



Sligo County Council Scrutiny Report

NOAC Report No. 43 - June 2021



Chair's Opening remarks

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

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

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

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



Michael McCarthy, Chair
28th June 2021

Background to Profiles and Scrutiny Programme

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

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

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

The purpose

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

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

The Scrutiny Process

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

1

Stage 1 (NOAC Scrutiny Visit)

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

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

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Stage 2 (NOAC Scrutiny Meeting)

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

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

3

Stage 3 (NOAC Sign off and Publication)

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

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

Progress to date

2017

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

2018

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

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

2019

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

2020

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

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

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

2021

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

Future meetings and reports

This report outlines the purpose and the procedures and while the process may continue to evolve it would not be expected at this time to produce another master report, similar to this one. This report takes into account the first 15 local authorities which have completed the process. It would be intended that once all stages in the scrutiny process has been fully completed with the relevant other local authorities that the report would be published on that basis and would form part of the suite of reports under the umbrella of the Scrutiny Report Process. It is anticipated that progress will continue to be made with further Stage 1 and Stage 2 meetings so that each local authority will have participated in the process. It must be outlined that significant changes and delays have been experienced due to the restrictions imposed by COVID in 2020 and 2021.

Conclusion

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

Sligo County Council had their Stage 1 meeting in September 2020 and their Stage 2 meeting in November 2020. It is important to note that the material in this report is reflective of the position at that time. Therefore any changes to the profile from later NOAC reports are not included in this report.

NOAC highlights the following points arising out of these meetings with Sligo County Council:

- NOAC acknowledged the progress Sligo County Council had made in addressing the budget deficit. This matter had been the subject of previous correspondence from the finance working group. The current level demonstrates the progress achieved while also delivering valuable customer services and progressing the development of the county from an economic and social perspective.
- NOAC noted and commended Sligo County Council on the very positive outcome that they achieved in the NOAC 2020 Customer Survey report.
- NOAC welcomed the presentation and acknowledged Sligo County Council demonstrated some very good examples of innovation.
- In relation to the Energy Upgrade works at Cranmore, NOAC would like to establish if a cost benefit analysis was carried out that would have the potential to be shared with other local authorities to assist with Climate Change initiatives.



Sligo County Council Scrutiny Process

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Sligo County Council

March 2020

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Sligo County Council General Information

Population:	65, 535 (Last census figure)
Area:	1,837.11 km ²
Municipal Districts:	Municipal District of Sligo Sligo-Drumcliff Ballymote-Tobercurry
2019 and 2020 Budgets	2019 - €65,208,000 2020 - €67,150,000
Number employed @ 31/12/2019	507
WTE Staff per 1,000 population	478.34
% of paid working days lost to medically certified sick leave	3.49%
Housing Information @ 31/12/19	
Local Authority Stock number	2,298
Number currently on waiting list	1,425
HAP Tenancies	758 (active tenancies as at 31/12/18) 285 (tenancies set up in 2018)
Homeless presentations	387 (for year 2019)
Any specific housing issues	As with other Local Authorities, numbers on housing waiting list and numbers presenting as homeless remain a concern.
Short Information	
Council Mission Statement	'To maximise economic, social, cultural and community development, deliver efficient and cost effective services in a democratic, accountable and transparent manner in partnership with local communities, voluntary and statutory agencies'
Economic Forum (CEF)	Sligo Economic Forum's role is focused on supporting, co-ordinating and promoting Sligo as a place to do business, to live, invest and visit. Further details in attached publication.
The Local Enterprise Office	Sligo's Local Enterprise Office delivers a range of programmes and initiatives with other key agencies to support new and emerging enterprise.
Retail Incentives	Sligo County Council is partnered with an Interreg Europe project called SARURE (Saving Rural Retail). It is an inter-regional cooperation project which is tasked with improving policies aimed at SME competitiveness.
The Corporate Plan	Currently at draft stage, expected publication date May 2020
Shared services	Sligo County Council's veterinary services delivered on a regional basis under S86 agreement

Regional Issues including new developments and initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ireland West Airport Knock (IWAK) ■ Climate Action Regional office
Supporting Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Designated Growth Centre under National Planning Framework ■ Sligo Tourism Strategy ■ County Sligo Diaspora Policy
Any other relevant information	Attached special supplement presents an overview of the major projects being planned and delivered by Sligo County Council

Collection Rates

	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014
Rate collection rates	81.00%	77.00%	76.00%	74.00%	67.00%
Rent collection rates	78.00%	78.00%	78.00%	78.00%	77.00%
Housing loan collection rates	62.00%	61.00%	57.00%	55.00%	46.00%

NOAC Reports Overview

NOAC was established in July 2014 as an independent statutory body to provide oversight of the local government sector in Ireland. NOAC's functions are wide ranging, involving the scrutiny of performance generally and financial performance specifically. NOAC also supports best practice, oversees the implementation of national local government policy, monitors and evaluates implementation of corporate plans, adherence to service level agreements and public service reform by local government bodies.

The annual Performance Indicator Report published by NOAC is one of its key reports every year. NOAC has the function of scrutinising local authority performance against relevant indicators. NOAC believes that monitoring performance over time and against comparable authorities has the potential to encourage continuous improvement in local authority service provision. From the reports published to date matters relevant to Sligo County Council are outlined in the points below.

NOAC REPORT NO 22

Performance Indicator Report 2018 – September 2019

- **Housing.** Sligo owned 2,129 social housing dwellings at end of 2018 with 3.83% vacant.

The average time for rehousing in vacant properties was 32.69 weeks, which takes longer than the national average of 27.75 weeks. However, this is a large improvement in this area in 2018. The past few years had much higher vacancy periods (72.14 weeks in 2015), (79.64 weeks in 2016), (77.67 weeks in 2017).

Sligo also has the lowest housing maintenance expenditure of all local authorities at €404.62. This is a trend which can be seen back to 2015, where it had the second lowest housing maintenance expenditure at €335.55.
- **Environment.** 97.42% of drinking water in private schemes were in compliance with statutory requirements. 7% of the County is unpolluted or litter-free. 65% is slightly polluted and 26% is moderately polluted.

