



NEIL GIBSON
PERMANENT SECRETARY, DoF

MIKE BRENNAN
PERMANENT SECRETARY, DfE

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Councillor Cora Corry
Mid Ulster District Council
Dungannon Office, Circular Road,
Dungannon
BT716BD
Via email eileen.forde@midulstercouncil.org

Your Ref: C079/23

Our Ref: SINV-0176-2023

17 April 2023

Dear Cora

Thank you for the letter on behalf of Mid Ulster District Council on 28th March 2023, requesting an emergency meeting to discuss the loss of ESF funding.

We fully recognise the valuable work carried out by the many groups and organisations that benefitted from the ESF and while we welcome the results of the UKSPF Economic Inactivity competition and the increased funding allocation for this intervention, we also recognise the implications the outworking of this will have for the voluntary and community sector, particularly for those who did not receive a funding offer.

The need for a full replacement programme for ESF is an issue that we, as Permanent Secretaries of our respective departments, NI Ministers (while in post), and departmental officials have been collaboratively engaging extensively with UK Government on since the announcement of this new fund in 2017 – seeking to achieve the Executive's agreed position of full replacement of ESF via existing NI structures.

However, the replacement for ESF, the UKSPF Economic Inactivity Competition, has been designed and will be delivered solely by Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and therefore any query in relation to this competition should be directed to the DLUHC.

In the absence of Ministers we are content for a discussion to be included on this subject at the next SOLACE meeting which is currently scheduled for June 2023.

Departments will continue to work collaboratively to seek to secure the best possible outcomes for Northern Ireland from the UKSPF or any future funding opportunity.

Yours sincerely



NEIL GIBSON

MIKE BRENNAN

COLUM BOYLE

PETER MAY

Councillor Cara Cory
Chair
Mid Ulster District Council
Burn Road
Cookstown
BT80 8TD

Eileen.Forde@midulstercouncil.org

By email

28 April 2023

Dear Councillor Cory

Thank you for your email (4 April 2023).

The natural gas network started in Northern Ireland in 1996, and since then there has been around 319,000 connections.

The Northern Ireland gas networks have been developed on an economic basis. Therefore, SGN need to prove that the extension to Moneymore is economically viable for it to go ahead.

This economic test for a network extension compares the cost of building its gas network with the projected gas network lifetime monetary return from gas usage in that town.

I would encourage you and your constituents to continue your discussions with SGN to see how this development can become economically viable. As having more residents, and businesses in the area willing to connect, may make development more viable.

As a regulator, we will always consider all new/revised business cases as submitted by the network operator.

All the very best.



John French
Chief Executive



Northern
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Councillor Córa Corry

By email: chair@midulstercouncil.org

21 April 2023

Our reference: MC/23/172

Dear Cllr Corry,

Thank you for your letter dated 28 March 2023 bringing to the attention of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland the Council's support for a motion passed by Newry, Mourne and Down District Council seeking a reduction in the minimum voting age to sixteen. As the Minister with responsibility for elections I have been asked to respond.

The Government recognises and hugely values the contribution young people make to society, however, the Government has no plans to lower the voting age, having been elected on a manifesto commitment to maintain the current franchise at 18.

The age of 18 is recognised in the vast majority of democratic countries as the age at which an individual becomes an adult. Accordingly, the vast majority of liberal democracies worldwide consider 18 the right age to enfranchise young people. This includes the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and almost all European Union countries.

I hope this helps explain the position of the Government.

Yours sincerely,

STEVE BAKER MP
MINISTER OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND



HM Treasury

Correspondence & Enquiry Unit
1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ
www.gov.uk/hm-treasury

Councillor Cora Corry
By email

4 May 2023

Our reference: TO2023/06779

Dear Councillor Cora Corry,

Thank you for your correspondence dated 28 March to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, regarding energy company profits. As it is not practical for ministers to respond personally to all the correspondence they receive, I have been asked to reply.

The UK was one of the first countries to implement a fiscal response to high oil and gas prices by introducing the Energy Profits Levy (EPL) in May last year. This recognised that profit levels in the sector had increased significantly due to very high oil and gas prices caused by global circumstances, including Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The EPL is a temporary 35 per cent surcharge on the exceptional profits being made by the sector and comes on top of the default 40 per cent headline tax rate applied to profits from UK oil and gas production, bringing the overall combined tax rate to 75 per cent, one of the highest rates globally. The levy will remain in place until March 2028.

