



**ANNUAL
REPORT**
2021



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Chairperson's Statement

On behalf of the Board, I am pleased to present the Annual Report for the National Oversight & Audit Commission (NOAC) for the calendar year ending 31 December 2021.

This is the eighth NOAC Annual Report and with the conclusion of another year, it is my pleasure to look back on the unique challenges, successes and responses that we have all encountered during that time. With its statutory remit of oversight of the local government sector, NOAC has continued to ensure that local government delivers value for money, while keeping the principles of proper governance to the fore. This role remains as important as ever, given that 2021 continued to be a challenging work environment for the local government sector, particularly with respect to the ongoing situation regarding Covid.

There have been few, if any, occasions in recent history where the importance of local government was displayed in a more tangible manner. Throughout the year, local authorities continued the work of helping citizens, businesses and communities in a practical way. This was achieved in many respects but most visibly through the Restart Grant schemes, the Community Call initiative and outreach amongst others, whilst at all times maintaining the provision of essential services.

Despite the negative effects wrought by Covid, the NOAC Board continued to conduct its meetings online very successfully.

However, I note with regret, that many of us have not had the pleasure of meeting some of our new colleagues to the Board in person yet. Also, all Stage 2 scrutiny meetings with local authorities, normally held in person, were instead conducted online. However, NOAC did manage to host three in-person Stage 1 scrutiny meetings in the local authority premises of Meath, South Dublin and Fingal County Councils when restrictions eased and it was permitted. This proved to be of mutual benefit to the local authorities concerned and to NOAC.

NOAC engaged in several other activities and made much progress throughout the year. Included in this was the hosting of two virtual Information Workshops on the guidelines for Performance Indicators in February and April 2021. This provided local authorities with updated information on their input and responsibilities for the information to be supplied for the annual Performance Indicator report. As a follow up to this work six validation meetings were also hosted with selected local authorities between June and August 2021.

NOAC also held the annual Good Practice Seminar, in conjunction with the LGMA and CCMA in November 2021.

We were fortunate enough to have an in-person occasion in Kilkenny Castle and to also host a large online event, allowing it to be brought to an even wider audience. This event has become a focal point for NOAC in setting out its stall with respect to what it personifies; the bringing together of all the practitioners in the local government sector, where good practice can be outlined, shared and re-produced where appropriate, across various local authorities. I am grateful to all the presenters and participants at that event. I particularly wish to thank Peter Burke, T.D., Minister of State for Planning and Local Government, in the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, for attending on the day and delivering the opening address.

NOAC produced numerous and varied reports throughout the year. Of particular note, are the scrutiny reports relating to the meetings between individual local authorities and NOAC. Equally important is a report on the Review of local authority and Regional Assembly Corporate Plans 2019–2024 which was published in November 2021. This reviewed the adequacy of the second local authority and Regional Assemblies Corporate Plans and further supports the development of best practice in corporate planning in local authorities. As usual, NOAC also produced its annual report on Performance Indicators, which allows local authorities to view where they are performing well and to review any areas where performance could be improved upon.

Two board members, Constance Hanniffy and Martina Moloney, retired during the course of the year. Both of these members have been part of NOAC since its establishment and I wish to take this opportunity to thank them for their time, dedication, expertise and enormous contribution to NOAC during their tenures. NOAC was also fortunate to appoint four new members during 2021 with a wide range of experience and talent between them, which augurs well for the future.

As always, I would like to thank the NOAC Secretariat for their hard work and ongoing support to the NOAC Board. I also wish to extend my sincere gratitude to our many colleagues, including the Chief Executives and performance indicator data coordinators from the local authorities for supplying information and attending meetings with NOAC during 2021. Additionally, I wish to thank the County and City Management Association, the Local Government Management Agency, the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage and the other bodies, agencies and departments that liaised with NOAC in support of its work programme during 2021.



Michael McCarthy
 Chairperson

5th April 2022

Executive Summary

This report was approved by the members of NOAC on 5th April 2022.

This is the eighth annual report of the National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC), covering the period 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2021.

NOAC was established in 2014 as an independent statutory body to provide oversight of the local government sector in Ireland. It is a key element of the local government reform agenda that emerged from the proposals set out in the Action Programme for Effective Local Government and is underpinned by the Local Government Reform Act 2014.

NOAC reports and recommendations are presented to key decision makers in the local government sector as well as the relevant Joint Committee of the Houses of the Oireachtas.

During 2021, NOAC published several reports and documents and hosted workshops including:

- ▶ Review of Local authority and Regional Assembly Corporate Plans 2019-2024
- ▶ Public Spending Code Report 2020
- ▶ Good Practice Seminar 2021
- ▶ Local authority Performance Indicator Report 2020 and Guidelines Workshop

Key activities of NOAC include reports on Performance Indicators 2020, Corporate Plans 2019 - 2024, Public Spending Code 2020 and the Scrutiny Programme/Profile Meetings.

The majority of NOAC's work is carried out by a number of working-groups, set up to focus on particular areas and to further various projects. These are:

WG1: - LG Governance, Efficiency and Reform

WG2: - Performance Indicators

WG3: - Communications and Customer Survey

WG4: - Financial Management and Performance

Other work of NOAC is carried out directly by the Chair.

In February 2017, NOAC, in accordance with its statutory functions, began to review the performance of individual local authorities. It is led by the Chair of NOAC, with support from NOAC members and the Secretariat.

During 2021, NOAC had six scrutiny meetings planned. However, due to the Covid restrictions it was only possible for three Stage 1 meetings in Meath, South Dublin and Fingal to proceed. Three Stage 2 meetings were also held with Limerick, Meath and South Dublin. During 2021, 17 scrutiny reports were also published on the process.



NOAC hosted the fourth Good Practice in Local Government seminar, in conjunction with the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) and CCMA, on 9th November 2021 in Kilkenny Castle. The event was part of Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's (DPER) Innovation week. The seminar was held as both an in-person and online event.

In September 2021, NOAC published its Local authority Performance Indicator Report 2020, NOAC's seventh Performance Indicators report to date.

This report included a validation review of six authorities with regard to the accuracy and reliability of a sample of indicators.

In November 2021, NOAC produced a report which evaluated the local authority and Regional Assembly Corporate Plans of 2019 to 2024. Amongst other areas, the report examined how the Corporate Plans were formulated and the process of consultation with stakeholders.

Again in November 2021, NOAC published a further report which was on the Public Spending Code Report 2020.

The Public Spending Code is comprised of a set of rules and procedures that ensure these standards are upheld across the Irish public service and brings together, in one place, details of the obligations of those responsible for spending public money.

As well as its regular meetings, NOAC had several meetings with other people and organisations of note. Among those are the following:

In January 2021, the NOAC Chair, Michael McCarthy met with the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, (DETE) Leo Varadkar T.D. to discuss the remit of NOAC and to consider further NOAC's oversight role in relation to the role of the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs).

In February 2021, NOAC met with DPER regarding the financial challenges to local government from Covid and Brexit.

In April 2021, the NOAC Chair met with representatives of the LGMA to discuss the future of the Local authority Satisfaction Survey and the associated 3 year infographic report.

NOAC Membership

NOAC's membership is statutorily prescribed as a minimum of six and a maximum of nine members.

At the end of 2021 there were nine board members on the NOAC Board.

The terms of Constance Hanniffy and Martina Moloney ended on 30 June 2021.

Declan Breathnach and Noel Harrington were appointed as board members on 28 April 2021. Ciarán Hayes and Philomena Poole were appointed on 1 July 2021.

The members and their term details are as follows:

Members and their term details

| Role | Member | Appointed | Reappointed | End of Current Term |
|--------------------|--------------------|------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| Chairperson | Michael McCarthy | 24/09/2018 | N/A | 23/09/2023 |
| Members | Mary Hurley | 21/07/2020 | N/A | 20/07/2025 |
| | Brian Cawley | 04/09/2020 | N/A | 03/09/2023 |
| | Niall Quinn | 04/09/2020 | N/A | 03/09/2023 |
| | Margaret Lane | 04/09/2020 | N/A | 03/09/2023 |
| | Declan Breathnach | 28/04/2021 | N/A | 27/04/2024 |
| | Noel Harrington | 28/04/2021 | N/A | 27/04/2024 |
| | Ciarán Hayes | 01/07/2021 | N/A | 30/06/2024 |
| | Philomena Poole | 01/07/2021 | N/A | 30/06/2024 |
| | Constance Hanniffy | 01/07/2014 | 01/07/2019 | term ended 30/06/2021 |
| | Martina Moloney | 01/07/2014 | 01/07/2016 | term ended 30/06/2021 |

Member Biographies



Michael McCarthy, Chairperson

Term Dates: 24 September 2018 – 23 September 2023.

