



To the presiding councillors

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Your reference:

Our reference:

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PARTNERSHIP PANEL FOR NORTHERN IRELAND – COUNCIL NOMINATIONS

I am pleased to advise you that the Executive Committee has now agreed my plans to establish a Partnership Panel between central and local government. The new Panel creates a forum for joint working and cooperation between the Executive and local government for the first time.

The basic structure and functions of the Panel were outlined in Section 103 of the Local Government Act 2014 (attached at Annex A). The Act provides for all Executive Ministers, including Junior Ministers to be members of the Panel. The local government side will be comprised of a representative from each of the 11 councils and up to five representatives of a representative body or association of the district councils that appears to the Department to be appropriate, possibly NILGA. Consequently, I am writing to ask your council to nominate a representative to the Partnership Panel and also to consider which representative body or association should be represented on the Panel.

We are all aware of the challenges and opportunities presented by the transfer of powers to local government on 1st April next year. The Panel will help us face those challenges together to ensure that we capitalise on the opportunities. In particular, I want the Panel to act as a mechanism for developing joined-up solutions that improve the delivery of local services – my recent press release refers (attached at Annex D). Though the Panel is an advisory body, I intend that it will have a productive role given the membership will be made up of decision makers in their own right from central and local government. It is important therefore to ensure that your representative on the Partnership Panel has a strategic overview of council

business, can act as council spokesperson and represent the new council fully in terms of contributing to the business of the Panel.

I enclose draft Terms of Reference (Annex B) and draft Standing Orders (Annex C) for your attention. Members of the new Partnership Panel will have the opportunity to review the Standing Orders and Terms of Reference at the first meeting of the group.

Finally, in terms of officer support, the Executive agreed that:

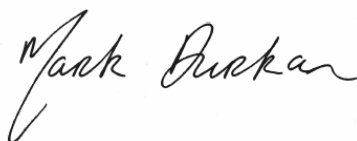
- A joint secretariat to support the Panel will be provided by my Department and NILGA;
- Support by civil servants and local government officers should be kept to a minimum with three senior DOE officials supporting the central government members of the Panel;
- The local government representatives should be supported by three Chief Executives, one of which should be the Chief Executive of NILGA. I would therefore ask that the sector agree two local government Chief Executives to sit alongside the NILGA Chief Executive;
- Departmental officials and local government senior officers will meet regularly to manage the business of the Panel.

I am keen to establish the Panel as soon as is practicable and hope to arrange the first meeting the last week in November. I should be grateful if you would inform the Department in writing as early as possible, but no later than 19th November 2014, of your:

- council nomination to the Partnership Panel;
- council's views on which representative body or association should be represented on the Partnership Panel; and
- confirmation of the two local government Chief Executives that will support local government members to participate fully in the business of the Panel.

All responses should be addressed to Claire Bradley, Local Government Policy Division 2, 4th Floor, Causeway Exchange, 1 – 7 Bedford Street, Belfast, BT2 7EG or claire.bradley@doeni.gov.uk by the above date.

Yours sincerely



MARK H DURKAN MLA
Minister of the Environment

Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014

PART 13 PARTNERSHIP PANEL

Partnership Panel

103. (1) The Department must establish and maintain a body to be known as the Partnership Panel for Northern Ireland (“the Panel”).

(2) The Panel may—

(a) give advice to any Northern Ireland department about matters affecting the exercise of any of its functions;

(b) make representations to any Northern Ireland department about any matters affecting, or of concern to, those involved in local government; and

(c) give advice to those involved in local government.

(3) The Panel is to consist of—

(a) councillors;

(b) Ministers; and

(c) a maximum of 5 representatives of such representative body or association of the district councils as appears to the Department to be appropriate,

but this subsection is subject to subsections (4) to (6).

(4) Each council may nominate a councillor to serve as a member of the Panel.

(5) The First Minister and deputy First Minister acting jointly may nominate Ministers to attend particular meetings of the Panel.

(6) Any Minister may attend any meeting of the Panel without having been nominated under subsection (5) to do so.

(7) In this section “Ministers” includes junior Ministers and subject to that any expression used in this section and in the Northern Ireland Act 1998 has the same meaning in this section as in that Act.

Partnership Panel for Northern Ireland: Draft Terms of Reference

INTRODUCTION

The Partnership Panel for Northern Ireland will provide a formal mechanism for constructive liaison between Executive Ministers and local government elected members at a political level on strategic policy matters of mutual interest and concern.

Whilst the Partnership Panel is an advisory body, Executive Ministers and elected councillors (nominated by the 11 councils) are key decision makers and that responsibility should be used to good effect when furthering the business of the Panel. It is incumbent on the members to strengthen relationships between the two tiers of government and ensure ownership of the Panel operates on a shared basis. Members must create a foundation for strategic thinking on a regional basis and an environment of collective and practical thinking for the Partnership Panel to fully function.

It is intended that the Panel will be reviewed two years after its establishment.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Panel may:

- Give advice to any Northern Ireland Department about matters affecting the exercise of any of its functions;
- Make representations to any Northern Ireland Department about any matters affecting, or of concern to, those involved in local government, and
- Give advice to those involved in local government.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE PARTNERSHIP PANEL

The Partnership Panel is to consist of:

- Councillors;
- Ministers; and
- a maximum of 5 representatives of such representative body or association of the district councils as appear to the Department to be appropriate.

