



# NOAC

National Oversight  
and Audit Commission



## Kildare County Council Scrutiny Report

NOAC Report No. 63 – March 2024



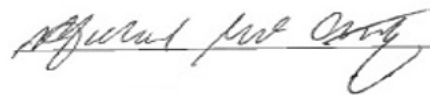
## Chair's Opening remarks

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**  
6<sup>th</sup> March 2024



## 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

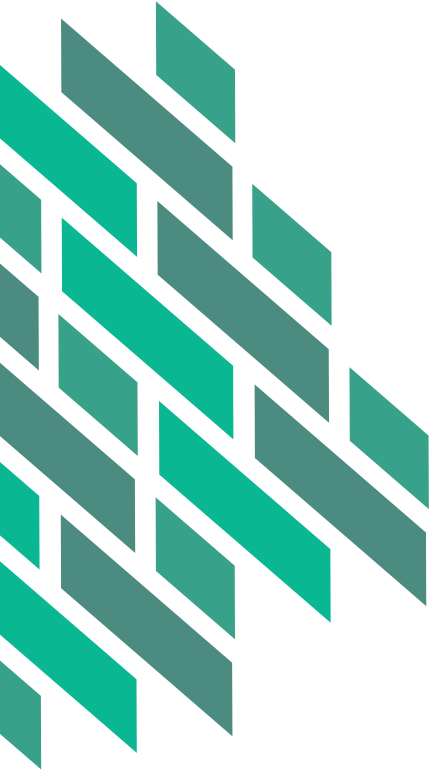
This report outlines the purpose and the procedures of such reports and, while the process may continue to evolve, it is not currently expected to produce another master report, similar to the master report produced in [May 2021](#). It is intended that once all stages in the scrutiny process have been 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. In 2023, there was seven Stage 1 and six 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.

Kildare County Council had their Stage 1 meeting in February 2023 and their Stage 2 meeting in January 2024. 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 Kildare County Council:

- NOAC noted with interest how Covid has accelerated the digital transformation of Kildare County Council services, with an emphasis on strengthening innovation to facilitate and underpin the hybrid working model and the delivery of online services.
- NOAC viewed it as positive that it has introduced choice-based letting in an effort to ensure that units do not remain empty.
- NOAC was pleased to hear that the Council undertook a formal review of its internal audit, in addition to examining its risk register.



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# NOAC Profile

## Kildare County Council

2024

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# Kildare County Council General Information

<b>Local authority</b>	Kildare County Council
<b>Population:</b>	247,774 (2022 Census)
<b>Area:</b>	1,695 km squared
<b>Municipal Districts:</b>	5 Municipal Districts
<b>2023 Budget</b>	€199,043,789
<b>Number employed @ 31/12/2022</b>	1,177 Headcount (1,068.26 Whole Time Equivalent)
<b>WTE Staff per 1,000 population</b>	4.3 staff per thousand
<b>% of paid working days lost to medically certified sick leave</b>	5.53% (includes Covid leave)
<b>Housing Information @ 31/12/22</b>	
<b>Local Authority Stock number</b>	6,295 including leased properties
<b>Number currently on waiting list</b>	3,460 (excluding HAP)
<b>HAP Tenancies</b>	1,799
<b>Homeless presentations</b>	1,910 presentations in 2023, of which 1,294 were repeat presentations.
<b>Any specific housing issues</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Availability and cost of land to deliver future social and affordable housing.</li> <li>■ Reliance on Part V and turnkey acquisitions to deliver significant percentage of social housing programme.</li> <li>■ Challenges in delivering affordable housing for purchase in the county and limited proposals for cost rental coming forward from AHB sector.</li> <li>■ HAP: Cost of and lack of rental properties, which is impacting on homelessness.</li> <li>■ In the past one to two years, there has been an emerging trend of refusals of allocations, which is being mitigated by increasing the number of properties offered through Choice Based Letting.</li> <li>■ Increasing costs associated with housing delivery and maintenance.</li> <li>■ Recruitment and retention of staff.</li> </ul>
<b>Short Information Paragraph</b>	<b>Our Vision</b> <b>Kildare – Living; growing; leading</b> Working together towards an inclusive and sustainable County.
<b>Council Mission Statement</b>	<b>Kildare County Council</b> Shaping a sustainable future while improving the quality of life of all citizens. Delivering enabling infrastructure and efficient accessible services and pursuing our vision through collaboration, innovation, inclusion and community engagement.



<b>Economic Forum (CEF)</b>	<p>The Council in 2020 developed a five-year Economic Strategy that supplements its LECP and identifies actions and targets in the area of Foreign Direct Investment FDI, SME supports, Equine Industry Tourism, Retail, Education, Green Economy, Agri-Food together with Public Realm and infrastructure projects to revitalise the local economies of our towns, villages and rural hinterlands.</p> <p>Its strategy will ensure consultation and alignment with the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy developed by the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly. Realising opportunities from our strategy will strengthen the sustainability of funding to the Council and enable reinvestment in supporting infrastructure and services that enhance quality of life of all.</p>
<b>The Local Enterprise Office</b>	<p>Local Enterprise Office Kildare will act as the first point of contact for businesses seeking general business advice and information. Local Enterprise Office Kildare will promote entrepreneurship, foster business start-ups and develop existing micro and small businesses to drive job creation and to provide accessible high-quality supports for Business ideas.</p> <p><b>Enterprise Support and Development Services</b> Provides financial support, training supports, mentoring, marketing, access to dedicated business networks, product and service development, micro-finance loan fund.</p> <p><b>Entrepreneurship Support Services</b> Enterprise Education – Secondary level programmes, female entrepreneurship, senior entrepreneurship, enterprise awards, enterprise promotional activities.</p> <p><b>Local Economic Development Services</b> <b>Strategic:</b> Development and implementation of local economic plans, input into County Development Plan, partnerships with relevant development agencies. <b>Promotional:</b> Identifying and developing projects and programmes to develop enterprise, employment and the local economy. <b>Operational:</b> Development of appropriate enterprise infrastructure at county level, management of local authority enterprise infrastructure/assets, development of programmes to address local needs, acting as an enhanced resource for Government to undertake one-off initiatives.</p>

