



Meeting with Fintan Towey, Assistant Secretary, Water Division, DHLGH.

Tuesday 18 October 2022 at 10.30am

Conference Room, Custom House.

Minutes

Venue: Conference Room, Custom House.

Attended by:

WAB

Chairperson	Paul McGowan	
Members	Michelle Minihan	Miriam McDonald
	Dónal Purcell	Martin Sisk
Secretariat	Claire Gavin	Deirdre Byrne
	Nason Fallon	

Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage

Fintan Towey Assistant Secretary, Water Division.

David Flynn Principal Advisor, Water Advisory Unit.

1. Introduction and WAB update

- The Chair of the WAB introduced the meeting and provided a brief overview of the ongoing work of the WAB which noted that the production of four Quarterly Reports each year is a statutory function of the WAB. Two have been published in 2022 so far, the second of which gained a significant level of media attention in August. The third is being prepared at present and will be published in the coming weeks. It will be a short Report, but the fourth Report of 2022 will contain a significant amount of information and will be published early in 2023.
- The Chair advised that a survey of Irish Water customers which was carried out at the end of 2021 and targeted customers who had interacted with Irish Water in the recent past. The results of the survey indicated that there is a lot of confusion among the public as to the role of Irish Water versus the role of local authorities and that the domestic and non-domestic customers are not satisfied with the level of communication from Irish Water, with regard to issues, outages etc.
- There were significant learnings gleaned from the survey and the WAB Board met Irish Water to discuss the issues which arose and to understand how Irish Water plans to improve its performance in this area.

- The Chair also outlined that the WAB has been reviewing the Regulatory Framework which is place to ensure Irish Water performs its functions appropriately. This review will result in a letter of advice to the Minister, under the WAB's statutory function to provide such advice.

2. Water Services (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill 2022

- **Irish Water oversight and governance**
 - It was noted that the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and An Fóram Uisce (AFU) have an oversight role in respect of Irish Water, as it stands.
 - It was noted by the DHLGH that further to the Minister's engagement with the Bill, new accountability arrangements for the oversight of Irish Water would be put in place involving interaction with the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) and further political and public scrutiny.
 - It was noted by the DHLGH that Irish Water is different to other utilities and by bringing PAC onto the field, it will be audited by the C&AGs and appear before the PAC annually – to examine Value-For-Money. It was further noted that the remit of the PAC is unrestrained, it looks at how money is spent and how services are provided.
 - It was noted that as the WAB brings together bodies that have a role in the oversight of Irish Water anyway – the EPA, the CRU and AFU. The extent of overlap between the three bodies and the WAB and then with the PAC becoming involved in oversight, the question was asked as to whether the cost of the WAB is still justified. The Minister is of the view that no, the WAB should no longer have a role and be dissolved, with effect from 31 December 2022, when the Bill is enacted. Irish Water will become Uisce Eireann on 1 January 2023.
 - The DHLGH requested the views of the WAB on the proposals and how can an orderly wind-up be carried out and how can value be harvested from the WAB prior to its dissolution.
 - It was noted that An Fóram Uisce, the Commission for Regulation of Utilities and the Environmental Protection Agency would still have a significant role in the oversight of Irish Water.
 - It was also noted that the Joint Oireachtas Committee (JOC) will still have a role and the EPA and CRU are accountable to the JOC.
 - The DHLGH noted that the WAB reports speak for themselves and acknowledged that the WAB has raised important issues in the context of the oversight of Irish Water.
 - It was noted that the dissolution of the WAB may lead to change in the role of AFU, which could be discussed further with the DHLGH.
 - The DHLGH noted that the next steps in this process are that the Bill will be back in the Dáil shortly, no exact date yet, but within weeks. The amendment related to the WAB is being worked on at the moment and the formal legal drafting is yet to be done.
 - It was anticipated that the formal role of the WAB will conclude on 31 December 2022 and a timeframe for completion of reporting will be laid out. Views on this will be welcomed, in a formal response from the WAB on issues arising and things that are important going forward.
 - The DHLGH noted that that there is no sense of any dissatisfaction with the work of the WAB to date and this matter only arose in the context of the new accountability framework for Irish Water.

- The WAB agreed to write to the DHLGH offering its views on how the new accountability arrangements for Irish Water (Uisce Éireann) could be addressed under the Public Accounts Committee and to outline the work programme for the remaining term of the WAB.