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**SENT VIA EMAIL**

Zack Polanski  
Chair of the Environment Committee

Susan Hall  
Chair of the Fire, Resilience and Emergency Planning Committee  
London Assembly

Dear Zack and Susan,

Thank you for your letter of 21 February to Ian Marchant about the flooding in London last July. I trust you will accept my reply on his behalf.

The intense storms that hit the capital were exceptional. On 12 July a month's worth of rain fell in an hour and on 25 July a month's rain fell in a couple of hours. This was far in excess of what was forecast, and beyond what the public sewers, and drainage systems connected to them and owned and maintained by others, were able to handle.

Alongside the impact of the unprecedented rainfall, we know that our customer service in response to the floods fell short of what people should rightfully expect. The two key areas in which we let our customers down were in our initial response on the ground, and how we could have better supported those trying to contact us. We have identified a range of actions that are now underway to make improvements.

However, given the varied responsibilities for managing flood risk, ensuring that we minimise the risk of future flooding needs to become the collective focus for all organisations involved in London's drainage systems. The demands on those systems are set to grow as the impacts of climate change increase, so working together will be key if we are to provide resilient services at an affordable cost.

You asked when we would be in a position to provide you with information on a range of topics. I am pleased to be able to update you on our progress and will address the topics you raised as they appear in your letter:

1. *The interim findings of the London Flood Review, and the final report once it is ready.*

We commissioned the London Flood Review as an independent exercise to help us understand the cause of the flooding, how our assets performed, and to support us and others to better prepare for future floods. As the Review is operating independently of Thames Water we cannot make commitments on their behalf about the timescales for their work, but we understand that they intend to publish their first interim report shortly, and are planning to update information on their website - <https://londonfloodreview.co.uk/> - about all publication timings. We have asked Mike Woolgar, chair of the Independent Expert Group leading the review, to contact you directly, and ensure that you receive both the interim and final report when published.

*2. Details of the concrete actions that Thames Water are already undertaking (while waiting for the report) to strengthen London's flooding infrastructure against future flash flooding episodes, and*

*4. The work that Thames Water is undertaking to respond to sewer flooding risk.*

We are working with the Boroughs significantly affected by the floods to develop short, medium and long-term plans for each area. To date the following activity is underway:

- We have committed £10m to deliver a Sewer Flooding Resilience Programme (SFRP) to identify and increase the resilience of those properties at high risk of sewer flooding. We will survey all the properties reported to us as affected by sewer flooding to understand the risk of a recurrence. Where appropriate, based on the level of risk and suitability of their sewer connection, we will install a street or property-level measure, such as a non-return valve. We plan to announce more details on this programme by the end of the month.
- We have committed to fund a range of sustainable drainage projects. Our approach on sustainable drainage is set out in response to question six, below.
- We recognise that for some communities there will not be a quick solution to reduce the risk of future floods, so we are in the process of commissioning the National Flood Forum to support five communities in developing their own Community Flood Action Plans. These plans will set out actions that the communities can take to protect themselves and identify actions that we and their respective Boroughs can take in parallel to help reduce their risk. This includes, for example, the use of property-level measures such as flood guards and air brick covers.

*3. The prevention and mitigation plan that Thames Water is considering for potential future events.*

Reducing the risks of future floods and mitigating the impact they can have is a multi-party solution that will be informed by the work of the Independent Review. We will incorporate the longer-term recommendations into our Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan, as set out in our answer to question 5. In the meantime, we are investing in short-term mitigation for high-risk properties through the SFRP mentioned above and working hard to improve our response when these events do occur.

We know our immediate response to the storms was not acceptable and have apologised to customers at the public meetings we have attended. Many customers could not reach us by phone or were kept on hold for too long before speaking to someone at our call centre. Our response teams were not adequately resourced and we failed to deliver a co-ordinated approach with the boroughs to best support our customers.

As a result, we carried out our own internal review to find out what lessons could be learnt and the measures we need to take to mitigate the impacts of similar events in the future. We completed this review in November of last year, and published a summary of our findings at <https://www.thameswater.co.uk/media-library/home/about-us/investing-in-our-region/flooding-review/july-flooding-internal-review.pdf>.

