Local Authority Enforcement Audit Report

PURPOSE OF AUDIT

This audit was carried out in accordance with ***Section 63(2)*** of the ***Environmental Protection EPA (EPA) Acts 1992 & 2003*** and aims to assess the performance by the local authority of its statutory functions in relation to environmental protection. This report contains advice and recommendations for the local authority in accordance with ***Section 63(3)(a) of the EPA Acts 1992 & 2003***.

The audit process is a sample of the performance of a local authority in carrying out its statutory functions in relation to environmental protection.

Audit Detail

Date of Audit	18/08/26
Local Authority	Laois County Council
Issue Date	07/09/26
Audit report Ref:	LAET 2026 09 07
Representing the Local Authority	Pat Delaney - Director of Services Colin Doyle - Executive Engineer (RMCEI Co-Ordinator) Evelyn Browney - Administrative Officer Ann Marie Callan - Executive Scientist Dermot Leonard - Senior Executive Engineer Georgina Ireland - Senior Executive Officer Steven Mullally - Assistant Scientist Derval O'Rourke - Staff Officer
EPA Inspectors	Marc Farrelly - Inspector Gemma Hennon - Inspector Maria Lenihan - Inspector

Summary of Key Findings

Observations were raised in relation to complaint handling, ENDS, local air & noise investigations; Construction & Demolition waste, household waste inspections, commercial waste inspections, PRI inspections, the management of Section 4 Discharge Licences and misconnections.

Actions in relation to the above are required to be taken, as specified in the audit report.

Laois County Council did not meet the required standard of strong or excellent for 5 out of the 15 NEPs under the local authority performance framework for 2026, as follows:

- ENDs;
- Construction & Demolition Material;
- Commercial Waste;
- Discharge Licences/Misconnections, and
- Local Air & Noise Investigations.

This is of concern to the EPA and must be addressed as a matter of priority by Laois County Council.

Laois County Council stated that lack of resources has impacted on the performance by the Council of its statutory environmental protection functions, in relation to waste, Section 4 discharge licences and ENDs. Laois County Council should, therefore, continue to review the staff resources in its environmental section and ensure that this vital work is appropriately prioritised and that adequate resources are deployed to deliver its statutory functions in environmental protection.

Environmental Complaints Handling

	Answer
Each local authority is required under the Governance NEP for 2026 to review and update existing complaints handling procedures and processes to ensure alignment with the revised Environmental Complaints Procedure for Local Authorities. Has this work been undertaken to date?	Yes

Observation

- In relation to the sample of complaints reviewed, the audit team found it difficult to track the investigation and enforcement actions undertaken on both the CRM system and in physical files shown.
- One of the environmental complaints, referred by the EPA to Laois County Council could not be readily found on the CRM system.
- The delay in progressing enforcement action in relation to one of the complaints reviewed, i.e. COM018744, (outlined in Table 1 below) is of concern to the EPA.

Table 1: Sample complaints reviewed

	Reference	Subject	Finding	Action
1.	COM021991	Waste	The site owner was requested to carry out three months of surface water monitoring and soil sampling on the 11/11/25. No other documentation was available on file, except for a recent email from planning seeking clarity on next steps with the site.	Progress the investigation of this site without further delay and ensure that all documentation relating to this complaint is kept on file.
2.	COM021376	Odours	The complaint was referred by the EPA to Laois County Council on 29/07/2025. The Waste Enforcement Officer investigated the matter without delay however, the complaint was not recorded on the CRM system until 16/09/2026. Details of the proactive work undertaken were not documented on the CRM system and were instead provided verbally by a Staff Officer and via an email retrieved during the audit.	Refer to Recommendations and actions required.
3.	COM018744	Pollution of the TRIOGUE_030	A warning letter was issued to a site on the 17/07/26 requesting cessation of contaminated surface water/trade effluent referencing a water sample, taken from a wash sump on site on the 09/06/25, showing an elevated ammonia level of 23.8mg/l. Laois County Council informed the audit team that the site has engaged with them and that an inspection of the site and further sampling will be completed week beginning 24/08/26. The delay in addressing pollution from this site is of concern to the EPA.	Refer to Recommendations and actions required.
4.	COM020440	Waste	Email correspondence was shown in relation to the complaint, demonstrating that the complaint was addressed, however the complaint could not be retrieved on the CRM system.	Ensure that EPA referred complaints can be readily retrieved on the CRM system.

