

OPR-AILG Planning Training Webinar for Elected Members February 2022

‘Local Authority Planning Functions and Water Services Investment: Ensuring a Co-ordinated Approach’ Q&A Responses

Introduction:

A number of questions that elected members raised during the course of the February 2022 training webinar could not be answered during the ‘live’ Q&A session due to time constraints. However, responses to all questions have been collated and responses are set out hereunder. We would like to re-emphasise that the Minister and his Department are responsible for planning policy and responses should be considered in the context of the explanations of same.

Question from Elected Member	Answer
<p>How can Irish Water encourage domestic water users to conserve water?</p>	<p>The Irish Water website has many tips for domestic customers to encourage responsible use of water, and Irish Water social media accounts do a lot of messaging to push people towards the advice on the website. During the winter the outbound messaging to Irish Water consumers focused seasonally relevant messaging, including tips on how to avoid leaks due to burst pipes in cold weather. The spring/summer outbound communications will primarily focus on water conservation tips in the home and garden. Local authorities have been very supportive of Irish Water’s media conservation campaigns by amplifying these water conservation campaigns on their own social channels, with co-ordination through the LGMA.</p> <p>Irish Water has also developed a Water Conservation Calculator that is due to go ‘live’ on the Irish Water website shortly. This will help people to appreciate their water usage and learn about ways to make savings.</p> <p>Irish Water uses the continuous flow alarms retrieved from the quarterly automatic meter reading to feed into the First Fix Free programme. Irish Water alerts high-usage domestic customers that there is a continuous flow (leak) alarm from their meter and offers a free survey. Many customers act on this notice to repair leaks and conserve water.</p>

	<p>Irish Water recognises that the Recast Drinking Water Directive will be transposed into Irish Law within 12 months, and this will require more information about water use (inter alia) to be provided to customers. This will help customers to manage water use.</p> <p>Irish Water will continue to work on initiatives into the future to support demand management in partnership with other stakeholders.</p>
<p>I have received representation from a number of residents complaining about the costs quoted by Irish Water for a connection. A farmer and a private resident were quoted over €70,000 for a connection. This is totally prohibitive. How will Irish Water resolve this issue?</p>	<p>The Irish Water Connection Charging Policy was developed and submitted to the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) for consultation and approved on December 18th, 2018. This is the first National Connection Charging Policy. This policy went live on 1st of April, 2019.</p> <p>Irish Water charges customers for connections in line with section 5 of the Water Charges plan and in conjunction with the Irish Water Connection Charging Policy. Standard charges apply for the majority of connections. For domestic connections, within standard parameters, the associated standard charge is €2,272 for Water and €3,929 for Wastewater.</p> <p>Where Irish Water has assessed the connection application and determined that an extension will be required to the existing mains and/or sewer in order to accommodate the connection a quotable charge will apply. The connection charge and quotable charge covers the cost of the works required to complete the connection beyond the standard parameters. All works are completed in accordance with Irish Water Codes of Practice and Standard details.</p> <p>Where connections are being sought in areas where there is no public network Irish Water welcomes applications from customers or developers who come together to make applications so that the cost can be shared so the burden is not placed on a single customer.</p> <p>Irish Water recommends early engagement via the free Pre-Connection Enquiry process to establish their ability to service the proposed connection. Customers can submit a request to this process prior to applying for planning permission or construction via the Irish Water</p>