## Retail Incentives

Kildare County Council has established the Shop Front & Accessibility Grant Scheme to financially assist and support independent business owners to improve the appearance of their shop fronts/commercial properties. These schemes are further supported by the new Brigid 1500 Retail Window Merchandising Grant Scheme which aims to assist local businesses in their celebration of the new national holiday. This funding is being provided in recognition of the fact that a building's facade makes a big impact on our town centres.

They help form people's first impressions of a town centre, so their condition can really affect a town's image. Smart shop fronts will make a town feel more prosperous, improve its image and contribute towards a stronger sense of identity.

We consult with communities and collaborate with partners to enhance the public realm and design of our towns and villages and deliver projects and programmes that revitalise the local retail economy and rural hinterlands.

We facilitate and support the expansion and sustainment of the retail offering in County Kildare with the introduction of training programmes and grant aid to trading on-line as a method of complimenting the bricks and mortar model of retail.

## The Corporate Plan

### 1. Received by NOAC on 6th December 2019

### 2. Strategic Objectives

#### Leading a Climate resilient Kildare

*"Building climate change resilience, action and sustainability into service and infrastructure, while protecting and promoting our natural and built environment for the well-being of present and future generations"*

### 3. Enabling Business and sustaining growth

*"To optimise the potential of Kildare and its businesses to innovate, invest, promote and sustain growth and employment, across our County and throughout our community."*

### 4. Supporting delivery of housing and associated community development

*"To work with all partners to strive to meet Kildare's housing needs, working to reduce homelessness and providing support for developing communities."*

### 5. Building communities through empowerment and inclusion

*"To empower all citizens to participate in safe and inclusive communities and access services and supports that make a positive difference in their lives."*

### 6. Delivering enabling infrastructure for a connected County

*"Continue to plan, deliver and maintain key infrastructure in our County that sustains mobility and access and positions Kildare to achieve sustainable growth."*

### 7. Supporting the Democratic Mandate, Performance and Communications

*"To assist local democracy while improving service delivery, engagement and communications by maximising the effectiveness of our people, budgets, operations and ICT resources."*

<b>Shared services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ HR &amp; Payroll – Core/MyPay – Laois County Council</li> <li>■ NRO &amp; DTTAS – Roads</li> <li>■ Climate Action Regional Office (CARO) – Lead - 17 counties.</li> </ul>
<b>Regional Issues including new developments and initiatives</b>	<p>One of 4 local authority led hubs in Kildare, the Mid Eastern Region Innovation Think Space (MERITS) development is located at Devoy Park, Naas and officially opened on 23rd June 2023.</p> <p>Kildare’s emerging high-tech cluster is attracting the interest of policymakers, entrepreneurs, and has in recent months attracted €2 million in Regional Enterprise Development Funds from Enterprise Ireland, matched by a further €1.3 million by Kildare County Council. This fund will see the development of The Mid East Regional Innovation Think Space (MERITS) - a new build project that clusters Irish and international new-technology companies in a collaborative space in Naas town centre.</p> <p>An Equine Innovation Hub, based at the National Stud opened in 2020, supporting 14 entrepreneurs in the Equine space.</p> <p>The development of the Athy Food and drinks Innovation space is at tender stage with a further hub in Monasterevan, for the textile industry, now at design stage.</p>
<b>Supporting Strategies</b>	Supporting strategies listed in the corporate plan.
<b>Any other relevant information</b>	A dedicated Communications Unit was established in January 2021 and this team has developed a clear communications strategy for the organisation. The Strategy seeks to support greater understanding and awareness of the role and functions of Kildare County Council to the citizens of Kildare, the press and other audiences and to manage the Corporate Social Media Channels.

### Collection Rates

	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014
<b>Rate collection rates</b>	86%	82%	70%	83%	82%	81%	83%	82%	78%
<b>Rent collection rates</b>	92%	93%	92%	92%	89%	88%	88%	88%	87%
<b>Housing loan collection rates</b>	73%	69%	62%	62%	51%	43%	47%	43%	42%

Kildare’s collection of commercial rates stands at 86%. It is positive when compared with the collection figure of 78% for 2014. Kildare’s rate collection numbers over the years have been in line with national average figures, with the exception of 2018, where it fell slightly below the mean collection rate of local authorities of 85.5%. At 86% Kildare’s 2022 figure is above the national average rate collection amount of 82.6%.

The collection of rents has improved to 92% and this is ahead of the mean for all local authorities at 88.1%. The collection rate has shown an improvement on the 87% collection rate for 2014.

Kildare has shown a marked improvement in the collection of home loans since 2014, albeit from a low base. In 2017 it collected 43% of those loans, giving it the lowest collection rate amongst all local authorities. Kildare’s overall housing loan collection rate of 73% in 2022, while a steady improvement over the years, is far below the national average figure of 82.6%.