- **Brown bins.** Sligo's brown bin uptake was 28.69%. The national average figure is 43.91%. There has been a steady improvement in Sligo's brown bin uptake, having been at 21.66% in 2015.
- **Green Flag status.** At the end of 2018, 56.1% of schools in the county held a Green Flag. The national average is 51.41%.
- **Fire service.** It took an average of 3:42 minutes to mobilise the part time fire brigades for calls to fires, an improvement on the 4:16 minutes for the previous year. It took 3:39 minutes to mobilise in respect of non-fire emergencies, which compares with 4:06 minutes the year previously.
- **Libraries.** There was an average of 2.4 visits per head of population and 177,394 items issued to library borrowers in 2018. This is an improvement on the 2017 figures, where there were 1.95 visits and 132,349 items borrowed.
- **Staff total.** Whole-time equivalent staff employed by Sligo at the end of 2018 was 408.06. The mean number of staff in local authorities that year was 913.16. Sligo's staffing numbers have gone up from previous years (391.01 in 2017 and 380.71 in 2016).
- **Sick leave.** Sligo's medically certified sick leave rate is 3.3%, making it one of 11 local authorities which met the public sector sick leave target of 3.5%. The national average was 3.78%. Sligo's self-certified paid sick leave was 0.21%. The national average is 0.35%.
- **Technology & Social media.** The total page views of Sligo's website in 2018 was 837,166, a big increase on the 699,275 views of the page in 2017. Total followers of Sligo social media channels at end 2018 were 14,978, up very significantly from 10,310 in 2017. The percentage of motor tax transactions dealt with online was also up, from 58.6% in 2017 to 61.96% in 2018.

NOAC REPORT NO 19

Performance Indicator Report 2017 – September 2018

- Cost per capita of the planning service dropped from €34.85 in 2014 to €29.75 in 2017 (€30.92 in 2018).
- The cost of the library service rose from €31.32 in 2014 to €32.48 in 2017 (€34.57 in 2018).
- Motor tax on line transactions have also improved from 43.65% in 2014 to 58.60% in 2017. (61.96% in 2018).
- The % of households availing of the 3 bin service increased from 22.09% in 2014 to 26.30% in 2017. (28.69% in 2018).
- The % area unpolluted or litter free was 12% in 2014 and 2% in 2017. (7% in 2018).

Full figures for all Performance Indicator reports 2014 – 2018 are included in a table below.

NOAC REPORTS NO 21 AND 18

Customer Satisfaction Survey July 2019 and July 2018

- In 2018, Ipsos MRBI was commissioned by NOAC to conduct a survey among the general public to establish their satisfaction with their Local Authority. A face-to-face in-home CAPI (Computer Aided Personal Interviewing) methodology is utilised and quota controls ensured that participants are representative of the Local Authority population by age, gender and social class.
- The first survey, conducted in 2018, surveyed the 10 largest LAs. The second survey, completed in March 2019, was conducted with the 10 medium sized LAs and Galway City. The remaining 10 Local Authorities will be surveyed in 2020. Sligo will be included in the 2020 survey and a report on the results of the survey will be published later this year.

NOAC REPORT NO 17

Internal Audit in Local Authorities – July 2018

- Local authorities were asked whether the audit committee had conducted an assessment of the adequacy of Internal Audit resources, including staff skills, within the last 2 years. Sligo was not one of 17 authorities which had done so.
- The Head of Internal Audit reports directly to the Chief Executive in nine authorities including Sligo.
- There was no internal audit function in place in Sligo County Council in 2014 or January 2015. There was an internal auditor appointed from January 2015 to March 2016. A part time internal auditor was appointed from March 2016 to January 2017 and from January 27 to August 2017 there was no internal audit function in place. There is a full time Internal audit function in place since September, 2017. A properly resourced internal audit function is essential to ensure the Audit Committee is supported.

NOAC REPORT NO 16

Review of 2015 Statutory Audit Reports to the Members of Local Authorities – June 2018

- Commercial Rates 2015: 74%
- Housing Rents 2015: 78%
- Housing Loans 2015: 55%

NOAC REPORT NO 12

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

- Prioritising the refurbishment of housing in high demand areas was a method being used by local authorities to minimise vacancies. Six local authorities, including Sligo County Council, all said that this was an approach that they employed.
- Sligo County Council are also using choice-based lettings.
- In terms of the proportion of cumulative rent owed that was collected by end 2014, Sligo is the second lowest at 73%.

NOAC REPORT NO 10

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

	2014	2018
Number of Registered Tenancies	4,984	5,675
% Units inspected	12	8.26
Inspected Failed %	86.6	76.55

Data from report relates to 2014, data for 2018 taken from Performance Indicator Report



