



It's everyone's water

Guildford Incident Report Our Action Plan

May 2024



About our report

The events in the Guildford area in November 2023 had a major impact on you, our customers. We have listened carefully to what you and our stakeholders have told us and asked ourselves what we should have done better. We have undertaken a technical review of the resilience in the area and assessed our performance against our incident management procedures. We have identified three key areas for improvement:

- Our operational resilience
- Our customer support and communication
- Our customer aftercare.

Background and context

A widespread loss of water supply was experienced across our Guildford water supply zone with customers in several postcodes (GU1 to GU8) impacted. A total of 24,764 properties experienced a disrupted water supply.

We recognise that as a water company we provide an essential service and that when this service is interrupted it can cause significant disruption and distress for our customers.

We know that being truly open and transparent is important so we committed to providing you with a full update on what happened and what we could have done better.

Purpose of this document

The document details what we've done and what we are going to do.

We've structured this report to reflect areas of concern raised by our customers during the incident.

In preparing this report we have listened to our customers, reviewed points raised by our stakeholders, and considered the learnings from our internal investigation.

We have set out key actions and summarise these in this report.

We recognise that our response to the incident was not what our customers expected, and we need to do better.



Our Chief Operating Officer Statement

I am sorry that our customers across the Guildford and Godalming area were impacted by the water supply interruption last November. I have reflected on your experience during the incident; on what we did well, but also where we fell short.

We have been publicly criticised on the resilience of our water supply systems in the area, that we did not communicate effectively with customers and that we did not provide the right aftercare to customers for the inconvenience they experienced.

Since the incident we have conducted reviews of our response during the incident and of our approach to after care for those affected. This was complemented by a specific technical review of Shalford Water Treatment Works and the wider operating system.

As an outcome of our technical review, we have commenced work on critical actions to address resilience issues in the wider Guildford System, including power. We have also taken steps to bolster our teams in the area.

In reviewing our approach to after care, we have paid particular attention to the way in which we applied our Customer Guarantee Scheme (CGS) and how this may have differed from the experiences many of you have told us about.

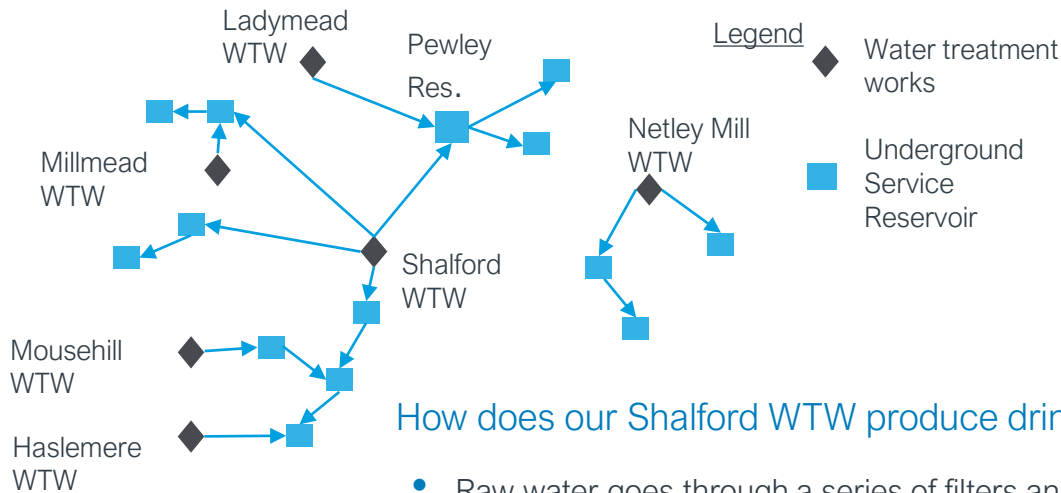
As a result of this review, and in recognition of the unique nature of the disruption we caused during the incident, we have taken the decision to provide additional compensation payments so that every affected customer will receive a minimum additional credit of £30 to their water bill.

I cannot promise that a similar incident will not happen again, but we will do everything we can to reduce the impact on our customers.



