Councillor Guide 2023
Information and resources to support you in your role as a councillor in Northern Ireland’s Local Authorities
Congratulations and Welcome

Your Induction Toolkit

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Welcome

Congratulations and Welcome to Local Government

Congratulations on being elected as a councillor.

Whether this is your first time in elected office, or you are an experienced councillor, you are entering local government at a time of great opportunity, with councils at the forefront of driving growth and prosperity in their areas. However, there are also many challenges, not least the increasing financial costs of delivering the important services residents rely on. Despite this, it is an exciting time to play your part in delivering strong and ambitious local leadership.

This guide aims to provide you with key information to support you in your role as councillor. It will complement the local induction provided through your council and regional induction programmes provided by Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA).

Rest assured that NILGA will continue to support you and your council as we move forward together through the 2023-2027 local government mandate and beyond, fighting hard to promote the benefits of local decision making.

Being a politically led organisation gives NILGA the mandate to represent council on the regional, national and international stage and I would encourage you to become involved in our work.

I wish you all the best in your role and I look forward to meeting you in the future.

Aleson Allen
New Councillors

Following the declaration of the election result, details of candidate spending, and donations must be reported to the Deputy Returning Officer, together with a declaration confirming the return is complete and correct. This must be no later than 35 days after the election result is declared.

Under the Political Parties Elections and Referendums Act 2000, councillors and other holders of certain elective office must follow rules about donations and loans they receive in connection with their political activities. You must only accept donations or loans over £500 from permissible donors and must report donations or loans over £1,500 in value to the Electoral Commission. Donations include gifts of money, goods, property or services. These rules are separate to the rules on declaring interests or donations to your council’s Register of Members’ Interests. You can find more information in the Electoral Commission’s donations and loans guidance for regulated donees or contact the Electoral Commission at infonorthernireland@electoralcommission.org.uk or 0333 103 1928.

The Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA), established in October 2001, is the representative and policy body for District councils in Northern Ireland and is often known as “the Voice of Local Government”.

NILGA promotes, develops, champions, protects and improves the local government sector in Northern Ireland, offering policy guidance, delivering councillor learning and development, and negotiating national pay agreements. Working with councillors and officers, NILGA represents local councils in Northern Ireland at UK national, Irish, European, Commonwealth and other international groupings.

The Association is led by all member councils and is supported by political parties at both local and central government. NILGA has formed effective corporate relationships with all relevant departments in central government, the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) and Senior Managers, officer networks, and other key agencies in the public, voluntary and private sectors. It has sister bodies in England (the LGA), Scotland (COSLA), Wales (WLGA) and Ireland (AILG / Regional Assemblies).

NILGA is constituted by - and accountable to - the member councils as the sector’s representative body. The Association takes a proactive approach to policy development for, and with, councils in Northern Ireland, contributing to issues which include local government improvement, devolution, shared services, climate action, the circular economy; community planning, local development planning, economic development and skills, community resilience and the draft Programme for Government.

NILGA and the 11-member councils have ambition for local government in Northern Ireland, to grow powers, responsibilities and resources gradually over time – and to ensure local government is a strong, professional, diverse, grassroots connected and inclusive part of how Northern Ireland is governed.
Who we are
The Northern Ireland Local Government Association is the representative body for Northern Ireland’s eleven local councils. Owned and constituted by the local authorities in Northern Ireland, NILGA is the voice of local government, lobbying for progress and protecting our councils’ interests.

Elected member development
“Being the best councillor you can be”
The learning and development of our councillors is a key priority for NILGA, empowering elected members to be the best community representatives they can be. NILGA’s Regional Programme of Elected Member Development provides planning, leadership, and development training for our members every year. And by using collective purchasing power, we save councils and ratepayers nearly £200,000 per year to deliver high-quality training courses.

Workforce
“Representing councils in national pay negotiations”
NILGA represents the 11 Northern Ireland Councils at national level where pay, terms and conditions for our 12,000+ workforce are agreed. We ensure that fair and affordable pay and terms are implemented by having a direct, council representation at every pay meeting until an agreement is struck, as well as providing advice to council HR teams. Since 2015, the benefits financially to our 11 councils based on national agreement, compared to local and regional outcomes in Scotland and parts of England, amount to approx. £7,000,000.

Communications
“Speaking up for local government”
NILGA is the strongest voice for our 11 local councils. We highlight the positive work and successes of local government in Northern Ireland, the delivery of first-class public services for communities, and communicate the roles and responsibilities of our councils. We are a strong communicator of everything good about our 11 local councils and a consistent advocate of the positive role that local government plays for communities and areas across Northern Ireland.

Representation
“The strongest voice for local government”
NILGA ensures elected members and local councils are represented on regional, national, and international bodies which we can learn best practice from, secure crucial investment, and develop positive links across the world. Whether it’s vital funding support during Covid, helping shape post-EU Exit funding and grant schemes, or co-designing policy, NILGA ensures local government’s voice is heard at all levels.

Policy
“Delivering practical solutions for local government”
Lobbying for progress and positive change is a key priority at NILGA. Policy work is a vital tool for our 11 local councils, collating ideas and solutions to present to partners in central and national government. NILGA’s strong lobbying has helped deliver on issues as varied as waste management, the environment, place-shaping, infrastructure, and Covid support funding.

Local Government for the future
“Protecting the future of local government”
Despite our successes, NILGA is constantly seeking to deliver more for local government in Northern Ireland. Review of local government reform, transfer of key regeneration powers, the rejuvenation of our high streets, climate action, a new financial deal for councils, EU replacement funding, improvement and transformation – these are just some of the issues we are working on to continue lifting up local government in Northern Ireland.
Your Induction Toolkit

Use this Induction toolkit to help you prepare for your role as an councillor.

INDUCTION CHECKLIST

Tick off the tasks below as you do them. Record information relevant to your council and useful documents to refer back to using the note paper at the back of this guide.

SIGNING UP
I have:
☐ Signed my acceptance of office
☐ Completed the council’s Declaration of Interests form
☐ Received a copy of the Northern Ireland Local Government Code of Conduct for Councillors
☐ Informed the council of any additional needs with which they can assist me in my role

FIRST THINGS FIRST
I have been supplied with:
☐ A security pass
☐ A mobile phone, tablet and/or laptop
☐ The opening hours of the main council offices and service depots
☐ A guided tour of the main council building and facilities, including council chambers
☐ A map outlining the layout of the main council offices, buildings and car parks

BASIC INFORMATION
I have had:
☐ A meet and greet with senior council staff including the Chief Executive, Directors, Heads of Departments and other key Officers.

I have access to:
☐ An organisational chart of the council’s internal management
☐ A list of other council members, their DEAs and political affiliation
☐ Key council strategy documents including the Corporate Plan, Best Value Strategy, Equality and Emergency Plans, Annual Report, Community Plan etc.
☐ Documents such as statistics about key issues in my council area
☐ A schedule of full council meetings, committee meetings and sub committee meetings
☐ The council’s Member Allowance scheme and claim forms

COUNCIL PROVISIONS FOR MEMBERS
I have investigated that my council can provide me with:
☐ A council email address and business cards
☐ A computer and mobile phone to carry out council business outside council hours
☐ An official photograph
☐ A press-cutting service, if available
☐ Administrative support and ongoing training
☐ A role profile/Code of Conduct for councillors
☐ A ‘buddying’ or mentoring scheme for new members or offer of a political mentor
☐ A list of training and development available to members, including that of NILGA

*TOP TIPS FOR COUNCILLORS*
☐ Learn how your council works and the services it provides
☐ Find out how council takes decisions and learn how you can influence them
☐ Initially concentrate on areas that you have an interest in and become knowledgeable in them
☐ Take advantage of formal training offered by your council
☐ Keep a copy of the Northern Ireland Local Government Code of Conduct for Councillors to hand and be aware of its content
☐ Organise yourself and your diary; learn how to prioritise your workload and plan ahead
☐ Keep in touch with your electorate, fellow councillors and key officers
☐ Read your correspondence, e-mails and action issues that are a priority using common sense and advice – ask questions if you are not sure
☐ Finally, do not take on too much too quickly.
Your Induction Checklist

1. **Stay on top of your emails** - Constituents are impressed by a concise and informed reply. Once a backlog has built up, you’ll have to plan and prioritise responses. Make sure you have an electronic / manual filing system to keep dynamic records of replies, officers’ responses, etc. You should add an automatic reply to your emails to set out what constituents can expect in terms of response times.

2. **Study party manifestos** – you’ll be challenged on what you are doing to deliver, whatever party, if any, you represent; it’s your job to do the challenging and negotiating. And check out the council’s Corporate Plan – it will give you a firm idea of what the priorities of the authority are over the next few years.

3. **Understand who runs your council** – councils in Northern Ireland operate through political decision making supported by Officer advice/guidance. Decision making is through Committee and council with all authority delegated from councillors to the Chief Executive through a Scheme of Delegation. Have a chat with the Officers you are most likely to be dealing with. Getting an understanding of who they are will be really useful over the next few years.

4. **Build good relationships** – and try to resolve disputes quickly – with your neighbouring councillors. Whatever your politics, you are likely be working together across party divides over the next four years to help fix residents’ problems.

5. **Make sure you’ve got a good photo on the council website, with your contact details**. Include information on your surgeries – even if citizens rarely attend and try not to skip these open public meetings, as it could be during the one you fail to attend that someone in need turns to you for advice. You might consider holding mobile surgeries – let people know in advance that you will be visiting in their area and people are more likely to answer the door!

6. **Find out about your council committees**. You will need to figure out which ones meet in the daytime and which ones go on well into the night – a lot of your choice will be based on when you are available. Plan your diary.

7. **Think about how you are going to be kept informed about, respond and adapt to new policies and emerging good practice** – your council’s Democratic Services Officer(s) and NILGA are two essential sources of information.

8. **Get to know your local journalists and foster a good relationship with them** – it’s important to build a robust relationship if you can, before they have some reason to chase you. Also have a look at local on-line forums – these can be a great place to find out what the issues are, and many councillors frequently contribute. Speak to your communications/marketing team and familiarise yourself with the council’s Communications Policy/Strategy, if they have one, to help you effectively and confidently communicate with the press and public, in line with council procedures.

9. **A Twitter account or other social media can be a valuable tool for engaging with your constituents**. There are many useful resources that can help you make the best of this tool and ensure it is used in an appropriate and safe manner.

10. **Make sure you know your council’s procedures in terms of recording Members’ Interests and declaring any entertainment or gifts you benefit from** – they’re easy to keep up to date, but also easy to get caught out on if you forget. And remember that while the ethics and standards regime can seem constraining, being caught out for not declaring a pecuniary interest is a criminal offence.

11. **Know your council’s Constitution and Standing Orders** – the rules for debates, for asking formal questions, for inviting deputations or making notices of motion. Better still, get someone to guide you through scenarios and earmark sections for referral pre-meeting.

12. **Make sure you are getting daily briefs, diary updates, and council / policy news**. Look out for NILGA emails and events. At events, you’ll meet and learn from others and be informed by what other councils are doing across NI.

13. **Explain your new role to your friends and relations**, advise them on the time commitment involved as it can be excessive at times and seek their support. However, also be sure to find time to relax and switch off.
**Part 1**

**Your Role as a Councillor**

**PART I (a)**

**The Councillor’s Role**

As a democratically elected local councillor, you have a unique and privileged position – you can make a real difference to people’s lives by focusing on improving social, economic and environmental wellbeing.

However, being a councillor is hard work. Every day you will be expected to play a part in planning, organising, monitoring and developing council business. Additionally, you will be directing and balancing the needs of your local area, your residents, voters, community groups, local businesses, your political party (if you belong to one) and the council. Collectively within each council, the councillors decide what is in the public interest amidst a range of conflicting issues and views.

A councillor’s role is varied and requires an individual assessment of the ways you wish to undertake your work. As the locally elected representative, you will engage with residents and groups on a wide range of different issues and take on an important community leadership role. Within council you will contribute to the development of policies and strategies, including budget setting and you may be involved in scrutinising or taking decisions on planning or licensing applications.

**Representation**

A councillor’s primary role is to represent their (District Electoral Area) and the people who live in it. Councillors provide a bridge between the community and the council. However, once elected you will be involved in making decisions that affect the interests of both your constituents and your council as a whole. Councillors therefore have two important representative functions; to represent the community and their council. As well as being an advocate for your constituents and signposting them to the right people at the council, you will need to keep them informed about issues that affect them.

In order to understand and represent local views and priorities, you need to build a strong network of relationships and encourage local people to make their views known, by engaging with you and the council. Honest communication and engagement are central to being an effective councillor.

As a local councillor, your residents will expect you to:

- Respond to their queries and investigate their concerns (casework),
- Communicate council decisions that affect them,
- Know your community and be aware of any problems,
- Know and work with representatives of local organisations, interest groups and businesses,
- Represent their views at council meetings, and
- Lead local campaigns on their behalf.
Community Leadership
Community leadership is at the heart of modern local government. Councils work in partnership with local communities and organisations – including public, voluntary, community and private sectors – to develop a vision for their local area, working collaboratively to improve services and quality of life for citizens. Councillors, having been democratically elected to represent the interests of people, are uniquely placed to shape current thinking on public services and consider ways to enhance people’s wellbeing. Your role in being a strong community leader also requires you to be approachable to citizens, ensuring they feel involved in decision-making, building trust with them, and building trust between citizens and with their council.

Developing Council Policy / Corporate Management
Councils need clear strategies and policies to enable them to achieve their vision for the area, make best use of resources and deliver services that meet the needs of local communities. As a councillor, you will contribute to the development of these policies and strategies, bringing the views and priorities of your local area to the debate (emphasising the need for regular and robust engagement with citizens). The committees and forums you are appointed to may vary slightly in how policies and strategies are developed. However, the council’s policy framework must be signed off by full council, on which every councillor sits.

As a councillor you will be expected to:
• Participate in the collective policymaking, governance and management of the council,
• Help decide service priorities, agreeing and setting budgets and determining which rate is to be struck,
• Initiate debate on issues related to the council’s functions,
• Monitor and challenge the council’s performance against targets in all aspects of council activity, and
• Ensure that council decisions are implemented and carried out fairly.

Finding Solutions
Councillors play a key role in working with others to solve problems, by assessing available evidence and data to arrive at positive solutions. This requires you to:
• Be available for constituents to raise enquiries and issues of importance, taking-action fairly and without prejudice;
• Develop a working knowledge of the organisations, services, activities etc, important to the community’s well-being and identity; and
• Undertake casework such as representing an individual or family at special appeals.

Other Duties
• Attending meetings – the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 lays down in law that failure to attend council or committee meetings for a period of 6 months, unless your reason has been approved by the council, will lead to the discontinuation of you being a member.
• Acting reasonably; and
• Following the Northern Ireland Local Government Code of Conduct.

Planning and Regulation
Councils are not just service providers; they also act as regulators. As a councillor you may be appointed to sit on the planning or other regulatory committees, considering issues such as planning applications, licenses for pubs and restaurants and ensuring that businesses comply with the law. In these roles, councillors are required to act independently and are not subject to the group / party whip. Learning and development programmes focussed on planning and regulation will be made available to members through councils and NILGA.

Code of Conduct and Standards
At the time of writing, a Northern Ireland Code of Conduct for Councillors is in place but is due for review. NILGA will be working with Department for Communities and the National Association of Councillors to ensure a suitable contemporary Code is developed.

The NI Code of Conduct for Councillors sets out the Principles and Rules of conduct which councillors must adhere to. As a councillor it is your personal responsibility to ensure that you are familiar with, and understand, your obligations under the Code, and that you behave in a way that ensures those obligations are met.

The principles are intended to uphold the highest possible standards of behaviour for councillors. The rules are the practical application of the principles. Councillors are expected to adhere to both.

The 12 Principles include:
• Public Duty
• Selflessness
• Integrity
• Objectivity
• Accountability
• Openness
• Honesty
• Leadership
• Equality
• Promoting Good Relations
• Respect
• Good Working Relationships

The Rules relate to your:
• Obligations as a councillor
• Behaviour towards other people
• Disclosure of information
• Use of position
• Use of council resources

There are currently 462 councillors across the 11 councils representing each of the 462 wards and Northern Ireland is divided into 80 District Electoral Areas which are amalgams of 5, 6, or 7 wards, and are used for the election of councillors in Proportional Representation elections.

COUNCILLOR VIEWPOINT
Ald Gerardine Mulvenna, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council

My advice for new councillors is:
• Seek out learning and development opportunities and go to as much as you can in the first six months as you will need all the guidance you can get.
• Get to know your council officers as these relationships are very important and will help you to be more effective in the role and on a wider note treat everyone with dignity and respect.
• Prepare yourself for it being often a 24/7 commitment. Achieving a work-life balance can be difficult. Therefore, try not to make promises you cannot keep.

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Antrim Borough Council

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• Expenses and allowances
• Acceptance and registration of gifts and hospitality
• Planning matters (Summary of Planning Do’s & Don’ts)

The Northern Ireland Public Service Ombudsman, by virtue of that appointment is also the Local Government Commissioner for Standards. In that capacity, the Ombudsman’s office has produced Guidance for Councillors from the NI Local Government Commissioner of Standards to help with the ethical standards framework of the Code.

The Local Government Commissioner for Standards

The Commissioner has delegated the authority to investigate and adjudicate on complaints that councillors have, or may have, failed to comply with the Local Government Code of Conduct for Councillors.

The Commissioner has delegated the authority to investigate alleged breaches of the Code to the Deputy Commissioner and the Local Government Ethical Standards (LGES) Directorate.

The LGES Team’s role is to receive, assess and investigate complaints. If an investigation is undertaken, the Team will take account of all the facts and evidence available to it, including what the councillor and the complainant have to say.

If, having completed the investigation, the team decides that there may have been a breach of the Code, the Deputy Commissioner will ask the Commissioner to consider holding an adjudication on the matter.

At a hearing which is usually held in public, the Commissioner will decide whether there has been a breach. If so, she will then decide what sanction should be imposed.

Further information on how complaints are assessed, investigated and adjudicated on can be found here. A Factsheet on what is expected of councillors during the investigation process, and information on the Commissioner’s service standards, can be found here.

Understanding the Code of Conduct

The Commissioner is committed to improving learning and understanding of the Code of Conduct through the production of guidance and other initiatives.

In 2017 a detailed Guide to the Code was issued by the Commissioner. To help demonstrate how the Code might apply in practice, examples of cases are used throughout the Guide.

In 2018 a Guide for Councillors on the Use of Social Media was produced. This is intended to help councillors identify the potential risks to compliance with the Code and to assist in using social media ethically, legally and safely.

The Adjudication Hearings section of the Commissioner’s website lists the hearings which have been held so far. The detailed Decision Notices in each case summarise the investigation and explain the reasons for the Commissioner’s findings. They provide important learning points for councillors.

To help councillors further understand the investigation process and the roles of the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner, staff from the Local Government Ethical Standards Team will be providing a number of information sessions during 2023.

Defamation and Privilege

Councillors can be sued for defamation if they say or write anything that will ‘lower a person in the estimation of right-thinking people’. However, in council meetings they have a qualified privilege to allow freedom of speech. This can protect you against being sued for something you say as part of your duty as a councillor or to defend or support the interests of the council – but it only applies if you can show that you honestly believed what you said and were not motivated by malice.

Use of Information

Freedom of Information

As a councillor, the decisions you make and the actions you take are all subject to public scrutiny. Your allowance, along with any expenses that you claim, will be published on the council’s website.

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives people rights of access to the information held by councils and other public bodies. The legislation aims to give people a better understanding of how organisations make decisions, carry out their duties and spend public money. For further information on FOI see https://ico.org.uk/%20for-organisations/guide-to-freedom-of-%20informationht

Environmental Information

The Environmental Information Regulations 2004 provide public access to environmental information held by councils and other public authorities.

The Regulations do this in two ways:
• public authorities must make environmental information available proactively;
• members of the public are entitled to request environmental information from public authorities.

The Regulations apply only to the environmental information held by public authorities. The Freedom of Information Act gives people access to most other types of information held by public authorities.

Usually, it will be obvious when requested information is environmental – for example, information about land development, pollution levels, energy production, and waste management – but more information on these regulations and their application is available on the ICO website https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guidance-index/freedom-of-information-and-environmental-information-regulations/information-you-hold-for-the-purposes-of-their-regulation-3-2/ht

Data Protection and the Role of the Councillor

Councillors are likely to have three different roles in relation to data protection:
• As a member of the council, for example, as a member of a committee,
• A representative of residents in their ward, for example in dealing with complaints, and
• They may represent a political party, particularly at election time.

Use of and Protecting Personal Information

Elected representatives have data protection responsibilities for the personal information they process in their work. They are data controllers under the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). This means they are responsible for making sure all personal data handled by their office is done in a way that complies with the requirements of the GDPR.

For more information about the GDPR, including advice to help data controllers comply please see the ICO’s Guide to GDPR. When councillors consider using personal information, they should consider the context in which that information was collected to decide whether their use of the information will be lawful, fair and transparent, as required by principle (a) of the General Data Protection Regulations:
Where a councillor is representing an individual resident, who has made a complaint, the councillor will usually have the implied consent of the resident to retain relevant personal data provided and to disclose it as appropriate. The resident will also expect that the organisations (including the local authority) that are the subject of the complaint will disclose personal data to the councillor.

If there is any uncertainty regarding the resident’s wishes, it would be appropriate to make direct contact with the resident to confirm the position – particularly if there is a need to go beyond the expectation of the constituent in use of their information.

It is vital that a councillor is always clear with constituents about what will happen with their information. The ICO has a Privacy Notice Template that councillors may use.

There is also useful Consent Guidance available from the ICO website.

**Special Category Data**

In considering whether they need to register their processing with the Commissioner, councillors must first decide in which role they are processing personal information:

- Elected representatives are exempt from paying a fee, unless they process personal data for purposes other than the exercise of their functions as a Member of the House of Lords, an elected representative or as a prospective representative.
- More information, updated Guidance on the Data Protection Fee is available from the ICO website.

**Political Campaigning**

Political parties, campaigners and candidates campaign using a variety of communication methods to engage with voters. Where such campaigning involves the processing of personal data (including electoral register information) it must be carried out in compliance with the GDPR.

**Offences**

**Data Protection Legislation contains a number of criminal offences, including:**

- **Failure to register when required to do so.**
  - Elected representatives are not required to pay a registration fee but DO have data protection responsibilities for the personal information they process in their work. You are a data controller under the UK GDPR. This means you are responsible for making sure all personal data handled by your office is done in a way that complies with the requirements of the UK GDPR.

**Making unauthorised disclosures of personal information.**

For example, a councillor who discloses personal information held by the council to their party for electioneering purposes without the council’s consent could commit an offence.

**Procuring unauthorised disclosures of personal information.**

For example, a councillor who obtains a copy of personal information apparently for council purposes, but in reality, for their own personal use (or the use of their party), is likely to have committed an offence.

**Security**

Councillors should be aware that they need to arrange for appropriate security to protect personal information. They must consider the nature of the information and the harm that can result. They should consider what technical and organisational measures, such as use of passwords, computer access privileges, procedures and staff training, are appropriate to keep information safe. Councils and political parties should also take appropriate measures in the same way.

**COUNCILLOR VIEWPOINT**

**Councillor Cara McShane, Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council**

I have been involved in politics since a young age, joining Sinn Féin at 16 and working in the Assembly as our Party’s Administrator for several years, before returning to university to complete a Masters in Human Rights Law.

