

Minutes of the National Oversight & Audit Commission (NOAC) meeting
Tuesday 20th October 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

Secretariat Maurice Coughlan
 Sheila McMahan
 Declan Grehan

Apologies Micheál Nolan
 Colleen Savage
 Henry Upton

Guests Eugene Forde, Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (D/JEI)
 Fergus Doyle, DJEI
 Claire Crowley, DJEI
 Richard Murphy, Enterprise Ireland (EI)
 Martin Corry, EI
 Gerry O'Grady, EI

Minutes of meeting of 15/9/2015 and matters arising

The minutes of the meeting of the 15/09/2015 were agreed without amendment.

Performance Indicators Report – update

The members had been circulated the summary report of the assessment visits. The Performance Indicators Sub-Group had suggested that the full membership consider the level of detail that would be appropriate for inclusion in the final Performance Indicators Report. It was agreed that the circulated document constituted the report from the sub-group to the members of the assessment visits and that the material for inclusion in the Performance Indicators report itself (which would be quite lengthy) should be limited to the overall position re data assurance, general points made in relation to the examined indicators and conclusions arising from the discussions with the Chief Executives and officials of the selected local authorities. John Buckley undertook to provide a re-working of this part of the report. The secretariat reported that formatted Tables of the data had been supplied by the LGMA on Monday 19th October but there were still some outstanding issues with the data that had not

yet been resolved. There had been a lot of contact with the LGMA over the last few weeks re the final figures and the commentary on the data trends which had not yet been received. The latest position advised to the secretariat was that we should start to receive this material from the LGMA in a piecemeal fashion later this week. It was decided that the Sub-Group would convene when the LGMA commentary was available so that it can be reviewed in conjunction with the redraft of the data assurance aspect and to consider what could be inferred from the data regarding best practice as identified and recommended by NOAC.

Housing Studies – update

The members were circulated documentation that included the final tenant questionnaire as agreed with Behaviour & Attitudes, who were the successful tenderers to conduct the survey of local authority tenants. Declan Grehan advised the meeting that 11 authorities still hadn't submitted any tenant data, 4 of which were among those asked to submit 120 names. These were now being pursued by phone by the LGMA. He also advised that only Galway City and Roscommon County Councils had yet to submit any of the housing questionnaires and that three were also outstanding from Longford County Council. Sheila McMahon referred to the circulated emails concerning the Housing Agency's agreement to provide expertise to assist with the Housing Studies, including to provide guidance to the LGMA in relation to the collation of the questionnaire data. A meeting has been arranged between David Silke of the Housing Agency and the NOAC Housing Sub-Group for Friday 23rd October to commence this involvement.

Corporate Plans Adequacy Report

Maurice Coughlan outlined the changes made to the draft on foot of the discussion at the last meeting. John Buckley recommended that it should be restructured to reflect the review of the Plans under the following criteria:

- provisions for consultation, adoption and promulgation
- analysis carried out by the local authority of its operating environment
- adoption of achievable Strategic Objectives and Supporting Strategies linked to the mission statement, expressed in terms of intended effects or outcomes
- the authorities' analysis of their internal capacity and re-allocation of resources relating input costs to outputs, having regard to the human and financial resources required, and
- implementation and monitoring arrangements specifying how the Plan objectives will be achieved and monitored.

There was some discussion of the extent of the control that local authorities have in relation to resources and their ability to analyse their capacity over a 5-year timeframe, which concluded with the view that NOAC's role is to report on how adequate the Plans are relative to the Guidelines. A deadline of Friday 23rd October was set for members to submit any further suggested changes to Maurice Coughlan after which the Chairman would sign off on the report.

Discussion with D/JEI and EI re Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs)

Eugene Forde, Fergus Doyle and Claire Crowley of D/JEI and Richard Murphy, Martin Corry and Gerry O'Grady of EI joined the meeting to brief the NOAC members on the progress made by LEOs. Eugene Forde spoke first about the significant challenge of taking the standalone former County Enterprise Boards (CEBs) and converting them into local authority units under the oversight of EI while also meshing them with current enterprise policy. He advised that a limited scope review of the Service Level Agreement (SLA) is underway and that LEOs work within Local Enterprise Development Plans that include a clear set of metrics against which they are measured. These relate to the areas of jobs created, training and mentoring provided and projects supported. The 120 staff who were in the CEBs when dissolved are still funded by D/JEI and these are augmented by 60 staff added by the LEOs and 26 graduate posts put in by D/JEI, and EI have been asked to look at whether the LEOs are adequately staffed. The budget is €18.5m (previously €15m for CEBs) and as this is unlikely to be increased, they are looking at performance related funding. Sustainable job creation is the main focus of their Minister, who placed great emphasis on the 4,000 jobs generated last year. D/JEI's objectives are to see local authorities take greater ownership of the LEOs, to ensure improved data gathering and information flows are put in place and to avoid LEO staff getting diverted from their micro-enterprise role into the wider economic development role applicable to local authorities.

