



## Water Forum Position on the Interests of Public Consumers related to Customer Service, Communications and Public Trust

23<sup>rd</sup> April 2026

### Introduction

The Water Forum (An Fóram Uisce) was established in June 2018 in accordance with the provisions of Part 5 of the Water Services Act 2017. The Water Forum is the national statutory body representative of stakeholders with an interest in the quality of Ireland's water bodies. The Water Forum consists of 26 members including representatives from a wide range of organisations with direct connections to issues relating to water quality and public water consumers. The Forum has advisory functions to the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, the Water Policy Advisory Committee, Uisce Éireann and the Commission for Regulation of Utilities.

The Water Services Act 2017 specifies that the Water Forum has a statutory role to advise the Minister in relation to the interests of customers of Uisce Éireann, and to make recommendations to Uisce Éireann in relation to policy documents and the performance of its functions.

The annual Ireland Reputation Index 2025<sup>1</sup> (based on 5000 members of the public) indicated that Uisce Éireann ranks very poorly in terms of reputation (ranking 94 out of 100). The Forum is of the view that significant improvements could be made to increase Uisce Éireann's perceived reputation through education and awareness, access to information, along with community engagement.

This position paper presents the Forum's views on the interests of public water consumers under the following topics:

- Public Trust in Drinking Water Supply
- Service Reliability
- Customer Service and Communications
  - Advance Notice to Disruptions
  - Contact Awareness
  - Customer Service Experience
  - Follow-up to Queries or Complaints
- Access to Information and Data
- Water Conservation

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<sup>1</sup> [Ireland REPUTATION INDEX 2025 5TH PLACE](#)

The Forum developed this position by drawing on member perspectives reflecting 15 different sectors, including 2 members who represent the interests of public water consumers. These perspectives were further informed by the following national surveys:

- The **Water Services Customer Survey** (commissioned by the Water Forum, carried out in August 2023) to determine the views of public and private water consumers in relation to their awareness of water issues and their views on communication with water service providers ([The-Water-Forum-Water-Survey-Policy-Report.pdf](#)).
- The **Public Water Customer Survey** (commissioned by the Water Forum, carried out in October 2025) to gauge public attitudes to their public water supply, customer services and communications from their water utility. This survey consisted of an online Nationally Representative Survey, which included 852 Uisce Éireann customers and an additional 213 Uisce Éireann customers from a Face-to Face Survey which was targeted in areas that had recent water supply disruptions ([106550-Water-Forum-Communications-Report-FINAL.pdf](#)).
- In 2021 the **Water Advisory Board (WAB)** commissioned a targeted survey of 628 Uisce Éireann residential customers in areas where Uisce Éireann had recently carried out maintenance or remedial work. While similar questions were asked in the Water Forum's Public Water Customer Survey, caution is needed when extrapolating trends due to small sub-sample sizes and differing methodologies between the 2021 and 2025 research (telephone versus face-to-face).

The top-level recommendation which encompasses many of those highlighted below, is the need for an Uisce Éireann Communications Strategy, which outlines a roadmap on how Uisce Éireann will build trust and better connect with their customers through improved communications, education and community engagement.

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*Recommendation 1: Uisce Éireann should develop a Communications Strategy which provides a roadmap on how it will improve public trust in the utility and in the water supply, through improved communications, education and community engagement.*

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## Public Trust in Drinking Water Supply

The Forum is of the view that a secure and resilient supply of high-quality drinking water to their homes is the most important interest of water consumers.

The European Union (Drinking Water) Regulations 2023 are the basis for drinking water regulation in Ireland. According to the latest assessment on public water supplies, the Environmental Protection Agency reported that compliance with the microbiological and chemical standards for drinking water remains high at greater than 99.8%, which means the water in our public water supplies is safe to drink.

The Water Forum's 2025 survey showed that overall satisfaction with drinking water quality is high, where 70% of public water consumers nationally reported being very or quite satisfied with the quality of their drinking water, an increase from 56% overall satisfaction relative to the 2023 survey.

