

Causeway Coast and Glens

Borough Council

To: Council Meeting

Date: 24th November 2015

Correspondence report

Hard copy correspondence available upon request

1. NILGA Outcomes Bulletin, 26th October 2015

Detailing the 5th meeting of the Local Central Government Political Partnership Panel. It communicates the key Outcomes and Actions made at the meeting, namely; Councillor Code of Conduct, Programme for Government, training 7 Development; Bonfires; Finance; Community Planning; Performance management ; Shared Services and Other Business.

2. Post Office, 2nd November 2015

A programme of investment and transformation is taking place across the Post Office network to make branches more modern and convenient. Changes are due to be made to the Post Office at 26 Main Street, Dunloy, Ballymena, BT44 9AA. The Post Office are seeking comments about the changes before finalising the plans. A feedback survey is available via the following link: www.postofficeviews.co.uk , and enter the **unique code** for the branch **16270299**. Changes are due to commence in January/February 2016; Cloughmills Post Office will provide a service during this period.

3. Free NILGA Regional Consultation Event “The Review of Business Rates”

The Department of Finance & Personnel recently published a consultation paper regarding the future of business rating in Northern Ireland. The Free Consultation Event has been organised by NILGA and DFP and will seek to provide Members and Officers with key information about the proposals from speakers and will enable participants to discuss the issues and provide their views.

- 11th December 2015, Lough Neagh Discovery Centre, Craigavon,
Registration **10.15am – 12:40pm** lunch and close.

Contact Democratic Services to register your place

4. SOLACE: Draft for Finalisation - NILGA: Independent Review of the Association’s Future Purpose, Sustainability, Roles, Priorities, Objectives & Structure, September 2015 (attached)

SOLACE in Business, part of the SOLACE Group (U.K), was commissioned by NILGA to carry out a small scale, independent review of the Association’s position and part to be played in the wider future governance framework for Northern Ireland.



26th October 2015

NILGA OUTCOMES BULLETIN

CENTRAL – LOCAL GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP PANEL NILGA OUTCOMES BULLETIN

The 5th Meeting of the Local – Central Government Political Partnership Panel met on Tuesday 20th October 2015. The bulletin is offered for members and officers of Councils in order to *communicate the **KEY OUTCOMES** and **ACTIONS** made at the meeting and create an opportunity for councils, at a Standing Committee and / or Full Council, to hear from and respond to, your council Panel members.*

COUNCILLOR CODE OF CONDUCT

A 3 person Review team has been set up by the Environment Minister, consisting of Liam Flanigan, former Chief Executive of the legacy Limavady Borough Council, together with local government expertise from Lanarkshire and Newport. The Minister confirmed that there would be thorough input from councils and NILGA in this review, with progress and outcomes coming to the Panel itself.

PROGRAMME for GOVERNMENT (PFG)

The timetable (to May 2016) and outcomes-oriented approach to the next PFG were reaffirmed, Panel members collectively and wilfully emphasised the importance of designing in councils to it, together with the NILGA Programme for LOCAL Government, now out with councils for feedback, as a complementary strategic product.

TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT

The Secretariat of the Panel will contact counterparts in Wales to consider the workings and evolution of the Partnership between central and local government there, with a view to delivering an initiative in early January 2016 as part of improvement and development of the Panel's governance and work.

BONFIRES

Local Government Partnership Panel members considered the comments and view of the Environment Minister on Bonfire Licensing. Members recognised the complexities and sensitivities, reaffirming the importance of thorough consultation with individual councils on any proposals for Bonfire regulation.

FINANCE

The Environment Minister confirmed and Panel members welcomed the partial restoration of the Rate Support Grant, an investment of £2.1 million for 2016/17, which benefits seven (7) councils. See also NILGA Press Release Thursday 22nd October 2015 - www.nilga.org Members of the Panel also emphasised the critical state of finances within the wider public sector and within local government specifically, citing 50% reductions in PCSP budgets as requiring collective action and Ministerial intervention. On the issue of the Social Investment Fund (SIF) Minister McCann provided an update and will provide Panel members (for wider distribution) a report on the roll out of the £80 million programme.

COMMUNITY PLANNING

The Department of the Environment confirmed the development of Council – Departmental engagement protocols, and Panel Members from local government urged that these are not seen as replacements to the push for statutory, multi-departmental community planning partners committing resources and budget to the 11 community plans now evolving across NI.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Further guidance on new performance indicators, supplementing those which already exist for Planning, Economic Development and Waste Management, will be released as soon as finalised by the Department, for consultation with Local Government and the LG Auditor.

SHARED SERVICES

Panel members delivered and debated a strategic level proposition, highlighting local government collaboration activity and its impact to date including on services like insurance, welfare of animals and recruitment, and resolved to consider further innovative ways of sharing services, including looking beyond existing programmes and initiatives, such as Local Government Shared Services (LGSS) in England.

An official from Enterprise Shared Services within DFP presented the current direction of travel within Central Government and emphasised the benefits and desirability of collaboration with councils. The concerns of councils were recognised in relation to local benefit, value for money, affordability and retention of control, and it was accepted that a step-by step approach was likely to be the best way forward for councils in the current post-reform context.

OTHER BUSINESS

Support arrangements to the Political Panel are to be enhanced, with invitations to be issued to the 11 Council CEOs to attend future meetings as observers.

Minister Durkan will be meeting with the 11 CEOs on an individual basis in the coming weeks to discuss progress on planning in each council area.

An update was received from the DARD Permanent Secretary in relation to the agricultural crisis, and Panel members welcomed the extra €7.1m received via prioritisation of the EU allocation via Defra, and that a one off payment of £1700 per farmer had been confirmed. Minister O'Neill is currently looking at supply chain issues.

Issues in relation to DRD, including grass cutting, winter maintenance and street lighting were raised in the absence of Minister McIlveen. NILGA will continue to press DRD to resolve pressures on councils.

Should you through your council wish to raise an issue of regional, strategic significance for the Partnership Panel, please contact NILGA, Joint Secretariat, at c.bradley@nilga.org

NILGA, Bradford Court, Upper Galwally, Castlereagh, BT8 6RB
tel: 028 9079 8972 web: www.nilga.org twitter: @NI_LGA

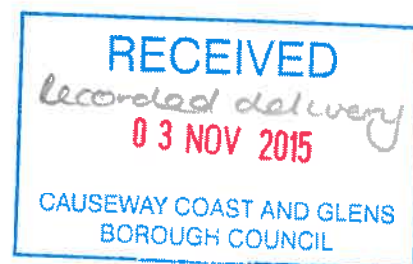
the voice of local government

Disclaimer: The Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) endeavours to ensure that the information contained within our Website, Policies and other communications is up to date and correct. We do not, however, make any representation that the information will be accurate, current, complete, uninterrupted or error free or that any information or other material accessible from or related to NILGA is free of viruses or other harmful components. NILGA accepts no responsibility for any erroneous information placed by or on behalf of any user or any loss by any person or user resulting from such information.



DSU 103
CM NOV
2015

Mr David Jackson MBE - Chief Executive
Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council
Cloonavin
66 Portstewart Road
COLERAINE
BT52 1EY



2 November 2015

Dear Mr Jackson

Dunloy Post Office®
26 Main Street, Dunloy, Ballymena, BT44 9AA

Changes to your Post Office® - tell us what you think

We're talking to the Postmaster about making some changes to the above Post Office and we'd like you to tell us what you think about the changes before we finalise our plans.

What's happening?

There's an exciting programme of investment and transformation taking place across the Post Office network, helping to make our branches more modern and convenient for you and for the Postmasters who run them. We're talking to the Postmaster about changing to one of our new-style local branches and if the change goes ahead:

- Post Office services would be offered from a low-screened, open plan style service point integrated into the retail counter
- The branch would be open for longer:
Mon – Fri 08:00 – 21:00, Sat & Sun 09:00 – 20:00.
(Current opening times are:
Mon, Tue, Wed, Fri 09:00 – 17:30, Thu 09:00 – 13:00 & Sat 09:00 – 12:30)
- You'll still be able to get most of the Post Office products and services you're used to however for a small number of services you may need to go on-line, telephone our customer helpline or visit an alternative Post Office. Details of product availability are provided overleaf
- To get your new branch ready, it may need to close for up to seven days during January/February 2016 for refurbishment

What's next?

