

**ANNUAL
REPORT**
2020



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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 2020.

Since our establishment, our goal has always been to ensure that NOAC is the main body that scrutinises performance and encourages improvements in local government services.

NOAC is recognised as an organisation that drives positive reform. Central to this is making sure that local government delivers value for money while adhering to proper governance. NOAC also ensures that it supports the best practices that are central to the work of local authorities.

For 2020, NOAC is particularly conscious of the impact of COVID-19 on local authorities. NOAC acknowledges the extra burden this placed on local authorities with the reduction in revenues and additional strain put on resources. Local authorities set up community response forums in order to co-ordinate local services and improve access to them under the Community Call launched in April 2020. This has been an unprecedented mobilisation of resources. As a result, NOAC engaged with the sector, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) as to its immediate and longer term effect on the work of the sector and its financing. This work is ongoing and will continue into 2021.

The NOAC board suspended meetings for a period of time in April 2020 to allow the potential redeployment of staff from the NOAC Secretariat to assist in the fight against COVID-19, however, work continued while meetings were paused. When meetings recommenced, it was under a new landscape of remote working. Through the use of technology NOAC was able to continue with its work and I would like to thank the NOAC Secretariat for its assistance in ensuring the board could continue its important work.

The reports published by NOAC over 2020 represent a considerable amount of information and comment on local authority performance for the year and provide an invaluable resource not only to the local authorities themselves but also to various government departments that operate through the authorities and to the wider public that are affected by how well their local authority carries out its functions.

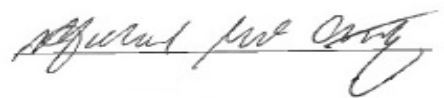
NOAC's Performance Indicator report continues to develop and evolve and illustrates the good performance by local authorities since the first report in 2014.

In 2018 NOAC commissioned a citizen satisfaction survey of the 31 local authorities. This work was undertaken over three years, completing in 2020. The report published in 2020 looked at the national picture and illustrated the public's perception of local authorities under various headings including the perception of the council and satisfaction with important services.

NOAC hosted its third Good Practice in Local Government seminar in 2020. Due to the restriction of COVID-19 the 2020 event was hosted virtually for the first time. The seminar allows local authorities to share good practices they have adopted. I would like to thank Minister Darragh O'Brien TD who provided the opening address and the individual contributors for their time and effort in participating in the event.

Five board members retired in the year and I would like to thank them for their hard work and dedication to NOAC over the period of their terms. NOAC also welcomed four new members in 2020 and I look forward to working with them into the future.

I wish to express my gratitude to the NOAC Secretariat, the Chief Executives, liaison officials and performance indicator coordinators of the 31 local authorities for complying with the various requests for information made by NOAC during 2020. I would also like 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 supported NOAC in its work over the last year.



Michael McCarthy
Chairperson

2021

Executive Summary

This report was approved by the members of NOAC on 27 April 2021.

This is the seventh annual report of the National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC), covering the period 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2020.

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 2020, NOAC published several reports and documents and hosted workshops including:

- ▶ Local Authority Customer Satisfaction Survey 2020;
- ▶ Customer Satisfaction Survey 2018- 2020 Infographic Report;
- ▶ Good Practice Seminar 2020;
- ▶ Local Authority Performance Indicator Report 2019 and Guidelines Workshop;
- ▶ Public Spending Code Report 2019

Key activities of NOAC include Performance Indicators, Corporate Plans, Public Spending Code 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. By 2020 the process of reviewing local authorities has become more structured, formal and documented. It continues to be led by the Chair of NOAC, with support from NOAC members and the Secretariat.

During 2020 NOAC had 6 scrutiny meetings planned. However, due to the COVID restrictions it was only possible for the Chair to attend 3 Stage 1 meetings in Monaghan, Limerick and Sligo.

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 to answer questions from board members on the various items including information contained in the profile report. In 2020 there was six Stage 2 meetings. The first 2 were held in the Custom House but due to COVID further meetings were held remotely.

The third and final Customer Satisfaction Survey Report, conducted in February/March 2020, and published in September 2020, was carried out in the remaining 10 local authorities: Carlow, Laois, Longford, Offaly, Westmeath, Leitrim, Roscommon, Sligo, Cavan and Monaghan. This report looked at the national picture from the three annual surveys published.

In November 2020 NOAC, in conjunction with the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA), hosted the third Good Practice in Local Government seminar. Over the years these have allowed local authorities to share the good practices adopted to deliver better services and to respond to the needs of the communities they serve. As a result of the COVID-19 restrictions, this year's event had to be hosted virtually. However, this enabled the event to reach a wider audience.

On the day Minister Darragh O'Brien provided the opening address. He acknowledged that local authorities had responded to the challenges presented with technological innovations, by altering internal services and business processes and adapting how they provide public services, advice, and guidance.

In December 2020 NOAC published its Local Authority Performance Indicator Report 2019, NOAC's sixth 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. Due to COVID-19 these reviews were undertaken remotely.

In late December 2020, NOAC published the Public Spending Code: Local Authority Quality Assurance Report 2019. 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.

And finally, NOAC carried out a review on the impact of COVID-19 on local authorities. As part of that review, NOAC has met with the County and City Management Association (CCMA), the Local Government Finance team in the DHLGH and DPER to hear what the impact has been and how it has been addressed.

NOAC will continue to monitor this into 2021 and beyond.

NOAC Membership

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

At the end of 2020, there were seven board members on the NOAC Board.

The term of Tara Buckley ended on 30 June 2020.