	<p>website. Irish Water will then assess its ability to service the proposed development and respond.</p>
<p>Why are water connections in Donegal (so expensive)? People simply can't afford such high prices?</p>	<p>The Irish Water Connection Charging Policy went live on 1st of April, 2019. The Policy is based on Standard Connection Parameters and Standard Connection Charges for the majority of Connections. Some Connections may inevitably have additional Quotable Charge elements, dependent on customer specific load or volume requirements, site specific factors and distance from the network.</p> <p>Standard charges are €2,272 for water and €3,929 for wastewater. Where connections are being sought in areas where there is no public network, depending on the technical feasibility, a network extension will be required. A quotable charge applies to cover the cost of the works required beyond the standard parameters. All works are completed in accordance with Irish Water Codes of Practice and Standard details.</p>
<p>The Killeel GWS in Co. Kildare has arsenic well above the safe limit and a "do not drink" notice is in place. Kildare Co Council have done trojan work to help the 55 odd families affected. It seems the only solution is to get a connection to the public water supply - which at best will take 18 months- yet Irish Water refuse to discuss the provision of a tanker for the affected families. The tanker will cost €1,000 per week and the GWS do not have the money. Can someone in the Department please ask Irish Water to be proactive on this problem and request the required funding to alleviate the hardship on the families? It looks like €75k will be needed as a minimum.</p>	<p>The Department of Housing, Local, Government and Heritage (DHLGH) confirmed that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the water supply in the Killeel area of County Kildare is provided by Killeel Group Water Scheme. - In the interest of public health, Kildare County Council, as the supervisory authority for private water supplies, issued a 'Do Not Consume Notice' to all users of this supply on the 6th January this year. The notice prohibited the use of the water supply for either drinking purposes or for the preparation of food. - As this is a private supply primary responsibility for its resolution rests with the management of the supply. <p>Kildare County Council confirmed to the DHLGH that they are continuing to work with the management of the supply to assist it in addressing its water quality issue. Initial assessments by Kildare County Council suggest that finding a solution in the short term is likely to be challenging. Given the public health concerns the DHLGH asked Kildare County Council to examine and report back on</p>

	<p>the most appropriate approaches for resolving the issues with the supply looking at solutions in the short, medium and longer term.</p> <p>In the short term Kildare County Council will examine the options for providing, or enabling, a temporary water supply for the area using a tanker. The DHLGH will consider funding for this once Kildare County Council report back. For clarity the provision of a temporary supply using a tanker is not a matter for Irish Water.</p> <p>In the medium term the DHLGH has asked Kildare County Council to examine the feasibility of providing a supply using an alternative groundwater source. Kildare County Council after getting expert advice, will provide the DHLGH with an initial assessment on the feasibility of doing this in the coming weeks.</p> <p>The more sustainable longer term solution for the supply appears to be its interconnection to the public (Irish Water) network and taking in charge. To initiate this Kildare County Council, on behalf of the supply, submitted (on 09/02/2022) a Pre-connection Enquiry to Irish Water. Given the public health concerns with the supply the DHLGH separately requested Irish Water to prioritise the enquiry. Irish Water have confirmed to the DHLGH that they will treat the evaluation of the application as a 'high priority' and will reply to Kildare County Council quickly. Once Kildare County Council receives a reply from Irish Water they will be in a position to consider the taking in charge option further.</p> <p>The DHLGH will continue to engage with Kildare County Council on the matter of the water supply in Kiltel. Kildare County Council will provide the DHLGH with regular updates on progress.</p>
<p>What is Irish Water's plan for taking ownership of water and sewerage infrastructure in private estates taken in charge by local authorities?</p>	<p>The Taking in Charge (TIC) of residential estates is primarily the statutory responsibility of the planning authority, under Section 180 of the Planning and Development Act 2000. In accordance with existing Government policy guidelines Irish Water is co-operating with planning authorities to assess the taking in charge of residential estates and the transfer of water services assets in these estates to Irish Water for on-going operation and maintenance.</p>

	<p>Department Circular PL5/14 of November 2014 and the subsequent Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which Irish Water has with individual local authorities (LA's) covers this issue.</p> <p>All local authorities are working in collaboration with Irish Water in respect of the TIC of residential estates in accordance with the signed MoU and protocols leading to the transfer of water services infrastructure assets within the estates to Irish Water.</p>
<p>Is it possible to find out what the results of that priority exercise by the local authorities was, where is it available?</p>	<p>Nationally, 212 small towns and villages were nominated for funding under the Small Towns and Villages Growth Programme (STVGP). As this list of nominations was provided by the local authorities, elected members should contact individual local authorities to obtain a list of the settlements that were proposed by them.</p> <p>To date, Irish Water has announced 37 projects under the programme, to an estimated value of €140M (based on current estimates, noting these estimates are refined as projects move through their phases and gates). A limited number of additional projects may be announced over the next year as cost estimates for the projects announced to date are further refined.</p> <p>Looking forward, a number of investment cycles will be required to address all the identified capacity deficits, and Irish Water plans to continue the STVGP into the next investment period (2025-2029) and beyond to achieve this (subject to the regulatory approvals process). During the current Investment Plan period (2020-2024) Irish Water will continue to undertake detailed assessments of settlements nominated (focussing on the higher priority sites) to enable them to continue to deliver projects under this programme into the next investment period. Local authorities will be given the opportunity to update their priority list in 2023. Irish Water expects to provide a view of their medium term plans into the next investment plan period as part of their public consultation for the 2025-2029 investment period (RC4).</p> <p>A list of the projects announced can be found in Appendix A attached. Irish Water are currently</p>

