



An Coimisiún  
um Rialáil Fóntas  
**Commission for  
Regulation of Utilities**

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**Commission for Regulation of Utilities**

# Irish Water Domestic Customer Handbook

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# 1. Introduction

This document is written by the Commission for Regulation of Utilities ('CRU') as the economic regulator of Irish Water and provides guidelines to Irish Water in terms of required levels of customer service and customer protection measures to be implemented in their business operations.

This document covers the required content of Irish Water's Customer Charter, Terms & Conditions and Codes of Practice for Domestic Customers.

To clarify, unless otherwise stated, and for the purposes of this Handbook, a customer is defined as anyone who utilises water supplied by or wastewater services provided by Irish Water at a specific premises. An account holder is an individual or a legal entity that has the obligation to pay for the services supplied by Irish Water to a specific premises.

General obligations on Irish Water in relation to customer service:

- 1.1.1 Each Code of Practice and Customer Charter should clearly specify its objectives and the target groups it is intended to reach.
- 1.1.2 Each Code or Customer Charter must be written in plain English and be set out in a way that is easy to understand.
- 1.1.3 Irish Water is required to prepare separate documents with regard to domestic customers in relation to Terms & Conditions of supply, Codes of Practice and the Customer Charter.
- 1.1.4 Irish Water is required to apply the principles of Universal Design subject to CRU approval, when implementing the requirements of and developing the services referred to in the Codes of Practice, Customer Charters, and Terms & Conditions, and in all associated communications with customers.
- 1.1.5 Irish Water is required to ensure all customer communication material, Codes of Practice documents, Terms & Conditions and Customer Charters are available in appropriate formats for customers and potential customers with special needs.
- 1.1.6 Copies of the Codes of Practice and Customer Charter must be published on Irish Water's website in an easily accessible and visible location.
- 1.1.7 Irish Water will be obliged to operate in line with any other existing legislation which covers their business.

- 1.1.8 Irish Water is required to train their staff and/or agents appropriately with respect to their Terms & Conditions, the Codes of Practice and Customer Charter requirements.
- 1.1.9 Irish Water must implement business processes which allow them to monitor the implementation of the Codes of Practice and report to the CRU on a regular basis. The CRU may seek to review or audit these business processes and monitoring procedures as part of its remit as the economic regulator of Irish Water.
- 1.1.10 The requirements in relation to these Codes of Practice do not apply in cases where fraudulent or illegal activity on the part of the account holder in relation to their Irish Water account and water or wastewater service supply infrastructure has been demonstrated to have taken place.

## 2. Key Documents

### 2.1 Documents requiring preparation by Irish Water

Irish Water will be required to prepare the following key documents to outline their customer service standards, as outlined below, to reflect at a minimum the requirements set out in this Handbook.

<b>Irish Water Domestic Customer Handbook</b>
<b>1. Customer Charter for Domestic Customers</b>
<b>2. Codes of Practice</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Customer Communication</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Metering</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Billing</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Vulnerable Customers</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Network Operations</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Complaint Handling</li></ul>
<b>3. Terms and Conditions of Supply</b>

## 3. Document Approval Process

### 3.1 Outline of approval of key documents

3.1.1 Irish Water is required to submit any amended documents listed in the table above to the CRU as required, for review and approval in advance of publication.

3.1.2 The CRU may approve or refuse approval of the documents submitted.

- 3.1.3 Once approval is gained documents shall be published and made easily accessible on the Irish Water website.
- 3.1.4 Any changes to approved documents must be further approved by CRU in advance of publication.
- 3.1.5 If any of Irish Water's proposed Codes of Practice or the Customer Charter are not approved, then guidelines as issued in CRU's decision on the handbook document will apply.

## 4. Irish Water's Domestic Customer Charter

### 4.1 General

- 4.1.1 Irish Water shall develop a Customer Charter, setting out the services provided and service quality levels offered. The Customer Charter must also set out its commitments where charter payments will apply and payment arrangements which apply if service quality levels are not met.
- 4.1.2 These commitments are an indication of Irish Water's commitment to customer service and are required to have a financial penalty associated with them if they are not met.
- 4.1.3 A penalty of €10 shall apply per commitment. This payment to the customer is in relation to the guarantee; the customer may still also pursue a complaint with Irish Water in relation to further costs associated with the impact of the failure to meet the commitment.
- 4.1.4 A customer shall be entitled to a charter payment for each instance that Irish Water fails to meet the commitments set out in Section 4.2.

### 4.2 Minimum Commitments

In their Customer Charter Irish Water must set out a list of minimum commitments where charter payments apply for domestic customers. Below is a list of the minimum commitments that must be included in that list, however, Irish Water may include additional commitments.

#### 4.2.1 **Minimum commitments where charter payments apply**

1. Irish Water guarantees to respond to customer complaints within 5 working days with a resolution or a plan for the steps required to achieve a resolution, under normal conditions.
2. Irish Water guarantees to issue accurate bills on a quarterly basis to domestic customers (Exceptions to this may exist for the first and final bills for new customers). All bills will be in accordance with the CRU's decision on Irish Water's Water Charges Plan.
3. Before a water meter is installed at a property, Irish Water guarantees to provide at least two weeks notification as well as meter installation information.
4. Irish Water guarantees to remedy any damage to a property which has



occurred as a result of its employees/agents activities during meter installation. This will be done free of charge to the customer.

5. Irish Water commits to treating sympathetically customers who contact them when they are having difficulty paying their water bills. Irish Water will inform customers of the payment options available, offer payment plans for customers in arrears and take a customer's ability to pay into account when agreeing any payment plan.
6. Irish Water guarantees to apply the applicable discount/rebate to a customer's bill in relation to notices that declare water unfit for human consumption in line with the CRU's decision on Irish Water's Water Charges Plan.
7. Where there is a planned interruption in an area, Irish Water guaranteed to provide at least two days' notice to customers whom Irish Water anticipate will be affected.
8. Where there is planned interruption in an area Irish Water guarantees to directly contact customers registered on the Priority Services Register at least two days in advance.
9. Where there is an unplanned interruption that is anticipated to last more than four hours, Irish Water guarantees to directly contact customers registered on the Priority Services Register to discuss any critical needs they may have.

