



Meeting between representatives of Irish Water and the WAB

Friday 2 September 2022 at 10.30am

Main Conference Room, Custom House.

Attended by:

Irish Water

Niall Gleeson, Chief Executive Officer

Geoffrey Bourke, Business Operations Manager (Customer Operations)

Catherine Lennon, Customer Service Manager (Customer Operations)

Mark Grehan, Head of Brand & Marketing (Corporate Affairs)

WAB

Paul McGowan, Chairperson.

Michelle Minihan, Miriam McDonald, Martin Sisk and Dónal Purcell.

Secretariat

Claire Gavin, Nason Fallon and Valerie Longmore.

Presentation by Irish Water on the findings of the WAB Customer Survey

Geoffrey Bourke, Irish Water's Business Operations Manager, gave a presentation on the findings of the WAB Customer Survey. Irish Water accepts the findings of the Survey and recognises that there are areas for improvement in its performance, including customer communications and how Irish Water interacts with customers as well as, clarity in the Public's mind with regard to roles and responsibilities in the provision of water services. Irish Water noted that the WAB customer survey was useful in flagging issues to them and will aid improvements in their performance.

Customer Communications

Irish Water advised that its website is its key anchor point for customer communications, with 600,000 - 1 million users per year, but that it also communicates with its customers through text messages, social media, letters and telephone calls (a multichannel approach to optimise communication).

Irish Water acknowledged that it needs to be more proactive in its customer communications, rather than reactive.

- The WAB noted that Irish Water’s communications strategy was predicated on the use of the website by the Public and there was an assumption that customers would consult the website.
- The WAB also noted that Public Service announcements on the radio by Irish Water in general, were not frequent. An increase in the frequency of such announcements in order to reach a wider audience was suggested.
- The use of WhatsApp and social media by under 35s as their primary communication channels was referred to by the WAB and should be considered by Irish Water in the context of its customer experience project.

The WAB noted that information flows from the field to the contact centre and internally needed to improve so as to ensure customers can receive the most up to date information. Irish Water advised that its ongoing customer experience programme encompassed the entire organisation.

The WAB emphasised that the customer survey revealed that Irish Water business customers were equally or more dissatisfied with contact and follow up as residential customers

Unplanned interruptions to water supply

Irish Water advised that unplanned interruptions to water supply were a significant challenge. Vulnerable domestic customers and business customers receive a text message advising of planned or unplanned outages.

- The WAB noted that where possible it would be best practice to advise the customer in advance of a disruption to their supply or if not possible an estimated timeline should be provided. Lack of information in this regard could lead to erosion of customer trust in Irish Water.
- The WAB asked if Irish Water utilised leaflet drops as part of its communication strategy as other public utilities did for planned local outages. Irish Water confirmed that leaflet drops were standard practice.

Irish Water noted that the “My Location” tool was a useful customer touchpoint for local information updates.

The WAB noted that Irish Water’s focus on small business as a key customer area was positive, but that its general focus on operational and technical matters needed to be balanced with a customer focus more generally.

Boil Water Notices

The WAB raised concerns with regard to Irish Water’s lack of communication and updates to customers on long term boil water notices. The WAB cited Drogheda as an example where there had

been no update since December 2021. Irish Water agreed to review its communications policy in respect of these customers.

In addition, the WAB raised the lack of follow up and communication surrounding an incident in which 25% of Limerick had an issue with discoloured tap water. It pointed out that this could have developed into a serious public health issue. Irish Water acknowledged this and outlined the process involved in assessing water quality, before putting in place a boil water notice, taking into account the impact on businesses.

The WAB noted that a forthcoming EU Drinking Water Directive would place additional requirements on Irish Water with regard to reporting to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Single Public Utility

Irish Water advised that from January 2023 it will be a single utility and it is expected that this will help standardise communications to customers. It advised from this date Irish Water will be known as Uisce Éireann and a communications campaign to customers will be undertaken as part of the rebranding exercise.

Conclusion

The Chair of the WAB thanked Irish Water for attending the meeting and for the useful exchange of views.