



QUARTERLY REPORT

No. 2 of 2022

2

August 2022

Web: www.wateradvisorybody.ie

Email: info@wab.gov.ie

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Foreword

Welcome to the second Quarterly Report of 2022 by the Water Advisory Body (the WAB).

▼
Paul McGowan *Chairperson*

In this report we highlight changes to 7 of 13 Performance Indicators.

We use these Performance Indicators to monitor how well Irish Water is performing. We also review reports produced by the Environmental Protection Agency (“EPA”) and the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (“CRU”).

The WAB published the results of a survey of Irish customers in May 2022, which targeted Irish Water customers living in areas which recently had issues with their water supply. It looked at Irish Water’s communication in terms of clarity, timeliness, efficiency, professionalism, and overall experience. The survey also attempted to gauge how this group of customers (both residential and business) would like to be communicated with in the future. Detailed information on the results of the survey can be found in section 3.1 of this Report.

In May 2022 the EPA published the Bathing Water Quality report for 2021. Overall, bathing water quality has continued to improve in 2021. Of the 148 identified bathing waters assessed, 144 (97%) met or exceeded the minimum required standard of “Sufficient”. Two bathing waters were classified as “Poor” in 2021, two fewer than in 2020. The local authorities with “Poor” bathing waters have management plans in place to address the issues.

Finally, I note the very recent publication (12 July 2022) of the Water Services (Amendment)(No. 2) Bill 2022 which would establish Uisce Éireann (Irish Water) as the standalone national authority for water services. We will return to this in our next quarterly report.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul McGowan', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Paul McGowan
Chairperson of the Water Advisory Body

Executive Summary

This is the tenth quarterly report published by the WAB, and the second report of 2022.

The WAB was established on 1 June 2018. The purpose of the WAB is to advise the Minister on measures needed to improve the transparency and accountability of Irish Water and to report on a quarterly basis to an Oireachtas Committee on the performance by Irish Water in the implementation of its Strategic Funding Plan.

A set of performance indicators has been selected to represent the activity of Irish Water in relation to the performance of its functions. Data in respect of these indicators is collated and published as part of the Quarterly Reports of the WAB in order to provide objective information on Irish Water's performance. This information is relevant to Irish Water itself, to track its own performance over time, but also to further inform both the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage and the Oireachtas on the performance of Irish Water.

A detailed explanation of each key performance indicator can be found in the Appendix to this Report.

The information published within this report is accurate as of 24 June 2022.

The following findings from the report are of note, with specific reference to the 7 Key Performance Indicators that have been updated since the last report.

Priority Urban Area List (Wastewater)

The number of priority areas reduced from 148 in 2017 to 92 in 2022. Nine areas were removed from the list in the 2022 update and four were added. The priority areas were updated in Q2 2022 using the most up to date information available at that time. This includes the number of areas discharging raw sewage in Q2 2022 and the number of areas that did not meet the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive standards for the calendar year 2021. It is important to note that a single agglomeration, the Greater Dublin Area served by Ringsend treatment plant, accounts for approximately 2.23 million or three quarters of the total population equivalent served by priority areas. Work is underway to upgrade and improve treatment at Ringsend and is expected to be complete in 2025.

Lead service connections replaced

During Quarter 1 2022, Irish Water replaced 1,607 lead service connections. The target for 2022 is greater than 10,000 replacements and the target for the five-year term of Revenue Control Period 3 (2020-2024) set by Irish Water in December 2019 is to replace 13,231 lead connections.

The WAB notes that progress has slowed significantly when compared to the progress made during 2019. Replacement of lead connections recommenced in Quarter 3 2020 following restrictions imposed due to COVID 19 and a stimulus package from Government during 2020 allowed some additional funding to be allocated towards lead connection replacements towards the end of 2020.

Of the 43,173 lead connections which have been replaced to date, 10,781 are shared or back yard services and 32,392 are individual public side services.

The WAB notes that Irish Water has continued to encounter difficulties in accessing shared and backyard service replacements. Some homeowners have refused to sign the necessary consent forms for works to be carried out on private property. Irish Water continues to engage with these homeowners to get these consent forms signed and the WAB strongly encourages this, in the interests of public health.

With an increased budget for 2022, the WAB welcomes the fact that Irish Water expects to significantly increase lead service connections replacements to greater than 10,000 this year.

Unplanned Interruptions to Water Supply

In 2020, out of all properties connected to Irish Water's network, Irish Water estimated that 20.4% of properties experienced an unplanned interruption for greater than 12 hours. Irish Water has been set a target of less than 12% of connected properties to be impacted by end 2024. It is currently on track to meet this target. Irish Water also estimated that 7.6% of all properties connected to Irish Water's network experienced an unplanned interruption for greater than 24 hours in 2020. Irish Water has been set a target of less than 3.6% of connected properties to be impacted by end 2024. As the number of properties impacted for greater than 24 hours in 2020 has gone up since the baseline (set at 7.19%), Irish Water is not currently on track to meet this target.

Given the importance of secure and reliable water services for all connected households and businesses, the WAB looks forward to Irish Water being on track under both measures in future years.

Boil Water Notices

When Irish Water took charge of water supplies in 2014 it set a target to eliminate all boil water notices that were in place at that time. This target was achieved. The WAB's main concern now is that current and future Boil Water Notices are limited in frequency and short of duration. At the end of Quarter 1 2022, 13,579 were on boil water notices. While this is a decrease on the number at the end of the previous quarter (16,069 people), the main concern for WAB is that 20 out of 21 current notices are long-term (in excess of 30 days) which means they could not be addressed quickly and require significant investment by Irish Water.

Agglomerations with no Wastewater Treatment

In 2013, there were 50 agglomerations in Ireland discharging untreated wastewater into the environment. Between 2014 and 2019, Irish Water had completed work at a total of 15 sites to reduce this number to 35. Irish Water has now been set a target to reduce this number to zero by 2024.

Irish Water was not targeted to provide treatment at any new sites in 2020. Nevertheless, Irish Water did reduce the number of agglomerations with no wastewater treatment by 1 (to 34) by providing treatment to a site earlier than planned. The WAB welcomes this. However, a significant concern remains over whether Irish Water will achieve the zero target by 2024.

Ease of Contact

Irish Water successfully exceeded its call abandonment target rate of 4% with a low call abandonment rate of 3% in 2020, consistent with 2019 performance. Irish Water answered 82% of calls within 20 seconds in the queue in 2020, which is consistent with its performance in 2019. However, Irish Water failed to meet the 85% target in 2020 for this metric and needs to improve its speed of telephone response performance to meet and sustain the target of 85% for the coming years up to 2024.

Irish Water achieved a customer satisfaction score of 77% in 2020, increasing on the 73% performance achieved in 2019. The WAB is pleased to note that Irish Water has met its target of an increasing trend in performance against this customer satisfaction metric.

Irish Water Customer Complaints management

Irish Water's performance declined in almost all the 'Customer Complaints management' metrics in 2020. Irish Water failed to achieve its target of 100% in the two 'Customer Complaints management' metrics in 2020. In 2020, Irish Water responded to 97.89% of domestic and 93.75% of non-domestic complaints within five working days, with either a resolution or an outline plan of the proposed resolution. This is the lowest five-day response rate for non-domestic complaints since Irish Water started reporting against this metric in 2018. Irish Water issued a final decision within two months to 94.45% of domestic and 88.82% of non-domestic customers in 2020. Irish Water's 2020 performance with complaints raised by domestic and non-domestic customers is the lowest since it first reported in 2018.

Customer service is at the core of utility delivery, and timely, effective complaints management is an important element of customer service. The WAB is disappointed to observe this level of performance in an area it would reasonably expect to see improvement year-on-year as it beds in its customer complaints processes. It is of particular concern to see deterioration in this area while at the same time recording an improvement in customer satisfaction.

Other Developments

Annual Report 2021

The WAB submitted its Annual Report 2021, which was produced in accordance with section 53 (1)(a) of the Water Services Act 2017, to the Minister for Housing, Local Government & Heritage on 29 April 2022. The Report covered the period from 1 January to 31 December 2021. It details the work undertaken by the WAB during the year and contains information on membership, expenditure, resources, publications and other relevant activities. English and Irish versions of the Annual Report can be found on the website www.wateradvisoryboard.ie.

Targeted Local Survey of Irish Water Customers

The WAB published the results of a survey of Irish customers on 5 May 2022, which targeted Irish Water customers living in areas which had recently had issues with their water supply. It looked at Irish Water's communication in terms of clarity, timeliness, efficiency, professionalism, and overall experience. The survey also attempted to gauge how this group of customers (both residential and business) would like to be communicated with in the future.

Key customer service findings of this targeted survey include:

- ▶ Two in three (66%) households experienced issues with their water in the last 6 months.
- ▶ Households are more likely to contact their County Council, rather than Irish Water, if they experience a water related issue.
- ▶ One in three households (33%) surveyed in these areas are still experiencing water issues.
- ▶ The majority of people (79%) who suffered from disruptions, were not made aware in advance that there may be disruptions/issues to their water supply.
- ▶ More than four in ten residents (45%) of these areas expect more water issues in the next few months.

