

## **NILGA Framework of Engagement With Constituent Councils Draft for Consideration**

### **Introduction**

The Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) undertook a review of NILGA in 2006 to design proposals to support the development of the organisation in the context of the RPA. In their report 'Modelling NILGA's Future' (see NILGA website) the IDeA set out a key recommendation for NILGA to enhance their communication and engagement activities.

NILGA arranged an away day to consider how our existing processes could be developed in early 2007. Proposals emanating from this meeting are detailed in the draft document for your consideration. As it is intended that the Framework will define how we develop joint working arrangements as a sector in the months and years to come, NILGA wishes to ensure the proposals for action are fully agreed with councils. We therefore are seeking to visit every Council by the end of March 2008 to discuss the operation of the framework as the basis for joint working in the future.

We would welcome the views of Councils, professional groupings and partner organisations in writing by the 28<sup>th</sup> of March 2008. Please see Consultation Questions on page 10 below. Responses should be made to the Director of Communications and Engagement as detailed below.

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# **NILGA Framework of Engagement With Constituent Councils**

## **Draft for Consideration**

### **1. Introduction**

The role of NILGA is to represent the generic interests of the local government sector. This can only be achieved effectively with the full engagement and support of the member Councils.

This document sets out a framework of how NILGA and its constituent Councils can work together to ensure a strong and coherent voice for local government so that the influence of the sector can be maximised within the wider public domain.

This is the first comprehensive engagement document for consideration by the Councils. Following consultation and subsequent finalisation, the document will be reviewed on an annual basis.

Specifically the document sets out:

- The Vision, Mission and Objectives
- Business Planning Cycle and Subscription Rates
- Membership, Roles and Responsibilities
- Communication Protocols
- Consultations and Development of NILGA Responses
- Working with Partner Organisations

### **2. Vision, Mission and Objectives**

NILGA will operate in the context of the agreed vision for local government. The NILGA vision, mission and objectives are summarised below.

#### **2.1 Purpose, Vision and Mission**

The purpose of NILGA is to support the development of local councils in line with the vision for local government. In summary the vision<sup>1</sup> is to empower local councils to;

- Provide strong civic leadership
- Deliver modern public services
- Shape the places where people live and work

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<sup>1</sup> See full Vision statement at [www.nilga.org](http://www.nilga.org)

These three themes are underpinned by a set of principles which include; working in partnership with other councils, central government and social partners; taking a citizen centred approach; continuous improvement; innovation; value for money and strong engagement with local communities.

In working towards the vision the NILGA key role is:

***“To be the voice of strong, democratic local government and the champion of improved services to citizens.”***

Our mission is;

***“To work with councils and other stakeholders to champion and support the development of a world class local government system in Northern Ireland which works in partnership with others to serve citizens”.***

## **2.2 Objectives**

The objectives<sup>2</sup> of the Association are summarised below.

- a) To represent the interests of member authorities
- b) To formulate sound policies for the development of local government
- c) To provide a forum for the discussion of matters of strategic concern
- d) To represent the interests of local authorities as employers
- e) To promote the policies of the Association and provide communication services
- f) To provide national and international liaison arrangements for the sector
- g) To provide services for any party or professional association in return for an agreed contribution
- h) To facilitate local government engagement in the RPA and seek to support the improvement of local government services.

## **3. Business Planning and Subscriptions**

The role of NILGA is to represent and promote the generic interests of the sector. In addition NILGA may deliver services on behalf of local government when there is collective agreement to do so.

### **3.1 Strategic Agenda**

NILGA will develop a strategic agenda in consultation with Councils within the first six months following a local government election. The strategic agenda will cover the four year period but will be reviewed on an annual basis as part of the business planning cycle. (See current strategic agenda at appendix A).

### **3.2 Business Plan, Operational Plan and Subscription Rate**

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<sup>2</sup> NILGA objectives are set out in full in the NILGA Constitution which can be viewed at [www.nilga.org](http://www.nilga.org)

NILGA will prepare a strategic plan on a four year basis and an operational plan on an annual basis. Without prejudice, the operational plan will outline core business and optional additional work.