We want to know what's important to you and would like you to tell us what you think, particularly on the following areas:

- Why you use this Post Office and what you like about it
- What you think about the proposed new-look Post Office. For example the Post Office service point would be on the retail counter, so is there anything you'd like to ask us or would like us to take into consideration about the proposed location of the Post Office till or the queuing area
- What you think about any changes to the opening hours
- If you have any comments about how you will access the Post Office products and services that won't be available at the branch if the change goes ahead
- If you have any comments about the potential closure period during the refurbishment or access to other branches in the area

There's also a list of frequently asked questions provided at the end which you may find useful.

It's easy to let us have your feedback by completing our convenient online survey via the following link postofficeviews.co.uk and entering the unique code for this branch 16270299

If you have a QR scanner on your mobile phone, all you need to do is scan here:




Customer information materials are also being displayed in branch and details are published on our website too at postofficeviews.co.uk


We'll be accepting comments up to and including 1 December 2015.

You can also let us have your comments in the following ways:

 postofficeviews.co.uk

 FREEPOST Your Comments
**(This is the full address to use.
No further address or name details are required)**

 comments@postoffice.co.uk

 Customer Helpline: 03457 22 33 44
Textphone: 03457 22 33 55

Please note that items sent by Freepost take 2 working days to arrive and don't include Saturday or Sunday. Therefore please do allow sufficient time for your comments to arrive before the end of the consultation period, as we are unable to consider feedback received after the deadline.

We won't be responding to you individually however the feedback received will be taken into consideration as we finalise plans with the Postmaster. We'll write to you again outlining the main comments received and our response to these and also to explain the final plans for the branch. All of the responses received will be provided to the independent statutory consumer watchdog, which in Great Britain is Citizens Advice and Citizens Advice Scotland, and in Northern Ireland, the Consumer Council.

When would the changes happen?

We're planning to make these changes in January/February 2016 and we'll put a poster up in branch at least two weeks before to let customers know the exact date and to tell them how we've considered the feedback. We'll make sure any disruption caused by the refurbishment is kept to a minimum.

The following branch will be happy to provide customers with Post Office services during this period.

- Cloughmills Post Office, 17 Main Street, Cloughmills, Ballymena, BT44 9LF

We'll also be asking customers for their feedback once the changes have taken place and details will be available in branch shortly after the new look branch opens.

Yours sincerely

Michael Brennan
Area Manager

To get this information in a different format, for example, in larger print, audio or braille please contact the Customer Helpline on 03457 22 33 44 or Textphone 03457 22 33 55.

This communication process has been agreed with the independent statutory consumer watchdog, which in Great Britain is Citizens Advice and Citizens Advice Scotland, and in Northern Ireland, the Consumer Council, and is being carried out in line with our Code of Practice for changes to the Post Office network, which we have agreed with them. If you'd like copies of the Code they are available in branch, or by contacting us or on our website at: www.postoffice.co.uk/transforming-post-office. If you think that the process has not been properly followed and wish to make a complaint, then please write to us or email us via the contact details included in our posters and letters and let us know why. We'll examine your complaint and respond to you as soon as we can. We will provide you with the relevant contact points for the consumer watchdog, so if you are still not satisfied when you have received our response, you can ask them for their assistance.

Dunloy Post Office® services available

Your Postmaster or our Customer Helpline on 03457 223344 will be happy to help you with any queries about product availability or provide you with details of maximum value of transactions. Customers can also shop online at www.postoffice.co.uk

| | Current branch | New branch |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Mail | | |
| First & Second Class mail | ✓ | ✓ |
| Stamps, stamp books (1 st class 6 & 12 only, 2 nd class 12 only) | ✓ | ✓ |
| Special stamps (Christmas issue only) & postage labels | ✓ | ✓ |
| Signed For | ✓ | ✓ |
| Special Delivery | ✓ | ✓ |
| Home shopping returns | ✓ | ✓ |
| Inland small, medium & large parcels | ✓ | ✓ |
| Express & contract parcels | ✓ | ✓ |
| British Forces Mail (BFPO) | ✓ | ✓ |
| International letters & postcards (inc. signed for & Airsure) | ✓ | ✓ |
| International parcels up to 2kg & printed papers up to 5kg | ✓ | ✓ |
| Parcelforce Worldwide International parcels | ✓ | ✓ |
| Articles for the blind (inland & international) | ✓ | ✓ |
| Royal Mail redirection service | ✓ | ✓ |
| Local Collect | ✓ | ✓ |
| Drop & Go | ✓ | ✓ |
| Withdrawals, deposits and payments | | |
| Post Office Card Account | ✓ | ✓ |
| Personal & Business Banking cash withdrawals, deposits & balance enquiries using a card. Also enveloped cheque deposits and barcoded deposit slips. | ✓ | ✓ |
| Postal orders | ✓ | ✓ |
| Moneygram | ✓ | ✓ |
| Change giving | ✓ | ✓ |
| Bill payments | | |
| Bill payments (card, barcoded or manual) | ✓ | ✓ |
| Key recharging | ✓ | ✓ |
| Transcash (without barcode) | ✓ | ✓ |
| Travel | | |
| Pre-order travel money | ✓ | ✓ |
| On demand travel money | Euros/Dollars | Euros/Dollars |
| Travel insurance referral | * | ✓ |
| On demand travel insurance | ✓ | * |
| Mobile Top-ups & E vouchers | | |
| Mobile Top-ups & E vouchers | ✓ | ✓ |
| National Lottery Terminal | ✓ | ✓ |
| Payment by cheque | | |
| Products marked * are available at Cloughmills Post Office, 17 Main Street, Cloughmills, Ballymena, BT44 9LF | Opening times: Mon, Tue, Thu, Fri 09:00 – 12:00 13:00 – 17:30 Wed 09:00 – 12:00 Sat 09:00 – 12:30 | |

Frequently Asked Questions.

Why are you looking to make this change?

This change is part of major programme of modernisation taking place across the Post Office network, the largest in the history of Post Office Limited. The Programme is underpinned by Government investment which will see up to 8,000 branches modernised and additional investment in up to 3,000 community and outreach branches.

Will my transactions still be private?

In most cases Post Office and shop customers queue together but the Post Office service point will be clearly signed. A low level serving screen helps to aid privacy and there would be enough space for people to wait back from those being served. Post Office training also covers the protection of confidential information and personal data.

What about security?

We can't go into detail about specific security arrangements in order to safeguard those people working at and using Post Office branches but there would continue to be appropriate security measures in place, as well as robust procedures and guidelines which postmasters and their staff are required to follow. All of which helps contribute to a secure environment.

Will people still be properly trained?

Our customers deserve to receive the best possible service. Post Office training packages are provided to postmasters so that any person they employ who would be handling Post Office transactions is trained to Post Office standards, just as you'd expect.

Will there be enough space?

To make sure any changes meet with Post Office accessibility standards, an assessment is carried out on what the proposed layout might look like following conversion. This includes having space to wait for service, adequate turning circle space for wheelchair users where appropriate and keeping entrance areas and shopping aisles free of any obstructions, so people have a clear access route to the Post Office service point.

Can I see the floorplans?

The feedback we get from customers and local representatives helps us to deliver the change with the postmaster, including the final layout. Once the change takes place, will be asking customers for their feedback on how they are finding their new style service.

Will I have to wait longer to be served?

The new style branch is designed to handle straightforward transactions which can be carried out quickly and efficiently. Post Office services will also be available whenever the shop is open so customers can choose to visit the branch at a time more convenient to them.

Will I still be able to do business banking?

Staff at the branch will be happy to speak to customers about their individual requirements and transaction limits for their specific transaction.

Will I still be able to leave my mail securely?

Mail will be held safely at the branch ready for collection by Royal Mail.



