



# NOAC

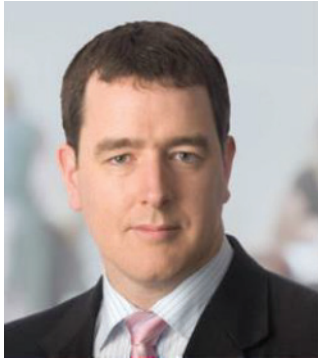
National Oversight  
and Audit Commission



## Westmeath County Council Scrutiny Report

NOAC Report No. 33 - May 2021

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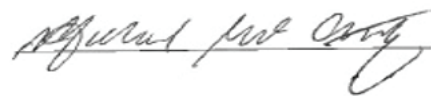
## Chair's Opening remarks

The Local Government Reform Act 2014 introduced significant changes to a wide range of aspects of the local government system, including in relation to matters of accountability and oversight. In that regard, the Act provided for the establishment of the National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC) as the statutory body overseeing the local government sector. NOAC was established in July 2014 under the 2014 Act to provide independent oversight of the local government sector. NOAC's functions are wide ranging, involving the scrutiny of performance generally and financial performance specifically, supporting best practice, overseeing implementation of national local government policy and monitoring and evaluating implementation of corporate plans, adherence to service level agreements and public service reform by local government bodies.

Since I became Chair of NOAC in September 2018, I continued the good work that had been started by the previous NOAC Chair in meeting with the Chief Executives of the local authorities and their Management teams. As outlined below this process has evolved over time and continues to evolve.

The preparation of the profile report also identifies the performance of local authorities in relevant NOAC reports and provides for further examination of the results of these reports. The Scrutiny Process requires time and resources from NOAC and the local authorities in preparation of the profile report and for the Stage 1 and Stage 2 meetings. NOAC considers to date that the investment of time and resources has been worthwhile and necessary.

I have been struck by the welcome and sharing of information that has taken place at the meetings. It has provided an opportunity to learn, to listen to how the particular local authority operates, the challenges they face, the plans and ideas that have been developed and gives an opportunity to reflect on what is working well and areas that need to be addressed. It has identified areas of good practice and many of these ideas have been showcased at the NOAC Good Practice Seminars over the years. I look forward to continuing to work closely and collaboratively with all the local authorities and want to use this opportunity to thank all the Chief Executives and their teams for the time and courtesy and welcome extended to NOAC in this process.



**Michael McCarthy, Chair**  
20 May 2021



## Background to Profiles and Scrutiny Programme

In February 2017, NOAC, in accordance with its statutory functions, began to review the performance of individual local authorities. The starting point was getting an overall picture derived from the performance indicator report results, the Local Government Audit Service (LGAS) audit reports, the financial position and revenue collection performance. Information on private rented sector inspections, housing stock management and maintenance data and Customer Satisfaction was all considered by using the relevant data contained in the NOAC reports published to date.

At the outset the importance of the meetings was emphasised over and above the data which NOAC had regarding local authorities. There was also an objective to broaden the NOAC members' understanding of the work of the local authorities and the individual priorities and pressures they faced and to put the information in context. Therefore, NOAC wanted to get the background perspective from the authorities and any other datasets that the Councils consider should be taken into account. Significant work is required to bring this part together and the work of the NOAC Secretariat and the local authority NOAC Coordinators must be acknowledged.

Following an initial face to face meeting, which is called a Stage 1 meeting, local authorities were invited to a Stage 2 meeting where more detailed questions would be carried out in the areas of interest to NOAC, including customer service and IT investment, collection rates, the quality of information provision to the public etc. These meetings would take place after or latterly before the main NOAC board meeting with all the board members present.

## The purpose

The process gives NOAC the opportunity to have oversight of all the local authorities and considers the factors that facilitates them in performing well, along with the barriers that may exist relevant to the individual local authority. The meetings enable the local authorities to outline their strong and weak performing areas. It allows for further examination of the results of the performance indicators and shows the results in context. It must be emphasised that these meetings differ from the Performance Indicator (PI) Validation meetings which are carried out by the Performance Indicator Working Group to interrogate the results reported in relation to selected performance indicators. These meetings, while very informative, are specific to the performance indicator process and do not consider other areas of performance that NOAC have oversight of, including Customer Service, Internal Audit, Corporate Plans etc.