Further detailed information on the results of the survey can be found in section 3.1 of this Report (Targeted Local Survey of Irish Water Customers).

In response to the survey, the WAB has invited Irish Water to discuss any insights arising from the findings of this survey and to consider actions to address the findings.

In this report the WAB also provides an overview of recent reports from the Environmental Protection Agency and the Commission for Regulation of Utilities on Bathing Water Quality in 2021, Irish Water's Performance Assessment and Capital Investment Monitoring for 2020 and the new Irish Water Disconnection and Reconnection Policy.

Part 1

Introduction

The Water Advisory Body (the WAB) is established under statute. The WAB consists of five members:



▼
Paul McGowan *Chairperson*



▼
Martin Sisk



▼
Miriam McDonald



▼
Dónal Purcell



▼
Michelle Minihan

Improving the transparency and accountability of Irish Water

Our overall function is 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. The WAB's functions are set out in the Water Services Act 2017.

Irish Water's Strategic Funding Plan is a public document and available on Irish Water's website www.water.ie. This report sets out the WAB's view on how Irish Water is performing against its Strategic Funding Plan. We use a series of performance indicators and commentaries on specific events to fulfill this requirement.

Each report is prepared for the Oireachtas and is published on the WAB's website - www.wateradvisorybody.ie.

Performance Indicators in this Report

The WAB has chosen a set of performance indicators to provide a broad view of Irish Water’s performance. The WAB will keep these performance indicators under review to make sure that they remain relevant and continue to be good measures of performance. In the accompanying Appendix, we explain each indicator and why it is important.

There are some areas of interest to the WAB where data are not available. These include cost reduction and efficiency improvements, procurement, remuneration and staffing policies of Irish Water. They also include Irish Water’s performance in terms of responsiveness to the needs of communities and enterprises.

The absence of data requires the WAB to take a different approach to measuring performance in these areas. For example, in relation to procurement, remuneration and staffing policies Irish Water commissioned an independent audit on procurement, reporting directly to the WAB. The “Review of Irish Waters procurement and contract policies and procedures to ensure compliance against PD02 and PD03” covered procurement policies and procedures with the full report available at <https://wateradvisorybody.ie/other-publications/>

Part 2

Key Performance Indicators

The WAB has selected thirteen performance indicators, each measuring the performance of Irish Water under a different heading.

These headings are:

- ▶ infrastructure delivery and leakage reduction (6 indicators);
- ▶ improvements in water quality (4 indicators);
- ▶ the responsiveness of Irish Water to the needs of communities and enterprise (2 indicators); and
- ▶ Energy and Emissions (1 indicator).

This report displays each of the thirteen performance indicators. A commentary is provided only on those performance indicators which have been updated in this Quarterly Report. Where available, the targets that Irish Water is working to in relation to each indicator are also set out.

For each indicator, the Appendix to this report includes a brief explanation of the indicator and the reason why the indicator is important.

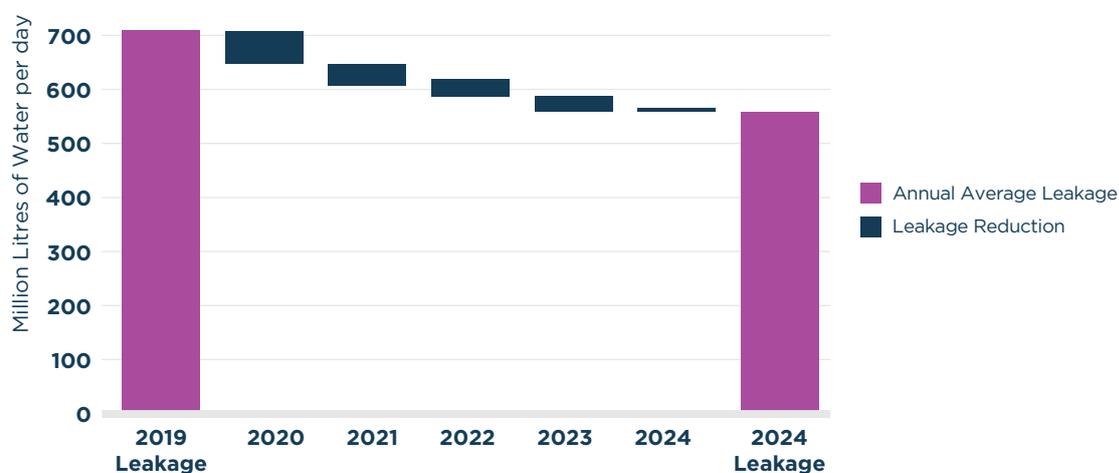
The WAB will continue to refine indicators to ensure they remain a useful measure of the performance of Irish Water.

2.1 Infrastructure Delivery and Leakage Reduction Indicators

This metric separately monitors the amount of water lost on the public network pipes and the amount of water lost on customer supply pipes. This metric has not been updated in this report. This metric was last updated in the Water Advisory Body Quarterly Report No.1 of 2022.

2.1.1 Performance Indicator 1 - Leakage

Figure 1
Public Side Leakage Reduction



The following leakage reduction targets have been placed on Irish Water to be achieved by the end of 2024:

- ▶ 161 million litres of water per day of water lost on the public network
- ▶ 15 million litres of water per day of water lost on customer supply pipes

In setting annual targets, Irish Water is to follow the targets as set out in Figure 1 for reducing public side leakage. Separately, a straight-line target has been placed on Irish Water to reduce the annual average amount of water leaking on customer supply pipes by 3 million litres of water per day, in each of the years 2020 to 2024.

2.1.2 Performance Indicator 2 - First Fix Scheme

This metric separately monitors the number of leak repairs and the combined total savings (in Megalitres/day).

This metric has not been updated in this report. This metric was last updated in the Water Advisory Body Quarterly Report No. 1 of 2022.

Figure 2

Combined total of Irish Water and Customer Leak Repairs completed half-yearly.

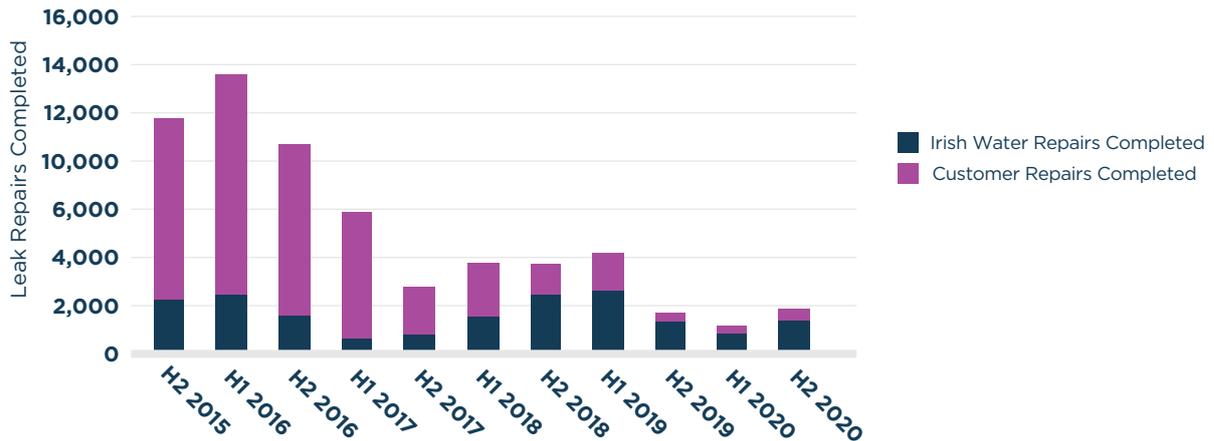
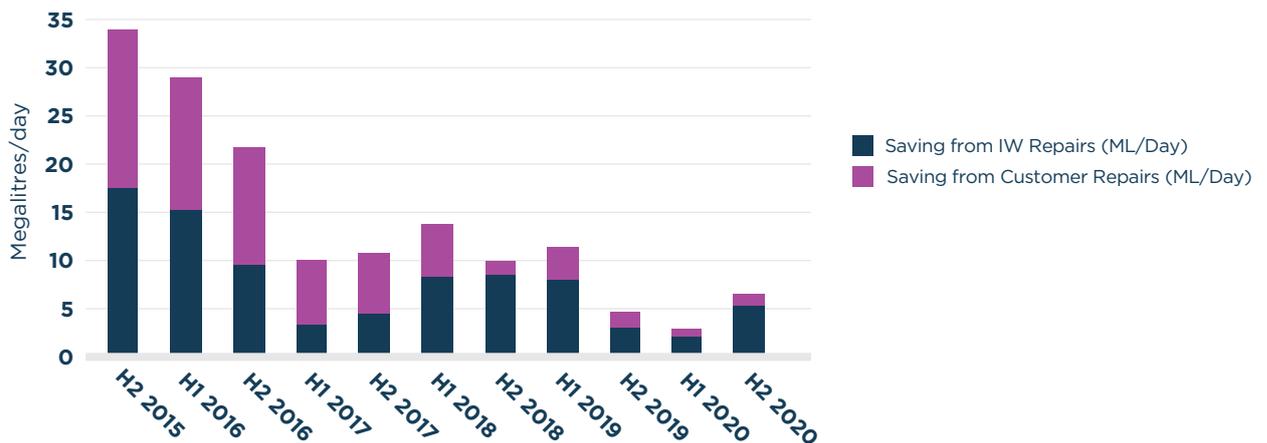


Figure 3

Combined total Savings in Megalitres/day of Irish Water and Customer Leak Repairs completed half-yearly.



