

Title of Report:	Partnership Panel
Committee Report Submitted To:	Council Meeting
Date of Meeting:	6 October 2020
For Decision or For Information	For Decision

Linkage to Council Strategy (2019-23)	
Strategic Theme	Leader and Champion
Outcome	We will establish key relationships with Government, agencies and potential strategic partners in Northern Ireland and external to it which helps us to deliver our vision for this Council area.
Lead Officer	Director of Corporate Services

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	N/A
Included in Current Year Estimates	N/A
Capital/Revenue	N/A
Code	N/A
Staffing Costs	N/A

Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	EQIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	Yes/No	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:

1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 The Purpose of the Report is to present the Key Outcomes Note from the Partnership Panel.

2.0 Background

2.1 The Northern Ireland Partnership Panel convened for the first time in four years on 16 September 2020. This Outcomes Note is provided by NILGA, the Northern Ireland Local Government Association, to provide an immediate update to all 11 member councils. Full Minutes will follow.

3.0 Recommendation(s)

3.1 **It is recommended** that Council note the Partnership Panel Key Outcomes Note, dated 16 September 2020.

PARTNERSHIP PANEL MEETING 16/9/2020 KEY OUTCOMES NOTE

“Sustainable councils in political partnership with Stormont will drive recovery”

Cllr. Matt Garrett, President, NILGA, 17th Sept. 2020 (see link [here](#) for more detail)

The Northern Ireland Partnership Panel convened for the first time in four years on 16th September 2020. This **Outcomes Note** is provided by NILGA, the Northern Ireland Local Government Association, to provide an immediate update to all 11 member councils. Full Minutes will follow.

The following Ministers were in attendance on 16th September:

Minister Carál Ní Chuilín (Chair), Department for Communities; Minister Conor Murphy, Department for Finance; Minister Nichola Mallon, Department for Infrastructure; Minister Naomi Long, Department of Justice; Junior Minister, Declan Kearney, TEO.

With apologies received from:

Minister Robin Swann, Department of Health (*Dr Michael McBride, Chief Medical Officer attended on behalf of Mr Swann*); Minister Peter Weir, Department of Education (*Derek Baker, Permanent Secretary attended on Mr Weir's behalf*); Minister Edwin Poots, Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs; Minister Diane Dodds, Department of Economy.
Junior Minister, Gordon Lyons, TEO.

The following Local Government Partnership Panel Members were present:

100% NILGA / Council attendance: Cllr Matt Garrett, NILGA President; Ald Mark Cosgrove, Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council; Cllr Robert Adair, Ards and North Down Borough Council; Cllr Paul Greenfield, Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council; Cllr Geraldine McAteer, Belfast City Council; Alderman Thomas McKeown, Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council; Cllr Ruairi McHugh, Derry City and Strabane District Council; Cllr Tommy Maguire, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council; Cllr John Palmer, Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council; Ald Billy Ashe MBE, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council; Cllr Kerri Hughes, Mid Ulster District Council; Cllr Robert Burgess, Newry Mourne and Down District Council / NILGA Office Bearer; Cllr Frances Burton, NILGA Office Bearer / Mid Ulster District Council; Cllr Martin Kearney, NILGA Office Bearer / Mid Ulster District Council; Alan McDowell, NILGA Office Bearer / Ards and North Down Borough Council.

LG Officials: Jacqui Dixon, Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council; Stephen Reid, Ards and North Down Borough Council; Derek McCallan, NILGA; Alison McCullagh, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council; Anne Donaghy, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council; David Jackson, Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council; Mark Mulholland, Belfast City Council; Karen Smyth, NILGA; Lisa O’Kane, NILGA; Amy McGrath, NILGA; Antoinette Kennedy, NILGA

Our Offers and Asks:

- (i) **For 2020/21, Stormont per rest of UK continues to support councils for financial losses suffered through reduced income, additional costs associated with recovery of services and increased waste management costs.**
- (ii) **Stormont works with Treasury and Councils to guarantee rates income / develop a new rates / income model urgently - without which provision of council services will diminish - in some cases significantly.**
- (iii) **Introduce temporary borrowing powers to cover some day to day spending. This would enable deficits to be managed over a longer period and help protect councils' reserves position.**
- (iv) **Ministers via the Partnership Panel and its Chair work in a Task and Finish team approach with NILGA / Councils on finances, to achieve post Covid economic, social and related recovery building a new sustainability plan for local government and our whole community.**

1. Partnership Panel Terms of Reference and Standing Orders

Opening remarks by the Chair, Minister Carál Ní Chuilín, responded to by NILGA President, Cllr. Matt Garrett preceded the revised Terms of Reference and Standing Orders for Partnership Panel were *approved* by Local Government, for Chair's final sign off, following comments raised in advance by Cllr. Tom McKeown and the noting of the Panel's last meeting in October 2016, as referenced in advance by Ald. McDowell.

