

Research into incident response

January 2024 Do Not Use and Do Not Drink Notices in Marleigh, Cambridge

Report for Ofwat/CCW – August 2024

1 Background, objectives and method

2 Summary of findings

3 Participant experiences of the incident

4 Company communications

5 Support during incident

6 Support after incident

7 Lessons learnt



Background, objectives and method



Blue Marble was commissioned by Ofwat and CCW to conduct research with customers to understand their experiences when incidents take place. The research is primarily focused on water or wastewater-related incidents that affect people in their homes or gardens or going about their daily lives. The programme will generate findings which:

- 1 Help to better establish what customers' expectations of companies are when incidents occur and how well these expectations are met
- 2 Can be used by Ofwat and CCW to improve companies' responses and management of incidents and people's experiences when they take place
- 3 Support Ofwat's wider regulatory work and inform CCW's wider work on behalf of consumers

This report is the fifth within that programme of work. More information on the project is available at:
<https://www.ofwat.gov.uk/customer-insights-when-things-go-wrong/>



The objectives for this specific project (the fifth in the programme) are as follows:

- 1** Understand the views, experiences and expectations of affected Independent Water Networks Limited's household customers following the January 2024 Do Not Use (DNU) and Do Not Drink (DND) notices, including views on Independent Water Networks Limited's communication, support during and after the incident, compensation and overall resolution
- 2** Determine any differences in the expectations and experiences of different customer groups affected by the incident
- 3** Identify what parts of Independent Water Networks Limited's response worked well and what could be improved



Incident

In January 2024, Independent Water Networks Limited (IWNL) issued a Do Not Use Notice (DNU) to consumers within the Marleigh estate, Cambridge instructing them not to use their water for any purposes except flushing toilets. The DNU was issued at approximately 19:15 on 18 January 2024. IWNL amended this to a Do Not Drink Notice (DND) at 16:15 on 22 January 2024. Following satisfactory water sample test results, the DND was lifted for all customers at 14:17 on 24 January 2024.

Impact

The area affected consisted of residential properties on a new build estate, along with 7 non-domestic properties (including a primary school and a nursery).

Communication

Independent Water Networks Limited communicated with local residents through various channels to raise awareness that there was an ongoing issue with their drinking water, and it was not to be used.

Independent Water Networks Limited did not share specific details about the potential contaminant in these communications.

Map of the Marleigh estate



N.B: Independent Water Networks Limited had not confirmed the cause at the time of the research, and so the cause was not included in the research questions.

We conducted qualitative research with 24 people from within the Marleigh estate to understand their experiences. Fieldwork was conducted online and in-person

Recruitment methods

- **On the ground:** e.g. surrounding the community centre
- **Social media:** promoting the research via local Facebook groups
- **Letter drops:** sending recruitment letters to all homes within the estate
- **Snowballing:** through participants interviewed for the community event

In-person community drop-in event (11 participants)

A range of household types, including some vulnerable participants; 10 participants were residents of the Marleigh Estate. One participant later took part in one of the depth interviews

One participant was not a resident of the Marleigh Estate but worked at the Nursery on the Estate (Monkey Puzzle). See Appendix (slide 43) for more information.

Fieldwork date: 4th March

2 x 90min focus groups (4 participants per group)

6 x 60min depth interviews

1 Households without dependent children

2 Households with dependent children, aged 5 and under

A range of household types, including some vulnerable participants

Fieldwork date: 12th March

Fieldwork dates: 13-14th March

Sample specification structured to provide a range of experiences / perspectives:

- Demographic mix: Socio economic grade; Life stage; Gender; Ethnicity; Range of vulnerabilities (health & economic)
- Household composition
- Access to transport (to include customers with no access to a car)

However, due to the makeup of the Marleigh estate, targets were filled on a best-efforts basis

See detailed sample description in the appendix



Summary of findings



1

The impact on participants varied depending on their household composition; families with young children experienced the most severe challenges in adjusting daily routines, while those with older children or larger households faced moderate difficulties. Comparatively, child-free households found it easier to adapt their behaviours, or stay elsewhere, and were not as severely impacted by the incident. However, many still felt inconvenienced by not having access to their water supply.

2

The majority adhered to the DNU and DND notices, though occasional slip-ups were noted. Compliance was largely driven by perceived personal vulnerability, and the smell and taste of the water. While there was some high-level concern at the outset, compliance did wane amongst some participants over time for the DNU.

3

The distribution of communications throughout the incident was generally felt to be sufficient, with a combination of emails leaflets, phone and in person communication. While broadly the communications were considered clear and informative, it was also noted that they were missing detail on the cause of the issue, practical updates and approximate timings.

4

Participants felt well-informed around available support and appreciated that this was on offer. However, feedback varied about how comprehensive this support was. Also, participants desired clearer guidance on claiming reimbursement and noted concerns over the administrative process.

5

The primary frustration expressed by participants was the lack of information regarding the cause of the incident. This absence of information deprived them of the ability to make informed decisions about their compliance and behaviours. Additionally, the ongoing absence of details in follow-up communications caused frustration about IWNL's transparency and accountability.



Participant experiences of the incident



Severity was determined by how easy or difficult participants found it to adapt their behaviours and household routines

Minor Impact



Those without children

Childless or with adult children

- Easier to adjust relative to those with children
- Able to change individual behaviours with minimal effort
- Easier to find alternative accommodation than larger families/households
- Can keep track of spending easier
- Can keep on top of cleaning/laundry

"I work in the office, and my husband was travelling so it had a lesser impact on us."
Household without children

Moderate Impact



Diverse family makeup

Older children/ non-nuclear families

- Larger households to manage, often with regular guests (e.g., stepchildren), so knock-on impact of laundry/ washing up etc., more difficult
- Some concern about teenage compliance
- More difficult to keep receipts/deal with administration of reimbursement with largely independent household members

"[Name]'s stepdaughter was here, so we had to think about how to make that work a bit more."
Household with children

Severe Impact



Those with young children

Aged c. 0-13

- Found it difficult to adjust, hard for children to cope without their daily routines
- Difficulties explaining the situation to children, and monitoring behaviours
- Worry about long-term impact on child's health
- Logistically difficult to make last minute plans with children
- Difficult keeping children clean

"It was like having your phone taken away, feel empty, how do you function? All the fundamentals revolve around water."
Household with dependent children

Others who rated the incident as 'severe' had additional, personal strains at the time: for example, one participant was moving house, another had a big meeting in London to prepare for and could not shower beforehand.