Specific targets have not been set for Irish Water in respect of the First Fix Scheme. This is because availing of a leak investigation and possible First Fix requires a good level of customer engagement to meet any target.

2.1.3 Performance Indicator 3 - Remedial Action List (Water)

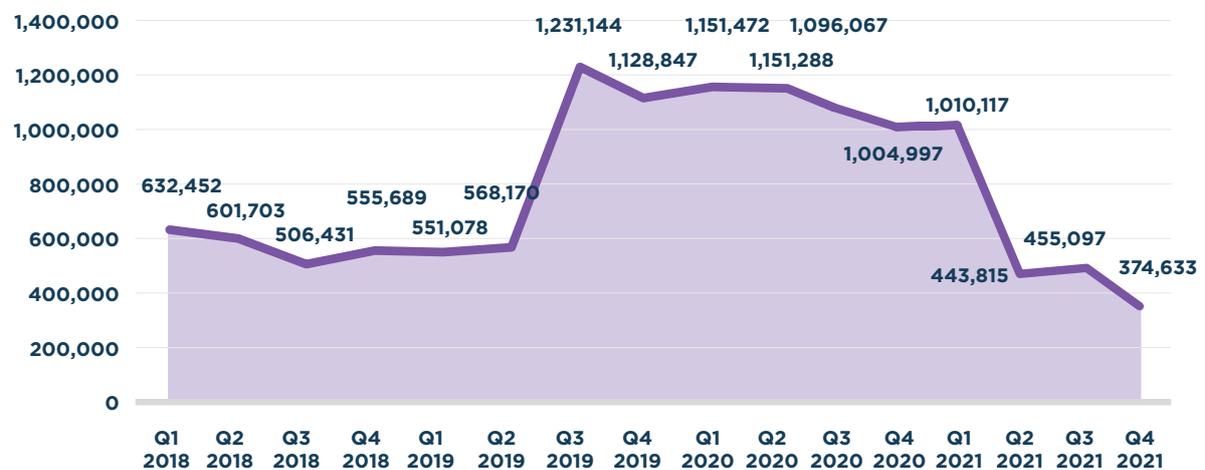
This Performance Metric has not been updated in this report. It was last updated in the Water Advisory Body Quarterly Report No. 1 of 2022.

Figure 4 shows the population served by drinking water supplies included on the list from Quarter 1 2018 to end Quarter 4 2021. The figures had been showing a general downward trend in both the number of drinking water supplies on the list and the population that these supplies serve: however, the addition of the Leixlip supply to the Quarter 3 2019 Remedial Action List changed this.

Under normal circumstances, the WAB would expect a continual reduction in the number of supplies on the Remedial Action List.

Figure 4

Population Served by Supplies on the Remedial Action List.



2.1.4 Performance Indicator 4 - Priority Urban Area List (Wastewater)

This metric has been updated in this report. It was last updated in the Water Advisory Body Quarterly Report No.2 of 2021.

Figure 5

Population equivalent served by priority areas.

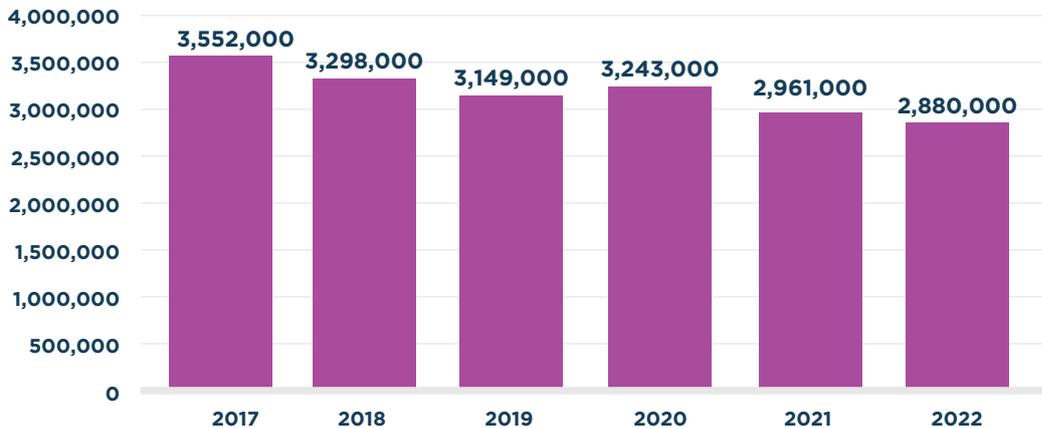


Figure 5 shows the population equivalent served by priority areas included on the priority areas list for 2017 to 2022. The priority areas were updated in Q2 2022 using the most up to date information available at that time. This includes the number of areas discharging raw sewage in Q2 2022 and the number of areas that did not meet the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive standards for the calendar year 2021. It is important to note that a single agglomeration, the Greater Dublin Area served by Ringsend treatment plant, accounts for approximately 2.23 million or three quarters of the total population equivalent served by priority areas. Work is underway to upgrade and improve treatment at Ringsend and is expected to be complete in 2025.

The number of priority urban areas reduced from 148 in 2017 to 92 in 2022. Nine areas were removed from the list in the 2022 update and four were added.

The number of large towns and cities that failed to comply with the mandatory treatment and effluent quality standards in the European Union's Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive in 2021 is 12, which is the same number as in 2020. The final deadline to meet these standards was 2005.

The WAB welcomes the fact that Cork City and Shannon in County Clare complied with the Directive's mandatory standards for the first time in 2021 following recent upgrades to the treatment plants serving these two areas.

The re-addition of Kinsale and Clonakilty in Cork and Ballymote in Sligo to the priority areas due to the failure to comply with the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive in 2021 is a concern to the Environmental Protection Agency. The treatment plants serving these towns have the capacity to meet the Directive's standards and had complied with the standards in 2020. This highlights the need for Irish Water to ensure ongoing vigilance and oversight in the operation of waste water treatment plants to get the best from them at all times.

The inclusion of an urban area on the list means that Irish Water must improve waste water treatment in that area. There can be a range of actions that Irish Water might need to take, depending on the reason it was added to the list. These may include:

- ▶ Infrastructural upgrades to the waste water treatment plant to treat sewage to the required standards;
- ▶ Upgrades to the collecting systems (sewers and pump stations) to ensure waste water is collected properly and conveyed to the treatment plant;
- ▶ Operational improvements to optimise treatment plant performance.

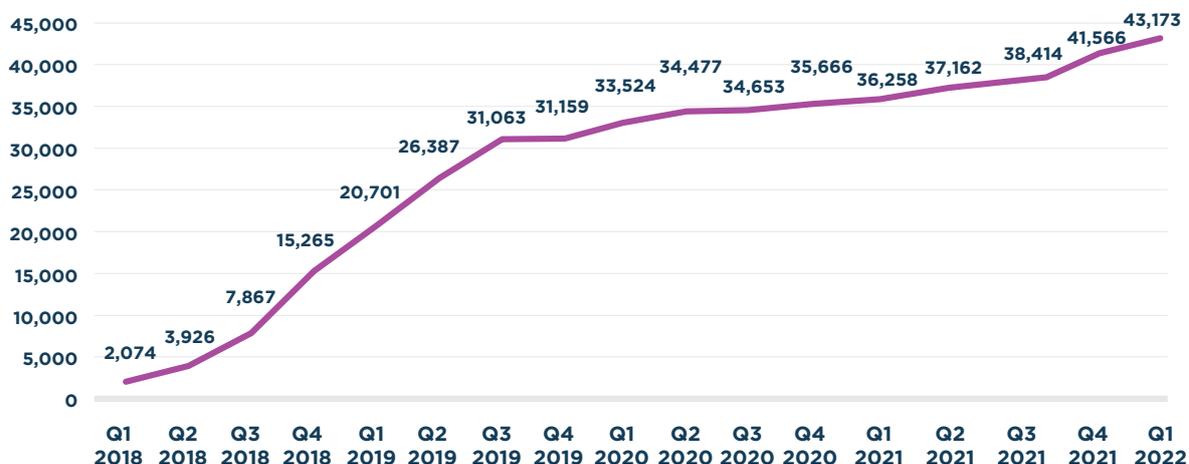
The target dates for completion of these specific actions must be reported to the Environmental Protection Agency, which monitors Irish Water’s delivery on those targets. The Environmental Protection Agency is concerned that Irish Water’s latest update in Quarter 4 2021 did not provide clear plans and timeframes to resolve the environmental issues at approximately one third of the priority areas. The next update on the priority areas is due at the end of Quarter 2 2022.