Unsurprisingly, satisfaction levels are lower among customers who have experienced recent issues or disruptions to supply. The Forum is of the view that there is scope to increase the public's trust and satisfaction with their water supply through raising awareness of the high-quality drinking water produced across public water supplies.

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*Recommendation 2: The Forum recommends that Uisce Éireann develop a communications campaign to raise awareness on the high-quality of public water supplies. This could be delivered through national messaging, and regionally through local communication channels.*

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In the 2024 assessment on public water supplies, the EPA stated there is still room for improvement to ensure supplies are resilient and safe into the future. Public drinking water supplies should be resilient to existing and future threats, such as population growth, economic growth and climate change. The Forum shares concerns with the CRU (in its latest RC4 consultation) in relation to Uisce Éireann failing to achieve and report on key performance targets on security of supply. The Forum is particularly concerned that Uisce Éireann is proposing to defer such reporting until RC5.

The Forum is of the view that understanding and reporting on security of supply is a critical aspect of sustainable water management and Uisce Éireann's ability to sustainably support increased housing targets and economic growth. A lack of understanding and reporting on security of supply poses a serious risk that key stakeholders will not have access to critical information needed to understand the scale of any deficits.

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*Recommendation 3: To support a resilient supply of water into the future, the Forum recommends that Uisce Éireann urgently deliver on evaluating and reporting on security of supply across water resource zones.*

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### Service Reliability

In the 2025 national survey commissioned by the Water Forum, 36% of public water consumers indicated they had experienced water issues in the last year, a decrease since the Forum's previous survey in 2023 where 41% said they had experienced water issues.

It is important to note that taste and colour were the most commonly reported issues in the 2025 survey. While these concerns do not generally indicate a breach of drinking water quality standards, they feature prominently in customer experience and perception/trust in the public water supply.

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*Recommendation 4: Uisce Éireann should initiate an education campaign in the various parameters monitored in drinking water and should include information on how taste and colour can vary between supplies. Uisce Éireann should consider how they can address the common taste and odour concerns raised by public consumers, through a platform to report these issues, along with follow up investigations and communications with the consumer*

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## Customer Service and Communications

The Forum acknowledges that there are times when Uisce Éireann will have to deal with both planned and unplanned disruptions to water supplies. The Forum is of the view, that the approach that Uisce Éireann takes to communicating disruptions is critical in relation to building and maintaining customer satisfaction and trust in the utility.

### Advanced Notice to Disruptions

In relation to planned disruptions, providing advance notice and progress updates is essential to maintain public trust in both supply and in the utility.

Other studies, for example in the UK, have indicated that meeting the public's expectations for accurate and timely information is coupled with their perceptions of a water utility's trustworthiness and their satisfaction with water and wastewater services (Tian et al., 2023).

In the Forum's survey in 2025, 36% of public water consumers who had experienced issues or disruptions to supply said they had received advance notice from Uisce Éireann. The UE text alert service was reported as the most common way to receive information about disruptions, followed by local flyers. The Forum was pleased to see that the advance notice to disruptions had increased (from 21% to 36%) since the WAB survey was carried out in 2021.

The Forum is of the view that there is scope to further strengthen existing methods of providing advance notice on issues, through increased sign up to the UE text alert service, which the survey indicates currently represents only 26% of public consumers.

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*Recommendation 5: The Forum recommends that Uisce Éireann explore new ways to increase the uptake of the text alert service to enhance advance notification of supply disruptions, increasing awareness of the benefits of signing up. Along with national messaging, Uisce Éireann explore should identify ways they can engage locally through community groups or events.*

*Recommendation 6: The Forum emphasises the need to continued engagement from Uisce Éireann during supply disruption, along with notification of when the issue has been resolved, to instil confidence in the water supply and utility. Supportive post-incident communication is important to rebuild trust after outages or quality issues.*

*Recommendation 7: The Forum recommends that Uisce Éireann proactively engage with local communities in areas there will be disruptions due to infrastructure repair and upgrade. The Forum recommends that Uisce Éireann not only communicate the details of any planned disruptions but also communicate the benefits of the planned works (e.g. reduced leakage, increased capacity).*

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#### Contact Awareness

The latest 2025 survey indicates that 70% of public water consumers know to contact Uisce Éireann if they have a query or complaint. Awareness of Uisce Éireann as the appropriate point of contact has increased (from 45%) since the 2021 WAB survey, reflecting the growing establishment of Uisce Éireann as the national public water utility. There is however, still opportunity for increased awareness on who to contact, as 18% of public water customers still indicated they would not know who to contact.

