



## NOAC / Tipperary County Council Transcript

**Miriam McDonald:** Okay. Welcome everybody and thank you very much to everyone from Tipperary for attending today. We're delighted that you could make the time to come, and we really appreciate you coming up early as well. So, thank you.

To kick off, I'll just introduce who's around the table from NOAC and the Secretariat side. Then maybe I'll ask you to introduce Tipperary, and then go into your opening address, if that's okay.

So just to start, well, I'm Miriam McDonald. I'm head of the-- I'm a member of the board, head of the-- We have four Working Groups, so I'm Head Chair of Working Group Three, and I'm chairing the session today. I'll hand over to Claire.

**Claire Gavin:** Claire Gavin, Head of Secretariat.

**Anne Haugh:** Anne Haugh, member of NOAC, and a member of Working Group One and Two.

**Declan Breathnach:** Declan Breathnach, from the Wee County of Louth, as I said earlier to some of you. You're most welcome, and I look forward to the engagement.

**Noel Harrington:** Noel Harrington, Board Member.

**John Byrne:** John Byrne, Board Member.

**Kathleen Holohan:** Kathleen Holohan, Board Member.

**Ciarán Hayes:** Ciarán Hayes, Board Member.

**Alan McDermott:** Alan McDermott, Member of the Secretariat.

**John Goldrick:** John Goldrick, Secretariat Member.

**Liam Brett:** Liam Brett, Director of Service for Roads and Transportation, Health and Safety, and Nenagh Municipal District.

**Mark Connolly:** Mark Connolly. Director of Finance and IT, and Thurles Municipal District.

**Anthony Coleman:** Anthony Coleman, Director of Services with Responsibility for the Local Authority Waters Programme, a shared service.

**Sinéad Carr:** Sinéad Carr, Chief Executive, Tipperary.

**Eamon Lonergan:** Eamon Lonergan, Director of Services for Corporate Services, HR, Environment and Climate Action.

**Brian Beck:** Brian Beck, Director of Service with Responsibility for Planning, Placemaking, Emergency Services, Emergency Management and EU Just Transition, and Carrick-on-Suir Municipal District.

**Shane O'Dwyer:** Shane O'Dwyer, Senior Executive Officer, Housing Services.

**Ger Walsh:** Ger Walsh, Senior Executive Officer, Corporate Services and Meetings Administrator for the Council.

**Damien Ginty:** Damien Ginty, Director of Services, Social Inclusion, Economic, Community, Rural Development, Libraries, Cultural Services and Tipp-Cahir-Cashel Municipal District.

**Miriam McDonald:** Thank you very much. Sinéad, I'll hand over to you now.

**Sinéad Carr:** Okay. Thank you, Chair, and thank you for the opportunity to attend here today. I'd have to say even in preparing for today, it actually was a really useful exercise. So, however today goes, I think the value of it won't be lost.

We've sent you on the profile there for Tipperary, and I'm not going to go through that in a huge amount of detail, but just maybe to make a couple of key points. We're obviously a very large rural county. We break down on a 60/40 basis in favour of rural population settlements. It takes us about two and a half hours to get from one part of the county to the other. And obviously, we're in two constituencies.

But I suppose the most distinctive thing about Tipperary is that, in addition to our nine towns, we have 126 settlements. And that dispersed settlement structure, it's a defining feature of the county, and we're committed to sustaining it as a local authority because it underpins community identity, local connectivity, and informal social supports. So a lot of what we do is focused around those particular areas. And obviously, that brings its own challenges around cost efficiencies, et cetera.

I'm also aware that customer services is an area that is focused upon, and there has been the recent report on the customer service scores, which we have done very well in, in fairness. But, we also recognise we have ongoing challenges in that area, and continued engagement and communication is a critical part of it. So we are working on areas like our CRMs, and we have a new draft Communication Strategy, which we hope will be more impactful and have a broader customer reach.

Our 40 elected members are a critical and core part of how we work and what we do, and we engage proactively with them in policy development, in strategic planning, and also in oversight. Our SPC structure, I think, works very well compared to a lot of other local authorities, and we get a lot of complex policies through, through that particular process. So, it's something we're particularly proud of.

On the financial side, we've worked very hard over the last two years to increase the council's budget to address rising costs and the expanding services. But we need to do a lot more to sustain that going forward. But in addition to that, I suppose what we are lucky to have is we do have a robust income collection system in place, and we've performed very well and very consistently over the last number of years in that area.

The corporate plan; we have five strategic themes on that, but we emphasise high-quality customer service, sustainability, collaboration, leadership, governance, public sector duty, and obviously, a strong commitment to public service. We have good implementation structures in place in terms of delivering on those priorities, and they're actively managed through the corporate risk register.

The strategic workforce plan, obviously, is our critical enabler in terms of the county. Every county obviously has one. But what I suppose would differentiate us is that one of our actions is to deliver an efficiency review report for each section internally. And the purpose of that is to ensure that the services are fit for purpose, that we identify opportunities to improve efficiencies, and that we

enable the reprioritisation of resources before we look at allocating additional staff into those spaces.

So, one of the key areas of action on that area as well is the digitalisation, which will be central to that work. And we're looking at setting up an Operational Efficiency and Optimisation Unit to lead on that, and that they will work with the heavy data-based service areas. And in parallel, we have - currently are undertaking a review of the outdoor staffing and the municipal district staffing levels, and that's a priority for '26.

So I suppose they're the corporate areas, I suppose, on a broad line. We do have 1,100 services to deliver, but there's just one or two key areas I want to focus on, on that.

Housing, obviously, is a critical piece of work for ourselves. We have exceeded our targets under Rebuilding Ireland and Housing for All. And to be fair, that's on the back of work that was done by previous managements, in terms of purchasing forward, purchasing lands. So, in addition to the 1,072 homes that we will have delivered by the end of this year, we've also managed over four years to accommodate 2,205 new tenancies, and that's significantly impactful for those households. And I suppose part of that is as a result of our reduction on the vacancy rates from 4.6% in 2019, to in around 1.9% last year.

We are focusing, currently, on reducing the turnaround times, and also, we're going to revisit again our rents, and we're doing a rent review at this point in time. We've done a previous one back in, I think, 2019/2020, where we merged the nine rent authorities.

Private housing, obviously, is still a significant issue for us, and particularly the contraction of the private rented sector, that's causing us a particular challenge. The other priority is around placemaking. I've mentioned the 126 settlements, so it was important for our team here that we had a better, more focused opportunity in terms of delivering for those communities in those areas. So, we put together a Placemaking Team under the Planning Directorate. We've Town Centre First, the Vacancy Homes, Derelict Sites, our Capital Projects, and our

Active Travel Team all sitting under that. They work with the municipal districts, and they bring a particular focus to improving the villages and towns in those areas.

That then is supported by a lot of work under the Croí Cónaithe, and the other initiatives that have come from government, in terms of revitalising those towns. So, at the moment, we have about a €124 million in capital expenditure expended on Public Realm, Community Facilities, Recreational Facilities in those Placemaking Initiatives.

On the Economic and Tourism side, look, that's an area we can't take our foot off the pedal on. We have to work hard for every job we get in a rural county such as Tipperary. We have, I suppose, two particular actions that we would be particularly proud of, the activation of our own strategic land banks for economic purposes in the small towns. And also, we have three significant employment land banks in Nenagh, just outside of Thurles on the Lisheen Mine Site, and in Clonmel. So there's a lot of really good work ongoing in those areas in terms of delivering jobs, and particularly in the context of Lisheen, where we have a National Bioeconomy Campus.

I think the last time we were with you, we had spoken about tourism, and we had set up a new tourism structure for an all-county tourism board. That's working very well, and we also have three place-based brands that are the Munster Vales, Lough Derg, and the Horse Country. Those three brands we work with other counties on. That has been particularly valuable to us from a product development perspective, and also from a marketing perspective. And I suppose part of the endorsement of that work is the fact that we were named in the Lonely Planet guide recently for 2026 as one of the top ten places to visit. And I think the trade in particular are very proud of that.

And then finally, look, climate action goes right across the board, in all counties. We have very strong implementation structures set up in terms of implementing that. It's a cross-cutting theme right across all of our service areas. We're probably one of the key differentiators in that we have a rural Decarbonisation Zone that's focused in around Lisheen Mines, and that broad

area. And also, I suppose with the appointment of a Building Energy Manager, we've managed to deliver tangible results, which has assisted us in our compliance with our own buildings, and targets, and fleet.

So I suppose to conclude, Chair, just to say to you that, as a team, we're motivated to improve the quality of life for citizens in the county. There are significant challenges without a doubt, not least of which is infrastructure, water, wastewater, the N24, Thurles Bypass. But there's also plenty of opportunities for us that we're eager to grasp. And as an organisation, I suppose what we're committed to doing is to driving, enabling, and advocating for the county and to ensure by the end, at least of this council term, that the citizens see concrete improvements in their quality of life.

So, I'm happy, I suppose, at this stage, to answer any questions and to assist you in whichever way we can. Thank you.

**Miriam McDonald:** Thank you very much. And, I mean, you mentioned that this process was a good exercise for you and your team, and I suppose just to echo that, we appreciate that, you know, you don't just turn up here, that there's a lot of work involved by everyone, in coming here today, so thank you very much.

So I mentioned we have four Working Groups, and the way we've structured the questions are according to those Working Groups. And I'm going to start with Working Group Three, which is around Customer Service and Communications. So, just, I suppose one-- we have some standard questions that we ask. So the first one is, you mentioned customer service, do you actually carry out customer service surveys? And if so, how regularly and so on?

**Sinéad Carr:** Right. Eamon, do you want to cover that?

**Eamon Lonergan:** Yes. Thanks, Chair. We haven't carried out a customer

service survey in a number of years. It's in our corporate plan as one of the initiatives we want to roll out as part of our new approach to communications. We have a new Corporate Communication Strategy, only signed off on in the last couple of weeks. We're also identifying mystery shoppers, that type of interaction. What we're really pleased with, I suppose, with the NOAC report on the sentiment, 2025 results for us were the best ever in terms of that. Going back to in 2022, we had zero above the national average.

Last year, we had all 12 sentiments above the national average, which was a huge part. So we're doing a lot right, and I think the strategy now is really good. We have our CRM system up running. So the feedback is good, but definitely we're open to doing it, and it's an initiative in the Corporate Plan that we would do these surveys. Ger, I don't know if you want to say anything more on that. Ger heads up our Communications side of the house.

**Ger Walsh:** Yeah. Thanks, Eamon. I suppose, look, we haven't done any direct surveys to date, basically. And part of that was, I suppose, when we merged, you were coming from a position where you had 10 authorities into one, and naturally enough, like, I mean, the sentiment would be very mixed in that context. The survey that was done by NOAC in 2018, I think we fared very poorly in that. I think we came out at 40% customer satisfaction.

