

Report on Local Authorities finds mixed performance in 2020

- Independent oversight body identified several areas of improvement across Ireland's local government sector –

30 September 2021: A report by the independent watchdog of local government has examined the performance of the State's 31 local authorities in 2020 across eleven areas. The annual report, by the National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC), found local authorities delivered mixed results in a range of areas including housing, homelessness, the environment and financial management.

In their seventh annual report, NOAC found local authorities have improved their adult homelessness levels, improved the collection rate of housing loans, stabilised their finances, and decreased staff sick leave. However, areas where downward change was noted by NOAC include social housing re-let times and costs and the impact of Covid-19 on local authority services.

Commenting on the publication of the report, Chair of NOAC Performance Indicator Working Group, Philomena Poole, said: "Public health restrictions and the increased challenges local authorities faced in providing essential services, along with the reduction in income, has impacted performance under various indicator headings. However, re-letting time and cost has again increased and although COVID-19 has impacted this area NOAC notes that there has been a steady rise in re-letting costs since 2014, with only a small decrease shown in 2019 compared to the prior year".

The NOAC uses 42 indicators across eleven areas to measure local authority performance. The data is submitted by the local authorities and other State and regulatory bodies. Some of the key findings in the report include:

- **Housing:** Local authorities had 141,128 dwellings in their ownership, a slight decrease on 2019 figures. There was 3.18% vacancy rate on social houses and the average time for rehousing was 32.69 weeks.
- **Adult homelessness:** 2020 is the first year since NOAC published its first Performance Indicators Report 2014, that there has been a decrease in both the number of adults in emergency accommodation and the number of adults in emergency accommodation that are long-term homeless.
- **Motor Tax:** 81.52% of motor tax transactions were completed online, an increase from 70.21% in 2019 and continuing a steady rise each year from 56.50% in 2015.

- **Environment:** Local authorities registered 84,942 pollution complaints in 2020, an increase compared to 2019. Nine local authorities recorded a decrease in the percentage area unpolluted or litter free, whereas 18 recorded an increase.
- **Financial management:** There were 11 authorities that had a deficit on the Revenue Account at the end of 2020, with all 11 having reduced their deficit amount from that in 2019.
- **Staff levels and sick leave:** Whole-time equivalent staff employed by the local authority sector at the end of 2020 was 29,717.92. This represents an increase of 1.9% since 2019. However, 11 local authorities showed a reduction in staff numbers. The national average medically certified paid sick leave rate for the sector in 2020 was 3.01%, a reduction from 2019.
- **Fire Services:** For fire incidents, 14 authorities increased the percentage in which the first fire tender reached the scene in less than 10 minutes compared to 2019. In the case of 17 authorities, the percentage where first fire tender attendance took longer than 20 minutes increased.

Philomena Poole concluded by saying that NOAC is aware of the impact that COVID-19 restrictions may have attributed to these results and noted: “NOAC was pleased to see that despite the challenges of 2020, local authorities continued to provide essential services and are continuing to develop new approaches to improve their performance. NOAC expects to see continued positive improvements recorded in its 2021 report and looks forward to showcasing some of the exemplars of good practices in its Good Practice Seminar later in 2021”.

NOAC would like to thank local authority staff, the LGMA, and all organisations who provided or reviewed data for NOAC’s Local Authority Performance Indicator Report 2020.

-ENDS-

The full report can be downloaded from the NOAC website www.noac.ie in addition to a video from the NOAC board.

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About the NOAC

NOAC (the National Oversight and Audit Commission) was established under the Local Government Reform Act 2014 to provide independent scrutiny of local government performance in fulfilling national, regional and local mandates. One of its functions is to scrutinise performance of local government bodies against relevant indicators and this is the seventh annual performance indicator report published by NOAC in relation to that function.

Since its establishment, NOAC has examined a range of areas of local authority activity, resulting in the publication of 43 reports to date. For further information on NOAC, including all reports published to date, see www.noac.ie