Mary Hurley was appointed as a board member and the Officer of the Minister on 21 July 2020 replacing Barry Quinlan whose term ended on 20 July 2020.

The terms of Sharon O'Connor, David Holohan, and Michael McGreal ended on 18 October 2020.

The NOAC Chairperson, Board Members and Secretariat thank the outgoing members for their hard work over the course of their terms.

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	Constance Hanniffy	01/07/2014	01/07/2019	30/06/2021
	Martina Moloney	01/07/2014	01/07/2016	30/06/2021
	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
	Tara Buckley	01/07/2014	01/07/2017	term ended 30/06/2020
	Barry Quinlan	22/05/2019	N/A	term ended 20/07/2020
	Sharon O'Connor	21/10/2016	19/10/2018	term ended 18/10/2020
	David Holohan	21/10/2016	19/10/2018	term ended 18/10/2020
	Michael McGreal	21/10/2016	19/10/2018	term ended 18/10/2020

Member Biographies



Michael McCarthy, Chairperson

Term Dates: 24 September 2018 – 23 September 2023.

Michael is the former CEO of the Irish Solar Energy Association. He was appointed as Chairperson 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 Dail 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.

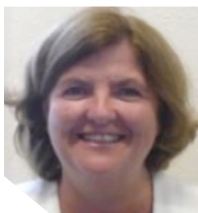
Constance Hanniffy is a graduate of NUI Galway and holds a BA (Hons) in Community and Family Studies. She was an elected member of Offaly County Council from 1974 to 2014 and a member of the Midlands Regional Authority from 1994 to 2014. She was also a member of the Irish delegation to the Committee 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 & 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, Eirvia (Parent company for Gas Networks Ireland and Irish Water). Her previous posts include HR Executive Roles, Board Gais Group, 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 barrister working in general practice on the Dublin, Eastern and Northern Circuits. Prior to commencing practice at the Bar he was a strategic communications specialist for almost 20 years and is 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.



Barry Quinlan

Term Dates: 22 May 2019 – 20 July 2020.

Barry Quinlan is an Assistant Secretary, heading up Local Government Division, at the Department of Housing; Planning and Local Government. After beginning his career in the private sector Barry has now over twenty years' experience working in the Civil Service. He has worked in the Housing; Planning and Local Government Divisions of the Department. Prior to returning to the Local Government Division Barry worked on housing policy and housing delivery. Barry has worked on Rebuilding Ireland; the Social Housing Strategy; the Housing Assistance Payment Programme; Public Sector Reform; Putting People First; New Local Authority Structures; LG Efficiency Review Implementation; Work-Force Planning; Shared Services; HR initiatives and IR negotiation and change management.



Tara Buckley

Term Dates: 1 July 2014 – 30 June 2020.

Tara Buckley is Director General of RGDATA (Retail Grocery Dairy & Allied Trades Association) which represents the interests of 4,000 Irish family-owned shops, convenience stores and supermarkets. A graduate of Trinity College Dublin and former journalist and political correspondent, Tara is a member of the Government's Retail Consultation Forum; the Brexit Forum at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, the Garda Strategic Retail Forum; the National Waste Management Forum; the Retail Forum at the Food Safety Authority and the National Planning Framework Advisory Group.



Sharon O'Connor

Term Dates: 21 October 2016 – 18 October 2020.

Sharon O'Connor is Chairperson of the Northern Ireland Education Authority since April 2015 and was previously Chief Executive of Derry City Council from 2011 to 2015. She is a member of the Accounts Commission Scotland. She has had over 20 years' experience as a Chartered Director, Non-Executive Director, Vice Chairperson, Committee Chairperson and Board Member and in 2009/10 was the Institute of Directors, Public Sector Director of the Year.



David Holohan

Term Dates: 21 October 2016 – 18 October 2020.

David Holohan (BCOMM, MBA, APA, C Dir, M.Inst.D, CMgr FCMI, Chartered FCSI) is Head of Equity Strategy at Mediolanum Asset Management. He was previously Chief Investment Officer at Merrion Capital and has worked in asset management firms and hedge funds, both in London and Dublin. David holds an MBA with merit from Imperial College London, is a Chartered Fellow of the Chartered Institute for Securities & Investment (UK), also a Chartered Fellow of the Chartered Management Institute (UK), a Chartered Director (UK) and Member of the Institute of Directors (Ireland). He was appointed to the Board of the HPRA by the Minister for Health in January 2016. David is Chairperson of the Governing Body of IADT and is Chairperson of the Board of the charity One in Four.



Michael McGreal

Term Dates: 21 October 2016 – 18 October 2020.

Michael McGreal was the Company Deputy Chairperson of IPB Insurance CLG until 31 December 2018 and Chairperson of the Board Remuneration and Nomination Committee. He was a member of Roscommon County Council from 1985 -2014 and served as Chairperson of the Council. Michael was a member of the West Regional and the BMW Regional Authority's. He was also a member of the Board of Inland Fisheries Ireland and an alternate member of the Committee of the Regions from 2010 to 2014. Michael holds a Diploma in Corporate Governance from UCD Michael Smurfit Business School and is a member of the Institute of Directors.