But since then, basically, we initiated a Communication Strategy, and at the most recent survey has shown a significant improvement in that. I think the satisfaction rate was up around 60%. We had a survey ready to go this year, but basically, we also carried out a review of the Comms Strategy. So we actually did a survey as part of that, and then also as part of the Corporate Plan process in 2024, and elements of that would have touched on customer service and how people view the council. So, I suppose, without a direct customer service, we had done-

**Miriam McDonald:** Yeah.

**Ger Walsh:** ... sort of surveys through other processes.

**Miriam McDonald:** Okay. And do you, do you track complaints? Do you have a complaints tracking system?

**Eamon Lonergan:** Yeah. We have a CRM system. We track all the complaints. They're divided up in terms of sections. So there's an Environmental Complaint System. So the same CRM system goes to the Environmental Section, and they handle the complaints there. And that's one of the areas, the environmental area, would be an area we'd have - we'd be very proud of. We would get over 1,200-1,500 complaints on average during the year, and we'll end up every year with about 97% of those handled.

So that's-- there's a really good buy-in to the CRM system. It's very useful. But that's what customers want. They want to make a complaint and know they get a reference number, know that it's been handled by somebody, and it's closed out rather than waiting for a reply. So, and it gives a direct line of contact to an investigator or an inspector. So yeah, the CRM system is really good.

**Sinéad Carr:** I think it might be-- it might be no harm to note as well, we have quarterly reports of the CRMs come to Management Teams.

**Miriam McDonald:** I was going to ask, does it come to the Management Team, yeah.

**Sinéad Carr:** It does. And we particularly focus on those areas where maybe the, the callbacks or the outstanding ones aren't closed of.

**Miriam McDonald:** Yeah.

**Sinéad Carr:** So there's a very strong focus on that. And also, we have arranged for the Ombudsman's office to visit us to go through the best process of dealing with them, so we get best practice in the council in that area.

**Miriam McDonald:** Okay.

**Sinéad Carr:** But certainly, I think the fact that we focus on the CRMs at Management Team makes a big difference in terms of making sure that they're dealt with at the local service level.

**Miriam McDonald:** Okay.

**Ger Walsh:** I suppose, maybe, if I might just add to that, we actually have reviewed our Customer Charter and Customer Complaints Procedure in light of the updated LGMA Complaints Procedure from the advice from the Ombudsman. And I suppose part of our Customer Charter is that the complaints are dealt with within each directorate. So, while we don't have a centralised, I suppose, register in place historically, we have actually put it in place, in the last, I suppose, couple of weeks. So, from a corporate perspective, we'd only probably track the ones that, probably, sort of, are appealed following on from the decision being dealt with at a section level.

**Miriam McDonald:** Yeah.

**Ger Walsh:** And they are normally the ones where a person is not happy no matter what-

**Miriam McDonald:** Yeah.

**Ger Walsh:** ... response they get, like.

**Miriam McDonald:** Yeah. And I know you mentioned that you have a new Communications Strategy. Do you have a Communications Team, or is it just one person, or how is that structured?

**Ger Walsh:** No, I suppose back in 20- probably '18, when we basically prepared the initial Communication Strategy, we didn't have any dedicated Communications Team. We were operating a kind of hub-and-spoke approach. So, while communications is being coordinated by corporate, it's basically been linked into a rep in each directorate, and we tried to manage it that way. I suppose, over the last 12 years, it has been relatively successful. And we've been able to deal, I suppose, with communications in a general way. But I suppose with the advancement in social media and all that-

**Miriam McDonald:** Yeah.

**Ger Walsh:** ... our current review basically has kind of signalled us to, basically, go down the road of maybe having a dedicated Comms Team. We would have staff assigned, but like, they'd also multitask across other service areas.

**Miriam McDonald:** Yeah.

**Ger Walsh:** So we're kind of, we have been more reactive rather than being

proactive in that regard.

**Miriam McDonald:** So, when you were developing the Communication Strategy, who led that then? You know, normally it would be, like, a Communications Manager, or whoever was responsible at the Senior Management Team for communications.

**Ger Walsh:** Well, I suppose in 2018, it was basically, we would've engaged RPS consultants to assist us with the Communication Strategy, and we re-engaged them, again basically, in 2025. And as part of that, they would've carried out basically workshops with the Management Team, with the Chief Executive, with the members. We'd also have basically carried out a survey, amongst staff and councillors, to basically, I suppose, get feedback in relation to, I suppose, how our Communication Strategy is currently operating. And arising from that, then basically, that has kind of led to, I suppose, recommendations to kind of maybe put a more dedicated Comms Team in place.

**Miriam McDonald:** Yeah, okay. And do you envisage that's one or two people, or-- have you talked about it?

**Eamon Lonergan:** Yeah. Our Workforce Plan, we did a Strategic Workforce Plan, which aligns with our corporate plan, and that identified four people, specialist skills, from Communication Manager, to digital skills, et cetera. So look, we have a whole team. We've only this week approved, or the Chief Executive approved, the appointment of a Communications Manager. So this will be a specialist post; Department sanction sought for that. So that's a start now of a more centralised communications approach.

It came through in our surveys during the Corporate Plan development phase, our Strategic Workforce Planning phase. So, it's something that we know, we recognise we need now. The multimedia channels that are there, our branding, all of those areas of communications, not just handling complaints, we really need to look at that. But again...

**Sinéad Carr:** And I suppose, just the other thing on that is, it's never just going to be down to one person anyway, even if we have just one. It, like-

**Miriam McDonald:** Yeah.

**Sinéad Carr:** ... the local elected members are a huge value to us in terms of their reach into different areas, as indeed are our staff. So it's about working with all of the service sections, the districts, and the members in terms of promoting what it is we do in that area.

**Miriam McDonald:** Yeah. Yeah. Okay, thanks very much. I'll hand over to Kathleen now.

**Kathleen Holohan:** Yeah. Just one other question in relation to Customer Service. You mentioned the survey in 2025, and one area that was commented on favourably in relation to Tipperary was how innovative you'd been. Is there anything that you would say specific that you've done? You're saying—and I understand that you want to do more. Is there anything that you've done yourselves that you think is maybe different to what other local authorities have done in terms of improving?

**Sinéad Carr:** Yeah. And I might hand over to Brian just in terms of some of the initiatives that Brian, that you would have done on your area?

**Brian Beck:** Yeah. So we're always trying to look at different ways of doing things. We would've been, say, for the pilot for e-planning; we put our hands up for that. I was on the board since 2016, so I knew it inside out. So we piloted that for the sector.

Other things that we would have done would be we're very much based on Procedural Manuals. So, when you have so many staff coming in and out, it's very difficult to train them up, whereas if there's a Procedural Manual continually being updated, they can pick that up. So one of the big ones for us was the Procedural Manual Part Eights. So that is spread out throughout all sections. They're aware of it, training is done, so they know how that operates and feeds in, and it creates significant efficiencies.

We would have also put our hands up to be the first local authority for an OPR review back in 2021. So I actually rang Niall Cussen and said, "Niall, this has just been announced. We're happy to be the pilot for that." Because we can only get good feedback. You know, if somebody-- if there's an issue, I prefer to know about it so we can address it.

The capital projects team, we can go into it in detail later on, but things like the project pipeline, the project charters, the risk assessments, the action registers, the QS reviews of costings. You know, all of those things gives us information that allows us to interrogate things a lot more.

One which we're quite excited about at the moment is the use of AI within the organisation, and we've just recently launched a Vacant Business Property Reopen Grant Scheme. It's a bit of a mouthful, but effectively, what it does is, if somebody is looking to set up a business within a vacant shop, they get a reduction in the rates. But we've introduced an AI tool on top of that, so they can-- it brings together all the information about, so you want to open up a coffee shop in an empty building; it brings all the information about the rents in

the area, it creates visuals of what it could look like, it looks at what competitors are in the area as well. So all of that is on the scheme. And what I want to do next is bring that into the Living Over the Shop Scheme, to use the AI to generate what your building would look like if it was refurbished.

And the latest one we're working on is the use of AI in validation of planning files. So we're having great difficulty with technicians in planning. And since AI's been introduced, we think there's an opportunity now for AI to link into e-planning to take the-- be used as part of the validation of the electronic files that are coming in, and that will speed things up and hopefully reduce invalidation rates. But also, it helps me with my lack of technicians.

So we're very much about innovation, looking at different ways of doing things and learning from those and then feeding them out throughout the organisation and working. You know, myself and Damien in Community are looking, and economic are looking at the AI for it. So there's, we're lots-- and also learning from our colleagues in other local authorities, obviously.

**Kathleen Holohan:** Okay, thanks. I'll hand over to John.

**John Byrne:** Thanks, Kathleen. You also scored particularly strongly in how inquiries are handled regarding Equality and Access, and it was as simple and easy to engage. Can you give us some insight into how you scored so highly in those areas?

**Sinéad Carr:** Yeah.

**John Byrne:** Is there something-

**Sinéad Carr:** Well, I think the first thing from our perspective, we're a very large county. So, we have sort of two headquarters, Clonmel and Nenagh, but we also have municipal districts, and a lot of our services are delivered through the municipal districts. So there's more immediate connection by the people who live in those locations that they can go in, and they can deal with the vast majority.

Also, in relation to our own CRM system, because we track it up and we follow it up, you know, if I see that there's significant outliers, we're asking questions, and we're asking them to go back and have a look at that and follow it up.

And look again, to be fair, not everybody's going to be happy with every service. So it's important that when somebody writes in to complain, that there's a genuine answer brought back to them. So, it's an area that I have a particular interest in because, you know, generic responses saying, "Thank you, we received it," isn't sufficient. We need to be able to get in under that and give people a rationale as to why it-- But I'd say certainly the main reason is because the districts carry a lot of the weight for us, and that-- and people, people see themselves as part of their district, and that's really, I think, what's of value to them. So it is-- there is a cost there, but there is a value there from the customer's point of view.

**John Byrne:** Thanks. Declan.

**Declan Breathnach:** Thanks, John. I want to focus particularly on the Good Practice, and start by complimenting Tipperary in terms of, I think you've done three presentations over the years to NOAC and the Good Practice Seminars, namely Sustainable Energy Centre of Excellence, the Environmental Climate and Energy Project in 2019.

And indeed, of particular interest is that you were first of a local authority to participate with the LA Corporate Website Development. And I suppose the essence of Good Practices is about people seeing that as an exemplar, in

the presentations, and we're anxious to know, you know, the feedback that you've got or indeed any particular updates you might have in terms of those three specific presentations. Because, you know, are other local authorities looking at them? And how is the whole progress in those good practices? Thank you.

