



Galway County Council Scrutiny Report

NOAC Report No. 61 – December 2023



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 have 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
12th December 2023



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.

2

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 then NOAC Chair, 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 deferred.

The COVID restrictions presented 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 via 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 had a significant impact on local authorities, and in particular, for NOAC on the Scrutiny process. The Stage 1 meetings were all held in person, but restrictions curtailed their activities in 2021. Stage 1 meetings were held with Meath and South Dublin in July 2021 and Fingal in October 2021. The Stage 2 meetings progressed, as these were capable of being held remotely, with one held in January 2021 with Limerick City and County Council, another with Meath in September 2021 and a further meeting with South Dublin in December 2021.

2022

2022 saw an increase in the number of scrutiny meetings held with local authorities. Stage 1 meetings were held with Galway City Council in March 2022, with Cavan and Leitrim County Councils and Dublin City Council in June 2022. Further Stage 1 meetings took place later in the year, with Wexford and Galway County Councils, in September 2022. Several stage two meetings were also progressed, with Wexford and Leitrim County Councils and Galway City Council, in October 2022.

Future meetings and reports

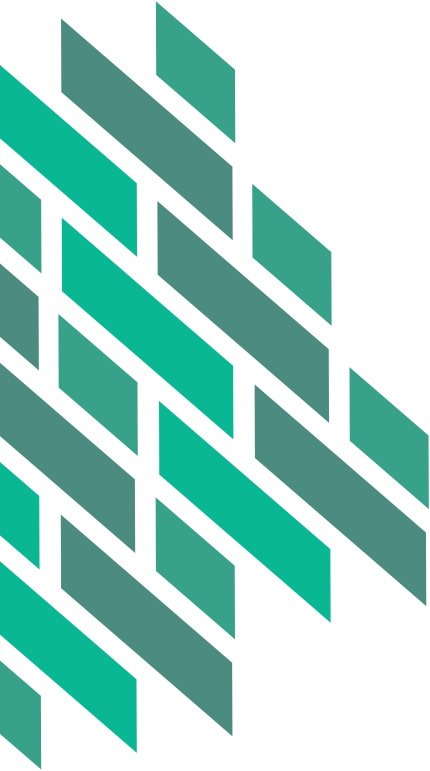
This report outlines the purpose and the procedures of such reports and, while the process may continue to evolve, it is not currently expected to produce another master report, similar to the master report produced in [May 2021](#). It is intended that once all stages in the scrutiny process have been 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. In 2022 and as noted above, 3 Stage 2 and 6 Stage 1 meetings were held with Scrutiny reports being prepared for the completed Stage 2 meetings. So far, in 2023, there have been seven Stage 1 and five Stage 2 meetings held.

Conclusion

The process thus far allowed for the NOAC Chair 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 and annually from 2019 to 2023.

Galway County Council had their Stage 1 meeting in September 2022 and their Stage 2 meeting in September 2023. 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. In addition, it should be noted that the relevant information from Performance Indicator Report 2022 is included in this report, as is information from the Review of Local Authority and Regional Assembly Corporate Plans 2019–2024. The NOAC highlights the following points arising out of these meetings with Galway County Council:

- NOAC was keen to note that Galway County Council is one of two local authorities which are piloting the e-planning system to enable planning applications to be conducted online.
- NOAC was interested on the Council's update in which a new audit and risk management methodology was implemented in 2023 to ensure that Corporate Governance is operating at the expected level.
- NOAC was pleased to hear that with respect to housing, the Council is focusing on improving the existing housing stock, including delivery of an energy retro-fit programme and transitioning to a planned maintenance programme.



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NOAC Profile

Galway County Council

September 2023

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Galway County Council General Information

Local authority	Galway County Council
Population:	193,323 (Census 2022) excluding Galway City
Area:	6,149 square kilometres
Municipal Districts:	5
2022 Budget	€143,895,408
Number employed @ 31/12/2022	816.59 (WTE staff total) or 1,043 staff including core staff, retained fire fighters and Non- DHLGH
WTE Staff per 1,000 population	4.224
% of paid working days lost to medically certified sick leave	3.96%
Housing Information @ 31/12/22	
Local Authority Stock number	2,646
Number currently on waiting list	3,506
HAP Tenancies	1,462
Homeless presentations	28
Any specific housing issues	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Constraints associated with delivering Housing for All including inflation and availability of contractors to deliver the housing capital programme. 2. Ukrainian Response. 3. Homelessness, including Traveller accommodation. 4. Availability of rental properties and cost of rents for HAP tenants. 5. Huge demand for Housing Adaptation/Mobility Aid Grants and Housing Aid for Older Persons Grants. 6. Resource requirements for an effective response to tackling dereliction and vacancy. 7. Resources implications associated with transiting from a response to a planned maintenance programme.

Short Information Paragraph	Galway County Council is responsible for the administrative area of County Galway, excluding Galway City. The Council is responsible for the County's Housing, Planning, Roads, Environment, Fire, Libraries and Economic Development functions. Galway County Council is the custodian of the environment and through its planning and environment policies seeks to enhance the County's attractiveness while protecting its unique character and atmosphere. The Council takes an active role in the promotion and development of the County's industrial, economic, business, social, arts, heritage and cultural affairs.
Council Mission Statement	To enhance the quality of life for the people of County Galway by leading and strengthening Community and Economic development and delivering efficient and sustainable services.
Economic Forum (CEF)	Extract from the Galway County Local Economic and Community Plan: An Economic Forum will be established by Galway County Council, comprising representatives from all support providers in the County connected to the support and service of start-ups and SMEs, with the purpose of maximising collaboration and cooperation across the County.
The Local Enterprise Office	<p>Since 2014 Galway County Council provides a joint service between the City and County. The Local Enterprise Offices are the local first-stop shop for seeking information and support on starting or growing a business in Ireland. Local Enterprise Offices offer a wide range of experience, skills and services.</p> <p>Our Role: To Help You Deliver on Your Business Idea.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ To drive the development of local enterprise, putting local micro and small business at the heart of job creation in Ireland. ■ To drive and support business start-ups and promote a 'can-do' business culture. ■ To increase the job potential of new and existing micro and small businesses. ■ To increase the number of innovative businesses with potential to export. ■ To be proactive in response to the needs of our clients.
Retail Incentives	<p>Examples -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The Trading Online Voucher Scheme by LEO. ■ The Town & Village Renewal Scheme Accelerator Programme 2020 (Specific to Covid) by our Economic Rural & Community Development Unit. ■ Commercial Rates Payment Incentive Scheme by our Finance Unit.
The Corporate Plan	<p>The Galway County Council Corporate Plan 2020 – 2024</p> <p>https://www.galway.ie/en/services/yourCouncil/corpdocs/</p>

Shared services	Library, Fire, Lifeguards, Veterinary Services, Sports Partnership, Local Enterprise Office, Rinville Park, Coroners.
Regional Issues including new developments and initiatives	<p>We have actively been targeting Planning and Waste Enforcement, strengthening of the Municipal Districts structure, responding to the demands of Climate Change & Energy Efficiency, supporting the Traveller Accommodation & Housing Capital Programme and other areas such as Active travel, Greenways, Urban and Rural regeneration fund programme.</p> <p>Transportation Infrastructure – Completion and opening of the Maigh Cuilinn bypass in Q4 2023, the commencement of the N59 Bunnakill to Claremont Scheme and both the N63 Liss to Abbey Scheme and N17 Milltown to Gortnagunnad Schemes (subject to TII funding). Also, continued work on the Conamara Greenway and the approval of the Galway City Ring Road which has been remitted back to An Bord Pleanála. Continue with the advancement of the Galway to Athlone Cycleway. Roll out of EV Charging Infrastructure (ZEVI).</p> <p>The Galway County Development Plan 2022 – 2028 – adopted & LAP plans in Ballinasloe (adopted), Athenry, Tuam and Loughrea (in statutory process).</p> <p>Rural Regeneration – street enhancement, town and village renewal, Clár, ORIS and other schemes.</p> <p>Town Centre First Officer appointed – Masterplans for Clifden, Tuam, Athenry, Gort prepared, next stage is implementation.</p> <p>Tourism and Hospitality – e.g. Outdoor Seating and Furniture Scheme. Roll out of other business supports to business e.g. pre-planning service, guide to Government grants and incentives.</p> <p>Housing Delivery Action Plan has been prepared, to increase the supply of social housing as per “Housing for All” Government Work Programme launched in September 2021.</p> <p>Ongoing management of illegal dumping in the County. An Energy Bureau Officer has been appointed for the Council as part of the Regional Energy Bureau model. The model has been developed in partnership with the Climate Action Regional Office and the SEAI.</p> <p>Rollout of Broadband – Digital Hubs programme.</p>

Supporting Strategies

Listed in the Galway County Council Corporate Plan 2020 – 2024, to support our Strategic Goals:

<https://www.galway.ie/en/services/yourCouncil/corpdocs/>

- Community Participation & Social Inclusion
- Economic & Enterprise Development
- Infrastructural Capacity
- Organisational Capacity
- Protection of Environment & Heritage
- Quality Customer Service
- Tourism Strategy

Any other relevant information

Galway County Council's staffing complement is one of the lowest in the country per head of population. Since taking up appointment I have initiated a strategic workforce planning exercise which will take advantages of existing resource efficiencies and focus new staff into service areas to improve our capacity to deliver core services.

