



**Minutes of the meeting between Irish Water and the Water Advisory Body**

**Tuesday 15 June 2021, 2pm**

Venue: Remote Meeting via WebEx Video Conferencing

Attended by:

Chairperson Paul McGowan

Members Miriam McDonald Michelle Minihan  
Martin Sisk Dónal Purcell

Secretariat Neill Dalton Darren Browne

By Invite: Eamon Gallen Florence White  
Orlaith Blaney Yvonne Harris

Apologies: Colin Flood

**1. Introduction**

The representatives of Irish Water were welcomed to the meeting by the WAB Chairperson before introductions were exchanged.

**2. Irish Water Presentation**

Irish Water presented to the WAB members on the following topics:

- Customer Operations Overview;

- Customer Experience Measurement;
- Key Customer Survey Metrics;
- Commercial Customer Satisfaction and Sentiment Metrics;
- Customer Operations Satisfaction and Sentiment Metrics;
- Enhancing their Customer Experience Programme;
- B&A Consumer Brand sentiment Survey;
- B&A Business Customer Survey;
- Water Conservation Survey Highlights; and
- Story of Water Research Highlights

### **3. Questions/Discussion on Irish Water Presentation to the WAB**

The following questions were asked by the WAB members:

**i. What is meant by measuring ‘sentiment’?**

Irish Water Customer Operations Sentiment Metrics measures if a customer is more ‘Positive, Negative or Neutral’ after their interaction with Irish Water. Irish Water Brand Sentiment Survey measures wider public perception of Irish Water.

**ii. With regards to the ‘Trust and Confidence’ metrics, how do you compare to your peers in that regard and what are your aspirations?**

Irish Water is pleased with the recovery from its lowest score of 16 in 2014 to its highest score of 52 in 2021. This is especially so as advertising or communication campaigns do not focus on this aspect of sentiment. Irish Water’s aim is to reach scores of late 50’s and early 60’s for trust and confidence, similar to other utilities. It was acknowledged that this would be a difficult task and may be more achievable if Irish Water became a Single Public Utility resulting in greater visibility of the work of Irish Water.

- iii. How have you been approaching communication issues arising from knock-on effects resulting from works beginning in one location which then impact a wider area? The recent case of water discolouration across Limerick City was cited as an example.**

Irish Water explained that as leakage works take place it can result in pressure being distributed to other parts of the water network which subsequently result in outages due to burst pipes at weaker points in the network. In terms of communications, Irish Water confirmed it works closely with the Health Service Executive and the Environmental Protection Agency around 'Boil Water Notices' and now provides location specific information on ongoing works on its website. In the case of all planned or unplanned disruptions to water supplies communications are delivered by Irish Water to customers through all available channels including website, social media, press releases to print and broadcast media and updates to elected representatives through the Elected Report Desk at our contact centre. Spokespeople are made available for interview as needed. Formal communications are also provided by the local authority. It was acknowledged that despite a dedicated number for the Irish Water Contact Centre being provided to the public, on occasion customers may instead seek information from local authority representatives. This may result in differing messages being received. The Limerick incident has demonstrated the importance of informing all relevant customers before works take place which is the normal practice for Irish Water. At the same time Irish Water is encouraging new commercial customers to inform them when they move into a new premises and of their industry, so that their supply can be protected if possible.

- iv. Are Irish Water considering being more proactive in communicating issues rather than being reactive? A recent example of water discolouration across Dundalk was cited.**

Irish Water explained that communications with the public can be challenging as initial communications take place with different stakeholders such as the Environmental Protection Agency, Health Service Executive and media. Communications are issued

proactively at all times within areas affected notifying them of planned or emergency works or disturbances in supply. These are issued to local representatives, through media outlets and online. It was acknowledged that feedback from specific incidents can also inform potential areas for improvement in this area.

**v. Recently nine complaints were upheld by the Commission for Regulation of Utilities, what lessons will be learned going forward?**

Irish Water employs a continuous learning lessons loop for all complaints. Before a complaint reaches the Commission for Regulation of Utilities, there is a process where the complaint has to go to the customer complaints manager. This allows a further opportunity for resolution and any learnings to be identified. Following this, if a complaint goes to the Regulator and is upheld a further assessment of lessons learned is carried out by Irish Water.

*Please reference WAB presentation deck 'Irish Water Customer Surveys'*

**vi. In communication terms, how do you handle Boil Water Notices and do you track customer satisfaction in terms of market research?**

Irish Water confirmed ongoing efforts to reduce areas affected by Boil Water Notices. It was confirmed that Boil Water Notices are enacted quickly on Health Service Executive advice.

Irish Water confirmed it has a defined set of steps for communicating Boil Water Notices. Once the affected premises are identified, advertisements are placed on all communication channels including the Irish Water website, local radio stations and social media. A specific process for vulnerable customers is also followed, whereby SMS text alerts advising re Boil Water Notices are issued.

Irish Water prioritises its internal review processes for the purposes of improving customer satisfaction, rather than surveying customers specifically around Boil Water Notices. It was noted that the Commission for Regulation of Utilities is carrying out an external audit following the “Do Not Consume” notice issued in Bailieborough, Co. Cavan.

- vii. **The presentation referred to commercial statistics up to the end of 2020, would you have performance figures for 2021?**

Irish Water confirmed they will supply the Secretariat with the most up to date data following the meeting. Also included will be 2021 ‘Net Easy’ data.

- viii. **Do you have a percentage on First Call resolution?**

Irish Water stated it is becoming more difficult to measure First Call Resolution due to increased self-service options via the website.

- ix. **Do you do any operational research on customers who are not in contact and would they be filtered by those who have contacted Irish Water over a period of time?**

This is an area that overlaps with the ‘Trust and Confidence’ survey measuring behaviour, attitudes and sentiments to Irish Water. Respondents are not filtered by contact with Irish Water.

- x. **Do you envisage communications changing if Irish Water becomes a Single Public Utility company and would you envisage any related communication challenges?**

Irish Water stated from a customer point of view it is their desire to have direct communication with customers to further enhance the current situation of communication through a range of broad channels. Part of this process will be to ensure that all customers nationally are provided with services through standard

operating procedures and have full visibility of Irish Water at the point of contact for service delivery, e.g. Consistent Irish Water branding for all vehicles, Irish Water signage at all offices and standard Irish Water staff ID and PPE (personal protective equipment, e.g. Hard Hats, high viz jackets etc.) as appropriate for all Irish Water staff across the country. Tariff harmonisation for non-domestic customers is due to be implemented from October 2021.

The WAB Board thanked Irish Water for its presentation and the answers provided to the Board.

**The meeting was brought to a close.**