

Quality Assurance – In Depth Check

Section A: Introduction

This introductory section details the headline information on the programme or project in question.

Programme or Project Information	
Name	Construction of a new Fire Station Headquarters for Kilkenny County Council's Fire & Rescue Service
Detail	Provision of a new Fire Station Headquarters for Kilkenny Fire & Rescue Service
Responsible Body	Kilkenny County Council
Current Status	Expenditure Being Incurred
Start Date	2017
End Date	2029
Overall Cost	€10.5m

Project Description

Kilkenny County Council in conjunction with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government through the National Directorate for Fire & Emergency Management (NDFEM) proposes to construct a new Fire Station Headquarters (HQ) for the Kilkenny City Fire & Rescue Services. The existing Fire Station HQ which has been in use for over 50 years is under pressure to cope with the demands of a modern Fire & Rescue Service.

The expansion of Kilkenny City in the residential, commercial, industrial sectors and particularly in the service industry including tourism has highlighted the need for an efficient Fire Service response to emergency calls. The Census of 2016 showed an increase of 8.6% in the population of Kilkenny City and this has increased year on year. A consequence of this growth however has been the increase in traffic and also the housing stock for the firefighting personnel is now further away from the Fire Station.

The existing Fire Station is located just off the main street of Kilkenny City which results in challenges for firefighters getting to the Station to respond to a call and for the fire appliances when turning out. Kilkenny is a medieval City with narrow streets and there are 10 schools within 1km of the Station. The option of building on the existing site or extending the existing building is not feasible. One of the main limitations is the size of the site which would restrict any expansion. It would not solve slow turnout times and the traffic congestion challenges would remain unresolved.

The primary function of the Fire Service is to facilitate the speedy response to incidents and to carry out administrative back-office support for the 7 no fire brigades within the Kilkenny Fire & Rescue Service. The proposed site comprises of 3 no. acres and is an adequate area to accommodate all the functional requirements of a modern Fire Service HQ for the Fire & Rescue Services. It will include the building, accommodation for the appliances, car parking, training facility and mechanic's workshop. It will also provide appropriate facilities for HQ staff both administrative and technical. The expected functional life of the new facility will be 40 years.

It is also proposed at a future date to co-locate the HQ for Kilkenny County Council's Civil Defence Services on the same adjacent site. The approximate size for this site has been determined and provision shall be given for a secure demarcation of access, site and boundary ancillary services will be provided.

Section B - Step 1: Logic Model Mapping

As part of this In-Depth Check, Internal Audit have completed a Programme Logic Model (PLM) for the Construction of a new Fire Station HQ for Kilkenny County Council, Fire & Rescue Service. A PLM is a standard evaluation tool and further information on their nature is available in the [Public Spending Code](#).

Objectives	Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes
Provide a modern facility capable of meeting the current operational needs	Capital funding is currently in place under the Fire Services Capital Programme for €10.5m	Site Location and analysis Tender process for provision of Design Consultancy	Modernised facility Upgraded training facilities	Enhanced safety for the public and communities

of a modern Fire & Rescue Service. Facilitate the speedy response of Fire & Rescue Services to incidents Maximise environmentally sustainable technologies as a means to minimize building running costs Accommodate fire brigade appliances and equipment in a state of permanent readiness for use Provide appropriate facilities for fire brigade personnel Facilitate ongoing training of staff Facilitate routine testing and maintenance of appliances and equipment	Suitable Site Kilkenny Fire & Rescue Service Staff Design Standards NDFEM resources	Services, including Project Management, Client Representative Services and Integrated Design Team Consultancy Services Submission of detailed proposal to NDFEM Project development and appraisal in accordance with “Guidelines for the Appraisal and Management of Capital Expenditure Proposals in the Public Sector”, the Guidelines issue by the Department of the Environment and Local Government “Planning and Financial Procedures for Fire Station Projects and Infrastructure Guidelines” Planning (Part 8) Public Consultations Construction Supervision Post Completion Review	Advanced Technology	Improved response capabilities. Ensure effective emergency response Improved turnout times for Fire and Rescue Services
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Description of Programme Logic Model

Objectives:

Kilkenny County Council's primary objective for the project is to construct a new Fire Station Headquarters for Kilkenny City Fire & Rescue Services to facilitate a speedy response from the Fire Service to incidents. This new modern facility will be capable of meeting the current operational needs. The expected functional life of the new facility will be 40 years. The additional functional requirements of the Fire Service can be summarised as follows:

- To facilitate the emergency turn out of the fire brigade
- To accommodate fire brigade appliances and equipment in a state of permanent readiness for use
- To provide appropriate facilities for fire brigade personnel, commensurate with the level of fire brigade activity
- To facilitate routine testing and maintenance of appliances and equipment
- To facilitate ongoing training for personnel
- Maximise environmentally sustainable technologies as a means to minimise building running costs in terms of heating, lighting, water usage, and CO2 emissions
- To provide appropriate facilities for HQ Staff both administrative and technical

Inputs:

The primary input of the programme is the current capital funding allocation of €10.5 million from the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government under the Fire Services Capital Programme. The input, expertise and oversight from Kilkenny County Council Fire & Rescue Staff and NDFEM resources are also noted.