Action: It was agreed that the Partnership Panel would commit to holding three meetings per year; and a meeting schedule will follow after this meeting.

2. Partnership Panel Draft Workplan

Following written points raised in advance by Cllrs. Burton, Burgess and Kearney, the Draft Workplan was discussed with overall support in principle, **Local Government had fully agreed in advance.**

It was noted that the Partnership Panel Workplan is a dynamic document which:

- (a) has been and will be further revised to reflect the COVID/ Economic situation,
- (b) will be updated as the Partnership Panel agrees upon work to be progressed through the Panel.
- (c) requires a Communications Protocol, raised on agenda as Paper PP05/20; to be discussed at next meeting.

3. Recovery from COVID 19

Dr. Michael McBride, Chief Medical Officer, provided a comprehensive update on the current situation. Community transmission of the virus has increased significantly since the beginning of July. Over the past 7 days (to 16/9/2020) the percentage of positive cases in the over 60s age bracket has increased from 9.5% last week, up to 16.5% this week. The Executive has taken the decision to place restrictions on certain postal code areas and this will be further reviewed very regularly.

In the midst of this, the Health Service is trying to get other services back to normal, whilst preparing for significant uptake in hospital beds for Covid.

Chair thanked Dr McBride and felt it was important to provide an overview of where we are recovery wise. She noted positively that departments and councils are doing a lot in terms of social and economic recovery from Covid and asked her Ministerial colleagues if they were content to provide to Local Government with a written update on what each department is doing in terms of Covid recovery.

Action: It was agreed that Ministers would provide a report to Local Government on what each of their departments are doing in terms of Covid Recovery.

The information will be circulated to Members via the Partnership Panel Secretariat.

Dr McBride thanked local government for their huge efforts and support to communities during the ongoing pandemic. He also took questions from local government representatives.

Ald. Mark Cosgrove raised the supply and demand issues with the current Covid testing programme; Dr McBride advised the issue of people living in Northern Ireland being offered tests in Scotland has now been resolved, adding that there are plans to significantly ramp up the Northern Ireland programme for Covid testing.

Other Local Government representatives spoke about *economic recovery* from COVID. Cllr. Paul Greenfield highlighted that through this difficult situation, councils have shown their worth and have provided the vital link between the departments and communities, especially in terms of essential public health and other key services; but also co-ordination work as local hubs for all services, e.g. preventative health and food distribution. Cllr. Greenfield also asked all Ministers to invest in these co-ordination roles of councils with further funding as part of the Spending Review that the Executive will be engaged in during the coming days.

Cllr. Robert Adair referred to the importance of councils and the NI Executive working together when rates are being set to avoid setting charges which people and businesses cannot afford to pay. Cllr. Adair also emphasised that financial support for local government would be essential to do this.

Ald. Mark Cosgrove raised the Local Government Finances - Resources, Recovery, Remodelling paper issued to the Panel, asking Ministers to consider that due to the urgency of the issue, a **small & targeted "Task and Finish" group be set up** with Ministers & Councillors, supported by inputs from Permanent Secretaries, council Chief Executives and senior Finance Officers.

Action: It was agreed that that via the Chair, the Partnership Panel Secretariat would liaise with Ministers, NILGA and SOLACE to set up a Task and Finish Group to progress this work as a matter of urgency.

The Minister for Finance added that LPS has already commenced discussions with councils in relation to the rates setting process.

4. Local Development Plans

The Chair, Carál Ní Chuilín, advised that she wanted Local Development Plans on the Agenda as they are a critical tool and provide a great opportunity to look at future improvements for everyone. Her department is currently trying to find new and innovative ways of increasing supply of housing to reduce demand and also are looking and working with councils and other partners around affordable housing and supporting community infrastructure.

There is currently a waiting list of 40,000 people for housing in Northern Ireland, and over half of those people are living in housing stress. The Minister added that we all need to be mindful that we can't go through the Local Development Plan process ignoring Housing.

Minister Ní Chuilín proposed that Local Development Plans be included as an item of work within the Partnership Panel Workplan.

Cllr. Kerri Hughes commented that housing and community investment is absolutely essential and must be addressed within our Local Development Plans. She further commented that the issue of Developer Contributions needs to be addressed and that contributions should be going to where needed most as outlined in councils' Economic Development Plans; obviously this would be subject to planning law and the individual powers that the Ministers for Infrastructure and Communities could enable.

Cllr. Tommy Maguire asked the Ministers for Communities and Infrastructure, in view of the importance of Local Development Plans, and the specifics highlighted at today's Panel meeting, which existing joint officer body might be able to prepare a position paper for Panel members for the next meeting?