Where there has been a failure by Irish Water in relation to any of the above, a domestic customer may complain to Irish Water highlighting that failure. If Irish Water has not met the above commitments that customer should then be issued a charter payment by Irish Water, for each failing. However, it is important to note that the above list does not restrict Irish Water from issuing charter payments to a domestic customer in other circumstances. Where Irish Water have received a complaint from a domestic customer and Irish Water recognises that the level of service that customer has received was inadequate, they may issue charter payments as they see fit.

The CRU recognises that the above list of minimum commitments where charter payments apply does not cover all aspects of the requirements set out in the Codes of Practice. However, the CRU considers that these commitments cover the most essential areas set out in the Codes.

Regardless of whether charter payments are applicable, Irish Water is expected to provide a high standard of customer service from the outset and endeavour to deliver all aspects of the Codes. The CRU will also review the requirements included in the Water Customer Handbook on an ongoing basis, as required, to ensure that the customer service levels delivered continue to develop over time.

## 4.3 Water and wastewater quality

4.3.1 The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is the regulatory authority that will deal with enforcing adherence to relevant environmental legislation by Irish Water.

4.3.2 From time to time it may be the case that some customer's water supply is deemed to be unfit for human consumption. For example, this may be where a boil notice has been issued, where alternative water supply has been arranged to protect customer health and safety or under other circumstances as defined by the EPA or HSE. In such circumstances the customer may not be charged the full amount that would otherwise be applicable. Irish Water will be required to apply charges in line with any CRU decision on Irish Water's Water Charges Plan in relation to such cases.

## 5. Code of Practice on Customer Communication for Domestic Customers

The use of the word customer in the Code of Practice on Customer Communication refers to existing and potential customers.

Irish Water will ensure that in all communication with customers and in all communication formats Plain English is used and the principles of Universal Design will be applied. Irish Water will also ensure that they can provide information in an appropriate manner to those with visual or other impairments.

Irish Water shall provide reports to the CRU on how Universal Design has been implemented within their customer communication material and processes. These reports shall be provided by Irish Water as directed by the CRU.

### 5.1 Customer information provision overarching requirements

- 5.1.1 Irish Water must adopt a transparent and fair approach to the communication of their services and the sign up of customers.
- 5.1.2 Irish Water must take all reasonable steps to ensure all customer communications are easy to understand and accurate.
- 5.1.3 Irish Water must ensure that their employees or agents are sensitive and make steps to cater for a person's inexperience or vulnerability when communicating information on their services.
- 5.1.4 Irish Water shall work to ensure there is full public and customer awareness of their vulnerable customers register. This will include providing information and working collaboratively with relevant support and charitable organisations.
- 5.1.5 Irish Water will provide through a range of communication channels detail of:
  - a) Pipework responsibility and ownership with diagrammatic representation including detail on the process a customer should follow if they notice a leak or an issue with pipework on their own property or outside their own property.
  - b) Broad guidance on group water schemes and distinction between Irish Water supplied services and group water scheme services.

- c) The process a customer must follow to request a new connection to the water and/or wastewater network and relevant application forms.
- d) How to access information on a schedule of connection charges and a clear and transparent connection charging methodology, with worked examples of the typical Irish Water connection costs for domestic customers.
- e) How to access information on the process a customer must follow to request information on existing water/wastewater networks, including any associated charges for the use or connection to such networks.
- f) Contact details for new connections/connection queries at Irish Water.
- g) Billing details - samples of bills, tariff details, tariff methodologies and explanations of terms used.
- h) Payment methods and arrears handling.
- i) Guidance to Irish Water customers with regard to disposal of substances not permitted through wastewater systems.
- j) Contact details for emergencies or pipe faults.
- k) How a customer can make a complaint.

## **5.2 Customer communication during supply interruptions and poor quality supply periods**

For the purpose of this Code a supply interruption is any incident related to Irish Water activities or assets that causes a customer's supply to be significantly impacted. This may include a complete interruption of supply or a significant drop in pressure at the customer's premises.

5.2.1 Irish Water shall ensure regular up-to-date information is available in advance of and during planned interruptions to normal supply on the planned timing of the interruption, and the anticipated time of restoration of supply. Customers that Irish Water anticipates will be affected during a planned interruption shall be notified at least 2 days in advance of the event. Notification of a planned interruption may be through direct communication with the customer or through a range of appropriate communication channels and information shall be made available to customers through telephone helplines.

5.2.2 Irish Water shall ensure regular up-to-date information is available to customers understood by Irish Water to be affected by an unplanned interruption to water supplies. This information shall be publicised through a range of appropriate communication channels and shall be made available to customers through telephone helplines.

5.2.3 In instances where notices that declare water unfit for human consumption are implemented, Irish Water shall make provision to communicate with all anticipated affected customers through appropriate communication channels to:

- a) inform them it is not safe to drink the water and inform the customer of any further precautionary measures that should be taken,
- b) explain the reason for the notice,
- c) highlight the anticipated duration of the notice, and
- d) provide regular updates on progress to rectify the issue causing substandard supply,
- e) contact registered vulnerable customers as per the requirements laid out in Sections 8.3 and 8.4.

Updated information on the notice duration shall be regularly publicised through: social media, customer emails, regularly updated website information and local broadcasts, and shall be made available to customers through telephone helplines.

5.2.4 In instances where (for public health and safety reasons, or other emergency reasons) customers are provided with alternative supply arrangements Irish Water shall make provision to communicate with all anticipated affected customers through a range of communication channels to:

- a) inform them it is not safe to drink the water and explain the reason why,
- b) inform the customer of any other precautionary measures that should be taken,
- c) inform them where Irish Water will locate and facilitate alternative water supplies,
- d) highlight the anticipated duration of the alternative supply, and
- e) provide regular updates on progress to rectify the issue causing substandard supply.
- f) contact registered vulnerable customers as per the requirements laid out in Sections 8.3 and 8.4.