Michael is the Director of Cloud Infrastructure Ireland. He was appointed as Chair of the National Oversight and Audit Commission in September 2018. He was an elected TD for the Cork South-West constituency from 2011 to 2016. He is a former member of the Dáil Public Accounts Committee. He was elected to Seanad Éireann for the period 2002–2011. Michael was an elected member of Cork County Council from 1999 to 2003.



Constance Hanniffy

Term Dates: 1 July 2014 – 30 June 2021.

Constance Hanniffy is a graduate of NUI Galway and holds a BA (Hons) in Community and Family Studies. She was an elected member of Offaly County Council from 1974 to 2014 and a member of the Midlands Regional Authority from 1994 to 2014. She was also a member of the Irish delegation to the Committee of the Regions from 1998 to 2014. She is a Board Member of the Sue Ryder Foundation and a member of the Offaly County Council Audit Committee. She is a past member of the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) and of the Taoiseach's Devolution Commission (1995–97) which made recommendations to Government on local government reform. She previously served as a member of the D/ ECLG's Consultative Committee on the Local Government Reform Green Paper. She is a past member of the BMW Regional Assembly and the former chairperson of its EU monitoring committee.



Martina Moloney

Term Dates: 1 July 2014 – 30 June 2021.

Martina Moloney was a career official in Irish local government for almost thirty-seven years. She holds a BA and MA in Public Management and a Doctorate in Governance and is a member of the Institute of Accounting Technicians. She worked in eight local authorities and held the post of Director of Community and Enterprise and Corporate Services in Galway City Council, before being appointed as County Manager in County Louth and subsequently as County Manager in Galway prior to her retirement in July 2014.



Mary Hurley

Term Dates: 21 July 2020 – 20 July 2025.

Mary is the Officer of the Minister and is an Assistant Secretary in the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.



Brian Cawley

Term Dates: 4 September 2020 – 3 September 2023.

Brian was formerly Director General of the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) and currently works as an independent consultant in public sector reform and in leadership and change management, working with a wide range of clients in Ireland, EC and internationally. He has extensive experience of working with central and local government in Ireland. Brian is a graduate of Trinity College Dublin and the University of Leicester, and holds an MSc in Training and Development and a Doctorate in Social Sciences.



Margaret Lane

Term Dates: 4 September 2020 – 3 September 2023.

Margaret is an executive coach and has extensive experience in finance and HR across the commercial, semi-state and public sectors. She has held the post of Strategic HR Director, Ervia (Parent company for Gas Networks Ireland and Irish Water). Her previous posts include HR Executive Roles, Board Gáis Group and Cork City Council. Among her other positions, she is a member of the Audit Committee of the NSSO and has valuable experience as she currently chairs the Audit Committee in the Office of the Ombudsman.



Niall Quinn

Term Dates: 4 September 2020 – 3 September 2023.

Niall is a practicing barrister and Accredited Mediator. Prior to commencing practice at the Bar and his work as a mediator he was a strategic communications specialist for 20 years. A former President of the Public Relations Institute of Ireland (PRII) and non-executive Director of the Public Relations Consultants Association, he continues to lecture in strategic communications and crisis communications at the PRII and to be engaged for strategic communications assignments. A BSc (Mgmt) graduate of Trinity College Dublin, he studied law at King's Inns, Dublin and was called to the Bar in 2015.



Declan Breathnach

Term Dates: 28 April 2021 - 27 April 2024.

Declan has been a member of the Parliamentary Budgetary and Oversight Committee, Vice Chairperson of the Good Friday Agreement Implementation Committee and Vice chairperson of the British-Irish Parliamentary Association. He was a member of Louth County Council from 1991 to 2016 and served as Dáil Deputy for Louth from 2016 to 2020. A former Primary school teacher and Principal, Declan has over 40 years of public service.



Noel Harrington

Term Dates: April 2021 - 27 April 2024.

Noel is currently Office Manager and Postmaster at An Post, Castletownbere, Co Cork. He was an elected member of Cork County Council from 1999 until 2011 and an elected member of Dáil Éireann serving from 2011 to 2016. His previous roles included; Member of the Oireachtas Committee on Public Oversight and Petitions, Chairperson of Cork County Council, Chairperson of The South West Regional Authority, Chairperson of Cork County Corporate Policy Group and Member of West and North Cork Local Enterprise Board.



Ciarán Hayes

Term Dates: 1 July 2021 – 30 June 2024.

Ciarán Hayes retired as Chief Executive of Sligo County Council on 1 January 2021 following a 42-year career across five Local Authorities including Galway City Council, Kilkenny County Council, Dublin County Council and Dún Laoghaire Corporation. He has a BA Degree in Public Management and a Higher Diploma in Computer Studies and is presently undertaking a Fellowship in Harvard University studying Climate change. In addition to his Chief Executive role in Sligo, he led the Local Government response to Climate change and to the establishment of the Climate Action Regional Offices (CARO). Ciarán is a Senior Fellow at Harvard University and has established 'Ciarán Hayes Consultancy' with a focus on Climate Action.



Philomena Poole

Term Dates: 1 July 2021 – 30 June 2024.

Philomena Poole is the former Chief Executive of Dun-Laoghaire Rathdown County Council (retired in May 2021). She was previously County Manager in Louth County Council. In these roles Philomena was responsible for the economic, social, cultural and environmental development of the county having spent over 40 years in local government. Leading large teams to deliver on significant infrastructure and social programmes as well as driving organisation transformation have been key to these roles. She has worked on leadership programmes and philanthropy initiatives with Co-Operation Ireland and holds a Masters Degree in Executive Coaching.

NOAC Working Groups

NOAC uses Working Groups to carry out the majority of work by furthering various projects.

| NOAC Working Groups | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|--------------------------------|
| Title | Code | Membership 2021 |
| LG Governance, Efficiency and Reform | WG1: LGER | Brian Cawley <i>Chair</i> |
| | | Niall Quinn |
| | | Constance Hanniffy* |
| | | Declan Breathnach** |
| | | Ciarán Hayes** |
| Performance Indicators | WG2: PI | Philomena Poole** <i>Chair</i> |
| | | Constance Hanniffy* |
| | | Martina Moloney* |
| | | Brian Cawley |
| | | Noel Harrington** |
| Communications and Customer Survey | WG3: CCS | Niall Quinn <i>Chair</i> |
| | | Margaret Lane |
| | | Philomena Poole** |
| | | Declan Breathnach** |
| Financial Management and Performance | WG4: FMP | Margaret Lane <i>Chair</i> |
| | | Martina Moloney* |
| | | Mary Hurley |
| | | Ciarán Hayes** |
| Chair Working Group | CHAIR | Michael McCarthy |

*denotes that this member's term expired during 2021.

**denotes that this member's term commenced during 2021.

Working group membership changed during 2021 due to the ending of terms of board members and the commencement of new members.

WG1: Local Government Governance, Efficiency and Reform Working Group

Role

The role of the Local Government Governance, Efficiency and Reform Working Group is to assist in NOAC's functions under section 126C (1) (d), (e), (f) and (g) of the Local Government Reform Act 2014. They include the following tasks:

- ▶ to monitor and evaluate adherence to any agreement in the nature of a service level agreement entered into by one or more local government bodies.
- ▶ to oversee how national policy in relation to local government is implemented by local government bodies.
- ▶ to monitor and evaluate the implementation of public service reform by local government bodies.
- ▶ to monitor the adequacy of the corporate plan prepared by a Regional Assembly and by a Council.

Meetings

WG1 met seven times during 2021.

| No. | Date |
|-----|-------------------|
| 1. | 9 February 2021 |
| 2. | 19 March 2021 |
| 3. | 23 April 2021 |
| 4. | 18 June 2021 |
| 5. | 24 September 2021 |
| 6. | 22 October 2021 |
| 7. | 3 December 2021 |

Principal Activities in 2021

Review of Corporate Plans 2015 – 2019 – May 2021

In May 2020, NOAC issued a questionnaire to local authorities which was designed to evaluate their implementation of the Corporate Plans for 2015 – 2019. The main focus of the questionnaire was to receive a summary outlining progress for each objective and goal under these Plans.

Local authorities furnished details of their achievements under their Corporate Plans under diverse headings including housing, roads, libraries, fire services and economic plans.

