

Minutes of the Meeting of the Water Advisory Body

Thursday 1 October 2020 11:30am

Venue: Remote Meeting via WebEx Video Conferencing

Attended by:

Chairperson Paul McGowan

Members Miriam McDonald Michelle Minihan
Martin Sisk

Secretariat John McCarthy Colin Flood
Darren Browne

By Invite: Donal Purcell

1. Minutes of previous meetings

a) 9 July 2020 with Department of Water Services;

The minutes of this meeting were approved with one minor amendment.

b) 4 September 2020 with Irish Water;

The minutes of this meeting were agreed following some amendments. The minutes will be circulated with Irish Water (IW) for comment and approval.

c) 4 September Main WAB Board meeting;

The minutes of this meeting were agreed following some amendments.

2. Declaration of any conflict of interest

There was no declaration of any conflict of interest.

3. Published WAB Quarterly Report NO.2 of 2020

The Chair acknowledged the efforts of the Board and Secretariat in producing the report. The board reiterated its desire to publish a third quarterly report before the end of the year. A discussion was held on the turnaround time for the report following the circulation of the

'Report Process' document. Media coverage of the report had been significant with the report mentioned in articles by the Irish Examiner, the Irish Independent and the Irish Times. The Board discussed the tone of the press release in relation to IW and reiterated the Board's intention to strike a balance and be fair. Any associated articles and responses will be stored on the Board's SharePoint site. On behalf of the WAB, the Department's communications team issued a series of tweets on the report. The Secretariat provided metrics received for these tweets and the associated traffic to the WAB website before and after the release of the report. A further discussion was held regarding communications methods as part of agenda item number 8. The Secretariat will continue to monitor responses to this report and will report back to the Board at the next meeting.

4. Planning for Report 3 of 2020.

The Board agreed that a third report should be released for 2020. The Board and Secretariat discussed a proposed timeline for receipt of data, first draft circulation, final draft review and publication.

Report Part 2 – Key Performance Indicators;

It was acknowledged that some key metrics may not be updated in this report. It was agreed that data and material would have a cut-off date of 31 October with the Secretariat receiving these from the EPA and the CRU by the 3 November. A first draft would be circulated a week before the next meeting of the WAB on 18 November. This meeting would involve reviewing the text of the draft report. The Chair will enquire as to the status of updated data from the CRU. Michelle Minihan will provide an update on the status of a Remedial Action List due to be released by the end of October. An update to the 'Ease of Contact' metrics was discussed as these currently report up to the end of 2018. However, these metrics are reported annually and it was unclear as to whether these would be published in time for the report. The Chair will enquire and inform the Secretariat.

Report Part 3 – Other Key Events;

The WAB Board held a discussion on what topics to feature in Part 3 of the report. While they acknowledge events are moving quickly and subject to change, they agreed to comment on the following:

- the imminent release of the Urban Waste Water 2019 report;
- the CRU Decision Paper on the update to Irish Water's Revenue Control 3 plan;
- Scottish Water International's recommendations to IW;
- Impact of Covid-19.

Michelle will enquire and inform the Secretariat about commenting on the key findings of the Urban Waste Water 2019 report if it has not been released by the time the Q3 report is due.

Part 4 of the report will include the Minister's letter. If a new board member is appointed before the release of the report, an update to the Board Members list and photos will be required, as will an update to the WAB website.

5. Review of Irish Water procurement procedures

The Secretariat have maintained contact with IW and they confirmed that the Stage One review is underway. They are working towards having it available for review by the end of November, but the Secretariat acknowledged that it may not be available by the next WAB meeting on 18 November. The Secretariat will discuss the approval process with IW before reverting to the WAB Board. In the meantime, the Secretariat will track progress of the Stage One review with IW. With regards Stage Two, the WAB Board are aware of the points made by IW and will revert in due course following the release of the Stage One review. The Chair will issue an invite to representatives of the CRU to attend the 7 December meeting.

