

Centre City Tower, 7 Hill Street, Birmingham B5 4UA  
11 Westferry Circus, Canary Wharf, London E14 4HD

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By email

Huw Merriman MP  
Member of Parliament for Bexhill and Battle  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

11 August 2023

Dear Mr Merriman,

Thank you for your letter dated 23 June, in which you shared concerns about South East Water's performance. Apologies for our delay in responding to you – we only received official sight of the letter when it was resent to David Black on 4 August, so sorry for keeping you and your constituent waiting.

I am very sorry to hear of the severe problems that your constituents have been experiencing with their water supply in the South East Water region. We recognise that these problems are particularly disappointing, coming during the first spell of hot weather this year and on the back of problems during the winter freeze thaw.

Providing reliable supplies of safe drinking water is paramount responsibility of all water companies and South East Water must do better to predict and manage operational issues, help customers, and engage with them on what is happening and why.

Customers can be entitled to compensation for interruptions to supply (information of which can be found [here](#)) and our regulatory regime also imposes automatic penalties on South East Water for poor performance in relation to interruptions to supply. We monitor companies to ensure they are complying with licence and statutory obligations, and where companies fail to comply, we will take enforcement action.

Ofwat [wrote to South East Water](#) in June as soon as we were made aware of these issues to urgently request a meeting to discuss their resilience and how they can work to ensure they uphold their general duty to customers. Our Chief Executive and Chair met with the board of South East Water on 25 July. We raised our serious concerns and made clear that their performance needs to significantly improve, not just operationally, but also in regaining the trust and confidence they have lost with their customers. While other companies have stepped up their preparedness plans, South East Water is continuing to experience shortfalls and levels

of disruption that are not acceptable. Following the meeting, Ofwat have requested further detailed information to be provided by South East Water, which will inform the next steps we take.

In addition, together with the [Consumer Council for Water](#) (CCW), the statutory body representing the interests of water customers, Ofwat has commissioned the research agency Blue Marble to conduct research with customers into the June incident with South East Water. This research is now underway, and there's more information about what we are doing available [here](#).

Also, if you or your constituents have contacted South East Water for further information and they have failed to respond, they may wish to contact CCW. CCW has a [frequently asked question portal on its website](#) as well as useful fact sheets on common complaint issues which you may find useful.

Regarding the hosepipe ban, it may also be worth noting that the temporary restrictions covering parts of Kent and Sussex, introduced by South East Water six weeks ago following the hottest June on record, [was lifted with immediate effect](#) on 7th August.

Water is a precious and finite resource. While it is the Environment Agency and Natural Resources Wales that regulate drought plans, as the economic regulator, Ofwat take the resilience of our water supply extremely seriously. We are requiring water companies across the country to reduce leakage, create more supply, and reduce demand for water. We will continue to work with South East Water to ensure they are doing all they can to address these issues. We are also closely monitoring concerns we are receiving from customers and will be considering them in our ongoing monitoring of South East Water.

I hope our response helps to provide some reassurance and clarity on Ofwat's role and what we are doing to ensure companies continue to protect and deliver a service on which we all rely.

Yours sincerely

**Stephen Humphreys**  
**Interim Director of Corporate Communications**