**Eamon Lonergan:** Yeah. Thanks, Declan. I might talk about the webpage development. And again, that we were one of the first in the country to adopt that. There was a Built to Share open-source model of web development, and we were recognised in 2025 in the Best Practice Report on that.

And again, we integrated our National Shared Service into that, and we integrated dual language and trying to, again, it was one of the innovations that you asked about, Kathleen. Why are customers looking at innovation? We have a website which is, to me, second to none. It's a fantastic website. All our services are there, and the access, as you mentioned, John, people can access our services, and that's where people are. The NOAC report recently, or the LGMA report, said that 45% of the public now want their information on the webpage. That's where they're going. So we have to have that place up and running and top-notch. So that was the initiative, that was the reason behind it.

In terms of further adoption, I just have a list here; Laois, Carlow, Galway City Council are the ones trying to, are implementing that now. So again, there's a follow-up there. The best practice has been shared, and we'll work with any one of those to advance that. But it has great advantages for customers, and again, that's just where we need to be in terms of that model and providing our services online as we go further and further online with our services.

**Ger Walsh:** Maybe just to come in on the website, as Eamon alluded to. Like, I suppose the word of caution I would make is our website was developed around the service catalogue that was developed nationally, like.

That's not being developed nationally; it's not been kept up to date. So that's something that basically has to be looked at. I know the LGMA are looking at that, basically. But we built that; the website was built around a service catalogue where you have 1,100 services. And I suppose there's evidence of basically how the website is operating, like we, as Sinéad said, we track indicators monthly, basically, in relation to the website. And I suppose between January and April of this year, we would have recorded 241,733 visits, and the average visit duration is one minute fifty-four.

So that, I suppose that's a relatively short time, suggests that most users visit with a specific purpose and leave once they find the information. The bounce rate is also at 61%, meaning that 61 out of every 100 visitors left after viewing a single page, which goes back to the point that they found what they were looking for and basically had got the information.

**Declan Breathnach:** I suppose the last question around that is: How do you cater for those who are not IT literate, or older generation, maybe that haven't adopted going on the website?

**Eamon Lonergan:** Yeah. I suppose there's a number. We have our offices. As Sinead said, we have two headquarters. We have five municipal districts. Whether you go to the library services, as well, and our other services like swimming pools, like there, there's access there and all, all access is accommodated for all people with access issues and difficulties.

But in terms of the website, the idea of that, making that so user-friendly, people are able to come in, as Ger said, in less than two minutes, you get your information you want, and you can get out. They're not searching around the website and getting frustrated. And that, that helps the customer, so it's really keeping up to speed, yeah.

**Sinéad Carr:** I might just give you an example of that, because we do have to be mindful of the accessibility for individuals. So, for instance, the Choice-

Based Letting, which is very much an IT-based system as well. We have particular supports, say for instance, for particular minority groups that may struggle. Maybe their English is not great. Maybe their literacy is not great, where we add value to them. And we also hold back a number of our appointments. Not everything is done through CBL, so there's a proportion held back so that we're able to allocate houses, for instance, to those that may be more disadvantaged or may not be in a position to utilise that.

So there's a number of those initiatives right throughout the system in terms of looking at those that have-- that struggle for whatever reason and aren't IT literate.

**Declan Breathnach:** And lastly could you just— sorry go ahead.

**Ger Walsh:** And I suppose we also have 40 councillors who are not afraid to make...

**Declan Breathnach:** Just lastly, is the issue of, I mean, the energy projects, the Environment, Climate, and Energy Project and the Energy Centre of Excellence. Has there been much interest by other local authorities in what you're doing and the feedback in terms of both feedback and updates?

**Brian Beck:** I might take the energy centre. I think the innovation around the energy centre was as much about the technology that was going into it, but as well as the structures that we had built in order to deliver it.

So we have a very, very well-advanced Capital Project Team, a number of layers, led by a Senior Engineer, with a layer below that, Senior Executive Engineer, then Project Engineers spread out throughout the local authority.

So our structure, we've been invited-- So we were invited by the Department to present on our structures. We're very, very focused on claims. Very much in terms of challenging design teams, making sure that we're not left open to poor designs which go out to tender, and then we're left carrying the cost. That feeds into our risk assessments, our action registers. So, at one level, it was the innovation around what we were trying to do, but on the other side, it was the innovation around the structure that we'd put in place in order to deliver Capital Projects on time, within budget.

The way we use contingencies, the way we use inflationary predictions, the way we use, for example, just give one example where we have a design team with a QS. We require them to employ a separate QS as well, and then our own design-- our own team have experience in that area. So we have gone back on one project 10 times to a design team before we go out to tender on it, because we're not happy that it does not leave the project exposed to claims.

So it's that level of innovation. We've been invited by Fáilte Ireland now; they're developing their Capital Project. They want to understand how we're operating our system in order to minimise claims and minimise cost overrun. So it's as much about the structure as about the project.

**Miriam McDonald:** Okay. Thank you very much.

**Declan Breathnach:** I'll hand it back to Miriam.

**Miriam McDonald:** Kathleen?

**Kathleen Holohan:** So, I'm on Working Group Four, and that deals with Finance and Audit. So, just in terms of the AFS for 2024, there's reference there in relation to the payments of subsidies and grants that have increased significantly by a 138%, from €14.1 million in 2023 to €33.5 million in 2024. So we're sort of wondering, was that specific area or why was there such a big increase?

**Sinéad Carr:** I'll let Mark answer that.

**Mark Connolly:** Yeah. The subsidy grants, the main push there would've been, there was significant monies post-COVID in relation to the increased cost of the Business Grant and the Restart Grants. So they would have driven a significant amount, too. There would've been monies then paid out through LAWPRO as well, in relation to the shared service that's held in the organisation as well. Plus, we continue to, I suppose, see increases in grants right across the way. We push up our own, you know, Disabled Persons' Grants, et cetera, too. So everything is on an upward trajectory, but it-- the particular ones at that stage would've been increased cost to business, in other words, the COVID-related ones, the Restart Grants, and the ones that we'd pay out in relation to LAW.

**Kathleen Holohan:** Okay. Thank you. I'll hand over to John.

**John Byrne:** Thanks, Kathleen. Just on the N24 Cahir to Limerick Junction, the report mentions the total expenditure was €5.3 million ex VAT, and that there were significant further claims outstanding. Can you tell us the value of the outstanding claims and how much was spent up to the end of 2025, and what steps you're taking to monitor the costs of the project?

**Sinéad Carr:** Liam?

**Liam Brett:** Yeah. Good morning all, and maybe just to thank you as Director of Nenagh Municipal District, the photograph of Nenagh Castle in the background...really makes us feel at home here.

**John Byrne:** We're here to please.

**Liam Brett:** So yeah, the N24 project is thankfully now at the very, very latter stages of design. The design documentation is literally weeks away from completion, and then will be handed over and go through a review process with TII, and then get lodged with An Coimisiún Pleanála towards the end of the year. The payments as of the end of 2025, broadly speaking, it's about €6 million for the consultants and €4 million for surveys.

So the cost has risen significantly, but I suppose the scope of the contract also changed, so that's fundamentally what changed those costs, in that over the time period from when the consultant was appointed in 2019, the length of the project increased. Active Travel was added because government policy changed. NIFTI, that design document was announced, which created or required an entire review of the design at that point in time. So I suppose the scope changed, and that led to increases in terms of the work involved. But thankfully, we're at the latter stages now.

**John Byrne:** You're keeping a close eye on it?

**Liam Brett:** We're keeping a very, very close eye on it. Yeah, we have, I suppose, a design team in the Mid-West Road Design Office that lead us on the project. We have a Senior Engineer dedicated to it ourselves. Every approval is signed off by Tipperary County Council and our funding authority, TII, Transport Infrastructure Ireland. There are claims-- There are claims going through a process at present with the consultant, but I've no doubt we'll reach a conclusion on those.

**John Byrne:** Thank you.

**Kathleen Holohan:** Just then, in terms of, you'd be aware obviously that NOAC did a review in relation to internal auditing in 2024. So, where are Tipperary at in terms of implementing those recommendations?

**Eamon Lonergan:** Of the 17 recommendations, Kathleen, three of them remain open. So we've made a lot of progress in that area. One of them is the area of external audit of our internal audit function. We don't outsource our-- It's an internal system. We have 2.6 worktime WTEs working on that. They report to the audit committee, report directly to the Chief Executive. So we are working with, in terms of that external recommendation, that external auditor, EQA, we're working with LGIAN, our internal auditor is a member of the LGIAN, and we're trying to get a national model that will suit with the CCMA. So we're looking at a model at the moment where the Institute of Internal Audit would validate an assessment with us. So we discussed this and other options with our audit committee. So this looks like the road we're going to go down, and we'll get that done this year; that would be our intention.

**Kathleen Holohan:** So it'll be a particular framework that the Institute would endorse?

**Eamon Lonergan:** Yeah. Exactly. Using a standard framework. It's a very thorough process, but it's a kind of self-assessment tool initially and then validated. And again, that's what seems to be appropriate, that we're a small internal audit compared to other local authorities. We're, you know, around three people, so that seems to be the appropriate way of doing it.

But again, look, it's very important that we do this, not just for compliance with the standard, but also just to see what our internal audit needs to do in terms of improvement, how mature it is, and what areas of efficiencies we could get around it and maybe future structuring of it. And again, it's something we have considered as part of our Strategic Workforce Plan as well. So, we're making really good progress in that, in those recommendations.

**Kathleen Holohan:** Thanks. I'll hand over to Working Group One.

**Declan Breathnach:** Thanks, Kathleen. I've just a standard question in relation to the risk register, and I'd like you to tell us what are the currently ranked highest in terms of impact and likelihood on the Corporate Risk Register, and what are the mitigating actions that are in place?

**Eamon Lonergan:** I can take those, Declan. Our top three-- We have 11 organisational risks, significant organisational risks. The top three are workforce management, financial management, and business continuity. And you'd expect those three, probably if you sat back and said: "Look, what with the current environment that we're operating in."

In terms of workforce management, we've a number of. In terms of resolving

that or having actions, it's on our register, and we list all our actions. We rate them, and they're reviewed on a quarterly basis by the Director of Service and reported twice a year to the Chief Executive.

One of the workforce management pieces was around the whole recruitment, retention. So we've a series of strategies around learning and development, career pathways, trying to retain staff and give opportunities for development through the organisation.