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*Recommendation 8: The Forum recommends that Uisce Éireann continue to build awareness of how public water consumers can contact Uisce Éireann, if they have a query or complaint.*

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#### Customer Service Experience

The Forum is concerned that the national survey completed in 2025 indicated that satisfaction in customer service was generally low, with only 10% of face-to-face respondents (in areas experiencing disruption) who had reached out to Uisce Éireann rating their contact experience as very good or quite good, and only 35% of the national representative sample indicating a positive customer service experience.

The rate of satisfaction in customer service was higher in 2023 (50% reporting good or quite good) and also in the WAB survey in 2021 (51% reporting good or quite good). The Forum acknowledges that some of this trend could result from rising customer expectations from the utility.

The Forum is aware that Uisce Éireann reports on a Customer Service Key Performance Indicator which is based on a monthly review of a sample of customer contacts to assess the ability of Uisce Éireann to resolve a customer's request on their first contact. While this is an important parameter to monitor, the Forum is of the view that it is only a very small component of overall customer satisfaction in the utility.

In addition, the Forum acknowledges the role of the CRU in relation to monitoring and reporting on customer service against the Uisce Éireann Domestic and Non-domestic Customer Handbooks (both published in 2020), which set out the Code of Practice for Customer Communications and for Handling Complaints. The Forum is of the view that these customer handbooks should be revised to ensure that they reflect the need for Uisce Éireann to become a customer serving organisation, with improved communications, education and community engagement.

Furthermore, the Forum recommends that Public Trust in Uisce Éireann should be included as a Key Performance Indicator in the CRU's Performance Assessment Framework.

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*Recommendation 9: The Forum recommends that the CRU should revise their Domestic and Non-Domestic Customer Handbook to reflect the need for Uisce Éireann to become a customer serving organisation, with improved communications, education and community engagement.*

*Recommendation 10: The Forum recommends that the CRU's Performance Assessment Framework should include Public Trust as a Key Performance Indicator.*

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Members of the Water Forum have concerns that the use of call centres as the point of contact for Uisce Éireann, could be contributing to the decrease in customer satisfaction. The Forum acknowledges that call centres are commonly used by large utilities and businesses to deal with customer complaints or queries to improve efficiency, consistency and costs in customer service. Research<sup>2</sup> indicates however, that centralised call centres can remove the local context, with generic customer services that are disconnected from local or regional needs. A study by Harvard Business Review (2021) highlighted the need for water utilities to make customer experience central to operations, and an understanding of the consequences of not doing so. This study also highlighted the concerns about call centre agents not being able to answer queries on specific local water issues.

The Forum is of the view that the use of centralised, outsourced call centres is further distancing Uisce Éireann from the communities and their customers, as staff at off-site call centres can lack knowledge on how to help customers in a particular area.

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<sup>2</sup> [Centralized customer satisfaction: Centralized vs: Decentralized Customer Support: Pros and Cons - FasterCapital](#)

The Forum is of the view that regional in-house call centres would improve the customer service experience, where the call centre is owned and operated by the company, is more connected to local and regional issues, and is better aligned with the brand values and customer experience.

The Forum acknowledges that the customer service experience is multi-faceted and requires tailoring for different audiences, whereby younger age cohorts would expect online engagement and data access, while older age cohorts rely on local communication channels and direct engagement with UE staff either in person or on the phone.

Recommendation: The Forum is of the view that there should be more transparency on the customer service model being used by Uisce Éireann, including accessible information about their call centres and approach to dealing with customer queries or complaints.

