



**COTSWOLD**  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Ms Sarah Bentley  
Chief Executive – Thames Water  
Clearwater Court  
Vastern Road  
Reading  
RG1 8DB

11 January, 2021

*When calling please ask for*  
Councillor Joe Harris  
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Dear Ms Bentley

### **Flooding in Cirencester**

As you may have seen from media reports, numerous properties in the Cotswold District were subjected to sewer flooding over the Christmas break. Clearly, this is an extremely unpleasant and distressing experience for the families affected and will have ruined their Christmas.

I visited a number of residents whose gardens were submerged by sewage flood water containing human excrement, tissue paper and sanitary products. I'm sure you would agree that this is simply not good enough. For many this was not the first time this has happened.

I am grateful for your teams on the ground and their contribution to the response. It was clear talking to some of them however that communication between senior decision makers at Thames Water and your operatives on the ground wasn't adequate.

It was also extremely disappointing that senior Council staff were unable to contact senior decision makers at Thames Water whilst the incident was unfolding and had to call via the emergency line like any other customer. Often phone calls back were promised that never happened. It wasn't until I appeared on regional television that a senior representative from Thames contacted the District Council.

I want to do everything possible to ensure there is no repeat of the incident.

I would therefore be grateful for a full report explaining in detail what happened, why the sewerage network could not cope and what mitigation is now planned to guard against a repeat incident. Can you also outline what capital projects you have in Cirencester and across the Cotswolds to guard against sewer flooding?

Can you also confirm whether Thames Water operates a mandatory or discretionary payments scheme to recompense the households affected and that you are actively offering this to the families affected?

In addition, I will shortly be calling a meeting of relevant agencies – Thames Water (sewerage), the Environment Agency (rivers and water courses) and Gloucestershire County Council (highways) - to discuss our approach, see what lessons can be learned quickly and make sure the approach is more joined-up and effective in future. I would invite you to submit the name of a senior designated person to participate.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Joe Harris', is centered on the page. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large 'J' and 'H'.

**Councillor Joe Harris**

Leader, Cotswold District Council