

This bulletin provides your Council with key information on the work being taken forward through NILGA, councils and partners, delivering results for local government. The bulletin is supplied for distribution at Full Council or Council Committee Meetings.

### LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM

#### Crunch Time

**Strong local government and effective two-tier administration are not luxuries. They are essential components of a stable, enterprising, sustainable, contemporary Northern Ireland.**

At the October 2012 NILGA Executive meeting, Councillor Seán McPeake, NILGA's President, referred to Local Government Reform Programme having entered "*crunch time*". In his address to the Executive, Cllr McPeake stressed that now, more than ever, councils need certainty regarding how the reform changes are to be delivered, particularly around Community Planning legislation, the functions and people being transferring into local government and the importance of elected member knowledge and engagement.

Governance (decision taking), engagement and resources must all be honed at this critical period, mindful that sound implementation work is progressing in some quarters whilst recognising, in the same vein, that resources are very stretched, with no room for additional capacity of productive elected members and council officers.

#### NILGA Executive - Special Meeting

A special NILGA Executive meeting was called on the 26<sup>th</sup> September 2012 to look at the many critical issues around reform, the progress that has been made to date and the gaps that exist. It was widely recognised that the timeline for reform was set, that reform was going to happen, and that there was no opportunity for slippage despite the fact that the DoE request for reform finance is still to be debated in the Assembly. In regard to Statutory Transition Committees (STCs), the general consensus reached supported STCs being formed, but the need for these to have a fully defined work plan consistent to all eleven was highlighted. The work plans should include the development of key preparatory work, including assets and liabilities realisation, key data gathering and analysis, convergence of operational systems and merger / new structures work, with matters such as severance, appointments of senior staff and similar awaiting clarification and communication to the sovereign councils.

There was wide recognition of the need for the two tiers of government to work more closely together and NILGA is particularly keen to work with the Department on proposals for a Central - Local Partnership Panel, including the provision of good practice examples from other jurisdictions. It is vital to the sector that this Panel strengthens councils as partners in government as this will greatly assist in the development of the vision for strong and effective local government. NILGA welcomes the opportunity to facilitate this joined up approach, liaising with the Department and the political parties who have already initiated discussions with the Association. [The full report is available on the NILGA Website.](#)

#### Regional Transitional Committee (RTC)

The next meeting of the Regional Transitional Committee is scheduled for **1<sup>st</sup> November 2012**. DoE has scheduled the meeting for 2pm and the Department will be issuing the papers for the meeting. NILGA has arranged **pre-meeting facilities from 12 noon in Belfast City Council's Learning and Development Centre**, East Bridge Street, Belfast, for Council Voluntary Committee Chairs and senior officers attending.

This will be the first RTC meeting that each of the five NILGA Office Bearers have been officially invited to attend.

#### BRITAIN IN BLOOM RESULTS – TAKE A BOW NORTHERN IRELAND'S COUNCILS!!

On the 6<sup>th</sup> October, the 2012 RHS Britain in Bloom results were announced in Guernsey by Matt Baker, host of BBC TV's *The One Show*. For yet another year, councils in Northern Ireland punched well above their weight, with five overall awards including Broughshane winning the ultimate community gardening prize of winner of the 2012 RHS Britain in Bloom Champion of Champions category. Other Northern Ireland award winners on the night included Bangor - Silver Award, Hillsborough - Silver Gilt Award, Ahoghill - Gold Award and Scarva - Silver Gilt Award. We would like to congratulate all the award winners who following their success in the Ulster in Bloom competition, have gone forward, with great success to represent Ulster in Britain in Bloom.



*Broughshane receiving their 2012 RHS Britain in Bloom Award.*

## EU OPEN DAYS 2012

Key representatives of NILGA's negotiating team supported by NILGA officers held meetings with each of the Northern Ireland MEPs in Brussels on the 9th & 10th October 2012. The key elements of the meetings were to champion greater EU Structural Funds investment into Northern Ireland's councils, focusing on local delivery (consultation going out to councils in November 2012); to promote the Charter of Local Self Government; and, to initiate Northern Ireland's bid for the "European Entrepreneurial Region" Award in 2015. NILGA will be spearheading a "European Entrepreneurial Region" campaign supported by councils and key business partners. The delivery of this significant campaign will be supported by NILGA Economic Sub Group, which held its first planning meeting in September in Coleraine.