During the meeting NOAC can see areas where consistent under-performance is highlighted and which can be examined further. It also allows for exemplars of best practice to be identified and used to share with other local authorities. The process as outlined, is not a follow up to the PI reports, but does enable consideration of issues that may warrant further clarification or investigation in the PI process. Local authorities have all indicated in the meetings thus far that they compare their performance and results in relation to what they deem as similar local authorities. This grouping could be reviewed further by NOAC and adopted for the results of some of its reports. Groupings are not only on size but, on levels of finances, urban and rural, staff numbers and other factors.

# The Scrutiny Process

The process has evolved over time, allowing it to become more structured, formal and documented. Given the importance of the work, it is led by the Chair of NOAC (or a delegated alternate, if required) with support from NOAC members and the Executive. The formal process agreed by the Board is termed as a constructive dialogue and is laid out below.

**1**

## Stage 1 (NOAC Scrutiny Visit)

Meeting held with NOAC Chair (or alternate) and/or one additional NOAC member and member(s) of the NOAC Executive. The Chief Executive and members of the management team, as invited by the Chief Executive shall attend.

- Stage 1 notice issued to Chief Executive of the local authority.
- Profile report prepared by NOAC Executive with input from the local authority. This is circulated along with an agenda to the local authority and NOAC attendees in advance of the visit. The report is based on general and specific information from NOAC reports relating to the local authority in question.
- Local authority to present on issues arising and take questions from attending NOAC members.
- Meeting minutes prepared and issued for comment.

**2**

## Stage 2 (NOAC Scrutiny Meeting)

Appearance at full NOAC meeting. The Chief Executive and members of the management team, as invited by the Chief Executive shall attend.

- Stage 2 notice to attend NOAC meeting issued to Chief Executive of local authority.
- Profile report updated as required and circulated along with an agenda to local authority and NOAC members in advance of the meeting.
- Local authority to present on issues arising and take questions from full NOAC board.
- Meeting minutes prepared for circulation to local authority for its comment.

**3**

## Stage 3 (NOAC Sign off and Publication)

Following completion of Stages 1 and 2 the Executive shall collate the material and present it to the NOAC Board as follows: -

- Final sign off on minutes / documents / reports.
- Comments / Findings / Recommendations to be made as required.
- Approval for completed records to be published.

## Progress to date

### 2017

To commence the process, profiles were prepared in respect of Cork City Council, Louth and Offaly County Councils and these were forwarded to the Chief Executives of the authorities concerned. The NOAC Chair at the time, Pat McLoughlin, began this process with a meeting with the Chief Executive of Louth County Council for a general discussion on the profile in August 2017. This Stage 1 meeting was followed by a similar meeting with the Chief Executive of Cork City Council in September 2017. The final Stage 1 meeting to take place in 2017 was held with the Chief Executive of Offaly County Council in October 2017. In December 2017 Louth County Council attended a meeting with NOAC after the main NOAC Board meeting. This was the first Stage 2 meeting, which formed an important part of the overall process. These meetings served a particularly important function which allowed the Council to give an overview of their work and also gave an opportunity to the full NOAC Board to put questions to the Council and understand their situation in more depth.

### 2018

In 2018 the schedule consisted of eight meetings with local authorities, four each for Stage 1 and Stage 2. A Stage 2 meeting was held with Offaly County Council in January 2018. This was followed by another Stage 2 meeting with Cork City Council in March 2018.

A new Chair, Michael McCarthy, was appointed on 24 September 2018. The process continued with Westmeath County Council in October 2018 and Kerry County Council in December 2018. These were Stage 2 meetings with the full NOAC board as in these cases, the 2018 Performance Indicator validation meetings for these authorities were deemed sufficient as Stage 1 meetings. Further Stage 1 meetings were held with Roscommon County Council and Tipperary County Council.

### 2019

The format continued with 8 meetings with local authorities during the year. Five Stage 1 meetings and three Stage 2 meetings. The Stage 1 meetings were with Donegal County Council, Laois County Council, Clare County Council, Waterford City and County Council and Carlow County Council. Stage 2 meetings took place with Roscommon County Council, Tipperary County Council and Donegal County Council.