6. News articles featuring the WAB

Aside from the aforementioned news articles following the release of the Q2 report, the Board discussed a recent newspaper article that referenced discussions from meeting minutes of the WAB.

7. Future WAB work programme

A discussion was held on the functions of the WAB in light of its current and future work programme. The Secretariat outlined the functions of the WAB as set out in the legislation and the level of progress made in relation to date. These are: -

(a) to advise the Minister on the measures needed to improve the transparency and accountability of Irish Water for the purpose of increasing the confidence of members of the public in Irish Water;

(b) to furnish, on a quarterly basis, a report to the Committee on the performance by Irish Water in the implementation of its business plan with particular regard to the following:

- (i) infrastructure delivery and leakage reductions;
- (ii) cost reduction and efficiency improvements;
- (iii) improvements in water quality, including the elimination of boil water notices;
- (iv) procurement, remuneration and staffing policies;
- (v) responsiveness to the needs of communities and enterprise.

In relation to (a) an advice note was issued to the Minister with the recent quarterly report.

In relation to (b) progress has been made to varying degrees with all, however further progress is needed in all but particularly item (iv).

In terms of future reports and KPIs, the members acknowledged that originally they wanted to develop a relatively small number of KPIs on which to track IW performance. The Body acknowledged their desire to remain active on as many fronts as possible. This would come in the form of work in relation to two areas:

- ‘cost reduction and efficiency improvements’ and
- ‘responsiveness to the needs of communities and enterprise’.

Previously the body had agreed to discuss developing KPIs in relation to ‘cost reduction and efficiency improvements’ following the publication of the RC3 Decision. This would also be an area that would be related to infrastructure and leakage reductions. It was agreed that when the CRU do have a meeting with the WAB a discussion could be had on potential areas where KPIs could be developed in relation to this area.

In relation to ‘responsiveness to the needs of communities and enterprise’, the Body discussed this as an area where the issue of customer service, call-centres and complaints could be examined. The possibility of the WAB undertaking a survey was also raised. The Body could carry out its own surveys and build on input from surveys carried out by the CRU and EPA. It was noted that the CRU will publish handbooks on customer service and will also publish a performance assessment framework which will set call centre targets for IW.

Suggestions of areas to zone in on included public perceptions around IW performance and the mapping of IW's customer complaints process. This would also tie in with another function of 'increasing the confidence of members of the public in Irish Water'.

With regards developing KPIs covering 'procurement, remuneration and staffing policies', given that a review is ongoing into IW procurement matters, it was agreed to wait and revisit this function following this review. In addition, the Body will revisit and discuss its function of 'advising the Minister on the measures needed to improve the transparency and accountability of Irish Water for the purpose of increasing the confidence of members of the public in Irish Water'.

The members discussed and agreed to the development of a data hub on the WAB website to facilitate tracking of key metrics over time and which would contribute to the messages the WAB deliver. It would also help in terms of transparency. This will be examined by the Secretariat in terms of capacity and the skills required.

The Body agreed that at a future meeting in the New Year they would revisit its future work programme. In the meantime, those associated with the CRU, EPA and An Fóram Uisce will pool together associated published research and reports from their respective bodies in the aforementioned areas.

8. Communications

The WAB received a letter from the Department seeking its views in the preparation for the Department's new 'Statement of Strategy' to identify key strategic issues for the 2021-2025 period. The Body agreed to respond to the letter by outlining the role of the body, to acknowledge the work of the WAB, provide some high level suggestions and to refer to the letter issued to the Minister following the release of the Quarterly Report No.2 of 2020. The Secretariat will circulate a draft response to the Body for comment before issuing.

For the release of the next Quarterly report, the Body could develop an accompanying video with the assistance of the Department. Following the aforementioned use of Twitter by the Department on the behalf of the WAB following the release of the Q2 report, the Secretariat will further investigate the possible uses that could benefit communication for the WAB.