Following the Review of Public Administration, I was elected onto the new Causeway Coast and Glens council in 2014, chairing the council’s Audit Committee for two years and Vice-Chairing the Leisure and Development Committee. I am currently the Chair of the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee as well as the Council’s Diversity Champion.

I have been a councillor since 2005, representing the people of Ballycastle, The Glens, Rathlin Island and Ballintoy. Elected at the age of 23, I became the youngest ever councillor elected to Moyle District council, having the honour of being Chair of the Council on two separate occasions.

My day-to-day activities involve attending council meetings; scheduling public and private engagements with multiple stakeholders; visiting individuals and community groups to discuss and advocate on a wide range of social, economic and environmental issues; as well as communicating messages effectively to the public using various methods including print media; radio and social media platforms.

The role of a councillor is varied, however, my advice for new councillors would be:

- Every day is a learning day – don’t be afraid to ask questions!
- An elected representative is both a rewarding and a privileged experience, however, don’t lose sight of the people who gave you the power to speak on their behalf and to make a difference to the quality of people’s lives.

We all have unique life experiences – your contribution to decision-making is valued and is important in an increasingly diverse society.
PART I (b) Support for Councillors

Councils provide support to councillors in their role as democratically elected representatives, although the level and type of support provided will vary. It can include:

- Induction and training,
- Access to space in the council headquarters, such as members’ room,
- Office equipment such as a mobile phone, computer and printer,
- Access to media and general communications advice,
- Research support,
- Support from your council in your professional development through the Councillor Development Charter, and
- NILGA Regional Programme for Councillor Development.

Some support is provided for all councillors; other support is provided via the political groups (or if you are an independent councillor, your council may have an independent group office). The Lord Mayor, Mayor or Chair of the council is more likely to have dedicated support.

Induction

Most councils offer induction sessions for new councillors to familiarise them with their new role and how the council works. Your induction should introduce you to the members and officers you need to know to do your job effectively and show you how and where to access the information you will need. It should also run through the legal framework you will be operating within.

Councils also provide a range of learning and development programmes for councillors. This will build your knowledge in particular service areas (such as planning, leisure or waste and recycling). Also, learning and development will also be available in other practical based core skills such as: public speaking, effective scrutiny and chairing skills.

NILGA also is well placed to materially contribute to council induction programmes and will work with officer teams to co-ordinate.

Accessing Information

Most of the information you need to be effective in your new role as a councillor will be available online. Your council’s website and intranet will contain lots of information about the council, the way it works, its services and the local area.

Council papers should be provided electronically and on occasions in paper form.

Officers have a duty to ensure that councillors have access to the information they need in order to make well-informed decisions. They may do this by producing factual reports, making presentations or arranging visits – for example taking members of the planning committee to visit a site that is subject to a planning application.

Members with additional or individual needs will be provided with materials in a suitable format (e.g. audio description).

Allowances

All councillors are entitled to a basic allowance. Those with additional roles may also receive a special responsibility allowance (SRA), which reflects the level of responsibility and expected time commitment, along with travel and subsistence.

Allowances are subject to income tax, and it is your responsibility to ensure that you pay the correct amount.

The National Association of Councillors Northern Ireland (NAC) is currently advocating on behalf of councillor pay rights in relation: to maternity leave, increased pay packages and widening the definition for eligibility for DCA Carers.

Pensions - The Local Government Pensions Scheme (NI) for Councillors

The main purpose of the scheme is to provide a pension in retirement for councillors. New councillors will be automatically brought into the Scheme but can opt out. The benefits built up and paid under the scheme are based on the length of your membership and your career average pensionable pay. The pensionable pay for a councillor consists of Basic Responsibility Allowance and Special Responsibility Allowance payments only.

Further details are available from the NILGOSC Website.

There are six types of allowances paid to councillors in Northern Ireland, the maximum allowances are determined by the Department for Communities (DfC) Local Government Division, full details available on the

DIC CONSOLIDATED COUNCILLOR ALLOWANCES CIRCULAR

Future circulars relating to councillor allowances will be made available on the Local Government Circulars section of the Department for Communities (DfC) website.

1. Basic Allowance Maximum (16,394, as of 1st April 2023)
2. Dependants’ Carers’ Allowances
3. Travel Allowances
4. Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA)
5. Subsistence Allowances
6. Chairperson/Vice Chairperson Allowance

Time off Work

Many councillors hold down jobs in addition to the work they carry out as a councillor. To support these councillors in carrying out public duties, there is specific statutory provision entitling employees who hold certain public positions to reasonable time off to perform the duties associated with them and this applies to councillors.

The duties are:

- Attendance at meetings of council or any of its committees or subcommittees;
- Performance of duties approved by the council for the purpose of discharging its functions or those of any its committees or subcommittees.

The amount of time off work concerned is not specified in legislation other than it being ‘reasonable’.

Website
In determining what is reasonable regard would be given to:

- How much time is required for the performance of council duties,
- How much time he or she has already been allowed off for council duties or other duties such as trade union work etc, and
- The circumstances of his or her employer’s business and the effect which his or her absence may have on it.

There is no requirement on an employer to pay an employee for the time off they have had to perform public duties. For further information please access the following www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/time-public-duties

Communication
An essential part of being an effective councillor is knowing how and what to communicate with different audiences. The following broad principles can help you.

Listen as well as promote:
As an elected representative it is important to let local people know what you have been doing, but it’s equally important to listen to people and groups in your area, such as:
- local residents
- fellow councillors and officers
- other elected representatives
- your political party or group
- local organisations (businesses, voluntary and community sector, partners, etc)
- the media
- community and religious leaders.

Make the most of available help:
The council will have a communications team whose job is to represent the council from a corporate point of view, reflecting the policy decisions made.

Find out what methods of communication are available to you and who their audience is (for example council and party websites, newsletters and magazines, e-newsletter, social media channels and events).

Abuse and Harassment
Abuse and intimidation of elected representatives is growing across the UK and Ireland. The Electoral Commission reported that more than seven in 10 candidates in the Assembly elections in May 2022 reported abuse and intimidation. The issue does appear to be more prevalent in Northern Ireland, with around 4 in 10 candidates in England, Scotland and Wales experiencing intimidation from voters.

In late 2022, NILGA undertook a survey to understand the extent of and forms through which abuse and intimidation of local councillors occurred in Northern Ireland.

In response, NILGA has identified 4 key priorities to support councillors and address the issue:
- Raise awareness of support services available to councillors,
- Provide guidance on using social media & filtering messages,
- Raise public awareness of the impact of abuse on councillor wellbeing, and
- Establish a cross-party forum for councillors and MLAs to consider how legislation could be developed for councillors and councils to address intimidation and threats online, including:
  - Model rules of engagement which can be placed on websites, setting out expected behaviours from those wishing to engage on social media and the consequences of not respecting the rules.
  - Debate and disagreement are welcome on this page, but only if expressed with courtesy, respect and politeness,

The intimidation and abuse of councillors, in person or otherwise, undermines democracy; it can prevent councillors from representing the communities they serve, prevent individuals from standing for election and undermine public trust in democratic processes. These harmful behaviours, whether occurring towards, between or by councillors are entirely unacceptable. Across the four UK nations COSLA, LGA, NILGA and WLGA commit to promoting civility in public life, positive debate and resolutely supporting the wellbeing of our councillors.

Since 2019, the 4 Associations have worked to deliver an action plan to raise the profile of the issue and provide support & guidance for councils. Councillors are rightly concerned about the risk of physical assault, violence, stalking, intimidation, threats & unwanted behaviour. It is incumbent upon us to ensure that councils are equipped to provide a “duty of care” ethos towards councillors. Understanding the extent of the issue and the impact it has (as well as for those considering entering public life) has been critical to developing plans to address the issue.

The #DebateNotHate campaign aims to raise the profile of the impact that intimidation and abuse of councillors has and to promote alternative methods of engagement with councillors. Resources have been developed for councillors and councils to address intimidation and threats online, including:

- Model rules of engagement which can be placed on websites, setting out expected behaviours from those wishing to engage on social media and the consequences of not respecting the rules.
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- Establish a cross-party forum for councillors and MLAs to consider how legislation could be developed in NI to improve the safety of elected representatives.

Collaboration in Local Government
NILGA and the other three UK local government associations agreed a joint statement on Civility in Public Life in 2019, to highlight the pan-UK and cross-party concern about intimidation of councillors and its impact on local democracy:

The intimidation and abuse of councillors, in person or otherwise, undermines democracy; it can prevent councillors from representing the communities they serve, prevent individuals from standing for election and undermine public trust in democratic processes. These harmful behaviours, whether occurring towards, between or by councillors are entirely unacceptable. Across the four UK nations COSLA, LGA, NILGA and WLGA commit to promoting civility in public life, positive debate and resolutely supporting the wellbeing of our councillors.

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A guide – Councillors’ guide to handling harassment, abuse and intimidation | Local Government Association

Similarly, NILGA and the Association of Irish Local Government are sharing best practice and ideas to support councillors and will be making this issue a priority in the new mandate.
Meeting People

Over the last 10-15 years, there has been a dramatic shift in how people get their information and how communities come together on different issues. Where previously a story in the local media might have been the way to get greatest awareness (and still might be), depending on the audience you are speaking to, you might find that a Facebook group, Twitter campaign, Instagram feed, LinkedIn page or organising a local forum will be more effective. You need to think about your audience, who you are trying to reach, then use the appropriate channels to reach your intended audience.

There are several ways of engaging with your audience locally. You can:

• visit local meeting places – cafes and shops
• write newsletters (paper and/or email)
• run events or meetings
• hold surgeries, either in person or online, providing opportunities for local people to ask questions or raise concerns
• use social media (make sure your content is accurate, informative, balanced and objective – if in any doubt then check your council’s social media policy)

Using Social Media

Councillors, officers and the council itself will use social media in distinct ways. However, there is a set of universal principles that are useful to keep in mind.

Tips for Navigating Social Media

• Be strategic – plan ahead: who do you want to engage with, why and how? What do you want to achieve?
• Be human: be approachable in your language and tone; behave online as you would in person,
• Use social media (make sure your content is accurate, informative, balanced and objective – if in any doubt then check your council’s social media policy)
• Be engaging: respond to questions and join in when you can move the conversation on or help,
• Be professional: remember that you represent your council and your party, so be aware of how your public voice comes across,

COUNCILLOR VIEWPOINT

Councillor Mark Glasgow,
Mid Ulster District

When elected to Mid Ulster District Council I was 24 years of age. During my term on council, I have been a member of the planning committee and vice chair of this committee as well as a member of the environment committee.

I have been a member of the PCSP, Shop Mobility and Cookstown Town Centre Forum. Also, I am the Mid Ulster UUP Group Leader and their representative on NILGA and the NILGA Executive. During 2017-2018 I was Deputy Chair of Mid Ulster Council.

Outside of council, I am a Board of Governor for Cookstown Nursery School and Newmills Primary School. Active in my local area in the Loyal Orders and taking part in local history group talks and local community groups.

Daily I am on the ground locally lobbying for more investment on roads, better infrastructure, better broadband for rural areas and much needed water mains upgrades in the rural areas.

My aim from the day I was elected was to be ready to help those needing help and to deliver for the area.

• Share and attribute: you can share what others have posted but it is polite to acknowledge and attribute where this has come from,
• Go to where your audience is: if the people you want to connect with are on a particular platform, forum or group, join it,
• Content is key: by creating sharable and engaging content you can contribute to the conversation and be heard,
• Be authentic: don’t pretend to be something you are not, and
• The internet is forever: remember that what you post now could be found in years to come.

Develop a positive relationship with the local media

Local journalists are always looking for good stories.

By building and maintaining a positive relationship with reporters in your area, you can establish yourself as a valuable and credible contact for news and comment.

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Journalists you have built up trust with will often call you looking for information. Think about the stories you can offer – even if they are not necessarily council-related. If you have a story of interest, don’t assume that issuing a press release will automatically do the job. Get to know the local media’s deadlines and give reporters as much notice as possible.

Present a Story

The best news stories are those that tell the TRUTH: Topical, Relevant, Unusual, Trouble or Human. Remember that your greatest strength with the media is as a community leader. A local reporter may not be interested in a political press release, but they will take notice if you are campaigning on behalf of your residents on high profile local issues.

Know your residents’ concerns, understand their ambitions and be their champions. Work with community groups – often they will be involved in campaigns of interest to the media that can help boost your profile. And think pictures: if a story has an obvious visual angle involving local people, it is far more likely to be covered.

Better use of data and evidence in local government

Data and evidence are increasingly being recognised as important in the design and transformation of local public services. It can be used to deliver outcomes and drive efficiencies, which is particularly valuable within current financial constraints. NILGA, as part of the Regional Programme for Councillors Development, will deliver a workshop each year to help councillors and councils get a better understanding of data and evidence-based policy making, why they are important, how to use data and evidence, and what support is available.
Do you need statistics on your local area?
Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Information Service (NINIS) is a service provided by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). NINIS provides access to statistical and locational information relating to areas across Northern Ireland as well as NI as a whole. The NINIS website currently hosts over 2,800 datasets across a range of themes including Population, Census 2011, Health, Education, Crime and Deprivation.

The NINIS website can provide you with a statistical snapshot of your area (area profile) simply by entering a postcode. You can access a range of interactive content and visualisations tools including population pyramids, infographics and maps which allow you to interpret the statistics in a spatial context.

How can this benefit you?
By allowing you to:
- find key population, education, health and economic statistics for your local area
- develop, monitor and evaluate policies
- make policy decisions based on evidence
- find population level equality statistics
- access a source of quality assured data
- undertake spatial research and analysis
- access infographics and interactive content by each Local Council (LGD2014)

Is training available?
Yes, NINIS provides training workshops for participants to familiarise themselves with the functionality and range of data on the website. Further info is available on the website.

PART I (c)
Personal Development
The role of a local elected representative is multi-faceted and involves using a unique set of skills.

What it means to be a councillor has changed dramatically and continues to do so in response to the uncertain political and economic context within which they are now operating. Other contextual challenges impacting on the role include the increasing remit, scrutiny and accountability of the councillor, changing citizen expectations, cost of living challenges, continuing high levels of COVID 19 incidence, devolution, new technologies and the continued transformation and localisation of public services.

The essential skill set for councillors has shifted markedly. Supporting councillors to equip themselves in this ever-changing role and challenging context is an investment with a high return.

Programmes of learning and development offered by NILGA, are closely aligned to the skill sets required for the various roles that councillors now undertake. Therefore, these programmes have never been more critical to the delivery of local government services such as: the collaborative role that the councillor engages in with the community, the role they play distinct from officers and from MLAs, together with the underpinning reputation of the local government sector as a whole. Great councillors contribute to great councils.

Islanders need to be able to:
- Scrutiny and Challenge
- Effective Communication for Influence
- Regulating and Monitoring
- Effective use of Digital Technologies and Social Media
- Resilience and wellbeing

Local Leadership and representation – refers to the need for councillors to engage with members of their community in order to learn about issues of local concern and help to facilitate and champion a vision for the locality. An effective councillor keeps up to date with local concerns by drawing information from diverse sources, including hard to reach groups. It involves encouraging trust and respect between individuals and groups by mediating fairly and constructively between different organisations and sections of the community with conflicting needs. It is about creating partnerships with different sections and groups in the community and ensuring their involvement in decision-making.

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Key Competencies / Political Skills Framework
The key competencies which are desirable for councillors to possess are:
- Local leadership and representation
- Partnership working
- Political Understanding

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- Local leadership and representation
- Partnership working
- Political Understanding
Political understanding – This skill requires councillors to develop a range of political skills to communicate their values, promote a political vision, and encourage democratic processes and public engagement. An effective councillor demonstrates a consistency in views and values through their decisions and actions. They help to develop cohesion between and within different groups and council. It recognises that councillors need to work across group boundaries at times, yet still be able to maintain their own political integrity. They clearly communicate political values through canvassing and campaigning. An effective councillor actively develops their own political intelligence (e.g., understanding local and national political landscapes). It is about looking for ways to promote democracy and increase public engagement.

Scrutiny and Challenge – Scrutiny and challenge is an important day-to-day aspect of the councillor role. Councillors need to act as a ‘critical friend’ by identifying opportunities for scrutiny inside and outside the council, and by providing constructive challenge and feedback to others. To be effective in this role, councillors need to analyse complex areas by investing in digital platforms and services to understand the signs of stress and to develop strategies to deal with it, as well as building up their own personal resilience in the role.

Effective Communication for Influence – This skill area places digital at the heart of what a councillor can do to increase the efficiency of public service delivery, making resources go further and meeting the key challenges facing your local area. It is about creating new sources of revenue for your area by investing in digital platforms and services and partnering with the private sector to innovate in your local area. It can renew local democracy and trust by enhancing engagement levels via multiple digital channels. It can also engender a culture change in your organisation by ‘leading by example’. Digital can transform ways of working and improve satisfaction by enabling residents to engage with the council in the same way they would with other services.

Councillors can effectively use social media by remembering that whatever platform you use be a person and try not to worry about reaching everyone in your ward. Councillors need to be careful that it doesn’t replace traditional work. It is important not to be slogan machine and to be mindful of times when you won’t post, e.g., to post in meetings or not. Do not wait for people to come to you and avoid having rows. Do not be abusive or discuss case work detail.

Resilience and Wellbeing
For all of us, life can sometimes demand courage and present challenges when faced with difficult decisions and changing circumstances. Councillors carry additional demands as they play a critical leadership role in leading others through testing and changing times.

Increasingly councils are having to make difficult decisions about which services it provides to communities, against a background of changing priorities, as well as the search for new and collaborative ways of working. As someone elected to serve your local community, these decisions are bound to be divisive and stressful, especially when it comes to explaining these decisions and dealing with the impact of those choices on communities. Undue stress is not helpful to effective decision making, performance or leadership.

The Local Government Association (LGA) has produced a workbook aimed at helping councillors to understand the signs of stress and to develop strategies to deal with it, as well as building up their own personal resilience in the role.

Resilience is the ability to bounce back from tough times, or even to triumph in the face of adversity; to display tenacity – but not at the expense of reason. Five elements contribute to resilience:

• Optimism – feeling positive about oneself, others, the world,
• Solution orientated – spotting and preparing for upcoming issues,
• A belief in one’s own abilities,
• Openness and flexibility – ability to tolerate ambiguity, and
• Ability to identify and manage stress and anxiety.

Councillor Development Charter and Charter Plus
The Councillor Development Charter and Charter Plus are part of NILGA’s coordinated approach to sector-led improvement across local government, supporting councils to continue their own improvement journey and contribute to the improvement of local government as a whole.

Learning and development is an important tool for councils, councillors and officers to deliver what communities need. Inspiring local communities and ensuring the wellbeing of the people and places councillors represent takes ambitious leadership – and effective political leadership is at the heart of a healthy democracy; with councillors who are well equipped and supported, resilient in times of challenge or usual business / when service provision is disrupted and / or has to be delivered in a new / different way and confident to make a difference, deliver and be trusted.

The Councillor Development Charter and Charter Plus helps councils to support councillor development and recognises those that have built an effective approach. The stages of the Charter Framework are as follows:

Stage 1 Commitment to the Charter and an Action Plan
The council will undertake a self-assessment against the Councillor Development Charter criteria and based on the self-assessment will develop an Action Plan.
Stage 2 Improving the Development of the Councillors
The council works towards achieving the Charter and meeting the requirements of the Action Plan.

Stage 3 Assessment
An on-site assessment will be carried out by a trained team of councillors / officers. A comprehensive report will be sent within one month of the assessment date.

Stage 4 Awarding the Charter
When the authority has been assessed and once you have been awarded Charter status the certificate will be issued.

Stage 5 Reassessment
Authorities are reassessed after three years to ensure commitment to the Councillor Development Charter has been continued. The benefits and possibility of working towards the Charter Plus can be explored at any time.

Achieving the Charter is subject to assessment against meeting the framework criteria:
- There is a clear commitment to councillor development and support,
- The council has a strategic approach to councillor development, and
- Learning and development is effective in building councillors’ skills and knowledge.

The Benefits of the Councillor Development Charter and Charter Plus
The following benefits have been reported by councils through the regional local government organisations which assess and award the Charter.
- Concise and clear guidance on how to achieve the Charter without being too onerous or overly bureaucratic,
- Flexible and focusses positively and supportively on what councils already have in place – a local approach to a national framework,
- Helps councils to decide on what to prioritise and improve,
- Councillor development needs are better understood and supported,
- The quality of councillor development is improved,
- New councillors are better prepared for their roles and responsibilities,
- Increases councillors competence and confidence,
- Self-care and reflection for councillors through development and growth,
- Strengthens member-officer relationships,
- Helps ensure effective top team political and managerial leadership,
- Enhances democracy and participation,
- Strengthens relationships with residents and partners,
- Improves outcomes for communities, and
- Fosters a culture of learning and support with the council and partners.

At the time of writing, ten councils have achieved the Charter standard with a further four councils achieving the exceptional Charter Plus Standard, demonstrating a higher success ratio with Charter commitment, to any of the other regions.

NILGA Regional Programme for Councillor Development
In partnership with councils and the Local Government Training Group (LGTG), together with the National Association of Councillors, NILGA also coordinates an annual programme of learning and development for councillors – the NILGA Regional Programme for Councillor Development. It includes a module-based ILM (endorsed award) accredited Planning Leadership Programme and a module-based CPD accredited Place Shaping Leadership Programme. Accredited learning provision will be delivered every two years during the mandate. In addition, the NILGA Regional Programme will also provide a learning and development session each month, ranging from Masterclasses on knowledge-based learning and development, underpinned by the political skills framework. Further learning and development sessions will include workshops on skills-based learning and development linked to the political skills framework. There is also scope for sessions responsive to emerging identified need. Councils will receive a copy of NILGA’s Regional Programme for the year and updates will also be provided to assist diary planning.

COUNCILLOR VIEWPOINT
Councillor Michael Goodman, Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council
I was first elected on to Antrim and Newtownabbey council in 2014 to the transition council. As someone who was experienced in working with councils from the outside, it was a totally new experience.

My first term as a councillor was perhaps unique due to the amount of time that was spent managing the merger of two separate councils because of RPA. There was a very steep learning curve, for everyone, old and new councillors, staff and ratepayers. A lot of new systems had to be developed and then introduced to staff, members and ratepayers while at the same time maintaining the level of service that ratepayers expected.

A lot of time commitment and learning was necessary during the whole first term. This was eased somewhat by the support of council staff and links with NILGA who provided a wide range of training and seminars to help councillors understand the new landscape they had come into. Apart from regular council meetings and committees there were statutory and other bodies which required council representation, understanding new powers like planning, community planning and economic development not just what they were but how they related to the new council and the role it played.

It was also essential to understand how the new powers could be used to benefit services that were already being delivered but also how they could be used to improve what we delivered for ratepayers.

I think my advice to a newly elected councillor is to step back and take stock of where you are and what you have to do. Don’t rush in. Speak to officers and find out how things work for good or ill. Sign up for as much training as you can fit in to your schedule, particularly around finance, budgeting, setting the rate and capital development.

More recently I have had the opportunity to participate in and complete the NILGA Leadership Programme 2021-22 and I would recommend it to all new councillors. It provides the opportunity to work with some excellent facilitators but also to hear and share with other councillors of varying levels of experience and with a wide range of backgrounds and interests.

