

Mr John Kelpie
Chief Executive
Derry City & Strabane District Council
98 Strand Road
Derry
BT48 7NN

8th October 2020

Dear John

Councils Sustainability - £71 million achieved to date for 2020/21 & More Work to Do

I have pleasure in referencing the 29th September 2020 NILGA Weekly Bulletin (attached for convenience) which highlights the partnership working which has to date yielded £71 million during 2020/21 for the 11 councils, with more effort now being diligently applied, to retrieve additional investment for this financial year.

In successive NILGA, all council engagements, and as clearly stated at the first Partnership Panel meeting in four years, last month, organised by the Association and with very constructive input by Council, investment this year offers some stability. The next two years will require a major overhaul of how councils are financed, what services are performed and what changes are needed at every level of government to re-set public finances, and the vital role of councils, going forward.

Council and your 10 counterpart local authorities, both councillors and officers, are working in a very collegiate, committed and results driven manner with both NILGA and SOLACE, to achieve some positive results such as the attached.

Amidst the continued work to contain the pandemic and deliver much needed economic recovery, we will push for the roles, responsibilities and resources of councils to be recognised fully, and continue to engage with Ministers, Committees and also Treasury itself, to put the case for local councils.

In the latter instance, NILGA has submitted a case for Councils to be invested in as part of the national, Comprehensive Spending Review, a first in terms of recognising specific consequential spending for local government, within devolved regions.

Thank you for presenting this communication and Bulletin to a Standing Committee of your Council.

Yours sincerely,



Cllr Matt Garrett
President (SF)



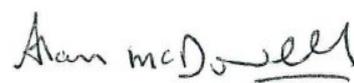
Cllr Frances Burton
Vice-President (DUP)



Cllr Robert Burgess
Vice-President (UUP)



Cllr Martin Kearney
Vice-President (SDLP)



Ald Alan McDowell
Vice-President (All)

Enc.

**NILGA Office Bearer ACTION MEETING – All Councils
Tuesday 29th September 2020 (10.15 – 11.00am)**

**£70m + in total negotiated for councils amidst new
containment & recovery measures.**

ACTION (carried forward): Derek McCallan and Karen Smyth are to hold a sub-meeting for those Members wishing to discuss the ongoing fly-tipping issue in their Council area.

Partnership Panel: At least 4 Ministers are expected to be engaged with the **Task & Finish Group** on sustainable finances with LG nominations to be made; Derek will discuss this with the OB's asap once attendance is sought in writing. The DfC Minister is keen not to have lengthy terms of reference, time is short, and needs are many from councils' perspectives.

£51million was allocated to Councils last week for Q2 – Q4; £40million for Councils and £11million for Waste Management. The details of how the money is to be divided is yet to be determined. Derek is keen for it to happen by joint working and co-design, much like the Welsh framework.

Circa **£6million of Waste Management money that was bid for did not get approved**, however, Karen Smyth said that this money is to be chased. Evidence-based facts and figures provided show that extra costs that Councils incurred were necessary - Andrew Cassells and Alfie Dallas are working closely with NILGA / SOLACE on this.

Ald McDowell explained there is a worry within Councils that there is a lack of information for the next financial year (2021-22). If there were financial assurances for loss of rates, Councils would be able to help rebuild and recover faster after Covid. Derek explained that the Task & Finish Group will help to determine that. Minister Murphy was sympathetic to revenue losses that Councils face, and capitalising revenue costs – some at least – would be a major sustainability step forward.

Lisa O'Kane said it is important to recognise the substantial impact that the contribution from Members at this weekly team NILGA meeting. Officer Bearers are to take the message of what happens at these meetings back to Council Committees.

ACTION: Members agreed that a letter be sent from the OB's to Council Chief Executives stating the collegiate work being done at the NILGA weekly meetings, as part of the effective all council partnerships now developing.

ACTION: All Members to receive the thank you letters sent to Ministers and SOLACE.

Ministers Dodds has confirmed attendance at the 9th October Executive meeting.

The **challenge for Councils now is twofold, sustainability & transformation.** The Reform, Devolution and Improvement Network have sent all Councils a Consultation on remodelling how Local Government is run and funded. NILGA has asked for support from SOLACE on this as well as each corporate council.

Ald Wales attended iESE last week and relayed that UK Councils often look for funding through working with the private sector and maybe this is something we could look at here in NI. This will be pursued via previous NILGA work, and with iESE.

The Place Shaping & Infrastructure Webinar Series will launch this week. Karen has asked for support from Elected Members at these as Cllr Corr may not be available for all 4 sessions. Minister Mallon is confirmed to attend session 4 – The ‘New Normal’.

