

Mr Mark Mathews
Local and Regional Government Liaison Manager
Thames Water

Via email

27th March 2018

Dear Mr Mathews,

I write in relation to the Lambeth Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 22nd March 2018 to formally set out the recommendations and questions arising as a result of discussions with yourself and Thames Water colleagues. This follows the events of early March 2018, which resulted in many residents and businesses in the borough being without water for several days, and the previous work done by Lambeth Scrutiny in conjunction with colleagues across the capital of which you are aware.

1. A written apology should be sent to all residents and businesses affected by the water outages in early March 2018
2. Much better communication is needed directly with individual local authorities (not just via the London Resilience Forum) when major incidents occur, particularly in relation to the sharing of information regarding vulnerable people in order that appropriate support can be provided to them in a coordinated manner
3. Communications put out by Thames Water updating customers on the progress of incidents need to be consistent and accurate, with realistic (i.e. not over-optimistic) timescales for resolution
4. Water stations set up to provide emergency water when an incident occurs need to be conveniently located and stocks need to be replenished appropriately so that they do not run out of supplies
5. Can water tankers be part of the response (instead of or in addition to bottled water stations) when customers are without water supplies?
6. What engagement will take place with elected members regarding Thames Water's strategic plans?
7. Thames Water's live mapping information needs to be more accurate; this should include the use of analytical tools to track social media tags
8. Appropriate steps should be taken to ensure that all tenants who were without water receive the same compensation being offered to homeowners. There should be a particular focus on social housing tenants

9. Subsequent to the meeting, correspondence received via local councillors suggests there is still considerable confusion with respect to the amount of compensation residents can expect to be paid [see *attached emails*]. It is requested that this be clarified as soon as possible
10. Clarification is requested on the compensation offer to businesses who were left without water during the March 2018 incidents; specifically the committee believes that the reported figure of £25 needs to be significantly increased, and that Thames Water should liaise with Castle Water and Business Improvement Districts to ensure the process and arrangements for claiming compensation are clear and simple
11. Further information is requested on how schools can take up the offer of an educational package of visits to Thames Water sites and talks by staff on STEM subjects
12. In addition to fair compensation to individual residential and business customers, including those in rented accommodation, the committee recommends Thames Water does something that benefits the whole community. Lambeth's Director of Public Health suggested a network of water fountains which would provide healthy, free drinks and help reduce plastic waste. The committee endorses this suggestion
13. The committee lacks confidence in Thames Water's capacity to respond appropriately to major incidents and as such wishes to see recommendation 6 from the joint scrutiny on trunk mains (that the Fire Brigade Union becomes the statutory Emergency Response Service for flooding, as recommended by the Pitt Review in 2008) progressed
14. Is Commitment 5.2 from Thames Water's Trunk Main Strategic Review (to instigate a trunk mains event response improvement programme) now in place and, if so, why did it not work in this case?

The committee also resolved:

- To endorse the letter sent by the Cabinet Member for Housing & Environment and the Cabinet Member for Healthier & Stronger Communities to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs dated Monday 5 March 2018, calling for an immediate inquiry into Thames Water's handling of the situation in Streatham and surrounding area in early March 2018 and into their suitability to operate the water network [*attached*]
- To invite Thames Water to a future meeting to report back on progress
- To write to Ofwat setting out the committee's views regarding increasing future infrastructure investment

On the latter point, the committee wishes to reiterate that it believes Thames Water's leakage reduction target of 15% by 2025, and 50% longer term, is woefully inadequate given current performance and should be increased considerably.

For reference, the full minutes of the meeting will be available in due course at the following link; this also includes the audio recording of the meeting:

<http://moderngov.lambeth.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=113&MId=10152&Ver=4>

I look forward to receiving your response to the numbered recommendations/questions above, which the committee plans to publish, at your earliest opportunity; in particular I would appreciate if nos 8-11 can be responded to as soon as possible given their pressing nature. I would be grateful if responses could be sent by email via Gary O'Key, Lead Scrutiny Officer, at gokey@lambeth.gov.uk.

Finally I would like to thank you and your colleagues for attending the meeting and hope that Thames Water's learning from the events of March 2018 leads to significant improvements in the service provided to the people of Lambeth in future.

Yours sincerely,

Councillor Ed Davie
Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Committee