The recent uplift for Galway will allow key strategic projects such as:

- Strategic Workforce Planning exercise/Municipal District Restructuring
- Planning & Economic Development – Development Focus
- Housing – Capital and Planned Maintenance
- Infrastructure - Project Management Delivery
- Corporate Office needs

Collection Rates

	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014
Rate collection rates	85%	82%	87%	86%	84%	84%	81%	67%
Rent collection rates	91%	92%	91%	91%	90%	91%	90%	88%
Housing loan collection rates	81%	79%	79%	76%	76%	76%	76%	75%

From records, it can be seen that the rate collections since 2014 have risen over the years, reaching 87% in 2019, before slightly falling back to 85% in 2021. This is in line with the national average of 84%.

Rent collections have risen slightly over the years, going from 88% in 2014 to 91% in 2021. The 91% figure is the same as the national average for local authorities for 2021.

Housing loans collection rates have also seen an increase since 2014, when it was at 75% and now stands at 81%, which is above the average collection rate of 82% for 2021.

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 Galway County Council are outlined in the points below.

NOAC REPORT NO 46

Review of Local Authority and Regional Assembly

Corporate Plans 2019–2024 – November 2021

In November 2021, NOAC published its review of the corporate plans of local authorities and regional assemblies for the period 2019 - 2024. The purpose of the report is to review the adequacy of the plans and to assist with the further development of good practice in corporate planning. In the report, examples of good practice in relation to both the process of developing the plans, and the content of the plans are highlighted. Cavan County Council has been successful in covering these areas within its Corporate Plan.

Under the process, areas considered for review included:

- The pre-plan consultation, which looks at how local authorities formulated the Corporate Plan, consulted with stakeholders and engaged with elected members.

- Review of the Corporate Plans. This investigated how local authorities proposed to review the progress of their Corporate Plans.
- Integration of the Corporate Plan with other policies and strategies, which examined the extent to which local authorities consulted other policy reports and strategies when devising their Corporate Plans.
- Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty. Under this heading, it was examined as to how local authorities engaged with the issue of human rights.

Examining the contents of the Corporate Plans, the following were among the areas reviewed:

- Vision and Mission: Strategies and Objectives. This detailed local authorities' visions, mission statements and broad goals during the life of the plan. It focused on the setting of actions and goals to deliver these broad objectives and visions.
- Financial resourcing of the Corporate Plan and how risks to the delivery of the Corporate Plan can be examined, taking into account how Councils are dependent on voted capital funds from central government.
- Measuring and mitigating risk. This examines where local authorities depend on other external providers and other public bodies to successfully deliver certain services. This involves risk which can be mitigated through appropriate oversight, including service level agreements.

Galway County Council is alluded to specifically in the section of the report outlined below, relating to evidence of pre-plan consultation:

- The Galway County Council corporate plan reflects a very comprehensive and broad stakeholder engagement programme, including: "Elected Members, staff and members of organisations and committees including Local Community Development Committee (LCDC), Joint Policing Committee (JPC), Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee (LTACC), Public Participation Network (PPN), Enterprise Ireland, Fáilte Ireland, Sports Partnership etc." This is a good example of a broad-based stakeholder consultation programme, presented in a transparent manner.

- In “Appendix 3: list of baseline data” of the plan, Galway County Council lists a specific functional area of “Citizen Engagement/ Public Participation Networks (PPNs)” which is “to enable the public to take an active formal role in policymaking and oversight committees of the local authority.” This includes details of corresponding supporting programmes and a measurement methodology. This appendix includes a section for all functional areas titled “Actual Current Operational Baseline” where one might expect to see hard data, but the section is entirely blank, perhaps suggesting data is not actually gathered. This is an example of where good practice risks being diluted through weak data collation and publication. It is notable that in the example of Galway County Council, consultation focused on inviting existing stakeholder organisations to complete a survey. There is no information on how citizens (those who are not members of one of the listed organisations) were canvassed for their views.

NOAC REPORT NOS 50 AND 44

Performance Indicator Reports 2021 and 2020

- **Housing.** Galway County Council owned 2,624 social housing dwellings at the end of 2021 with 7.1% vacant, compared to a national average of 3.16%. In 2020 the Council owned 2,590 social housing dwellings with 7.07% vacant, compared to a national average of 3.18%.

In 2021 the average time for rehousing in vacant properties in Galway County was 65.93 weeks, which is almost double the national average of 34.44 weeks. This is a very significant increase on 2020, when the average time for rehousing in vacant properties in Galway County was 49.22 weeks, compared with the national average of 32.69 weeks.

New house building inspections increased marginally from 15.28% in 2020 to 16.97% in 2021. Galway County had a maintenance cost per unit nationally in 2021 of €909.50, which was a decrease on the €1,058.16 in 2020.

- **Environment.** 22% of the County is unpolluted or litter-free, the same as in 2020. 43% of the area is slightly polluted, which again represents the same figure for 2020 and 23% is moderately polluted (24% in 2020). The national average figures for being unpolluted or litter-free in 2021 was 22% and was 13% for being moderately polluted.
- **Green Flag status.** At the end of 2021, 34% of schools in the County held a Green Flag, while this was 35% in 2020. The national average in 2021 was 34.8% and was 41.83% in 2020.
- **Fire service.** It took an average of 1:57 minutes to mobilise fire brigades for calls to fires, compared to the 2:06 minutes of 2020.
- **Libraries.** There was an average of 0.7 visits per head of population (below the national average of 0.86) and 504,912 items issued to library borrowers in 2021. For 2020 the figures were 0.64 visits compared to the national average of 1.05 and 435,010 items borrowed.
The cost of the library service was €20.59 in 2021, compared to the national average of €36.92.

- **Roads.** In terms of road condition, Galway County had 31.32% of its local primary roads having no defects. Regarding its local secondary roads, 17.43% had no defects, while 14.28% of its tertiary roads had no defects.
- **Cost per capita of the planning service** increased slightly from €21.29 in 2020 to €22.31 in 2021.
- **Staff total.** Whole-time equivalent staff employed by Galway County Council at the end of 2021 was 802.79. This compares to 780.13 for the end of 2020.
- **Overheads.** It was noted that in terms of overheads, which are costs directly related to the operational activities of a local authority, Galway County had 36.32% of its payroll costs as a percentage of its revenue expenditure (31.15% in 2020), compared to an average across all local authorities of 31.83%.
- **Sick leave.** Galway County’s medically certified sick leave rate is 3.43% (compared to 3.54% in 2020), making it one of the local authorities which met the public sector sick leave target of 3.5%. Galway County’s self-certified sick leave rate was 0.17% in 2021. The national average is 0.19%.

- **Technology & Social media.** The per capita total page views of Galway County's websites in 2021 was 8.12, which compares to an average of 13.6 across all local authorities. The per capita total page views of Galway County's websites in 2020 was 6.26, which compares to an average of 15.56 across all local authorities.

The per capita total number of followers at the end 2021 of its social media accounts was 0.54, as opposed to an average of 0.93 across all local authorities. This compares to the per capita total number of followers at the end 2020 of its social media accounts of 0.45, as opposed to an average of 0.81 across all local authorities.

With regards to the cost of Information Communications Technology (ICT) provision per whole-time equivalent staff member of a local authority, Galway County recorded a cost of €2,751.88 per whole-time equivalent staff in 2021, down from €2,896.86 in 2020.

- **Public lighting.** Galway County reported a billable wattage of 4,537 kilowatts per hour, which compares to 4,579 kilowatts per hour in 2020.
- **Public liability.** In 2021 Galway County had a cost of settled claims per capita of €4.67. This is lower than the €5.56 cost in 2020.

NOAC REPORT NO 18

Customer Satisfaction Survey 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 local authorities. The second survey, completed in March 2019, was conducted with the 10 medium sized local authorities and Galway City. The remaining 10 local authorities were surveyed in 2020. Galway County was included in the 2018 survey.

- 57% of respondents were satisfied with Galway County Council, which was slightly above the average level of satisfaction with all Councils, which was 53%.
- 79% believed that Galway County promotes economic activity compared to the average of 48%.
- 29% of people felt that Galway County provides good value for money, where the average was 27% across all local authorities.
- 51% of people believe that Galway County is doing a good job, compared to the overall satisfaction rating of 47%.

