

Mr Mike Nesbitt MLA
Committee for the Executive Office
Parliament Buildings
Stormont
Belfast
BT4 3XX

25th November 2016

Dear Mr Nesbitt

Re: Draft Programme for Government, 2016 – 2021.

Thank you for your correspondence, dated 4th November 2016, in regard to the above mentioned matter.

This response has today been ratified by NILGA's All Council Meeting of 25th November 2016.

Due to the breadth, complexity and impacts of the issues in the draft PfG which materially affect local government in Northern Ireland and as the councils' representative body, NILGA has chosen not to adhere to the template provided. Therefore, the comments below are respectfully offered to the Committee for the Executive Office.

A. Outcomes

NILGA is fully supportive of outcome based approaches and welcomes the further draft of the PfG as a genuine attempt at organising all the elements as they must be to ensure a reasoned chance of delivery. However, in the interests of clarity and succinctness and moving away from the silo culture that has frustrated delivery, we would have liked to have seen a further rationalisation of outcomes. By way of illustration, outcomes one, six, twelve and thirteen all relate to a prosperous economy and therefore could be captured in a single outcome.

Delivery Plan / Indicators

In regard to the primary indicators highlighted in your correspondence, NILGA would – as requested - comment specifically on (i) the Nations Brand Index (#40).



If the above hexagon of Nation Brand “quality” is to be considered as a key performance indicator NILGA would assert that for “Brand NI” to be upwardly mobile, during the lifetime of the PfG, then there would need to be the development of an effective devolution plan within Northern Ireland over this and the next NI Assembly mandate.

Materially, this would involve setting up an All Party Group covering both tiers of government to develop, determine and implement a clear vision of the contemporary roles of local and regional government in NI, ensuring that practical devolution, supporting the principles of subsidiarity, is realised incrementally between (i) 2016 - 2021 and (ii) 2022 – 2026.

This matter has been raised with the Executive Office’s Junior Ministers.

(ii) Total spend by external visitors (#30) –

NILGA concurs that building our place on the international stage, and actively promoting Northern Ireland as an investment and tourist destination will be a key catalyst for economic growth. Councils in Northern are really well positioned to use their networks internationally as a means of maximising investment and spend within the global context and the sector welcomes opportunities in this regard.

NILGA strongly advises that local government is included as a key delivery partner, particularly when the delivery plan clearly recognises the potential of local activity to impact on the global image of the region and the need for consistency in the message being conveyed both locally and internationally; and the explicit function and resources placed by councils on tourism and economic development.

B. Wider Comment

NILGA welcomes the fact that the Committee for the Executive Office intends to produce a co-ordinated report on the response of the statutory committees to the draft PfG. Aligned to this, and your request that consultees provide general comments on the outcomes based approach to the draft PfG, the Association would state the following:

- NILGA strongly supports the Outcomes Based Approach, subject to review and clarity on delivery and measurement.
- NILGA draws the Committee's attention to the 2007 decision of the Scottish Assembly to abolish departments in government and deliver on a Single Outcome Approach (SOAs).
- As Committee members are no doubt aware, Single Outcome Agreements (SOAs) are agreements between the Scottish Government and Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) which set out how each will work towards improving **outcomes** for the local people in a way that reflects local circumstances and priorities.
- Therefore, for the draft PfG Outcomes Based Approach to be thoroughly effective, decision taking needs to be further localised. Hence, NILGA's request for an All Party Group (above mentioned) with an overarching scrutiny role for the Committee.
- So, the outcomes-based approach will require radical (yet incremental) rewiring of how public services are financed, provided and planned for in NI, with councils delivering more, as economic, social and public service hubs, working within the NI Assembly's broad policy environment. This should be an underpinning, ideological shift within the PfG.
- The frequent reference to Local Government as partners in the many elements of the 14 Outcomes, 48 Indicators and associated Delivery Plans is welcomed by NILGA, mindful of the additional powers conferred upon the 11 new councils in April 2015.
- Councils, however, do not possess the financial resilience or full complement of resources and skills to do this within a single PfG period. Therefore, a negotiated settlement between local and regional government will be required before the end of this mandate, implemented in the 2022 – 2026 period, supporting the outcomes-based approach prevalent in the draft PfG and NILGA's Programme for Local Government.
- By way of practical justification of these comments, NILGA asserts that the processes at the heart of outcomes based accountability have been found in many successful change efforts both internationally and at a UK region level.

In conclusion, NILGA looks forward to developing a mutually beneficial relationship with both TEO and the Committee for the Executive Office, and will be content to provide oral evidence upon request.

Yours sincerely



Derek McCallan
Chief Executive