

3 MARCH 2009

MINISTER CONSULTS ON STRATEGIC DIRECTION FOR WATER AND SEWERAGE SERVICES

Regional Development Minister today launched a consultation on the future direction for Water and Sewerage services.

The Minister said: **"I am consulting on the key investment priorities for Water and Sewerage services. This covers 2010 to 2013 and focuses on improving services to customers, promoting sustainability, making NI Water more efficient and meeting environmental obligations.**

"The draft Guidance I am issuing has been developed with statutory partners and benefited from extensive customer research carried out by the Consumer Council, telling us what customers want.

"The Executive has already made significant investment in our water and sewerage services through its Investment Strategy. The North now has the highest drinking water quality it has ever had and wastewater treatment standards continue to improve. I want to continue these improvements by delivering on existing commitments. But we need to target customers' concerns in critical areas such as flooding from sewers and interruptions to water supply so that we get the best value for the huge investment we are making.

"I hope people will respond to the consultation to tell us what they think is important. I know people will be concerned about paying for water but this consultation is not about that. The future funding arrangements for water and sewerage services is an Executive decision which we will be consulting on separately."

The draft Guidance has been published for a ten-week consultation period, ending on 8 May 2009.

Copies of the Consultation Document can be obtained, free of charge, by either contacting the Water Policy Division on 028 90542987 or downloaded from the water policy section of the Department for Regional Development's website, <http://www.drdni.gov.uk/>.

Responses to the consultation can either be emailed to the Department at waterpolicy@drdni.gov.uk or posted to the address below:

David Lynch
Water Policy Division
Department for Regional Development
3rd Floor Lancashire House
5 Linenhall Street
Belfast BT2 8AA

Comments may also be faxed to: 028 9054 7875.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. The Guidance is issued by the Regional Development Minister to the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation (NIAUR) under powers contained in Article 7 of the Water and Sewerage Services Order (Northern Ireland) 2006. NIAUR must have regard to this Guidance when discharging its functions.
2. This consultation is not about the way water and sewerage services should be funded and governed. The Executive commissioned an Independent Review to look at this in 2007. The Review completed its work last year and the Executive is committed to consulting separately on any decisions it takes on the Review's recommendations. For 2009/10, the Executive has decided to defer the introduction of additional household payments for water and sewerage services.
3. The Guidance is part of a wider process called Price Control 10 (PC10). The purpose of the wider process is to determine strategic priorities, costs, plans, targets, prices and customers' views for water and sewerage services over 2010/13 period. More information on PC10 can be found on NIAUR's website at <http://ofreg.nics.gov.uk>.

4. Media queries to: Press Office, Department for Regional Development, Press Office, Tel 028 90 540887. Out of office hours please contact the Duty Press Officer via pager number 07699 715 440 and your call will be returned.