Central – Local Government Political Partnership Forum – 27th September 2019

KEY OUTCOMES

The fifth meeting of the Central- Local Government Political Partnership Forum, took place on Friday 2019. This Outcomes Note is provided by NILGA, the Northern Ireland Local Government Association, to provide immediate update to member Councils and Councillors and MLAs appointed to the Forum.

The following MLAs were in attendance on 27th September 2019:

Fra McCann MLA, Sinn Fein; Peter Weir MLA, DUP and Robbie Butler MLA, UUP.

With apologies received from John Blair, Alliance, and Mark H. Durkan MLA, SDLP.

The following Local Government Members were present:

Ald Stephen Moutray, NILGA Office Bearer Alternate; Cllr Stephen Dunne, Ards and North Down Borough Council; Ald Tom McKeown, Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council; Ald Billy Ashe MBE, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council; Cllr Robert Burgess, Newry Mourne and Down District Council; Cllr Matt Garrett, NILGA Office Bearer /Belfast City Council; Cllr Christine McFlynn, Mid Ulster District Council; Cllr Martin Kearney, NILGA Office Bearer; and Ald Alan McDowell, NILGA Office Bearer.

With apologies received for Cllr Frances Burton, NILGA President / Mid Ulster District Council; Ald Danny Kinahan, NILGA Office Bearer / Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council; Cllr Sheamus Greene, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council; Cllr Geraldine McAteer, Belfast City Council; and Cllr Ruairi McHugh, Derry City and Strabane District Council;

Keynote presentations were provided by: NI Water: Sara Venning, Chief Executive
NIFRS: Michael Graham, Chief Fire and Rescue Officer
Local Government Officer Representation:
Louise Kennedy, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council
Ann McCullough, Ards and North Down Borough Council
NILGA: Derek McCallan, Karen Smyth, Lisa O’Kane, Antoinette Kennedy

KEY OUTCOMES & ACTIONS from the Central – Local Government Political Partnership Forum, 27.09.2019

1. Issues raised by Councils for discussion and debate at Forum, 27.09.2019

(i) Mid and East Antrim Borough Council – Ald Billy Ashe – Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Services Budget Pressures -

In light of recent news speculation concerning NIFRS budget pressures and the reduction of provision at a number of stations, MEABC requested that this issue be raised at the Central
– Local Government Political Partnership Forum. On 27.09.2019, Michael Graham provided a presentation to the Forum; key points raised will be highlighted at Section 4 of this outcome note. (An electronic copy of NIFRS presentation will also be circulated to the Forum.)

(ii) Mid Ulster District Council – Cllr Christine Flynn - *The Impact of Infrastructure Deficit on Social Housing Demand and Housing Stress*

Significant wastewater network capacity issues are emerging in the Council area, resulting in new housing developments being turned down by NI Water hence exacerbating social housing demand and housing stress further.

There is also growing concern that the heightening wastewater capacity issues will frustrate Mid Ulster’s growing manufacturing business base.

On 27.09.2019 Sara Venning, Chief Executive of NI Water provided a presentation to the Forum; a synopsis of the key points raised will be provided at Section 3 of this outcome note. (An electronic copy of NI Water presentation will also be circulated to the Forum).

Derek McCallan commented that today’s keynote presentations highlight the severe financial pressures our vital services are facing. We want to see the Assembly and Executive up and running to resolve these pressures as soon as possible. In the meantime, local councils need to be given the powers, resources and finances to get things done.

2. Outcomes from Central – Local Government Political Partnership Forum, 28.06.2019

**Code of Conduct** – Concerns raised at the last Forum have been communicated to the Review Group convened by the DfC to review and evaluate the Local Government Legislation Framework over the next 3 years. The Forum will be kept updated.

**DoF Business Rates Consultation** - The Department of Finance launched their Business Rates Consultation in mid September. The closing date for submissions to the consultation is 11th November 2019.

**Action:** The Business Rates Consultation will be discussed at the NILGA Executive meeting scheduled for 11th October 2019, and NILGA will be collaborating with the 11 Councils to agree a formal response. A link to the Business Rates Consultation can be found here: [https://consultations.nidirect.gov.uk/dof-internal-communications/department-of-finance-business-rates-consultation/](https://consultations.nidirect.gov.uk/dof-internal-communications/department-of-finance-business-rates-consultation/)


In her presentation “Risk to Northern Ireland’s Ambition”, Sara Venning spoke about how NI Water plays a vital role in enabling Northern Ireland’s growth; however “Northern Ireland’s growth ambitions” as outlined in the Draft PfG, the Industrial Strategy for Northern Ireland,
and Councils’ Local Development Plans, may be put at risk due to ageing water and wastewater networks which are struggling with increasing demand and volumes.

As highlighted by Ms Venning in her presentation, Waste water facilities in 99 towns across all 11 Council areas are at or near capacity which will have a knock-on effect on housing, business expansions, Councils local development projects and “city deal” projects. By 2027, it is anticipated that Waste water facilities in a further 33 towns will be at full capacity.

