



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Northern Ireland Local Government Association
Date:	Friday, 24 <sup>th</sup> April, 2009
Reporting Officer:	Gerry Millar, Director of Improvement
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1.0	<b><u>Relevant background information</u></b>
1.1	Members will be aware of the ongoing discussions over the past year in regards to the Council's relationship and engagement with the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) and the concerns of Members in terms of the level of capacity within the Association, the subscription contributions sought from the Council, the value for money received and the lack of representation on NILGA's Executive.
1.2	Members will recall that the Council's Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting on 23 <sup>rd</sup> May 2008, agreed to write to NILGA indicating that it would be willing to pay a reduced annual subscription of 76,230 (excluding VAT) for the period 2008/2009 which would be proportionate to the percentage of the Northern Ireland population rather than the £104,328 subscription charge requested by NILGA which was calculated on the basis of the penny rate product for each council.
1.3	At its meeting on 19 <sup>th</sup> September 2008, the Committee had been informed that NILGA had written to the Council, dated 17 <sup>th</sup> July 2008, to report that its Executive had agreed in principle to the reduced subscription fee and had set out proposals to further strengthen the Councils relationship with the Association including additional places for Belfast City Council on its Executive, the designation of a NILGA liaison officer and the provision of in-kind officer support (e.g. Legal advice, policy and research support, professional support in terms of business planning and performance management) from the Council to NILGA. The Council had provided such support to NILGA on an ad-hoc basis within the context of both sharing best practice and the Council's continued engagement within the Review of Public Administration process.
2.0	<b><u>Key Issues</u></b>
2.1	Correspondence has been received from NILGA, dated 10 <sup>th</sup> March and 2 <sup>nd</sup> April 2009, setting out the annual subscription proposals for the period 2009/2010, an update on NILGA's progress over the past year and an outlining the proposed Annual Business Plan for the 2009/2010 period (copies of which are attached at Appendix 1).
2.2	<b><u>NILGA ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION FOR THE PERIOD 2009/2010</u></b>
2.2.1	On the 12 <sup>th</sup> December 2008, the NILGA Executive Committee had agreed that an overall annual increase of 2.5% was required for the 2009/2010 period. However, given the current financial pressures facing local government, NILGA had agreed to waiver this 2.5% increase for a one year period and therefore, it is proposed that the overall total subscription base remains the same as the 2008/2009 period. Notwithstanding this decision, the proposed annual subscription fee for Belfast City Council for the period 2009/2010 is £106,627 (exc. VAT) which is based on the penny rate product figures for each District Council area.
2.2.2	<b>In keeping with the previous decision taken by the Committee in regards to its subscription fee for the 2008/2009 period, correspondence has been sent to NILGA indicating that the Council's annual subscription fee should not be based on the penny rate product but rather proportionate to its population coverage which would equate to 76,230 (exc. VAT) for 2009/2010. In addition, it is recommended that the existing arrangements whereby the Council provides in-kind support to NILGA continue for the forthcoming year, particularly within the context of the role of NILGA in supporting the RPA implementation process.</b>

2.2.3	It is important to recognise that NILGA is firmly anchored within the established decision making machinery and implementation structures in regards to the Review of Public Administration process. NILGA facilitated the nomination process for the RPA Strategic Leadership Board and Policy Development Panels and provide Joint Secretariat support, alongside DoE officials, to these structures as well as the Regional Transition Co-ordination Group. The Joint Secretariat is contributing also to the development of policy and discussion papers which are being submitted to the SLB and PDPs for consideration. NILGA has an established internal RPA Working Group on which the Council is represented and has extended their staff complement (refer to Appendix 2 for copy of Organisational Structure) to enable them to resource the areas of work which they are involved.
2.2.4	The embedding of a more formalised link between NILGA and the Council and a structured approach to liaison between both parties, will enable the Council to inform and somewhat shape the ongoing agenda of NILGA and help raise the bar in terms of planning and policy development within NILGA and across the wider local government sector. Accordingly, the support and advice provided by the Council to NILGA will benefit the wider local government sector.
2.3	<b><u>NILGA BUSINESS PLAN</u></b>
2.3.1	<p>In terms of the NILGA's proposed business plan for the period 2009/2010, there is greater emphasis and focus on the role of NILGA in supporting the local government sector within the RPA policy development and implementation process and providing secretariat and direct support to the established delivery structures including the Strategic Leadership Board and the Policy Development Panels. The key areas of activity identified include:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ representing local government on key policy issues;</li> <li>▪ supporting strong local government engagement in the RPA policy development process;</li> <li>▪ supporting negotiations between central and local government on implementation issues and a resources package to support the RPA implementation;</li> <li>▪ support the role out of an effective communications strategy;</li> <li>▪ developing a local government RPA implementation plan; and</li> <li>▪ bringing forward key projects to support local government e.g. a climate change package and economic recovery package.</li> </ul>
2.4	<b><u>PROPOSED DELIVERY STRUCTURES</u></b>
2.4.1	<p>NILGA has also put forward proposals for a new three tier governance structure (refer to Annex A of Appendix 1) consisting of the Full Members General Assembly which would meet 5 times a year; Executive Committee which would meet 10 times a year; and a series of Sub-Committees/Panels which are intended to refocus the activities of the Association towards those areas of importance for local government and to facilitate broader councillor involvement in such areas of work. The proposals put forward include the established of a new:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>i) <u>Strategic Policy Committee</u>:</b> this would meet on a quarterly basis and focus on developing a strategic approach to policy development for local government. It is proposed that the Committee would comprise of one member from each party and the chairs of the established NILGA Policy Sub-Groups (e.g. Waste, Europe, Agriculture, Planning, Health and Environment etc). It is proposed that local government Chief Executives and senior officers would support this group.</li> <li><b>ii) <u>People and Employment Panel</u>:</b> this would meet on a quarterly basis and comprise of an amalgamation of the NIJC and JNC political groupings. The anticipated role for the new panel will be to support the development of a strategic approach to employment issues.</li> <li><b>iii) <u>Economic Development Committee</u>:</b> this would meet on a quarterly basis and comprise of 10 elected members, two from each party. It is proposed that this Committee would be support by local government Chief Executives and officers from the Local Economic Development Forum. This remains subject to ongoing discussions between the Local Economic Development Forum and NILGA.</li> </ol>

