# Irish Water’s connection charges labelled biggest barrier to Leitrim housing development



At a recent municipal meeting in Ballinamore, a Leitrim councillor voiced strong concerns regarding what he termed the "behaviour of Irish Water," which he identified as the most significant obstacle to housing development in the region. Councillor Paddy O'Rourke described the exorbitant costs associated with water and sewerage connections as a critical issue, noting that the current pricing structure creates an environment where a handful of contractors effectively monopolise the market. He cited an eye-watering estimate of €150,000 for a family seeking to connect their home to the public network, a sum that raises questions about accessibility for potential new homeowners.

O'Rourke also reflected on the legislative landscape that facilitates these challenges. He referred to the transfer of urban wastewater management from local authorities to Irish Water in 2014, a move he believes was stealthily executed during a period of political distraction with local and European elections. This transition, according to O'Rourke, has had long-lasting repercussions on the affordability of vital services, particularly for rural constituents.

Fellow councillor Enda McGloin added further context to the discussion, recounting difficulties faced by local businesses in securing water connections critical for economic growth. He highlighted a case involving a new food hub on the Dowra Road, where an existing water supply was deemed insufficient by Irish Water, prompting a demand for a €35,000 connection fee despite the proximity to existing services. This situation underscores the frustration among local entrepreneurs, who are eager to expand but find themselves stifled by bureaucratic red tape and high costs. McGloin mentioned that these disheartening experiences have already reached the Minister for Enterprise, indicating a growing political awareness of the issue.

This is not the first time concerns regarding Irish Water's pricing model have been raised. In July 2021, three households in the Drumkeerin area faced a collective connection cost of €150,000, leading to severe criticism from Councillor Mary Bohan. She has been vocal about the discriminatory nature of such charges, pointing out that rural residents are disproportionately affected by these financial burdens compared to their urban counterparts. Bohan's frustrations echo those of many in the community, who are wrestling with the implications of exorbitant costs posed by a near-monopolistic provider.

The question of connection fees extends beyond individual challenges; it's emblematic of a broader housing crisis that Leitrim is grappling with. Recent data highlighted that Leitrim had the lowest number of housing starts in Ireland as of January 2025, with only 101 homes initiated. This stark statistic, attributed to soaring construction expenses, paints a grim picture of the region's housing landscape.

In response to these mounting pressures, Leitrim County Council has been urging resistance against upcoming water charges deemed likely to escalate costs for farmers and residents alike. This campaign highlights an ongoing discourse about the need for equitable pricing that does not hinder the development of homes and businesses in the region. As rates proposed for connection continue to rise, the council's stance serves as a potential rallying point for the community and may indicate forthcoming political action aimed at reforming how water services are priced in rural areas.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.ireland-live.ie/news/leitrim-live/1816862/biggest-single-impediment-to-building-houses-in-leitirm-is-the-behaviour-of-irish-water.html)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.ireland-live.ie/news/leitrim-live/1816862/biggest-single-impediment-to-building-houses-in-leitirm-is-the-behaviour-of-irish-water.html), [[3]](https://www.leitrimobserver.ie/news/home/1598033/council-urges-opposition-to-upcoming-water-charges-affecting-leitrim-farmers.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.leitrimobserver.ie/news/home/651036/mindblowing-cost-for-three-leitrim-houses-to-connect-to-irish-water.html), [[6]](https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/oireachtas/irish-water-charging-up-to-12-000-to-connect-houses-1.3245294), [[7]](https://www.leitrimobserver.ie/news/home/1707344/housing-crisis-leitrim-faces-irelands-lowest-house-builds.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[3]](https://www.leitrimobserver.ie/news/home/1598033/council-urges-opposition-to-upcoming-water-charges-affecting-leitrim-farmers.html), [[5]](https://www.water.ie/connections)
* Paragraph 5 – [[4]](https://www.leitrim.ie/council/services/water-services/rural-water/water-and-waste-water-connections/), [[7]](https://www.leitrimobserver.ie/news/home/1707344/housing-crisis-leitrim-faces-irelands-lowest-house-builds.html)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.ireland-live.ie/news/leitrim-live/1816862/biggest-single-impediment-to-building-houses-in-leitirm-is-the-behaviour-of-irish-water.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.leitrimobserver.ie/news/home/651036/mindblowing-cost-for-three-leitrim-houses-to-connect-to-irish-water.html> - In July 2021, three households outside Drumkeerin, Co. Leitrim, were quoted a total of €150,000 to connect to the Irish Water system. With a grant of just over €30,000 available, each house would need to contribute €40,000. Councillor Mary Bohan criticised Irish Water's monopoly and high charges, stating that the costs were 'discriminatory to those living in rural areas'.
3. <https://www.leitrimobserver.ie/news/home/1598033/council-urges-opposition-to-upcoming-water-charges-affecting-leitrim-farmers.html> - Leitrim County Council has urged opposition to upcoming water charges affecting farmers in the region. Councillor Mary Bohan highlighted the high costs imposed by Irish Water for connections, citing a case where three households faced charges of €150,000. The council emphasised the need to resist these planned increases, which would disproportionately impact multiple connections.
4. <https://www.leitrim.ie/council/services/water-services/rural-water/water-and-waste-water-connections/> - Leitrim County Council provides information on water and wastewater connections for customers on semi-private Group Sewerage Schemes (GSSs). Customers must apply to Uisce Éireann for a connection, which involves assessing the capacity of the existing network and may require upgrades. The connection charge policy indicates that this is an indirect connection, and a connection charge must be applied by Uisce Éireann.
5. <https://www.water.ie/connections> - Uisce Éireann (formerly Irish Water) outlines the process for connecting to the public water supply or wastewater collection infrastructure. The Connections and Developer Services department assists with the various processes involved in completing a connection into the Uisce Éireann network. The page provides important information about these processes and what is needed along the way.
6. <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/oireachtas/irish-water-charging-up-to-12-000-to-connect-houses-1.3245294> - In October 2017, it was reported that Irish Water was charging up to €12,000 to connect individual houses to the water mains. Fianna Fáil TD John McGuinness highlighted complaints about single household connections costing between €10,000 and €12,000, expressing concern that this was another way of raising funds and warning the Government to set guidelines to prevent Irish Water from exploiting the situation.
7. <https://www.leitrimobserver.ie/news/home/1707344/housing-crisis-leitrim-faces-irelands-lowest-house-builds.html> - In January 2025, data from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage revealed that Leitrim had the lowest number of house builds in Ireland, with only 101 homes commenced. This low number is attributed to rising construction costs, which make new construction financially unappealing for developers and builders, leading to a lack of new housing development in the county.