

19th September 2011

IMPROVEMENT COLLABORATION AND EFFICIENCY (ICE) PROGRAMME

Dear Council Mayors, Chairs and Chief Executives,

As President of the Local Government Association (NILGA) and Chair of SOLACE we are writing to update you on the progress of the ICE Programme and to seek your council's nominations for the Regional Governance Group (RGG – see Appendix A).

As you may recall, we recently wrote to you enclosing a copy of the Improvement, Collaboration and Efficiency (ICE) Consultation Final Report. This detailed the principal areas of feedback received on the recent ICE 'Case for Change' and Regional Governance Consultation together with options for moving forward.

In that letter we informed you that NILGA and SOLACE would soon be meeting with the Minister of the Environment, Mr Alex Attwood MLA, to hear his opinion on proposals for the wider local government reform programme. We would then be in a position to consider the relationship between the ICE programme and wider local government reform programme, should the outstanding issues in respect to RPA be resolved by the NI Executive.

We confirm that a delegation from NILGA and SOLACE held an inaugural meeting with Minister Attwood on Thursday 21st July 2011 to discuss the future of Local Government Reform. A presentation was also delivered on the ICE programme.

This was a positive and productive first meeting, yet it is clear that the Minister is unable to provide the necessary clarity sought on the wider local government reform programme. He is however supportive of the ICE programme and is keen that we progress to the **next phase** in its development and implementation.

Based on the ICE programme consultation responses, it is clear that local government believes that 'Do Nothing' is not an option. We are therefore recommending that we proceed with **option 3** outlined in the ICE Consultation Final Report, to proceed with the establishment of the Regional Governance Group (RGG) and implement the ICE Programme (with alignment to the reform programme when direction is agreed). This will ensure that the momentum and knowledge generated to date is not lost.

ICE represents a distinct programme of work and any determination to develop further action relating to wider modernisation and reform issues affecting local government will require new thinking and distinct delivery models. Councils should note that the RGG will not be a decision making body – all decisions will be taken by Councils themselves.

What are you being asked to do?

Nomination to Regional Governance Group and its Operation

You are asked to nominate **one** elected representative and **one** substitute member from your council to the Regional Governance Group.

It will be for each individual council to decide the best method for nominating its representative, with the understanding that each member shall be representing his or her council on the development of strategic policy in relation to the ICE programme. Councils are responsible for selecting those nominees who will best serve the knowledge, enthusiasm and capacity required to represent council and to support the RGG's determination of the strategic policy objectives and priorities for the ICE Programme.

Attached in Appendix A is an overview of the RGG, its membership and operation. It also incorporates comments and suggestions made by consultees during the recent ICE programme regional governance consultation.

We would welcome your council's nominations in writing. Please send this by **Tuesday 2nd November 2011** via email to ICE@nilga.org. Alternatively, you can write to us at the address below.

ICE Programme
NILGA
Unit 5b Castlereagh Business Park
478 Castlereagh Road
Belfast
BT5 6BQ

The first meeting of the RGG is expected to be held during November 2011 and notification will follow.

We believe that amidst the ongoing uncertainty around the Local Government Reform Programme and an increasingly challenging economic climate, the ICE Programme provides the sector with a viable opportunity to deliver better outcomes for citizens and ratepayers. It provides a clear direction, the opportunity for strong leadership for the sector as well as good governance and engagement at a regional level with flexibility to drive collaborative improvement projects at regional, sub-regional and local levels.

We look forward to receiving your nominations and working with you as we lead the journey towards excellence.

