

Minutes of the National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC) meeting
Tuesday 7th November 2017

Venue: Main Conference Room, Custom House, Dublin 1

Attended by:

Chairman Pat McLoughlin

Members John Buckley

Tara Buckley

David Holohan

Paul Lemass

Michael McGreal

Martina Moloney

Colleen Savage

Secretariat Sheila McMahon

Claire Gavin

Diarmuid O'Leary

Apologies Connie Hanniffy

Sharon O'Connor

Guests David O'Connor, Dominic Byrne and Claire Gilligan re CCMA ICT Strategy

Minutes of last meeting and matters arising

The minutes of the meeting of 25th September were approved. The members confirmed that they were not aware of any conflicts of interest in relation to the items for discussion at the meeting.

Local Authority Profiles

The Chairman summarised his visits to the Chief Executives of Louth and Offaly County and Cork City Councils. In two cases, the Chief Executive was accompanied by just one official, whereas a team of officials had been involved in the meeting with the other authority. The discussions had given a good insight into local issues and the opportunity to submit contextual material had been provided. He had indicated that the profiles were likely to be published as a group, subsequent to the meetings between the Executives and the NOAC members. In the discussion that followed, it was agreed that the Chief Executives should be invited separately to ordinary NOAC meetings, with the Louth Chief Executive invited to the next NOAC meeting on 19th December. Chief Executives will be asked to give a short opening statement and NOAC members can then follow up with questions on the areas covered in the profiles and on functions that have not yet featured in NOAC reports, such as the economic and community development function. The secretariat will prepare a list of suggested questions under each area. Following the meetings, a brief summary of the information provided along with any suitable contextual material can be added to the profiles, which would then be published.

Performance Indicators Report 2016

Martina Moloney, chair of the Performance Indicators Sub-Group, advised the members that subsequent to the last NOAC meeting and the circulation of the final draft of the PI Report 2016 to sections of the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government and other Departments to which the data was relevant, inconsistencies in the housing stock data had come to light. Final publication of the report had therefore been postponed. The Sub-Group and secretariat have been examining the data since then in conjunction with relevant officials in the Department's Housing Division. A desktop exercise had been conducted on 7 local authorities and inconsistencies identified in relation to all five categories of social housing provision. Some variations from published Departmental statistics are explicable due to differences in the data being gathered and timing, but others are inconsistent with NOAC's guidelines to local authorities. The Sub-Group, along with Department representatives, met with relevant staff in Dublin City Council on 2nd November and, while some reconciliation had been possible, further information is awaited on RAS and SHCEP data variances that the Council were unable to clarify at the meeting. It is proposed in the coming weeks to visit two more local authorities for greater clarity as to the scale of data reliability issues involved. The Sub-Group will make a recommendation to NOAC after those visits and by the 19 December NOAC meeting.

The Chairman thanked the sub-group for all their work on trying to resolve the issues and acknowledged the difficulties with validating the housing stock indicators to give a sufficiently high degree of confidence in the figures. The subsequent discussion clarified that the review exercise under discussion related to adjustment and reconciliation, i.e. figures that are not correct that need to be adjusted and variations due to differences in the questions asked that need to be reconciled rather than amended. The chair of the Sub-Group is to let the Chairman know if additional resources for the further validation exercise are required. Looking forward to the 2017 Performance Indicators Report, the Sub-Group will begin a review of the housing indicators in the context of official housing statistics, the Department's views and other information gaps.

Customer Survey Project

Colleen Savage, chair of the Customer Survey Sub-Group, updated the members in relation to the request for proposals to undertake the customer survey. She summarised her analysis of the proposals submitted by three market research firms. She advised that the methodology proposed was consistent across all three tender proposals. Ipsos MRBI was selected on the basis of price where the services covered by the survey will be relevant to all residents, due to its clear explanation of the analysis to be provided, and relevant previous experience. A follow-up workshop was included in the successful proposal. In order to keep the cost down, only 100 surveys would be carried out per authority so sub-analysis at an individual local authority level will be limited, but the net promoter score should be robust. The services to be surveyed will be discussed at the workshop on Thursday and are likely to include roads and

parks/recreation and the initial surveys will be carried out on the 10 authorities with the largest populations. In the two subsequent years, the 10 smallest and 11 middle size areas will be surveyed. The cost will be in the region of €50,000 per annum after VAT, so the project represents a significant commitment of NOAC's budget. The other sub-groups were reminded to give consideration to any consultancy needs that they might have or that may be likely to arise. The members thanked Colleen for her contribution.

