



Weighing the Pros and Cons

This paper is not definitive in nature, but rather highlights some of the Pros and Cons attached to any consideration Belfast City Council would give to the possible withdrawal from NILGA. Whilst there is growing political pressure within the Council to reconsider its position within NILGA given the fact that the Council's interests may not be adequately represented, at this stage, through NILGA, it should be noted that **no decision has been taken by the Council to withdraw from NILGA.**

PROS

- Whilst NILGA has shown a willingness to engage with the Council and seek its input and views on emerging policy issues (e.g., Waste Management), there has been a tendency that the agreed "NILGA view" frequently reflects the perspective of rural Councils.
- The Council would be required to commit more time and effort at Elected Member level to reflecting Belfast's interests in NILGA's lobbying positions.
- It is the Council's experience that Government have been willing to engage independently with BCC on key policy issues, e.g., the Review of Public Administration, European Affairs, Waste Management etc.
- The Council would tend to develop and coalesce around a "Belfast position" on major policy issues
- Concerns with regard to the current levels of capacity within NILGA and its ability to effectively lobby on behalf of the local government sector on key issues including, for example, the positioning of NILGA as a key player in lobbying European affairs and the possible negative impact this may have on the Council's information networks and ability to bring down European funding.
- In terms of regional policies and economic development issues, Belfast tend to lose out in regional arguments as the majority of Councils and hence NILGA are not supportive of the regional significance of Belfast.
- There seems to be a strong anti-Belfast agenda within the **Membership** of NILGA.
- The interests of Belfast may be better served outside of NILGA than within.
- The Council's annual subscription charge (which is currently in excess of £100K) could be redirected to other services within the Council.

CONS

- The Council should be engaged within NILGA and attempt to gain greater influence within the Association with a view to providing leadership and direction to the Local Government sector.
- NILGA have the ear of Government and consequently, in theory at least, can be an effective channel through which to influence Government policy.
- Withdrawal from NILGA may lead to a fracturing of the local government sector. In that event, Local Government as a whole may be weaker and that in turn may have a potential negative impact on the level of influence of the Council.
- The reputation of the Council could be severely damaged as a result from its withdrawal from NILGA.
- The Council may become marginalised and the rural vs urban differential may be exacerbated.
- The Environment Minister and Central Government generally might give greater weight to the views espoused by provincial Councils through NILGA as a forum as against the City Council.
- Central Government intend to use NILGA as a key stakeholder in engaging on behalf of the Local Government sector on issues such as local government modernisation, NI Direct and the Review of Public Administration process.
- Belfast must ensure that it would retain adequate representation on the current delivery structures in place to take forward the modernisation programme and RPA process e.g., the RPA Strategic Leadership Board and Modernisation Sub-Groups.
- The Council would need to consider its engagement with and role within regional bodies such as NIJC and its ability to play a part in regional and national negotiations.
- If the Council were to withdraw from NILGA without a clear commitment from Government that it would engage separately with BCC, the Council's ability to influence could be dangerously diminished.
- There may be no political consensus within the Council to withdraw from NILGA.

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