



Subject:	NILGA Consultation – “Devolution within Northern Ireland”
Date:	21 September 2018
Reporting Officer	Suzanne Wylie, Chief Executive
Contact Officers:	Kevin Heaney, Programme Manager Russell Connelly, Programme Support

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	PURPOSE OF THE SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT
1.1	The purpose of this report is to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - seek approval from the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for the draft response to the NILGA Consultation paper “Devolution within Northern Ireland”.
2.0	RECOMMENDATIONS
2.1	The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) note and review the attached NPI Report at Appendix 1 (ii) approve the draft council response at Appendix 2 subject to any amendments
3.0	MAIN REPORT
3.1	The Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) have commissioned and published a “Devolution within Northern Ireland” report completed by the New Policy Institute (NPI).

This evidence based report, drawing on direct communication with all strands of government and wider society, together with policy and data benchmarking across all neighbouring jurisdictions, is provided to the Council for corporate comment preferably by Friday 28 September.

The purpose of the consultation is twofold:

- i) to inform the existing and future legislative and resource actions to enhance the role of Councils in Northern Ireland
- ii) to take actions with partners in government and more widely to strengthen the sustainability and value of local government in Northern Ireland

NILGA have indicated that they will reconvene with all councils, individually and collectively, in the first quarter of 2019 in terms of a Regional Policy Framework, which will be a vital tool for the new councils beyond May 2019.

Members will wish to be aware that in the context of this consultation, neighbourhood services refers not to any geographic provision of services but to the overall range of different services traditionally provided by local authorities across the entire district (i.e. water safety, food safety, waste collection, waste disposal, etc.). A list of these services is contained within the appendices to the attached NPI report.

3.2

Corporate response

Officers have prepared a draft corporate response to the NPI report. In summary the main points of the draft corporate response are as follows:

- The Council agrees overall with the principles contained within the NPI report 'Devolution within Northern Ireland' and is supportive of the general conclusions and next steps as set out within the report.
- The Council notes the current discrepancy in the % of total public expenditure shared by local government in Northern Ireland (4% of the NI total public expenditure) with that of Wales and Scotland (both 27% of their respective total public expenditure).
- The Council believes that devolution of **neighbourhood services** will allow for a more responsive approach to communities' needs and aspirations. Councils have a greater understanding and engagement with their local communities enabling the tailoring of services, improved decision-making and the delivery of local outcomes. This should lead to greater effectiveness and efficiency of services.
- In addition to the devolution of neighbourhood services, the Council would also wish to stress the importance of the transfer of key **regeneration functions** during phase 2 of any devolution of powers to local government.
- Belfast City Council are working alongside five other local councils in partnership with the NIO / Executive and the Treasury to secure funding for a **Belfast Region City Deal**, including the ability of councils to borrow against growth, to plug deficits in key infrastructure and to bring forward key regeneration development schemes. Economic geographies can create the

conditions to unlock future growth potential within the city-region, help deliver economic growth, transform public services and close the gap on inequalities.

- The Council would also recommend that responsibility for the delivery of **employability and skills** initiatives may be further devolved from Departments to local government. While there is a range of activity taking place across Belfast, the pervasive challenges of long-term unemployment and economic inactivity have not been addressed in any real way. The Council would wish to explore how we can work with partners to use the information we have to plan better around skills needs and training provision to meet these needs with the objective of supporting **inclusive economic growth**.
- The Council would highlight the complementarity between the ambitions set out within the **Programme for Government and the Belfast Agenda** and emphasise the importance of working in partnership with the Executive to design placed-based programmes and initiatives which deliver common outcomes.
- An outcomes based approach is essential to driving our approach to ensure that residents receive the best outcomes and services. **Community planning** is a first step towards this and the learning from the experience of Local Government reform and the transfer of powers to date should be harnessed to strengthen local government's ability to deliver a place-based approach.
- The Council recommend that as part of any further devolution of powers and services to local government, a review is carried out to strengthen the obligations placed upon Departments and Community Planning partners to both participate and realign funding streams alongside the agreed outcomes within the Community Plan and the Programme for Government.
- The Council would also be particularly supportive of recommendation 5 and would seek assurances that the level of **financial resources** made available for devolution to NI councils was not only adequate but that **councils be indemnified against any potential shortfall** through appropriate "New Burdens" or similar legislation.
- Clearly there will be a role for NILGA in helping to develop political awareness and supporting political engagement/negotiation with central government and NI Executive regarding any future proposals for the devolution of powers in terms of ensuring that they fit-for-purpose and adequately resourced. It is important to recognise, however, that the **primacy rests with local government and councils to lead this process** with the support and advice of professional officers.

FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

None

3.4	EQUALITY OR GOOD RELATIONS IMPLICATIONS/RURAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT None
4.0	Appendices - Documents attached
	Appendix 1 – NPI Report – Devolution within Northern Ireland Appendix 2 – Draft corporate response to the consultation document