APPENDIX

Performance Indicators		2018		2017		2016		2015		2014	
		Data	Median/ Average	Data	Median/ Average	Data	Median/ Average	Data	Median/ Average	Data	Median/ Average
H1	Social Housing provided in year per 1,000 population	0.37	0.84	0.47	0.53	n/a	3.43	1.35	1.91	1.02	0.80
H2	% of directly provided dwellings vacant at 31/12	3.83	2.77	4.04	2.73	6.09	3.02	6.33	3.5	5.06	3.8
H3a	Average time from vacation date to PI year re-letting date (weeks)	32.69	27.75	77.67	28.9	79.64	32.99	72.14	28.43	12.55	31.43
H3b	Average cost expended on getting re-tenanted units ready for re-letting	€19,194.84	€18,590.28	€22,320.39	€17,160.60	14,930.74	€15,877	9,902.81	€13,378.40	5,989.15	€11,534.91
H4	Average repair and maintenance cost per unit	€404.62	€841.83	€366.09	€1,311.82	345.02	€1,500.23	335.55	€1,292.57	403.51	€1,272.30
H5	Inspections (Dwellings inspected in 2018) carried out in year as % of registrations	8.26	7.39	4.47	4.96	5.77	4.36	10.20	5.64	16.13	6.51
R1a	% Regional Road KM that ever received a PSCI rating	99	99.36	97	96	98.00	99	41.00	68	100.00	47.9
R1b	% Total Regional Road KM with a PSCI rating of 9-10	47	37.58	44	28	40.00	30	21.00	20	45.00	11.15
R1c	% Total Primary Road KM with a PSCI rating of 9-10	33	23.39	26	20	25.00	13	34.00	11	35.00	6.4
R1d	% Total Secondary Road KM with a PSCI rating of 9-10	22	15.19	16	14	12.00	10	19.00	8	20.00	4.61
R1e	% Total Tertiary Road KM with a PSCI rating of 9-10	12	12.42	10	8	7.00	7	8.00	5	12.00	3.63
R2a	KM Regional Road strengthened using road improvement grants	4.1	13.4	3.90	10.3	3.40	10.8	3.90	10.2		
R2b	KM Regional road resealed using road maintenance grants	5.6	15.3	5.60	11.9	8.30	12.2	5.80	8.3		
R2/3	% Motor tax transactions performed online	61.96	69.15	58.60	65.95	56.24	64.05	49.60	56.6	43.65	54.7
W1	% private schemes with water quality in compliance	97.42	97.1	98.24	98.46	98.76	97.77	99.78	99.07	99.80	97.9
E1	% households availing of a 3-bin service	28.69	43.91	26.30	39.53	24.67	37.7	21.66	34.87	22.09	31.66
E2	Pollution cases on hand at year end as % of the cases that arose that year	18.59	11.00	12.67	9.79	4.84	9.91	20.37	8.49		
E3	% area unpolluted or litter free	7	19.00	2	10	30.00	13	26.00	14	12.00	9.5
P1	New buildings inspected as % of new buildings notified	14.05	16.75	16.82	17	18.68	19.42	37.25	24	16.13	17.71
P2	% of determinations that confirmed the decision made by LA	62.5	75.92	63.64	79	75.00	77.78	61.54	71.88	66.67	71.7



	Performance Indicators	2018	Median/ Average	2017	Median/ Average	2016	Median/ Average	2015	Median/ Average	2014	Median/ Average
		Data		Data		Data		Data		Data	
P3	Ratio of planning cases being investigated at year end as to cases closed	1.47	3.03	1.26	2.41	2.33	2.87	0.69	2.61	3.41	2.88
P4	Cost per capita of the Planning Service	€30.92	29.24	€29.75	28.31	30.85	€26.96	33.45	€26.76	34.85	€25.27
F1	Cost per capita of Fire Service (based on 2016 Census)	€65.97	53.85	€57.68	57.74	55.86	€56.07	59.22	€57.88	58.41	€55.9
F2	Average time to mobilise Brigade re Fire (Minutes) (FT)	N/A	1.42	N/A	1.45	n/a	1.5	N/A	1.6	N/A	1.66
F3	% of Fire Cases in which first attendance is within 10 minutes	47.76	52.92	51.61	40.45	60.80	57.79	53.80	56.98	48.65	58.6
L1a	No. of Library visits per head of population	2.4	3.50	1.95	3.56	1.91	3.61	1.92	3.68	2.33	3.71
L1b	No. of Items borrowed per head of population	2.71	3.00	2.02	2.92	2.81	3.82	3.27	3.82		
L2	Cost of Library Service per capita	€34.57	30.52	32.48	31.00	30.11	€30.05	31.58	€30.02	31.32	€29.41
Y1	% of local schools involved in Comhairle na nÓg Scheme	84.62	80.00	69.23	69.04	92.31	68.07	84.62	67.59	36.36	51.86
C1	WTE staff per 1,000 population	6.23	5.99	5.97	5.75	5.81	5.64	5.97	5.58	6.34	5.63
C2a	% of paid working days lost to medically certified sick leave in year	3.30	3.74	3.30	3.74	5.24	3.76	3.53	3.52	3.55	3.34
C2b	% of paid working days lost to self-certified sick leave in year	0.21	0.35	0.19	0.33	0.24	0.38	0.22	0.39	0.25	0.4
C3	LA website page views per 1,000 population	12,774.33	16,210.00	10670	14,632	7,911.31	12,422	4,067.47	11,666	3,735.74	9,651
C4	Overall cost of ICT Provision per WTE	€3,516.78	2894.57	€3,663.07	€3,048.41	3,486.98	€2,675.69	3,158.62	€2,680.15	2,913.00	€2,646.8
M2a	% Commercial Rates Collected in year	81	86.00	77.0	83	76.00	82.3	73.00	83	67.00	77
M2b	% Rent & Annuities Collected in year	78	89.00	78.0	89	78.00	88.0	78.00	85	77.00	84
M2c	% Housing Loans Collected in year	62	75.00	61.0	74	57.00	70	55.00	68	46.00	67
J1	LEO jobs output per 1,000 population	.50	0.77	0.80	0.68	0.90	0.7	0.59	0.66	0.90	0.73



Stage 1 meeting

NOAC Scrutiny Meeting Sligo County Council

Date:	22 September 2020	
Venue:	Sligo County Hall	
Attendees:	Sligo County Council <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ciaran Hayes, CE, Sligo County Council ■ Marie Whelan Head of Finance ■ Bartley Gavin A/Director of Housing and Corporate Services ■ John Moran, Senior Executive Officer ■ Kevin Colreavy, Administrative Officer 	NOAC <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Michael McCarthy, Chair ■ Claire Gavin, NOAC Executive

NOAC's profile for Sligo County Council was circulated in advance of the meeting and this formed the basis for the discussion on the day. NOAC Chair outlined the format of the meeting and invited the CE to give an outline of the Council and the issues facing it. Matters discussed in detail were:

- **Financial Issues and Challenges.** Sligo County Council had significant financial legacy issues and the main focus for the previous Council members and the staff was on the finances and the financial plan. The lack of finances affected every service provided. The CE acknowledged that the Council would have the lowest spend on areas like housing maintenance and this in turn results in delays in re-letting times. The Council did not have the finances to reinvest in the repairs and due to this lack of funding to carry out significant repairs, a number of these properties ended up derelict.