REGIONAL CONSULTATION EVENT **“The Review of Business Rates”**

11th December 2015

Lough Neagh Discovery Centre, Craigavon

Registration for this event - 10.15am

The Department of Finance & Personnel recently published a consultation paper regarding the future of business rating in Northern Ireland. According to Arlene Forster, Finance Minister: “the overall objective of this review is to ensure that we have the best and most acceptable system of raising revenue to help fund our public services in the future. The paper discusses various options and proposals for consideration in relation to property valuations, rating and reliefs. District councils in Northern Ireland receive a substantial part of their rates income from the non-domestic sector, so it is important that the local government sector responds fully to this consultation.

This FREE consultation event has been organised by NILGA and DFP, and will seek to provide Members and Officers with key information about the proposals from speakers, and will enable participants to discuss the issues and provide their views. The outcome will facilitate both a regional response from NILGA and specific council responses.”

AGENDA

| | |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 9.30 am— 10.30am | NB: Preceded by NILGA Executive meeting (to complete NILGA Business Only) |
| 10.15am | <i>Registration and tea/coffee for all delegates</i> |
| 10.45am | Welcome & Introduction to Consultation Event — Ald Carla Lockhart, NILGA President |
| 10.55am | <i>The Future of Business Rates - Summary & Options</i> <i>Brian McClure, Director of Rating Policy, Department of Finance & Personnel</i> |
| 11.25am | <i>The Future of Business Rates - A Local Government Framework Response</i> <i>David Bell, on behalf of the Northern Ireland Local Government Association</i> |
| 11.45am | Interactive Session - Roundtable Discussion |
| 12.15pm | Feedback by delegates of roundtable discussion |
| 12.35pm | <i>Summary of Outcomes/ Practical Next Steps</i> |
| 12.40pm— 1.30pm | Lunch & Close |

Please complete the booking form (except for NILGA Exec Members) on the reverse and return it to NILGA by emailing c.bradley@nilga.org, by Monday, 7th December 2015

“The Review of Business Rates”

11th December 2015

Lough Neagh Discovery Centre, Craigavon

Registration begins at 10.15am

BOOKING FORM

PLEASE NOTE:

**This event is open to ALL Councillors, not just NILGA members.
Places at these events are limited so early booking is recommended.**

Contact name of person responsible for bookings _____

Council: _____

Email: _____

Contact telephone number: _____

Council nominations

| Full Name | Title | Preferred Venue (s) | Dietary / Special requirements |
|------------------|--------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

Please return to Claire Bradley at the NILGA offices on or before 7th December 2015, email: c.bradley@nilga.org or by post:

**Claire Bradley
NILGA
Bradford Court
Upper Galwally
Castlereagh
BT8 6RB**

DRAFT FOR FINALISATION

NORTHERN IRELAND LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

(NILGA)

INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF THE ASSOCIATION'S FUTURE PURPOSE, SUSTAINABILITY, ROLES, PRIORITIES, OBJECTIVES & STRUCTURE

**KIM RYLEY
CHAIR
SOLACE IN BUSINESS
SEPTEMBER 2015**

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. SOLACE in Business, part of the SOLACE Group (U.K), was commissioned by NILGA to carry out a small scale, independent review of the Association's position and part to be played in the wider future governance framework for Northern Ireland. The main fieldwork for this was carried out locally in June 2015.
2. Although significant differences of views were expressed about certain aspects of the matters under review, by a wide range of stakeholders interviewed, there was virtually unanimous support for the notion that local government in Northern Ireland needs an authoritative, credible, unified, single voice. The key question is whether NILGA is enabled to be the body that can best exercise this crucial role.
3. The context for the review is one where the wider governance landscape in Northern Ireland is in a state of flux and transition at every level, as the region moves inexorably towards greater self-determination. It is likely to be several years before this new infrastructure is in place fully and is functioning effectively. NILGA's place in this new, emerging governance structure is, as yet, uncertain and it has taken steps to anticipate, rather than react to, such uncertainty through this review and in terms of previous consultation, strategic restructuring and resource management exercises since 2011. These changes, functionally, have reduced the size and cost of the organisation by over 50% in four years and introduced efficiencies which have been acknowledged by many. Now is the time for NILGA to offer a more sector led sustainable solution that is supported by the local government sector.
4. Bold, high calibre political and professional leadership is needed now in the local government sector in Northern Ireland, if it is to take advantage of the new opportunities to do things differently as presented by these changes. Such shifts in the previous locus of power means that relationships between the various constituent parts of the system need to be re-negotiated actively. It is here that NILGA is most criticised by some of its partners for its current approach and "style". There are widely held perceptions that the political leadership in the Association is inaccessible to its members, lacks transparency, and is unsophisticated in its "management of influence" on behalf of the sector. Conversely, it is acknowledged that NILGA's operational team produces good quality services and have been an integral part of the development and protection of local government in Northern Ireland during the changes above mentioned. Tackling the deficits and effectively communicating successes must be an immediate and high priority for NILGA.

5. There is a clear, shared view that NILGA should concentrate on its “core” purpose, and related roles, as a representative body for local government, and should do fewer things better. There is no consensus about what other functions NILGA might or should perform in addition to this, and there needs to be an open discussion about this with the 11 new authorities, and with other key partners. This discussion will take time, but concentrating on the core purpose of representation and key roles provide a foundation for this discussion now and in the early part of 2016/17.
6. To be effective in future, NILGA needs to enhance its political leadership capacity and capabilities and this leadership has to be understood and bought into by councils. This will involve necessary changes to its structure, membership arrangements, ways of working, support staff deployment, and communications/engagement with stakeholders. The Association needs to adopt a strategic, outcomes-focussed approach and to actively negotiate further devolution of powers and responsibilities to local authorities in the future. It is therefore appropriate that the Association will consult upon a Programme for Local Government over the next few months and is positioned to input into wider, EU, national and regional policy discussions on devolution and subsidiarity.
7. The recommendations in this report, which result from these findings, are unapologetically comprehensive because the fulfilment of them should be extremely beneficial for local government in the medium and long term. They set out a 20 point programme of action for NILGA over the next 3 years, but are NOT to be seen as all being required immediately or required to be done by NILGA – rather they are a template of aspiration for the sector. How the Association and councils choose to respond to this modernisation challenge will be important. Local government is more influential where an effective Local Government Association is operating. This is why all parts of the UK and Ireland have LGAs currently and is why Northern Ireland should seek to operate with a similar body.

In doing these things over time as recommended, the Local Government sector in Northern Ireland can attain the recognition and development it requires to achieve the prize of strong councils with greater impact and local discretion, operating on the solid foundations of excellent shared support services. The recommendations are challenging but the prize is worth achieving.

CONTENTS

- 1. Review Brief and Methodology**
- 2. Context – the Emerging New Governance Landscape**
- 3. The Purpose and Roles of NILGA**
- 4. Other Functions**
- 5. Structure and Constitution**
- 6. Communications and Relationship Management**
- 7. Timescale for Change**
- 8. Recommendations**

1. REVIEW BRIEF AND METHODOLOGY

1.1 Solace in Business, part of the Solace Group (UK), was commissioned by NILGA to carry out a small scale, independent review of the Association's current position and part to be played in the wider future governance framework for Northern Ireland.

1.2 The aim of this independent research study was to carry out a review of the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA), to assess and make recommendations on:

- The services and representation provided by NILGA
- NILGA's sustainability
- Areas for future focus and development, which would add value to local government
- Ensuring performance is measured and communication with, from and to councils, is optimised.

1.3 The main fieldwork for this study was carried out in Northern Ireland in June 2015. Desktop research was undertaken on a number of key background documents relevant to the context for the review, including:

- details of the current organisational structure for the Association and recent changes to this,
- the Association's updated Constitution (June 2015),
- the Association's current Corporate Plan (2012-2016),
- the Consultation paper issued to all Councils by NILGA in November 2014 and the Outcomes Paper of February 2015 resulting from responses received,
- earlier related external studies commissioned by the Association.

