

Ms Rachel Fletcher
Chief Executive
OFWAT
Centre City Tower
7 Hill Street
Birmingham
B5 4UA

06 April 2018

Dear Rachel

Response to Severe Weather March 2018

First of all, may I say how sorry we are that any of our customers lost supply during the recent severe weather. Over the years, we have sought to apply a 'continuous improvement' ethos to our emergency response procedures and undoubtedly our experience from the recent events, will allow us to develop further our ability to deal with extreme events and minimise impact on our customers.

We take our responsibility to respond to operational emergencies very seriously. This is something that our Executive and Board take an active interest in. Our response to the severe weather event was led by myself, as chair of our 'Crisis Management Team'. Our Chairman and Board were kept fully informed of events as they developed on a daily basis over the period of the severe weather. Throughout the year we engage with the Board in terms of our annual emergency planning exercise programme and on related matters such as the 'Security and Emergency Measures Directive' audit.

In terms of the severe weather itself, we experienced very challenging conditions, with a Met. Office 'Red Warning' issued on 1st March which led to large volumes of snowfall impacting on much of our operating area. Conditions were so bad, that the M4 in south Wales, was closed and many minor roads remained inaccessible a week after the 'Red Warning'. However, our preparations to deal with the impact of the weather were in place well ahead of the worst of it hitting us.

Our emergency plan was enacted in the week prior to the 'Red Warning' as we took heed of the predicted deterioration in conditions. Following the experience of the 'Winter 2010' we have added materially to our emergency resources; for example, we have over 200 '4x4' vehicles and our own fleet of over 30 water tankers. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. We have an annual winter preparation plan and this was reviewed at Executive level on 21st November 2017 and we carried out a simulation test of related procedures on 14th December 2017. These actions, plus our general emergency procedures formed the basis of our response to 'Storm Emma'.

The impact of the weather was felt right across our operating area with emergency command centres operating around the clock between 28th February and 9th March. In addition to our usual operational resources, under our emergency procedures we mobilised a further 700 colleagues, from other parts of the business and our supply chain to support the incident response. Our focus was very much on protecting supplies to our main population centres and this ensured that virtually 99% of connected properties did not experience any issues at all. However, four rural communities suffered prolonged supply interruption and we very much regret this. In these areas, just over 6,000 properties were affected, with the worst being 341 with a supply loss of just over 5 days.

We have ensured that these customers received a written apology and compensation very promptly starting on 9th March, as conditions improved. In the four worst affected areas we have also proactively contacted over 150 business customers and we are responding with similar speed, to a handful of compensation claims as a result of this. In terms of support to customers, we have issued over 4,000 'lagging kits' free of charge over this winter period (prior to Storm Emma), as part of our annual 'Wrap Up Wales' campaign to help people protect their home plumbing.

Throughout the incident we did all we could to identify vulnerable customers and at our call centre, we utilised a process to prioritise delivery of bottled water to customers in such circumstances. More widely, we sought to get alternative supplies to communities where we had lost supply, however at the 'height' of the storm our efforts were severely hampered by inaccessible road conditions.

We put considerable effort into customer communication during the incident and at the same time made sure that we engaged with stakeholders. In relation to the four specific rural areas, we have met or spoken with respective Assembly Members and MPs and have received positive feedback from them in terms of our response and approach to customer. We also had regular dialogue with Welsh Government officials throughout the incident and this included direct briefing with Ministers.

For us, the recent severe weather was a significant event across the whole of our operating area and we expended every effort to mitigate the impact on our customers. However, we recognise there are some things we could have done better and we will ensure that the respective 'lessons learnt' are fully taken into account for future emergency events.

If you have queries or need clarification on the Report or Data Tables please contact Mike Bishop on 07775 408508 or by email to mike.bishop@dwrwymru.com.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Perry', written in a cursive style.

Peter Perry
Chief Operating Officer