

National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC)

Final Minutes of the Meeting – Tuesday 21 July 2020 at 10:00 am

Venue: Remote Meeting via WebEx Meeting Platform

Attended by:

Chairperson: Michael McCarthy

Members: Sharon O'Connor Martina Maloney

Constance Hanniffey Tara Buckley

Michael McGreal David Holohan

Secretariat: John F McCarthy Neill Dalton

Colin Flood John Goldrick

Darren Browne

1. Minutes & actions of previous meeting:

The minutes of the last main meeting held on 23 June 2020 were agreed.

2. Declaration of conflict of interest:

No conflicts of interest were raised.

3. Matters Arising:

There were no matters arising.

4. Remote Working:

As it stands, DHPLG staff are required to work from home where possible. While no definitive timeframe has been set, broad indications suggest this may continue till the end of the current year. A board member raised a concern about the lack of contact to the DHPLG switchboard. It was indicated that the approach to remote working varied Department to Department largely due to the level of operational work carried out. The Chairperson indicated that he will discuss the matter with the new Minister when they meet.

5. NOAC Membership:

In light of Barry Quinlan's resignation, the Secretariat confirmed that an additional submission is now with the new Minister. It was confirmed that an additional Public Appointments Service (PAS) panel will be required to appoint new board members beyond the end of September 2020. The Chairperson confirmed he will raise the topic when he meets the new Minister.

6. Work Programme:

a) WG1 – Local Government Governance, Efficiency & Reform (LGGER);

An update was provided by Sharon O'Connor.

- A working group meeting was held on 13 July 2020. Most of the new Corporate Plans 2019-2024 have been received. Corporate Plan 2015-2019 review questionnaire responses are still being received and an approach has been prepared regarding Corporate Plan for 2020-2024. This will need to be prioritisation of work on the Corporate Plans with concentration on specific areas.
- Scoping terms for assessing the ICT strategy of local authorities and for examining the performance of LEOs are being prepared.
- The WG are preparing a scoping document on NOAC's role in reviewing the performance of Regional Assemblies. It was proposed as a starting point that the Directors of the Regional Assemblies would be invited to a WG meeting via VC. A board member acknowledged the efforts of the WG to begin work on assessing the work of regional assemblies as this had not been progressed in the last six years.

b) WG2 – Performance Indicators:

An update was provided by Martina Maloney.

- Work is commencing on the report into economic development indicators. A meeting was held with Sean Ó'Riordáin and Associates who have developed a questionnaire to go to LAs with a pilot questionnaire due to be issued to Offaly and Cork City. A report on economic development indicators may be available in October. With the PI data returns date on 24 July, a better picture on data gathering should be available soon after.

- The LAs of Cork have been in contact with regards providing PI data in light of the boundary change. They are due to come up with a methodology but they are facing obstacles. The Secretariat will meet with the LAs of Cork and recommend an approach to the WG. Once the WG has considered the recommendation, it will revert to the full NOAC board.
- The Secretariat brought attention to the circulated NUIG paper, *“A Reassessment of Local Government’s Financial Position and Performance”* and the associated memo. This will be further discussed by the WG.
- A board member raised the number of councillors representing an area compared to the number of residents as a future item that could be examined by the WG. However, this was suggested as a possible item for WG4 instead. The NOAC Chair agreed to add this as an agenda item at future meeting of the full NOAC board

c) WG3 – Communications and Customer Service:

- Further to the approval of the Customer Satisfaction Survey 2020 report at the previous meeting, the Secretariat presented the Infographic Summary Report 2018-2020. The Members approved of the infographic.
- A discussion was held regarding the publicising of the report with options including a press release, an animated video and radio interviews. The Secretariat have enquired as to advice on the best way to proceed. The end of August was agreed.
- The Members agreed to provide advance notice to the LA Chief Executives before the release of the report with late August being a possible release period.
- The Members wanted to again register their appreciation to former member and WG3 Chair, Tara Buckley, for her contribution and proposed including her in the PR content. The Secretariat have been in contact Tara with regards the possibility of providing commentary on the report.
- The Secretariat provided an update and presentation on the development of the new NOAC website. The existing site will stay active until the new one has been finalised. Content will be transferred from the old site to the new site with the end of August is the target completion date. A further finalised product will be presented to the Members at the NOAC meeting on 1 September. The Members were encouraged to provide any comments they may have.