Activities:

There will be a number of key activities carried out throughout the project. These include the project development and appraisal in accordance with "Guidelines for the Appraisal and Management of Capital Expenditure Proposals in the Public Sector", the Guidelines issued by the Department of the Environment and Local Government "Planning and Financial Procedures for Fire Station Projects and Infrastructure Guidelines. planning consents, public consultations, design, construction and supervision of the project will also take place.

Outputs:

Kilkenny County Council will have a new modern Fire Services HQ. The HQ will be capable of meeting the current operational needs of a modern Fire & Rescue Service. The facility will be constructed to the highest standards and will contain advanced technologies. It is envisaged that Kilkenny County Council's new Fire & Rescue Service HQ will be operational for 40 years.

Outcomes:

The new Fire HQ for Kilkenny County Council will enhance safety for the public and communities and ensure modern effective emergency response. It is envisaged that the turnout times for Kilkenny Fire & Rescue will improve when they are operational from the new HQ. These response times are a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for the Fire & Rescue Service and are reported on to the National Oversight & Audit Commission (NOAC) annually.

Section B - Step 2: Summary Timeline of Project/Programme

The following section tracks the proposed construction for Kilkenny County Council's new Fire & Rescue Service HQ from inception in terms of major project milestones.

June 2017	Request from Kilkenny County Council's Chief Fire Officer (CFO) to NDFEM seeking approval and support to commence the process of developing and appraising the strategic options to construct a new Fire & Rescue Services HQ in Kilkenny City
June 2021	Chief Fire Office tenders for valuers to identify and provide valuation services to Kilkenny County Council for a suitable site for the new HQ
Dec 2021	Avison Young issue their Site Options Report for new Fire Services HQ
Dec 2022	Kilkenny County Council submits its preliminary appraisal and site options report from Avison Young for the new HQ to NDFEM in the Department of Housing Planning & Local Government
Dec 2022	Contract for the purchase of the site for the new HQ was received from the vendor and reviewed by Kilkenny County Council's Solicitors. The Contract includes special conditions setting a date for completion of contract and remedies payable by Kilkenny County Council in the event of default. This contract was the subject of extensive negotiations
Feb 2023	Approval in principle is received from the NDFEM for the provision of a new Fire HQ in Kilkenny, with a capital programme funding allocation amount of €6m. The Council are requested to provide a project design brief, setting out the facilities proposed to be provided at the new HQ
May 2023	Contract for the acquisition of the site for the new Fire HQ was signed by both parties and the 10% deposit in the amount of €97,500 was paid to vendor
July 2023	Kilkenny County Council issue tender documents for the provision of Design Consultancy services for the new Fire HQ with a closing date of Sept 2023
Oct 2023	Tenders were assessed and the Chief Executive appointed the successful tenderer HLM+LD (Europe) Limited t/a HLM Architects for the provision of Design Consultancy Services including Project Management & Client Representative Services integrated design team Consultancy Services in the amount of €696,280
Dec 2023	Contract for Design Consultancy Services was signed between Kilkenny County Council and HLM Architects
June 2024	Report from HLM Architects issued and included Project Brief, Site Location,

Existing Building Analysis, Design Concept early stage/final, Design Concept - Interiors, Appearance, Training Tower Yard, Site Tests, Environmental Impacts, Landscape DAC & Fire Consultant Reports & Drawings

June 2024	HLM advised Kilkenny County Council that unexpected site conditions had been noted during site tests. These results were reported to the Vendor for further investigations. Consultants for the Vendor and the Environment Section in Kilkenny County Council undertook further assessment of the environmental situation
June 2024	Kilkenny County Council received confirmation from NDFEM for approval in principle for increased capital funding allocation for the project from €6m to €9.5m and a further €1m for the workshop
Jan 2025	Vendors Consultants issued a report with the conclusion that the comprehensive data set compiled to date confirms that the soil quality on site poses no risk to human health or the surrounding environment, which is consistent with the other reports issued, stating that there is low to no risk associated with the proposed development
Jan 2025	Correspondence received from Vendors Solicitors stating that as Kilkenny County Council had not obtained Planning Permission on the site as per the special conditions in the Contract by 31st Dec 2024, the Vendor had exercised his right to end the contact and return the deposit paid by the Council for the site

