



January 13th, 2016

Notice Of Meeting

You are invited to attend the Strategy Policy and Resources Committee Meeting to be held on **Thursday, 14th January 2016 at 6:00 pm** in **Downshire Civic Centre**.

The Members of the Strategy Policy and Resources Committee are:-

Chair: Councillor R Burgess

Vice Chair: Councillor H Reilly

Members:	Councillor P Brown	Councillor S Burns
	Councillor M Carr	Councillor W Clarke
	Councillor G Craig	Councillor D Curran
	Councillor G Donnelly	Councillor L Kimmins
	Councillor C McGrath	Councillor B O'Muirí
	Councillor B Quinn	Councillor M Ruane
	Councillor W Walker	

Agenda

1 **Apologies**

2 **Declarations of Interest**

3 **Action Sheet of the Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee Meeting held on 17 December 2015 (copy attached)**

[SPR-17-12-2015.pdf](#)

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Local Development Plan

4 **Local Development Plan - Paper 6 - Environmental Assets (copy attached)**

PLEASE NOTE: ALL COUNCILLORS ARE INVITED TO ATTEND FOR THIS ITEM OF BUSINESS : LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN - PAPER 6 - ENVIRONMENTAL ASSETS.

[SPR Report Jan'16 re LDP Paper 6-Environmental Assets.pdf](#)

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[LDP Paper 6 - Environmental Assets.pdf](#)

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Corporate Services - Democratic Services

5 **Time of Future Committee Meetings**

6 **Procedures for Sod Cutting and Civic Receptions (copy attached)**

[Council Events.pdf](#)

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[Appendix 1.pdf](#)

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Corporate Services - Human Resources

7 **Local Government Pay 2016 (copy attached)**

Corporate Services - Finance

8 Report on Procurement/Tender Awards etc to 31 December 2015(copy attached)

Procurement Report.pdf

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Consultation Documents

9 Draft NILGA Response to the Business Rates Consultation (copy attached)

Business Rates Consultation Report.pdf

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NILGA Draft Consultation Document.pdf

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Estate

10 Annalong Marine Park - 2 No Additional Easements for Cove Developments (copy attached)

Report Cove Developments.pdf

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Easement Map 1.pdf

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Easement Map 2.pdf

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Annalong Marine Park - letter from B McShane.pdf

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11 Lease of Office Accommodation at Saint Patrick Visitor Centre for Downpatrick's Visitor Information Centre (copy attached)

St Patrick Centre lease.pdf

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St Patrick's Centre Appendix.pdf

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12 Forkhill Peadar O'Doirnin GAA – Lease of Soccer Field (copy attached)

Report Bog Road, Forkhill.pdf

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Soccer pitch Forkhill-Appendix 1.pdf

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13 Former Warrenpoint Boat House, Marine Parade - Future Use (copy attached)

Warrenpoint Boat House.pdf

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Items Restricted in accordance with Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014

14 Victoria Lock Refurbishment Scheme - Progress Report (copy attached)

This item is deemed to be restricted by virtue of Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 - Information relating to the financial of business affairs of any particular person (including the Council holding that information) and the public, may, by resolution, be excluded during this item of business

Victoria Lock Refurbishment Scheme Progress Report 14 January 2016.pdf

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15 Report on Tenders - Repairs to Canal Bank at Middlebank (copy attached)

This item is deemed to be restricted by virtue of Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 - Information relating to the financial of business affairs of any particular person (including the Council holding that information) and the public, may, by resolution, be excluded during this item of business

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Report on Tenders Repairs to Canal Bank at Middlebank SP&R Committee 14 January 2016.pdf

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Invitees

Cllr. Terry Andrews	terry.andrews@downdc.gov.uk
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ACTION SHEET- STRATEGY, POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING – THURSDAY 17 DECEMBER 2015

AGENDA ITEM	SUBJECT	DECISION	FOR COMPLETION BY DIRECTOR – including actions taken/date completed or progress to date if not yet completed
SPR/230/2015	Local Development Plan Paper 5 – Transportation	It was agreed that the report on the Local Development Plan Paper 5 – Transportation was noted.	Noted.
SPR/231/2015	Local Development Plan – Sustainability Appraisal incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment – An Overview	It was agreed that the Local Development Plan Preparatory Studies Sustainability Appraisal incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment – An Overview” was noted.	Noted.
SPR/232/2015	Presentation on Final Directorate Business Plan – Strategic, Planning and Performance	It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Craig, seconded by Councillor Walker, that the Final Directorate Business Plan – Strategic, Planning and Performance be approved.	Approved.
SPR/233/2015	Brand Management – Signage Proposals	It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Ó’Muirí, seconded by Councillor W Clarke, that the application of the Newry, Mourne and Down District Council corporate identity to the Council’s signage, be approved.	Approved.
SPR/234/2015	Proposed Overspend for Provision of Bus Shelters	<p>It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Craig, seconded by Councillor Walker:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That Council officials meet with senior officials of Transport NI to investigate funding for bus shelters. • That correspondence be sent to the DRD Minister advising of Council’s concerns regarding responsibility for bus shelters. 	Being actioned.

AGENDA ITEM	SUBJECT	DECISION	FOR COMPLETION BY DIRECTOR – including actions taken/date completed or progress to date if not yet completed
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That advertising on bus shelters be investigated. • That the overspend of approximately £30,000 in this year's Capital Budget for Bus Shelters, be approved. 	
SPR/235/2015	St. Mary's Primary School	It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Burns, seconded by Councillor W Clarke, that the consultants appointed to develop a major investment strategy for the Newry Civic Building/Area Investment Plan, complete an options paper for Council to consider in light of the decision by the site owners not to sell the St Mary's site to Newry, Mourne and Down District Council.	Ongoing.
SPR/236/2015	Council Land at Carnbane Playing Fields, Newry JG035 Ballydougan to Newry SMT Phase 2A	It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Burns, seconded by Councillor Ó'Muirí, that the compensation of £5,250 offered for the NI Water Scheme at Carnbane Playing Fields, Newry, be accepted.	Offer accepted and being actioned.
SPR/237/2015	Kilkeel Former Cinema/Town Hall Building and Yard	It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Burns, seconded by Councillor Ruane, that discussions be entered into with interested parties regarding possible future uses for this property and reported through Active and Healthy Communities Meeting.	Ongoing.
SPR/238/2015	Expansion of Downshire Office Accommodation	It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Burns, seconded by Councillor Ruane, that negotiations commence with the Trust and Land & Property Services regarding the current valuation.	Email sent to the Trust.
SPR/239/2015	Forkhill Peadar O'Doirnin GAA – Lease of Soccer Field	It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Burns, seconded by Councillor Ruane, that officials discuss the matter with the Carbane League and bring this back to Committee in January 2016.	Agenda Item Jan SPR Committee.

