

## **Affinity Water response to St Albans City and District Council Internal Performance Scrutiny Committee meeting 6 January 2015**

Following the St Albans City and District Council Internal Performance Scrutiny Committee meeting on 6 January 2015, I agreed to investigate and respond to the matters raised at the meeting.

Please find below our response on the issues discussed at the meeting, which I hope demonstrates how seriously we take leakage in St Albans and our desire to work with the Council to help resolve identified issues.

Nigel Beaven  
Head of External Communications  
Affinity Water

13 January 2015

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### **1. Water leaking at Romeland, St Albans**

Councillors raised the issue of leaking water at Romeland, which was brought to our attention on 17 October 2014. I would like to reassure the Council that we have undertaken an extensive investigation to identify the source of the leak.

To date, our leakage technicians have spent over 80 hours of time on investigations.

We have fully checked the area around Romeland, George Street, Verulam Road and Spicer Street using sound technology which helps us identify possible leaks.

We identified two potential sources of leaks. The first was at the George Street junction with Spicer Street. We excavated the site and found there was no leak present.

We undertook a second excavation where we found visible water outside Romeland Cottages. At this site we found a damaged brick culvert. Further investigations indicated that the water was coming from a communication pipe supplying 15 George Street. This was replaced.

Our technicians then undertook further checks for further leaks, including exposing the water main outside Romeland Cottages, and none were found.

Another job was raised to re-excavate and expose the brick culvert outside Romeland cottages. We dug a sump hole to pump water away. Once that had been done there was a tiny trickle of water remaining.

We undertook water sampling to ascertain if this was treated water. The results indicated that it was not, because the chlorine residual was far lower than the levels that would show up in treated mains water.

The brick culvert at the site has collapsed, causing water to show on the surface. The problem is intermittent and we are confident that this demonstrates it is a drainage issue after heavy rain, rather than a leak from our network.

As a water supply company, we are not qualified to be involved in the fixing of drains and we passed this information to St Albans Council on 25 November. I have included photos of our excavations and I have attached this at Appendix A.

### Working towards a resolution

I understand that this leaking water is a cause of concern and we are committed to work with St Albans City and District Council to assist with resolving this issue.

Whilst we are confident that the problem relates to drainage and not a leak on our network, we do understand that this is complex issue and we would like to reassure members that we take our responsibilities as a community focused water company seriously.

To provide further reassurance, if members of the Committee would find it helpful, we will re-excavate the area around the culvert and use a CCTV camera to inspect it, at our cost, and to use additional testing, to attempt to find the source of the water.

We would also be willing to be pay for an independent inspector to examine the area and to make their inspection report and the CCTV camera findings available to all interested parties.

We would very much welcome support from the Council to bring interested parties, including those responsible for drainage together, so that we can work in partnership to agree this approach and bring about a swift resolution.

## **2. Water leaking at London Road, St Albans**

Councillors also raised the issue of leaking water at London Road, which was brought to Affinity Water's attention on 28 August 2014.

The location of the possible leak was close to a very busy junction with a four way set of traffic lights. The only way this could be safely investigated was to work at night. Our teams spent two nights investigating the source of the leaking water.

Our initial investigations suggested this was a drainage issue as our sound technology was not picking up noise to indicate a leak and there was a variation in the water flow.

We reported this to the Council and were requested to re-investigate the matter. We undertook a further overnight investigation. On this occasion; a small leak was found and repaired on a communications pipe to number 34 London Road.

This repair did not reduce the amount of water at London Road at the time and this was again reported to the Council as a drainage issue.

Since then we have had no further contact about London Road and our technicians have undertaken several checks on London Road which indicate that the area has been dry for the past few months. From this, we have assumed that the problem was related to surface drainage and has been rectified.

### **3. Affinity Water policy for identifying and fixing leakage**

The Council requested clarification on Affinity Water's target response times for fixing leakage.