NILGA will consult with Councils in December each year on the operational plan and the proposed subscription rate. The business case and subscription rate will be considered in the light of consultation responses at the NILGA Full Members' meeting in early spring each year.

### **3.3 Performance Management and Reporting**

NILGA will act within an agreed performance management framework which will include continuous improvement processes. The organisation will report to Councils on an annual basis regarding performance against the objectives.

### **3.4 Review and Evaluation**

The executive will review the performance of the organisation on an annual basis and monitor ongoing performance on a monthly basis. NILGA will institute an external review no less than once per electoral term.

## **4. Membership, Roles and Responsibilities**

Membership arrangements are set out in the constitution and are summarised below.

### **4.1 NILGA President and Vice President (Office bearers)**

#### **Composition**

There are five NILGA Vice Presidents. The Presidency will circulate over the electoral period dependent on party strength (largest to smallest) with the change being made each year at the NILGA AGM.

#### **Meeting Frequency**

NILGA Office Bearers will meet no less than once per month.

#### **Role**

The role of the Office Bearers is to:

- Hold the Chief Executive to account for the performance of the organisation and adherence to organisational policies and protocols
- Facilitate NILGA nomination processes
- Provide liaison with their political party grouping
- Represent NILGA at public events and conferences
- The President will act as a spokesperson for the organisation
- A NILGA Vice President will be appointed as the Treasurer. The Treasurer will chair a Finance meeting every quarter and report to the NILGA Executive on this basis.

## **4.2 Executive Membership**

### **Composition**

The five Office Bearers are ex officio members of the Executive. The additional 28 members of the Executive are allocated by the political nominating officers (in liaison with the NILGA Office Bearers if different) relative to party strengths.

While it is not specified in the constitution, members recognise the desirability of every Council being represented on the Executive to ensure informed decision making and enhance communication. If a council is not represented within the 33 persons on the Executive, it will be entitled to appoint an observer. Observers can contribute to the NILGA debates and will be requested to provide a liaison/communication role but will not be entitled to vote.

The NILGA Executive is supported by three Chief Executive Advisors.

### **Meeting Frequency**

The Executive members will meet on a monthly basis.

### **Role**

The role of the Executive members is to:

- Consider the generic interests of local government having cognisance of their Council and party perspectives
- Develop the NILGA Annual Business Plan and approve draft estimates
- Monitor the performance of the organisation
- Review ongoing NILGA business and provide advice on developing actions to deal with emerging issues
- Support the liaison and communication arrangements with Councils
- Report to the NILGA Full Members
- Consider NILGA policy positions in advance of consultations with Councils.

## **4.3 Full Members**

### **Composition**

There are 152 members of NILGA composed of representatives of all member councils. Each Council will be represented by a number of nominated councillors reflective of the relative size of the Council and the political composition of the Council.

All Chief Executives of member councils are invited to contribute to NILGA meetings.

### **Frequency of Meetings**

The NILGA Full Members will meet every two months.

## **Role**

The role of the NILGA Full members is to;

- Consider issues of generic importance to local government having cognisance of Council and party political perspectives
- Contribute to the policy debate at NILGA meetings
- Agree policy responses
- Agree the NILGA business plan and subscription rates
- Consider the recommendations of the NILGA Executive when developing policy beyond that stated in the strategic agenda.

**4.4 Working Groups** (RPA, E government, Waste, NIJC, JNC, Planning, Health and Environment, European, Agriculture and Rural Development (Agriculture group is facilitated by Dungannon and South Tyrone DC).

### **Composition**

Nominating Officers will allocate Chair and Vice Chair positions of the working groups based on party strengths. Each party will be entitled to nominate additional representatives to each working group to ensure two party members per group. (Nominating officers will have regard to gender and geographical parameters). NILGA will review the working group arrangements on an annual basis to ensure the effective management of the work of the organisation.