NOAC Working Groups

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

NOAC Working Groups			
Title	Code	Membership 2020	Membership 2021
LG Governance, Efficiency and Reform	WG1: LGER	Sharon O'Connor	Brian Cawley
		Michael McGreal	Niall Quinn
		Constance Hanniffy	Constance Hanniffy
Performance Indicators	WG2: PI	Martina Moloney	Martina Moloney
		Constance Hanniffy	Constance Hanniffy
		Sharon O'Connor	Brian Cawley
Communications and Customer Survey	WG3: CCS	Tara Buckley	Niall Quinn
			Margaret Lane
			Michael McCarthy
Financial Management and Performance	WG4: FMP	Barry Quinlan	Margaret Lane
		Martina Moloney	Martina Moloney
		David Holohan	Mary Hurley
Chair	CHAIR	Michael McCarthy	Michael McCarthy

Working group membership changed during 2020 due the ending of terms of board members and the commencement of the new members.

The adopted Strategy and Framework Work Programme as well as the Multi Annual Work Programme for the period 2020-2022 realigned the previous working group structure from seven to four to ensure that they have a more sustainable workload and are aligned with the actions.

WG1: Local Government Governance, Efficiency and Reform Working Group

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.

Review of Corporate Plans 2015 – 2019

In May 2020 NOAC furnished local authorities with a questionnaire 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 for each objective/goal outlining progress in the delivery of objectives, highlighting areas of best practice and any underachievement, with explanation, together with any changes in priorities during the period.

The questionnaire issued during a time when significant numbers were in the first few months of remote working due to COVID restrictions and many co-ordinators cited difficulties at getting the information or understanding the request. The data on implementation submitted by the local authorities is being analysed, however based on the data returned it is clear that the interpretation of strategic objectives and goals is different between different local authorities and that for the future some standardisation in format and approach will need to be considered.

Local Authority Corporate Plans 2020 – 2024

Local authorities are required to prepare a corporate plan within six months of the annual meeting in a local election year. Guidance on the preparation of Corporate Plans for 2020 – 2024 issued from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage to local authorities in August 2019. Corporate Plans were subsequently submitted by local authorities to NOAC for the purpose of a review. Understandably, due to the COVID situation, there have been significant changes across the local authority sector, which has impinged on the Corporate Plans.

NOAC will be assessing those plans by considering the impact of COVID and will also be reviewing on the adequacy and the extent to which the Plans took account of the 2020 – 2024 Guidelines. These details are being examined by NOAC and an update will be prepared on this in due course.

Meeting with the Directors of Regional Assemblies

A meeting was held on the 14 September 2020 between NOAC and the Directors of the three Regional Assemblies (Northern & Western Regional Assembly, Southern Regional Assembly and Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly).

NOAC discussed areas of mutual interest to it and the Assemblies. These include Regional Assembly Corporate Plans and the performance of Regional Assemblies in carrying out their role in relation to the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES). Other relevant areas of discussion included the governance and structures of Regional Assemblies. Further collaboration will take place to progress these areas in the coming year.

WG2: Performance Indicators

The working group's mandate is to recommend appropriate performance indicators in respect of local authority activity, and to oversee the data collection, verification, compilation and publication of a report on those indicators annually.

Performance Indicators

The performance indicators consist of 39 measurable values that demonstrate how effectively a local authority is achieving key objectives.

To date the Working Group has published six 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.

The working group compiled the guidelines for the report in early 2020 based on the learning from the previous year's report, changes in methodology for existing indicators and the development of new indicators.

On 15 February 2020 NOAC held its' Performance Indicators Workshop to provide further direction to data coordinators from local authorities on the 2019 report guidelines.

Last year, in respect of the 2019 report, NOAC increased the number of indicators from 37 to 39 with the addition of a new water indicator regarding the percentage of registered schemes monitored and a new waste / environment indicator to establish the percentage of energy savings by local authorities. It also added two additional data points in respect of the existing library Indicators to measure the number of active library members per head of population and the annual expenditure per capita on new stock.

The LGMA, which collected the data on NOAC's behalf using the LGRReturns system, also provided a commentary on the indicators which was included as an appendix to the 2019 Performance Indicators report.

After a follow up on individual data items with local authorities by the NOAC Secretariat, the working group held meetings remotely with six local authorities and carried out an assessment of the accuracy and reliability of a subset of indicators.

Research

NOAC engaged the services of Seán Ó'Riordáin and Associates (SORA) to undertake research into expanding impact measurement and indicators of economic development activity by local authorities in Ireland. The work involved a review of the activities of the 31 local authorities in the area of economic development including tourism development, and recommending appropriate indicators that the NOAC could use in its Performance Indicator reports to measure local authority economic activity and to supplement existing indicators of Local Enterprise Office Activities and Tourism.

The Working Group held meetings with SORA and agreed the approach and work to be undertaken.

A representative from the LGMA joined in these discussions and NOAC would like to thank them for their valuable contribution. The draft report was reviewed by the Working Group towards the end of 2020.

The final report will be submitted to the full NOAC board for approval in 2021.

WG3: Communications and Customer Survey Working Group

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 126C(1) (c) to support the development and enhancement of best practice.

The Working Group determines the activities or functions that should be the subject of surveys, develops requests for proposals, reviews and questionnaires.

Highlights of the work undertaken by this Working Group in 2020 include the:

The Customer Satisfaction Survey Report 2020 published in September 2020

NOAC commissioned IPSOS/MRBI, to carry out a citizen satisfaction survey of all 31 local authorities over a three-year period. The first survey, in 2018, surveyed the 10 largest local authorities. These were Dublin City, Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown, Fingal, South Dublin, Cork County, Limerick, Galway County, Kildare, Meath and Tipperary.

The second survey, in 2019, was undertaken with the 10 medium sized local authorities and Galway City.