Participants reacted differently to the incident and to the information provided; a range of factors influenced this response

12

Compliance with the DNU and DND Notices was influenced by personal circumstances, perceived risk and length of incident

Time since the start of the incident

- As the days went on and participants remained well despite 'slip ups', some became less compliant with the DNU
- Some were initially less compliant (*'it'll blow over'; 'they're just being cautious'*) but the longer the incident went on, the more concerned and compliant they became

Perceived vulnerability

- Those who are 'healthy' were less concerned or worried about absolute compliance
- Those with younger children more likely to be concerned (one participant made sure their children complied, even if they themselves did not)
- Older participants more likely to comply to 'safeguard' their health

Smell and taste of the water

- For some, their neighbours reported smelling an odd odour from the tap, other participants reported a strange taste, and a minority saw 'bits' in the water
- For those who experienced this, their concern and compliance heightened
- For those who did not, they assumed their houses were not impacted

Activity

- Some activities (e.g. cleaning floors) seen as less risky, which reduced compliance
- Others (showering, drinking) saw higher compliance

Lack of knowledge about cause

- Lack of information on the cause meant participants could not make informed decisions about compliance
- Uncertainty led to speculation, ranging from concerns about potential health risks (*'Will I get cancer?'*) to dismissing the severity altogether (*'If it was really bad, they would tell us'*)

Timing of receiving DNU

- Some concern about having drunk contaminated water before the notice was issued
- For some, this reduced compliance (*'I've drunk it all day and I'm not ill'*), for others, concern and compliance increased





Bottled water

- Almost all participants exclusively drank bottled water during the incident
- Some topped up water bottles from safe places (e.g. their workplace, the gym)
- Most used the water provided by IWNL
- The bottled water provided was easy to access, left in 'sensible' locations, and plentiful
- Some bought water and were reimbursed
- Some would have boiled water had the DNU not specified this was unsafe

"I stopped drinking the water altogether, only used the provided water." Household without children



Eating out

- All participants either had takeaways or ate in restaurants at least once.
- Takeaways were more widely used as they allowed participants to remain at home
- Initially, eating out was considered a 'treat' and participants often had to go over the caps for reimbursement, as it is difficult to find a meal for under £10
- Many used the food trucks that were provided by Hill (the construction company who developed the Marleigh estate) at the start of the incident

"We went to the food trucks on the Friday, didn't want anything there so went out to dinner with friends." Household with dependent children



Cooking adaptations

- Many bought ready meals to minimise on washing up
- Others cooked at home almost 'as normal' but used bottled water when preparing food/ washing hands/ washing up
- Those cooking at home were more likely to be health conscious or have specific diets (e.g. vegan/ vegetarian)

"We used the single-use trays for cooking, felt a bit bad about that." Household with dependent children





Using hotels

- Some stayed at hotels for all, or a couple of nights, during the incident
- Most came home during the day
- Some families used hotels to keep their children safe, but others with large households found it too logistically difficult
- Those without children did not report as much need to use hotels, but found it logistically easier



Using leisure facilities

- A few went to use showers at leisure centres nearby
- Most of those who did this were already members of a gym, so it was easy for them to incorporate a shower
- One participant used showers at work



Staying with friends/family

- Some stayed with friends or family either because:
 - They could not find a hotel for under £100
 - They preferred to stay in a more homely environment
- This was less of a viable option for those with larger families and/or no local contacts



Forgoing showering

- One claimed to forgo showering altogether during the incident
- Others skipped bathing, doing so less than usual during the event but still washing once or twice
- More prominent amongst those who work from home, are retired, or teenagers



Bottled water to brush teeth

- Most used bottled water to brush teeth during the incident
- Some were less compliant, either through forgetfulness or laziness, and 'risked it' due to the perceived low risk of consuming water when brushing teeth
- One made sure to put bottles by every tap in their home to aid compliance

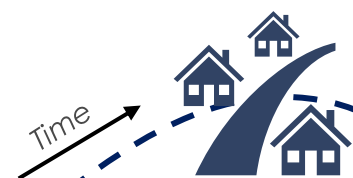


Using alternative products

- Body wipes and baby wipes were used to clean homes and themselves/their children
- Keeping hand-sanitiser by the sink



Hayley*, who lives with her husband, was heavily pregnant at the time, though still working, and had a young toddler to look after. She was preparing for an imminent visit from her in-laws at the time of the incident, as well as deep-cleaning the house to prepare for the birth of her child



Hayley found it very difficult to manage during the incident. She was preparing to go into labour, so wanted to deep clean the house and do a lot of laundry in preparation. Her toddler is also a 'very messy' eater, and cleaning up after him was difficult without water. He also has skin allergies, so there was a heightened need to comply strictly with the rules. In addition, her in-laws were due to visit. Overall, it was very difficult to manage and happened at 'the worst possible time'

Though Hayley was eligible for the PSR, she had not heard of it and did not sign up for it. She relied on her husband to bring her bottled water from the drop-off points. More information about additional support for people like her would have been hugely beneficial. Hayley worries how she would have coped had her husband not been around

Hayley heard about the incident over the neighbourhood WhatsApp group; first about water tasting strange, then about the official DNU. Hayley had to phone up for formal confirmation of the DNU. Because her water tasted fine she had been drinking it all day, so was worried that the official notice was only issued later. As she was 39 weeks pregnant at the time, this was particularly concerning for her



Hayley found the support offered helped her to manage. She was relieved that IWNL offered the hotel as an option, and spent some nights there, as well as using the food and water on offer. Financially, she felt very well supported



"My husband called IWNL to confirm that we did have a DNU at our house, because at first we thought there was a bit of miscommunication, some people had said it was just a few streets, not ours." Hayley

"It just happened at the worst time. We had a car problem, and I was pregnant, and with the in-laws [visiting] and now we don't have water. Everything was just kind of piling on top of each other all of a sudden." Hayley

