

PARTNERSHIP PANEL

NOTE OF MEETING HELD AT 11AM, 21st April 2021

VIA ZOOM

Central Government

Minister Deirdre Hargey, DfC (CHAIR)
Minister Conor Murphy, DoF
Minister Robin Swann, DoH
Minister Naomi Long, DOJ
Michael McCallion (on behalf of Minister Poots) DAERA

Joint Secretariat

Derek McCallan, NILGA (Joint Secretary)
Antoinette Kennedy, NILGA
Sorcha Hassay, DfC (Joint Secretary)
Ian Hanash, DfC

Observers

Tracey Meharg, Perm Sec, DfC
Katrina Godfrey, Perm Sec, DfI
Anthony Carleton, DfC
Piers Dalgarno, DfC
Ronan McGinley, SpAd DfC
Rhiannon McKenna, DfC
Graeme Wilkinson, DfE
Mark Ovens
Jane Holmes, TEO
Geoffrey Simpson, TEO
Michael McAvoy, DoJ
Patricia O'Lynn, DoJ
Roger Wilson, CE ABC Council
David Burns, CE LC Council
Alison McCullagh, CE FO Council
David Burns, CE LCC Council
Adrian McCreesh, CE MU Council
Adele Watters, DfI
Michael McAvoy, DoJ
John Tully, BC Council
Jean Bonner, MEA Council
Amy McGrath, NILGA
Karen Smyth, NILGA
Lisa O'Kane, NILGA

Local Government

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
Stephen Reid, SOLACE Vice Chair / CE Ards North Down

Apologies

Minister Nichola Mallon, DfI
Minister Edwin Poots, DAERA
Minister Deirdre Dodds, DfE
Minister Peter Weir, DE
Ald. Mark Cosgrove, Antrim & Newtownabbey
Jacqui Dixon, SOLACE Chair / CE Antrim & Newtownabbey

| ITEM | WELCOME, APOLOGIES and OPENING ADDRESS | |
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| 1. | <p>The Chair, Minister Deirdre Hargey welcomed everyone to the Partnership Panel Meeting and also welcomed Cllr Joe Boyle, Regional Secretary from the NAC to his first meeting of the Partnership Panel.</p> <p>Minister Hargey commented on the success of the vaccination programme to date and the dates announced by the Executive in the past week for the gradual easing out of restrictions subject to medical data review. The Chair also spoke about the important role local government has played over the past year in working with Stormont departments, with Ministers and officials across the board. The Minister also raised NILGA’s campaign “Councils make it happen” which she indicated clearly demonstrated the value of good delivery of essential services particularly in times of real need. In summing up, Minister Hargey reiterated her thanks on behalf of the Executive to Councillors and Councils and thanked NILGA for their ongoing support for the Partnership Panel.</p> <p>Asked to respond, the NILGA President in his opening comments emphasised the work which has been ongoing in terms of Council Finances. Through evidence and persistence, the 11 Councils have received mitigation funds of over £100 million to offset deficits due entirely to Covid, consequently they have struck sustainable, prudent rates for the current financial year and will be working hard this year to maintain services in 2021/22, with further funding sought to enable a full recovery. Cllr Garrett also welcomed the Executive’s timetable for reopening and the success of the vaccination rollout; adding that the success and impact of all of this will be local – in our villages, towns and cities, so Councils will be front and centre again. In summing up, the NILGA President commented that central government together with local government has a job of work ahead and a new look at local government’s resources within a new Programme for Government is crucial as we recover together.</p> | |
| 2. | <p>NOTE OF PANEL MEETING 20TH JANUARY 2021 & UPDATE ON ACTION POINTS</p> | |
| | <p>The note of the last meeting on 16th September was proposed by Ald Thomas McKeown and seconded by Cllr Tommy Maguire. The Minister provided an overview of actions in progress and those completed.</p> <p><u>Outstanding Actions from Partnership Panel Meeting, September 2020:</u></p> <p><u>Action 4.5</u> – it was agreed that the Local Development Plans would be on the Partnership Panel Workplan. NILGA has advised that this is being progressed with DfI and Councils. The 11 Councils Principal Planning Officers have recently met on this matter. As this work goes forward it will be reported upon during the work cycle year and progress will be reported back to Partnership Panel.</p> <p><u>Action 4.8</u> – The DfC are looking into the completion of the Councillors Code of Conduct Review. The Communities Committee discussed and noted the Departmental Response to the consultation on the Code of Conduct on 14th January 2021. Work is ongoing within the Department bringing this piece of work forward.</p> | <p>APPROVED: MEETING NOTE 20.01.2021</p> |