Those ten were comprised of Kilkenny, Louth, Wexford, Wicklow, Clare, Cork City, Kerry, Waterford City and County, Galway City, Mayo and Donegal. It was published in July 2019.

The third and final annual survey, conducted in February/March 2020, and published in September 2020, was carried out in the remaining 10 local authorities: Carlow, Laois, Longford, Offaly, Westmeath, Leitrim, Roscommon, Sligo, Cavan and Monaghan.

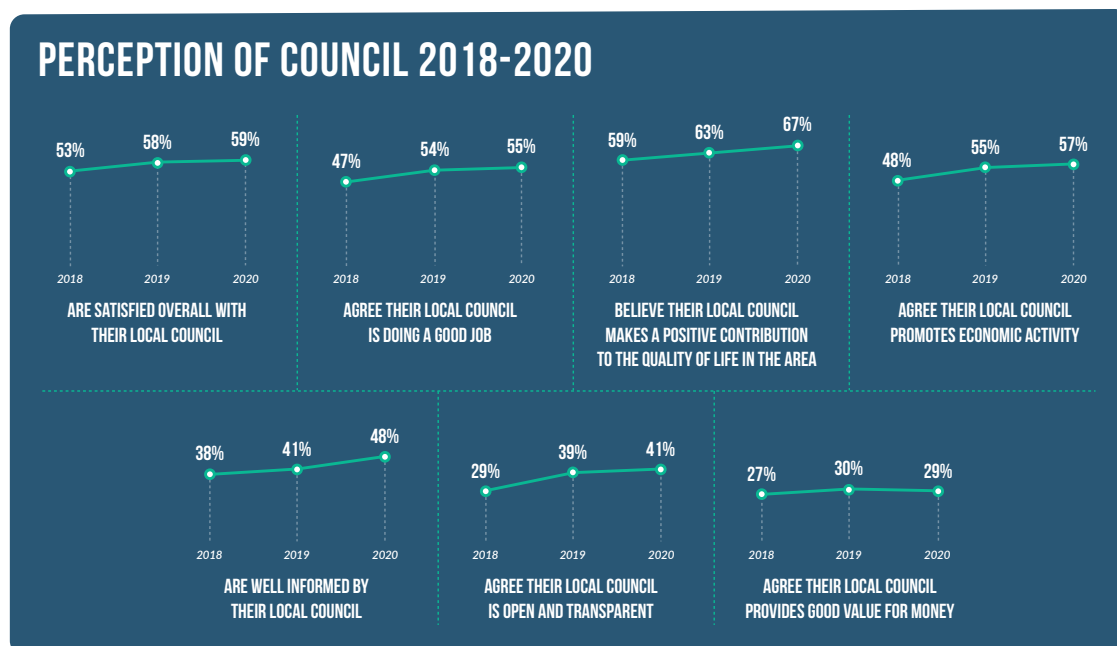
The survey was conducted using the same questions and same sample size as the previous surveys. The survey can be found on the noac.ie website under "publications".

Findings of the Local Authority Satisfaction Survey 2020:

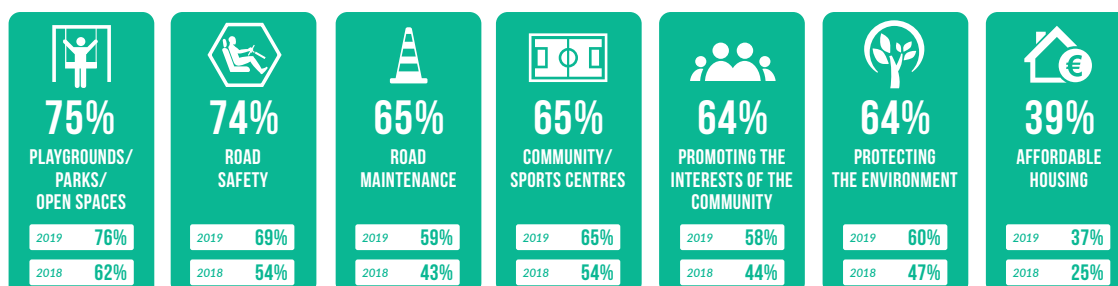
- ▶ Overall satisfaction with Councils in 2020 was at 59% whilst Sligo topped the list at 68%.
- ▶ Satisfaction with road safety and road maintenance was higher across Councils surveyed in 2020 at 74% and 65% respectively. Westmeath polled the highest in this category at 88% and 84% respectively.
- ▶ Over half of those surveyed believe their Council is doing a good job, both Westmeath (71%) and Sligo (68%) polled above average in this category.
- ▶ 29% of respondents think that their Council provides good value for money. Offaly was above average in this category at 41%.
- ▶ 39% surveyed were satisfied with affordable housing services provided by their local authority. Roscommon was above average in this category at 50%.
- ▶ 6 in 10 people contacted their local authority in person when surveyed in February/March prior to Covid-19 restrictions.

Customer Satisfaction Survey 2018-2020 Infographic Report Published in September 2020

This report looked at the national picture from the three annual surveys published. The report, illustrated in the summary infographic shows:



SATISFACTION WITH TOP IMPORTANT SERVICES



MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS FOR MAKING SOMEWHERE A GOOD PLACE TO LIVE



New logo/branding and the development of a new website

NOAC was set up in July 2014 and over the course of time it was deemed by the board that it needed its own corporate identity. This matter was considered in 2018 but under Working Group 3 in late 2019 a tender was prepared and issued for a new logo/branding and for the development of a new website.

In conjunction with a contractor, work commenced on this task. A new logo was adopted by the board in July and the new website was launched in October.

