



## **DFP - Briefing on Key RPA Issues**

**NILGA Meeting with Peter Robinson, Minister for Finance and Personnel  
Craigantlet Buildings 2.00pm, 5<sup>th</sup> December 2007**

### **Attendees**

**DFP**, Minister Peter Robinson, Richard Bullick and Mary McIvor

**NILGA**, Ald Arnold Hatch, President of NILGA, Craigavon BC, Cllr Jack Beattie, Castlereagh BC Trevor Polley, North Down CEx, Peter McNaney CEx Belfast CC, Heather Moorhead, NILGA CEx

### **Key Objectives**

Seek the Ministers support in pressing the Executive to build Strong Effective Local Government as an essential element of the delivery of the Programme for Government.

1. Modern citizen centred public services and greater efficiencies
2. An Appropriate suite of functions (as described in the NILGA response)
3. Innovative and modern approach
4. New partnership relationship with the Assembly
5. Modern local government finance systems, which are flexible and allow locally tailored solutions and budget to support reorganisation

### **Key Outcomes**

- Overall the meeting was very open and positive
- The Minister confirmed his commitment to strong effective local government
- He recognised opportunities for service integration and a citizen-centred approach
- Service improvement issues (EGovernment, Shared Services, Public Service Centres) were discussed and the Minister outlined his work within the new Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit
- He indicated that he felt local roads should remain as a single integrated service but recognised councils needed greater local influence
- Local Government representatives indicated that the figures produced relating to transfer of Roads were inaccurate and took no account of integration
- The issue of 'group delivery' models was discussed with the need for proper business models and robust accountability relationships
- He welcomed any work that the local government sector could undertake on efficient models of delivery
- Local Government representatives set out the case for the transfer of Youth and Library Services, outlining that antisocial behaviour was the most pressing issue for local communities
- It was acknowledged issues relating to governance would need to be addressed

### **Wider Issues**

- Local Government representatives outlined that local government should be a preferred service delivery vehicle for central government departments
- Local Government representatives raised the issue of the cost of rate collection – stating it benchmarked very poorly against counterpart organisations and the existing system was not sufficiently robust to support council financial planning





# **DETI - Briefing on Key RPA Issues**

**Meeting with Nigel Dodds, Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment**

Netherleigh 3.00 – 3.45pm, 13<sup>th</sup> December 2007

**Supporting Documents.** NILGA and SOLACE Responses, Strong Effective Local Government, Beyond the Emerging Findings Report.

## **Attendees**

Minister Nigel Dodds, Fiona Heffer, DETI, Colin Lewis INI

Ald Arnold Hatch, President of NILGA, Craigavon BC, Cllr John Mathews, Vice President Larne BC, Liam Hannaway CEx Banbridge, Adrian McCreesh, Local Econ Development Officers Forum, Heather Moorhead, NILGA CEx

## **Key Objectives**

- Explore opportunities for a more mutually effective approach
- Seek support in pressing the Executive to build Strong Effective Local Government to take advantages of the opportunities
- Other– Competitiveness and Employment Programme and Lisbon Agenda delivery issues

## **Issues Raised with the Minister**

### **Local Government Welcomes**

- The strategic role of the DETI
- The focus of Invest NI in relation to inward investment and international business
- The active participation of NDPBs in Community Planning
- Local Tourism (Small Scale Accommodation, Local Marketing, Local Product Development, Visitor Servicing, business support) £1m, 4 staff
- Local Economic Development (Start a Business, Enterprise Shows, Investing in Women, social economy, Neighbourhood renewal ) £5.7m, 8 staff
- Citizen Centred approach

### **Opportunities to do better - Issues to explore**

1. Maximise the opportunity of the change process
2. Clarity of roles - Councils should have the lead role in local economic Development
  - streamline and integrate services
  - clear local point of contact – one stop shop
  - Provide better co-ordination and local synergies
  - Build better partnerships with Private and Voluntary sectors
  - Presumption for local council delivery of local services
3. Joint/Co-ordinated working
  - Local control or influence in use of the land bank
  - INI activity in local Economic Development Strategies
  - Greater local government representation on INI and NITB
4. Tourism