Updated information on alternative water supply duration shall be regularly publicised through: social media, customer emails, regularly updated website information, and local broadcasts, and shall be made available to customers through telephone helplines.

## 5.3 Customer communication through printed material

5.3.1 Irish Water shall make available relevant printed material upon a request (by phone, email or in writing) from a customer or potential customer. At a minimum this includes Customer Terms & Conditions, Codes of Practice, Customer Charter and tariff information.

## 5.4 Customer communication by telephone

5.4.1 A customer or potential customer should have the opportunity to speak to an Irish Water staff member or agent working on their behalf to find out further information about water or wastewater service supply, connection policy, metering, billing and any other relevant area.

5.4.2 Telephone contact details should be made easily visible at all times on Irish Water's website, bills and in print media.

5.4.3 Irish Water shall make provision to have sufficient staff trained and available to deal with such contact from customers.

5.4.4 Unless requested by a customer and apart from during an emergency or interruption to service, Irish Water must not make a telephone call to a household customer:

- a) on Christmas Eve
- b) on any Public or Bank Holiday
- c) on Sundays
- d) or outside the following times:
  - i. 9am to 9pm weekdays
  - ii. 11am to 5pm Saturdays

## 5.5 Customer contact in person

If Irish Water, an Irish Water representative or a contractor working on Irish Water's behalf engages in direct communication, or has a need to visit in person, for maintenance or operational reasons, at a customer's premises (with or without a prearranged appointment) or by personal contact, the representative must immediately and at all times after that on request by the customer:

- a) produce an identity card that shows his or her full name and photograph and the name, business address and contact number of Irish Water. Where

Local Authority staff are working on behalf of Irish Water, then they are obliged to produce an identity card that shows their full name and photograph as well as the Local Authorities name, business address and contact number;

b) advise the customer of the purpose of the visit.

5.5.1 Unless requested by a customer and apart from maintenance and operational reasons, Irish Water must not contact a household customer at the customer's premises for direct communication purposes:

- a) on Christmas Eve
- b) on any Public or Bank Holiday
- c) on Sundays
- d) or outside the following times:
  - i. 9am to 9pm on weekdays
  - ii. 11am to 5pm on Saturdays

## 5.6 Customer contact by e-mail

5.6.1 Irish Water may send electronic mail for direct communication purposes in line with data protection legislation. Where Irish Water engages in direct communication via e-mail to customers, Irish Water must provide the following information to customers:

- a) Irish Water's name and address; and
- b) Irish Water's e-mail address or other means of electronic contact; or
- c) Irish Water's contact number;

## 5.7 Customer contact by SMS

5.7.1 Where Irish Water engages in direct communication via SMS to customers, Irish Water must identify themselves in the text, by providing their name.

## 5.8 Account holder sign-up

In addition to requirements set out above, Irish Water must set out in their Code of Practice clear rules around customer sign-up, and third party sign up as appropriate. In addition, when signing an account holder up Irish Water must:

- a) Where a joint account is to be opened, Irish Water should confirm with any other named person on the account that they wish to be named as soon as

possible after the initial account opening.

- b) Provide a simple method for account holders to add a third party contact to their account.
- c) Clearly explain how the account holder will be billed, including billing frequency.
- d) Explain how the account holder can make payment against the bill and any budgeting options available.
- e) Explain that the duration of the contract is evergreen (that is, 'open-ended').
- f) Provide the account holder with a copy of the Terms & Conditions of supply of water and wastewater service contract and the rates that apply to the service they are signing up to. Where an account holder is not provided with a copy of these documents at the point of sign up, copies of these documents must be sent to the account holder and key terms must be highlighted and explained.
- g) Explain any penalty that may apply if the account holder does not meet the terms of the Terms & Conditions.
- h) Highlight the existence and purpose of the Vulnerable Customer Register and how any customer can apply to be put on the register if they believe they meet the relevant criteria.



## **6. Code of Practice on Metering for Domestic Customers**

Irish Water will set out in a Code of Practice on Metering, the procedures it will take in relation to installation of new meters, testing for suspected faulty meters and the maintenance or repair/replacement of meters that may malfunction. For avoidance of doubt this Code of Practice relates only to domestic meters installed by Irish Water, and does not refer to domestic meters previously installed by Local Authorities or meters installed by private individuals.

### **6.1 Installation of new meters**

- 6.1.1 Irish Water will during meter installation programmes give at least 2 weeks' notification and meter installation information in advance of meter installation, with at least 2 days advance notification of an anticipated installation date.
- 6.1.2 Installation of water meters by Irish Water will be undertaken in as professional and as least disruptive a manner as possible to the property and the surrounding area.
- 6.1.3 Irish Water shall in line with relevant legislation ensure that water meters are installed in accessible locations, where feasible, and that the meter can, where possible, be read by the customer.
- 6.1.4 Irish Water will remedy any damage to a property which has occurred as a result of its employees' or agents' activities during meter installation free of charge to the customer. Remedy of damage to a property during meter installation shall be processed through the normal complaint handling procedures and standards (if not otherwise agreed between Irish Water and the customer).

### **6.2 Meter ownership and meter access post installation**

- 6.2.1 Irish Water will make it clear to customers at all times that the meter is the property of Irish Water.
- 6.2.2 Irish Water will be responsible for all operation and maintenance tasks on metering equipment.

6.2.3 The customer may, if he/she so wishes, open the meter box to inspect the meter or to isolate their water supply from the stop valve. Irish Water will be obliged to provide information to a customer on how to access their meter as required, but will not permit a customer to remove any Irish Water apparatus from the meter box.

### **6.3 Meter testing**

6.3.1 Irish Water will facilitate testing of water meters upon request from a customer. Upon request from a customer to test a meter; Irish Water will conduct this test within a reasonable timeframe.

6.3.2 Irish Water may impose an additional up-front cost-reflective regulated charge on the customer for this service as approved by the CRU, and must notify the customer of this charge in advance so as to allow a customer to decide whether to proceed with the testing.