2.1.5 Performance Indicator 5 - Lead service connections replaced

This Performance Metric has been updated in this report and is based on information valid up to the end of Quarter 4 2021.

Figure 6

Total lead connections replaced (cumulative)



Commentary

Irish Water has stated that the target for 2022 is > 10,000 replacements. (A target of 13,231 for the entirety of Revenue Control 3 period (2020-2024) was previously set by Irish Water in December 2019). During Quarter 1 2022, Irish Water replaced 1,607 lead service connections.

Figure 6 above shows the rate of progress of lead connection replacements up to end of Quarter 1 2022, which demonstrates that progress has slowed significantly when compared to the progress made during 2019. Replacement of lead connections recommenced in Quarter 3 2020 following the lifting of restrictions imposed due to COVID 19 and provision of a stimulus package from Government during 2020.

This allowed some additional funding to be allocated towards lead connection replacements towards the end of 2020.

Of the 43,173 lead connections which have been replaced to date, 10,781 are shared or back yard services and 32,392 are individual public side services.

Irish Water has continued to encounter difficulties in accessing shared and backyard service replacements, as some homeowners have refused to sign the necessary consent forms for works to be carried out on private property. Irish Water continues to engage with these homeowners to get consent forms signed. With an increased budget for 2022, Irish Water expect to significantly increase lead replacements to >10,000 connections this year.

2.1.6 Performance Indicator 6 - Unplanned Interruptions to Water Supply

This metric monitors the number of properties experiencing unplanned interruptions to their supply for greater than 12 and 24 hours. This metric has been updated and is based on information valid up to the end of 2020.

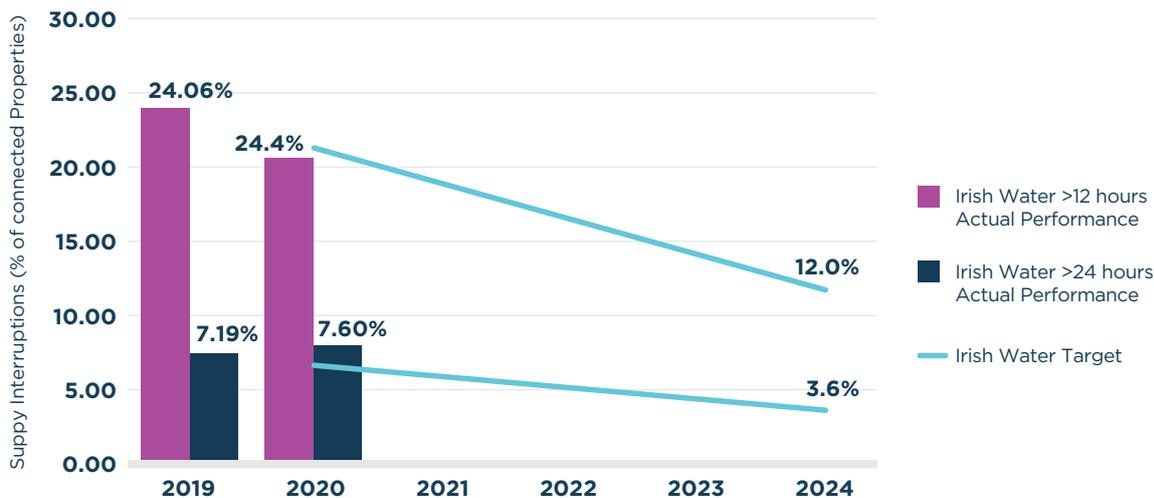
Figure 7

Number of Estimated Properties Experiencing an Unplanned Interruption to Supply.

Unplanned Interruption	Q 3 2019	Q4 2019	Q1 2020	Q2 2020	Q3 2020	Q4 2020	Total (Q3 2019 - Q4 2020)
>12 Hours	220,984	74,570	53,105	84,050	140,577	89,271	662,557
>24 Hours	35,043	31,889	35,076	27,281	49,241	25,672	204,202

Figure 8

Unplanned Interruptions to Supply 2020 - 2024 Target.



At a minimum, Irish Water has been set the following targets:

- ▶ less than 12% of connected properties should experience an unplanned interruption for greater than 12 hours by end 2024 based on the ‘revised estimated number of properties’; **and**
- ▶ less than 3.6% of connected properties should experience an unplanned interruption for greater than 24 hours by end 2024 based on the ‘revised estimated number of properties’.

Commentary

In 2020, out of all properties connected to Irish Water’s network, Irish Water estimated that:

- ▶ **Unplanned interruptions in excess of 12hrs:** 20.4% of properties experienced an unplanned interruption for greater than 12 hours. Irish Water has been set a target of less than 12% of connected properties to be impacted by end 2024. It is currently on track to meet that target.
- ▶ **Unplanned interruptions in excess of 24hrs:** 7.6% of properties experienced an unplanned interruption for greater than 24 hours. Irish Water has been set a target of less than 3.6% of connected properties to be impacted by end 2024. As the number of properties impacted for greater than 24 hours in 2020 has gone up since the baseline, Irish Water is not currently on track to meet this target.

Irish Water has reported that a number of factors may have influenced the numbers of properties impacted by unplanned interruptions, including Covid-19 related works delays and process improvements by Irish Water.

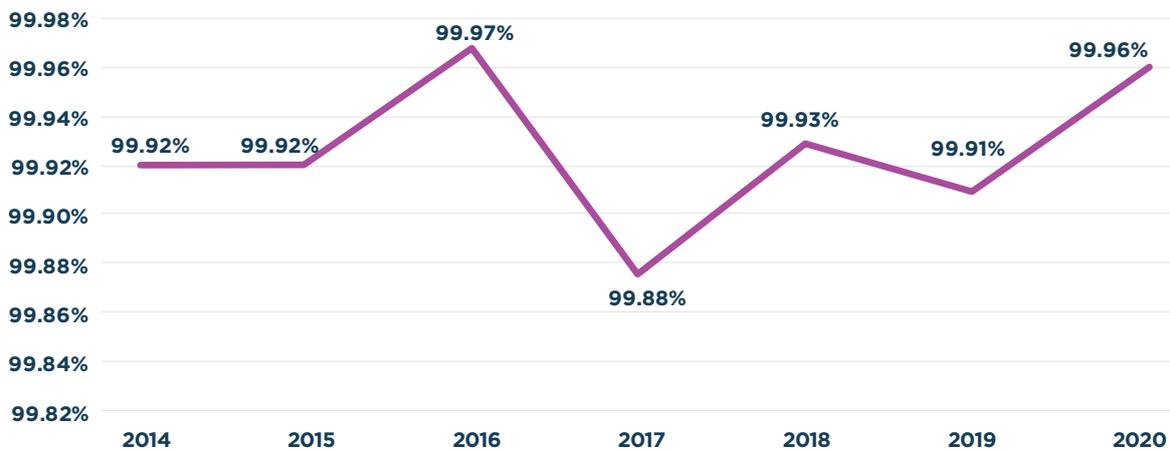
2.2 Improvements in Water Quality, including the elimination of boil water notices

2.2.1 Performance Indicator 7 - Overall compliance with microbiological indicators for drinking water

This Performance Metric has not been updated in this report and is based on information valid up to the end of Quarter 3 2021.

Figure 9

Percentage of Samples complying with the E.coli Standard



2.2.2 Performance Indicator 8 - Boil Water Notices

This Performance Metric has been updated in this report and is based on information valid up to the end of Quarter 1 2022.