However, the Council did manage to secure derelict funding from the Department of Housing to address these units and this has seen an improvement in the re-letting times. The Council use contractors to carry out the repairs. Waste is a significant expense that the Council incur in many of their vacant units.

One of the serious issues of the financial plans was the staffing levels. It was considered that the Council had surplus staff, and there was calls to cut staff and therefore services. In 2018, the NDP was launched in Sligo and this identified the need to get investment in infrastructure and to rebrand the image and assets of Sligo. It was decided to position it as a smart city and location. Funding from the ERDF of €3m was secured for the enhancement of O'Connell street Sligo and it was future proofed with meet me boxes which provide underground chambers to avoid digging up footpaths and roads for services in future years.

Public lighting columns were upgraded and are now capable of being used for smart digital technology. The Council is working with Sligo IT in getting public spaces available and usable for students.

- **Advanced Technologies.** Other Capital projects are the N4-N15 €9m capital project that is providing underground cables connecting traffic lights with fibre and this is also assisting in the marketing of the smart city.

Western distributor road is a €25m capital project that has built in ducting and will provide connectivity with the IDA and an 85-acre site development, which will have built in climate change requirements.

Sligo are looking at ways to invite people to invest, live and visit by having better public realm and free Wi-Fi. They have plans to convert a car park and to develop a cultural plaza with space for concerts, markets, public open space to attract people into it.

Connaughton Road Car Park is going to be cleared. A land asset management team is under consideration with the emphasis on developing the town centre lands. Such development can also contribute towards reducing the legacy debt. There are 3 other town centre sites identified for development:

1. Building Block
2. Market Yard- there is Enterprise Ireland funding of €2m secured to provide a digital futures manufacturing centre and matched funding of €150,000 each from SCC and IT Sligo.
3. The 'Landing Space'- this is a collaboration with the IDA, Sligo IT where they are leasing the first floor of the building. The building had been left empty for over 10 years and now has 60 desks available there to attract industry and in particular, start-up businesses who can avail of subsidised rent.

Going into the area of artificial intelligence was setting down the road of pitching Sligo in a different way. There is a vision of working with the likes of the IDA, Enterprise Ireland, Sligo IT, Jaspers funding, European Investment Bank funding etc. to progress this.

Other sites/assets to note were the Eastern Garavogue Bridge, which will open up land to the east of the town and where the Council have acquired 16 acres of zoned land which has a number of potential uses, including possible development as an educational centre or a link with Sligo University Hospital. The site also offers potential for Housing.

Further sites have been identified for purchase and development. There is a strategic plan in place for developing Sligo. There is still strong emphasis on the financial issues and on the further improvement of collection of rates, rent and housing loans. The LPT was not reduced and this year it was voted to increase it by 15%. The land assets means that there are several good sites including sites close to the regional park which will be used for private development close to Cranmore Park.

Cranmore Park is a large social housing development, which is getting Housing Regeneration funding. This area has been targeted for climate change objectives. There has been €21m secured for insulation and new heating systems. There is a HSE collaboration on this programme and the air quality will be monitored and as the home improvements are made they expect to see improvements in the air quality and this in turn should hopefully lead to a decline in respiratory illness. The tracking of this information will allow for future HSE planning. The HSE has also come on board for the smart city. The HSE have taken the lead in the living lab programme, which uses technology and gives devices to patients to connect from home to the hospital.

- **Corporate Plan 2019-2024.** Sligo still has not submitted its 2019-2024 Corporate Plan to NOAC in accordance with agreed guidelines. It was outlined at the meeting that Sligo was the only plan that was outstanding. It was explained that the delay was due to a number of factors and to begin with, Covid meant that the Council could not have their meetings. This plan is very different from the previous plan where the emphasis was on the financial issues. This plan reflects the new smart city approach, it looks at the land assets and has had SPC engagement.

They have also had public consultation engagement and this only closed in mid-August but yielded some good detailed submissions. Sligo advised that the plan would be submitted in October and NOAC requested that it be out on their website without delay once approved.

- **NOAC Customer Satisfaction Report 2020.** NOAC referred to the survey carried out in 2020 in which the results for Sligo County were largely positive. Sligo were delighted with the results as they have had a strong focus on Customer Service and it is important to see that the message is getting out there. They see customer service and customer satisfaction as very important factors for foreign investment and that it feeds into the decision regarding relocation to the area. Their social media numbers have increased. Events like storm planning and a recent fire in Killerry mountain made it possible to put the message out to people. They have opted to send out visual messages as this has more impact than text and to do this they are asking the area engineers and other staff to send photographs that can be sent out on social media. They use all the social media platforms and have a very small social media team which is made up of just 2 very dedicated people who are available 24/7 and constantly working out of hours. This has seen their number of followers increase along with their pages views.
- **Ireland West Airport.** This is an essential service for Sligo. The Council have a stake in the airport and they did this to allow for critical improvements and developments to take place. Last year there were over 800,000 passengers and they were on course to have the 1 million this year. Relationships were fostered with the Sligo diaspora in the New York Airport Authority and a sister airport arrangement had been made with Stuart Airport in New York. Unfortunately, Covid impacts all of this work and the number of flights and passengers using the airport. Almost all flights have been cancelled with the current restrictions.

- **Climate Action Regional Office.** In 2015, the CCMA recognised that climate change was a big issue for local authorities and that there was a need for a proactive approach. They identified the need for extra expertise including scientists. They made a business case for four regional offices. The offices were set up in 2018 with regional offices. The Western Regional office based in Mayo is primarily responsible for coastal erosion. The Southern offices are located in Cork and looks at road works and climate change. The Midlands and Eastern office in Maynooth, Co Kildare looks after flooding while the Dublin regional office looks primarily at urban issues. Part of the training programme was to have 28,000 staff trained up on Climate issues. The comprehensive training programme was in modules for all levels including engineers, front line staff, road staff, Councillors, housing staff etc. The training programme was designed by the IPA. The CARO offices in Mayo is the energy bureau for all local authorities and advises on all energy issues. The national objective is to flip the fossil fuel reliance. Sligo is looking at their network of swimming pools with the ESB to see if a geothermal programme can be put in place to harness energy to power the heating. There was some discussions on wind power and solar farm applications and while the reaction to renewable energy is favourable, planning and locations of these can be challenging. Finally, it was concluded that Sligo County Council see that their land asset management and their digital intelligence is their route to deliver for Sligo and to overcome their financial issues.

