

PRESS RELEASE

Department for Regional Development

16 April 2003

METERING OF DOMESTIC WATER SUPPLIES HAS NOT BEEN RULED OUT

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State Angela Smith MP today emphasised that she had not ruled out water metering as part of the Water Reform consultation process.

The Minister's comments are in response to the large volume of correspondence and enquiries that have been received by the Water Reform Unit on this issue.

There have also been comments on the subject of metering in the media.

She said: **"My Water Reform Unit has received a large number of telephone calls and letters from the public asking why metering has not been considered as an option for determining household water charges.**

"In fact, the metering option is specifically referred to in the consultation document. It explains that the Executive had previously ruled out metering but then asks for views on whether that decision should be revisited.

" I can assure the public that we are listening carefully to all views on the subject of water metering. We will reflect on comments received on this issue,

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and on all others, at the end of this consultation process and before taking any final decisions.”

The Minister stated that the consultation on Water Reform has generated considerable interest and debate.

She said: **“I welcome the level of response to the consultation . To date, the Water Reform Unit has issued nearly 1700 copies of the consultation document, consultation summary, and audiotape. It has received around 150 responses to the consultation from members of the general public, and there have been over 1600 visits to the Water Reform website.**

“I am committed to full and open consultation on what will be the most radical reform of water and sewerage services in Northern Ireland in decades. I am pleased to see so many members of the public engaging in this consultation process, and I hope many more will do so in the remaining weeks of the public consultation process.”

The Minister explained that the public would have the opportunity to attend a series of public meetings on Water Reform over the next few weeks.

She said: **“A series of five public meetings will get underway in Omagh tonight followed by Londonderry, Ballymena, Belfast and Craigavon during April and May. These meetings will give the public the chance to discuss their views on the options for reform with a panel comprising officials from my Department, and independent members with expertise in industry, and consumer and social policy issues.”**

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The Minister recognised that it may not be possible for some people to attend an evening meeting.

She said: “**I appreciate that some members of the community may find it difficult to attend an evening meeting, so I have asked my Water Reform staff to be available during the afternoon at the venue where the public meeting will take place.**”

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. Angela Smith MP launched the consultation paper, “The Reform of Water and Sewerage Services in Northern Ireland” on 11 March 2003. The consultation period ends on 20 June 2003.
2. 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.
3. 3 possible options are proposed for the basis on which water charges may be determined. These are:
 - A flat charge applied to all households
 - A charge based on property value
 - A combination of a fixed and variable charge
4. The consultation also seeks views on whether metering should be considered as an option for determining the level of water charge.
5. Dates for public meetings on the Water Reform Proposals are as follows:
16 April: **Omagh** Leisure Centre;

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29 April: Tower Hotel, **Londonderry**;
7 May: **Ballymena** Town Hall;
13 May: Grosvenor House, **Belfast**, 13 May;
14 May: **Craigavon** Civic Centre

6. Officials from the Water Reform Unit will be available to answer queries and receive responses to the consultation on Water Reform at each on the above venues between 2.00 and 4.00 on the date of the public meetings.

7. Copies of the consultation paper can be obtained from:

Water Reform Unit
Department for Regional Development
Room G.18
Clarence Court
10-18 Adelaide Street
BELFAST
BT2 8GB

Tel: (028) 9054 0608
Fax: (028) 9054 0822
E-mail: queries@waterreformni.gov.uk

8. Further information on Water Reform can be obtained from the Water Reform website: www.waterreformni.gov.uk

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