ACTION: Information to be sent to all Members on this Webinar Series.

Lisa explained the status of the ‘Kick-Start Programme’ in NI. DfC is responsible for youth unemployment and it is on their agenda to look at this. Ald McDowell said while this is positive news, it is crucial that people of all ages who need help have access to this Programme. Derek said a £7million social economy fund is being pushed out now, cross-over between DfE, councils and DfC is needed. There was an attempt at bringing recovery together at the Partnership Panel and not to have silos working within the Departments.

Planning governance remains a strategic concern at some Councils in terms of needing to defer decisions and the technical issue of an application not being heard fully in a virtual setting. Challenges could come through on this. Members said that a strict process of Chairing and policy enforcement, 4/5 minutes slots for those in favour of and those against the planning application is key. Keeping procedures tight is therefore crucial and prevents challenge.

Code of Conduct Review and other matters will be raised at the NAC on Friday in Cookstown, NILGA will attend in support of this.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

Next OB Action Meetings: Tuesday 6th, 13th & 20th October 2020

Code of Conduct Training Event: Wednesday 7th October 2020

NILGA All Council Executive Meeting: Friday 9th October 2020

Environmental Impact Assessment Training Event: Thursday 15th October 2020

All details available via www.nilga.org and part physical/ part virtual meetings now being considered but not guaranteed, from Nov 2020 subject to technology and compliances.

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NILGA Office Bearer WEEKLY ACTION MEETING – All Councils Tuesday 6th October 2020 (10.15 – 11.15am)

COUNCILS TO PLAN AHEAD – Transformation & Funding Essential for Our Entire Electoral Term & Beyond - Not Just This Year.

Headline for last week was the aggregate funding for Councils to March 2021, this cannot go unnoticed. There needs to be recognition of this through reporting into Councils the NILGA bulletin at standing Committees. Council Chiefs can support the bulletin going to full Council meetings, signed off by Office Bearers, to reference all the collective hard work. The £70million plus is a good start but financial planning is needed for the years ahead.

SOLACE have prepared a letter on ‘**Council future Funding & Recovery**’ which was sent to the Communities Committee before they meet on the 8th October. NILGA has added to this submission, setting out a joint position – that Council finances as they stand are an unsustainable model. It is not about income losses alone, remodelling is crucial.

ACTION: NILGA to send attendees a copy of the SOLACE letter sent to the DfC.

ACTION: NILGA to send attendees a copy of the letter sent to Council Chiefs on 08.10.20

Minister Dodds has sent her apologies for the NILGA Executive on Friday 9th October 2020 and will reschedule for another time, (**STOP PRESS: An Economy Senior Official will present in the interim**). A short interactive discussion on economic policies, small businesses and the social economy will take place. Discussion can be captured, and issues raised by members of all councils will form a follow up to the **NILGA Economy & International Affairs Network** meeting on 8th October 2020 which will be focusing on tourism. The Network will receive a presentation from the NI Tourism Alliance.

NILGA gives evidence on the role of local government in tourism to the **Economy Committee** meeting on 21st October 2020. Officers from councils have been asked to assist with the development of a submission to the Committee. NILGA will be represented by Ald. Stephen Moutray and Lisa O’Kane.

Strength in numbers – councils acting together – was discussed and various co-ordination activities of SOLACE & NILGA were considered. All have a clear community & economic focus. Derek has asked Members to link up with their own chief executive in Council to help the process. Cllr Burton asked NILGA to push the rural economy and rural enterprise in the new Rural Development Programme. Cllr Nicholl agreed and said the Rural Needs consultation also needs looked at. Members collectively agreed these as a priority, NILGA consultation responses were much needed by many councils and Departments of Stormont.

ACTION: Attendees to receive a copy of the report from NI Tourism Alliance.

ACTION: NILGA to prepare a priority policy piece on Rural Needs.

Cllr Kearney raised the issue that **musicians have “fallen through the cracks” in terms of financial support during Covid**. The new licencing laws of premises closing at 11pm has only exacerbated the issue. Cllr Garrett agreed and said that BCC put forward a motion to try and lobby for funding and support for the arts and creative sector going forward. Hotels, travel agents and the beauty industry

are having similar issues. Members agreed to submit evidence to NILGA so the Association can lobby the DfE & DfC on councils' behalf, via the evidence-based approach.

Cllr Nicholl explained that money had been allocated to Tourism, but funding was still being held back. The importance of everyone working together and the connection of what we do in councils via NILGA is crucial. Managing expectations is difficult but necessary. An individual council's issues are often resolved when the aggregate of councils come together as a sector.

