

**Sent by email only to:**

Chair of Council Planning Committees

cc: Council Chief Executives  
Council Heads of Planning

13 January 2026

Dear Chair,

**Planning Learning and Engagement Programme – Request for Nominations**

On behalf of the NILGA Executive, we are writing to you in your capacity as Chair of the Planning Committee to seek your Council's active involvement in a strategically important piece of work being jointly progressed by the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) and the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA).

Planning is one of the most significant and high-profile functions exercised by local government, and the role of councillors in planning decision-making is critical to ensuring outcomes that are lawful, robust, transparent and reflective of local priorities. Against a backdrop of increasing complexity, public scrutiny and challenge within the planning system, there is a clear need for stronger, more consistent engagement with elected members across all councils.

DfI and NILGA are therefore developing an enhanced and coordinated approach to **planning learning, engagement and continuous improvement for councillors**, which places elected members at the centre of planning improvement activity. This work builds on ongoing engagement with councillors, the Department's Planning Improvement Programme, and the Minister's clear support for deeper, more structured engagement with elected members and closer partnership working with NILGA.

**Proposed approach**

The proposed approach is designed to support councillors across all councils to exercise their planning responsibilities with confidence and consistency, and will include:

- Ongoing, structured engagement between DfI, NILGA and elected members on planning improvement, reform and future challenges, including engagement with the Infrastructure Minister as appropriate.
- A blended programme of learning and engagement for councillors, combining:
  - Short, accessible written and digital learning materials;
  - Thematic online engagement sessions on emerging, specialist and high-risk planning issues;
  - In-person engagement with individual Planning Committees focused on development management, decision-making and good practice;

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- Improved sharing of good practice between councils, recognising the value of learning from different committee structures, schemes of delegation and approaches to member–officer working; and
- Stronger alignment between councillor learning, officer development and the Department’s Planning Improvement Programme.

**Task and Finish Advisory Group**

Central to the success of this work is meaningful input from councillors who are directly involved in Planning Committee decision-making. To that end, DfI and NILGA propose to establish a **Task and Finish Advisory Group of councillors drawn from across all councils.**

This group will play a key advisory role in shaping the learning and engagement programme, ensuring it reflects the realities faced by Planning Committees, and helping to identify priority areas where councillor leadership and shared learning can make the greatest impact. Representation from across councils will be essential to ensure the work is informed by a broad range of local contexts, experiences and challenges.

We would therefore request that you to **nominate up to two councillors** from your Planning Committee to participate in this Advisory Group. Nominees should be a current Planning Committee member, have experience of Planning Committee work and a willingness to contribute constructively to regional planning improvement on behalf of local government.

The Advisory Group will operate on a time-limited basis and it is expected to meet a number of times during 2026. Given the regional nature of this work and pressures on councillors’ time, it is expected that online attendance can be facilitated if needed.

We would be grateful if nominations could be submitted by **28 February 2026** including the name, role and contact details of each nominee.

Your Council’s engagement in this work will be vital to ensuring that the resulting approach is credible, relevant and firmly rooted in elected member experience. We look forward to working closely with you and your nominated members as this important programme is taken forward.

Yours sincerely



**Cllr Billy Webb, MBE JP**  
**President (All)**



**Cllr Matt Garrett**  
**Vice-President (Sinn Fein)**



**Cllr Alison Bennington**  
**Vice-President (DUP)**



**Ald Hazel Legge**  
**Vice-President (UUP)**



**Cllr Carl Whyte**  
**Vice-President (SDLP)**