## 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 Kildare County Council are outlined in the points below.

### NOAC REPORT NOS 58 AND 50

## Performance Indicator Reports 2022 and 2021

- Housing.** Kildare owned 5,181 housing dwellings in 2022 with 2.44% vacant, compared to a national average of 3.03%. In 2021 the Council owned 4,980 social housing dwellings with 3.34% vacant, compared to a national average of 3.16%.

In 2022 the average time for rehousing in vacant properties in Kildare was 50.97 weeks, which compares unfavourably to the national average of 35.22 weeks. This is a dis-improvement on 2021, when the average time for rehousing in vacant properties in Kildare was 48.78 weeks, compared with the national average of 34.44 weeks. Kildare explained that it had a high level of refusals in 2022, which would increase the re-letting time.

Kildare's re-letting cost of units in 2022 was €42,545.75, which is high in comparison to the national average of €21,886.04.

New house building inspections increased greatly from 47.49% in 2021 to 53.11% in 2022.

Kildare had a maintenance cost per unit nationally in 2022 at €1,099.35, which was a significant increase on €925.72 in 2021.

- Environment.** 74% of the County is unpolluted or litter-free, similar to the 77% for 2021. 25% of Kildare is slightly polluted, which compares with 21% for 2021. The national average figures for being unpolluted or litter-free in 2022 was 20% and was 13% for being moderately polluted.
- Three bins.** Kildare's three bin uptake is 90.86%, down from 95.49% in 2021.
- Green Flag status.** At the end of 2022 24.26% of schools in the county held a Green Flag. The national average is 29.46%. This compares to 25% for 2021.
- Motor Tax.** 90.95% of motor transactions were conducted online in 2022, the second highest figure amongst all local authorities.
- Fire service.** It took an average time of 7:05 minutes to mobilise the part-time fire brigades for calls to fires, longer than the average of 5:31 minutes for all retained fire services. It took an average of 6:26 minutes to mobilise the part-time fire brigades for calls to fires in 2021.

Kildare had the second lowest cost nationally in 2022, at €25.47, with the average across all local authorities being €42.48 for part time stations. In 2021 Kildare's cost was €33.04.

- Roads.** In terms of road condition, Kildare had 38.51% of its local primary roads that had no defects. Regarding its local secondary roads, 31.25% had no defects, while 30.18% of its tertiary roads had no defects.
- Libraries.** There was an average of 1.94 visits per head of population and 750,145 items issued to library borrowers in 2022, compared to 0.52 visits and 241,715 items issued in 2021. This represents more than a threefold increase in visitors and issues in 2022 compared to 2021.
- Revenue Account Balance.** Between the end of 2021 and the end of 2022 Kildare went from a deficit in its revenue account balance (-€48,008) to a slight surplus (€4,164).



- **Staff total.** Whole-time equivalent staff employed by Kildare at the end of 2022 was 949.92. Kildare's wte staff numbers have been increasing over the years and have risen from 2015 when this figure was 803.1.
- **Sick leave.** Kildare's medically certified sick leave rate is 3.68%, a very minor increase on the 3.66% of 2021, meaning that it was one of the local authorities which did not meet the public sector sick leave target of 3.5%. The national average was 3.58%. Kildare's average self-certified paid sick leave was 0.26%. The national average is 0.32%.
- **Technology & Social media.** The per capita total page views of Kildare County's websites in 2022 was 7.79, which compares to an average of 13.65 across all local authorities. The per capita total page views of Kildare's websites in 2021 was 9.97, which compares to an average of 13.6 across all local authorities.

The per capita total number of followers at the end 2022 of its social media accounts was 0.37 (the lowest amongst all local authorities), as opposed to an average of 0.94 across all local authorities. This compares to the per capita total number of followers at the end 2021 of its social media accounts of 0.34, as opposed to an average of 0.93 across all local authorities.

With regards the cost of Information Communications Technology (ICT) provision per whole-time equivalent staff member of a local authority, Kildare recorded a cost of €3,846.86 per whole-time equivalent staff in 2022, down from €4,156.85 in 2021.

## NOAC REPORT NO 57

### Public Spending Code 2022

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 Kildare 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.

Of particular interest:

- Its final outturn expenditure of projects/programmes completed or discontinued in the reference year that was greater than €0.5m was €92,936,846 which was significantly below the national average of €47,893,631.



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 Amount in Reference Year	Capital Expenditure Amount in Reference Year (Non Grant)	Capital Expenditure Amount in Reference Year (Grant)	Projected Lifetime Expenditure	Current Expenditure Amount in 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 Amount in Reference Year	Capital Expenditure Amount in Reference Year (Non Grant)	Capital Expenditure Amount in Reference Year (Grant)	Final Outrun Expenditure
Kildare County Council	€0	€2,328,825	€0	€395,607,873	€179,826,867	€133,037,184	€0	€169,539,227	€313,247,766	€0	€4,984,566	€0	€92,936,846
Average	€6,246,974	€5,265,311	€1,968,912	€271,437,527	€196,651,157	€52,197,176	€10,490,114	€215,037,709	€580,819,455	€356,191	€8,791,525	€5,632,550	€47,893,631

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.

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.

- Under the heading “Evidence of pre-plan consultation” within the section “Public expectations – Visibility, engagement and communications” Kildare County Council states: “A recurring issue in recent consultations has been the need for better and more frequent communication and consultation by the Council... Clearly, with a population of over 36% aged 0-24 we must meet the challenge of reaching and engaging with a younger group of citizens whose lives are shaped by the decisions we have taken and will take. The Council’s website will be re-developed during this Plan along with new online consultative platforms and a revised Communications Strategy. As part of the proposals to improve communications a dedicated Communications Unit is planned.” The report outlines that this suggests an awareness on the Council’s part of the diversity of its audience and the need to actively structure its communications to improve “understanding of our services and role” with the wider public, who are not necessarily part of an existing stakeholder network.

