

19 December 2017

Trust in water

Proposal to grant a variation of appointment to Independent Water Networks Limited to enable it to provide water and sewerage services to a site called Blythe Valley Park, Solihull

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1. About this document

We propose granting a variation of appointment to Independent Water Networks Limited (“**IWN**”) as a water and sewerage company and consequently varying the appointment of Severn Trent Water (“**SVT**”) as a water and sewerage company. This notice is a consultation on this proposal under section 8(3) of the Water Industry Act 1991 (WIA91).

The consultation period will last for 28 days from the date of publication of this notice. Having considered any representations submitted during the consultation period in response to the consultation, Ofwat will decide whether or not to grant the variations of appointment set out above.

2. The Site

IWN has applied for a variation to its appointments to be able to provide water and sewerage services to a site called Blythe Valley Park in Solihull (“**The Site**”). The Site is in SVT’s water supply and sewerage services areas.

The Site comprises of 750 household properties and three commercial properties. It will be fully built out by 2025.

Site maps can be viewed in [section 8](#) of this consultation notice.

3. The applicant

In October 2007, IWN obtained its first appointment as a water and sewerage undertaker for a housing development at the Long Croft Road site in Anglian Water's (ANH) area. Since then Ofwat has agreed to vary IWN's areas of appointment so it can serve a further 15 sites for water and/or sewerage.

We are currently assessing six further applications (inclusive of the present) submitted by IWN.

4. The proposal

Ofwat proposes to:

- grant a variation of appointment to IWN as a water and sewerage company to include the Site; and
- vary the appointment of SVT as a water and sewerage company by excluding the Site from its water supply area and its sewerage services area.

By means of the above, IWN will become the water and sewerage services supplier for the Site.

5. Our approach to the assessment of this application

The new appointment and variation (NAV) mechanism, set out in primary legislation¹, provides an opportunity for entry and expansion into the water and sewerage sectors by allowing one company to replace the existing appointee as the provider of water and / or sewerage services for a specific area. This mechanism can be used by new companies to enter the market and by existing appointees to expand their businesses.

When considering applications for NAVs, Ofwat operates within the statutory framework set out by Parliament, including our statutory duty to protect consumers, wherever appropriate by promoting effective competition. In particular, in relation to unserved sites, we consider that we must ensure that the future customers on a site – who do not have a choice of supplier – are adequately protected. When assessing applications for NAVs, the two key policy principles we apply are that:

- customers, or future customers, should be no worse off than if the site had been supplied by the existing appointee; and
- Ofwat must be satisfied that an applicant will be able to finance the proper carrying out of its functions as a water and/or sewerage company.

We clarified these two policy principles in February 2011 when we published our NAV – [policy](#) and [process](#) documents. In November 2012, we published our '[Statement on our approach for assessing financial viability of applications for new appointments and variations](#)'. This states that we will adopt a company-based assessment of financial viability, rather than a detailed site-based assessment, where it is appropriate to do so.

When we assess whether customers will be no worse off as a result of the appointment, we not only consider the customers on the site but also the generality of customers. These include not only the customers of the existing provider but also customers more generally across England and Wales, who in our view benefit from the effective operation of the NAV mechanism.

¹ The legal framework for new appointments is set out in the WIA91. Section 7 of the WIA91 sets out the criteria by which an appointment or variation may be made. Section 8 sets out the procedure for making that appointment or variation.

6. The application

IWN has applied to be the water and sewerage company for the Site under the unserved criterion, set out in section 7(4)(b) WIA91.

6.1 Unserved status of the Site

To qualify under the unserved criterion, an applicant must show that at the time the appointment is made, none of the premises in the proposed area of appointment is served by the existing appointee.

We have been provided with a letter from SVT which states that the Site is considered to be unserved for both water supply and sewerage services. We have also been provided with an aerial photograph which demonstrates that there are no buildings on the Site.

Given this information, we are satisfied that the Site will be unserved at the time of the variation of appointment.

6.2 Protecting customers

Ofwat acts to protect consumers, especially those who are unable to choose their supplier. In assessing applications to supply new development sites, Ofwat acts on behalf of both existing customers as well as potential new customers who are not yet on site, to protect their interests. The fact that future customers on a site have not directly chosen their supplier is not a position unique to NAVs – only eligible business, charity and public sector customers (“Business Customers”) in England and Wales are able to choose their supplier².

Recognising this, our assessment of an applicant’s proposals includes analysis of its plans to ensure customers will be at least no worse off in terms of their annual bills and levels of service than if they had been supplied by the existing appointee in whose geographical area the relevant site sits. We will continue to protect customers on a site by regulating the new appointee's prices and service levels.