"We have a toddler who has eczema. So, it's okay if something kind of gross gets on me, but if it's on him, it could lead to an episode of terrible symptoms for a long time." Hayley



Company communications





Email

- Some concern around the timings of initial email (the community WhatsApp group had noticed the issue early morning)
- Positive response when received daily email updates from IWNL; it showed the situation was being addressed
- Information provided was clear and useful
- The links to the support offered, and DNU and DND notices within the email helped reinforce consistency of messaging

“It was a bit of a shock for me, didn't hear from the supplier until later that evening.” Household with dependent children

“The leaflets made [the guidance] abundantly clear.” Household without dependent children



Post (leaflet)

- Icons made it easy to understand for all
- The visuals were eye catching and not confused with junk mail, making it hard to miss
- Guidance was clear
- A few mentioned neighbours got different leaflets. One participant's neighbour received a DND when they had got a DNU
- The numbers on the leaflets were not clear for some; some would have liked a date on the leaflet
- One participant received a DND notice moments before receiving the DNU, which resulted in confusion

“At first people received different leaflets with different numbers...Being in the same neighbourhood receiving different leaflets made it hard to know what was going on.” Household without dependent children



Social Media

- Awareness of IWNLs social media was low
- Very few respondents checked the social media updates from IWNL

“No I don't follow them on social media, I don't really want to.” Household with dependent children

“No I don't remember seeing anything about the social media.” Household without dependent children

Receiving notification via more than one channel was positive. It catered to all, reinforced messages, and ensured all were aware of the incident before long.





Website

- Some remember being directed to the website in the initial email communications from IWNL
- Few used it, relying instead on email updates
- Of those who did, they were positive about the consistent messaging, but some felt the updates were lacking

"The email also pointed you towards a website where you could keep an eye on what was happening. So you had up to the minute stuff as well. So that was quite helpful. But it was all very straightforward." *Household without dependent children*

"Not really enough information was there to say whether it was useful or not." *Household without dependent children*



Phone calls

- Of those who opted in to PSR calls, they appreciated the regular check-up calls
- A few participants called IWNL for more information, but found that the phone handlers could not provide information the participant did not already know
- All phone handlers were friendly, reassuring, and pleasant, despite their lack of new information

"Someone mentioned to me to call them if you have a small child, so I did that on the Friday, and for the following week they constantly replied and updated me through calls and emails." *Household with dependent children*



In-person

- Staff at the community centre were pleasant, friendly, and approachable
- But they were unable to offer additional information
- One mentioned that they were there during working hours; not ideal for those with jobs
- Though few spoke to staff, those that did appreciated that they were available, visible, and on-site
- One participant who spoke to staff received some informal information on timelines: they found this particularly useful

The above channels (and social media), though available, relied on customers reaching out to receive information; as a result, they were used by fewer residents.





The cause

- The strongest criticism was on the lack of communication on the cause
- It led to speculation about the type of contaminant and the danger to the community
- Most felt unable to assess the severity. For some, this led to increased stress, for others, not knowing created false reassurance and lower levels of compliance

"Just being told 'your water may be contaminated' is a scary idea, may have made it less concerning to include some practical information about what had actually happened." Household without dependent children



Updates on the work

- Those who actively sought information from IWNL wanted more transparency and for staff to be able to provide practical updates instead of platitudes
- Participants also wanted transparent information as soon as possible, to aid in planning (e.g. whether it is best to try and manage at home, or go to a hotel)

"Be more upfront about it - these are the things we are looking out for, this is what we're finding, this is the normal process we expect to take etc, this is the timeline we're working towards depending on the compound we find in the water." Household without dependent children



Anticipated timings

- Some participants felt that the communications were missing information on how long it may take to fix
- While they acknowledged this might be hard to provide, even knowing that it would not have been an overnight fix would have helped them prepare
- Others stated that if they had known the cause, they could have made an 'educated guess' on the probable timings instead

"Even if you can't give specifics, give some idea of timings so that people can plan." Household with dependent children

Despite these criticisms, most participants acknowledged why IWNL may not have been able to share this information at the time. Though they are generally accepting about the lack of information during the incident, this acceptance does not apply to the lack of follow-on communications (see slide 34)





Word of mouth

- Neighbours were quick to spread the news, particularly reporting when their water had a strange smell / taste / look
- Communities shared information within WhatsApp groups
- Word of mouth also acts as a rumour mill with mentions of:
 - People being sent to hospital after drinking the water
 - Concerns about losing hair due to the contaminant

"On the Friday they put on food trucks so I went there for food and overheard some neighbours spreading rumours that someone had had to go to hospital, and they were worried that their hair may fall out, which I didn't really believe, but it made me think that I shouldn't really be using this water".

Household without dependent children



Mainstream media

- A few participants mentioned seeing neighbours being interviewed by journalists and recalled watching the BBC newscast of the incident
- One participant mentioned finding the news report confusing as the neighbour being interviewed (who first reported the issue to IWNL) seemed to have received different information to them

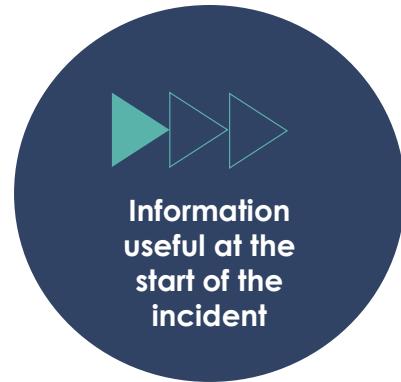
"Then later on, the BBC was around. There was the interview. We got to hear and listen and see the personal experience of the neighbour who reported the issue first, but it was quite a bit confusing at the time with what should I do, so I ended up being selective." *Household without dependent children*



The notice was also smoothly distributed, allowing all residents to have the same information at the same time

Content	Timing	Behaviour
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Guidance on the DND notice was clear• Language was unambiguous• The information was consistent across channels, with participants receiving information in leaflet and email formats	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unlike at the start of the incident where the ‘rumour mill’ spread information, IWNL issued simultaneous information to all residents for the DND notice• The consistency in communicating the DND notice increased confidence in the messaging	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The majority immediately adapted their behaviour to be in line with the new notice, using their household water supply for showering and cleaning (but not for consumption)• However, a minority continued to behave as if the DNU was still in effect, and only used bottled water until the ‘Safe to use’ notice was issued (this was more common amongst the vulnerable and/or with dependent children)