Some of the points of note from the review included:

- ▶ A total of 1,278 strategic objectives and goals were listed.
- ▶ 827 of these are reported to have been substantially completed.
- ▶ 706 are on-going.
- ▶ 212 have been delayed or carried forward. The main reason cited for the delays was planning, finance or because they involved large capital projects.

NOAC was pleased to receive substantial responses which were informative.

Review of Corporate Plans 2019 – 2024 – November 2021

WG1 undertook an evaluation of the corporate plans prepared by local authorities and Regional Assemblies for the period 2019–2024. A comprehensive review and analysis of the corporate plans was completed and a report was published in November 2021. The report incorporated commentary on the adequacy of the plans in terms of their content and the process for their completion, including the adequacy of consultation mechanisms.

Many good practices were highlighted, and also recommendations on potential areas of improvement for future Corporate Plans.

Further details on this report are contained in the Reports and Highlights section of this report and the full report no 46 is available on www.noac.ie

WG meeting with the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly June 2021

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly delivered a presentation at a Working Group meeting in June 2021 to explain its two year monitoring report on the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES.) The RSES provides a framework for investment to better manage spatial planning and economic development in the region to 2031 and beyond. The purpose of the Monitoring Report is to specify the progress made in securing the overall objectives of the RSES for the Eastern and Midland Region, including progress made by relevant public bodies and each local authority in the Regional Assembly area. The Assembly furnished NOAC with a final copy of the Monitoring Report in quarter 3, 2021.

Engagement with Local Enterprise Offices

The process of gathering information to help NOAC better understand activities in Local Enterprise Offices was commenced and will be progressed during 2022.

WG2: Performance indicators Working Group

Role

The role of this group is to oversee the production of an annual report on local authority performance indicators. This involves reviewing the indicators and appropriate guidance for local authorities, determining the verification process that should be applied to the submitted data and drafting NOAC's commentary on the compiled data, as well as any follow-up functions that may be required.

The group was established in October 2014 and relates to NOAC's function under section 126C. (1) (a) of the Local Government Act to: -

- (a) scrutinise the performance of any local government body against or in comparison with any indicative matter (in this Part referred to as 'relevant indicators') that-
 - (i) the Commission considers it appropriate to refer to (which shall include indicative matters relating to customer service), or
 - (ii) the Minister may prescribe by regulations for the purpose of this paragraph

The work of the group also covers to some extent the areas of Local authority Financial Performance (Section 126C (1) (b)).

Meetings

WG2 met seven times during 2021.

| No. | Date |
|-----|------------------|
| 1. | 14 January 2021 |
| 2. | 27 January 2021 |
| 3. | 2 March 2021 |
| 4. | 7 April 2021 |
| 5. | 29 June 2021 |
| 6. | 17 November 2021 |
| 7. | 15 December 2021 |

Principal Activities in 2021

Performance Indicators

One of NOAC's key functions is to scrutinise the performance of any local authority against, or in comparison with, relevant indicators that the Commission consider are appropriate. The performance indicators consist of several measurable values that demonstrate how effectively a local authority is achieving key objectives.

To date, the Working Group has published seven performance indicator reports. Each year the sub-group reviews the set of indicators and liaises with the local authorities and other stakeholders on improvements or changes that could be incorporated into its report.

Performance Indicators (PI) Report 2020

The working group compiled the guidelines for the report in early 2021 based on changes in methodology for existing indicators and the development of new indicators. On 15 February 2021, NOAC held its PI Workshop to provide direction to data coordinators from local authorities on the 2020 report guidelines. The workshop was held online due to Covid restrictions. All local authority data coordinators were invited to the workshop where the 2020 PI guidelines were presented and explanations of methodology and updates to the indicators were given.

A further workshop was held on 15 April 2021 to cover the specific area of housing. The workshop was attended by 30 local authorities and representatives from the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA). Presentations were delivered to the attendees and participants had the opportunity to address their queries in a question and answer session.

For the 2020 report, NOAC increased the number of indicators from 39 to 42 with the addition of three new indicators:

- ▶ Two new indicators were added to the finance section, M3 – Public Liability Claims and M4 – Overheads; and
- ▶ A new indicator was added to the environmental section, E6 – Public lighting.

NOAC also further refined some indicators to improve clarity and to capture the information in a more efficient way.

More details on this report are in the Reports and Highlights section. The full report, guidelines and promotional video is available on www.noac.ie

Other Activities of the Working Group

NOAC Performance Indicator Framework

To improve better practice, WG2 analysed similar work conducted in different countries such as Scotland, US, Australia and New Zealand with the view to creating a NOAC Performance Indicator Framework. WG2 also engaged with Gerard Turley and Stephen McNena from the School of Business of NUIG, who provided an overview of their work in the area of local government performance frameworks.

Work on new indicators: Economic Development and climate change

In 2020, WG2 commissioned Seán Ó'Riordáin, from Seán Ó'Riordáin and Associates (SORA), to write a research paper on the scope of work by local authorities in the area of economic development.

“Exploring the development of an Economic Performance Indicator for Local Authorities” was considered on 14 January 2021 by WG2 members. The paper provided a good starting base for the introduction of a new performance indicator on Economic Development.

As the next step, the WG2 members met with CCMA/ Business Enterprise Innovation and Urban/Town Economic Renewal (BEIUER) committee on 15 December 2021 to complete this review. The CCMA/BEIUER committee submitted a discussion paper entitled “Performance indicators of economic development activity by local authorities” and discussed its findings with WG2 members.

The new economic development indicator will be developed further for the 2021 Performance Indicator report.

On 29 November 2021, WG2 considered the report submitted by the LGMA entitled National Performance Indicator Trend Report which reviewed current indicators and analysed the possibility of introducing new ones.

WG2 also corresponded with the LGMA to develop a new future indicator on climate change. The following questions were identified to cover the climate change area:

- ▶ Does the local authority have a designated full-time equivalent (FTE) climate action officer?
- ▶ Does the local authority have a climate action team?

Please find more details about performance indicators at the following link to the [2020 Performance Indicators Report](#).

WG3: Communications and Customer Survey Working Group

Role

The purpose of this Working Group is to carry out NOAC’s functions under section 126C (1)(a) of the Local Government Reform Act 2014, which is to scrutinise local authority performance against relevant indicators that relate to customer service and under section 126 C(1) (c) to support the development and enhancement of best practice.

The Working Group commits itself to delivering on its agreed terms of reference with regard to the activities or functions that should be the subject of surveys and also develops requests for proposals, reviews and questionnaires. The WG is cognisant of its interactions with external stakeholders in particular, through its branding and communication. These are continually demonstrated, at occasions, such as the Good Practice in Local Government seminar. Through the noac.ie website a steady stream of information has been communicated to stakeholders. For 2021, there was 3,831 users on the site, which will be built upon in future years.

Meetings

WG3 met five times during 2021

| No. | Date |
|-----|------------------|
| 1. | 24 February 2021 |
| 2. | 11 March 2021 |
| 3. | 8 April 2021 |
| 4. | 18 June 2021 |
| 5. | 16 November 2021 |

Principal Activities in 2021

New logo/branding and the development of a new website

New branding and an updated website was adopted by NOAC in 2020. NOAC uses the branding for all its reports, correspondence and at its online events during 2021. The new website has provided NOAC with an improved online presence to interact with stakeholders. It also is where details of our publications, work programmes, recorded seminars, work events, press releases, minutes of meetings and more are available.

NOAC built upon the foundations laid in 2020 in this area. It put to good use the branding images which it had developed, showcasing them at the Good Practice Seminar in November 2021. Details of this Seminar and other events continue to be updated on the NOAC website. Meanwhile, the website functionality has been improved for stakeholders and additional content has been continually added throughout the year. In particular, twenty new reports were published to the website in 2021, including multiple reports on the local authority scrutiny process, along with reports on the Public Spending Code and a review of local authority and Regional Assembly Corporate Plans.

Stakeholder mapping exercise

The Working Group developed a stakeholder mapping exercise to ascertain precisely all of the relevant stakeholders of NOAC. A tender was developed and issued in May 2021 to engage a company to assist in this project. Following the awarding of a contract and preliminary meetings with the successful company, a workshop was held in October 2021 with the NOAC board.

At this point, NOAC's stakeholders were teased out with an explanation of its current relationship with each stakeholder and identified key relationship priorities and considerations. This initiative gave NOAC a clearer understanding of its stakeholders. This will be valuable for now and into the future to ensure that it engages meaningfully with all its various stakeholders. NOAC received a preliminary report on the event in December 2021 with details of its stakeholders and preferred methods of interaction. A finalised report will be received early in 2022.