Representatives of NILGA's Team in Brussels at the EU Open Days (Ards, Belfast, Craigavon and Magherafelt council were represented).

## ELECTED MEMBER DEVELOPMENT

NILGA recently finalised a contract with the DoE in regard to regional communication, co-ordination and engagement in local government reform. One element of this rightly focuses on capacity building and elected member development for councillors. In the coming weeks NILGA will be engaging with all 26 member councils to ensure that the member development work that is ongoing is delivering for councils on the ground and also how we can improve and developed this work within the DoE contract as well as through other means. Working with our colleagues in the NAC, Belfast City Council was the first council to receive "Charter Status" for their elected member development work in January this year. We now congratulate **Strabane District Council** who very recently became the second council to achieve Charter Status through inspired input from the corporate council and elected members individually.

## NILGA CORPORATE PLAN 2012 – 2016

The NILGA Corporate Plan defines the strategic themes defining the Association's work being carried out between October 2012 and March 2016. We would like to thank all the councils who provided us with feedback on our draft corporate plan. Your comments and recommendations were incorporated into the final document and the adapted and corporately agreed version was launched at the NILGA AGM on the 28<sup>th</sup> September 2012 with the encouraging support of elected members representing all 26 councils, and the Environment Minister. [Copy available on the NILGA Website.](#)

## MEETING WITH THE FINANCE MINISTER AND FINANCE MINISTER ELECT OCTOBER 2012

On the 15<sup>th</sup> October 2012 two of NILGA's Office Bearers, Cllrs McPeake and Robinson, supported by NILGA officers were received by the Finance Minister Sammy Wilson MLA, the Finance Minister elect Simon Hamilton MLA and Des Armstrong, Chief Executive of the Central Procurement Directorate, at Stormont. The discussions were focused on three key topics, finance for reform, flexible procurement to support local economies and regional / local government engagement with the European Investment Bank (EIB). All of these separate but critical issues are linked in as much as they have a huge impact on the sustainability of Northern Ireland's future councils and local economies. The Minister and the Minister elect offered to receive further information on re-profiling of delivering Structural Funds in 2014 - 2020 and on the proposed council led regional SME procurement charter which exists in Wales and is supported by the Federation of Small Businesses.

## NIO CONSULTATION ON MEASURES TO IMPROVE THE OPERATION OF THE NI ASSEMBLY

NILGA has provided a response to the NIO Consultation on measures to improve the operation of the Northern Ireland Assembly. NILGA broadly welcomes the review in the context of determining a formal, two tier devolved government within Northern Ireland, but requires that the consultation should be part of a **whole system review of public representation and service**, optimising both political representation, spend and investment within the social and economic environment which now prevails. In addition to our consultation response, NILGA is arranging a meeting with the new Secretary of State, Theresa Anne Villiers MP, to further develop our position and to discuss the merits of a wider, whole system review.

[Copy available on the NILGA Website.](#)

## CHANGES TO DEPENDANTS' CARERS' ALLOWANCES FROM 1<sup>ST</sup> OCTOBER 2012

The Department of the Environment has determined new maximum rates of dependants' carers' allowances under the Local Government (Payments to Councillors) 2012 Regulations. The Department has confirmed that from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2012, the maximum amounts shall not exceed the following:

Standard Care	Specialised Care
£6.19 per hour	£12.38 per hour
£161.00 per month	£322.00 per month
Maximum payments per member, per month, shall not exceed £322.00	

## IMPORTANT - FUTURE DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

- 9th November 2012, NILGA Executive meeting, 10.00am at the NILGA Offices
- Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> November, 2012. 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Parliament Buildings, Stormont. To mark this historic occasion, there will be a special open day to showcase the Building and its grounds. For further information please contact the Assembly events office on 028 9052 1802, email [openday@niassembly.gov.uk](mailto:openday@niassembly.gov.uk) or visit [www.niassembly.gov.uk](http://www.niassembly.gov.uk).
- 23rd November 2012 - NILGA Full Members meeting, 10.00am Mossley Mill, Newtownabbey
- 12th December 2012 & 10th January 2013 – Elected Member Planning & Awareness / Engagement events – venues to be confirmed.
- 28th February 2013 - NILGA Conference/Local Government Awards. Everglades Hotel, Derry / Londonderry (a draft agenda and booking form will shortly be issued to all councils).

## NILGA - Your Local Government Association

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