“We got an email about it. My husband and I were both at work, so we got that. And then by the time we got home, there was the pamphlet in the door.”
Household with dependent children



- Multi-channel notification of notices as soon as possible at the start of the incident, with detailed follow ups via post (leaflets) and email
- Information about the cause/ nature of the contaminant
- Information about anticipated timelines



- Direct comms to include key info to illustrate extent of requirements, and importance of compliance (relates to knowing the cause)
- Multi-channel service updates & reminders: including on water deliveries, and also providing residents with full information on test results etc. as soon as it is available, to help with planning
- Clearer signposting to the IWNL website and social media (for updates)

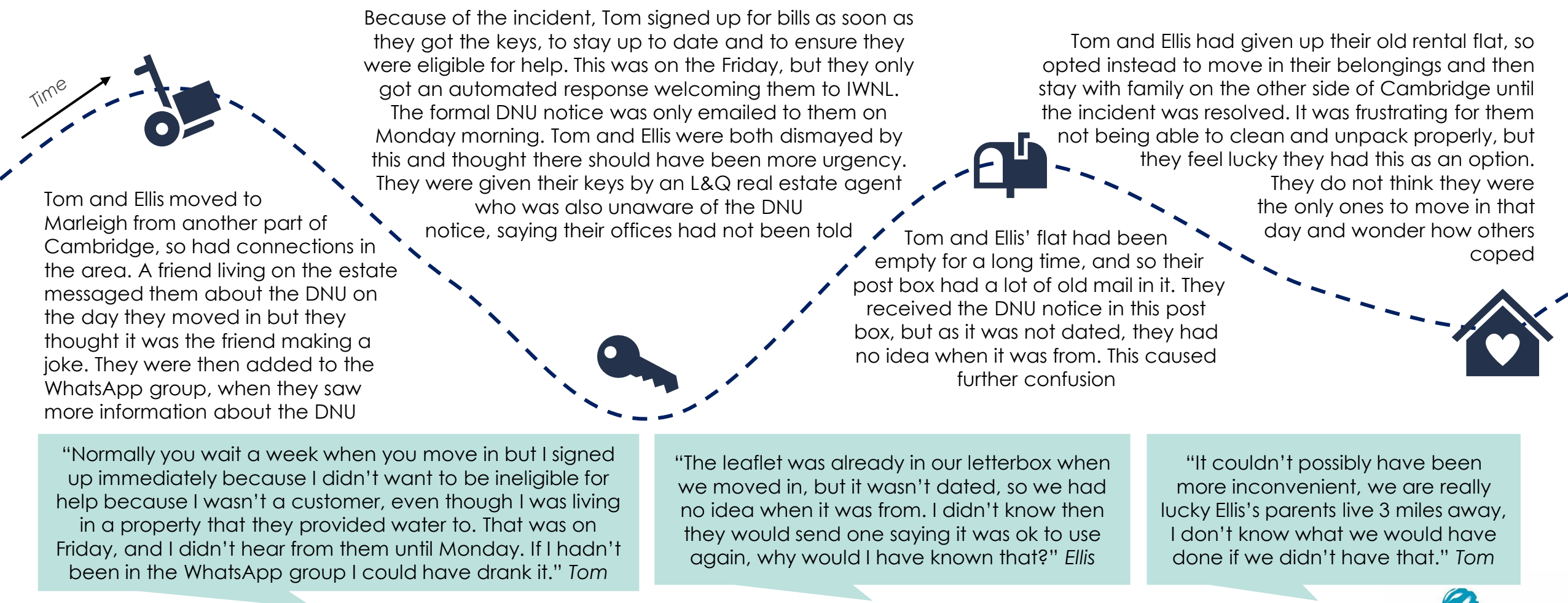


- Wrap-up communications detailing how it happened; new precautions and protocols to prevent it happening again



Case study: moving to the Marleigh estate on the day the incident began

Tom and Ellis* completed on their house purchase on the day that the incident began. They were not on IWNL's contact list because they had not yet signed up for water bills, so felt overlooked and a little forgotten at the beginning of the incident






*Names have been changed.





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Support during incident



Support	Take up	Difficulties or access issues
 Hotels <i>Up to £100 per household per night for hotels/AirBnB</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One couple's neighbours took advantage and had a long weekend in Brighton with IWNL paying for their hotel there One resident reported staying in a hotel as it was 'exciting' for his son Others took advantage of the hotel offer for peace of mind, but came home during the day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Having to check-in and check-out daily was stressful, time consuming, and ultimately impractical for many who used it Most did not want to stay away from home £100 per household per night was insufficient Most hotels do not accept dogs; those with pets struggled
 Laundry <i>Refunding laundry costs</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One woman with a large household was pleased this service was on offer and took advantage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finding and using a laundrette was logistically difficult to slot into the daily routines for many
 Food <i>Funding meals of up to £10pp per meals, up to 3 meals a day</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many were initially excited for paid-for takeaways and meals out, using this as an 'excuse' to go out for a nice meal The free food truck provided by Hill was 'really good', though most were aware this was Hill support, and not from the water company 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Having to go to the shop daily was time consuming A reliance on meal deals, or ready meals, takeaways, or meals out at restaurants was unhealthy and tiresome Those who had guests or unregistered residents at their address found the 'per person' rule confusing or impractical Some wanted to combine the £30 for household shopping, rather than 'per person per meal'

Support	Take up	Difficulties or access issues
<div><div>Bottled water</div><div>Bottled water made available on-site at the Marleigh estate</div></div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Some received water at their front door, others at the top of their roads, and others collected it at the community centreThere was plenty; no one worried that they would run out, even when outsiders came to steal itThe community checked in on neighbours and made sure water was distributed to those who needed it	<ul style="list-style-type: none">One woman with a toddler did not get a home delivery, causing anxietySome reported concerns about the plastic pollution, litter, and responsible disposalThere were incidents of theft of the water by those outside the estate coming to take
<div><div>Gym</div><div>Refunding the use of shower facilities at gyms</div></div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">While no participants used this, some mentioned this was a nice touch	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Having to go to a gym to shower before work was impractical

Support and the PSR

Awareness of the PSR was low, but few of our sample were eligible:

- One woman with a toddler could not leave the house to collect bottled water; her husband was away but he contacted IWNL who delivered water immediately
- One was pregnant and had a toddler; she too was unaware of the PSR and was reliant on her husband for extra help
- Only one household signed up to the PSR because of the incident; they received calls regularly

See Appendix (slide 45) for a full breakdown of the support offered

While a majority were pleasantly surprised by the 'comprehensive' support outlined, a minority were underwhelmed

Amongst all residents...