Policy work is continuing on **fly-tipping protocols** and a sub-group meeting will be held in due course. Karen Smyth said 4 councils have signed up to this already. Karen also asked attendees to promote the **Place Shaping & Infrastructure Webinar series** with their fellow Members in Council.

Ald McDowell is to present to the **NI Affairs Committee (Westminster) on 14th October 2020 on the 3.5 billion Shared Prosperity Fund**. SOLACE is to assist in giving evidence at this. SOLACE has also released the Ekosgen Report which will be a help to NILGA to make an evidence base.

Peace Plus is progressing well and SEUPB is developing the criteria, outputs, and allocation for each theme. Engagement with councils on the Peace Plus action plans and cross-border spatial policies will also take place soon. The Finance Minister will be attending the next Steering Group meeting, with drafts going to both Governments by Jan 2021. NILGA OBs and CEO said a big yield from SPF and Peace Plus could help to keep the rates down and economic development up.

Cllr Garrett explained that the Councils and senior officers are starting to reference more the **real value in the NILGA/ SOLACE individual work & partnership**. Agendas in all meetings have Covid recovery on them, issues are common throughout all council areas, therefore coming together and being heard is crucial for LG. The Partnership Panel Task & Finish Group and engagement from Ministers shows **a consistent approach is impactful to all**.

Ald McDowell wanted to see **Shared Services on Recovery Plans**, savings could be made through services such as back-office support. A model driven by councils is needed; there is a fear that future government funding will come with strings attached. Cllr Kearney explained that the **Mid South West Growth Deal** proves that there is a benefit in working together and not to be insular. Derek said there is a leadership role and a changing model and direction of travel for LG. The Reform, Devolution and Improvement work by NILGA's Network has led to a live consultation currently out with councils, which explicitly references Shared Services – radical, professional & political partnership is needed.

Cllr Garrett explained that councils received a letter from NMD asking for **support on the increase of fines and stronger legislation for dog-fouling**, and suggested NILGA write to DAERA on behalf of the councils, subject to receiving details from either NMD or BCC or both. There was also comment about the fine increase from £80 to £250 and the pros and cons of this. Cllr Curran explained the reasoning behind the letter and said the consequences could be serious for errant dog owners. Stray dogs are also an issue, as well as people putting their name to a complaint, which is mandatory, creating fear of whistleblowing or reprisal.

ACTION: NMD / BCC to send NILGA the original letter sent to councils which will be considered in regional policy terms.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

Next OB Action Meetings: Tuesday 13th, 20th & 27th October 2020

Economy & International Affairs Network: Thursday 8th October 2020

NILGA All Council Executive Meeting: Friday 9th October 2020

Environmental Impact Assessment Training Event: Thursday 15th October 2020

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NILGA COUNCILS ALERT: TOURISM, COVID & THE ECONOMY, PLACE SHAPING, PLANNING POLICY & £2.4 BN ADDITIONAL FUNDING FOR NI REMAIN HIGH ON THE AGENDA

**NILGA Office Bearer WEEKLY ACTION MEETING – All Councils
Tuesday 20th October 2020 (10.15 – 11.30am)**

COMPLETED 21/10: The Economy Committee submission on the impact of Covid on council is complete, with NILGA and Solace views aggregated, presented 21/10 via President & M&EA CE.

Councils must be materially involved in restriction and recovery design, whether regional or local and the impact on Council services needs a proper flow of information, currently assisted by Finance & Emergency Planning teams. The Executive, DfC and DoF are all asking for information from Councils at Committee and Ministerial levels. Further Barnett Consequentials have come through estimated at £2.4 BN, the sector needs to press for an evidenced based allocation.

COMPLETED 20/10: Joan McCaffrey from LG Civil Contingencies provided a regional level update for NI. The Civil Contingencies teams from all areas have now amalgamated into one team which has made sharing information a quicker and easier process. **A strategy has been launched on containment and recovery, which needs public buy-in.** Even though a pandemic was always on the risk register, no one could have predicted the effect it would have on everyone, including local government. The Civil Contingencies Group meets weekly and has done since March 2020. Stephen Reid, as the SOLACE representative on the group has provided optimum support during this time, giving and gaining info from DfC, PHA and TEO.

Further update via **NILGA Executive in November 2020**, with greater detail on the council services service opening / capacity pattern.

A cross-council Communications Subgroup has been set up with TEO, so the correct information is filtered down from Stormont to Councils and then to communities. This group is well placed to communicate on **winter and EU Exit** contingencies, which are continuing areas of work. A civil contingency 'Hub' of government departments and local government has been set up to ensure that debriefs, improvement of services and restrictions announcements happen together, progress update at above NILGA Executive.