6.3.3 If the meter is found to be faulty (excluding damage caused by the customer) then Irish Water shall be obliged to refund the cost of the meter testing to the customer and repair or replace said meter at no cost to the customer.

## 7. Code of Practice on Customer Billing for Domestic Customers

Irish Water shall ensure that all bills are in accordance with the CRU's decision on Irish Water's Water Charges Plan.

### 7.1 General customer service in relation to billing:

7.1.1 Irish Water will ensure that all bills, scheduled or otherwise, are calculated accurately based on one of the following:

- a) Actual meter readings conducted by Irish Water staff or its agents
- b) Customer meter readings
- c) Estimated readings - in exceptional circumstances, where Irish Water have not been able to visit and/or read meter an estimated bill can be issued based on historic or assessed consumption rates for the account holder's premises; Fixed charges (where water meters are not yet installed or cannot be installed for technical reasons). Default fixed charge (where there is insufficient information to apply the appropriate charge).

7.1.2 Irish Water will endeavour to read customer meters and to issue bills quarterly (every 3 months) for their water and/or wastewater usage. Exceptions to this may exist for the first and final bills for new customers in line with dates of commencement and cessation of water/wastewater service provision to a particular account holder.

7.1.3 Irish Water will ensure that unmetered customers are billed quarterly in line with their appropriate fixed charge.

7.1.4 Irish Water shall charge customers for wastewater services based on a) a direct volume equivalent of their metered water consumption, or b) an appropriate fixed charge for unmetered customers in accordance with the CRU's decision on Irish Water's Water Charges Plan. Irish Water will ensure there is adequate explanation of the wastewater charge on the bill.

7.1.5 Where Irish Water has issued 2 consecutive estimated bills to an account holder Irish Water is obliged to:

- visit the meter specifically and investigate reasons for non-reading
- take a direct reading to ensure subsequent billing is accurate and
- calculate any over or undercharging which may have resulted from estimated

billing and incorporate into subsequent bill(s)

- 7.1.6 With the exception of the first bill, to be issued in quarter two 2015, Irish Water should issue scheduled bills to account holders no later than one month after the completion of scheduled meter reads for the billing period involved except in situations where the account holder has agreed otherwise or where the meter reading data appears erroneous. Every effort should be made for a prompt revised bill in the event of meter reading affecting the outcome of arrears or proposed reduction.
- 7.1.7 Where Irish Water becomes aware of an unexpected delay in billing an account holder that will exceed one full billing period Irish Water will contact the account holder where reasonably practicable to notify the account holder of the late billing.
- 7.1.8 Where Irish Water offers electronic billing to customers, an account holder may opt into this type of billing format.
- 7.1.9 Where an account holder wishes to switch back to paper billing this will be facilitated in a simple process at no cost to the account holder.
- 7.1.10 Where an error is discovered in relation to the billing applied to an account holder or the meter readings or meter number associated with an account holder, Irish Water will determine whether the account holder has been in effect over or under paying for the water and/or wastewater services supplied. Where the account holder has been determined to have been underpaying and has previously made all reasonable efforts to pay their bills in a timely manner, the account holder will be required to pay the balance for the previous 12 months from the discovery of the error. Where the account holder has been in effect overpaying, Irish Water will refund in full the amount overpaid by the account holder for the duration of the error as established by investigation. For the avoidance of doubt where an account holder has consistently been in arrears with their bill payments and has not engaged with Irish Water in efforts to establish an appropriate payment plan, they will not be eligible for such protection from charging errors.

## 7.2 Information on the bill

The bill must be clear, simple and easy to understand for customers.

- 7.2.1 The following information must be placed on the front page of the bill in a manner that allows the account holder to find it easily:
- a) Account holder account number and account holder name

- b) Account holder address
- c) Property/supply address if different from account holder Address
- d) Water meter number
- e) Summary of charges
- f) Billing period covered

Other information required on the bill:

- a) Irish Water's emergency reporting contact number
- b) Irish Water general enquiries contact number, contact email & contact details for customer queries
- c) Billing frequency
- d) Stipulate whether a meter is installed or not
- e) Customer type
- f) For unmetered customers, an explanation of the fixed charges
- g) Meter readings, upon which the bill is based including an indication as to whether the readings are either i) an actual reading by Irish Water; ii) an estimate or iii) a reading submitted by a customer
- h) Clear breakdown of charges, water consumption and wastewater release unit data; including any applicable rebates, allowances and penalties. For those customers who are metered but capped at the appropriate charge , the information on the bill will allow a customer to easily understand their capped charge and their metered charge for a particular billing period, in line with the CRU's decision on Irish Water's Water Charges Plan
- i) Clear breakdown of any separate works, such as connection works, connection repair, meter testing where these are being applied to the account holder as separate charges
- j) VAT as a separate line item, where applicable
- k) For bills issued from June 2015 onwards Irish Water shall display historical consumption/wastewater release data for the previous 12 months (where data is available). This should include concise outline of units consumed and may also contain information on wastewater units calculated, unit price, standing charge and discounts/allowances provided. This information shall also be made available to account holder through an online system in advance of this date where possible.
- l) A list of payment options
- m) From 1<sup>st</sup> October 2015, the customer's water zone

## 7.3 Presentation of Information on Charges

- 7.3.1 When presenting information on charges Irish Water must:
- a) Display all charges and tariffs on its website at all times
  - b) Display information on capped charges and fixed charges
  - c) Ensure customers who enquire about charges and tariffs by telephone are given details on the charges and tariffs applicable to them
  - d) Display charges and tariffs on a per unit basis. Information on applicable VAT rates (or VAT exemption) shall be stated on the bill.

