

Northern Ireland Partnership Panel: Standing Orders

- 1) The Department for Communities will establish and maintain a body known as the Partnership Panel for Northern Ireland (“the Partnership Panel”).

PURPOSE

- 2) The Panel provides a forum where elected representatives may:
 - i. give advice to any Northern Ireland department about matters affecting the exercise of any of its functions;
 - ii. make representations to any Northern Ireland department about any matters affecting, or of concern to, those involved in local government;
 - iii. give advice to those involved in local government; and
 - iv. initiate actions, stemming from the Panel’s discussions, involving any Northern Ireland Department and local government.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE PARTNERSHIP PANEL

- 3) The Partnership Panel is to consist of :
 - i) Councillors;
 - ii) Ministers; and
 - iii) a maximum of 5 elected representatives of such representative body or association of the district councils as appear to the Department to be appropriate.
- 4) All Executive Ministers are members of the Partnership Panel, and will be invited to attend meetings for substantive agenda items relating to their portfolio responsibility. The members of the Partnership Panel will therefore include:
 - i) Minister for Communities (Chair);
 - ii) Minister of Justice;
 - iii) Minister of Finance;
 - iv) Minister of Education;
 - v) Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural; Affairs
 - vi) Minister of Health;
 - vii) Minister for the Economy;
 - viii) Minister for Infrastructure; and
 - ix) The Executive Office.
- 5) The Minister for Communities is the Chair.
- 6) Each council may nominate a councillor to serve as a member to the Panel.

- 7) Appointments to the membership of the Partnership Panel shall be made as soon as is reasonably practical after each ordinary election and in any event so that a meeting can be convened within one to six months of the election.
- 8) Substitutes will be permitted with prior express permission from the Chair.

RESIGNATION FROM THE PARTNERSHIP PANEL

- 9) A person appointed as a member of the Partnership Panel shall normally remain a member until the end of the day before the ordinary election following his/her appointment i.e. in the case of a local government member until the end of the day before local government elections and in the case of a Northern Ireland Minister, the day before the Assembly elections, or until the end of the person's term of office with the authority of which they are a member.
- 10) However, a member may resign from the Partnership Panel by giving written notice to the Panel Secretariat, who shall notify the Communities Minister.
- 11) On ceasing to be a member of the Partnership Panel, a member shall also cease to be a member of any committee or working group of the Partnership Panel.

MEETINGS OF THE PARTNERSHIP PANEL

- 12) The Chief Executive of each of the 11 councils shall be invited to attend the meetings of the Partnership Panel in an observer role.
- 13) Partnership Panel members should agree the frequency of meetings as one of their first items of business at their first meeting.
- 14) The Partnership Panel may conduct its own business or that of its committees or working groups by video link or other electronic means.

SUPPORT ARRANGEMENTS

- 15) Three officials from the Department for Communities should support the Minister for Communities alongside a small number of officials (as required) supporting other Executive Ministers in attendance.
- 16) The local government membership should be supported by three Chief Executives, one of which should be the Chief Executive of NILGA.
- 17) Supporting officials and officers should not have speaking rights during full Partnership Panel meetings, unless expressly invited by the Chair/ member to speak.
- 18) Central government officials and local government officers should meet regularly to support the management of the business of the Panel going forward.

ESTABLISHMENT OF COMMITTEES AND WORKING GROUPS

- 19) The Partnership Panel may set up committees and working groups to examine specific issues. A motion to establish a committee or working group shall specify its proposed terms of reference, an assessment of the costs, benefits and any other implications of establishing the committee or working group and a date which it shall cease to exist. Such a date shall not be more than 12 months later than the date of its first meeting, unless the Partnership Panel determines otherwise. It shall also specify how the proposed subject to be investigated by the working group differs from or complements other policy initiatives already taken forward (or to be taken forward) by the Northern Ireland Executive. In the event of there being an overlap with policy work already underway details should be provided of any liaison arrangements proposed.
- 20) In exceptional circumstances the Partnership Panel may extend committees and working groups beyond 12 months. This will be subject to a review of their performance against their terms of reference, their outstanding work programme and the date on which this work will be completed. No resolution to extend the life of a committee or working group should be valid for more than 12 months without a fresh resolution.
- 21) The members of any committee or sub-committee established by the Partnership Panel shall be elected by the Partnership Panel from among its members.

THE CHAIRING OF THE PARTNERSHIP PANEL AND ASSOCIATED COMMITTEES

- 22) The Partnership Panel shall be chaired by the Communities Minister or an Executive Minister nominated by him or her. The Partnership Panel shall select the chairs of its committees from among the members of the Partnership Panel.

INVITEES

- 23) The Partnership Panel, its committees or working groups may invite any other person to attend meetings and may invite such a person or body to submit evidence and produce documents or to speak.

WORK PROGRAMME

- 24) The Partnership Panel Secretariat shall draw up and maintain a forward work programme for a rolling period of 12 months. The forward programme should be a regular agenda item of the Partnership Panel meetings and should be compiled taking into account the views of all Departments within the Executive. It will also need to reflect the views of the local government representatives.

SECRETARIAT

- 25) Joint Secretariat functions to the Panel will be provided by the Department for Communities and NILGA.

AGENDA

- 26) The Chair, in consultation with the central government and local government membership, shall determine the agenda for meetings of the Partnership Panel.
- 27) The Chair of each committee or working group of the Partnership Panel shall determine the agenda of their meetings. The Chair may require specified items to be discussed at any meeting of the committees and working groups.
- 28) Documents relating to the business to be taken at the Partnership Panel or its committees and working groups should normally be made available to members at least 5 working days before the meeting to which they relate. With the agreement of the Partnership Panel, its committees or working groups documents may be made available by electronic means only.

DECISIONS

- 29) The decisions of the Partnership Panel, its committees and working groups will be taken on the basis of consensus. Decisions will not be made by voting. Disagreements over matters of policy or procedure will be recorded in the meeting notes. Individual dissension on matters of general agreement shall be recorded at the request of any member.

RECORDINGS OF PROCEEDINGS

- 30) A record of the proceedings of the Partnership Panel, its committees and working groups will be taken and made available on the DfC website.