

## **Council's Response to the NI Local Government Association (NILGA) Consultation regarding the NI EU Operational Programme 2014-2020 Future Delivery Campaign for Local Authorities**

### **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 **Belfast City Council** welcomes the opportunity to respond to the NILGA consultation exercise with respect to the delivery of EU Structural Funds 2014-2020.
- 1.2 Through various mechanisms, local authorities continue to lobby for the inclusion of new proposed delivery structures in the EU legislation that will underpin the funds.
- 1.3 Councils support the greater emphasis within the draft legislation on the role of local authorities as essential partners in the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the new EU programmes 2014-2020.
- 1.4 Councils have specifically asked National and Regional Government to make use of the Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) and Community Led Local Development tools of delivery for delegation of combined allocations of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF) for the period 2014-2020.

### **2.0 Council's consideration of the NILGA campaign**

#### 2.1 Delegated Funding

Belfast City Council is supportive in principle of the NILGA proposal to maximise the role of local authorities in the delivery of Eu funds between 2014-2020. **The Council** is also supportive of the idea that there should be a single, unified local government position on this issue.

**We** agree with NILGA's statement that 'there is a compelling need to fully consider a new model to deliver local government elements of the next round of EU investment'. However, we would go further to say that councils also should have an even greater influencing role on the NI Consultative partnership, to shape all Eu programming detail within the new EU/UK Partnership Agreement as recommended in Eu legislation.

We fully recognise the need for a regional approach to delegated Eu funding, which, in the context of RPA, will allow all local authorities to become involved in the delivery of EU funds. We recognise that under the Reform of Local Government, Councils will in effect become the vehicle for Economic Development and Regeneration for their areas as we will be responsible for Community Planning. An integrated funding approach will therefore be essential for the effective delivery of the Community Plans from 2015 onwards. In that

regard, we believe that an Integrated Territorial Investment would be the appropriate model for large urban centres whilst the Community Led Local Development model would be appropriate for rural areas. We believe that a proportion of future EU Structural Funds should be delegated to the new Councils, or clusters of Councils if appropriate, aligned to the new models of delivery set out above.

Collaboration by Local Councils in the delivery of EU funding has already proved to be successful on previous programmes through Cross -Border INTERREG, Peace III and Rural Development partnerships.

With regard to governance and accountability arrangements it would be advantageous to have one Government department assigned as the accountable department for local government delivery to reduce the bureaucracy and administrative burden of EU programmes as experienced to date.

2.2 We fully agree that now is the opportune time to be proactive in making the case for more focussed delivery of EU funds, built on the principles of subsidiarity and a “place-based” approach to integrated development.

2.3 **Belfast City Council** agrees with NILGA’s rationale for change in the next EU programming round and the guiding principles set out by NILGA in its “Campaign Consultation Document”.

#### The proposed NILGA delivery model

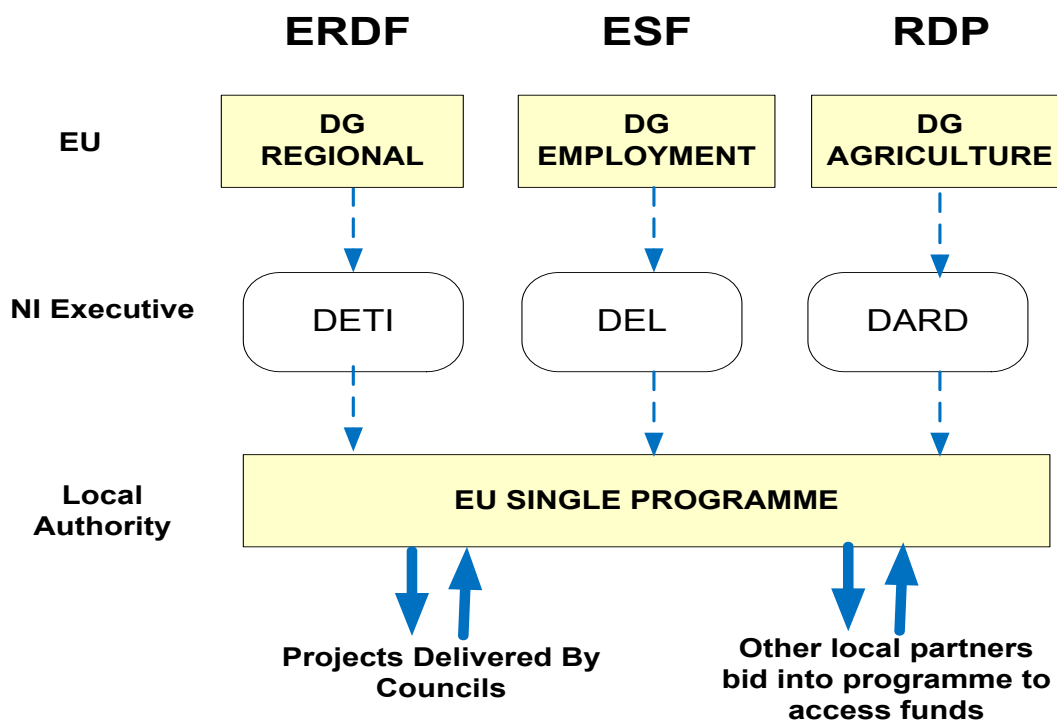
2.4 Whilst we recognise and support the devolution of EU funds to a Local Government level, we would ask for clarity around the role of the proposed ‘Collective Council Local Government Regional Investment Group’ (LGRIG) for EU Operational Programmes 2014-2020.

2.5 It is unclear in this section of the NILGA paper what role this LGRIG would have. Whilst we believe that there is a need for a structure for Councils to collaborate and share best practice in terms of European activity but it is unclear in the NILGA paper what value this group would add to that of other vehicles which already exist including:-

- i. The NI Local Economic Development Forum
- ii. The NI EU Regional Forum
- iii. The NILGA led EU Policy and Economic Development Working Group
- iv. SoLACE
- v. The 5 Cross Border INTERREG Partnerships

2.6 We believe that the NILGA EU officer resource should continue its work in supporting elected members on Steering and Monitoring Committees, but also build on the work it has commenced in relation to the creation of an EU knowledge bank as a resource for local Councils. Supporting Members on the Monitoring and Steering Committees will be critical going forward to ensure a unified local government voice at these meetings.

2.7 Belfast City Council would not be supportive of the proposed LGRIG playing any decision making or administrative role in the delivery of EU funds. It is our view that this would be best delivered through local area based structures using the ITI and CLLD models as set out in the diagram below.



The Council would ask NILGA to confirm that it is not envisaged that the LGRIG will play any role in determining the allocation or administration of any funds which may be delegated to local government.

### 3 Conclusion

3.5 **Belfast City Council** would like to emphasise its support in principle of the delegation of EU funding to local government 2014-2020.

3.6 It is the view of Belfast City Council that the proposed LGRIG's role should be limited to one of facilitating collaboration and sharing of best practice. The term "**Delivery Model**" used in the Consultation Document should be entitled "**Supporting Structure**" and presented within the paper in a way which clearly demonstrates that it is not an overarching body to which Councils would be accountable.

3.7 We would be keen to work with NILGA and Central Government to find a workable solution to the accountability issue with regards to devolving EU funds to Local Authorities.

3.8 Belfast City Council is keen that a consensus local government position is agreed and presented to the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) and the NI Consultative Partnership overseeing the design of the new NI ERDF & ESF programmes. The Council would therefore stress the need for an agreed paper to be formulated for presentation by February 2013 at the latest.