NOAC now uses the logo for all its reports, correspondence and at its online events during 2020.

The new website has provided NOAC with an improved online presence to interact with users. This is where details of our publications, work programmes, recorded seminars, work events and more are outlined. The website has been used extensively by many of NOAC's customers, particularly in the local government sector. NOAC has been monitoring the use of the website and is satisfied with the number of visitors to date. Work will continue in 2021 in this area to make improvements and provide greater content.

The Good Practice Seminar 2020

On 4th November 2020 NOAC, in conjunction with the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA), hosted the third Good Practice in Local Government seminar. Over the years these have allowed local authorities to share the good practices adopted to deliver better services and to respond to the needs of the communities they serve.

As a result of the COVID-19 restrictions, this year's event had to be hosted virtually. However, this enabled the event to reach a wider audience. On the day Minister Darragh O'Brien provided the opening address. He acknowledged that local authorities had responded to the challenges presented with technological innovations, by altering internal services and business processes and adapting how they provide public services, advice, and guidance.

While COVID was an important topic, the seminar explained some of the many good practice projects which are taking place throughout the local authority sector:

Wexford County Council's focus on Key Performance Indicators has benefited economic and community development throughout the county. This has yielded results in the collection levels of commercial rates, rents and annuities, and housing loans.

Offaly County Library Service

undertook one of the first pilots of the innovative My Open Library service in Ireland. This service offers extended opening hours to library members for 365 days of the year.

A presentation was delivered on the increasing use of drone technology by **Wicklow Civil Defence** to carry out a range of tasks including national search activities, fire monitoring assistance and area reports after severe weather events or flooding.

Dublin City Council discussed Circular Economy Training for Small and Micro Enterprises. MODOS is a Circular Economy training programme designed for micro-enterprises and SMEs in Ireland. The pilot included seven companies. During 2020, the programme has been expanded nationally with a Dublin MODOS programme and a National MODOS programme.

The local government sector is critical for the implementation of national climate change policy at local level. The challenges led to the development of a strategic plan for the sector, "Delivering Effective Climate Action 2030". This was the focus of the presentation delivered by Sligo County Council.

Limerick City and County Council dealt with the theme of Championing Culture and Creativity. A focus on excellence in the creative process and supporting this across art forms provides professional artists with opportunities to engage with audiences in communities and across generations.

Cork County Council have developed additional socially inclusive initiatives for older people including the production of a positive-ageing webinar. The Council also enlightened the group with its teen talk, which focused on supporting parents with issues affecting teenagers in 2020.

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

WG4: Financial Management and Performance

The group was established to progress NOAC's function under section 126C(1) (b) of the Local Government Act 2014 to scrutinise the financial performance, including in relation to value for money, of local authorities in respect of their financial resources.

In 2020, this working group subsumed the work of the Public Spending Code Working Group and published the Public Spending Code: Local Authority Assurance 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. 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.

Chair

Other than the working groups a number of activities are carried directly under the supervision of the Chair of the Commission. These include the Scrutiny Programme as well as a review of the recommendations of previous NOAC reports. The Chair also leads on engagement with other bodies such as the SEAI, LGMA and the AILG as well as the production of the Annual Report. In addition a review of work elsewhere such as for Audit Scotland is also under way to learn lessons and good practice from similar bodies.

As part of the ongoing work of the Scrutiny Programme meetings were held with seven local authorities in 2020 including three stage 1 meetings and six stage 2 meetings. Including these local authorities, stage three reports have been prepared on the backlog of meetings extending back to 2017. These amount to 13 local authorities and are to be published in early 2021.

NOAC Activities

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 2020 the process of reviewing local authorities has become more structured, formal and documented. It continues to be led by the Chair 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.

During 2020 NOAC had 6 meetings planned. However, due to the COVID restrictions it was only possible for the Chair to attend 3 Stage 1 meetings in Monaghan, Limerick and Sligo.

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 to answer questions from board members on the various items including information contained in the profile report.

Stage 1 and Stage 2 meetings held in 2020

Local Authority (LA)	Stage 1 meetings	Stage 2 meetings
Laois County Council		January 2020
Waterford City & County Council		March 2020
Clare County Council		June 2020*
Carlow County Council		September 2020*
Monaghan County Council	February 2020	July 2020*
Limerick City and County Council	August 2020	
Sligo County Council	September 2020	November 2020*

**Meetings held by WEBEX videoconference system.*

Both meetings are attended by the Secretariat and minutes are kept.

In 2020 there was six Stage 2 meetings. The first 2 were held in the Custom House but due to COVID further meetings were held remotely

by WEBEX. The table below gives the details of all the Stage 1 and Stage 2 meetings held in 2020.

The minutes of all the meetings and any presentations made are available on the website and it is anticipated that a report of the meetings will be published in 2021.

Local Authority Performance Indicators Report

In December 2020 NOAC published its Local Authority Performance Indicator Report 2019.

Roads: NOAC recommend that 100% of roads are surveyed to ensure the accuracy and completeness of information published and in assisting local authorities to identify roads that require repair. Roads are required to have 100% surveys every 2 years and every 5 years for local tertiary roads.



The report noted overall, the amount of roads being surveyed regularly is increasing and the amount being spent on roadworks is also increasing, however the rate at which roadworks are being carried out and year on year change in road condition is only slowly improving, particularly for condition ratings 1 to 4.

This suggests that costs associated with carrying out roadworks are increasing over the period. What is notable from the data in the report, including trends, is that there has only been a slow improvement in pavement condition.

