MESSAGE FROM THE NILGA PRESIDENT
MICHAIL Gove MP - SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT INVESTING IN NORTHERN IRELAND VIA NILGA

The attendance by Westminster’s “Levelling Up” key Minister (NILGA All Council Executive, December 2021) is an important end of year investment & engagement signal for NILGA and its 11 member councils, as well as for Northern Ireland more widely. The attendance was one of the very first engagements by Secretary of State Gove in his role as “Minister for Intergovernmental relations”.

With multibillion, multi annual budgets for community renewal, enterprise, environmental custody, new skills, technology and infrastructure, designed theoretically to ensure that there is no net deficit in a post EU funding environment, NILGA has spearheaded ministerial, official and technical engagement to ensure our 11 member councils navigate and benefit from this formative yet massively important Programme.

NILGA’s policy and actions remain crystal clear – councils should receive every single financial and strategic incentive possible to lead place shaped investment, social cohesion, a modern and radical approach to enterprise and to environmental management. They should do so with direct and partnership investment allocated by both Westminster and Stormont alike. They should be enabled to offer existing, forward-thinking plans, without wading through mechanistic criteria, and they should be engaged with just like any local authority anywhere else – as equal partners – as is the case in counterpart regions. Whilst councils like Derry City and Strabane and Ards and North Down have already received first phase investment, all 11 councils and their communities must be able to do so in 2022.

NILGA welcomes the “open door” approach by DLUHC at political and officer level and will ensure that the evidence of working directly with councils is reinforced at every opportunity in the months ahead, simply because – as Conference 2021 stated loud and clear – Councils Can Make It Happen.

NILGA’S CHIEF EXECUTIVE STEPS DOWN AFTER 24 YEARS OF COUNCIL SERVICE
Derek McCallan, NILGA’s Chief Executive since 2011, stepped down last month after over 24 years working with councils across NI and further afield.

Reflecting on the decision and his tenure, Derek stated: “Local government has been and will remain my professional family and improving local democracy is still a personal cause. The NILGA role is an exciting, rewarding and unique challenge – but I know that the Association and its 11 councils have a clear vision, they have a sustainable future and they have garnered the credibility to improve local democracy and produce more joined up public services right across NI.

“Without doubt, I will not be a stranger and hope that with good health I can contribute in different ways in the months and years ahead. In the meantime, the NILGA team itself, rather than myself, should recognise its tremendous contribution and its achievements every day as the positive, strong and respected voice of local government. The Association and the 11 councils best work in a permanently dynamic and uncertain world is ahead, but I am privileged to have been a part of a decade of inspiration and perspiration – and have been honoured by the sincere appreciation offered by all in our local government family. It’s a fact, as councils, we are stronger together.”

NILGA’s Christmas donation in lieu of card giving is to Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke.

NI Chest Heart & Stroke provide expert care and support to anyone at risk of or currently living with chest, heart and stroke conditions. They also fund local ground-breaking research into better treatments, care and prevention.

www.nichs.org.uk
THANK YOU NILGA MEMBERS

NILGA would like to thank and acknowledge the tireless support of our Full, Executive and Network Members. These Members ensure that NILGA fulfils its role in supporting the development of a strong, effective local government sector. The impact of these Members within councils and externally, has been critically important to improving regional communications and policy effectiveness over the past year.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT CONFERENCE 2021

Over 100 physical delegates along with virtual attendees joined the Policy & Investment event on the 24th November at the Clandeboye Lodge Hotel, Bangor, the first major council-led summit since February 2020. Jointly delivered by NILGA and SOLACE NI, the 2021 “Councils Make It Happen” event tackled dealing with the economic, environmental, investment, social and health issues facing all in NI. Speakers included Health Minister Robin Swann MLA, Junior Minister Gary Middleton MLA, Economy Minister Gordon Lyons MLA, Communities Minister Deirdre Hargey MLA, NILGA President, Cllr. Robert Burgess, Stephen Reid, SOLACE NI Chair and senior figures across the public, business, community and voluntary sectors.