- Clarity of role - NITB and Regional Tourism Partnerships in regard to marketing,
  - Clarity of roles between NITB and Councils in regard to development of tourism product
  - Council should have the lead in developing signature projects
5. Other Departments
- DARD – Farm Diversification and Product Development should transfer
  - DEL – Skills matching

## **Outcomes**

- The meeting was extremely open and productive with the Minister confirming the need for a mutually beneficial approach to meet the challenges.
- The Minister recognised the variety of service providers and agreed that there was too much confusion and duplication
- He confirmed he had now commissioned work to develop an Enterprise Framework/Entrepreneurship Strategy. This work would involve mapping out the existing service provision to identify gaps and overlaps. Fiona Hepper explained that this work would be taken forward in two phases. The first before the RPA and the second afterwards to take advantage of the new organisational structures.
- The Minister agreed to work closely with local government in taking the work forward – Members welcomed this approach
- Members agreed the key role of INI but stated councils needed to have a lead role at local level and that the presumption should be in favour of local authority delivery
- The Minister and INI representatives agreed there needed to be a much stronger relationship with councils.
  - In the community planning process
  - To support councils identify new growth companies
  - Use of the land and incubation sites
- The Minister agreed that there was significant confusion within the tourism sector. He recognised the need to address this issue and to strengthen the local authority role.
- Members acknowledged the major opportunities available when Planning and Regeneration were transferred to local government.

## **Other Issues**

- Adrian McCreesh informed the Ministers that LED officers had been informed that the Competitiveness and Employment Programme would be publically advertised and that this was unacceptable. The Minister agreed to look into the matter but agreed it did not seem appropriate.
- Adrian McCreesh asked for clarification on the percentage spend of the programme on the Lisbon Agenda (Innovation and creativity) – The minister agreed to look into the matter.



## **NILGA/DSD Meeting - RPA Issues**

3<sup>rd</sup> January 2008

**NILGA Attendees** Ald Arnold Hatch, Cllr Peter Weir, Cllr Helen Quigley, Tony McGurk, Peter McNaney, Heather Moorhead.

### **NILGA - Key Objectives of the Meeting**

- Explore opportunities for a mutually effective approach to transfer of Regeneration and Community Development functions
- Discuss Housing and Licensing Functions
- Request support in pressing Executive to build Strong Effective Local Government

### **Issues Raised with the Minister**

#### **Regeneration and Community Development**

- NILGA welcome transfer of Regeneration and Community Development functions
- NILGA welcomes the Minister's commitment to strengthen Local Government in the recent letter to NILGA
- Seek early discussion and programme of action to address implementation challenges
  - Skills base and staffing issues
  - Major Schemes – request early Council involvement
  - Modernisation of legislative basis

**NILGA would welcome the development of an early joint implementation programme of action** (to include capacity building, alignment of resources at the local level and the initiation of collaborative regeneration projects, in the lead up to the transfer of functions).

#### **Housing Functions**

- Councils already have significant housing role (unfitness, grant, rent control, enforcement)
- NILGA would welcome reinstatement of the following functions as a vital part of the 'place shaping' and 'health protection/well being' roles of councils
  - Urban Renewal
  - Houses in Multiple Occupation
  - Private Sector Grants, Group Repair and Unfitness
  - Energy Conservation (fit with Sustainable Development statutory duty)
- NILGA recognises the value of the NIHE as a Strategic Housing Authority – and that they are best placed to retain Supporting People and Travellers Sites

**NILGA would welcome opportunities to develop pilot schemes to model new delivery models in advance of the transfer of functions**

#### **Licensing**

- NILGA would welcome further consideration of the transfer of some licensing functions recognising the fit with Local Government regulatory functions
- Local Government reject the transfer of Liquor Licensing at this time – due to the significant difficulties experienced in other regions





## **Wider Issues**

- NILGA questions the caveats detailed by DSD
- Conflict of interest in NIHE provider/regulator roles
- Need to capitalise on added synergies with renewed functions such as Community Planning, Planning, Economic Development and Local Roads
- NILGA would welcome a wider debate relating to the role of Councils in housing related issues in the changing context.

