



Minute

NOAC meeting with the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform Housing, Local Government & Heritage Vote team

23 February 2021 at 10:00am

VC – Remote Meeting

Attendees:

NOAC Chair: Michael McCarthy

NOAC Members: Connie Hanniffy Brian Cawley

Martina Moloney Mary Hurley

Niall Quinn

Apologies: Margaret Lane

NOAC Secretariat: John McCarthy Claire Gavin

Darren Browne John Goldrick

Colin Flood

Apologies: Neill Dalton

DPER: Garrett O'Rorke

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform was invited make a presentation to the NOAC Board.

Garrett O'Rorke of the Housing, Local Government & Heritage Vote Team in the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform (DPER), attended and delivered a PowerPoint presentation that gave a brief overview of Covid-19 and Brexit fiscal supports, an overview of other exchequer supports and outlined the challenges to Government by Covid-19 and Brexit. The presentation gave the key aspects of budget 2021 and the projected deficit as % of GDP.

Q. The NOAC board asked if local authorities should return to building their own houses from a DPER perspective.

A. DPER is neutral on this but generally supports the most cost effective way to house building. It sees that there is no one solution as each project is unique. In one area it may be more efficient for local authorities to build their own stock, but in others it would be cheaper to use Approved Housing Bodies. The affordable housing scheme is on the way and its output will have to be reviewed in this regard.

Q. The NOAC Board asked if it was still the case that a maximum of 10% of capital spending can be carried-over annually and if a local authority could not spend the 90% in time, what allowance could DPER make.

A. DPER advised that it is still in place and likely to remain in place. Capital allocation can carry over 10% annually, but the rest would return to the exchequer. If that proves to be more for housing, DPER would be cognisant of this when making the allocation next year and would not leave the Department short.

Q. The NOAC Board asked DPER to explain the rationale in changing its allocation for 2021 in relation to offices.

A. DPER advised the change to the waiver was primarily aimed at helping small businesses and the most affected sectors e.g. hospitality.

Q. The NOAC Board advised that 2021 could be even more of a fiscal challenge and financial supports may be struggling this year. In NOAC's role to monitor performance, how would failing businesses and thus reduced rates, how will DPER deal with this?

A. The reality is that not all businesses will reopen. There is huge pressure but Government is willing to commit to keeping businesses open and helping enterprises. New schemes and new ideas to help small businesses are in place. The issue is under review and is an agenda item for the government meeting each week. It is important that businesses can be kept afloat, they will then help the exchequer.

Q. The NOAC Board asked, in relation to the recovery from the Resilience Fund from EU, if the application for funding is from central departments or is there any opportunity at regional level.

A. DPER advised the Resilience Fund is through departments. All government departments were asked to make submissions for funding for projects, the funds coming from the Exchequer and then rebated by the EU in circa 2023.

Q. NOAC noted that there is potential for local authorities to play a role as an engine of growth and inquired on how they access the funding.

A. DPER advised that it does not get involved in the day-to-day funding issues. This is done by Local Government Finance and the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage. If there are any valid proposals put forward that can play a role in economic recovery DPER will consider it.

NOAC thanked Mr O'Rourke for the presentation. It was noted that it is important from a NOAC point of view to have this interaction with DPER. It gives NOAC a broader understanding of how Local Government stands in a myriad of other stakeholders and what their roles are. NOAC looks forward to further engagement in the future.

The meeting was brought to a close.