Again, the risk of workforce is multi-layered. One is the retention piece, one is attracting piece, one is upskilling for the new technologies that are coming. Brian mentioned AI, climate action, all of these new areas that we're getting into. We do need to upskill, and it's one of the things that comes back through all the surveys we do with staff and culture surveys, is that training, learning, and development needs to be better for us to be more adaptable and ready.

During workforce planning, we've restructured. Obviously, HR is a support service for the organisation, and if that support service is weak, the organisation suffers, and vacancies are longer. Recruitment competitions take longer to run. So we've strengthened that this year. We've brought in additional staff and restructured. We have a strategic HR section now and also an operational HR looking after the day-to-day.

So that's just one aspect of one, but these are all actioned on a quarterly basis, reviewed, assigned to a Director of Services. And I chair the risk oversight committee for the organisation, and we meet four times a year. And we go through these risk registers. We also go through that, that would be what we consider our organisation risk register or our corporate. We also now have operational risk registers, so for every single business unit has its own risk register, and they feed into the risk oversight committee. So we've a really good handle on risk, and it's kept up to speed, and it's very manageable in terms of a register. So I'm very happy with that.

**Sinéad Carr:** I might just, Declan, on that one too.

**Declan Breathnach:** Sure.

**Sinéad Carr:** I think it's worthy noting just in terms of the risk piece. One of the key, I suppose, new initiatives that happened is a number of new government departments have started to deliver their services through local authorities, and they're on fixed contract basis. Probably LAWPRO is one such one, to be honest. And because it's a shared service, that's a significant draw on us. So one of the significant issues that we have, and as a sector, I think we're addressing it now, is that we need to start looking at those.

Because what's happening is we have good staff that are progressing into those other fixed contract bases, on a secondment basis. It hollows out our own core services from good staff, and we end up filling those with temporary staff. So we really need to draw a line under that, and that's one of the key risks. Now, I think with LAWPRO, we've brought it to a degree. I think that'll address a lot of our current concerns, at least the biggest proportion of it. But it certainly it's an ongoing risk for us that we need to be careful as a sector even in that sort of space.

**Declan Breathnach:** Thank you. Would you like to comment on that? On the LAWPRO?

**Anthony Coleman:** Yeah. Just yeah, in relation to LAWPRO as a shared service. So currently, the staff complement for the Water Framework Directive team is 97, and there's another additional 20 on another project. They're split between Tipperary and Kilkenny as the lead authorities.

The majority of those staff are on temporary contracts up until December '27, in line with the River Basin Management Plan. And a number of those staff would've been in previous cycles, so they're in situations. They're in contracts of indefinite duration, and others coming through.

And as Sinéad said, we need to give some certainty here that the obligations under the Water Framework Directive will continue. We're already preparing a new plan with the Department and other agencies. So, a business case has been submitted to the Department here to regularise those staff, and we'd hopefully, over the next number of months now, go through that process to provide certainty for those staff, but also for those that are on secondment into LAWPRO as well, that they can be backfilled on a permanent basis. And as I said, LAWPRO is probably one of the larger shared services, but that would be replicated across the local authority sector, where you have temporary contracts for different initiatives.

**Declan Breathnach:** Thanks, Anthony. I think Mark wanted to come in there.

**Mark Connolly:** Yeah. Just to come in, I suppose when we're talking about risk, key risk obviously within the business continuity side is the whole area of cyber.

We're obviously very conscious of the risk. We try to be as proactive as possible on it. We'd run, you know, we're very well aware that you're only as strong as your weakest link, and we would run a lot of phishing tests, et cetera, just to trial and test, and where people fail a phishing test, we'll go back and try and do the education piece. And we've an escalation process in place that if people fail a second or a third phishing test, then we escalate it within the section, to say you go to your section head, potentially the Director. Or if you continually fail, you could end up facing the Chief Executive on it.

So, I think that's one part of the cyber. We're trying to segregate our system so that, God forbid and touch wood, if we did have an attack, that we're able to segregate different sections so that everything doesn't go down.

And we're also increasing, particularly with our Microsoft 365 rollout, we're moving a large cohort of our systems to the cloud. So that gives us, I suppose it gives us an efficiency in relation to cost because we're not investing in kit

on the ground, but it also gives that peace of mind that there's segregation of further servers, et cetera, so that, again, it reduces the risk of an all-out down of systems, if Tipperary County Council happen to be hit by a cyberattack.

**Declan Breathnach:** Thank you.

**Brian Beck:** I might just jump into say as well...

**Declan Breathnach:** Oh, sorry. Yeah, Brian.

**Brian Beck:** ... that on the business continuity, we're working with IPB. They're coming down next week to do a workshop with all Directors and Senior staff on business continuity, specialising in the cyber side of it. So each section will be developing their own business continuity, which is cyber, but also other business continuity is built on top of that.

We're also, I don't know if you're aware of our Hydra Suite in Clonmel Fire Station. It's the only one in the country outside of the Gardaí and the Police Service of Northern Ireland. It allows for real-time reenactment of simulated incidents. So we're developing with IPB a simulated cyberattack scenario. We're going to run a pilot with Senior staff here in Tipperary on that in the autumn. And then we will, working with IPB, we'll roll that out and offer it to other local authorities and other state agencies to allow them to simulate a cyberattack for their organisation.

**Declan Breathnach:** Anne wants to come in on staffing. And if anybody else wishes to come in on this issue, please feel free.

**Anne Haugh:** Yeah, this is probably also appropriate to Working Group Two, but just because you mentioned the whole staffing thing under the risks and the corporate risks. Indicator C1 on Whole Time Equivalents, Tipperary was one of only eight local authorities that the Whole Time Equivalents went down between 2023 and 2024, by about 33, I think, of a headcount. So, just wondering what's the context around that? Because it's unusual that it would be going down. I think it's between '23 and '24.

**Eamon Lonergan:** Yeah. I can come in. Yeah, as when we monitored, Anne, carefully, and that trend has gone back up again. What happened, I suppose, in the previous year to that, it went up. There was an anomaly, and it was probably largely due to an influx of temporary contracts like Climate Action, Town Regeneration Officer, LAWPRO. So we had a spike the previous year, which looked like it came down in 2024, and that's the anomaly in the graph. So we're back to where we would normally have been prior to that, the previous years, that one 1'050 figure. But it went up to 1,089, I think, in 2023, so just shows the drop. So that's it, and it's correcting itself now.

**Anne Haugh:** And they were still in place, though, were they? Those additional, you know, contract positions. Were they-- Are they classed as Whole Time Equivalents?

**Eamon Lonergan:** Yes.

**Anne Haugh:** You know, those...

**Eamon Lonergan:** Yes. Yes.

**Anne Haugh:** Even the five-year contract ones?

**Eamon Lonergan:** Yes. Yeah. They're all part of our headcount and our Whole Time Equivalents. That would have shown a spike in the previous year. LAWPRO was probably...

**Anne Haugh:** So it was more the '23 was high rather than-

**Eamon Lonergan:** Yes. Yes. It went up. Exactly. That's it. Yeah, yeah.

**Anne Haugh:** Okay, perfect. Yeah. Thank you.

**Declan Breathnach:** And Anne, maybe you deal with the human rights?

**Anne Haugh:** And then I go back now to Working Group...?

**Declan Breathnach:** One.

**Anne Haugh:** ...one.

**Declan Breathnach:** I should have said apologies from Brian Cawley, who's the chair of this particular group, but he's quite interested in hearing your responses.

**Anne Haugh:** So I suppose a large part of what Working Group One do,

well, it's around Governance, Efficiency and Reform. But the corporate plans and the new cycle of corporate plans from 2024, we review those as part of the Work Programme. And within your new Corporate Plan, you talk about establishing a Cross-Departmental Project Team to monitor implementation of the Public Sector Duty requirements. I suppose just maybe fill us in on where you're at with that and how you see that team achieving its objective.

**Sinéad Carr:** Okay, Ger?

**Eamon Lonergan:** Yeah, I might come in first, and I'll bring in Ger as well, because Ger heads up that team. I suppose the Public Sector Duty was one of the things we wanted to include in our Corporate Plan, more so than the previous plans, and the implementation of it. Whilst we were implementing it, we wanted a wider organisation embedment, I suppose. So it's one of our risk registers, one of our risks on our 11 risk registers. So that's the significance and the importance it gets in the organisation. It's one of our core values, also in our Corporate Plan. We have six core values in there, and Public Sector Duty is one of those. It's mentioned in two strategic objectives, and there's a whole appendix on the implementation of it in the plan as well. And that led into what Ger will speak about now is actually the Working Group that was set up, the external expertise that we brought in, and the development of. And Ger will explain its statements and implementation plans. But it holds a huge amount of regard in the organisation.

**Ger Walsh:** Yeah. Thanks, Eamon. I suppose, yeah, we put the cross-directorate group in place basically following the adoption of the Corporate Plan, and it was a specific objective of the Corporate Plan to obviously carry out an assessment of your Equality and Human Rights Issues in relation to services affecting the identified groups.

As part of that, we engaged an external consultant to assist us because, in fairness, I suppose we weren't fully knowledgeable of basically what we were dealing with. We had done it in-house basically back in 2022. So I know it's meant to be done as part of the Corporate Plan process, but we had actually done it in 2022. So, we had indicated to carry out a review, in, I suppose, early 2025. We actually have that done now. We've carried out an assessment and evidence book of the issues. We did it basically, I suppose, as part of an evidence-based and participative manner, in that we engaged with basically, I suppose, representative associations of the identified groups.

We would also have reviewed, basically, I suppose, national policies and strategies that would affect those groups in relation to the services that Tipperary County Council provides. And we produced a value statement that basically, I suppose, identified four interconnected values that basically, I suppose, our implementation plan is based around. And they are respect, inclusivity, voice, and social sustainability.

And then for each of those, I suppose basically, two statements would have been set out to capture the implications of those values for Tipperary County Council: a statement of outcome and a statement of process.

As it stands at the moment, I suppose all of that documentation is available on our website. The value statement, the assessment and evidence book, our implementation plan for the next four years, and then we also have an Action Plan identified then for '25 and '26. Part of that is basically, I suppose, in relation to any new policies or strategies. I suppose with the help of the consultant, we have a kind of Public Sector Duty Risk Assessment template that will assist each directorate to basically do that kind of assessment in respect of each policy or plan. And the specific objective this year is to

basically-- the fact that we've done our Communication Strategy and our Customer Action Plan, we're going to review those, basically carry out a Public Sector Duty Risk Assessment on those. That's, I suppose, we'd hope to get that done in the latter part of this year.