Revenue Balances: The report noted monitoring the cumulative surplus/ deficit balance in the Revenue Account from the Income and Expenditure is critical to knowing the overall financial health of a local authority. It highlighted from 2015 to 2019 the sum of the credit balances of local authorities increased from €12m to €46m and the number of local authorities with deficits reduced from 16 to 11.

The report noted the longer a debt remains in arrears typically the more likely it is not to be collected. Noting the trends in the report, it is clear that there have been improvements in the collection rate of payments to local authorities include commercial rates, rent & annuities and housing loans.

The report also noted an ongoing concern for local authorities is the burden that the impact of borrowing placed on finances. Clarity regarding the future of these repayments is important.

Communications (Websites / Social Media):

The report noted the increasing importance of digital media to any organisation, not least local authorities is obvious in recent years. This is particularly so during the current COVID-19 pandemic. NOAC as part of its indicators measures the page views of a local authority website and the total number of social media followers. The report noted in both instances the increase has been very large, with website usage increasing by 78% from 45.96 to 81.28 million views from 2014 to 2019 and social media followers increasing from 644,521 to 3,134,560, a 386.34% increase for the same period.

Cost of Planning Services (P4): Over the period from 2014 to 2019 the cost per head of population for the provision of the Planning Service has increased from €26.23 in 2014 to €30.27 in 2019. For 2019 there was quite a variation in costs between local authorities.

The report noted some local authorities have circumstances that can impact on costs an example of which would be Dublin Airport in Fingal. Some local authorities can be impacted by level of economic activity that can affect scale and quantity of cases, costs relating to activities such as enforcement or development of a County Development Plan. Other local authorities can have small staff numbers that can result in costs being impacted by staffing issues.

Economic / Jobs: The report noted local authorities have traditionally had an important role in supporting economic activity in their areas. Often this is through the provision of infrastructure and land services to other agencies and enterprises. However, in recent years local authorities have had an increased role in this area through the creation of the Local Enterprise Offices (LEO's).

Between 2014 and 2019 local enterprise offices have assisted in the creation of 20,044 jobs in Ireland or an average of 3341 jobs per year. The number of mentoring recipients during the same period increased from 7,564 to 10,756 per year.

Energy Efficiency performance:

A new Waste / Environment indicator was added in 2019 under the heading of E5: Energy Efficiency Performance. This indicator measures the percentage of energy savings achieved by the end of 2019 relative to the baseline year of 2009. NOAC obtained this data directly from the SEAI. Reducing energy consumption and promoting energy efficiency is a key target of all local authorities. The report noted that all local authorities have achieved energy savings since the baseline year.

Measuring these results in the coming years will indicate what progress is being made in this area.

Other matters: The report noted delivery of output is critical for an organisation particularly to be able to do so in an efficient and effective manner. However, the use of shared services is also increasing in local authorities as they can allow for more effective delivery in a more cost-effective manner. The report noted the role of such services is evident in a number of indicators to varying degrees and have played various roles in supporting or delivering services.

Trend Analysis

The report noted the following trends.

Housing

Data for the ownership of dwellings was examined for the period of 2017 to 2019 and showed an increase in start of year ownerships over the period of 2.59% and an increase of end of year ownership of 4.13% over the same period.

From 2014 to 2019 there was a 32% increase in the number of adults in emergency accommodation that are long-term homeless.

Roads

For Regional roads there have been improvements in lengths for ratings 9 to 10 (roads with no defects or minor surface defects) with lengths for other ratings reducing. However, lengths at rating 1 to 4 (roads with some to significant structural defects) remain persistently high. Overall, this trend shows that the condition of Regional and Local Primary roads has improved over the last 6 years.

Nationally there has been a steady increase on online motor tax transactions going from 57.76 in 2014 to 77.10% in 2019.

Water

In general, there is a high and consistent level of compliance nationally with figures ranging between 97% and 98% for the period from 2015 to 2019.

Waste / Environment

Over the period from 2014 to 2019 the number of households with access to a 3-bin collection has increased substantially by 57% with the percentage of households increasing by 102%.

The percentage of LA area within the 5 levels of litter pollution data has been consistent for the period of 2014 to 2019 and shows a lot of slight to moderate pollution ranging between 14% to 16% and 63% to 72%. However, there is little incidence of severe pollution with a max of 2% in 2016. Levels of no pollution have shown increases from 10% to 15%..

Planning

New Buildings inspected decreased from 27.07% in 2015 to 23.90% in 2019.

The number of planning cases referred to or initiated by a LA increased by 9.9% from 2014 to 2019.

The Cost per Capita of the Planning Service shows an overall increase of 15.29%.

Fire Services

The per capita cost of running a Fire Service increased over the period by 10.15%. 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 14% and part-time stations by 5.35% over the period from 2014 to 2019.

Library / Recreational Services

The number of library visits nationally decreased by 15.3% over the period, however from 2017, when the figure was lowest at 13.9 million the figures have increased for each year since.

The average national per head cost of running a Library Service in a local authority increased by 15.77% over the period and reflected a cost increase for each year except for 2015.

Youth / Community

The national average percentage of Local Schools Involved in the Local Youth Council/ Comhairle na n-Óg Scheme increased from 52% to 68% over the duration.

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 reduced by 20% between 2014 and 2019, with a reduction recorded for each year over the duration.

Corporate

The Whole Time Equivalent (WTE) Staff numbers in local authorities has dropped from 2014 to a low in 2015 and then has continued to increase to 2019. Overall, the numbers have increased by a total of 9.7%.

