

NILGA

Corporate Plan

2023-2027



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NILGA's Impact

Who we are

The Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) is the council led representative body for local authorities in Northern Ireland. The Association is supported by political parties and independent members in councils. NILGA members are drawn from each of the 11 councils providing regional and cross-party representation on the NILGA Executive Committee.



Our Aims

- To be the inclusive and collective voice of councils and promote, enable and develop local government in Northern Ireland
- To convene and engage on matters relating to national, regional and local policy and the financing of local government services; as it affects the delivery of local services and outcomes for local people; and as the organisation deems appropriate
- To ensure that local government and the Northern Ireland Executive work together in partnership based on principles of mutual respect and interdependency whilst recognising the legitimacy of the role each play in Northern Ireland's governance

Who We Work with

NILGA believes genuinely and wholeheartedly that working in partnership with others will add important value to our work. Whether that is in partnership with Ministers, civil servants, political parties, other local government associations or other key stakeholders.

Of particular importance though is the partnership with the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives NI (Solace NI) as strategic professional officer advisors and the National Association of Councillors (NAC NI) as the organisation who represents the interests of individual councillors.

What we do

NILGA is the Voice of Local Government in Northern Ireland. It represents the sector's views on critical policy issues and national pay, promotes the role and successes of local government, delivers training for elected members and works with partners to secure the future sustainability and transformation of the sector.

NILGA collaborates with the NI Assembly and Departments, regional, national and international bodies and other local government associations to support its work and enhance the role of NI local government.

NILGA's six key workstreams are:

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.

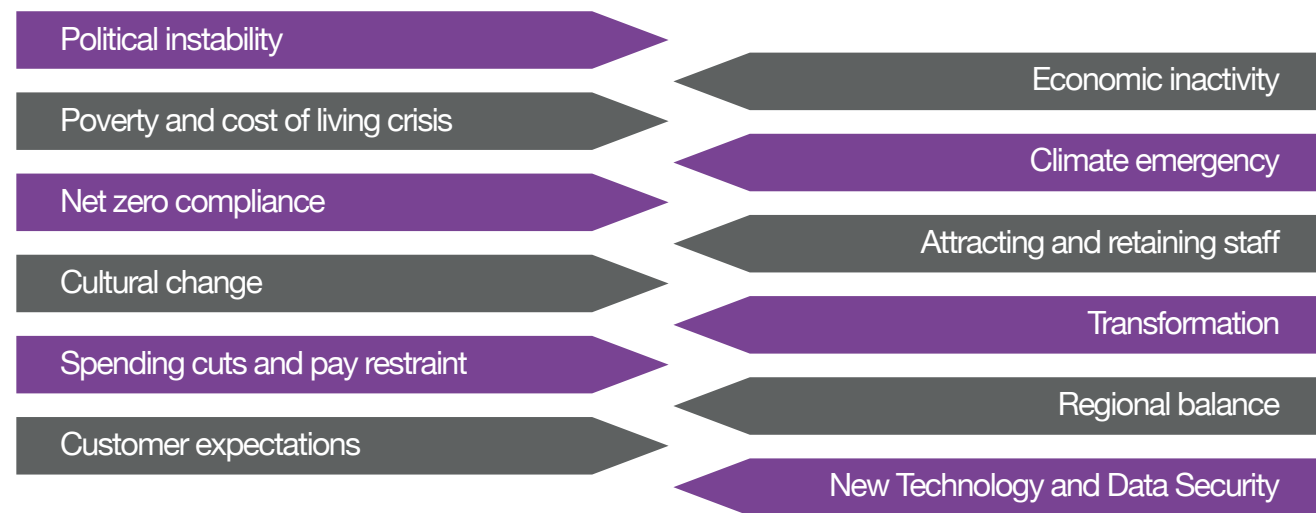


Strategic Context

Background

Local government is integral to our structures of governance, public services and political life. Therefore, as the representative voice of local government, NILGA is central to key local, regional and national policy to delivering lasting, real and positive change in people’s lives.

There are very significant challenges for the future of public services including:



NILGA wants to ensure that our future direction supports and enables councils and the local government sector to tackle these challenges and maximise opportunities to deliver for people. This is particularly important following local government elections on 18 May 2023 which provided a renewed and focused mandate for councils and councillors.

In anticipation of the 2023-2027 local government mandate, NILGA as the representative voice of local government has undertaken a number of independently facilitated reflective reviews of all aspects of our work, engaging widely with councils, councillors, chief executives, political parties and partner organisations such as the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives NI (Solace NI) and the National Association of Councillors (NAC). These reviews were:

- Review of NILGA’s policy development, impact and future priorities
- Review of NILGA’s governing constitution to ensure it is fit for the future
- Review of the effectiveness of NILGA’s Elected Member Development Programme
- Review of NILGA’s strategic operating context now and into the future

NILGA for the Future

NILGA’s Vision

Councils, councillors, officers and partners welcome the renewed ambition and enthusiasm for NILGA’s work with a recognition that this is an important period for local democracy.



