

PARTNERSHIP PANEL

NOTE OF MEETING HELD AT 2PM, 16TH SEPTEMBER 2020

ONLINE zoom meeting

Central Government

Minister Carál Ní Chuilín (Chair) DfC
Minister Conor Murphy (DoF)
Minister Nichola Mallon (DfI)
Minister Naomi Long (DOJ)
Junior Minister Declan Kearney (TEO)
Dr Michael McBride (DoH)
Derek Baker (DE)

Local Government

Ald. Mark Cosgrove (Antrim & Newtownabbey)
Cllr. Robert Adair (Ards & North Down)
Cllr Paul Greenfield (Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon)
Cllr Geraldine McAteer (Belfast)
Ald Thomas McKeown (Causeway Coast & Glens)
Cllr Ruairi McHugh (Derry City & Strabane)
Cllr Tommy Maguire (Fermanagh & Omagh)
Cllr John Palmer (Lisburn & Castlereagh)
Ald Billy Ashe MBE (Mid & East Antrim)
Cllr Kerri Hughes (Mid Ulster)
Cllr Robert Burgess (Newry, Mourne & Down/
NILGA Office Bearer)
Cllr Matt Garrett (NILGA President / Belfast)
Cllr Frances Burton (NILGA Office Bearer /
Mid Ulster)
Ald Alan McDowell (NILGA Office Bearer /
Ards and North Down)
Cllr Martin Kearney (NILGA Office Bearer /
Mid Ulster)
Jacqui Dixon (SOLACE Chair / Antrim &
Newtownabbey)
Stephen Reid (SOLACE Vice Chair / Ards &
North Down)

Joint Secretariat

Tracey Meharg (DfC)
Anthony Carleton (DfC)
Nichola Creagh DOE (Joint Secretary)
Ian Hanash (DfC)

Derek McCallan, NILGA (Joint Secretary)
Antoinette Kennedy, NILGA

Observers

Mark O'Donnell (DfC)
Stuart Freeman (DfI)
Michael McAvoy (DoJ)
Michelle Scott (DfE)
Cheryl Davidson (DoJ)
Piers Dalgarno (DfC)
Louise Anderson (DfC)

Alison McCullagh (Fermanagh & Omagh)
David Jackson (Causeway Coast & Glens)
Anne Donaghy (Mid & East Antrim)
Karen Smyth (NILGA)
Lisa O'Kane (NILGA)
Amy McGrath (NILGA)
Mark Mulholland (Belfast)

1.	AGENDA ITEM 1: WELCOME & APOLOGIES	
1.1	The Chair Minister Ní Chuilín welcomed everyone to the Partnership Panel Meeting.	
1.2	Apologies were noted and accepted from Minister Robin Swann; Minister Peter Weir; DE; Minister Edwin Poots, DAERA; and Minister Diane Dodds, DfE.	
1.3	It was noted that Dr Michael McBride would be providing an update to the Panel on behalf of Minister Swann. It was further noted that Derek Baker, Permanent Secretary DE would be attending on Minister Weir's behalf.	
1.4	Minister Ní Chuilín handed over to NILGA President, Cllr Matt Garrett for his opening remarks. Cllr Garrett commented that he welcomed the first meeting of the Partnership Panel in four years and thanked the Chair for her leadership in calling today's meeting.	
2.	AGENDA ITEM 2: NOTE OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING 16TH OCTOBER 2016	
2.1	Note was accepted as an accurate record.	
3.	AGENDA ITEM 3: PARTNERSHIP PANEL TERMS OF REFERENCE AND STANDING ORDERS	
3.1	The revised Terms of Reference and Standing Orders for Partnership Panel were <i>approved</i> .	Approved: TOR & SO [PP01/20; PP02/20]
3.2	Further to comments raised by Ald. Tom McKeown in advance of the meeting, it was agreed that the Partnership Panel would commit to holding three meetings per year.	
4.	AGENDA ITEM 4: PARTNERSHIP PANEL WORKPLAN	
	<p>Following written points raised in advance by Cllrs. Burton, Burgess and Kearney, the Draft Workplan was discussed with overall support in principle, Local Government had <i>fully agreed</i> in advance.</p> <p>It was noted that the Partnership Panel Workplan is a dynamic document which:</p> <p>(a) has been and will be further revised to reflect the COVID/Economic situation,</p> <p>(b) will be updated as the Partnership Panel agrees upon work to be progressed through the Panel.</p> <p>(c) requires a Communications Protocol, raised on agenda as Paper PP05/20; to be discussed at next meeting.</p>	<p>Approved: Workplan [PP03/20]</p> <p>PP05/20 to be raised at next meeting.</p>