Communications Strategy

The Working Group undertook development of a Communications Strategy for NOAC. The aforementioned stakeholder mapping exercise was the first stage in this process. With this complete, the next phase of NOAC's Communications Strategy will be pursued in 2022. This phase will involve the issuing of a tender for an external agency to prepare a Communications Strategy for NOAC.

Customer Satisfaction Surveys

From 2018–2020, Ipsos MRBI was commissioned by NOAC to conduct a three year survey among the general public to establish their satisfaction with their local authority. The first survey, conducted in 2018, surveyed the 10 largest local authorities. The second survey, completed in March 2019, was conducted with the 10 medium sized local authorities and Galway City. The third survey, completed in February/ March 2020, surveyed the 10 smallest local authorities. Following on from the success of these surveys, the function for carrying out future surveys was transferred by agreement to the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA). NOAC discussed this with the LGMA in April 2021 and it continues to liaise with them on this area.

It will maintain an oversight role in the delivery of these surveys into the future, ensuring that citizens who engage with local government receive a high quality customer service and customer satisfaction.

Good Practice in Local Government seminar

NOAC hosted the fourth Good Practice in Local Government seminar, in conjunction with the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) and CCMA, on 9th November 2021 in Kilkenny Castle. This has become the flagship event for local authorities to come together to outline the good practices within their own areas, which improve the lives of the people in their communities. In 2021, the event was part of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's Innovation week and this further raised the profile of the event.

Due to Covid restrictions it was decided that for the first time the seminar would be held as both an in-person and online event. With 111 on-line attendees, this aspect of the seminar was a particular success. This allowed the occasion to be communicated to a wider audience, while also bringing together those involved in local government in Ireland to a live forum. Peter Burke, T.D., Minister of State for Planning and Local Government, in the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, opened the event, alluding to the continued innovation of local authorities in the way they conduct their business. Examples of this were demonstrated in the innovative method of Mayo gathering the impacts of weather events locally and in enabling access to a virtual consultation of Dun Laoghaire Rathdown's Draft County Development Plan.

Details of all the projects showcased are included in a summary note further in the report under Highlights and Activities. Video clips of all the speakers and projects are on the website www.noac.ie

WG4: Financial Management and Performance Working Group

Role

This working group was established in January 2020 and took over the roles of previous working groups relating to:

- Financial Performance;
- Public Spending Code.

The work of the group relates to NOAC's function under section 126C. (1) (b), (e) and (f) of the Local Government Reform Act 2014:

- (b) to scrutinise the financial performance, including in relation to value for money, of any local government body, in respect of the financial resources available to it;
- (e) to oversee how national policy in relation to local government is implemented by local government bodies;
- (f) to monitor and evaluate the implementation of public service reform (including enhanced efficiencies) by local government bodies either generally or in respect of any local government body or class of such bodies.

In addition, the role of this group is to collate and prepare the annual Local Government Quality Assurance Report under the Public Spending Code.

Meetings

WG4 met five times during 2021

| No. | Date |
|-----|------------------|
| 1. | 10 February 2021 |
| 2. | 30 March 2021 |
| 3. | 1 June 2021 |
| 4. | 13 October 2021 |
| 5. | 30 November 2021 |

Principal Activities in 2021

Public Spending Code

As of 2020, this working group subsumed the work of the Public Spending Code Working Group and publishes the Public Spending Code Report.

The Public Spending Code was developed by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and it applies to all public bodies in receipt of public funds.

Local authority Chief Executives were requested to submit their 2020 Quality Assurance reports by 28 May 2021. Of the 31 local authorities, 24 submitted their reports by the deadline.

Chief Executives certified 28 Quality Assurance Reports while three Quality Assurance Reports were certified by Acting/Interim Chief Executives. The Code requires that the Quality Assurance reports be published on the organisation's website. All 31 local authorities complied.

WG4 compiled and published the seventh Public Spending Code report for the local government sector in November 2021.

Further details on this report are included in the Reports and Highlight section in this Annual Report. The full report is available on the website on www.noac.ie

Review of Shared Services: MyPay

As part of the Financial Performance Reviews (Action 16 of its Terms of Reference), WG4 decided to review MyPay.

The MyPay Shared Services Centre was first initiated in 2014. Since then, the numbers of active employees within the Local Government Sector that MyPay cater for has increased from approx. 19,000 in 2014 to 35,000 in 2021. In addition, there are 16,000 pensioners for whom payroll services are also provided.

The services provided by MyPay are:

Standardisation:

- Common Standard Design;
- Standard processes for all Local Authorities;
- High level of automation e.g. Case Management system, Core and IVR;
- Standard reporting for all Local Authorities.

The members engaged with MyPay representatives twice, on 10 March 2021 and 30 November 2021. At the first meeting, it was agreed that officials from MyPay would prepare a paper on changes to the MyPay Operations Environment. The paper was submitted and reviewed by the members.

The Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) provided correspondence containing updated information about the number of local authorities that have already joined MyPay. Analysing the information provided, the members acknowledged there are examples of good practice that have been achieved, specifically:

- ▶ The upgrade has allowed Local Authorities to conform to new revenue requirements;

- ▶ The advance onto the latest version of Core Portal;
- ▶ Taking on the single pension scheme.

Engagement with Audit Committees

All Audit Committee chairs were invited to attend the NOAC Good Practice event which took place on the 9 November 2021, with 14 Audit Committees registering for the event. The workshop showcased a range of local authority innovations across diverse areas such as climate action, public consultation and citizen interaction. The Chairperson appraised the WG members on the work undertaken by the Southern Region Chairs of Audit Committees.

Engagement with the Local Government Audit Service (LGAS)

On 27 September 2021, the Chair of the WG and the Secretariat met with the head of the Local Government Audit Service (LGAS) and explored different ways to collaborate and review Service Level Agreements and other areas of work that need to be considered by this WG.

NOAC Scrutiny Process

Reviewing the performance of individual local authorities

In February 2017, NOAC, in accordance with its statutory functions, began to review the performance of individual local authorities.

By 2021, the process has become more embedded resulting in a more formal structure. It continues to be led by the Chair or alternate of NOAC, with support from NOAC members and the Secretariat.

As outlined in previous years, the profile reports are used as a starting point to get an overall picture of the local authority. The information is derived from sources such as the performance indicator report results, the Local Government Audit Service (LGAS) audit reports, the financial position and revenue collection performance reports.



Information is also used from private rented sector inspections, housing stock management and maintenance data, customer satisfaction surveys and any other relevant data including by using the data contained in the NOAC reports published to date. Once the profile report has been prepared, it is forwarded to the Chief Executives of the relevant local authorities as the basis for the Stage 1 meeting. The Stage 1 meeting has heretofore been held in the relevant local authority's offices.

Stage 1 and Stage 2 meetings held in 2021

| Local Authority (LA) | Stage 1 meetings | Stage 2 meetings |
|----------------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Limerick City and County Council | | January 2021 * |
| Meath County Council | July 2021 | September 2021 * |
| South Dublin County Council | July 2021 | December 2021 * |
| Fingal County Council | October 2021 | |

*Meetings held by WEBEX videoconference system.

During 2021, NOAC had six meetings planned. However, due to the Covid restrictions it was only possible for the Chair to attend three Stage 1 meetings in Meath, South Dublin and Fingal. Following on from the site meeting, the Chief Executive and members of the management team are invited to attend a Stage 2 meeting with the NOAC Board where local authorities can make a presentation, outline how their authority operates and answer questions from board members on the various items including information contained in the profile report.

Both meetings are attended by the Secretariat and minutes are kept. The table on page 22 gives the details of all the Stage 1 and Stage 2 meetings held in 2021. The minutes of all the meetings and any presentations made are available on the NOAC website.

Given that substantial progress had been made in this area by this stage, it was decided that it was timely to produce a master report in 2021 outlining the details of the scrutiny process to date. In addition, 16 individual reports were produced on each of the local authorities which had participated in both the Stage 1 and Stage 2 meetings. Issues such as collection rates, staff numbers, inspection rates and 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.