At the same time, the Government has issued a clear signal that it wants the oil and gas sector to reinvest its profits to support the economy, jobs, and the UK's energy security. That is why the EPL includes a new investment allowance which provides companies with an immediate and additional incentive to invest. Under this allowance companies can claim around 91p in tax relief for every £1 they invest. This relief increases to £1.09 for every £1 invested towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions from the production of oil and gas, helping to support the sector to transition to lower carbon oil and gas production as part of our commitment to Net Zero. While the UK still needs oil and gas, it makes sense to encourage investment in our domestic resources and retain the economic benefits and support UK jobs. Using gas from the UK Continental Shelf also generates lower emissions than importing seaborne Liquefied Natural Gas.

The Office for Budget Responsibility expect the EPL to raise just under £26 billion between 2022-23 and 2027-28. This significant source of tax revenue has helped fund vital cost of living support, including the Energy Price Guarantee on household energy bills and additional support for those most in need. Revenues from the levy are on top of around £25 billion in tax receipts from the sector over the same period through the permanent tax regime, ensuring oil and gas companies pay their fair share of tax and contribute towards the support being provided for the most vulnerable households and businesses.

It would not be appropriate for the Government to comment on individual taxpayers. The EPL only applies to profits companies make from the exploration and production of oil and gas in the UK or on the UK Continental Shelf. Any profits made by companies from such operations in other oil and gas basins are not subject to the EPL but may be subject to the tax system of that other oil and gas basin jurisdiction. This is in line with other profit-based taxes on companies which operate in both the UK and overseas.

Thank you for taking the time to make us aware of your concerns.

Yours sincerely,

Correspondence & Information Rights Team
HM Treasury

**From the Permanent Secretary
and HSC Chief Executive**



Councillor Cora Corry

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Your ref: C076/22

Our ref: SINV-0058-2023

Date: 3 May 2023

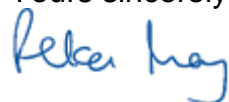
Dear Councillor Corry

Thank you for your correspondence of 28 March 2023 inviting me to reconsider my decision to meet with elected members from Mid Ulster District Council to discuss a Women's Health Strategy for NI.

Further to my letter of 15 March 2023 outlining the desire to progress some coordinated action on improving women's health within our current capacity, I understand that officials are preparing to meet with the All-Party Group on Women's Health in the near future to discuss this further. Subject to capacity and other pressures, it is intended that relevant policy and professional leads from across the Department will then engage with health providers, clinicians and other stakeholders, including Councils, to discuss the priority actions that could feasibly be taken forward on women's health within our current resources.

I hope this gives you reassurance that the Department will be engaging with you in due course. You will appreciate that in the absence of increased recurrent investment in our health and social care system, the scope of any action plan is likely to focus on maximising delivery and improving health outcomes within our current financial and staff resources.

Yours sincerely



Peter May

FROM THE PERMANENT SECRETARY
Mike Brennan



Councillor Córa Corry
Chair, Mid Ulster Council

info@midulstercouncil.org

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Our Ref: SCOR-0191-2023

24 April 2023

Dear Ms Corry,

SIGNING OF TOURIST ATTRACTIONS AND FACILITIES

Thank you for your letter dated 12 April 2023.

I am aware that you also wrote to my colleague in the Department for Infrastructure, Julie Harrison, Permanent Secretary, and she provided a written response to similar issues raised back in November 2022.

Since then, officials from Tourism NI met with officials from the Department for Infrastructure in December 2022 to discuss eligibility, process and potential improvements in relation to the White-on-Brown Tourist Signage Scheme. Discussions are ongoing and we are reviewing related feedback from applicants, local authorities and other stakeholders.

As I hope you can appreciate, it is not possible for every tourist amenity to be signed as there is such a number and variety of these. Whilst it is Tourism NI's role to promote tourism, it is recognised that providing a large number of signs with a lot of information in an uncontrolled manner has the potential to confuse visitors and detract from the main purpose of the sign which is to direct traffic in a safe and efficient way.