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| | <p><u>Action 4.9</u> – NILGA was to ask Councils about the Community Planning Review and also the feedback on the Community Planning Strategic Priorities; this item will be discussed later in the agenda.</p> <p><u>Outstanding Actions from Partnership Panel Meeting, January 2021:</u></p> <p><u>Action 8.7</u> – A meeting on the UK Environment Bill was to be convened. There are ongoing discussions between DfC, DAERA and DfI on this matter and a meeting is planned again shortly and an update will be provided to Partnership Panel as work is progressed.</p> <p><u>Action 10.7</u> – Progress is ongoing on issues as previously raised by Councils on Summer Hunger; Transportation and Rural Isolation; Wastewater Infrastructure deficit; and the policy gap regarding regeneration in settlements below 5000 people. Discussions are taking place with NILGA and the relevant Departments regarding these matters and will be progressed. An update will be provided at the October 2021 Partnership Panel Meeting.</p> | <p>PP SEC: ACTIONS UPDATE WILL BE PROVIDED AT NEXT MEETING 20.10.2021</p> |
| <p>3.</p> | <p>MATTERS ARISING</p> | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Update on Shared Prosperity Fund, Minister Conor Murphy <p>In response to Action 7.12 of the January 2021 Partnership Panel Meeting Minister Murphy updated the Panel on the Shared Prosperity Fund. He commented that the detail on the Shared Prosperity Fund remains frustratingly vague. As outlined in the Whitehall Spending Review of Autumn 2020, the fund is £1.5bn per annum across the UK. It is expected that the prospectus and the investment framework will be published by Parliament before the Summer recess; with allocations subject to the 2021 spending review.</p> <p>The Pilot for the Shared Prosperity Fund- the <i>Community Renewal Fund</i> - was announced in the Spring budget; it amounts to £220m in total; with an allocation of £11m for Northern Ireland; targeted at similar interventions as under the previous European Social Fund and European Regional Development Fund; however, it should be noted that the £11m is far less than would have been achieved under the previous ESF and ERDF funding.</p> <p><i>The Executive has no function in the delivery of the Shared Prosperity Fund nor the Community Renewal Fund Pilot.</i> The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) will be administering the funds; the process is competitive; projects being bid for will be pitted against other projects across Scotland, England and Wales. Local Government will be able to participate where they have legislative powers to do so, however, again local government will have to liaise directly the Department for MHCLG.</p> <p><i>The new arrangements / funds will not fully replace what has been lost in terms of the European Structural Funds.</i> NI however will be eligible for the EU Peace Plus Project which will commence rollout in the near future. There was to be a meeting between NI, Scotland and Wales with the Treasury to discuss the Shared Prosperity Fund and pilot; however, assembly and parliamentary elections have been called in both Scotland and Wales, and the meeting with the Treasury has been postponed. <i>The Executive is of the</i></p> | |

view that the central administration of the Shared Prosperity Fund by MHCLG is the wrong way to administer the fund; it is a direct interference in devolved nation arrangements. The Finance Minister and the Executive will continue to engage with the Treasury and the Panel will be kept updated on progress.

Cllr Martin Kearney, in response to Minister Murphy's update commented that NILGA will be working to quality assure & localise the Shared Prosperity Fund both in preparation and delivery terms as Councils are central to its success. A concern raised by Cllr Kearney is that in GB, councils will lead & coordinate the bidding process locally; however, in Northern Ireland - with the absence of local coordination of bids across the councils, community & voluntary sector and private sector; there could be duplication, with applications at cross-purposes to each other and with projects targeting the same cohort (particularly for skills). There is an opportunity before the Shared Prosperity Fund starts in 2022 to reshape MHCLG's thinking on this and central and local government should work together to do so.

Action: Strategic work will continue between local government and the Department of Finance on a shared approach, positioning our local authorities at the core of the Shared Prosperity Fund. It would be mutually beneficial for the Department of Finance to link in with SOLACE/ NILGA on their work in relation to the Community Renewal Fund and the Levelling Up Fund. Regional co-ordination model to ensure sound management / monitoring to be considered.