How the water supply works in your area

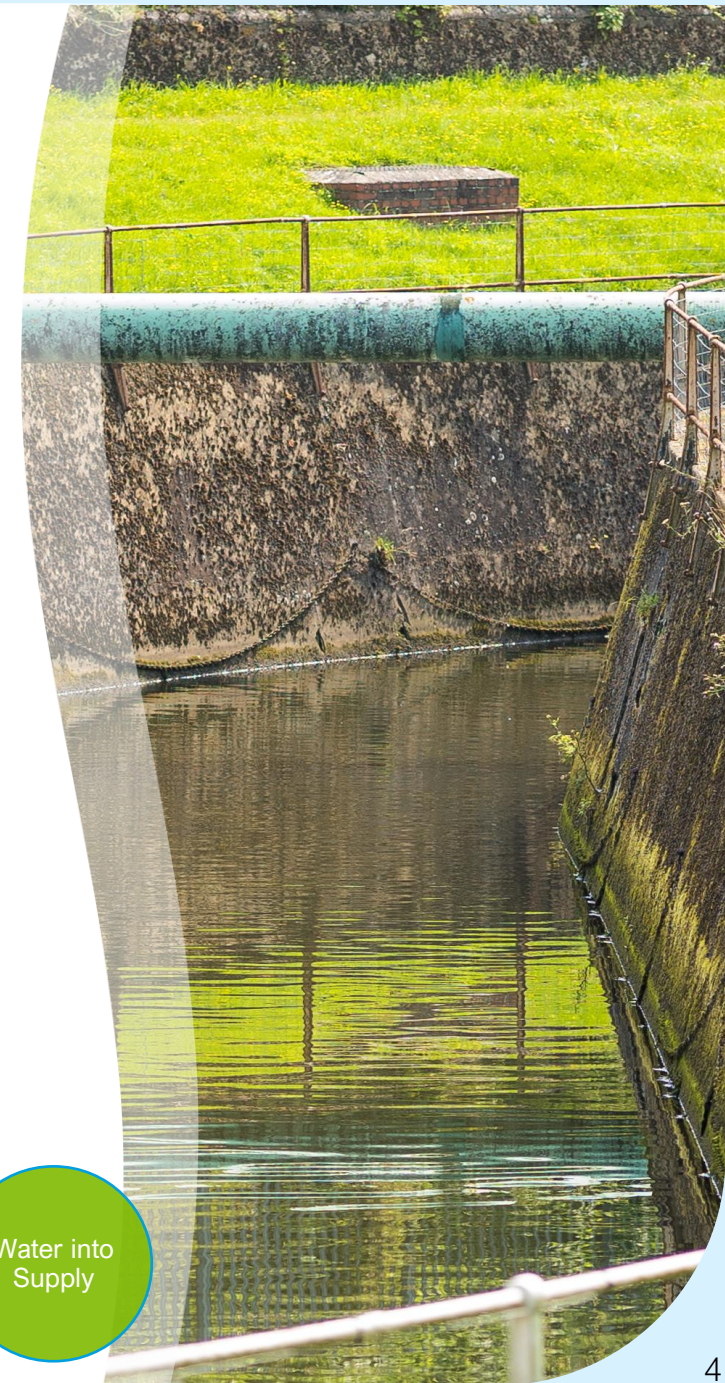
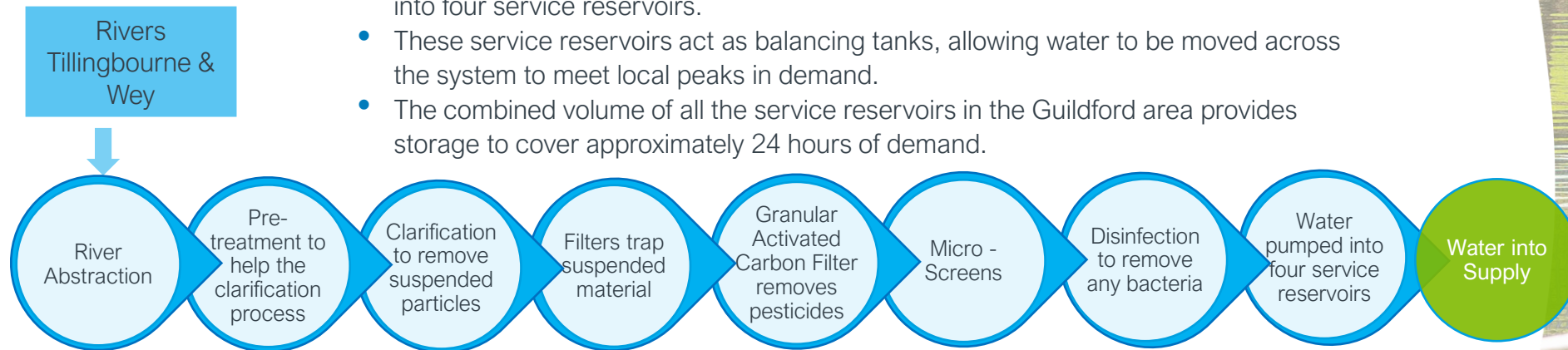
Every day we treat and supply 64.5 million litres of water to the Guildford supply zone – that is the equivalent of nearly 26 Olympic-sized swimming pools. The majority of this water (40%) comes from our Shalford Water Treatment Works (WTW), which takes and treats water from two river sources - the River Tillingbourne and the River Wey. A further five treatments works (Haslemere, Mousehill, Millmead, Ladymead and Netley Mill) also provide treated water to the Guildford area.