**Anne Haugh:** Okay. So, every department, I suppose, and every directorate has...

**Ger Walsh:** A representative.

**Anne Haugh:** But they also have actions that they, as part of the implementation plan?

**Ger Walsh:** I suppose the key element will be, I suppose, upskilling staff and making them aware of what the Public Sector Duty is and how you actually carry out that assessment. Because, obviously, we bring policies and strategies before our SPC, but it's critically important that they are risk assessed from a Public Sector Duty perspective. So it's upskilling staff now to basically be able to do that in terms of any new plans and strategies. And then, I suppose, as part of the action plan for the next four years, we'll be reviewing existing plans and strategies.

**Anne Haugh:** Okay. Okay. Okay, thanks for that.

And the second question is also related to the Corporate Plan. Appendix six, you talk about the baseline indicators, which are essentially, I think, the NOAC indicators that you're using to monitor progress against the objectives in the Corporate Plan. So maybe just, I suppose, two parts to it.

How you will be making sure, I suppose, or how you will monitor progress going forward using those indicators? And I know you said you'd supplement them with other sources, such as the housing targets and so on. And how you will go about that, I suppose how you'd structure yourself to make sure that happens and is monitored over the lifetime of the plan.

And then secondly, I suppose, even in this early stage, I suppose the second year into it, is there any problematic areas that you already anticipate might create a difficulty in achieving within the Corporate Plan that are already raising their head or raising a red flag for you?

**Sinéad Carr:** Okay. We have implementation structures in terms of the Corporate Plan, and obviously, they come to the Management Team. Eamon, do you want to talk about the implementation? I'll come in after you then on that.

**Eamon Lonergan:** Yeah. Of course. Our corporate plan is implemented primarily through our PMDS system. So our team development plan at Senior Management Team, that document is identical to the Corporate Plan, so the two of them talk to each other, and that's the only way we'll get this through the organisation. It links in with our Annual Service Delivery Plans as well. But the TDP, which the management team does, goes down into Business Unit level, and then it spreads out through the Personal Development Plan meetings.

So that's working really well, and we reviewed that last year, and we've made improvements to make that. And we've the highest level of PMDS that we've had in the organisation in a good number of years. And that's the importance of it. This will be aspirational unless we start delivering on the actions. And the actions are then agreed every year. Annual actions linked into the plans, linked into the NOAC indicators.

And at Management Team, we'll identify measures and initiatives they're taking, then for implementation. The Business Unit Team develops its own actions and implementation report.

We're developing dashboards as well, not just that. Of course, at the moment we're a little bit static. We want to have iterative dashboards. The Housing Section have piloted in their section working on dashboards, where there's a lot more information coming through on a daily basis, weekly, et cetera.

**Anne Haugh:** And is that for reporting on the objectives in the Corporate Plan and the actions?

**Eamon Lonergan:** Yes. Yeah. We link into that. As well as operational. So you'd have your strategic objectives, a dashboard. You'll have another one for maybe operational, where we want to know information at hand, numbers at hand, whether it's down to housing numbers or people on a list registry. Other data can wait for a quarter. So we'll develop these dashboards over the course of the year. And we have a working group set up to establish, to really advise us on that. And that will link in NOAC as well, as well as Sinéad said, other indicators.

**Sinéad Carr:** So, in addition to those structures on the NOAC indicators point of view, first of all, we have reports that come to the Management Team on a yearly basis in terms of the NOAC publications. Ger, in fairness, it pulls together a very good document. So we compare ourselves internally in terms of how each service area has done over the years and where the difficulties are. And we also compare ourselves to comparable counties.

**Anne Haugh:** Okay.

**Sinéad Carr:** And how we, in terms of the service and how that performs. And that then will fit into the TDP of the following year in terms of addressing those issues. The other then area where the NOAC indicators are of value to us is, I mentioned in my opening statement, that each service area has to do an Efficiency Review in addition to the Strategic Workforce Plan. That's one of the actions.

So one of the core areas I've asked each service area to look at is that I want them to look at their work in 2019, their work output, their staff numbers, and then to look at it in 2025 in terms of that, and the NOAC indicators are involved in that. And then I want to compare them to comparable counties, so that when they're coming in looking for additional staff or additional resources, I know that they have gone through that process of an assessment. They've looked at their own teams, and they've reprioritised. So, they're certainly, they're a useful tool for us on a Management Team basis to look at in the context of how are we performing, where do we need to improve, and then they will give us some level of direction and guidance.

**Anne Haugh:** And to what level then, Sinéad, would you share that with the elected members? Do you know, as well? Would you involve them in the...

**Sinéad Carr:** Yes.

**Anne Haugh:** ... reporting process as well around-

**Sinéad Carr:** Well, the NOAC report certainly is brought to the elected members. So every time we have a report done, there's a presentation done to them on that particular area. And also in strategic policy committees when we're working on key areas where there are appropriate NOAC indicators, they're utilised in that space, too.

**Eamon Lonergan:** And also on the Audit Committee, when we'll have elected members on the Audit Committee. We go through, Ger does a very detailed report every single year, and we've been doing it for the last ten years or more, where we have heat, as Sinead said, league tables, heat maps. We look at our ranking compared to other local authorities of equivalent size. So we really do get into the NOAC 129 indicators. It's not just a report that we get and we look at. It's analysed in detail. Ger spends weeks and weeks dealing. It comes back to the Management Team. But the Audit Committee are very, very interested in seeing this and how we're performing, and the councillors as well also get their reports on it.

**Anne Haugh:** Okay. Thanks very much for that.

**Declan Breathnach:** Thanks, Anne. I'm moving on to Service Level Agreements. It's particularly pertinent to Working Group One, but there may be other members that would want to come in, and feel free to.

I suppose to start, in 2023, NOAC did a survey in relation to leisure centres, and you responded that you had five leisure centres. I think they were Tipperary, Carrick-On-Shannon, Clonmel, Nenagh, and Thurles. But we also note that Tipperary County Council has 13 companies, in which it has interests ranging from 20% to 100%.

Can you outline the governance arrangements and local authority assurance in relation to these financial and operational performances? What are the main challenges? And lastly but not least, the SLAs that you've entered Tipperary County Council, where are they referenced in the corporate plan? Where are they? And we just can't see them, or I can't see them, I should say.

So in summary, the arrangements in relation to these 13 companies. I did note, for example, that there were quite a large amount of issues surrounding debt. For example, the Roscrea Swimming Pool Limited, I think you have a deficit of

€347,000. And in relation to Fethard Community Campus, I think it's a current debt of €78,000. And of course, we're asking what measures have been taken in '25, and to date in 2026, to address these growing deficits. And it'd be remiss of me if I didn't say it's not an issue just in Tipperary, it's elsewhere. And, you know, what measures or what recommendations do you feel-- what would Tipperary do to deal with these?

**Sinéad Carr:** I might just take it, and then I'll hand over to both Mark and maybe Ger, who I know has done some work on it as well. I suppose in the first case, actually, they're not, you're right, they're not referenced in the Corporate Plan, and maybe that is an omission that we need to look at. But there's certainly, we have a significant number of companies. They do a lot of good work as well, and there's a lot of social, corporate work that they undertake, that sometimes there's not an economic value on that. But we're very much aware of the risk of them, and we have taken a bit of work on, in terms of reviewing their structure and their governance, and also in terms of engaging with them on a stronger financial basis.

I might let Mark maybe deal with the finance side, particularly in terms of Roscrea that you've mentioned, and maybe Ger, maybe on the review, or Damien, on the review we'll take as well on the companies that we've undertaken at the moment.

**Mark Connolly:** Yeah, okay. Look, I'll come in. I suppose first of all, particularly on the two swimming pools, from a governance point of view, there is a financial management accounting sitting on the board of both those pools, and it's important that we keep a close eye on them financially.

Just specifically in relation to Roscrea, a lot of work has gone in. We've had individual meetings with the Chair and some members of that Board, and I suppose there's two things to say about it. First of all, we did comparisons versus other pools, and a very easy pool for us to do. Like, we had a similar pool actually in Thurles, but Roscrea is actually a bigger pool. So there was

recognition that there was, I suppose, a budgetary issue in relation to the allocation of monies from Tipperary County Council to that allocation to Roscrea Swimming Pool.

But that's not the whole solution here. So I suppose for Budget 2026, an additional allocation of over €80,000 has been allocated to Roscrea Swimming Pool, but that came with caveats. I wrote specifically to the Chair and put out a number of caveats that came with that, and one was a full review of pricing structure, comparison to other pools, inventory of where money was spent in relation to repairs and renewals, et cetera, too. So that work has-- that request has gone to the Chair, and we've requested that back by the middle of this year, 2026.

So that will get us on the straight and narrow for '26. But we've obviously got to deal with the legacy deficit as well. So as part of that too, we've requested that a new financial plan allowing for this additional allocation from Tipperary County Council will also actually show where they're ring-fencing money for, number one, future investment, but also for bringing back down the deficit. So there's a meeting now arranged, it's probably going to work into early July, after the first six months, to review expenditure there.

But we do think that we have upped our contribution with there to bring it into line with similar pools. But as we say, we're asking the company itself to bring a lot more to the table as well.

And we're happy that we have that strong governance and an individual Finance and Governance Working Group within a subgroup of the Board at that pool, which an accountant from Tipperary County Council is sitting on, is looking at that one specifically. And to be fair, the deficit has come down by about 10% from '23 to '24. But absolutely, there's a lot more work to be done there on that one as well.

And just very briefly in relation to Fethard, there is a deficit. It's a relatively new company that was set up. You can see that the level of that deficit is starting to fall down as well. But again, we were very clear with that company when it was

set up that while they were getting their feet under the table, they had to keep a close eye on their pricing and making sure that, because there's an excellent facility up there, and that what they were charging for the services was competitive and that it was realistic as well. So I think both of those, we're well aware of them, and I think we're on the right track financially to solve them.

**Sinéad Carr:** So I'd just invite to maybe Damien, and then Ger maybe just –

**John Byrne:** Sorry, can I? Just one question: are these private firms or are they community? And who sits on the boards of them?

**Mark Connolly:** There is for the Roscrea Swimming Pool, there is a private operator running it, and then there's a board then that sits.

**John Byrne:** But is it owned by the local authority, or was it, was it built by voluntary effort, or how did it come about initially?

**Mark Connolly:** Well, yeah, that particular pool was built via a loan, and so that actually had been paid back then through the local authority to pay back the loan. So these companies are set up to make sure that we could avail of, I suppose, the VAT situation at the time, they were to claim back the VAT on all the construction side of it too. So that's how the companies are set up. So the actual companies are owned by Tipperary, like Tipperary County Council are the owners of the pool and the building. But the companies are –

**John Byrne:** And who sits on the board of that then?

**Mark Connolly:** The board are ourselves; we've nominees on the board. Yeah, we've got elected members and then staff on it as well. But we've also got community people sitting on the board as well. So we've got that feedback in from the communities, too.