WATER National Enforcement Priorities

Discharge Licences / Misconnections

Observation

- Laois County Council has 14 Section 4 discharge licences. The audit team was informed that 3 C category licences can be revoked; one has ceased discharging and two have Certificates of Authorisations from the EPA and no longer require a Section 4 discharge licence. Only 3 sites were compliant in 2025. One new Section 4 discharge licence was issued in 2025.
- There was no system in place to track non-compliant sampling results or self monitoring returns. The audit team was informed that resource constraints and a lack of administrative support have contributed to challenges in the management and enforcement of Section 4 discharge licences.
- Following misconnection work in the vicinity of a housing estate in June and July of 2026, foul sewage/wastewater was identified in three specific surface water network areas and one other potential area. This surface water network drains to the Hermitage stream (TRIOGUE_030) via a standing lake. This water body has been identified as an Urban Run Off pressure. There was no plan for further investigation to identify and resolve the source(s) of this pollution.

Air & Noise National Enforcement Priorities

Local Air and Noise investigations

Observation

1. There were no dry cleaners certified by Laois County Council under the Solvents Regulations. The Council confirmed that correspondence had been issued by registered post to two operators identified as potentially falling within the scope of the Regulations; however, the correspondence was either refused or not accepted by the recipients. The audit team was informed that the next enforcement action under consideration is the issuing of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs). These two potential operators were previously discussed during an EPA audit on 25/04/2024. Progress in advancing the investigation since that time has been limited and has been attributed to resource constraints and competing workload priorities within the Council.
2. The Deco Paints Register was not easily accessible on the local authority's website, as it could only be located through an external Google search and not through direct navigation of the website.
3. There is one Air Pollution Licence in operation within Laois County Council's functional area (Ref. No. QY05-62), which was issued in 1997. Emissions monitoring is undertaken annually; however, monitoring was not completed in 2025, and this was not identified or addressed as a non-compliance with the licensee at that time. Monitoring was subsequently carried out on 05/03/2026. A review of the monitoring report identified an issue with the sampling platform, which should be followed up with the licensee to ensure appropriate corrective action is taken.

Environmental Noise Directive (ENDs)

Observation

- The measures set out in the Noise Action Plan were not progressed during 2025 and have not advanced to date in 2026. The Council advised that implementation has been impacted by funding and the availability of relevant technical expertise within the Environmental Section. The Council requested a meeting with the relevant team in the EPA to discuss this matter further. The audit team contacted the relevant team within the EPA and that team will contact the local authority directly to arrange this meeting.

Waste National Enforcement Priorities

Construction & Demolition material

Observation

- A low level of construction and development site inspections, i.e. 5 was undertaken in 2025 and this was highlighted in the 2025 Local Authority Performance Report. Four construction and development site inspections have been planned for 2026; one construction and development site inspection has been completed to date in 2026 and this level of activity in the area was considered too low by the audit team.
- The audit team was informed that staff in the Environmental Section are not getting information on Building Commencement Notices.
- The reviews of Resource and Waste Management Plans were not being tracked.
- One inspection was taken of a site notified under Regulation 27 to date in 2026, this level of activity in the area was considered too low by the audit team.

Household Waste

Observation

- A total of 46 of the 150 planned household inspections were completed during Q1 and Q2 of 2026. The audit team was informed that these types of inspections are undertaken on a door-to-door basis, are recorded and tracked, and that fines are issued where appropriate. However, in cases where fines are not paid, no further enforcement action is taken.
- Laois County Council was unaware of work required in relation to Multi Unit Developments (MUDs). This work is an activity for focus in 2026 and WERLA guidance on this work area is available for local authorities on the Network for Ireland's Environmental Compliance and Enforcement (NIECE) portal.

Commercial Waste

Observation

- Laois County Council informed the audit team that inspections in relation to commercial sites in 2025 comprised of letters requesting evidence of appropriate waste disposal including segregation of food waste. 8 follow-up physical inspections were carried out to date in 2026.
- Laois County Council were unaware of commercial site lists provided by WERLA.
- None of the planned commercial site inspections for 2026 were completed in Q1 and Q2 2026.