Guildford Water Resource Zone – a complex, interconnected system of treatment works and underground service reservoirs.

How does our Shalford WTW produce drinking water from river water?

- Raw water goes through a series of filters and is then chemically treated before going into four service reservoirs.
- These service reservoirs act as balancing tanks, allowing water to be moved across the system to meet local peaks in demand.
- The combined volume of all the service reservoirs in the Guildford area provides storage to cover approximately 24 hours of demand.



What happened to your water supply following Storm Ciarán?

2nd November

Turbidity' is a measure of the clarity of water. Most river waters have high turbidity following heavy rainfall as sediment is disturbed and becomes suspended in the water.



At 05:31 on Thursday 2nd November power supply fluctuations due to Storm Ciaran were experienced at five of our water treatment works (WTW) across Guildford (Haslemere, Netley, Ladymead, Millmead and Mousehill). Without power we are unable to produce wholesome water, so the sites temporarily shut down (which is how the system is designed to respond).



This temporary shutdown led to a drop in the volume of water stored in our underground service reservoirs.



Once the power stabilised, our engineers were able to return Millmead and Mousehill WTWs to supply. They also returned Ladymead WTW to supply but at a reduced output. This was due to the failure of a pump at one of our boreholes.



Due to the heavy rainfall, the turbidity in the river supplying our Shalford WTW increased significantly. Technical issues were encountered when attempting to treat the elevated turbidity which required extensive onsite work to remedy. Water quality will always be our priority, so it was essential we systematically addressed these issues prior to returning the site to supply.



Due to the increased risk of customer impact, our operational teams escalated the risk of supply. In response, our Incident Management team established a senior incident structure to oversee the return to service, communications to customers and stakeholders and alternative water provision.



Our customer contact centre received the first customer contact. A recorded message was put in place on our phone lines to provide customers with information regarding the event and signpost web updates.

3rd November



With service reservoir storage levels already low, and Shalford WTW still out of operation, customers started to progressively experience interruptions from the afternoon of Friday 3rd November.



As the scale of the impact was increasing (numbers of customers and potential duration), our Incident Management team took the decision to request Executive oversight of the incident. In parallel, Surrey declared a Major Incident and Local Resilience Forum (LFR) partners stepped up their involvement to support the incident.

5th November



After successfully stabilising the treatment process, our engineers returned Shalford WTW to supply and storage began to recover across the area.

6th to 14th November



It then took a further 5-7 days for supplies to recover fully across the system as the hilly nature of the topography in the area meant air got trapped in the system and stopped the flow of water into some areas. These airlocks had to be systematically investigated and addressed before supply was fully restored to all.



Our approach to supporting you and your community during the incident

Supporting you and keeping you informed

- We know how important it is to keep you informed of what's happening during an incident and being clear about the support we can provide.
- A key element of our response was ensuring you had access to wholesome water during the incident. To do this we:
 - Delivered bottled water to our most vulnerable customers registered on our Priority Services Register (PSR).
 - Opened water stations which provided bottled water for collection.
 - Provided water via tankers to prioritised public infrastructure (e.g. hospitals and care homes) and
 - Worked with plumbers to bleed air from water pipes in our network and your properties where these were reported when your water returned.

