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28 November 2008 - Wilson sets out council reform challenges

Local government organisations must ensure they are ready to meet the challenges posed by the 11 new councils in 2011, Environment Minister Sammy Wilson insisted today.

During a keynote address to the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) in Cookstown, the Minister paid tribute to the role the association had played in driving forward council reforms.

But he also told NILGA members it was important their organisation started debating now its future role in local government before the 11 new councils finally take shape.

The Minister declared: "I am committed to helping NILGA develop to meet the challenges that lie before us but NILGA also need to work with the local government sector as a whole to change and adapt to new circumstances - both now and in 2011.

"You need to start the evolutionary process now. Leaving it to 2011 to think about how NILGA is governed, how it will relate to 11 new councils, how it will be funded, and what services it will provide to those new councils is too late.

"I challenge you to begin the debate. Use your spring conference as a platform for debate. Begin the process now."

In his address to the 'Initiating Change – Building Strong Local Government' seminar, Mr Wilson acknowledged calls for more clarity on the funding of the change programme.

He told delegates: "I take very seriously the need to address the funding of the reform programme.

"We are developing a Strategic Outline Business Case to identify detailed costs and benefits. This will provide the context for discussing the funding requirements with my colleagues in the Executive."

The Minister also stressed the critical role of NILGA in building the capacity of local government to lead change.

He urged its members to rise to the considerable challenge ahead and evolve to fit the changing needs and aspirations of the 11

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new councils that will come into being in 2011.

Notes to Editors:

1. The Northern Ireland Local Government Association is the representative organisation for local government in Northern Ireland and facilitates the development of the sector. Its Chief Executive is Ms Heather Moorhead.
2. Its Full Members' Meeting is on Friday 28 November at the Glenavon Hotel, Cookstown. The theme of the event is Initiating Change – Building Strong Local Government. The purpose of the seminar is to provide information regarding the proposals for implementing the Review of Public Administration.
3. For media enquiries please contact DOE Press Office 028 9054 0014 or out of office hours, contact the EIS Duty Press Officer on pager 07699 715 440 and your call will be returned.

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