AGENDA ITEM	SUBJECT	DECISION	FOR COMPLETION BY DIRECTOR – including actions taken/date completed or progress to date if not yet completed
SPR/240/2015	Ballynahinch Community Facility	<p>It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Burns, seconded by Councillor Ruane,</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That Council consider the lease of land in Council ownership in Ballynahinch to Local Community Group to develop a community facility. 2. That Council officers assist the Local Community Group with applications to various funding agencies, Pease IV, etc. 	Ongoing.
SPR/241/2015	Remedial Works to Castlewellan Library	<p>It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Reilly, seconded by Councillor Burns, that approval be granted to the Education Authority, to use Council land adjacent to Castlewellan Library for the purpose of undertaking remedial works to this building, subject to the Council receiving payment for use of its land.</p>	Approved and being actioned.
SPR/242/2015	Request To Purchase Land/Right Of Way At New Line Playground, Saintfield	<p>It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Burns, seconded by Councillor Ruane, that the request from Mr Johnston to acquire a strip of land at New Line Playground, Saintfield be refused with regret, pending completion of the Council's Play Area Strategy.</p>	Approved and being actioned.
SPR/243/2015	Walkway at Dundrum – Transfer of Lighting	<p>It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Burns, seconded by Councillor W Clarke, that expenditure in the sum of £2,350.12 plus VAT and £3,000 for the supply and installation of electrical cubides at two locations and electricity supply for lighting of the Walkway at the Quay, Dundrum, be approved.</p>	Approved.
SPR/244/2015	Progress Report on Victoria Lock	<p>The content of the report was noted and further details on compensation events/additional costs for Victoria Lock Refurbishment Scheme awaited.</p>	Noted. Further details awaited.

AGENDA ITEM	SUBJECT	DECISION	FOR COMPLETION BY DIRECTOR – including actions taken/date completed or progress to date if not yet completed
SPR/245/2015	Newry Leisure Centre Phase 2 – External Works and Fencing	<p>It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Burns, seconded by Councillor Ruane, that the following Capital Budget request be referred to the draft Rate Estimates for 2016/17 for consideration:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2016/17 £200,000 for external works/fencing • 2017/18 £110,000 Newry Leisure Centre – Phase 2 	Email sent to R Dowey.
SPR/246/2015	Newry Civic Centre and Area Investment	<p>It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Burns, seconded by Councillor Ruane:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That specialised consultants be appointed to develop an investment strategy (the former St Mary's Primary School Site recommendation refers – SPR/236/2015) • That a group of Councillors be appointed to support officers and consultants in a new Strategy (Councillors Carr, Stokes, Craig). 	Approved.
SPR/247/2015	Saintfield Development Association – Progress Report	<p>It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Burgess, seconded by Councillor Burns that approval be given to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An Economic Appraisal/Business case for a Community/Leisure facility at Saintfield. • Saintfield Development Association to avail of Local Enterprise Centre Social Enterprise Officer to advise on Business Plan. • Newry, Mourne and Down District to publically advertise an Expression of Interest for interested parties to enter into a Joint Venture for a Community/Leisure Centre at Saintfield. 	Approved.

AGENDA ITEM	SUBJECT	DECISION	FOR COMPLETION BY DIRECTOR – including actions taken/date completed or progress to date if not yet completed
SPR/248/2015	Agree Date for SPR Meeting in March 2016	It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Burns, seconded by Councillor Ruane, that the Strategy, Policy and Resources in March be held on Tuesday 15 March 2016 at 2pm.	Approved.
SPR/249/2015	Schedule of Meetings for May 2016 – May 2017	It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Burns, seconded by Councillor Ruane, that the draft timetable for Council and Committee meetings May 2016 – May 2017, be approved.	Approved.
SPR/250/2015	Downshire Civic Centre – Smoke Free Zone	It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Burns, seconded by Councillor Ruane, that Downshire Civic Centre be included in the Department of Health’s Smoke Free Zone.	Approved and actions will follow.
SPR/251/2015	Emergency Planning	Noted.	Noted.
SPR/252/2015	Derryleckagh Sports Project	It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Ruane, seconded by Councillor Carr, that the report be noted, and a further report be brought back to the most relevant Committee.	Noted. Report to be brought back to Committee.
SPR/253/2015	Newry Street United Shared Spaces Project	<p>It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Burns, seconded by Councillor Craig, that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial support to Newry Street United to assist with redevelopment of a play area in Kilkeel at an approximate cost of £30,000 (Group to provide £50,000) • Recommend referring to 2016/17 Rates Estimates. • 25 year lease of property in Kilkeel for development of a Community Centre funded by Spaces and Places £350,000. • Council assistance with Capacity Building of the Community 	Approved.

AGENDA ITEM	SUBJECT	DECISION	FOR COMPLETION BY DIRECTOR – including actions taken/date completed or progress to date if not yet completed
		<p>Association.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council to maintain play area at completion of redevelopment. 	
SPR/254/2015	Review Of Business Rates: The Case For Change - Seminar	It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Carr, seconded by Councillor Ruane, that approval be given for a representative from each Party to attend the “Review of Business Rates: The Case for Change” conference at a cost of £125 + VAT per delegate.	Actioned.
SPR/255/2015	Six Month Report on Corporate Plan (2015-2019)	<p>It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Burns, seconded by Councillor Craig:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That the six-month performance report on the Corporate plan (2015-19), be approved. • The arrangements for its annual review be approved as detailed in the report (previously circulated) 	Approved.
SPR/256/2015	Policy and Procedure on Unacceptable Actions or Behaviour by Complaints	It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Burns, seconded by Councillor Craig, that approval be given to the Draft Policy and Procedures on Unacceptable Behaviour by Complainants.	Approved and procedures will now be implemented.
SPR/257/2015	Safeguarding and Photography of Children	On the proposal of Councillor Burns, seconded by Councillor W Clarke, that a revision to Part 6 of the Council’s Safeguarding Policy to allow for the use of the consent form provided at Appendix 2 (previously circulated), be accepted.	Accepted.
SPR/258/2015	Treasury Management Services – ABC Council	It was noted that a contract was awarded to Arlington Close at a figure of £4,750 per annum.	Noted.

AGENDA ITEM	SUBJECT	DECISION	FOR COMPLETION BY DIRECTOR – including actions taken/date completed or progress to date if not yet completed
SPR/259/2015	Tenders Awarded to 30 November 2015	It was noted at Appendix 1 (previously circulated), the current Tenders anticipated over £30K up to 30 November 2015.	Noted.
SPR/260/2015	Report from Procurement	The report from Procurement was noted.	Noted.
SPR/261/2015	Management Accounts for 7 Months ended 30 October 2015	The Net Revenue Expenditure Report Year to Date 31 October 2015, was noted.	Noted.
SPR/262/2015	European Rural Network for Job Mobility – ERN4Mob Project	It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Burns seconded by Councillor Craig, that approval be given for the Chair of SPR Committee, Director of SPP and Project Co-ordinator to attend a project kick-off meeting in February 2016.	Approved.
SPR/263/2015	Decade of Centenaries Programme 2016	The report, outlining the current overview of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council's proposed activities during 2016 in relation to the Decade of Centenaries 2016 (Easter Rising and Somme), was noted.	Noted.
SPR/264/2015	Draft Terms of Reference for the Health Forum	<p>It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Burns, seconded by Councillor W Clarke;-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That approval be given to the Draft Terms of Reference for the Health Forum. • That approval be given to the first Task and Finish Forum to advocate for continued A&E provision and Stroke Services at Daisy Hill Hospital. 	<p>Agreed at Council Meeting 4.1.2016 that membership be referred to Party Representatives Forum for discussion, including Task and Finish Forums eg:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Continual A&E provision – Daisy Hill Hospital.