In 2021, the reports that were published included:

- ▶ Scrutiny Process and Overview Report
- ▶ Louth County Council Scrutiny Report
- ▶ Cork City Council Scrutiny Report
- ▶ Offaly County Council Scrutiny Report
- ▶ Kerry County Council Scrutiny Report
- ▶ Westmeath County Council Scrutiny Report
- ▶ Roscommon County Council Scrutiny Report
- ▶ Tipperary County Council Scrutiny Report
- ▶ Donegal County Council Scrutiny Report
- ▶ Laois County Council Scrutiny Report
- ▶ Waterford City and County Council Scrutiny Report
- ▶ Clare County Council Scrutiny Report
- ▶ Carlow County Council Scrutiny Report
- ▶ Monaghan County Council Scrutiny Report
- ▶ Limerick City and County Council Scrutiny Report
- ▶ Sligo County Council Scrutiny Report
- ▶ Meath County Council Scrutiny Report

Highlights and Details of Noac Reports Published in 2021

As ever, NOAC had an active year in the area of publications. Listed below are the reports published during 2021. These may be downloaded at www.noac.ie.

NOAC Reports published during 2021

| Name | Report Number | Date of publication |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|---------------------|
| Scrutiny Process and Overview Report from 2017 | 28 | May 2021 |
| Louth County Council Scrutiny Report | 29 | May 2021 |
| Cork City Council Scrutiny Report | 30 | May 2021 |
| Offaly County Council Scrutiny Report | 31 | May 2021 |
| Kerry County Council Scrutiny Report | 32 | May 2021 |
| Westmeath County Council Scrutiny Report | 33 | May 2021 |
| Roscommon County Council Scrutiny Report | 34 | May 2021 |
| Tipperary County Council Scrutiny Report | 35 | May 2021 |
| Donegal County Council Scrutiny Report | 36 | May 2021 |
| Laois County Council Scrutiny Report | 37 | May 2021 |
| Waterford City Council Scrutiny Report | 38 | May 2021 |
| Clare County Council Scrutiny Report | 39 | May 2021 |
| Carlow County Council Scrutiny Report | 40 | May 2021 |
| Monaghan County Council Scrutiny Report | 41 | May 2021 |
| Limerick City and County Council Scrutiny Report | 42 | June 2021 |
| Sligo County Council Scrutiny Report | 43 | June 2021 |
| NOAC Performance Indicator Report 2020 | 44 | September 2021 |
| Public Spending Code Report 2020 | 45 | November 2021 |
| Review of Local authority and Regional Assembly Corporate Plans 2019 - 2024 | 46 | November 2021 |
| Meath County Council Scrutiny Report | 47 | December 2021 |



Local authority Performance Indicator Report 2020: Report No 44

As outlined in the section on Working Group 2 above, NOAC published its seventh annual Performance Indicator Report. This report has evolved since the first report in 2014 and, this year, NOAC is reporting on 42 indicators under 11 headings. In publishing this report, NOAC is carrying out its function of scrutinising local authority performance against relevant indicators.

NOAC acknowledged the impact of Covid and the significant burden it placed on local authorities. It effected revenue collections and sources and put additional strain on resources while still delivering essential services and providing new services. These included the rollout of the restart grants to businesses, administering the voucher and grants schemes and responding to thousands of phone calls through the Community Call helpline.

With so much data, local authorities can look at the results to streamline their processes, monitor various areas of performance more accurately, and understand their results on a deeper, more individual level, collecting, analysing, and using this wealth of insights for improvement.

The selected indicators record local authority activity in relation to some aspects of their wide-ranging functions and these are collated and published annually in order to provide objective information on their performance.

This information is relevant to the local authorities themselves, both to track their own performance over time and to compare their performance with other local authorities of a similar profile and size.

The report is also of importance to the various Government Departments that work with the authorities and to the wider public that are affected by how well their local authority carries out its functions. On a fundamental level, the Performance Indicators provide critical performance-based information that enables local authorities and its stakeholders to understand where improvements may be required and thus take action.

Accordingly, this year there were three new indicators introduced and revisions/clarity to other indicators introduced. NOAC is conscious of the impact that Covid had on the work of local authorities in 2020. Public health restrictions and the increased challenges local authorities faced in providing essential services, along with the reduction in income, impacted performance under various indicator headings. In this regard, the report includes a section on Covid that sets out a summary of some of the additional work local authorities undertook in 2020 to help in the fight against Covid that are not measured by the indicators in this report.

Three New Indicators in 2020:

- ▶ Two new indicators were added to the finance section, **M3 – Public Liability Claims and M4 – Overheads**; and
- ▶ A new indicator was added to the environmental section, **E6 – Public lighting**.

Revisions to Indicators:

- ▶ The guidance under H1: Social Housing Stock has been amended to include further clarifications.
- ▶ The guidance under H5B to D: Private Rented Sector Inspections was amended.
- ▶ E1 Number/Percentage of households with access to a 3 bin service was amended to measure the percentage of households with access to 3 bin service based on those in agglomerations of >500 instead of using the household figure from the 2016 census.
- ▶ The name of E4: The percentage of schools that have been awarded/renewed green flag status in the two years to 31 December 2019 was updated to percentage of schools that currently hold and have renewed their green flag status.
- ▶ The guidance for L1C: Library registered members per head of population was changed and L1D was added to record the number of registered members of the library in the year.
- ▶ C3: Local authority website and social media usage was updated. For the 2020 report, NOAC amended how the figures for this indicator are presented. In prior years, NOAC reported on the total number of page views and the total number of followers. This was amended for the 2020 reports and the results are now presented on a per capita basis to provide more useful data.

Overall, local authorities have shown improved performance in the following areas:

- ▶ Housing stock levels increased;
- ▶ Homeless adult levels decreased;
- ▶ Motor tax transactions conducted online increased;
- ▶ Certified and self-certified sick leave rates decreased;
- ▶ Housing loan collection levels increased;
- ▶ Revenue account deficits decreased.

The Process for the 2020 Report

On 15 February 2021, NOAC held its Performance Indicator Workshop to provide direction to data coordinators from local authorities on the 2020 report guidelines. The workshop was held online due to Covid restrictions.

On 15 April 2021, a further workshop was held virtually to cover the specific area of housing.

30 April was the closing date for the submission of data.

From June to August 2021, the data was validated and audited by NOAC.

Performance Indicators Validated in 2021 for 2020 Report

| No. | Indicator | Title |
|-----|-----------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | H3 | Average Re-letting Time and Direct Costs |
| 2 | E1 | Number/Percentage of dwellings with access to a 3 bin service |
| 3 | E6 | Public Lighting |
| 4 | C3 | Local authority website and social media usage |
| 5 | M3 | Public liability claims |
| 6 | M4 | Overheads |

Local Authorities Validated in 2021 for 2020 Report

| No. | Local Authority | Date |
|-----|-----------------------------------|--------------|
| 1 | Cork City Council | 23 June 2021 |
| 2 | Laois County Council | 25 June 2021 |
| 3 | Clare County Council | 13 July 2021 |
| 4 | Carlow County Council | 21 July 2021 |
| 5 | Tipperary County Council | 21 July 2021 |
| 6 | Waterford City and County Council | 28 July 2021 |

NOAC would like to thank the NOAC Secretariat, local authority coordinators who arranged the visits and the Chief Executives and other local authority staff who met with NOAC members in the course of the visits. The report noted that NOAC is broadly satisfied with the validity of the data of each local authority. This report is available in full at www.noac.ie

Validation meetings were held remotely with six local authorities. The process carried out an assessment of the accuracy and reliability of a subset of six indicators which were selected by members for a quality assurance review:

- ▶ H3 Average Re-letting Time and Direct Costs;
- ▶ E1 Number/Percentage of dwellings with access to a 3 bin service;
- ▶ E6 Public Lighting;
- ▶ C3 Local authority website and social media usage;
- ▶ M3 Public Liability Claims; and
- ▶ M4 Overheads.

The indicators were primarily selected to get a better understanding of the way that the data is compiled by the local authorities and in particular the validation process applied by local authorities in returning data as part of this process. The following councils were chosen and the dates of the meetings were as follows:

- ▶ Cork City Council on 23 June 2021;
- ▶ Laois County Council on 25 June 2021;
- ▶ Clare County Council on 13 July 2021;
- ▶ Carlow County Council on 21 July 2021;
- ▶ Tipperary County Council on 21 July 2021; and
- ▶ Waterford City and County Council on 28 July 2021.

NOAC conducted meetings with Chief Executives and/or their Management Team of the local authorities for a general discussion on overall performance issues and experience with the indicators, process and results. The local authorities provided the members with a brief overview of the context in which the authorities operate and their particular priorities and challenges.

These six meetings identified exemplars of good practice in local authorities. It provided clarity and context to the data and, in some cases, it identified incorrect data which was subsequently corrected.

