



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

Nichola Mallon MLA
Minister for Infrastructure

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4 March 2022

Dear Minister,

Planning in Northern Ireland – Regional Planning Commission

At its meetings on 10, 17 and 24 February 2022, the Public Accounts Committee took evidence on its inquiry into Planning in Northern Ireland from the Department of Infrastructure, SOLACE and NILGA.

Both SOLACE and NILGA indicated dissatisfaction in respect of aspects of the current governance arrangements for Planning in Northern Ireland. Both organisations reported that they considered engagement between council planning officers and relevant Departmental officials to be functioning reasonably satisfactorily. However, they also strongly felt that elected representatives from the district councils lacked a robust and durable mechanism through which they could communicate the legitimate concerns of their constituents and work with the Minister to develop and support an overarching planning strategy.

Our colleagues on the Infrastructure Committee have intimated that they share this view. Consequently, the Public Accounts Committee and Infrastructure Committee have agreed that the Chairperson of the latter and I should write to you in order to suggest that you urgently review the functioning of the current Planning Forum and give consideration to the establishment of a Regional Planning Commission. The Commission might be chaired by the Infrastructure Minister and include elected representatives of the district councils and other key stakeholders. The Commission might allow district councils etc. to raise concerns in respect of the operability and consequences of planning policy and

thus prevent or limit some of the planning issues uncovered during the PAC Inquiry.

A response at your earliest convenience and certainly prior to the anticipated reporting date for the Planning in Northern Ireland inquiry (Wednesday 16 March 2022) would be greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'William J. Humphrey'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

William Humphrey MBE MLA
Chairperson
Public Accounts Committee

Jonathan Buckley MLA
Chairperson
Committee for Infrastructure