

## **WATER SUPPLY DISRUPTION – POST INCIDENT REVIEW**

### **1. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1.1 That Panel Members note the issues raised within the report and the associated action plan.

### **2. INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 At the end of October 2023, New Forest District Council (NFDC) experienced significant impacts (particularly along the district's coast) with flooding and structural damage, from adverse weather brought about by Storm Ciaran.
- 2.2 Council services responded to the impacts by warning and informing the public of the predicted adverse weather conditions, preparing for and monitoring coastal and flooding issues, and invoking business continuity plans to ensure critical services were still delivered.
- 2.3 On 2 November 2023 at 17:00 the Emergency Planning Officer at NFDC was notified of an incident at Testwood Water Treatment Plant located east of Totton, due to flooding caused by Storm Ciaran. There was an issue with the raw water quality coming from the River Test and the high levels of turbidity (cloudiness or haziness of the water supply caused by suspended matter in the water) had resulted in the Testwood plant shutting down. The measurement of turbidity is a key test of both water clarity and water quality.
- 2.4 A decision was taken by Southern Water to stop the water supply to the eastern New Forest area below and including Marchwood, which resulted in a large-scale water disruption incident for 18,838 properties along the 'Waterside'.
- 2.5 This resulted in a major incident being declared and a multi-agency response was stood up for an extended period of time, in order to respond to and support affected communities.
- 2.6 NFDC stood up its Emergency Control Centre (ECC) on Friday 3 November 2023 and internal command structure to manage the Council's response, in conjunction with the management of the incident by our partners. The ECC supported the multi-agency response to:
- i. Open an additional water distribution centre in Calshot at St Georges Hall with the assistance of Fawley Parish Council.
  - ii. Redirect Council staff to open and manage distribution at St Georges Hall on day 1 of the incident.
  - iii. Utilise Council operatives to transport water between Gang Warily and Calshot.
  - iv. Collect local information and feed this back into the multi-agency response.
  - v. Proactively pursue the change of distribution sites to more suitable locations and supported the use of Appletree Leisure Centre
  - vi. Assist some vulnerable residents obtain personal water supplies by passing on reports of vulnerable households and venues, signposting residents plus delivering a small number of supplies.
  - vii. Amplify incident communications to the district's residents through networks and social media channels.

- 2.7 The incident command structure was stood down at 11:23 on Sunday 5 November 2023, when supplies were re-established.
- 2.8 Following the incident, a debrief was undertaken internally and by the Local Resilience Forum (LRF), to review the incident response, share best practice and identify recommendations for improvements for any future incidents.
- 2.9 This report details the findings of the review and presents an action plan to address the issues raised, whilst also recognising what worked well.

### **3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 (the Act) sets out the legislative framework for the NFDC to respond as a category 1 responder to civil emergencies, whilst continuing to perform its functions. The responsibilities under this Act include assessing the risk of emergencies occurring and using this to inform contingency planning and putting in place emergency plans and business continuity management arrangements.
- 3.2 The Act defines an emergency as an event or situation which threatens serious damage to human welfare in a place in the United Kingdom (UK), the environment of a place in the UK, or war or terrorism which threatens serious damage to the security of the UK. The disruption to a supply of water, poses a threat to human welfare and requires category one and two responders to have plans in place, for the purpose of mitigating the effects of an emergency.
- 3.3 The Water Industries Act 1991 sets out the main powers and duties of the Water Companies and The Security and Emergency Measures Direction 2022 (SEMD) requires water providers to provide plans to ensure provision of water by alternative means, should the piped water supply fail.
- 3.4 The SEMD stipulates that Water Providers must supply no less than 10 litres of drinking water per person per day, to all those affected within the first 24 hours of a provider becoming aware of an incident and maintain this supply until the piped supply is restored.

### **4. SCOPE OF THE REPORT**

- 4.1 This report solely reviews the activities carried out and lessons learnt following the water disruption incident in November 2023 and matters around flooding and pollution incidents relating to Southern Water are outside the scope of this report.
- 4.2 The incident was the localised interruption in the piped water supply arising from an asset failure at Testwood Water Treatment Plant and the disruption of water supply to 18,838 properties over a 3-day period in the waterside area of the New Forest.
- 4.3 The concerns around the impacts of recent storms on sewer networks, storm overflows and the potential for pollution incidents are recognised but not discussed in this report. The Environment Agency is the body responsible for regulating water quality and ecological protection and will investigate and take appropriate action for any offences where a water pollution activity occurs. The Council will continue to support and work with the Environment Agency if required, should there be incidents within the district.

## 5. ROLES DURING AN INCIDENT

- 5.1 It is the responsibility of the water provider to identify the cause of any water disruption issue and the time it will take to rectify the problem. It is their role to identify alternative water supplies, for the provision of portable water for distribution, to identify vulnerable customers, lead on communications, identify and communicate with sensitive venues, such as care homes, provide water for livestock and consider the long-term impacts on communities.
- 5.2 The role of category 1 responders (which includes the District Council and other agencies) in a water disruption incident, is to support the water provider with media and communications with the public, support the water provider to ensure bottled water sites are suitable to allow distribution of water bottles, identification of vulnerable people and support with the distribution and assist with access to the water collection sites.
- 5.3 NFDC will also consider the risk to health, if water was unfit and the Environmental Health service work with the Drinking Water Inspectorate and businesses based on the impact of the lack of water, public health issues around flushing toilets, laundry etc and decisions on whether it was safe for businesses to operate.
- 5.4 The role of the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) is to ensure that multi agency processes and procedures are in place to respond to an emergency. The generic national framework for managing emergency response and recovery identifies three tiers of management and the relationship between them. This includes:
- Strategic “gold command” – considering the long-term impact and risks, defining and communicating strategies and objectives for the response.
  - Tactical “silver command” – senior operational officers determine priorities, plan and coordinate tasks and ensure the health and safety of the public.
  - Operational “bronze command” – officers deployed to undertake work at the site of the emergency, liaising with other agencies and communicating back.

