



**Northern Ireland Water**

***Freedom of Information Act 2000***

**Publication Scheme**

**January 2009**

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## **1. Freedom of Information - Background**

The main features of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the “Act”) are:

- A right to be told whether information is held by a public authority and a right to have that information supplied to you upon request, subject to certain discretionary and legal exemptions.
- A duty on public authorities to adopt a publication scheme for the proactive publication of information. The scheme, which must be approved by the Information Commissioner, will specify the classes of information the authority intends to publish, the manner of publication and whether the information is available to the public free of charge or on payment of a fee.

NI Water’s aim in developing this scheme is to set out:

- the classes of information we publish or intend to make available as a matter of course;
- how this information can be accessed; and
- whether the information is available free of charge or on payment.

The NI Water website at [niwater.com](http://niwater.com) will be used to house up-to-date information as part of the Publication Scheme as well as providing links to relevant organisations.

NI Water is committed to providing information on all aspects of its operations and will endeavour to make this information readily available to members of the public. In particular NI Water will aim to make available information on the cost and standard of its service to customers, decisions made that affect its customers and the reasons for them.

The classes of information and the manner in which they will be published are specified in Section 15 of this scheme.

## **2. Purpose of the Publication Scheme**

Adopting and maintaining a Publication Scheme is a requirement of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Publication Schemes are intended to promote greater openness by all public authorities.

The purpose of this Publication Scheme is to help members of the public gain access to information held by NI Water.

### **3. Office of the Information Commissioner**

Additional information on the Freedom of Information Act 2000 can be obtained from the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), which enforces and oversees the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Data Protection Act 1998. ICO's contact details are:

Information Commissioner  
Wycliffe Lane  
WILMSLOW  
Cheshire  
SK9 5AF  
Tel: 01625 545 745  
Fax: 01625 524 510  
Email: [mail@ico.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:mail@ico.gsi.gov.uk)

Details of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, including exemptions can be located at the following websites:

<http://www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk> and  
[www.legislation.hmso.gov.uk/acts/acts2000/20000036.htm](http://www.legislation.hmso.gov.uk/acts/acts2000/20000036.htm)

### **4. Introduction to Northern Ireland Water**

Northern Ireland Water (NI Water) was formed in April 2007 following a change of status from the Water Service (an Agency within the Department of Regional Development (DRD)) within the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) to a Government Owned Company (GoCo).

NI Water is a publicly owned corporation, the sole shareholder being the DRD. The creation of Northern Ireland Water will enable major improvements to be made in the service provided, in terms of both quality and cost. NI Water's focus is very much on providing high quality water and wastewater services, safeguarding public health, the environment and enhancing customer services.

NI Water is responsible for the supply and distribution of drinking water and the provision of sewerage services to approximately 780,000 domestic, agricultural and business customers throughout Northern Ireland. NI Water supplies services to a population of 1.7 million with over 99% of households in N. Ireland connected to the public water supply and 83% served by the public sewerage system.

#### *4.1. Structure of Northern Ireland Water*

Northern Ireland Water was set up under the Companies Order like other Northern Ireland Companies and is subject to all the legislation and requirements which govern any other business structured as a limited company. NI Water is 100% owned by Government with the Department for

Regional Development Minister as the sole shareholder. The Board of Northern Ireland Water comprises two Executive (CEO and Finance Director) and five Non-Executive Directors and provides independent judgement on issues of strategy, performance, governance and executive appointments

The Chief Executive is assisted by an Executive Team of 13 who manage the following functions:-

- Asset Management
- Billing
- Business Improvement
- Customer Services
- Engineering & Procurement
- Finance & Regulation
- Human Resources
- Operations
- Legal and Company Secretary
- Information Management
- Head of Strategy
- Communications
- Commercial Directorate

#### *4.2. External Interfaces*

Northern Ireland Water has close liaison with a number of bodies and regulators who have responsibility for aspects of the water and waste water industry. These are – Northern Ireland Assembly, Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation, Consumer Council for Northern Ireland, Environment and Heritage Service and the Drinking Water Inspectorate.

### **5. Formulating the Scheme**

To meet the terms of the Act Northern Ireland Water must, in adopting or reviewing its publication scheme, have regard to the public interest in allowing public access to information about:

- the services provided by the Northern Ireland Water;
- the costs of those services;
- the standard attained by those services;
- the facts which form the basis of decisions taken by Northern Ireland water which are of importance to the public; and
- the publication of reasons for decisions made by it.