It allowed me the time and space to think about how and what my council was doing and provided me with the tools to raise issues with officers and also to suggest solutions. It was clear also that councillors don’t work in a vacuum and that there is a lot to be gained from building relationships and partnerships with fellow councillors, officers, and other statutory agencies.

I would highly recommend this course to all councillors, as it has been developed from a sound academic and practical background and contains information and insights which I have found invaluable over the past few years.
The 21st Century Councillor

Research undertaken by the University of Birmingham in 2016 considered the changing role of the councillor in response to the context within which they operate. The contextual challenges, some more applicable to the Northern Ireland context than others, include: the instability of devolved institutions, the NI protocol, changing citizens expectations, the cost of living crisis, new technologies, different scales of working and organisation of public services at local level.

The report is considered to be a call to action for councillors and organisations to rethink the role of councillors. It has encouraged a redefinition, towards the 21st century understanding of the councillor as:

- Advocate – acting on behalf of all citizens, not just those who shout loudest, or your voters, but also the most vulnerable and voiceless,
- Steward of place – coherent stewardship of scarce public resources, across locality and working in partnership with others,
- Entrepreneur – working with citizens and partners to develop new solutions,
- Catalyst – enabling citizens to do things for themselves, and having new conversations about what is now possible,
- Buffer – mitigating the impact of austerity on citizens, particularly for those who are most vulnerable,
- Sensemaker – translating a shift in the role of public services and the relationship between institutions and citizens, and
- Orchestrator – convening groups of people to work together, mediating between different groups, and helping to broker relationships.

These complex and newly recognised roles, require an expansive transformation of the foundational and relational skillset required to deliver effective public services. It is essential to view the integration of skills development, as a continuous skill acquisition spectrum: councillors should be open to continuous professional development to expand their civic skillset, moving beyond the basic training expectations required.

Through the NILGA Leadership Programme, councillors will ensure that they develop an acute political capacity. This programme will give members the chance to think, reflect, learn, and improve upon their current function as a councillor.

PART I (d)

Outside Bodies and Council Appointment Methods

What is an Outside Body?

All councils appoint councillors to represent the interests of the local authority on a diverse range of outside bodies. This is a key element of a councillor’s role. Working corporately with partner bodies to serve his or her constituents, and in so doing, instill a civic responsibility at the same time.

Outside bodies may be local (within the council area), regional (across a number of councils) or national (covering Northern Ireland and in some circumstances across rest of UK, Ireland or internationally).

Your input into Outside Bodies will be determined by a number of factors:

- Your interests and skills,
- Your ability to participate within an overall timetable of responsibilities, and
- Whether or not you are considered for appointment (processes of selection can involve nominations being based upon council’s political make up, as part of a wider selection of appointments categorised as “Positions of Responsibility”).

Typically, within a council’s committee administration structure, a list of outside bodies exists, subject to change as new bodies emerge and other bodies cease, with appointments to these being subject to a process at the council’s Annual General Meeting (AGM). Appointments can last for one year, or for a full electoral term, subject to performance and criteria, depending upon your council’s policy. Similarly, within NILGA, a selection process based on the d’Hondt system takes place for a full electoral term for Outside Bodies requiring councillor representation across all of N. Ireland and further afield.

The D’Hondt Method

Under the Local Government Act 2014, the d’Hondt system is the default method for appointing councillors to “Positions of Responsibility”, which include nominations to outside bodies.

The d’Hondt, or highest average method, is named after a Belgian lawyer from the 1870s. Unlike single transferable vote, it does not use a quota or formula to allocate seats or posts. Instead, these are allocated singularly and one after another. The basic idea is that a party’s vote total is divided by a certain figure that increases as it wins more seats.

As the divisor becomes bigger, the party’s total in succeeding rounds gets smaller, allowing parties with lower initial totals to win seats. The divisor in the first round is one, (i.e. it has no effect) and thereafter it is the total number of seats gained plus one.

Overleaf is an example of how the system would work when being used to allocate committee chairpersons in the Assembly. Suppose the number of seats won in the Assembly were as in the top line of the table in figure 1.

Follow each round horizontally across the table to see which party has the biggest total and therefore wins that round. Follow each party’s total vertically to see it decrease as it wins more seats.

A has the highest total, 39, so wins the first round. A’s figure is now divided by 2 (its total seats + 1) to give a new figure of 19.5. The highest total for round two, on the second line, is 23 for F - which wins the seat and sees its figure reduced to 11.5. Round three goes to

1 Mangan, Neatham, Bottom and Parker (2016) The 21st Century Councillor
A, again as its adjusted figure of 19.5 is again the highest. The new A figure is 13 - its original total of 39 divided by 3 (2 seats + one).

Rounds four and five go to G and B with totals of 17 and 16 respectively. Their adjusted figures are 8.5 and 8. The highest total for the sixth round is 13, giving A its third representative.

The party’s new figure is 9.75, based on its original total of 39 divided by 4 (3 seats + 1). The final round in this example goes to F with a total of 11.5. If the table continued, the new F figure would be 7.67. This process would continue until all the posts or seats are filled.

The 2014 Act permits two alternative methods of selecting positions of responsibility - the Sainte-Laguë Method and the Single Transferable Vote (STV) method. These methods may only be used where 80% of council so agree at the first Annual General Meeting following an election.

For the purposes of the Councillor’s Guide, we have provided examples of key Outside Bodies which exist in all 11 councils in N. Ireland. However, you should find and review a full list for your own local authority.

Sainte Laguë Method
This method is very similar to the d’Hondt process, except that the divisor is doubled – i.e. it becomes twice the number of seats held plus 1.

Single Transferable Vote Method
This is the method of voting used at local government elections in Northern Ireland.

A single transferable vote is one which is:
(a) Capable of being given so as to indicate the voter’s order of preference for candidates; and
(b) Capable of being transferred to the next choice when the vote is not needed to give a prior choice the necessary quota of votes or when a prior choice is eliminated from the list of candidates because of a deficiency in the number of votes given for that person.

Figure 1
These figures are for illustrative purposes only.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Round</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>G</th>
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<td>23</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
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<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PART 2 (a)

Background and Context

Local government touches the lives of everybody, every day. Councils in Northern Ireland have a wide remit from local planning, local enterprise, waste and recycling to off-street parking. Guiding councils in the delivery of such functions is a swathe of underpinning legislation and policy that most citizens do not see. As a councillor, understanding how it works will help you to represent your local community.

Local Government Reform and the Local Government (NI) Act 2014

In May 2015, further to a year of operating in shadow form, the most wide-ranging reform to local government since 1972 took place, as 26 councils were replaced by 11 new authorities with new names and an expanded set of powers and functions. This reform was designed to modernise local government and improve services and to create stronger, more effective local government. The additional powers and responsibilities included some powerful tools to enable councils to shape their areas and communities, allowing more creativity in delivering services, allowing councils to be more flexible and responsive to local needs; bringing power closer to citizens. There are also long-term financial benefits to running 11 councils instead of 26.

The framework for this reform was provided in The Local Government (NI) Act 2014 - which replaced, amended, negated or enhanced various parts of the pre-existing Local Government (NI) Act 1972, and introduced many new features for governance and operation of 11 new councils. This Act was the backbone for the production of a huge raft of additional secondary legislation, some of which has, even yet, still to be completed. The 2014 Act is the main piece of legislation used by councils, but there are some pre-existing pieces of legislation and regulation that are still in use.

What responsibilities were the councils given in 2015?

Transferred functions: A number of functions previously delivered by NI Executive departments are now carried out by councils. These include local development planning, local economic development and off-street car parking.

The 2014 Act merely set the scene for transfer of functions, with each transfer requiring a separate additional piece of primary legislation. The largest of these so far is the Planning (NI) Act 2011 - which predated the Local Government Act by some three years, but which didn’t come into force until 2015. Other functions were due to transfer, such as regeneration, but this has not yet taken place.

Debate is continuing regarding transfer of functions, with each transfer requiring a separate additional piece of primary legislation. The largest of these so far is the Planning (NI) Act 2011 - which predated the Local Government Act by some three years, but which didn’t come into force until 2015. Other functions were due to transfer, such as regeneration, but this has not yet taken place.

By way of context, councils in Northern Ireland are responsible for approximately one sixth of the powers and spending that councils in Wales, Scotland and the Republic of Ireland have.

Community Planning: Since 2015 councils have been leading a community planning process to enhance social, economic and environmental wellbeing. This is done in partnership with other public service providers, departments, and community organisations in order to collectively co-design and enhance public services. It enables councils to influence how and where services are provided. A local community plan has been produced in each council area, which each Community Planning Partnership is working collaboratively to implement. Information on your local plan and delivery is available on your council website.

Councils have also been given a General Power of Competence; allowing a council to act with similar freedom to an individual, unless there is a law to prevent it from doing so. This allows a council to act in its own interest and to develop innovative approaches to help improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of its area.

What are the other changes to councils?

• New governance arrangements – for the first time, sharing council positions of responsibility across political parties and independents is enshrined in law. The public also have more access to council meetings and documents.

Devolution

Devolution can be described as the moving of power and/or responsibility from a higher level in an organisation to a lower level, or from central government to a local government, or further to even more local entities or partner(s). On 2 December 1999, the UK Parliament devolved powers to the Northern Ireland Assembly for the first time. Devolution itself, however, was not new to Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Parliament and Executive, which governed between 1921 and 1972, were also devolved institutions. When they were suspended in 1972, Northern Ireland came under Direct Rule from Westminster.

Dual mandate ended - a bar was placed on MLAs, MPs and MEPs from also being elected or being councillors.

*At the time of writing, the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly are in suspension and the Partnership Panel is therefore unable to meet.

Names and status of the 11 councils

The names of the 11 local government districts were set out in the Local Government (Boundaries) Act (NI) 2008, but legislation was put in place to enable the councils to change these names, which some did.

The new councils were also required to consider status - whether they would be a district council, borough council or, in some cases, a city council. This issue is linked to a council’s name as the status is usually reflected in the name. If a council wished to call itself a “borough council”, it was able to opt to continue an existing borough charter within its district or it could have applied to the Secretary of State for the grant of a new charter. Councils which had a city within their new district could have chosen to call themselves city councils. Regulations provided councils with options in relation to their charters and borough status, resulting in the names and statuses currently in place.
From a council and councillor perspective, devolution in a very practical sense involves the transfer of powers and responsibilities from national level bodies – including Westminster and Stormont – to local authorities. Devolution below Stormont is a democratically important continuum.

As described above, in 2015, the 11 local councils received a small number of key devolved powers, including Planning, Community Planning, further economic development powers and neighbourhood services such as off-street car parking.

Importantly for you as a councillor, this transfer of power was not an end, but a beginning, of a process. There has however, been a series of delays in taking an ‘augmentation’ of devolution forward – mainly due to repeated suspensions of the Legislative Assembly since 2017. NILGA, has continued to press for change, and is ready to work with government departments and Members of the Legislative Assembly to take forward a contemporary Programme for Local Government, when practicable.

In 2016, NILGA agreed a Programme for Local Government as a “vision piece” for local councils to work towards more powers, resources and control to communities1 “People Power” Report, Commission on the Future of Localism, January 2019.

NILGA has tracked council views on potential for further transfers of functions, with resources, but until restoration of a Legislative Assembly, progress will be limited.

As a councillor, it is of particular interest in your role to look strategically at your council’s policies. Regarding the formulation and scrutiny of policies, it is important that you understand:

- the arguments around devolution,
- the trends associated with devolving power from larger, centralised institutions to and through councils to the communities you serve; and
- the wider societal and economic narrative around devolution.

NILGA and your council will be very useful sources of information, learning and participation on devolution to and through councils, which is very much a progressive exercise over time.

The value of devolution is that it offers benefits to making decisions at a scale more closely connected to citizens. Strong local government and empowered local communities provide the foundations for evolving devolution and considering new ways to governance our society. Locality, a membership network for community organisations in the UK, recognises the power of communities in building a fairer society - and usefully explains how:

“We need radical action to strengthen our local institutions, devolve tangible power, resources and control to communities”

Within the Northern Ireland context, the impact of not having devolution is captured in recommendations from the “Devolution and Democracy in Northern Ireland – Dealing with the Deficit” consultation and report, led by the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee (NIAC) in late 2018.

PART 2 (b)

Council Functions and Operation

How does local government function in its wider context?
The 11 district councils form Northern Ireland’s third tier of government, below Westminster and the devolved government at Stormont. Councils are involved in policy and decision-making and the direct delivery of local services. Citizens within each of the 80 District Electoral Areas (DEAs) in Northern Ireland elect councillors to constitute their local council. A Local Government District (LGD) is the entire area controlled by a district, borough or city council.

How often are councillors elected?
Local government elections normally take place on the first Thursday in May every four years. (2023) was an exception due to the date of the coronation and associated arrangements. Councillors are elected by proportional representation using the single transferable vote system, with each DEA forming a multi-seat constituency. The next election (following May 2023) is therefore scheduled to be in May 2027.

How is Local Government organised?

How Council Boundaries are decided
Each DEA comprises a number of wards with boundaries reviewed every 10-15 years by the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner. The boundaries of the 11 councils at time of writing were recommended by the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner in 2009 and finalised with amendments by the Northern Ireland Executive in June 2012. A review of these boundaries took place in 2022, but the Department for Communities will not make an order to give effect to the Commissioner’s Final Recommendations Report until after the election in May 2023. Therefore, the establishment of an independent DEA Review process will not be commenced by the Northern Ireland Office until after May 2023.

The District Electoral Commissioner, who is appointed by the Secretary of State, recommends boundaries of DEAs. Commissioners try to avoid dividing wards between parliamentary constituencies, as they often represent local communities, although this is sometimes inevitable. The current 80 DEAs were established in late 2013 following a review by the Commissioner.

How are councils categorised?
Councils in Northern Ireland can either be categorised as City, Borough or District Councils. Where a council has a City or Borough status it has two other ceremonial privileges. It may designate up to one quarter of its members as aldermen and confer the freedom of the City or Borough on distinguished individuals or groups. City and Borough councils appoint a Mayor and Deputy Mayor while District councils appoint a Chair and Vice-Chair.

How was the present system of Local Government formed?
The 11-council model of NI Local Government was developed and then implemented in 2014/15 as part of the Review of Public Administration.
Council Functions - What Councils do and don't do

There is a statutory basis in everything a council does, meaning that no council can exercise any function without holding the appropriate authority in law. If a council acts without authority, its decisions or expenditure may be held to be "ultra vires" meaning "outside the powers" of the council. The roles and functions of councils are established in the Local Government Act 1972 and in other legislation including the Local Government Finance Act (NI) 2011 and the Local Government (NI) Act 2014. Councils carry out most of the functions outlined below. However, not every council will have the entire range of services, depending upon its geographical location and size:

- waste collection and disposal
- recycling and waste management
- local planning functions
- civic amenity provision
- grounds maintenance
- street cleaning
- cemeteries
- public conveniences
- food safety
- health and safety
- environmental protection
- environmental improvement
- estates management - building design and maintenance
- building control-inspection and regulation of new buildings
- regulation of houses in multiple occupation (HMOs)
- dog control
- licensing, such as entertainment licensing
- enforcement byelaws such as those around litter
- sports, leisure services and recreational facilities
- parks, open spaces and playgrounds
- community centres
- arts, heritage and cultural facilities
- registration of births, deaths and marriages
- road closures for special events
- off-street parking (except Park and Ride)
- road capital investment
- conservation area designation and management
- listed building enforcement notices
- compensation where listed building consent has been revoked or modified
- issuing of Building Preservation Notices
- providing advice to developers on tourism policies and related issues
- providing business support including business start-up advice, along with training and delivery of customer care schemes
- small-scale tourism accommodation development
- local tourism
- social entrepreneurship
- capital investment
- youth entrepreneurship (such as Prince's Trust and Shell Livewire)
- community listing of buildings of special architectural or historic interest
- local economic development
- "Start a Business" programme and enterprise shows
- local development plan functions
- development management and enforcement
- neighbourhood renewal funding relevant to enterprises initiatives
- education
- personal social services
- roads
- public housing
- fire service

I started working in Ballymena Borough Council on the 1st November 1968. I saw the first reorganisation of local government in October 1973, reducing councils from 78 to 26 in number. This carried on until RPA in 2011, which was actually delayed 4 years until 2015, when 26 councils were reduced to 11 councils. I am one of the very few people who has experienced three administrations of local government. Prior to RPA and being a senior officer in the council at that stage, I took the council Planning meeting, when the planning officials came along to present their planning report on a monthly basis. The council's role was only consultative but there were many strong and sometimes heated arguments with the Department's planning officials when an application was being refused. Many deferrals took place, accompanied by site visits and eventually a decision was made.

I retired from council and decided to ventured into politics and stood for election in May 2015 but was unsuccessful. However undeterred, I stood again in May 2019 and was successful this time. The four-year period is almost gone and I will stand again for another term in May 2023. I have served on the planning committee of Mid and East Antrim council over the last 4 years, where I have robustly supported applications which created jobs, created investment and supported our rate base. I have noticed a great difference in the attitude of our planning officers, whereas prior to RPA they had the authority to make planning decisions behind closed doors, but now working relationships with our officers are very supportive with the number one priority to grow the economy.

NILGA amongst many other things, provides training support for councillors. I attended the ILM accredited NILGA Local Planning and Leadership Programme, which was excellent. Having previously had some knowledge of planning, this programme certainly enhanced and widened my knowledge of the subject. One of the modules was with a Planning Commissioner from the Planning Appeals Commission. I found this module to be extremely informative and overall, I thoroughly enjoyed the entire course and can wholeheartedly recommend the course to any councillor, especially those elected for the first time, if they are on the planning committee.
such as planning and licensing, powers and make decisions on regulatory matters.

Resources Committee,

overarching policies e.g., a Strategic Policy and

categories:

Council committees are arranged in the following

Committee System

The Chief Executive is the head of the corporate organisation, is the accounting officer and undertakes electoral duties. Frequently the Chief Executive may have his or her own department which deals with the central or corporate functions of the council.

Permitted forms of Governance

The Local Government Act (NI) 2014 provides several alternative forms of governance which a council may choose to operate. These are:

- A committee system
- Executive Arrangements
- Prescribed Arrangements

A committee system is the default option, but councils may choose one of the other methods if at least 80% of councillors present and voting so decide.

Committee System

Council committees are arranged in the following categories:

- A central council committee which deals with overarching policies e.g., a Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
- Quasi-Judicial committees which have council powers and make decisions on regulatory matters such as planning and licensing,
- Functional committees which are designed to deal with specific issues, for instance a Leisure Services Committee, and
- Joint committees that draw/contain members from a number of councils which deal with wider issues such as tourism.

Executive Arrangements

There are two permitted forms of Executive arrangements:

- A “cabinet-style executive” which must contain between 6 to 10 councillors, and
- A “streamlined committee executive” where each committee must contain between 6 and 10 councillors.

Under this system, many decisions which would be taken by the full council under a committee system would be taken by an executive committee. If this form of governance is chosen, councils must also operate one or more overview and scrutiny committees, which have certain powers to review decisions made by the executive.

Prescribed Arrangements

If a council wishes to operate a different form of governance, instead of either committee or executive arrangements, it may apply to the Department for Communities who may prescribe alternative arrangements. Prior to prescribing any new arrangement, the Department must satisfy itself that the new arrangements would present an improvement, would ensure that decisions are taken in an efficient, transparent and accountable way and would be appropriate for all councils to consider.

How are decisions made?

Councils have different ways of making decisions; most have a committee structure. This means the council will set up committees to deal with specific areas of the council’s business. These committees will make decisions or recommendations with the agreement of the council.

Councils can also make decisions using executive arrangements. This is where smaller groups of councillors take decisions on a range of matters within an agreed framework set out by the council.

Whichever system is used to make decisions, there must be a full council meeting on which all councillors sit. This is responsible for setting the policy framework, agreeing the budget and spending plans and making constitutional decisions. It is also a forum for debate on major issues affecting the council and its local area.

The Constitution

As a new councillor you will receive a copy of your council’s constitution which sets out how the council conducts its business, including:

- who is responsible for making decisions and how decisions are made,
- procedural matters (set out in the standing orders),
- the role of officers, and
- standards and ethical governance.

It is important to familiarise yourself with these parts of the constitution, in particular the standing orders. These specify the terms of reference of the council’s various member structures, the rules on declarations of interest, the timings and order of business at council meetings and the rules of debate.

Agendas and Minutes

Council agendas provide advance notice of the date, time and place of meetings and the business to be transacted. In the case of the council meeting there is a period of at least three days statutory notice.

Some meeting terms include:

- Quorum – number of members required for the meeting to take place,
- The Chair – regulates the meeting and ensures proceedings are properly conducted,
- Standing Orders - the rules for conducting business in council and committees,
- Points of Order – used if a member believes standing orders aren’t being followed, Chair rules on the point,
- Motions and Resolutions – council and its committees consider and vote on motions, if approved by the majority, they become a resolution,
- Amendments – this is the modification of the wording of a proposal, each amendment is dealt with by the Chair in order, and
A Practical Guide to Policy Making in Northern Ireland is available to download.

Policy and Decision Making
A policy consists of principles, rules, and guidelines formulated or adopted by an organisation to reach its long-term goals. Your council will have many policies. Obtain any available list of these from a Democratic Services Officer, if possible, familiarising yourself with internal (how the council and its members / officers conduct themselves and comply with policies and legislation) and external (how the council approaches its services, for example Economic Development and Planning) policies.

Policies are often connected, for example Community Planning and Local Development Planning must be considered collectively, as well as separately, to develop your understanding of the overall shared vision, direction and Corporate Plan for your council.

Councillors can influence policies through:
- Membership of committees, sub committees and Full council itself;
- Being a member of a Partnership Board, Voluntary Body or Working Group;
- Sitting within a political group; and
- Providing evidence, through casework.

Policy Making Guidance
The NI Executive Office provides practical guidance on policy-making, applicable to all public servants. Many of the key elements which it advocates can be applied by district councils, for example, on “Joined Up Government” and “Evidence Based Policy Making”.

PART 2 (c)
Local Government Finance
This section gives a brief overview of financial matters in local government.

Local Government Expenditure - Revenue and Capital
Local government exists to provide a range of services. Expenditure on these services fall into one of two categories, namely:
- Capital expenditure - monies expended on the acquisition or enhancement of tangible assets such as land, buildings, vehicles, and plant and equipment, which are intended to be used for a period in excess of twelve months. Materiality considerations require councils to set a de minimis amount for capital expenditure. Although the amount is specific to each council, historically many councils have determined that the de minimis amount should be £7,500 (excluding VAT); and
- Revenue expenditure - monies expended on the day-to-day provision of services e.g., wages and salaries, heat and light, rent and rates, and the purchase of services and materials. Technically, revenue expenditure is defined as expenditure that is not capital expenditure.

Sources of Income
Capital Income
Several sources of capital income are available but the two most common are:
- Grants - central government sometimes contributes towards the cost of a specific capital project or asset. Prior to BREXIT, most capital grants tended to originate from Europe or from a specific body such as the Foundation for Sport and the Arts. However, BREXIT has significantly reduced the level of EU funding and, although councils have recently benefitted from other capital funding, such as Levelling Up funding, it is currently unclear whether previous levels of capital funding will be maintained in the future; and

Borrowing - the bulk of local government capital outlay is paid for with borrowed funds. These funds have to be repaid with interest over the term of the borrowing.