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. Galway County was not one of 17 authorities which had done so.
- The Head of Internal Audit reports to the Chief Executive (CE) and Director of Corporate in three authorities, including Galway County.
- In response to the question as to whether any External Quality Assurance review of Internal Audit has been undertaken, only six local authorities, including Galway County, confirmed that this was the case.
- When questioned if a compliance test was carried out in 2016 with regards to the operation of the Internal Audit unit against the stated function in the charter, only five local authorities, excluding Galway County, confirmed this to be the case.

NOAC REPORT NO 12

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

Number of Housing Estates managed by each Local Authority

Galway County ranked twentieth with respect to the number of housing estates managed by a local authority, at 86.

Local Authority Staff Numbers

The number of dwellings per WTE working on the management function ranged from 1,197 in Galway County Council to 66.2 in Dublin City Council with a median of 154.3 and an overall average of 128.8 dwellings per WTE.

NOAC REPORT NO 10

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

	2014	2020
Number of Registered Tenancies	5,944	7,036
% Units inspected	1.0	12.21
Inspected Failed %	100	99.52

Data from report relates to 2014, data for 2020 taken from Performance Indicator Report

NOAC REPORT NO 51

Public Spending Code 2021

The Public Spending Code (PSC) was developed by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER). The Code applies to both current and capital expenditure and to all public bodies in receipt of public funds. According to DPER, the Code 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 and that their reports should be submitted to NOAC for incorporation in a composite report for the local government sector.

The Quality Assurance reporting requirements consists of the following five steps:

1. Local authorities should draw up an inventory of projects/programmes at the different stages of the Project Life Cycle, in respect of all capital and current expenditure projects to a value greater than €0.5m.

2. Confirm publication on the local authority's website of summary information on all procurements in excess of €10m related to projects in progress or completed in the year under review and provide a link to the relevant website location.
3. Complete the seven specified checklists. Only one of each type of checklist per local authority is required and not one per each project/programme. The completion of the checklists is to be based on an appropriate sample of the projects/areas of expenditure relevant to that checklist.
4. Carry out a more in-depth review of selected projects/programmes such that, over a 3-5 year period, every stage of the project life-cycle and every scale of project will be subject to a closer examination. Revenue projects selected for in-depth review must represent a minimum of 1% of the total value of all revenue projects in the inventory, while the requirement in respect of capital projects is 5% of the total value of all capital projects in the inventory.
5. Complete a short summary report consisting of the inventory, procurement reference and checklists referenced in steps 1 to 3 and the local authority's judgment as to the adequacy of the appraisal/planning, implementation or review work that it examined as part of step 4, the reasons why it formed that judgment and its proposals to remedy any inadequacies found during the entire quality assurance process.

In the case of Galway County Council it complied with all five steps as highlighted above including providing links to the online Publication of Summary Information of all Procurements in Excess of €10m.

A particular point of note was:

- Its final outturn expenditure of projects/programmes completed or discontinued in the reference year that was greater than €0.5m was €63,638,846 which was significantly below the national average of €47,115,384.

Local Authority	Expenditure being Considered - Greater than €0.5m (Capital and Current)				Expenditure being Incurred - Greater than €0.5m (Capital and Current)				Projects/Programmes Completed or discontinued in the reference year - Greater than €0.5m (Capital and Current)				
	Current Expenditure Reference Year	Capital Expenditure Amount in Reference Year (Non Grant)	Capital Expenditure Amount in Reference Year (Grant)	Projected Lifetime Expenditure	Current Expenditure Reference Year	Capital Expenditure Amount in Reference Year (Non Grant)	Capital Expenditure Amount in Reference Year (Grant)	Cumulative Expenditure to-date	Projected Lifetime Expenditure (Capital Only)	Current Expenditure Reference Year	Capital Expenditure Amount in Reference Year (Non Grant)	Capital Expenditure Amount in Reference Year (Grant)	Final Outrun Expenditure
Galway County Council	€0	€0	€269,481	€334,180,180	€148,233,290	€960,015	€50,074,221	€185,295,345	€1,101,391,466	€0	€183,923	€11,289,691	€63,638,846
Average	€7,327,049	€5,865,083	€3,972,866	€238,802,224	€205,008,477	€45,469,548	€7,295,668	€340,256,110	€488,173,084	€109,826	€7,064,180	€2,819,326	€47,115,384

GALWAY CITY

Performance Indicators	2021		2020		2019		2018		2017		2016		2015		2014	
	Data	Median/Average	Data	Median/Average	Data	Median/Average	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	0.63	0.59	0.45	0.64	0.83	1.15	0.29	0.84	0.13	0.53	n/a	3.43	0.13	1.91	0.38	0.80
H2 % of directly provided dwellings vacant at 31/12	7.10	3.16	7.07	3.18	6.34	3.15	4.42	2.77	2.78	2.73	3.76	3.02	5.56	3.5	7.19	3.8
H3a Average time from vacation date to PI year re-letting date (weeks)	65.93	34.44	49.22	32.69	51	28.17	52.14	27.75	39.91	28.9	49.86	32.99	48.34	28.43	51.19	31.43
H3b Average cost expended on getting re-tenant-ed units ready for re-letting	€21,701.72	€19,653.39	€17,174.71	€19,065.30	€13,204.09	€18,336.85	€18,165.83	€18,590.28	€13,983.83	€17,160.60	19,091.86	€15,877	11,549.66	€13,378.40	8,033.58	€11,534.91



Performance Indicators	2021		2020		2019		2018		2017		2016		2015		2014	
	€	%	€	%	€	%	€	%	€	%	€	%	€	%	€	%
H4 Average repair and maintenance cost per unit	€909.50	€1,150.13	€1,058.16	€1,119.82	€1,060.27	€1,168.99	€933.82	€841.83	€1,129.34	€1,311.82	1,050.43	€1,500.23	528.94	€1,292.57	766.15	€1,272.30
H5 Inspections (Dwellings inspected in 2020) carried out in year as % of registrations	No data available	No data available	12.21	6.73	10.01	9.93	11.68	7.39	10.28	4.96	0.56	4.36	1.36	5.64	0.96	6.51
R1a % Regional Road KM that ever received a PSCI rating	94	91	94	77	97.94	99	98	99.36	56	96	98.00	99	19.00	68	100.00	47.9
R1b % Total Regional Road KM with a PSCI rating of 9-10	26.13	30.90	19.9	31.19	48.78	38.28	43	37.58	25	28	28.00	30	9.00	20	19.54	11.15
R1c % Total Primary Road KM with a PSCI rating of 9-10	31.32	26.05	20.8	24.00	14.47	23.08	16	23.39	11	20	19.00	13	16.00	11	16.30	6.4
R1d % Total Secondary Road KM with a PSCI rating of 9-10	17.43	21.40	9.6	17.66	12.44	17.67	9	15.19	5	14	7.00	10	5.00	8	4.49	4.61
R1e % Total Tertiary Road KM with a PSCI rating of 9-10	14.28	15.38	14.4	13.93	11.25	14.23	9	12.42	5	8	4.00	7	3.00	5	2.85	3.63
R2a KM Regional Road strengthened using road improvement grants	27.8	13.40	34.2	14.7	27.60	13.17	20.3	13.4	32.50	10.3	31.20	10.8	31.10	10.2		
R2b KM Regional road ressealed using road maintenance grants	33.8	19.9	37.4	19.4	41.60	14.27	27.4	15.3	26.10	11.9	30.20	12.2	19.70	8.3		

Performance Indicators	2021		2020		2019		2018		2017		2016		2015		2014	
R2/3 % Motor tax transactions performed online	87.96	86.18	84.03	81.52	74.67	70.21	72.28	69.15	69.05	65.95	66.03	64.05	58.24	56.6	52.52	54.7
W1 % private schemes with water quality in compliance	No data available	No data available	No data available	No data available	98.60	97.50	97.25	97.1	98.77	98.46	98.59	97.77	99.25	99.07	99.00	97.9
E1 % households availing of a 3-bin service	96.50	55.09	99.09	89.73	24.56	48.36	21.53	43.91	17.04	39.53	13.91	37.7	10.68	34.87	10.85	31.66
E2 Pollution cases on hand at year end as % of the cases that arose that year	97.86	10.82	77.08	10.38	48.32	9.28	46.26	11.00	37.70	9.79	4.05	9.91	29.69	8.49		
E3 % area unpolluted or litter free	22	22	22	22	22	15.00	20	19.00	23	10	13.00	13	14.00	14	12.00	9.5
P1 New buildings inspected as % of new buildings notified	16.39	16.97	15.28	15.28	15.60	23.90	15.05	16.75	15.07	17	11.46	19.42	26.96	24	0.96	17.71
P2 % of determinations that confirmed the decision made by LA	41.86	71.17	66.67	73.17	67.61	73.07	65.57	75.92	82.05	79	75.00	77.78	71.43	71.88	71.05	71.7
P3 Ratio of planning cases being investigated at year end as to cases closed	23.23	3.60	19.13	3.74	7.73	2.74	6.76	3.03	2.65	2.41	20.67	2.87	15.59	2.61	7.09	2.88
P4 Cost per capita of the Planning Service	22.31	33.37	21.29	31.47	21.31	€30.27	19.63	29.24	€19.04	28.31	18.49	€26.96	20.17	€26.76	21.22	€25.27
F1 Cost per capita of Fire Service (based on 2016 Census)	€52.72	82.69	52.48	79.93	50.11	€60.79	48.36	53.85	€45.65	57.74	42.73	€56.07	46.40	€57.88	44.15	€55.9