5.	AGENDA ITEM 5: RECOVERY FROM COVID 19	
5.1	<p>Dr. Michael McBride, Chief Medical Officer, provided a comprehensive update on the current situation. Community transmission of the virus has increased significantly since the beginning of July. Over the past 7 days (to 16/9/2020) the percentage of positive cases in the over 60s age bracket has increased from 9.5% last week, up to 16.5% this week. The Executive has taken the decision to place restrictions on certain postal code areas and this will be further reviewed very regularly.</p>	
5.2	<p>In the midst of this, the Health Service is trying to get other services back to normal, whilst preparing for significant uptake in hospital beds for Covid.</p>	
5.3	<p>Chair thanked Dr McBride and felt it was important to provide an overview of where we are recovery wise. She noted positively that departments and councils are doing a lot in terms of social and economic recovery from Covid and asked her Ministerial colleagues if they were content to provide to Local Government with a written update on what each department is doing in terms of Covid recovery.</p>	
5.4	<p><u>Action:</u> It was agreed that Ministers would provide a report to Local Government on what each of their departments are doing in terms of Covid Recovery.</p> <p>The information will be circulated to Members via the Partnership Panel Secretariat.</p>	
5.5	<p>Dr McBride thanked local government for their huge efforts and support to communities during the ongoing pandemic. He also took questions from local government representatives.</p>	
5.6	<p>Ald. Mark Cosgrove raised the supply and demand issues with the current Covid testing programme; Dr McBride advised the issue of people living in Northern Ireland being offered tests in Scotland has now been resolved, adding that there are plans to significantly ramp up the Northern Ireland programme for Covid testing.</p>	
5.7	<p>Other Local Government representatives spoke about <i>economic recovery</i> from COVID. Cllr. Paul Greenfield highlighted that through this difficult situation, councils have shown their worth and have provided the vital link between the departments and communities, especially in terms of essential public health and other key services; but also co-ordination work as local hubs for all services, e.g. preventative health and food distribution. Cllr. Greenfield also asked all Ministers to invest in these co-ordination roles of councils with further funding as part of the Spending Review that the Executive will be engaged in during the coming days.</p>	
5.8	<p>Cllr. Robert Adair referred to the importance of councils and the NI Executive working together when rates are being set to avoid setting charges which people and businesses cannot afford to pay. Cllr.</p>	