Councils have powers to raise funds from a variety of sources, but most borrowings come from the Government National Loans Fund, which typically offers funds at a very competitive interest rate. Funds may be borrowed from other sources, such as banks. These funds sometimes offer greater flexibility in terms of repayment than borrowings from the Government National Loans Fund.

As borrowings must be repaid, each year a council’s revenue account typically makes two payments known as ‘loan charges’ or ‘debt charges’. This expenditure simply represents the annual repayment of borrowed funds together with interest thereon. These payments are due on 1 February and 1 August each year.

The requirement for councils to comply with the Prudential Code in 2012 was accompanied by the granting of increased autonomy to councils in relation to their borrowing practices. Prior to 2012, councils had to seek approval from the Department of Environment (now the Department for Communities) if they wanted to borrow funds. The powers conferred on councils by the Local Government Finance Act (Northern Ireland)
2011 resulted in councils assuming complete responsibility and accountability for their borrowing. This autonomy is regulated by the requirement for councils to set authorised and operational borrowing limits, establish Prudential Indicators and publish their performance in relation to these indicators on an annual basis. Councils may also make direct contributions from their revenue account to finance their capital expenditure in a particular financial year. Alternatively, it may make revenue contributions to a Capital Fund to build up a ‘ring-fenced’ source of finance for specific capital projects. Generally, direct or indirect contributions from revenue are small or limited by statute.

**Revenue Income**
Revenue expenditure is generally funded by revenue income.

**There are four main sources of revenue income as listed below:**

**District Rate Income** – this is by far the most significant source of council revenue income. Each council is empowered to receive part of the property taxes (Rates) levied on rate payers. The element of the Rates that rate payers pay which goes to their local district council is known as the council’s District Rate Income.

Every council calculates a district Rate each year, which is estimated to be sufficient to generate enough Rate income when added to the council’s other income streams to fund the council’s expenditure in that year.

The element of the Rates that rate payers pay, which does not go to their local district council, is known as Regional Rate Income. Regional Rate Income is paid to the Northern Ireland Assembly to contribute to the cost of central government services.

**Fees and charges** - these are monies raised by each council by charging for those services that it is permitted to raise charges for. Examples include admission charges to leisure centres; building inspection fees; trade/commercial waste collection charges and rental income from catering franchises.

To date, legislative restrictions have prevented district councils from levying fees and charges which represent more than cost recovery. In other words, district councils do not trade for profit. This may change in the future as councils develop their use of the statutory General Power of Competence.

**Specific revenue-based government grants** - sometimes central government departments make a financial contribution towards the running costs of council services. An example of a council service, which benefits from revenue-based government funding is the District Council Good Relations Programme, which is funded jointly by the Northern Ireland Executive Office and the eleven councils. As part of this programme, councils deliver agreed, outcome focused good relations projects supervised and managed by a team of Good Relations Officers (GROs);

**Other grants** - central government in Northern Ireland is a combination of two elements, namely:

- **Regional Rate** - this helps to finance those public services that are not administered by councils and is struck by the Department of Finance at a uniform Rate for each of domestic and non-domestic sectors that is applied in every district council area.
- **District Rate** - varies from one district council area to another and finances those local services that are directly administered by district councils.

On average approximately 75% of a district council’s recurrent revenue income is generated from the district Rate. Every district council is legally obligated to strike a separate district Rate for the domestic and non-domestic sectors in their area. This is because non-domestic Rates are levied based on net annual (assumed rental) value, whereas domestic Rates are levied on the basis of capital (assumed purchase) values. Prior to 2021/22, councils were required to use a statutory conversion factor to ‘convert’ their non-domestic Rate into a domestic Rate. Councils are, however, now free to ‘de-couple’ their domestic Rate from their non-domestic Rate.

**Current Rating System – domestic and non-domestic hereditaments (properties)**
A discrete capital value system is used to apply a single tax rate to assess the Rates due in respect of each domestic property. Consequently, every domestic property rate payer could pay an amount, which is independent of every other domestic property apart from the fact that the capital value on which the Rate is assessed is currently capped under legislation at £410,000.

This system contrasts with the English system of banding, where households are allocated to one of several different bands according to their capital value. The band determines the amount of council Tax to be paid, with all households within the same band paying the same amount.

Rateable valuations for domestic properties in Northern Ireland are assessed on the capital value of the property based on 1 January 2005. When assessing the capital value, Land & Property Services (LPS) use information about the sale prices of houses in each district council area. They also assume that all properties have an average state of internal repair and fittings, such as a standard kitchen and bathroom.

If a property was built after 2005, the capital value will be assessed by comparing the property with similar properties that had been built prior to 2005.
The factors that are taken into consideration when valuing a property include:

- size and type of property, such as detached, semi, terrace, flat etc;
- location of the property;
- whether or not the property has a garage or other domestic outbuildings; and
- whether or not the property has central heating.

“Size” means the external area of the property if it is a house and the internal area if it is an apartment.

The total amount of Rates payable on a domestic property annually is calculated by multiplying the Capital Value by the sum of the domestic district and regional Rates for the district council area in which the property is located.

Legislation requires, among other things, the maintenance and updating of the Valuation List. This list is based on each of the district council areas, sub-divided into wards with properties arranged street by street in basic alphabetical order and shows the Capital Value (CV) and Net Annual Value (NAV) of all domestic and non-domestic properties respectively.

Ratepayers have the right to inspect the list and extract information.

Non-domestic properties are still valued based on rental values - otherwise known as NAV (Net Annual Value) – at a prescribed date. This value on rental values - otherwise known as NAV (Net Annual Value) – is based on rental values as 1 April 2018. However, the most recent non-domestic revaluation was carried out during 2022 and will take effect from 1 April 2023 using property values at 1 October 2021.

Periodic revaluations of all non-domestic and domestic properties may be carried out to ensure that the Rate burden within both the non-domestic and domestic sectors is equitably apportioned equitably between all non-domestic and domestic properties respectively. The current valuation list for domestic properties became operative on 1 April 2007 and is based on capital values at 1 January 2005. The current valuation list for non-domestic properties became operative on 1 April 2020 and is based on rental values as 1 April 2018. However, the most recent non-domestic revaluation was carried out during 2022 and will take effect from 1 April 2023 using property values at 1 October 2021.

Annual Revenue Budget and Striking the District Rate

In order to strike the district domestic and non-domestic Rates, each council draws up detailed estimates of expenditure and income for each incoming financial year which runs from 1 April to 31 March. These estimates are referred to as the “Annual Rate Estimates” and a great deal of time and effort is devoted to their preparation.

The Annual Rate Estimates serve two purposes, namely:

- they enable the council to calculate the district Rate income which it estimates that it will need to deliver its services in the forthcoming financial year; and
- they serve as the basis for detailed budgets for the monitoring and control of revenue income and expenditure in the relevant financial year.

Each council is required by legislation to strike its district Rates before the “prescribed date”, which is generally 15 of February in each year.

Annual Accounts

Councils are required to produce annual accounts in accordance with the requirements of the CIPFA Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom and the requirements of any Accounts Direction issued by the Department for Communities (DfC).

In these financial statements you will see a summary of the council’s financial transactions for the year of account including details of revenue income and expenditure, capital outlays and financing, and loans borrowed or repaid.

The financial statements follow a prescribed format and include an Annual Governance Statement, remuneration report, audit certificate issued by the Local Government Auditor, and relevant notes to the accounts.

Legislation obliges each council to submit its draft annual financial statements to the Department for Communities by 30 June and to publish them on its website by 30 September.

Department for Communities

The Department for Communities has statutory powers to request information, reports and returns from district councils and can order inquiries into any matter relating to council functions.

Where a council fails to discharge a statutory function, the DfC can direct it to take specified action. If a council fails to take such action, the Department can empower its officials to exercise the functions of the council.

As a result of some former central government functions transferring to councils in April 2015, the Local Government Act 2014 has provided the relevant central government departments with powers in relation to district council functions that are similar to the DfC’s powers to direct the Council to take specified action.
Local Government Auditor

The Local Government (Northern Ireland) Order 2005, as updated by the Local Government (Northern Ireland) Act 2014, provides that the DfC may, with the consent of the Comptroller and Auditor General (the C&AG), designate a member of the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) staff as the Local Government Auditor. Once designated, this Auditor carries out their statutory and other responsibilities, and exercises their professional judgment, independently of the DfC and the C&AG. The current Local Government is Ms Colette Kane.

The statutory responsibilities and powers of the designated Local Government Auditor are set out in the 2005 Order and the 2014 Act. In discharging these, the Local Government Auditor is required to carry out their work in accordance with a Code of Audit Practice (the Code). The scope of external audit in local government is extended to cover not only the audit of the financial statements, but also the audited bodies’ arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources, as well as councils performance improvement responsibilities.

The Code focuses on how the Local Government Auditor should carry out their wider range of functions and the audit of the financial statements is conducted in accordance with International Auditing Standards issued by the Financial Reporting Council.

The Local Government Auditor can, if considered appropriate, make a Public Interest Report on any appropriate, make a Public Interest Report on any functions and the audit of the financial statements is conducted in accordance with International Auditing Standards issued by the Financial Reporting Council.

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The budget proposals must be finalised by a statutory date each year (the ‘prescribed date’), typically 15 February, which is the date by which each council must have determined its district Rate and set its annual budget.

Please note the following:

- The financial year typically runs from 1 April to 31 March, so upon your election the budgets for that year will already be agreed, although revisions are possible to address policy changes or other relevant issues, and
- Familiarise yourself with financial definitions and associated abbreviations which will help you understand fully the financial information presented to you. Your council should provide training for all councillors on the budget and associated financial processes.

The Council Workforce

The most valuable resource your council has is its employees.

As local government is a labour-intensive sector, it is vital that you develop skills in managing relations with the officers that you may engage with on a regular or occasional basis. Proper management principles require that any employee should only have one boss to whom he or she is responsible to avoid confusion where different people are asking for different responses. Accordingly, individual councillors must not instruct members of staff but if they believe something is not being done properly, they should raise the matter with the Chief Executive or Director of the relevant department.

A council’s paid employees are called officers. All council officers must treat all political groups and individual councillors equally, fairly and always remain politically neutral.

You as a councillor will be responsible for setting the strategic direction and agreeing the policy framework of the council; officers are responsible for delivering the council’s policies and for the day-to-day operations.

Officers fall broadly into two main categories: front-line and support. Front-line officers deliver services to the public – e.g., refuse collectors, animal welfare officers, leisure centre attendants and environmental health officers. Support officers ensure that front-line services and the democratic process can operate smoothly – e.g., through administrative, financial, legal, communications and IT support.

The Chief Executive and the senior management team will head up the main functions or departments of the council. Good member/office relationships are important to a highperforming authority, but the relationship between the leader or elected mayor and the Chief Executive is particularly important and can have a profound effect on the council’s performance.

Your council will have a protocol on working relationships between councillors and Local Government Officers. It relates to all aspects of the working environment, both physical and virtual. The protocol reflects the content of both the Employee and Councillor Codes of Conduct that always demand the highest standards of personal conduct. It upholds the seven Nolan Principles and the additional five principles of public life. Appendix 2 of Code of Conduct for Local Government Employees sets out The Local Government Employee and Councillor Working Relationship Protocol.
NILGA’s representation on the National Joint Council for Local Government Services (NJC)

The principal way in which terms and conditions of employment for employees in local government are set is through national collective bargaining, where representatives of councils and council employees meet to negotiate those terms and conditions. Generally, most collective bargaining takes place either nationally or locally at individual employer level, with regional support.

The national level covers all council employees in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Scotland has its own arrangements. The national level of bargaining is concerned with negotiating the broad framework for pay and conditions of service, including issues considered to be core, minimum conditions. The regional level of bargaining consists of eleven regions (nine in England plus one each in Wales and Northern Ireland). This tier is primarily concerned with advising on the interpretation of national and regional agreements and can assist with the resolution of any disputes between a council and its employees within the region. All other matters are for local determination between individual councils and their employees. Most employees within councils (around 95%) fall under the National Agreement on Pay and Conditions of Service, known in local government as the ‘Green Book’, which sets out the conditions of service negotiated by the National Joint Council for Local Government Services (the ‘NJC’).

The Council Workforce and Development

As abovementioned, NILGA is the registered Northern Ireland Regional Employers’ Association. In that role, NILGA represents district councils in Northern Ireland, as employers, in discussions nationally and interacts with trade unions recognised as representing employees in local government. As an Employers’ Association, it also has representation on the National Association of Regional Employers (NARE) which provides a direct access to both member and officer learning, from across 13 regions, and enables best practice, free and low-cost training, learning tools and similar advantages to be tailored for every council in Northern Ireland.

NILGA is a registered and licensed “Councillor Development Charter and Charter Plus” provider. The Councillor Development Charter and Charter Plus is a nationally accredited Award recognising a council’s commitment, strategic approach and its effectiveness to member development. It is an initiative, which at its fullest level requires assessment and endorsement from the community which you and your council serve.

NILGA retains a strong link and input into the Local Government Training Group, an all-council grouping resourced to provide workforce and member learning and development in a regionally co-ordinated manner for the 11 councils.

PART 2 (d)

Decisions and the Law

Overview and scrutiny are at the heart of local accountability. It is the principal democratic means, between elections, of ensuring that decisions made by the council and its partners are held to account. In many councils, scrutiny has become a major element in the policy development process and is how ideas for improvement can be debated and evaluated.

Acting within the Statutory Powers of the Council

A council’s existence and powers are a result of parliamentary legislation. Hence the council cannot go beyond those powers in making decisions.

Even though councils have a General Power of Competence (see below), they still need to ensure that they are legally able to carry out any proposed action.

Your council has the following powers:

- those which are clearly provided for by the legislation under which it proposes to act - known as express powers;
- those which can reasonably be read into that legislation - known as implied powers;
- those which can reasonably be said to be necessary companions to the express powers - known as incidental or consequential powers.

In deciding that the council should act, you should be satisfied that the council is entitled under legislation to take the suggested course of action. You could ask that the matter be referred to the council’s legal advisers, or request that officers present a consideration of possible legal consequences among their recommendations. Where discretion is given to council, it must exercise it. In holding power, councils have to choose between using power and not using it.

General Power of Competence

The Local Government Act 2014 introduced a new General Power of Competence in Northern Ireland. This is an important legislative statement emphasising that councils have the power to do anything an individual may do, in the interests of the district, unless specifically prohibited by law.

Your council will have established or will be establishing criteria to formulate a Policy which would ultimately be adopted by the council in exercising its General Power of Competence. It is important that you understand its principles (bettering your District), its constraints (working within the law) and its benefits (e.g., solving a long-term problem of an unadopted road, building housing, developing business facilities). NILGA works with councils in NI and across the UK in providing learning and best practice in relation to the General Power of Competence and its potential uses.
The European Convention on Human Rights

The European Convention on Human Rights was incorporated into NI law by the Human Rights Act 1998, which came into force in October 2000. There are 3 categories of rights under the Convention:

1. Absolute rights: These cannot be limited or qualified in any way and include: the Article 3 right to freedom from torture, inhuman and degrading treatment and punishment; the Article 4 prohibition on slavery and enforced labour and the Article 7 protection from retrospective criminal penalties

2. Limited rights: Certain Convention rights are subject to explicit and clearly defined limitations or exceptions, e.g., the Article 5 right to liberty, which allows for deprivation of liberty within narrowly specified parameters

3. Qualified rights: Interference with these rights is permissible only if it:
   - Has its basis in law;
   - Is necessary in a democratic society, in that it;
     - Fulfils a pressing social need;
     - Pursues a legitimate aim;
     - Is proportionate to that aim; and
     - Is related to a permissible aim set out in the Article in question, such as the prevention of crime or the protection of public order or health.

The European Convention has 18 elements, covering major issues like Marriage, Life, Freedom of Expression, Conscience and Religion.

Crucial for a councillor is a broad understanding of it, its proper interpretation and subsequent application, if required.

Equality and Human Rights after ‘Brexit’

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland have been tasked with overseeing the Government’s commitment to protecting equality and human rights in a post-‘Brexit’ Northern Ireland.

Under the Ireland/NI Protocol to the Withdrawal Agreement reached with the EU, the UK Government committed to ensuring that the protections currently in place in Northern Ireland for the rights, safeguards and equality of opportunity provisions set out in the chapter of the same name in the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement will not be reduced as a result of the UK leaving the EU.

Equality and Human Rights Law and the Convention, from a Northern Ireland perspective, is available from the NI Human Rights Commission (NIHRC). This is a national human rights institution with a status accreditation from the United Nations. NIHRC is funded by the United Kingdom government, but is an independent public body, established on the basis of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement (1998). The associated Northern Ireland Act 1998 introduced a number of transformative legislative requirements, some of which are detailed below.

Equality: Section 75 and Disability Duties

Councillors must be aware of and implement their positive statutory equality responsibilities under the following legislation:

- Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998

What are the Section 75 statutory duties?

Section 75 aims to make a real difference to the lives of people in Northern Ireland through public organisations considering equality and good relations when carrying out all council functions, such as, when making decisions, developing new policies, or when revising existing ones.

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (the Act) requires councils and councillors as the decision makers, to comply with the following two statutory duties:

1. to have **due regard to the need** to promote equality of opportunity in relation to the nine equality categories
2. to have **regard to the desirability** of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion; and racial group

The promotion of equality of opportunity entails more than the elimination of discrimination. It requires proactive action to promote equality of opportunity between the categories identified in Section 75.

The Equality Commission emphasises that the good relations duty embraces and extends beyond the religious / political dimension of ‘community relations’. Consideration of the needs and interests of all minority ethnic groups is also important in this context. Further Good Relations Guidance for councils is available from the Commission:

- [Good Relations Local Council Advice.pdf](#)
- [Good_Relations-Public_Authorities_Guide.pdf](#)

What is an ‘Equality Scheme’?

A council’s equality scheme is a statement of the council’s commitment to fulfilling its Section 75 statutory duties. The scheme sets out how the council is going to ensure that equality and good relations are considered across all functions.

Individuals can raise complaints with councils that an approved equality scheme may not have been complied with and the Commission has the power to investigate complaints, if the equality scheme is not implemented effectively. Councillors should therefore be aware that the equality scheme is an important governance and risk document.

What does case law say about complying with the Public Sector Duties?

Councillors may find it helpful to be aware of the following principles, called the Brown principles, when planning their and their council’s compliance with the Section 75 duties:

1. a decision-maker must be aware that he/she is obliged to comply with the public sector duties;
2. the duties must be fulfilled before and at the time that a particular decision is being considered, and not afterwards;
3. the duties must be exercised in substance, with rigour and an open mind; and not as a “tick box” exercise;
4. the duties are non-delegable; meaning that it is the actual decision-maker who must comply with the duties, and not some other person;
5. the duties are continuing ones;
6. it is good practice to keep adequate records that will show that the statutory goals have actually been considered and pondered and to promote transparency and discipline in the decision-making process.

How can a councillor practically demonstrate effective leadership in regard to their Section 75 obligations?

The leadership and commitment of councillors and council Chief Executives are critical to the successful implementation and achievement of the intended outcomes of the Section 75 duties, and to ensuring that a meaningful and effective approach to implementing the duties is adopted across the council as an organisation.

The Equality Commission has published S75 guidance specific to local government, with a handy checklist for council decision makers.
The Equality Commission has also produced general leadership guidance for public authorities to remind decision-makers of what is required to ensure the effective implementation of the Section 75 duties. A suite of guidance can be found at https://www.equalityni.org/578leadership.

Some of the practical actions covered in this guidance that councillors and council officers can take to demonstrate Section 75 leadership are:

Good governance

• be fully aware of and understand the implications of all of the commitments contained in council equality schemes and apply the arrangements positively and continuously;
• ensure that equality scheme training commitments are implemented, including appropriate mandatory training e.g., policymakers who will be undertaking Screening/Equality Impact Assessments (EQIA), e.g., Section 75 Training for councillors;
• ensure compliance with the duties by scrutinising, e.g., the quality of Quarterly screening reports and Section 75 annual progress reports.

Meaningful equality assessments

• ensure that screening and equality impact assessments are undertaken for each policy, as defined in the equality scheme;
• expect meaningful screening and EQIA assessments to be presented with each new or revised policy decision, including “high level” or strategic policies. If meaningful equality assessments are not provided with council papers for consideration, then decision makers should ask for them;
• the equality assessments should be considered along with the policy proposals, so that decision-makers take the assessments into consideration at the point of decision making i.e. before a decision is taken;
• ensure they are satisfied with the quality and coherence of equality assessments (screening and/or equality impact assessments (EQIA)) undertaken, ensuring that the assessments are not simply a ‘tick-box’ exercise.

What are the Disability Duties?
The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (“DDA”) Section 49A requires councils to:

1. have due regard to the need to promote positive attitudes towards disabled persons, and
2. the need to encourage participation by disabled persons in public life.

This duty is supported by an obligation to have a disability action plan.

Councillors should scrutinise council Disability Action Plans (DAPs) to ensure they cover all functions of the council and contain meaningful actions that will have real outcomes. Further information on the disability duties is available on the Commission’s website at ECNI - Disability Duties for Public Authorities - Equality Commission NI.

Freedom of Information

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives people rights of access to the information held by councils and other public bodies. The legislation aims to give people a better understanding of how organisations make decisions, carry out their duties and spend public money. The act created two principal obligations for councils:

1. All councils must adopt and maintain a publication scheme setting out details of information they hold, and how the information can be obtained and whether there is a charge for it;
2. All councils must comply with requests made under the Act for information they hold (unless one of the exemptions from disclosure applies). Requests for information should be responded to as quickly as possible and certainly within 20 working days except in some limited circumstances.

As a councillor, the decisions you make and the actions you take are all subject to public scrutiny. Your allowance, along with any expenses you claim, will be published on the council’s website.

General Data Protection Regulations

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is a European wide law that replaced the Data Protection Act 1998 in the UK. The GDPR sets out requirements for how organisations need to handle personal data.

In addition to other changes, it enhances the rights of people whose data is held (known as ‘data subjects’ in the Data Protection Act 1998) and give them more control over what happens to their data. The eight protection principles which were in the 1998 legislation have been replaced by six in the new Regulation.

These six general principles are very similar to the current law. Personal information should be:

• Processed lawfully, fairly and in a transparent manner
• Collected for specified, explicit and legitimate purposes and not further processed in a manner that is incompatible with those purposes
• Adequate, relevant and limited to what is necessary
• Accurate and, where necessary, kept up-to-date
• Retained only as long as necessary
• Processed in an appropriate manner to maintain security

Councillors are responsible for ensuring all personal data is handled in a way that complies with the requirements of GDPR.

The Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO) website provides helpful advice for organisations, with particularly useful advice in relation to political campaigns.

COUNCILLOR VIEWPOINT

Cllr Alistair Cathcart, Ards and North Down (DUP)

I became a councillor, in December 2013 aged 25 as a co-op option to replace Peter Weir MLA on the old North Down Council. Having worked in a MLA’s Office I was familiar with the constituency side of things but I had to learn the structures and procedures of council which does take a bit of time.

I later stood in the 2014 elections for the new Ards and North Down Council and got elected to represent the Bangor Central DEA. It is an honour to be voted by the people of your own City to represent them and the City’s interests.

