

PRESS RELEASE

Department for Regional Development

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MINISTER HIGHLIGHTS POTENTIAL WATER REFORM JOB REDUCTIONS

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Angela Smith, MP, said today that the Water Reform's efficiency programme could lead to between 500 and 600 fewer jobs in the Water Service in five to seven years time.

However, she assured staff that a range of measures would be used to manage the reduction in staff and that every effort would be made to avoid the need for compulsory redundancies.

The Minister said: **"We have informed Water Service staff and trade unions that the figure of between 500 and 600 fewer posts has emerged from work on the efficiency programme. This will be the subject of further examination in light of the needs of the Service and of affordability. We have highlighted measures to manage the reductions and to minimise the impact on Water Service staff.**

"These include natural wastage through normal age retirements and staff turnover, retraining and redeployment of staff to other Agencies and Departments in the Northern Ireland Civil Service, early retirements and voluntary redundancies. Every effort will be made to avoid the need for compulsory redundancies.

"At the launch of the public consultation document on The Reform of Water and Sewerage Services in Northern Ireland on 11 March, I stressed that the current arrangements for the delivery of these services must be reformed if the

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charges paid by households in the future are to be fair and affordable.

“It is clear that whichever one of the five business models outlined in the consultation document emerges from the consultation process as the preferred model, a major programme of efficiency will be required to ensure that costs are reduced and that standards of service are maintained or improved.”

“Measures under consideration include the centralisation of functions, which could lead to the closure of some offices and depots, improvements in procurement procedures and investment in increased use of technology.”

The Minister also made the point that the Water Service reforms would free resources for other key public services, such as health, education, roads and transport.

The Minister urged people from throughout Northern Ireland to ensure that they put forward their views on the water reform issues. A series of public meetings are being held throughout April and May and alternatively submission can be made to the Water Reform Unit by 20 June 2003.

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. For media queries contact Eamon Deeny on 07768 798916 or Anne McGivern on 07780 683029.
2. 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.
3. The paper seeks views on:
 - 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.

4. Dates for public meetings on the Water Reform Proposals are as follows:
- 16 April: **Omagh** Leisure Centre;
 - 29 April: Tower Hotel, **Londonderry**;
 - 7 May: **Ballymena** Town Hall;
 - 13 May: Grosvenor House, **Belfast**, 13 May;
 - 14 May: **Craigavon** Civic Centre
5. Copies of the consultation paper can be obtained from:
- Water Reform Unit
Department for Regional Development
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10-18 Adelaide Street
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- Tel: (028) 9054 0608
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6. Further information on Water Reform can be obtained from the Water Reform website: www.waterreformni.gov.uk