## **6. Responsibility for the Publication Scheme**

Responsibility for the Publication Scheme rests with

John Collins  
NI Water Information Manager  
Information Management Unit  
Northern Ireland Water  
Hampden House  
55 Royal Avenue  
BELFAST  
BT1 1FX  
[waterline@niwater.com](mailto:waterline@niwater.com)

Northern Ireland Water is committed to extending the amount of information that it makes available via its Publication Scheme. Northern Ireland Water will review its Publication Scheme annually and will consider additional updates throughout the year if there are significant levels of publication requests.

## **7. Exemptions**

The Act contains a number of exemptions to the right to obtain information held by Northern Ireland. In deciding what information to include in this Publication Scheme, Northern Ireland Water has considered the exemptions contained in the Act and, where required, whether the public interest in withholding publication outweighs the public interest in publishing the information. For example, Northern Ireland Water may legitimately decide not to include information if:

- it is reasonably obtainable elsewhere;
- it is a trade secret;
- disclosure would prejudice substantially the commercial interests of any person;
- it relates to an investigation of a crime or would prejudice substantially security (national security and defence) or health, safety and the environment; or,
- It constitutes personal data under the Data Protection Act 1998 or publication would infringe one of the eight data protection principals contained in the Data Protection Act.

## 8. Obtaining a Copy of the Publication Scheme

You can obtain a copy of the NI Water publication scheme by:

- Downloading a copy from our website: [www.niwater.com](http://www.niwater.com)
- E-mailing: [waterline@niwater.com](mailto:waterline@niwater.com) to request an electronic copy or a single printed copy
- Telephoning WaterLine on 0845 744 0088 to request an electronic copy or a single printed copy
- Writing to the following address requesting a single printed copy:

Information Management Unit  
Northern Ireland Water  
PO Box 1023  
Belfast  
BT1 9DG

Our Publication Scheme is available in large print and can be provided in alternative formats upon request.

## 9. Accessing Information under the Publication Scheme

The publication scheme has to detail the format(s) that each item is available in. Unless otherwise stated, information can be made available electronically or in paper format. You should note that for some items available electronically you may need to have appropriate software (such as Adobe Acrobat Reader) to read it. Plans may not always be available electronically. It should be noted that only single copies of hardcopy material will be provided. Depending on the format of the item you will be able to access information by:

- Downloading a copy from our website: <http://www.niwater.com>
- E-mailing: [waterline@niwater.com](mailto:waterline@niwater.com) to request an electronic copy or a single printed copy
- Inspecting it, by prior agreement, in the offices of Northern Ireland Water where the item is kept. For further information or to make an appointment, contact Customer Service on 0845 744 0088.
- Telephoning Customer Service on 0845 744 0088 to request an electronic copy or a single printed copy

- Writing to the following address requesting a single printed copy:

Information Management Unit  
Northern Ireland Water  
PO Box 1023  
Belfast  
BT1 9DG

## **10. Charging Policy**

Northern Ireland Water aims to make the vast majority of publications available free of charge however, where there is a charge associated with the provision of published information, this will be clearly specified in the Publication Scheme. If Value Added Tax is chargeable this will be indicated in the Publication Scheme.

If material is subject to fees laid down by law, those fees will be levied. Some classes of information contain information which Northern Ireland Water has had to devote professional time, skill and effort in collecting, assembling and analysing with a view to it having a commercial value. This information may not be routinely published but is made available only on payment of applicable fees.

## **11. Copyright**

The material supplied through this Publication Scheme is provided for use by the individual requesting it.

Copyright in material accessed by the Publication Scheme may belong to Northern Ireland Water or to other copyright holders. Unless otherwise stated, copyright is reserved to Northern Ireland Water or to other copyright holders. Permission to reproduce it must be obtained from the copyright holder. The right to information under this Publication Scheme does not include permission to copy or reproduce that information and to do so may infringe copyright and entitle the copyright holder to take action against you.

If Northern Ireland Water indicates that Northern Ireland Water copyright material may be copied or distributed by you free of charge it must be reproduced accurately and not used in a misleading context or for commercial purposes. In addition, you must identify the source of the material, the fact that it is subject to copyright and identify Northern Ireland Water as owner of the copyright.