### **Frequency of Meetings**

Working Groups meet monthly, quarterly or as required.

### **Role**

The role of the working groups is to support the development of NILGA policy positions and develop projects to support the ongoing work. The groups may also provide a communication, liaison or negotiating role as appropriate. Working Groups will report to the NILGA Executive on a regular basis.

The Chairs of the Working Groups will be expected as far as possible to be the spokesperson for NILGA in relation to the topic area covered.

### **4.5 Outside Bodies**

Nominating officers will use the d'Hondt mechanism for allocating positions on outside bodies. Nominating officers will have regard to gender and geographical parameters. Individuals on outside bodies will be expected to report to NILGA on an annual basis. NILGA officers will support NILGA members on outside bodies as required.

## **5. Communication Protocols**

Effective two way communication systems are essential. The communication mechanisms and responsibilities are outlined below.

### **5.1 NILGA Responsibilities**

#### **Visits**

NILGA will endeavour to formally visit each council no less than once per year. Formal visits will be supported by informal visits at officer level.

#### **Minutes**

Chief Executives will be furnished with the minutes of the NILGA Full Members' meetings.

#### **Website**

NILGA will maintain the website with all appropriate policy information.

#### **Monthly Update**

NILGA will circulate a monthly update in the first week of every month detailing the key work areas during the month and highlighting upcoming events.

#### **Consultations**

When NILGA formally consults with councils a period of no less than eight weeks will be allocated. (If urgent consultations are required NILGA will endeavour to maximise the time available for a response or consider special consultation arrangements)

#### **Requests for information from Local Government Partners**

To support the participation of the sector in a variety of projects it is often necessary to highlight examples or collate the views/activities within the sector. In these cases NILGA will endeavour to highlight a range of views across a variety of geographical areas.

#### **Contact Management**

In all cases where two-way communication is required, NILGA will contact the relevant officer, and the Council Liaison Officer.

#### **Information**

NILGA will endeavour to respond to any council request for information within two working days.

### **5.2 Council Responsibilities**

#### **Council Agenda**

Councils are requested to place the NILGA monthly update on the Council agenda to facilitate discussion about sectoral issues.

### **NILGA Executive Member/Observer**

Councils are requested to facilitate an opportunity for the NILGA Executive member to report on NILGA issues at the council meeting and to raise any issues or concerns that the Council may have at NILGA meetings. Issues of significant concern should be formally raised in writing by the Council.

### **Council Liaison Officer**

Councils are requested to appoint a Liaison Officer to ensure that all NILGA requests for information are effectively dealt with in the appropriate time scales.

### **Management of Engagement**

Councils are requested to review the attendance of members at NILGA meetings on a six monthly basis and manage their engagement with NILGA. Councils are requested to advise NILGA of any Council membership changes within 14 days.

## **6. Consultations and Development of NILGA Responses**

**6.1** The aim of NILGA is to represent the generic interests of the sector. To achieve this, a variety of processes are utilised depending on the issue. These are detailed below. Councils should note that NILGA will avoid making any public statements about issues pertinent to individual council issues or more regional issues.

### **6.2 Strategic Policy**

The NILGA strategic agenda will be developed within 6 months of the local government elections. It will be developed in consultation with the sector at NILGA meetings, conferences and events and will be fully consulted upon with individual councils. NILGA will publish press releases or respond to government departments on matters of agreed policy without further reference to councils (e.g. NILGA call on government to work in partnership with local government).

### **6.3 Emerging Strategic Issues**

If a strategic issue emerges, NILGA will formally consult with Councils. This may be undertaken in two ways:

- NILGA will seek the views of councils and collate a response (e.g. response to fly tipping).
- NILGA will develop a draft options paper and consult on this with councils (e.g. development of the Information Systems Strategy).

If the matter is of major significance to the sector, NILGA will also organise a seminar or conference to fully debate and explore the policy options to support the development of a response (e.g. Water Charging Seminar, Community Planning Seminar).



