



# AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE IN **PUBLIC RELATIONS 2022**

# Best Long-Term Campaign



A picture of Cork Lower Harbour for 'Cork Lower Harbour Main Drainage Project'.

## Campaign

Cork Lower Harbour Main Drainage Project – Long Term Public Relations Campaign

## Description of Campaign

This campaign brought Cork Lower Harbour communities on a journey with Irish Water from 2014 to 2021, to create awareness, achieve buy-in, consideration, trust and ultimately advocacy for the multi-staged project that successfully ended the discharge of the equivalent of 40,000 wheelie bins of raw sewage **every single day** into Cork Harbour.



## Organisation

Irish Water

## Background to the Campaign

For decades, the equivalent of 40,000 wheelie bins of raw sewage discharged **every day** from 4 urban agglomerations or areas around Cork Harbour directly into the harbour. As well as damaging the environment and limiting development of these areas, this practice was in breach of national and European legislation, putting Ireland at risk of substantial financial penalties from the European Court of Justice.

Having secured planning permission for the Project in 2009, Cork County Council identified a new solution to elements of the project following a design review in 2013, which required a Strategic Infrastructure Development application to An Bord Pleanála (ABP) for an amendment to the original planning permission.

Irish Water assumed responsibility for water services in January 2014. At that time, there were significant protests nationwide, along with negative media and stakeholder commentary surrounding the introduction of water charges and meters.

Irish Water progressed with the delivery of the Project, including managing the application to An Bord Pleanála and

the delivery of significant infrastructure along narrow, busy commuter filled roads, with associated traffic restrictions impacting communities and businesses over 4 phases of development.

**Phase 1 (2014 – 2016)** involved the construction of the new state of the art Shanbally Wastewater Treatment Plant as well as managing applications to An Bord Pleanála for planning amendments to the location of the Lee Estuary Crossing as well as Pump Station locations

**Phase 2 (2017 – 2019)** included work along narrow, busy commuter filled roads as we extended and repaired the sewer network on the south side of the harbour in the towns of Carrigaline, Monkstown, Passage West and Ringaskiddy.

**Phase 3 (2019 – 2020)** saw us constructing the vital sewer link between Cobh and Monkstown, over 60 metres below the Lee Estuary, through which raw sewage from Cobh would be pumped for treatment.

**Phase 4 (2019 – 2021)**, the final phase of the works, saw us extending and repairing the sewer network on the north side of the harbour in the scenic and touristic town Cobh.

Given the potential impact of these works on communities and businesses around the harbour, the challenge was to build awareness of and support for the project, while building trusting relationships in this complex landscape, supporting the delivery of this critical infrastructure, to achieve compliance with the European Union's Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive, protecting the environment and supporting the sustainable development and growth of the Cork Lower Harbour area.

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## Statement of Objectives

The key communications objectives to support the safe delivery of the project and build trust in Irish Water included:

- Establishing the project team as the trusted source of information by delivering consistent, effective, accessible, meaningful, transparent and accountable communications through strategic communications planning and proactive stakeholder engagement;
- Establishing positive relationships with the receiving community, achieving buy-in from stakeholders and increasing the trust and confidence in Irish Water;
- Creating an awareness and understanding of the size, scale and benefits of the work involved in the overall Cork Lower Harbour Project for both internal and external stakeholders;
- Creating awareness of how the project will affect people directly, any potential disruption and our plans to mitigate against likely disruption;
- Ensuring that all stakeholders had access to the relevant information on the project as the project progressed;
- Reinforcing that Irish Water continue to make progress, underpinning Ireland's economic growth and safeguarding our water for our future.

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## Programme Planning and Strategy

Given the challenging nature of the project, the timing and the landscape within which it was to be delivered, the importance of building relationships and trust locally was recognised as pivotal to the success of the project. A dedicated Community Relations Manager was appointed to the project to act as a voice and representative of the project at local level and to develop an overall approach to proactive public relations, including consultation, engagement and communication.

The approach set out a journey to first create awareness for our stakeholders and from there, achieve buy-in, consideration, trust and ultimately advocacy for the project.

The use of simple and relevant messages that were easily understandable and memorable and designed to resonate in a powerful and personal way with as wide an audience as possible, was key to help to create an awareness of the project.