### 2020

A meetings list was scheduled for 2020 to cover 6 additional local authorities. The year commenced with a Stage 1 meeting with Monaghan County Council in February, along with two Stage 2 meetings with Laois County Council and Waterford City and County Council. Further meetings were scheduled for April, however due to the COVID crisis these meetings were required to be deferred.

The COVID restrictions presented some challenges to the meetings but it was decided to continue the Stage 2 meetings virtually and meetings were held with Clare, Monaghan, Waterford City and County, Carlow and Sligo. These were carried out by the WebEx platform.

A socially distanced Stage 1 meeting was held in person with Limerick City and County Council in August and with Sligo County Council in September 2020.

### 2021

COVID has had a huge impact on local authorities, and in particular, for NOAC on the Scrutiny process. The Stage 1 meetings have all been held in person thus far and restrictions have allowed for no Stage 1 meetings to be held yet in 2021. The Stage 2 meetings have progressed as these were capable of being held remotely, with one held in January 2021 with Limerick City and County Council. It is hoped to make up for lost time as the restrictions are relaxed and plans are in place to commence Stage 1 meetings as soon as it is possible to do so.

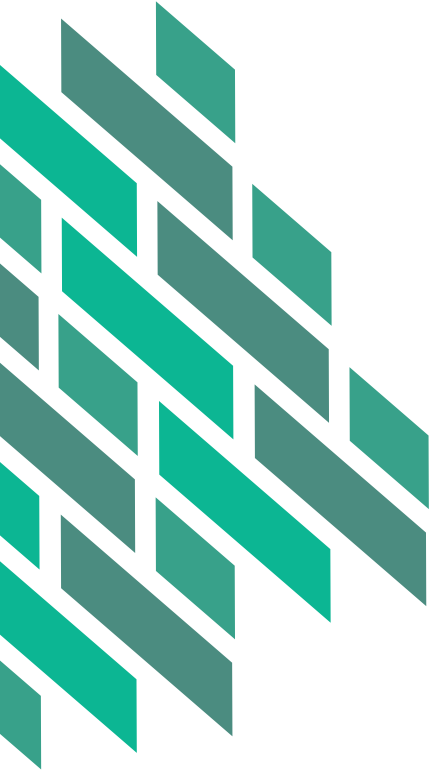
## Future meetings and reports

This report outlines the purpose and the procedures and while the process may continue to evolve it would not be expected at this time to produce another master report, similar to this one. This report takes into account the first 13 local authorities which have completed the process. It would be intended that once all stages in the scrutiny process has been fully completed with the relevant other local authorities that the report would be published on that basis and would form part of the suite of reports under the umbrella of the Scrutiny Report Process. Later in quarter 2, 2021, Sligo County Council and Limerick City and County Council reports will be published. It is anticipated that progress will continue to be made with further Stage 1 and Stage 2 meetings so that each local authority will have participated in the process. It must be outlined that significant changes and delays have been experienced due to the restrictions imposed by COVID in 2020 and 2021.

## Conclusion

The process thus far allowed for the NOAC chairman and members to get a greater understanding and insight into the challenges that face each of the local authorities. Also, issues such as collection rates, staff numbers, inspection rates, finances that are included in reports in some cases benefit from the explanation and discussion as to the reason behind these figures. The meetings also enabled NOAC to see the various priorities that each local authority considered relevant to their citizens and how they overcame various challenges and how they work collaboratively with other local authorities, state bodies and stakeholders. Areas of Good Practice have been identified along the way and these have contributed to presentations of these projects at the NOAC Good Practice Seminars in 2017, 2019 and 2020.

Westmeath County Council had no formal Stage 1 as during July 2018 a very comprehensive validation meeting was held in connection with the Performance Indicator report and therefore it was deemed that in this case that it was in order to proceed to a Stage 2 meeting in October 2018. It is important to note that the material in this report is reflective of the position at that time. Therefore any changes to the profile from later NOAC reports are not included in this report. NOAC found the programme in Westmeath in relation to the income collection and also in relation to their housing and vacancies to be very interesting. In relation to housing vacancies it was interesting to note that the Council explained that it used a contractor to undertake all repairs. This represented good value for money and they recently had their contract extended. The Council also advised that a small number of staff were on hand to deal with any housing emergencies. The Council advised that the low turnaround time in these properties was due to a special focus on the issue and a significant investment from the Council. It remains a challenge to find the internal funding to continue this practice.



