



**NILGA seeks to provide you and your Council with an opportunity to access and benefit from more financial and technical assistance from a wide range of European Union investment now and in the future.**

**The EU Knowledge Bank Bulletin is a free practical information service that will inform member councils of forthcoming European investment opportunities, together with early warning on legislation, regulation and policy that will have an impact on operational services and the financial projections for local authorities.** Costs and legal assurances are both important at the present time, when Councils are being asked to do more processes and more compliances with less resources.

The EU Knowledge Bank Bulletin prioritises the importance of the issues through a “traffic light” classification system in order to assist Councils to prioritise as the key decision body for communities to quickly identify areas of direct local interest, and benefit. EU information points are classified as follows:

**Green - Council opportunity – follow up recommended**

**Amber – consultation and key issues in progress – one to watch**

**Red – early warning of EU fines or punitive policy impact – campaign work required collectively as a sector**

### **(A) NILGA Knowledge Bank**

NILGA’s free, EU Knowledge Bank will complement and work in partnership with the high degree of EU expertise at senior, practitioner, financial officer and audit levels within councils, cluster partnerships and within metropolitan, rural, cross border and other specialist sub regions.

**The EU Knowledge Bank service is provided to all member Councils as part of their existing investment, at no additional cost, through reprioritising NILGA budgets.**

The NILGA EU Knowledge Bank will –

- Provide all member councils with monthly bulletin updates and more frequent advice if pertinent in regard to specific opportunities for **COUNCILS** wishing to work independently or in clusters to, for example, consider applying for investment directly from the EU or in direct collaboration with other municipalities without a “middle tier” of programme management
- Provide an early warning on proposed EU regulation that could affect Council’s planning, service delivery and development

- Enable input **NOW** in advance of the 2014 – 2020 round of funding by local government which to date has not been fully taken advantage of by the sector and which has led to a reactive response to managing EU Funding Programmes and disproportionately high administration and audit costs (consultation will follow on this during December 2011 and January 2012)
- Enable knowledge based lobbying of local MLAs, Ministers, MPs and MEPs that will **SOLVE** complex often structural and / or bureaucratic barriers before they take hold
- Provide a Funding Tracker or “Blue Pages” electronically which will offer information on EU funding opportunities for councils linked to successful applications already made by councils from non NI areas
- Provide pro-active, practical support in seeking out wider EU funding streams to assist local corporate and investment priorities
- Create increased understanding of the benefits from EU investment for Councillors so that they gain a strategic perspective to deliver critical economic benefits for their Councils not only at a local but at regional level
- Lobby for a direct resource to be utilised by NILGA and Councils in NI, based in Brussels, through the Northern Ireland Office
- Provide a cross region **LOCAL GOVERNMENT TECHNICAL RESOURCE** within Brussels, also, as negotiated by NILGA as part of the Local Government Group. This is available through NILGA, now.

### **(B) NILGA victory on EU fines**

**UK Ministers will be prevented from arbitrarily passing EU fines onto Councils under key concessions to the UK Localism Bill which have been jointly secured by NILGA and the UK Local Government Group.**

In its original form the UK Localism Bill gave UK Ministers sole power to force Councils to pay fines levied by the EU against the UK Government for missing national targets on issues such as air quality, public procurement and waste framework. Councils across the UK could have been forced to pay up to £1.2 billion in EU fines passed to the Government.

NILGA and its sister local government associations placed a number of bill amendments before the House of Lords during July, and after sustained lobbying, the Government has made a number of key concessions, which have been tabled as Government amendments to the bill. Amendments include the introduction of a statutory agreement which describes the conditions under which national fines can be reallocated to Northern Ireland Councils.

**NILGA will now be seeking to work with the Northern Ireland Assembly to ensure that Councils will continue to be protected against punitive EU fines in the future.**

### **(C) Revised Management arrangements for 2014 – 2020 EU Programmes**

NILGA has been invited by DFP to present an options paper on the role of local government in the management of the next round of EU funds 2014 – 2020. This is a critical **opportunity** to contribute to the discussion and present effective solutions on the design, management and delivery of EU Programmes post 2013.