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 Minister for the Environment will be the Chair.

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

Departmental officials and local government officers will meet regularly to support the business of the Panel going forward.

To ensure a smooth, efficient and effective process, sufficient administrative support will be provided by DOE and NILGA to enable the Partnership Panel to perform and address the business described in this paper.

MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

Secretariat

Joint Secretariat support will be provided by the DOE and NILGA.

Meetings

The Partnership Panel will meet at such times and such venues as the Chair will determine. The Panel may invite other persons to attend meetings in order to submit evidence and produce documents, or to speak.

Agenda

The Chair of the Partnership Panel will determine the agenda for the meetings, taking into account the views of Executive Ministers, local government councillors and members of a body representative of district councils.

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

Record of proceedings

Record of the proceedings of meetings will be in action format, listing key decisions and actions to be taken and will be prepared by the Secretariat. Copies will normally be forwarded to Panel Members within 4 weeks of the meeting. Following approval of the draft record, the Secretariat shall arrange for this record to be published on the DOE website.

Northern Ireland Partnership Panel: Draft Standing Orders

2. The Department of the Environment will establish and maintain a body known as the Partnership Panel for Northern Ireland (“the Partnership Panel”).

PURPOSE

3. 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; and
 - iii. Give advice to those involved in local government

MEMBERSHIP OF THE PARTNERSHIP PANEL

4. The Partnership Panel is to consist of :
 - i. Councillors;
 - ii. Ministers; and
 - iii. A maximum of 5 representatives of such representative body or association of the district councils as appear to the Department to be appropriate.
5. 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 of the Environment (Chair);
 - ii. Minister for Social Development;
 - iii. Minister for Regional Development;
 - iv. Minister of Justice;
 - v. Minister of Culture, Arts & Leisure;
 - vi. Minister of Enterprise, Trade & Investment;
 - vii. Minister of Finance & Personnel,
 - viii. Minister of Education
 - ix. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development
 - x. Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 - xi. Minister for Employment & Learning, and
 - xii. The Junior Ministers.
6. The Minister for the Environment is the Chair.

7. Each council may nominate a councillor to serve as a member to the Panel.
8. The Partnership Panel will have a maximum of 5 representatives from a representative body or association of the district councils as appear to the Department to be appropriate.
9. 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.
10. Substitutes will be permitted with prior express permission from the Chair.

RESIGNATION FROM THE PARTNERSHIP PANEL

11. 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.
12. However, a member may resign from the Partnership Panel by giving written notice to the Panel Secretariat, who shall notify the Environment Minister.
13. 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

14. Partnership Panel members should agree the frequency of meetings as one of their first items of business at their first meeting.
15. 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

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

19. 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

20. 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.
21. 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.
22. 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

23. The Partnership Panel shall be chaired by the Environment 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

24. 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

25. 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

26. Joint Secretariat functions to the Panel will be provided by the Department of the Environment and NILGA.

AGENDA

27. The Chair, in consultation with the central government and local government membership, shall determine the agenda for meetings of the Partnership Panel.

28. 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.

29. 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.

VOTING

30. 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

31. A record of the proceedings of the Partnership Panel, its committees and working groups will be taken and made available on the DOE website.

DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

5 November 2014

Durkan announces new era of joined up working between central and local government

Environment Minister Mark H Durkan today announced that he will chair a new Partnership Panel with local government.

The Executive has given the green light to his proposals for the Panel which is intended to improve co-ordination between departments and councils, and help deliver better outcomes for local communities.

The Panel brings together a working partnership, comprising Executive Ministers, councillors from the 11 new councils and members from a representative body or association of the district councils (possibly NILGA).

Mark H Durkan said: **“By establishing this Partnership Panel, I am creating a forum where key decision makers from central and local government can come together to develop joined-up solutions and improve the delivery of local services. Joint policy development and better operational collaboration will help us to tackle the issues that really matter to people.**

“Local government reform will result in bigger challenges for councils with the transfer of planning, local economic development, local tourism and the introduction of new community planning powers. Bringing this family of powers together within councils will enable local government to adopt a comprehensive approach to dealing with local needs and priorities. I am determined that central government departments should support this process through the Partnership Panel.”

He added: **“I intend that the Panel will be based on the key principles of openness, trust and honesty, with shared goals and values. My message to the future partners is that they must grasp this opportunity to adopt a more sustainable approach to the challenges we are facing.”**

Notes to editors:

1. Membership will comprise of Departmental Ministers, elected members from district councils and a maximum of five representatives from a local government body.
2. The duties of the Panel may involve giving advice to any Northern Ireland department about matters affecting the exercise of any of its functions, making representations to any Northern Ireland department about any matters affecting, or of concern to, those involved in local government, and giving advice to those involved in local government.
3. The Partnership Panel will be supported through joint secretariat arrangements between the DOE and NILGA. The Panel is expected to hold its first meeting in the coming weeks.
4. All media enquiries should be directed to the DOE Press Office 028 9025 6058 or for out of office hours, contact the EIS Duty Press Officer on pager: 07699 715 440 and your call will be returned.