Performance Indicators	2021		2020		2019		2018		2017		2016		2015		2014	
F2	1:57	1:27	2:06	1:28	2:15	1:24	2:19	1:42	2:38	1:45	2:44	1:5	2:67	1.6	2.58	1.66
F3	44.24	56.17	42.16	55.30	35.08	55.14	32.47	52.92	41.88	40.45	43.65	57.79	40.23	56.98	44.35	58.6
L1a	0.7	0.86	0.64	1.05	2.47	3.57	2.41	3.50	2.26	3.56	2.31	3.61	2.54	3.68	2.72	3.71
L1b	2.81	2.07	2.42	2.19	3.37	3.14	3.45	3.00	2.22	2.92	4.15	3.82	3.95	3.82		
L2	€20.59	36.92	19.33	35.95	€19.89	€34.94	20.18	30.52	19.06	31.00	17.58	€30.05	17.82	€30.02	18.91	€29.41
Y1	41.67	63.25	54.29	63.29	77.14	68.30	77.14	80.00	77.14	69.04	77.14	68.07	71.43	67.59	57.41	51.86
C1	4.48	5.89	4.35	6.06	3.98	5.95	4.22	5.99	2.84	5.75	4.19	5.64	4.23	5.58	4.29	5.63
C2a	3.43	2.89	3.54	3.01	4.16	3.71	4.21	3.74	4.71	3.74	4.25	3.76	3.88	3.52	3.45	3.34
C2b	0.17	0.19	0.14	0.20	0.32	0.36	0.27	0.35	0.29	0.33	0.28	0.38	0.31	0.39	0.34	0.4
C3	8.12	13.60	N/A	N/A	8,287.10	16,572	8,060	16,210.00	3873	14,632	6,941.81	12,422	6,300.18	11,666	6,938.06	9,651
C4	2,751.88	3,521.62	2,896.86	3,457.02	2,271.63	3,060.84	2,560.15	2,894.57	€2,782.21	€3,048.41	2,174.07	€2,675.69	2,246.64	€2,680.15	2,632.18	€2,646.8

Performance Indicators	2021		2020		2019		2018		2017		2016		2015		2014	
M2a	85	83.40	82	76	87	87	86	86.00	84.0	83	84.00	82.3	81.00	83	67.00	77
M2b	91	88.8	92	88.3	91	89.80	91	89.00	90.0	89	91.00	88.0	90.00	85	88.00	84
M2c	81	81.6	79	79.4	79	78	76	75.00	76.0	74	76.00	70	76.00	68	75.00	67
J1	1.05	0.59	-0.12	-0.30	0.62	0.64	0.58	0.77	0.38	0.68	0.43	0.7	0.39	0.66	0.47	0.73
E6	4,537	5,942	4,579	6,209			0.62									
M3	4.67	11.05	5.56	12.21	18.86	13.53	7.77	11.62								
M4	36.32	31.83	31.15	26.75												



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Stage 1 meeting

Final NOAC Stage 1 meeting with Galway County Council Based on the most recent census

Date:	30th September 2022 at 11 a.m., WebEx online meeting	
In attendance:	Galway County Council <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Jim Cullen, Chief Executive ■ Alan Farrell, DOS ERCD & Ukraine Forum ■ Michael Owens, DOS Planning and Sustainable Development and Corporate Services ■ Liam Hanrahan, DOS Housing & Ukraine Lead ■ Liadhan Keady, Administrative Officer, Corporate Services ■ Derek Pender, Acting DOS Infrastructure and Operations Unit ■ Aine Fenton, Acting head of finance ■ Carol Walsh, Assistant staff officer, Corporate Services 	NOAC <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ciaran Hayes, Alternate Chair NOAC ■ Alan McDermott, NOAC Executive ■ John Goldrick, NOAC Executive

NOAC's profile for Galway County Council was issued in advance of the meeting and formed the basis for the discussion on the day. A second meeting between Galway County Council and the NOAC Board will take place at a later date. The alternate NOAC Chair explained that many of the questions presented in the meeting would revolve around the profile report which had been sent to the local authority in advance of the meeting. The Chief Executive (CE) gave an overview of the Council and the issues facing it.

Background to Galway County Council

Based on the most recent census Galway County has a population of 192,000, which is an increase of 8% from the 2016 census. It is the 10th highest local authority in population and with an area of 6,150 sq km is the second largest county in the state. Galway County has 39 Councillors elected from five Municipal Districts. The Council is part of the Northern and Western Regional Assembly. The County has six Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs):

- Climate Change & Biodiversity SPC
- Community & Cultural Development SPC
- Economic Development & Enterprise SPC
- Housing SPC

- Planning, Environment, Agriculture & Emergency Services SPC
- Transportation & Infrastructure SPC

There is also a Corporate Planning Group (CPG), consisting of all the SPC Chairs and the Cathaoirleach of the Council.

Challenges

- **Covid:** The Chief Executive acknowledged that Covid had a massive impact on how the Council operated during the pandemic, as was the case for every local authority. Business continuity became highly important and it was necessary to adopt new arrangements for working and meeting. Remote and blended working has continued in the aftermath of Covid. This needs to be monitored to ensure that services for customers continue to be delivered to a high standard. Technology will continue to be important and an enabler of new working and meeting patterns into the future.
- **Financial:** The Chief Executive explained that the overriding challenge faced was the difficulty in maintaining appropriate service levels because of a long-term underfunding of the Council. The annual budget of €144 million is significantly lower than that of comparable local authorities such as Donegal, Mayo, Kerry and Tipperary, each of whom are smaller in terms of population and size. Referring to his slide presentation, he said the expenditure per capita was the lowest in the country. The staffing levels in the Council were well below what a county of Galway's size and scale needed but the revenue funding simply isn't there to recruit any more than had already been recruited.

While the Council receives significant road grants, the spend on other services such as Planning, Fire, Libraries, Recreation and Amenity, Piers and Harbours is well below the national average. The root of the problem was the Council's baseline funding which needs to be adjusted upwards to bring it in line with comparable local authorities. He said the Council had been pressing this case for some time with the Department as this issue was, is and will remain the overriding challenge facing the Council unless addressed.

Significant projects

The Chief Executive referred to The Galway City Ring Road and said it was of vital importance to the sustainable development of Galway City and County and the wider region. It is necessary so that all the benefits of the Galway Transport Strategy can be fully realised. The current position was that there were a few judicial reviews pending to the decision of An Bord Pleanála to grant planning approval for the scheme. One of the judicial reviews was on environmental grounds and he referenced the complexity of delivering large infrastructure projects in Galway due to the extent of environmental designations. Referring to the presentation, he said 30% of the County has some form of European designation for SAC, SPA or NHA while 50% of the land area in Conamara has one designation or another. This adds to the complexity of the process and as a consequence it adds time and cost to projects.

Ukraine

The Council is accommodating recent arrivals from Ukraine. There are approximately 3,300 Ukrainians in Galway, with 1,300 in the County areas. The majority within the County are being accommodated in hotels, former nursing homes and other properties. Where possible the Council is sourcing standard housing units and is mindful of transportation issues that arise for very rural locations as most of the new arrivals don't have independent transport to schools, shops and other public services.

Homelessness

The Council has a homeless unit, which is funded through the regional fund and staffed by two full time employees. The Council has a further six beds with COPE Galway, plus a further three in the women's unit. There are fourteen families housed in emergency accommodation in bed and breakfast units.

Housing

Inflation costs are having an impact on the delivery of housing units. Contract costs have increased, and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage has responded with arrangements to assist. The next two years will be very challenging for housing completions.

The Council is currently undertaking a large survey of its properties to see how many require retro fitting. 70% of units will need a deep retro fit, with 117 units upgraded to date, with a further fourteen due later in the year. Thirteen are currently at tender stage, while it is expected that thirty four more will be completed in 2023.

Finance

In 2020, the rent collection rates were at 92%. The Council has a rates collection team, who have been well trained, which assists in achieving higher collection rates. 2021 rates collections were reasonable, with many waivers provided by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. 2022 collection rates have been higher than in 2021. The ESB is due to decommission the 70 wind turbines of Derrybrien wind farm and it was noted that there was potential for a significant loss of rates income as a result.

