



National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC)
Final Minutes of the Meeting – Tuesday 13th September 2022 at 10 a.m.

Venue: Remote Meeting via WebEx Meeting Platform

Attended by:

Chairperson: Michael McCarthy

Members: Niall Quinn Ciarán Hayes
Declan Breathnach Philomena Poole
Noel Harrington Brian Cawley
Fiona Quinn

Secretariat: Claire Gavin Nason Fallon
John Goldrick Deirdre Byrne
Valerie Longmore

Apologies: Margaret Lane

1. Minutes & actions of previous meeting

The following amendments were requested to the NOAC minutes of 5th July 2022. It was outlined that the LGMA ICT Strategy was being moved from WG3 to WG1. While no difficulty is envisaged with this proposed move, no formal agreement has been made on this. It will be discussed at the WG1 meeting on 14th September.

It was also outlined that if there are any items which need to be amended with minutes, that this can be brought to the attention of the meeting, in order to have such amendments undertaken.

2. Declaration of conflict of interest

No conflicts of interest were raised.

3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

4. Work Programme Updates

Chair: Scrutiny Reports

There are upcoming online Stage 1 scrutiny meetings with Wexford County Council on 29th September and Galway County Council on 30th September. At the next board meeting on 11th October there will be online Stage 2 scrutiny meetings with Galway City, Leitrim and Wexford.

Performance Indicators Working Group (WG2)

The Performance Indicators Report is looking at a publication date of the end of September. It is planned that there would be publicity accompanying its launch, with a focus this year on seeking national coverage. The Secretariat has put out a tender for the PR, but only one reply was received to date.

Some significant delays were experienced in getting that data this year and it was agreed that this was due to a number of factors, including the urgency around the housing of the Ukrainian refugees. Significant parts of the report are completed and with the desk top publisher while other parts have yet to be completed.

There is a variation with the numbers for the housing stock, which is the main area to be reconciled. There are valid reasons for the variances in housing, due to the Department and NOAC counting housing units in different ways. The Secretariat has contacted local authorities during the summer to reconcile these numbers. The board believed it important that it is outlined up front why there are differences in numbers, which is that the Department and NOAC are measuring slightly different items. A footnote on the methodology may be included to explain these differences. The board gave an approval in principle for the report to be published.

For Working Group 2 the priority is the national performance framework which will be a focus for the WG once the PI report is published.

The Communications and Customer Survey Working Group (WG3)

WG3 met on 7th September, which was attended by the contractor on the communications strategy. As the meeting went over, some agenda items, including the response to the LGMA's letter regarding the Customer Survey and the Corporate Planning event, were not dealt with. The communications strategy contained numerous positive items, such as how NOAC's function was viewed, which was the outcome of a survey of key stakeholders by the contractor.

The strategy itself fell short of requirements. It presented six pillars, which envisioned a strategy of a website led approach, which it was felt did not constitute a strategy. Other items needed to be covered, such as whether an organisation wishes to be high or low profile, what the tone of communications would be, how NOAC would build up from where it is now to where it wants to be over a three year period, how spokespeople should be used, and issues such as reputational risk should be covered. WG3 furnished its feedback after the meeting and the contractor will revert to the WG in October. It is hoped that there will be a strategy at that point which can be approved by the board.

On the Good Practice seminar, projects have been selected. An assistant secretary will attend from DP&ER, which will raise the profile of the event. The Secretariat will also be engaging with the communications unit in the Department and the LGMA. It is suggested that to meet the commitment

of engagement with local representatives, that one local authority official should be invited to the seminar, plus, for the first time, one invitation could also issue to the chairs of the local authorities. This suggestion was agreed to by the board.

Financial Management and Performance Working Group (WG4)

The Audit Committee workshop of 31st August was well attended by NOAC and audit committees. A report of the event will be provided by the Secretariat at a later point which will include issues raised on the day, some which pertain to the Department rather than NOAC. The speakers found it an interesting and worthwhile meeting.