## 7.4 Payment Options

- 7.4.1 Irish Water may provide a choice of payment methods which must at a minimum include the following categories:
- a) Electronic Funds Transfer;
  - b) Postal;
  - c) Over the counter (for example: Pay point, Post Office);
  - d) Household Budget Scheme.
- 7.4.2 Irish Water shall offer a facility where customers can pay their bills on a more frequent basis than quarterly.
- 7.4.3 Where a customer is paying by direct debit then the account holder must be notified in line with the Single European Payment Area (SEPA) standards for notification of direct debits.
- 7.4.4 Irish Water should include details in their Code of any standard budgeting/payment arrangements that customers may avail of, for example, Household Budget Scheme, level/budget payment plans that allow the spreading of costs over a defined time period.
- 7.4.5 Where an account holder requests a change to their payment method Irish Water shall facilitate this within 5 working days.

## 7.5 Tariffs & Prices

- 7.5.1 Irish Water will notify customers of the tariff applicable to that customer in line with the account holder's Terms & Conditions.

- 7.5.2 Changes in tariffs will be clearly indicated to the account holder with at least 30 days' notice in advance of the change being implemented. The change in tariff will also be stated on the bill and the method of application will be explained on the bill or in an accompanying insert (this may be an electronic notice where an account holder has chosen this method of billing).
- 7.5.3 Where Irish Water uses a method of prorating bills at a tariff change, this will be indicated on the bill and the methodology explained on the bill or in an accompanying insert (this may be an electronic notice where an account holder has chosen this method of billing).

## 7.6 Closing Account and Issuing Final Bill

- 7.6.1 The Billing Code should set out clearly Irish Water's requirements for closing accounts. This should include the steps the account holder must take in order to close their account and any liability they may have in the event that they do not close their account correctly.
- 7.6.2 Irish Water will, upon request from an account holder to close an account, offer an estimated read at no charge to the account holder. If the account holder does not wish to accept this the account holder can provide a self-read, or can request a specific Irish Water meter read to be conducted, for which a cost reflective charge may apply. Irish Water will endeavour to conduct such a read within 5 working days of the request from the customer. Irish Water may not keep an account holder's account open and bill the account holder indefinitely for continued consumption where the account holder has made contact to close their account and has accepted an estimated read, provided a self-read or requested a specific Irish Water read. If none of these options have been accepted by the account holder Irish Water should put in place a process for addressing this which may include engaging with the account holder until a satisfactory outcome is reached before closing the account.
- 7.6.3 Irish Water may not keep an account holder's account open, apart from when there is a requirement to collect an outstanding balance, but must ensure this account is not linked to a property where a new occupant or account holder has been registered at said property.
- 7.6.4 Where an account holder has closed their account the final closing bill will be issued not later than six weeks from the effective date of account close taking place.

## **7.7 Arrears & arrangements for identifying and dealing with customers in financial difficulty**

- 7.7.1 Irish Water is required to include in their Code of Practice on Billing a section outlining Irish Water's procedures for dealing with customers having difficulty paying and the options available for these customers.
- 7.7.2 Irish Water shall be proactive in engaging early with customers who are having payment difficulties to establish appropriate payment plans.
- 7.7.3 Irish Water will advise customers to contact them at an early stage if they are experiencing difficulty making payment on their bill.
- 7.7.4 Irish Water will endeavour to ensure that customers with repayment difficulties who contact Irish Water will be made to feel that their case will be heard sympathetically and that offers of repayment will be carefully considered.
- 7.7.5 Irish Water should ensure that staff handling arrears cases have received sufficient training and are able to identify and support vulnerable customers.
- 7.7.6 Irish Water must direct customers to a copy of their Code of Practice on Billing at an early stage during the follow-up action for non-payment of an account or for failure to keep to an agreed payment arrangement.
- 7.7.7 Should the account holder wish to nominate a third party to represent them this must be facilitated, for example a Money Advisor including MABS, another recognised charity or Social Welfare Representative.
- 7.7.8 Where circumstances warrant it, Irish Water should be proactive in recommending the customer seek guidance to his/her local MABS office or an appropriate alternative.

## **7.8 Payment Plans**

- 7.8.1 A payment plan, whereby a staged repayment of the account arrears is agreed between an account holder and Irish Water, is a method of assisting customers who are experiencing financial difficulties in paying their bills. Irish Water is required to assist customers in genuine financial difficulty in making a payment plan and, where appropriate and where consent is given by the customer, engage with a money advisor acting on behalf of the account holder, for example MABS, or another recognised charity or third party.



7.8.2 Irish Water must take account of the individual customer's ability to pay when agreeing any repayment arrangement, by credit or other method and confirm with the account holder that arrangements are manageable.

7.8.3 Where a payment plan has been entered into with the account holder, details of the payment plan, including a clear explanation of the new payment arrangement and any associated terms, must be clearly communicated to the account holder through an appropriate communication channel(s) requested by the account holder. Irish Water is obliged to keep appropriate records on file to demonstrate direct engagement with the account holder.

## **7.9 Dealing with premises with no registered account holder**

7.9.1 The Code should include a separate section setting out clearly Irish Water's process for handling properties where there is no registered account holder, and clearly identify liability for water/wastewater charges as regards the owner or occupier of such properties.

7.9.2 Where it arises that a property has had an account holder close an account and no new account has been registered to that property Irish Water must clearly identify the appropriate party to which liability for water/wastewater charges is transferred.

7.9.3 Where Irish Water is supplying a property and the existing account holder has closed their account, Irish Water must issue a notice, in writing by letter, to inform the appropriate party that they are now liable for water charges, until such time as a new occupant registers with Irish Water.

7.9.4 Where applicable, Irish Water may work with relevant agencies in identifying ownership of property receiving Irish Water services (water supply and/or wastewater services).

7.9.5 Where applicable, Irish Water will contact the ultimate property owner at an alternative known address.

## **7.10 Credit on a customer's bill**

7.10.1 Where a customer has a credit on their account which exceeds €15, a customer may request that Irish Water refund this credit to them. Irish Water shall offer a range of payment options to the customer for the payment of the credit, which must be refunded to the customer within 15 working days of the customer request.