Planning and development

The Council has recently adopted the County Development Plan 2022 to 2028. The plan includes ambitious objectives for economic development and the Core Strategy of the plan distributes the projected population growth across the main towns, strategic growth towns and other villages and settlements. The Council is developing the areas of Garraun and Briarhill in the metropolitan area of the county outside the city boundary where there is significant potential for residential development along with further employment opportunities in these areas. The construction of the N6 Galway City Ring Road and the implementation of the Galway Transport Strategy will support the development of the lands at Briarhill. Oranmore is to get an upgrade to its train station, with a second platform and additional car parking.

Galway County Council is one of two local authorities piloting the e-planning system to enable planning applications to be made online. It commenced earlier this year and at this point nearly 50% of applications are being made using the portal.

The National Food Innovation hub in Athenry was opened in September 2022. The industry units at the hub consist of private, secure company dedicated offices, laboratories and storage space.

This hub provides a platform whereby companies can build a research base and develop and test products to bring to the market.

Tourism

A tourism strategy is being developed for the period 2022 – 2030. It recognises the importance of tourism as a key driver of economic, social, and cultural regeneration. It will see the introduction of tourism development zones covering all parts of the county built around the development potential specific to each area.

Climate

Like many local authorities, Galway County Council will experience the impact of climate change through more frequent severe weather events, flooding and coastal erosion. The Council has appointed a climate change coordinator and a climate action steering group is in place to oversee the development and implementation of a climate change action plan. Some of the initiatives will include a public lighting retrofit programme, energy efficient retrofitting of Council houses and an EV strategy.

The Chair thanked the Chief Executive for the presentation. He raised a number of queries in relation to homelessness, management of voids and the delivery of housing units under the Housing For All Plan. These were responded to by Mr. Hanrahan DOS. In relation to finance, he noted the baseline funding issue and the impact that can have on service. He noted that the collection rates for rents, loans and commercial rates seemed to be holding up despite the impact of Covid. The Chair asked about the relationship between the developments proposed for Garraun and Briarhill and how they related to the Ardaun proposals. Mr Owens restated the Council's priority for the development of Garraun and Briarhill. He also referenced the growing importance of the climate change agenda and remarked it would become more prominent for everybody.

The minutes of this meeting and the future NOAC meeting will be circulated by the NOAC Executive to Galway County. Once approved, these, along with the Stage 2 minutes and any presentations will be published on the NOAC website.



Stage 2 meeting

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

Stage 2 Scrutiny Meeting

Date:	Wednesday 13th September 2023 at 11:30 a.m.	
Venue:	Custom House, Dublin	
Attended by:	<p>Chair</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ciarán Hayes (alternate Chair) <p>Members</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Margaret Lane ■ Fiona Quinn ■ Declan Breathnach ■ Brian Cawley ■ Kathleen Holohan <p>Apologies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Michael McCarthy ■ Miriam McDonald ■ Noel Harrington <p>Secretariat</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Claire Gavin ■ Alan McDermott ■ John Goldrick 	<p>By Invite:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Liam Conneally, Chief Executive ■ Michael Owens, Director of Service, Housing and Ukrainian Response ■ Eileen Ruane, Director of Service, Environment, Climate, HR, ICT & Digitisation ■ Liam Hanrahan, Director of Service, Economic Development & Planning ■ Derek Pender, A/Director of Service, Infrastructure & Operations and Fire & Emergency Services ■ Alan Farrell, A/Director of Service Community & Rural Development & Corporate Services ■ Áine Fenton, A/Head of Finance, Finance & Motor Tax ■ Tina Ryan, Administrative Officer, Climate Change Co-Ordinator ■ Carol Walsh, Staff Officer, EA to Chief Executive

Meeting with Galway County Council

NOAC's profile for Galway County Council was issued in advance of the meeting. The NOAC alternate Chair welcomed the officials from the local authority and congratulated the new Chief Executive in his role.

The Chair explained that NOAC has a statutory oversight role, with involvement in tasks as diverse as scrutiny meetings, validation meetings for the Performance Indicators Report and the hosting of the annual Good Practice Event. The Chief Executive (CE) was invited to give an overview of the Council and the challenges it faces. The CE gave a presentation after which the following matters were raised by the board members and were discussed in detail:

Overview

A re-organisation of the Council has taken place since the publication of the Corporate Plan 2019-2024. A strong management team exists, with six Strategic Policy Committees and five Municipal Districts in place. The Chief Executive advised that Forward Planning and Regeneration will now be aligned, allowing for seamless work to be completed for the Council, with a keen focus on the Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan. It was noted that the 2014 Local Government Act had an affect with respect to the duties and functions of the municipal districts, along with a re-structuring of staff, which also allowed for the strengthening of these districts.

It was highlighted that the Council encapsulates the largest speaking Irish area within the country, in addition to having four large inhabited islands. With thirty per cent of the County covered by environmental designations, these represent both restrictions and opportunities. In addition, the Council boundaries also encompass a large swathe of the metropolitan area, along with strong performing towns. There are many shared services with the City Council. Issues in these areas are very different to those of the islands, hence the focus on the importance of the municipal districts.

Corporate Governance

The Council noted that it is very important that Corporate Governance is operating at the expected level. A new audit and risk management methodology was implemented in 2023 and it contains a two-step approach, consisting of a Corporate Risk Register and Unit Risk Registers.

The Public Sector Duty informs all areas of the work of the Council and it needs to become part of the structure of the operation of the organisation in order to further enable the Council as a fair and transparent organisation.

In terms of the County Development Plan, it was the result of two years of diligent work by Council staff and the elected members, including a significant public consultation process. It encompasses valuable ideas which will lead to continued sustainable development, investment and job creation, with the emphasis now needing to shift to its implementation.

Economic Development

One of the recent successes highlighted are the plans for Dexcom to build its newest global facility in Athenry, which will take place over a number of phases. Dexcom is a specialist in continuous glucose monitoring for people with diabetes and the facility will create 1,000 higher end medical technical jobs, providing a huge benefit to the locality.

The Council highlighted the work they have done on the Bia Innovator Campus, which will be the first infrastructure project in Ireland with food sector incubation and innovation support in one location, which is due to officially open in early 2024. The Council also mentioned the close working relationship it has developed with the IDA, indicating that there are more potential projects in the pipeline.

The Council highlighted its Portumna Vision 2030 strategy which will see the development of an arts and performance space in the vacant courthouse in the town, which will assist in promoting Portumna as a tourist destination.

The Council noted the strong work completed by its Local Enterprise Office and that it is a shared service provided for with Galway City Council. It was highlighted as being business oriented, with a well-publicised online trading voucher scheme in place.

With respect to the Strategic Workforce Plan, the Council believes that it has been underfunded, with a workforce of 830, which is low in relation to the population that it serves. It is also restricted in the number of staff which it is allowed to recruit. Given this situation, it ensures that it promotes efficiencies, uses technology and undertakes innovative practices to deliver necessary services to its customers.

Regeneration

The Council mentioned using the Clár, URDF and dereliction grants sensibly as a delivery mechanism for prominent buildings in County villages and towns.

Finance

The Council's budget for 2023 is €158 million, while the Local Property Tax is set at €20.3 million. The Chief Executive referred to the uplift in baseline funding as positive news, however he indicated that he would be looking for a further increase to the baseline funding and was hopeful that the Council would also assist with the funding issue.

The Council will also be seeking outside expertise on the finance side and several projects will continue to be funded, such as LEAP, a community-building project for creative individuals. A further project noted is Connected, which brings together the collective expertise of communities in Ireland engaging in sustainability, launched in March 2023.

Housing

The Council advised that the delivery of social housing was on target and that it wishes to improve its turnaround times for vacant social housing units and voids and is examining innovative ways to achieve this. Under the Housing for All plan, Galway County will see the delivery of 1,717 social housing units, 1,030 from the Council itself and a further 687 to be delivered by Approved Housing Bodies. A minimum of 226 new affordable homes will be delivered by 2026. In addition, a vacancy survey will be undertaken to examine the reasons behind vacancies and the Council is also addressing the response to the Ukrainian situation, including supporting the provision of approximately ninety modular homes on a Council site in Ballinasloe.

Transport

The Council is ready to implement various road projects and highlighted those in the planning stages such as the N6 Galway City Ring Road, the N59 Maigh Cuilin bypass and the N59 Bunnakill to Claremount road.

Galway's local community benefits from several Greenways, such as the Galway to Oughterard and Clifden to Recess Greenways which provides clear benefits to communities.

The Council is also in discussions with Irish Rail to restore the rail network between Athenry and Claremorris which would have a positive impact on those regions, particularly given the recent Dexcom investment in Athenry. Plans are also in motion to further increase the double track rail sections between Galway and Athenry to boost rail frequency and capacity.

Gaeltacht and the islands

These regions have specific needs and challenges, due to their remoteness and the environmental designations pertaining to areas within them, of which the Council is acutely aware.