#### **6.4 Technical Issues**

If an issue is of a technical nature, NILGA will ask the appropriate professional grouping (or group of officers) to develop a draft response. This can be adopted by the NILGA Executive or further consulted upon with Councils depending on the nature of the issue and the time scales available (e.g. response to Reform of Rates).

#### **6.5 Public Interest Issues**

When a matter is not of strategic significance to local government but is raised at NILGA by a council and is of significant public interest, NILGA will decide either to express no view, to request further research or to express the view of the Executive (e.g. seat belts on school buses).

#### **6.7 Agreement on the appropriate process**

In all cases the NILGA Executive will agree the method of consultation. Chief Executive Advisors will advise the NILGA Chief Executive on the appropriate methodology.

### **7 Working With Partner Organisations**

NILGA have agreed to work with organisations within the sector to contribute to the strategic development of the sector.

#### **7.1 SOLACE**

NILGA and SOLACE have agreed to work together on issues which support the development of the sector.

- **Liaison Arrangements** - To support communication, NILGA and SOLACE will provide a liaison mechanism at the NILGA RPA working group. One meeting will be arranged in December each year to support the development of joint working.
- **Nominations to outside bodies** – NILGA and SOLACE will design a protocol for allocating positions on outside bodies and work together to support the effective representation of the sector.

#### **7.2 Other Professional Organisations**

NILGA will work in partnership with the professional groupings within the sector. NILGA will circulate the members of these organisations with the NILGA monthly update. NILGA will request advice and support from these organisations when developing policy positions within their own professional context. NILGA will prioritise development of these relationships in the coming years.

#### **7.3 Local Government Staff Commission**

NILGA have agreed to work with the LGSC. This relationship is defined in a Memorandum of Co-Operation.

## **7.4 National Association of Councillors**

NILGA has agreed to work in partnership with the NAC. Specifically NILGA will circulate monthly updates to NAC members. The NAC will be expected to take a lead on Councillor issues relating to terms and conditions. NILGA will liaise with the NAC on these issues and provide support to the NAC as appropriate.

## **7.5 Meetings Schedule**

NILGA will publish a schedule of meetings and circulate it to all partner bodies in January each year. NILGA will liaise with partner bodies to avoid diary clashes as far as reasonably practicable.

# **NILGA Consultation - Key Questions**

**Jan – March 2008**

## **Framework For Engagement**

### **Section 2: Vision, Mission, Objectives**

1. Do you feel the vision, mission and objectives set out for NILGA are appropriate?
2. Is there anything that should be amended, left out or included?

### **Section 3: Business Planning and Subscriptions**

3. Is the development of the Strategic Agenda a useful tool to define the local government strategic priorities?
4. Are the proposals for business planning cycles and the subscription rate setting appropriate?

### **Section 4: Membership, Roles and Responsibilities**

5. Have you any comments on the membership and representational arrangements within NILGA?

### **Section 5: Communication Protocols**

6. Are the communication protocols appropriate to ensure effective communication?
7. Do you believe the Council responsibilities set out are workable and appropriate?

### **Section 6: Consultations and Development of NILGA Responses**

8. Are the consultation mechanisms adequate to ensure that NILGA is au fait with local government thinking?

### **Section 7: Working With Partner Organisations**

9. Have you any further suggestions as to how this work could be enhanced?

## **Wider Comments**

10. Do you have any wider comments?

## **Responses**

Please forward your response to Máire Killoran, Director of Communications and Engagement at [M.killoran@nilga.org](mailto:M.killoran@nilga.org) by the 28<sup>th</sup> March 2008.

## Appendix A: Strategic Agenda

### Introduction

The paper presented at the NILGA conference and subsequently endorsed by the political panel of the task force sets out a vision in which local government is citizen focused, has the ability to act independently in the interests of citizens and operates within a strategic context agreed with government.