NOAC Chair thanked the CE for the comprehensive discussion and invited Sligo to present at the Good Practice event on November 4th and to attend virtually at a future NOAC meeting later in 2020. It was advised that the minutes of both meetings would be circulated and agreed and together with any presentation would be published at a future date on the NOAC website.



Stage 2 meeting

Minutes of the National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC) Meeting with Sligo County Council

Date:	Tuesday 10th November 2020 at 10:00 a.m.	
Venue:	Webex meeting	
Attendees:	Chairman <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Michael McCarthy Members <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Martina Moloney Niall Quinn Brian Cawley Constance Hanniffy Mary Hurley Apologies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Margaret Lane NOAC Board Secretariat <ul style="list-style-type: none"> John F McCarthy Neill Dalton John Goldrick Claire Gavin Colin Flood Darren Browne 	By Invite: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ciaran Hayes - Chief Executive Sligo County Council Dorothy Clarke - Director of Services for Planning, Community & Economic Development Tom Kilfeather - Director of Services for Infrastructure, Environment, Fire Services & Climate Action Marie Whelan - Head of Finance John Reilly - Head of Enterprise John Moran - A/Director of Services for Housing & Corporate Kevin Colreavy – Meetings Administrator

Meeting with Sligo County Council

The Chair welcomed the Chief Executive and Management team to the meeting. In advance of the meeting, the Council sent in a presentation to NOAC on Sligo County Council. The CE gave the presentation which was an overview of the situation of the local authority, the projects it was undertaking, the challenges it faced and its recent achievements.

Some of the issues facing Sligo include rural depopulation and emigration. In terms of past issues, in 2013 Sligo borough Council was deemed to be an unsafe place to work. The Council was also involved in a legal case over Lissadell House, for which it incurred legal costs of just over €5 million. The legal bill was required to be paid in 2018.

Council finances were also outlined. In terms of income sources, the biggest increase has been in its rates collection. The Council's deficit climbed from under €2.9 million in 2007 and peaked at €26.6 million in 2014. By 2019 the deficit had made progress and had reduced to just below €18.5 million. The Council however need to change the resulting downward impact and therefore the Smart City/Smart County project was one of the more significant approaches taken.

From a national perspective, Sligo is deemed to be peripheral, so the Council had to do something different to keep young people within the County. They therefore attracted foreign direct investment. The Department of Housing pointed the Council towards the European project assistance fund called JASPERS. One of Sligo's initiatives was that it became a digital town in 2019 with LEOs and the retail sector on board. This is an initiative which seeks to highlight the economic, social and cultural benefits of the internet and to ensure SMEs and the local economy are realising the full potential of digital technology, particularly e-commerce.

The Council are also engaged in upgrading works. Enhancement work is taking place in O'Connell Street. Phase one of this project is complete and phase two will commence in quarter 1, 2021. There is work ongoing on the Eastern Garavogue Bridge, which is a €22 million project. On completion this will lead to reduced journey times between the North and South sides of the River Garavogue in the eastern quadrant. Refurbishment works of €3 million will take place in Stephen Street plaza in quarter one of 2021. In Connaughton Road car park a multi-use development site will be constructed. Another scheme is looking to bring 1,500 more students into the city centre to make it more sustainable.

The Embankment is a project taking place in conjunction with the IDA, I.T. Sligo and the Council. It is a fast landing solution for high end IT companies seeking to establish a base of operations. This enables a client to test the labour market, experience the location and build its talent pool, while working locally on a more long term property solution. Sligo has a further I.T. development in the locality, which is the Market Yard. This is a digital futures manufacturing centre.

In relation to roads projects, Sligo is undertaking the €9 million N4-N15 Sligo Urban Improvement Scheme underway, which will upgrade this dual carriageway. There is also the €22 million capital project road improvement works on the Western distributor road which are due to be finished shortly. Works are also taking place on Sligo port, as the Council wishes to attract inward investment.

Sligo had positive news under the NOAC's Customer Satisfaction Survey 2020, where it had a 68% satisfaction rating, which is the highest among all local authorities. Sligo welcomed this result and indicated that it had made many improvements in the delivery of its services and on customer service in particular. On a less positive note, staffing figures over the last few years are down by 37.5%.

A major re-generation project took place in the housing estate of Cranmore. These houses were built in the 1980s and required several modifications. Now, due to the work undertaken in the houses where fuel poverty existed, energy efficiency has improved significantly and this has had a positive impact on the air quality and the general health of the tenants.

A community response forum was also set up to deal with COVID. A support freephone is in place to assist at-risk members of the public in County Sligo to access non-emergency and non-medical supports and advice during the Covid-19 Level 5 public health emergency.

Following on from this presentation, the NOAC board members put questions to the Council, the main areas of which are outlined below.

Lissadell House legal fees

The Council confirmed that, in addition to paying its own legal fees, it also had to pay for 75% of the plaintiff's legal fees of approximately €2 million in the recent Lissadell House case.

Waste collection

Given that brown bin uptake is only at 29% in Sligo, the question arose as to whether the Council can check how people are disposing of their refuse and what levels of illegal dumping are taking place. The Council is working on a project which uses Eircodes to examine this issue at the moment. There are however data protection issues to be examined and these need to be resolved to deal with the issues.

Knock airport

Seven local authorities in the region have become stakeholders in Knock airport. This has allowed the airport to develop its infrastructure including increasing the runway and apron and expansion of its trade and commerce by making Knock a commercial hub. Knock airport won a contract to disassemble double decker aircraft, which is very beneficial. Stewart airport in New York has become a sister airport to Knock airport. This airport has been useful in allowing Sligo to tap into its diaspora in that region.