- The Secretariat also provided updated NOAC branding. Animated logos and updated map images were presented. The updated map image addressed the prior feedback to the previous design and was received positively by the Members. An additional image for use was also presented. Further images can also be produced in time. The Members expressed satisfaction and gave their approval.

d) WG4 – Financial Management and Performance:

- The Secretariat confirmed receipt of Barry Quinlan’s resignation leaving no Chair currently assigned to this WG.
- The Secretariat is looking at the options of outsourcing the work involved in relation to My Pay shared service, with a proposal by September.
- Suggestions for the Value for Money unit were sought from the NOAC Members by the LGAS with the following two topics suggested:
 - A review of the effectiveness of the risk management process in the LAs
 - Review of VFM of the ICT service.
- The Secretariat have engaged with the IPA about assisting in holding a seminar in relation to Audit Committees (Action 10).
- The LGAS have published their “Overview of the Work of the Local Government Audit Service Year ended 31 December 2018” which was circulated to members and contains a summary of audit findings for local authorities from that year. This is in support of Action A1.
- The LGAS are happy to meet with NOAC and discuss how they can work together. The Secretariat will also circulate the “Public Service Performance Report 2018”. It was agreed to hold a meeting with the LGAS in the Autumn at a time when a LA is not due to attend a NOAC meeting.
- The Secretariat referred to the DPER Public Service Performance Report 2019 for the consideration of members from the perspective of local authority sector data and as an approach to Financial Performance to consider. This report shall be circulated to members.

e) CHAIR:

On the Scrutiny Programme the Secretariat provided an update with five more LA profile visits due to be undertaken by the end of the year.

A draft paper was presented to members for consideration with options being presented on reporting. The Secretariat proposed that individual reports could be made per LA with a broader report every so often. This will be considered further by the Board members at the next meeting. Comments made included: -

- Supported the approach of individual LA reports as the best way forward.
- Visits should look at good practice and innovation; at how the local authority performs financially and that LAs corporate plan performance needs to be considered.
- A discussion was held regarding comments / findings / recommendations arising.

The Secretariat will take on board the comments made and further comments prior to the next meeting. A draft report for one local authority can be brought forward as a sample for consideration at the next meeting.

A finalised version of the Annual Report 2019 was agreed with the text having previously been agreed at the June meeting.

The Secretariat updated on further discussions had with Audit Scotland.

7. Update on engagements and meetings with other bodies/organisations:

A meeting with the LGMA will follow this meeting.

8. Future Meetings:

The next 3 meeting dates were agreed. These include the following:

- 1 September 2020
- 13 October 2020
- 1 December 2020

9. Any other business:

Work has commenced on developing a SharePoint system for the Members and Secretariat.

Meeting was brought to a close.

Agenda Item No:	Action	Decision
5.	NOAC Membership	The Chairperson confirmed he will raise the topic when he meets the new Minister.
6 (b).	NUIG paper, "A Reassessment of Local Government's Financial Position and Performance" and the associated memo.	This will be further discussed by WG2.
6 (b).	Examining the number of councillors representing an area compared to the number of residents.	The NOAC Chair agreed make this a future agenda item to return to.
6 (c).	Infographic Summary Report 2018-2020.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Members approved of the infographic. • The Members agreed to an approach for launching the report at the end of August. • The Members agreed to provide advance notice to the LA Chief Executives before the release of the report
6 (d).	Public Service Performance Report 2018	The Secretariat will circulate
6 (d).	NOAC meeting with the LGAS.	It was agreed to hold a meeting with the LGAS at a time in the autumn when a LA is not due to attend a NOAC meeting.
6 (e).	LA Scrutiny reports	<p>The draft report tabled will be further updated based on comment received and will be circulated to members.</p> <p>A sample LA report will be prepared for members to consider at the next meeting.</p>
6 (e).	Annual Report 2019	A finalised version of the Annual Report 2019 was agreed with the text having been agreed at the June meeting.
8.	Future Meetings	The next 3 meeting dates were agreed.