# Westmeath County Council Scrutiny Process

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# NOAC Profile Westmeath County Council

October 2018

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# Westmeath County Council General Information

Population:	88,770
Area:	183,200 ha
Municipal Districts:	2 (Athlone and Mullingar)

## COUNCIL MISSION STATEMENT

“To enhance the quality of life for the people of Westmeath by leading economic and community development and delivering efficient and sustainable services.”

## Staffing

Number employed	@ 31/12/2017 523 (headcount)
WTE Staff per 1,000 population	439.35

### Percentage of paid working days lost to medically certified sick leave

2014	2.46%
2015	2.20%
2016	1.68%
2017	3.41%

## Budget

2017	€68,502,488
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## Housing Information at 31/12/17

Local Authority Stock number	1,841
Number currently on waiting list	1,728
HAP Tenancies	372

## Homeless presentations

2015	12 presented
2016	18 presented
2017	76 presented

## Any specific housing issues

Westmeath has advised that there is an inadequate supply of Social Housing. In the recent PI 2017 report it was noted that the proportion of the stock vacant at end 2017 was less than the national average in the case of 17 local authorities. The lowest vacancy rate was in Westmeath County Council at 0.43% and Westmeath County Council had the shortest average re-letting time of 6.8 weeks.

## Economic Forum (CEF)

- Westmeath Economic Enterprise and Tourism Strategic Policy Committee in place.
- IDA, EI, Council Officials meet to discuss matters of interest.

## The Local Enterprise Office

- LEO Unit in place 4 years in the Council Headquarters.
- The figure for jobs created per 1,000 population is 1.12 compared to National Average of 0.68%.

## Retail Incentives

- Business Incentive Scheme for vacant properties in place.
- LEO support in place applicable to retail section.

## The Corporate Plan

Westmeath County Council's Corporate Plan structures its supporting strategies around 6 strategic goals (economic and enterprise development, social inclusion and community participation, infrastructural capacity, protection of the environment, quality customer service and organisational capacity) each relevant to a number of different functional areas. The Plan incorporates about 6 key indicators in respect of each of these goals. The Plan has a very well presented section on implementation and monitoring addressing fully each such area referenced in the Guidelines and the factors influencing the operating environment are all clearly outlined. Many local authorities put a lot of obvious effort into the presentation of their Plans, in this regard; Westmeath's Plan was commended for the quality and clarity of their presentation and identified by NOAC as an exemplar of better practice in the preparation of its Corporate Plan.

Areas for commendation within the plan

- preparing and implementing a new Retail Strategy for the county and maximising the use of Council facilities for the dissemination of information on services
- a strong focus on health and safety at work requirements
- While the plan discussed improving the level of communication with the public in a general way, the clear communication of the cost and revenue implications of different choices in relation to local services, particularly in the context of the local property tax and other charges in respect of services, was not covered
- Approved by Westmeath County Council Members in 2015.



## Shared services

- Participating in the majority of LGMA supported Shared services. please explain/elaborate
- NOAC report No 6 - Local Government Shared Services Projects - April 2016 noted the following shared services in Westmeath: MyPay, Building and Control Management System (BCMS), MapRoad Licensing, Local Government Operational Procurement Centre (LGOPC), Local Government Strategic Procurement Centre (LGSPC) and Fix Your Street

## Regional Issues including new developments and initiatives

- Chief Executive chairs Midlands Action Plan for jobs



# NOAC Reports Overview

## NOAC REPORT NO 19

### Performance Indicator Report 2017 – September 2018

#### NOAC wished to note that:

Westmeath comprehensively explained how its internal policies and procedures result in quality information being provided to NOAC for the performance indicator process. NOAC members acknowledged the robust system that the Council have put in place in respect of data collection, validation, and use of the performance indicators to drive change in the authority. Key priorities for the Council relate to meeting the social housing need and the authority's financial position. NOAC were pleased to learn that Westmeath has recently been able to move from a deficit to surplus position.