AGENDA ITEM	SUBJECT	DECISION	FOR COMPLETION BY DIRECTOR – including actions taken/date completed or progress to date if not yet completed
			b. Retention of Services – Downe Hospital.
SPR/265/2015	Social Investment Fund	<p>It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor W Clarke, seconded by Councillor Ruane, that officials meet with the Castlewellaan Community Partnership to look at the management possibility.</p> <p>It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor W Clarke, seconded by Councillor Brown, that the report be noted.</p>	Ongoing.
SPR/266/2015	Peace IV	It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Ruane seconded by Councillor Craig, that officers proceed with the consultation process and submit the application to Council for approval prior to submission.	Approved.
SPR/267/2015	Financial Assistance	<p>It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor W Clarke, seconded by Councillor Brown, that :-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approval be given to fund 18 applications to the value of £39,416.90. • Retrospective approval be given to 2 advances – 2 groups have requested additional assistance in terms of an advance. To enable the projects to proceed, Safer Warrenpoint has been provided with 100% advance and Newtownhamilton Community Association with 75% advance payments. 	Approved.
SPR/268/2015	Advertising of Statutory Notices	Approved.	Approved.

AGENDA ITEM	SUBJECT	DECISION	FOR COMPLETION BY DIRECTOR – including actions taken/date completed or progress to date if not yet completed
SPR/269/2015	Provision of Advertising Services	Approved.	Approved.
SPR/270/2015	Appointment of Independent Expert Assistance – Planning	Approved.	Approved.

Report to:	Strategy, Policy & Resources Committee
Subject:	Newry, Mourne and Down Local Development Plan Preparatory Studies Paper 6: Environmental Assets
Date:	14 January 2016
Reporting Officer:	Anthony McKay, Chief Planning Officer
Contact Officer:	Andrew Hay, Development Plan Manager

Decisions Required

Note the content of this report.

1.0 **Purpose & Background**

- 1.1 Preparatory studies are essential in providing the evidence base for preparing the Local Development Plan (LDP). A reliable and comprehensive evidence base is vital to informing and justifying the 'soundness' of the LDP documents (Plan Strategy and Local Policies Plan) and to show how policies and proposals help to achieve the social, economic and environmental objectives for the plan area.
- 1.2 As part of the programme of preparatory work, the purpose of this report is to present 'Paper 6: Environmental Assets' for members consideration.
- 1.3 The paper provides members with an overview of the environmental assets in the Newry, Mourne and Down District Council area.
The paper builds on the existing evidence base and provides information on:
- The regional policy context for the protection, conservation and enhancement of the built, natural and landscape heritage;
 - An overview of the built, natural and landscape heritage within the District; and
 - An audit and summary of all designated environmental assets within the District.

2.0 **Key Issues**

- 2.1 'Paper 6: Environmental Assets' allows members to commence consideration of the diverse range of environmental assets that exist across Newry, Mourne and Down and develop an understanding of the importance and value, and contribution they make to the District. The paper aims to provide a foundation for future decision making which will need to be further developed and informed through the local development plan process in the consideration, protection, and utilisation of our environmental assets.
- 2.2 Archaeological and built heritage assets such as ring forts, historic and vernacular buildings, planned parklands, buildings and features associated with industrial heritage, are all important sources of information about our past, and are often significant landmarks in the present townscape and countryside. This archaeological and built heritage constitutes an irreplaceable record which contributes to our understanding of both the present and the past and is an important economic resource. Their presence usually adds to the quality of our lives and promotes a sense of local distinctiveness which is an important aspect of the character and appearance of our towns, villages and the countryside.

<p>2.3</p> <p>2.4</p> <p>2.5</p> <p>2.6</p> <p>2.7</p> <p>2.8</p>	<p>The diversity of Northern Ireland’s habitats, species, landscapes and earth science features (i.e. natural heritage) is an important and highly valued asset of our society. Our natural heritage provides a wide range of opportunities for enjoyment, recreation and sustainable economic activity. The conservation, enhancement and restoration of the abundance, quality, diversity, and distinctiveness of the region’s natural heritage are also fundamental to the overall health and well-being of our society.</p> <p>One of the core planning principles of the Strategic Planning Policy Statement is to preserve and improve the Built and Natural Environment.</p> <p>In accordance with the Executive’s commitment to preserve and improve the built and natural environment and halt the loss of biodiversity, our environment must be managed in a sustainable manner. This requires an integrated approach to the management of the natural and cultural aspects of the landscape. Whilst all of us share a collective responsibility in this regard, the planning system plays an important role in conserving, protecting and enhancing the environment whilst ensuring it remains responsive and adaptive to the everyday needs of society. This is a key aspect of the wider objective of furthering sustainable development which the Council should take into account in the preparation of the LDP.</p> <p>The planning system has a key role in the stewardship of our archaeological, built, natural, and landscape heritage. The aim is to manage change in positive ways so as to safeguard that which society regards as significant whilst facilitating development that will contribute to the ongoing preservation, conservation and enhancement of these environmental assets.</p> <p>In this context the LDP, should identify the main archaeological, built, natural, and landscape heritage features, where they exist within the plan area and bring forward appropriate policies or proposals for their protection, conservation and enhancement.</p> <p>Data gathered as part of this and other preparatory studies will be used to establish the baseline of the social, economic, and environmental characteristics of the plan area and enable the Council to identify the issues which need to be addressed by the LDP. Furthermore, it will provide a sound basis on which to formulate the plan strategy, policies and proposals within the LDP that will subject to independent public examination.</p>
<p>3.0</p>	<p><u>Recommendations</u></p>
<p>3.1</p>	<p>Members are requested to note the content of this report.</p>
<p>4.0</p>	<p><u>Resource Implications</u></p>
<p>4.1</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>5.0</p>	<p><u>Appendices</u></p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper 6: Environmental Assets

Report to:	Strategy, Policy & Resources Committee
Subject:	<i>Arrangement for Council Events: sod cuttings and official openings.</i>
Date:	<i>14 January 2016</i>
Reporting Officer:	<i>Liam Hannaway</i>
Contact Officer:	<i>Eileen McParland</i>

<u>Decisions Required</u>	
Members are asked to note the report's contents and consider and agree to recommendations contained within this report.	
1.0	<u>Purpose & Background</u>
1.1	The purpose of this report is to recommend arrangements for Council events (sod cutting and official openings). The arrangements are to supplement the procedures already agreed by Council for civic receptions/hospitality/Chairperson's attendance at external events.
2.0	<u>Key Issues</u>
2.1	The Council has already agreed procedures for civic receptions; hospitality and chairpersons attendance at external events.
2.2	There is a need to establish additional procedures for sod cuttings and official openings of Council projects to ensure a consistent approach.
2.3	Having discussed this matter at Party Representatives Forum, Members are requested to consider the procedure outlined in Appendix 1.
3.0	<u>Resource Implications</u>
3.1	None as the procedure seek to regularise ad-hoc arrangements previously operated
4.0	<u>Appendices</u>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Appendix 1.

