

PMcN/as

4 May 2007

Ms Heather Moorhead
Chief Executive
NI Local Government Association
123 York Street
BELFAST BT15 1AB

Dear Ms Moorhead

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT MODERNISATION / RPA IMPLEMENTATION –
CONSULTATION ON THE WAY FORWARD**

I refer to your letter of 24 January seeking the views of the Council on the above consultation document and subsequent letter of 20 March agreeing to meet representatives of the Council to discuss any concerns which it might have.

The Council's Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting on the 27 April, approved the attached response to the consultation document.

This decision was ratified by the Council at its meeting on 1 May.

The attached response sets out a series of conditions that the Council believes are prerequisites for developing the Association's capacity and relationship with member authorities and the Council would seek assurances from the Association, its office bearers and Executive Committee that it is committed to working towards achieving such conditions.

I should point out that the Council decided to withhold payment of its annual NILGA subscription contribution until discussions had taken place with the Association and the Council has received the Association's specific proposals on how it intends to address the matters the Council has raised.

contd

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Ms Heather Moorhead
Chief Executive
NI Local Government Association

I would therefore request that you bring to the attention of your office bearers and Executive Committee the Council's response. I have asked my PA to arrange a suitable date when the Chairman of Policy and Resources and the Party Group Leaders might meet your office bearers to discuss both the Council's concerns and the proposed changes necessary in order to enable the Association to represent and promote effectively the views and interests of the local government sector. I look forward to hearing from you in the near future to agree a suitable date for a meeting.

Yours sincerely

PETER McNANEY
Chief Executive

Enc

Local Government Modernisation and RPA Implementation

NILGA consultation on the way forward

Belfast City Council Response

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Belfast City Council is supportive of the need for a strong Local Government Association which is highly attuned, responsive and accountable to its member authorities and provides a coherent single voice for the local government sector within Northern Ireland. The Council is concerned, however, of the current lack of capacity within the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) and its disconnection with Councils.

If NILGA is to be 'fit for purpose' and deliver the enhanced remit proposed for it within the Local Government Modernisation agenda it must build trust, confidence and credibility among its member Councils. This will necessitate radical changes to be made by NILGA in terms of its current governance arrangements, increasing its officer capacity, engaging more effectively with member authorities and earning the trust and confidence of elected Members and local Councils.

The Council has expressed concern with regard to the value for money it receives from the Association commensurate with its annual subscription and how this contribution relates to Belfast's role within, and representation on, the Association, the Executive Committee and the positions of office bearers.

In moving forward, the Council would seek reassurances and detailed proposals from NILGA, its Office Bearers and Executive Committee that it is committed to working towards achieving the undernoted conditions which, the Council believes, are prerequisites for developing NILGA's organisational capacity and relationship with member Councils.

- (1) The full implementation of the recommendations in the IDeA report on "Modelling NILGA's Future", including detailed proposals on how NILGA intends to establish a "considerably changed and strengthened management team" which paragraph 22 of the report states is "the single most important recommendation for NILGA to adopt in order to trigger complementary commitment from the key stakeholders".
- (2) NILGA to take forward plans, as a matter of urgency, to upgrade the quality of communications with member authorities and to strengthen its membership and engagement framework with Councils.
- (3) NILGA to produce proposals on how it intends to reconfigure its governance arrangements with constituent authorities, ensuring that Councils have proportional representation on its Executive Committee in relation to how much they contribute to the Association.
- (4) NILGA to engage more effectively with the professional and officer expertise within Councils and in so doing add weight and credibility to the policy positions developed by the Association and to help shape a more clearly aligned local government position on emerging RPA related issues.
- (5) NILGA to concentrate, initially, on the core task of building its own organisational capacity, putting its new structure in place and strengthening its relationships with member Councils.

- (6) NILGA to agree with constituent Councils an overall modernisation delivery framework which encapsulates all the key stakeholders involved in local government.
- (7) NILGA to agree with constituent Councils a shared vision and set of key priorities for the local government sector which should underpin the implementation of the RPA modernisation agenda.
- (8) NILGA to agree with constituent Councils a service level partnership agreement which would guide the working relationship between NILGA and Councils and provide clarity on both the functions to be undertaken and commitments entered into by both bodies. The SLA could also provide a performance management framework to allow both parties to evaluate outcomes.

The Council recommends that a more effective way of taking forward the implementation of the RPA and the modernisation of local government would be the use of a mixed economy of all the key stakeholders, of which NILGA is one component, who have a role in local government reform and which will require the assembly of the right resources with the necessary skills, capabilities and delivery capacity.

The Government needs to exercise caution in committing significant resources towards the restructuring of NILGA prior to any agreement on the future role of the Association within the local government modernisation process and in light of the uncertainties around future implementation structures resulting from the restoration of the Northern Ireland Assembly and devolution of responsibility for driving forward the RPA modernisation agenda. The Council advocates the need to ensure that any funding for the modernisation of local government be made available to Councils to permit them to engage in modernisation activities.

Therefore, it has agreed to write to the Department of the Environment indicating that caution should be exercised to ensure that the Northern Ireland Local Government Association is not used as a substitute to consulting with District Councils and seeking engagement with the Department to ensure that modernisation funding was available to Councils directly.

In addition, the Council is concerned with regard to the extent of the proposals to significantly restructure and strengthen the staffing complement of the Northern Ireland Local Government Association by trebling its current size and does not believe that such an increase would be justified at this point in time.

The Council would like to reiterate its previous concerns regarding the transparency in the recruitment of staff to the Local Government Taskforce and agreed that it will only permit its staff to participate if appropriate recruitment processes, which are compliant with existing employment and equality legislation and in accordance with the Local Government Staff Commission Code of Practice, are put in place.