Figure 10

Boil water notices at the end of each quarter

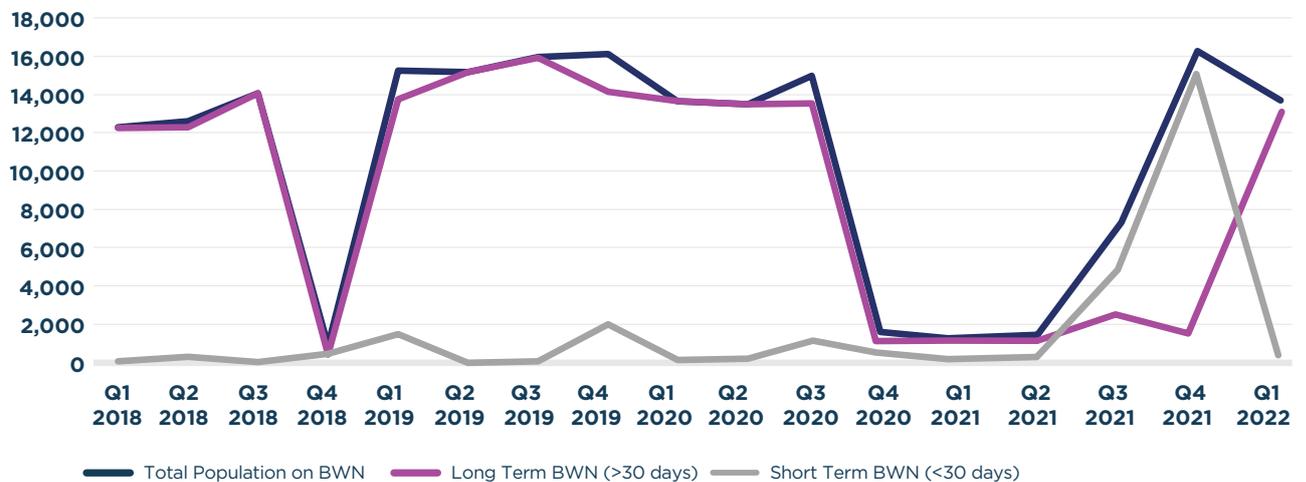


Figure 10 shows the total population on boil water notices at the end of Quarter 1 2022. The graph also shows how long those boil water notices have been in place by showing the population on boil water notices for less than thirty days and the population on boil water notices for more than thirty days.

Commentary

Under normal circumstances the WAB expects that no consumer should be on a long-term Boil Water Notice. Boil water notices should be kept at low levels and for as short a period as possible.

The WAB notes that at the end of Quarter 1 2022, 13,579 people were on boil water notices which is a decrease on the population on boil water notices at the end of the previous quarter (16,069 people).

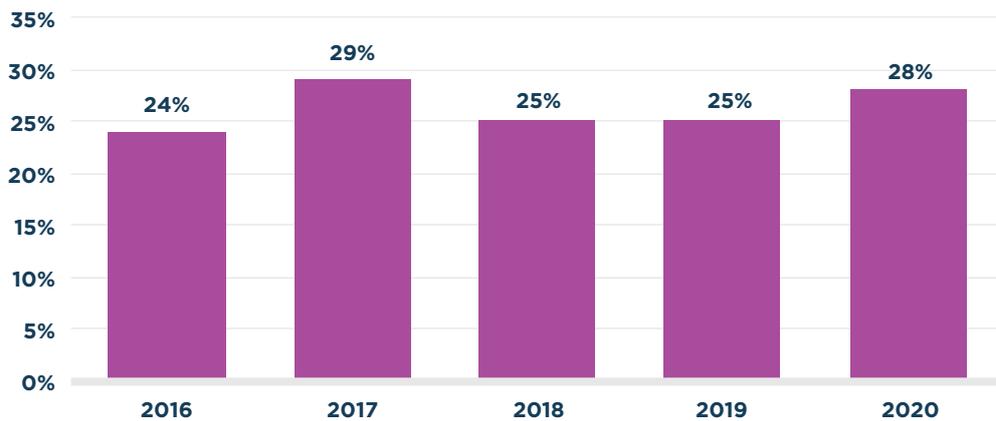
However, of the 21 boil water notices in place at the end of Quarter 1, 2022, 20 of those notices were long term boil water notices which means the notice was in place for longer than 30 days. This means that the solution to fix the problem with the plant could not be addressed quickly and requires significant investment by Irish Water. The WAB notes this trend with concern. Some of the larger water supplies which were on long term boil water notices at the end of Q1 2022 included Whitegate Regional (9,482 people) and Gort (2,776 people). The WAB will continue to monitor the number of people affected by short term boil water notices, particularly for supplies where notices need to be put in place on more than one occasion. It will continue to monitor Irish Water's progress in this area and that boil water notices remain in place for as short a period of time as possible.

2.2.3 Performance Indicator 9 - Compliance of Urban Waste Water Treatment (UWWT); Plants with Environmental Protection Agency discharge licences

This metric has not been updated in this report. This metric was last updated in the Water Advisory Body Quarterly Report No. 2 of 2021.

Figure 11

Percentage of Population served by compliant Urban Waste Water Treatment plants (by population equivalent)



2.2.4 Performance Indicator 10 - Agglomerations with no Wastewater Treatment

This metric monitors the number of agglomerations with no wastewater treatment or preliminary treatment only. This Performance Indicator has been updated and is based on information valid up to the end of 2020.

Figure 12

Agglomerations with No Treatment or Preliminary Treatment Only Targets.



A target of zero agglomerations with no treatment or preliminary treatment only has been placed on Irish Water by end 2024, in line with the annual targets set out in Figure 12.

Commentary

In 2013, there were 50 agglomerations in Ireland discharging untreated wastewater into the environment. Between 2014 and 2019, Irish Water had completed work at a total of 15 sites to reduce this number to 35. In 2020, Irish Water was not targeted to provide treatment at any new sites but did reduce the number of agglomerations with no wastewater treatment by 1 as Irish Water provided treatment to a site earlier than planned.

However, the WAB notes the CRU raised a concern that Irish Water may not be able to provide treatment at the remaining 34 sites before the end of 2024. This concern is also raised by the EPA in its Urban Waste Water Treatment Report 2020, where it states *“There have been repeated delays in providing treatment at many areas and Irish Water continues to extend the time frame to eliminate discharges of raw sewage. The changing nature of Irish Water’s plans is a significant concern and the delays are prolonging risks to the environment and public health.”*

The WAB is of the view that a discharge of untreated wastewater is an environmental concern for a wide range of stakeholders across Ireland and is not acceptable. The WAB will continue to monitor Irish Water’s performance against this metric.

2.3 Responsiveness to the needs of Communities and Enterprise

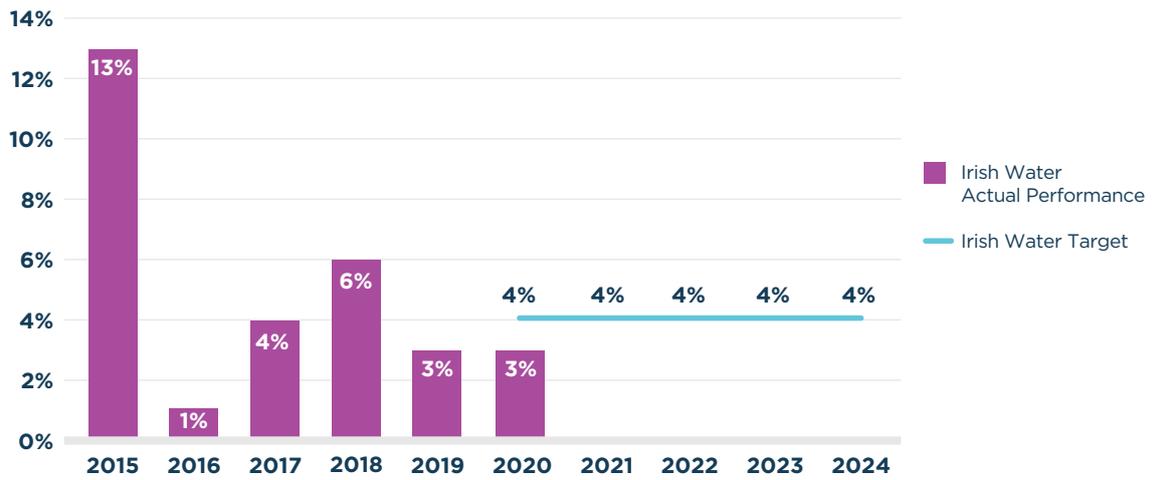
This metric has been updated and is based on information valid up to the end of 2020.

2.3.1 Performance Indicator 11 – Ease of Contact

There are 3 separate metrics within the Ease of Contact performance indicator:

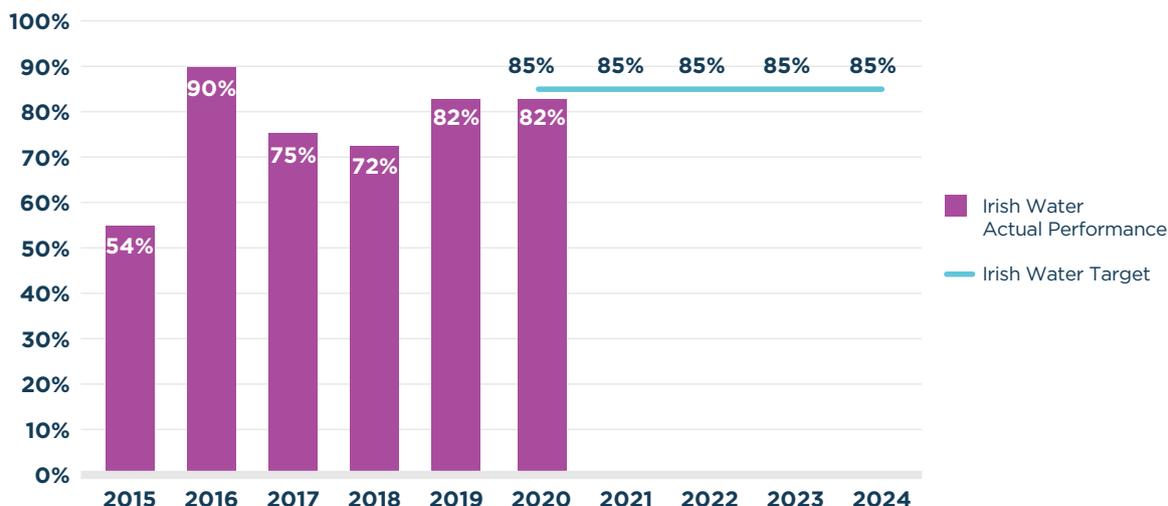
Figure 13

Call Abandonment Rate



The Call Abandonment Rate metric is the percentage of calls that are abandoned while a caller is waiting in the queue to speak to an agent. It is designed to incentivise Irish Water to shorten the length of time customers may spend in the queue. A target call abandonment rate of 4% or less has been placed on Irish Water for each of the years 2020-2024.