2.4.2	There are clearly overlaps and connections between the work to be taken forward by NILGA and the work already being undertaken by individual councils and as part of the ongoing work of the established RPA implementation structures (e.g. a Strategic Human Resources Group is to be established under the auspices of the RPA Regional Transition Co-ordinating Group to take forward HR related issues as part of the RPA process). It will be important that NILGA's work adds value and does not duplicate work already underway.
2.4.3	It is important to recognise that whilst NILGA is one key component in supporting the RPA process, local authorities (at both elected Member and officer level) are a constituent part of the process and it is important that the implementation of the RPA is 'owned' by the whole sector.
2.4.4	It will be important that Belfast City Council and local government generally are directly involved within the work of NILGA and, in particular, the evolving programme of work of the new Committees/Panels proposed. This is particularly important given the significant period of change ahead for local government resulting from the RPA and the need to be actively engaged within and drive this process.
2.4.5	Whilst the Council would welcome the engagement of local government Chief Executives and other senior officers within the proposed governance structures, it would seek further clarity as to the process through which local officers will be nominated onto such structures and the level of work which would be required in this capacity.
2.4.6	Members will note that in order to strengthen the relationship with constitute councils, as previously requested for by Belfast City Council, NILGA has indicated its intention to institutionalise an annual meeting between NILGA Office Bearers and Chairs/Mayors and Chief Executives of councils.
2.4	NILGA has offered that a delegation from NILGA would meet with councils on an individual basis to discuss any particular comments and concerns they may have in relation to any aspect of the ongoing work of NILGA and to make a presentation in relation to its planned activities and the RPA process generally.
2.5	<b><u>FUTURE ROLE OF NILGA</u></b>
2.5.1	Members will accept that the future role and remit of NILGA post RPA is somewhat uncertain at this stage. The Council has previously documented the need for a remodelled Local Government Association which is highly attuned, responsive and accountable to its constitute Councils and which provides a coherent single voice for the local government sector within Northern Ireland. Within the context of a smaller number of constitute Councils post 2011, there is a real opportunity to develop a more focused and effective role for NILGA as the representative voice of local government. NILGA themselves have indicated that the Association would be subject to review in the lead up to the new local government structures to be put in place in 2011.

<b>3.0</b>	<b>Resource Implications</b>
	<u>Financial and Human Resources</u>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ If the Council decides to make payment on its annual subscription fee for the period of 2009/2010 using the same formula as that applied last year (e.g. proportionate to population catchment), this will result in a payment of £76,230 (exc. VAT).</li> </ul>

<b>4.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
4.1	Members are asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) note the contents of this report;</li> <li>b) agree that further clarity be sought from NILGA in regards to the intended process to be put in place to secure local government officer nominations and support for the proposed new governance structures and the level of work which would be required within this capacity; and</li> <li>c) consider the offer from NILGA to provide a briefing for Members on the proposed activities of the organisation over the forthcoming year and also on the RPA process generally.</li> </ul>

<b>5.0 Documents Attached</b>
<b>Appendix 1: NILGA Annual Subscription and Business Plan Update</b>
<b>Appendix 2: NILGA Organisational Structure</b>