Significant investment in Northern Ireland’s ageing water and wastewater networks, (most of which are now over 50 years old) is required urgently as the current funding is not keeping pace with Northern Ireland’s needs. At its last PC15 (Price Control 2015 – 2021) NI Water set out that it needed £2.8bn for NI Water infrastructure; the sum they received was £990m.

In summing up, Ms Venning reiterated that NI Water’s current governance model is broken, to date it hasn’t delivered the investment that Northern Ireland needs. She asked Forum Members to communicate to their parties the critical and urgent funding required to update NI Water’s ageing infrastructure and the importance of a new Governance Model for NI Water.

NI Water launched their consultation on their Draft Strategy on 25th September 2019. The closing date for responses to the consultation is 6th November 2019.

**Action:** NILGA will be developing a regional response with Councils to the NI Water Draft Strategy and would encourage Councils to respond. The link to the NI Water consultation can be found here: [https://www.niwater.com/ourstrategy/#your-say](https://www.niwater.com/ourstrategy/#your-say)

**Action:** As discussed at meeting, NI Water’s most recent Drinking Water response is attached with this note.

4. **Keynote Presentation 2 – Michael Graham, Chief Fire and Rescue Officer, NIFRS**

Michael Graham, Chief Fire and Rescue Officer and Alan Walmsley, Assistant Chief Fire and Rescue Officer updated the Forum on the financial constraints currently being faced by the NIFRS (approx. £2.3 million financial pressure) , and details of the Interim Service Delivery Model they have put in place, introduced from 12th August 2019.

NIFRS 2019 / 20 budget allocation is £74,147,643. To ensure services are planned, designed and delivered efficiently (while also remaining focused on community and firefighter safety) the interim Service Delivery Model has been introduced to try to manage the financial constraints the NIFRS is facing.

As of 12th August 2019, there are some stations which will operate with a nucleus crewing of 3 personnel , to be introduced at the following current day crewing stations – *(Station strength will be reduced from 7 to 5 personnel)*; Carrickfergus Station, Enniskillen Station, Newtownards Station, Armagh Station, Omagh Station and Portadown Station.
As outlined in the Interim Service Delivery Model, the primary focus is on how to deliver Fire and Rescue Services on a regional basis; to shift the focus of attaching resource to stations; and into the community instead. On-call firefighters provide emergency fire and rescue services to their local communities around the clock.

The role of the NIFRS has evolved over the years. The number of call outs to fires has dropped over the last 10 years; 40 – 60%. The Fire Service is now responding to different kinds of calls, including flooding incidents etc. In terms of "callouts", 30 – 35% callouts happen between 8am – 6pm, Monday – Friday. 65% of callouts happen at the weekend.

One of the issues causing concern – is the amount of money being spent in overtime – and how the service can reduce to a point where the Service can breakeven. There are currently 805 fulltime firefighters and the Interim Service Delivery Plan sets out how to use 805 firefighters in the best way. The NIFRS are also currently recruiting for part-time / on-call Firefighters in 41 stations across Northern Ireland.

In summing up, Mr Graham advised that the NIFRS still have circa £2.3m million of financial pressure; if additional funding is received in year, consideration will have to be given as where it is best spent. Mr Graham added that the NIFRS are currently working with the Department on the development of a 5 year strategic and transformative programme.

**Action:** NIFRS will be engaging with Councils over the coming weeks to update Councils on changes to the operational model and proposed plans moving forward.

5. **Issues to be addressed at future meetings of the Forum**

Mid Ulster Council have raised two issues to be discussed at future meetings of the Central – Local Government Forum:

(i) **Enhanced Health Care** – NILGA will seek representation from the Department of Health and the Health and Social Care Board for a regional discussion on the potential for improved health and care delivery across Northern Ireland and the Council role in public health to Central – Local Government Political Partnership Forum.

**Action:** NILGA will seek representation from the Department of Health and the Health and Social Care Board to meet with Central – Local Government Political Partnership Forum.

(ii) **Transportation & Rural Isolation** –

**Action:** Initially this issue will be brought to NILGA Placeshaping and Infrastructure Policy and Learning Network for further development with the 11 Councils, and brought to a future meeting of the Central – Local Government Political Partnership Forum.
**Action:** A template for Councils will be circulated with this Outcome Note to communicate issues which they wish to be raised at future meetings of the Central – Local Government Political Partnership Forum.

6. **Maximising impact of broadband for small businesses & communities**

Lisa O’Kane addressed the Forum. The current Project Stratum has raised negative concerns in the 11 Councils as it may not meet expectations in rural areas. The NILGA Office Bearers will be meeting with Noel Lavery, Permanent Secretary, DfE to raise regional concerns about the project and plan for future initiatives.

**Action:** Lisa O’Kane to provide an update on progress at next meeting.

7. **Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Central- Local Government Political Partnership Forum will take place on **Friday 31st January 2020, 10am – 12.30pm, in the NILGA Offices, Bradford Court, Castlereagh.**

**NB:** Please note that a fuller version of Outcomes and Actions will follow in Draft Minutes.