1.4 The main evidence gathering for this study came from a large number of face-to-face and one-to-one telephone interviews with a wide range of representatives with an interest in NILGA's activities and possible future role. These included:

- Local councillors who are NILGA Executive members
- Local councillors who are NILGA members, but are not on its Executive
- Local councillors who are not NILGA members
- Local Authority Chief Executives
- Representatives from a wide range of stakeholder agencies, including the Business Community, Higher Education, and Voluntary and Community Organisations,

- Senior officials and Ministers from the Northern Ireland Assembly Government and
- Senior officers from other UK local government associations, including the LGA, WLGA, COSLA, and ANEC.
- (Several written submissions were also received from some of these bodies and these were also taken into account).

1.5 The study used an "Appreciative Enquiry" approach to questioning these interviewees in depth, to reveal both what has been and is positive about the Association's work and achievements, and where and how improvements can be made to this in future. This enabled a "mirror" to be held up to the Association which gives a clear reflection of how it is seen by itself and others. Although significant differences of views were expressed (and are recorded here) about certain aspects of the matters under review, there was virtually unanimous support for the notion that local government in Northern Ireland needs an authoritative, credible, unified, single voice and that, with necessary changes, NILGA is a body that can best exercise this crucial role.

2. CONTEXT – THE EMERGING NEW GOVERNANCE LANDSCAPE

- 2.1 The wider governance framework in Northern Ireland is in a state of flux and transition at every level currently. Key institutions and agencies have been, or are being, re-structured, their functions are changing or being re-distributed, and some organisations (such as the Local Government Staff Commission) will shortly cease to exist. As Northern Ireland moves inexorably towards greater self-determination, there needs to be a co-ordinated and active debate about how to take advantage of these new opportunities to do things differently, particularly in relation to making this whole infrastructure closer and more democratically accountable to the local people that it serves.
- 2.2 It needs to be recognised more overtly that such tectonic shifts in the locus of power means that relationships between the constituent parts of the system need to be re-negotiated. There needs to be an agreed, formal process for this dialogue, given the complexities involved and the likelihood that it will be some years before the new infrastructure is in place fully and is functioning effectively. This will enable a more planned transition, on a “whole system” basis, and enable the organisations affected to evolve at a pace which is viable for them.
- 2.3 Such an approach must not be focussed though on institutions or architecture, but rather on the effective utilisation of all the expertise and resources available, at both regional and local levels. This will help determine not only where particular functions, responsibilities and accountabilities are best located, but also will create a new infrastructure which incentivises greater collaboration, integration and further devolution. Whilst NILGA has communicated this approach since 2011, for example in its responses to the Review of the NI Assembly and number of government departments, the NI Economic Strategy and the proposed Programme for Government, the opportunity for this transformative change presents itself now for the local government sector as a whole.

"Northern Ireland does not need 11 "mini-Stormonts" all doing their own thing! We must avoid the things that divide us." - NIA Minister

- 2.4 It needs to be recognised that the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive is still an immature body and is in the process of re-structuring itself, as well as exploring how its political decision making processes can be made more robust and stable. The Assembly is not yet fully functional. It does not find it easy to let go to others those functions which would be best carried out more locally, and it displays a tendency to be overly directive about how things should be done, rather than focussing on achieving a set of shared and agreed outcomes to improve the quality of life of all its citizens. As a result, the Assembly often duplicates the work of other bodies and its siloed structure has prevented it from taking a joined up approach to tackling

complex issues. There are however, some able politicians in the Assembly who understand the need for change and who will support the development of a fuller role for local government in the future.

- 2.5 In this fluid and uncertain context, it is important that the local government sector is able, collectively, to position itself well, as an increasingly important and influential part of the emerging new governance system. This needs to provide also for the sector to push pro-actively for greater subsidiarity of decision making powers and responsibilities, with further devolution being planned and agreed at a pace which matches the ambition of each local authority, and being supported by a strong business case showing greater value-for-money.
- 2.6 11 new local authorities in Northern Ireland are quickly finding their feet and are picking up the newly acquired devolved functions and responsibilities enthusiastically. Already they are exploring actively how best to collaborate with one another, on both a sub-regional and regional basis, to achieve better economy of scale, as well as greater impact and influence. Such improvements were one of the main reasons for major restructuring of the sector. However, significant further devolution to councils in Northern Ireland is needed if they are to match the roles being performed by those in other parts of the U.K. and Ireland, and be able to deal with the funding cuts to come as part of continuing austerity in the approach of the Government to the future role and size of the State.
- 2.7 In this emerging new landscape the need also to look at the part played by the relatively bloated “quangocracy” in Northern Ireland, which lacks democratic accountability and makes integration of related functions more difficult, cannot be avoided. Many of the functions currently carried out by these bodies will need to continue in the future, but could well be performed differently and else where in the system.
- 2.8 From a local government perspective, there is a particular need in this context for strong, bold leadership that is able to take a longer term, strategic view of the sector’s future role. At this point in time, particularly, there is a need for the sector to have a credible, accepted, unified single voice, not least in its dealings with the Northern Ireland Assembly, as well as with other partners and allies. The key question, therefore, is how NILGA can best exercise this crucial role and how it will need to operate differently in future to do so effectively.

"The range of functions NILGA is best equipped to perform will determine the type of leadership it needs to display. It needs high quality members to be credible." - Voluntary Association Representative

2.9 NILGA's place in this new, emerging governance structure is, as yet, uncertain. It has a small number of highly motivated and able staff which supports the Association. The organisation's vulnerability has meant that its workforce is managed in a short term, reactive manner and despite improvements in productivity, this is unsustainable. Therefore, how the Association and councils – as well as SOLACE - respond to the challenging 20 point programme which repositions NILGA will be important, both for NILGA and for the Local Government sector as a whole. There is a salutary warning in the current vitriolic public hostility between the Welsh Government and the WLGA, where working relations have all but broken down completely.

3. THE PURPOSE AND ROLE(S) OF NILGA

3.1 It needs to be remembered that NILGA is a voluntary association and a membership body. As such, each member council can decide whether it wishes to join and how active a part it wishes to play in the Association's activities. In general, the appeal of such bodies to potential members tends to rest on them gaining benefits through their membership that would not otherwise be available to them. These tend to include:-

- an opportunity to actively influence policy development on a larger scale;
- personal / corporate development opportunities and access to high quality, low cost training, mentoring and coaching;
- early access to important information and examples of best practice;
- the support of a network of peers;
- collective work on issues such as investment, procurement, workforce development and innovation and,
- participation in key events and activities.

3.2 It is true, however, that the greater the degree of Members' participation in and contributions to such an association, the greater the value they are likely to extract from being a member of it. Although NILGA is a political association i.e. its members are elected local politicians, *it is owned and "controlled" by the councils that constitute it*, (not by individual councillors), and its role and purpose should not be confused with those of the National Association of Councillors in Northern Ireland.

3.3 It is evident, however, that to develop and be successful in the future, NILGA needs to clearly re-define (and widely publicise) its "core" purpose and the role(s) it is best placed to undertake in the emerging new governance framework for Northern Ireland. This needs to demonstrate the relevance of the Association, particularly to the 11 new local authorities, its ability to give value-for-money for its

membership fees, and what benefits and advantages it could/would bring to “my council”.

- 3.4 There is overwhelming support for having an effective body that can provide an authoritative, representative voice for the local government sector in Northern Ireland. *In making this its main objective, NILGA can save the new councils’ time and money, both of which they are short of, but it must avoid being seen as too directive in its style and tone. NILGA must not act as if it is an independent think tank, and has in fact expressly stated that it is not such a body and its appointed members need to be clear of their role as representatives of their Council and, as a collective, of the regional local government sector in Northern Ireland. (In other words, they have no status or authority, in this context, as an individual councillor).*

"NILGA's pivotal role is to co-ordinate a consensus view for the local government sector, and to act as its advocate." - NIA Minister

- 3.5 With a visibly fresh approach, a new NILGA can continue to play a pivotal role as an honest broker of consensus across the sector, and across the political spectrum in Northern Ireland. Its closely related roles are those of advocate, assertive (but not bullying) negotiator, and co-ordinator of key actions to promote the interests of the sector, in the region and beyond. As a legitimate lobbying organisation, NILGA necessarily needs to have a wider (and longer term) perspective than those of individual Councils, and be able to act as a sounding board and a single point of contact to the sector collectively, for businesses, representative bodies, quangos, regional Voluntary Associations, and others who wish to engage with it, in a turbulent and uncertain political environment. To fulfil this, NILGA needs to make further changes beyond and the changes need to be owned and invested in by the 11 councils. Such changes in themselves are less important than the outcomes, mutual acceptance and shared trust that must prevail as a consequence of them.