Tourism

A tourism strategy is soon to be launched for the period 2022 – 2030. Councillors have taken ownership of this plan, which will see the introduction of tourism development zones throughout the County, the development of a brand strategy for Galway and job creation through new economic opportunities within the local economy. The Chief Executive referred to the can-do attitude of the community.

Future success for the County

The Galway Metropolitan Area is set to enhance the role of Galway as a regional gateway, and the Council is working in conjunction with Galway City Council. The Galway Strategic Economic Corridor is a component of the economic development strategy for the County which has identified priority areas for economic development.

It was noted that both onshore and offshore renewable energy developments are expected to bring economic opportunities to the County.

Recruitment

It was noted that full employment exists in the country, which brings challenges for recruiting further staff within the Council. Prospective staff also need to contend with the issues of a high cost of living and a shortage of housing. A large transfer of staff exists between the City and County Councils within Galway, which can have a beneficial side to it. Galway County noted that the finance, I.T. and professional functions are areas that are particularly difficult to recruit. The local authority cannot offer the same salary benefits as the private sector, so needs to sustain a positive working environment and provide impressive facilities. Many staff supports are present, including an employee assistance service, along with the development of a staff well-being system to encourage positive approach to work and healthy eating programmes. The Chief Executive has worked to strengthen each unit and use the learnings of the efficiencies that have been formed with the reduction in current staffing levels.

Planning

The Council highlighted that it had recently engaged in a productive meeting with the Clifden Chamber of Commerce and the planning issue with regard to one-off housing was the main agenda item. There is a housing need within the wider community but many applications fail due to the environmental impact effect of such houses. Of particular concern are the vast number of holiday homes within the area and Galway noted that it is important to protect the environment while also addressing housing needs. It highlighted the use of an online pre-planning service which will be dealt with at a municipal district level. Though not representing a solution to all issues, this will allow housing applications to be dealt with in a consistent manner and noted that four out of five applications are currently being granted. Galway County advised that this pre-planning system was recently tested in the Aran Islands, which allows for a frontloading of designs, maps, reports, etc., which it believes will help applications.

For larger scale projects, the Council wants to ensure that there is designated land available to create the appropriate mix of zoning. With respect to Athenry, the Council is aiming to provide sufficient housing within the area to support its employment growth. Athenry also owes its success to its connectivity, particularly with a motorway and rail network in place. Additionally, the Council noted that Athenry has the benefit of being in the proximity of other towns, so benefits from its development can filter out to those areas.

Risk register

It was highlighted that the funding of the local authority and the delivery of the work programme are the top risks within the Council. On the operational side, it was noted that the fire and emergency services are also considered a high risk area.

The Council also noted that the Audit Committee sets its annual audit programme at the start of the year and considers the Risk Register and the LG Audit Report and Management Letter in finalising the audit programme. All internal audit reports are considered by the management team, contain a risk priority rating, and progress on those are given regularly.

Housing challenges

The present focus pertains to capital housing delivery. The targets under Housing for All will result in a 39% increase in housing stock and it was noted that the quality of housing for the future will be of the utmost importance. The Council is also ensuring that it is creating sustainable communities, rather than solely producing housing units. Local amenities are being delivered, including sports facilities, along with age friendly housing units.

The Council is also focused on improving the existing housing stock including delivery of an energy retro-fit programme and transitioning to a planned maintenance programme. Challenges will remain in funding these improvements and other challenges include re-let times, which are currently longer than desired. The aim is to improve the turnaround times of these properties over the next few years. In particular, it was highlighted that undertaking improvement works in the Connemara region is difficult due to the size of the MD and the distribution of housing stock within the region. The Council recognised that it needs to be innovative and creative in how it addresses these issues. While the Approved Housing Bodies are of benefit to the housing situation, the Council will need to continue to provide significant support for them to deliver housing units, particularly in relation to direct build projects

Internal Audit

The audit committee in Galway County is informed by the corporate risk register and audits are progressed, with all of the audit queries followed up by the management team, with ongoing reporting back into the audit committee.

Fire Service

It was highlighted that Galway had the slowest response time to incidents for its full time fire service. The Council advised that it is looking to construct a new site for the fire service on the Headford Road and is liaising with Galway City Council, which it expects will alleviate future response times.

Sick leave

Galway's sick leave figures were discussed and it was noted that they are higher than those of the national average. The Council advised that this statistic was mainly due to a small number of staff who are on long term sick leave.

Social media

In terms of its social media presence, the Council will be redesigning its website as part of the digitisation strategy to make it more modern and accessible. At present, it receives less traffic than average compared to other local authorities. The Council highlighted that it uses Facebook, X, LinkedIn and Instagram platforms to highlight its work and the aim of its redesign of the website is to drive traffic from those platforms onto its website. The Council noted that it is experiencing growth on those platforms and its X platform has 16,000 followers.

Ardaun development

Both Galway County and City Councils are engaging on work at a significant development in Ardaun which forms part of the area of both local authorities. Investment is taking place in the surrounding area of Ardaun, within Garraun and within the city, with development both at an IDA site and airport site. Oranmore train station is also receiving significant investment via URDF funding for a planned upgrade with the last piece in these projects ensuring climate sustainability. It was noted that a management team meeting would take place in October to review ongoing progress and plan for the future in these regions.

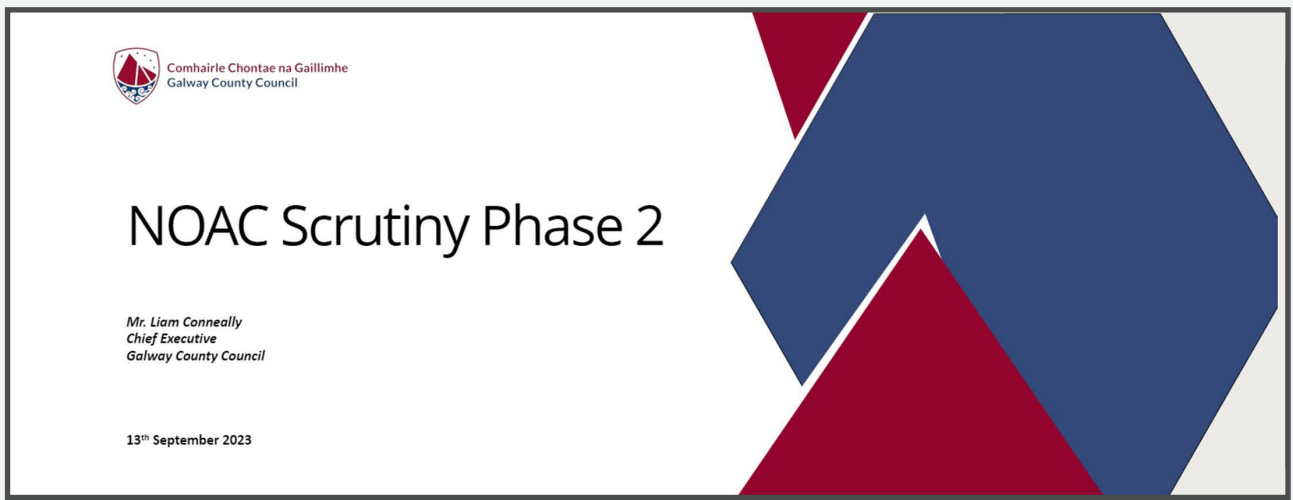
Conclusion


The alternate Chair thanked the local authority officials for their attendance at the meeting and outlined that the minutes will be published on the NOAC website at a future date.

The meeting was brought to a close.