- **Update on Waste Management, Michael McCallion, DAERA**

As per Action Point 9.8 in the January 2021 Minutes, Michael McCallion, Head of Waste Management at DAERA provided an update on behalf of Minister Poots.

In his address to the Panel, Michael McCallion highlighted that the *Circular Economy Package* is key to pushing resources further up the waste hierarchy away from landfill and incineration. Waste separately collected for reuse or recycling may not be incinerated or landfilled. Amongst other things the legislation increases recycling rates to 65% by 2035 and waste to landfill of 10%.

In terms of current waste performance; the last annual waste data (November 2020) indicates that for 2019/2020 the recycling rate for household waste was 51.9%, while the landfill rate for household waste was 23.7%. There is work to be done to meet the new targets.

Waste statistics are produced on a quarterly basis; the last quarterly report showed a decrease in the waste recycling rates. The last bulletin stated that waste from households recycling rate as a percentage of waste from householder arising had fallen to 49.6%; and this is particularly important as it is now below the EU 50% target which was due to be met by 2020. Next quarterly report is due out on 22.04.2021 and this will show if NI has reached the new set targets for end of 2020.

Within DAERA, the emphasis has been on increasing the quality and quantity of the resources which are collected for recycling. DAERA have a range of initiatives in place including the *Household Waste Collaborative*

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| | <p><i>Change Programme.</i> There was also a consultation on <i>future recycling and separate collection of waste of a household nature in Northern Ireland</i> a couple of months back.</p> <p>The Household Waste Collaborative Change Programme financially supports Councils to further increase recycling rates and improve the quality of recycling; to date DAERA has paid out £5m to 9 Council projects. DAERA are currently reviewing the Collaborative Change Programme and are considering extending the timeframe for the Programme and the overall funding requirement. Minister Poots has recently set the match funding contribution required from Councils at 50% and he anticipates that this will allow Councils to take forward their projects; the funding provided by DAERA can assist more projects and this will benefit local communities by increasing the rate and quality of recycling.</p> <p>The Department are currently consulting on a number of policies which will shape the strategic waste direction moving forward. In line with the rest of the UK, a public consultation was issued by DAERA recently on <i>extended producer responsibility for packaging</i> and the introduction of a <i>deposit return scheme for drinks containers</i>.</p> <p>Michael McCallion also provided a short overview on the COVID funding which was provided to Councils as a necessity to ensure the continuation of household waste collection. £15.2m was made available to Councils to cover the additional costs incurred by their waste management services. To date £12.5m has already been paid out to Councils.</p> <p>In response to Mr McCallion's update, Ald Billy Ashe MBE commented that local government appreciates the complexities around waste; however local government would be keen to see some urgency around waste management programmes. Waste management costs are approximately 25% of Council's annual gross spend. Moving forward local government envisage smarter technologies and developments in the circular economy. However, the uncertainty of landfill sites and waste treatment continues to cause concern about price increases. <i>Local government is happy to step up and play a constructive role in partnership to identify solutions that can move us all forward.</i></p> <p>Action: Strategic work will continue between DAERA and Local Government to identify solutions to address waste management concerns and relevant central – local governance mechanisms re-considered.</p> | <p>DAERA. LOCAL GOVERNMENT.</p> |
| <p>4.</p> | <p>Finances</p> | |
| | <p>Budget 2021/2022</p> <p>Minister Conor Murphy provided an update to the Panel. The final Budget for 2021 / 2022 has been agreed by the Executive; the budget position is a marginally improved one; with some flexibility negotiated for funding allocated for the COVID response to be carried over from the last financial year into this year's budget.</p> <p>The Executive received £3.3bn additional funding last year for the COVID response; almost all of which has been allocated across the Departments, with very little returned to Treasury. The Executive are working within a <i>flat</i></p> | |