## **Outcomes from the Meeting**

### **General RPA Issues**

- The Minister outlined her commitment to Strong Local Government
- It was agreed that outcomes for citizens should be the primary driver in the RPA
- The Minister agreed to act as a champion for local government within the Executive and would be happy to receive further information on the wider issues
- The Minister agreed the potential to release capital and land for social housing in developing Public Service Centres in the future (specific reference made to the opportunity of the NICS Accommodation Strategy)
- Opportunities to proactively involve local government in central government policy development processes to capitalise on local delivery experience and council resources was discussed

### **Regeneration and Community Development**

- The Minister reiterated her commitment to transfer Regeneration and Community Development functions to councils
- It was agreed there are significant opportunities available for citizens and organisations in developing a more collaborative approaches
  - Agree a common central/local policy framework
  - Align resources and agree key roles
  - Access to local government support to further the social housing agenda
  - Access to the flexibilities available within the local government operational framework
  - Innovative approaches
- She agreed that work should begin as soon as possible on developing pilot projects and joint working between DSD and councils to address the implementation issues
  - The Minister said she would welcome a paper from local government setting out local government ideas and proposals for early action
- It was agreed that the regeneration legislative framework should be enhanced (potential for greater compulsory purchase powers)

### **Housing**

- The role of the NIHE as the strategic housing authority was agreed
- The Minister confirmed her support for greater strategic involvement from the Housing Council in housing issues
- The advantage of retaining Supporting People and Travellers Sites at a regional level was discussed
- The Minister heard the NILGA views concerning the other six housing functions and stated that these were still under discussion
- The Minister highlighted a differing view between the NI Housing Council and NILGA requested NILGA to work with the Housing Council to develop a common approach
- She welcomed support from NILGA to encourage councils to respond to her letter concerning availability of surplus council owned land for social housing







# **NILGA Meeting with Connor Murphy DRD**

Clarence Court 11-12am, 9<sup>th</sup> January 2008 **NILGA Attendees** Ald Arnold Hatch, Cllr Sean Begley, Mick McGuckian, CEx Cookstown John Dempsey, CEx Ballymoney, Heather Moorhead, CEx NILGA

## **Key Local Government Points Presented**

NILGA set out the principles and evidence base to support the transfer of local roads to local government

- The need for Strong Effective Local Government
- Place-shaping role of Councils – strategic role of Central Government
- Locally accountability and joined up decision making
- The capacity to congregate of resources and consensus to drive local development
- The example of models in other regions
- Basis of previous decisions and lack of robust economic appraisal information
- Unworkability of the existing arrangements and the need for a step change

## **Summary of Key Discussions and Outcomes**

- The Minister welcomed the NILGA delegation and agreed the need to strengthen Local Government to deliver better outcomes for citizens and as a development ground for the next generation of politicians
- The Minister agreed the need to have defined roles between central and local government and acknowledged the difficulties associated with existing arrangements.
- The Minister set out his view that the retention of mainstream roads functions within Roads Service in central government was the most efficient model of delivery
- NILGA argued that if local roads do not transfer the budget should be transferred to councils to permit them to commission services to ensure local accountability
- NILGA Members challenged the figures and rationale used in the decision making process
- The Minister expressed his commitment to the development of a genuine and meaningful engagement model which would provide new councils with a formal and direct input to local roads decision making. He advised that a range of models could be examined including an appropriate statutory framework
- NILGA members set out their belief that this would lead to an unworkable accountability model and expressed concern that there was no precedent for such a model
- NILGA set out the need to be able to add to the local roads budget where there was a local consensus to do so and the Minister agreed this could be examined
- NILGA members expressed strong disappointment with this approach believing that local roads should most appropriately be accountable to local communities

## **Key Commitments**

- In due course, the Minister would set out the rationale for his view that mainstream roads functions should be retained in Roads Service
- The Minister would seek to ensure that DRD Officials fully engage with local government in developing models for engagement

