HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Ben Tritton
Head of Public Affairs
Communications and Engagement
Ofwat, 11 Westferry Circus,
Westferry House,
London. E14 8RH

Reference No. HW72204 30 January 2026

Dear Ben

Thank you for your email about the Ofwat investigation into the recent water outages across Kent and Sussex. South East Water's communication with Parish Councils and all their customers was abysmal and they did not provide vulnerable people, livestock owners, businesses and schools with adequate support.

The provision of bottled water was lacking. A water station was originally set up at Headcorn and later at Mote Park but this was still miles away from Boxley and other affected areas. For some of my constituents, the travel to Headcorn meant a two hour round trip, with some arriving at the station to be told that there was no water left. Communications about water stations was poor. Some vulnerable people and those on the Priority List were provided with water while others were not. Again, communication was poor and sometimes incorrect.

I did not receive any complaints from hospitals, prisons or care homes. That said, some schools were forced to close, and even large businesses were not properly supported throughout the crisis. There is the ongoing problem of providing water to livestock during outages - both on farms with water storage and domestic customers with larger animals such as horses who are totally dependent on mains water.

The quality and quantity of South East Water's communications was abysmal. I became an intermediary, passing on as many updates as I could to Parish Councils and affected residents. My staff and I worked over the weekend to support vulnerable residents because South East Water were not fulfilling this basic job. There was no way for Parish Councils to contact South East Water directly other than via the public information lines and this needs to change.

The most frustrating aspect of dealing with South East Water is that lessons do not seem to be learned and improvements made. Last July, South East Water left thousands of people in East Kent in my constituency without water for up to eight days. I raised the same concerns about the company's emergency response then and in the months following. From the recent outages nothing seems to have improved since then. I have been calling for the Chief Executive of South East Water to be replaced to help restore public confidence and make sure the necessary improvements are made.

I would be grateful if your investigation could look into any proactive measures South Water could have taken to prevent the outages, why lessons were not learned and acted on from previous outages, and the appalling emergency response to customers without water during the most recent outage.

It would also be helpful if your investigation could also consider the part the Kent Resilience Forum played, including whether they should have acted sooner or differently to provide more support to vulnerable people and prevent schools from closing, and whether its membership and remit is adequate to effectively deal with water outages. If this is beyond the scope of your investigation, I would be grateful if you could let me know who should look into this.

Parish Councils raised with me the lack of communication between Southern Water and South East Water. They told me Southern Water stopped South East Water's supply during the outage.

Parish Councils asked if both water companies could have one communications team during emergencies and share water stations so people can go to their nearest one regardless of who supplies their water.

They also suggested that water companies should warn local supermarkets of water shortages in advance so they can replenish their water supplies. There were reports of supermarkets also running out of bottled water.

It is vital that everything that can be done, is done to prevent this from happening again and if there is another emergency that the response, communications and support to local residents is much better.

Yours sincerely



Helen Whately MP
Member of Parliament for Faversham and Mid Kent