suggests that this would represent a £29.8% reduction from the 2014/15 subscription (i.e. £104,191 originally requested by NILGA), it should be noted that the Council only agreed to pay £82,990 for the 2014/15 period based on population size.</p> <p>Based on the current NILGA proposals which are linked to the populations of the new 11 councils, <b><u>Belfast would be the only council in Band A;</u></b> with five Councils in Band B (Armagh, Banbridge &amp; Craigavon; Lisburn and Castlereagh; Newry, Mourne Down; North Down &amp; Ards, and Derry &amp; Strabane), with the remaining five councils in Band C (i.e. Causeway Coast &amp; Glens; Mid-Ulster; Antrim &amp; Newtownabbey; Mid and East Ulster; and Fermanagh and Omagh).</p>
	<p><b>Dissolution Policy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NILGA are proposing to introduce a new dissolution clause within its constitution which in summary would mean that a process is followed to make arrangements whereby the member councils shall distribute/discharge the Association's new assets/liabilities in the event of its cessation.</li> </ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Belfast City Council Response</b>
3.1	<p>Whilst the Council has continuously advocated the need for a strong Local Government Association (LGA) which is focused on its core business of advocating on behalf of local government on regionally significant policy issues and facilitating engagement between central and local government, it is clear that the Council does not currently require or avail of the support provided by NILGA to the same extent as the other councils.</p>
3.2	<p>Members will be aware that Council has successfully developed its own internal expertise, capacity and support mechanisms and has a strong in-house policy and communication capacity. It has successfully implemented Members' support and development programmes, developed and coalesced around corporate positions on emerging policy issues and has gained direct access to Ministers and Central Government officials as required.</p>
3.3	<p>In considering a response to NILGA's consultation, Members may wish to include specific comments in relation to the following:</p> <p><b><u>General Comments</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognise the need to reconfigure the Northern Ireland Local Government Association within the context of the new 11 Council model and accept, in principle, that there may be a need for regional support and coordination around many of the areas set out by NILGA. This may be even more important during the early stages of the operation and bedding in of the new councils.</li> </ul>

- It is important however that the scope of support proposed (i.e. future products and services) is not so broad that it is at risk of potentially diluting the overall impact of the Association. Commend that the added value and core focus of a reconfigured Local Government Association would be 'developing consensus positions and advocating on behalf of local government, and facilitating engagement with the NI Executive and central government departments on regionally significant policy issues and related local government matters.
- Over recent years, Belfast City Council has established a good working relationship with NILGA, at both an Elected Member and Officer level, and would seek to reinforce and build upon this in moving forward; continuing to provide assistance and support where possible and within resource limits.

### **Investing in Local Government**

- Securing investment and stimulating the economic, social and physical regeneration of cities, towns and neighbourhoods will be a core focus of each of the 11 larger councils in moving forward; further reinforced by the new transferring powers of spatial planning, regeneration and community planning.
- Whilst recognising the potential role of a local government association in providing regional support and more so awareness around potential investment opportunities which may exist, it is the council(s) who must be the foci for taking forward local government investment and improvement.
- Members will be aware that the Council has already proven track record in securing substantive investment into the city and has co-designed, funded and delivered, in partnership with central government and the NI Executive, significant physical projects including e.g. £100m Titanic Signature Project.
- The Council has also successfully drawn down significant European funding for key capital schemes including the extension to the £30m Belfast Waterfront Hall and £11.7m stated of the art shared community hub at Girdwood. In fact the Council is delivering in excess of £360m as part of its Investment Programme for the city and has already secured in the region of £80m external funding to support the delivery of key physical and infrastructure project within Belfast.