Following verification of data and quality assurance review, NOAC prepared its report and published it on 30 September.

The 2020 keys messages include

H3: Average Re-letting Time and Cost.

This is already a challenging area for local authorities and the impact of Covid in 2020 placed further strain on improving performance in this area. Nationally the average re-letting time has increased from 28.17 weeks in 2019 to 32.96 weeks in 2020 and the average re-letting cost from €18,336 to €19,065. NOAC is aware that due to the pandemic, the cost of using contractors increased and public health measures may have resulted in longer turnaround times for properties.

It is evident from this year's validation visits that some local authorities are carrying properties for extended periods of time that can skew their overall performance in this indicator. The delay in bringing these properties to re-let standard can be for various reasons including legal impediments.

H6: Homeless Adults.

Tackling homelessness is a key priority for local authorities and one which in any year is challenging.

2020 is the first year since NOAC published its first Performance Indicators Report 2014, that there has been a decrease in both the number of adults in emergency accommodation and the number of adults in emergency accommodation that are long-term homeless. All of the city authorities confirmed a reduction in both categories and Dublin City Council, which returns figures for the four Dublin authorities, showed the largest decrease in both. Of particular note, is its decrease in the percentage of long-term homeless adults from 68.04% in 2019 to 16.93% in 2020. This reduction is a positive impact of Covid and as a result of specific measures introduced including the ban on evictions of tenants and increased bed capacity.

E1 – Households with Access to a 3 Bin Service.

In previous reports the percentage of households with access to a 3 bin service was based on the 2016 census household figures. For the 2020 report, NOAC amended this indicator to measure the percentage of households based on those in agglomerations of over 500. As such, the results for this year are not comparable to previous years. To address this, NOAC has also included the figures in this report using the previous methodology to aid in comparing performances in this transition year. This indicator was reviewed as part of NOAC's validation visits.

L1: Libraries.

The figures in the 2020 report show a dramatic decrease in the national average number of library visits per head of population from 3.57 in 2019 to 1.05 in 2020. This decrease is directly attributable to library closures in the year as a result of public health measures.

Although the national average for the number of items borrowed also decreased from almost 497,000 in 2019 to almost 347,000 in 2020, the drop is not as significant as the number of visits. Libraries made significant efforts to increase their online presence and two local authorities increased the number of items borrowed from 2019.

C3: Website and Social Media.

For the 2020 report NOAC amended how the figures for this indicator are presented. In prior years, NOAC reported on the total number of page views and the total number of followers. This was amended for the 2020 report and the results are now presented on a per capita basis to provide more useful data. This should enable greater comparison nationally and allow local authorities to more easily identify areas of potential performance improvement. Due to the impact of Covid, an increase in the use of local authority run websites was to be expected. However, due to a change in cookie monitoring policy during 2020, the ability for some local authorities to track page views was restricted. This in part can explain the drop in the national page views from 81 million in 2019 to 74 million in 2020. However, the number of social media users increased nationally from 3.1 million in 2019 to 3.9 million in 2020. Due to public health restrictions in place, local authorities placed a greater emphasis on improving the availability of services online and the use of social media to communicate with the public.

M1: Revenue Account Balances.

Due to the impact of Covid, further pressure was placed on local authority finances in 2020. Extra costs were incurred to continue to provide services and the reduction in rates income greatly impacted local authority finances notwithstanding grants received from central government. In 2020, all local authorities with deficits recorded deficit amounts have decreased.

The overall deficit for these authorities has decreased from €46 million in 2019 to €40 million in 2020.

M3: Public Liability Claims.

NOAC introduced this as a new indicator for 2020. The indicator measures the cost per capita of insurance claims for local authorities over a period of three years. The cost of insurance and settling claims impacts the available funds of local authorities to carry out other services. Data for this indicator was collected from local authorities and Irish Public Bodies (IPB). At the validation visits, NOAC noted the importance of managing insurance claims and ensuring risks are mitigated in so far as possible. Single large claims in a particular year can skew the per capita cost for local authorities and this is particularly relevant to smaller local authorities.

J1: Economic Development.

As set out in the 2019 report, in recent years local authorities have had an increased role in economic development through the creation of the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs). The LEOs provide advice, information and support to business in both starting a business and developing an existing business. There are 31 teams across the local authority network. Nationally, the results in the report shows a significant decline in the number of jobs created in 2020 across all 31 local authorities. There is no doubt that the reduction in jobs created is as a result of the restrictions imposed due to Covid.

The full report, press release, 2020 guidelines and the WG Chair's video on the 2020 report, together with the previous reports are all available on www.noac.ie

Trend Analysis

NOAC has carried out its seventh performance indicator report in its 2020 report. The information collected over this period provides sufficient opportunity to review trends in the data and to highlight and discuss the changes noted. Trend analysis can be valuable as an early warning indicator of potential problems. It can also show where improvements have been made year on year. Below are some of the trends outlined in the report:

Housing

Data for the ownership of dwellings was examined for the period of 2017 to 2020 and showed an increase in 'start of year ownerships' over the period of 5.35% and an increase of 'end of year ownership' of 5.80% over the same period.

The national average percentage of local authority dwellings that were vacant at the year-end decreased by 22% from 2015 to 2017 and then increased by 16.25% to 3.18% in 2020.

Overall, from 2014 to 2020 the time taken to re-let a dwelling increased by 4.00%. However, in the period from 2017 to 2019 it had fallen to 28.99, 27.75 and 28.17 weeks respectively. From 2014 to 2020, the costs involved in reletting a dwelling increased by 65.28%.

The average expenditure on dwelling repair and maintenance during the period decreased by 11.98% from 2014 to 2020. For the period from 2014 to 2020, the number of registered tenancies increased by 17.39%.

Roads

NOAC welcomes the trend that shows a very high and increasing percentage of roads being surveyed, however, it is noted that the Department of Transport requirement is to achieve 4 x 100% for the periods specified and this has not yet been achieved.

The kilometres of regional road strengthened rose from 362km in 2015 to 457km in 2020. In line with this, the amount expended on regional road strengthening work also rose from €48,078,678 in 2015 to €99,083,705. The kilometres of regional road resealed rose from 350km to 505km.

Nationally there has been a steady increase in online motor tax transactions going from 57.76% in 2014 to 81.52% in 2020.

Waste/Environment

NOAC amended this indicator for the 2020 report to measure the percentage of households based on those in agglomerations of over 500 instead of the 2016 census household figure as in previous years. The new method shows that 89.73% of households in an agglomeration over 500 availed of a 3 bin service. When based on households as per the 2016 census, the trend rose each year, from 22.09% in 2014 to 48.22% in 2020.

The median percentage of LA area within the five levels of litter pollution data has been consistent for the period of 2014 to 2020 and shows a lot of slight and moderately polluted areas ranging between 70% to 62% and 16% to 17% respectively. However, there is little incidence of significant pollution with a maximum of 2% in 2017. The level of no pollution has shown increases from 10% to 22%.

The percentage of schools that have been awarded green flag status fell from 51.41% in 2018 to 41.83% in 2020.

Planning

The Code of Practice for Inspecting and Certifying Buildings and Works (The Code) in relation to inspections of new buildings for which valid commencement notices have been received sets a minimum requirement of 12 – 15%. Since 2015, the median national figure has decreased from 24% in 2015 to 15.28% in 2020.

The cost per capita of the planning service indicator calculates the cost per capita of services provided by local authorities relating to planning and shows an overall increase of 19.98% from 2014 to 2020.

Fire Services

The per head cost of running a Fire Service increased over the period from 55.19% in 2014 to 62.69% in 2020.

For mobilisation times in relation to fire incidents, the full-time and retained fire stations showed small improvements to the times. Full-time station times improved by 12 seconds over the period from 2014 to 2020.

For retained stations, timings improved by 8 seconds over the same period. For mobilisation times in relation to other incidents, the full-time and part-time fire stations showed small improvements to the times with full-time station times improving by 20 seconds and retained station timings improving by 19 seconds over the same period.

Library/Recreational Services

The challenges presented by Covid in 2020 impacted on the performance of local authorities under this indicator. Due to public health measures libraries were forced to close for a significant period of time. After this, the reopening was on a reduced capacity basis with restricted access. This is evident in the significant reduction in library visits per head of population of 70.59% from 2019 to 2020.

Youth/Community

The national average percentage of local schools Involved in the Local Youth Council/ Comhairle na n-Óg Scheme increased from 51.86% to 63.29% over 2014 to 2020.