<p>5.9</p> <p>5.10</p> <p>5.11</p> <p>5.12</p>	<p>Adair also emphasised that financial support for local government would be essential to do this.</p> <p>Ald. Mark Cosgrove raised the <u>Local Government Finances - Resources, Recovery, Remodelling</u> paper issued to the Panel, asking Ministers to consider that due to the urgency of the issue, a small & targeted “Task and Finish” group be set up with Ministers & Councillors, supported by inputs from Permanent Secretaries, council Chief Executives and senior Finance Officers.</p> <p>As set out in Paper PP04/20; Local Government are asking Ministers to consider the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>For 2020/21, Stormont per rest of UK continues to support councils for financial losses suffered through reduced income, additional costs associated with recovery of services and increased waste management costs.</i> ➤ <i>Stormont works with Treasury and Councils to guarantee rates income / develop a new rates / income model urgently - without which provision of council services will diminish - in some cases significantly.</i> ➤ <i>Introduce temporary borrowing powers to cover some day to day spending. This would enable deficits to be managed over a longer period and help protect councils’ reserves position.</i> ➤ <i>Ministers via the Partnership Panel and its Chair work in a <u>Task and Finish team</u> approach with NILGA / Councils on finances, to achieve post Covid economic, social and related recovery building a new sustainability plan for local government and our whole community.</i> <p>Action: It was agreed that via the Chair, the Partnership Panel Secretariat would liaise with Ministers, NILGA and SOLACE to set up a Task and Finish Group to progress this work as a matter of urgency.</p> <p>The Minister for Finance added that LPS has already commenced discussions with councils in relation to the rates setting process.</p>	
<p>6.</p>	<p>AGENDA ITEM 6: LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS</p>	
<p>6.1</p> <p>6.2</p>	<p>The Chair, Carál Ní Chuilín, advised that she wanted Local Development Plans on the Agenda as they are a critical tool and provide a great opportunity to look at future improvements for everyone. Her department is currently trying to find new and innovative ways of increasing supply of housing to reduce demand and also are looking and working with councils and other partners around affordable housing and supporting community infrastructure.</p> <p>There is currently a waiting list of 40,000 people for housing in Northern Ireland, and over half of those people are living in housing</p>	

	<p>stress. The Minister added that we all need to be mindful that we can't go through the Local Development Plan process ignoring Housing.</p>	
6.3	<p><i>Minister Ní Chuilín proposed that Local Development Plans be included as an item of work within the Partnership Panel Workplan.</i></p>	
6.4	<p>Cllr. Kerri Hughes commented that housing and community investment is absolutely essential and must be addressed within our Local Development Plans. She further commented that the issue of Developer Contributions needs to be addressed and that contributions should be going to where needed most as outlined in councils' Economic Development Plans; obviously this would be subject to planning law and the individual powers that the Ministers for Infrastructure and Communities could enable.</p>	
6.5	<p>Cllr. Tommy Maguire asked the Ministers for Communities and Infrastructure, in view of the importance of Local Development Plans, and the specifics highlighted at today's Panel meeting, which existing joint officer body might be able to prepare a position paper for Panel members for the next meeting?</p>	
6.6	<p>Minister Ní Chuilín advised that she has been concerned about the Section 76, Developers Contributions issue; first of all because councillors who sit on a Planning Committee are sitting as quasi-judicial, and she believed councillor involvement in decisions related to developer contributions could be enhanced.</p>	
6.7	<p>As an action point, the Minister advised that her Department would work with the Department for Infrastructure to take forward this work, adding that it would be included as part of the Workplan for the Partnership Panel.</p>	
6.8	<p><u>Action:</u> DfC will co-ordinate work with DfI to develop an informed position and guidance on Section 76, Developers Contributions.</p>	
6.9	<p><u>Action:</u> Local Development Plans to be included as an area of work in the Partnership Panel Workplan.</p>	
6.10	<p>Cllr. Geraldine McAteer asked the Minister for Communities and the Minister for Infrastructure a question about the impact of the wastewater infrastructure deficit on councils' development ambitions, visions which may be curtailed by lack of wastewater infrastructure. Developers are having to put in physical wastewater infrastructure themselves. Cllr McAteer asked how the issue is going to be addressed; the need for housing on one hand, and not having the wastewater infrastructure on the other.</p>	
6.11	<p>In response Minister Nichola Mallon commented that one of the biggest inhibitors to building more homes and growing the economy has been the historic underinvestment in our water and wastewater infrastructure. There are over 100 locations across Northern Ireland which are at or just over capacity which means that planning applications are not going to be passed. It is a huge issue and one</p>	