SARURE

SARURE is an Interreg Europe project to which Sligo County Council is partnered. It is an inter-regional co-operation project which is tasked with improving policies aimed at SME competitiveness. It is looking at the decline in rural populations and sustaining towns and villages in Europe. One of the solutions to this issue is to utilise remote working and digitalisation. More businesses in Sligo are now going online.

Internal Audit

Sligo had a noted period where there was no internal auditor or where the internal audit function was not properly resourced. Sligo County Council advised that this has now been addressed since the appointment of an Internal Auditor in 2018.

Council deficit

From 2013 to 2018 the Council had been paying only interest back on a number of its loans. The actual loans are now in the process of being re-paid. They advised that they made many cutbacks but that they also recognised that they needed to grow and that they could not retrench and grow at the same time. The Council are hoping that it can utilise its strategic land bank to assist in this area by improving the rate base and extract value from the land in strategic locations.

At the end of 2019 there was €5.1 million of unfunded capital balances. All of these are manageable and will be dealt with in time.

COVID response

The Council has been working well with organisations in dealing with the COVID issue. Existing relationships already existed with other bodies, including the HSE and the community and voluntary groups of Sligo PPN, which was very useful. Agencies were quick to respond and worked well together. One of the initiatives was a food run, whereby local businesses prepared food, which was then delivered to vulnerable people. Though libraries and playgrounds were initially closed in the first lockdown, social distancing measures were put in place and in the case of libraries a click and collect service is now back in place. Parks reopened with social distancing measures in place.

Cranmore estate

The investment in the work in the Cranmore estate, which includes insulation and heating upgrades, gives very substantial benefits to the social housing tenants. There is significantly less air pollution in the area now, which is valuable in terms of the health of people living here. The investment required for the heat pumps is eight to ten years. The financial savings estimated to be in the region of €83 per week accrue to the social housing tenants, as they now spend less on fuel. It was clarified that there is no payback required by the tenants on this investment.

New Business Park

Sligo County Council are working jointly with the IDA to do a feasibility study to develop this park as a near zero energy park. This should give Sligo an edge in trying to attract foreign direct investment to the region.

Conclusion

The NOAC Chair thanked the Chief Executive and Management Team for attending the online meeting with NOAC and for providing valuable insight into its work. He also thanked the CE for the presentation he had given at the NOAC Good Practice Seminar on the 4th of November.

The minutes of the meeting and presentation will be published on the NOAC website at a future date.

The meeting was brought to a close.

4

Stage 2 Presentation

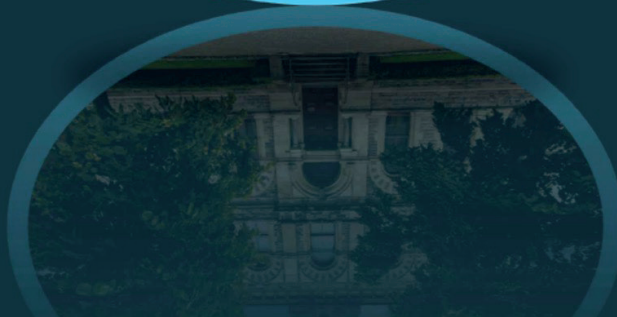
Sligo. LIVE
INVEST
VISIT

Sligo. LIVE
INVEST
VISIT

Sligo.

City Hall:

Chamber Declared an Unsafe
Place of Work in 2013



Sligo. LIVE
INVEST
VISIT

Sligo.

Lissadell House:

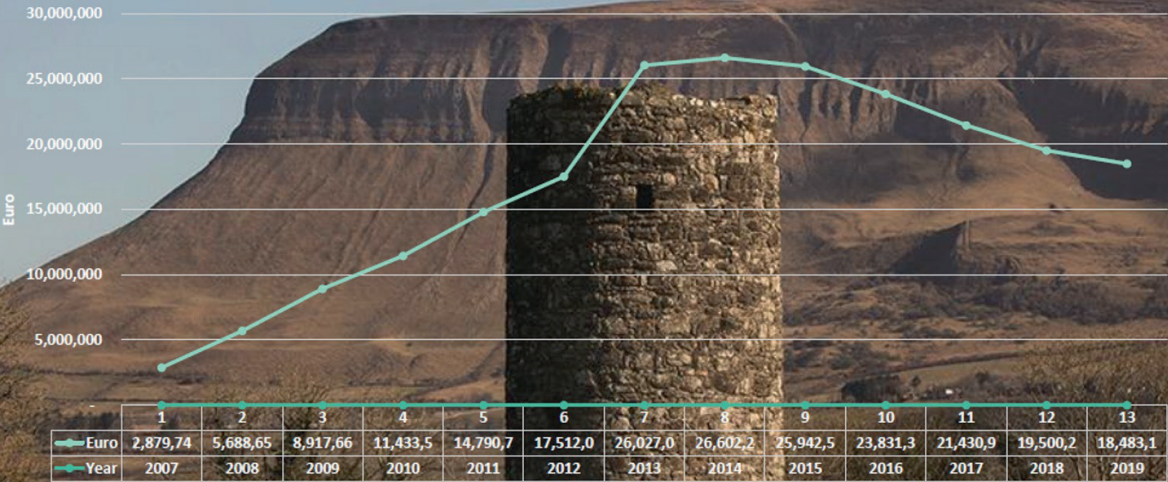
Relationships Cultivated

Sligo. LIVE INVEST VISIT



Council Finances

Cumulative Deficit 2007 -2019



Sligo.