For the duration of the analysis the average percentage of working days lost to certified leave increased by 11.08%.

Since 2014 the usage of local authority websites has increased by 78.83%

Since 2014 the expenditure on ICT per WTE has increased by 11.94% and, other than a drop to in 2015, is a year on year increase over that period.

Finance

The national revenue account credit balance across the 31 local authorities has increased since 2014 from €3.36m to €46.62m in 2019.

Although the national trend shows a positive picture there are a number of local authorities that have recorded deficit balances since 2014 and the national figure is increased by a small number of local authorities with large surplus balances.

Since 2014 the national median percentage (%) commercial rates collected in a year has risen by 21% over the period.

Since 2014 the national median percentage (%) Rents and Annuities collected in a year increased by 3.45% over the period.

Since 2014 the national median percentage (%) of Housing Loans collected in a year has increased by 20% over the period.

Economic Development

Since 2014 the year on year national total of jobs created with assistance from the LEO in a year has decreased by 9% however it peaked in that period in 2018 at 3,656. The national total

of trading online vouchers approved by the LEO in a year has increased by 7% since 2016 however trading online vouchers drawn down decreased by 27%. For mentoring recipients, the annual number of participants has increased by 55.42%.

Summary of Trend Analysis

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, and 5 indicators did not have sufficient data to draw any conclusions in relation to trends.

Quality Assurance Review of the Data

NOAC undertakes an extensive process to ensure that the data used in the Performance Indicators are as accurate as possible. There are a number of stages to this that entail: -

- ▶ After the local authorities submitted their data in LG>Returns, the NOAC secretariat carries out an audit review of the data screening and checking it for anomalies.
- ▶ As part of the production of the report queries arise in the analysis of the data and generation of tables and graphs.
- ▶ The data is compared to data from other sources and organisations for accuracy. Where possible this is done in consultation with these bodies.

- ▶ Data extracts of the report are circulated to other organisations and external reviewers for correctness. In particular the data tables shared were from performance indicators that these sections also collect data on, from local authorities.
- ▶ The Performance Indicator Working Group completed validation reviews of the data, selecting a number of local authorities and Performance Indicators that were reviewed via teleconference.

Performance Indicators Validated 2020

No.	Indicator	Title
1	H1	Social Housing Stock
2	H5	Private Rented Sector Inspections
3	E4	% of Schools that have been Awarded/Renewed Green Flag Status
4	P4	Cost Per Capita of the Planning Service
5	C5	Overall Cost of ICT as a Proportion of Revenue Expenditure
6	F1	Cost Per Capita of the Fire Service
7	M2	5 Year Summary of % Collection Levels for Major Revenue Sources

Local Authorities validated 2020

No.	Local Authority	Date
1	Cavan County Council	21 August 2021
2	Galway County Council	25 August 2020
3	Leitrim County Council	10 September 2020
4	Meath County Council	18 September 2020
5	Fingal County Council	21 September 2020
6	Wexford County Council	28 September 2020

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 the 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

Public Spending Code Report

In 2020, NOAC published the Public Spending Code: Local Authority Quality Assurance Report 2019.

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 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 in Part A04 of the Code and that their reports should be submitted to NOAC for incorporation in a composite report for the local government sector.



The Quality Assurance reporting requirement in the Public Spending Code consists of the following five steps:

1. The local authority must 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. The Public Spending Code requires the inventory to break down capital expenditure being considered, incurred and recently ended between capital projects and capital grant schemes.

The report noted of the 31 authorities, Galway City were the only local authority which had a current expenditure programme recently ended in 2019. The following 12 authorities did not have a current expenditure project or programme in their 'under consideration' category:

Local Authority
Carlow County Council
Dublin City Council
Galway City Council
Galway County Council
Kildare County Council
Kilkenny County Council
Leitrim County Council
Monaghan County Council
Roscommon County Council
Westmeath County Council
Wexford County Council
Wicklow County Council

2. The local authority must confirm publication on their website of summary information on 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.

The report noted the following local Authorities provided links to where this summary information on Procurement in Excess of €10m is available:

Cavan County Council	http://www.cavancoco.ie/procurement-over-10-million.htm
Cork City Council	https://www.corkcity.ie/en/council-services/public-info/spending-and-revenue/
Cork County Council	https://www.corkcoco.ie/your-county-council/accessibility-maps-publications
Dublin City Council	http://www.dublincity.ie/PublicSpendingCode
Kildare County Council	http://kildare.ie/CountyCouncil/PublicSpendingCode/
Limerick City and County Council	https://www.limerick.ie/council/services/business-and-economy/procurement/procurements
Mayo County Council	https://www.mayo.ie/finance/public-spending-code-compliance

3. The local authority must complete seven specified checklists. The completion of the checklists is based on an appropriate sample of the projects/areas of expenditure relevant to that checklist. The report noted all local authorities fulfilled the requirement.
4. The local authority must carry out a more in-depth review of selected projects/programmes such that, over a three to five year period, every stage of the project life cycle and every scale of project will be subject to a closer examination. Initially the review requirement was that the value of the projects selected for the in-depth check each year should be at least 5% of the total value of all projects in the inventory when averaged out over a three-year period. This was amended in 2016 to a requirement that 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 remains 5% of the total value of all capital projects in the inventory. Both of these minimums can be through in-depth reviews carried out in the years 2016 to 2018.

The report noted that all local authorities have carried out in-depth checks of a selection of projects from their inventories.