- The £10 per person per meal for food was largely considered sufficient, although had some impracticalities
- Providing bottled water was considered a bare minimum rather than 'extra support'
- All agreed that £100 for a hotel in Cambridge is not sufficient, especially:
 - a) for last-minute bookings
 - b) for a family unit
 - c) for a safe/secure hotel
 - d) in a well-connected area of Cambridge

The low reimbursement offered for a hotel drove much of the discontent around the support on offer



Pleasantly surprised

- Believed that IWNL did not owe them anything, other than bottled water, and were grateful for any extras
- Were pleased that inconveniences were recognised (e.g., laundry, food)
- Were mostly living without dependents, or vulnerable household members
- Did not consider themselves to be 'out of pocket' and were not counting pennies during the incident
- Were not emotionally impacted by the incident



Underwhelmed with support

- Expected compensation to cover the inconvenience caused
- Thought much of the support was just the 'bare minimum'
- Stated they had spent extra (eating out more, etc.) or inconvenienced family members (e.g. stayed with family who fed them) and wanted this addressed
- Often had dependents in the household
- Often reported more anxiety relating to the incident

"Have you ever tried to find a hotel in Cambridge for £100 a night? At short notice? It's not possible." Household without dependent children

"£10 per person per meal, so £30 a day, that's quite a lot. I think overall, apart from the hotel obviously, it's quite generous." Household with dependent children

"The support was probably on the low side, even though it's kind of generous in some ways." Household without dependent children

"We stayed with family who obviously fed us, so why shouldn't they be reimbursed?" Household without dependent children



There was a lack of clarity around what exactly was available, and how to claim, which fuelled anxiety for some

Some ambiguity in guidance

- Some residents stated that the wording on the support information leaflet was 'vague' or 'ambiguous' (see appendix for show material)
- Though IWNL did offer some extra support beyond that outlined in the communications, most were unaware of this
- Some only found out about this additional support 'by accident' (either through calling IWNL to complain, on the WhatsApp group, or in passing conversation with others)
- This led to some confusion as to exactly what support was on offer, and if there was any flexibility in the offer of support outlined
- Some even expressed surprise when expenses were paid, as they were initially mistrusting of IWNLs promise of 'support'

"If the nearest hotel that's £100 a night is in, say, Kettering, is it reasonable that I can claim £80 worth of fuel?" *Household without dependent children*

"It says 'reasonable expenses' but there's nothing to say what reasonable is, and what they say is reasonable might be different to what you think is reasonable." *Household without dependent children*

Model of reimbursement

- The Marleigh estate is relatively affluent, and there was recognition that households could afford the reimbursement model of receiving support
- Residents were comfortable keeping receipts, but the administrative side of this was considerable, especially for those with larger households
- Most found the process easy, and were surprised with how quickly they were reimbursed
- However, there were cases of some residents having to chase up payments more than once
- One resident was angry she had to itemise her receipts by day; another was unhappy unregistered residents' meals were not reimbursed

"I was surprised they reimbursed it all actually, I was expecting they'd quibble over a couple of things." *Household without dependent children*

"It's an affluent area, and luckily most people here do have a spare £500 that they can just use in situations like this." *Household without dependent children*





Improving knowledge of the PSR

- More information about the PSR:
 - Eligibility
 - How to sign up
 - What support to expect if they are on the PSR for this specific incident

"Yes we should have been on it [the PSR]. I wasn't aware of it before today, nobody mentioned it to us."
Household with dependent children



Bespoke information

- Clear communication around additional support available
- Better signposting to communication channels for residents to discuss their specific needs and how IWNL can support these

"The communications need to be improved around what we're actually entitled to, and what the process is."
Household without dependent children



Area-specific support

- Reimbursement costs that are tailored to the cost-of-living in Cambridge

"[The support] needs to be tailored to the area. While the support was there, it's not fair, if this was central London and they offered £100 people would laugh. Cambridge is the same price." Household without dependent children



Streamlining reimbursement processes

- Clearer guidance around how to claim
- Templates to fill in for reimbursements
- 'Flat rate' paid to households, instead of having to claim back expenses

"There should have just been a flat rate, even if it's just £50 per person per day, you'd have just eased off and got less stressed about it."
Household without dependent children



Case study: Signing up to and using the PSR during the incident

Greg* lives in a detached house on the Marleigh Estate with his wife Emily*. They are both retired and have two grown up children who do not live far from them. As Greg is in his 60s, he signed up for the PSR after receiving the initial email with the DNU and outlining information about the register. He was aware of the PSR before receiving this email



* Names have been changed.



Support after incident



Most went back to their normal behaviours when told it was safe to do so, but for a couple there were lingering doubts



Content & timing

- Guidance on the Safe to Use notices was clear and unambiguous
- The notice was issued to all residents simultaneously, and like with the DND notice, this consistency led to increased trust and higher compliance

Behaviour

- The vast majority went back to their usual behaviours
- Some continued to drink bottled water because they '*had a lot to get through*', not through worry of contamination

Lingering doubts

Though most went back to their normal behaviours, two are still impacted by the event (at the time of research):

- One participant, though she was drinking tap water again, '*thought about it*' every time she went to the tap; for her, the experience was lingering
- Another continued to lack confidence in the water supply, and her family now only drinks bottled water, ordering a few crates a week to be delivered to their house



Sentiment towards speed of resolution

- Participants observed IWNL personnel working tirelessly to resolve the issue and found them to be excellent
- While most were content with the speed of resolution, most were unaware of how long a resolution 'should' take
- Some raised concerns about delays in IWNL receiving test results and whether the incident occurring over a weekend prolonged the resolution process
- Overall, many agreed that without knowledge of the underlying cause, it is challenging to assess the adequacy of the resolution speed

"We don't know the full extent of what they were doing but I'd go down there constantly and there'd be 8-10 workers there from when I left for work in the morning, and they were still there when I got back at night, Saturdays and Sundays included. Because we don't really know what was going on we can't really judge how quickly they did it, but they looked like they were working really hard which puts your mind at ease a bit. It shows you're not just being left behind or ignored."

