

Stella Creasy MP

Via Email.

Date: 10th August 2021

Dear Stella

Thank you for your letter of 3 August requesting clarification in respect of additional issues raised by residents. As you are aware, unfortunately Waltham Forest again experienced heavy rainfall over the weekend, and I know the team have updated you separately on the action taken as council teams quickly mobilised to support our residents. Our teams are out again this week checking gullies and responding to concerns, and we continue to report issues to Thames Water where they need to take action on their areas of responsibility.

Returning to your additional questions on the previous incident, I have set out our responses as fully as possible below.

Notification regarding potential flooding

During the week commencing 19 July 2021, the Met Office issued several time specific 'yellow' warnings regarding the possible impact of thunderstorms/heavy rain as follows:

- On Tuesday 20 July at 10.12 covering the period 1300 to 2359 that day – 'Thunderstorms developing this afternoon may cause impacts to travel and power supplies' There was no impact on Waltham Forest.
- On Friday 23 July at 11.40 covering Saturday 24 and Sunday 25 – 'Heavy rain or showers and thunderstorms over the weekend could lead to difficult driving conditions, disruption to transport, flooding of homes and businesses and isolated power outages'. Specific Warnings issued were:
 - Yellow Thunderstorm Warning (Low Likelihood of Medium Impacts) valid 2000 on Friday 23rd July to 2200 on Saturday 24th July 2021. There was no impact on Waltham Forest.
 - Yellow Thunderstorm Warning (Very Low Likelihood of Medium Impacts) valid 0900 to 2359 on Sunday 25th July 2021.



In summary, the warning received on Tuesday 20 July highlighted adverse weather that might affect the borough later that day. The notification received on Friday 23 July highlighted the possibility of thunderstorms throughout the weekend, with the greater risk of thunderstorms and flooding predicted on the Saturday rather than the Sunday. Sunday's Yellow Thunderstorm warning was upgraded to an Amber warning by the Met Office at 14.49 on Sunday 25 July.

Joint working arrangements with Thames Water and the Environment Agency

Waltham Forest works closely with Thames Water and the Environment Agency in a number of areas, including those relating to drainage and flood risk management in the borough.

The Council also works with the Environment Agency through the Thames Regional Flood and Coastal Committee (RFCC) to ensure that there are coherent flood management plans and to encourage efficient, targeted and risk-based investment in flood management.

You have specifically asked why Thames Water were not involved in the Gold meeting on the evening of Sunday 25 July. Highways Officers were in close contact with their local counterparts in Thames Water at an early stage during the period of heavy rainfall that commenced during the afternoon. As a result, attendees at the Gold Meeting were fully appraised of the response that Thames Water were providing locally, taking calls from residents and businesses where premises had been affected by flooding and dealing with those requests for service and information. For that reason, they were not invited to this initial GOLD meeting. However, we have now agreed they will be a standing member of any future GOLD meetings as they were this weekend.

As you highlight, the long term solution to incidences of flooding is dependent on a multi-agency response and we will continue to work in partnership with Thames Water the Environment Agency and all relevant partners and to press them to take action where needed and put in place robust plans to mitigate heavy rainfall in the future.

A revised Multi-Agency Flood Plan for Waltham Forest and engagement with our local community

Prior to the recent unprecedented rainfall in Waltham Forest, we had already started to review the borough's Multi-Agency Flood Plan. As previously outlined, the principle factor which triggered the review was the parallel changes to our own Local Plan. However, the new plan will of course reflect the issues and experiences of those impacted by the recent flooding, setting out the responsibilities as part of a multi-agency response to any future flooding event.

The redrafted Multi-Agency Flood Plan is scheduled to be submitted to the local Borough Resilience Forum this Autumn. The existing nominated working group will then finalise and agree content changes, including any recommendations from recent flooding events.

We recognise that there is a process that needs to be followed in order that the views of the key responder and voluntary response organisations can be considered and incorporated as appropriate. However, in the short term, the council will engage with residents and businesses to ensure they are aware of the contents of the emerging plan, including the steps it recommends residents to take in flood risk mitigation.

The Councils' engagement with residents and businesses will include delivering a flood advice leaflet to households across the borough; publishing additional information detailing the procedures to be followed in preparing and responding to local floods; and engaging with local voluntary organisations.

Our communities and voluntary organisations already play a vital role in our local resilience and response arrangements. The Council have just finalised a project with the British Red Cross which identified a number of local voluntary organisations that have agreed to become more involved in responding to emergencies. Their engagement and participation will be reflected in the new Multi-Agency Flood Plan.

Locations affected by the recent flooding and our programme of checking/clearing gullies

Overall, the Council assisted with cleaning 125 roads that had various levels of flooding including those locations notified to us by your office. All roads have been inspected and cleaned and Council officers assisted residents where required. The Council's waste collection team deployed extra resources to assist residents in disposing of damaged/spoiled items where required. In addition, we removed parking restrictions in key areas to support residents with storage and disposal. Highways Officers have assessed damage in the most impacted locations and have tasked contractors to carry out specified repairs or to undertake further investigations pending appropriate remedial works.

With regard to the Council's risk-based approach to checking and where necessary clearing gullies, I can confirm that the location of high-risk gullies is based upon a historical knowledge of their condition at each scheduled visit. The categorisation of gullies as high risk etc is subject to risk-based review and amendment. The gully cleansing regime is updated on a regular basis and was last updated in May 2021.

Flooding Risk – Insurance premiums and preventative action

The Council is confident that the revised Multi-Agency Flood Plan, and its engagement around the plan, together with the learning from this incident will put the borough in an even better position to respond to a similar event, should it occur in the future.

In the meantime, the Council will explore opportunities to engage with insurance companies to provide reassurance of the collective preventative measures that are in place in Waltham Forest to reduce the risk of flooding to properties and will work with all Waltham Forest MPs to press Government on insurance regulation on our residents behalf.

Notwithstanding the above, having a robust Multi-Agency Flood Plan in place is clearly not a universal panacea to the extreme weather event that we experienced a few weekends ago, events that scientists have warned are more likely to become a regular occurrence through the effects of climate change. The high levels of rainfall over a short period of time simply over-whelmed our largely 19th century drainage infrastructure.

In this regard, the Council strongly believes that significant additional investment is needed in our drainage and sewerage systems to increase its capacity and resilience to better cope with future events on this scale. A significant priority of the Council will be to engage with Thames Water to attempt to secure the investment in improved drainage

infrastructure that we believe is sorely needed. We would welcome the opportunity to work closely with you to make the necessary case to Government for increased funding in this area for the ultimate benefit and peace of mind of our local community.

Yours sincerely.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'M' followed by 'Esom.' with a period.

Martin Esom
Chief Executive