Hosted by Jayne McCormack, the conference was supported by Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE), CCLA Investment Management and TerraQuest Digital Solutions. This was the first Local Government Conference since restrictions began over 20 months ago. Press Release.
Reform, Devolution and Improvement  Chair - Cllr Mark Glasgow, Mid Ulster DC
RDI Network have met three times during 2021 most recently in mid-September. What is important for the members of the Reform team is developing and distributing – to councils and departments – major, NILGA led, direct action on a Vision and Development plan for all of local government, the responses to which from our 11 councils have been received and are giving it resounding support.

Elected Member Development  Chair - Cllr Frances Burton, Mid Ulster DC
The next meeting of NILGA Regional Elected Member Development Network is on the 26th January 2022.

Charter - Fermanagh and Omagh DC continued strongly to meet the Councillor Development Standard following reassessment on the 1st July 2021. Derry City and Strabane DC demonstrated continued commitment, robustness in strategy and impact at their Councillor Development Charter Plus Standard reassessment on the 12th November 2021.

Regional Programme 2021-22 - Accredited Provision in Local Development Planning and Leadership well underway with the delivery of Module 4 in both respective programmes taking place 16th and 17th December. Today NILGA is delivering in Partnership with Climate NI, accredited learning in the Climate Emergency / Carbon Literacy for Councillors.

The Local Government Commissioner for Standards Survey - will be disseminated to all councillors, as well as the Chief Executives of local councils and other stakeholder bodies who have engaged with the Code, seeking views, comments and experiences of the delivery of Local Government Commissioner for Standards functions, in the interests of ensuring they are working as effectively as possible.

Audit & Organisational Sustainability  Chair - Ald David Drysdale, Lisburn & Castlereagh CC
The Audit & Organisational Sustainability Working Group through the Chair, Ald David Drysdale, continues to evaluate and scrutinise the framework of internal control and corporate governance of NILGA.

As uncertain times continue, the group has regularly monitored and approved NILGA’s Corporate Risk Register as well as scrutinising NILGA’s policies and procedures, making recommendations and ensuring compliance.

Health, Social and Environmental Wellbeing  Chair - Cllr John Coyle, Fermanagh & Omagh DC
The Network met with DAERA officials on 7th December to discuss the Green Growth Strategy and to develop the NILGA response. A high-level consideration began on how to develop central local implementation of strategy and forthcoming climate action plans.

Members also led a 'mid-term' reprioritisation exercise, with a renewed focus on community planning, tackling poverty and driving 'resources to rural' as we wait for the necessary climate legislation to be passed. The next meeting will be on 13th January, looking at mental health, the community planning review and the environment strategy.

Place Shaping and Infrastructure  Chair - Cllr Stevie Corr, Belfast City Council
A conference on regeneration is being planned for the new year, in collaboration with the Economy and International Affairs Network. Another capacity building event is planned for early spring in relation to the Planning Portal. Dates and agendas for both events will issue shortly.

Economy & International Affairs  Chair - Ald Stephen Moutray, Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon BC
The Economy & International Affairs Network’s priorities are economic recovery, skills and labour market issues; and regeneration. The network members have met Ministers, Assembly Committees and stakeholders on recovery, skills, social economy and rural development to ensure councils are resourced to offer place-based solutions to local businesses and residents. As we look to the future, building a competitive, inclusive and greener economy alongside strong economic policy, is key to addressing Covid recovery and EU Exit issues. We will be collaborating with the Place Shaping & Infrastructure Network to deliver a regeneration conference in Spring 2022.