**Declan Breathnach:** Yeah. Damien to start, and then Ger. And if any other members want to come in on this, feel free to.

**Damien Ginty:** Just in relation to Fethard, just for clarity, that's a CLG, and we do have a Tipperary County Council employee on the Board as a Director. It was constructed on lands in the ownership of Tipperary County Council, which are leased to the company on a 99-year lease, with a rent review after five years, index linked to the CPI. Now, I know the company was referenced in the Local Government Audit Report, but as of last year, it is now turning a profit, and it is now setting aside funds for a sinking fund. So it's in a very, very good position.

It was constructed through RRDF funding, but also a significant philanthropic donation. And it is very, very important to us, particularly for the FDI sector as a venue. And it caters for a huge, huge range of sports, particularly the international community.

**Declan Breathnach:** Ger?

**Ger Walsh:** Yeah, I suppose just to add to what Damien and Mark have said. I suppose it's worth bearing in mind that basically, some of these companies are legacy issues from the merger, and North Tipperary would have operated differently to South Tipperary. North Tipperary would mainly have set them up as limited companies, whereas in South Tipperary, the likes of your leisure centres would have been operated within local authority.

It's also, I suppose, a risk that's identified on our risk register, the whole associated companies. And, arising from that, basically, we carried out a review towards the end of last year, and I brought a report to Management Team basically this year. We actually have 22 associated companies, and it's actually in our Annual Report, not the Corporate Plan. We provide a register of all our companies in the Annual Report every year, and that's been updated now to reflect the 22 companies. That report also identifies who's sitting on the boards, the composition of the board. Basically, whether they're elected from the council, the staff executive, and then whether there's any community representatives.

We've also, I suppose, put in place kind of draft Policy Guidelines, but we're also conscious that there's a policy being developed by the CCMA at sector level. So I suppose we're operating on those guidelines at the moment in relation to governance arrangements, in relation to how you appoint someone, resignations and basically, governance reporting methods.

We've also put in place, we've arranged for training for basically both staff and councillors, we've that arranged in the next couple of months in relation to their fiduciary responsibilities sitting on boards. So they're all measures we've put in place arising from, I suppose, those issues.

**Declan Breathnach:** Thank you. Just going to the CEO, Sinéad. Could you comment on, you know, is it becoming a cause for concern when NOAC said about looking at the SLAs in 2023? I mean, from a national point of view or indeed for yourselves, is it a cause for concern in terms of managing your finances?

**Sinéad Carr:** Look, it absolutely-- it is an issue like. There's no point in saying otherwise, without a doubt. I suppose there's a couple of things that we need to be mindful of. Just as a local authority, you're ambitious for your own communities, and you're trying to deliver services and facilities for them. And

sometimes you are constrained as a local authority as to how to do that, and this is one of the few vehicles that you have.

But I think what we need to do is we just need to get better at maybe a tighter management of them and a tighter focus of them. And I think to be fair, with the review that we're doing now, we have that under a far tighter rein than we would have had in the past. And sometimes, you know, because we've 22, that's a lot of companies. You can lose focus. So the fact that they're pulled in under our risk register, there's a greater focus on them. So I think we'll be in a better position going forward with them.

**Declan Breathnach:** Thank you. Miriam, over to Working Group Two.

**Miriam McDonald:** Thanks very much. Okay. Ciarán?

**Ciarán Hayes:** Sinéad, good to see you again, and welcome to you and your team. Just following on slightly. You referred to it in terms of the last, in the answer to the last question. You mentioned the different companies is a legacy of the merger, right? The merge now is what, over ten years?

I'm conscious now from my own experience that two different authorities, North and South riding, two different cultures. How are you dealing with it? Are there any other legacy issues arising from the merging of those two cultures?

**Sinéad Carr:** Well, yeah, look, it takes a while to work through these issues. So the big-ticket items were dealt with in the first number of years in relation to it. The rents merger obviously was one of them. It was a critical one that was dealt with in 2019/2020, and that was a significant cultural shift for a number--Because remember, we also had town authorities which had their own systems as well.

In terms of the current legacy issues, culture-wise, the CEO of Glen Dimplex told me a number of years ago when we were going through this that, you know, the culture wouldn't change until the last of us have left from the old ones. And I think I'm one of the last ones, so I have to wait 'til I go, maybe in this. But certainly with new staff coming in, they're beginning to get used to the systems that are in place. They're certainly getting used to the way that it is set up. In terms of legacy, additional issues, actually, at the moment we're going through a Parking Harmonisation Process. So it'll be interesting to see how that works out.

**Ciarán Hayes:** Say that again.

**Sinéad Carr:** Parking charges harmonisation.

**Ciarán Hayes:** Oh, that's always interesting, yes.

**Sinéad Carr:** So there's some really good work, I have to say, some really good work done by the Roads Section on coming up with a system as to how we can harmonise it without taking away the responsibility of members.

**Ciarán Hayes:** Is this an issue where you have different parking charges for different towns? Is that it?

**Sinéad Carr:** Correct, yeah. Correct. Yes, that's it.

**Ciarán Hayes:** So I imagine the engagement then with the elected members is interesting in that-

**Sinéad Carr:** Very good, yeah. And that's where our SPCs actually work really well because we're able to work through them with the figures, the implications. The red line issue for them obviously is they cannot go below the budget line of what's currently collected, so therefore they had to come up with a system that's going to address that. So when you get to work with the members at SPC level, and you're able to work through those figures and the impact of those figures with them, it's actually very-- it's really, really useful, and you get some very good concepts from them, but they're also in the position to be able to push back. And what I would have found through the council is when you work through the SPC, when you go to the plenary, to push it through the plenary, you actually have the councillors who are, who are making the case for you.

**Ciarán Hayes:** Okay, so you have them on board essentially.

**Sinéad Carr:** Well, once they sign off on it, which-

**Ciarán Hayes:** At the SPC level.

**Sinéad Carr:** Yes.

**Ciarán Hayes:** Yeah. Yeah.

Okay. Just conscious of recent reports there in relation to your tourism and, in particular, some of the greenways that you're promoting at the moment. But it's just noted, and NOAC notes that you've five local authorities, which included Tipperary, didn't actually have a Tourism Strategy in place in 2024. Now, you referred to the data again at the outset. Do you want to just elaborate on where you are in that space?

**Sinéad Carr:** Yeah. I'd say when that was actually filled in, there was a Tourism Strategy, but it had come out of date, and there is a new strategy now has been in place. I think it was adopted, was it last... Just before...

**Brian Beck:** November.

**Sinéad Carr:** ... November of last year...

**Brian Beck:** November published.

**Sinéad Carr:** ...in relation to it. So there's a five-year strategy now up to 2030, so I'd imagine that that's where that was captured at the time.

**Ciarán Hayes:** Okay. So that's kicking in. Okay.

Going back, I was interested, too, in your comment on the Decarbonised Zone for the Lisheen Mines, which is a rural, obviously a rural focus. I'm just wondering, did you collaborate or liaise with the likes of what's going on in Kerry, for example, in Dingle, in relation to that rural focus? Although my sense is it's probably a very different rural project.

And the second part of the question then is, how do you propose to develop the whole issue of Decarbonised Zones in the 126 settlements? What are the lessons from that rural initiative going to impact in the urban space?

**Sinéad Carr:** Okay. I'll let Eamon go through that. He's on the environment side. But just to say the Decarbonisation Zone that we chose, one of the reasons is we're a very rural county, for that very reason, in terms of looking at it as a pilot, and there's a number of settlements within that Decarbonisation Zone. But also

on the basis of we'd the Lisheen Mines, which was a worked-out of lead and zinc mine, we'd about 400 staff laid off there, in the middle of the 2000s, and it's about trying to bring that back into sort of a bio economy, circular economy type initiative where there'll be additional jobs delivered. And to date, we've been very successful on that, haven't got to where we need to get to on it, but it's very successful.

Maybe, Eamon, do you want to help deal with the decarbonisation?

**Eamon Lonergan:** I can, Ciarán. Yeah, we selected that DZ largely around the National Bioeconomy Campus, which was already in place. It was an area under the Just Transition Fund as well, captured in that area. So it was a unique area. We wanted to turn around what happened from the extraction of minerals and product into a good news story, a climate action; we felt that that was a big challenge for us.

**Ciarán Hayes:** So you're, you're tying it into kind of sustainable and circular economy stuff.

**Eamon Lonergan:** Yes. Exactly.

**Ciarán Hayes:** ... and economic development at the same time.

**Eamon Lonergan:** Yeah. And as well as that, agricultural and that economic piece. And Bord na Móna as well, having huge tracts of land there, working with them and trying to see how we can learn from them as well, in terms of our own landbanks, in terms of forestation, in trying to get lessons in the urban piece. This area has villages, the likes of Littleton, the areas were very strong in that peat extraction. So we're looking at initiatives within those villages, working

with those communities. What do they want, in terms of whether it's vacant buildings? You know, and we're also working then with the Community Climate Action Fund, which is a fantastic resource for local villages and local areas. And they're also looking at different initiatives, whether it's their community centres becoming more circular economy or setting up initiatives like food production. So we're going beyond just the climate and the energy piece. We want to get into, you know, wider initiatives.

**Ciarán Hayes:** Is this, Eamon, where you're gone from a situation where you've had generations of families involved in peat harvesting and in the whole peat industry, and now you're, you're looking at different industries? And in terms of where you want to be, and you say you're not there yet, where's the gap? What's the gap, and how do you propose to-

**Sinéad Carr:** Okay. So, and I might let Brian come in on the bio economy side. But in the context of sort of the peat and the lead and zinc, it's quite an impoverished rural area at this point in time, in my view.

**Ciarán Hayes:** Is this the zinc mines around the Galmoy area as well? Is it North Kilkenny? Is it the same?

**Sinéad Carr:** No. No, it's a different one. No. This is up around... It's just outside of Thurles. It's outside of Thurles, so it's quite a significant area. But it's mainly peat, and lead, and zinc, and both have now ceased. So it's around working with those communities in terms of looking at alternative options. But what we have focused on is on the circular bio economy. We're designated as a National Bio economy Campus. We have done a lot of work on investment and lead on it ourselves. I might just let maybe Brian come in, just to give you an overview of

the bio economy piece, because that ties in very strongly with what we're trying to do in terms of economic re-regeneration.

**Brian Beck:** So, the Bio economy Campus, it's European designation for the area. The DZ is built around that. So just to give you an idea, we would have used the fact that we were a rural DZ to apply under EU Just Transition, and we would have received €1 million to develop the Bio economy Campus that we have there, in terms of bringing through planning applications for the next generation of pilot facilities to grow the bio economy. We work with UCD, Trinity, UCC, TUS, and some private companies as well, in developing that, and that was a key part of the million.

