

Minutes of the National Oversight & Audit Commission (NOAC) meeting

Friday 31st July 2015

Venue: Main Conference Room, Custom House, Dublin 1

Attended by:

Chairman Pat McLoughlin
Members Kevin Baneham
Tara Buckley
Connie Hanniffy
Paul Lemass
Martina Moloney
Colleen Savage

Secretariat Maurice Coughlan
Sheila McMahon

Apologies John Buckley
Padraig McNally
Micheál Nolan
Henry Upton

Minutes of meeting of 30/06/2015

The minutes of the meeting of 30 June 2015 were agreed without amendment. Matters arising were included on the agenda and the meeting to review the Corporate Plans was taking place immediately after this meeting.

Update re Performance Indicators Report

The members were updated regarding the meetings of the sub-group on 7th and 20th July 2015 and the assessment visits that had been carried out by Martina Moloney, Connie Hanniffy, John Buckley and Paul Lemass. These were all now complete apart from Cork city which takes place on 12th August. The sub-group members reported that the visits had gone well and that they were happy that the data supplied in respect of the examined indicators was robust and that the indicators were relevant and useful, although some aspects of the indicator on the per capita cost of the planning service may require review. Variations in what is recorded as library visits had been noted and this indicator might also require to be reviewed to take into account remote lending of ebooks and the fact that some libraries were utilising electronic counting systems of all visits to the premises, which raises issues of consistency in what was included as visits in the returns.

Data checking in conjunction with the LGMA was ongoing and the reports of the individual visits would be compiled into a composite report for inclusion in the overall report when the LGMA's work was completed.

Update re the Housing Studies

The questions for the three questionnaires had been forwarded shortly after the last meeting to the LGMA for compilation into questionnaires to be completed electronically by the local authorities with the objective timeframe of issue by mid-July. The draft management questionnaire, which required a number of changes, was provided last week and the private rented questionnaire was provided just this morning so there was considerable slippage. The questionnaires have been prepared using Survey Monkey. Subsequent to checking by the secretariat, these will be circulated to the members for information and to the sub-group and focus group for any final changes before being cleared for issue to the local authorities. The draft text to be issued with the questionnaires, which was circulated with the draft report outlines, was approved subject to Kevin Baneham's suggestion of adding a general question seeking the authority's objectives for the private rented regulatory function.

In relation to the customer survey, Colleen Savage advised the meeting that 100 respondents would be required per local authority for responses to be robust, which would be costly and difficult to achieve in the smaller local authorities. She suggested that a more national type survey might be more appropriate focussing on the areas with greater numbers of local authority tenants. Following discussion, it was agreed that samples of 100 could be sought from larger authorities representing up to about 80% of the total stock with, say, 20 tenants from each of the smaller ones. In the case of the latter responses, the usefulness would be for comparison as to consistency. Questions that required Yes/No or a rating response would keep the costs down, but it would probably be necessary to include 2 or 3 open ended questions. It was suggested that requests for tenders to carry out the surveys should specify a budget and that might encourage tenderers to be more creative in their proposals.

Programme Management Office (PMO) Report

This report had been received at the end of June and circulated by email. As noted, it contained information in respect of the shared services projects only and not the final summary of the position in relation to all of the recommendations of the Local Government Efficiency Review. The secretariat had spoken to Maria Melia of the PMO who indicated that her office now dealt only with the shared services projects and so this was all that they could report on. She will look into the LGMA co-ordinating a report of the final position on all the LEGR recommendations.

In relation to the shared services, the Chairman stated that the information supplied was not clear as to which local authorities were implementing which shared service and didn't clearly indicate the status of the projects with regard to the targets in the relevant business cases. The members expressed the view that what was needed was a report that showed the progress of the projects in the context of the PMO's work plan on a green, amber, red

basis and which was explicit about where any blocks exist. It was suggested that NOAC request the PMO to provide a revised report structure on this basis and/or any existing report templates that may be more suitable, before seeking a revised report on the shared services projects.

Revenue Collection Performance and LGAS Activity Report

In relation to rates collection, the members were circulated with the letters that had issued to the 11 local authorities that had the weakest collection and/or highest level of arrears in 2013 and the two responses received to date. The Chairman requested that a reminder issue to the outstanding authorities in another week or so.

Following consideration at the last meeting of issues arising in the LGAS Activity Report, the secretariat outlined the analysis of the Annual Financial Statements in relation to the ratio of general revenue balance to current revenue and of capital deficits to unfunded balances which had been assisted by Richard Murphy of the LGAS, as well as John Buckley. Draft letters had been circulated for issue to those authorities that had a revenue deficit balance greater than 9% of revenue and to Louth County Council. Probably arising from historical transfers of capital to reserves, only 3 local authorities had a negative capital balance and their unfunded balances were not particularly high so it was not proposed to look at this aspect at this stage. The draft letters were approved subject to inclusion of an early September deadline for receipt of a reply.

Local Enterprise Offices

Maurice Coughlan summarised the circulated scoping paper for a LEO study focussing on the change management aspect as discussed at the previous meeting. Tara Buckley outlined her concerns at devoting scarce NOAC resources to a study that was process focussed rather than one that focussed on the end users. It was suggested that NOAC might request the addition of some questions relating to end users in the yearly data sought by Enterprise Ireland. There was considerable discussion about the need to examine whether the change in structures, which was intended to involve the expertise of the Enterprise Ireland Centre of Excellence being made available to micro businesses, was delivering on that objective.

The Chairman pointed out that this aspect would not be discernible by focussing on the end users and not the process and suggested that representatives of the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation and Enterprise Ireland be invited to NOAC's meeting on 20th October to obtain their views. In the meantime, members requested an update regarding the planned EI customer survey and the end June 2015 quarterly jobs and grants data supplied by authorities to EI as the 2014 data does not give the full picture due to the removal of some categories of jobs such as childcare and local enterprise.

Any Other Business

The secretariat circulated correspondence received from a TD on behalf of a constituent who had made allegations about his county council. The individual had followed up the letter with a phone call to the secretariat who outlined to the meeting the information that had been provided in that call. The members were of the view that the matter was not within NOAC's remit, particularly as it related to a contract in 2008. The Chairman indicated that he would respond to the TD and would follow up with a phone call to the constituent to explain why his complaint was not appropriate to NOAC.

Next Meeting

The next meeting is on 15th September 2015 in the offices of the PRTB, O'Connell Bridge House.