Section B - Step 3: Analysis of Key Documents

The following section reviews the key documentation relating to appraisal, analysis and evaluation for the construction of Kilkenny County Council's new Fire & Rescue Service HQ

Project/Programme Key Documents	
Title	Details
Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003	Outlines Kilkenny County Council's statutory obligations as a Fire Authority
Kilkenny Fire & Rescue Services Fire & Emergency Operations Plan 2022 – 2026	Fulfills Kilkenny County Council's statutory obligation as a Fire Authority
Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, NDFEM,	A Framework for Fire Safety in Ireland

Keeping Communities Safe 2013	
Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, NDFEM Capital Programme	State investment in fire and emergency services
Kilkenny County Council Corporate Plan	Strategic framework for Kilkenny County Council
Kilkenny County Council Capital Programme	Details of Kilkenny County Council Capital Programme for construction and acquisition projects
Climate Action Plan 2023	The plan implements the carbon budgets and sectoral emissions ceilings and sets out a roadmap for taking decisive action to halve our emissions by 2030 and reach net zero no later than 2050
Infrastructure Guidelines	The Infrastructure Guidelines sets out the value for money guidelines for the evaluation, planning and management of public investment projects, including purchase or acquisitions of assets or shareholdings, in Ireland

Key Document 1: Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003

The Fire Services Act 1981 updated by the 2023 amendments, provides the legal framework for the organisation of fire services in Ireland. It includes the establishment of fire authorities, fire-fighting operations and the protection and rescue of persons and property. It also defines the responsibilities of building owners and occupiers to maintain fire safety standards in their premises.

Key Document 2: Kilkenny Fire & Rescue Services Fire & Emergency Operations Plan 2022/2026

The Fire & Rescue Services Fire & Emergency Operations Plan fulfills Kilkenny County Council's statutory obligation as a Fire Authority as outlined in Section 26 of the Fire Services Acts. This plan details current arrangements within the Fire Authority, but it also sets out strategic plans and targets for the Fire Authority.

Key Document 3: Keeping Communities Safe

Keeping Communities Safe is the output from a review in 2012 of fire services and fire safety in Ireland. It aims to provide a comprehensive, balanced strategy to ensure the safety of the public in their homes and other locations, as well as worker-safety in providing emergency services.

Key Document 4: Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, NDFEM Capital Programme

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage James Browne TD has announced the State's largest ever investment in fire and emergency services in the landmark €328.5 million Fire Services Capital Programme (2026–2030). The programme, developed by the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management (NDFEM), sets out a comprehensive plan

to modernise Ireland's fire service fleet, infrastructure, training capability and communications systems to meet the evolving risks facing communities nationwide.

Key Document 5: Kilkenny County Council Corporate Plan

Kilkenny County Council Corporate Plan is the strategic framework outlining the Council's vision, priorities and objectives for a five-year period. The plan is designed to guide policy making, resource allocation and service delivery across all Council functions, ensuring accountability, transparency and responsiveness to the needs of the community.

Key Document 6: Kilkenny County Council Capital Programme

Kilkenny County Council Capital Programme 2025-2030 has an overall spend of €1,015 billion. The programme is 100% grant-funded and includes the provision of the new HQ for Kilkenny City.

Key Document 7: Climate Action Plan 2023

The Plan details how Ireland's transport system needs to make accessible, sustainable transport modes more attractive and shift away from car dependency through consideration of the proximity between people and places in land use and housing policy.

Key Document 8: Infrastructure Guidelines

The Infrastructure Guidelines sets out the value for money guidelines for the evaluation, planning and management of public investment projects in Ireland. The Guide replaces the Public Spending Code requirements for capital expenditure outlined in Public Spending Code.

Section B - Step 4: Data Audit

The following section details the data audit that was carried out for the construction of Kilkenny County Council's new Fire Service HQ. It evaluates whether appropriate data is available for the future evaluation of the project.