Developments to the WAB website are ongoing. An update to the ‘Meetings’ pages is in development which will make it easier to view the minutes and presentations of meetings with key stakeholders. The Secretariat may look into the possibility of developing an Irish language version of the WAB website next year.

9. Confirm next three meeting dates

The next meeting dates were confirmed as follows:

- 18 November 2020
- 7 December 2020
- 14 January 2021 (replacing previously agreed date of 7 January 2021)

10. Any Other Business

The Secretariat will circulate an update of the Members’ and Secretariat’s contact details.

The Secretariat will also follow up on the invite to the Minister to a future WAB meeting.

The National Water Resources Plan will issue in December with the WAB considering a response when published.

The Body wished to record their thanks to former member Dr Tom Collins for his excellent and insightful input to the bodies various deliberations and who has been incredibly dedicated to the area of water as a human right and how it is delivered across Ireland. The Minister will also record his thanks to former member Dr Tom Collins.

The meeting was brought to a close.

Agenda Item No:	Action	Decision
1.	Amendment to minutes.	<p>Amendments agreed to meeting minutes of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) 4 September Main WAB Board meeting; b) 4 September 2020 with Irish Water; c) 9 July 2020 with Department of Water Services;
3.	Quarterly Report No.2 of 2020	Any associated articles and responses will be stored on the Boards SharePoint site.
4.	Quarterly Report No.3 of 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data and material would have a cut-off date of 31 October. • Secretariat receive data and material from the EPA and the CRU by the 3 November. • A first draft would be circulated a week before the next meeting of the WAB on 18 November. This meeting would involve reviewing the text of the draft report. • For the release of the next Quarterly report, the Body could develop an accompanying video with the assistance of the Department.
4.	Quarterly Report No.3 of 2020 - Report Part 2 – Key Performance Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Chair will enquire as to the status of updated data from the CRU. • Michelle Minihan will enquire on the status of a Remedial Action List due to be released by the end of October. • The Chair will enquire about an update to the ‘Ease of Contact’ metrics and inform the Secretariat.

4.	Quarterly Report No.3 of 2020 - Report Part 3 – Other Key Events	<p>The Body agreed to comment on the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the imminent release of the Urban Waste Water 2019 report; 2. the CRU Decision Paper on the update to Irish Water's Revenue Control 3 plan; 3. Scottish Water International's recommendations to IW. 4. Impact of Covid-19. <p>Michelle will enquire and inform the Secretariat about commenting on the key findings of the Urban Waste Water 2019 report if it has not been released by the time the Q3 report is due.</p>
4.	Quarterly Report No.3 of 2020 – Part 4 and Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will include the Ministers letter. • If a new board member is appointed before the release of the report, an update to the Board Members list and photos will be required, as will an update to the WAB website.
5.	Review of Irish Water procurement procedures	The Chair will issue an invite to representatives of the CRU to attend the 7 December meeting.
7.	Future WAB work programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was agreed that when the CRU do have a meeting with the WAB that they could discuss potential areas where 'cost reduction and efficiency improvements' KPIs could be developed. • Those associated with the CRU, EPA and An Fóram Uisce will pool together associated published research and reports from their respective bodies and discuss further at a future WAB meeting.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Given that a review is ongoing into IW procurement matters, it was agreed to wait and revisit this function following this review. This Secretariat will examine in terms of capacity and the skills required to undertake a data hub.
8.	'Statement of Strategy' letter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Body agreed to respond to the letter by outlining the role of the body, to acknowledge the work of the WAB, provide some high level suggestions and to refer to the letter issued to the Minister following the release of the Quarterly Report No.2 of 2020. The Secretariat will circulate a draft response to the Body for comment before issuing.
10.	AOB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Secretariat will circulate an update of the Members' and Secretariat's contact details. The Secretariat will also follow up on the invite to the Minister to a future WAB meeting.