



CASTLEREAGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

Stye Braes o Ulidia Burgh Coouncil

Stephen Reid BSc MBA
Chief Executive

Anna Lo, MBE, MLA
Chairperson, Committee for the Environment
Room 245
Parliament Buildings
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By email: committee.environment@niassembly.gov.uk

14 November 2013

Our Ref: 26(I)/CEP141113/04

Dear Ms Lo

Castlereagh and Lisburn Statutory Transition Committee Response to Call for Evidence on The Local Government Bill

At a Castlereagh and Lisburn Statutory Transition Committee meeting held on Wednesday 13 November the Committee considered the "Local Government Bill" and their response to the call for evidence by the Department of the Environment, Environment Committee. The Committee welcomed the opportunity to provide evidence to the Environment Committee on the Bill and believes that its introduction is a further positive step forward in the local government reform programme.

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

Positions of responsibility (Part 3)

The Committee 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 Committee 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 Committee 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). It felt that this has potential for a high percentage of Committee decisions being subjected to call-in and thereby making effective decision making extremely difficult. The Committee 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 agreed 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 Committee 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 Committees by Government Departments (Part 14)

The Committee is strongly opposed to being "controlled" by Central Government Departments and request that guidance be produced to ensure that Departments do not micro-manage Committees and put in place unrealistic reporting expectations on them. They further agreed that Committees 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 Statutory Transition Committee's comments. The Committee 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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Henderson', with a small 'pp' written to the left of the signature.

Alderman Michael Henderson
Chair of the Castlereagh/Lisburn Statutory Transition Committee