On council, I am a member of the Bangor City Advisory Group and I sit on the council Panel for the Belfast Region City Deal, which includes Bangor Waterfront Scheme, a major regeneration project. I enjoy being in the room and having an influence on decisions that will ultimately shape the future of my City.

I currently sit on the Environment Committee, as well as the Planning Committee, which I chaired on two occasions, at an interesting time when the council is creating a new Local Development Plan which will shape the Borough for years to come. In terms of outside bodies, I am board member of Libraries NI and Director on the North Down Development Organisation, which is a local enterprise agency.

What I think I enjoy most is the ‘small wins’ for constituents. Getting a street light fixed when the darkness was worrying an elderly constituent, repairing a favourite park bench, or getting the Housing Executive to replace a broken boiler in time for Christmas. These issues may seem minor but for that person it may mean a lot.
They have procedures which have been made by health and social care professionals.

Some examples that the Ombudsman may regard as maladministration include:

• Unfairness, bias or prejudice
• Giving advice that is misleading or inadequate
• Refusing to answer reasonable questions
• Discourtesy and failure to apologise properly for errors
• Mistakes in handling a complaint

It is important to be aware that any complaints about maladministration within councils would be dealt with by the Ombudsman. Therefore, complaints about alleged maladministration as a result of the actions of council staff, including Chief Executives, would be handled by the Ombudsman and not the Commissioner. The Commissioner only deals with allegations that a councillor has or may have breached the code of conduct for councillors.

Addressing Rural Needs
The Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 places a duty on public authorities, including councils, to have “due regard to rural needs when:

- developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies, and plans”,
- “designing and delivering public services”,
- compile information and report on organisational activities in both the annual report and to DAERA, and
- carry out these duties in line with any guidance or advice set out by DAERA

Why is it important?
The Act is important because it seeks to ensure a consistent and considered approach to taking account of the needs of people in rural areas when undertaking strategy and policy development, as well as when designing or delivering public services. It sets out to:

- ensure the consideration of the needs of people in rural areas becomes more firmly embedded within public authorities;
- help deliver fairer and more equitable treatment of people in rural areas;
- contribute to delivering better outcomes for people in rural areas and help make rural communities more sustainable;
- increase transparency, requiring public authorities to compile and publish information on how they comply with the due regard duty when carrying out certain activities and for this information to be published in an annual report.

The Act imposes the duty on public authorities to have “due regard” to rural needs. Councils must comply with this duty, otherwise they are in breach of their legal responsibilities.

What are the implications for councils?
The Act applies to all councils in NI, as well as to their statutory community planning partners. It took effect for councils from 1st June 2017.

DAERA has provided guidance on how organisations may comply with the Act. This includes a template for a Rural Needs Impact Assessment, which it recommends should be completed, reviewed and approved for each policy, strategy, or plan that is being developed, adopted, implemented or revised, as well as when designing and delivering public services.

The Rural Needs Impact Assessment template should be completed by council staff responsible for the policy, strategy, plan, or service review or delivery planning.

COUNCILLOR VIEWPOINT
Cllr Stephanie Quigley, Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council

My name is Stephanie Quigley.

Before I came into local government, I was a community podiatrist working for the Northern Health Trust and a mum to five of a family. In October 2013, I was co-opted on to the legacy Coleraine council replacing my father after he had served twenty years as an SDLP councillor. I am fortunate to have a great role model and wonderful father who had served all the community and was held in such high regard. I came into this role as I had the privilege of witnessing the difference that my father had made in the lives of the people he represented, and I really wanted to carry on his good work.

In May 2014, I was elected and since then I have worked full time as a councillor. I have really enjoyed bringing projects like Street Pastors to the borough, a cross community project that takes care of our young people out enjoying the night-time economy.

I have a keen interest in social and affordable housing and my passion lies in my advocacy role for people in need. I really enjoy working with people and being a voice for those who are in need of help or support.

I also have a keen interest in mental health issues and I am currently chairperson of the ‘Darkness to Light’ anti-suicide walk which we are running for the first time in this area. My hope for the future of local government is that there will be more unity and that political parties will work together for the greater good for all our communities.

In my time as councillor I have become involved in cross-community projects such as the ‘Light’ anti-suicide walk and the ‘Darkness to Light’ walk. I have also been involved in the ‘Daffodil House’ project, which provides support for those in need.

I have been elected as a councillor for the first time and I am very proud to represent the people of Coleraine. I have a passion for social and affordable housing and I am a member of the Housing Committee.

I have been involved in various community projects such as the ‘Street Pastors’ scheme, which provides support for those in need.

I have been elected as a councillor for the first time and I am very proud to represent the people of Coleraine. I have a passion for social and affordable housing and I am a member of the Housing Committee.

I have been involved in various community projects such as the ‘Street Pastors’ scheme, which provides support for those in need.
In many cases the information and analysis required to complete the template will already be available. Where it is not, the template will act as a prompt to staff to review their processes so that they can provide answers to all aspects of the template.

As those responsible for the overall governance of the organisation, councillors must therefore satisfy themselves, when considering and approving any action by council to which the Act should apply, that the council has fulfilled its statutory duty.

As elected representatives, and when nominated by council to other committees and other bodies, Councillors may also have a role to play, acting on behalf of their constituents, in considering the activities of other statutory bodies, and whether they have complied with the terms of the Act as part of their decision-making process.

How do you take account of Rural Needs?
The Act requires organisations to have “due regard” to rural needs. The Rural Needs Impact Assessment template is provided to help staff consider and assess what this means in any given scenario.

Detailed guidance has been made available by DAERA to support organisations and individuals to understand and interpret the requirements of the Act, and to guide them through the completion of the Rural Needs Impact Assessment template.

A key aspect of this guidance is the interpretation of what the duty requires of organisations; what having “due regard” means. It DOES NOT mean that everyone should have EQUAL access to services or policy impacts, but rather that, where there may be a negative differential impact for those people in rural areas, these are identified and addressed within the development process.

What support is available to help?
As noted above, DAERA has made detailed guidance available online, including an Impact Assessment template, a set of Frequently Asked Questions, and a sample of case study material regarding completion of the template and addressing the duties established under the Act.

Staff within DAERA are also available to answer specific questions on the Act, should there be anything not covered within the guidance, however it will remain the responsibility of each organisation to ensure that it complies with its legal duties.

Members of staff within each council are identified with a lead role and responsibility for the co-ordination, monitoring and reporting of council performance in complying with the Act.

These nominated individuals will also be able to offer further advice to both staff and councillors, in support of their role and areas of responsibility. They may also act as the key organisational contact with DAERA in order to facilitate ongoing networking and information exchange activities (raising queries or issues on behalf of their council and receiving information on best practice approaches and solutions to common queries).

PART 2 (e)
Local Government Organisations

Solace NI
SOLACE NI aims to lead and manage the collective role of local government in transforming the lives of citizens. As the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives, Solace NI acts as the professional voice for local government and works closely with the NILGA as the democratic voice, to effectively represent and influence the strategic direction of the sector.

The Chief Executives of the 11 councils are members of Solace NI. They meet on a monthly basis to consider the current and emerging challenges and opportunities for local government, particularly those which may benefit from a collective, sector wide approach.

Solace NI collaborates with a range of stakeholders, both within and beyond the local government sector, to demonstrate leadership and expertise in providing essential public services and addressing the needs and aspirations of local people and places across Northern Ireland.

The current officers of Solace NI are:
Chair: Roger Wilson (Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council) Vice Chair: David Burns (Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council) Hon. Secretary: Alison McCullagh (Fermanagh and Omagh District Council) Hon. Treasurer: Marie Ward (Newry, Mourne and Down District Council) For further information, please contact Kate Bingham, Policy and Executive Officer, Solace NI – kate.bingham@armaghanbridgecraigavon.gov.uk

National Association of Councillors (NAC)
The National Association of Councillors (NAC) Northern Ireland Region is the only body that represents, and is run by, all Northern Ireland’s 462 councillors.

The NAC was set up in 1993, when local councillors decided they needed a strong local body as well as belonging to the UK National Association of Councillors.

The NAC aims to assist its members by providing information and advice that will help them when working within their communities, and for carrying out the roles they may hold within their councils.

The NAC has close links with other councillors throughout Ireland and has built strong relationships with their representative bodies – the Local Authority Members Association (LAMA) and the Association of Irish Local Government (AILG). They also work alongside us at NILGA.

For further details please visit the What We Do Page on the NAC NI Website – http://www.nac-ni.org/

National Association of Councillors
Northern Ireland Region

Contact Details:
tel: 028 9181 9413 email: office@nac-ni.org
web: http://www.nac-ni.org/
Office Hours:
Monday & Tuesday 9am to 4.30pm
Wednesday 9am to 1pm
The Northern Ireland Local Government Officers’ Superannuation Committee (NILGOSC) is the non-Departmental public body responsible for the administration of the Local Government Pension Scheme locally. At 31 March 2022 there were 171 employers contributing to the scheme including all 11 councils, as well as the Education Authority, the Housing Executive, housing associations, FE Colleges, schools, Translink and many other public bodies.

Council staff are automatically brought into the pension scheme on commencement of employment unless they choose to opt-out. Employees pay between 5.5%-10.5% of pay and the employer makes a contribution of 19% (from 1 April 2023). The Scheme is a “Defined Benefit” scheme, similar to that in other areas of the public sector, and provides a pension based on the member’s length of service and career average pay. The pension received does not depend on the performance of the financial markets. The Scheme is a key part of the employee’s remuneration package.

Membership of the scheme is also open to councillors. New councillors will be automatically brought into the Scheme but can opt out. The benefits built up and paid under the Scheme are based on the length of your membership and your career average pensionable pay. The pensionable pay for a councillor consists of Basic Responsibility Allowance and Special Responsibility Allowance payments only.

At retirement you will receive a pension based on your average pay while a member of the Scheme which will be revalued each year to keep pace with the cost of living. Survivors’ pensions are payable to your spouse/civil partner/eligible cohabiting partner and children. Life cover is also automatically provided of three times pensionable pay and you can say who you would like to receive the death grant. You can remain in the Scheme until the day before age 75. Further details can be found on the NILGOSC website at: [https://nilgosc.org.uk/members/about-the-scheme/councillor-pensions/](https://nilgosc.org.uk/members/about-the-scheme/councillor-pensions/) or by phoning NILGOSC on 0345 3197 325.

The rules of the Scheme are made by the Department for Communities which is the sponsoring body for NILGOSC. NILGOSC also manages a significant investment fund, the income from which is required to pay the pensions for scheme members. The fund is invested in a range of asset types globally. As a responsible investor NILGOSC ensures that environmental, social and governance factors are taken into account when investing.

Unsurprisingly climate risk has been a major focus for the fund since 2008 with NILGOSC being a supporter of the 2015 Paris Agreement. Further details can be read at [https://nilgosc.org.uk/pension-fund/being-a-responsible-investor/climate-risk/](https://nilgosc.org.uk/pension-fund/being-a-responsible-investor/climate-risk/).

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PART 3 (a)

Understanding your role in Place Shaping

Place shaping refers to your council’s strategic leadership role in coordinating how places are governed and how they will be shaped as they evolve over time. This approach involves you, as a councillor, working with your council officers and citizens, and external partners, to co-produce a wide range of decisions, services, programmes across and related to the social, economic and environmental experience of the locality to nurture better places with enhanced services. The aim of which is to promote the general wellbeing of citizens, their local economy and their surrounding environment.

International and national trends, particularly around technological change, shifts towards outcomes (conditions for wellbeing) and the changing nature of public service provision, indicate, now more than ever, how local authorities play a key role in shaping their local places and communities (Place Shaping). In Northern Ireland, this place shaping approach is crucial for the current and future role of local government in improving local service delivery and the design of places to meet the wellbeing needs of communities. Wellbeing is about quality of life, people’s living and working conditions, the quality of services people experience, and reflects whether our society is becoming more sustainable and resilient. Drawing on Scottish vocabulary, wellbeing is about creating ‘flourishing communities’, those where neighbours look out for each other, people have pride and satisfaction with where they live and feel able to influence decisions about their area. Residents are able to access open and shared environments, and avail of quality green and blue spaces, feel safe going out and there are places and opportunities that bring people together. For further reading on wellbeing in Northern Ireland, the Carnegie UK Trust published, in September 2021, the Working Together for Wellbeing, the Report of the Northern Ireland embedding Wellbeing in Local Government Programme.

As democratically elected local representatives, councillors like you are in a unique and privileged position to make a real difference to people’s lives. One of the reasons that you became a councillor is because you care about your area. Caring about people and places requires you to appreciate – and engage with – place shaping functions in council for improving local wellbeing outcomes. A council’s Local Development Planning and Community Planning powers are two core place shaping processes, alongside it’s corporate planning responsibility for improving performance management. This place shaping approach will also play a key role in tackling climate change, as connecting these core place shaping processes and councils’ climate plans has come to the fore in the race to mitigate and adapt in response to the growing climate crisis.

Local government in Northern Ireland is undergoing an ‘improvement journey’ set within the context of rationalisation and reform of public service delivery across the devolved UK. This improvement journey requires councils to measure the impact of its duties and functions on people’s wellbeing, in terms of performance outcomes, and making arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions to achieve strategic effectiveness, better service quality and nurture innovation. In parallel, there is a shift towards achieving alignment across our public service provision through better policy integration and collaborative working, coupled with new thinking around coproduction (working collaboratively, not separately) and outcomes (focusing on impact, not inputs or outputs). NILGA, your all council body, wants to see councils and government working with local people in a relational, not a transactional, manner.

All councils are responsible for the delivery of many plans, such as the Community Plan, Local Development Plan, Corporate Plan or Performance Improvement Plan (Figure 1). These plans must be aligned and connected to each other. Ideally the overarching outcomes and priorities within the Community Plan (service delivery), Local Development Plan (spatial vision) and Corporate Plan are effectively “cascaded” across the organisation, so that everyone knows where they fit in and how they contribute to achieving these shared outcomes and priorities.

These local government planning processes should work together, not work in isolation, and Figure 1 illustrates the connection between the regional and local policy landscape.

This section of the guide will describe and explain three key planning functions (Community Planning, Local Development Planning and Performance Improvement) and related activities (such as Regeneration, Leisure, Culture/Arts and Economic & Tourism Development) in council which councillors should think of as a ‘place shaping toolkit’ and how involvement in – and making the connections between – these functions will enable you and your community to fully participate in shaping places and improving wellbeing in your council area. In doing so, the subsections below will consider each planning function, why each one is important, how each one operates, how some are statutorily connected, and what support is available for you as councillors.

![Figure 1: Strategic Landscape](Image 893x212 to 1164x686)
PART 3 (b)

Place Shaping Systems

Community Planning

Community Planning offers an innovative way to consider how public services are co-designed and co-delivered. Whilst council is the hub of this, many other government departments and agencies, as well as the business, community and voluntary sector, must play their part in community planning to work together with communities to plan and deliver better services. Community Planning identifies the priorities and sets the vision for improving the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of districts and the people who live there for achieving sustainable development.

The Local Government Act (NI) 2014 requires the council to initiate, maintain, facilitate and participate in community planning for its district. The council is the lead partner and is required to put in place a process of collaboration through a Community Planning Partnership, comprising the council, statutory partners and the wider community, including the voluntary and community sector, to develop and implement a shared vision for promoting wellbeing of its area, community cohesion and improving the quality of life of its citizens.

The structure of the community planning partnerships and the areas they cover vary – depending on the size and geography of the area, socio-demographic factors, the local economy and local political priorities – but they all have in common the need to collaborate in the delivery of community planning in their area.

The Community Plan is the overarching wellbeing plan for each council area and provides direction to other plans, initiatives and partnerships. Being co-produced between council and partners, the Community Plan is written and implemented by the Community Planning Partnership, with meaningful engagement with local communities. The high-level output of community planning – the Community Plan – is based on evidence gathered by the council and sets out the strategic vision and wellbeing outcomes for a council area. Subsequent action/delivery plans set out what will be required to achieve the vision and wellbeing outcomes, working within the opportunities and constraints of the evidence and information from the community on their aspirations for their streets, neighbourhoods and communities.

Why is Community Planning Important?

Community planning is a significant and ambitious long-term collaborative opportunity aimed at improving people’s lives, strengthening the economy and creating more resilient environments.

Community Planning is about getting the right services in the right places linked to the people who need them. Fundamentally, Community planning is about sustainable development – balancing the economic, environmental and social impacts of service needs.

Councillors are well placed to identify and understand needs, priorities and strategic actions for their area. Acting as direct links between council and citizens, councillors work with officers to inform and guide the community planning process and help to access and engage the right people. Also, Councillors can ensure that the wellbeing priorities, outcomes and delivery actions established are clear, meaningful, relevant and, most importantly, seek to address the things that matter most in the local areas.

How to do it

The community planning process involves engagement and partnership working. It is about collaboratively identifying the priorities and setting a vision for the area that will improve the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of districts and the people who live there. This can be at a very strategic level through outcomes, such as residents with good jobs, or at a programme level, such as how customers are better off when the initiative works the way it should, e.g., the percentage increase of people in a skills development programme who get and keep good-paying jobs. All improvements, no matter how big or small, eventually add up to become major improvements over time to helping to improve the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of districts.

The Department for Communities’ Guidance explains that from the outset the community planning process should set out to achieve the following:

1. A baseline of existing conditions in the council area which includes an equality/good relations analysis or enables the council to fulfil its equality scheme commitment to future monitoring requirements;
2. An integrated view of the social, economic and environmental needs of the area in the context of regional, national and European policies and strategies, and taking in to account communities and issues that extend into neighbouring council areas and jurisdictions;
3. A clear focus on delivering in the short to medium term to achieve the long-term visions.
4. Outcomes-based accountability (OBA)

Outcomes-based accountability is the approach to planning and monitoring impact that underpins the draft Programme for Government (PIG). As community plans need to relate to the PIG it is useful to be aware of OBA. OBA is a straightforward way of thinking and taking action that can be used to improve the quality of life (wellbeing) in communities at a population level as well as the individual level.

Getting Involved and Accessing Support

Each of the 11 district councils in Northern Ireland has its own committee structures for progressing community planning. As a councillor, you should use the following points to help you consider how you can get involved and access support:

1. Ensure that you are clear about your role and are able to explain it to others.
2. Get involved. Talk to your residents and organisations linked to your local area and help them become aware of community planning.
3. Councillors engaged in community planning structures are well positioned to provide a deeper understanding (provide greater context to ‘the story’) of local areas they represent, which is vital for designing impactful solutions to some of the complex issues that communities are dealing with.
4. Work in partnership with your officers and apply constructive challenge when necessary.

1 Department for Communities (July 2018) Monitoring and Reporting Guidance
as performance at a programme level. For communities (population accountability), outcomes are conditions of wellbeing, such as residents with good jobs and children ready for school. Remember, for programmes (performance accountability), outcomes are what customers are better off when the project works the way it should, such as the percentage increase of people participating in preventative health measures in a community, reducing illness and staying healthy.

There are two clear and distinct levels of impact identified above which can be illustrated as follows (and illustrated in Figure 2):

- **Population accountability (1)**: for outcomes which are the conditions of wellbeing we want for children, families and the community as a whole – for example, ‘our people are healthy and well – physically mentally and emotionally’.

- **Outcomes need long-term and inter-agency responses. Because they are complex, they cannot be measured directly, but are tracked by indicators.**

- **Performance accountability (2)**: for the work of individual agencies, programmes and projects deliver actions designed to contribute to outcomes. Performance accountability is tracked through performance measures.

  - **Performance measures** capture the quantity and quality of the work, through three measures that ask ‘How much did we do?’ ‘How well did we do it?’ and ‘is anybody better off?’

  OBA aims to address the big issues affecting districts, requiring joined-up multi-agency working and recognising that improving outcomes can take a long time to change.

Outcomes-based accountability can help community planning partnerships identify clear priorities for their area and measure how they are going to meet these. Through community planning processes, OBA allows for better alignment of regional and local priorities. It is important that community planning partnerships are clear about their priorities, can direct resources to them, and then gather the right information to assess whether their actions are making a difference in improving services and delivering better outcomes for local people.

The Department for Communities’ guidance indicates that Community Planning Partnerships, in contributing to outcomes, will need to demonstrate and report regularly on actions - what was done, how well it was done and is anyone better off (i.e., outcomes that positively change the conditions of people’s wellbeing). Regular monitoring of the interventions and actions from delivery plans needs to be carried out throughout the lifetime of the action identified. Community Planning Partnerships therefore have to define and agree key principles on monitoring and evaluating in order to report.

**Planning**

In addition to Community Planning, councils have primary responsibility for the implementation of local development planning processes, sometimes referred to land use planning or spatial planning. Irrespective of the different titles currently in use, the Planning Act (NI) 2011 establishes that planning must secure the orderly and consistent development of land, working to do so in the public interest. Since 2015, councils have responsibility for the following key planning functions:

- Local plan-making (Local Development Plan - LDP) – sometimes referred to as ‘forward planning’;
- Development management (excluding regionally significant applications);
- Planning enforcement.

The Department for Infrastructure (DfI) retains responsibility for planning legislation, regional policy, and the determination of regionally significant and called-in applications. It also provides oversight and guidance for councils and performance management functions.

Comprehensive guidance on the Planning system is available in the Northern Ireland Planning System. The Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland sets out the Department’s regional planning policies for securing the orderly and consistent development of land in Northern Ireland under the reformed two-tier planning system and outlines the core principles for this system, i.e.:

- Improving Health and Well-being;
- Creating and Enhancing Shared Space;
- Supporting Sustainable Economic Growth;
- Supporting Good Design and Positive Place Making; and
- Preserving and Improving the Built and Natural Environment.

**Why is planning important?**

Planning is about creating sustainable development and creating resilient communities. In short, planning tries to get the right things built in the right places. Planning tries to include other policy areas (e.g., social justice, housing, job creation, regeneration and climate change) into local development plans (forward planning) to better inform later decisions on planning applications. Fundamentally, planning is about balancing the economic, environmental and social impacts of new development.

Finding this balance is what makes a planner’s job challenging, yet very rewarding.

Hopefully you and your community will want to be materially involved in what planning can do for your council area. If you sit on your Council’s planning committee you will be tasked with assessing the different benefits and impacts of applications, weighing up these considerations against regional policy and the policies in your published local development plan (LDP). There is a great deal of information and guidance available to you and tools that can be utilised such as supplementary planning documents, and design guides.

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2 Department for Communities (July 2018) Community Planning Monitoring and Reporting Guidance

3 ibid

4 Further information is available at: https://www.planningni.gov.uk/index/policy_legislation.htm
Even if you don’t sit on a planning committee, you will still have a key role to play in supporting your residents to engage in the planning process. So, it is vital that you have a sound understanding of the planning system and any changes that take place.

Often, the only time residents and businesses encounter the planning system is when they, or their neighbours, want to do something to their property – at the planning application stage. This is quite late in the overall planning process, as it is the plan-making stage (Local Development Plan) that sets out how the council sees the area developing over a 10-15 year period and outlines the policies against which individual proposals will be assessed.

If you and your community really want to influence the future of the area, the local development plan is a good place to start to get engaged in how this plan will set out what you want your local area to look like and include in future.

How to do it (Land Use Planning – The Local Development Plan)

In technical terms land use / spatial / development planning is the regulation and forward management of land development in the public interest, linking with other sectors. e.g., local service delivery (community planning), regeneration and economic development, furthering sustainable development and promoting wellbeing.