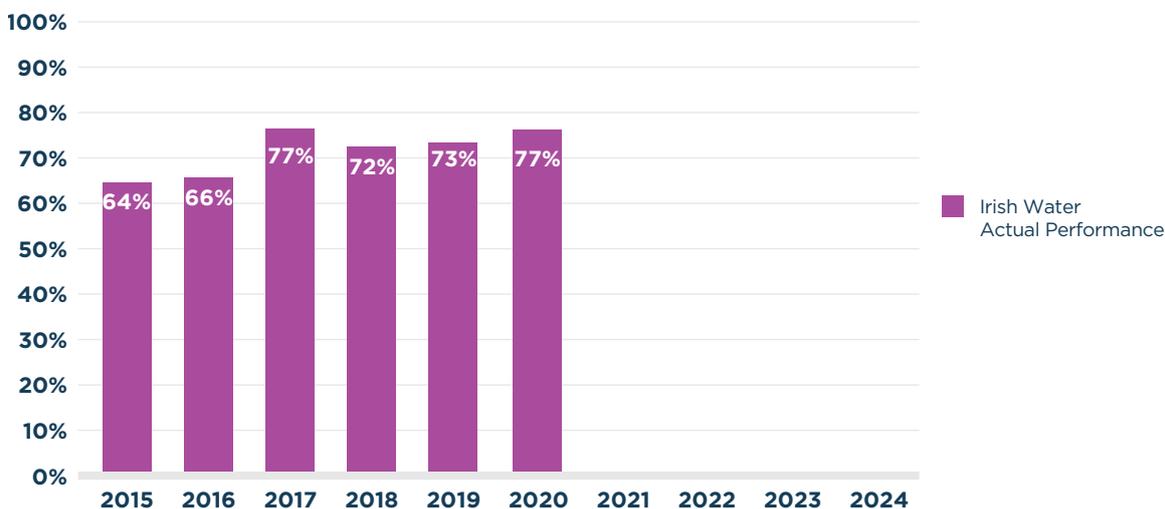
Figure 14
Speed of Telephone Response.



The Speed of telephone response by Irish Water measures the percentage of calls that enter a queue to speak to an agent which are answered within 20 seconds.

A target of at least 85% of calls answered by an agent within 20 seconds of being in the queue has been placed on Irish Water for each of the years 2020-2024.

Figure 15
Customer Satisfaction Survey.



The Customer Satisfaction metric measures customer satisfaction levels of their experience dealing with Irish Water through phone contact. No specific incremental customer satisfaction score targets have been placed on Irish Water over the period 2020-2024. Irish Water’s performance (under the current survey method) is required to improve in 2020 over that achieved in 2019 and continue to do so. CRU has proposed that a new survey approach is implemented in the future which may allow comparison with other Irish and UK utilities, and against which targets will be set.

Commentary

Irish Water has improved its performance in one metric and maintained its performance in two metrics within this 'Ease of Contact & Customer Service' indicator in 2020.

A. Call Abandonment Rate Metric: Irish Water successfully achieved its target with a low call abandonment rate of 3% in 2020, consistent with 2019 performance.

B. Speed of Telephone Response Metric: Irish Water answered 82% of calls within 20 seconds in the queue in 2020, which is consistent with its performance in 2019 (Figure 14). Irish Water failed to meet the 85% target in 2020 and needs to improve its speed of telephone response performance to meet and sustain the target of 85% for the coming years up to 2024.

C. Customer Satisfaction Metric: Irish Water achieved a customer satisfaction score of 77% in 2020, increasing on the 73% achieved in 2019. This means Irish Water has met its target of an increasing trend in performance (Figure 15).

2.3.2 Performance Indicator 12 - Irish Water Customer Complaints management

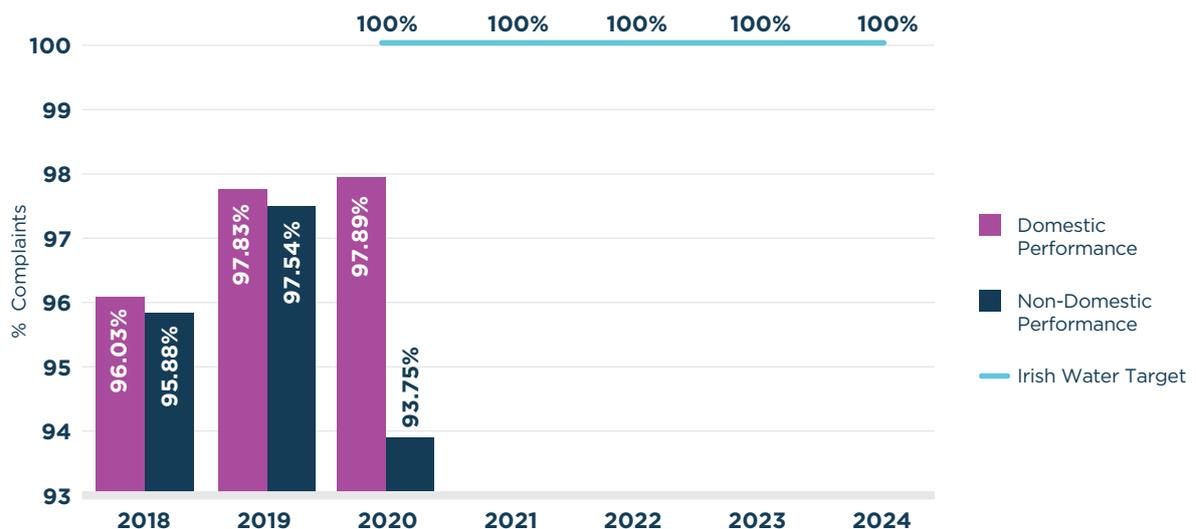
This metric has been updated and is based on information valid up to the end of 2020.

The number of complaints Irish Water receives is monitored in two ways. They are:

- ▶ the percentage of complaints that are responded to within five working days, with either a resolution or an outline plan of the proposed resolution; and
- ▶ the percentage of complaints to which a final decision is issued within two months.

Figure 16

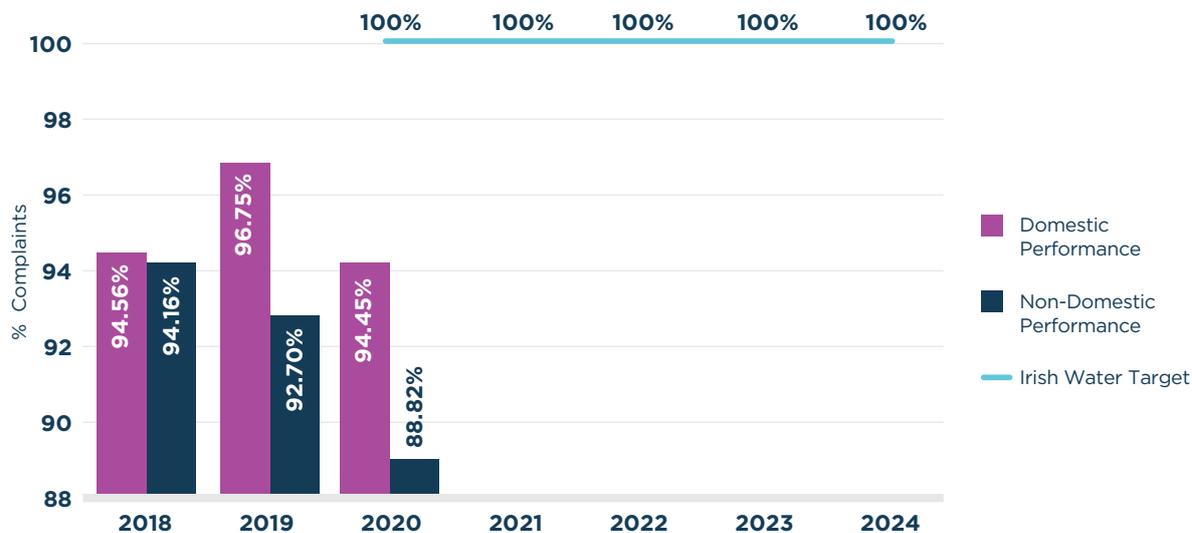
Response to Complaints within 5 working days



A target of 100% of complaints to be responded to within 5 working days, either with a resolution or an outline plan of the proposed resolution has been placed on Irish Water for each of the years 2020-2024.