## **7.11 Monitoring of billing issues and reporting to CRU**

7.11.1 Irish Water shall monitor and collate data on, but not limited to, customers who are in arrears, are on payment plans. Irish Water shall be required to report data to the CRU, as directed. The CRU shall engage with and issue directions to Irish Water on the exact details to be included in such reports and the frequency that the reports shall be supplied.

7.11.2 The CRU will use this information to inform its customer protection activity and economic regulation of Irish Water. The CRU may also, from time to time, amend the specific reporting requirements that must be provided by Irish Water.

## **8. Code of Practice on Vulnerable Domestic Customers**

### **8.1 Definition of a vulnerable customer for the purpose of the Codes of Practice**

A vulnerable customer in relation to water supply is someone that is either:

- a) critically dependant – critically dependant on water for their medical needs, or
- b) someone who for reasons that may include advanced age or physical, sensory, intellectual or mental health reasons requires additional support communicating with, or receiving services from, Irish Water.

Irish Water will adhere to any Governmental Policy Direction in respect of a range of specific medical conditions, to be set out by the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, and incorporate these into the Code of Practice, as appropriate.

Irish Water must establish and maintain a register of vulnerable customers, and a customer included in this register will be categorised under the two definitions outlined above. Therefore, Irish Water must establish and maintain a “Priority Services” register for customers who are registered as critically dependent and a “Special Services” register for customers who are registered as vulnerable.

The registers must be available to customers who are not account holders but who reside in a household with an account holder. Medical details collected by Irish Water to facilitate the maintenance of such registers shall be held in line with Data Protection Legislation.

The register should provide a clear list of the different categories under which customers may register as vulnerable. This will help Irish Water to ascertain what additional assistance may be required in different circumstances.

### **8.2 Required provision by Irish Water for Vulnerable Customers**

8.2.1 Irish Water shall set up a vulnerable customer register which shall include a priority services register and a special services register and will work proactively to ensure eligible customers are registered.

8.2.2 Irish Water shall work to ensure there is full public and customer awareness of their vulnerable customers register. This will include working collaboratively

with relevant support and charitable organisations to highlight the existence of and access to the register.

### **8.3 Required provision by Irish Water for Priority Services customers**

- 8.3.1 Irish Water may require a customer to demonstrate eligibility for inclusion on their register of priority customers. This may include requesting medical confirmation of vulnerability.
- 8.3.2 Irish Water shall ensure that for customers registered as critically dependant on water/wastewater services that the provision of safe and clean water supply is prioritised. For instances where there are planned interruptions to water supply Irish Water will contact customers expected to be impacted directly at least 2 days in advance to highlight the anticipated duration of water interruption. Irish Water shall also make an alternative water supply available where possible for the customer if this is required.
- 8.3.3 At the outset of an unplanned interruption (where the interruption is anticipated to last longer than four hours) Irish Water shall contact all registered priority customers that are expected to be impacted directly to inform them of the interruption, to discuss any critical needs they may have and how Irish Water can help.
- 8.3.4 Irish Water will continue to keep all registered priority customers directly informed, as appropriate, during unplanned interruptions and provide advice as to when restoration of supply is anticipated.
- 8.3.5 In instances where notices that declare water unfit for human consumption are implemented Irish Water shall contact all registered priority services customers directly to:
- a) inform them it is not safe to drink the water and inform the customer of any precautionary measures that should be taken,
  - b) explain the reason for the notice,
  - c) highlight the anticipated duration of the notices,
  - d) provide regular updates on progress to rectify the issue causing substandard supply and;
  - e) ascertain what extra requirements they may have and facilitate these requirements where possible.

- 8.3.6 In instances where (for public health and safety reasons, or other emergency reasons) customers are provided with alternative supply arrangements Irish Water shall contact all registered priority services customers directly to:
- a) inform them it is not safe to drink the water and explain the reason why,
  - b) inform the customer of any other precautionary measures that should be taken,
  - c) inform them where Irish Water will locate and facilitate alternative water supplies,
  - d) highlight the anticipated duration of the alternative supply,
  - e) provide regular updates on progress to rectify the issue causing substandard supply and
  - f) ascertain what extra requirements they may have and facilitate these requirements where possible.

## **8.4 Required provision by Irish Water for special services customers**

8.4.1 Irish Water will provide the opportunity for customers who require additional support on a number of issues to register so that wherever possible Irish Water can adapt the services and communications provided to those customers to cater for those customer's needs. Additional support should be provided to customers who register as:

- a) Needing special assistance in accessing alternative water supplies due to mobility restrictions.
- b) Needing specific communication assistance due to sight, hearing or intellectual impairments.
- c) Wishing to register a nominated account contact to be contacted in all cases of direct communication with the customer; for example billing, account and arrears queries, interruptions – unplanned and planned.

8.4.2 Irish Water should ensure that during unplanned interruptions to water supply that are anticipated to last for greater than 12 hours and where alternative supply is arranged that customers who have registered as needing special assistance in accessing alternative water supplies; needing specific communication assistance, or with a nominated contact that they (and in the case of customers with nominated contacts that the nominated contact) are contacted directly to ascertain whether they require assistance to access alternative supplies. Irish Water will provide whatever assistance is possible and shall do so free of charge in as efficient a manner as possible.

8.4.3 Similarly, Irish Water shall ensure that in instances where notices that declare water unfit for human consumption and/or alternative supply arrangements are in place that the same sets of customers (as in 8.4.2) are contacted directly to ascertain whether they require assistance to access alternative supplies. Irish Water will provide whatever assistance is possible and shall do so free of charge in as efficient a manner as possible.

## 8.5 Customers with special communication requirements

8.5.1 Irish Water is required to put in place alternative communication formats for customers who have special requirements not catered for within Universal Design.

8.5.2 Irish Water is required to develop a standard method of communicating with customers with vision impairments. Additional methods of communicating must be provided which must include the following (unless Irish Water can demonstrate that it would be prohibitively expensive): Braille bills, talking bills, phone calls, electronic services including, e-billing and internet based information in a format compatible with assistive reading technology.