Appendix 1

Procedures for Council events: sod cuttings and official openings

Type of Event	Recommended Invitees
Sod cutting for Council projects of District significance eg. Leisure Centres, Civic Buildings etc.	Chairperson, Chief Executive or Nominee, consultant, contractor It is not recommended that sod cuttings be held for projects which are DEA specific
Official opening of DEA specific projects e.g. extension of community centre	Chairperson, DEA Councillors, Chief Executive, relevant directors or nominees
Official opening of projects of district significance e.g. phase II Newry Leisure project	All Councillors, MLA's and MP's of specific constituency/constituencies in which the project is located, Chief Executive, relevant Directors and/or nominees
Official Opening of major projects of district significance e.g. new Civic Building for Council	All Councillors, MLA's and MP's of three constituencies within the Newry, Mourne and Down District, Chief Executive, relevant Directors and/or nominees

Note: The Council's corporate marketing section will arrange event appropriate PR in line with the corporate media policy.

Comhairle Ceantair an Iúir
Mhúrn agus an Dúin
Newry, Mourne and Down
District Council



Date 18 DEC 2015

Chief Executive
Liam Hannaway



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To: **Chief Executives in England, Wales and N Ireland**
(additional copies for HR Director and Finance Director)
Members of the National Employers' Side
Regional Directors

9 December 2015

Dear Chief Executive,

LOCAL GOVERNMENT PAY 2016

I am writing to update you on the work we have been doing on your behalf on the local government national pay negotiations for 2016.

The National Employers met with the unions on 3 December and again today and have now made a final pay offer. A letter sent to the trade unions is attached at **Annex A** and a copy of the Employers' press release is attached at **Annex B**.

The Employers were clear with the unions from the outset that they wished to reach a final position that both Sides would wish to see as the basis for an agreement. Therefore the Employers have formally asked that the unions consult their members on this final offer and they will spend the next few days considering this request.

The Employers' final offer was constructed in such a way as to clearly reflect the views expressed by attendees at each of the regional pay consultation briefings that were held during September. There was overwhelming support among councils for the Employers to seek a two-year agreement with a headline of one per cent in each of 2016 and 2017 in addition to increasing the bottom pay points to take account of the new National Living Wage.

I am sure that your council will be well aware of the challenge we face in the coming years of having to increase the bottom pay point by potentially 32% to achieve the Government's target of 60% of median earnings (currently forecast to be around £9.35 per hour) in 2020. This obviously necessitates us having to increase subsequent pay points in order to maintain differentials. The National Employers have asked to work with the unions over the coming months to find a way that fairly and affordably meets this objective and the offer was constructed in a way that supported this longer term target of restructuring the national pay spine.

① Catma MiShelly
② Cant SP+D

The National Employers made the following final offer to the unions:

From 1 April 2016:

- On SCP 6, £900 (equivalent to 6.6%)
- On SCP 7, £900 (equivalent to 6.6%)
- On SCP 8, £900 (equivalent to 6.5%)
- On SCP 9, £900 (equivalent to 6.4%)
- On SCP 10, £900 (equivalent to 6.3%)
- On SCP 11, £300 (equivalent to 2.0%)
- On SCP 12, £300 (equivalent to 2.0%)
- On SCP 13, £250 (equivalent to 1.6%)
- On SCP 14, £250 (equivalent to 1.5%)
- On SCP 15, £200 (equivalent to 1.2%)
- On SCP 16, £200 (equivalent to 1.2%)
- On SCP 17, £175 (equivalent to 1.01%)
- On SCPs 18 and above, 1.0%

and...

From 1 April 2017:

- On SCP 6, £500 (equivalent to 3.4%)
- On SCP 7, £500 (equivalent to 3.4%)
- On SCP 8, £475 (equivalent to 3.2%)
- On SCP 9, £400 (equivalent to 2.6%)
- On SCP 10, £375 (equivalent to 2.5%)
- On SCP 11, £300 (equivalent to 1.9%)
- On SCP 12, £300 (equivalent to 1.9%)
- On SCP 13, £300 (equivalent to 1.9%)
- On SCP 14, £300 (equivalent to 1.8%)
- On SCP 15, £300 (equivalent to 1.8%)
- On SCP 16, £250 (equivalent to 1.5%)
- On SCP 17, £225 (equivalent to 1.3%)
- On SCPs 18 and above, 1.0%

The total increase to the national paybill resulting from this offer is 2.4% over two years (covering the period 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2018). Approximately 0.4% of this figure is designed to meet our immediate obligations under the National Living Wage and to start the process of moving towards the expected level of the Living Wage by 2020. This final offer is at the limit of affordability for councils.

In addition, subject to agreeing terms of reference, the Employers offered to meet a non-pay element of the unions' claim which seeks, "...a joint review of term-time working and an NJC approach to deliver fair, consistent and transparent contracts for school support staff..."

We have been very clear in numerous meetings and conversations over many months that our room for manoeuvre in negotiations was very limited. We have also reiterated that for the NJC to retain credibility it was incumbent on both Sides to quickly provide advice and a way ahead to 2020 to meet the huge challenge we face from the impact of the National Living Wage. I shall keep you informed of developments.

Yours faithfully,



Sarah Messenger
Head of Workforce

ANNEX A

Heather Wakefield, Justin Bowden, Fiona Farmer
Trade Union Side Secretaries
NJC for Local Government Services
UNISON Centre
130 Euston Road
London NW1 2AY

9 December 2015

Dear Heather, Justin and Fiona,

LOCAL GOVERNMENT PAY 2016

Further to our meeting today, I am writing on behalf of the Employers' Side of the NJC to respond formally to the Trade Union Side's pay claim.

The National Employers wish to make the following final offer that we believe balances the desire to provide a pay increase for all NJC employees with councils' limits of affordability:

From 1 April 2016:

- On SCP 6, £900 (equivalent to 6.6%)
- On SCP 7, £900 (equivalent to 6.6%)
- On SCP 8, £900 (equivalent to 6.5%)
- On SCP 9, £900 (equivalent to 6.4%)
- On SCP 10, £900 (equivalent to 6.3%)
- On SCP 11, £300 (equivalent to 2.0%)
- On SCP 12, £300 (equivalent to 2.0%)
- On SCP 13, £250 (equivalent to 1.6%)
- On SCP 14, £250 (equivalent to 1.5%)
- On SCP 15, £200 (equivalent to 1.2%)
- On SCP 16, £200 (equivalent to 1.2%)
- On SCP 17, £175 (equivalent to 1.01%)
- On SCPs 18 and above, 1.0%

and...