6.12	<p>that is going to require significant investment (funding forecast of £2.3bn for the net Price Control Period up to 2027), ambitions for Local Development Plans will be hampered, as will meeting the Programme for Government outcomes. She added that the Executive agrees that strategic recovery from COVID will require investment in water and wastewater infrastructure.</p> <p>Minister Ní Chuilín added that the Executive is working collaboratively on this issue and that councils' roles would be essential also – Local Development Plans in a post Covid world will be different to before.</p>	
7.	<p>AGENDA ITEM 7: LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCES – RESOURCES, RECOVERY AND REMODELLING [PP04/20]</p>	
7.1	<p><u>Action (per previous):</u> It was agreed that via the Chair, the Partnership Panel Secretariat would liaise with Ministers, NILGA and SOLACE to set up a Task and Finish Group to progress this work as a matter of urgency.</p> <p>7.2 Cllr. Geraldine McAteer commented on complementary but equally important joint work and a “co-design” approach to synergise the 11 Council Recovery Plans with the plans at Assembly and Departmental level should be taken forward, adding that Community Plans were vital components of the revised Programme for Government that could in themselves be engines of social and economic recovery.</p> <p>7.3 Minister Ní Chuilín added that as set out under “New Decade, New Approach” partnership, co-design and co-production will be key and central as we move forward for the future.</p> <p>7.4 <u>Action:</u> Best mechanism to align Council recovery plans and resources needed for them with Assembly level / departmental plans to be developed.</p>	
8.	<p>AGENDA ITEM 8: IMPLEMENTATION OF OUTSTANDING LEGISLATION FROM RPA</p>	
8.1	<p>The Chair handed over to the Minister for Infrastructure to provide an update specifically on Planning legislation. The matter had been raised in advance by Ald. McDowell.</p> <p>8.2 Minister Nichola Mallon advised that she had recently sent a letter to the Infrastructure Committee about the review of the 2015 legislation, adding that officials have already started to look at some of the difficulties and areas for improvement. Stakeholder engagement would follow, and a report should be ready by the end of the year.</p> <p>8.3 <u>Action:</u> NILGA, DfC, DfI, councils, will continue to develop this work and Minister Nichola Mallon’s report should be linked to Panel’s next meeting.</p>	

8.4	Looking at outstanding legislation beyond Planning, Ald. Mark Cosgrove following an issue raised in advance by Ald. Billy Ashe raised the Councillors Code of Conduct with the Minister. Prior to the Assembly collapsing in 2017, a Review of the Councillors Code of Conduct had been completed ready for the Minister for approval. Members asked if completion of this work could be sorted.	
8.5	Action – The Chair, Minister Ní Chuilín, agreed to look into completion of the Councillors Code of Conduct Review work as a matter of urgency.	
9.	AGENDA ITEM 9: COMMUNITY PLANS REVIEW	
9.1	Cllr John Palmer commented that due to councils prioritising essential works in response to the COVID crisis, some have as yet not commenced the Community Plans Review process. Due to the challenging COVID situation it is difficult to get the substantive strategic contact with some community groups; would the Minister consider delaying if specific councils required, the Community Planning Review for 1 year?	
9.2	Dr Michael McBride also asked a question through the Chair, if there were Covid issues that might be better prioritised in terms of the Community Plan Review?	
9.3	The Chair added that there are a lot of issues which were previously agreed which aren't going to be met because of the current health crisis and that Departments would try to accommodate local government.	
9.4	Action: Minister Ní Chuilín asked (through the NILGA President, Cllr Matt Garrett), for NILGA to ask each council about this issue and feedback on the Community plan strategic priorities per council.	
10.	AGENDA ITEM 10: AOB	
10.1	£20m Blue Green Fund - Minister Mallon asked councils if they have projects that are on the blue green agenda which are at the stage for investment; climate action; active travel etc; to get in touch with her department's walking and cycling champion (Liz Loughran; Email Liz.Loughran@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk).	
11.	AGENDA ITEM 11: DATE OF NEXT MEETING	
11.1	In respect of a question tabled in advance by Cllr. Ruairi McHugh, it was agreed that the next meeting of the Partnership Panel would take place before the end of the financial year.	
11.2	Action: A schedule of meetings for the year 2021 and into 2022 will follow shortly.	