8.5.3 The following is the list of communications to be provided, as a minimum, in non-standard format for vision impaired customers:

- a) Domestic Customer Terms & Conditions
- b) Customer Charter
- c) Customer Codes of Practice
- d) Domestic Tariff Information
- e) Personalised Household Customer Communications (As approved by the CRU)
- f) Planned and unplanned interruption notification
- g) Any letter to a customer informing them of a change in services or tariff
- h) Any insert to customers that has been required by the CRU

8.5.4 Irish Water is required to develop communication methods for customers with hearing impairments which would be similar to offering a phone service to customers with regular hearing. This could include the provision of an SMS based service for registered customers.

## **8.6 Third Party Representation**

8.6.1 Irish Water is required to provide a simple method for customers to register a third party representative on their account where necessary.

## **8.7 Reporting on Vulnerable Customers**

Irish Water shall report on the number of Vulnerable Customers they have on their registers and detail the actions they have taken to support such customers, as directed by the CRU.

The CRU shall engage with and issue directions to Irish Water on the exact details to be included in such reports and the frequency that the reports shall be supplied.

From time to time the CRU may amend the content and detail that Irish Water must report on in relation to vulnerable customers as well as the frequency of this reporting.

## **9. Code of Practice on Network Operations for Domestic Customers**

### **9.1 Information Provision on Water/Wastewater Connections**

In this context 'connections' refers to the water and wastewater network assets of Irish Water, and Irish Water shall have a Code of Practice that covers how customers can access information on connecting to the network and the levels of service customers can expect from their connections to the wider networks.

### **9.2 Operation and maintenance responsibility of pipework**

9.2.1 Irish Water is obliged to make available on their website clear and concise guidance on the split in ownership between Irish Water assets and a typical domestic customer, including diagrammatic representation.

9.2.2 Irish Water will engage with a customer requesting clarification of pipework ownership at specific properties within 3 working days of receiving the request, and provide an answer within a reasonable timeframe.

9.2.3 Where a customer has notified Irish Water of a fault on an Irish Water asset Irish Water are obliged to respond to the customer within 2 working days and give an outline of Irish Water's planned action in relation to the fault.

### **9.3 Planned network interruptions affecting customers**

9.3.1 Irish Water shall endeavour to restore supply to the affected customers within 24 hours of supply cut off, or as advised in planned works notification. Irish Water must meet all legal obligations with respect to providing alternative supplies to customers.

### **9.4 Unplanned network interruptions affecting customers**

9.4.1 Where Customers are affected by unplanned water supply interruptions Irish Water will endeavour to restore supply within 12 hours. For large water main issues Irish Water will endeavour to return supply within 24 hours. Irish Water



must meet all legal obligations with respect to providing alternative supplies to customers.

## 9.5 Customer asset flooding

9.5.1 Where a building or wider property is affected by flooding (either water or wastewater) assumed to originate from an Irish Water asset, Irish Water will attend the property affected within 4 hours of the notification and attempt to stop the flooding. Where it can be proven that an Irish Water asset had failed and caused damage to a property then Irish Water shall be obliged to engage with the customer to agree how to resolve or ameliorate the damage. Exceptions to this requirement exist for failure of assets due to extreme or severe weather events which cause reasonable design capacity of Irish Water assets to be exceeded.

## 9.6 Water pressure

9.6.1 Where a customer experiences reduced water pressure the customer can request an investigation into reduced pressure. Irish Water shall supply information as to the likely cause of the pressure reduction or agree to investigate the cause within 5 working days and communicate this to the customer directly. If after investigation the cause of the reduced pressure is likely to be as a result of leak on the customers assets Irish Water will highlight this to the customer. Where a customer is suffering reduced pressure as a result of Irish Water activity or Irish Water's assets Irish water will give advice within 10 working days as to how they intend to rectify the situation (where possible).

## 9.7 Out of hours service

9.7.1 Irish Water shall provide details of the services for customers reporting emergency situations. This must include a contact number that is available to customers 24 hours a day.

## 10. Code of Practice on Complaint Handling for Domestic Customers

### 10.1 Definition of a complaint

A complaint is defined as:

- The expression (through various possible channels, letter, email, phone call, physical claim) of a customer's dissatisfaction and his/her explicit expectation for a response or resolution.

Explicit – the customer states he/she is seeking some action to address his concern, even if he/she is not able to identify and state what action is required.

For clarity a customer in this context is defined as any person that wishes to complain to or about Irish Water.

### 10.2 General obligations in Complaint Handling

10.2.1 Irish Water is required to provide an easy process for customers/potential customers to use when they are experiencing difficulties with their water/wastewater service supply and wish to make a complaint to Irish Water. The Code of Practice must set out Irish Water's complaints handling process and commitments in a step by step, easy to follow process.

10.2.2 Irish Water is required to appropriately attempt to resolve all relevant complaints as soon as possible in house. Irish Water is required to accept complaints from recognised agencies or third parties who are confirmed as acting on behalf of the customer.

10.2.3 Where requested or in cases where the customer is unsure of the complaints process, Irish Water is required to refer customers its Code of Practice on Complaint Handling and to send it to them where requested.

10.2.4 The Code, as a minimum, should include the following:

- a) An undertaking to provide the customer with a satisfactory explanation of their issue, an apology or some form of redress as appropriate depending on the circumstances and outcome of the complaint.
- b) Details of how to contact Irish Water to make a complaint. At a minimum a customer should be able to initiate their complaint by post, by email and over the phone.
- c) An outline of the procedure of complaint escalation enacted by Irish Water if the customer remains dissatisfied having completed the first step in the

complaints process. This will include escalation to a more senior level where appropriate. Irish Water must outline that complaints must be made in writing in order for them to be escalated.