The local authority must complete a short summary report consisting of the inventory, procurement reference, the seven checklists and the local authority's judgment as to the adequacy of the appraisal/ planning, implementation or review work that it examined as part of the in-depth checks, the reasons why it formed that judgment and its proposals to remedy any inadequacies found during the entire quality assurance process.

The report noted that all 31 local authorities complied with Step 5.

This report is available in full at www.noac.ie

Social Media

In 2020, NOAC continued to build its presence nationally with the use of social media. When the Local Authority Performance Indicators Report 2019 and the Customer Survey Report 2020 were published, the Communications Unit in the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage tweeted links, videos and animations on NOAC's behalf. The tweets gained impressions in the thousands and helped promote not only the reports but the role of NOAC in the local government sector.



NOAC Engagement

Meeting with the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA)

NOAC invited the LGMA to discuss their work and potential areas for co-operation between the two bodies.

The LGMA team gave a presentation on the LGMA, its work, remit, recent innovations, COVID 19 response and an overview of their "Strategic & Operational Review 2019".

They highlighted their ongoing research in this area and issued a survey for local authorities to collect the challenges faced by the authorities during the pandemic.

NOAC offered to work with LGMA to show the work of local authorities in the area of Climate Change through its performance indicators. The LGMA noted that in ICT, one of the biggest issues it faces is resources, particularly having regard to the cost of expertise in this area.

NOAC welcomed LGMA focus on research as there is a deficit of data that is independent and validated that NOAC can use in its reports. Local Government in other countries have huge amounts of research, while very little is published in Ireland.

NOAC indicated that it is currently carrying out a review of previous report recommendations and as such will need to write to the LGMA for progress updates in relation to relevant reports and areas that it was involved in.

In conclusion, both parties agreed that LGMA and NOAC collaboration can only add to the local government sector.

Meeting with The County and City Management Association (CCMA)

On the 6 October 2020, the CCMA met with the NOAC board remotely via videoconference.

The CCMA gave a presentation on a three year support proposal for the local authority sector in the context of Covid-19 and answered questions from the NOAC board members. The presentation and questions covered areas such as Covid-19 Support Proposal, Estimated Covid-19 impact 2020 to 2023 and Funding deficit requirements.

Meeting with the Local Government Finance Team from the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage (DHLGH)

The Local Government Finance team from the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage gave a presentation to the board entitled: "The general impact and financial impact of Covid-19 on local authorities in 2020 and beyond". It highlighted the emergency costs associated with Covid-19 in 2020 and the impact on income from goods and services Income impacted by Covid-19 for 2020. The team explained how they engaged with the local authorities. They also advised NOAC of the action the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage has taken, its work with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Rates Waiver Scheme.

The NOAC members advised that it had been a difficult year for local authorities, and that NOAC thank the Local Government Finance and the local authority finance officers for their hard work.

Engagement with Local Government Audit Service (LGAS)

The Director of the Local Government Audit Service (LGAS) attended the December meeting of the NOAC. The LGAS was invited to give a presentation of their work. The LGAS is responsible for the independent, external audit of all local government bodies in Ireland. Amongst other work, local government auditors ensure that the annual financial statements of local government bodies are prepared in accordance with the Code of Audit Practice.

The LGAS also has a value for money unit which undertakes VFM studies and publishes reports on matters that have been selected by the VFM consultative committee.

In 2019 the LGAS decided to carry out a review of the output of the VFM Unit, to ensure it is best placed to deliver on legislative commitments. To achieve this the LGAS established a Working Group to review the output of the VFM Unit.

All local authorities were surveyed to determine the level of awareness and satisfaction that exists for the work of the VFM Unit. The results were very positive with satisfaction ratings of between 90% - 97% with the Unit's reports to date.

NOAC updated the LGAS about its work programme. It was outlined that it is important that NOAC and the LGAS don't cover the same work areas and that they can complement each other's work where possible. Given that both organisations have limited resources it was important that there was no duplication of work.

The NOAC Chair thanked the LGAS for their attendance and input to the meeting.

Resources and Expenditure

NOAC is supported by a Secretariat, staffed with a full-time equivalent of 5.4. The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage provide the staff.

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 2020 was €200,000.

Expenditure

NOAC expenditure for 2020 was € €147,763.07, which was incurred as follows;

2020 Budget - €200,000.00	
Expenditure	Amount
Member Fees (including PRSI)	€56,521.38*
Travel and Subsistence	€11,529.50**
Research	€47,925
Communications	€31,257.47
Other (Miscellaneous Expenses)	€529.72
	Expenditure
TOTAL	€147,763.07

The members consider this statement of expenditure to be a true and fair view of NOAC spending during 2020.

**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.*

The prior year expenditure was reduced by €3,228.96 due to an accounting adjustment.

Appendice

Appendix 1:

Attendance at NOAC Board Meetings

Member	21/01/2020	03/03/2020	25/03/2020	19/05/2020	23/06/2020	21/07/2020	01/09/2020	06/10/2020	10/11/2020	27/11/2020	16/12/2020	Total
Michael McCarthy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	11
Tara Buckley	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	4
Constance Hanniffy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	11
David Holohan	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	N/A	N/A	N/A	8
Michael McGreal	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	N/A	N/A	N/A	7
Martina Moloney	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	11
Sharon O'Connor	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	N/A	N/A	N/A	7
Barry Quinlan	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2
Margaret Lane	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	✓	✓	✓	✗	3
Niall Quinn	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	✓	✓	✓	✓	4
Brian Cawley	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	✓	✓	✓	✓	4
Mary Hurley	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	3

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, Planning and Local Government 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.