*"NILGA must do less, better! Its credibility depends on its ability to form relationships that enable it to confidently represent the whole local government sector, and to proactively form and sustain alliances of mutual interest. This will be the key to likely further devolution."
- Business Sector Representative*

- 3.6 Ideally, *NILGA needs to be viewed widely as the “go to” constituted body, not least for the local authorities it serves. It should be able to act effectively as a regional policy forum, network, conduit, and commentator or influencer of U.K and N.I Assembly Government policy and legislation.* Depending on the key priorities for local authorities in Northern Ireland, this approach would include areas of development such as policy guidance, advocacy, economic growth and prosperity,

skills development, “fairness” and equality, regional improvement, waste and environmental protection, good governance and democratic engagement/ participation. Crucially, NILGA should be able to ensure a regional overview and understanding of such matters, and of the collective actions needed to progress the desired outcomes for local people, as well as to help coalesce ideas, energy and resources around their implementation.

- 3.7 For this to happen, NILGA needs to adopt itself – and advocate to others including councils and wider government - a higher level, more strategic, outcomes-based approach, and embed a credible, respected political leadership capability. Indeed, its value and credibility as an organisation will be based on it being widely accepted as the single, trusted, authoritative, unifying, representative voice for the sector. NILGA needs to attract and retain “top quality” local politicians – those with wide experience and impact, and to develop member “experts” in key areas of policy development, rather than operate through a system of annual political rotation. (This raises issues about how many representatives of the 11 councils sit on NILGA, and how these are appointed – which is dealt with in the next section of this report).
- 3.8 NILGA’s ability to form and maintain new positive, open, honest and “straightforward” relationships with a wide range of partners and allies will be essential to its success in exercising an effective leadership role for the sector. *Nowhere will this be more important than in its better liaison and close joint working with the newly reconstituted SOLACE Branch for Northern Ireland. A co-ordinated joint approach by the two organisations will offer the high quality political and professional leadership that the region needs.* NILGA will, however, need to differentiate its role from the complementary one to be played by SOLACE, and allow each organisation to operate in its own sphere of influence. There will be times when a particular case can be made best by senior council officers working “quietly behind the scenes” and others where a visible democratic mandate posited by NILGA will be more effective. This will allow each organisation to play to its strengths on an agreed, mutual agenda of securing better outcomes for local people.
- 3.9 There is a similar need in forming new relationships for NILGA to differentiate its role from those that the 11 new councils might seek to adopt collectively, on either a regional or sub-regional basis. Similarly, NILGA’s collaborative working relationship with the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive will be a crucial litmus test of the effectiveness of the Association’s new approach and way of working. The key here will be for NILGA to move away from seeing its role as one of scrutinising Assembly decisions and holding the Assembly to account, to one of brokering a genuine strategic outcomes-based partnership designed to promote the principle of greater subsidiarity and devolution to local level. NILGA needs to take the lead pro-actively in re-vamping the current Partnership Panel with the Assembly in these

terms, so that it provides a more effective dialogue about bringing about such governance changes in a planned way, over the next few years. The arrangements already in place between local authorities in Scotland and the Scottish Parliament could provide a helpful model for this improved approach. As mentioned in 2.3 above, it is appropriate that the Association will consult upon a Programme for Local Government over the next few months, has prioritised strategic discussions with OFMDFM, including Junior Ministers responsible for high level policies in this sphere and is positioned to input into wider, EU, national and regional policy discussions on devolution and subsidiarity.

- 3.10 In terms of extending its influence and impact on behalf of the local government sector, NILGA needs also to enhance existing and develop new wider networks, on a pan-U.K. / Irish, pan-European and international basis, not least to tap into and share emerging best practice. This can be done validly as part of a wider objective of putting Northern Ireland on the world stage, to raise its profile for tourism and inward investment, and to demonstrate the ambition of the sector to be a leading player in economic growth for the region. NILGA's securing of the *European Entrepreneurial Region of the Year*, in 2015, for all of Northern Ireland, must be capitalised upon, acknowledging that European and regional partners have been established to ensure an economic and skills legacy to this accolade. One mark of the maturity of Northern Ireland's political institutions will be their ability to look outwards and learn from others in this way, rather than to simply pursue parochial local or party political agendas.
- 3.11 In essence, by doing fewer things better, NILGA can act as a small, but energetic "spider" in the centre of a growing web of influence. Its role is, in part, to act as the glue which holds the system of local public service delivery together. NILGA must develop an effective means to pro-actively form and extend alliances of mutual interest, for the benefit of the sector, even acting as an "outreach partner" able to gain access to and funnel (grant) funding to other bodies, where appropriate, and where they share the Association's values and objectives. Again, for this to happen, it must be a role accepted by the sector.
- 3.12 Success in all this will depend on NILGA increasing its leadership capacity and capability, if it is to operate with confidence across all levels of governance in Northern Ireland. The Association has a key role, therefore, in actively supporting the Councillors' Charter and in developing a new regional framework for the development and training of elected members, not least given the high turnover of local councillors in the recent local government elections. This is already seen as a high priority, particularly in relation to those functions where the 11 councils have acquired new powers and responsibilities such as Planning, and NILGA can prepare the sector to actively take on further devolution to come. In practice, such a programme to create the "21st Century Councillor", as a community leader, and deliver a Programme

for *Local Government*, will need to rely largely on the resources of the local authorities for their implementation, (as would most other functions NILGA might take on).

- 3.13 A further important aspect of NILGA's "core" functions is for the Association to be the protector and promoter of the reputation of local government and locally delivered public services in Northern Ireland. This involves identifying, sharing and celebrating good practice, innovation, and successes/achievements. But, in terms of its joint leadership role for the sector with SOLACE, it means NILGA driving forward a sector-owned comprehensive programme to transform local public services, and citizen engagement, in an age of continuing austerity, rather than this being dictated by regional or national government. This will be a major challenge for the new councils, which are still focussed to a large extent on establishing themselves individually, not least in them emulating the growing trend in the rest of the U.K towards shared services (between local authorities), and integrated service delivery across organisational boundaries and all public service bodies in a particular locality or sub-region. NILGA needs to actively assist the new councils to take up confidently their General Power of Competence and to give their "place-shaping" role high priority, not least in relation to economic growth and community cohesion.
- 3.14 More cost-effective approaches to local public service design and delivery will be needed for many years to come, particularly in relation to a joined-up approach to tackling priorities such as Early Years provision, Crime, and Unemployment, as well as the trend towards "pooled" budgets and "payment by results". NILGA's credibility and, indeed, that of the new councils it serves, depends on a shared ability to make quick and visible progress with this agenda for change and innovation, so that the region moves up the field to join the front-runners in other parts of the U.K.

4. OTHER FUNCTIONS

- 4.1 Although there is a good degree of unanimity of support for NILGA reformulating itself around the "core" roles and functions set out above, views are much more mixed about what other activities, if any, the Association ought to be involved in. As such, some of the ideas presented – **all** of which have come from respondents – are as much about the sector's needs rather than being a matter exclusive to NILGA. However, there are a number of possible areas where NILGA might add value on a regional basis, some of which it is undertaking currently, or which are carried out by other bodies.
- 4.2 Care is therefore needed in considering such proposals to ensure that such activities does not distract from or dilute NILGA's main roles and purpose as a representative body for the sector. Costed business

cases, which demonstrate clearly what value for local councils NILGA's involvement would add, should be a requirement of these considerations, as should an active dialogue about what they might otherwise choose to do for themselves collectively. These proposals will take time to develop but should be part of the dialogue which has been sought by NILGA and needs to be formally re-established between SOLACE and the Association, and should form part of the core agenda of each.

