

NOAC – National Oversight and Audit Commission

A Review of the Management and Maintenance of Local Authority Housing

The National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC) has published a report on its review of the performance by local authorities of their functions of managing and maintaining their own stock of nearly 131,000 social houses.

In commenting on the report, NOAC Chairman, Pat McLoughlin, said: “This report looks at how local authorities look after their own houses, both in relation to the condition of the dwellings and in relation to the whole process of how they manage their housing stock. NOAC has made local authority housing functions the focus of its first two thematic reviews because both of these tenures - social rented and private rented - are simultaneously under a lot of pressure currently.”

The report is based primarily on responses from authorities to a questionnaire, although, similar to NOAC’s thematic review of the performance of functions relating to the private rented sector, some data integrity issues relating to the information provided by authorities were encountered.

NOAC has already published on its website the results of a customer satisfaction survey carried out on 758 local authority tenants on NOAC’s behalf by Behaviour & Attitudes for this study. That survey found plenty of positives – 81% of the surveyed tenants were satisfied with the structural condition of their home, 48% believed that the Council’s service had improved over the past 5 years, 64% of the tenants’ homes had benefitted from energy efficiency improvement works and 28% were the subject of a Home Condition Survey. Of those tenants living in local authority estates, 85% consider their estate to be a pleasant place to live and overall, two thirds said they would praise their Council’s housing and maintenance services to family and friends.

“One thing we found” said Pat “is that there are large variations in the number of local authority staff assigned to the management of this housing, ranging from 1 whole-time equivalent for every 66 dwellings in Dublin City to 1 for every 1,197 dwellings in Galway County. Snapshot vacancy rates varied from 0.2% in Wicklow to 8% in Roscommon, with 993 of Dublin City Council’s 1,355 vacant properties having been kept empty pending planned demolition or refurbishment work. This has led NOAC to its conclusion that existing funding schemes, such as the Voids Programme and the regeneration/remedial works schemes, can end up having a perverse impact on available supply.”

NOAC has concluded that there is a need to review the basis of funding for the renovation of vacant properties so as to avoid any incentive to delay the return of the dwelling to productive use and that a full cost benefit analysis should be carried out to underpin any decision to set aside a dwelling for a planned development that may not happen for some time. ‘Rebuilding Ireland’ indicates an intention to implement choice-based lettings in all local authorities and a benefit from this is that it will quickly be apparent if there are dwellings for which there is no demand that could be disposed of to release resources for acquisition of accommodation in higher demand areas.

The study found that only 15 authorities have ever carried out a condition survey of their housing stock and only 5 of these survey their stock at regular intervals. A general condition survey could be carried out as part of the energy rating exercise that follows on from the Energy Retrofitting Programme that is helping the local authority sector contribute to the achievement of greater public sector energy efficiency, with more than 39,000 dwellings retrofitted to date.

More analysis of this local authority function is recommended in the areas of procurement and use of national framework agreements, planned maintenance, cost control, sharing of services and resource allocation so as to achieve greater efficiencies in maintaining and managing the housing stock.

The report has been sent to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, as is the practice with all NOAC reports.

Notes for Editors

The report is available here:

<http://noac.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/NOAC-Management-and-Maintenance.pdf>.

The National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC) was established under the Local Government Reform Act 2014 to provide independent scrutiny of local government performance in fulfilling national, regional and local mandates, including performance in respect of financial resources. Its mission is to independently oversee the local government sector by reviewing the financial and operational performance of bodies within its remit, overseeing implementation of national local government policy and identifying opportunities for best practice.

Since its establishment, NOAC has examined a range of areas of local authority activity, resulting in preparation and publication of 12 reports to date.

NOAC also published recently its Annual Report for 2016, which is available at:

<http://noac.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/NOAC-Annual-Report-2016.pdf>.

For further information on NOAC, including all reports published to date, see www.noac.ie.

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