Even where a destination is eligible for tourist signage, signage cannot be guaranteed. The final decision will be taken by the Department for Infrastructure, taking into consideration road safety and traffic management issues.

As Julie Harrison included in her response to you in November in relation to the cost of providing signs, this is the direct responsibility of the Department for Infrastructure and in which they take a full-cost recovery approach.

As mentioned, Tourism NI has already met with officials from the Department for Infrastructure on the subject of White-on-Brown Signage and they will continue to engage with them and seek potential improvements and amendments to the process. Tourism NI officials will keep you posted of progress in this area.

Finally, I note that you have also written to John McGrillen, CEO, Tourism NI inviting him to a Mid Ulster Council Development Committee meeting on 15 June to discuss the topic of White-on-Brown signage. Tourism NI will respond to you directly on this request.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'mbrennan', written in a cursive style.

MIKE BRENNAN
Permanent Secretary
Department for the Economy

Mr Adrian McCreesh
Chief Executive
Mid Ulster District Council
Council Offices
Circular Road
DUNGANNON
BT71 6DT

the voice of local government

17th April 2023

Dear Adrian,

There is no doubt that the last year has been challenging for councils, particularly in relation to local industrial disputes and the soaring costs of delivering services, with those challenges continuing into the new financial year.

Having just completed my first year as NILGA Chief Executive and as we approach the start of a new mandate, I have been struck by the strong sense of solidarity between councils on key issues. I wanted to highlight some of the work undertaken by NILGA to support you on those key issues over the last four years.

- **Elected Member Development** – The Regional Elected Member Development programme has just completed its first full mandate with Elected Members participating 373 times in accredited and non-accredited opportunities to assist them in fulfilling their roles. Examples include Chairing Skills, Performance Improvement, Public Affairs/Lobbying, Challenge/Scrutiny, Planning, Emergency Planning, Climate Emergency/Carbon Literacy and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. The regional programme is currently under review and I would encourage your council to participate in that review.

Additionally, NILGA co-ordinates the kite mark standard in Elected Member learning and development, namely Charter and Charter Plus with all 11 councils now holding one of these standards for their investment in Elected Member learning and development.

- **Policy** – A highlight during the last mandate was our role in ensuring councils and the value of local leadership were recognised in the COP26 Glasgow Agreement and during the development of the Climate Change Act (NI) 2022 and associated policy and strategy. More recently NILGA has worked to ensure that the associated public body reporting requirements are meaningful but not burdensome for councils.

Additionally, NILGA has been working for some time on behalf of councils to address the challenges in the existing planning system. This has included delivering sustained Elected Member pressure at NI Executive level to recognise the challenges, as well as providing solutions as to how those could be addressed. This work culminated in NILGA providing evidence on behalf of councils both to the Northern Ireland Audit Office report on the planning system and the subsequent Public Accounts Committee report.

- **Communications** – One of NILGA's key functions is to positively promote councils regionally, nationally and internationally. In fulfilling this, NILGA has delivered two key campaigns promoting both the important role of council staff and Elected Members, with each campaign having good regional representation. Those two campaigns were "Councils Make It Happen" and "Be a Councillor, Make a Difference". NILGA has also just delivered the first fully in-person local government conference since the COVID-19 pandemic in partnership with Solace NI, with excellent feedback on this full capacity event.

NILGA has also worked with councils to ensure your best practice is showcased regionally, nationally and internationally, with particular focus on innovative economic development in recent years.

Northern Ireland Local Government Association

Bradford Court, Upper Galwally, Castlereagh, BT8 6RB

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- **Workforce** – NILGA represents the Northern Ireland councils at National Joint Council (NJC) level on pay and terms and conditions for council staff, in keeping with our collective commitment to our workforce. Negotiations were challenging in recent years but nevertheless agreement was reached as per the constitution of the NJC throughout. Local disputes arose across the 11 Northern Ireland councils during 2022 and NILGA provided regional information sharing and co-ordination for councils during that time.

NILGA has also co-ordinated the Northern Ireland Local Government Employee of the Year Award, with 10 nominations from councils, making it a very competitive field of nominees.

- **Representation** – Ensuring the strongest voice for councils regionally, nationally and internationally is key to NILGA's work. Of critical importance was lobbying and giving evidence during COVID-19 to the Finance Committee on lost income, additional waste costs and why councils needed to be eligible for the furlough scheme as well as lobbying DfC on the role Councils should play in supporting communities during that time. Regionally, the financial support secured during that time exceeded £100m.