While it is evident that the changes are extremely complex and there is significant debate required in relation to the detailed changes, there is strong agreement around the local government strategic agenda. The outcomes which Local Government wishes to highlight are listed below in general terms and in relation to each work stream.

### Long Term Priorities - 2009

1. Strong Local Government where councils are self funding and have the power to act in the interests of citizens
2. A formal and meaningful relationship with Government
3. Strong Well Being/Community Planning legislation leading to a new culture of joined up working and strong civic leadership
4. A system of governance arrangements which are robust, equitable and inclusive and rooted in local communities
5. A citizen focused and modern approach to delivery of public services

### Short term Priorities – as soon as possible

1. The development of a new transformational mind set and need for a new brand (New Local Government – 2015)
2. A robust communication strategy
3. Identification and provision of adequate resources from government to support effective implementation
4. Provide details of the services to be relocated, full costings, develop arbitration and negotiation arrangements
5. Initiate agreed changes where appropriate before 2009

Working Group	Objective	Priorities
Central/Local Relationship	Local government as a sphere of government (Currently treated as a social partner)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ A new culture of partnership</li> <li>➤ Legalised and resourced relationship with prescribed engagement mechanisms e.g. Code of practice or concordat)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A voice in shaping regional policy</li> <li>- Independence to shape local policies</li> <li>- Strong political framework supported by officers interfaces and informal systems</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Finance	Independent Local Government  Adequate resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Finance system which is equitable and maximises local government independence</li> <li>➤ Services identified to be relocated to local government should relocate with full resources consistent with New Burdens doctrine</li> <li>➤ Independent arbitration desirable and sound negotiation process required</li> </ul>

Governance	A robust and equitable system of governance which is inclusive and effective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Effective committee/leadership arrangements</li> <li>➤ Robust system of checks and balances</li> <li>➤ Accountability mechanisms for community plan</li> <li>➤ Effective local engagement mechanisms</li> <li>➤ Adequate support and remuneration for democratic activities</li> </ul>
Community Planning	New culture of joined up working, partnership and strong civic leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Legislative power to require agencies to engage in the community planning process</li> <li>➤ Accountability mechanisms for community plan</li> <li>➤ Strong generic powers to act in the interest of the community unless otherwise specified.</li> </ul>
Human Resources	Smooth, managed change process in the short term and a productive, flexible workforce in the longer term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Local manpower plans to ensure necessary human resources for new organisations</li> <li>➤ Mechanisms for managing people displaced in the change process (e.g. re-training, severance etc) with full, central funding</li> <li>➤ Effective communication streams</li> <li>➤ Modernised local arrangements for: Recruiting, Developing, Performance managing and Rewarding people in local government</li> </ul>
Capacity Building	A strategic approach to ensure the sector is fit for purpose in the short term and has the ability to develop itself in the future	<p>Implementation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Elected members and LGA supported to develop strategic work 06-09</li> <li>➤ Strategic relationship with parties</li> <li>➤ Officers and members supported and developed to lead change process and work in a new system (current and new services)</li> <li>➤ Relationship developed with new services at all levels</li> </ul> <p>2009+</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Capacity to have strong political leadership based on good professional advice</li> <li>➤ Capacity of DoE to support local government across central government</li> <li>➤ Capacity of sector to develop itself (Organisations, members and staff )</li> </ul>
Shared services	New ways to deliver services which do not limit the autonomy of individual councils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Explore opportunities for transformational ways to deliver services</li> <li>➤ Agree services which should be delivered on a shared basis</li> <li>➤ Provide framework for new councils to share services (Permissive legislation already in place)</li> </ul>
Performance Management	Modern performance management systems with a focus on self development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Effective information management and reporting systems</li> <li>➤ Proactive auditing arrangements adding to best value</li> <li>➤ Capacity to self improve and self regulate (regulation by exception)</li> </ul>
Estate	Rationalised estate capable of meeting new needs efficiently and equitably	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Accessible services</li> <li>➤ New methods of working where possible (Arbitration process may be required)</li> </ul>