Richard Murphy spoke about the information obtained from the recent customer survey conducted on EI's behalf by W5, which highlighted many positives but also some negatives. The NPS (Net Promoter Score range: -100 to 100 designed to eliminate overly negative and overly positive responses) for the LEOs is 35, which means their clients would in general recommend the LEOs to colleagues and friends. This is about the score that Enterprise Ireland itself would achieve and higher than would apply to many institutions such as the banks. 67% of LEO clients were satisfied with the interaction process, 70% strongly agreed that the LEOs made engagement easy and 64% were satisfied with the LEO staff that they engaged with. The negatives centred on the need for improved communication channels, particularly the flat experience offered by the website, and lack of awareness of some of the services on offer within the LEO. He also outlined the comprehensive training programmes that are being implemented with a specific focus on the customer experience of dealing with LEOs and development of a customer charter. Contacts are being built up with the other significant agencies relevant to LEO services (e.g. Chambers Ireland, Skillnet, Revenue, D/Social Protection, Microfinance Ireland). While LEOs have got off to a great start, EI wants them to widen the entrepreneurial and enterprise experience and be available to every micro enterprise in the country.

There followed a question and answer session with the NOAC members covering such areas as whether any HR issues had been bedded down; the key metrics under which NOAC should assess performance in this area, particularly with regard to activity in the area of soft supports; the fact that as the SLAs are also within NOAC's remit, it will need to keep on top of

the review; the LEO role in promoting access to MFI funding, the Competition Scheme €5m fund and trading online vouchers; whether thought is given to a top down approach such as looking at the number of SMEs trading in the area; whether the jobs created are minimum wage jobs and if this measure is a good reflection of expenditure; safeguards to avoid displacement of employment and when it comes to initiatives such as the Wild Atlantic Way, management of the 'local jersey' aspect for all the different businesses involved. With regard to the latter, the D/JEI and EI representatives placed considerable emphasis on the role of the Competition Scheme fund. EI recommended that any performance indicator dealing with soft supports should encompass the areas of participants attending relevant training courses, Start Your Own Business support and use of mentoring.

The Chairman and members thanked the D/JEI and EI representatives for providing their overview and perspective on the LEO challenges, which the members will discuss at the next NOAC meeting and in the context of planning NOAC's work programme. Prior to proceeding with the agenda, the Chairman requested that the secretariat prepare for the next meeting a summary of the issues raised and matters relevant to NOAC's remit arising from the LEO discussion.

Revenue Collection Performance – update

Paul Lemass reported on the meeting of the Financial Performance Sub-Group on 29th September that he had chaired in the Chairman's unavoidable absence. The update on the work of the Programme Management Office's (PMO) Debt Management Group received subsequently had been circulated to the members. The Chairman enquired about the suggestion made by the Sub-Group that NOAC should hold a dedicated workshop on how to improve financial performance in local authorities. The Sub-Group members clarified that this arose out of the difficulty within the full agendas of normal NOAC meetings to get the opportunity to stand back and look at how NOAC is fulfilling its oversight role, particularly in the area of financial performance. The Chairman referred to contacts he'd had with the Heads of Finance within the authorities who he'd found to be very engaged and expressed the view that such a workshop would best be facilitated by someone with experience of that role within the local government sector. He requested that a suggested outline of the proposed workshop content be drafted for consideration at the next NOAC meeting.

Public Spending Code Reports and Revised PMO Report

The secretariat reported that all 31 of the 2014 reports have now been received and the task of compiling the composite report would be worked on as priorities permitted.

As the discussion regarding the LEOs had continued for longer than envisaged, due to time constraints the Chairman requested that this item be deferred to the next NOAC meeting on 24th November 2015, when it is to be the first item on the agenda. That meeting will also be held in the offices of the PRTB.