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| | <p><i>cash budget position</i> for 2021/2022. £900m has been received for the COVID response this year; a large proportion of the £900m has been allocated to Health.</p> <p>Action: Continued development of strategic engagement between Departments and local government on finances to prioritise funding.</p> <p>In response to Minister Murphy’s update on the Budget 2021/2022, Ald Alan McDowell commented that the Budget for 2021/22 is clearly a difficult one; the settlement does not provide the level of support needed to kickstart our economy as we emerge from the challenges of the past year. The Executive had hoped for a multi-year budget as did Councils, but the Task & Finish Group proposed and led by local government should help to address this and more sustainable councils going forward.</p> <p>Local Government Finances – Task and Finish Group</p> <p>NILGA President and LG Finances Task and Finish Group Chair advised that short-term measures were agreed at the inaugural meeting of the TFG to ensure that councils have the investment to keep them sustainable in 2021 and 2022.</p> <p>The TFG provides formal two-tier political focus on local government finances which is valuable in itself. The combination of rates struck by councils and support provided by Stormont for deficits – including the recent Rates Support Grant increases will protect households, businesses and key services. Officer work at both central and local government level has commenced on developing a longer-term sustainable business model for Councils moving forward.</p> <p>Action: TFG Chair has called for a mid-year review meeting, scheduled for the 8th of September 2021 to review progress towards developing a new financing model for Councils. TFG Meeting Outcomes will be brought to the October meeting of the Partnership Panel.</p> <p>The LG Finances TFG was set up to address the unsustainability of the current local government financing model. <i>The single long-term focus for the TFG is to secure a big change to the current Council financing model</i>– having a financial plan 75% reliant on rates income & services is unique in any part of government, is not sustainable, and will not provide consistent delivery & improvement of Council services. The September 2021 midyear review and consideration of longer-term sustainable business model alternatives for Councils will be welcomed. The TFG may be stood down at this stage; but <i>only</i> if there are solid options to politically scrutinise and for LG to have its say in advance.</p> | <p>ALFGO. DoF. DAERA. DfC.</p> <p>ALGFO. DoF. DfC SECRETARIAT</p> |
| 5. | PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT | |
| | <p>Cllr Paul Greenfield in his address to the Panel spoke about the vital role of Councils in the emerging Programme for Government. For the emerging Programme for Government to work, and for sustainable recovery from this pandemic and any major global disruption, <i>localised investment, via better resourced Councils</i>, is key. Cllr Greenfield added that moving forward local</p> | |

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| | <p>government would like to see the <i>Panel having a regular monitoring role as the PfG develops and is implemented.</i></p> <p>Cllr Geraldine McAteer highlighted the importance of the Partnership Panel having a regular review and scrutiny role for the PfG; with TEO, DfC, NILGA and SOLACE initially charged with developing the right method to deliver and communicate this, considering their cross-cutting roles. This would be very worthwhile strategically as we need to get this right for all of our citizens. The statutory role of the Partnership Panel ensures interdepartmental and all council engagement on this common and vital Strategy.</p> <p>Minister Hargey stated that the consultation on the PfG had closed on 22 March 2021 and emphasised the importance of getting the framework right. The Executive is committed to delivering an Outcomes based PfG and taking cognisance of the lessons which have been learnt from COVID 19 which have clearly demonstrated <i>a whole government approach; local and central; is key when it comes to delivering public services.</i> Partnership and co-design is the right approach.</p> <p>Minister Hargey added that she is also keen to see <i>alignment between the Programme for Government and the Council Community Plans.</i> With regards to the issues pertaining to PfG; when scrutiny has been completed; the Minister advised that the Partnership Panel will revisit the issue and discussions will take place between local and central government in the interim on the paper presented by Local Government and what the final Programme for Government document will look like.</p> <p>Action: Partnership Panel will revisit local government recommendations for emerging Programme for Government, following co-ordinated work between bodies cited above.</p> | <p>TEO, DfC, NILGA, SOLACE</p> |
| <p>6.</p> | <p>COMMUNITY PLANNING</p> | |
| | <p>In response to the COVID pandemic, Cllr John Palmer advised that all Councils have amended Community Plan Action Plans which take cognisance of our new reality. Actions for Community Recovery, Preventative Health and Economic Recovery are at the fore. He added that local government looks forward to seeing and being materially involved in the emerging outcomes from the Community Planning Review as laid out by the Department and recommendations for Community Planning changes moving forward.</p> <p>Councillor Tommy Maguire added that <i>Community Planning has great potential as a real driver in the emerging Programme for Government.</i> Community Planning fully invested in and fully recognised on a multi-departmental basis as engines of growth and social cohesion across council areas would be a big gain in terms of the Programme for Government.</p> <p>Councillor Maguire also referred to Carnegie’s “<i>Embedding a Wellbeing Framework</i>” Report which provides clear recommendations to improve Community Planning including ringfenced multi-year funding and an augmentation review to include regeneration powers.</p> <p>Cllr Maguire asked the Chair to consider the recommendations as outlined in paper PP03 as crucial, and to encourage the wider Panel’s support for them. Cllr Maguire also proposed that an invitation be</p> | |