**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 including Kildare County Council.

- 43% of respondents were satisfied with Kildare County Council, below the average level of satisfaction with Councils, which was 53%.
- Kildare’s satisfaction rating was highest in the area of road safety at 58% satisfaction compared to the average satisfaction rate of 54% among all Councils.

- 15% of people felt that Kildare provides good value for money. This was the lowest rated Council in this category, significantly lower than the 27% average for all Councils.
- 37% of people believe that Kildare is doing a good job, which was the poorest performance in this category, 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. Kildare was not one of the 17 authorities which had done so.
- The Head of Internal Audit reports to the CE in nine authorities, one of which is Kildare.

**NOAC REPORT NO 10**

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

	2014	2020
<b>Number of Registered Tenancies</b>	11,452	13,236
<b>% Units inspected</b>	4.7	4.16
<b>Inspected Failed %</b>	53.7	98.33

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

# KILDARE

Performance Indicators	2022		2021		2020		2019		2018		2017		2016		2015	
	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	0.84	0.75	0.73	0.59	1.37	0.64	1.94	1.15	1.19	0.84	0.61	0.53	n/a	3.43	0.99	1.91
H2 % of directly provided dwellings vacant at 31/12	2.44	3.03	3.34	3.16	1.69	3.18	1.62	3.15	1.35	2.77	1.78	2.73	1.84	3.02	1.46	3.5
H3a Average time from vacation date to PI year re-letting date (weeks)	50.97	35.22	48.78	34.44	38.88	32.69	35.49	28.17	26.83	27.75	26.42	28.9	15.82	32.99	8.66	28.43
H3b Average cost expended on getting re-tenanting units ready for re-letting	€42,545.75	€21,886.04	€39,195.43	€19,653.39	€23,517.64	€19,065.30	€30,331.21	€18,336.85	€28,349.17	€18,590.28	€26,108.98	€17,160.60	€46,180.73	€15,877	€24,847.49	€13,378.40
H4 Average repair and maintenance cost per unit	€1,099.35	€1,297.48	€925.72	€1,150.13	€654.41	€1,119.82	€727.51	€1,168.99	€837.21	€841.83	€1,070.43	€1,311.82	€1,669.27	€1,500.23	€1,473.26	€1,292.57
H5 Inspections (Dwellings inspected in 2018) carried out in year as % of registrations	No data available	No data available	No data available	No data available	4.16	6.73	9.17	9.93	3.65	7.39	3.29	4.96	3.13	4.36	4.26	5.64
R1a % Regional Road KM that ever received a PSCI rating	91	88.48	70	91	20.60	77	99.20	99	100	99.36	95	96	99.00	99	38.00	68



Performance Indicators	2022		2021		2020		2019		2018		2017		2016		2015	
R1b	42.81	36.13	42.57	30.90	53.20	31.19	47.21	38.28	42	37.58	41	28	31.00	30	19.00	20
R1c	38.51	29.63	40.19	26.05	42.70	24.00	41.77	23.08	38	23.39	31	20	20.00	13	10.00	11
R1d	31.25	23.65	31.78	21.40	29.90	17.66	26.37	17.67	20	15.19	15	14	6.00	10	4.00	8
R1e	30.18	18.85	10.17	15.38	7.40	13.93	6.41	14.23	5	12.42	4	8	2.00	7	1.00	5
R2a	18.30	11.15	16.1	13.40	19.80	14.7	19.70	13.17	21.7	13.4	18.20	10.3	11.70	10.8	26.90	10.2
R2b	16.20	14.4	21.1	19.9	28.0	19.4	10.70	14.27	8.4	15.3	20.00	11.9	16.30	12.2	10.90	8.3
R2/3	90.95	81.1	91.99	86.18	91.16	81.52	84.31	70.21	82.72	69.15	80.50	65.95	78.61	64.05	71.46	56.6
W1	No data available	No data available	No data available	No data available	No data available	No data available	96.52	97.50	98.93	97.1	98.79	98.46	99.02	97.77	98.67	99.07



Performance Indicators	2022		2021		2020		2019		2018		2017		2016		2015	
E1	90.86	56.62	95.49	55.09	91.35	89.73	57.36	48.36	52.36	43.91	51.21	39.53	46.60	37.7	45.92	34.87
E2	12.85	10.81	6.75	10.82	5.03	10.38	4.66	9.28	1.87	11.00	9.55	9.79	16.08	9.91	0.64	8.49
E3	74	20	77	22	80	22	86	15.00	57	19.00	4	10	7.00	13	44.00	14
P1	53.11	18.3	47.49	16.97	16.80	15.28	14.45	23.90	17.89	16.75	24.38	17	22.14	19.42	13.29	24
P2	83.72	73.16	68.42	71.17	79.27	73.17	81.33	73.07	84.93	75.92	80.00	79	83.33	77.78	65.71	71.88
P3	3.97	3.13	7.12	3.60	9.37	3.74	5.23	2.74	4.94	3.03	1.02	2.41	2.49	2.87	2.25	2.61
P4	€37.15	€33.54	37.72	33.37	€35.10	31.47	€37.60	€30.27	€35.44	29.24	€33.32	28.31	28.56	€26.96	26.24	€26.76
F1	€25.47	€82.63	€33.04	82.69	€32.00	79.93	€31.49	€60.79	30.49	53.85	€30.48	57.74	28.21	€56.07	28.35	€57.88
F2	N/A	01:26	N/A	1:27	N/A	1:28	N/A	1:24	N/A	1.42	N/A	1.45	n/a	1.5	N/A	1.6



