

Stella Creasy MP
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Sent via email only

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Dear Stella

Thank you for your letter dated 22 August and apologies for the delay in responding.

We understand how distressing and disruptive flooding is for our residents and have been working extremely hard to make sure they can receive help and support from us.

As you recognise, a great deal of work has gone into mitigating the impact of flooding following last year's extreme downpour. We believe the most recent incident showed that this work has been effective. However, clearly this type of weather event is becoming commonplace as a result of climate change and will be a recurring theme in the future. In fact, the only sustainable long-term solution to adverse weather events, is for us to take radical action against climate change. This is coupled with the fact that London's Victorian-era infrastructure does not have the capacity to manage the volumes of water produced by these events.

We are committed to building on the good work already done, with partners like Thames Water and especially with residents, to improve flood resilience in Waltham Forest and ensure our response is as efficient as possible.

Whilst this partnership work is vitally important and something we will continue to strengthen, there is an obvious lack of clear national leadership and regulatory structure which allows for meaningful change to be made. Grace sat on the Mayor of London's flood roundtable and will continue to add my voice to pan-London calls for more funding and powers to local government to deal with flooding. We need a collective call to action by the government to ensure residents are kept safe locally.

Detailed below are the numerous improvements that have been made to the way we prepare, communicate, respond, and follow-up when heavy rain is predicted. We have also set out some of the resilience work that is underway and what our next steps are.

17 August flooding incident

The flooding on 17 August was preceded by a long period of dry weather. In the days leading up to the rain officers and staff had checked high risk roads to ensure they were clear of debris and gullies were clear and running.

We utilised social media channels to communicate with residents in the lead up and during the rain. We invited people to reply to social media posts to alert us to issues in their area, allowing an efficient response to a wide range of reports whilst keep phone lines clear for the most urgent calls.

In total 47 locations were affected by heavy rainfall on 17 August. Neighbourhood Officers have visited all areas to check in on residents and offer assistance. Waltham Forest and Thames Water staff have also attended all locations to ensure they have been cleaned and detritus and debris cleared.

Following the clean-up operation, the Council and Thames Water are investigating every location with an aim to identify and implement improvements to the infrastructure and reduce the risk of flooding in the future.

We believe that the majority of problems identified have now been resolved. If residents are still experiencing issues, they can find support and report issues on our website; they will be followed-up with and receive assistance.

<https://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/parking-roads-and-travel/roads-and-pavements/flooding-or-drainage-problem>

Ongoing work to improve flood resilience

It is imperative that these flooding events and the physical adaptations required are viewed through the lens of climate change. We are in the late stages of producing a climate action plan that takes a holistic look at the climate emergency, including the resilience measures, adaptations, and improvements to biodiversity required to protect residents from extreme weather.

Linked to this, one of the key actions following July 2021's flooding was securing funding from Department for Education, Thames Water, as well as external funding to build a Sustainable Urban Drainage System (SUDS) in Brooke Road / Oliver Road. The scheme has been designed and we have engaged with residents and St Marys School and looking to start work in October subject to final approvals. This work was due to commence before the incident on 17 August, but St Mary's asked us to delay until after the school holidays. We are also in the process of delivering six other SUDs in the borough.

We have updated our dropped kerb policy and in the process of updating Homeowners Guide to encourage better water retention at properties. Clyde was instrumental in having a suite of flood resilience options added to our service store, allowing residents to better protect their homes. This is something that was put in place quickly and efficiently.

Waltham Forest and Thames Water have jointly funded a National Flood Forum Representative to work with the communities most impacted by flooding. This work has begun; the forum representative will collaborate with residents to craft a Community Flood Plan and ensure greater resilience.

In order to properly scrutinise and evaluate flood resilience, including actions the Council and Thames Water are responsible for, our newly established Climate Scrutiny Committee have incorporated flood mitigation into their work programme for this year.

London Flood Review and next steps

The Council has worked closely with Mike Woolgar, Chair of the independent review panel established by Thames Water following flooding across the capital last year. This has included facilitating visits to the most severely affected areas in Waltham Forest.

The London Flood Review recently published its [final stage 4 report](#) outlining recommendations to improve London's sewerage and draining systems. We have read the report and will be meeting with Mike Woolgar in the coming weeks to discuss its findings. Both of us intend to continue to make the case for further improvements to be made in Waltham Forest's high-risk areas.

Whilst the Review has proposed a number of recommendations, it is not a regulatory force and has no official powers in ensuring recommendations are enacted. We would both welcome your support in making representations to Government, and suggest they are focused on the implementation of the Review's recommendations.

The key recommendation that should be enacted is around funding. The Review found the funding process for flooding schemes can be long and laborious. This is designed in such a way to make sure that the limited funds available are used wisely and for maximum benefit across the country. However, it is often easier to demonstrate that large river and coastal schemes are more cost-effective for the benefits that they achieve compared with surface water mitigation schemes.

The other asks support lobbying Government would be appreciated on are:

- That the funding for high-risk areas is streamlined and to make the bidding process easier for Local Authorities for surface water mitigation schemes.

- That the Review reconsider its recommendation on not upsizing all the pipes in London due to cost. We believe pipes in the high-risk areas should be upsized or firm alternatives should be offered to where this not feasible.
- We believe Flood Re, a government-backed reinsurance scheme that aims to make the flood cover part of household insurance more affordable, could be improved to minimise insurance premiums for residents.

Thank you again for getting in touch and for the support you have offered to residents who have been affected by flooding. You have been an excellent advocate for them and challenged us to hold ourselves and partners to account. We will ensure that flood resilience is put forward as an area that could be explored in our new Climate Scrutiny Committee. We look forward to continuing to work with you on this issue and would be happy to arrange a meeting with you to further outline action and explore how we can strengthen our approach.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Grace Williams
Leader of Waltham Forest Council



Councillor Clyde Loakes
Deputy Leader of Waltham Forest Council
and Cabinet Member for Climate and Air Quality