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| | <p>extended to the Carnegie Trust to the next Panel Meeting; - and for the Partnership Panel to consider in advance a Report on the emerging outcomes from the Community Planning Review. Cllr Ruairi McHugh seconded Cllr Maguire's proposal.</p> <p>Minister Hargey approved the recommendation for the Carnegie Trust to present to the Panel and this will be added to the Agenda for the October 2021 Partnership Panel Meeting.</p> <p><u>Action:</u> Invitation to be extended to the Carnegie Trust to the October 2021 Partnership Panel Meeting to discuss the Embedding a Wellbeing Framework Report.</p> <p>Minister Hargey further advised that the Permanent Secretaries Group and SOLACE have established a Community Planning Group; jointly chaired by local government officials and DfC officials. The group has been tasked with producing recommendations on the new <i>Community Planning Support System</i> based on the recommendations of the Strategic Investment Board report towards a programme of support for Community Planning.</p> <p>A series of Community Planning workshops have also taken place and the Community Planning working group will present their work including a draft implementation plan for the new Community Planning Support System to the next meeting of the PSG / SOLACE which will take place in June 2021. This group's work will take into consideration Covid-19, the response to Covid-19 and the Carnegie recommendations. An update on this work will also be provided at the next Partnership Panel meeting.</p> <p><u>Action: An update on PSG – SOLACE Community Planning Support System and implementation plan will be provided at next Partnership Panel meeting.</u></p> | <p>SECRETARIAT</p> <p>DfC SOLACE</p> |
| <p>7.</p> | <p>Public Life Civility and Parity</p> | |
| | <p>○ <i>Civility in Public Life</i></p> <p>Councillor Frances Burton raised with the Panel, the growing issue of online abuse and intimidation against elected members – MLAs, MPs and Councillors alike - on social media platforms. NILGA has been working with LGA, COSLA and WLGA in England, Wales and Scotland and now in Ireland to raise the profile of the issue.</p> <p>Cllr Burton added that the abuse against elected members is deterring people from joining political life; existing Councillors are also saying they will not run for election again due the abuse they are receiving. Cllr Burton put forward 2 recommendations to the Panel:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>To consider the cost of installing security equipment as an eligible expense for councillors in Northern Ireland, through a national budget as is the practice in England, Wales and Scotland.</i> ● <i>DoJ to continue to work with NILGA to raise awareness of the impact of harassment on politicians, to promote the #DebateNotHate campaign and to refine training & guidance materials to ensure compliance with Northern Ireland's legislation.</i> | |