Cross Cutting Enablers

As a result of our recent reviews, it has been identified that NILGA must ensure that the following cross cutting enablers are in place to drive our success in the 2023-2027 local government mandate.

Focus on enhancing NILGA's strategic profile

- A strategy must be in place to develop NILGA's strategic profile to effectively communicate our purpose, priorities, partnerships, relationships, client base and how we can best work with individual councils, local government collectively, central government, political parties, partners and stakeholders.
- NILGA will continually refresh our knowledge of the main and emerging actors within the various partner organisations, policy networks, political parties and civil servants.
- NILGA will highlight our success in providing an effective and positive forum for cross-party working and consensus development around policy issues and explore in more detail how and why NILGA operates effectively in this regard.
- NILGA will ensure key performance indicators are in place to measure all aspects of our work to ensure a decisive focus on our impact and effectiveness.



Shifting from lobbying to negotiating

- NILGA will embed itself in the policy-making process of central government and transform this relationship from being perceived and operating as a lobbying body for local government to that of a negotiating partner, embedded in the policy-making processes
- NILGA will ensure balance between the work we undertake either individually or collectively for our membership on a functional process level and the work we undertake with central government as an advocate and partner in policy development; and promoting the interests of local government
- NILGA will ensure leadership on devolution and decentralisation to local government is at the centre of our work, including setting clear objectives as to what can and should be achieved for local government through any future process of devolution and decentralisation.



Raising awareness of NILGA's purpose, services and impact

- NILGA will ensure there are high levels of awareness of our services and impact across both local government, central government, political parties, partners and stakeholders, including the range and quality of our services and the value added.
- NILGA will ensure the work we undertake is clearly distinguished from that of Solace NI and the National Association of Councillors and identify areas of mutually beneficial co-operation with those bodies while maintaining an independent identity
- NILGA will deepen our understanding of the varying needs and perceptions of its different partners and stakeholders to ensure our services have purpose and deliver maximum impact



NILGA Corporate Plan 2023 -2027

This NILGA Corporate Plan 2023-2027 is intended to enhance our strategic alignment, outline our work in supporting councils, councillors and communities and deliver a NILGA that is valued and effective.

Strategic Themes	Corporate Priorities
Empowered and resourced councils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influencing the delivery of outstanding legislation and financial sustainability to allow local government to function effectively • Delivery of balanced and respectful central/local relationships delivering on the principle of prioritising local decision making • Support sector led transformation and innovation informed by best practice
Empowered and confident councillors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable confident politically led representation for the sector • Deliver high quality learning and development for councillors • Deliver improvements in effectiveness of Code of Conduct for councillors
Empowered and supported people and places	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influence further devolution of powers and resources to support local decision making • Shape regional and national policy to empower local delivery • Support councils and councillors in creating the conditions for local economic, social and environmental resilience
Empowered and valued NILGA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build confidence in NILGA's effectiveness • Enable proactive councillor and officer engagement in key regional sectoral work • Reinvigorate local democracy through communications and collaboration

Strategic Theme – Empowered and resourced councils

Context

Public services have been under pressure for some time and as global economic and political uncertainty continues, the prospects for our citizens and businesses are under threat. Over the next decade councils will have to face the challenges of public sector spending restraint, meeting new legislative requirements and increasing customer expectations.

Local government has the ambition and drive to overcome these challenges and build on the confidence in councils to deliver for people, with strengthening local democracy as key. Councils are agile, dynamic, innovative, have a real connection with the communities they serve and have high levels of accountability and democratic oversight.

However, barriers to success remain - local government reform remains incomplete, with legislation and regulations to affirm council rules of operation, planning processes and a code of conduct outstanding.

To achieve our sectoral ambitions and create stronger more reliable public services, greater collaboration with government departments to design services, deliver added-value and remove duplication is essential. Embracing technology and using data to drive decision-making as well as investing in our workforce will be the cornerstones of innovative 21st century councils.

Corporate priorities

- Influence the delivery of outstanding legislation and financial sustainability to allow local government to function effectively
- Support the delivery of balanced and respectful central/local relationships delivering on the principle of prioritising local decision making
- Support sector led transformation and innovation informed by best practice

Why it matters

Financial sustainability is a critical success factor for the sector. Fair and transparent budget allocations over a longer term (which return the Rates Support Grant to sustainable levels) would offer greater certainty to councils and recognise their role and value. Pooling of budgets for place-based delivery and alignment of funding streams across government would minimize inefficiencies and bureaucracy. As a valued partner in government, local government can improve policy and process design and delivery for better local and regional outcomes.

Delivery of outstanding legislation to allow local government to function effectively, along with progress on priority policy areas will go some way towards empowering the local government sector in Northern Ireland. However, this must be underpinned by sector-led transformation and innovation, informed by best practice which takes advantage of the best knowledge and expertise across sectors and place real value on local decision making.