From 1 April 2017:

- On SCP 6, £500 (equivalent to 3.4%)
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- On SCP 15, £300 (equivalent to 1.8%)
- On SCP 16, £250 (equivalent to 1.5%)
- On SCP 17, £225 (equivalent to 1.3%)
- On SCPs 18 and above, 1.0%

The total increase to the national paybill resulting from this offer is 2.4% over two years (covering the period 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2018). Approximately 0.4% of this figure is designed to meet our immediate obligations under the National Living Wage and to start the process of moving towards the expected level of the Living Wage by 2020. This final offer is at the limit of affordability for councils.

In addition, the Employers have agreed to your request for, "...a joint review of term-time working and an NJC approach to deliver fair, consistent and transparent contracts for school support staff..." As a first step, we suggest that the Joint Secretaries draft Terms of Reference for this work.

Finally, we wish to enter quickly into detailed discussions over the coming months on how the NJC can ensure that the national pay structure can be adapted fairly and affordably to meet the requirements of the National Living Wage.

We have formally requested that you now put this offer to your members for consultation and understand that you will be considering this over the next few days.

Yours sincerely,



Sarah Messenger
Employers' Secretary

ANNEX B

PRESS RELEASE: 9 DECEMBER 2015**Council employees' pay offer announced**

Council employees have been offered a two-year pay increase from 1 April 2016. The majority of employees - those on salaries starting at £17,714 per annum - would receive an uplift of one per cent on 1 April 2016 and a further one per cent on 1 April 2017, with those on lower salaries receiving higher increases to take account of the new National Living Wage.

The National Employers, who negotiate pay on behalf of 350 local authorities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, made the offer to unions today. It will affect over 1 million employees.

Cllr Sian Timoney, Chair of the Employers' Side, said:

"Despite the challenge of the recent Spending Review and new National Living Wage, there is a broad consensus among councils that there should be a pay offer to staff this year"

"This offer balances our commitment to increase the pay of our hardworking employees with the responsibility we have to address the ongoing financial pressures we face"

"We believe that this is a fair deal for employees, given the limits of what we can afford, and a fair deal for the taxpayers and residents who use and pay for the vital services which local government provides"

Notes to editors

The total increase to the national paybill resulting from this offer is 2.4% (£364.175m) over 2 years (covering the period 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2018). Approximately 0.4% of this figure is designed to meet our immediate obligations under the National Living Wage and to start the process of moving towards the expected level of the Living Wage by 2020. This final offer was at the limit of affordability for councils.

This pay offer does not apply to council chief executives, senior officers, teachers or firefighters, who are covered by separate national pay arrangements.

The National Joint Council negotiates the pay, terms and conditions of staff in local authorities. It agrees an annual uplift to the national pay spine, on which each individual council decides where to place its employees. Each council takes into account a number of factors such as job size and local labour market conditions when deciding an employee's salary. There are no nationally determined jobs or pay grades in local government, unlike in other parts of the public sector.

-ENDS-

Current Tenders anticipated over 30k upto 31 December 2015

EU tenders placed with **OJEU Notice in RED**

Reference	OJEU	Close	End of Standstill Award	Dept	Person	Description	Type	Estimate	Award Value	Successful Tenderer/ Postion
13/2015		6-Nov		RTS	JGordan	Household Recycling Centre, Flying Horse Road, Downpatrick	ITT	33 k		- Awaiting award
15/2015	Y	6-Nov		SPP	EMcManus	Downpatrick Leisure Centre with Quigg Golden	ITT/EU	15,500 k		- At Standstill still folowing challenge - done by Quigg Golden.
16/2015		27-Nov		ERT	WWarburton	Destination Partnerships Web Data Managements Systems & Native Apps	ITT	100 k		- Awaiting award
17/2015		4-Nov		ERT	MBoyle	Facilitator to Assist in the Development of a Tourism Strategy to 2020	ITT	40 k		- Awaiting award
18/2015	Y	1-Dec		SPP	EMcManus	Leisure Centre Newry - Phase 2. (PQQ 52-2014)	ITT/EU	9,800 k	9,773,128.00	- Contract Award Notice issued (2016/S 005-004720) - Awarded 6th January, 2015
19/2015		20-Nov		RTS	LDinsmore	Supply and Delivery of 4 No. Roll-on Roll-off, Open Top Containers	ITT	20 k		- Awaiting award
20/2015		30-Nov		RTS	LDinsmore	Compactor Units - Servicing & maintenance of	ITT	28 k		- Awaiting award
21/2015		11-Dec		RTS	TDaly	Structural Repairs Canal Bank located at Middle Bank Newry	ITT	100 k		- Awaiting award
22/2015		4-Dec		RTS	LDinsmore	Supply of 1 No X 7.5 Tonne Refuse Collection Vehicle c/w Bin-Lifting Device	ITT	65 k		- Awaiting award
23/2015	Y	23-Dec		RTS	LDinsmore	Lot 1 - Supply & Delivery of 1no. 15 tonne Street Cleansing Vehicle	ITT/EU	120 k		- Awaiting award
24/2015	Y	23-Dec		RTS	LDinsmore	Lot 2. Supply & Delivery of 1no. 10-12 tonne Street Sweeping Vehicle	ITT/EU	115 k		- Awaiting award
25/2015	Y	23-Dec		RTS	LDinsmore	Lot 3. Supply & Delivery of 1no. 2.5t Multipurpose Street Cleansing Vehicle	ITT/EU	60 k		- Awaiting award
26/2015		11-Dec		ERT	MB	EXPRESSION OF INTEREST - Licence for 2 Trading Pitches at Slieve Gullion	Licence			- Awaiting award
24/2015	Y	23-Dec		RTS	LDinsmore	Lot 2. Supply & Delivery of 1no. 10-12 tonne Street Sweeping Vehicle	ITT/EU	115 k		- Awaiting award
25/2015	Y	23-Dec		RTS	LDinsmore	Lot 3. Supply & Delivery of 1no. 2.5t Multipurpose Street Cleansing Vehicle	ITT/EU	60 k		- Awaiting award

Tenders currently current or pending as of 31 December 2015

07/2015				ERT	EMcQuaid	Graphic Design and Print Management Service for Tourism	ITT			Pending issue
28/2015				RTS	TD	Supply of 3 Intergral Style Panel Vans	CCS	39 k		Pending issue
29/2015				RTS	TD	Supply of 2 Car-Derived vans	CCS	20 k		Pending issue
30/2015				RTS	TD	Supply of 2 Panel Vans (max GVW 3500kg)	CCS	48 k		Pending issue
32/2015				ERT	RK	Arts, Culture and Museums Audience Development Plan	ITT	22 k		Pending issue
27/2015		08-Jan-16		RTS	CH	Supply and Delivery of Grounds Maintenance Machinery	ITT	30 k		Current
31/2015		08-Jan-16		RTS	CH	Spring & Summer Bedding Plants Stock	ITT	25 k		Current