Additionally, after effective lobbying by both NILGA and councils, agreement was secured from the previous DfC Minister that discussions could open again between councils and departmental officials on the possible transfer of regeneration and early discussion is underway on the scope of that work.

Most recently, NILGA has worked with councils to develop an agreed sectoral position on the UK Levelling Up policy and funding and lobbied on this position at both NI Executive and UK Government level. NILGA also worked with councils to develop a regional position on the practical solutions needed to be undertaken to support people through the cost of living crisis. Effective lobbying on this position resulted in DfC now using some of those solutions in their delivery.

NILGA has undertaken much reflection in the last year, with all of its work under independent review. This is critical to how we as an organisation move forward in an open and transparent way and thank you for your participation in those reviews. That work is currently being collated to inform our Corporate Plan for the 2023-2027 mandate and we will consult formally with you early in the new mandate on the draft plan.

What remains clear is how important it is now, more than ever, that local government in Northern Ireland has a strong and unified voice and NILGA is committed to playing its leadership role in delivering that.

To enable the continued delivery of NILGA work, the annual core subscription for your council for 2023/2024 is £56,008. Please be assured any increases are due entirely to the same unavoidable inflationary and staffing costs facing councils and we have made every effort to keep your subscription as low as possible. If your council could provide a purchase order number for the subscription amount, we will provide an invoice by return.

On behalf of NILGA, I want to thank the NILGA Members from your council from the last year, Cllr Kearney, Cllr Burton, Cllr McPeake, Cllr Glasgow, Cllr Doris, Cllr McGuigan, Cllr Robinson, Cllr Totten, and your Officers that so willingly give of their time in supporting the work of NILGA.

I look forward to continuing the close relationship with both the political and corporate leadership in your council to shape NILGA's regional political leadership role in a way that adds value for the sector and please let me know if there is anything that I can do to assist you, your Members or your wider corporate team.

Yours sincerely



Alison Allen

Northern Ireland Local Government Association

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Chief Executive

Northern Ireland Local Government Association

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Chief Executive

8th June 2023

Chief Executive
Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council
Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council
Mid and East Antrim Borough Council
Mid Ulster District Borough Council

Dear Colleagues,

As you will be aware, in March we concluded our public consultation seeking views on the transformation of our acute maternity services.

Following the consultation, at its public meeting in March 2023, the Board of the Northern Trust approved a recommendation that all hospital births should take place at Antrim Area Hospital.

Today that recommendation was approved by Peter May, the Permanent Secretary of the Department of Health.

Operationally, this will come into effect from 17 July 2023, and preparations are now underway to introduce the new model.

We strongly believe this is the best outcome for women and babies in our care. Many of you will be aware of the ongoing workforce challenges facing our maternity staff at Causeway, with our experienced team of clinicians advising that the provision of consultant-led births at the site is unsustainable.

Today's decision will allow us to continue delivering the highest standard of inpatient maternity care and births at one, dedicated site, with a safer, more sustainable staffing model.

We know that this has also been an uncertain time for our very committed team of maternity staff at Causeway Hospital and we are supporting them through this period of transition.

Causeway Hospital is a key part of the Trust's acute hospital network. We recognise that the hospital and its staff play a vital role in serving the local community, and we remain committed to maintaining acute services and an Emergency Department at the site.

Bretten Hall, Antrim Area Hospital Site, Bush Road, ANTRIM, BT41 2RL
Tel: 028 94424327



Causeway Hospital will retain its high quality antenatal and postnatal care which we recognise are critical local services for women.

We also plan to enhance these services so that pregnant women will have access to complex antenatal care and clinics at Causeway Hospital.

We have issued a press release in response to the Permanent Secretary's announcement <https://www.northerntrust.hscni.net/2023/06/08/acutematernityservices/>

The statement from the Department of Health is available here <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/news/maternity-plan-will-protect-safe-and-sustainable-care>

Yours sincerely,



Jennifer Welsh
Chief Executive

Bretten Hall, Antrim Area Hospital Site, Bush Road, ANTRIM, BT41 2RL
Tel: 028 94424327