Household with dependent children

"So, there's no kind of apology that I remember seeing, or explanation about what happened. No recognition of the inconvenience in terms of, like, a monetary thing. There's been nothing to recognise the inconvenience."

Household without dependent children

"They need to share the tests, what happened, what's being done to avoid this happening in the future."

Household with dependent children

Communication participants are waiting for

- **An apology, an explanation, and an acknowledgement** that the incident was an inconvenience – some are still expecting this to come, but most are not
- Some households reported having water tests done at their homes and still waiting to be told the results of these tests; other homes did receive the results
- One woman was waiting for follow on information about compensation, as she had assumed that there will be some
- Another mentioned they were expecting an automatic deduction from their water bill





Anger

- Most participants felt their agency to make informed decisions was taken away
- Some perceived the IWNL as 'dishonest' or 'untrustworthy' because of the lack of transparent information following the incident
- The lack of communication suggested to some participants that they are not 'intelligent enough' for an explanation



Concern

- The water company's lack of knowledge about the issue or its cause raised concerns about its competence
- This prompted questions about how they can assure current safety, or prevent recurrence
- Since many consumed the water before being informed not to; if the issue could potentially lead to long-standing health problems, they wanted more information to protect themselves

At the time of research, many were still hoping to receive 'final' communications that apologise and explain the cause. All participants noted its absence and were unhappy this final element of the incident has not been resolved. At the time of writing this report, this is the most recent update from IWNL: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-68668292>

"What I feel is missing from that is the wrap up of, 'Here's the reason it happened, here's the reason it's not going to happen again.' And I don't need the scientific details, but I know that some people would like them because they will understand them, which is fair, I think."
Household without dependent children

When asked to rate IWNL for their handling of the incident: "For me it'd be ten up until the point when it was fixed, and then it would have been a three. We haven't heard a peep from them since. We still don't know what happened."
Household without dependent children

"If you're a more vulnerable person, then probably the lack of information makes you exceptionally worried."
Household without dependent children

"What we didn't get from that was what had been the problem in the first place. And we'd like to know that. Why did it happen? Whose fault was it? Will it happen again?"
Household without dependent children



Most participants were unaware of the Guaranteed Standards Schemes (GSS) prior to the research (see appendix for show material)

Expectations of compensation

- A majority were not *expecting* compensation; but they do believe they should get it
- A minority confused 'reimbursement' with 'compensation'; they were happy to receive the former and pleased it was a relatively straightforward process
- However, most wanted an acknowledgement of the inconvenience caused
- Many did not believe the reimbursement fully covered the inconvenience; for some, this inconvenience was substantial
- As a minimum, participants believed they should have received a deduction in their water bill for the duration of the incident
- One participant received a £35 compensation after following up on test results, citing a contract clause outlining expected timelines

"So, they paid for my hotels, but they've not compensated for my time of having to go elsewhere and all the rest of it. It was a pain; it was draining. Particularly when you don't know how long it's going to last." *Household without dependent children*

"We couldn't use the water at that time, we should at least be reimbursed for any standing charge." *Household without dependent children*

"It should be mandatory, it's out of our control and we're paying our water bill every month." *Household without dependent children*

Reaction to GSS exclusions

- The vast majority, when shown the GSS stimulus, found it very unfair that DNU and DNDs are not covered in the compensation scheme
- They pointed out that not being able to use water was the same as not having a water supply
- Some stated they would have preferred not to have had water at all so that they could have received the compensation
- Only one participant mentioned that it was preferable to have had water to flush the toilet
- The exclusions left some participants feeling negatively towards the company

"Even though it physically works, I feel that's a cop out from them." *Household with dependent children*

"I think there was semantics used to stop them having to pay. I don't think it was fair. They were interpreting it very, very rigidly in a way that benefited the water company and didn't benefit the people who'd been genuinely inconvenienced." *Household without dependent children*



- A detailed explanation of:
 - the cause
 - the contaminant
 - information about this contaminant
- Debrief on what steps were taken to resolve the incident, test results, what the final risk was to residents
- Assurances that IWNL is learning, and implementing new protocols for future incidents



- A formal written apology communicated to all residents to apologise for the inconvenience



- A written acknowledgement that the incident was a significant inconvenience for residents (even if some were able to easily manage)
- The acknowledgement should also include a form of financial compensation, or a deduction in the water bill



IWNL scored highly for incident management, but lower when taking post-incident communications into account

When asked to rank how well IWNL handled the interruption overall, on a scale from 0 to 10, **almost all participants gave scores between 3 and 8**

Some participants caveated their scores, noting that during the incident they would rate IWNL highly, but low after resolution, due to issues with post-incident communications.