Members agreed that clear, concise, and cohesive messaging is key. From council Chief Executives to elected members, sharing the right information at the right time to the right audiences is crucial. Information on NI Direct has proven to be difficult to find due to the scale of the site - Joan has said this is currently been looked at to try and simplify.

Brexit liaison continues at SOLACE level with DfC, DfE and DAERA. A liaison officer is due to be in post soon to link between both tiers of government, NILGA also engaged in Trade / Migration / Ports policy

engagement at national level. A Hub is to be re-established for Brexit as there are similar implications for Covid as Brexit, e.g. food checks.

Joan thanked NILGA for its support in gaining 3-year funding (proposed) for 'civil contingencies', this to be reaffirmed by NILGA in DfC Minister's meeting 29/10/2020.

ACTION: Joan to give a progress update at the NILGA Executive on Friday 13th November.

ACTION: DfC Minister meeting

ACTION: Mainstreaming channelled through DfC to protect long term emergency planning function.

The DoF sent communication to NILGA on the Shared Prosperity Fund (EU successor funding) which noted *'we do not believe delivery directly via local Government is a viable option in Northern Ireland and that engagement of local government in replacement programmes should be a matter for the NI Executive under similar terms as current programmes'*. This to be addressed, noting the NI Affairs Committee presentation by NILGA / Belfast CC CE, Suzanne Wylie, who did a great job offering clarity and compelling evidence for local government on benefits of councils gaining investment from the Shared Prosperity Fund.

ACTION: DoF Ministerial / Perm sec Follow Up.

Strategic Policy: The emerging Programme for Government (PfG) 2021 is to be shaped in a way which materially recognised Community Planning more. Important this is shaped with LG's inputs. NILGA has been invited as have SOLACE to participate in early stage discussion.

ACTION: NILGA to respond to DfC communication on the emerging PfG.

FUNDING CLAWBACK (VAT): This ruling could provide retrospective funding in the region of £50-£70 million for NI councils but will likely be subject to HMRC appeal. [VAT rebate for Councils](#)

ACTION: Recognition piece to be completed by NILGA to MUDC.

4 LGAs finance meeting on Wednesday which Derek attends weekly has shown that evidence base lobbying works. Information from Treasury has shown there to be Barnett Consequentials for NI (see above).

Economy Committee meeting on 21st October in relation to the role of local government in tourism, (NILGA President Cllr Garrett, Lisa O'Kane and Anne Donaghy as SOLACE representative would give evidence to the Committee). Council officers have made contributions towards a paper. There is a briefing with the President / Anne on 20th October.

Partnership Panel Finances Task & Finish Group Update – NOT YET MET. Derek is meeting with the Assistant Permanent Secretary this week at his request. The Minister and LG members discussed and agreed this, NILGA sent follow up twice and matter is now urgent.

ACTION: Derek will formally update Tuesday 27th October and informally over weekend.

Brexit – Lisa has been asked by the Independent Money Authority (IMA) to start engaging with them to ensure EU citizens’ rights are upheld by public authorities here; there is a meeting at end of the week. The EU Transition Delivery Board meeting has been postponed until November.

Per comments by council representative, Cllr. John Coyle, NIO refused to meet with Fermanagh & Omagh DC on EU Exit, the council’s Brexit committee believes “it is operating in an information vacuum”. Lisa noted that NIO had taken on board criticism that there had been little engagement with civic society – and local government - on Brexit and was surprised that invitation from the committee had been declined.

ACTION: Lisa to follow up with the NIO & UPDATE on IMA meeting next Tuesday.

Mental Health Services are feeling the pressure financially with funding running low; F&O DC member Cllr. Coyle confirmed that a letter to DfC, DoH and DAERA had gone, asking for extra funding.

Cllr Burton explained that massage therapists and reflexologists have had to close, meaning clients are going without treatment and these businesses are also, like hospitality and others, very fragile. Lisa said registered businesses can now claim for grants (not just those paying rates) and advised Frances to speak further to the Economic Development team within Council, who could then follow through if necessary, via NILGA at regional level.

ACTION: Date for fly-tipping protocol meeting to be sent to relevant members.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

Next OB Action Meetings: Tuesday 27th October 3rd & 10th November 2020

Place Shaping & Infrastructure Webinar Series: Wednesday 4th, 11th & 25th November 2020

NILGA All Council Executive Meeting: Friday 13th November 2020

All details available via www.nilga.org



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