Performance Indicators	2022		2021		2020		2019		2018		2017		2016		2015	
F3 % of Fire Cases in which first attendance is within 10 minutes	16.91	52.65	18.46	56.17	20.20	55.30	16.91	55.14	21.14	52.92	24.65	40.45	20.40	57.79	24.71	56.98
L1a No. of Library visits per head of population	1.94	2.09	0.52	0.86	0.98	1.05	3.19	3.57	3.02	3.50	2.76	3.56	2.72	3.61	2.86	3.68
L1b No. of Items borrowed per head of population	3.03	2.71	1.09	2.07	0.98	2.19	3.54	3.14	2.55	3.00	2.26	2.92	3.00	3.82	3.12	3.82
L2 Cost of Library Service per capita	€34.97	36.68	€31.73	36.92	€36.56	35.95	€34.73	€34.94	€33.67	30.52	32.06	31.00	24.07	€30.05	30.96	€30.02
Y1 % of local schools involved in Comhairle na nÓg Scheme	85.19	64.7	88.00	63.25	65.38	63.29	85.71	68.30	91.18	80.00	100.00	69.04	87.50	68.07	95.83	67.59
C1 WTE staff per 1,000 population	3.83	5.6	4.37	5.89	4.36	6.06	4.30	5.95	4.18	5.99	3.91	5.75	3.81	5.64	3.82	5.58
C2a % of paid working days lost to medically certified sick leave in year	3.68	3.58	3.66	2.89	2.59	3.01	4.80	3.71	4.39	3.74	4.45	3.74	4.06	3.76	4.17	3.52
C2b % of paid working days lost to self-certified sick leave in year	0.26	0.32	0.16	0.19	0.16	0.20	0.32	0.36	0.33	0.35	0.29	0.33	0.34	0.38	0.31	0.39

Performance Indicators	2022		2021		2020		2019		2018		2017		2016		2015	
C3	7.79	13.65	9.97	13.60	10.54	N/A	11,289.23	16,572	10,788	16,210.00	11,095	14,632	10,145.77	12,422	9,328.04	11,666
C4	€3,846.86	3,729.33	€4,156.85	3,521.62	€3,967.82	3,457.02	€2,807.18	€3,060.84	€2,541.51	2894.57	€2,356.91	€3,048.41	2,176.92	€2,675.69	1,934.93	€2,680.15
M2a	86.00	88.1	82.00	83.40	70.0	76	83	87	82	86.00	83.0	83	83.00	82.3	82.00	83
M2b	92.00	88.1	93.00	88.8	92	88.3	92	89.80	89	89.00	88.0	89	88.00	88.0	88.00	85
M2c	73.00	82.6	69.00	81.6	62	79.4	62	78	51	75.00	43.0	74	47.00	70	43.00	68
J1	0.24	0.67	0.19	0.59	-0.02	-0.30	0.31	0.64	1.28	0.77	0.48	0.68	0.43	0.7	0.48	0.66
E6	7,283	5,740	7,421	5,942	8,010	6,209	N/A	N/A								
M3	6.41	11.31	10.68	11.05	8.88	12.21	8.69	13.53	6.91	11.62						
M4	€32.49	32.35	€31.30	31.83	26.45	26.75	N/A	N/A								



# Stage 1 meeting

## Final minutes

### NOAC Stage 1 meeting with Kildare County Council

Date:	23rd February 2023 at 11 a.m.	
Venue:	Aras Chill Dara, Naas, Co. Kildare	
In attendance:	<b>Kildare County Council</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Sonya Kavanagh, Chief Executive (CE)</li> <li>■ Annette Aspell, Director of Services – Housing and Corporate Services</li> </ul>	<b>NOAC</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Michael McCarthy, NOAC Chair</li> <li>■ Claire Gavin, NOAC Secretariat</li> <li>■ Alan McDermott, NOAC Secretariat</li> </ul>

NOAC’s profile for Kildare County Council was issued in advance of the meeting and formed the basis for the discussion on the day. It was outlined that a second meeting between Kildare County Council and the NOAC Board will take place as part of this process. The NOAC Chair further explained the role of NOAC, outlining that it was established in 2014 as an independent body, which is tasked with oversight of the local government system.

The Kildare CE gave an overview of the Council and the issues facing it. Matters discussed in detail were:

- **Council overview.** Kildare is located in the greater Dublin area with 3 major towns in North Kildare that lie in the Dublin Metropolitan Area. The county has experienced rapid population growth in the last 30 years with its population doubling to almost 250,000 as per the latest census figures. It has a significant urban and rural mix and both the agriculture and equine industries play important roles in the county. It is also home to Maynooth University, the only University located in a town and has a highly skilled and young workforce which is both an opportunity and a challenge with 40% of the workforce commuting and growth outpacing investment in community services such as access to GP services, Garda numbers and pre-school facilities.

- **Motor tax.** It was noted that Kildare had one of the lowest year-on-year increases in its online motor tax transactions nationally at under 1%, though it did have the third highest rate of online motor tax transactions nationally in 2021 at 91.99%. This showed an already impressive uptake in the online system effecting its ability to achieve larger year-on-year increases in uptake.
- **Housing.** Housing loans and collection rates were discussed with it being noted that Kildare are engaging with people to convert shared home ownership loans to annuity loans to assist them getting out of arrears. This results in removing a rental fee and mortgage fee into one affordable annuity loan for those in arrears. This process can be very complex which can involve write-offs and while there have been some repossessions this is something that is avoided where possible. Furthermore, Kildare’s land bank will be significantly depleted over the next few years and the Council will have to purchase land that is serviced or can be serviced. This is a competitive market and it will need to keep a pipeline of projects going to try to keep pace with the social and affordable housing demand.

