

CIPFA Northern Ireland Debate Report

Given the success of CIPFA's pilot debate held in 2006 on the future of post-primary education, the Branch Committee was keen to develop an annual event on a topical issue affecting the public services in Northern Ireland. Buoyed by development funding from CIPFA, the Branch decided to establish an expert panel to provide a range of forthright views and have a mature debate about what needs to be done to balance the need for an effective transport system with the need to protect the environment. The event was held on 11 December 2007 in the prestigious surroundings of the Linen Hall Library in Belfast. Jim Kitchen, Head of Sustainable Development Commission in Northern Ireland, Chaired the debate and introduced the topic providing observations from his own perspective. Other speakers were:

- Mike Thompson, Director, Regional Planning and Transportation Division of the Government's Department of Regional Development who was able to set the scene and provide an update of Government policy.
- Steven Patterson, Director of Sustrans, the UK's leading sustainable transport that uses innovative ways of overcoming transport challenges.
- Brian Gregory representing the Association of British Drivers, a pressure group that promotes the 'voice of the driver' and lobbies against speed cameras, current speed limits and road charging. The Association has radical views about global warming and its effect on the environment.
- David Clement, a long-standing and prominent CIPFA member who is an avid user of public transport and who will be able to provide a user perspective as well as suggest some creative ways to deal with the future of public transport in Northern Ireland.

The event was attended by 60 senior executives from a range of public bodies including central government, local government, Non Departmental Public Bodies, as well as from the voluntary and private sectors.

The diverse range of bodies provided an opportunity for the CIPFA brand to be widely promoted. Promotion of CIPFA was enhanced by significant media interest with a number of journalists attending and features appearing in the local press and further afield, for example the Scottish paper 'The Herald'. The event also provided an opportunity to present newly-qualified CIPFA members with their membership certificates.

Anecdotal as well as hard evidence indicated that the event was very successful and demonstrates to the Branch that there is a need for this type and style of event. A summary from the completed evaluation sheets shows a high level of satisfaction with the:

- content of the event
- quality of speakers
- suitability of the venue
- administrative arrangements

In addition, some delegates provided useful feedback on how the event could be enhanced.

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