The national average percentage of organisations on the County Register at year end that opted to be Part of the Social Inclusion College within the PPN increased from 16.21% in 2019 to 16.33% in 2020.

Corporate

From 2014 to 2020, the average percentage of working days lost to certified leave decreased by 9.88%.

From 2014 to 2019, the usage of local authority websites increased by 76.84% over the entire period, with increases recorded for each year. This is until 2020 when there was a drop of 8.82% from 2019.

The national revenue account balance across the 31 local authorities has increased since 2016 from €29.24m to €62.79m in 2020. This is a very significant improvement over the period.

Since 2014 the national median percentage (%) commercial rates collected in a year has risen by 20.83% until 2019 and then fell to 77.10% in 2020.

Economic Development

Since 2014, the national total of jobs created with assistance from the LEOs has decreased significantly by 143% with a net of -1,494 after it peaked in 2018 at 3,656. This decrease can be attributed to the effects of Covid. The national total of trading online vouchers approved by the LEOs has increased by 1,035% since 2016 from 1,141 to 12,946.

Summary

The majority of indicators showed trends over the last number of years and, of those, most were positive. A number of indicators, however, showed no particular trend or pattern. NOAC is pleased with the improvements shown in various indicators. Where performance has decreased, NOAC would expect local authorities to focus on increasing performance in these areas while maintaining the upward trend in other areas. NOAC is mindful of the impact of Covid on local authorities in 2020 and the negative affect it had on performance in respect of certain indicators.

The Good Practice Seminar 2021

NOAC hosted the fourth Good Practice in Local Government seminar, on 9th November 2021 in Kilkenny Castle.

NOAC recognises that local authorities are continually seeking to innovate in their service delivery and citizen engagement. The now annual NOAC Good Practice in Local Government seminar, was opened by Peter Burke, T.D., Minister of State for Planning and Local Government, in the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. The seminar was included for the first time as part of the DPER Innovation week and was held both in-person and virtually.

This event organised by NOAC, in collaboration with the Local Government Management Agency, showcased a range of local authority innovations across areas such as climate action, public consultation and citizen interaction. It is acknowledged that local authorities had a lot of practical experience in demonstrating excellence and that it was appropriate, and indeed vital, that they shared that knowledge with each other. On the day, the Chair of NOAC acknowledged that the projects chosen for the seminar were just a sample of the innovations happening throughout the country.

The event is one of the important roles where NOAC is supporting the development and enhancement of good practice by local government bodies. The closing remarks were provided by Brendan McGrath, Chair of the County and City Management Association and Chief Executive of Galway City Council.

The seminar hosted the projects which were on show by the local authorities during the day:



Mayo County Council delivered its Weather Impact Register App (WIRE), which uses a GIS based tool for local authorities to record and review the impacts of weather events and climate trends in their areas, which is of use to inform climate adaptation planning into the future.

Galway City Council brought the audience through its URDF (Urban Regeneration and Development Fund): A journey through collaboration, whereby it engaged in dialogue with a number of potential partners in the City to develop a number of connected and interlinked projects for investment in compact growth in the city that will unlock and support public and private investment and fast-track the integrated sustainable growth of the City core.

Meath County Council presented on its Sustainable Development Goals at Local Level. The Council nominated Trim to work with 18 other locations within Europe on this pilot project. It involves volunteers and community workers in Trim feeding input on their local information into this project. The ultimate goal is to achieve an Integrated Action Plan (IAP) that could be replicated across other towns or scaled up to county level.

Dun-Laoghaire Rathdown (DLR) County Council used technology to full effect for its virtual County Development Plan. This involved setting up a virtual room to facilitate online consultation and access to the DLR Draft County Development Plan 2022-2028. This allowed those who could not view the plan in person due to Covid restrictions to view it in a similar layout online.

Longford County Council showcased its development of a network of rural working hubs. These will be a key component in creating sustainable and vibrant rural communities in the County and providing commuters and start-ups/ entrepreneurs with the opportunity to relocate to a workspace close to where they live.

Cork City Council outlined its streetscape development to meet the needs of businesses and communities during Covid using extensive partnership structures including transport, Gardaí, elected members and business representative organisations. Changes were based on agreed principles and as a result 17 streets have been permanently pedestrianised and 4.7km of cycle routes have been installed.

Fingal County Council provided a Chatbot to deliver information to citizens and businesses regarding its response to Covid. During a time when offices were closed to the public, the chatbot offered another information channel for the public in addition to phone, website and social media, with the added benefit of being available at a time and place of the citizen's choosing.

All presentations, including videos and slides are available on our NOAC website www.noac.ie



Public Spending Code Report 2020: Report No 45

The Public Spending Code was developed by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and it applies to all public bodies in receipt of public funds. All Irish public bodies are obliged to treat public funds with care, and to ensure that the best possible value for money is obtained whenever public money is being spent or invested.

In February 2021, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) published the fourth version of the Public Spending Code (PSC) Quality Assurance (QA) Requirements – A Guidance Note for the Local Government Sector.

As local authority funding derives from a number of sources, including grants from several Government Departments, it was decided that the Chief Executives of individual local authorities should be responsible for carrying out the quality assurance requirements and that their reports should be submitted to NOAC for incorporation in a composite report for the local government sector.

The original letter issued on 11 March 2021 to local authority Chief Executives and requested them to submit their 2020 Quality Assurance reports by 28 May 2021. Of the 31 local authorities, 24 submitted their reports by the deadline. The Quality Assurance reporting requirement consists of the following five steps:

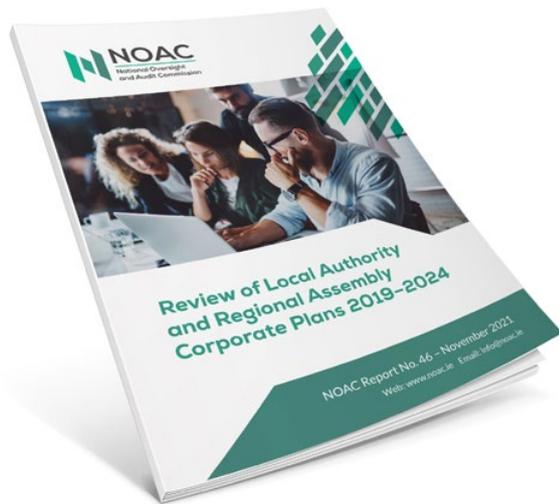
1. Local authorities should draw up an inventory of projects/programmes at the different stages of the Project Life Cycle, in respect of all capital and current expenditure projects to a value greater than €0.5m.
2. Confirm publication on the local authority's website of summary information on all procurements in excess of €10m related to projects in progress or completed in the year under review and provide a link to the relevant website location.
3. Complete the seven specified checklists. Only one of each type of checklist per local authority is required and not one per each project/programme. The completion of the checklists is to be based on an appropriate sample of the projects/ areas of expenditure relevant to that checklist.
4. Carry out a more in-depth review of selected projects/programmes such that, over a 3-5 year period, every stage of the project life-cycle and every scale of project will be subject to a closer examination. Revenue projects selected for in-depth review must represent a minimum of 1% of the total value of all revenue projects in the inventory, while the requirement in respect of capital projects is 5% of the total value of all capital projects in the inventory.

5. Complete a short summary report consisting of the inventory, procurement reference and checklists referenced in steps 1 to 3 and the local authority's judgment as to the adequacy of the appraisal/planning, implementation or review work that it examined as part of step 4. The reasons why it formed that judgment and its proposals to remedy any inadequacies found during the entire quality assurance process are also required.

Chief Executives certified 28 Quality Assurance Reports while three Quality Assurance Reports were certified by Acting/Interim Chief Executives. The Code requires that the Quality Assurance reports be published on the organisation's website. All 31 local authorities complied.

WG4 compiled and published the seventh Public Spending Code report for the local government sector in November 2021.

The full report and previous years reports are available on www.noac.ie



Review of Local authority and Regional Assembly Corporate Plans 2019 – 2024: Report No 46

One of the statutory functions of NOAC includes monitoring the adequacy of corporate plans prepared by the 31 local authorities and 3 Regional Assemblies. With that in mind, NOAC undertook a review of the current Corporate Plans of those organisations for the period 2019 – 2024.

The objective of this was to review the quality of the current plans and to support the development of best practice for future plans. A framework was established for the review that included identification of areas for improvement and examples of best practices under various themes within the plans.

A final report was published in November 2021. It incorporated a review of the process for developing the plans and the contents of the plans.