Participants expressed frustration towards:

- Lack of communication and transparency about the cause of the incident, and who is responsible
- No reassurance that the root cause has been identified, and that protocols are in place to ensure it will not happen again

"We've had no results, no idea what they've done to stop this again, no protocols to divide Marleigh effectively, they have caused more stress than necessary." *Household with dependent children, scored 3/10*

When asked to name one thing that IWNL did well during the incident, **participants focused on the notices themselves and initial support provided**

Participants felt the company did well at:

- Providing information about the DNU and DND notices, and what these mean for customers
- Providing water for all customers
- Offering reimbursements for various things (though there were some areas for improvement within this)

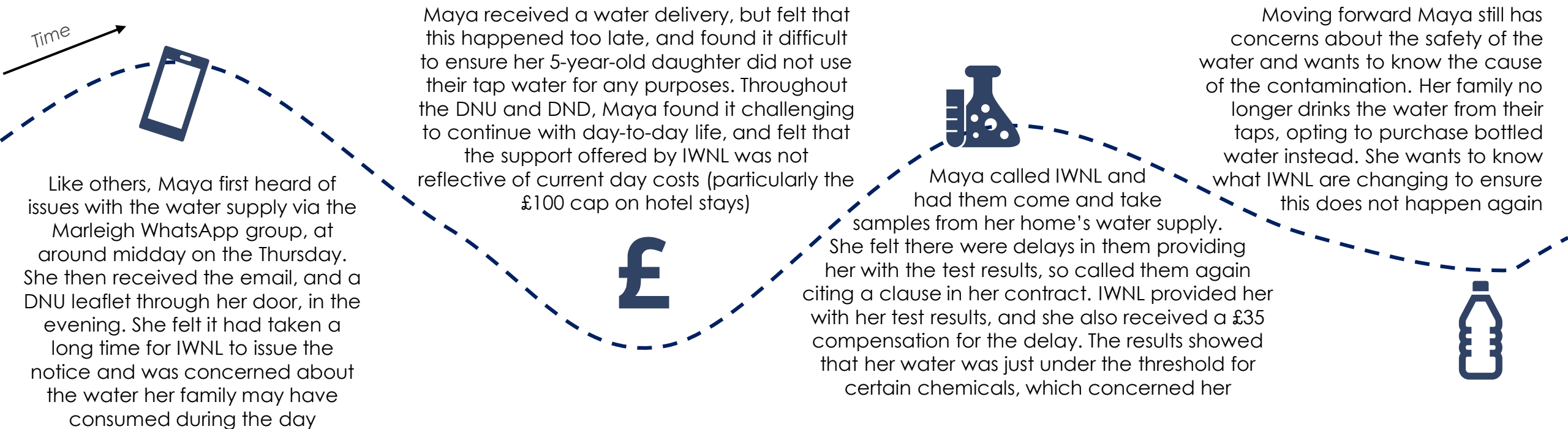
"There's an investigation, great, but what are the next steps? We all accept mistakes can happen, but there should be a code of conduct of some sort to ensure that the people who live here can still enjoy their lives while living on a building site." *Household with dependent children. Scored 4/10*

Most felt supported by IWNL during the incident – although they listed **areas for improvement**

- Some of the price caps were deemed too low, in particular the £100 per night for a hotel
- Recognition of how people shop (e.g. some noted the £10pp per meal had to be claimed on individual receipts, but people would buy multiple meals at once)
- Flexibility around households where residents are transient (e.g. single parent households where children are not registered but stay regularly)



Maya* lives with her husband and 5-year-old daughter on the estate. She was told she was on a priority list but is unsure if this is the PSR.



"They were slow to deliver water, especially me, with a 5-year-old, I can hold back doing my teeth and can stay up later, but my daughter can't, and we didn't get provisions until 11pm, I feel like that wasn't very proactive, given many people had alerted them to it."
Maya

I was absolutely livid, they expected you to budget on £100 per night for a hotel, and it was unplanned for, there are a million things you've got to take with you, it was unplanned, and for me it was a really stressful time, and they could have allocated bigger budgets." Maya

"The root cause needs to be identified, addressed, mitigated, with correct procedures put in place to ensure that this doesn't happen again." Maya

*Names have been changed.

Lessons learnt





What went well

1. **Consistent and ongoing communication** about the incident was highly appreciated; maintain this approach. Regular updated and continuous reassurance is crucial for maintaining trust and keeping everyone informed.
2. **Widespread support on offer, that everyone was able to access.** Residents appreciated the blanket level of support that was offered, regardless of personal circumstances.



What could be better

1. **Be proactively transparent with those affected.**
 - a) Companies should trust impacted customers by providing them with all available information, as soon as possible. Failing to do so can exacerbate anxiety and concerns, creating the perception that the company may have something to hide, and allows rumours to spread. Transparency is key to fostering trust and maintaining credibility.
 - b) Companies should ensure clarity around the process for anything financial, such as support and reimbursement. Clearly delineate what is and is not covered and allow for personalised conversation to take place so individuals with different circumstances know the steps to take.
2. **Consider the context of the affected area.**
 - a) Companies should consider individuals who may 'slip through the net', such as employees on on-site businesses, residents who may have only recently moved in etc. Have a contingency plan in place to promptly inform everyone once an issue arises.
 - b) The incident happened in an area where most had the disposable income to cover the incident and unexpected costs that arise. Additionally, those who were eligible for and/or on the PSR often didn't feel the need to use it, due to the strong support systems they had in place, either financially, or from friends and family helping out. These circumstances made it more manageable for residents, but companies managing these kind of incidents need to keep in mind that had an area where people were less likely to have a disposable income and/or had more vulnerable been impacted the severity of the impact may have been vastly different.



Appendix



We conducted qualitative research with 24 customers from within the Marleigh estate, to understand participants' experiences first-hand. The focus of the research is on household experiences, so while a non-household participant was interviewed, their views are not included within the main report.

In-person community drop-in event (11 participants)

A range of household types, including some vulnerable participants; 10 participants were residents of the Marleigh Estate. One participant later took part in a depth	One participant was not a resident of the Marleigh Estate but worked at the Nursery on the Estate (Monkey Puzzle). Their views are not included in the report, but summarised on the following slide
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2 x 90min focus groups (4 participants per group)

6 x 60min depths

Households without dependent children	Households with dependent children, aged 5 and under	A range of household types, including some vulnerable participants
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Good mix of demographics across sample (not including drop-in event)

- 11 x >50, 3 x 50+; 14 x ABC1; 2 x non-white
- 6 x male, 8 x female
- 8 x contacted Independent Water Networks Limited during the incident

Range of vulnerabilities:

- 3 x health condition impacting daily life; mental health condition; physical disability; immunocompromised
- 5 x households with children >5 – 1 of which newborn
- 3 x living alone

N.B: Demographics not mutually exclusive

Recruitment involved several methods

- **On the ground:** e.g. surrounding the community centre
- **Social media:** promoting the research via local FB groups
- **Letter drops:** sending recruitment letters to all homes within the estate.
- **Snowballing:** through recruited participants