OVERALL SATISFACTION

Average

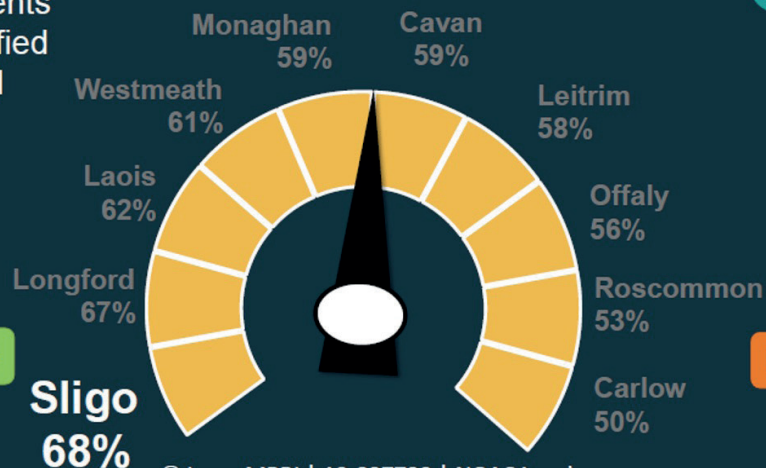
59%

NET SATISFIED

(vs. 58% in 2019)

(vs. 53% in 2018)

59% of respondents claim to be satisfied with their council



Above Average

Below Average

Average range +/- 10% of average score

Sligo. LIVE INVEST VISIT

© Ipsos MRBI | 19-097799 | NOAC Local Authority Satisfaction Survey 2020

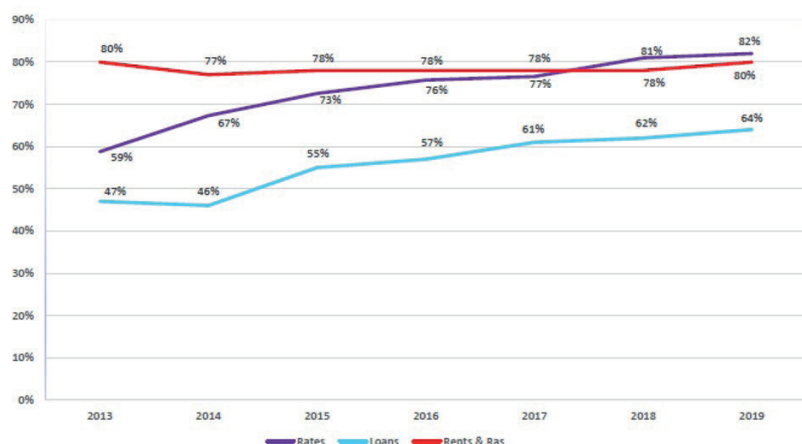
Sligo.

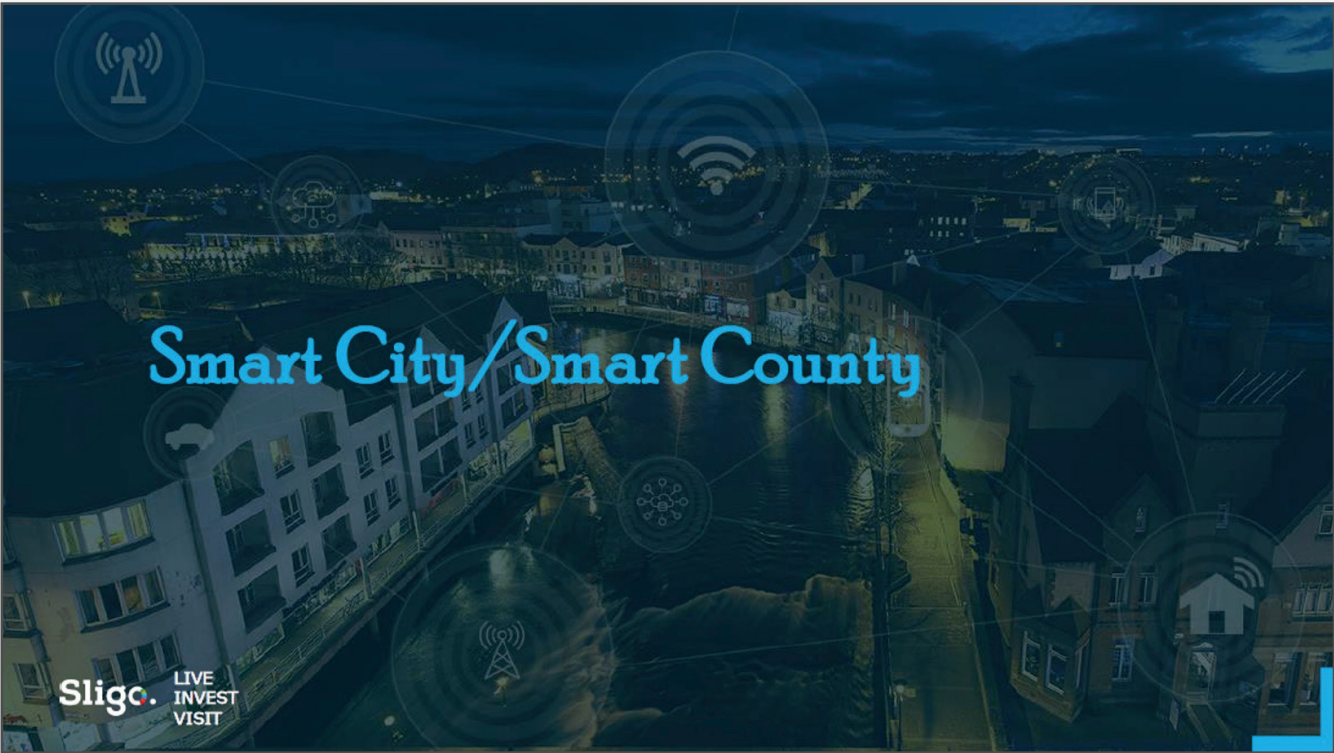
Income Task Force

- Focus on maximizing collections on all income streams

Sligo. LIVE INVEST VISIT

Income Collection 2013-2019 Commerical Rates, Loans & Rents & RAS







European Investment Bank

The EU bank



JASPERS
Joint Assistance
Supporting Projects
in the European
Regions

‘Sligo – Quadruple
Helix’





A group of approximately 15 people, including men and women in business attire, are standing on a red carpeted staircase. Behind them is a large screen displaying the Sligo. logo and a landscape image. The screen also contains the text: "Sligo offers an enviable pace of life that blends the comforts of modern living with a pristine natural environment".