There can be issues of persons abandoning properties when unable to repay loans and lenders may have difficulties with what to do with such properties. It was recognised that there can be a lot of queries regarding vacant properties such as with derelict properties or persons no longer living in a property such as in a nursing home. The Council is working in providing age-friendly housing that would be close to amenities and public transport and noted the development of McAuley Place, Naas as a positive example of good practice. The Council would like to replicate this model but highlighted the importance of location.

Kildare also highlighted that it is committed to delivering 2,400 social and 800 affordable housing units over the lifetime of Housing for All. It noted that 40% of delivery will be through approved housing bodies and it will continue to build on its good working relationship with those bodies in order to reach its targets.

- **Traffic.** The Council is looking at this area and noted the balance needed between removing parking from town centres and improving public transport while engaging rate payers who have a preference for persons to have the ability to park in a town centre, particularly if it has a large hinterland such as Naas. A scheme of redesigning footpaths and opening the town centre in Dunmanway, Co. Cork was highlighted as a good example of this though it was noted that such schemes need the right amount of support to reach fruition and that there is a need to allocate resources accordingly.
- **Council Chamber.** The Council consists of 40 elected members, broken down to 12 Fianna Fáil, 11 Fine Gael, 5 Labour, 4 Social Democrats, 3 Green, 1 Sinn Féin and 4 Independents. It was highlighted that there was a good gender balance in the Council Chamber and that the Council is looking to upgrade its software in order to allow the better functioning of Council meetings. In particular, it was highlighted that with such a large Council and the demands of hybrid meetings, the upgrade should help in this area.
- **Blended working.** Kildare County Council brought in its blended working programme in the first week of December 2022 to its 1,200 staff. This involved staff applying for the ability to work from home for a certain amount of days a week depending on their area of work and business needs. It was noted that this option does not solve accommodation issues in the Council offices but it is something that can be used to attract staff.
- **Digital transformation.** Covid has accelerated the digital transformation of Kildare County Council services, where there will be an emphasis on strengthening innovation to facilitate and underpin the hybrid working model and the delivery of online services.
- **Staff Recruitment and Retention.** This is a significant challenge for Kildare where there are difficulties in competing with other employers regarding financial remuneration. Kildare is looking at becoming an employer of choice by focussing on family friendly arrangements, opportunities for promotion and self-development.
- **Ukraine.** The war in Ukraine has had a significant impact and Kildare has played a lead role in the provision of accommodation, matching pledged properties and the Community response. However, it was noted that this work cannot be undertaken without an impact on its delivery of core services and functions.
- **Inflation.** There has been a significant increase in prices as well as supply chain issues, which have affected capital projects. This has meant that Kildare have had to assess this impact on both their current and capital budgets and make adjustments accordingly.
- **Climate Action.** Kildare is a lead authority on Climate Action with the Eastern and Midlands Climate Action Regional Office (CARO) being located in Naas, Co. Kildare. The creation and implementation of a Local Climate Action Plan will be a key focus this year (it will need to be completed by early 2024) which will include the identification of a decarbonised zone in Maynooth, where a range of climate mitigation, adaptation and biodiversity measures will be identified to address local low carbon energy, greenhouse gas emissions and climate needs to contribute to national climate action targets.



Issues include the implementation of active travel, providing quick charging EV stations, communicating to homeowners on how to help reduce heating bills, changing mind-sets regarding transport options, etc. It is hoped that the successful implementation of the Maynooth project could be later rolled out to other towns in the county such as Newbridge and Naas. Particular challenges will be consultation and engagement with stakeholders while ensuring to keep in line with the Plan.

- **Priority areas.** Kildare identified a number of priority areas it is driving progress on such as:
  - Fit for purpose Local Government – ensuring it is fit for purpose to deliver efficient and effective services as well as prudent financial management and strategic workforce planning.
  - Affordable and accessible housing for those unable to provide housing for themselves, employees of existing businesses and those of prospective businesses.
  - Cultivating a pro-business culture and environment through infrastructure, soft supports and fostering new business and the expansion of existing businesses.
  - Taking a holistic approach to climate resilience using learnings from the decarbonised zone in Maynooth and the production of its first local climate action plan.
  - Healthy place-making as a key to underpin objectives given a rapidly growing young population and a weak service base.
- **Diversity and libraries.** Kildare noted that it has a large international community, highlighting North Kildare and Kildare town as areas where there are particularly larger international communities. It produces leaflets in a number of different languages for those communities, which are available in libraries. It has a specific website for Ukrainian nationals and has piloted an online register for local elections with particular attention being on 16-17 year olds. It further highlighted that the library in Naas is moving location and that, while it had initially received negative feedback on this proposal, it will be an excellent addition to the centre of the town.
- **Land Disposal.** A media programme regarding the disposal of land owned by the Council was discussed. In particular, it was noted that the process followed was correct and that the land disposal was carried out with the vast majority of support of the Council members itself.
- **Communication.** It was noted that the response by local authorities to the Covid pandemic raised the profile of local government and the work they undertake. Kildare have social media sites that can highlight the work of the Council as well as a specific site that provides community stories from local people and businesses. This can help show the public the work that Kildare carries out, which it may not be aware of. Additionally, there is a circular relationship with businesses, and while there are very large rate payers such as Intel in the county, it has a large number of SMEs (approximately 7,000) that also contribute.
- **Conclusion.** The NOAC Chair concluded the meeting and invited Kildare to attend a full NOAC meeting with the board, later in the year.