Your use of the material provided under this Publication Scheme is at your own risk. Northern Ireland Water gives no warranty as to the quality or accuracy of the material or its suitability for any use.



## **12. Record Retention and Disposal Policy**

### *12.1. Introduction to Policy*

Northern Ireland Water is undertaking a comprehensive management and retrieval policy for all official business records. A Records Retention and Disposal policy that complies with legislative requirements is an essential part of Northern Ireland Water's records management regime.

### *12.2. Policy Statement*

Northern Ireland Water has a Records Retention and Disposal Policy which will apply to all official business records. The Scheme will contain a list of generic record types and will include specific periods of authorised retention. Authorised retention periods will take into account legislative requirements as well as meeting the operational needs of the business.

### *12.3. Purpose of Retention Scheme*

The Records Retention and Disposal Policy prescribes the period of time records should be kept for. Once this date has been reached, records will be reviewed by the record owner and, in the majority of cases, an appropriate disposal route selected. When records are to be destroyed they will be treated as confidential waste and a record of their destruction, including appropriate authorisation, will be made and kept permanently (or for an appropriate period) for audit trail purposes.

### *12.4. Identifying Records for Permanent Preservation*

It is the Information Manager's responsibility, as NI Water Records Officer to see that Reviews are systematically carried out, so as to eliminate redundant information and reduce the bulk of records held by NI Water, while ensuring that no papers likely to be required for business continuity reasons and/or permanent preservation are destroyed.

### *12.5. Review of the Retention Scheme*

The Retention Scheme will be revised periodically to ensure that all records are encompassed by the scheme and to enable retention periods to be adjusted where necessary. All revisions will gain management team approval before coming into force.

### **13. Complaints and Right of Appeal**

If you have any queries or complaints about this Publication Scheme you should give full details to:

John Collins – Information Manager  
Information Management Unit  
Northern Ireland Water  
Hampden House  
55 Royal Avenue  
BELFAST  
BT1 1FX  
[waterline@niwater.com](mailto:waterline@niwater.com)

If, after the handling of your query or complaint, you remain dissatisfied you may ask Northern Ireland Water for the matter to be reviewed internally. To ensure a fair and unbiased review this will be undertaken by an independent team whose members were not involved in the initial complaint request. Northern Ireland Water is required to complete internal reviews within 20 working days.

If your request for information is unable to be resolved, you can appeal to the Information Commissioner, the independent body which oversees the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act 2002.

Information Commissioner  
Website: [www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk](http://www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk)  
Phone: 01625 545 700  
Email: [mail@ico.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:mail@ico.gsi.gov.uk)  
Post: Information Commissioner, Wycliffe House, Water Lane,  
Wilmslow, CHESHIRE SK9 5AF

### **14. Feedback and Suggestions**

It is important that this Publication Scheme meets your information needs. Northern Ireland Water would welcome your comments and suggestions on how to improve it. You can submit your comments and suggestions by:

- E-mailing: [waterline@niwater.com](mailto:waterline@niwater.com)
- Writing to John Collins – Information Manager  
Information Management Unit  
Northern Ireland Water  
Hampden House  
55 Royal Avenue  
BELFAST  
BT1 1FX  
[waterline@niwater.com](mailto:waterline@niwater.com)

If you require an answer please make that clear and be sure to include details of how Northern Ireland Water can contact you.

## **15. Classes of Information**

The following classes of information have been established to make it easy for members of the public to find information. The information has been subdivided into 7 main categories:

### **Who we are and what we do**

Information on our organisation, structure, location and contacts

### **What we spend and how we spend it**

Financial information about our income and expenditure, procurement, contracts and financial audit

### **What are our priorities and how we are doing**

Information on our strategies and plans, performance indicators, audits, inspections and reviews

### **How we make decisions**

Information on our policy proposals, public consultations, senior-level meetings and internal guidelines

### **Our policies and procedures**

Information on our policies and procedures for delivering our services and conducting our business

### **Lists and registers**

Information on our public registers, asset registers and disclosure logs

### **The services we offer**

Information about the services we provide, including leaflets, guidance and newsletters

If you cannot find the information you are seeking, please email [waterline@niwater.com](mailto:waterline@niwater.com) or call 0845 744 0088.