Figure 17

Response to Complaints (with Final Decision) within 2 months.



A target of 100% of complaints to be issued a final decision within 2 months has been placed on Irish Water for each of the years 2020-2024.

Irish Water’s performance has declined in almost all of the ‘Customer Complaints management’ metrics in 2020:

A. Response to Complaints within 5 working days: In 2020, Irish Water responded to 97.89% of domestic and 93.75% of non-domestic complaints within five working days, with either a resolution or an outline plan of the proposed resolution (Figure 16). This is the worst five-day response rate for non-domestic complaints since Irish Water started reporting against this metric in 2018. Irish Water did not meet its target of 100% of complaints to be responded to within five working days, either with a resolution or an outline plan of the proposed resolution.

B. Response to Complaints (with Final Decision) within 2 Months: Irish Water issued a final decision within two months to 94.45% of domestic and 88.82% of non-domestic customers in 2020 (Figure 17). Again, Irish Water’s 2020 performance with complaints raised by domestic and non-domestic customers is the worst since it first reported in 2018. Irish Water did not meet its target of 100% of complaints to be issued a final decision within two months.

Irish Water has attributed the lower performance in response to complaints within both five working days and two months to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions impacting its ability to carry out site visits and/or field investigations which may be required to close out some complaints.

2.4 Energy and Emissions

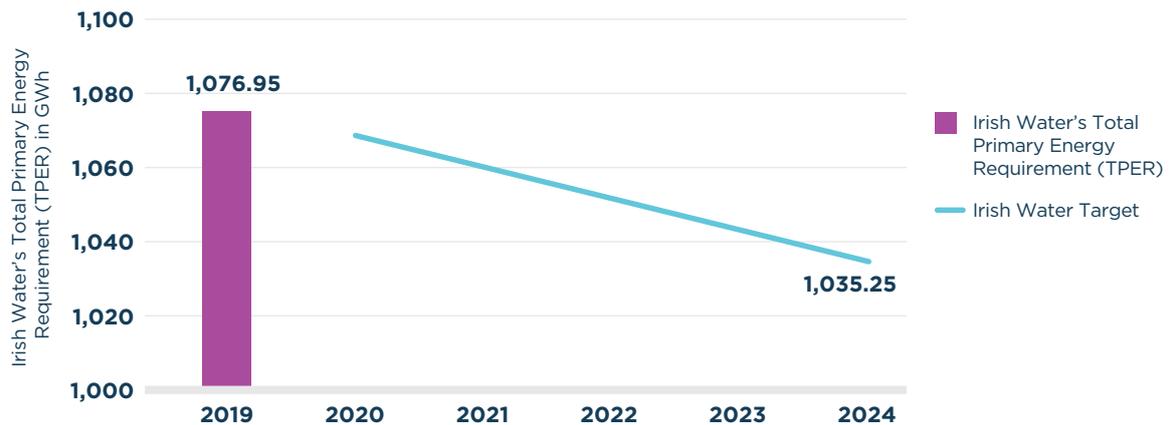
2.4.1 Performance Indicator 13 - Energy Consumption Targets

This metric monitors Irish Water's Total Primary Energy Requirement in Gigawatt hours.

A minimum target reduction of 40.71 Gigawatt hours in Total Primary Energy Requirement (TPER) has been placed on Irish Water by end 2024.

Figure 19

Energy Consumption Targets.



Commentary

As Irish Water has yet to report on this metric, the WAB is unable to comment on Irish Water's performance against this metric at this time.

Irish Water's Performance Assessment submission to the CRU in 2021 did not include energy consumption figures for 2020 as the data had not yet been verified by the SEAI. The SEAI published its Annual Report 2021 on Public Sector Energy Efficiency Performance in February 2022. This report sets out that Irish Water continues to be the highest single public user of energy in this report for 2020.

Part 3

Key Events

3.1 Targeted Local Survey of Irish Water Customers

Introduction

A core function of the Water Advisory Body is to report on the responsiveness of Irish Water to the needs of communities and enterprise. Accordingly, Core Research on behalf of the WAB completed local surveys of Irish Water customers between 26th October and 7th December 2021.

The purpose of the survey was to:

1. establish views of customer communication and contact by Irish Water in terms of clarity, timeliness, efficiency, professionalism and overall experience.
2. gauge how Irish Water customers (both residential and business) would like to be communicated with in the future.

Approach to/Scope of Survey

This was a targeted survey of 628 residential and 400 business customers in areas where Irish Water had recently carried out maintenance or remedial work.

The findings of the report are not intended to be nationally representative, but rather represent a snapshot of the issues impacting a number of defined areas.

The results of this survey have a margin of error of +/- 3.9% at a confidence level.

Where sample sizes are <50, results must be interpreted with a level of caution.

Key Findings

Confused Lines of Communication

Customers were unclear who to contact if a problem occurred. Given the historical relationship between Irish Water, local authorities and customers, this may be understandable. However, it is important that this confusion is addressed.

	Residential	Business
Who do you contact when a problem occurs?	Local Authority – 53% Irish Water – 35%	Local Authority – 45% Irish Water – 40%
Who is responsible?	Local Authority – 51% Irish Water – 50%	Local Authority – 57% Irish Water – 51%

(multiple responses were allowed).

Contact Experience

While the professionalism of staff was acknowledged (51% residential; 61% business) the majority of customers were dissatisfied with their contact with Irish Water.

	Survey Response
Lack of response when contacting Irish Water	39% residential; 60% business
Dissatisfaction: Ease of dealing with Irish Water	55% residential; 57% business
Dissatisfaction: Clarity of information provided	66% residential; 57% business
Dissatisfaction with information/response provided	63% residential; 100% business

Accessing information

In many cases customers appear to find out for themselves that there was an issue and that the issue had been resolved.

Where possible it is best practice to give advance notice of a disruption. If this is not possible an estimated timeline for completion should be provided and communicated.

Advance notice and issue resolved	
Aware that there was going to be a disruption	79% residential; 83% business were not aware
Communication that the issue was resolved	45% residential; 72% businesses found out for themselves

There is a strong preference from customers for advance notice and to be kept updated where possible.

Preferred Notice of Disruption	Residential	Business
	73% few days	85% a week
		53% few days

Communications Reach

Customers receive information from Irish Water through a variety of media. Their preferred source of information is not the same with text messaging being the most popular.

	Main sources of information	Preferred source of information
Social media	26% residential; 31% business	14% residential; 6% business
Flyers/Leaflets	26% residential; 28% business	34% residential; 30% business
Text	5% residential; 14% business	52% residential; 67% business
Email	Not specified	3% residential; 60% business

Customer Experience Improvement

When asked how Irish Water could improve the customer experience the dominant themes are better communication in advance and during the event.

	Action	% Respondents
Residential	Improve communications	33%
	Notify us of issues	38%
	Keep us updated	26%
Business	Advance notice of disruption	49%
	Better communication	21%

Next Steps

The Water Advisory Body will invite Irish Water to discuss any insights arising from the findings of this survey and to consider actions to address the findings. Based on this discussion, the WAB will decide if any further action is required. This may include:

- ▶ Making recommendations to the Minister on any measures needed to improve the transparency and accountability of Irish Water;
- ▶ Identifying additional Key Performance Indicators to report on to the Oireachtas Committee; or
- ▶ Undertaking further survey(s).

3.2 EPA Bathing Water Quality Report 2021

In May 2022, the EPA published the Bathing Water Quality Report for 2021.

KEY MESSAGES FOR 2021

Bathing water quality has continued to improve.

- ▶ 97% of the 148 identified bathing waters met or exceeded the minimum required standard.
- ▶ 115 bathing waters were excellent quality, up four from 2020.
- ▶ Two bathing waters were “Poor”, down two from 2020. These were Balbriggan (Front Strand Beach) and Lady’s Bay, Buncrana.

There are still some issues impacting bathing water quality to address.

- ▶ Agriculture, urban waste water and fouling from dogs on beaches all impacted on the quality of bathing waters.
- ▶ Irish Water needs to improve the operation, management and maintenance of treatment plants and networks which impact on bathing waters.
- ▶ Local authorities need to prioritise measures to improve the two “Poor” bathing waters, and to increase the number of bathing waters at “Good” or “Excellent”.

POOR BATHING WATERS

Two bathing waters were classified as “Poor” in 2021, two fewer than in 2020. The Local Authorities with “Poor” bathing waters have management plans in place to address the issues.

Balbriggan

The main sources of pollution are sewage discharges and misconnections; faeces from dogs, birds and other animals; and contaminated surface streams flowing through the town. Fingal County Council is addressing misconnections and working with the assistance of UCD to identify pollution sources. Irish Water plans an upgrade of the Quay Street pumping station and a drainage action plan for Balbriggan in 2022.