# 3

## Stage 2 meeting

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

#### Stage 2 Scrutiny Meeting

Date:	Tuesday 17th January 2024 at 11:30 a.m.	
Venue:	Custom House, Dublin	
Attended by:	<p><b>Chair</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Ciarán Hayes (alternate)</li> </ul> <p><b>Members</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Margaret Lane</li> <li>■ Fiona Quinn</li> <li>■ Declan Breathnach</li> <li>■ Miriam McDonald</li> </ul> <p><b>Apologies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Michael McCarthy</li> <li>■ Noel Harrington</li> <li>■ Brian Cawley</li> <li>■ Kathleen Holohan</li> </ul> <p><b>Secretariat</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Claire Gavin</li> <li>■ John Goldrick</li> </ul>	<p><b>By Invite:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Sonya Kavanagh, Chief Executive</li> <li>■ Eoghan Ryan, Director of Corporate, People and Cultural Services</li> </ul>

#### Meeting with Kildare County Council

NOAC's profile for Kildare County Council was issued in advance of the meeting. The NOAC alternate Chair welcomed the officials from the local authority and explained that NOAC holds approximately six stage two scrutiny meetings per year. This affords NOAC the opportunity to meet with senior local authority staff, giving them the opportunity to present pertinent issues relating to their Council. The CE gave a short verbal presentation after which a number of matters were raised by the board members and were discussed in detail:

- **Overview:** the 2022 census outlined that Kildare has a population of slightly under 250,000 people, signifying that its population has doubled over the past thirty years. This brings both opportunities and challenges. Kildare has a strategic location close to Dublin, while also containing rural areas from the mid to south of the County. It is very accessible and is connected with three motorways and rail services. However, the public transport network within the County is not at the same standard, in terms of linking up its own towns.

- **Business:** Kildare has major companies providing employment in the County, including foreign direct investment companies like Intel, which is a great benefit for the area. The County has also become a major hub for logistics, such as warehousing, in the last five years. Businesses such as Aldi, Lidl and Primark have their warehousing in Kildare, while many small to medium enterprises are also based in the County. While Covid was a challenging era, one benefit was having LEOs reaching out to businesses, and establishing links with them.

- **Tourism:** Kildare is trying to harness its tourism potential. The Brigid 1500 Festival takes place in Kildare in January and February 2024. The festival celebrates the life of St. Brigid and showcases the cultural heritage of Ireland. There is great interest in this festival from the British embassy in Ireland. Other points of note include the RRDF funded redevelopment of the Athy Shackelton Museum, which has just commenced.

The 48km Barrow Blueway is also an important tourist attraction, with significant work completed along this route, as is the provision of the Royal Canal Greenway (west of Maynooth) and the Grand Canal Greenway (11km recently opened from Alymer Bridge to Sallins and plans to extend to the Offaly border).

The significant number of competing strategic projects and the capital required to advance them across the larger towns and rural areas presents particular challenges. Some of the south of the County still has significant pockets of deprivation and so this is a challenge for the Council. Kildare's equine industry is important, attracting a large international interest. It has established the name of Thoroughbred Country that it shares with Tipperary.

- **Population of towns:** Due to rapid population growth, Kilcock is the youngest small town in the country. Maynooth and Kildare town are also within the top ten within this category. The Council has strong links with Maynooth University. Having a young, well-educated workforce is important for attracting industry to the region. However, there are issues to address, among them in Athy, which contains areas of deprivation and youth unemployment.

- **Service provision:** There are challenges associated with population growth. The Council budget appears strong but it is attempting to catch up with the provision of services. This affects the local authority, Tusla, the HSE, the Gardaí and other organisations. There is a weaker service base in the County than would be expected. Statutory agencies are working together to put a focus on this issue and obtain greater funding and delivery of services for the County. The elected members wish to ensure that the projects that are in the planning stages are delivered upon.

Kildare encompasses eleven towns, seven of them with a population of over 10,000, so there is significant planning to provide each area with adequate funding and equitable services based on the population and to ensure that they are targeting areas of disadvantage.

- **Staffing:** One of the major challenges facing the Council is the issue of recruiting and retaining staff. The local authority, civil service and HSE are all endeavouring to recruit staff. A lack of affordable accommodation in the County may be a factor in recruiting and retaining staff.
- **Fire Services:** the response times for arrival at fire incidents within ten minutes has dropped off according to the Performance Indicator 2022 report. This is partially due to the difficulty in recruiting and retaining fire services staff. The recent IR issues and agreed pay related increases will have an impact on the cost of the fire service and service provision may need to be reviewed in light of these increased costs. It is difficult to get retained fire staff. Overall vacancies within the local authority stand at around ten per cent of staff.
- **Customer Satisfaction:** on the last occasion when NOAC produced a customer satisfaction survey, Kildare's results were below average. The Council is mindful of this and has established a communications team, as it was previously felt that its positive work had not been promoted. There is also the fact that many people living in Kildare have moved there from elsewhere, and may not have the same sense of belonging to the community.

There may also be a disconnect and members of the public may not understand that certain services, such as the Fire Service and Library and Arts Service, are Local Authority services.