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| <p>Cllr Burton also thanked Minister Naomi Long for her leadership on this matter.</p> <p>Action: Minister Hargey advised that she has instructed officials within the Department to engage with NILGA; an update will be provided at the October Partnership Panel Meeting.</p> <p>Minister Naomi Long also addressed the Panel, commenting that she fully recognises the impact online attacks can have. It is difficult to disengage with the social media channels as a lot of elected members use the platforms as a communication tool for work with their constituents. Online abuse is an issue which was addressed by Judge Murrinan in his recent review of the hate crime legislation, adding that it is vital that action is taken on this. Communications are not devolved issues; they are reserved issues at Westminster. DoJ is working closely with the Westminster on this; an Online Safety Bill is on course at Westminster; DoJ is working to ensure that the needs / protections of the people here in Northern Ireland are included in that Bill and she has written to the Home Office and the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to ensure that the recommendations made by Judge Murrinan in his review of hate crime legislation are considered as they draft the legislation. DoJ will also be drafting a Hate Crime Bill for introduction early in the next mandate.</p> <p>In terms of involvement in publicity campaigns to highlight online trolling, Minister Long advised that she is happy for her officials to engage with NILGA on how best to take this forward.</p> <p>Action: DoJ officials will liaise with NILGA re #DebateNotHate online campaign.</p> <p>Minister Long also spoke about the recommendation raised by local government on the provision of security equipment for Councillors. She highlighted MLAs are able to access security equipment through expenses for their offices; however, this does not extend to security equipment at their homes. Hence unless Councillors have a constituency office, there wouldn't be parity for such a scheme. Minister Long advised that her officials liaise with NILGA on this matter; however, it should be noted the scheme for MLAs applies to security equipment for offices and not for personal home security systems. Minister Long added that the NIO operates a home protection scheme that offers advice and practical support to anyone who receives particular personal threat which is verified.</p> <p>Action: DoJ officials to engage with NILGA on access to security equipment for Councillors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Maternity, Paternity and Sickness Pay for Councillors <p>Minister Hargey referred Members to Paper PP05 and invited Cllr Kerri Hughes to update the Panel. In her address to the Panel, Cllr Kerri Hughes advised that the issue on maternity, paternity and sickness pay for Councillors was initially raised by Mid Ulster Council with DfC.</p> <p>Council appreciates that a response has been received but would like to raise that a Model Parental Leave Policy should be a joint aim to ensure that elected members, both MLAs and Councillors - are given parity with MPs in</p> | <p>DfC NILGA</p> <p>DoJ NILGA</p> <p>DoJ NILGA</p> |
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| | <p>terms and conditions as regards Maternity and Paternity pay; and that consideration be given to legislation which specifies this entitlement.</p> <p>Cllr Hughes asked the Minister to consider the recommendation as outlined in paper PP05 to improve matters for existing and potential MLAs & councillors alike. Cllr Hughes added that colleagues in the National Association of Councillors, including Cllr Joe Boyle in attendance, are equally keen to see this equality enshrined in legislation.</p> <p>In response to Cllr Hughes overview, Minister Hargey advised that there are no barriers in terms of local Councils deciding for the payment of allowances to Councillors who are in periods of sickness or on maternity /paternity leave, as long as they comply with the legislative requirements that are set out. Minister Hargey advised that the guidance on this matter will be reissued. Minister Hargey added that she was aware that there are some Councils in England that have agreed protocols in relation to Councillors leave of absence; protocols are being explored by Councils in Scotland also.</p> <p>Minister Long added that the issue as raised is wider than providing leave and allowances for Councillors; it should also include arrangements to cover the work of elected members on leave. To allow for elected members, e.g., new mothers to take leave, there should be consideration of arrangements which would allow a Councillor to co-opt an alternate to provide maternity cover and to ensure continuity of service to constituents.</p> <p>Action: A further discussion between DfC officials and local government to take place re arrangements / consideration of legislation change that offers parity of treatment for all elected members, regardless of their position across government.</p> | <p>DfC LOCAL GOVERNMENT</p> |
| <p>8.</p> | <p>Engagement with Councils on the co-design of the Social Inclusion Strategies</p> | |
| | <p>Minister Hargey brought this agenda item to today's Panel Meeting on behalf of the Executive and provided an overview of the proposals for co-design for the Social Inclusion Strategies. In NDNA there was a commitment made to the development of Social Inclusion Strategies around <i>anti-poverty</i> which includes child poverty; <i>disability</i>; <i>gender equality</i> and <i>sexual orientation</i>. These strategies are being developed using a co-design approach to ensure meaningful stakeholder engagement and involvement throughout the process.</p> <p>In October 2020, interim DfC Minister Caral Ní Chuílin established 4 expert panels of academics and experts to gather information and evidence in each of the 4 respective themes and to develop reports. The 4 reports were published in March 2021 and are now available on DfC's website. The four thematic reports were sent to co-design groups involving community representatives of the grassroots and organisations with a remit under each of the four themes and they will work with the Department and across government in the development of each of the 4 Strategies.</p> <p>In conjunction with the co-design groups, Department is also engaging directly with people who have lived experiences of the issues from each of the four thematic areas. Department has also established cross-departmental groups to look at the priorities within each of the Departments</p> | |