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*Recommendation 11: The Forum recommends that Uisce Éireann review its current approach to using centralised, outsourced call centres for its customer service. The Forum is of the view that regional in-house call centres would offer improved customer experience and satisfaction.*

*Recommendation 12: The Forum recommends that Uisce Éireann review and strengthen their customer service experience, with targeted plans to cater for all types of customers through all communication and engagement channels.*

*Recommendation 13: The Forum is of the view that Uisce Éireann staff should be visible and accessible within the community and recommends that opportunities for local community engagement (e.g. regional community officers) are identified and Implemented.*

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#### Follow up to Queries/Complaints

The 2025 national survey asked those who had contacted Uisce Éireann with a query or complaint if they were satisfied with follow-up responses. Only 27% of the nationally representative sample were satisfied with follow-up responses, with no “satisfied” responses recorded in the face-to face sample. This indicates a decrease in satisfaction with follow-up with Uisce Éireann since 2021, when 35% of residential customers who experienced issues, were satisfied with follow-up responses.

Appropriately dealing with customer queries and complaints by ensuring customers are satisfied with the response or solution is important for both customer service experience and customer satisfaction.

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*Recommendation 14: The Forum recommends that Uisce Éireann strengthen Customer Service Experience by exploring customer focused methods and solutions to improving the timeliness and consistency of responding to an following up with customers, particularly during and after supply disruptions*

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### Access to Data and Information

Studies show that access to water data and information is a strong driver of customer satisfaction (Tian et al., 2023, James, 2021). In the Forum’s 2025 survey, public water consumers expressed strong interest in receiving information about their water supply (52%), where the desire was stronger among those who experienced recent issues or disruptions (69%). Customers showed the greatest appetite for information on drinking water quality and water conservation.

The Forum acknowledges that there is a large amount of information on Uisce Éireann’s website related to local water quality, water and wastewater projects, customer services and water supply updates. The Forum welcomes the development on the Uisce Éireann website, where users can insert their Eircode which directs consumers to a significant amount of information specific to individual water resource zones.

While the surveys indicated that appetite for information is high, many customers (71%) do not actively seek it out and 14% of customers are unaware that information is available, indicating largely passive engagement with existing channels. A study by James (2021) indicated that water quality information has to be packaged in such a way that people want to engage with it.

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*Recommendation 15: The Forum recommends that Uisce Éireann identify how to increase awareness among the public that information on their public supply is readily available on the Uisce Éireann website.*

*Recommendation 16: The Forum recommends that Uisce Éireann improve the visibility and clarity of information through clear signposting and plain language on water quality parameters, along with information on monitoring and reporting of public water supplies.*

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The Forum’s 2023 survey found that there is a large disconnect between a water source and the water that comes out of the tap: of the public water consumers surveyed, 54% said they were somewhat or entirely lacking in knowledge about where their water comes from. By comparison 82% of consumers of private group water schemes considered themselves knowledgeable, indicating a greater connection between source and supply in communities who are responsible for their own water supply and treatment. The Forum is of the view that education and awareness initiatives related to where water is sourced, how it is treated, distributed and monitored are essential to increase the public’s perception on the value of water. Research has shown that educational campaigns can lead

to a longer and deeper change in behaviour and water use than traditional policy instruments (Cotterill, 2021; Water UK, 2019).

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*Recommendation 17: The Forum recommends that a national “know your water supply” campaign is developed to educate the public about how drinking water is sourced in the natural environment, and undergoes lengthy treatment before distribution across the water network. This should increase the public’s perception of the value of water, and the need to conserve this precious resource.*

*Recommendation 18: The Forum recommends that the current approach to entering the consumer Eircode on the Uisce Éireann website, also provides information on the local water source (i.e. what lake, river, groundwater source) and the local water treatment plant. This could be made visibly appealing with photos and location maps of the water source and the water treatment plant to better connect people with their water supply.*

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## Water Conservation

The Forum strongly advocates for water conservation to be used as a tool for sustainable management of water resources. The Forum acknowledges that there are multiple avenues to strengthen water conservation and demand control, through stronger building standards, leakage reduction, education and awareness to both domestic and non-domestic customers and stronger planning controls to ensure that the demand does not exceed water availability within a water resource zone.