Report to:	Strategy, Policy & Resources Committee
Subject:	<i>Draft NILGA response to the Business Rates Consultation to be used for Members to draw up a response on behalf of Newry Mourne and Down District Council.</i>
Date:	14 January 2016
Reporting Officer:	Robert Dowey
Contact Officer:	Robert Dowey
<u>Decisions Required</u>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Members need to decide if they wish to make a separate response to the document enclosed from NILGA on or before 29 January 2016.</i> 	
1.0	<u>Purpose & Background</u>
1.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NILGA's draft response to the Business Rates Consultation has been drawn up based on comments received at a consultation event with elected members and officers on 11 December 2015 and also in liaison with ALGFO. Members should be conscious that a separate meeting has been set up to discuss a response to NILGA on 25 January 2016. Further comments to the response are now requested for submission on or before 29 January 2016. In order to inform Members in the preparation of their own response the NILGA document is attached.
2.0	<u>Key Issues</u>
2.1	Should the Council be preparing a submission as a Council or by Political Party.
<u>Possible Future Issues for Consideration</u>	
2.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some members attended a seminar in Belfast on 12 January 2016 at which they received additional relevant information and they may decide to feed this in to any response being made.
<u>Resource Implications</u>	
3.1	None
<u>Appendices</u>	
4.1	Appendix 1 – Draft NILGA response to the Business Rates Consultation



Draft NILGA response to the DFPNI Consultation on the review of the Non-Domestic Rate

NILGA Executive Committee
15th January 2016

The following paper is written in response to the DFPNI consultation on the Review of the Non-Domestic Rate. This was drafted further to a focussed policy event on 11th December 2015 and in liaison with the Association of Local Government Finance Officers. This draft will be considered by the NILGA Executive Committee, prior to submission to the Department. The official closing date for this consultation is 25th January but NILGA has negotiated an extension from the DFP who require a submission **by 1st February**.

Should comments from councils be received by NILGA prior to the 29th January, these will be factored in to the final response.

For further information or to discuss any of the issues highlighted, please contact Karen Smyth at the NILGA Offices: Email: k.smyth@nilga.org Tel: 028 9079 8972

Derek McCallan
Chief Executive

6th January 2016

Introduction

NILGA, the Northern Ireland Local Government Association, is the representative body for district councils in Northern Ireland. The membership is comprised of the 11 local authorities and the organisation is supported by all the main political parties. We consider rating reviews to be of great importance and have been working closely with the Department of Finance and Personnel for a number of years in relation to its ongoing work on rating policy.

NILGA believes that the need for transparency, simplicity and increased accountability is the key to any policy regarding rates. The public should be able to understand all charges levied upon them and know what they are used for. We particularly welcome the 'innovation lab' approach that was taken to developing this consultation, which was an extremely inclusive method for policy development.

The following comments are made, further to a policy event held by NILGA on 11th December, which was attended by over forty councillors and local government finance officers.

Comments in response to DFP Consultation Questions

1 Are there any additional criteria that should be used to judge the suitability of the system for raising revenue locally?

NILGA supports the principles outlined in the consultation document, i.e. efficiency, certainty, simplicity, flexibility, proportionality, equity/fairness, and is also keen to support the Department in its drive to develop a better rating system. It is our view that a property based tax is well-understood and should be retained in Northern Ireland, and although we are aware that other options were considered at the Innovation Lab, we understand that no viable alternative was proposed by participants.

2 Do you think that more frequent revaluations would lead to a more equitable rating system and improve the current rating system? 2a If yes, how often should revaluations occur? 2b Should the date and/or frequency of revaluations be written into legislation?

One of the major issues with the 2015 non-domestic revaluation was the length of time between revaluations, which meant that some valuation changes were more severe in impact than would have been the case if they could have been introduced over a period via intermediate revaluations. This problem would be mitigated if valuations were carried out more regularly. To provide certainty, this measure should be provided for in legislation.

NILGA would therefore propose a formal regime of revaluations, at intervals of 5 years at most, which should be instituted and underpinned by appropriate legislation.

3 Do you think that all current and/or future rate supports should adhere to clearly defined criteria? 3a What should these criteria be and what do you consider to be the most important?

The whole area of reliefs and exemptions needs to be examined in the context of the fundamental principles of equity and proportionality.

NILGA believes that all forms of business with a property (including non-domestic revenue generating items such as solar panels) should pay a proportionate element of the rate burden. The rating system needs to take into account ability to pay and also be able to respond to circumstances, such as the broader economic environment.

NILGA believes that the widening of the tax base will allow the overall tax burden to be mitigated among existing taxpayers. Steps should be taken to:

- Ensure that the collection rate is increased, along with cost savings in the collection process, more intense inspection of properties and greater use of data sharing with councils and other bodies such as utility companies, the Electoral Office and the Post Office/Royal Mail.
- Bring more bodies into the scope of the rating system (bearing in mind equity and proportionality)

- Carry out a comprehensive review of reliefs – in particular, NILGA would advocate ending full relief for the charitable sector, the 50% relief for vacant non-domestic properties and SBRR, along with a reduction in the relief for de-rated properties. The precise proportion of rates payable going forward by these bodies should be the subject of the review.
- Target future reliefs and exemptions on areas and schemes which will assist in widening the tax base and on those ratepayers whose ability to pay is less.
- It is ESSENTIAL that a set of guiding principles for reliefs is introduced, as noted in para 4.22 of the consultation document. NILGA agrees that :
 - The purpose must be clearly stated
 - Reliefs should potentially be time bound, with well-defined timescales
 - Reliefs should be targeted – for example, at specific sectors, ability to pay or economic growth
 - The need for reliefs should be regularly evaluated, including assessments of whether they are achieving their desired purpose and impact
 - An exit strategy should be prepared

4 Should industrial de-rating be retained in its current form? 4a If you disagree, what would you recommend instead and why?

In the past, and for many years, full rate relief was provided to those eligible for relief, which is essentially available to industrial/manufacturing bodies. However, prior to the recent recessionary years, a decision had been taken to gradually increase the rate burden on eligible businesses by 10% per annum until they paid full rates. This had reached a rate burden of 30% of the theoretical maximum before it was put on hold due to the recession. It remains on hold.

Legislation currently provides that councils are fully compensated by way of grant for rates lost on de-rated properties. Hence the loss to the public purse falls on central government.

It is noted that this relief is no longer available within the rest of the UK, and that the ERINI report in 2007 suggested that relief be provided at no more than 50%.

NILGA member councils are keen to retain de-rating relief in the short term due to the current difficult economic climate and within the context of wider economic policy concerns such as energy prices, the need to rebalance the public and private sector in NI, attracting inward investment, encouraging entrepreneurial activity etc.

Some members suggested that rates payments could be linked to significant profit margins of larger, very successful companies with evidence of ability to pay, although this would have implications for the principles of transparency, simplicity and may prove difficult to assess.