#### Waste

The NOAC members examined litter pollution in detail as part of this year's validation process. Westmeath County Council made suggestions for improvements in the current data gathering system

- The use of tablets to manage their survey findings in real time.
- Giving the local authority access to real time data.

#### Housing

The proportion of the stock vacant at end 2017 was less than the national average in the case of 17 local authorities. The lowest vacancy rate was in Westmeath County Council at 0.43% and Westmeath County Council had the shortest average re-letting time of 6.8 weeks.

#### Roads

All local authorities had a percentage of regional roads that fell into PSCI rating of 5–6, 7–8 and 9–10. In respect of PSCI rating 5–6 (surface defects, localised distress) Westmeath County Council had the lowest percentage of regional roads given this rating (7%).

#### Fire

The cost per capita of providing the fire service was higher in 2017 than the previous year in 18 local authorities however Westmeath was the third lowest at €31.36. Westmeath had the longest average time for non-fire incidents of 7.7 minutes. Westmeath highlighted at this year's validation visit that day time incidents often skew the response time figures in terms of meeting the 5 minute target, particularly for brigades in Athlone and Mullingar.

## NOAC REPORT NO 17

### Internal Audit in Local Authorities - July 2018

- In reference to Audit Charter and Authority, when questioned if a compliance test was carried out in 2016 with regards to the operation of the Internal Audit unit against the stated function in the charter Westmeath confirmed this to be the case.
- The Head of Internal Audit reports directly to the Chief Executive in Westmeath in line with recommendations in the report.
- Frequency of Internal Audit Committee Meetings - Westmeath indicated that it has 4 in 2016 which was the case for 17 other authorities.

## NOAC REPORT NO 12

### A Review of the Management and Maintenance of Local Authority Housing – May 2017

All local authorities, with the exception of Galway City and Westmeath County Councils, supplied contact phone numbers of tenants who agreed to participate in a survey aimed at gathering data on their experience as local authority tenants and at measuring their satisfaction with the way in which their local authority manages and maintains the housing it provides to them.

In terms of the proportion of cumulative rent owed that was collected by end 2014, South Dublin is the lowest at 73% followed by Sligo at 77% and Dublin and Galway Cities and Waterford all at 78%. Laois and Monaghan County Councils are the highest at 95%, followed by Kerry and Westmeath at 94% and Roscommon at 93%.

Nationally, the average maintenance and improvement expenditure per unit in 2014 was €1,679 and the average rent received per unit was €2,665 or 159% of the amount spent maintaining and improving the dwellings. For 12 local authorities rent received in 2014 was more than twice the expenditure on maintenance and improvement and in Westmeath's case, it was almost three times the expenditure.

## NOAC REPORT NO 10

### Rented Houses Inspections A Review of Local Authority Performance of Private Rented Houses Regulations Functions – October 2016

16 local authorities have written policy/ operations manual for undertaking inspections in the rented sector. However, Westmeath is one of the authorities in this report that did not have a written policy at that time.

## NOAC REPORT NO 8

### Financial Performance of Local Authorities 2013-2015: Deficits, Audit Opinion and Financial Statements – April 2016

Revenue Balance – Westmeath			
	General Revenue	Income	Balance as % Income
2013	(1,790,272)	62,515,248	2.86%
2014	27,702	68,013,510	0.04%
2015*	248,620	66,198,314	0.38%
2016*	335,712	70,932,456	0.47%
2017*	366,368	70,045,475	0.52%

Westmeath County Council moved from a deficit balance to a surplus in 2014, the inclusion of Athlone Town Council's figures accounted for only 47% of that improvement in its finances.