## 6. ISSUES IDENTIFIED AND ACTIONS

- 6.1 A number of issues were identified from feedback gathered and observations during the incident. These are summarised in the action plan in **Appendix 1**.
- 6.2 Initial feedback from NFDC officers involved in the incident was that whilst there were some internal improvements which could be made regarding the Council’s own response, officers worked well together, stood up the ECC response and both Members and officers worked hard to support our communities.
- 6.3 The main feedback centred around the following areas:
- Delay in notification from Southern Water on the potential large-scale loss of water supply to residents in the waterside area of the New Forest.
  - Issues with the setup, location and management of bottled water sites.
  - Traffic congestion around the sites and movement on the sites.
  - Accurate and timely mapping to identify vulnerable customers and sensitive infrastructure.
  - Provision of data for assurance on delivery to all vulnerable customers.
  - Timely sharing of public messaging from the water providers and between agencies.

- Sufficient resource, expertise and resilience within NFDC to respond to and recover from an incident (particularly over a protracted incident).
- The importance of plan reviews, training and exercising to ensure preparedness for any future incidents.
- Effective use of technology to aid communication and record keeping during an incident.
- Longer term engagement with water providers to review strategic investment plans are robust in improving infrastructure and reducing the likelihood of future incidents.

6.4 The action plan identifies actions and improvements to be implemented, where these actions have been fed into the LRF debrief (who will identify actions, who is responsible and priorities for completion) and where the responsibility lies with NFDC to implement the improvements.

## **7. ACTION TAKEN SINCE THE INCIDENT**

7.1 Following the incident, further work has taken place which includes:

- A joint letter sent to the Chief Executive of Southern Water on 15 December 2023 from Hampshire Local Authority Leaders, regarding serious concerns around repeated water disruption incidents and their impact and inadequate support for local residents.
- An LRF multi-agency debrief on 2 February 2024, which NFDC attended and fed in issues identified following the incident.
- A Stakeholder meeting was held on 26 February 2024, attended by the Chief Executive of Southern Water and Hampshire Local Authority Leaders and Chief Executives, to discuss plans to address concerns around infrastructure, response methods and future proofing. The meeting was productive and Southern Water recognised the concerns raised by key stakeholders and the need for significant improvements. A further follow up meeting will be arranged between New Forest District Council and Southern Water to explore further collaboration and practical arrangements in the event of another incident.
- Training on 7 March 2024, delivered by HCC, for Members on their role during and following an emergency incident.
- This report being presented to the Place and Sustainability Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 7 March 2024 on NFDC's response to the incident and lessons learnt.

7.2 There will be future attendance by the Lead Officer for Emergency Planning at a HIOW LRF Water Disruption Task and Finish Group set up to apply learning from previous water supply incidents, improve data sharing, identify an approach to water distribution sites and review the water disruption plan.

7.3 OFWAT (as the Water Services Regulation Authority) have the role of ensuring water companies provide the best service to customers and communities, improve the environment and make sure water supplies are secure for future generations. Planning officers are members of a Southern Water Stakeholder Group, which is attended by OFWAT and they have raised the local issues around water disruption, pollution and flooding, in order for OFWAT to review Southern Water's performance and future strategic plans.

- 7.4 Southern Internal Audit Partnership has undertaken a review of the Council's Business Continuity arrangements and are reviewing the Emergency Planning provision. The initial assurance opinion for business continuity is reasonable with some non-compliance and scope for improvement identified. The actions highlighted in the report are to ensure critical activity response plans are in place for all relevant areas and that they are regularly reviewed and up to date.

## **8. CONCLUSION**

- 8.1 Whilst there are many smaller incidents that are dealt with on a regular basis to ensure our communities are protected and supported, this was the first major incident that NFDC has responded to, requiring the set up of the Emergency Control Centre, since the significant storm event in February 2014. Whilst there were wider issues outside of the District Councils area of control or responsibility, the District Council's response was good and positive lessons were learned to inform future incidents.
- 8.2 Implementation of the identified actions in the table are required, to improve the preparedness for any similar water disruption or emergency incidents, and through further engagement with the water provider and regulator to reduce the likelihood of future incidents occurring.
- 8.3 Community resilience will be key in the future, in supporting local communities and agencies to prepare for and respond to emergencies. Many communities are aware of the risks which may affect them and know the skills, knowledge, resources, and assets they have to help prepare for and deal with the consequences of emergencies they may encounter.
- 8.4 The Council's next Community Forum on 27 March 2024 covers community resilience and the work on devising community plans to aid resilience and response.

## **9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 As the Council has a duty to respond to emergency incidents there is inevitably time and expense costs attributed to the Council's response. For reference purposes a total of 326 hours (standard time, standby and overtime) were spent by council officers responding to this incident, with an additional indicative cost in overtime of £6,574 and approximately £300 in mileage costs.

## **10. CRIME & DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 None directly arising from the report although some of the public did become frustrated at the bottled water sites due to the traffic congestion that impinged on the site management by the water company.

## **11. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 Water providers have a duty to protect water resources and make sure their supplies are resilient. They need to consider how to mitigate climate change impacts and future demands and avoid polluting the environment.

## 12. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

12.1 It is a legal requirement for water providers to ensure that all residents have a wholesome supply of drinking water, with a particular focus on those who are considered vulnerable.

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### **Background Papers:**

None.