	<p>working to progress these projects through the various delivery stages. The delivery of many of these projects will span into the next investment period (2025-2029). Updates on delivery timelines will be provided as the projects progress to the individual local authorities.</p> <p>It should also be noted that projects nominated under the STVGP may be delivered and funded under existing national programmes in the current investment programme, based on prioritisation today within those programmes e.g. WWTP upgrade where there is a priority compliance need identified.</p> <p>Summary of the 37 projects announced to date can be found in the appendix A to this list of questions</p>
<p>I'd agree with Niall that we have unprecedented tools to work with regarding regeneration of our rural settlements, coupled with the boost Covid has given to the decoupling of work from place, but we are hamstrung by the RSES and NPF. Is it planned to be reviewed? And given that most if not all of the CDPs will be finished, does it not mean many rural counties will miss out on the opportunity?</p>	<p>There are ample opportunities to not only support but encourage the sustainable development of rural villages and towns through the National Planning Framework (NPF) and Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES).</p> <p>Planning involves making real choices in how and where to prioritise growth in combination with anticipated and planned infrastructural capacity and the capacity of our environment.</p> <p>Within the broad framework of the NPF/RSES and national and regional projections of population change, (which projections are regularly updated and will be following the 2022 census) your development plan core strategy is where those choices are made.</p> <p>Strategic planning policies, as above, broadly encourage a balanced approach in regional, urban and rural development terms with a major focus on activating the use of vacant urban lands and empty buildings to reduce our environmental “footprint”.</p> <p>Clear planning policies based on setting realistic amounts and distribution of zoned land, strong and practical active land management actions (CPO and other property acquisition for key “stuck” sites and empty buildings), and prioritising development of rural villages and</p>

	<p>towns over widespread building in the countryside are the signs of a development plan putting sustainable development into practice.</p> <p>Development plan core strategies are one step but in many cases local area plans and village plans will be the next steps in putting in place strong planning policies to sustainably guide the development of rural villages and towns.</p>
<p>Good quality water in our rivers, streams and seas won't improve without sorting rural housing policy. It would be very easy to sell rural nodes if we knew the proper state investment would follow. Sites need to be designated, services provided by Irish Water, power, broadband, rural transport links, crèche facilities, paths, lighting etc etc. this is absent from the local authority side. We need their vision and expertise to help us convince our constituents that this is a good thing! It can't be left up to private developers.</p>	<p>This point is well made.</p> <p>As a country with a long tradition and culture of a lived in landscape and rural countryside, planning for the future is key if we are to reconcile the demands such living is increasingly placing on our environment.</p> <p>There are many parts of rural Ireland where, for example, the provision of individual septic tanks and percolation areas in any concentration is likely to lead to serious water pollution over time.</p> <p>Clustered or nodal development around the structure of existing small rural towns and villages that dot every part of rural Ireland is one alternative, as long as these locations can themselves support water services that do not pollute as well as other key infrastructures.</p> <p>Developer-led approaches to infrastructure failed during the so called celtic-tiger era. So, it is correct to say that, through a plan and local authority-led approach, serviced sites, in sustainably serviced rural locations, are the way forward.</p> <p>As the presentations outlined, with many hundreds of presently un-sewered rural villages, it is not realistic to expect that all can be attended to at the same or over a short time.</p> <p>That said, Government has indicated its willingness to support a carefully phased programme of investment in each local authority area.</p> <p>Therefore, if each development plan strongly committed to a series of demonstration projects, these could be added to over time as long as the uptake of investment made by Government</p>