We also got €5 million from the Department of Agriculture, under the EU Just Transition, to help grow the Bio economy Pilot Facility on the site. We are also looking, under the next call of the EU Just Transition, to bring that to the next stage. We'll be applying for another €2 million under EU Just Transition. And to give you an example of the villages you mentioned, we'll be applying for Littleton as a demonstrator village within a rural Decarbonisation Zone, as to how a village like that could take on board the needs of a village in terms of decarbonisation, in terms of renewable energy, in terms of retrofitting and just taking that small village, using that as a pilot and then once we have that done, going to the other villages. I think we've 13 in the Decarbonisation Zone.

So the Decarbonisation Zone unlocked a lot of that money. The fact that we were the National Bio economy Campus unlocked all of that. The Irish Bio economy Foundation is based there. We've had visits in the last month, I think, Damien, from the Canadian ambassador and New Zealand ambassador bringing over people, and the Bio economy Week, we've that coming up later on this year, based in Littleton.

**Ciarán Hayes:** Okay, so I chair the Performance Indicators Group. So in terms of what you're proposing to do, you've lost 400 jobs in the area. What's your target in terms of new jobs in that space?

**Brian Beck:** Yeah. So-

**Ciarán Hayes:** And what's your gap now?

**Brian Beck:** So, the campus there, we own some of it. There's a private owner, owns some of it. We have to date, we have got a very significant wind farm, which I think Facebook bought. We have a solar farm going on the tailings pond, that'll be starting shortly. We've just been granted a very significant Anaerobic Digester by a Tipperary-based company. Several other industries have gone in. So we're probably hitting around the 200 jobs, let's say, at this point with-

**Sinéad Carr:** So, what we're looking at, I suppose, in terms of your target is 400 by the end of the council term. We have 200 at the moment, which is significant in a small couple of years. And there's enough pipeline coming in to say that we'd have a good chance of hitting that 400. But if we got to 400, we've effectively replenished what was in the lead and zinc mines. That doesn't address now, obviously, the other areas in terms of Bord na Móna. So there's a lot of work. But to me, to us, this is probably a very significant area for future strategies.

**Ciarán Hayes:** Yeah, it seems quite interesting listening to you. You've a combination of a whole raft of renewable energies there between the AD plant, the solar, and the wind. So, okay. That makes a lot of sense.

Okay. Can I stick with the, somewhat, with the climate theme? I'm looking at your housing policies, just in terms of the retrofits. Who's this? Is this Shane?

**Sinéad Carr:** So that'd be Shane, yep.

**Ciarán Hayes:** We introduced a new Performance Indicator just in terms of the retrofits. Oh, sorry. I'm going to go back. The second part of the question is: how do you propose the lessons from your DZ, how does that translate then into your 126 settlements?

**Brian Beck:** Yes. So as I said, the lessons from Littleton they'll be used within the 13, and that will then grow through the other settlements. We're doing, for example, we're doing smart village plans with the South Tipperary Development Company, where the communities are developing their own plans supported by the development company. So it's about getting it out to the community, providing them with the information. And then we also have, I think, Climate employed a Community Staff Member?

**Eamon Lonergan:** Yeah. We have a DZ Officer working with communities. So again, Littleton is one of the areas we're focusing on. Obviously, it's in the heart of the DZ, and it's one of the areas we-

**Ciarán Hayes:** But your biggest, from a carbon emissions point of view, your biggest emissions are going to come from the Nenagh's and the Thurles's and the Roscrea's and the Clonmel's. How are you going to advance the emission? How are you going to reduce the emissions in those spaces?

**Eamon Lonergan:** Yeah. And we are doing that, I suppose, in terms of our own emissions with our own buildings, our own headquarters, our own swimming pools, and those, those large significant users. We're also looking at District Heating Systems within the larger ones, the Thurles, the Nenagh, and we had funding this year through SEAI. So we're focusing that on probably the urban areas, but we're very conscious, as Sinéad said, we're a very rural local authority.

**Ciarán Hayes:** Your District Heating, what's your power source for that?

**Eamon Lonergan:** We're doing a feasibility survey at the moment, looking like geophysical and geothermal. But look, we will look at other sources. There's buildings and facilities in the area, particularly around the-

**Ciarán Hayes:** So if you have a geothermal source, that's added then to your multiplicity of renewable energy activities going on. Okay.

**Sinéad Carr:** I think just to answer your question as well, Ciarán, in terms of how we're going to. Like, you need a pilot area to be able to measure what we've done, how it has been done, and what the locals feel like it. So the lessons learned from those and the fact that you're able to demonstrate it in a village like Littleton, you're then able to demonstrate and say, "Here are the grants that are available. Here's the savings that you'll make. Here's the value it is for the biodiversity, and/or the climate, et cetera." So what you need to do in terms of the village area is to capture that information, work with them to support them in that, and then be able to transfer the learnings there to the individuals. Because at the end of the day, it's about your property, your money, and the value you're getting from it.

Ciarán Hayes: And therein lies the challenge. Yeah.

Okay. Housing on the retrofit side, Shane, we're looking at, we introduced a new performance indicator in this, just in the last year or two. For 2024, Tipperary had 71 completions, which was the second lowest nationally. And that was compared to 55 completions in 2023. In terms of the 2030 targets, I'm conscious you have, what, 5,500 houses. Probably, I mean, rough guess, 30% of those will probably need to be retrofitted. So I'm just wondering, at these levels, how are you going to achieve that?

**Shane O'Dwyer:** Yeah. So I suppose the first thing to recognise, Ciarán, is that we have had a significant turnover of staff in the retrofit area. It was originally a contract post in the Performance and Efficiency Review that were submitted up to the Chief Executive. And in our Workforce Plan, we recognised the need to regularise posts in that area and upskill. Because one of the problems we had with the contract posts was people would move in, here's a secure post, you're stop-start the whole time. That's not going to cut it. We're not going to get to where we need to with that. So that's our aim, and that's also linked to the inspections, which you'll notice that's another area that required improvement.

The two of those were looked at in conjunction, in parallel, and it's the same staffing type arrangement. We need to look systemically different at it to justify and support more permanent roles to allow us a more continuous delivery rather than this stop-start as people move in, move out, constantly train and get them back up to speed.

**Ciarán Hayes:** Okay, I'm not sure. The structure of the scheme is kind of it's an annual scheme anyway. It's not a rollover. It's not a three-year scheme. So the structure itself is a little bit stop-start anyway.

Okay, but even at that, you're, in terms of comparing Tipperary with other counties, similar counties, you're still-

**Shane O'Dwyer:** Oh, we've a way to go, and we recognise that, and I suppose the staffing structure that we've put in is recognising that and hoping to address that.

**Ciarán Hayes:** Okay. It's a challenge.

Turning to the- staying on housing just for the moment. As I say, you've over, what, 5,590 houses. Now, you've very good performance in terms of your vacancy rate, but I'm just conscious... And you're below the national average, but I'm just conscious there's been a little bit of a switch there in recent years. And going back to 2023, you had a vacancy rate of 1.8%, but that's kind of gone up a bit now to 2.56%. Are you going to pull back from that? I mean, you're still performing well below the national average.

**Shane O'Dwyer:** Yeah. No, so what I can say here is there was a couple of longer- term voids we were working on. Initially in 2020, I suppose, we were- In 2019, actually, we were at 4.61%. At that stage, it was recognised that we needed to do something systemically different to address it. So, there was a €4 million loan approved with the idea being that, I suppose, it was like fast-forwarding the rents from the additional supply to front-load that money to allow us to address voids. So if I look at 2024, we were at 2.56%. At 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2025, we're at 1.98%, and as the lads mentioned here, we've a live dashboard now for some of these performance indicators. So, I looked at the 30th of April 2026, we were at 1.82%.

**Ciarán Hayes:** Okay. So you're pulling it back down. Yeah. And just to be fair, you're still performing well below the national average.

**Sinéad Carr:** Yeah. And look, I know everybody wants to get to the top of the table, but I'm going to be honest, if we're under 3%, I think that's a reasonable

management of the large stock that we have, and I'd be happy enough as the Chief Executive on that. It's when we go over the 3% I would get unhappy.

**Ciarán Hayes:** Yeah. The alarm, the red flags will... Okay. Noel, do you want to come in?

**Noel Harrington:** Yeah, thanks. Thanks, Ciarán. I'll just say thanks again for attending. I'm following on from the Performance Indicator Working Group, and just a couple of areas there that kind of jumped out. On the libraries, the 2024 performance indicator on visits show Tipperary about a quarter down on the national average. Is that a concern? Is there a problem with that? Is the council introducing any issues to address or to improve that performance indicator over the next couple of years?

**Sinéad Carr:** I might hand it down to Damien on that.

**Damien Ginty:** Yeah. Just, I do note the performance indicator, but I suppose if we look at it from 2022, '23, '24, there's been a continuous increase. And for 2025, visits per the population have increased to just under 2.5. That's partially due to a significant drop during COVID, and there's been a cultural change now, and people are beginning to come back to the libraries. So we've seen approximately 60-70% increase in membership and activity incrementally over those years.

**Noel Harrington:** So, would you hope to see, because we're comparing it with the national median as well. So, and I was benchmarking '24 against the national median as well, so presumably they would have had the same issues.

There's nothing like library locations, library buildings, nothing that's inhibiting the visitor experience?

**Damien Ginty:** No, but we do have a new full-time. At the minute, we've eight full-time libraries, four part-time libraries. That's moving to nine full-time libraries and three part-time. So I would envisage that upward trajectory will increase because we'll have extra opening hours by virtue of the new library opening in Cahir.

**Ger Walsh:** Yeah, I suppose our draft figures for 2025 have shown an improvement in the actual library services.

**Noel Harrington:** Okay. So the trend is going hopefully the right...yeah. Thank you.

And the second area just to touch, and again, it's on the road side. You know, quite a good story in many ways. I was looking at the regional roads. The amount of kilometres improved over the last 10 years is twice the average. Now, I'd assume that is because Tipperary is the size it is, it would get a large allocation to improve the roads. The percentage of roads then, of the non-national roads, between regional, primary, secondary and tertiary, tells an interesting story, and I want to focus first of all on the Secondary one. Over the ten years, for the first eight, seven or eight years, pretty much on the average, not much of a deviation. And in the last two years, you're three times better than the average in terms of the reported PSCI figure. And either we could do with the formula, or we could do with the explanation.