Stage 2 Presentation



 Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe
Galway County Council

NOAC Scrutiny Phase 2

Mr. Liam Conneally
Chief Executive
Galway County Council

13th September 2023

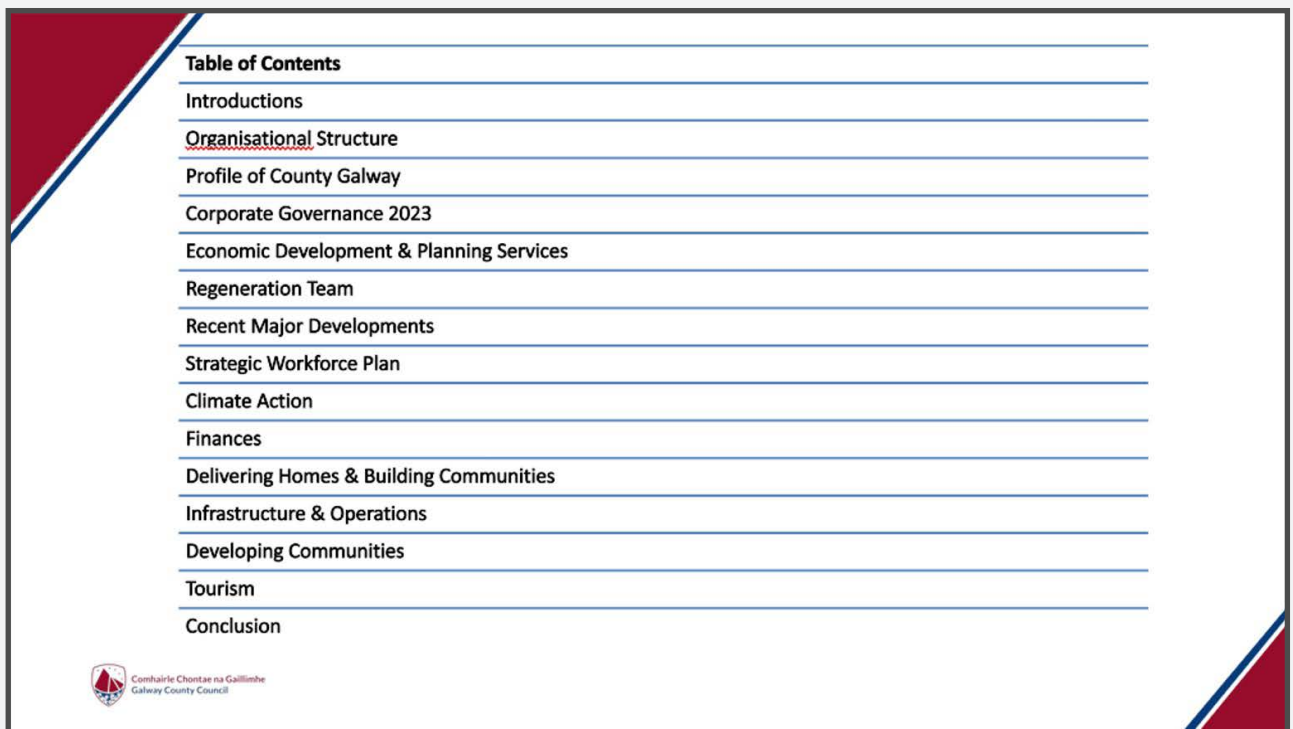




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Infrastructure & Operations
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Conclusion





Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe
Galway County Council


NOAC Scrutiny Phase 2

Mr. Liam Conneally
Chief Executive
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13th September 2023

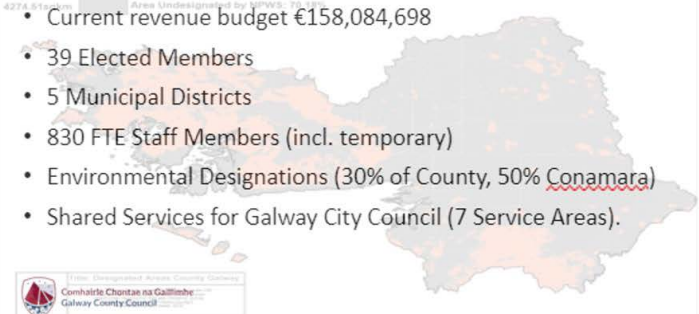
Profile – County Galway


- Population 192,995 (Census 2021)
- 2nd largest local authority by geographical area
- 10th largest by population
- 49.7% of the national Gaeltacht population (working with Údarás na Gaeltachta)
- Four inhabited islands – Inis Mór, Inis Óirr, Inis Meáin and Inisbofin.
- Current revenue budget €158,084,698
- 39 Elected Members
- 5 Municipal Districts
- 830 FTE Staff Members (incl. temporary)
- Environmental Designations (30% of County, 50% Conamara)
- Shared Services for Galway City Council (7 Service Areas).



County Galway

-  POPULATION: 192,995
-  AREA: 6,149 km²
-  COASTLINE: 1,086 KM
-  PUBLIC ROAD NETWORK: 6,904km





Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe
Galway County Council



Corporate Governance 2023

Audit and Risk Management

New Risk Management Methodology implemented in 2023

2 step approach:

1. Corporate Risk Register - Identifying Significant Risks of a strategic nature, mitigative actions and owners
2. Unit Risk Registers - Identifying Significant Risks of an operational nature, mitigative actions and owners

Business Continuity Plan

Develop and implement a Business Continuity Plan/system for the Council.

Process was facilitated by IPB, in conjunction with the Corporate Governance Working Group.

Public Sector Duty

Galway County Council has progressed an initiative to implement the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty (the Duty).

Corporate Governance Working Group were tasked with creating the conditions for implementation of the Duty.

Galway County Council's PSD Implementation Plan was adopted by the Management Team in July 2023.



Implementing the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty



Economic Development & Planning Services



Former Galway Airport - Masterplan being undertaken. Engagement with IDA & City Council.

Athenry – Bia Innovator Hub, IDA Lands, Planning permission lodged for Dexcom – 1,500 jobs, Two phase campus

Guarraun – Linked to Ardaun Corridor on city boundary

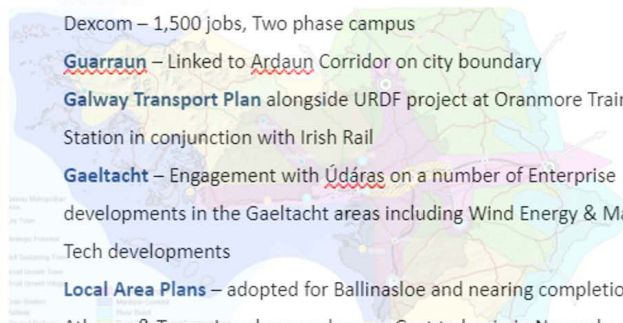
Galway Transport Plan alongside URDF project at Oranmore Train Station in conjunction with Irish Rail

Gaeltacht – Engagement with Údárás on a number of Enterprise developments in the Gaeltacht areas including Wind Energy & Marine Tech developments

Local Area Plans – adopted for Ballinasloe and nearing completion for Athenry & Tuam. Loughrea underway. Gort to begin in November.

Development Management: 78% of applications now using e-planning portal. New Pre Planning developed and being trialed

Planning Enforcement: 250 cases per annum.



Realignment of Planning & Economic Development Function:

(1) Pre-Planning, Development & Planning Enforcement

(2) Future Planning & Master planning
County Development Plan
Local Area Plans
Guideline documents
Urban Framework plans
URDF – Oranmore Train Station & Guarraun/Briarhill

(3) Regeneration
Town Regeneration Officer
Town Centre Plans
Proposals – RRDF etc

(4) Capital Delivery Unit
Town & Village Scheme advice/support
RRDF & Clifden Destination Town delivery (eg Portumna Courthouse)

(5) Local Enterprise Office
Client Development
Financial Aids

(6) Economic
Engagement with IDA, Enterprise Ireland, Fáilte Ireland, Údárás, Chambers and Large Employers



Regeneration Team



Buildings	Public Realm	Streetscape Enhancement	Planning (Master)	Outdoor Recreation	Other Current Projects
Projects in Progress					
Loughrea Town Hall <Proceeding to construction 2023>	Clifden Town Centre <Plus Galway Road Car Park>	Ballinasloe 2022/3 <complete>	Gort Town Centre First Plan <2022>	Portumna Blueway Capital	Clifden Destination Towns <Programme €666k; Large canopy Market Square; 3no. Outdoor dining parklets; wayfinding; Rallyconneely Road Junction traffic calming/greenway readiness> Upgrade public Toilets
Portumna Courthouse <Proceeding to construction 2023>	Portumna Town Centre <Plus Clonfert Avenue Car Park>	Atherry 2022/3 <RRDF; complete Q1 2023>	Atherry Town Centre First Plan	Wheels of Atherry	Atherry Branding
Juan Town Hall	Gort Town Centre <Plus Barrack Street Car Park>	Juan 2023	Oughterard Town Centre First Plan	Long Point Loughrea	Atherry Wayfinding <100k delivery>
Atherry Community Hub <Burke's Lane Building acquired through T&V – 50K project development also secured – proceeding to Part 8 Q1 2023>	Atherry Market Square and Cross Street; Phase 1 of 2	Portumna 2023	Urban Design Guide <Scott Tallon Walker>	Portumna Forest Park and Bathing Area	Portumna Sculpture Trail
Abbey Street, Portumna <Development Site Acquired –		An Spidéal 2023	Shopfront Design Guide <T&V>	Banagher Outdoor Pool <ORIS Measure 3 application>	Portumna, Irish Workhouse Centre <public realm/entrance threshold/interpretive plan>
Atherry, Bia Innovator Campus					Shambles Market, Juan
Clifden Remote Working/Enterprise Hub					

Recent Major Developments:

Dexcom - IDA Client Company, 1500 jobs, Pre-Planning Process supported & Planning Lodged



Local Enterprise Office – Galway (City & County)



221 Jobs created in 2022.

Financially supported 268 small businesses, employing 1,192 people.

86 Trading online vouchers

734 Mentoring participants

18 Green for Business Grants

Regen – Masterplans & Projects:

Portumna VISION 2030

Collective Vision, Collective Delivery



Courthouse

VISION 2030

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Courthouse is a key project in the regeneration of the town centre, providing a new public space and a landmark building. The project is a partnership between the Council and the private sector, and is a key element of the town's regeneration strategy.

