

Partnership Panel for Northern Ireland: Terms of Reference

INTRODUCTION

The Partnership Panel for Northern Ireland will provide a formal mechanism for constructive liaison between Executive Ministers and local government elected members at a political level on strategic policy matters of mutual interest and concern.

Executive Ministers and elected councillors (nominated by the 11 councils) are key decision-makers and that responsibility should be used to good effect when furthering the business of the Panel. It is incumbent on the members to strengthen relationships between the two tiers of government and ensure ownership of the Panel operates on a shared basis. Members must create a foundation for strategic thinking on a regional basis and an environment of collective and practical thinking for the Partnership Panel to fully function.

It is intended that the Panel will be reviewed to coincide with each Programme for Government period.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Panel may:

- give advice to any Northern Ireland Department about matters affecting the exercise of any of its functions;
- make representations to any Northern Ireland Department about any matters affecting, or of concern to, those involved in local government;
- give advice to those involved in local government, and
- initiate actions, stemming from the Panel's discussions, involving any Northern Ireland Department and local government.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE PARTNERSHIP PANEL

The Partnership Panel is to consist of:

- Councillors;
- Ministers; and
- a maximum of 5 elected representatives of such representative body or association of the district councils as appear to the Department to be appropriate.

All Executive Ministers are members of the Partnership Panel, and will be invited to attend meetings for substantive agenda items relating to their portfolio responsibility.

The Minister for Communities will be the Chair.

A meeting Chair shall be agreed by the Panel in circumstances where the Chair is unable to attend all or part of a Panel session.

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

Departmental officials and local government officers will meet regularly to support the business of the Panel going forward.

To ensure a smooth, efficient and effective process, sufficient administrative support will be provided by DfC and NILGA to enable the Partnership Panel to perform and address the business described in this paper.

MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

Secretariat

Joint Secretariat support will be provided by the DfC and NILGA.

Meetings

The Partnership Panel will meet at such times and such venues as the Chair will determine. The Panel may invite other persons to attend meetings in order to submit evidence and produce documents, or to speak.

Agenda

The Chair of the Partnership Panel will determine the agenda for the meetings, taking into account the views of Executive Ministers, local government councillors and members of a body representative of district councils.

Documents relating to the business of a meeting will normally be made available to members at least five working days before the meeting to which they relate.

Record of proceedings

Record of the proceedings of meetings will be in action format, listing key decisions and actions to be taken and will be prepared by the Secretariat. Copies will normally be forwarded to Panel Members within 4 weeks of the meeting. Following approval of the draft record, the Secretariat shall arrange for this record to be published on the DfC website.