Keeping the community informed

- During incidents like this, it is important for us to work with key representatives within your community to keep them informed of our progress. To do this:
 - We sent more than thirty updates to local MPs, Council Leaders and the CEOs of Waverley District Borough Council, Guildford Borough Council and Surrey County Council.
 - We liaised closely with Emergency Planners at Surrey County Council and other key partner agencies and
 - We provided regular updates to Defra and the Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI), keeping them fully informed of the event.
- On Sunday 5th November, the Surrey Local Resilience Forum declared a 'major incident' and a multi-agency response was co-ordinated. This meant we could extend our reach into impacted communities.



Support for all customers

We know we need to do better to provide support to you and your communities during incidents like this. We have already put the wheels in motion to address the feedback we've received.

Our aim

- Our aim is to ensure we are available to respond to customers via their chosen channel when they need us.

What we did

- During the incident we received over 5,000 calls from customers in the impacted postcodes.
- We used our website and social channels to post updates on what was happening as the incident progressed. More than 60 updates were provided throughout the incident.
- We opened five bottled water stations for customers to collect bottled water.
- We used tankers to inject water directly into our network with more than two million litres of water delivered.
- We organised for plumbers to attend customers' properties where airlocks were reported when supplies returned.

What we could do better

- Our communications were not frequent enough and lacked the detail and empathy you rightly expected.
- We did not provide you with enough information on the actions we were taking and the timescales to resolve the incident.
- We over relied on our website to provide you with information.
- We failed to notify those customers who were affected by the operation of our tankers.



Dedicated support for vulnerable customers

Our online Priority Services Register helps people who need extra support.

Our aim

- Our aim is to always provide dedicated support to our most vulnerable customers.
- Our PSR is categorised into four Tiers, with Tier 1 being the most vulnerable. In this incident we prioritised our most vulnerable customers in the area (Tiers 1 & 2), and critical services such as hospitals.

What we did

- We opened a dedicated line to our customer contact centre to specifically support PSR customers, which received more than 200 calls.
- We hand delivered bottled water to our most vulnerable customers on our PSR – over 1,250 properties received more than 30,000 litres of water
- We prioritised sending tankers to hospitals, supporting Milford, Farnham Rd, Royal Surrey, and Mount Alvernia hospitals at various points through the incident.
- We provided pallets of bottled water to all care homes in the impacted area.

What we could do better

- We did not meet the expectations of all our PSR customers
- We were not sufficiently clear as to what support customers at each tier on our PSR should expect during the incident which left some customers disappointed by the service they received.
- We experienced issues mobilising support to specific priority locations with whom we did not have prior emergency planning arrangements.



How we supported you after the incident

It is clear from the feedback that we have received from many of you, either directly or via a nominated representative (your MP or the Consumer Council for Water), that the way in which we have handled aftercare has fallen well short of your expectations and for this we are truly sorry.

Our initial approach

- Our regulator, Ofwat, sets a range of guaranteed service standards. Like many in the industry, we have enhanced these under our Customer Guarantee Scheme (CGS).
- The Customer Guarantee Scheme is linked to the way in which we calculate Supply Interruptions which is a regulated measure, audited as part of our regulated Annual Return.
- This scheme defines fixed payments we must make in the form of bill credits if your water supply does not return within 12 hours*. If there are additional delays, we pay an extra £30 for every further 12-hour period your water is off.
- Under this scheme, credits were made to 13,116 customers.

Our reflections

- Given the nature of the incident and the feedback from customers, we went beyond our CGS to provide additional payments to those customers whose supply returned between 10pm and 7am.
- These enhanced parameters were applied during January/February 2024 and saw the total number of customers receiving a credit to their bill increase to 15,158.
- Furthermore, the Customer Guarantee Scheme assumes a single, resolved supply interruption and does not adequately consider circumstances in which there is a series of supply interruptions that create a prolonged period of disruption.
- With this in mind, we have committed to providing bill credits of £30 to all customers affected by the incident and are conducting additional, detailed case reviews of the experiences of those customers who have specifically provided further feedback to us since the first Public Meeting in December 2023. The outcome of these reviews will be communicated to customers by the end of June 2024.

* Note: the amount varies for commercial customers (which we refer to as non-household). The equivalent amount is £75 for every 12 hours and this is recovered through their retailers



How we will put things right

We know we need to do better to provide support to you and your communities during incidents like this. We have already put the wheels in motion to address the feedback we've received.