As the economy improves, our members believe that further incremental reduction in this relief should be considered, with eventual discontinuation. The suggestion is made that relief could then be used as an incentive for new business. Such a position would need to be carefully considered in light of the reduced manufacturing carried out in Northern Ireland in recent decades and the impact increasing rates burdens would have on eligible businesses, investment and employment.

NILGA does not believe that this is the right time to change the approach to this relief, but proposes that a review would be required further to any reduction in corporation tax. Any review should be carried out within the developing context of introduction of corporation tax, national living wage and other general employer costs.

5 Do you consider that rate relief for Sport & Recreation should be awarded as at present and maintained at the current level of 80%? 5a If you disagree, what would you recommend instead and why? 5b Should the criteria to disregard social facility apportionment be removed or reduced from the current level of 20%?

Members strongly supported the provision of sport and recreation facilities as a vital contributor to public health and well-being, and retention of the current reliefs, and expressed strong support for the distinction made between amateur and 'not for profit' sports clubs/facilities and private sector (profit making) facilities.

Given the shift towards preventative health policy and the push to encourage physical activity, removal of this relief was seen to be a retrograde step, and potentially costing the public sector more in the long run, through increased need for healthcare.

Members were also very strongly of the view that council-owned and managed facilities provided as a statutory requirement (and where the private sector has failed) should not bear any additional rates burden.

This relief is currently at the same 80% level as England & Wales, although it is noted that councils there have the opportunity to provide further relief locally in some cases.

NILGA believes that this relief should be retained at its current level, whilst acknowledging that consideration could be given to enhancing the powers of councils to grant further relief in accordance with locally set criteria. NILGA is strongly of the view that to consider this kind of extension of council powers, more information and detailed consideration will be required, as covered in our response to Q13.

NILGA notes the comments in the consultation paper that exemption can apply to some substantial social facilities if they are part of a whole complex which has a large NAV. NILGA would favour this approach being dropped so that a fair share of rates is paid from such substantial social facilities.

6 Should Freight & Transport relief be removed? 6a What would be the potential consequences of such a move?

Northern Ireland is situated on the periphery of both the UK and Europe, and hence NILGA supports the retention of this relief as the consequences of its removal could harm trade.

7 Is residential homes relief still necessary to encourage the provision of care homes by the private sector? 7a Should it be limited to organisations that can demonstrate charitable status?

NILGA notes that there have been many reports, and strong public concern in recent times, about the potential closure of publicly funded care/residential homes. NILGA therefore believes that whilst a fair and equitable rating system should see privately run homes paying some level of rates, it would be inappropriate at the present time to remove this relief in its entirety. It would also not be appropriate to limit the relief only to homes with charitable status.

8 Should empty property relief continue at 50%? 8a Should any of the current exemptions (listed in Annex F4) be removed? 8b Should there be any additional exemptions within the policy?

In NI, generally speaking, vacant non-domestic properties pay 50% rates after an introductory 3 month exemption period. In England, the position is that such properties generally pay full rates after the 3 month exemption period, whilst in Scotland the owner will pay 90% of the liability. All jurisdictions have a number of exemptions and exceptions. NILGA notes that the 2009 review of this relief suggested its retention at the 50% level in order to help property owners mitigate the impact of the recession.

NILGA is aware that there is a substantial loss of revenue to the rating system via the more generous exemption in NI, however, the context of unoccupied retail high street property in Northern Ireland indicates a need for the 50% relief.

Increasing the relief (from 50%) is unlikely to be a greater incentive to get the vacant properties re-let/occupied, but our members are of the view that the 50% relief is an incentive for the landlord to get a building back in use. It is believed that if the relief is reduced, this would be likely to provide an incentive to let property to charity shops.

There is some local government support for reducing the relief to e.g. 33%, or to stage a reduction in relief over time, but a business case and evidence base would be required to set a new level.

At the NILGA meeting on 11th December 2015, some concern was expressed in relation to who the liability falls on for the 50% paid – the landlord or the tenant as the person with rights for occupancy?

An audit of empty properties is strongly recommended to enable proactive identification of properties and the taking of appropriate action.

NILGA believes that the 3 month amnesty should continue.

9 Is there any evidence that the parameters (qualifying criteria or duration) of the empty shops rates concession should be changed? 9a If yes, to what should they be changed to?

The NILGA view is that the rationale for the current level of this relief, which is minor in cost terms, is adequately explained in the consultation paper as being able to target properties which have been vacant for a longer time and providing help for only the difficult first year of trading. Retention of this relief in its current form is therefore supported.

10 What changes (if any) should be made to the current level of 100% non-domestic charitable exemption? 10a Should a reduced exemption or cap apply to those organisations competing with commercial interests? 10b Should all charity shops pay some rates? 10c Should charities have their relief capped so that they do not take over expensive properties, simply to help the owner avoid empty property rates?

This is by far the largest area of relief and is most likely to be highly controversial too. For example, many businesses complain about charity shops, with whom they are in competition, having an advantage by not having to pay rates at all. Relief for such shops is currently around £5m per annum, based upon figures provided to NILGA by DFP. It is also noted that many charity outlets are selling new goods or services in direct competition with small businesses. Our members believe that the cumulative impact of multiple charity outlets on the high street is having a particularly damaging effect on the independent retail sector.

Members were of the view that charity shops were a ‘double edged sword’ on the high street, filling vacant properties but attracting rates exemptions. The view was strongly expressed that some charity shops should pay some rates, again based on ability to pay – for example some charity shops are part of large national charities, some are small independent outlets for small local charities.

Such shops are, however, only a fraction of the overall charitable sector. Official “charities” as a whole get relief of £13m out of a total of £83m for the whole sector. The biggest portion of the relief for the charitable sector goes to religious organisations (£30m out of £83m).

At the meeting on 11th December, members were of the view that a number of charities were multi-million pound operations, with large senior management salaries. NILGA believes that more exploration is required as to what is accepted as a charity – e.g. large housing associations, universities attract charitable status. ‘Trading’ status of charities should also be explored. The Charity Commission holds figures for charity income and this information could be used as a reliable source of information, although NILGA accepts that deciding who pays and who doesn’t, could be a difficult decision to make.

NILGA believes that charities should pay some rates, based on ability to pay, in a similar manner to the system in place across the water, for example a system similar to that in England, (80% exemption) pro rata based on annual accounts.

NILGA notes the DFP consultation paper's comments regarding council leisure centres and municipal golf courses. As mentioned in the consultation paper, DFP is asked to note well the statutory obligation on councils to provide leisure facilities, which are quite distinct from private facilities.

Council-run leisure facilities operate at a substantial loss despite entry fees being charged, and any move to impose rates on such facilities would inevitably lead to this cost being directly recouped from ratepayers, either in general or by increasing charges. NILGA would hence not support any proposal to levy rates on such facilities. NILGA would also argue that municipal golf courses are a further facility provided to the public at such a substantial discount that they do not, in effect, compete with privately run courses.

11 What, if any, changes should be made to both the hardship relief and Rural ATM exemption?

NILGA would not support any changes to these reliefs.

