



CASTLEREAGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

Stye Braes o Ulidia Burgh Cooncil

Stephen Reid BSc MBA
Chief Executive

Anna Lo, MBE, MLA
Chairperson, Committee for the Environment
Room 245
Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Stormont
BT4 3XX

By email: committee.environment@niassembly.gov.uk

14 November 2013

Our Ref: 26(I)/CEP141113/05

Dear Ms Lo

Castlereagh Borough Council Response to Call for Evidence on The Local Government Bill

At a Castlereagh Borough Council meeting held on Tuesday 12 November the Council considered the "Local Government Bill" and their response to the call for evidence by the Department of the Environment, Environment Committee. The Council welcomed the opportunity to provide evidence to the Committee on the Bill and believes that its introduction is a further positive step forward in the local government reform programme.

The Council recognises that the Bill is enabling legislation and that much of the detail will be contained in subordinate legislation and guidance, which is still in the process of being developed. It is imperative that this legislation (and associated guidance) is developed in partnership with local government prior to its introduction to the Assembly, as there will be no opportunity to make amendments once that has occurred.

The Council supports the NILGA response to the call for evidence dated the 11 November with the following additional comments.

Positions of responsibility (Part 3)

The Council is concerned that the Bill is highly prescriptive in terms of how Members may be selected for positions of responsibility and committee membership. Whilst the Council firmly supports the principle of proportionality, it would contend that consideration be given to permitting local solutions which are politically agreed.

Call-In and Qualifying Majority Procedures (Part 7)

The Council agreed that this part was too inflexible and was concerned with the current broad definition of the two circumstances in which call-in can apply (as set out at a Clause 45 (1) of the Bill). I felt that this has potential for a high percentage of council decisions being subjected to call-in and thereby making effective decision making extremely difficult. The Council therefore felt that because of the potential delay in decision making and potential cost of legal advice that this part of the Bill should be removed, but if this is not supported request the Department to develop robust and clear definitions around the criteria for each of the two circumstances and to examine and detail the practicalities and process for implementing such procedures.

Press/Public access to Meeting (Part 8)

The Council supported NILGA's view on openness and transparency, but felt that there may be a need to restrict attendance at committees or other subcommittees because of the practicalities and costs involved in providing information and access for the public.

Control of Councils by Government Departments (Part 14)

The Council is strongly opposed to being "controlled" by Central Government Departments and request that guidance be produced to ensure that Departments do not micro-manage councils and put in place unrealistic reporting expectations on them. They further agreed that Councils should be only accountable to one Government Department, being the Department of the Environment.

I trust that the Environment Committee will be made aware of the Council's comments. The Council would welcome the opportunity to work closely with the Department and the Committee for the Environment on the further development of all subsequent legislation and guidance.

Yours sincerely



Stephen Reid
Chief Executive