The Forum has previously made recommendations in relation to water conservation, which the Forum believes are also the interests of public water consumers as they support the sustainable management of Ireland’s water resources into the future.

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*Recommendation 19: The Forum recommends that Ireland’s Building Regulations should be revised and strengthened to include water efficiency targets for new buildings.*

*Recommendation 20: The Forum is of the view that it should be a planning requirement that new buildings should have a domestic water meter, not as a pricing strategy but as a demand management tool for Uisce Éireann.*

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There is a general misconception that Ireland due to its wet climate, does not experience water stress. Cotterill (2021) illustrated that if there is no perceived need to save water, due to a lack of information on water scarcity or water supply vulnerability, there is little incentive to do so.

When questioned about understanding and perspectives on water conservation in the 2023 national survey, there was very strong agreement (74%) on the importance of conserving treated water. The positive support for conservation was also reflected in the 2025 survey, where 64% said they felt supportive of water conservation efforts, and 44% felt proud to contribute. Still 26% of public water consumers felt sceptical about the impact water conservation and 30% frustrated by the need to

conserve water, illustrating there is room for improvement to increase public attitude towards water conservation through education and awareness.

Despite broadscale agreement on the need to conserve water in the home, there is a lack of knowledge on how to go about it and concern that water conservation measures would be expensive. In the 2023 survey, 73% of respondents said more information on their water use would be helpful, with over half having little or no idea how much water they use in a day.

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*Recommendation 21: The Forum calls for greater transparency around supply demand deficits across water resource zones, highlighting the need for increased water efficiency to support the demand in a given region and thus supporting water conservation messaging.*

*Recommendation 22: The Forum recommends that Uisce Éireann initiate proactive communication on drought tracking, to raise awareness of the ongoing work being done by Uisce Éireann and also the potential stress on their local water resource zones.*

*Recommendation 23: The Forum recommends that Uisce Éireann continue to promote water conservation messaging and initiatives, with proactive engagement to highlight the broader benefit of conserving water (including to support housing targets, economic development and future risks from climate change).*

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A study on household water use behaviour by Jorgensen et al. (2009), indicated that if there is a lack of institutional trust in the authority delivering the messaging, people will be less inclined to cooperate and save water. Cotterill (2022) therefore recommended that a collaborative approach for future education and awareness initiatives should be developed and delivered by multiple agencies in Ireland.

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*Recommendation 24: The Forum is of the view that the DHLGH should also initiate a national “know your water supply” campaign to educate the public about how drinking water is sourced in the natural environment, and undergoes lengthy treatment before distribution across the water network. Receiving this message from multiple sources (not only Uisce Éireann) has been proven to better influence behaviour around water use.*

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## Summary of Recommendations