### Date of signature of Annual Financial Statements

2013 AFS	6 May 2014
2014 AFS	27 April 2015
2015 AFS	16 March 2016
2016 AFS	22 March 2017*
2016 AFS	10 July 2018*

\*Updated data not included in Original report. Westmeath have operated a surplus Revenue Balance since 2014

	Performance Indicators	2017		2016	
		Data	Median/ Average	Data	Median/ Average
H1	Social Housing provided in year per 1,000 population	0.45	0.53	n/a	3.43
H2	% of directly provided dwellings vacant at 31/12	0.43	2.73	0.65	3.02
H3a	Average time from vacation date to PI year re-letting date (weeks)	6.80	28.9	8.67	32.99
H3b	Average cost expended on getting re-tenanted units ready for re-letting	€11,401.74	€17,160.60	12,551.65	€15,877
H4	Average repair and maintenance cost per unit	€1,066.64	€1,311.82	€347.87	€1,500.23
H5	Inspections (Dwellings inspected) carried out in year as % of registrations	10.7	4.96	4.53	4.36
R1a	% Regional Road KM that ever received a PSCI rating	100	96	100.00	99
R1b	% Total Regional Road KM with a PSCI rating of 9-10	48	28	44.00	30
R1c	% Total Primary Road KM with a PSCI rating of 9-10	24	20	12.00	13
R1d	% Total Secondary Road KM with a PSCI rating of 9-10	11	14	10.00	10
R1e	% Total Tertiary Road KM with a PSCI rating of 9-10	7	8	7.00	7
R2a	KM Regional Road strengthened using road improvement grants	6.9	10.3	7.80	10.8
R2b	KM Regional road resealed using road maintenance grants	6	11.9	4.40	12.2
R2/3	% Motor tax transactions performed online	56.11	65.95	52.83	64.05
W1	% private schemes with water quality in compliance	100.00	98.46	100.00	97.77
E1	% households availing of a 3-bin service	5.51	39.53	4.75	37.7
E2	Pollution cases on hand at year end as % of the cases that arose that year	11.13	9.79	5.79	9.91
E3	% area unpolluted or litter free	4	10	5.00	13
P1	New buildings inspected as % of new buildings notified	15.58	17	3.53	19.42
P2	% of determinations that confirmed the decision made by LA	87.50	79	78.57	77.78
P3	Ratio of planning cases being investigated at year end as to cases closed	5.56	2.41	4.53	2.87
P4	Cost per capita of the Planning Service	25.86	28.31	21.45	€26.96
F1	Cost per capita of Fire Service (based on 2011 Census for 2014 and 2015)	31.36	57.74	33.35	€56.07
F2	Average time to mobilise Brigade re Fire (Minutes) (FT)	n/a	1.45	n/a	1.5
F3	% of Fire Cases in which first attendance is within 10 minutes	27.67	40.45	27.29	57.79
L1a	No. of Library visits per head of population	3.33	3.56	3.46	3.61
L1b	No. of Items borrowed per head of population	2.61	2.92	4.23	3.82
L2	Cost of Library Service per capita	27.78	31.00	27.44	€30.05
Y1	% of local schools involved in Comhairle na nÓg Scheme	69.23	69.04	100.00	68.07
C1	WTE staff per 1,000 population	4.95	5.75	4.94	5.64
C2a	% of paid working days lost to medically certified sick leave in year	3.41	3.74	1.68	3.76
C2b	% of paid working days lost to self-certified sick leave in year	0.44	0.33	0.23	0.38
C3	LA website page views per 1,000 population	9,514	14,632	8,813.74	12,422
C4	Overall cost of ICT Provision per WTE	€3,400.63	€3,048.41	€3,115.30	€2,675.69
M2a	% Commercial Rates Collected in year	81	83	81.00	82.3
M2b	% Rent & Annuities Collected in year	97	89	96.00	88.0
M2c	% Housing Loans Collected in year	89	74	85.00	70
J1	LEO jobs output per 1,000 population	1.12	0.68	1.21	0.7