## Key Messages

All communications tools, channels and supporting collateral reiterated the key messages:

- **The equivalent of 40,000 wheelie bins of raw sewage is discharged into the harbour every day.** The use of '40,000 wheelie bins' created a tangible and understandable metric to describe how much raw sewage was discharging untreated into the harbour every day. This metric was relatable for all audiences, and could be represented visually using graphics and animation.
- **Cleaning up our Harbour.** The use of the 'Cleaning up our Harbour' reinforced that all involved in the development of the project, Irish Water, Cork County Council, and the communities around the harbour were working together to clean up our harbour.
- **Making progress – Irish Water and Cork County Council are working to bring that '40,000 wheelie bins' number to zero by 2021.** The '40,000 wheelie bins' metric was used to convey the sense of progress as each contract was successfully completed and less raw sewage was entering the harbour.

## Engagement

Creating opportunities for direct engagement was key to involving and informing all stakeholders, communities, businesses and local residents about the Project, while also promoting all available channels for communication, including update texts, emails, website updates and local Community Liaison contact details.

Information events were hosted within the community, including local schools, hotels, community centres and sports clubs. Local Liaison Committees were developed and engaged with throughout the project. Over 80 community engagement events including open evenings, information events, briefings meetings and drop-in clinics for residents, businesses and local groups to ensure the local community were made aware of and kept up to date on the Project and had the opportunity to have their views, concerns and issues heard and taken into account.

This engagement was facilitated by the Community Relations Manager for phase 1 and by a dedicated full time Community Liaison Officer (CLO) for subsequent phases, who worked closely with the Project team and with communities and businesses directly impacted by the works.

The proactive use of Site Visits began at the end of 2016 with the completion of the Shanbally Treatment Plant, showcasing the scale of this key major infrastructural projects, building awareness and appreciation of the benefits of the project for our environment, community and economy. These site visits continued throughout Phase 2, 3 and 4 and were supplemented with video material and a suite of communications materials to showcase progress to a wider audience.

## Integrated Communications Campaigns

Integrated Communications campaigns were used in parallel with the elected representative and community engagement events using the simple project messages with creative images distributed across multiple channels, from online videos to radio advertising, to on site in a 360-degree approach to raise awareness of the project and help improve the perception of Irish Water for people in Cork as it progressed works to Clean Up Our Harbour.

Construction signage and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) was branded with the 'Cleaning up our Harbour' brand, while creative images were printed on construction site hoarding, and outdoor advertising on Bus Shelters, at shopping centres and Cork train station promoting the benefits of the works.

We created awareness internally within Irish Water, profiling stories on the project team and progress on the works, to encourage employee advocacy for the project. In addition to promoting video animations and community personality profiles on digital and mainstream channels, we worked with businesses in areas which were most impacted by the works to tailor information to reduce the impact on businesses. The approach proved successful in raising the profile of the CLH project and increasing trusting relationships with the businesses in the community.

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## Measurement

The campaign achieved all its communications objectives, supporting the successful delivery of this major infrastructure project over 8 years and ending the discharge of 40,000 wheelie bins of raw sewage daily into Cork Harbour, positively impacting the local economy and greatly improving the amenity value of the Cork Lower Harbour for the surrounding communities.

- The campaign supported extensive stakeholder and community engagement, increasing awareness of the CLH project in the receiving community with high attendance and engagement at all stakeholder information events and site visits and significant community sign up to regular communications channels with progress updates;
- Strong community interest and cooperation in the delivery of the project with regular support and compliments throughout the delivery of the works;
- Successful Strategic Infrastructure Development application to An Bord Pleanála in 2014 and 2016.
- The focused advertising campaign achieved:
  - > 59% recall for our outdoor advertising in Cork City;
  - > 98% positive media sentiment;
  - > A 174% uplift in awareness of the project in Cork City;
  - > A 135% uplift in knowledge of the CLH project;
  - > A 77% uplift in Trust and Confidence in Irish Water;
  - > A 115% uplift in the understanding of the role of Irish Water;
- Acknowledgement and advocacy for the project from residents, businesses and elected representative throughout the Cork Lower Harbour Area, including the president of the Cobh and Harbour Chamber and An Taoiseach, Micheál Martin as and other businesses around Cobh spoke as independent advocates in support of the project and the work of Irish Water throughout.

*“I want to thank the entire team on how well the project was run.  
No one likes disruptions in their daily lives but your team did a great job”*

**Harbour resident**

*“Exceptional Engagement” Councillor Sinéad Sheppard  
“Fantastic engagement from Irish Water while delivering a cleaner Cork Harbour”*

**Johanna Murphy, President of Cobh and Harbour Chamber**

*“This is a historic day for the communities living in and around Cork Lower Harbour, completing a project that ensures a cleaner harbour, and provides new opportunities for sustainable social and economic development”*

**An Taoiseach Micheál Martin**

**ruepoint**



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