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Matthew Offord MP
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Your ref: MO/HS
Our ref: Q153625-252

Dear Dr Offord

Thank you for your letter received on 13 October 2014, regarding your enquiry on behalf of constituents following the recent interruption of water to their properties between 6 and 7 October.

We would like to apologise for the problems our customers experienced while we worked to restore their supply.

Unfortunately, the reason was a burst on our 21 inch strategic main on the A41 in Edgware, at approximately 9.30pm on Monday 6 October which affected the water supply to around 12,000 properties in Harrow and Mill Hill.

Our priority was to repair the main and restore water as quickly as possible and to provide customers with information while we did this.

Our repair team were on site within two hours of the burst, but due to the close proximity of a pressurised gas main, they were not allowed to use mechanical diggers to excavate the burst area. It was therefore necessary to hand dig, so the repair was unable to progress as quickly as we would have wished.

Work continued through the night to replace a four metre section of the water main and once this was completed, the pipework was gradually recharged with water, to prevent bursts due to water pressure and air in the pipework. We were able to restore water to all properties by early evening on Tuesday 7 October, with a significant proportion restored prior to this.

In view of the size of the burst, we put in place the contingency plan we have for incidents such as this. We arranged for the delivery of over 20,000 litres of bottled water to five locations across the area for customer collection. In addition, we delivered water to those of our customers registered onto our Safeguard scheme, who are either water dependent or unable to fetch water for themselves. We also made deliveries to other residents who contacted us with the same issues and to care homes.

To provide information to our customers about the burst, we recorded a special telephone message which was automatically played to customers who called us from HA8 and NW7 postcodes.

Our UK based contact centre was increased in size during the incident, to minimise caller waiting times and to provide as much resource as possible to answer customer questions.

We put details about the burst and bottled water collection points on our website, sent text message updates to those customers that had registered for our updating service and were very active on social media, answering customers' queries.

Because of the large number of properties affected by the burst and the relatively short timescale of the incident, it would not have been possible or practical to arrange for letters to be distributed to our customers.

We appreciate any loss of water is both inconvenient and disruptive for our customers and we very much regret the impact of this particular burst for those living and working in the area.

We carefully review all such incidents at a senior level for our opportunity to identify any measures we can take to improve the way we respond in future. Part of this procedure includes assessing whether any customers are entitled to a payment under our Guaranteed Standards of Service (GSS) scheme.

While our records indicate water was restored to our customers well within the 48 hour period we were required to achieve as this was a strategic water main, all available monitoring data will be assessed, and should any property be entitled to a GSS payment this will be automatically be paid.

I hope you find the above information helpful. Should you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.