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| 9. | UK Levelling Up Fund | |
| | <p>Minister Hargey introduced the Agenda Item. She advised that there was an announcement on the 24th of February 2021 by the Chief Secretary of the Treasury, Stephen Barclay on a Levelling Up Fund to boost growth in the devolved administrations. Minister Murphy has been looking into this on behalf of the Executive and the Chair invited the Finance Minister to provide an update.</p> <p>Minister Murphy advised that the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government will be administering this fund. There is a <i>call for applications currently; which must be submitted by 18th June 2021.</i></p> <p>The allocation for Northern Ireland is £20m per annum. The funding is spread over three priorities; <i>Transport; Regeneration/ Town Centre investment; and Culture investment.</i> The Executive is included as one of the bodies which can apply under the Transport priority. However, the Executive has been excluded from being able to apply for funding under Regeneration/ Town Centre, and Culture priorities.</p> <p>The Executive has no role in promotion or assessment of the Levelling Up Fund or any control over the objectives or criteria of assessment for the fund; all of which will be undertaken by the MHCLG. The Executive will not have any say in which projects are deemed successful.</p> <p>Minister Murphy further advised that it is his understanding that arm's length bodies and local government are eligible to apply to the fund where they have legal autonomy to deliver; the guidance is available online. The Executive cannot provide guidance <i>however would encourage projects in line with the strategic vision in the Programme for Government.</i></p> <p>MHCLG have advised that a Framework for the Levelling Up Fund will become available; to date this has not been provided. The intention is to deliver the fund centrally from MHCLG to the devolved nations; and this is concerning. Minister Murphy advised that as with the Shared Prosperity Fund; he will continue to engage with Treasury. Minister Murphy is pressing for a meeting with Stephen Barclay of the Treasury and will continue to work with Scotland and Wales on this matter when the Scottish and Welsh elections have finalised.</p> <p>The Levelling Up Fund is principally Capital funding; the structure of the fund was changed in March 2021; it was increased to £4.8bn. The £800m initially earmarked for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales has since been absorbed into the overall fund and will be delivered centrally. The Levelling Up Fund is not intended to replace the EU Structural Programmes; we will receive less money compared to the previous EU Structural Programmes. It is a competitive process; projects from Northern Ireland will be competing with projects from England, Scotland and Wales. The guidance to put forward projects is available on the MHCLG website.</p> <p>In summing up, Minister Murphy commented that the Levelling Up Fund is another unsatisfactory approach to delivery of funding; it aligns itself with the general replacement of EU Funding which is going to see NI sold short and losing authority on how it is spent. The Minister and his Department will continue to challenge the Treasury on this matter.</p> | |

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| | <p>Following Minister Murphy’s update, the Chair invited Cllr Robert Burgess to make comment. In his address to the Panel, Cllr Burgess advised that a coordinating task force should be established at regional level involving local government, the private, education and third sectors to ensure real not perceived local & regional needs are addressed and that Northern Ireland can maximise benefits of the Levelling Up Fund and the Shared Prosperity Fund. Existing mechanisms can be reshaped – it’s a new approach we need not another layer of administrative weight.</p> <p>Cllr Burgess added that as this is a matter for several departments especially Communities, Infrastructure and Economy and all councils, it would be useful to get further clarification on bidding and capacity funding with the first deadlines looming. In his concluding remarks, Cllr Burgess also highlighted that NILGA & SOLACE since EU Exit have asked for replacement Funds to have a place-led, locality-based budgeting approach applied, which focuses on the needs of 11 district council areas at its heart and the content of each Community Plan. It’s too much money and too important to get wrong, so any support would be valued.</p> <p>In response Minister Hargey commented that as reflected by Minister Murphy in his overview, the Executive has similar concerns and the Finance Minister and Executive will continue to address the concerns with the Treasury on how SPF, Levelling Up and other funds will be administered and will continue to engage with local government.</p> <p><u>Action:</u> Ongoing work in advance of April 2022 roll out to continue between and within departments and local government.</p> | <p>EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENTS LOCAL GOVERNMENT</p> |
| <p>10.</p> | <p>Any Other Business</p> | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Youth Parliament <p>Ald Ashe MBE spoke to this agenda item. He highlighted the value of the Youth Parliament in Northern Ireland and his concern that Stormont have ceased funding to it. In his address Ald Ashe highlighted the value of the programme encouraging young people to engage positively with the political world, especially now in today’s turbulent and ever evolving times, programmes which encourage young people into politics must be welcomed, endorsed and supported. He added that earlier in the meeting Cllr Burton spoke about people leaving public life because of how difficult it can be at times, adding that he thinks we should be making every effort to encourage our young people so that they can step up and serve their communities. He added that he would value Minister Hargey’s input to maintain this project.</p> <p>Minister Hargey thanked Ald Ashe for his update adding that she agreed with his proposals; engaging young people is critical; adding that she has seen first-hand the excellent work being taken forward by a number of Youth Forums including the Youth Parliament and the NI Youth Forum. The Chair advised that she take this forward as an action point with Minister Weir and would start to explore the issue as raised. An update will be provided to Ald Ashe and local government in advance of the October Partnership Panel Meeting.</p> | |