The local development plan process aims to move away from a narrow land use focus towards a ‘place shaping’ approach which incorporates how other policies influence the spatial configuration of places, the interaction between people and places, and the services people can access in various places.

The Local Development Plan (LDP) is written and implemented by the council in close consultation with the community. The high-level part, the ‘Plan Strategy’, is based on evidence gathered by the council and sets out the strategic vision and objectives for the area. The plan will set out the desired policies that will guide future investment and planning decisions for working to achieve the vision.

The LDP for your council will be comprised of more than one document, including the Plan Strategy, a series of development plan documents (DPDs) and a Local Policies Plan.

The whole process involves engagement and partnership working with other council services, voluntary and community organisations, businesses, neighbouring authorities and statutory consultees such as the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, Transport NI and NI Water.

Getting Involved and Accessing Support

Each of the 11 district councils in Northern Ireland has a planning committee, which is charged with approval and oversight of the local development plan prior to full council ratification, as well as consideration of, and decision on, planning applications and enforcement of planning controls.

As a councillor, you should use the following points to help you consider how you can get involved and access support:

1. Ensure that you are clear about your role and are able to explain it to others.
2. Get involved. Talk to your residents and local businesses and help them become more aware of planning structures and its purpose.
3. Find out the timescale and status of your council’s Local Development Plan and note any emerging themes.
4. Work in partnership with your officers and apply constructive challenge when necessary.
5. Whilst complying with standards like the Code of Conduct, work with developers, other stakeholders and officers to ensure sustainable local benefits from new development.
COUNCILLOR VIEWPOINT
Cllr Robert Irvine, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council

My first venture into representative politics was during the Local Government elections in 2001, when to my surprise, and delight, I was elected to Fermanagh District Council. Since then I have remained as a representative in local politics and now sit on the re-formed Fermanagh and Omagh District Council.

Politics forms a large part of my working week, however when not engaged in the political arena, I am involved in the construction industry working in property as a quantity surveyor/project manager/property developer. Construction is a very fulfilling profession and I have been privileged to work on many projects over the years that have challenged and developed me, on a personal level. The skills and core competencies developed through this work have better equipped me for my role as a councillor, and I have developed an interest and expertise in related matters such as planning and land use.

NILGA as well as being the voice of Local Government also provide support and training modules for councillors. The recently developed ILM (Endorsed Award) NILGA Local Planning Leadership Programme has proved to be an excellent platform to enhance and widen the knowledge and skill base of participants. The interactive nature of the course allowed learning by instruction, participation and sharing of experiences by all of those involved. The content was pitched at the right level and covered the complete range of subject matter that councillors need to have knowledge of and be competent in. It highlighted the serious nature of the work and how it related to Community Planning.

I found that through participation in the course my own appreciation of, and competence in, the area of planning and related subject matter has greatly increased. For those wanting to broaden their horizons in planning it is a must do activity. I would recommend it to anyone as I have thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

Looking forward, the course has helped me to be more confident not only in planning matters, but as a councillor in general, allowing me to better fulfil the role for my community.

Wellbeing provides an outcome-based way that focuses on how people and communities are doing. Thinking about wellbeing and using outcomes provides a framework to consider the added value of services, by focussing on how services make people’s lives better and the district more prosperous and liveable. Wellbeing is understood as creating conditions for citizens to enjoy long, healthy, creative and valued lives (such as health, meaningful and rewarding work, social relationships, access to a healthy environment, tackling inequalities and promoting a sustainable economy).

As illustrated in Figure 3, extracts from the legislation framing local development planning and community planning indicate that both planning processes have shared goals of achieving sustainable development and improving wellbeing. Working towards these shared outcomes require everyone, including councillors, to consider how decisions in each planning regime – and how alignment across these planning functions – enhance social, economic and environmental wellbeing.

The Local Government (NI) Act 2014 introduced and amended the Planning Act (NI) 2011 to include, a statutory link between both planning processes – the first of its kind in the UK. This requires councils to take account of their Community Plan (service delivery) when preparing their Local Development Plan (spatial vision). The local development plan provides the spatial strategy for the community plan, flowing from the vision for the council area and its communities and linking public and private sector investment through the land use planning system. Figure 4 illustrates how both planning functions overlap to focus on creating sustainable development and improving wellbeing outcomes, with community planning being people-centred in delivering appropriate and necessary public services, and local development planning being place-based in appropriately guiding decisions on the natural and built environment. The creation of these plans require engagement with a wide range of stakeholders across government, private sector and civic society.
Successful programming of community planning and local development planning activities to ensure both processes are working towards their shared legislative goals require:

- Understanding of regional policy context and objectives (e.g., PIG outcomes, Outcomes Delivery Plan 2018-19, Regional Development Strategy 2035; etc.)
- Place-based working that adopts an asset-based approach to highlight the strengths, capacity and knowledge of all those involved in both community planning and local development planning.
- Working together (across citizens, council staff, councillors) to gain local knowledge and insight, make best use of available resources and to maximise collaborate gain.
- Nurturing alignment between vision (plans), activities (decisions/ actions) and outcomes (impact).

The need for close alignment between these two processes, as captured in current legislation, provides councils with powerful place-shaping responsibilities to deliver better public services and healthier places for people to live, work and enjoy. The places where people live and work have a significant role on people experiencing positive or negative social, economic and environmental wellbeing. However, understanding a place, and its context is not just about understanding the stakeholders but also understanding the nature of the place, its heritage, its layout, land uses, how it is connected and how people access services. This physical understanding of a place and plan is a very important part of place shaping.

**Performance Improvement**

The Legislation

Part 12 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014 sets out a general duty of improvement for local government, whereby all councils must put in place arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of functions. To meet this duty, councils are required to:

- Set and publish improvement objectives through the annual Performance Improvement Plan
- Monitor and report progress in achieving these objectives and complying with the general duty of improvement through the annual self-assessment report.

The Northern Ireland Audit Office carried out an Annual Performance Audit and Assessment to determine whether each council has complied with part 12 of the Local Government Act (NI) 20014 and is on track to deliver improvements in the future.

**Performance Improvement – Why Is It Important?**

Local government is increasingly faced with delivering services with less money. Effectively managing performance can be used as a tool to modernise and transform services, and turn the vision councillors have for their communities into tangible outcomes and benefits for all.

Robust and reliable performance management arrangements enable councillors to assess whether the council is achieving what it set out to achieve in the Corporate Plan, Performance Improvement Plan and other key plans and strategies. Accurate and meaningful performance information can assist you in making informed decisions about how things are, in order to make things better. Performance management therefore provides you with an opportunity to take positive action and translate strategic priorities into meaningful results.

Councillors are well placed to identify, understand and anticipate opportunities in Districts, acting as a direct link between the council and its citizens, work with officers to promote and participate in conversations and help to access and engage the right people. Also, councillors can ensure that the priorities and objectives set are clear, meaningful, relevant and most importantly seek to address the things that matter most in the local area. Ultimately you make the final decision regarding the strategic direction of the council.

Effective performance management can deliver significant improvement and councillors can play a role by challenging, probing and questioning how this can be achieved. Whilst your council may have the systems in place to support the process of performance management, ultimately, it is the organisational culture and the creativity and commitment of staff that will deliver the greatest improvements to the local area.

The process for Performance Improvement typically follows 3 key stages:

- **Plan**
- **Monitor**
- **Improve**

**How to do it**

Councillors have an important role to play throughout each stage of the process:

- Making sure the needs of citizens and the challenges they face are taken into consideration when developing the council’s policies, plans and strategies.
- Helping to identify clear, meaningful and relevant priority areas, where performance should be improved.
- Using performance information to monitor, review and scrutinise progress in delivering key plans and strategies, challenging areas of under-performance and recognising where performance is better than anticipated.
- Comparing performance, identifying good practice and learning from others.
- Making key decisions in response to what the performance information is highlighting. This might include addressing under-performance by taking corrective action through revising plans, re-allocating resources and identifying improvement activity that will have a positive impact on local services, local areas and local communities.
- Integrating learning and improvement into a continuous cycle of performance management, using the information to plan ahead and deliver efficient and effective services that meet the needs of local communities.

**Getting Involved and Accessing Support**

Many councillors sit on council committees which are responsible for managing and overseeing the performance of specific Directorates within each council and the respective services and

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7 Extract from Dr Gavan Rafferty’s presentation, Local Development Planning, Community Planning and Regeneration, part of NILGA’s Local Planning Programme for Elected Members (May 2018).
8 The following points are derived from Dr Gavan Rafferty’s presentation, Local Development Planning, Community Planning and Regeneration, part of NILGA’s Local Planning Programme for Elected Members (May 2018).
programmes of work. As a councillor you will work with officers to ensure efficient and effective delivery of these services / programmes and to identify where improvements need to be made.

**Questions to Ask when reviewing performance**

- Why is performance at the current level?
- Are we achieving our targets and meeting priorities?
- What are the challenges in achieving X level of performance?
- What will happen if we don’t meet our targets?
- How does our performance compare with others and over time?
- How can we make sure things get better?
- How can performance be improved?
- What can we learn from this?
- What is the impact on the citizen?

By asking these questions, councillors will send out a clear signal that performance and improvement are being taken seriously at the highest level of the organisation.

In addition to this, each council has some form of a Scrutiny Committee, that is charged specifically with monitoring; assessing; and reviewing council's performance in line with the council's annual Performance Improvement Plan.

Councillors act as a bridge between the council and the community, balancing many different roles and experiences. Your role as a council member offers you the opportunity to contribute to the decision-making process. You can use your experience to help build high performing organisations that are well led, well organised with a can-do culture and focussed on making life better for local communities.

**PART 3 (c)**

**Place Shaping Activities**

**Regeneration**

Regeneration, as defined in the Department for Communities framework, is described as: ‘activities that reverse the economic, social and physical decline in areas where market forces will not do this without the support of government’.

Economic – strengthen the local economy and create wealth by tackling worklessness and promoting job creation. It also aims to change behaviour, encouraging and supporting people to become more entrepreneurial.

Social – improving conditions for communities and neighbourhoods through creating safer environments and better co-ordinating public services.

Physical – improving the physical fabric of buildings and the public realm to create attractive, safe and sustainable places in which to live, work and visit.

Regeneration powers were to formally transfer to councils in 2015. However, the Department still retains regeneration powers. Councils are already materially involved in regeneration in their districts, and their existing activity can be enhanced through use of the General Power of Competence – a legislative power to assist economic and infrastructure development – and related legislation. Like Community Planning and Local Development Planning, regeneration is a key element of place shaping, so to maximise impact it is important that regeneration activities, which councils are involved in, are aligned to outcomes in other plans (e.g. Community Plan and Local Development Plan).

It is intended, however, that if the transfer of regeneration powers takes place, the overall suite of complementary community planning, land use and regeneration powers will be combined more effectively to enhance the impact councils can have in shaping, attracting and retaining investment for their areas, and consequently improving local environmental, economic and social wellbeing, as is the case in England, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland.

**Enterprise and Local Economic Development**

Economic development is a statutory role for councils, since April 2015. In practice, councils have been actively encouraging economic development through funding and support programmes for business since the 1990s.

**Why is Enterprise & Local Economic Development important?**

Councils face a number of economic challenges, including low levels of economic activity, globalisation and global trends, skills issues and low levels of investment in transport and telecoms infrastructure. These issues are addressed through Community Plans, Economic Development Strategies and Local Development Plans.

**How to do it**

Councils play a vital role in supporting local economies and driving growth, for example by:

- Developing economic development & tourism strategies in collaboration with key local stakeholders
- Supporting growth and investment in new and existing businesses

In scrutinising whether or not the council’s Performance Improvement Objectives are being achieved, the Scrutiny Committee Members may consider the following:

1. Is improvement demonstrated? Have indicators /milestones /targets been achieved?
2. Where is the evidence to demonstrate the improvement for year-end reports over previous quarter?
3. How does performance compare with the previous period?
4. If performance has fallen over 2 consecutive periods, what intervention has been made to get the objective back on track?
5. What internal governance is in place to ensure delivery of the objectives?

9 Department for Social Development (2013) Urban Regeneration and Community Development Policy Framework
Establishing partnerships with local, national and international investors

Enhancing the quality of life for their communities and making local areas more attractive to shoppers and business investment

Collaborating with central government to improve infrastructure, such as transport and broadband services

Working with colleges & training providers to ensure that local people have the skills that they and local businesses need

Some of the initiatives councils are currently responsible for include:

- the Go for It Programme (which is delivered by all 11 councils and managed centrally by Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council),
- business support
- youth entrepreneurship,
- social enterprise development,
- female entrepreneurship,
- small-scale tourism accommodation development

Councillors offer a range of programmes to help businesses on finance, marketing & sales, strategic planning, digital & social media, HR issues, IP & legal issues, research & development and innovation. Since the 1990s, councils have received EU funding to support the creation of new sustainable jobs in local businesses, to assist businesses to become more competitive in indigenous and export markets and to stimulate investment in rural areas. Councils and businesses have been reliant on this funding, therefore how it is replaced will be a matter for negotiation with UK government.

PART 3 (d)

City and Growth Deals

City & Growth Deals

The NI Executive and the UK government have committed £1.2bn capital funding to four City and Growth Deals: Belfast Region City Deal (£700m); Derry City and Strabane City Deal (£210m); Causeway Coast and Glens Growth Deal (£72m), and Mid South West Region Growth Deal (£252m). This once in a generation package will also be complemented by private sector and other sources of funding.

Each of the deals aims to respond to the unique challenges in the area it covers and generate new economic opportunities to drive inclusive growth. More information on the projects within each deal can be found at:

- Belfast Region City Deal
- Derry City and Strabane City Deal
- Invest Causeway
- Mid South West

In conclusion, Place Shaping is crucial, initially complex subject, but the social, economic and environmental benefits are clear when it all comes together. NILGA continues to work with local and central government to ensure that powers and resources devolved to councils are designed and delivered in a way that has local places and local people at the centre.
What is the Programme for Government?
The Northern Ireland (NI) Executive is bringing forward an Outcomes-based Programme for Government (PfG) that is focused on achieving outcomes of societal wellbeing and delivering real and positive change in people’s lives. The PfG, which is currently in draft form, builds on the outcomes-based approach (OBA) that has defined strategic planning across the public sector since 2016.

The draft Framework contains nine strategic Outcomes which, taken together, will set a clear direction of travel for the NI Executive and provide a vision for the future of all citizens.

Background
The draft Outcomes Framework is effectively the third version of the draft PfG first published in 2016. Over the course of these iterations, the number and phrasing of the outcomes has changed. The draft PfG Framework was published for consultation in May 2016, and contained 14 outcomes. These 14 outcomes were retained in the full PfG consultation, then published in October 2016. After the political hiatus of the NI Assembly and the Executive in January 2017, the Civil Service published an ‘Outcomes Delivery Plan’ in June 2018. This Plan aimed to ensure that Executive business was ‘discharged as effectively as possible and in a coordinated manner that gives effect to the direction set previously by ministers’.

The Outcomes Delivery Plan therefore appears to represent the PfG as it stood when the Executive was suspended in 2017. In the Plan, the number of outcomes was reduced from 14 to 9.

Since the consultation was published, the Assembly has again been suspended (March 2022) and is inoperative at the time of writing.

There is a lack of detail in the draft Outcomes Framework beyond the nine proposed outcomes. For each of its nine outcomes, the Framework provides some narrative detail of what the outcome means, ‘Key Priority Areas’ which fall within that outcome and a list of strategies which could contribute to these key priority areas. Very little detail beyond this is provided.

Why is the PfG important?
Delivering for Citizens
The NI Executive is committed to developing a long-term, strategic Programme for Government, based on a shared and strategic vision for the future which aims to improve wellbeing for all. It is hoped that this new Programme for Government will bring a new focus to deliver lasting, real and positive change in people’s lives.

It is intended to build on the Outcomes-based approach that has defined strategic planning across the public sector since 2016, and to reflect the messages contained in the New Decade New Approach agreement (January 2020).
The Draft Outcomes Framework consultation document (Jan 2021) presented a picture of the kind of society aspired to - “An inclusive society in which people of all ages and backgrounds are respected and cared for and in which we all prosper. A society which has no barriers to prevent people from living fulfilling lives. The Outcomes will apply equally to everyone, and no one is excluded.”

**Draft Outcomes Framework: The Outcomes**

Outcomes are statements of societal wellbeing which, taken together, are intended to capture the range of things that experience and research suggest matter most to people:-

- Our children and young people have the best start in life,
- We live and work sustainably – protecting the environment,
- We have an equal and inclusive society where everyone is valued and treated with respect,
- We all enjoy long, healthy active lives,
- Everyone can reach their potential,
- Our economy is globally competitive, regionally balanced and carbon-neutral,
- Everyone feels safe – we all respect the law and each other,
- We have a caring society that supports people throughout their lives, and
- People want to live, work and visit here.

It is intended that the Programme for Government will be underpinned by a budget and supported by key Executive strategies including an investment strategy, an economic strategy and an anti-poverty strategy aimed at building a strong and prosperous society by tackling disadvantage and achieving sustainable economic growth.

**Working together**

The key not only to the development of the new Outcomes-based PIG, but also its implementation and delivery, will be government’s collaboration and teamwork with key stakeholders and partners, including councils.

The Outcomes-based approach should ensure that departments think and work outside of their boundaries. They create, or ‘co-design’ and ‘co-produce’, strategies and plans that cut across departments and sectors to tackle societal problems and improve wellbeing for all.

There is a fundamental link between the outcomes in the Programme for Government, and council Community Plans, which are also designed using an outcomes based approach.

The Executive repeatedly defines the outcomes as ‘the critical first step in the development process’, and states that: ‘It is crucially important to get the wording of the Outcomes right as they will provide the starting point for future long-term strategic policy planning by the Executive and act as a touchstone for its strategies and actions moving forward.’

It is hoped that further detail will follow, potentially in further consultation/s on a full PIG, its delivery plans and its indicators, once the NI Assembly becomes active again.

**How to do/respond to it (as a Councillor)?**

The Programme for Government is what will drive any changes to laws, the delivery of public services and investment in future projects. It is the starting point for a real and positive transformation, and it is important that you as a councillor, are aware of this, and are actively engaged, through your council in engaging in the PIG development and implementation processes.

You have an important role in sharing your priorities, your knowledge and experience, working within your council, your community planning partnership and with government to create and innovate, to help build and sustain a better society and a healthy, clean environment for everyone.

It was evident during 2020-2023, in what was the worst global health pandemic in 100 years, that greater and more positive collaboration emerged between government and its partners, particularly local councils. There has been a greater realisation of the things that are most important in life: people’s health and happiness. There has been a greater willingness to work in new and innovative ways, harnessing technologies and using them to best advantage to ensure business continuity and to find more efficient ways of working. In responding to the pandemic, we have learned a great deal about working in partnership with others - not just central and local government, but with other sectors too.

**Getting involved and accessing support**

At the time of writing, work on further development of the Programme for Government is in a hiatus, and the Budget for Northern Ireland for 2023-2024 was taken forward by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland through the Houses of Parliament in Westminster.

Should the NI Assembly return and the NI Executive be reformed, activity will recommence on this area of work. As a key partner in government, councils supported by NILGA, will be materially involved in influencing the Programme for Government as it develops further and is implemented.
PART 4 (b)  
Climate Action and Green Growth

Climate Action
This section will consider:
- What is Climate Change?
- Why is it important for councils/councillors?
- How should councils take Climate Action?
- Accessing Support
- NI Government and Climate Action: The Green Growth Strategy

What is Climate Change?
Climate change is the long-term shift in average weather patterns across the world. Humans have been increasing greenhouse gas emissions since the mid-1800s, causing average global temperatures to rise by around 1.1°C. While natural climate cycles of the past have included weather extremes, this increase in temperature means that we are seeing more intense and frequent impacts. This is already happening, and the impacts will continue to worsen in the coming decades.

Even if we stop all greenhouse gas emissions immediately, we have now locked in some unavoidable changes, even in the best-case scenario. Climate change makes existing risks worse, so we are already starting to feel these effects.

Mitigation and Adaptation
Climate Action is approached in two key ways:
1. Climate Mitigation - reducing greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere to limit global temperatures increases.
2. Climate Adaptation - understanding the impacts of climate change in NI, and taking steps to prepare our society, the economy and the environment.

As a result of this warming, the projected trend is that Northern Ireland will experience warmer, wetter winters and hotter, drier summers than we have done in the past. However, weather from year to year is variable, so cold snaps, drier winters and wet summers will still occur. Therefore, we need to prepare for a much greater range of weather extremes.

Why is it important for councils?
Extreme weather events are already becoming more intense and frequent, and this trend is expected to continue for years to come. Some of these extreme events include: increased flooding, sea level rise, increased frequency of heatwaves, and more intense storms. These have a significant impact on council assets and services as well as the communities they represent.

How will the climate change?
The climate stripes (Figure 2) below show how much Northern Ireland has warmed since 1884 by showing through colour intensity how much each year was above or below average temperature.

This section will consider:
- What is Climate Change?
- Why is it important for councils/councillors?
- How should councils take Climate Action?
- Accessing Support
- NI Government and Climate Action: The Green Growth Strategy

Figure 1: The balance of Mitigation and Adaptation.

Figure 2: Climate stripes for NI showing a clear pattern of increasingly warming years which is set to continue.

Why is this important for councillors?
As a councillor, you have an influential role and can lead by example. All decision-making should consider how you can help to achieve the statutory requirements for climate action relevant to local councils.

Statutory Requirements
Additionally, there are a number of legislative requirements for climate action relevant to local councils.

The Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland)² sets out:
- Targets for net-zero greenhouse gases by 2050. These legally binding targets set out a clear incentive for taking climate action and councils will need to deliver as part of government plans
- That certain public bodies, including councils, will be required to report on climate change plans and actions
- Government must develop a Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme (NICCAP) on a five-yearly basis which outlines the approach for addressing the risks of climate change as set out in the UK Climate Change Risk Assessment. In the current NICCAP (which was developed under the requirements of the UK Climate Act (2008)³), SOLACE NI and NILGA agreed an ambition for Local councils to develop climate adaptation plans by 2024.

How should councils take Climate Action?
Climate action must take place through a coordinated and cohesive approach. Delivering sustained climate action involves helping people identify their role, through building understanding and skills, putting in place the right incentives and tools, prioritising actions for the short and medium term, and developing methods for tracking progress. It is vital that we learn from each other and use best practices to avoid falling short of targets.

Developing Climate Action Plans
Climate action includes creating Climate Action Plans which strategically address both mitigation and adaptation. This can involve:
1. Mitigation: reporting on the % of greenhouse gas reduction, the % change in levels of energy efficiency, and the carbon accounting for projects.
2. Adaptation: developing adaptation actions based on a good understanding of vulnerability to the risks to climate change and monitoring the progress of actions within these plans.

Additional key climate actions include:
- having internal climate change champions and trained staff
- identifying and integrating climate actions into policies and decision-making
- establishing a green procurement strategy

1 https://showyourstripes.info/europe/unitedkingdom/northernireland
• monitoring consultations received on climate action plans
• promoting a fair and just transition, including empowering local communities to engage in a vision for their future.