Northern Ireland Strategic Migration Partnership (NISMP)
NISMP continues to coordinate the local oversight for the Home Office Asylum Accommodation and Support contracts, which are delivered in NI by Mears and Migrant Help/Bryson, and to coordinate the NRPF Stakeholder Reference Group which aims to improve support for destitute migrants who have no recourse to public funds. It has also established a “Welcome Hub” and regular advice clinics for Hong Kong nationals who have arrived under the BN(O) visa route. The Welcome Hub can be found on both the NI Direct and NILGA websites.
COP26 REPORT
NILGA was delighted that as a result of sustained international lobbying by local governments, in which NILGA was involved, the COP26 Glasgow Pact was amended to ensure that the final version recognised the importance of local government in leading on climate action.

The Pact explicitly called out multilevel, cooperative action, and the role of local and regional governments in advancing and implementing climate goals. The preamble of the Pact makes this explicit reference, "Recognizing the important role of indigenous peoples, local communities and civil society, including youth and children, in addressing and responding to climate change, and highlighting the urgent need for multilevel and cooperative action," (preamble, Glasgow Climate Pact) which builds on what the Paris agreement also laid out.

FUEL POVERTY
3rd December was Fuel Poverty Awareness Day. With energy costs soaring, National Energy Action have produced information on how to support vulnerable energy consumers this winter - Northern Ireland Fuel Poverty Action Guide. Every home should be a warm and safe place but for many households, the cold reality is that their situation is getting much worse. The cost of living in the UK is soaring to its highest level in a decade. Household energy bills have increased by well over £230 since last winter and will soar again early next year. Over the same period, those on the lowest incomes have seen their income plummet by over £1000 per year.

PROJECT STRATUM
Project Stratum is a £165 million investment set to revolutionise connectivity in rural areas by extending gigabit capable full fibre broadband infrastructure to approximately 76,000 homes and businesses across the region. The roll-out of the new full fibre network, funded under Project Stratum, reached a milestone in November providing full fibre broadband access to 15,000 premises. Press Release.

CIVILITY IN PUBLIC LIFE CAMPAIGN
NILGA is working with the other UK local government associations on a programme of work to encourage civility in public life. As part of this, the English LGA is coordinating a call for evidence on abuse and intimidation of councillors which seeks to understand the nature, frequency and impact of abuse of councillors.

We would encourage councillors from all councils and parties to contribute to this survey, which will form the evidence base of what needs to be done to reduce harassment.

To help us identify trends and issues in NI, we would request that all completing the survey should input "NI" and then their council name in the Region question on the first page of the survey which is available HERE. More information on the Civility in Public Life campaign is available HERE.

NI Reval2023
At revaluation, Land & Property Services (LPS) adjusts the rateable value of business properties to reflect changes in the property market. This autumn LPS will revalue over 74,000 business properties. Businesses must at revaluation, Land & Property Services (LPS) adjusts the rateable value of business properties to reflect changes in the property market. This autumn LPS will revalue over 74,000 business properties. Businesses must now complete a Rent and Lease Questionnaire (RALQ), online by 31 December 2021 on NI Reval2023: Rent & Lease Questionnaires. Link

£2M FOR COUNCILS TO DELIVER GREENWAY AND ACTIVE TRAVEL PROJECTS
Infrastructure Minister announces extra capital funding of £2 million for Councils to assist them in developing and delivering active travel schemes and greenway projects in 2021/22 and 2022/23. Press Release.

WINTER UPDATE
REGIONAL COMMUNITY RESILIENCE Getting Weather Ready the Regional Community Resilience Group Newsletter.

NORTHERN IRELAND WATER
Frozen pipes flood homes and businesses Winter Proof Your Home

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IN LINE WITH CURRENT GUIDANCE, THE NILGA TEAM CONTINUE TO WORK FROM HOME WHERE POSSIBLE – WE WILL BE CLOSED FROM THURSDAY 24TH DECEMBER UNTIL WEDNESDAY 29TH DECEMBER. FOR ANYTHING URGENT, PLEASE EMAIL OFFICE@NILGA.ORG

NILGA EXECUTIVE
Web: www.nilga.org Twitter: @NIL_GA #CouncilsMakeItHappen

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