	<p>can be seen to be working through effectively managed rural planning policies that actively direct people wanting to build rural homes towards these nodes.</p> <p>Your development plan is going to be the key to putting in place such initiatives by picking the appropriate locations and then backing them up with policies that signal to prospective applicants in those areas that such locations are where there rural housing needs can best be met from an environmental and long-term planning perspective.</p>
<p>Difficult to get responses from Irish Water to queries submitted via local representatives email facility.</p>	<p>Irish Water has confirmed that they are committed to providing an excellent level of customer service and communication to all their customers and stakeholders.</p> <p>Irish Water provides an extensive number of channels for their customers dependant on their query and/or concern and there is also the facility of an emergency 24/7, 365 helpline for any urgent matters relating to faults or disruptions on the public network.</p> <p>Irish Water contact centre agents complete extensive training before they progress to managing customer calls. There are multiple support mechanisms in place to resolve customers issues and Irish Water’s Regional and Local Engineers on the ground can provide commentary directly into Irish Water’s system with information on issues that Irish Water’s contact centre can access directly once added by the local authority. In addition to this, Irish Water has a highly experienced engineer based within the contact centre to provide support in the resolution of technical issues. This engineer’s extensive knowledge is leveraged on an ongoing basis to further enhance training content. In addition to this, Irish Water’s agents receive one to one coaching on a regular basis to improve the service they provide and these coaching sessions also facilitate feedback on areas of improvement.</p> <p>Irish Water also provides a dedicated service for Public Representatives nationwide. These services are provided to local elected representatives to ensure efficient and effective triage and resolution of any queries. For Local</p>

Representatives, the Local Representative Support Desk is open Monday to Friday (excluding Bank Holidays), between the hours of 09:00 to 17:30. Irish Water’s dedicated team can be contacted either by telephone on 0818 178178 & email at localrepsupport@water.ie.

The LRSD team receive prioritised support from across the Irish Water business and have direct relationships with the Regional Engineers so that information from the ground can be gathered and fed back where necessary.

The services provided by the team to assist local representatives include:

- Dedicated telephone line
- Dedicated email address
- Small team to allow Irish Water staff to build working relationships with representatives.
- Mass communications of any press releases or urgent updates concerning elected members constituency or surrounding areas.

Councillor Clinics

Irish Water is committed to working openly and transparently with elected representatives at both local and national level. As per above the utility provides a dedicated support desk to respond to queries across all Irish Water departments.

Irish Water also provides support at a local level to councillors through regularly scheduled councillor clinics, where utility personnel are available to answer queries face-to-face and discuss local issues raised, as well as broader changes that impact at a national level.

Councillor clinics are scheduled by Irish Water’s local Communications Specialists in each area and in coordination with the Local Authority (LA) to ensure suitability of time. Since the onset of the Covid—19 pandemic, Councillor Clinics have been successfully running via Zoom, which has facilitated greater participation from Irish Water technical experts.

Councillors are requested to submit their questions in advance of the clinics to ensure the

	<p>appropriate Irish Water/LA personnel are in attendance, or that answers to specific questions are available at the clinic.</p> <p>For questions that arise on the day and can't be answered immediately, these are followed up by the Communications Specialist and replied to in the days following the clinic, via the Local Representative Support Desk (LRSD).</p> <p>The clinics are organised, managed and chaired by the relevant Irish Water Communications Specialist for the area and are supported by the local Asset Operations staff. Depending on the queries submitted, other technical experts from Irish Water may be invited to attend.</p> <p>On occasion, presentations on topical issues are provided at the clinic by Irish Water technical staff and this is added to the clinic agenda and invitation.</p> <p>Outside of Councillor Clinics, elected representatives can raise any queries they have as follows: The Local Representative Support Desk Email: localrepsupport@water.ie or phone 0818 178 178. Staff are available Monday – Friday from 9am to 5.30pm to deal with queries from elected representatives about any topic related to Irish Water. Outside these hours, the 24/7 customer care line is available for urgent queries at 1800 278 278.</p>
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Appendix A: List of 37 Projects Funded under Irish Water’s Small Towns and Villages Growth Programme