

## **Opening Statement**

### **Joint Committee on Public Petitions and the Ombudsmen to discuss Public Petition No. P00021/22 Kiltimagh Water Scheme**

**Mr. Douglas Kelly**  
**Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage**

Good afternoon Chair and members of the Committee.

Firstly, I would like to thank the Committee for the invitation to the Department to contribute to the discussion on the proposed Community Water Connection for Clearagh, Kiltimagh, County Mayo.

My name is Douglas Kelly and I am the Principal Officer in the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage with responsibility for the Rural Water Unit within the Water Division of the Department. I am joined here today by my colleague Mr. Luke Varley, Assistant Principal Officer, who is head of operations in the Rural Water Unit.

I propose to limit my comments to the Rural Water Programme which is under the remit of my Department and as they relate to the issue in question. I will not be in a position to speak on issues relating to Mayo County Council or Uisce Éireann.

State investment in water services in Ireland is provided for in the National Development Plan and, in practice, is primarily delivered by Uisce Éireann.

As set out in the Programme for Government “Our Shared Future”, the Government is committed to continue investment in our rural communities.

However, in addition and in line with Government policy objectives, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage continues to invest in water and waste water infrastructure to support the development of our rural communities. The Department recognises that investment in water services is a key requirement to help to sustain our rural areas, and improve the quality of life of our people.

More than €243 million of funding, over the period 2021 to 2025, has been provided under the National Development Plan for non-Uisce Éireann investment in the rural water sector which includes €175 million of funding through the Rural Water Programme.

The Multi-annual Rural Water Programme is the primary funding stream providing capital funding to address the challenges faced by the Rural Water Sector in maintaining, renewing and developing their systems and networks.

The core purpose of the multi-annual programme is to provide the sector with the necessary funding for projects that will improve the quality, quantity and reliability of water services and address infrastructure deficits that are having an impact on the provision of safe and secure water services to rural dwellers.

The Department also provides investment support to individual households through grants for drinking water (private wells) and waste water (septic tanks).

The first cycle of the multi-annual programme was introduced in 2016 to replace a previous block funding grant arrangement. In 2019, the Department invited applications from local authorities to fund projects under a further cycle of the programme.

The Department received in excess of 900 applications from across the country. Of these, approximately 700 individual projects were approved funding by the Minister, including some where emergency work and additional funding was required. Many of these projects are now fully completed, while work continues and is at different stages with other more complex projects.

Exchequer funding of over €61.5 million was provided in 2023, under the Rural Water Programme to fund projects and households to deliver improvements to the quality, reliability and efficiency of water services in rural areas of Ireland.

The Minister launched a new Multi-annual Rural Water Programme 2024-2026 on 17 January 2024. Local authorities were invited to submit applications, under a range of funding measures, before the closing date on 12<sup>th</sup> April 2024.

The Department has received applications for funding for priority projects and is currently completing a process of validating and, where necessary, clarifying issues with the local authorities.

When completed the Department will refer all valid applications to an independent Expert Panel. The Panel is established and tasked with critically evaluating each request for funding received under the multi-annual programme and with making a recommendation on individual projects for the consideration of the Minister.

Working in partnership with the key stakeholders in the sector – including the local authorities, Uisce Éireann, local communities and the Group Water Schemes, the Department is using Exchequer funding in a cost effective manner to improve the water services available to rural Ireland.

Local authorities play a particularly vital and very effective role in supporting the delivery of the multi-annual programme and are responsible for the administration and oversight of the delivery of individual projects in their area.

Mayo County Council did submit an application under the multi-annual programme in 2019 for a Community Water Connection for Clearagh, Kiltimagh. The submission was to enable some 21 houses in the area that are reliant on private wells, connect to the Uisce Éireann network.

The specifics of the application for the Community Water Connection at Clearagh were assessed by the independent Expert Panel and a recommendation made. Having considered the Panel's recommendation, the Minister approved funding of €90,865 for the Clearagh project, in October 2019.

To date the Department has paid €51,352, to Mayo County Council for works on this project including the planning, design and tendering stages.

In the case of all projects approved funding under the multi-annual programme, if a local authority finds itself in the position of requiring additional funding for a specific project, an application can be made to the Department at any stage during the project. In such cases, the Department will fully consider the application and will provide a decision and additional funding, if appropriate, without delay and as soon as possible.

To date the Department has not received a request from Mayo County Council for additional funding for the proposed project in Clearagh, Kiltimagh

Finally, I would like to thank again the Committee members for the invitation to meet with you today. My colleague and I are happy to take any questions that you may have.