We identified six key areas for improvement and 14 actions which needed to be taken, nine of which have been completed. They include ensuring we have more staff trained to answer questions about flooding so our call centre can handle more calls and provide better information. We have also developed a full operational plan that sets out how we will prepare, respond and co-ordinate our actions with others when severe rainfall is forecast.

This will help ensure we can deploy resources more quickly to where they are most needed. While there has been nothing on the scale of the July incidents since this was implemented, we have had several storms since where this approach has been successful in getting us on the scene quickly.

*5. The progress you are making with your Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan (DWMP).*

Our DWMP programme is progressing well and we are on track to launch a public consultation on our draft Plan in July. We have developed the plan through extensive collaboration with the Lead Local Flood Authorities (LLFAs) and River Catchment Partnerships in our region throughout 2021, including two (north and south London) workshops in May. These were followed by seven workshops in November and December.

During these (and previous) workshops we have amassed 383 potential partnership project opportunities. We see this as a clear desire and willingness for collaboration around flood risk in London.

The recommendations from the Independent London Flood Review are expected in June 2022 so will not be in time to inform the DWMP that is published for consultation this summer. We will, however, review the recommendations carefully once available and identify how best to integrate them into both our DWMP and five-year investment plan for 2025-30.

*6. The contribution that you see sustainable drainage making to reductions in surface water flooding.*

In the face of a changing climate and urbanisation, we know we can't simply keep building bigger sewers. Our surface water programme has been set up to develop the way we work with others, particularly LLFAs, to share both the costs and the benefits of sustainable drainage (SuDS), and to understand their effectiveness.

Our programme is driven by three key principles: 1) the need for sewer capacity; 2) collaboration; 3) creating public value. It aims to:

- Free up sewer capacity in the areas that most need it due to flooding or pollution
- Develop mutual confidence in a partnership delivery model
- Build capacity and experience within LLFAs and best practice in delivery
- Monitor the effectiveness of interventions.

We have set up two distinct ways of working with partners:

1. Strategic partnerships. In London we have partnered with the Boroughs of Lambeth and Hounslow and are working together to manage water runoff from over 6 hectares (60,000m<sup>2</sup>) by 2025.
2. Wider partnership projects. We anticipate supporting more than 50 diverse projects, mainly in London, which we expect will disconnect more than 20 hectares of land that currently drains to our sewers.

For example, we have partnered with the London Borough of Waltham Forest and the Department for Education – each contributing £250,000 - to create SuDS at St Mary's Church of England school in Walthamstow. This will increase flood resilience in an area that suffered extensive flooding last summer.

Our DWMP identifies areas of highest risk and need, and our surface water programme complements this by building delivery mechanisms that we hope to expand in future investment periods. We are also taking a leading role in the Strategic SuDS pilot, which is providing evidence of the impact that SuDS can have on reducing flood risk. The learnings from the pilot are embedded into our DWMP, which will recommend significant SuDS interventions across London.

There is more information about our surface water management programme at [www.thameswater.co.uk/suds](http://www.thameswater.co.uk/suds).

*7. How Thames Water is working with partners to drive multi-agency collaboration to cope with flood events and how this will help deliver a long-term solution for London.*

Given the various responsibilities for different aspects of flood risk, a multi-agency, collaborative approach will be essential in managing the risk posed by future floods.

A round-table discussion convened by the Mayor in the period following the floods led to the creation of a Task and Finish Group in which we played an active role and which has proposed how the different agencies involved in managing flood risk should work together. The Group has recommended the need for an urgent London-wide strategy and plan, led by a multi-agency group.

We fully support the recommendations and have offered to provide £50,000 and to fund a part-time post to support the group. Nevil Muncaster, our Strategic Resources Director, will represent us on this group and could take on the role of co-chair, if other members agreed this was appropriate.

I hope this update is helpful, and that I have been able to reassure you of the focus and attention work to improve our preparedness for future floods is receiving. Please let me know if you have any further questions or would like to discuss our approach with a member of the team.

With very best wishes,



Sarah Bentley  
**Chief Executive Officer**