Minister Ní Chuilín advised that she has been concerned about the Section 76, Developers Contributions issue; first of all because councillors who sit on a Planning Committee are sitting as quasi-judicial; councillors' involvement was essential.

As an action point, the Minister advised that her department would lead on this work, and that it would be included as part of the Workplan for the Partnership Panel.

Action: The DfC will co-ordinate work to develop an informed position and guidance on Section 76, Developers Contributions.

Cllr. Geraldine McAteer asked the Minister for Communities and the Minister for Infrastructure a question about the impact of the wastewater infrastructure deficit on councils' development ambitions, visions which may be curtailed by lack of wastewater

infrastructure. Developers are having to put in physical wastewater infrastructure themselves. Cllr McAteer asked how the issue is going to be addressed; the need for housing on one hand, and not having the wastewater infrastructure on the other.

In response Minister Nichola Mallon commented that one of the biggest inhibitors to building more homes and growing the economy has been the historic underinvestment in our water and wastewater infrastructure. There are over 100 locations across Northern Ireland which are at or just over capacity which means that planning applications are not going to be passed. It is a huge issue and one that is going to require significant investment (funding forecast of £2.3bn for the net Price Control Period up to 2027), ambitions for Local Development Plans will be hampered, as will meeting the Programme for Government outcomes. She added that the Executive agrees that strategic recovery from COVID will require investment in water and wastewater infrastructure.

Minister Ní Chuilín added that the Executive is working collaboratively on this issue and that councils' roles would be essential also – Local Development Plans in a post Covid world will be different to before.

Action: Local Development Plans to be included as an area of work in the Partnership Panel Workplan, officer group to develop.

5. Local Government Finances – Resources, Recovery, Remodelling

Action (per previous): It was agreed that that via the Chair, the Partnership Panel Secretariat would liaise with Ministers, NILGA and SOLACE to set up a Task and Finish Group to progress this work as a matter of urgency.

Cllr. Geraldine McAteer commented on complementary but equally important joint work and a “co-design” approach to synergise the 11 Councils Recovery Plans with the plans at Assembly and Departmental level should be taken forward, adding that Community Plans were vital components of the revised Programme for Government that could in themselves be engines of social and economic recovery.

Minister Ní Chuilín added that as set out under “New Decade, New Approach” partnership, co-design and co-production will be key and central as we move forward for the future.

Action: best mechanism to align Council recovery plans and resources needed for them with Assembly level / departmental plans to be developed.

6. Implementation of outstanding legislation from RPA Stage 1 (2015)

The Chair handed over to the Minister for Infrastructure to provide an update specifically on Planning legislation. The matter had been raised in advance by Ald. McDowell.

Minister Nichola Mallon advised that she'd recently sent a letter to the Infrastructure Committee about the review of the 2015 legislation, adding that officials have already started

to look at some of the difficulties and areas for improvement. Stakeholder engagement would follow, and a report should be ready by the end of the year.

Action: NILGA, DfC, DfI, councils, will continue to develop this work and Minister Nichola Mallon's report should be linked to Panel's next meeting.

Looking at outstanding legislation beyond Planning, Ald. Mark Cosgrove following an issue raised in advance by Ald. Billy Ashe raised the Councillors Code of Conduct with the Minister. Prior to the Assembly collapsing in 2017, a Review of the Councillors Code of Conduct had been completed ready for the Minister for approval. Members asked if completion of this work could be sorted.

Action – The Chair, Minister Ní Chuilín, advised that she'd look into completion of the Councillors Code of Conduct Review work as a matter of urgency.

7. Community Plans Review

Cllr John Palmer commented that due to councils prioritising essential works in response to the COVID crisis, some have as yet not commenced the Community Plans Review process. Due to the challenging COVID situation it is difficult to get the substantive strategic contact with some community groups; would the Minister consider delaying if specific councils required, the Community Planning Review for 1 year?

Dr Michael McBride also asked a question through the Chair, if there were Covid issues that might be better prioritised in terms of the Community Plan Review?

The Chair added that there are a lot of issues which were previously agreed which aren't going to be met because of the current health crisis and that Departments would try to accommodate local government.

Action: Minister Ní Chuilín asked (through the NILGA President, Cllr Matt Garrett), for NILGA to ask each council about this issue and feedback on the Community plan strategic priorities per council emerging due to and those inhibited because of Covid.

8. AOB

£20m Blue Green Fund - Minister Mallon asked councils if they have projects that are on the blue green agenda which are at the stage for investment; climate action; active travel etc; to get in touch with her department's walking and cycling champion (Liz Loughran; Email Liz.Loughran@infrastructure@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk).

9. Date of next Meeting

In respect of a question tabled in advance by Cllr. Ruairi McHugh, it was agreed that the next meeting of the Partnership Panel would take place before the end of the financial year.

Action: A schedule of meetings for the year 2021 and into 2022 will follow shortly.

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