

PRESS RELEASE

Department for Regional Development

18 April, 2003

MINISTER SEEKS VIEWS FROM LONDONDERRY ON WATER REFORM

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Angela Smith MP, today urged householders in the Londonderry area to contribute to public consultation on the reform of water and sewerage services in Northern Ireland.

She was speaking as notice was given of a public consultation meeting at Derry's Tower Hotel on Tuesday, 29 April 2003 at 7:30 pm. Officials will also be available at the venue from 2pm until 4pm to provide an additional opportunity for members of the public to ask questions and to give their views.

The meeting, the second in a series to be held across Northern Ireland, will address the options for radical reform of water and sewerage services set out in a consultation document launched by the Minister on 11 March 2003. Discussion will be lead by a panel of people with knowledge of the water industry, consumer and social policy issues.

Ms Smith added: **"The reform programme will consider the most appropriate basis for charging for water and sewerage services, the most effective business model for delivering these services and how best to promote the customer interest under the new charging regime.**

"The options for Water Reform set out in the consultation document will affect every person in Northern Ireland and I am keen to hear the views of householders in and around the city.

"There is a clear need for massive investment in Northern Ireland's water and

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sewerage infrastructure and the step-change in long-term investment that must be made can only be achieved through the development of secure, self-financing arrangements for water and sewerage services.

“Otherwise, the costs of investment in these services would have the unacceptable effect of sacrificing spending on other key public spending priorities, such as new hospitals, schools and transportation schemes.

“That means the introduction of domestic water charging and in order to keep future charges at an acceptable and affordable level, changes to the current arrangements for water and sewerage delivery are required.”

The Minister said that anyone unable to attend the public meetings or to speak to officials at Derry should put forward their reviews to the Water Reform Unit before 20 June, 2003.

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. The consultation paper, *“The Reform of Water and Sewerage Services in Northern Ireland”* was launched by Angela Smith MP on 11 March 2003. The consultation period ends on 20 June 2003.
2. The paper seeks views on the following:
 - The basis on which domestic water and sewerage charges should be set.
 - Possible business models for a reformed Water Service.
 - How best to protect the consumer interest.

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3. Copies of the consultation paper can be obtained from:
**Water Reform Unit,
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4. Further information on Water Reform can be obtained from the Water Reform website: www.waterreformni.gov.uk

5. The Water Reform Unit can also provide further information regarding the public consultation meeting, to be held in the Tower Hotel, Derry, on Wednesday 16 April, commencing at 7:30pm.

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