The LGMA recently undertook a customer services survey. Rural Councils had a lower satisfaction rate than urban Councils with the understanding being that people in rural communities wanted to know more about what was happening in their locality and they were dissatisfied if they felt the information was not forthcoming from their local authority. Kildare has been reticent in relation to using customer surveys. The Council has felt that if someone has interacted with it and sought the provision of a service, and been declined, then it will receive a negative response. The Council is trying to improve its customer service and the management service which it has for dealing with customer service. Elected members often highlight customer services issues to the Council team.

- **Housing:** the average re-housing time is behind the curve when compared nationally, while the cost of re-letting houses are higher than the average. However, the Council has reduced the re-housing time and put in place frameworks for contractors so staff can draw down a contractor from a list. While re-letting costs are high, the Council feels that good value is provided and there is a level of future proofing as necessary upgrading work is undertaken on the unit while it is vacant. It also believes that re-letting times will drop in future returns as improvements in processes will be reflected in those returns.

The rate of refusals in the County is causing issues. Choice-based letting has been introduced in an effort to ensure that units do not remain empty. The housing stock in Kildare has grown again, however the aesthetics of vacant houses is negative. Work has been undertaken on this over the last two to three years, so the expectation is that refusal rates will fall. This is a key priority for Kildare and they expect to see significant improvements in all these areas in the next two to three years.

- **Communications:** website and social media hits on the Kildare website are lower than national average in the Performance Indicator report, something which has been discussed with the Council's communications team.

The kildare.ie website was established twenty years ago. Currently, the library, arts, tourism and Brigid 1500 all have separate websites, which dilutes the hits to the main website. The Council feels that it may be better to bring all of these websites together. If it combines the statistics on the various websites, it shows that there is a high level of interaction with the public.

The Council has also had significant consultations with the Public Participation Network on a range of issues. The County Development Plan 2023-2029 received the Chambers Ireland Award under the Communications Category in 2023 for its innovative approach to public consultation across a range of platforms and activities and for example, there have been approximately 3,000 responses to the Curragh draft management plan. Kildare accepts that it has a job of work to bring all the websites and traffic together.

- **Service improvements:** in 2014 when town councils were abolished, Kildare created a full customer service team, which had not previously existed. A new communications team has also been established and customer service software was rolled out to improve interactions with the elected members. In the last year the directorates were re-organised to improve communication and collaboration within Directorates and across Directorates. There has also been significant upgrades to libraries. Naas library and Cultural Centre is opening in January 2024. Athy library is a one stop shop, where the public can also undertake various types of classes, hold meetings, exhibitions and events.
- **Social media:** the Council is examining Facebook and Instagram, which are very different platforms. Facebook is useful for announcing information, while Instagram is designed more for uploading imagery and photographs. The Council has tracked its number of followers, with Facebook having a steady following and Instagram increasing its numbers. It is important to know the target audience and how best to connect to them. The age friendly team is using Facebook and printed newsletters. The Council on their Kildare Community Stories Facebook page has undertaken video interviews with people to ascertain their views of services. Some of these videos have received 2,000 views.

The Council needs to consider how to react to circumstances where it posts something online and it is hijacked by certain people. Its communications staff are experienced in dealing with such circumstances. The Council is also active on local radio, particularly regarding topical issues.

- **Leasing:** Cases can arise whereby a house has been leased and then sold by a landlord with a tenant in place. The tenant in situ gets priority over people longer on the housing waiting list. Allocating housing in these circumstances can be challenging, as this could mean that another person on the housing list could be bypassed. However, there are only around 70 to 80 cases where this potential exists. The Council also needs to ensure that the sale of a rented/ lease property does not force a tenant into homelessness.

A process takes place whereby the Council examines each house offered under leasing, and establishing whether this may be offered to a person who is currently residing in homeless accommodation. There has been a significant amount of properties offered under leasing. The Council's housing waiting list stands at approximately 3,500 people and 1,800 on the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme.
- **Executive and members:** the Athgarvan land disposal that was the subject of a Prime Time Investigates programme had been a democratic decision taken by the members in a public forum, but some members felt that their decision making was being queried in its wake. The relationship between the executive and members is very positive, with a mutual respect existing between both.
- **Energy bureau:** this was something which was borne out of necessity, with an acknowledgement of the need for this in the area. The Council is leading out on this. It has only recently been established. Kildare also took the lead in Climate Action with the establishment of the CARO. The Council has reviewed its list of buildings within its portfolio to seek opportunities to reduce its energy demands. It has targeted its three highest energy users, such as its HQ at Aras Chill Dara and its two swimming pools.

It wishes to put in new systems in some buildings, such as solar panels on the roof of the cotton mill (new storage facility adjoining its HQ). The Council is also carrying out a feasibility study on its swimming pools, and has secured funding to explore a new district heating system similar to what was undertaken in south Dublin by Codema. It has an Energy Efficiency Officer in place who is working with the likes of SEAI and Codema.

- **Internal Audit:** the Council undertook a formal review of the internal audit five to six years ago, along with examining its risk register. The Council has hired a professional auditor to head up the Internal Audit Team and they prepare an annual plan that sets out areas to be audited annually (eight-twelve areas annually). The Council is currently reviewing its Risk Register with IPB. One incident has been raised in the last year, which was addressed by an independent report. Kildare has a very good Audit Committee, in particular the Chair, who is focused and drives the work of the Internal Audit team. The members consider the outcome from the internal audits and are also very engaged on governance issues.

## Conclusion

The alternate Chair closed the meeting by acknowledging the positive results achieved by the Council within the environment sphere and in particular the results from the EPA November 2022 report. He thanked the local authority officials for their attendance at the meeting and outlined that the minutes and full report will be published on the NOAC website at a future date.

The meeting was brought to a close.





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