Yours sincerely



Cllr Evelyne L Robinson
President



Ashley Boreland
Chair of SOLACE

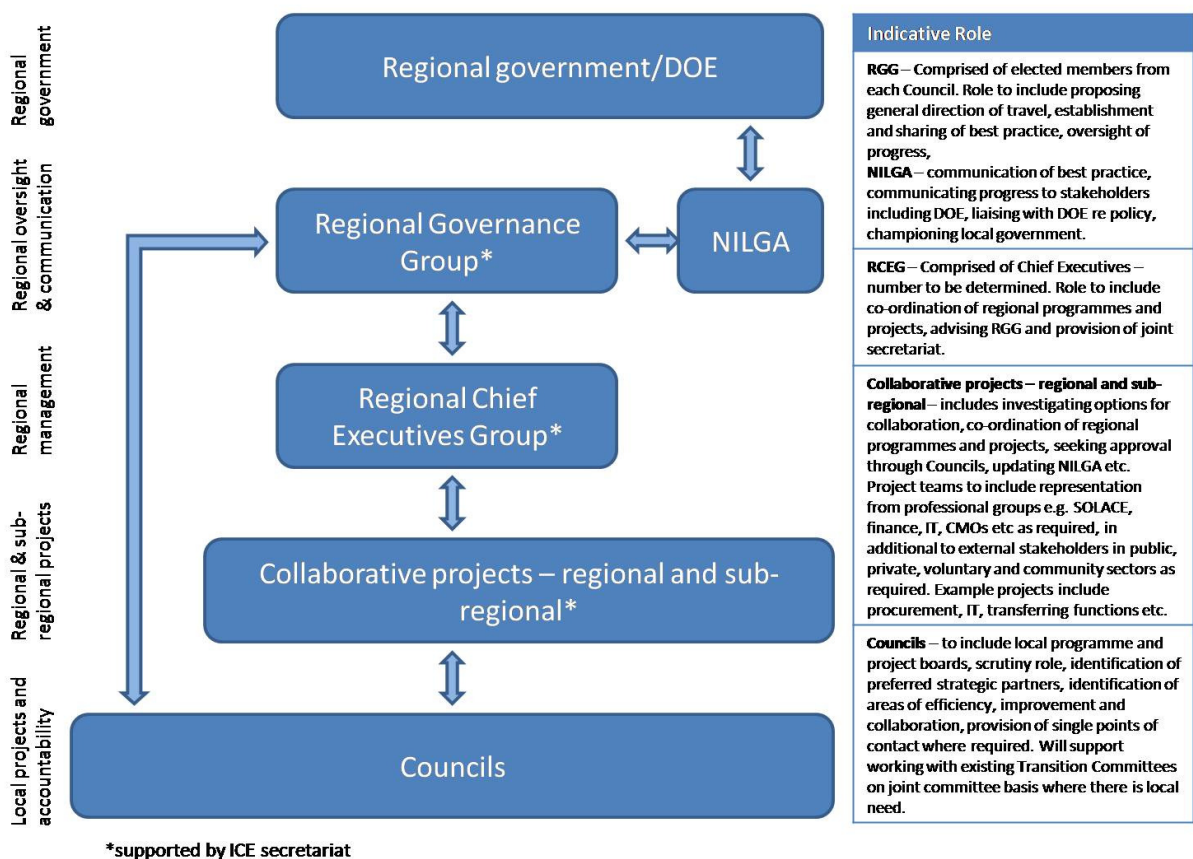
September 2011

Regional Governance Group (RGG)

Councils were first consulted on proposals for regional governance arrangements to support the ICE programme back in August 2010. Council views were also sought on high-level operational principles.

The majority of councils chose, as their preferred governance model, the inclusive regional option, which included representation from each of the 26 councils. This became known as the Regional Governance Group (RGG) although it is referred to in the diagram below as the Regional Collaboration Group.

An illustrative diagram of the RGG is attached below. This preferred model recognises that the 26 councils are the only bodies with statutory powers to effect decisions related to ICE.



Role of the RGG

Members of the RGG shall determine the strategic policy objectives and priorities for the ICE Programme and will focus on guiding and enabling the programme. RGG members will not have a role in the operational delivery of projects, as this will be for participating councils to provide.

The role of the RGG is to:

- Support the local government sector in identifying and delivering opportunities for improvement, collaboration and efficiency.
- Agree and maintain a shared vision and strategy for the development of improvement and collaboration.
- Consider opportunities for collaboration and make recommendations as appropriate to councils.
- Co-ordinate the effective scrutiny and monitoring of the specified collaborative projects.
- Ensure progress reports are provided to the participating councils at intervals specified by them.
- Provide feedback to and from participant councils.
- Develop and share best practice.

