

Overview & Scrutiny

Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission

Hackney Council
Hackney Town Hall
London, E8 1EA

Reply to: Thomas.thorn@hackney.gov.uk

10th December 2019

Ms Nikki Hines
Government Liaison Officer
Thames Water Infrastructure Alliance
Picketts Lock Lane
London N9 0BA

Dear Ms Hines,

I am writing to you prior to the Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission meeting of the 14th January 2020. Thank you for having confirmed that Thames Water will be in attendance at that meeting, which will see Members and residents hear and ask questions around the recent flooding in the N4 area, the causes of the incident, Thames Water's management of the aftermath, and its general management of its network.

At our last meeting - which came prior to the flooding in N4 - Cllr Ian Rathbone (a Member of our Commission) raised concerns with what he said were continuing issues following the flooding in the Lea Bridge Ward, caused by a separate mains burst late last year. This was despite his interjections on behalf of the parties concerned within his role as local Ward Councillor.

One issue concerned apparently failed attempts by the charity owners of the Old School House to obtain compensation from Thames Water to reflect the loss of fundraising opportunities which were caused by mains burst. On this point, I understand the flooding to have led to major disruption to activities which had been planned and put in place to support the efforts to bring the site back into community use.

Another issue concerned a vulnerable resident who we heard had not had their circumstances returned to what they were prior to the flood, and who had suffered considerable distress. On this point, I understand there to be some lack of clarity around the party responsible for putting the situation right but I would urge Thames Water to do so through recognition and recompense for any loss of items and for the anxiety caused.

The Commission were very concerned to hear these accounts. As a way forward, I asked that the Member provided details of these issues to me, for me as Chair of the

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Commission to take forward with Thames Water. I have now received the correspondence from the Member which I have enclosed at the end of this letter.

Given the upcoming meeting on the 14th January, I ask for a response to the matters raised by Cllr Rathbone, by the 15th November. This will enable this letter and the response to it to be published in the agenda papers for this meeting. Members would then reserve the right to ask questions on these items on the evening.

I hope that this is a suitable way forward on the matter, and look forward to seeing Thames Water staff on the 14th January.

Yours sincerely,



Cllr Sharon Patrick
Chair, Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission

Submission from Cllr Ian Rathbone - 5th November 2019

To Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission:

Re: Aftermath of flooding in Leabridge Road in October 2018

I raised this matter at the end of the recent LiH meeting and it was agreed I would write with details. There are two main matters of concern which I wanted to raise concerning the burst water main in Leabridge Road in October 2018 and the ensuing poor performance by Thames Water and its associates.

1. Resident at Flat 1, Block 1, 142 Lea Bridge Road, E5 9RB

The resident of this property [name withheld] returned to her flat post flooding in October 2018 and was forced to sleep on the floor, and had no belongings. Neighbours rallied round with curtains, blankets and food. She and her family had to be rescued on the day of the main flooding by inflatable dinghy by the Fire Brigade.

She still has no proper cooking facilities, and her belongings have not been returned to her. She has become the subject of some kind of back and forth game with both Thames Water and her landlord Clarion saying the other is

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responsible for the storage of her possessions, which were stored somewhere following the flooding of her ground floor flat.

Aspect, the contractors on site, eventually gave her some basics – curtains, bed, kettle etc but she still doesn't have her own belongings back, including some of her mother's possessions, stored with her.

On 25 June, 2019, eight months after the flood, I wrote to Clarion asking that as a matter of urgency, to find out where her personal property is and arrange for it to be restored to her, and for a check to be made about connection of services. The response from Clarion was unsatisfactory, saying the situation was the responsibility of Thames Water.

On October 25, 2019, I spoke to the affected resident. The cooker provided doesn't work, washing machine doesn't work, and television doesn't work. Small portable TV in bedroom works. No table or chairs. Bed is not satisfactory. No floor coverings. Not even a working bell on the flat door. No financial compensation has been offered. She says they don't care about her.

2. The Old School House

The Buddhist group who now own the building, which is Grade II* listed, built in 1862, tried to negotiate with Thames Water for their loss of funds they were trying to raise to restore the building at the time of the flood, and as a goodwill contribution towards repair and restoration of the building. The group felt they were given the run around by TW, and could get nowhere with their claim.

I spent several hours writing a detailed background history to the building for TW who said this could help to obtain a 'donation' from them. However, the officer I dealt with suddenly left TW and the replacement person later claimed they could not deal with the matter and went silent.

Residents affected by the flood generally agreed with TW that they would like TW, as a gesture of goodwill to the community, to provide funds to the Old School House to help with its refurbishment. This was mentioned at the LiH meeting at B6. TW agreed to look at this, subject to clearances further up their chain of authority and good reasons to be supplied - hence my writing a background and the Buddhist group putting in a claim.

After nearly a year, the Buddhist group asked me not to pursue things further as they did not want to be further associated with what they considered the process to be - not 'honouring' or 'respectable'.

3. What next?

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It is now a year on, and although all other residents have had their matters settled as far as we know, the terrible domestic situation of the resident at Flat 1, Block 1 – caused by Thames Water - has still not been resolved, and TW still seem unable to sort it out, trying to apportion responsibility to others for the situation they are morally responsible for.

They need to be brought to account for this and other matters, and for an investigation made of their performance in the aftermath of the flood in dealing with all the residents seeking compensation and restitution.

The damage to this community has been immense and people are still apprehensive and anxious that the water main could burst again at any time and flood their area once more.

This is not the first time the main has burst in the area. Four years ago when it happened, the damage was mainly restricted to the road and grassed area, causing considerable traffic problems on Lea Bridge Road for lengthy periods of time – and lasted for four months as they failed to repair the pipes properly. TW gave assurances then that it would be unlikely to happen again.

Questions still remain: where is the emergency plan TW promised they would provide? Where is their forward plan of works in this area to deal with the fractured main and the continued replacement of Victorian pipes beyond the junction of pipes at this point?

The local community need a lot of reassurance and explanation which has not been forthcoming, apart from the investigation of the Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission, which residents who attended the meeting at B6 said had been very helpful for them.

Cllr Ian Rathbone, Councillor for Lea Bridge ward