Getting involved and accessing support
Further information is available on:
• Climate Northern Ireland advice and support service: https://climatenorthernireland.org.uk
• How an organisation can understand and prepare for climate risks: ‘NIAdapts’ is the Climate NI climate adaptation planning toolkit: https://www.niadapts.org.uk
• Carbon literacy training for councillors: https://climatenorthernireland.org.uk/opportunities/climate-emergency-training-for-ni-local-authorities-councillors
• How NI Government, Local Government and Civil Society are adapting to climate change: https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/northern-ireland-climate-changeadaptation-programme
• Support is also available for councils from Sustainable Northern Ireland, through the work of the Sustainable Development Forum. https://www.sustainableni.org/sustainabledevelopment-forum

Additionally, Sustainable NI supports the Assembly All Party Group on Climate Action, which is comprised of MLAs and councillors from each council. https://www.sustainableni.org/allparty-group-climate-action

NI Government and Climate Action: The Green Growth Strategy
The UK has a net-zero emissions by 2050 target, to which the Climate (NI) Act 2022 has aligned. In February 2020, the NI Assembly declared a climate emergency.

Northern Ireland must therefore take action to tackle climate and environmental challenges. The Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) is leading the development of the Green Growth Strategy on behalf of the Northern Ireland Executive. Green Growth presents a tremendous opportunity which can help us to rebuild our economy following the Covid-19 crisis. We have the potential for a green revolution right here, right now in Northern Ireland.

The Green Growth Strategy is the Northern Ireland Executive’s multi-decade strategy, balancing climate, environment and the economy in Northern Ireland. It sets out the long-term vision for tackling the climate crisis in the right way.

What is Green Growth?
Green Growth means using the move from a high to a low greenhouse gas emissions economy to improve people’s quality of life through green jobs and a clean environment. Green Growth means recognising and accepting the impact we have on our planet and doing something about it.

Green Growth is an opportunity to kick-start Northern Ireland’s recovery following the Covid-19 crisis while ensuring that the environment around us continues to provide the resources on which we all rely.

The focus of Green Growth is ensuring that our natural assets can deliver their full economic potential on a sustainable basis. Our climate and environment affect all of us and we all need to take individual responsibility and consider how our own actions impact the environment.

Climate Action is central to Green Growth
One of the key commitments of the Green Growth Strategy is to develop Northern Ireland’s first Climate Action Plan. The Climate Action Plan will set out how government intends to achieve the carbon budget for the Climate Action Plan period and the overall emissions reduction targets as stated in the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022.

This strategy recognises the need for adaptation and mitigation measures to work together to address both the causes and potential impacts of climate change.

DAERA is leading on the development of Northern Ireland’s first Climate Action Plan which will cover the period 2023 to 2027. The main function of the Climate Action Plan is to deliver upon the relevant ‘carbon budget’ which is the maximum amount of permitted emissions in a 5 year period, as well as outline how the longer term emission reduction targets will be achieved. The Act requires this first Climate Action Plan to be published before the end of 2023.

5 ‘Green jobs’ means developing a low carbon, skilled workforce with more people working in jobs that contribute to climate action and a clean environment. We should support those with barriers to work to upskill and move towards the green economy through an inclusive skills strategy.
6 Our natural environment is one of our most important assets. This contributes to our prosperity and well-being in numerous ways. It provides the essential services for our life and work, from the air we breathe, the food we eat and the water we drink, to the resources for our infrastructure and built environment. Clean environment means clear air and water; more sustainable land use; improved habitats and greater biodiversity.
PART 4 (c)

Emergency Planning and Community Resilience

Civil Contingencies: Information for Councillors

What is an Emergency?

“Any event (happening with or without warning) causing or threatening death or injury, damage to property or the environment or disruption to the community, which because the scale of its effects cannot be dealt with by the emergency services and public service providers as part of their day to day activities.” (Guide to Emergency Planning Arrangements in Northern Ireland, 2011)

What Role does the council Play in an Emergency? The role of council in an emergency is to:

• Provide support for the emergency services and/ or those engaged in response and link with these agencies throughout the emergency
• Provide services such as sandbag distribution, clean-up operations, specialist staff and/or equipment and manpower, where requested
• Provide council building(s) where requested including assistance in the provision of suitable accommodation for an emergency support centre
• Maintain normal council services at an appropriate level commensurate with circumstances, despite disruption and the possible redeployment of staff
• Co-ordinate the actions of public services in recovery from the emergency and restoring the local community to normal.

Role of Councillors in Emergency Situations

Councillors can provide a useful and effective conduit for the flow of information between the council’s Emergency Management Team, the emergency services and the community affected by the emergency. Members will often be aware of vulnerabilities within their own community and they will also be aware of community strengths and resources. This will assist in facilitating accurate and timely dissemination of information and provide an essential information source.

On discovering a potential emergency: contact emergency services. Emergency numbers are also provided for relevant agencies. Some hotlines have been provided for the use of councillors only.

NI Housing Executive
03448 920 901

Flooding incident line
0300 2000 100 (Non emergency, 24 hour line)

Figure 1: The Elements of Civil Contingencies illustrating the six activities required to accomplish resilience.

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timely dissemination of information and provide an
essential information source.

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been provided for the use of councillors only.

NI Housing Executive
03448 920 901

Flooding incident line
0300 2000 100 (Non emergency, 24 hour line)

NI Electricity Networks
0808 100 2969 (Hotline for councillors)
03457 643 643 (Customer Hotline)

Gas Emergency
0800 022 001 (Gas smell)

DfI Roads
0300 200 7894

Useful Online Facilities

MET Office
Sign up to receive Met Office weather alerts
https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/about-us/guide-toemails

BT
0800 587 7561 (Hotline for councillors)
or 0330 123 0988

Traffic Watch NI
Keep up to date with the latest traffic information:
https://trafficwatchni.com/twni/

NI Water Waterline
0345 300 6461 (Hotline for councillors)

NIE Networks
Check for up to date power outage information
in your area by visiting:
https://powercheck.nienetworks.co.uk
03457 440 088 (Customer Hotline)

NI Direct
You can report issues such as potholes, surface
water flooding, or fallen trees online via the NI Direct
website. Search ‘report a fault’.
https://www nidirect.gov.uk

When council is involved in an emergency situation: The Chief Executive will ensure that a
channel of communication is set up to provide regular updates to all councillors.

Media enquiries: A council Communications Officer will assist councillors in responding to media requests. In the immediate aftermath of an emergency, communication with the media will normally be led by the PSNI Director of Press and Public Relations. Only the PSNI should release information on casualties and deceased.

During an Emergency

• Be aware of the role of councillors as outlined within the council’s Emergency Plan
• Attempt to contact constituents in your area who are affected. This should be in person where possible as the visible presence of councillors can bring assurance to people who are affected
• Liaise as appropriate with your own party, MLAs, Executive Ministers and MPs to gain information, to inform or to lobby for support
• Remember that work of other agencies may be sensitive during an emergency and that this may be undertaken in the council’s Emergency Management Room
• Where possible, when liaising with Emergency Services, Utility companies and Lead Government Agencies use dedicated phone lines (listed on this leaflet)
• Be aware of the sensitivities of the emergency, especially if attending council premises which are involved in the emergency, along with MLAs or other officials (for e.g a community or leisure centre where people are sheltering). Councillors will be aware that such visits can be accompanied by television cameras and this may impinge on the sensitive and confidential nature of an emergency response, and the occupants may be distressed and extremely vulnerable. Councillors are advised to seek the support of the Chief Executive or Head of Communications to facilitate such visits.
Dealing with the Media

• In emergencies the opportunity may arise for councillors to speak to the media. Councillors will be aware that objective, clear, factual information is essential and that misinformation can greatly exacerbate / confuse any emergency situation.

• When preparing for an interview in an emergency situation, councillors are encouraged to contact the Head of Communications or the Chief Executive for up-to-date information. Councillors are asked to work closely with the Chief Executive, and the Head of Communications to ensure that public messages are accurate, up-to-date and in the public interest.

• When an emergency is serious it is useful to have a single spokesperson. The civic leadership role of the Mayor/Chairperson can most readily be used. In other cases where technical expertise is required, a council Director may act as emergency spokesperson.

PART 4 (d)

Cybersecurity and Online Scams

What is Cybersecurity?
Cyber security focuses on protecting computer systems from unauthorised access or being otherwise damaged or made inaccessible. Information security is a broader category that protects all information assets, whether in hard copy or digital form. Cyber security is at the epicentre of privacy and trust in the global digitalised society. A more fulsome guide to cybersecurity for councillors is available HERE.

Why is it important for councils?
Legal Requirement, with severe consequences (from ITgovernance.co.uk)

The GDPR and DPA 2018 require organisations, including councils, to implement appropriate security measures to protect personal data. Otherwise, you risk substantial fines. Cyber security is a critical business issue for every organisation.

Challenges - Mitigating the cyber security risks facing a council can be challenging. This is especially true if your council has moved to remote or hybrid working and has less control over employees’ behaviour and device security. An effective approach must encompass your entire IT infrastructure and be based on regular risk assessments.

Consequences - Cyber attacks can cost organisations billions of pounds and cause severe damage. Impacted organisations stand to lose sensitive data and face fines and reputational damage. (See Hackney Case Study – local.gov.uk)

How to respond to it?
Effective cyber security management must come from the top of the organisation. A robust cyber security culture, reinforced by regular training, will ensure that every councillor/employee recognises cyber security as their responsibility. Good security and effective working practices must go hand in hand.

Getting involved and accessing support

Preventing an attack requires:

Leadership
• Are your chief executive and other members aware of the issues of cyber security in your council?
• Who has lead responsibility for cyber security? Which councillor? Which officer?

UK local authorities experience 10,000 attacks per day

There is a 14% year on year increase in the number of attacks

There have been more than 2 million incidents
Governance

- Is cyber security featured on your risk register?
- Is cyber security part of your civil contingency plans?
- Which, if any, committee oversees cyber security activity and policy?
- What data and information standards and protocols are in place?

Technology and Information

- Does your council have the technical capability – both tools and staff – and processes in place to manage an attack? And is this tested regularly?
- Is there a pre-agreed prioritisation of which systems to restore or sustain? (E.g. frontline customer service hubs, etc.)
- How is technical information on the threat or attack shared into national, regional and local systems?

Partnerships

- Is there a Warning, Advice and Reporting Point (WARP) in the region and is your council a member of it?

A WARP (Warning, Advice and Reporting Point) is a community-based service where members can receive and share up-to-date advice on information security threats, incidents and solutions.

A WARP brings together Information Security, Assurance and Governance practitioners on a regional, sub-regional or partnership basis. The groups meet to exchange views, listen to guest speakers, undertake training or exercises and to exchange incident information. All meetings are conducted on a ‘Chatham House Rule’ basis, using a traffic light protocol when discussing threats and incidents. The groups are built and operate on trust.

Response and recovery in the event of an attack requires:

Leadership

- Who has lead responsibility for overseeing the response, continuity and recovery? Which councillor? Which officer?
- Is there a designated lead spokesperson to communicate with staff and the public?

Governance

- Are business continuity plans in place? How regularly are these reviewed?
- Is there an agreed communications plan?
- Are all plans accessible and comprehensive in the event of an attack? For e.g., hard copies with clear guidance.

CASE STUDY
Hackney London Borough Council (from local.gov.uk)

Hackney London Borough Council fell victim to a serious and sophisticated cyber attack in October 2020. The incident meant that many of their systems were unavailable, such as those that permitted residents to pay rent, council tax and to access housing benefit payments.

The attack was devastating and was part of a wider, growing trend of similar attacks on large organisations across the UK and worldwide. It came at the time when the council was already grappling with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The council immediately began working with the NCSC, who supported the investigation into the attack. They also worked alongside the National Crime Agency (NCA) and Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO). The council’s Audit Committee received a number of updates on the attack and recovery, and also benefited from an independent audit carried out in order to assess the background to the attack, how it happened and from there, how they can improve their processes and systems going forward.

Most of Hackney council’s services were up and running again around one year later, recovery efforts in that time involved: writing to thousands of customers affected by council Tax service requests, working through backlogs in some other services, in particular Business Rates, benefits, housing waiting lists and Planning and making corrections to bills.

Pertaining to why this happened, the council advised that they had made significant progress in moving their ICT systems to industry leading cloud services, but many of their key systems had not yet migrated to the cloud and were impacted by the attackers. The council has advised other local authorities to perhaps consider migrating to ‘modern, cloud-based technologies’ to help them reduce cyber risks, highlighting the rapid increase in cyber threats. Whilst the risks of moving to the Cloud also require consideration, a cloud-based approach can often have benefits.

Hackney council are keen for others to learn from their experience and emphasised the importance of having a robust cyber security framework and response and recovery plan. They have worked hard since the attack to ensure that officers and members have sufficient knowledge and relevant training in relation to cybercrime and how it can be minimised.

The Audit Committee and Overview and Scrutiny Committee played a crucial part in response and recovery, making sure that there was member level scrutiny and that they had regular oversight of the matter.

Northern Ireland WARP
Main contact: Info@nicybersecuritycentre.gov.uk
Secondary contact: Mark Brett

The four pillars of cyber security
Governance | Assurance | Technology | Culture
It is important that the council makes sure people in the organisation only have the access rights they need. It should have a ‘zero trust mindset’ when it comes to problem spotting – assume a breach has occurred.

The council must ensure cybersecurity is embedded into the culture of your council. Only an effective combination of people, process and technology can guard against organisational cyber attacks.

**Protecting the Public from online scams**

Scams are happening more and more through the internet and email. You are more likely to fall victim to fraud or cyber offences above any other crime. As a councillor, people are likely to approach you for help if they fall prey to a scam, so it’s important to be aware of the various kinds of scam in operation.

**Online scams through emails and websites**

There are many different types of online scams such as bogus ‘free trial’ offers, bogus emails, counterfeit goods. Below are some of the most common:

**Copycat government websites**

Some scams involve websites designed to look like official government websites such as HMRC. They charge you a fee to process or renew official documents like passports or visas, which you can do yourself for free or cheaper. Sometimes a fee is charged but the application is not processed at all.

**Dating and romance scams**

Scammers use dating websites, social networks and chat rooms to get personal details or money from people. Romance scammers don’t prey on a specific gender, sexuality, race or age.

**Phishing emails**

A common trick scammers use is to send you a fake email pretending to be from your bank or another organisation you trust like HMRC or PayPal. This email will ask you to visit a website and log in with your account details. The site looks just like your bank’s website but is really a fake site set up by criminals to get your details.

**Holiday scams**

This is where scammers target online holiday booking and accommodation sites to scam unsuspecting customers into paying for accommodation that is not available or doesn’t exist. Often the victim only becomes aware they have been scammed when they arrive at their accommodation or destination and find no booking has been made.

**Mandate fraud**

This happens where two people are in email correspondence and a scammer hacks an account, creates a very similar duplicate and inserts bank account details and asks for payment, resulting in the scammer getting the money.

**Economic Importance:**

**Cyber Security in Northern Ireland**

Firms in the region deliver expertise globally, on advanced persistent threats, to national security, government, health, automotive, critical infrastructure, capital markets, legal, ecommerce, e-learning and child safety online.

The region is also a hotspot for international cyber security firms, including leaders such as Proofpoint, IBM Security, Rapid7, Imperva, Anomali, Contrast Security and Cygilant. Northern Ireland is an established location for cyber security development by leading international firms such as Allstate, Aflac and Citi.

Northern Ireland is home to the Centre for Secure Technologies (CSIT) at Queen’s University Belfast. CSIT is the UK’s Innovation and Knowledge Centre (iKc) for cyber security and a dynamic motor for research and commercial spin-outs.

The region’s engineering excellence is internationally recognised and demonstrated in the growing ecosystem of locally headquartered cyber security firms offering solutions to a global client base.
PART 4 (e)

‘Cost of Living’ Crisis

What is the ‘Cost of Living Crisis’?
People on the lowest incomes – both in and out of work – have endured a decade of austerity, with freezes and cuts to social security benefits and in-work support; hollowing out support, undermining resilience and ability to cope with adversity. After two years of facing the challenges posed by a global pandemic, they now find themselves disproportionately affected by the current cost of living crisis, crushing energy bills and faced with the stark choice of going cold or hungry to make ends meet.

People in Northern Ireland are being impacted by rising costs, at a time when they already have the lowest gross weekly income compared to the UK average. Affordability permeates all aspects of consumer experience, with people making difficult financial decisions and sacrifices with their food shopping behaviours. Low-income families are facing severe challenges, with uplifts to benefits not maintaining alignment to inflation.

Why is it important?
The cost of living crisis requires an unprecedented response to protect the most vulnerable within society. Rising food and energy prices are already driving people into poverty and inflation rate increases are increasing mortgage repayments for many.

Support for people
At national level, a number of measures were put in place, including support for energy bills, payments to those on low income / disability benefits and pensioners.

The Northern Ireland Executive provides advice and guidance for those in need of help with the cost of living crisis on its website: Cost of Living nidirect. At the time of writing there is a great deal of uncertainty as to how much, if any, government financial support will be available for the 2023-24 financial year and beyond.

How are councils responding?
It is important to note that councils have very limited statutory functions in assisting with the cost of living crisis and nor are they funded to do so. However, councils are working across sectors providing leadership and co-ordination within their areas to deliver a range of initiatives in response to the crisis.

Local Government Resources
Councils are facing extremely challenging financial constraints, with energy & supplies costs and rising employee costs limiting councils’ capacity to support non-statutory programmes. With approximately 80% of councils’ income coming from the District Rate, this financial pressure means that councils have limited options under the current NI Local Government financial regime, other than to pass these on to the public as rates increases.

It is important to note that there is no dedicated funding package for councils to deliver against the cost of living crisis.

Community Support Programme
The Community Support Programme supports the provision of community centres, local advice services, resource centres, community group grants and the employment of community support staff in councils. At the time of writing, the Department for Communities has offered flexibility within the Community Support Programme to support the unprecedented need arising from the crisis and councils are adapting their offering to meet local needs as far as possible.

How is local government pressing for change?
NILGA and SOLACE NI are working together to lobby for change, but progress is difficult due to the lack of an Executive at Stormont. Local government is working closely with Department for Communities who take the lead on most key issues. Details of the key issues and asks are included at nilga-ni-local-government-response-to-cost-of-living-crisis.pdf

The Impact of the ‘Cost of Living’ Crisis on charities and community groups
Charities and community groups have been especially hard hit by the sharp rise in the cost of living. Many have experienced an increased demand for their services. At the same time, their organisations are facing rising costs. The combination of higher energy bills pressure on staff costs has been so acute that some organisations are fearful about their long-term future.

These organisations often provide lifeline services to the most vulnerable people in society - those experiencing hunger, homelessness, unemployment, debt problems, mental health problems, and a variety of other challenges.

Many of these organisations relied on government funding and some have faced funding cuts. It has become harder to raise donations as donors tighten their belts. With more people working from home, raising funds this way has become harder because workers are less likely to get together to raise money for charity, and there have been fewer people in town and city centres to approach for support.

NICVA carried out surveys in July 2022 and early in 2023.

According to a 2023 NICVA survey, the biggest concerns facing the voluntary and community sector were the increasing cost of fuel and energy; wellbeing of staff/volunteers and the potential increasing of staff wages.

All of this has a knock-on effect on day-to-day operations and service delivery, affecting communities across Northern Ireland. For e.g., organisations providing mental health services are experiencing an increase in demand for their counselling services, from clients experiencing huge anxiety worrying about how they are going to...
pay their bills. Other organisations are reporting a decrease in demand for services due to competition with other increased living costs, as people don’t have the money to pay for some services. Several organisations are struggling with basic running costs, falling memberships and the closure of membership groups due to members not being able to afford the price of membership.

Funding from Government departments has not increased in line with inflation. At the time of writing there is no certainty whatsoever in relation to funding for the 2023-24 year, with 1700 jobs at risk.

Why is this important for Councillors?
In the current context, with diminishing government funding, and no clarity on long term funding arrangements for the Voluntary and Community Sector, many organisations will turn to councils to seek financial assistance. This will add pressure on councils and their members, in what is an already financially difficult time.

Councils are under increasing pressure to act in the absence of regional initiatives – they want to react locally and are ready to work collaboratively to do this, however they are constrained financially and legislatively in the scope of what they can do. While they may be able to support measures in the short term, this simply leaves a cliff edge when funding runs out and it often means that funding is diverted away from other programmes.

Accessing Support
Key organisations that councillors are likely to come into contact with when trying to assist constituents include:

Advice NI
Advice NI is the independent advice network, whose members offer free, independent, high quality advice on issues such as: Benefits, Debt, Housing, Employment, Disability, Community Care, Consumer issues, Benefits, Personal and Business Debt, EU Settlement Scheme, Tax Credits and other HMRC services.

Advice NI will have up-to-date information on their website www.adviceni.net/cost-of-living about support available for those experiencing hardship. Advice NI can help address the crisis someone is experiencing and provide support to maximise income, help navigate the benefits system, and identify any additional grants entitlements. The advisers can also provide specialist debt and budgeting advice to people calling the line. If needed, they’ll issue someone with a voucher so they can get an emergency food parcel from their local food bank.

Freephone advice helpline: 0800 915 4604
Email for advice: advice@adviceni.net
For non-advice-related queries, email: comms@adviceni.net

National Energy Action (NEA)
NEA is the national fuel poverty and energy efficiency charity, working to ensure that everyone is warm and safe at home. If someone you know can’t afford to heat their home then NEA can help, offering a range of advice and support both directly to people in need, and via frontline workers and other intermediaries.

Call 0800 304 7159, Monday to Friday 10.00 am-12.00 noon
www.nea.org.uk

NI Housing Executive
The Northern Ireland Housing Executive is the regional housing authority. NIHE works in partnership with communities and other organisations to ensure that everyone has access to a good affordable home in a safe and healthy community, working to meet the housing needs of existing and future generations.

NIHE provides advice and assistance on a range of issues, including homelessness, fuel poverty, energy efficiency grants, and housing benefit: https://www.nihe.gov.uk/housing-help

Contact numbers area available on the NIHE website: https://www.nihe.gov.uk/aboutus/contact-us/how-to-contact-us

Trussell Trust Food Banks
Food banks in the Trussell Trust network welcome and support everyone who is referred to them, always acting with respect and without judgment. Volunteers will give a minimum of three days’ emergency food and offer support to resolve some of the difficulties someone might be facing.

In order to get help from a food bank a person will need to be referred with a voucher, which can be issued by a number of local community organisations (for instance schools, GPs and advice agencies). Your local food bank can advise which agencies can help.

Find your local food bank here.
Trussell Trust also work through Advice NI. People can call for free to talk confidentially to a trained Advice NI adviser on: 0800 915 4604 (Open Monday to Friday, 9am – 5pm. Closed on public holidays.)
PART 5 (a)

Strategic Partnerships

NILGA and our member councils have good relationships with the NI government departments, particularly those more closely linked to the work of councils – i.e., Department of Communities (DfC), Department of Infrastructure (DfI), Department for Economy (DfE), Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA).

When the NI Assembly is functioning, the regional leaders at NILGA are frequently called upon to represent the views of the sector to Assembly scrutiny committees as key stakeholders, and have also built strategic relationships with Whitehall departments, particularly since Brexit and the advent of ‘Levelling Up’ policies and funding.

Some strategic partnership arrangements are set out in legislation, such as the Political Partnership Panel, Community Planning Partnerships and the Police & Community Safety Partnerships.

City and Growth Deals

are strategic partnerships representing a new way of working between central and local government and regional partners and securing substantial bespoke packages of investment from central government and partners to support the delivery of a shared economic vision. (Refer to Part 3 for more detail).