### Recommendations to Uisce Éireann (short term)

- 1.** The Forum recommends that Uisce Éireann should develop a Communications Strategy which provides a roadmap on how it will improve communications, education and community engagement to build public trust in the water supply and the utility.
- 2.** The Forum recommends that Uisce Éireann explore new ways to increase the uptake of the text alert service to enhance advance notification of supply disruptions, increasing awareness of the benefits of signing up. Along with national messaging, Uisce Éireann should identify ways they can engage locally through community groups or events.
- 3.** The Forum emphasises the need for continued engagement from Uisce Éireann during a supply disruption, along with notification of when the issue has been resolved, to instil confidence in the water supply and utility.
- 4.** The Forum recommends that Uisce Éireann proactively engage with local communities in areas where there will be disruptions due to infrastructure repair and upgrade. The Forum recommends that Uisce Éireann not only communicate the details of any planned disruptions but also communicate the wider benefits of planned works (e.g. reduced leakage, increased capacity).
- 5.** The Forum recommends that Uisce Éireann continue to build awareness of how public water consumers can contact Uisce Éireann, if they have a query or a complaint.
- 6.** The Forum recommends that Uisce Éireann identify how to increase awareness among the public that information on their public supply is readily available on the Uisce Éireann website.
- 7.** The Forum recommends that Uisce Éireann improve the visibility and clarity of information through clear signposting and plain language on water quality parameters, along information on monitoring and reporting of public water supplies.
- 8.** The Forum recommends that the current approach to entering the consumer Eircode on the Uisce Éireann website, also provides information on the local water source (i.e. what lake, river, groundwater source) and the local water treatment plant. This could be made visibly appealing with photos and location maps of the water source and the water treatment plant to better connect people with their water supply.
- 9.** The Forum is of the view that there should be more transparency on the customer service model being used by Uisce Éireann, including accessible information about their call centres and approach to dealing with customer queries or complaints.
- 10.** The Forum recommends that Uisce Éireann continue to promote water conservation messaging and initiatives, with proactive engagement to highlight the broader benefits of conserving water (including to support the growing population, economic development and future risks from climate change).
- 11.** The Forum recommends that Uisce Éireann initiate proactive communication on drought tracking, to raise awareness of the ongoing work being done by Uisce Éireann and also the potential stress on their local water resource zones.

### Recommendations to Uisce Éireann (long term)

- 12.** The Forum recommends that Uisce Éireann develop a communications campaign to raise awareness on the high-quality of public water supplies. This could be delivered through national messaging, and regionally through local communication channels.

- 13.** That Forum recommends that Uisce Éireann urgently deliver on evaluating and reporting on security of supply across water resource zones to support a resilient supply of water into the future.
- 14.** The Forum recommends that Uisce Éireann should initiate an education campaign on the various parameters monitored in drinking water and should include information on how taste and colour can vary between supplies. Uisce Éireann should consider how they can address the common taste and odour concerns raised by public consumers, through a platform to report these issues, along with follow up investigations and communications with the consumer.
- 15.** The Forum recommends that Uisce Éireann review its current approach to using centralised, outsourced call centres for its customer service. The Forum is of the view that regional in-house call centres would offer improved customer experience and satisfaction.
- 16.** The Forum recommends that Uisce Éireann review and strengthen their customer service experience, with targeted plans to cater for all types of customers through all communication and engagement channels.
- 17.** The Forum is of the view that Uisce Éireann staff should be visible and accessible within the community and recommends that opportunities for local community engagement (e.g. regional community officers) are identified and implemented.
- 18.** The Forum recommends that Uisce Éireann strengthen Customer Service Experience by exploring customer focused methods and solutions to improving the timeliness and consistency of responding to and following up with customers, particularly during and after supply disruptions
- 19.** The Forum recommends that a national ‘know your water supply’ campaign is developed, to educate the public about how drinking water is sourced in the natural environment, and undergoes lengthy treatment before distribution across the water network. This should increase the public’s perception of the value of water, and the need to conserve this precious resource.
- 20.** The Forum calls for greater transparency around supply demand deficits across water resource zones, highlighting the need for increased water efficiency to support the demand in a given region and thus supporting water conservation messaging.

#### Recommendations to the CRU

- 21.** The Forum recommends that the CRU should revise their Domestic and Non-Domestic Customer Handbooks to they reflect the need for Uisce Éireann to become a customer serving organisation, with improved communications, education and community engagement.
- 22.** The Forum recommends that the CRU’s Performance Assessment Framework should include Public Trust as a Key Performance Indicator.

#### Recommendations to the DHLGH

- 23.** The Forum is of the view that the DHLGH should also initiate a national ‘know your water supply’ campaign to educate the public about how drinking water is sourced in the natural environment, and undergoes lengthy treatment before distribution across the water network. Receiving this messaging from multiple sources (not only Uisce Éireann) has been proven to better influence behaviour around water use.
- 24.** The Forum recommends that Ireland’s Building Regulations should be revised and strengthened to include water efficiency targets for new buildings.

- 25.** The Forum is of the view that it should be a planning requirement that new buildings should have a domestic water meter, not as a pricing strategy but as a demand management tool for Uisce Éireann.