Sligo.

Eastern Garavogue Bridge

- €22m Capital Project

Sligo. LIVE
INVEST
VISIT



Sligo.

O'Connell St. Enhancement

- Phase 1 Complete
- Phase 2 to Commence Q1 '21



Sligo. LIVE
INVEST
VISIT

Sligo.

Sligo Cultural Plaza



Sligo. LIVE
INVEST
VISIT

Sligo.

Stephen Street Plaza

- €3m Refurbishment
Commencing Q1, 2021

Sligo. LIVE
INVEST
VISIT



Sligo.

Connaughton Road Car Park

Sligo. LIVE
INVEST
VISIT



Sligo.

Wine St. Car Park:

Urban Renewal



Sligo. LIVE INVEST VISIT

Sligo.

THE EMBANKMENT

Innovative
collaboration
between IDA, IT,
Sligo and Sligo
County Council



Sligo. LIVE INVEST VISIT





Sligo.

N4-N15:

- €9m Capital Project

Sligo. LIVE INVEST VISIT

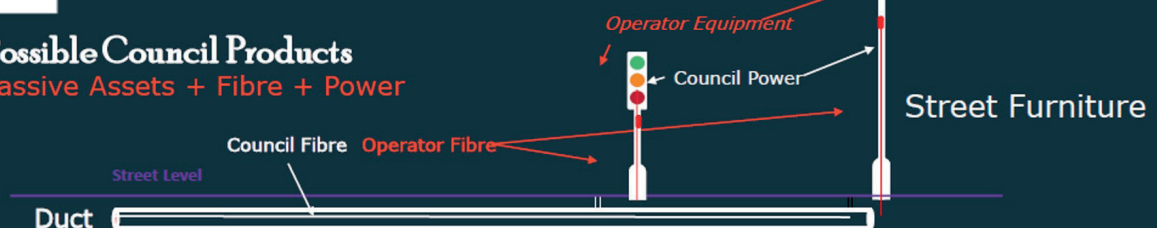


Sligo Smart City

Sligo.

Possible Council Products

Passive Assets + Fibre + Power



- Council makes their Passive assets – Ducts, Street Furniture, Buildings available for interested parties (e.g. Mobile Operators) to locate their equipment on the infrastructure. The Operator pays an annual fee for the use of the "footprint" and sometimes has a Service Level Agreement (SLA) to ensure rapid access in the event of a fault with their equipment.
- Council makes their excess fibre (e.g. for Traffic lights) available to rent to the Operator
- Council allows the operator to "tap" their power for the sensor/basestation
- The Operator provides the equipment and adds a fibre tail
- The Operator delivers the service

Sligo. LIVE INVEST VISIT



HSE Digital Transformation

Shakespeare Advisory Ltd

Sligo.

Western
Distributor Road:

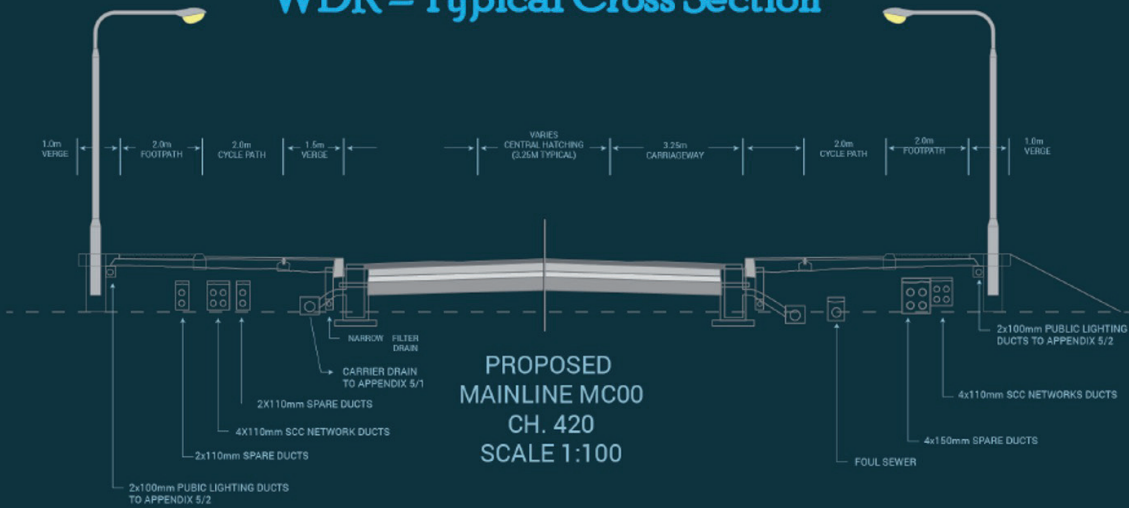
- €22m Capital Project

Sligo. LIVE INVEST VISIT



Sligo.

WDR – Typical Cross Section



Sligo. LIVE INVEST VISIT

IDA, Sligo

Year 1 (Q4 2019)
Sligo AOB



Year 2 (2020)
Sligo ABS





ATB Finisklin (Completed)



The Landing Space (Completed)



Western Distributor Road
Under construction in partnership with Sligo County Council

Sligo. LIVE INVEST VISIT

Sligo.

Sligo Port:

Urban Renewal

Sligo. LIVE INVEST VISIT



Sligo.

Climate Change and Housing

NZEB Social Housing

Energy Costs:

A3 BER
€7.50 – 8 p.w.

Sligo. LIVE
INVEST
VISIT



Sligo.

Cranmore, Sligo
January 2019

Sligo. LIVE
INVEST
VISIT





National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC)
An Coimisiún Náisiúnra Maoirseachta & Iniúchoóireachta

Postal Address: Custom House, Dublin 1, D01 W6X0.

Website: www.noac.ie

Email: info@noac.ie