Relating to process, the areas of pre-plan consultation and ongoing monitoring of implementation were considered. The report also commented on how the Corporate Plans were integrated with other local government policies and strategies to ensure that there was appropriate linkages.

The review of the content included the visions set out and how these were to be achieved through specific goals. It also dealt with how the Plans were to be financially resourced and the risks environment.

Specific examples of good practice were highlighted under various headings, so that these could be replicated as appropriate in future corporate plans.

NOAC considers this report to be a key output for 2021 and further supports the development of best practice in corporate planning in local authorities. NOAC discusses the recommendations at the scrutiny meetings with individual local authorities.

The full report is available on www.noac.ie

NOAC Engagement

Meeting with the Tánaiste and review of the Local Enterprise Offices

NOAC has continued its engagement with various stakeholders across the local government sector. Among those stakeholders are the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs), which are crucial to local authority economic development.

With this in mind, in January 2021 the NOAC Chair, Michael McCarthy met with the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, (DETE) Leo Varadkar T.D. At the engagement, NOAC explained its functions and remit and referred to its publication of the annual local authority Performance Indicator reports and Customer Satisfaction Survey reports which provide detailed information on the work of local authorities in relation to local enterprise and LEOs.

NOAC outlined ways in which it will continue to provide an important oversight role of local authority activities for the future. Indeed, it has begun its process of an examination of the LEOs and has formulated a questionnaire to ascertain a fuller picture of their workings. This questionnaire will be issued in 2022 and on receipt of the relevant information, this area will be explored in greater depth.

Meeting with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform

In February 2021, a representative of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) was invited to attend a meeting of the NOAC Board.

The DPER official gave a presentation outlining the challenges to government from Covid and Brexit.

The presentation gave the key aspects of budget 2021 and the projected deficit as a percentage of GDP.

The meeting was important for NOAC to give it a broader understanding of how local government stands in a myriad of other stakeholders and to discuss financial issues relating to the sector.

Meeting with the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA)

In April 2021, the NOAC Chair met with representatives of the LGMA. In 2020, NOAC had completed a 3 year programme of local authority Satisfaction Surveys and the associated 3 year infographic report.

It had been agreed that the LGMA would take over the development of the following local authority Satisfaction Survey.

NOAC and the LGMA met to discuss the future of these reports. NOAC wished to maintain an oversight role in the delivery of this survey given its statutory remit and experience in this area. NOAC continues to engage with the LGMA as the future report progresses.

Further meetings

During the year and to progress the NOAC remit, the Chair had meetings with various other interested stakeholders, including a number of Senators and Ministers of State in his capacity as Chair of NOAC.

Resources and Expenditure

NOAC is supported by a Secretariat, staffed with a full-time equivalent of 5. The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage provide the staff. However, the Secretariat held a full time vacancy at senior level for most of 2021.

These staff support NOAC and manage its work programme, along with other duties. NOAC is funded from the Local Government Fund and its allocation from that Fund in 2021 was €350,000.

Expenditure

NOAC expenditure for 2021 was €138,538.74 which was incurred as follows;

| 2021 Budget - €350,000.00 | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| Expenditure | Amount |
| Member Fees (including PRSI) | €68,124.36* |
| Travel and Subsistence | €7,384.39** |
| Research | €28,796.02 |
| Printing and Publishing | €17,431.90 |
| NOAC Workshops | €9,942.73 |
| Communications | €6,480.04 |
| Other (Miscellaneous Expenses) | €379.30 |
| | Expenditure |
| TOTAL | €138,538.74 |

The members consider this statement of expenditure to be a true and fair view of NOAC spending during 2021.

*The annual fees payable to members of NOAC, excluding the Officer of the Minister, are: Member: €7,695. Chairperson: €11,970.

** Travel and subsistence expenses incurred are paid at standard civil service rates.

Appendices

Appendix 1:

| Attendance at NOAC Board Meetings | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-------|
| Member | 19/01/2021 | 23/02/2021 | 23/03/2021 | 27/04/2021 | 25/05/2021 | 20/07/2021 | 07/09/2021 | 02/11/2021 | 07/12/2021 | Total |
| Michael McCarthy | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 9 |
| Constance Hanniffy | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ | ✓ | ✗ | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | 3 |
| Declan Breathnach | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ | 4 |
| Martina Moloney | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | 5 |
| Noel Harrington | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ | 4 |
| Ciaran Hayes | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 4 |
| Margaret Lane | ✓ | ✗ | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ | 5 |
| Niall Quinn | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ | ✓ | ✓ | 7 |
| Brian Cawley | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ | ✓ | 8 |
| Philomena Poole | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ | 3 |
| Mary Hurley | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ | 7 |

Appendix 2:

Terms of Reference of NOAC

NOAC was established under the Local Government Act 2001 (the Act) (as amended by the Local Government Reform Act 2014) with effect from 1st July 2014. NOAC has adopted a corporate governance regime in accordance with best practice.

The purpose of this document is to set out the terms of reference of NOAC. These terms of reference, approved by NOAC on 4 July 2017, are effective from 1 July 2017.

1. Membership

Members of NOAC shall be appointed by the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government in accordance with section 126H of the Act. The Commission shall be made up of at least 6 members.

Only members of NOAC have the right to attend Board meetings. However, the staff of the secretariat and other individuals may be invited to attend for all or part of any meeting, as and when appropriate or necessary.

Appointments to NOAC shall be for a period of up to 5 years, which may be extended for one further period of up to 5 years.

In the absence of the Chairperson, the remaining members present shall agree one of their number to chair the meeting.

2. NOAC Secretariat

NOAC's secretariat will ensure that the members receive information and papers in a timely manner to enable full and proper consideration to be given to the issues.

The secretariat is also responsible for the formal induction of new NOAC members and organising mentoring for members where required.

3. Quorum

The quorum necessary for the transaction of business shall be 4 members. A duly convened meeting of NOAC at which a quorum is present shall be competent to exercise all or any of the authorities, powers and discretions exercisable by NOAC.

4. Frequency of Meetings

NOAC shall meet at least 8 times a year, and as otherwise required.

5. Notice of Meetings

Meetings of NOAC shall be summoned by the secretariat at the request of the Chairperson.

Where at all possible, notice of each meeting confirming the venue, time and date, together with an agenda of items to be discussed, shall be forwarded to the members no later than two working days before the date of the meeting. Supporting papers shall be sent to the members at the same time.

6. Minutes of Meetings

The secretariat shall minute the proceedings, discussions and decisions of all meetings of NOAC, including recording the names of those present and in attendance.

Minutes of NOAC meetings shall be circulated to all members for approval at the next NOAC meeting.

7. Duties

The day-to-day running of NOAC shall be carried out by the secretariat who will report on the work as appropriate by email and at NOAC meetings.

The members shall advise and support the secretariat.

NOAC shall satisfy itself that financial controls and systems of risk management are robust and defensible.

NOAC shall keep itself up to date and fully informed about strategic issues and changes affecting it and the environment in which it operates.

NOAC shall ensure that on appointment, members receive a formal letter of appointment setting out clearly what is expected of them in terms of time commitment, sub-group service and involvement outside NOAC meetings.

NOAC may, from time to time, establish such sub-groups of NOAC as are necessary to assist it in the performance of its duties. They may include members who are not members of NOAC if specialist skills are required. Where a sub-group is put in place:

- ▶ the terms of reference shall be specified in writing and approved by NOAC and reviewed annually;
- ▶ NOAC, on the nomination of the Chairperson, shall appoint its members;
- ▶ NOAC shall receive reports from the sub-group that reflect activity undertaken by the group;
- ▶ all protocols concerning the operation of NOAC shall be applied to a sub-group;
- ▶ notes of sub-group meetings shall be circulated to all NOAC members.

NOAC shall review the results of its performance evaluation process that relate to the composition of NOAC and corporate governance generally.

NOAC shall keep under review corporate governance developments (including ethics-related matters) that might affect the State body, with the aim of ensuring that its corporate governance policies and practices continue to be in line with best practice.

NOAC shall ensure that the principles and provisions set out in the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies (and any other corporate governance codes that apply to it) are adhered to.

8. Reporting Responsibilities

NOAC shall keep the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage informed, outside of the Annual Report exercise, of significant matters arising within the State body.

9. Other

NOAC shall, at least once a year, review its own performance, constitution and terms of reference to ensure it is operating at maximum effectiveness and implement any changes it considers necessary.

10. Authority

NOAC is authorised to obtain, at its own expense, outside legal or other professional advice where the members judge it necessary to discharge their responsibilities as members of NOAC.