NILGA will be working closely with elected members, Programme clusters, new members of the Programme Monitoring Committees, SOLACE, the LED Forum and social partnered other local representatives to determine through our own, Council driven proposals the practical details of the changes that need to be

made in order to deliver an enhanced European investment product – creating local sustainable economic growth and a new understanding of and participation in EU structures. **This will help to keep rates lower and external investment higher.**

In keeping with the UK Local Government Group (COSLA, WLGA and LGA) and our Irish sister association ACCC, we are committed to giving localities and communities greater control and greater influence over programmes and services delivered in their areas – in order that local people and businesses can influence the shape of future programmes and see local level investment returns.

The need for this work is also evidenced by the European Commissions desire for greater subsidiarity, emphasis on Leader Plus, Community Planning, UK Group lobbying across the local government family for consistent and high level remodelling of current funding structures, and the necessity to find workable local level solutions highlighted by Border Groups and Cities.

**NILGA will be holding a revised EU management programme consultation workshop, details will be circulated shortly for this event planned in early 2012.**

#### **(D) Meeting with UK Lead EU Funds Chief Negotiator**

NILGA has met Tim Goodship (UK Dept. Business Innovation & Skills), the UK's lead national negotiator with the EU Commission on the future EU Structural Funds 2014-2020. Among the topics discussed was the importance of Northern Ireland Local Government being involved in future discussions on the design and management of the next round of regional EU funds. NI will be given a key role in this negotiation through NILGA.

**A direct line of communication between the UK EU Structural Funds 2014-2020 delegation team and NILGA has been opened.**

#### **(E) Structural Funds Summit - Logjam Event**

In response to Councils and Clusters "logjam" concerns – related to the diverse and substantial concerns about criteria, processes, changing targets, micro auditing, delays in receipt of Letters of Offer, and more -, NILGA will arrange a summit during late November 2011 with available agencies and partnership representatives in order to address obstacles on a joint, shared agenda.

**This focus group will report to all Councils for further input and endorsement.**

#### **(F) Development of UK Local Government EU investment platform**

NILGA has negotiated an agreement with the LGA, COSLA and WLGA to develop a closer working relationship on a UK national level in order to secure EU investment, and protect councils from punitive fines and polices. The four regions Office Bearers and CEOs will be meeting on 14th November 2011 at the UK Forum meeting in Edinburgh to discuss closer EU collaboration. NILGA has also received a formal offer of direct EU support from our Scottish sister association, COSLA.

#### **(G) Development of trans-national local Government EU cooperation and investment**

Discussions have been held with the ACCC, the Irish Regions Office (Brussels), and with Irish County Managers on how the two transnational regions can share EU best practice and investment opportunities.

**NILGA has scheduled a joint NI / IRL local government working group of Council Leaders in April 2012, to explore joint investment opportunities.**

## (H) CAP reform update

NILGA is currently considering the new proposals made on 12<sup>th</sup> October 2011 by the European Commission on the **Common Agricultural Policy 2014-2020**. The proposals represent a major opportunity for elected members to influence and redesign a policy which will be effective and efficient for Northern Ireland. A full analysis of the proposal will be made available to Member Councils by the close of the calendar year.

## (I) European Letters of Support

NILGA's President, Cllr Evelyne Robinson, has received letters of encouragement and support for NILGA's push to create greater co-ordination, management, delivery in partnership and monitoring by Councils in regard to future EU Funds.

- **Mercedes Bresso**, President of the Committee of the Regions (CoR);
- **Keith Whitmore**, President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (CONGRESS);
- **Frederic Vallier**, Secretary General of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR); and
- **Gerry Mulligan**, Director of the Northern Ireland Executive Office, Brussels.

The Knowledge Bank testimonials and wider work plan are now effective.



*NILGA delegates at the EU Open Days 2011.*



*NILGA Members participating in an EU budget debate .*

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