- d) Timescales for each stage of complaint handling and investigation with clear commitments to response times and details of any company standards and payments for failure to respond within the set time. The complaints process should lead to a response to the complaint in 5 working days with a resolution or an outline plan of the timely and specific case related steps required to achieve a resolution, under normal conditions. If a visit is required to resolve or investigate a complaint Irish Water will arrange a visit within a reasonable timeframe. In all cases the complaints process should lead to a final decision which includes an answer to the query, issuing to the customer within two months, except in cases where the customer is not engaging with Irish Water.
- e) Details of how the CRU can assist in resolving complaints which Irish Water has not resolved to the customer's satisfaction and how the CRU can be contacted. This must include the fact that the customer must have communicated their complaint in writing to Irish Water and completed their complaint process before it can be accepted by the CRU. The CRU's contact details must appear at the end of the Code as a point of reference for unresolved complaints at the end of the escalation process.
- f) The arrangements for making Charter Payments (where applicable) to customers, including details of when such payments may be due and the time limit in which the customer should receive payment.
- g) The Code should include a commitment to making payment to the customer within a reasonable timeframe, where payment is due to the customer.
- h) Guidance that outlines where a customer has completed Irish Water's complaints handling process and is not satisfied with the outcome, the customer will be informed that their complaint has been closed and will be referred to the Code of Practice on Complaint Handling. Irish Water shall keep a record of the final outcome of all complaints received.
- i) Details of the roles of the CRU and the EPA in relation to complaints.

10.2.5 In the case of an unresolved complaint in relation to the quality of water supply, or pollution incidents then Irish Water will advise the customer of the EPA's role in water quality complaints and provide contact details for the EPA.

10.2.6 For cases of complaints which have been closed as unresolved (other than those relating to water quality or pollution incidents) Irish Water will supply or direct the complainant to all Codes of Practice applicable to Irish Water. The customer must receive from Irish Water written notice of closure of their

complaint (by letter or email) including details of the CRU's Customer Care Team should they wish to escalate their complaint.

10.2.7 Where the CRU is investigating a customer's request to investigate a case of non-compliance with a Code of Practice, Irish Water must refrain from taking follow up action in relation to any monies that are the subject of a dispute. No such action should take place prior to the CRU issuing a judgement on breach or non-compliance with a Code of Practice. This does not mean that Irish Water cannot follow up additional monies accrued before or after the bill in dispute which remain unpaid.

10.2.8 This Code may include different complaint handling procedures for different customer categories.

### **10.3 Monitoring of complaints and complaint resolution and reporting to CRU**

10.3.1 Irish Water shall at all times keep and maintain adequate records of complaints lodged with Irish Water and the actions taken by Irish Water to resolve such complaints.

10.3.2 Irish Water shall report on the number of complaints handled by Irish Water, as directed by the CRU. To clarify, this constitutes all complaints received by Irish Water (not only those considered valid by Irish Water) through all communication formats. The CRU will use this information to inform its economic regulation of Irish Water and will liaise with the EPA with regard to unresolved Water Quality complaints.

The CRU shall engage with and issue directions to Irish Water on the exact details to be included in such reports and the frequency that the reports shall be supplied.

From time to time the CRU may amend the content and detail that Irish Water must report on in relation to customer complaints as well as the frequency of this reporting.

# 11. Terms and Conditions of Supply for Domestic Customers

## 11.1 General

All Terms & Conditions within Irish Water's Standard Customer Agreements must be fair and set out in a transparent way. The Terms & Conditions contained within the Standard Customer Agreements shall be fair and reasonable to the customers they address, and written in line with Universal Design.

## 11.2 Content of Standard Terms & Conditions

11.2.1 The standard Terms & Conditions must include, at least:

- a) a letter addressed to the specific named customer (occupier or premises owner) to provide clarity as to who the contract is held by;
- b) the identity, address and contact details of Irish Water;
- c) reference to Irish Water's Customer Charters and Codes of Practice which set out the services provided and the service quality that should be expected;
- d) clear reference to the special services and priority registers as set out in the Code of Practice for Vulnerable Customers and how to access these;
- e) an option to register a second point of contact for all vulnerable customers;
- f) the means by which up-to-date information on all applicable tariffs and charges may be obtained;
- g) the conditions for amendment/variation and termination of services and of the contract;
- h) details of any penalty clauses which may apply to the contract must be highlighted within the Terms & Conditions;
- i) the means by which the account holder will be notified of any change in Terms & Conditions of supply, including 30 days' notice in advance of those changes taking effect;
- j) the means by which the account holder will be notified of any change in tariff, including 30 days' notice in advance of those changes taking effect;
- k) details of how the account holder will be billed, and the terms associated with payment of bills (billing frequency must be set out in Irish Water's standard Terms & Conditions or the additional Terms & Conditions associated with the applicable tariff) ;

- l) any obligation on the in relation to payment of account, payment method and details of any penalties or actions which may apply in the event of failure to pay;
- m) details of the pipework ownership and maintenance responsibilities of Irish Water and of an Irish Water customer (with a welcome pack to new customers also providing a diagrammatic representation of the boundaries between Irish Water pipework assets and a customer's pipework assets);
- n) any obligation on the account holder in terms of limiting consumption of water in relation to water conservation, environmental or public health requirements and any penalties or actions which may apply including reference to supply reduction;
- o) the method of initiating procedures for settlement of complaints including reference to Irish Water's Code of Practice on Complaint Handling;
- p) that a customer's personal information may be transferred to a Local Authority or Irish Water Agent (in accordance with the Data Protection Act requirements) for the purpose of maintaining and operating supply to the premises;
- q) Irish Water's conditions for the termination of the contract. This section should set out clearly any steps the account holder must take in order to close their account in line with Section 7.6 of the billing Code.

## 11.3 Review Process

11.3.1 The CRU will review the Terms & Conditions to establish:

- a) That the minimum requirements set out above have been met.
- b) That the Terms & Conditions are written in Plain English to the greatest extent possible and are set out clearly and transparently so that a customer would be able to read and understand what they are entering into.
- c) That any penalty clauses or obligations on the account holder in order to receive the product they are signing up to are highlighted clearly in the text, are reasonable and are easy to understand.
- d) That it is clear from the Terms & Conditions what obligations the account holder faces in relation to payment terms, customer pipework responsibility, closure of account and substances prohibited for disposal through the wastewater system.