The sample specification was structured with the aim to provide a range of experiences and perspectives on the incident, including:

- Access to transport (to include customers with no access to a car)
- Household composition
- Vulnerability (health and financial)

However due to the makeup of the Marleigh estate these groups were recruited on a best-efforts basis

Fieldwork dates: 4th March, 12th-14th March

Some parents were concerned that the primary school and nursery found out about the issue from residents, not IWNL

- One parent mentioned that the school was initially notified about the incident by parents within the community
- They felt that additional communications efforts should have been made to ensure that the school and nursery were aware and could plan
- They noted that given the first emails about the DNU were sent late at night, no one would have been at the school to see leaflets, or checking work emails

Workers at the L&Q real estate office were reportedly also not informed about the incident until later

- One participant who received his keys from an L&Q agent had to let the agent know about the incident
- The agent expressed he had only found out about the DNU when another colleague arrived in the office; he had already drunk the water by that point

Case study: experiences of a staff member at the Marleigh nursery

Stacey* works at the nursery on the estate but is not a resident. She said that the nursery did not receive any official notice about the incident, first learning about it from parents of the children they cared for. Only after reaching out to IWNL did she receive any information about the DNU, two hours after the nursery had opened

The nursery had to be closed for six days (from Thursday to Wednesday, equivalent to three working days). Stacey felt this disruption caused a lot of stress and anxiety for both staff and parents.

Stacey felt that there was a lack of communication from IWNL. She did receive some phone calls after reaching out, but they were 'sporadic' and 'back and forth'.

When she was verbally told the nursery could reopen (once the DNU was amended to a DND), she asked for this in writing. However, this didn't come until late on Monday night, meaning they were unable to open the next day. At the time of research, the nursery was attempting to make an insurance claim for lost income.

"They didn't tell us anything, we had no communication at all. The first we heard about it was when some of the parents who come to us who live on the estate texted me to say, 'have you heard about this?'". Stacey

**Names have been changed.*





WARNING!

Due to an ongoing incident,
DO NOT USE YOUR WATER
until further notice.




We will provide
bottled water

Your water may be contaminated

Do not use your water for:

-  Drinking
-  Cooking or preparing food
-  Washing, bathing or cleaning your teeth
-  Giving to pets

You can use your water for:

-  Flushing the toilet

IMPORTANT: Boiling water **WILL NOT** clean, treat, purify, or kill contaminants.

We are working as quickly as possible to test and confirm your water supply has been restored to a high standard.

www.iwnl.co.uk | 02920 028711 | [Live chat on our website](#)



WARNING!

Due to an ongoing incident,
DO NOT DRINK YOUR WATER
until further notice.



We will provide
bottled water

Your water may be contaminated

Do not use your water for:

-  Drinking
-  Cooking or preparing food
-  Cleaning your teeth
-  Pets or livestock

You can use your water for:

-  Flushing the toilet
-  Bathing, washing and showering

IMPORTANT: Boiling water **WILL NOT** clean, treat, purify, or kill contaminants.

We are working as quickly as possible to test and confirm your water supply has been restored to a high standard.

www.iwnl.co.uk | 02920 028711 | [Live chat on our website](#)

Extra support for you

IWNL are aware of an incident impacting our customers and have issued a 'Do not use notice'.

IWNL want to ensure that all of our customers have access to clean and safe water. Please see the below guidance and support that is on offer.

We provide a range of services to support you during this incident including:

- Alternative accommodation
- Alternative facilities
- Additional transport costs
- Laundry service
- Drinking water
- Food

Alternative accommodation

IWNL will fund hotel/BnB stays at reasonable costs of up to £100 per household per night to enable customer access to safe and hot water.

Use of alternative facilities

IWNL will refund any use of hot water facilities e.g., leisure centres.

Additional transport costs

Where customers have decided to stay in alternative accommodation and additional travel expenses have been incurred, IWNL cover the additional costs. This may include petrol/fuel, bus, train or taxi cost. Please keep all receipts and make clear any additional mileage on your claim.

Laundry

IWNL are aware that customers will not be able to safely clean laundry. We will refund any laundry costs if you have sourced this independently. Alternatively IWNL are also organising a laundry service with a local company. We will be in contact about this shortly when available to use.

Drinking water

There is bottled water that has been made available on site, so there is no need to buy your own.

Food

IWNL are aware that customers may not be able to safely prepare food and cook whilst the 'Do not use notice' is in place. As such we will fund hot meals at £10pp per meal, up to three meals per day.

In all instances, please keep hold of your receipts and you can submit your claim by emailing us at billing@IWNL.co.uk. Whilst IWNL commit to refunding all reasonable expenses during this time, if you have concerns about being able to fund any of this, please contact a member of the team at **02920 028711**

Physical disability	Blind or partial sight loss	Difficulty hearing or speaking	Health condition requiring constant supply of water <u>e.g.</u> Dialysis	Memory loss <u>e.g.</u> Dementia, Alzheimer's	Language other than English / literacy difficulties
Mental health condition <u>e.g.</u> depression	Older people	Unable to use internet (digitally excluded)	Developmental conditions <u>e.g.</u> Autism	Ill health / immuno-suppressed	Pregnancy or babies/children aged under 5 in household



Guaranteed Standards Scheme

All customers of water and sewerage companies are entitled to guaranteed minimum standards of service, as laid down by the Government. These rights are known as the guaranteed standards scheme. Where a company fails to meet any of these standards of service then it is required to make a specified payment to the affected customer.

GSS Regulation	GSS payment
Appointments not made properly	£20
Appointments not kept	£20
Incidences of low water pressure	£25
Incorrect notice of planned interruptions to supply	£20
Supply not restored(*) – initial period	£20
Supply not restored(*) – each further 24 hours	£10
Written account queries and requests to change payment arrangements not actioned on time	£20
Written complaints not actioned on time	£20
Properties sewer flooded internally	Payment equal to annual sewerage charges (Min. £150. Max. £1000)
Properties materially affected sewer flooded externally	Payment equal to 50% of annual sewerage charges (Min. £75. Max. £500)





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