**John Byrne:** Or the staff.

**Noel Harrington:** How did it go from the roads mapped as a nine and ten grade, which is the best grade, going from three years ago, to about 25% to just over 60%?

**Liam Brett:** Yeah, I suppose the main change that happened about three years ago, I suppose, was up until three years ago, we'd done those PSCI ratings through some of our own staff, and that was Area Engineers, and so there was ten staff involved in it, plus outside contractors. So there was a huge variant in—

**Noel Harrington:** Sorry. Would the outside contractors have done in conjunction with the Area Engineers? Or let's say you take an Area Engineer of their Municipal District Area, or would the outside contractor have done an entire area, and your engineers would have done any area solely themselves? If you know what I mean. That they weren't doing it together.

**Liam Brett:** It certainly varied over the years, but we would have given more the category to that outside contractor, as in regional or local primaries for one district, and let our own staff focus on the others. But I suppose we changed our way for providing allocations to each municipal district three years ago. As part of that, we actually took the PSCI rating as a factor in the allocations being allocated out to each of the five municipal districts.

Because of that, we wanted to have greater corporate governance around it. So we've two staff internally that do every one of those PSCI surveys across the

county. And actually, to ensure that we can stand over the figures, each one of those staff picks a category. So one will do the regionals for the entire county, one will do local primaries for the entire county, and so on, so that there's consistency across each municipal district. Because, as I said, 20% of the RI monies that we allocate to municipal districts is based on where the worst roads are, and we use that indicator.

**Noel Harrington:** Okay. So, are you done then with the outside contractors assessing the non-national roads then? Is it completely done in-house?

**Liam Brett:** Assuming we can keep continuity of staff, our preference is to keep it in-house.

**Noel Harrington:** And does the RMO play any role in overseeing that or verifying that or, you know, even sampling that or, you know, making sure that, you know, that, I'm sure the figures are fine, but I'm just saying, are the RMO involved?

**Liam Brett:** Well, I suppose the RMO would assist us on a regular basis. They're a great support to us. As we've migrated in-house, I suppose, it's done more by our own staff. Of course, the RMO do organise the survey of the regional roads. It's done on a periodic basis. And every two or three years, they actually, they do the procurement of the contractor for that piece of work.

**Noel Harrington:** So I want to get a feel for the performance here of the local authority, right? Again, it's difficult to explain how you got a trebling of the figures. But you're saying, it's not a trebling of the standards, it's a different way of measuring the standards.

**Liam Brett:** Well, we can certainly stand over the figures a lot more now than we could have had in the past because the variance, I suppose, between interpretation, when there's so many people involved, has gone. It's down to two staff now, and they take a category across the county. You're picking up on the nine to ten, is the regional roads that went up.

**Noel Harrington:** Yes. Yeah, yeah

**Liam Brett:** That's not played out through all the standards. You will have seen the seven to eight drops accordingly, for the most part. But the trend we're seeing in those is that in general, we've been able to increase over the years, increase the standard of our regional roads. We haven't been in terms of the local tertiaries, the lower category roads.

**Noel Harrington:** Yeah, because there's a bit of a disimprovement in how you've assessed those. Is that an operational issue? Or is it just the way it falls? Or was it a policy issue? Look, we're going to focus on the primary, secondary, and regional roads, and maybe not so much on the tertiary.

**Liam Brett:** Are you picking the figure in terms of the amount surveyed or-?

**Noel Harrington:** No, sorry, the PSC, the rating.

**Liam Brett:** So the volume of them that are a poor rating certainly would have drifted up, and that's, I suppose, a couple of reasons. We would have prioritised our monies for the higher traffic roads. With the view as we get on top of them, to work down through the categories. So you will have seen the red roads that we have; the one to four category for regional roads has dropped dramatically,

and you'll see that again in the 2025 indicators. But we haven't been able to get to those, to those lower category, local tertiary roads. The figure is of 83% percent in terms of surveying of the local tertiaries, as well is only okay. But there's a challenge constantly with those that there can be issues with access to the local tertiary road network in certain places.

**Noel Harrington:** Do you do an exercise in terms of, we'll say, price or allocation received per kilometre of road in a general sense? Would you have like an informal league table on that, or how you perform in that? And how much you get for that allocation? Some counties do very well, some do less so for different reasons, maybe difficulties with contractors and things like that. Would that be something? Was there anything that stands out in that?

**Liam Brett:** So the allocations we get from the Department of Transport are essentially, they're allocated based on road length per local authority. We always spend our full allocation. In fact, in recent years, we've been overspending on the allocation and agreeing with the Department when they would agree that we can overspend on it. In terms of the rate per meter for both RI and RM, I think the rates are quite competitive. So for most of the RI, we contract it out, but for most of the RM, it's done in-house, and that works well in the other services that we provide in terms of winter maintenance, and use of velocity patchers. But I think both of those figures are competitive when you look through the figures in comparison with other local authorities.

**Noel Harrington:** And just if, if you don't mind, last question. In terms of you mentioned, the new system you have for logging complaints to council. Do you do an assessment of, we'll say, you look at well, a certain percentage of this is Roads complaints and Housing and that. Is that reflected in both what you receive in the complaint side, and perhaps also with the elected members in the chamber through the municipal districts or whatever, that there have to be

motions toward? Would roads take up a good bit of that discussion in the districts?

**Liam Brett:** It certainly does. Roads is a big topic, yeah. And there is a correlation between poor weather, the number of complaints that come in, and also the number of PL claims that come in.

**Ciarán Hayes:** Just a quick question to follow-on on that, Liam. If you have accidents on the road, some of your traffic lights might be damaged, some of your boundaries might be damaged, a car might go on fire, whatever. Fire brigade is called out, right? Presumably, you charge for that service, do you? For the fire brigade.

Do you also charge, or do you also recover from the insurance the damage to the road surface, let's say, in the case of a fire or a case of a public light being destroyed or a traffic light being destroyed? Is that also recouped from the insurance?

**Liam Brett:** In general, no. In general, it's very, very difficult to follow up with the individual that's-

**Ciarán Hayes:** So, where is that carried out? So, you have an accident. It's because somebody did something wrong, something happened, and the people involved in the accident will recover the cost from their insurance, some way or other. So what do you do? Do you carry the cost then out of your block grant?

**Liam Brett:** Well, in general, it's through our resources. Now, there can, of course, be exceptions. But in general, the road surface is not damaged-

**Ciarán Hayes:** But let's say a traffic light at a junction is destroyed, you know?

**Liam Brett:** Yeah, for a more significant issue, certainly, we would attempt to follow up with the individuals where we can gather details.

**Ciarán Hayes:** If your fire brigade is called out, do you send out a bill?

**Sinéad Carr:** There would be a bill sent out for those. And that is actually followed up.

**Miriam McDonald:** Okay.

**Declan Breathnach:** A very quick one. A lot of technical jargon surrounds the analysis of quality of roads. Joe Public, who's on a tertiary road, and sometimes they don't understand when you say tertiary road. Third-class road. You know, the last time I looked, I think it was an average of 1 in 34 years or something like that, that road would be resurfaced. That's what the public want to know about. Can you comment and give us an estimate in terms of, say, your tertiary roads, how often are they covered? And we all know, you know, the issue around the quality of roads, particularly in the last winter. So, I mean, I think we can understand the figures here, but how do you communicate to Joe Public, who's not satisfied that their tertiary roads are being looked after?

**Liam Brett:** I suppose maybe two comments there. Certainly, the return period, as you mentioned, 34 years. I think in recent times it has drifted, certainly has drifted higher for us in Tipperary. And that's because even though our allocations have increased, inflation since 2022, since the Ukrainian war, has certainly outpaced the increases that we've got, so our

outputs are dropping.

Now we have invested very heavily in our velocity patcher fleet. We have essentially 10 velocity patchers. We would have, I think, the largest fleet across the country. And so we're doing what we can to maintain those lower category of roads and keep them in a passable condition, albeit maybe not in the condition that everybody would like them to be.

**Miriam McDonald:** Okay. Thank you all very much. I just have one last quick question. In the Corporate Plan, and just mindful of the LGMA's recent survey about branding and so on, and you mentioned you have three brands, you know, intercounty brands. Does the Corporate Plan look at branding?

**Sinéad Carr:** The Corporate Plan and one of the actions will be to look at the branding, and particularly on the tourism side, as well as things like libraries, fire brigades, all of that.

**Miriam McDonald:** Yeah.

**Sinéad Carr:** It's an area that we do need to look at. People see them through different perspectives.

**Miriam McDonald:** Okay.

**Ger Walsh:** It's also a key feature of our revised Comms Strategy. Branding.

**Miriam McDonald:** Okay. And then just this is, again, a final question that we put to everybody. Are there any issues that we haven't covered today that

NOAC should be aware of in our role as the National Oversight Body? Is there anything?

**Sinéad Carr:** Look, it's like everything, I suppose. Who would have said there would have been a war in Iran and it would have another inflationary impact on us, which is going to obviously be significant.

I would say there's a couple of areas that I'm mindful of at the moment. I mean, obviously, one that I've mentioned are the various different services that are being asked, we're being requested to host from other government Departments where there are fixed-term contracts. It's having certainly an impact, and that needs to be looked at.

Stranded costs, obviously, of Uisce Éireann is obviously an area that we're still grappling with and hopefully coming to an end of it.

Climate, the penalties on climate targets, there's still no clarity around that, about what happens when you don't meet your targets. What are the implications?

I would say then the RZLT obviously is another area. I mean, I mentioned on the housing side, we've been very fortunate that we've been able to work on the decisions of past council decisions on purchasing lands back in the '70s, '80s, and '90s. With the RZLT, that's certainly going to constrict or contain to some degree what we can purchase, because there's going to be an added cost on us. It doesn't seem very sensible to me when you're paying it out with one hand, and you're giving it back with the other hand. But they're just some of the issues, I suppose, that come to mind.

**Miriam McDonald:** Okay. Okay, well, thank you very much. We really appreciate it. Hmm? Oh, sorry, yes. Sorry, one last thing.

We have a Customer Service Workshop in October, hopefully this year. We still have to finalise the date. And it would be great if you could consider putting something forward for that. You know, I was even thinking the AI project that you talked about could be a really nice one for some. You know,

I mean, we have the Good Practice event. The Customer Service one is around good things in terms of Customer Service that other local authorities could learn from. So if you would consider putting something forward, that would be great.

**Sinéad Carr:** Certainly, yes.

**Brian Beck:** Absolutely.

**Miriam McDonald:** Sorry. Ending the day with more work and a sales pitch. So there we go. Thank you very much for your time and your patience in answering all the questions. We really appreciate it.

**Sinéad Carr:** And thank you very much. We appreciate it too. Thank you.