When the RGG is established, there shall be no delegation of functions from councils to the group. While the RGG may make recommendations on collaborative opportunities, as the bodies with statutory responsibility, it shall be for individual councils to decide whether they wish to participate. If required in the future, other limited functions may be delegated from participating councils to the RGG to achieve economies of scale, promote savings and minimise costs. This shall be subject to the agreement of all participant councils.

Membership of the RGG

While membership is voluntary, it is assumed that all 26 councils will be part of the RGG.

Membership of the RGG will be for one named member from each of the participating councils (with each council also asked to nominate a substitute member).

The importance of political reputation / balance is recognised, as is the need for a 'fit for purpose' and manageable governance structure. In order to maximise representation on the RGG, the five NILGA office bearers will also be members.

Chair/Deputy

The RGG shall annually elect a Chair and Deputy Chair from within existing membership. The method of allocating these positions will be agreed by the RGG.

Membership of the RCEG (Regional Chief Executives' Group)

In the short to medium term it is proposed that the SOLACE Executive, working through the ICE Programme Management Group, shall undertake this role. Meetings will also be attended by the NILGA Chief Executive. Progress reports will be presented to SOLACE Branch and NILGA Executive/ working group meetings and feedback from these meetings will be fed back to the RGG for further development.

Resources to support the ICE Programme and RGG

During the ICE consultation, continued resources to support the ICE Programme were highlighted as a key issue for most consultees. The ICE programme was developed and supported using resources previously tasked with progressing transition and transformation under RPA. This primarily related to Change Managers and key, dedicated seconded staff within NILGA, including a small Performance Improvement Team.

DOE funding ended for a number of these posts in March 2011 and while a degree of momentum has been sustained and non council investment is being sought by NILGA¹, future sustainability of resource remains a key issue. The RGG once operational, will need to give consideration to the longer term issue of resources to support the programme.

At the outset it is proposed that meetings of the RGG will be hosted on a rotational basis by member councils.

Secretariat support for RGG

Pending consideration and agreement of the arrangements for support resources, it has been agreed that, in the short term, NILGA will provide secretariat support from within its existing resources and through non Council investment supplementing this to enable the RGG to operate¹. This will include:

- a) Arranging meetings
- b) Taking minutes
- c) Administrative support
- d) Venue hire
- e) Coordination with external stakeholders
- f) Communication of decisions

It has been suggested that this arrangement is supported through liaison with the host council for each meeting of the RGG.

1 - We are informed by DoE that such funding is available to NILGA subject to finalisation of clear business and performance objectives.

Cost

In the immediate future, it is anticipated that the only costs to be met by member councils will be expenses relating to their RGG member and, if appropriate, RCEG member and costs associated with hosting meetings (to be rotated across member councils). Following consideration of the issue of resources by the RGG, member councils will be consulted on any potential additional costs which shall be recovered from councils and / or external sources and shall be estimated in advance where possible by reference to a business case.²

2 – Councils are reminded that the secretariat role by NILGA is covered by Council subscriptions.

Expenses

Relevant expenses shall be paid to members by their sponsoring councils.

Operating Principles for the RGG

Standards and Conduct

All members and officers of the RGG shall exercise leadership by behaving in ways that exemplify high standards of conduct and effective governance.

Capacity Building

The RGG will commit itself to developing its member's skills, so they can carry out their roles effectively.

Location of Meetings

Initially the RGG will be hosted by each of the participating councils on a rotational basis.

Attending Meetings

Members shall attend as many meetings as practicable and be actively involved in decision making so the RGG can work effectively and consistently. This includes informing oneself, preparing for discussions, engaging, and maintaining links with the members of the parent council. It may also include engaging willingly and actively with the public, service users and staff, within an agreed communication framework.

Length of Service

Participating Councils are responsible for the period of time which representatives may be nominated for, and it should be understood that this may be up to four years.

