

teamtalk

Caroline O’Kane is no stranger to change or hard work and has always been open to new challenges and opportunities in life. Now, a firm fixture in the Integration and Management team, Caroline talks to us about her career to date, her time in Limerick City and County Council, and her thoughts on how Uisce Éireann can continue building on the great legacy of the Local Authorities, delivering water services, and working for the communities of Ireland.



I am a proud Limerick woman, born and bred, from Annacotty originally, and I have worked in Limerick, for the people of Limerick, since 1990. I started with Limerick County Council, as a Clerk Typist, assigned to Reception. I had a shorthand and typing qualification, but no formal third level education at all. I was a teenager of the 80’s, reared in a very different Limerick and Ireland. The country was not as well off as it is now and my family wasn’t in a position to send me to college, but I took every opportunity I could get to improve myself and get ahead in life.

I remember when I got the job with the council, my father threw a party. A job in the council was a job for life. That is how it was looked upon, so I understand why some of our colleagues in the Local Authorities may feel uneasy about leaving the council for Uisce Éireann. From my perspective, having worked in both organisations, they are very similar in what they offer in terms of job security.

They are both pensionable, lifetime employers with great opportunities to be had. For some of my colleagues in the council who work in water services, their fathers or uncles may have worked there before them so it is a difficult decision to make for them and there is a sense of loyalty to the Local Authority. What I would say however, is that for those interested in staying in water services, there are great opportunities. Uisce Éireann is now a vital cog for Ireland to develop housing, and all the crucial infrastructure a modern society needs to thrive.

We are all aware of the changes that are happening in water services currently, but things have changed dramatically in Limerick and in Ireland since 1990 and we have moved previously to cater for changes in the past. We are not saying we are going to be better than how Local Authorities did things because we are moving away from that model and how it was done. What we are saying is that we will bring the best of what the Local Authorities offered and the best of Uisce Éireann under one roof and that it will be a better way of doing things locally, and nationally for the communities of Ireland.

Having worked in both a Local Authority and in Uisce Éireann, I would advise my colleagues in water services to keep an open mind. There will be great opportunities for everyone in this organisation. I would urge everyone to participate and understand what’s on offer.

The grade I started in Limerick on is now gone, it has been done away with, so to speak, but I was always open to new opportunities, and I think you must in life, because you never know what's around the corner. I didn't always get the roles I went for either, but I think you learn a lot more sometimes from those roles and jobs you don't get. I have more on the job experience and life experience rather than book learnt qualifications, so I am a good case in point that there are opportunities there to be had for everyone, if you put yourself out there and work hard enough.

I worked in housing in the Local Authority for years and I got my first introduction to Uisce Éireann or Irish Water at the time, when I was managing two area offices in Limerick and we took part in the first Scada and Maximo trials back in 2014. Then in 2019, I decided to join Uisce Éireann and I have to say, I have never looked back. I am really enjoying it.

I am currently working on the Integration and Management Team (I&MT) working on the integration of operational data. I bring in the Local Authority perspective of things to this, and I am working with 31 Local Authorities to identify the data they need to bring across and what they can't bring across. We need this data to ensure we can carry out our day-to-day activities on the ground, smoothly. An example of this would be if there is a burst main. The crew on the ground may need to see a set of drawings before they go digging up a road, but if that important data has not been transferred across, we are in trouble, and it will take longer to fix. Leading to a poor customer experience.

Thankfully, I have a great relationship with our colleagues in the Local Authorities as I go around meeting people, and you need to bring people with you.

Going forward, I would like Uisce Éireann to get more embedded in the community. If you're working in water services currently, you have an incredible respect within your community, and there is something special about it. We need to tap into this community spirit, and once our colleagues come across, I believe we will get there. But we still have a lot of work to do to capture hearts and minds.

I like the way we work in Uisce Éireann. Everyone has a good attitude and we work collaboratively. We are beginning to build our new culture together with our Local Authority colleagues, but it will take time.