Plastics and Producer Responsibility Initiatives

Observation

- The four PRIs designated as activities for focus in 2026 are Farm Plastics, WEEE, Batteries and DRS. There were no planned inspections under Farm Plastics and the level of planned activity under the WEEE, Battery and DRS was considered too low by the audit team.
- Four WEEE and Battery inspections were carried out in Q1 and Q2 2026 and no DRS inspections have been undertaken to date this year.

Recommendations & Actions Required

COMPLAINT HANDLING:

1. Ensure that complaint investigations and related enforcement actions are advanced in a timely and effective manner to achieve timely resolution and cessation of any identified pollution.
2. Progress the investigation of complaint Ref. No. COM018744 (Pollution of the TRIOGUE_030) as a matter of priority.
3. Ensure that robust records are maintained for complaint investigations and associated enforcement actions, enabling a clear and auditable trail of the complaint handling process from receipt through to closure.
4. Implement measures to ensure that EPA-referred complaints can be readily identified and retrieved from the Complaints Handling System.

WATER NEPS

Discharge Licences / Misconnections

1. Implement a system to manage the enforcement of Section 4 discharge licences, to include up-to-date risk-rating of discharges, compliance status, monitoring results, self-monitoring returns, warning letters issued, and any enforcement actions taken.
2. Where non-compliances with Section 4 discharge licences are identified, ensure timely notifications are issued to licensees, and progression to enforcement where required.
3. Where conditions of a Section 4 licence are not being met due to safety concerns inhibiting sampling or inspection, ensure that those concerns are resolved promptly.
4. Ensure timely revocation of Section 4 discharge licences of closed businesses or businesses that no longer require a Section 4 discharge licence.
5. Misconnections are an activity for focus in 2026. Ensure that appropriate risk assessments and standard operating procedures for investigations are in place so that safe and effective investigations can be carried out, with a focus in areas where urban run-off has been identified as a significant pressure.

AIR & NOISE NEPS

Local Air & Noise Investigations

1. Progress the investigation of the two potential dry-cleaning operators, identified as falling within the scope of the Solvents Regulations. The EPA is concerned by the limited progress made in advancing this investigation since the previous audit, particularly given the time elapsed.
2. Ensure that the Deco Paints Register is readily accessible through the local authority website and can be easily located through direct website navigation without reliance on external search engines.
3. Ensure that all licence-required emissions monitoring is completed within the required timeframe and that any missed monitoring events are identified and addressed promptly as potential non-compliances.
4. Follow up with the licensee (Licence Ref. No. QY05-62) regarding the issue identified with the sampling platform and ensure that appropriate corrective actions are implemented.
5. Undertake a review of Air Pollution Licence Ref. No. QY05-62 to determine whether its conditions remain appropriate, up to date, and reflective of current regulatory requirements and site activities.

ENDS

1. Establish and maintain engagement with the relevant EPA team to help inform and advance activities in this area.

WASTE NEPS

Construction and Demolition Material

1. Increase inspection activity relating to construction and demolition sites, as well as sites registered under Regulation 27, to ensure an appropriate level of regulatory oversight.
2. Implement arrangements to ensure that relevant staff within the Environmental Section receive Building Commencement Notices in a timely manner, to inform and support the planning and targeting of inspection activities in this area.
3. Ensure that the desktop inspections of RWMPs are tracked and accounted for under RMCEI category 6.1.7.

Household Waste

1. Ensure a consistent escalated enforcement approach is used to address non-compliant households to improve waste segregation and use of 3 bins.
2. Undertake inspections in relation to MUDs in line with WERLA guidance, that is available on the NIECE portal NIECE Portal - Organization home

Commercial Waste

1. Engage with WERLA to obtain intelligence on commercial sites for inspection.
2. Progress the planned inspections of commercial sites for 2026 without further delay and ensure timely follow-up of non-compliant sites.

PRIs

1. Carry out farm plastic inspections in 2026 and ensure that any non-compliances identified are followed up in a timely and appropriate manner.
2. Increase the planned level of inspections under WEEE, Batteries and DRS for 2026.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS

Laois County Council is required to address the recommendations and actions outlined in this report and submit a comprehensive response to the EPA by 02/11/26. The submission should detail the measures taken, or planned, to implement these recommendations and actions, including associated timeframes where applicable. Please note that these actions may be subject to verification by the EPA during future audits or inspections. This report is issued without prejudice to the right of the EPA to take any further action which it may in future decide is appropriate, whether under Section 63 of the EPA Acts 1992 and 2003 or otherwise.

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