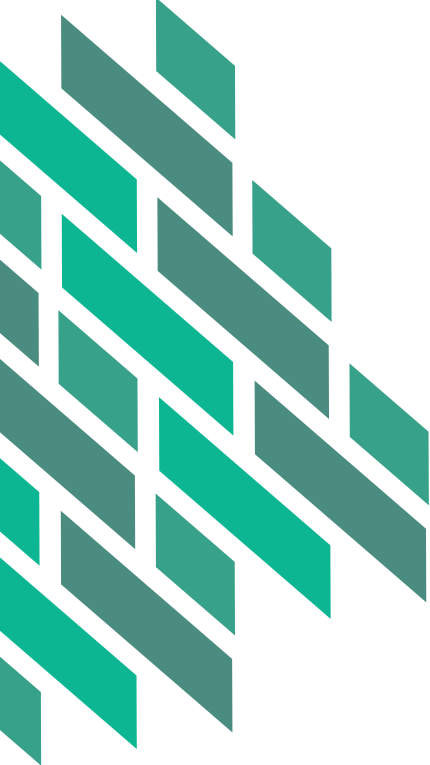
	Performance Indicators	2015		2014	
		Data	Median/ Average	Data	Median/ Average
H1	Social Housing provided in year per 1,000 population	2.00	1.91	1.27	0.80
H2	% of directly provided dwellings vacant at 31/12	1.45	3.5	0.90	3.8
H3a	Average time from vacation date to PI year re-letting date (weeks)	10.00	28.43	18.47	31.43
H3b	Average cost expended on getting re-tenanted units ready for re-letting	13,905.89	€13,378.40	9,887.07	€11,534.91
H4	Average repair and maintenance cost per unit	€550.39	€1,292.57	4,075.28	€1,272.30
H5	Inspections (Dwellings inspected) carried out in year as % of registrations	12.33	5.64	14.04	6.51
R1a	% Regional Road KM that ever received a PSCI rating	42.00	68	22.32	47.9
R1b	% Total Regional Road KM with a PSCI rating of 9-10	10.00	20	2.00	11.15
R1c	% Total Primary Road KM with a PSCI rating of 9-10	6.00	11	2.00	6.4
R1d	% Total Secondary Road KM with a PSCI rating of 9-10	5.00	8	0.00	4.61
R1e	% Total Tertiary Road KM with a PSCI rating of 9-10	2.00	5	0.00	3.63
R2a	KM Regional Road strengthened using road improvement grants	11.90	10.2		
R2b	KM Regional road resealed using road maintenance grants	5.90	8.3		
R2/3	% Motor tax transactions performed online	45.75	56.6	41.34	54.7
W1	% private schemes with water quality in compliance	100.00	99.07	97.90	97.9
E1	% households availing of a 3-bin service	4.48	34.87	4.42	31.66
E2	Pollution cases on hand at year end as % of the cases that arose that year	15.78	8.49		
E3	% area unpolluted or litter free	3.00	14	1.00	9.5
P1	New buildings inspected as % of new buildings notified	13.01	24	14.04	17.71
P2	% of determinations that confirmed the decision made by LA	50.00	71.88	72.73	71.7
P3	Ratio of planning cases being investigated at year end as to cases closed	2.24	2.61	3.30	2.88
P4	Cost per capita of the Planning Service	22.69	€26.76	32.46	€25.27
F1	Cost per capita of Fire Service (based on 2011 Census for 2014 and 2015)	31.65	€57.88	32.85	€55.9
F2	Average time to mobilise Brigade re Fire (Minutes) (FT)	N/A	1.6	N/A	1.66
F3	% of Fire Cases in which first attendance is within 10 minutes	25.73	56.98	31.73	58.6
L1a	No. of Library visits per head of population	3.34	3.68	3.60	3.71
L1b	No. of Items borrowed per head of population	3.79	3.82		
L2	Cost of Library Service per capita	27.63	€30.02	27.89	€29.41
Y1	% of local schools involved in Comhairle na nÓg Scheme	100.00	67.59	38.46	51.86
C1	WTE staff per 1,000 population	5.36	5.58	5.58	5.63
C2a	% of paid working days lost to medically certified sick leave in year	2.20	3.52	2.46	3.34
C2b	% of paid working days lost to self-certified sick leave in year	0.37	0.39	0.34	0.4
C3	LA website page views per 1,000 population	9,156.29	11,666	7,750.22	9,651
C4	Overall cost of ICT Provision per WTE	3,051.73	€2,680.15	2,654.00	€2,646.8
M2a	% Commercial Rates Collected in year	79.00	83	73.00	77
M2b	% Rent & Annuities Collected in year	95.00	85	93.00	84
M2c	% Housing Loans Collected in year	73.00	68	54.00	67
J1	LEO jobs output per 1,000 population	1.82	0.66	0.56	0.73





# Stage 1 meeting

No formal Stage 1 meeting was held with Westmeath.