- 4.3 **Economic Growth** – there is a growing expectation in national government that local authorities should see this as their highest priority, and should play a pivotal role in bringing greater prosperity and financial security to all their residents. On the back of winning for NI the EER Award (see 3.10), NILGA could create a new framework which would enable councils to form a more strategic overview of what is needed regionally and sub-regionally, and would support closer working with all stakeholders to identify and take advantage of new opportunities and sources of funding. NILGA could be instrumental also in establishing a joint approach with Invest NI, in putting in place a better framework of support for SMEs and new business start-ups, and for promoting the development of more commercially minded “entrepreneurial” councils.

"You cannot pursue investment and economic growth as an 11x zero sum game, though we do want 11x local "powerhouses", with a collaborative approach and a shared vision for prosperity." - NIA Minister

"NILGA's co-ordination role for local councils in working closely with the Business Sector is central and crucial to Economic Development in Northern Ireland." - Business Sector Representative

- 4.4 **EU Policies and Funding** – although NILGA has a clear track record of success in this context, on behalf of local authorities, the current approach could readily be scaled-up to give Northern Ireland a stronger and more effective voice in Europe. This might involve, for example, investment by OFMDFM in NILGA taking on the role of the Northern Ireland European Regional Forum (NIERF), from January 2016. The support of the new councils for this, and of Belfast City Council in particular as the best known face of the region overseas, is crucial.
- 4.5 **Devolved Functions** – NILGA needs to consider also whether it is best placed to undertake communication and policy guidance on some of the suite of new functions likely to become the responsibility of local authorities under future devolution initiatives and, indeed, the Association should lead the sector in preparations for greater subsidiarity. This could include taking on roles currently carried out by quangos (such as training by the Staff Commission).

- 4.6 **Workforce Planning and Organisational Development** – there is certainly a clear need for a strategic and co-ordinated approach to workforce development issues, given the massive changes in employment practices which are likely in the coming years. As in other parts of the UK, Management skills (particularly in People Management) are a weakness currently in Northern Ireland, and it is essential that current expertise in this area is not lost as a result of planned changes in the institutional architecture that houses it. In relation to local councils, there is a strong case to be made for a framework which provides an *integrated and complementary* approach to the development of both elected members and staff, (not least as the boundaries between the two groups start to break down with the growth of “elected officials”).
- 4.7 Consideration needs to be given to whether NILGA can make a valuable contribution to Industrial relations by undertaking the role of the Regional Employer for local government staff, rather than such matters being left either for individual councils to deal with separately or for determination by (a remote) national government. In short, it is possible as is the case currently for NILGA to be the simple and inexpensive link between the national negotiating machinery and the local government workforce in Northern Ireland. However, the extent of support for this amongst the new councils needs to be tested, in the context of a likely turbulent and challenging period of change as the public sector workforce in Northern Ireland is scaled down, and new technology, new skills requirements, and new ways of working are introduced to improve public sector productivity. The 2015/16 and 2016/17 pay and negotiation climate in a national context is fraught to say the least, with relationships with unions and the National Living Wage proposals being just two key issues. A political and practical link to all such changes which will affect councils in NI financially and structurally is essential and has to be invested in, but need not be complex and costly.
- 4.8 **An Innovation Hub** – there could be merit in NILGA leading an initiative to pull these related strands together into a (virtual) Innovation Hub, as a Northern Ireland Centre of Excellence, (rather than creating a new organisation to replace out-dated ones), owned and run by the new councils collectively, which will drive transformational change across the sector,
- 4.9 **Getting Closer Together** – In reality, given the need to keep NILGA “mean and lean” in future, whatever additional functions it is agreed that NILGA takes on, much of the work involved in any of these extra functions would need to be undertaken using the staffing resources and expertise of the new councils, with NILGA acting as a co-ordinator and facilitator of such activities on the sector’s behalf. This would not prevent groups of councils also working directly together or jointly procuring external support on some initiatives, perhaps at a sub-regional level. Such an approach would, however, mean that NILGA

needs to retain sufficient “core” staff (with the right capabilities for these new roles), supported by a programme of two-way staff development and secondments.

- 4.10 Better co-ordination of the use of all available resources in the sector around councils’ shared themes and priorities for action would also require greater joint working between NILGA, SOLACE, and the Professional Officers Group, to support the various Political Leadership groups tasked with achieving the desired outcomes. This will depend, in turn, on a framework of closer liaison, access and collaboration, based on mutual trust and respect between NILGA staff and senior managers in the local authorities, and on each of the groups feeling welcome in the “camp” of the other. To lead and support this development, the Chief Executive of NILGA will need to gain the confidence of all the Chief Executives of the 11 new councils, and to achieve “parity of esteem” with them.

"NILGA needs a sustainable "critical mass" if councils are to work together on the basis of necessary trust. It needs to build from the bottom up, and to avoid perceptions of "empire building" or of acting on the basis of self-interest." - Senior ANEC Representative

- 4.11 As with Chief Executives and their councils, the NILGA Chief Executive needs to be accepted as the Principal Adviser to, and Spokesperson on behalf of, the NILGA Board. Albeit prompted and supported by their respective professional advisers, in both NILGA and the new councils, it is the role of the elected members to determine political priorities and the best means of realising their ambitions. In re-positioning NILGA in the changing governance landscape of Northern Ireland, and in redefining its “core” purpose, role(s), and ways of working with others, the Association’s new Chair will need particular personal support, if she is to lead these significant changes with confidence.
- 4.12 **Managing Risk** – Given that local government in Northern Ireland has recently entered a period of unprecedented, turbulent, and uncertain change, the sector needs a mature debate about how, collectively, it is going to deal with the risk of failure by any of its councils or related bodies. It seems to be accepted generally that NILGA has a valid “core” role in being the “Guardian” of the reputation of local government in Northern Ireland, and so it has a clear interest in this aspect. However, there is little or no consensus on what part NILGA should play either in promoting Performance Improvement or in dealing with significant under-performance by councils. There is a strong aversion to the Association having any direct “powers of intervention” to prevent the risk of failure, given the role of the Northern Ireland Audit Office and of the Assembly in such matters. However, there is a shared recognition of the need for the sector to take responsibility collectively for its performance, in preference to having a bloated and expensive external audit and inspection regime. This should involve helping local authorities prepare effectively for such external scrutiny/challenge and

acting as “First Responder” in the event of a seriously critical assessment of any council’s effectiveness and “good health”.

“Councils will need help to act more “commercially”, like independent businesses, for the first time. NILGA can help guide councils to more cost effective approaches.” - NILGA Member

- 4.13 This sensitive issue is under active review by the other LGAs across the U.K. The recent bruising experiences of several local authorities in Wales is testament to the long term reputational damage that is possible in being unprepared for the publicly damning criticisms of an “aggressive” Audit Office out to make a name for itself. On this basis, there would be merit in actively exploring, as a high priority, whether NILGA could add value by commissioning a new, more effective form of Peer Review process for NI local authorities, working jointly with the other U.K LGAs to achieve economy of scale and value-for-money. Such an approach would fit well with and complement NILGA’s role as a catalyst for transformational changes in local public service design and delivery, including scoping and advising councils on the merits and best ways of implementing new business models and ways of working. Again however, this requires clinical discussion and testing.

“NILGA can help map the best way forward for councils and identify best practice elsewhere. Our more proactive future role should be to facilitate genuinely transformational change, and to celebrate success.” - NILGA Non Member

5 STRUCTURE AND CONSTITUTION

- 5.1 NILGA’s critics and those who are sceptical about its value would argue that it is the Association’s behaviour and “body language” that needs to change, not least in relation to its relationship with the new councils and with the NI Assembly. Its supporters would contradict this. But, to facilitate such a revitalised approach, NILGA needs to do two things – to put in place a new, streamlined structure, with a smaller Board and greater transparency over where decision making is located, together with an effective framework for wider member involvement /engagement, supported by improved, two-way communication and greater openness.
- 5.2 The issue of ensuring political balance within NILGA in this context also needs re-thinking, with this perhaps being left to the constituent councils, as the nominating bodies, to determine and achieve in relation to their overall representation on the Association. To extend influence, access wider skills and perspectives, and introduce a degree of external challenge, the Association should consider introducing positions for a number of non-executive directors, as well as providing, as it has done in the past, for senior civil servants and other “experts” to attend its meetings where appropriate.