12 Should the rating system be used to pursue economic development objectives or should its primary function be to simply raise revenue? If yes, what sectors should be targeted? 12a What are the disadvantages of such approach and do you feel that using the rating regime in this way would make a material difference to Northern Ireland's economic performance?

NILGA supports the targeted use of the rating system to deliver economic development objectives – both by central government and by local government (as per our response to Q13 below).

13 Would it be advantageous for District Councils to take on powers for granting reliefs?

13a In what areas would this be considered to be beneficial?

At the NILGA meeting on 11th December, members were asked for their views on this issue, and most requested more detail, or expressed concern in relation to the proposal. Some saw potential in an enhanced ability to address town centre/high street issues and evidence of 'doughnut' towns and cities, but noted that detailed discussions with Land and Property Services would be required. More detail would be required as to how such reliefs would operate in practice; and concern was expressed in relation to the additional burden on councils and who would pay for extended reliefs.

A need for checks and balances at council level was identified should such powers be made available, given the potential political issues involved. Concern was also expressed regarding the introduction of such inconsistency of approach across different councils, and it was noted that some councils will be able to afford to provide greater reliefs than others, potentially exacerbating current gaps between richer and poorer councils.

14 Should District Councils have the ability to strike separate domestic and non -domestic rates?**14a What would be the advantages and disadvantages of such an approach? Should District Councils continue to be compensated in full for the elements contained within the de-rating grant?**

At the present time, councils have a strict procedure to follow as regards setting their rates. A council must first set a non-domestic rate, and a fixed factor (the growth or conversion factor) must be used to then derive the domestic rate. This matter has been discussed with the Departments of Environment and Finance & Personnel on various occasions in recent years.

NILGA acknowledges that a power to strike separate domestic and non-domestic rates could help shape the future of the new council areas, particularly towns and cities, and would enable councils to tailor rates to local needs. This would, for example, enable councils to lower their non-domestic rate to act as an incentive for investment. It was noted that such a power would enable a council to set one rate across the district should it wish to do so, which was seen as positive, with consequent support for removal of the conversion factor. A choice of this nature being made available was broadly welcomed, with concern expressed by a few members who believed that central government should retain control of this area of policy.

NILGA would therefore recommend that, in future, growth/conversion factors should not be mandatory, but rather should be a guide only, thus allowing councils greater flexibility to set rates according to locally developed priorities.

There is unanimous support within local government for retention of the de-rating grant and continuation of compensation for the elements included within it. NILGA therefore strongly supports retention, particularly in view of many additional burdens passing to councils at present.

15 To what extent do you feel that a rate bill based on a property's NAV is a fair reflection of the occupying business' ability to pay?**15a Should local revenue be raised using an alternative method that would better reflect an 'ability to pay'?****15b What method should be used and what are the advantages and disadvantages of such an approach?**

NILGA understands the concerns expressed about this matter, but believes, as expressed in the consultation paper, that it may be impractical to operate a system better reflecting 'ability to pay' on a yearly basis.

NILGA therefore largely supports the retention of the current system, as it represents a reasonable basis which aligns to the simple capital valuation of a domestic property, although we would be happy to consider practical ideas coming forward as a result of this consultation.

The occupation of a business property, as with a house, will, more often than not, correspond with ability to pay.

16 Should we consider taxing ownership instead of occupation for the Non-Domestic sector?

As outlined in the consultation paper, NILGA believes that the current basis of generally taxing occupation works well and should be retained.

17 Should a switch to capital value be considered in more detail for Non-Domestic property?

NILGA supports the retention of the current system of using NAVs rather than moving to a capital value system.

18 Do you agree with the principle of a derelict land tax? 18a What should the scope of the tax be?

18b Should it apply to all unused and derelict sites or should it be restricted to land that is zoned for a particular development.

The NILGA Planning and Regeneration Working Group has recently considered the issue of derelict land, further to the introduction of a 'levy' in the Republic of Ireland through the Irish "Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015". Potential lobbying activity for a similar levy in Northern Ireland was considered within the context of NILGA work related to the ongoing transfer of regeneration powers from DSD, but should DFP instead wish to further a similar approach, NILGA would strongly support further research into this issue. This is also related to work that NILGA has recently carried out at the behest of the Regional Development Committee, who carried out an Inquiry into Unadopted Roads.

19 Should public sector organisations that are funded from central government continue to pay rates?

19a What are the potential consequences of moving away from such an approach?

NILGA supports the current practice of taxing public sector properties, since, as outlined in the consultation paper, this practice provides rates income for councils. If it was to be discontinued, councils would have to be fully compensated in a similar manner to the current "de-rating" grant.

20 Notwithstanding some of the fundamental policy concerns expressed above, is their support for exploring the issue of LVT in more detail?

This type of tax is used in a few jurisdictions, and NICVA recently launched a report advocating this locally. At the Innovation Lab, and also the recent IRRV Conference, it was argued that LVT was not an appropriate solution here.

NILGA believes that although the introduction of a Land Value Tax would have some merits, it is not thought to be appropriate for Northern Ireland at this time. Like IRRV, NILGA would argue that a tax on vacant land would help to widen the tax base, but that it raises the question of how to treat vacant agricultural land. We do not currently support further work being carried out on this issue.

21 Would an online sales tax benefit businesses operating within Northern Ireland? How could this be practically implemented?

NILGA would not support the introduction of an online sales tax, a local income tax or a tourist tax at this time.

22 Should DFP pursue an assessment of other/additional systems for raising revenue within Northern Ireland? If yes, what tax should be examined in more detail? What would the potential benefits of such an approach?

NILGA would agree with the Department's assertion that exploring any alternative form of taxation would be "extremely challenging and be unlikely to deliver significant additional benefits" at this time, however, at the NILGA event on 11th December, a suggestion was made to commission a study in relation to raising revenue within the context of the new council 'General Power of Competence'. The Department may wish to consider this suggestion as it carries this work forward.

Collection and Administration

NILGA recognises that there is merit in retaining the centralised rate collection body as currently exists. However, NILGA notes that considerable investment is needed in order to bring systems up to date and ensure much better integration as we progress. NILGA would urge that funds for such technological investment should be prioritised.

NILGA would also advocate that Land & Property Services (LPS) needs to be more accountable to local councils for its collection performance along with the costs levied on councils for write-offs, collection and other matters.

It is in everyone's interest to ensure that collection rates are maximised and costs of collection minimised, thereby increasing net revenue raised to the benefit of all.

Members are therefore extremely keen to see development of a better partnership approach between councils and LPS, to develop better 'policing' of rates evasion, utilising the skills of building control and other council staff.

Conclusion

NILGA thanks the Department for ensuring continuing local government involvement in the development of new rates policy. We trust that the views of NILGA and of our member councils will be taken on board within the consideration of the way forward following the closure of this consultation.

We are particularly pleased to see the presentation of radical ideas in the consultation paper, and NILGA seeks further involvement in the development of these ideas which the Department decides to take forward.

Any queries in relation to this response should be addressed to Karen Smyth, Head of Policy at NILGA - email: k.smyth@nilga.org tel: (028) 9079 8972.

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