# 2

## Stage 2 meeting

National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC) profile meeting with Westmeath County Council

Date:	23 October 2018	
Venue:	Withdrawing Room, Custom House, Dublin 1	
Attendees:	<p><b>Chairperson:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Michael McCarthy</li> </ul> <p><b>Members:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tara Buckley</li> <li>Paul Lemass</li> <li>Connie Hanniffy</li> <li>John Buckley</li> <li>Michael McGreal</li> </ul> <p><b>Secretariat:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Claire Gavin</li> <li>Neill Dalton</li> <li>Colin Flood</li> <li>Ken Doyle</li> </ul> <p><b>Apologies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Martina Moloney</li> <li>Dave Holohan</li> <li>Sharon O'Connor</li> <li>Colleen Savage</li> </ul>	<p><b>Westmeath County Council:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pat Gallagher, Chief Executive</li> <li>Jimmy Dalton, Head of Finance</li> </ul>

The Chair welcomed the Chief Executive and Head of Finance to the meeting. The Chief Executive provided an update to the group on matters concerning the Council and the challenges that they face. A comprehensive briefing document was then circulated to all NOAC members.

The Chief Executive and Head of Finance then proceeded to answer questions from the NOAC members.

## Housing

The NOAC Board commended the quick turnaround of vacancies in relation to housing. The Board queried if the Local Authority reserved its own tradesmen and what was the Local Authorities' approach to difficult mortgages. The Council advised that it did reserve the services of a contractor to undertake all repairs. They represented good value for money and recently had their contract extended. The Council also advised that a small number of staff were on hand to deal with emergencies. The Council advised that the low turnaround time in these properties was due to a special focus on the issue and a significant investment from the Council. It remains a challenge to find the internal funding to continue this practice.

In relation to the Local Authorities' approach to difficult mortgages, the Council explained that the HFA allowed them to offer Interest Only and Mortgage to Rent Schemes as a means to help residents in mortgage arrears. Now most of the loans are performing well, with approximately 40 loans in potential trouble, of which one quarter will probably not perform. Mortgage loans is the business of the local authorities and when Government policy in the boom recommended affordable housing schemes, the Council carried out many of these which didn't perform after the crash.

However, the MTR allowed for people to stay in their homes and transferred over from ownership to local authority tenants seamlessly. 50 or so have taken up this process and approximately 20 more will be transferred in the future. There is a credit committee set up by the Council which provides a prudent approach to granting loans. The Council also operate a code of practice for borrowers in arrears which has been agreed by the sector. The challenge was dealing with legacy issues but with a new Council and a new management team, the focus is looking forward rather than looking back.

In relation to unsold Affordable housing units, the Council have leased them to an AHB. There is an €11m loan outstanding for 52 houses. The rent generated is retained by the AHB and the Council pay interest on the borrowings which is being funded through the leasing scheme. The reason that these units were not sold is that they were just constructed as the economic crash occurred. In relation to HAP, Westmeath and Longford have created a place finder and some housing supports also. There are good systems and structures but the demand has increased significantly. There is a budget in place but it is expected that there could be a significant overrun this year.

The NOAC Chair commended their efforts and said they were a beacon for other Local Authorities to follow.

## Commercial Rates

The NOAC Board asked about the Council's plans for commercial rates. The Council admitted that they had lost ground on performance on rates. Since 2014, the Council has to harmonise rates between rural and urban areas. Furthermore, as a result of the Valuation Office Revaluation Project 55% got a reduction while 45% got an increase in the rate amount. The medium term target is 90% collection of commercial rates and the Council plan to reach 86-88% by the end of 2018.

The Council advised that Westmeath was a rural county with two big towns and that while the domestic economy is improving, the county took a battering (economically) in the recession years. Of those on the commercial rates books, the majority of them are paying. There were small numbers in the uptake of the rates incentive scheme, which the Council believes demonstrates that rates are not a significant impediment to new business setup. A business incentive scheme, which looked at reducing the vacancy rates, was replaced by a Shop Front scheme where grants were offered up to €2,500 for 50% of work spent of improvement works to shop fronts.



**National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC)**  
**An Coimisiún Náisiúna Mairseachta & Iniúchoíreachta**

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