

Central – Local Government Political Partnership Forum

Draft Terms of Reference

Introduction

We have entered the third year without a functioning Legislative Assembly and Executive. The eleven councils are the only democratically elected, fully functioning part of government in Northern Ireland.

In the absence of the Assembly and a statutory, Ministerial Partnership Panel for Northern Ireland, the formative “*Central – Local Government Political Partnership Forum*” provides two tier, devolved political scrutiny, joint awareness on critical issues affecting the sector and more widely, together with a governance link to councils and departments, at regional (all NI) level.

Purpose

The Central – Local Government Political Partnership Forum will bring together political representatives of councils (*Local Government Partnership Panel and NILGA Office Bearers*) with MLAs appointed by their parties as principal policy liaison members.

The Forum will work collegiately with willing government departments during the continuing political impasse to realise policy and communication benefits through joint democratic scrutiny, which ultimately delivers more effective public services for our citizens until the Legislative Assembly is reconstituted / returned.

The Forum can provide a key political “axis” in times of wider political, fiscal and legislative concern, and ensure formal, policy awareness and political connection for ALL parties, in accordance with the Good Friday Agreement principles of aggregated, inclusive decision making.

Membership of the Central – Local Government Political Partnership Forum

Membership of the Forum will include:

- MLAs per Party (1 or 2)
- A member from each council (*)
- NILGA Office Bearers

Formal senior officer associate input is sought from:

- Council Chief Executive representation (2 or 3 per meeting)
- Permanent Secretaries (1 or 2 per meeting)

*It is recommended that council nominees are considered as being able to avail of any Special Responsibility allowance per council’s prevailing policy.

As a non-statutory Forum, the Chair of meetings may be a mechanism for future discussion.

Meetings

The Central – Local Government Political Partnership Forum will meet 3-4 times annually, determined by policy and delivery issues which jointly require Central and Local Government oversight and outcomes, such as the delivering the Programme for Government common and substantive policy and budgetary issues, and such matters which are not ideologically contentious, where negotiated consensus is needed to resolve them.

Per above, representation will be sought from one or more Permanent Secretaries or alternates from government departments, senior representatives of neighbouring jurisdictions, and bodies representative of key policies, for example Education, the Economy, Local Government strategic stakeholders, plus where relevant, associate input from civic, employer, academic skills and community leadership (*regarding Programme for Government delivery*) will be invited to participate in Forum Meetings.

Secretariat

As an interim, NILGA will maintain a secretariat service and seek formal input in this regard also, with The Department for Communities.

Governance

The Forum is diagrammatically illustrated in Appendix I and may cease to meet when a new statutory mechanism is realised, however, members of the Forum may be retained by parties and councils at their discretion, for continuity and regarding annual / electoral term appointments processes.

In partnership, NILGA will issue Outcome Notes, Minutes, Action points and follow up with members and stakeholders, ensuring timely, relevant, information to deliver outcomes.

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