Data Required	Use	Availability
Avison Auctioneers Site Options Report	The Site Options report is a crucial document that provides a comprehensive analysis of potential project sites. The report is used to evaluate suitable sites for the project by assessing various factors such as location, accessibility, infrastructure and regulatory compliance	Yes
Kilkenny County Council Fire & Rescue Internal Preliminary Appraisal	The Preliminary Appraisal allowed the Fire & Rescue staff to tease out the feasibility, budget requirements, risk	Yes

	identification and stakeholder communication needs for the project. This together with the independent Site Options Report allowed the NDFEM to make an informed decision on the initial viability of the project	
Contract for the acquisition of a suitable site	The Contract outlines the terms and conditions governing the purchase, including the price, conditions and completion date	Yes
Tender Files including tender process, independent assessment and appointment of relevant service providers	Proper record keeping is a critical aspect of public procurement. It is essential for Audit purposes to ensure that Kilkenny County Council is adhering to procurement guidelines	Yes
Design Consultant Report	Design Consultant report from HLM Architects included: Project Brief, Site Location, Existing Building Analysis, Design Concept early stage/final, Design Concept - Interiors, Appearance, Training Tower Yard, Landscape DAC & Fire Consultant Reports & Drawings	Yes
Details on Project Expenditure on Agresso FMS	Financial monitoring of projects and compliance with budgets	Yes
Correspondence from NDFEM	Confirmation of approval in principle and details of recoupment of funding from NDFEM	Yes
Presentations/updates to NDFEM/ Council Management and Elected Members on project progress	Ensure that NDFEM/ Council Management & Elected Members are kept up to date with progress on the construction of the new Fire & Rescue Services HQ	Yes

Data Availability and Proposed Next Steps

The necessary data is available on file to evaluate the acquisition of a suitable site and construction of the new Kilkenny County Council's Fire & Rescue Services HQ. The project is currently 'being incurred' by Kilkenny County Council and approval in principle is in place from NDFEM for the project at a cost of €10.5m. The documents and reports that were undertaken for the project thus far are available on file. The financial management information is available from Agresso (Financial Management System).

The building design is largely complete and the next step is to apply for Planning Permission (Part 8). Kilkenny County Council Management are still in negotiations regarding the site acquisition. While a Contract had been in place for the acquisition of the site the Vendor rescinded the Contract. While this is challenging, Kilkenny County Council Management are progressing the site acquisition as a matter of urgency.

Section B - Step 5: Key Evaluation Questions

The following section looks at the key evaluation questions for Kilkenny County Council's Fire & Rescue Services new HQ project based on the findings from the previous sections of this report.

Does the delivery of the project/programme comply with the standards set out in the Public Spending Code? (Appraisal Stage, Implementation Stage and Post-Implementation Stage)

The delivery of Kilkenny County Council's Fire & Rescue Services new HQ complies with the broad principles of the Public Spending Code and Infrastructure Guidelines. The project is in the early Appraisal Stage progressing towards the next step which is the completion of the building design brief and then applying for Planning Permission (Part 8).

Is the necessary data and information available such that the project/programme can be subjected to a full evaluation at a later date?

The necessary data and information are available on file should there be a requirement for a full evaluation of the project in the future.

What improvements are recommended such that future processes and management are enhanced?

Kilkenny County Council's Fire & Rescue Services is working closely with NDFEM, which is the Approving Authority for this project. It is essential that this collaboration is continued as it allows the Approving Authority advance knowledge of proposals and creates the opportunity for Kilkenny County Council, the Sponsoring Agency, to receive feedback on proposals as they are developed and streamlines the project lifecycle and approval process.

During the course of this In Depth Check the documentation for the project had to be retrieved from multiple sources. I would recommend for ease of Audit and future evaluations if required that one repository for all the project files is put in place. This will ensure efficiency and allow for the sharing of information in real time. One repository will help to ensure data consistency and accuracy and provide stakeholders with a clear understanding of project progress.

Section: In-Depth Check Summary

The following section presents a summary of the findings of this In-Depth Check on Kilkenny County Council's Fire & Rescue Services new HQ.

Summary of In-Depth Check

Overall, I find that Kilkenny County Council's Fire & Rescue Services new HQ complies with the broad principles of the Public Spending Code and adheres to the Infrastructure Guidelines. The Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government through the NDFEM have granted approval in principle and funding in the amount of €10.5 million to progress the project. This funding forms part of the €328.5m Fire Services Capital Programme (2026-2030), the largest ever investment in fire and emergency services in the history of the State.

Kilkenny County Council is in the early stages of this project. The Design Brief for the project is progressing and the Council will soon be in a position to apply for Planning Permission (Part 8). The solution to the challenge of the acquisition of a suitable site is of utmost importance at this stage and Kilkenny County Council Management are actively engaging to complete this acquisition as a matter of urgency.

Kilkenny Fire & Rescue Services identified the need for a new Fire HQ to serve the people and communities of Kilkenny. The option of building on the existing site or extending the building is not feasible. The benefits of the new Fire & Rescue Services HQ in Kilkenny will include improved emergency response, increased capacity and enhanced facilities. The investment is part of a larger programme that aims to support fire services across the region, ensuring infrastructure is in place for the future. Overall, the new HQ will reinforce public safety in Kilkenny and protect critical infrastructure and essential services.