- 5.3 The Association should adopt an action-orientated, outcomes-based structure, which moves away from sterile, formal committees to the more fluid and flexible use of Policy Development Groups or of Taskforces, which work in wider partnership across and beyond the sector, as well as with SOLACE. These could be focussed on each of the agreed strategic priorities listed in section 3.6 above, and be tasked to produce specific desired outputs within set deadlines. These groups/taskforces would provide attractive platforms for wider member involvement and influence, on the basis of their personal interests and expertise. The designated Spokespersons for each of these groups would, necessarily, have a higher profile (including with the media), but would articulate an agreed collective view on the matter under consideration, rather than a personal one. It is acknowledged that these task and finish, policy and best practice, spokesperson roles have been put forward at NILGA's AGM and first Executive meetings, there now has to be a cultural change and the implementation developed in the outcomes oriented way referred to above.
- 5.4 On this basis, and given that there would be a regular and frequent flow of information about the Groups' deliberations and outputs, the main Board would meet less frequently. Its role would be that of a Steering Group – setting priorities for the Taskforces within an overall strategic framework of activities and objectives, monitoring and evaluating progress, and ensuring the effective reporting of outputs/outcomes, as well as overseeing the operational requirements of the Association and its staff.
- 5.5 NILGA needs to be future focussed and have a strategic overview of the sector's direction and pace of travel, (particularly in this period where the new councils are distracted, understandably, by the operational requirements of establishing themselves). It needs to formulate a new 3 year Corporate Plan (and related budget) from 2016 up to the next local government elections in 2019. This would set out clear priorities for action and success criteria, based on what the constituent councils want/need. In effect, the Association needs to create a new, medium term Programme for Change for Local Government in Northern Ireland, and to use this overtly, in dialogue with the Assembly Government (and with other key partners/allies) to actively influence the future development of the wider governance framework for the region, and the (growing) place of local government within this, as further devolution to local level is planned and put in place. There needs to be wide, genuine consultation on this prior to the next Assembly elections, with a view to its implementation following immediately afterwards. It should be noted that the Northern Ireland Assembly is not (yet) signed up to the Charter for Local Self-Government.

"NILGA's role needs to be clear and specific. This should include sharing and promoting best practice from its UK networks and beyond. It needs to be future focused and strategic." - Local Authority Chief Executive

- 5.6 To a large extent, the funding and resources NILGA needs to operate effectively depend on the range and nature of the functions that councils agree it should undertake on their behalf. But, regardless of this, there is the need to ensure that NILGA has sufficient “core” funding from its members to enable it to sustain a “critical mass” of appropriately skilled staff who are not employed on renewable short term contracts. NILGA’s core team, for reasons of productivity, development and certainty requires investment that is not part of an uncertain annual “ask” to the 11 councils. NILGA’s Chief Executive therefore needs to work with the Board and member Councils to determine the function and cost of this small team. These could then be supplemented as necessary, by interim appointments, secondments or project based staff, as required by particular functions for which there are discrete, separate funding arrangements (which are not part of the subscriptions of member councils). Within its “core” capacity and capabilities, the Association must be able to support research/policy development and communications/information sharing activities, drawing on expert assistance for/from the new councils also, as needed. In order for it to feel that NILGA is “owned” by its member authorities, there was clearly merit in relocating its offices and meetings facilities into the premises of one of these councils, and office space in others should be a consideration.

6. COMMUNICATIONS AND RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

- 6.1 As a visible symbol of the deeper changes in the way that NILGA intends to work with others in future, the Association needs to “refresh” its brand, keeping the same name but adopting a new look and style. More importantly the Association needs to develop an effective Reputation Management Strategy (and Action Plan), to correct misunderstandings, remove ignorance, and overcome outdated hostility to its roles and ways of doing things in the past.
- 6.2 This could be part of a larger, sector-wide, collective campaign, led and co-ordinated by NILGA, in close collaboration with the new councils, to improve understanding of the part the sector can play in future in the “Leadership of Place” which will be essential to improving quality of life for all the people of Northern Ireland.
- 6.3 More immediately, NILGA needs to put in place a genuine relationship building exercise with all key players/allies (and possible new partners) it needs to collaborate with to achieve the shared objectives of its member councils. This would involve the new councils themselves, the N.I Assembly Government (both Ministers and senior civil servants) the Business and Third Sectors, other local public services and others within the Association’s legitimate networks and growing spheres of influence.

*"NILGA needs to look beyond Northern Ireland, to have wider perspectives and links, so that it can better predict and help others prepare for and respond to the big, strategic trends that are emerging."
- NIA Minister*

- 6.4 The Association needs to do more with councils to share and celebrate its successes and achievements. Also, it must take speedy action to improve the understanding of the many newly elected councillors about NILGA's new role(s) and the benefits these can bring to their authorities. This needs to be based on a framework of more regular, personal visits to councils and shared events by NILGA Executive Board members, by Task Force / Policy Group Spokespersons, to increase the level and frequency of such two-way inter-action. Consideration should be given to establishing a wider "focus group" of all key stakeholders, so as to facilitate their greater influence and contributions, as well as to survey partners' satisfaction/approval levels for NILGA's progress and ways of doing business.

*"There is a definite need for NILGA, but it must be "owned and controlled" by councils, and take a lead in binding them together to promote their shared interests. The fundamental issue is one of trust!"
- NIA Senior Official*

- 6.5 In this context, NILGA has responsibility to lead on a robust and challenging, (but less aggressive) approach to making more effective the Partnership Panel with the N.I. Assembly. This will need to be based on behaviour which skilfully fosters mutual trust and respect, and reflects parity of status and esteem between the two tiers of government. A key objective in this approach for the Association should be to propose and win agreement to an improved framework of collaboration with the Assembly, similar to that in place between councils and the Parliament in Scotland, in which an in-depth dialogue can take place about further devolution to local authorities.

"The Partnership Panel is the key to a new political relationship between the Northern Ireland Assembly and Local Government - and NILGA can be the vehicle for ensuring that the 11 new councils become an integral part of political decision making." - NILGA President

- 6.6 Finally in this context, NILGA needs quickly to formulate a new two-way Communication framework with councils, designed to enable the Association to take soundings on key issues/developments quickly and easily, as well as to report on its decisions and actions taken on their behalf. To be effective, this will need buy-in and collaboration from the councils so that, for example, there are formal opportunities to report on, discuss, and provide comments on NILGA's progress, which are built into the committee process of each council. This should seek to overcome any perception or feeling that NILGA is remote from or inaccessible to its members.

7. TIMESCALE FOR CHANGE

- 7.1 In terms of sequenced actions to demonstrate visibly an improved approach to its “core” purpose, roles and functions, NILGA needs to identify a number of quick wins which will show its intentions, good faith, and progress. This must recognise that, like the wider governance landscape around it, the Association is likely to be in a state of flux and transformation for several years, as it rises to the significant challenges it is now facing.
- 7.2 There will be a period of political uncertainty in the U.K at national government level in the period running up to the planned Referendum on our E.U membership. This coincides roughly with the N.I Assembly elections in May 2016 and the associated review of the Assembly’s organisation structure which will move to 9 departments after that date. This provides NILGA with a key period in which it can discuss, consult on, agree and plan (with the new councils and other key partners) a new set of future arrangements for carrying out its crucial “core” purpose, and any other related functions where the Association can add real value for councils and the wider local public service sector.

"NILGA needs to be allowed and helped to evolve and grow its impact, in the same way that the 11 new councils will." - Local Authority Chief Executive

- 7.3 NILGA should actively seize the opportunity, over the next 12 -18 months to lead a sector wide review of the use of resources available to the whole local government system in Northern Ireland, in order to put together a comprehensive devolution and investment proposition for enhancing the role of the local government sector within this in the future. These new arrangements could then be worked up and put in place fully after the next Local Government elections in Northern Ireland in 2019, with progress towards this objective being reviewed, with the Assembly and other partners, in 2018.