When a leak is reported, the details are passed to an advisor who logs the information and arranges for one of our technicians to visit the site.

The technician will attend the site to find out where the water is coming from, using specialised leakage detection equipment. In some cases, a water sample is taken for analysis to determine if it is coming from our network.

This can take between 1 and 10 days, depending on how serious the leak is, but in practice we aim to complete this within 5 days and visible leaks are often addressed by the next day.

We endeavour to fix leaks as soon as we can. However, the timescales take into account different circumstances. Factors such as the need for Affinity Water to gain permission from local councils to dig, management of traffic through temporary traffic lights or having to arrange to divert traffic, all impact the time it takes us to fix a leak.

### **4. Affinity Water Thamesdale, London Colney repair December 2014**

Councillor Katherine Gardner highlighted an issue on 29 December 2014, when a resident's car had traffic cones placed in front and behind their vehicle, with an unsatisfactory notice "Affinity 30 Dec" left on the vehicle.

We have looked into this issue and it involved a meter pit leak repair, which was scheduled for 30 December.

The usual procedure is to cone off the area in advance to allow the work to be done. If a vehicle is already within the working area, cones are placed either side of the vehicle – to indicate that the area needs to be reserved for the repair. A printed notice is placed on the vehicle window, explaining that the contractor is working on behalf of Affinity Water, the date the repair will be carried out and that the space is required to enable this to be done.

We work extensively with our contractors to ensure that good communication is employed to inform our customers of street works and to keep disruption to a minimum. Parked vehicles are a challenge for us, as the owner cannot be readily identified, but printed notices on windscreen are an effective way to requesting owners to move their car and to keep the area clear.

On this occasion, it appears that the correct notice was not used, for which we apologise. The particular contractor used on this job has since stopped working for Affinity Water.

The leak was repaired on 31 December.

## **5. Providing leakage information for future St Albans City and District Council Internal Performance Scrutiny Committee meetings**

Affinity Water takes leakage extremely seriously and between 2015 and 2020 we are increasing investment in our network of pipes to more than £500 million to make it more resilient.

We have invested to drive down the level of leakage in our network, and since 2010 we have consistently outperformed the targets set by our regulator, Ofwat.

Every day we have more than 100 people finding and fixing leaks. We constantly monitor the flow of water through our network looking for unusually high/low flows to identify leaks.

We have committed to reducing leakage by 14% – 27 million litres per day by 2020.

This is the largest percentage reduction in the next five years of any water company in England and Wales.

We would be happy to provide an update on our activity to address leakage in St Albans at a future meeting of St Albans City and District Council and we could also provide a regular, half yearly report on leakage work in St Albans for the Committee if this would be helpful.

## **6. Helping vulnerable customers**

The Committee were given information on Affinity Water's schemes to assist vulnerable customers and requested an update on this.

### **Low Income Tariff (LIET)**

Affinity Water's LIET fixed-tariff is aimed at customers who have a low household income or are claiming benefits.

If their annual household income is less than £15,860 or they are in receipt of housing benefit or income support, such as Jobseeker's Allowance, they are eligible for a reduced bill of £95.00 that can be spread over twelve months.

From April 2015, the bill will change to £90.00 per year for household incomes less than £16,010.

As of 31 December, 9,933 customers have been transferred to our LIET tariff, 867 are pending to go live and a further 761 are awaiting approval - in total, 11,561.

### **WaterSure Scheme**

Metered customers on certain qualifying benefits and with either:

- three or more children under the age of 19
- or a person in their household with a medical condition which means they use a lot of water could be eligible for this scheme, which places a limit on their bill.

Currently, 4,409 customers have registered with the WaterSure scheme.

More information on these tariffs is available at: [www.affinitywater.co.uk/lowincome](http://www.affinitywater.co.uk/lowincome)

**Appendix A - Romeland, St Albans**

**Pictures of damaged drain culvert, following excavation**