Political Partnership Panel

Under S103 of the Local Government (NI) Act 2014, a formal mechanism was created, loosely based on the Welsh ‘Partnership Council’ Model. The Partnership Panel was established and is maintained by the Department for Communities, and may:

“(a) give advice to any Northern Ireland department about matters affecting the exercise of any of its functions.

(b) make representations to any Northern Ireland department about any matters affecting, or of concern to, those involved in local government; and

(c) give advice to those involved in local government.”

The Panel consists of councillors, ministers, and a maximum of 5 representatives of ‘such representative body or association of the district councils as appears to the Department to be appropriate’ (i.e., NILGA). The Terms of Reference for the Panel are available from the NILGA Office.

Each council may nominate a councillor to serve as a member of the Panel. The First Minister (FM) and deputy First Minister (dFM) acting jointly may nominate Ministers to attend meetings of the Panel, but any Minister may attend any meeting of the Panel without having been nominated by the FM or dFM. “Ministers” includes junior Ministers.

When the Assembly is functioning, the Panel provides a useful tool for escalating strategic regional matters of concern to Ministers and enables Ministers to communicate effectively with local government as a sector. It also enables Ministers to understand each other’s work and to work in a more ‘joined up’ fashion on issues affecting local government, which is critically important when working with a multi-party Executive. It is not a decision-making body.
When the Assembly is not functioning, the Panel does not meet. At such times, NILGA has facilitated regular meetings between the council nominees to the Panel, NILGA office bearers and MLAs from the political parties with a remit in relation to local government. These meetings enable local government to raise awareness of issues of concern with the Assembly party groupings, and to assess acceptable directions of travel on strategic matters of concern.

Community Planning Partnerships
– Refer to Part 3 for more detail.

Community planning involves the local council, statutory agencies, community and voluntary sectors working together in partnership to identify local community needs and then designing and providing services to improve people’s lives. Each council area has a place-based partnership:

- Antrim and Newtownabbey Community Planning Partnership
- Ards and North Down Community Planning Partnership
- Armagh Banbridge and Craigavon Community Planning Partnership
- Belfast Community Planning Partnership
- Causeway Coast and Glens Community Planning Partnership
- Derry City and Strabane Community Planning Partnership
- Fermanagh and Omagh Community Planning Partnership
- Lisburn and Castlereagh Community Planning Partnership
- Mid and East Antrim Community Planning Partnership
- Mid Ulster Community Planning Partnership
- Newry Mourne and Down Community Planning Partnership

PCSPs have a range of duties which are set in legislation:
- consult and engage with the local community on the issues of concern in relation to policing and community safety. Each PCSP has a Policing Committee with a distinct responsibility to provide views to the relevant district commander and the Policing Board on policing matters.
- identify and prioritise the issues of concern and prepare plans for how these can be tackled.
- monitor the performance of the police and work to gain the co-operation of the public with the police in preventing crime; and
- deliver a reduction in crime and enhance community safety in each district, directly through interventions, through the work of delivery groups or through support for the work of others.

PCSPs work with the community to identify issues of concern in the local area and prepare plans to deliver practical solutions. They also work in partnership with other organisations which contribute to community safety in the area.

Oversight of PCSPs and District PCSPs (Belfast) is by a Joint Committee, which has a legislative basis in the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. The Joint Committee consists of representatives of the Department of Justice and the Northern Ireland Policing Board. The Joint Committee provides strategic direction, support and funding to PCSPs, and monitors their effectiveness.

Further information on PCSPs, including the PCSP Members Handbook is available at www.pcsps.org.
PART 5 (b)

External Relations

UK Local Government Association
NILGA cooperates with the Local Government Association, Welsh Local Government Association and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on a range of pertinent issues for local government, including finance, funding and international relations. The Associations carry out joint lobbying initiatives and campaigns.

A formal meeting of the 4 associations takes place twice per year in the form of the UK Local Government Forum.

For more information see
Home - Local Government Association
Home - WLGA
COSLA | COSLA
Association of Irish Local Government
NILGA cooperates closely with the Association of Irish Local Government on areas of mutual interest. Bilateral meetings are held at least twice per year to discuss issues such as local government finance, planning, governance, funding opportunities and issues affecting councillors in their role.

For more information see
AILG - Association of Irish Local Government

EU liaison
Committee of the Regions – UK Contact Group To ensure continuing political cooperation with representatives of UK local government and devolved parliaments and assemblies following the UK’s withdrawal from the EU, the EU Committee of the Regions (CoR) established the CoR-UK Contact Group in February 2020. The aims of the group are:
(a) to act as a forum for continuing dialogue and political partnership between EU local and regional authorities (LRAs) and UK local government and devolved parliaments and assemblies, and to exchange know-how, in particular on cross-border issues.
(b) to provide LRAs with the opportunity to discuss problems or opportunities regarding the relationship between EU LRAs and UK local government and devolved parliaments and assemblies arising from the UK’s withdrawal from the EU.
(c) to give EU LRAs and UK local government and devolved parliaments and assemblies a means of discussing European Union legislation and changes to EU legislation currently applicable in the UK where it would affect them even after the United Kingdom’s departure from the European Union.

NILGA is represented on the group by its President. A representative from the NI Assembly is also entitled to sit on the group. Meetings are held 2-3 times per year and alternate between Brussels and the UK.

For more information see
Relationship with the UK (europa.eu)

Council of European Municipalities & Regions (CEMR)
NILGA is a member of the Council of European Municipalities & Regions (CEMR) which represents the interests of Europe’s local and regional governments and their associations in more than 40 countries. It promotes citizenship and exchange between elected representatives.

For more information see
CEMR: home (ccre.org)

Congress of the Council of Europe
The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities is an institution of the Council of Europe, responsible for strengthening local and regional democracy in its 46 member states and assessing the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. As the voice of Europe’s municipalities and regions, it works to foster consultation and political dialogue between national governments and local and regional authorities, through cooperation with the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers.

For more information see
Congress of Local and Regional Authorities - Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (coe.int)
PART 5 (c)

Government Departments and their Agencies

nidirect is the official government website for Northern Ireland citizens. nidirect brings together lots of information from government departments and agencies, allowing interactive services to be accessed on matters like Dog and Vehicle Licenses, Flooding, Planning, Pensions and much more.

For more information see https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/

The Executive Office (TEO), previously the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), was created on 9 May 2016 as part of the implementation of actions emanating from the Fresh Start Agreement. The overall aim of TEO is to contribute to and oversee the co-ordination of Executive policies and programmes to deliver a peaceful, fair, equal and prosperous society.

The Executive Office
SD03 Stormont Castle
Stormont Estate
Belfast
BT4 3TT

Telephone: 028 9037 8151
Email: info@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk
Website: https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/

Departmental Responsibilities
• Good Relations and Social Change
• Strategic Investment and Regeneration
• Making Government Work
• Ending violence against women and girls
• International Relations - British/Irish, Joint Ministerial Committee, North/South, European Policy and Co-ordination
• Promoting Northern Ireland
• Statistics and Research

TEO Non-Departmental Public Bodies
• Equality Commission for Northern Ireland - https://www.equalityni.org/Home
• Northern Ireland Community Relations Council - https://www.communityrelations.org.uk/
• Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation - http://mazelongkesh.com/
• NI Judicial Appointments Commission - https://www.nijac.gov.uk/
• Commission for Victims and Survivors for Northern Ireland - https://www.cvsni.org/
• Strategic Investment Board - https://sibni.org/
• Victims and Survivors Service - https://www.victimsandservice.org/

Other TEO ALBs (within the accounting boundary)
• Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments Northern Ireland - https://www.publicappointmentsni.org/
• Office of the Attorney General for Northern Ireland - https://www.attorneygeneralni.gov.uk/

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
www.daera-ni.gov.uk

DAERA has responsibility for food, farming, environmental, fisheries, forestry and sustainability policy and the development of the rural sector in Northern Ireland.

The Department assists the sustainable development of the agri-food, environmental, fishing and forestry sectors of the Northern Ireland economy, having regard for the needs of the consumers, the protection of human, animal and plant health, the welfare of animals and the conservation and enhancement of the environment.

DAERA provides a business development service for farmers and growers and a veterinary service for administration of animal health and welfare.

The Department's College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) delivers training and further and higher education courses in the agri-food sector.

DAERA is responsible to the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) in Great Britain for the administration of schemes affecting the whole of the United Kingdom. The Department also oversees the application of European Union agricultural, environmental, fisheries and rural development policy to Northern Ireland.

DAERA has two Executive Agencies:
• Forest Service - https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/forest-service

The Department also sponsors several Non-Departmental Public Bodies:
• College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise - https://www.cafre.ac.uk/
• the Agri-food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) - https://www.afbni.gov.uk/
• Livestock and Meat Commission - https://www.lmcni.com/
• Loughs Agency - https://www.loughs-agency.org/
• Northern Ireland Fishery Harbour Authority - https://nifha.net/
• Farm Safety - https://www.hseni.gov.uk/topic/agriculture
• Northern Ireland Environment Link - https://www.nienvironmentlink.org/

Contacts

Dundonald House
Upper Newtownards Road
Ballymiscaw
Belfast BT4 3SB

Jubilee House
111 Ballykelly Road
Ballykelly
Limavady
BT49 9HP

Klondyke Building
Cromac Avenue
Gasworks Business Park
Malone Lower
Belfast
BT7 2JA

customer helpline 0300 200 7852 or email daera.helpline@daera-ni.gov.uk
Website: https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/
Department for Communities

The Department for Communities (DfC) is the largest of nine Northern Ireland departments. It was established under the Departments Act (Northern Ireland) 2016.

DfC provides support to meet the needs of some of the most disadvantaged citizens, families and communities across Northern Ireland. Areas of responsibility include delivery of the social welfare system including child maintenance support, providing advice for those seeking employment, ensuring the availability of good quality and affordable housing, facilities for sports and leisure, supporting local government, maintaining museums and revitalising town and city centres.

DfC has strategic responsibility in Northern Ireland for setting policy, bringing forward legislation and resourcing in the following areas:
- Housing
- Urban regeneration
- Sport
- Benefits and pensions
- Social inclusion
- Helping people find employment
- Arts and culture
- Museums and libraries
- Child maintenance
- Voluntary and community sector and the regulation of charities
- Ulster Scots and Irish Language
- Historic environment
- Local government
- Public Records Office

The Department works with a number of bodies:
- Armagh Observatory and Planetarium - https://www.armagh.space/
- Arts Council NI - http://www.artscouncil-ni.org
- The Charity Commission - https://www.charitycommissionni.org.uk/
- Northern Ireland Housing Executive - https://www.nihe.gov.uk/home
- NI Museums Council - https://www.nimc.co.uk/
- Sport NI - http://www.sportni.net/
- Ulster Scots Agency - https://www.ulsterscotsagency.com/
- Foras na gaeilge - https://www.forasnagaeilge.ie/?lang=en
- Nil Commissioner for Children and Young People - https://www.niccy.org/
- Libraries NI - https://www.librariesni.org.uk/ Pages/default.aspx
- Commissioner for Older People for NI - https://www.copni.org/
- Ulster Supported Employment Limited - https://www.usel.co.uk/
- Local Government Staff Commission - http://www.lgsc.org.uk/
- NI Local Government Local Government Officers Superannuation Committee - https://nilgosc.org.uk/

Contact
Causeway Exchange
1-7 Bedford Street
Belfast BT2 7EG
Telephone: 028 9082 9000
Website - https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/

Website - https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/

Department for the Economy

The Department for the Economy (DfE) provides a wide range of services to help develop the Northern Ireland economy. The Department is responsible for:
- Economic Policy
- Employment and Skills Programmes (including apprenticeships)
- Energy
- Further Education
- Higher Education
- Employment Rights
- Consumer Affairs
- European Fund Management
- Telecoms
- Tourism
- Insolvency Service
- Minerals and Petroleum
- Credit Unions and Societies
- Statistics and Economic Research

The Department works with a number of bodies:
- Tourism Northern Ireland - https://www.tourismni.com/
- Tourism Ireland - https://www.tourismireland.com/
- Construction Industry Training Board Northern Ireland - https://www.consultingandtrainingboard-northern-ireland.co.uk/
- The Industrial Court - https://www.industrialcourt.gov.uk/
- Northern Ireland Screen - https://northernirelandscreen.co.uk/
- Office of the Industrial Tribunals and the Fair Employment Tribunals - https://www.empiremploymenttribunalsni.co.uk/

Contact
Department for the Economy
Adelaide House
39/49 Adelaide Street
Belfast
BT2 8FD

Telephone: 028 9052 9900
Text Relay: 18001 028 9052 9900
Email: dfemail@economy-ni.gov.uk
Website - https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk

Invest Northern Ireland - https://www.investni.com/
InterTrade Ireland - https://intertradeireland.com/cache/blitz/intertradeireland.com//index.html.gz
Health and Safety Executive NI - https://www.hseni.gov.uk/
Northern Ireland Certification Officer for Trade Unions and Employers’ and Associations - https://www.nicertoffice.org.uk/
The Labour Relations Agency - https://www.lra.org.uk/
Construction Industry Training Board Northern Ireland - https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/construction-industry-training-board-northern-ireland
The Industrial Court - https://www.industrialcourt.gov.uk/
Northern Ireland Screen - https://northernirelandscreen.co.uk/
Office of the Industrial Tribunals and the Fair Employment Tribunals - https://www.empiremploymenttribunalsni.co.uk/
The Department of Education's primary statutory duty is to promote the education of the people of Northern Ireland and to ensure the effective implementation of education policy. The Department’s main statutory areas of responsibility are 0-4 provision, primary, post-primary, special education and youth service. It also has responsibility for the development and management of an Executive Strategy for Children and Young People and an Executive Childcare Strategy.

The Department is accountable through its Minister to the Assembly for the effective delivery of its statutory functions and for the effective use of the public funds for which it is responsible. It is supported in delivering its functions by a range of Arm’s Length Bodies, each of which is accountable to the Department.

The Department’s responsibilities are:
- Curriculum and Learning
- Children and Young People Issues
- Pupils and Parents
- Teaching Staff
- Non-teaching staff
- Schools and Infrastructure
- Support and Development
- Good Relations and Social Change
- Statistics and Research

The Department works with a number of bodies:
- Education Authority - [https://www.eani.org.uk/](https://www.eani.org.uk/)
- Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education - [https://nicie.org/](https://nicie.org/)
- Middletown Centre for Autism - [https://www.middletownautism.com/](https://www.middletownautism.com/)
- General Teaching Council for NI - [https://www.gtcni.org.uk/](https://www.gtcni.org.uk/)
- Council for Catholic Maintained Schools - [https://www.ccmssschools.com/](https://www.ccmssschools.com/)
- Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta - [https://www.comhairle.org/english/](https://www.comhairle.org/english/)
- Governing Bodies Association NI - [https://www.gbani.org/](https://www.gbani.org/)
- Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment - [https://ccea.org.uk/](https://ccea.org.uk/)
- The Education and Training Inspectorate - [https://www.etini.gov.uk/](https://www.etini.gov.uk/)
- Controlled Schools’ Support Council - [https://www.ccssni.org.uk/](https://www.ccssni.org.uk/)
- Catholic Schools Trustee Service - [https://www.catholiceducation-ni.org/](https://www.catholiceducation-ni.org/)

Contact
Rathgael House
Balloo Road
Rathgill
Bangor
BT19 7PR.

Telephone: 028 9127 9279
Email: DE.DEWebMail@education-ni.gov.uk
Website: [https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/](https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/)

The Department of Finance (DoF) aims to help the Northern Ireland Executive secure the most appropriate and effective use of resources and services for the benefit of the community. In pursuing this aim, the key objective of the Department is to deliver quality, cost-effective and efficient public services and administration in the Department’s areas of executive responsibility.

The Department comprises:
- Public Spending Directorate
- Construction and Procurement Delivery
- Land & Property Services
- Enterprise Shared Services
- Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
- Strategic Policy and Reform Directorate
- Departmental Solicitor’s Office
- NICS HR
- Communications and Engagement Division

The Department’s responsibilities are:
- Finance: Information on Northern Ireland’s (NI) public finances, including the NI budget and guidance on accountability and financial management
- Working in the Northern Ireland Civil Service, including pay scales and Civil Service Pensions (NI)
- Procurement
- Programme and project management and assurance

The Department works with a number of bodies:
- Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
- Special EU Programmes Body

Contact
Department of Finance
Clare House
303 Airport Road
Belfast
BT3 9ED

Telephone: 028 9185 8111
Email: dof.enquiries@finance-ni.gov.uk
Website: [www.finance-ni.gov.uk](http://www.finance-ni.gov.uk)
It is the Department of Health's mission to improve the health and social well-being of the people of Northern Ireland. It endeavours to do so by:

- leading a major programme of cross-government action to improve the health and well-being of the population and reduce health inequalities.
- this includes interventions involving health promotion and education to encourage people to adopt activities, behaviours and attitudes which lead to better health and well-being.
- the aim is a population which is much more engaged in ensuring its own health and well-being.
- ensuring the provision of appropriate health and social care services, both in clinical settings such as hospitals and GPs’ surgeries, and in the community through nursing, social work and other professional services

Key Responsibilities

The Department has three primary business responsibilities:

- Health and Social Care (HSC), which includes policy and legislation for hospitals, family practitioner services and community health and personal social services
- Public Health, which covers policy, legislation and administrative action to promote and protect the health and well-being of the population
- Public Safety, which covers policy and legislation for fire and rescue services

Who they work with:

- Belfast Health and Social Care Trust – www.hscni.net
- Northern Health & Social Care Trust – www.northerntrust.hscni.net
- Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Service – www.nibts.hscni.net
- Northern Ireland Fire Rescue Service – www.nifrs.org
- Northern Ireland Guardian Ad Litem Agency – www.nigaal.hscni.net
- Northern Ireland Practice and Education Council – www.nipec.hscni.net
- Northern Ireland Social Care Council – www.niscc.info
- Public Health Agency - www.publichealth.hscni.net
- Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority - www.rqia.org.uk
- South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust – www.setrust.hscni.net
- Southern Health & Social Care Trust – www.southerntrust.hscni.net
- Western Health & Social Care Trust – www.westerntrust.hscni.net

Contact

Department of Health
Castle Buildings
Stormont
Belfast BT4 3SQ
Telephone: 028 9052 0500
Email: webmaster@health-ni.gov.uk

The Department works with a number of bodies:

- TrafficwatchNI
- Translink
- NI Water
- Belfast Harbour Commissioners
- Londonderry Port & Harbour Commissioners
- Warrenpoint Harbour Authority
- Waterways Ireland
- Northern Irish Drainage Council

Contact

Department for Infrastructure
Clarence Court
10-18 Adelaide Street
Belfast
BT2 8GB
Telephone: 028 9054 0540
Specific contacts are listed on the Department’s website www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk

The Department’s purpose statement is:

“Every day connecting people safely, supporting opportunities and creating sustainable living places.”

The main responsibilities of the Department are:

- regional strategic planning and development policy
- transport strategy and sustainable transport policy
- public transport policy and performance
- road safety and vehicle regulation policy, including strategies to reduce the number of people killed or seriously injured on our roads
- driver and operator licensing and driver and vehicle testing
- provision and maintenance of all public roads
- certain policy and support work for air and sea ports
- river and sea defence maintenance and the construction of flood alleviation schemes
- provision of flood maps and risk information
- policy on water and sewerage services and management of the Department’s shareholder interest in Northern Ireland Water
DOJ’s objectives are centred around ‘Problem-Solving Justice.’ Problem Solving Justice gives scope to drive forward new and more imaginative strategies, based on addressing the underlying causes of offending behaviour. Early intervention can help both the individual, and benefit wider society, and this is borne out by some of the positive work the Department is currently.

The Department has a range of powers relating to devolved policing and justice functions, set out in the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (Devolution of Policing and Justice Functions) Order 2010. It is responsible for the resourcing, legislative and policy framework of the justice system, and has four Directorates - Access to Justice, Safer Communities, Justice Delivery and Reducing Offending to deliver on priorities.

Key responsibilities.
• Justice and the law
• Legal aid
• Prisons
• Youth justice
• Forensic science
• Policing and community safety
• Statistics and Research

Who they work with;
• Victim Support NI - www.victimsupportni.com
• RUC George Cross Foundation - www.rucgcfoundation.org
• Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland - www.ppsni.gov.uk
• Probation Board for Northern Ireland - www.pbni.org.uk
• Prisoner Ombudsman - www.ni-prisonerombudsman.gov.uk
• Police Service of Northern Ireland - www.psni.police.uk
• Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust - www.prrt.org
• Organised Crime Task Force - www.justice-ni.gov.uk
• NSPCC - www.nspcc.org.uk
• Northern Ireland Police Fund - www.nipolicefund.gov.uk
• Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland - www.policeombudsman.org
• Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service - www.justice-ni.gov.uk

Contact
Department of Justice
Block B
Castle Buildings
Stormont Estate
Belfast
BT4 3SG

Tel: (028) 9076 3000
www.justice-ni.gov.uk

PART 5 (d)
Other important organisations
Advice NI https://www.adviceni.net/
Development Trusts NI https://www.dtni.org.uk/
Care Opinion NI https://www.careopinion.org.uk/
NI Council on Voluntary Action https://www.nicva.org/
NI Environment Link https://www.nienvironmentlink.org/
Community Places https://www.communityplaces.info/
Rural Community Network https://www.ruralcommunitynetwork.org/
Money and Pensions Service (MaPS) https://moneyandpensionsservice.org.uk/

Much of life is shaped by how we manage our money, including the challenges we face. When people reach out for help, money guidance is often given as part of wider support. As an Elected councillor, we want to support you with resources and help you build confidence to talk money, should your constituents approach you with money worries, during this cost of living crisis, and challenging times.
What is money guidance?

• This is any non-regulated money conversation you have with constituents. It could range from signposting to an appropriate service or nudging them towards tools and resources within the www.MoneyHelper.org.uk Government website.

• Guidance provides impartial information on the available options, which may include the pros and cons. Guidance does not recommend one option over another. Financial advice does, however, and is regulated.

What is the Money Guiders Programme and how this could help your role as an elected Councillor?
The Money Guiders Programme will help you to talk about money with your constituents confidently, and offer safe, effective guidance.

• You will know what money guidance means, and the boundaries between guidance and regulated advice

• You will develop the core and technical competencies to support what you do, enhancing your service

• You will be part of a community where practitioners learn from each other

• It is a FREE 2.5-hour eLearning programme (if sat in one sitting). On completion of the eLearning, you will have the opportunity to complete an assessment (up to 1 hour) and be able to claim a City & Guilds Digital Credential on completion. Should you wish to extend your learning, you will be able to move into tier 1 of the technical domains, at that point.

• Additionally, MaPS will help you to use www.MoneyHelper.org.uk as a key resource for your constituency work.

NILGA is a key stakeholder of Money & Pensions Service and connects councillors to the Money Guiders Programme. Why not sign up today and complete the programme, by contacting MaPS via email: money.guiders@maps.org.uk

For more information:
Go to: maps.org.uk/money-guiders
Search: Money Guiders programme or #MoneyGuiders on social media

About us
Money Guiders offers free professional development from the Money and Pensions Service (MaPS), an arms-length body sponsored by the Department for Work and Pensions. Our vision is everyone making the most of their money and pensions. maps.org.uk