

8 December 2023.

## **Water Services.**

Dear Colleague,

We wanted to provide you with an update on some matters relating to the implementation of the Framework for the Future Delivery of Public Water Services (the Framework).

On the 2 June 2023 Minister Darragh O'Brien further confirmed that workers who opted not to transfer to Uisce Éireann (UE) and remain in their Local Authority would retain their terms and conditions of employment including allowances. This confirmation by the Minister removed a significant obstacle to the implementation of the Framework and in the intervening period three meetings of the Irish Water Consultative Group (IWCG) have been held. The IWCG is made up of Unions, the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA), UE management and officials from the Department of Housing. The IWCG is chaired by an official from the WRC.

While the discussion at the IWCG have been wide-ranging there are a number of matters in particular that we wanted to draw to your attention.

- 1) You will be aware that the Framework provides that a voluntary severance scheme will be made available to Local Authority Water Services Staff. We can now report that Local Authority Water Services Staff will be provided with the opportunity to express and interest in availing of the voluntary severance scheme in the early weeks of 2024. It is anticipated that information on the scheme including a mechanism to allow workers calculate the value of the scheme will be provided through each Local Authority.
- 2) We have continued to press the management side of the IWCG to ensure that the public water services are sufficiently resourced and that where staff vacancies arise they are filled in line with the terms of the framework. You will be aware of recent communications from Local Authorities regarding the cessation of acting arrangements in Local Authority Water Services on the 31st December 2023. This unilateral decision was only communicated to unions after the event. At the most recent meeting of the IWCG we pointed to the damaging impact of this decision. Following these representations, UE and the LGMA have agreed that existing fixed term contracts or acting arrangements due to finish by the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2023 can be extended for a maximum period to no later than the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024. This is to enable UE to make arrangements for the filling of these posts. Where possible the filling of these posts by UE should be completed at the earliest possible date before the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024.

- 3) There are a number of other matters that continue to be actively discussed and monitored at the IWCG, including, the arrangements for the re-assignment and redeployment of Local Authority water services staff, the arrangements for staff transferring to UE, data sharing and Local Authority laboratories.
- 4) Alongside the Framework, the Government published a 'Wider Policy Context Document' which amongst other things commits the Minister to bring proposals to Government on the holding of constitutional referendum to prevent the privatisation of UE and requires the Department of Housing to fund a pilot programme aimed at providing upskilling and training opportunities for Local Authority water services workers. We have had discussions with the Department of Housing on the provision of the pilot programme and we are awaiting proposals from them on this initiative. The Minister has yet to announce his plans for the promised referendum and we intend to intensify our 'Keep Water Public – Name the Date' campaign in 2024.
- 5) We have recently been made aware of a decision of Louth County Council to withdraw from the master co-operation agreement. This decision has very significant consequence for water services staff in that Local Authority. We have been in contact with the LGMA and the Department of Housing to demand that the position of water services in that Local Authority be brought back into line with their colleagues in other Local Authorities.

We intend to issue more regular communications like this over the course of 2024 to keep you apprised of developments at the IWCG.

**On Behalf of  
Congress, Connect, Fórsa and SIPTU.**