Appointing Substitutes

It is recommended that Councils formally appoint a substitute member. In the event that the council's nominated member of the RGG is unable to attend a meeting, the substitute member should attend on his/her behalf.

The substitute member shall have the duties of any nominated member of the committee. If the absent member is the Chair of the RGG, the Deputy Chair shall chair the meeting. If both the Chair and the Deputy Chair of the council are absent from a meeting of the RGG, such councillor as the councillors present may choose, shall preside.

The nominated member is responsible for ensuring that their substitute is briefed in the business of the meeting.

Resignations

Resignation from the RGG should be effected by delivery of at least one-month's notice in writing to the Chair of the RGG. The relevant council will be asked to appoint a replacement.

In the event the Chair resigns from the RGG or from the position of Chair during the term of office, the Chair shall be replaced for the remaining term by a member of the RGG from the same Party.

Quorum

The RGG will be considered quorate for the purpose of decision-making when a minimum of one-quarter of the participating membership is present.

Count out

Upon the attention of the Chair being called by a Member or duly appointed officer to the fact that there is not a quorum present, the Chair shall declare the meeting of the RGG at an end, and the names of those who are present shall be recorded on the minutes of the RGG.

Decision-making and Accountability

All members shall have equal status and collective responsibility for decisions. Normally decisions will be determined by consensus. Though having people with different points of view may lead to some conflict this is natural and may lead to more creative thinking. If issues cannot be resolved there will be a show of hands. If there is a tie the Chair may have a second or casting vote.

The RGG working within a framework of collaboration, mutual trust and co-operation, shall always operate inclusively of its participant councils. It is not the responsibility of members to decide whether their council will participate in any collaborative or other opportunity. Individual councils will decide whether they wish to avail of collaborative opportunities.

Transparency & Reporting

The work of the RGG shall be open and transparent to member councils and interested parties. Decisions, recommendations, declarations of interest, and reservations will be recorded in the minutes of meetings.

Where practicable, meetings will be open to interested parties. Councillors who are not members shall have the right to attend meetings but will not have voting rights. Speaking rights will be determined by the Chair of the RGG. Issues such as cost of overheads, etc. shall be determined by the sponsoring council. A copy of the operational principles shall be circulated to every member of the constituent councils in the group.

Work Programme

A work programme shall be agreed by members of the RGG, working in collaboration with the Chief Executives on the RGG. The aim will be for the RGG to reach a consensus on issues for inclusion in its work programme. The RGG work programme shall be made available to councils.

Agendas

The Chair and Deputy Chair of the RGG in conjunction with the Secretariat shall determine the agenda for meetings.

Documents relating to the business shall normally be made available to members at least five working days before the meeting to which they relate.

Minutes

In conjunction with the host council, the NILGA secretariat will co-ordinate the collation and distribution of minutes of each meeting of the RGG, or where appropriate sub-committee. The RGG shall agree the nature and style of the minutes to be recorded. In the absence of agreement on the nature of the minutes, the minutes shall as a minimum record the significant aspects of the discussion on the relevant agenda item, and any decision(s) taken by the RGG or sub-committee together with the names of proposers and seconders.

Reports

Reports shall be prepared in a way that enables effective decision-making. Reports shall be circulated with the relevant notice or at least five working days prior to meetings.

Frequency of meetings

The RGG shall determine how often it should meet. It is anticipated that the group shall meet at least once every six weeks initially but in the longer-term; meetings may be held in response to critical points in the delivery of the programme, rather than at regular intervals.

Sub Groups and Working groups

The RGG can appoint sub-groups or working groups, if necessary. These bodies shall be required to make recommendations to the RGG. Sub groups and working groups shall have written terms of reference approved by the RGG that cover:-

- Its objectives
- Its circle of competence
- Reporting requirements
- Membership

The RGG shall review subgroups and working groups once a year to decide whether they are still required.

Evaluation and Review

The RGG structure, membership and terms of reference will be reviewed after the first year of operation and every two years thereafter. This process will be led jointly by NILGA and SOLACE. The results will be circulated for consideration by participating councils.

Terminating the Group

The RGG may be terminated at any time by agreement of all the participant councils.