

Overview & Scrutiny Committee 22 March 2018

Report title: Burst Water Mains

Wards: All

Portfolio:

Cabinet Member for Housing & Environment: Councillor Jennifer Brathwaite

Cabinet Member for Healthier & Stronger Communities (*inc Emergency Planning*): Councillor Mohammed Seedat

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Report summary

This report recaps on the joint scrutiny work undertaken by Lambeth with other London Boroughs and the Greater London Assembly (GLA) Environment Committee over the past 12-18 months and outlines the events of March 2018 which have led to a renewed scrutiny focus on the causes and effects of, and response to, water main bursts in the borough.

Finance summary

There are no direct capital or revenue implications arising from this report.

Recommendations

1. To note the information contained within this report and those submitted by Thames Water.
2. To use this, together with the information gleaned from questioning of invited guests at the meeting (particularly Thames Water) to formulate observations/recommendations as appropriate.

1. Context

- 1.1 A series of major water main bursts occurred across London in late 2016, affecting a number of boroughs including Lambeth, Islington, Hackney and Lewisham. As a result of this, a joint scrutiny inquiry was set up by these boroughs, working with the Greater London Assembly (GLA) Environment Committee. The aim of the inquiry was to seek to reduce the risk of flooding, to better protect homes and businesses and to improve responses to flooding incidents.
- 1.2 Lambeth's Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to establish a Burst Water Mains Scrutiny Commission to look into the issues locally as part of this joint scrutiny. This commission held a one-off meeting in April 2017 at which Thames Water representatives were questioned on burst trunk main incidents in the borough over several years, principally in Herne Hill and Leigham Vale, Streatham.
- 1.3 Following on from this, Lambeth representatives met with colleagues from the other boroughs and the GLA to formulate a set of seven joint recommendations as follows:
 - (i) *That Thames Water improve their emergency response arrangements including instituting a dedicated emergency response line for the reporting of leaks and investigating the possibility, with the Metropolitan Police Service, of receiving a 'blue light' service from the Police should a major incident be declared.*
 - (ii) *That Thames Water improve and join up their monitoring system for detecting the likelihood of bursts on major trunk mains.*
 - (iii) *That Thames Water, when submitting their case to OFWAT for their future 5 year investment plans, prioritise the phased improvement of ageing Victorian pipe replacement on major trunk mains. This should be completed within a specified period to be determined and published by Thames Water, but 15 years is proposed, given the problems that major bursts on these roads cause to businesses and residents.*
 - (iv) *That Thames Water develop and publish performance and attendance standards, both in relation to major and minor pipe bursts.*
 - (v) *That a clear and comprehensive compensation policy be developed by Thames Water, covering clean up/insurance/compensation and goodwill payments. This should be clearly communicated to customers and available on the company website. Compensation for inconvenience should be formally recognised and included in the policy.*
 - (vi) *That the Mayor, GLA and London Boroughs support the campaign of the Fire Brigade Union to become the statutory Emergency Response Service for flooding, as recommended by the Pitt Review in 2008, in view of the recent major bursts resulting in severe flooding and given the fact that such occurrences are more likely in the future due to the ageing Victorian trunk mains network across London.*
 - (vii) *That the London Plan should include provision, when planning permission for basements is being requested, to ensure that a risk assessment is carried out prior to approval to ensure the risk to life of flooding is minimised.*
- 1.4 Thames Water provided written responses to these recommendations to Lewisham's Overview & Scrutiny Committee in October 2017. These are attached at appendix 1.
- 1.5 In parallel with this, as part of their own response to the events of late 2016, Thames Water commissioned an independent forensic review of their trunk main network, which examined the causes of these major bursts. The review was conducted by Paul Cuttill OBE – an independent

consultant with over 30 years' experience in the utilities sector – and his final report (“the Cuttill report”) was published on 24 March 2017. The report concluded that there was no common cause and no systematic failings that could have been said to have consistently caused or enabled the bursts; however Cuttill identified recommendations for improvement across four areas: asset planning; asset operations and maintenance; asset monitoring; and event response and aftercare.