Strategic Theme - Empowered and confident councillors

Context

Councillors are elected to make decisions which affect the quality of life and livelihoods of local people. Inspiring local communities and creating the conditions for inclusive growth takes ambitious leadership – and effective political leadership is at the heart of a healthy democracy. By investing in the skills and knowledge of councillors through the provision of learning opportunities tailored to their role, NILGA will strengthen the impact councillors have on local areas and in doing so strengthen the voice of local government.

Through a standardised regional induction programme and renewed Elected Member Development programme, NILGA will support councillors to push boundaries for their constituents and the local government sector and deliver better outcomes for all.

Elected member conduct, ethics and standards are important issues for local government. The continued impasse on modernising the Code of Conduct in both content and process, undermines local democracy and the representative, policy and operational workings of councils and councillors.

Corporate priorities

- Enable confident politically led representation for the sector
- Deliver high quality learning and development for councillors
- Deliver improvements in effectiveness of the Code of Conduct for councillors

Why it matters

The role of local councillor is wide-ranging and demanding from place-shaping to licensing. Equipping local leaders with the competencies, skills and knowledge to carry out their roles is a priority for all councils, whether that be on developing skills in leadership or scrutiny and challenge; or building knowledge on planning, climate change, economic development or community planning.

Councils who want to improve the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of their communities must invest in councillor learning and development. Councils participating in the Elected Member Charter process can benefit from a robust, structured framework to increase councillor competence and confidence; strengthened member-officer relationships; and enhanced democracy and participation.

A review of the current Code of Conduct for councillors to mirror that of the NI Assembly would provide clarity for councillors, while not impeding their role as democratically elected decision makers.

Strategic Theme - Empowered and supported people and places

Context

Councils are at the forefront of improving how people live and work. They are place-shapers and are best placed to identify solutions to local challenges and draw in the right partners to deliver for their areas.

Councillors are embedded in their communities, giving them unique insight into their needs, hopes and aspirations. Bringing this unique perspective to the delivery of public services both within their councils and with central government, councillors play a vital role in holding public services accountable for delivering for people.

Addressing climate change, improving community planning mechanisms, unblocking bureaucracy in the planning system, realising the potential of local development planning and using economic and social levers will stimulate growth and investment in local areas. Yet councils are still dependent on regional government delivering public services in local areas as the devolution and decentralisation of powers has not been comprehensive. The absence of regeneration powers and budgets diminishes the role of local councils in shaping and improving their areas.

Corporate priorities

- Influence further devolution and decentralisation of powers and resources to support local decision making
- Shape regional and national policy to empower local delivery
- Support councils and councillors in creating the conditions for local economic, social and environmental resilience

Why it matters

Pride in place is best achieved by delivery close to local people and businesses, in other words by local authorities that understand each place's unique local context. A place-based approach to public service delivery, underpinned by cross-government and cross-sectoral collaboration will drive inclusive growth in local areas. As the civic hub and primary co-ordinator of public services in local areas, local government has a central role to play to reduce fragmentation, improve efficiency and effectiveness in government.

Strategic Theme - Empowered and valued NILGA

Context

As the representative body for the local government sector, it is important that NILGA members are confident in its ability to provide strong leadership, scrutiny, representation and accountability.

NILGA's constitution sets out the governance framework for the organisation which will include regular engagement with the full NILGA membership as well as on an individual council basis. NILGA's Executive Committee members must engage in scrutiny of the organisation's performance and impact to shape its success, with input from councils and the wider group of councillors. Compliance with everchanging legislative and regulatory requirements, overseen by a strong Audit and Organisational Sustainability Committee will ensure value for money is achieved for members.

In addition, having a responsive and adaptable approach to formulating, co-designing and shaping policy with political and officer input will allow the organisation to engage effectively and proportionately and demonstrate its value to government and other sectors.

Communicating success as well as becoming more outward-looking and collaborative in our engagement will raise the profile and impact of the organisation and the sector

Corporate priorities

- Build confidence in NILGA's effectiveness
- Enable proactive Councillor and Officer engagement in key regional sectoral work
- Reinvalidate local democracy through communications and collaboration

Why it matters

To be strategically effective and sustainable, NILGA must demonstrate value and impact to its members and partners. Maintaining decisive focus on its corporate priorities, working at pace to deliver on these and providing evidence on the impact of its work will reassure members of the organisation's role and benefits.

As a political organisation NILGA will always be led by the views of its member councils. To support that, however, NILGA must understand and reflect the differing policy views of the political parties in its work and can only do this by maintaining sound and open relationships with political parties. Equally, NILGA will rely on reciprocally strong relationships with the professional officer core via Solace NI to advise on technical and operational matters which affect the sector, in particular on new and revised policy and regulatory requirements, funding, and processes. Fully communicating the shared and regional views of councils and councillors in its policy work will reinforce NILGA's representative voice for the sector.

Making It Happen

The NILGA Corporate Plan 2023-2027 will be supported by an annual business plan, which will be agreed by the NILGA Executive. This will identify the specific actions required to deliver on these corporate priorities and more importantly the framework within which NILGA's performance and impact is measured and communicated to its members.





NILGA

Corporate Plan

2023-2027

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