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| <p><u>Action:</u> Minister Hargey will liaise with Minister Peter Weir about NI Youth Parliament and will provide a report to Ald Ashe and local government in advance of the October Partnership Panel meeting.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Virtual Meetings Legislation <p>Alderman Thomas McKeown commented on the expiration of the virtual meetings legislation on 7th May adding that he was aware that the Minister’s Department has drafted legislation to be taken forward. He asked the Chair if she could provide an update on the position with the new virtual meetings legislation. In response Minister Hargey advised that subject to agreement by the Executive, she intends to bring forward a Bill to extend the provisions for remote working for a further period. Once she has received Executive approval the Chair will update Members in due course.</p> | <p>DfC DE</p> |
| <p><u>Action:</u> Minister Hargey will provide an update on proposed provisions to strive to enable continuation of virtual meetings beyond 7th May 2021 in due course.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ DfC Definition of Affordable Housing <p>Minister Hargey advised that the demand for both social and affordable housing broadly impacts all of Council areas and is a consideration in Councils Local Development Plans. The current definition of affordable housing remains synonymous; and it has a limited number of tenures and products. As Councils are introducing planning conditions within the Local Development Plans to support mixed tenure development in terms of increasing the supply of social and intermediate housing; these plans will be difficult or impossible with the existing definition for affordable housing.</p> <p>Minister Hargey advised that she is taking forward a piece of work to update the Councils in relation to the definition of affordable housing. The Department considers that it is timely to introduce a new definition of affordable housing for a number of reasons; it would serve as an enabler to bring a greater range of affordable housing products forward in terms of the market and to support the delivery of mixed tenure developments coming forward which will align to Council Local Development Plans. It will also contribute to increasing housing supply and reducing housing stress.</p> <p>As it stands, the system is broken; there are over 40,000 people on the housing waiting list; over 30,000 of those people in housing stress, which has been heightened by the pandemic. Urgency is required on the future direction of travel. There was a major housing statement read in the Assembly in November 2020; the affordability definition will be part of the wider housing revitalisation programme.</p> <p>The Minister also reported that work has commenced to develop an evidence base for an intermediate rent model which delivers good quality, well managed homes with longer tenancies offering security of tenure for people; which will also sit between the social and market rents as well. The mixed tenure approach has a number of positive impacts including the creation of strong balanced, sustainable communities which will be at the</p> | <p>DfC</p> |

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| | <p>heart of a forthcoming housing supply strategy which the Department is working with the NIHE on currently.</p> <p>The definition will become available in April and the next steps are to liaise with key stakeholders on the research and to progress new affordable housing products within the available financial resources. <i>Minister Hargey advised that the Department can provide specific sessions with DfC Housing teams if Panel Members think that would be useful.</i> This work will also sit well with the work being progressed by Councils on their Local Development Plans.</p> <p>Action: DfC will liaise with Local Government on work to progress affordable housing priorities.</p> <p>Cllr Geraldine McAteer responded to Minister Hargey's update. She thanked the Chair for her comprehensive update and the work the Department is leading on to create more affordable and social housing to reduce housing stress. Cllr McAteer added that it was encouraging to see the great work being taken forward to tackle homelessness and to tackle the vast social housing waiting list.</p> <p>Cllr McAteer also congratulated Minister Hargey on her announcement earlier in the week on securing an additional £162m for social housing as well as the 30% increase in house builds for 2020/21 which will be welcomed right across our community.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Climate Action <p>Cllr Ruairi McHugh spoke to this Agenda item. He referred Panel Members to the Climate Action Information piece as provided at PP06 and asked Panel Members to note the ongoing work and to <i>consider how joint central – local working on climate action be assessed for impact and improved - as we move forward on the biggest issue facing society today.</i></p> <p>Cllr McHugh added that his own Council, Derry City and Strabane District have shown great leadership, pioneering the way forward in terms of declaring the climate emergency and other Councils have followed DCSDC's lead on this. The purpose of Paper PP06 today is to encourage feedback across Departments on preparations and inputs into the COP26 event scheduled for Glasgow in November 2021.</p> | DfC LOCAL GOVERNMENT |
| 11. | Date of next meeting | |
| | <p>Minister Hargey thanked Panel Members for their participation and contributions today and advised that the next meeting of the Partnership Panel will take place on Wednesday 20th October 2021 at 11am.</p> | |

NB: In line with GDPR, permissions were sought and obtained for a screenshot of the Partnership Panel meeting for use in the DfC's social media (Twitter) account.

**Partnership Panel Joint Secretariat
May 2021**