- 1.6 In response to the findings of the independent forensic review, Thames carried out their own Trunk Mains Strategic Review, the final report of which was published on 2 October 2017. This sets out a series of commitments to reduce the risk of burst water main events and the distress and disruption they cause.
- 1.7 In early March 2018, the UK was hit by an extreme cold weather front which led to snow and sub-zero temperatures across much of the country, including London, for several days. Upon thawing, a number of water mains burst, leaving thousands of households and businesses without water. This was a particular issue in parts of London and the South East. The Streatham area was among the worst hit, with schools being forced to close and some residents having their water supplies cut off for up to five days.

2. Proposal and Reasons

- 2.1 Following on from the events of March 2018 and in light of the previous work done by Lambeth Scrutiny in conjunction with colleagues across the capital, the Chair requested that an item be added to the agenda for this meeting to examine the causes of the bursts, the effects on residents, businesses and infrastructure, and the response. Representatives from Thames Water have been invited to attend as have Emergency Planning officers and relevant Cabinet leads from Lambeth Council to give their perspective.
- 2.2 While this paper seeks to give a brief overview of the context, a further report was requested from Thames Water to outline the causes and effects of, and response to, recent bursts, as well as an update on progress against the joint recommendations referred to above. This is attached at appendix 2 and should be used to inform questioning.

3. Finance

- 3.1 There are no capital or revenue implications arising as a direct result of this report.

4. Legal and Democracy

- 4.1 There are no legal or democratic implications arising from this report.

5. Consultation and co-production

- 5.1 This item is being considered at a public meeting of the Council's Overview & Scrutiny Committee. Ward councillors and residents are welcome to attend the meeting and address the committee (subject to time constraints) in order that their views and experiences can be heard and considered. Any requests to speak at the meeting should be made via the Lead Scrutiny Officer (see contact details at the head of this report).

6. Risk management

- 6.1 N/A.

7. Equalities impact assessment

7.1 N/A

8. Community safety

8.1 N/A

9. Organisational implications

9.1 N/A

Audit Trail				
Consultation				
Name/Position	Lambeth directorate/ department or partner	Date Sent	Date Received	Comments in para:
Councillor Ed Davie	Chair, Overview & Scrutiny Committee	09.03.18		
Alison McKane, Director of Legal Services & HR	On behalf of Strategic Director, Corporate Resources	09.03.18	12.03.18	
Sue Foster, Strategic Director	Neighbourhoods & Growth	09.03.18		
Kristian Aspinall, Emergency Planning lead	Neighbourhoods & Growth	09.03.18	09.03.18	
Wayne Chandai, Head of Democratic Services & Scrutiny	Corporate Resources	09.03.18	09.03.18	
Nisar Visram, Assistant Director Corporate Finance	Corporate Resources	09.03.18	12.03.18	
Andrew Pavlou, Legal Services	Corporate Resources	09.03.18	12.03.18	
Jacqueline Pennycook, Democratic Services	Corporate Resources	09.03.18	12.03.18	

Report History	
Original discussion with Cabinet Member	
Report deadline	N/A
Date final report sent	
Part II Exempt from Disclosure/confidential accompanying report?	No
Key decision report	No
Date first appeared on forward plan	N/A
Key decision reasons	N/A
Background information	Lambeth Burst Water Mains Scrutiny Commission: Meeting papers (25 April 2017) GLA Environment Committee papers:

	<p>19 January 2017 15 June 2017 21 February 2018</p> <p>LB Islington Policy & Performance Scrutiny Committee papers: 20 December 2016 18 January 2017 8 March 2017 22 March 2017 20 April 2017 4 May 2017 20 July 5 October 2017</p> <p>LB Lewisham Overview & Scrutiny Committee papers: 23 January 2017 31 October 2017</p> <p>Thames Water Trunk Mains Forensic Review ('Cutill report') (24 March 2017)</p> <p>Thames Water Trunk Mains Strategic Review (2 October 2017)</p>
<p>Appendices</p>	<p>Appendix 1: Thames Water response to joint scrutiny recommendations (October 2017)</p> <p>Appendix 2: Thames Water Note to LB Lambeth Scrutiny 14 March 2018</p>