What we have already done

- We have refreshed our communications handbook so that the messages we issue are more timely, informative and provide an appropriate level of technical information.
- We have followed up specifically with Farnham Road Hospital to ensure we have the right emergency planning arrangements in place.

What we plan to do next (by March 2025)

- We will provide refreshed training to colleagues leading on incident communications so that we consistently deliver the right updates.
- We will design a new aftercare process so that we have the right focus on supporting you once our repairs are complete, but your experience of the incident is not over.

Our ambitions for the future (2025 – 2030)*

- We will make better use of our website to share photos and videos to bring our response to life.
- We will make better use of digital tools to update you in a variety of ways, reducing the effort you need to make to keep up with what's happening.



* Note: subject to Ofwat's approval of our business plan for 2025-2030

Steps we are taking to improve the resilience of your supply

We have completed a detailed review of the operational issues we had during the incident to understand what we need to do to significantly reduce the risk of your supply being affected in the future.

Technical Review

The in-depth review identified four root causes to the impact of the incident:

- A lack of resilience to fluctuations in the power supply to our treatment works which caused these sites to 'trip' and a need to be reset by our engineers.
- Insufficient number of skilled and experienced engineers, leading to an over-reliance on a small number of people.
- Process design issues at Shalford WTW, where if the treatment process is stopped, getting it back into full operation takes time.
- A lack of resilience across the wider Guildford water supply system, meaning that there isn't enough capacity to treat and store water to meet demands when a big WTW is out of service.

Solution

- Improve the resilience of the WTWs (and pumping stations) to fluctuations in power supply.
- Increase the number of skilled engineers who can respond 24/7 to extended incidents.
- Increase the resilience of each WTWs so they are more robust to shocks and stresses, e.g. extreme weather.
- Increase the resilience of the Guildford water supply system, so that even if a WTW is temporarily inoperable, the system can maintain sufficient supply.
- Improve the balance between supply and demand through reducing leakage and helping customers use less water.
- In the long-term, bring in additional water resources from outside the Guildford area.

Progress

- We have bolstered our management team in the area with colleagues who have deep technical experience.
- We have invested in additional frontline colleagues who can provide around-the-clock technical oversight in the area.
- We have re-briefed all team members on the learning from the incident and the procedures to follow if something goes wrong.
- We have installed monitoring to allow us to better understand power issues and invested in standby generation equipment at Ladymead WTW to provide power resilience.



How we intend to invest for the future in your area*

We have designed a programme of significant investment that will make the water supply system in your area more resilient and improve the reliability of the service we provide. Many of these schemes are already underway.

Shalford WTW

- We are investing £12.5 million in several upgrades that are due for completion by March 2026. This will improve the resilience of the treatment process to poor quality river water and make the disinfection process more reliable. We are also improving the works to enable us to more quickly return the site to full operation when the treatment process is interrupted.

New west to east Guildford transfer main

- We are investing £46 million by 2030 in a new 9km transfer pipeline to connect Pewley underground service reservoir in west Guildford to Netley Mill WTW in east Guildford. This will reduce the potential for supply interruptions and, by connecting Netley Mill WTW to the rest of the Guildford system, increase the resilience of the supply for customers in the eastern part of the Guildford area.
- As part of a separate project, we are also increasing the capacity of the large diameter trunk mains serving the south Guildford area.

Ladymead WTW upgrade

- We are investing £9.4 million by 2025 and plan to invest a further £7.6 million by 2030 (subject to Ofwat's decision on our 2025-30 business plan). This includes upgrading parts of the treatment process to remove a 'single point of failure', installing a new disinfection system and improving our ability to pump water from local boreholes.

Mousehill WTW upgrade

- Our plans for these works include improvements that will increase the yield of boreholes at the site; changes to remove the existing single point of failure at the site's contact tank and further enhancements to the treatment process that will make the site more resilient. A total of £6.6 million of investment is planned, with £3.1 million to end of 2025 and, subject to the outcome of the PR24 process, £4.7 million in 2025-2030.

Netley Mill WTW upgrade

- We are investing £6.1 million by to upgrade parts of the treatment process to make it more reliable.

* Note: subject to Ofwat's approval of our business plan for 2025-2030



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