



## Meeting with the Joint Committee on Rural and Community Development

12 December 2018

“Supporting communities and sustaining small rural business within the border region after Brexit”

### Statement by the Northern Ireland Local Government Association

Good morning Senators and Deputies. I am Councillor Seamus Doyle, a member of NILGA and a member of Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council.

The Northern Ireland Local Government Association, NILGA, is the only functioning cross party political body in Northern Ireland at present.

Throughout the hiatus in regional government at Stormont, NILGA has sought to build consensus and represent all of Northern Ireland’s main political parties at local government level in Westminster, Dublin and Brussels.

Northern Ireland’s councils have built a strong track record in delivering economic growth and fostering peace and reconciliation. Northern Ireland and the border corridor in particular will be the region most affected by Brexit and its outworkings and we are working intently to prepare our councils and to attempt to minimise any negative effects for local areas.

Brexit is a major concern for our councils. We are all too familiar with the risks we are facing:

- The unbinding of our close ties with our neighbours on an economic and social level which will widen the gap between our communities and impinge on our way of life
- Different rules and regulations creating havoc for business, the environment and ordinary people which will create difficult conditions for our small businesses and tourists, resulting in a downturn in both economies
- Pressure on our agriculture, health, manufacturing and hospitality sectors if people don’t want to live in Northern Ireland

But in this difficult situation we find ourselves in, our communities and councils will find ways to continue our strong tradition of cooperation. We are feeling optimistic about the future of cross-border cooperation following recent meetings with the regional assemblies in Brussels and follow-up meetings at home and we are planning future collaborative work together. This will include:

- Sharing information and tools to ensure local authorities North & South are prepared for Brexit
- Embedding entrepreneurialism in our local authorities
- Investigating joint opportunities for training and development

- Building regional relationships to improve cross-border spatial development and regeneration

In economic policy terms, the emergence of city and growth deals can be a real gamechanger for Northern Ireland. NILGA's paper of May 2018 highlights the interconnectedness of our economies in particular the links with the National Development Plan 2040 and the cross-border linkages with the Derry and Newry areas – indeed in the Derry City Region area 40% of the population lives in Donegal. It goes without saying that investment in one jurisdiction will reap benefits for the entire region, whether that be investment in jobs, broadband, education or infrastructure. This is what we must focus our minds on to ensure growth of the entire island.

These are my opening remarks on behalf of NILGA and my colleague Lisa O'Kane will address any questions from the Committee.