

Minutes of the National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC) meeting
Tuesday 25th October 2016

Venue: Offices of the LGMA, Local Government House, Usher's Quay, Dublin 8

Attended by:

Members Pat McLoughlin
 John Buckley
 Tara Buckley
 Constance Hanniffy
 Paul Lemass
 Martina Moloney
 Colleen Savage
 Henry Upton

Secretariat Maurice Coughlan
 Declan Grehan
 Sheila McMahon

Minutes of the Meeting of the 13th of September and matters arising

The minutes were agreed without amendment. A reminder is to issue to the outstanding local authorities who have not provided liaison details. The Chairman provided an update of his meeting with John McCarthy, Secretary General of the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government who had indicated he was happy with the work NOAC had carried out to date and the issues selected for examination. Maurice Coughlan updated the members regarding the filling of membership vacancies through Stateboards.ie.

Performance Indicators Report 2015 – update

The secretariat advised that the draft LGMA commentary is with the CCMA Chair for sign off and there are a couple of outstanding queries re one of the Finance indicators. Subject to that and approval of the NOAC commentary, the report is ready for publication. The LGMA have produced info graphics for the indicators that will be on its website and will provide links directly into the main NOAC indicator report. While NOAC welcomes this development to make the report more visually appealing, it decided it would not be appropriate to include its name on this LGMA initiative; instead, NOAC will keep to the same report format as last year.

Martina Moloney, chair of the Performance Indicators Sub-Group, advised the meeting that there is evidence of improvement and further engagement with the process within local authorities since the performance indicators replaced the service indicators. The process is more streamlined and the quality of the data has improved but it is still not perfect. Target setting is not yet embedded and next year NOAC should apply greater focus on those indicators for which national targets have been set. It is acknowledged that local targets are more appropriate to some of the indicators, having regard to local circumstances, resources and priorities. The proposal to look at grouping local authorities for comparison purposes will also be useful. The CCMA response on this is awaited and it

is hoped to interact with the Environmental Protection Agency before the year end in relation to streamlining the environmental/waste indicators. Some issues identified during the process of producing the 2015 report will be considered when planning the 2016 report.

The meeting discussed the need to introduce more outcome focused indicators and the possibility of benchmarking or introducing a league table of overall performance. It was noted that outcome focused indicators are hard to develop due to the issue of cause and effect and that the democratic nature of the local government system, whereby the elected representatives decide the priority functional areas based on local circumstances, was not conducive to a league table approach. It was suggested that the 2016 report should include a planning indicator relating to serviced and zoned land available and that the possibility of getting outside advice on outcome focussed indicators should be examined.

Some amendments to the NOAC commentary section of the report were discussed, including a stronger statement that comparison of results between authorities should be in the context of their scale and nature. John Buckley also provided the secretariat with suggested changes. The members were asked to provide any further amendments before Thursday 27th of October, after which the report will be finalised and published when the outstanding material has been provided by the LGMA. NOAC's audience and the approach when publishing reports to ensure that as wide an audience as possible is captured and having regard to social media were discussed. The Chairman asked that a copy of the Performance Indicator report be sent to the chair of each Audit Committee.

Rented Sector Housing Study – approval of final text of report for publication

The meeting agreed that the report is ready for publication and delivers a strong and clear message. The Chairman will discuss an appropriate press release with the secretariat and the suggestion was made that a short briefing document should be put together of the information gaps for the Chairman.

Customer Survey Sub Group – update

Colleen Savage, chair of the Customer Survey Sub-Group, provided an update to the meeting on the approach to a local authority customer engagement review agreed by the sub-group. She advised that the review will follow a three step approach that will include; Step 1 – desk top review to assess if basic information is readily available on local authority websites and letter/questionnaire to issue to local authorities aimed at garnering information on their approach to customer engagement/satisfaction, Step 2 –set up a discussion group with local authority customer service officers and potentially a 'mystery shopper' approach, Step 3 – Assessment of inter-agency collaboration to be done in late 2017 or 2018. The secretariat has commenced work on Step 1.

There was some discussion of the proposed approach and what the outcome of the exercise will look like. Alternative views were expressed on an approach that asks authorities to indicate the work they're doing under the main *Putting People First* headings from which the most interesting projects could be selected for case studies and the need to base the review on the end users' perspectives. It was agreed that the questionnaire can cover qualitative data, basic customer service information and more strategic information, and that items such as the communications budget and

how it is spent and sports and recreation services can be included in the review. The Ombudsman's reports should also be looked at for relevant interaction with the sector. Colleen Savage undertook to amend the scoping paper to include points raised during the discussion, but the general direction was agreed and work on the review can now proceed.

Meeting with the Director of Audit, LGAS

The further meeting the previous week between the Chairman and some of the members and the new Director of Audit of the LGAS, Níamh Larkin, was discussed. The Chairman proposes to invite Níamh Larkin to a NOAC meeting in the near future to discuss these issues further with the full NOAC membership. The members expressed satisfaction with the approach she outlined to collaboratively working with NOAC in the VFM area and planned reports that will mine data to be collected with the Annual Financial Statements. The point was made that the terms of the collaborative engagement will need to be clear when it comes to publication of future reports. In referring to the proposed consultation on NOAC and VFM work for 2017, the Chairman recommended that NOAC's work plan should be decided after the new members have commenced their role on NOAC.

Financial Performance Sub Group – update

The sub-group provided an update on their recent meeting. The proposed NOAC review of the unfunded balances was impacted by the indication given at the meeting with the Director of Audit that this was one of the areas planned for examination in conjunction with the 2016 audit. The timeframe for the LGAS report is end 2017 so NOAC should await the LGAS report so as to avoid duplication of effort. The sub-group will look at the data items that are proposed for collection for the LGAS study and will feed any views into the LGAS. The sub-group had requested and reviewed the reports of individual local authority Audit Committees on the Statutory Audit Report by the relevant Local Government Auditor. The intention is to produce a very short report on this review and the sub-group outlined the format that is planned.

AOB

The Chairman advised the meeting that he has carried out an initial review of the new Code of Governance for State Bodies to assess which aspects of it apply to NOAC and he will go through with the secretariat the elements that are either applicable or desirable, or that should be included in the letter to the Department seeking exemption from certain parts. NOAC will have to develop a template for a self-evaluation exercise under the code.

Date of next meeting

The next NOAC meeting is on Tuesday 6th December at 10.30 a.m. and will be in the Custom House.