Lady’s Bay, Buncrana

The main sources of pollution affecting the bathing water are Buncrana waste water treatment plant, combined stormwater overflows, and surface run-off, which are made worse by heavy rainfall. Irish Water is due to begin upgrade works at Westbrook pumping station and the sewer network during the summer of 2022 and a new larger capacity storm tank is also due to be constructed at Buncrana waste water treatment plant.

3.3 Irish Water Performance Assessment Framework Annual Report 2020

In March 2022, the CRU published the Irish Water Performance Assessment Report for 2020. This is the CRU's first assessment of Irish Water's performance against targets, facilitated by the CRU's metric review and target setting decision paper published in 2021.

The Framework provides a structured and clear basis for the CRU to assess Irish Water's performance for its customers across six categories:

- ▶ customer service,
- ▶ security of water supply,
- ▶ quality of water supply,
- ▶ sewer incidents,
- ▶ environmental performance, and
- ▶ energy and emissions.

The publication of reports under the Framework incentivises Irish Water to improve its performance and service delivery for its customers and allows customers and other stakeholders of Irish Water to monitor that performance.

The CRU set Irish Water 2020 targets on 17 of the 27 metrics in the CRU's 2020-2024 decision on the Framework. Of the 17 metrics for 2020, a total of 20 targets were set against these as some metrics had more than one target. Irish Water met eight of these 20 targets.

The CRU welcomed Irish Water's improvement and stability under many of its customer service metrics, particularly the call abandonment rate and customer satisfaction survey which are outlined further in this WAB report. However, the CRU also outlined some concerns with continued delays in implementing a number of metrics to begin reporting under the Framework. In addition, the CRU is concerned with the increasing likelihood that Irish Water will not meet many of its environmental performance targets by the end of the period.

As was the case with the Irish Water Capital Investment Plan (2020 to 2024) Monitoring Report No. 1, the CRU was unable to report on Irish Water's 2020 leakage figures due to a lack of information at the time. The CRU will publish an addendum to its report setting out the 2020 leakage data in due course.

Overall, the CRU welcomed Irish Water's progression to establish the Framework for 2020-2024 and will continue to monitor Irish Water's annual progression towards 2024 targets in further reports.

3.4 Capital Investment Plan 2020 to 2024 Monitoring Report No. 1

In March 2022, the CRU published the 'Irish Water Capital Investment Plan (2020 to 2024) Monitoring Report No. 1'. This monitoring report provided an update on Irish Water's delivery during the first year (2020) of its five-year Revenue Control 3 (RC3) as measured against its agreed RC3 outputs and outcomes. Irish Water has made progress during the initial year of RC3, despite some barriers to progress outside of its control. Whilst progress across different metrics in 2020 was delayed relative to the RC3 2020 outputs and outcomes goals, Irish Water is expected to make up lost ground as it ramps up its capital investment program beyond 2020.

In its submission, Irish Water included a mixture of confirmed and forecasted spend across 2020. The CRU previously approved a spend of €760m on investment in water and wastewater infrastructure during 2020, however Irish Water's data submission shows that €787m was spent or forecast to be spent. The additional spend was sourced from two separate government stimulus funds provided during 2020 that essentially brought forward funds from later years of RC3.

During 2020, progress was made in upgrading the Coagulation, Flocculation and Clarification (CFC) & Filtration processes at 14 sites and enhanced the Disinfection processes at 53 sites. Additionally, Irish Water provided two new and upgraded five wastewater treatment plants during 2020.

The CRU was unable to report on Irish Water's 2020 leakage figures due to a lack of information at the time. The CRU will publish an addendum to its report setting out the 2020 leakage data in due course. Furthermore, Irish Water was invited to provide a submission detailing (1) any reprioritisation's made to the 2020 Investment Plan and (2) the drivers behind those changes under what is termed a 'Change Control' process. Whilst Irish Water did not provide the CRU with a change control submission for 2020, the CRU has requested that full-year 2020 and 2021 change control submissions be provided as part of Irish Water's next data submission. This aims to provide more context around Irish Water's progression against its Investment Plan.

3.5 Irish Water’s Disconnection and Reconnection Policy

In April 2022, the CRU published its decision on Irish Water’s Disconnections and Reconnections charging policy. The decision harmonises disconnection and reconnection processes and charges within a national framework for all Irish Water customers. It also maintains an approach to harmonising Irish Water’s charging policies nationally, in line with recent connections and non-domestic tariffs decisions. This ensures equity and fairness for all customers throughout Ireland.

Under the new policy, domestic and non-domestic customers can be either temporarily or permanently disconnected from Irish Water’s network. Charges will only apply to temporary disconnections – permanent ones will be free.

The circumstances under which customers could be disconnected are summarised in the Table 1 below:

Disconnection Type	Domestic properties	Non-domestic properties
Temporary	Upon request of the customer. The customer must be able to demonstrate an alternative source of water supply (i.e., a private well or an alternative water source), prior to disconnection.	Upon request of the customer.
		No registered customer at the premises has been established.
		Failure to pay a bill relating to the supply of water/wastewater services.
		Failure to honour a payment plan.
Permanent	Where the premises is to be demolished and the customer requests the disconnection.	Upon request of the customer.
		For an unauthorised connection.
	Disconnection of an unoccupied premises which either has an unauthorised connection, and/or there is a risk to health and safety from possible contamination.	Continuation of the use of the connection would pose a risk to health and safety.

Table 1: Summary of criteria for temporary and permanent disconnections at domestic and non-domestic properties.

Where customers were temporarily disconnected, they will have the opportunity to reconnect to Irish Water’s network. If customers have been permanently disconnected from the network, they must apply for a new connection and be subject to the charges and policy decisions set out in the **Connection Charging Policy**.

The CRU has decided that permanent disconnections will be free of charge for both domestic and non-domestic properties. For temporary disconnections, the rates will be dependent on the reason for the temporary disconnection, i.e., if the request was made by the customer or if it was due to non-payment (in the case of non-domestic customers). The rates for both domestic and non-domestic disconnections are shown in Table 2 below.

Service	In/Out Standard hours	For Customer Requested	Due to non-payment (non-domestic)	Aborted Site Visit (per visit)
Temporary Disconnection	In	€140	N/A	€140
	Out	€210	N/A	€210
Reconnection	In	€140	€500	€140
	Out	€210	N/A	€210

Table 2: Rates for temporary disconnections and reconnections for domestic and non-domestic properties. Charges listed are inclusive of VAT

Irish Water is also required to adopt a standardised customer engagement process that should be followed in advance of disconnecting customers from Irish Water's network. This is to ensure that customers are fully informed of how the process will work, when the disconnection or reconnection will be carried out and how a customer may contact Irish Water to ask any questions.

In order to implement the above decisions, Irish Water will need to make changes to its IT systems, develop process maps and train its staff to apply the policy and detailed processes. Acknowledging this lead-in time, the CRU requires Irish Water to implement the decisions by 1st October 2022 and will publish an updated Water Charges Plan to reflect this decision on that date.

Glossary of Terms

Agglomeration - an agglomeration is an urban settlement (village, town or city area) which is connected through a pipe network to a wastewater treatment plant.

Chlorination - Water chlorination is the process of adding chlorine or chlorine compounds such as sodium hypochlorite to water. In particular, chlorination is used to prevent the spread of waterborne diseases.

Cryptosporidium - A disease-causing protozoon widely found in surface water sources.

E.Coli - Coliforms, specifically Escherichia coli (E. coli), are the universal indicator microorganisms of faecal contamination of water. These bacteria, which are of definite faecal origin (human and animal), are excreted in vast numbers and their presence in a water supply is proof that faecal contamination has occurred and is a definite indication that pathogens may be present.

Gigawatt hours (“GWh”) - A measure of energy volume.

Million litres of water per day (“MLD”) - A measure of water volume per day.

Pathogen - Microorganisms that can cause disease in humans, other organisms or animals and plants. They may be bacteria, viruses, or protozoa and are found in sewage, in runoff from animals, farms or rural areas populated with domestic and/or wild animals, and in water.

Population Equivalent - in waste-water treatment the population equivalent is a reference that describes the specific load of a wastewater treatment plant.

Remuneration - Reward for employment in the form of pay, salary, or wage, including allowances, benefits (such as company car, medical plan, pension plan), bonuses, cash incentives, and monetary value of the noncash incentives.

Trihalomethanes - Trihalomethanes are a group of four chemicals formed, along with other disinfection by-products, when chlorine or other disinfectants used to control microbial contaminants in drinking water react with naturally occurring organic and inorganic matter in water.

Turbidity - Turbidity is a measure of the degree to which the water loses its transparency due to the presence of suspended particulates. The more total suspended solids in the water, the murkier it seems and the higher the turbidity. Turbidity is considered as a good measure of the quality of water.

