

Minutes of the National Oversight & Audit Commission (NOAC) meeting  
Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> September 2015

Venue: PRTB Offices, O'Connell Bridge House, D'Olier Street, Dublin 2

Attended by:

Chairman     Pat McLoughlin  
Members     Kevin Baneham  
                  John Buckley  
                  Tara Buckley  
                  Connie Hanniffy  
                  Paul Lemass  
                  Pdraig McNally  
                  Martina Moloney  
                  Micheál Nolan  
                  Colleen Savage  
                  Henry Upton

Secretariat    Maurice Coughlan  
                  Sheila McMahan  
                  Declan Grehan

Minutes of meeting of 31/07/2015 and matters arising

The minutes of the meeting of 31 July 2015 were approved without amendment. In relation to Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs), the invitation had issued to the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (D/JEI) and to Enterprise Ireland to attend the next meeting of NOAC on 20 October 2015 and an update re the planned customer survey and the second quarter 2015 metrics had been requested.

Performance Indicators Report – Update

John Buckley reported that the final assurance visit to Cork City Council had gone smoothly with no particular issues arising. The secretariat advised that checking with all the local authorities that had returned LEO job creation figures that differed from those supplied to D/JEI was nearly complete and that the Fire and Emergency Directorate had been asked to provide the first response population figures for the shared fire service areas so that the sub-group could consider the best way to present the per capita costs. Progress by the LGMA on checking figures referred to them following consultation within the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (D/ECLG) including, in particular, the adult homeless indicator, has been slow mainly due to relevant local authority staff being on leave. However, updates to the figures had started to come in over the last few days. Work is underway on the summary report of the assessment visits.

When the data checking is completed, the final tables can be compiled and it is only at that point that any key messages from an oversight perspective can be discerned. The LGMA's overview of the data should be available within the next fortnight. All these components of the report will be considered by the sub-group and it is hoped that the final report will be ready for publication by NOAC by the end of next month. While the LGMA will probably also make the report available on their website, they will be advised that as the report is to NOAC, it will be published first by NOAC.

#### Housing Studies Update

The deadlines applicable to the final 4 questionnaires that had issued to the local authorities and the request for proposals to carry out the LA tenant survey were all 21<sup>st</sup> September. There had been a longer than anticipated delay in formatting and issuing the questionnaires to the authorities. While the LGMA would collate the returned data, the analysis and interpretation of it would need to be carried out by NOAC and was likely to require the involvement of outside expertise. The general view was that the appropriate source of the required expertise was the Housing Agency. However, as the sub-group had been advised that the Housing Agency has no spare capacity at present given the demands of the Housing Strategy, this may only be feasible on the basis that the Agency in turn contracts out the work for NOAC to expert/s that they occasionally engage to augment their own full-time resources. It was agreed that the Housing sub-group should now start the shaping of the reports by deciding on the principal tables of the questionnaire data that should be included, which would form the structure of the narrative.

There was a general discussion around the way in which NOAC was set up to draw primarily on the resources of the Local Government Management Agency, the Programme Management Office and the Local Government Audit Service. NOAC needs to be able to rely on these resources to deliver in accordance with NOAC's expectations and timelines, but there is a tendency in that situation for the demands of the parent organisation's work to take precedence, so it may become necessary to seek to have the structure revisited. The Chairman proposed that he should meet with the three organisations to seek NOAC input to their work-plans for 2016 and to discuss with the Director of Audit the allocation of an Auditor to do analytical work for NOAC as it arises and possibly work in the VFM area at other times, in the context of the resources that should by now have been freed up on foot of the abolition of the 54 town and borough councils.

#### Revenue Collection Performance – Responses

The Chairman commented that many of the responses received to the Rates Collection letters gave the impression that the level of attention being given to the issue had increased only very recently, even though this revenue would have been critical during the height of the recession. Others commented that the role of local authorities in supporting economic development made it difficult to take any action that could force the closure of a business

that might otherwise trade out of its difficulty, that there has been a level of bandwagon jumping by some viable businesses to take advantage of the economic situation, and that there may, as a result, be a tendency, even in an improved economy, to treat rates as the bill of last resort. The responses were not always clear as to the basis for taking decisions to write-off or as to the level of understanding of the forms of insolvency. An area that may need further information is the bad debt provisioning by each of the authorities to establish what portion of the arrears they see as collectible.

The Chairman suggested that a sub-group be formed to (a) consider further the responses from the 11 local authorities examined, (b) review the progress and impact of the work of the CCMA Debt Management Group. and (c) review the processes for systemic oversight and governance in this area. The Chairman, John Buckley, Tara Buckley, Paul Lemass, Martina Moloney and Henry Upton volunteered to participate in the group.

#### Corporate Plans - Adequacy Report and Implementation Monitoring Arrangements

Maurice Coughlan outlined changes that were made to the draft report arising from the discussion at the meeting that immediately followed the last NOAC meeting on 31 July. These related to summaries of the statutory provisions and better practice as identified in the reviewed plans and draft conclusions for the members' consideration. The members were generally satisfied with the report subject to some changes, including: the addition of text within the conclusions on the importance of the consultation process, placement of the text on compliance with the deadlines and receipt of the Plans, inclusion of a summary of the content of the D/ECLG guidelines for context, possible inclusion of plan excerpts, etc.

It was agreed that the report when finalised should be published as a standalone report and should be sent to the Chief Executive and Cathaoirleach of each local authority. A preliminary discussion followed regarding how NOAC will carry out the second aspect of its role to monitor implementation of the Corporate Plans, which will be subsequent to any necessary modifications of the Plans following adoption of the Local Economic and Community Plans.

#### PMO Report – Update

A revised draft format of the shared services report received by the secretariat just before the meeting was circulated to the members. Paul Lemass outlined a meeting held with the PMO subsequent to the last NOAC meeting, following which the Office had supplied the circulated format which would report on the projects in groupings of Transactional Models, Collaborative Projects, Policy Implementation, ICT Enablers and Not Delivered. If NOAC is happy with this format, the PMO will finalise the report. The members were satisfied with the amended presentation but requested the identification of projects where no business case was made and that details of the local authorities operating a shared service be included in the section dealing with the delivery of the relevant shared service initiative.

The members enquired as to the position re the final summary of the implementation of the Local Government Efficiency Reforms (LEGR) and the secretariat said this was also raised again at the meeting with the PMO on 2<sup>nd</sup> September who had indicated that it was being prepared in collaboration with other agencies, such as Finance Local Section of D/ECLG, that were appropriate to LEGR recommendations on matters other than shared services.

#### Any Other Business

It was agreed that the new sub-group should also look at the local authority responses to NOAC's letters arising from the content of the last Local Government Audit Service Activity Report, as many of the issues covered in the circulated replies received to date were common to the replies on the rates collection performance.

#### Next Meeting

The next meeting is on 20 October 2015 and also will be in the PRTB offices.