### ***Elected member development and peer mentoring***

- The Elected Member Development Charter is provided by South East Employers (SEE) and is currently delivered via NILGA. Belfast City Council was the first council in Northern Ireland to achieve this accreditation and will be the first council in Northern Ireland to seek re-accreditation- by March 2015. In planning for the re-accreditation process in March 2015 BCC has been liaising directly with SEE. However, the Council would highlight that it may be beneficial if an organisation in Northern Ireland had the capacity to provide the Elected Member Development Charter at a regional level and be the awarding body for the associated NI Charter accreditation process in the future.
- The Council also recognise that the delivery of regional Member capacity developmental activities and programmes is a useful mechanism for networking and sharing of ideas and knowledge. They can also provide value for money and seek to ensure economies of scale. It is, however, essential that the facilitators/training deliverers have the necessary knowledge, expertise and experience of the subject matter being discussed. A blended training approach is desirable e.g. use of peer mentoring; action learning; development programmes etc in addition to the normal presentations or seminars.
- There is no doubt that Councils in Northern Ireland would benefit from the ability to access elected member development and support activities. As highlighted previously however the activities **must be able to add value to councils and members at an individual level**. Councils need best practice activities delivered by high calibre providers with the relevant expertise and experience.

- It is also important that any emerging Political Skills framework reflects the governance arrangements in Northern Ireland.
- The Council would be supportive of the proposal put forward in regards to putting in place a learning and development call-off framework of expert providers to design and deliver elected member capacity building activities and programmes. Each council should be able to access the framework to deliver bespoke activities and programmes in-house if it so wishes to.
- Individual councils will have mechanisms in place for recording elected member training attendance. Attendance and learning from regional activities or programmes should be discussed (and recorded appropriately) via elected member personal development meetings and documentation at individual council level- we would wish to avoid duplication of effort at all times.

### ***Workforce, Employment and People Development***

- NILGA, in the past through NIJC has provided advice and guidance to BCC on the application of national terms and conditions and has been a useful source of advice in respect of the industrial relations temperature at across the region.
- There is a need for careful, independent consideration to be given to the industrial relations framework for NI local government within a post local government reform environment.
- Serious thought needs to be given to the constitution, remit and governance of any such body given NI councils' new powers; the direction of travel for local government; the financial context within which we are working; the ambitions, priorities and needs of **individual** councils; and the in-house Human Resources and Organisational Development capacity of the eleven new councils.

### ***Finance Model – Subscriptions***

- Given the current financial pressures and growing scrutiny on budgets and spend, all services within the Council are subject to value for money and efficiency challenges. Similarly, any subscription paid by the Council to a third party is under review in context of value for money and affordability.
- Whilst welcoming the steps taken by NILGA to reduce its operating cost base and the intention to introduce a new financial model for calculating member subscription fees, the Council would have concerns in relation to the current proposals put forward i.e. banned system whereby subscriptions are linked solely to population size and arbitrary bands.
- As a result Belfast would be the only council designated as Band A (i.e. paying a subscription of £85,950), which is almost 45% greater than Band B (i.e. £47,950) which applies to 5 councils and around 50% greater than Band C (i.e. £42,750) which applies to 5 councils.
- In examining which alternative options may exist for a more equitable basis for calculating subscriptions, the Council would recommend that future subscription charges should be based on the number of elected Members in each council rather than a 'banned' based on population.
- Based on this model the Belfast CC would be required to pay a subscription of around **£70,058** (approx), if agreed, which is a **£15,892** reduction in the current proposed subscription. A summary of the estimated breakdown of subscriptions per council is set out at **Appendix 2**.

<b>4</b>	<b>Resources</b>
4.1	If agreed, NILGA subscription of £70,058.

<b>5</b>	<b>Equality and Good Relations Implications</b>
5.1	There are no equality implications contained within this report.

<b>6</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
6.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- note the contents of this report and the appendices attached</li> <li>- agree that a response is submitted to the NILGA consultation based on the comments set out at section 3.0 above and taking into account any feedback from Members; and</li> <li>- consider and agree that the Council will pay a subscription fee of £70,058 based on number of elected Members and that a response is submitted to NILGA on this basis.</li> </ul>

<b>7</b>	<b>Documents Attached</b>
<p><b>Appendix 1</b> Consultation document</p> <p><b>Appendix 2</b> Summary of estimate council subscriptions based on number of Members in comparison to population.</p>	