There was a lot of engagement at the meeting, with the audit committees seeking further engagement for the future. There is the possibility that the audit committees would expect another meeting before Christmas. One of the points highlighted was that there was a lack of clarity of the role of NOAC.

It was outlined that when an item is raised, with the expectation that NOAC should do something which isn't within its remit, this needs to be articulated straight away. Having a matrix outlining the responsibilities of NOAC and other bodies would be worthwhile in this regard. Presentations had been submitted so that people would understand NOAC's remit. It was suggested that NOAC's annual report could be forwarded to audit committees to give them a better understanding of the organisation and to reduce their expectations of the role of NOAC.

It should also be remembered that one of the objectives in meeting the audit committees was to reach out to groups that NOAC had not previously engaged with and that NOAC is seeking to build a relationship with this group for the future as well. There can be a misunderstanding of what NOAC's role and functions are, as was noted in some of the matter raised by deputies at the attendance of the Joint Oireachtas Committee in May. The board thanked the Secretariat for its work on the Audit Committee meeting, which was considered a success.

Work on the Public Spending Code is at an advanced stage and will be presented at the next board meeting.

5. October Stage 2 meetings

This item was largely covered earlier in the meeting. Further details of the meetings of 11th October were outlined. Each of the meetings with the three local authorities (Galway City, Leitrim and Wexford) will need to be kept to an hour, to ensure that there are no over-runs into another meeting slot. Board members who cannot attend all three meetings may wish to note the times of the individual meetings in order to attend for a particular meeting during the day.

6. Statement of Strategy

A report was received on the NOAC planning day in May and now the question arises as to what are the next steps and how the Statement of Strategy will be developed for the future. Members believed that a further facilitated planning day would be useful to this end.

An issue was raised about the alignment of Work Plans in the Working Groups and NOAC's statutory responsibilities. It is important that NOAC uses its limited resources to best effect. An example was highlighted on WG3 which has a particular output to review the ICT strategies of local authorities. The question of its usefulness arises, given that this is not directly aligned to NOAC's statutory role. It was suggested that the Work Plans should be discussed in advance of undertaking tasks as to whether they represent a useful employment of resources.

One of the items highlighted in the planning day was the overlap of work in different organisations. The more important issue is whether any areas of work are being neglected. It may be worthwhile to meet the Department to examine NOAC's role with respect to other agencies. Missing work areas was deemed to be a risk area. A matrix of responsibility for NOAC and other organisations, demonstrating also what work items are on the fringes, would be useful. Secretariat resource planning is also a key area to focus on, to ensure that there are sufficient resources in place to undertake the necessary work. The chair will discuss these suggestions with the Secretariat.

7. Work Planning

This item is directly related to the previous item of the agenda, and no further discussion took place on this topic.

8. Date of next meeting

The next meeting will take place on 11th October, followed by a meeting on 22nd November.

9. Any Other Business

It was recorded that the sister of former board member Martina Moloney passed away. It may be appropriate to sympathise with her family.

The value for money unit are looking for topics for next year, therefore any suggestions may be forwarded to Claire Gavin.

It was also noted that Darren Browne has now moved on from the Secretariat and his work in the unit was acknowledged. He has been replaced by Valerie Longmore. A note of thanks to Darren may be issued.

The Secretariat is looking to get a corporate rate for hotel rooms for attendees.

The meeting was brought to a close.

Agenda Item No:	Subject	Action
1.	Minutes and actions of previous meeting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreed to, subject to amendments outlined, and will be published on the website.
4.	Work Programme – WG2: (PI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approval in principle was given to publish the Performance Indicators report.
4.	Work Programme – WG3: (CCS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The chairs of the local authorities will be invited to the Good Practice seminar.
6.	Statement of Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A future facilitated planning day will be organised on the Statement of Strategy. • The NOAC chair will discuss highlighted items under this heading with the Secretariat.