² The majority of Business Customers where the area of the relevant appointed company is not wholly or mainly in Wales (and whose premises are, or are likely to be, supplied with at least 50 MI where the relevant area is wholly or mainly in Wales) could effectively switch suppliers of water and/or sewerage from 1 April 2017.

6.3 Price

IWN proposes to match the tariffs of SVT for potable water and for waste water services.

6.4 Levels of service

Every appointee is required under its conditions of appointment to publish Codes of Practice on debt and leakage, and a Customer Code for its household customers. We have assessed IWN's proposed Codes of Practice and Customer Code, and our view is that these are of an appropriate standard. Our view is that customers on the Site would be no worse off in relation to the points covered by the above Codes of Practice and the Customer Code than they would be if SVT were to be the customers' water and sewerage supplier.

6.5 Site owner choice

IWN has the consent of the developer, IM Properties (BVP2) Limited, to become the water supply and sewerage services provider for the Site.

6.6 Environment Agency (EA) and Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI)

We take the views of these organisations into account before progressing to formal consultation on an application for a new appointment. Both the EA and DWI informed us that they are content for us to consult on this application³.

6.7 Incumbent's existing customers

In considering whether customers will be no worse off, we also considered the potential effects of this variation on the prices that SVT's existing customer base may face.

The calculation necessarily depends on a range of assumptions, and there are clearly difficulties involved in quantifying the effect. It is therefore necessary to use a

³ The EA and the DWI will also be formally consulted on the proposals, as they are on the list of organisations which must be formally consulted as set out in section 8(4)(b) of WIA91.

simplified set of figures. We have expressed the effect in 'per bill' terms to try and quantify the possible effect in an easily understandable way.

We have assessed the potential magnitude of this impact by comparing how much SVT might have expected to receive in revenue from serving the Site directly, were they to serve the Site, with the revenues they might expect from the proposed arrangement with IWN.

We recently updated the approach we take to estimating the impact of granting a new appointment or variation on the annual bills of the incumbent's customers. We updated the approach to reflect the current price setting regime and the latest financial data we hold. Using this approach, we estimate that there will be no increase on the water bills of existing SVT customers, and a potential £0.007 increase on the sewerage bills of existing SVT customers if we grant this variation to IWN. This is once the Site is fully built out.

This estimate does not take into account the potential spill-over benefits to customers arising from dynamic efficiencies achieved as a result of the competitive process to win sites.

Therefore we consider that granting this variation to IWN would have a nil or negligible financial impact on customers' bills and could have potential benefits for customers.

6.8 Ability to finance and properly carry out its functions

We have a statutory duty to ensure that efficient appointees can finance the proper carrying out of their functions. When a company applies for a new appointment or variation, it must satisfy us that it is able to carry out all of the duties and obligations associated with being an appointed sewerage company.

We have considered the revenues and costs of serving the Site should the relevant variations be granted. Following this review we have concluded that the Site demonstrates sufficient financial viability.

IWN has an unlimited Keepwell agreement from its owner Brookfield Utilities UK Limited, entered into in July 2013. IWN has confirmed that this agreement is still in place and will cover this Site.

On this basis, our view is that the risk of this Site not being financially viable is small and as a result we are currently satisfied that applicant would be able to finance its functions if the variation is granted.

7. Conclusion and next steps

In assessing IWN's application, we have considered the general benefits of NAVs. Our view is that our two key policy principles would be met in this case, as customers would be no worse off, and IWN would remain able to finance, and carry out, its functions. We have also considered the effects of granting the proposed variation of IWN's appointment and consequential variation of SVT's appointment on SVT's existing customers.

We are currently minded to grant this variation of appointment under the unserved criterion. We are consulting on our proposal to do so.

Where to send submissions

Any person who wishes to make representations or objections with respect to the application should do so in writing to Hayley Robinson at Centre City Tower, 7 Hill Street, Birmingham, B5 4UA or by email at Hayley.Robinson@ofwat.gsi.gov.uk

Representations must be received by Ofwat no later than 17.00 hours on 19 January 2018. Further information about how to make representations or objections, including information on the treatment of confidential information, can be obtained from Ofwat at the above address or at <http://www.ofwat.gov.uk/foi/>

Ofwat will only use the information you have provided for the purpose of this consultation. We will retain your information in accordance with Ofwat's retention schedule and will not share with third parties unless we have a legal obligation to do so. For further information please see Ofwat's Privacy Policy in our [Publication Scheme](#).

8. Site maps