"NILGA needs to present the challenges facing the new councils as opportunities to do things differently. It needs to promote and support new forms and patterns of service delivery across organisational boundaries." - NIA Senior Official

- 7.4 This ambitious programme for change will stretch NILGA and the new councils significantly over the next few years, as the sector’s ability to step up to greater self-determination is put to the test. Without bold and visionary political and professional leadership, clear priorities and outcomes, a coherent medium term plan of action, and a genuine willingness to work collaboratively across the whole regional governance structure, it is unlikely that local government will mature sufficiently or quickly enough to fully realise its potential to be a major player in shaping the future prosperity and cohesion of Northern Ireland, Such failure will leave the region’s residents relatively poorer,

as the rest of the U.K makes better progress and leaves Northern Ireland behind. This would be a democratic and economic missed opportunity of the highest order.

Kim Ryley, Chair, SOLACE in Business, September 2015

APPENDIX ONE.

RECOMMENDATIONS (CATEGORISED AS 2015 / 16 by “NOW”, and as 2016 / 17 and beyond by “MEDIUM TERM”)

It is **recommended** that NILGA:-

NOW (immediately and by March 2016)

- 8.1 Distributes the Independent Review report as a basis for finalisation by the 11 Councils through a wide-ranging dialogue also to include SOLACE about:-
- how NILGA can enhance the legitimacy for its “core” purpose and leadership role, as the representative single voice of the local government sector in Northern Ireland;
 - what other, related functions it should carry out on behalf of the sector, where it can be demonstrated through costed business cases that this adds value to the work of the councils themselves; and does not dilute the Association’s main role; and
 - in what ways its structure, processes, and ways of working should change to improve openness and transparency, increase member support and engagement, and foster trusting relationships to enhance collaboration, and sustain active partnerships that improve the quality of life of the people of Northern Ireland and the resilience of local communities.
- 8.2 Instructs its Chief Executive, once the future functions of the Association have been agreed, to bring forward for consideration clear, costed, proposals developed with members / the 11 Council Chiefs on a consistent basis – as sought by them - for the future size, shape (in terms of capacity and capability), location and investment required for the Association’s “core” staffing complement, to ensure NILGA’s effectiveness and sustainability; how this needs to be augmented to carry out other, related activities through separate funding streams; and for drawing on and co-ordinating the use of the resources and expertise of the local authorities, where necessary, not least through joint working with the SOLACE N.I Branch, as well as the commissioning of external expert support, when needed.
- 8.3 Negotiates and puts in place an effective framework for better liaison and joint working with the newly reconstituted SOLACE Branch for Northern Ireland, to form a co-ordinated joint approach which will provide the high calibre of political and professional leadership the region needs in the uncertain, turbulent and challenging times ahead.
- 8.4 Takes the lead in bringing forward proposals to improve the effectiveness of the Partnership Panel with the N.I Assembly

Government, and which brokers a genuine strategic, outcomes based partnership founded on mutual respect and the principle of greater subsidiarity, rather than seeing the Association's role as being one largely of scrutinising and holding the Assembly to account.

- 8.5 By January 2016 formulates a new, future focussed and strategic Corporate Plan (and related budget) for the three year period 2016-19, which sets out clear desired outcomes, priorities for action, and success criteria, based on what the constituent councils want/need collectively, and uses this Programme for Change for Local Government in Northern Ireland, in the period before the next Assembly elections, as the basis for the dialogue with the Assembly Government (and with other key partners/allies) on the future development of the wider governance framework for the region, which will start to be put in place after those elections.
- 8.6 Drives forward the creation of wider networks of influence beyond the region, which encourage the political institutions of Northern Ireland to look outward to learn from best practice elsewhere and to put the region and its ambitions for economic growth and prosperity on the world stage.
- 8.7 Increases its leadership capacity and capability, as well as those of the wider local government sector in Northern Ireland, by providing support for its new Chair from an experienced senior politician, as a coach/mentor, such as a former Chair of the LGA in England; by actively championing the Councillors' Charter; and by commissioning a new, regional framework for the development and training of elected members, which prepares the local authorities to actively take on the further devolution of new powers and responsibilities to come.
- 8.8 Is consulted with as part of ensuring that there is an effective response by the local government sector to the regional need for a strategic, co-ordinated approach to industrial relations and to workforce planning and development requirements, and that current expertise in this field is not lost, given the massive changes in employment practices which are likely in the coming years.
- 8.9 Identifies and takes action as a priority on a campaigns and actions which will show the Association's intentions, good faith, and progress in improving its effectiveness, as well as lead, over the next 12 – 18 months, a sector-wide review of the use of the resources available to the whole local governance system in Northern Ireland, as part of putting together a comprehensive devolution and investment proposition for enhancing the role of the local government sector within this in the future.
- 8.10 Works with SOLACE to construct effective arrangements to identify share and celebrate the sector's good practice, innovative approaches, and successes/achievements, to enhance the reputation of local

government and its future role in the wider governance structure of the region.

- 8.11 Puts in place a new, streamlined structure for the Association, with a smaller Board, supported by the Office Bearers and new Policy Development Groups or Taskforces for each of the strategic priorities agreed collectively by the new councils, as part of an effective framework for wider member involvement, and with new arrangements for the nomination of “senior” elected representatives by the councils, which achieves overall political balance.
- 8.12 By January 2016 clarifies the role (as a Steering Group) of its Executive Board and establishes a (less frequent) meeting cycle, together with new ways of working, not least in terms of more active and regular contact with each of the local authorities it serves.
- 8.13 Puts in place quickly a genuine relationship building exercise with all its key players, partners/allies (and possible new partners), as part of actively developing the value of and extending the Association’s networks and spheres of influence, including more regular and intensive inter-action with each of the local authorities; the setting up of an inclusive stakeholder “Focus Group”, and regular surveys of (and reporting on) partners’ satisfaction/approval levels for NILGA’s ways of doing business and progress.

MEDIUM TERM (2016 & 2017)

- 8.14 From April 2016 has a new, two-way Communication framework with councils, to enable the Association to readily take soundings on key issues/developments, as well as to report on its decisions and actions taken on their behalf, to overcome any perception that NILGA is remote from or inaccessible to its members.
- 8.15 Refreshes” its brand and profile, with media relations and communication work, as part of a larger Reputation Management Strategy as well as lead and co-ordinate a similar, collective campaign to promote the growing role of the local government sector in the “Leadership of Place”.
- 8.16 Drives forward a sector-owned, comprehensive programme of change to transform the future delivery of local public services, and the greater citizen engagement on which this needs to be based, by a focus on extending the “place shaping” role of local authorities and the creative use of their General Power of Competence, as well as an integrated, joined up approach with other bodies/agencies to tackling cross-cutting priorities.
- 8.17 Creates a new framework which enables and supports local authorities, individually and collectively, to play a pivotal role in bringing about

greater prosperity and financial security for all their residents, through a joint approach with other agencies (such as Invest N.I); a stronger voice in Europe to access greater funding; better support for SMEs and new business start-ups; and promoting the development of more commercially minded “entrepreneurial” councils.

- 8.18 Lead the design and creation of a new “Innovation Hub”, as a virtual “Centre of Excellence” for Northern Ireland, which brings together creative ideas, energy and resources, and which enables experimentation and prototyping of new approaches to take place and be tested before scaling-up what works best, without risk of wider service failure.
- 8.19 Takes views about putting in place new, more effective arrangements which enable the local government sector in Northern Ireland to exercise collective responsibility for its own performance, through the commissioning (jointly with the other U.K LGAs) of a new, more robust form of peer review process, and promoting its active adoption by all the new councils.
- 8.20 Considers introducing positions for a number of “non-executive directors” on its Board, as well as providing, where appropriate, for senior civil servants and other external experts to attend its meetings, so as to provide wider perspectives, greater challenge, and improved decision making.