TIMELINE

Phase 1: Design and planning (2022-2023)
Phase 2: Construction (2023-2025)
Phase 3: Completion and opening (2025)

PARTNERS FOR DELIVERY
Galway County Council, Courthouse Development Ltd, Galway City Council

STRATEGIC ROLE
Phase 1 and 2 will regenerate the town centre, providing a new public space and a landmark building. The project is a key element of the town's regeneration strategy.

Strategic Workforce Plan

PROJECT PLAN:

- Review of current operations and structures
- Consider best practice in organisation design.
- Address requirements for new processes or functions and incorporate process and service improvement initiatives across the organisation.
- Identify opportunities for using technology and innovative practices to enhance service delivery.
- Formulate recommendations on a workforce planning model with projections of costs and options.
- Final report – Business Transformation Proposal to include a new strategic workforce plan, scaling of the organisation, skillset requirements and implementation roadmap.

EVIDENCE BASED PLAN WITH FOCUS ON:

- Strengthening of the Municipal Districts
- Economic development, urban and rural regeneration
- Tourism Strategy and implementation
- JTF activation
- Marine planning
- Digitisation of services
- Project Management Office (PMO)
- Climate Change Projects
- Continued business process improvement
- Central Communications Unit

Climate Action

Status

- Full Climate team in place with agreed cross departmental governance.
- Pre-draft stakeholder engagement currently underway. Climate Youth Assembly held.
- Regional Energy Bureau Officer and internal Energy Officer in place.
- Projects including CONNECTED, LEAP and Galway Partner Forest Programme.



Current projects

- Active Travel – 123 projects completed (2021 – 2022)
- Social housing retrofits – 284 units by year end 2023.
- Public lighting – 57% LED
- Community supports – energy master plans and climate action fund
- Extensive biodiversity and natural heritage programme in place

Finances



Budget		LPT Baseline		Increase	Capital Expenditure		
2023	€158m	2024	€20.3m	€5.791m	2023	€100m	(Best Estimate)
2022	€143m	2023	€14.5m		2022	€88m	
2021	€136m	2022	€14.5m		2021	€78m	
		2021	€14.5m				



Commercial Rates

3,800 customers €32.8m rate book approx.
 Top 100 customer account for 50% of rate book
 Revaluation of commercial rates in 2024



Transition of Úisce Éireann

Stranded Costs
 Funding of Central Management Charge



Strategic Workforce Planning

Retirements of staff
 Recruitment and retention of staff
 Resources



Climate Change

Increase in Climate related projects

Delivering Homes & Building Communities

Housing for All – a New Housing Plan for Ireland (2022 – 2026)

Social Housing Delivery: **1,717** by 2026 (1,030 by GCC & 687 by AHB)

Social Housing Stock **2,624** @ 01/01/2022 Minimum Increase of **39%** by 31/12/2026 to **3,555**

Challenges & Opportunities:

- General Capacity: Staff, Design Teams, Construction.
- Capacity of AHB Sector to Deliver 40% of Target (687 Dwellings) by 2026.
- Limited Serviced lands in high demand areas that supports Sustainable Communities.
- Requirement to transition from Reactive to Planned Maintenance Programme.
- Tenancy & Estate Management associated with 39% Increase in Stock.



Housing for All. Gort Na gCloch, Clifden



Delivering Energy Efficient Homes
 Building Sustainable Communities

Delivering Homes & Building Communities

Affordable Housing

Deliver Minimum of 226 New Affordable Purchase Homes by 2026 (Direct Build, Advance Purchase & Part V)

Affordability in the Galway Housing Markets – Galway Metropolitan Area, Key Towns, Small Towns and Villages, Rural, Gaeltacht & Islands

Local Authority Home Loan (30 Loans approved to date in 2023 to a value of €5.2million)

Addressing Vacancy

- Vacancy Survey (Phase 1 Survey 1,717 Properties)
- Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant (249 Applications – 67 Approved)
- CPO Activation Programme (300 Properties to Enter Programme in 2023 to include 27 CPO's)
- URDF Call 3 (€2million – 21 Properties, Ballinasloe, Oranmore and Tuam)
- GCC Regeneration Projects (Gilmartin Road, Tuam, St. Joseph's, Clifden, Bridge Court, ~~Ahascragh, Dunlo Hill~~, Ballinasloe)

Ukrainian Response

- Immediate – 90 Modular Units in Ballinasloe.
- Integration – Recruitment of Team Underway.

Housing for All – Proposed Regeneration 13 Units in Ballinasloe



Infrastructure & Operations

Public Road Network in County Galway	
Type:	Length:
Motorway	114km
National Primary Roads	23km
National Secondary Roads	291km
Regional Roads	900km
Local Roads (Primary, Secondary, Tertiary)	5,613km

Schemes of Strategic Significance: Galway City Ring Road N6

N59 Maigh Cuillin Bypass

N59 Bunnakill to Claremount



Other Road Schemes in County Galway with Planning Approval

N63 Liss to Abbeyknockmoy Scheme

N17 Milltown to Gortnagunnad Scheme

Athenry Northern Ringroad - Western Section

Greenways

Galway to Oughterard Greenway

Clifden to Recess Greenway

Derrygimlagh to Kylemore Greenway

Athlone to Galway Greenway - Next steps



Flood Relief Schemes

- South Galway Flood Relief Scheme
- Clifden Flood Relief Scheme
- Ballinasloe Flood Relief Scheme

Rail Network - Opportunities

Short to Medium term Interventions in Galway :

- Double tracking between Athenry and Galway to increase capacity
- Restoring the rail line between Athenry and Claremorris.
- Provide more direct services between Ireland's West and South Coasts – e.g., between Galway, Limerick, and Cork
- Ensure regional and rural lines have at least one train per two hours (at regular times) – and hourly services between Galway, Limerick, Cork, and Waterford.

Developing Communities

Public Participation Network

- Membership now stands at **1,249** groups
- Representation on SPC's and LCDC.
- Communication opportunities through PPN

Pride of Place & Tidy Towns

- Strong 'can do' communities
- Pride of Place Judging took place on 16th August
- Gort Riverwalk was entered under Community Wellbeing Initiative and Creggs for Climate Action and Biodiversity.

Healthy Ireland

- 'Healthy Islands' project shortlisted for Age Friendly Active and Healthy Ageing Award.

Age Friendly

- Directory of Services for Older People due to be launched as part of Positive Ageing Week 1st – 7th October 2023
- A walkability Audit was conducted as part of improvement works for the Palace Grounds in Tuam

START

Tourism

- The adoption of the first Tourism Strategy means that there is an agreed road map in place to achieve the vision set for Galway.
- Development of a brand strategy for Galway / Gaillimh.
- This strategy will deliver a stronger tourism sector and ensure job creation and greater prosperity for the people of County Galway including the Just Transition area.
- Collaboration with Tourism Stakeholders – Galway Tourism Forum.
- Identifying and generating projects of scale and at a readiness for development and investment within the timeframe.



Working with our Elected Members, what will success look like for Galway County?

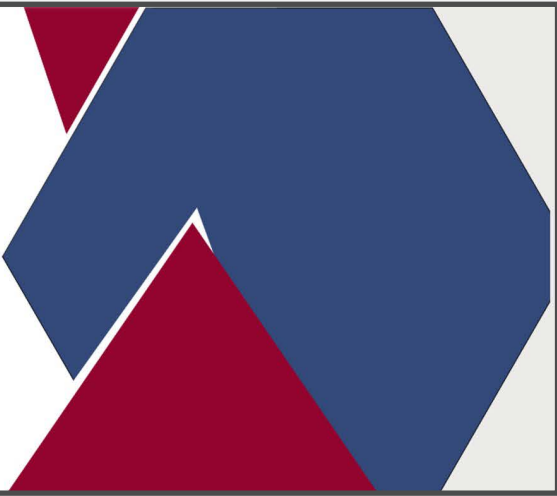
- Galway Metropolitan Area to enhance the role of Galway as a regional gateway – collaboration with Galway City Council and other stakeholders- creation of the West of Ireland Economic Corridor.
- Galway Strategic Economic Corridor - masterplan strategic sites, Guarraun (Oranmore) Ardaun Athenry and the Galway Airport site.
- On/Offshore Renewable Energy- economic opportunities, infrastructure enablement. Galway as the Green energy location for investment.
- Climate Adaptation and Mitigation- potential for biodiversity net gain and private sector investment.
- Modern fit for purpose local authority delivering high quality public services – strategic workforce plan and digitization of council services.
- Staff wellbeing and development. Councillors Training.
- Corporate Plan 2024 – 2029 & Local Economic and Community Plan- integration of public sector duty.
- Measurement of Success: Customer Satisfaction Survey and NOAC Indicators.





Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe
Galway County Council

Go raibh maith agaibh!





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

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