



Mr John Russell
Senior Director, Strategy, Finance and Infrastructure
Ofwat

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By email

Dear John

December Freeze/Thaw

Thank you for your letter of 16 January and further clarification e-mail of 23 January. As you indicated in your letter, this is a relatively short response because the freeze/thaw was managed with little impact on services to either residential or business customers. This is because we had well prepared response plans based on previous incidents, including the 2018 freeze/thaw and Ofwat's subsequent report.

The freeze started for our area on 10 December, during which time our background leakage levels started to rise, culminating in a significant leakage increase overnight on 18/19 December when the thaw started. Customer contacts increased immediately following the thaw but reverted to normal levels within a week. We proactively communicated with our customers throughout this period.

The immediate impact of the thaw saw a significant rise in leakage with minimum night flows increasing by 80 MI/d, 62%, a very similar scenario to that seen during the "Beast from the East". This resulted in a widespread leakage break out across our entire network and prompted an overall water resource demand similar to the hot weather of June 2022. We also experienced high volumes of alarms, including high demand on service reservoirs and network flow and pressure points, during the period we managed 119 reservoir alarms and they all remained in service.

Throughout the whole event, we only had seven interruptions to supply, one planned and six bursts, resulting in loss of supply to a total of 390 properties, of which only 32 were impacted for over three hours – see table overleaf:

Location	Type of Interruption	Properties Interrupted	Start of Interruption	End of Interruption	Period of Interruption (DD:HH:MM)
Maundown	Planned	33	19/12/2022 13:55	19/12/2022 15:00	00:01:05
Henley View, Crewkerne	Unplanned	105	19/12/2022 18:57	19/12/2022 20:45	00:01:48
Henley View, Crewkerne	Unplanned	32	19/12/2022 18:57	20/12/2022 03:20	00:08:23
Calstone, Calne	Unplanned	26	20/12/2022 12:00	20/12/2022 14:55	00:02:55
Bay Lane, Gillingham	Unplanned	72	22/12/2022 19:30	22/12/2022 21:30	00:02:00
Bay Cottage, Gillingham	Unplanned	72	22/23/2022 23:30	23/12/2022 02:10	00:02:40
Barton Road, Minehead	Unplanned	17	28/12/2022 21:00	28/12/2022 23:30	00:02:30
		390			

Our performance for supply interruptions in December was near normal, with only 1.51 seconds added to our performance commitment measure in the month. We remain on target for this year's supply interruptions performance commitment of 5 minutes 45 seconds.

We continued to provide a free leak repair service for domestic supply customers. During the freeze/thaw period, there was an increase in repair volumes by 40% in December and 65% in January compared to our normal level.

Customer communication

To encourage customers to prepare their homes for cold weather ahead of any extreme weather events, we provided advice including how to lag water pipes in exposed areas and finding and checking internal stop taps. We also explained what we do to find and locate leaks on our network.

This was communicated through our customer magazine, sent to 1.1 million homes, as well as on social media channels using memorable video clips and images. We also used digital radio adverts to target customers while in their homes, working with the largest commercial radio station, Heart FM, for maximum reach. Additionally, articles were published in our customer e-newsletter and in local newspapers. A dedicated cold weather advice page on our website was signposted from the homepage and via social media banners.

In preparation for the thaw, we formed an incident team, extra out of hours support, repair resources and supply tankers and prepared additional customer messaging. We also reviewed our emergency water supply stocks and alerted local Highways departments to expect an increase in reactive repairs.

To offer support once the thaw started, we sent 734 proactive texts to customers in affected areas and called customers in those areas who were on our Priority Services Register. We added messaging on our phone lines signposting where to find relevant support and advice relating to the freeze and an emergency banner on our website, which was seen by 18,000 customers, with 2000 of them clicking through to the advice page.

Throughout the event, we liaised closely with our non-household retail providers. There was no impact to any non-household customers.

As part of our preparations, we checked all our bottled water stocks to ensure we had sufficient supplies and re-stocking plans were in place. As we had very little interruption, we only had three requests for bottled water from customers, which were delivered - two were to support customers with domestic plumbing issues and one part of a supply interruption.

We made good use of our integrated water supply grid to move water around our region and we were also able to assist Bournemouth Water with a 6 Ml/d transfer through the Christmas period.

We maintained active engagement with the wider industry through PIM and NIM, where companies openly shared current challenges and appropriate support was offered.

As we experienced so few supply interruptions, the only payments we made were to 15 customers for cancelled appointments.

I confirm all recommendations from Ofwat's 2018 report have been completed. As always, there are lessons to be learned, in particular the importance of anticipating the impact of changing weather patterns and proactively preparing to deal with them. As part of our PR24 business plan, we will include our assessment of the impact of the increase in frequency of extreme weather events.

I hope this summary gives you what you need. If you would like any further information, please let me know.

Very best wishes.

Colin Skellett
Group Chief Executive