ICT Strategy

David O'Connor, Dominic Byrne and Claire Gilligan of the CCMA ICT Strategy Group joined the meeting to discuss the issues raised at the last NOAC meeting, viz. the level of resources required, value for money, cyber security and the consumer-facing aspect of the strategy. David O'Connor provided a summary of the level of collaboration in developing the strategy so that the degree of buy-in would be high, notwithstanding the huge variation in resources for ICT that are available to local authorities. He said that it is not the intention to leave any local authority with no support for legacy systems. Shared systems are evolving generally and the e-planning system being developed is working with the 3 different planning systems in use in authorities so that planning applications have consistent descriptions and the user experience is always the same.

Claire Gilligan outlined initiatives on the cyber security front being managed through the ICT Committee and reporting to the Board of the CCMA. Expertise across the sector is being leveraged for the benefit of all authorities, emergency planning guidelines are nearly ready and a standard set of policies and templates are being developed. The cyber group has been providing presentations on the strategy to HR networks and other local authority fora and a seminar on cyber security is being held at the end of November. A tender has issued for a central contract to disseminate information on cyber threats to local authorities. The LGMA has carried out weakness assessment exercises on its systems and authorities are doing the same with their systems for which they use outside expertise. Dominic Byrne, who chairs the group of Heads of IT, added that systems are independently assessed for security when in development and that the onus is always on each authority to protect its own infrastructure and own firewalls because a shared response raises the issue as to which authority gets help first if a nationwide event arises. In relation to the General Data Protection Regulation requirements, there is a Data Protection Officers Network and the LGMA are reviewing with the authorities how it is proposed to address each of the requirements.

The Chairman enquired whether looking at VFM will be an on-going part of strategy implementation or will it be a matter for each authority individually. Claire Gilligan advised that benefits realisation is an integral part of the oversight of each ICT project and Dominic Byrne advised that benefit realisation assessment is a best practice element of the improved governance pillar of the strategy. While the LGMA don't recommend a standard management tool for the sector, they advise of the broad principles that should be included in central and local projects based on Department of Public Expenditure and Reform guidance. In relation to

a query as to the actual programme of work over the next three years, David O'Connor advised that the draft implementation plan currently being prepared by the Heads of IT group has 31 specific actions and the Committee will be happy to share this with NOAC when finalised. He acknowledged that the variation in the outcomes for the 'cost of ICT' performance indicator collected by NOAC deserves to be interrogated by scale of local authority to give improved insight into how the components might be managed and that this could be researched on NOAC's behalf.

In relation to data sharing, the members enquired as to where the data repository will be and how will it link into the Department's data so that there is a single data source that will not need verification. Dominic Byrne responded that the Build to Share project involving hosted or cloud type provision will address some of these issues but connectivity then becomes crucial and elimination of all local networks and local support needs is not possible. It is the standard that data outputs will be generated by the systems and that manual interventions will not be possible, but the quality of the data inputted for centralised collection will be down to the individual local authorities. The members requested that NOAC be thought of as a customer, along with the Department, in preparing the implementation plan.

David O'Connor identified all of the foregoing as really customer service issues and the impact on the customer is where the elements of the strategy connect together. Public ease at getting the information they want from local authorities has to be paramount. Digital First is relevant to all recent IT projects. A service catalogue covering all local authority services will be the basis for populating the local government portal project – www.localgov.ie. The description of these services should filter down to the individual local authority websites so that they all look the same for users on online services. Change management is at the core of all the projects discussed today and some current projects under the term 'smart cities' were outlined. The Chairman concluded that the next step would be to look at the implementation plan when finalised and thanked the guests for their participation at the meeting.

In the short subsequent discussion, it was agreed that the implementation plan should be reviewed to see if there is a focus on costs at a governance level as, if not, NOAC will need to consider whether its existing ICT indicator is adequate to keep an eye on the VFM aspect. It also needs to ensure that national level systems provide key reliable data that NOAC can use in performance indicators. It was decided that a letter should issue from NOAC to the CCMA expressing the view that any new systems should meet management information needs and performance indicator data requirements and should address customer satisfaction and VFM.

Best Practice Event and Public Spending Code Update

The members had been circulated the programme for the best practice event on 21st November, which is to be introduced by the Minister for Local Government. Tara Buckley and Martina Maloney offered to chair sessions, while Paul Lemass and Michael McGreal indicated that they hoped to attend.

The secretariat advised that the 2016 Public Spending Code report had been delayed due to work on the Performance Indicators report but that the inventory, checklists and summary of the in-depth reviews had now been compiled. It was hoped to put together the covering text over the next few weeks and the main part of the report would then be circulated to the members.

Any Other Business

The members noted the forthcoming discussion of the Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government that the chairman had been invited to attend. The secretariat had circulated a further email regarding the cost of the MinutePad software and NOAC agreed that the secretariat should prepare a specification for obtaining tenders for the provision of a system to organise and manage Board documentation.

Next Meeting

The next meeting is on Tuesday 19th December 2017 in the Custom House.