

Julie James AS/MS  
Y Gweinidog Newid Hinsawdd  
Minister for Climate Change



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-05-1010  
Ein cyf/Our ref JJ/11826/21

Jack Sargeant MS  
Chair - Petitions committee

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20 December 2021

Dear Jack,

Thank you for your letter of 22 October 2021 regarding Petition P-06-1010 'An independent inquiry into the 2020 flooding in Rhondda Cynon Taf so that lessons are learned.'

The rainfall and river levels which led to the floods of February 2020, were exceptional. It was the wettest February since records began in 1862, and the fifth wettest winter on record. These events produced significant impacts across Wales.

I would like to once again thank the heroic efforts of the emergency responders, Local Authorities and Natural Resources Wales (NRW) who worked in atrocious conditions, day and night, to protect life and property. I also want to thank neighbourhood volunteers throughout Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (RCT) who provided help and support to the community to rebuild following the flood event.

The human cost of a flooding event can never be underestimated. For individuals who witness their homes flooded, it is a very upsetting and distressing experience. The devastating situation for communities following the February 2020 floods was of course made even more difficult by the subsequent outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. I extend my sympathies to everyone whose homes flooded as a result of the February 2020 storms and the subsequent flooding events.

The Welsh Government's response to the February storms was swift. We invited all Risk Management Authorities to apply for emergency funding to repair flood alleviation assets and improve communities' standard of protection. RCT applied for and was allocated £1, 924,500 to repair their assets. An additional £409,000 has been provided to RCT to repair and improve a culvert inlet at Pentre which was significantly damaged during Storm Dennis. I'm pleased to inform you work on this project is nearing completion and will reduce flood risk to 157 homes.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

The Welsh Government also provided RCT with £1,696,913 of funding through the Emergency Financial Assistance Scheme (EFAS) to assist with the immediate clear up costs of Storm Dennis.

To assist households with the immediate situation they experienced following Storm Dennis, the Welsh Government quickly moved to extend our Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF) to provide assistance to individuals with essential living costs such as food, gas and electricity. Payments of £500 were awarded to households that experienced internal flooding, with an extra £500 for households without insurance, or if their insurance did not cover flood damage. In total The Welsh Government made payments of £565,000 to 792 homes across RCT.

Further storms in January 2021 resulted in 41 homes in RCT experiencing internal flooding. The Welsh Government has provided a further £210,750 to RCT to undertake repairs to flood alleviation assets which suffered structural damage during this period.

In 2021-2022 RCT is due to undertake £1,824,774 of flood alleviation capital projects including business case development and construction with £1,666,858 of Welsh Government funding to reduce flood risk to 446 homes and businesses. Additionally RCT will undertake £1,065,000 in small scale schemes in 2021-2022 with the Welsh Government providing £905,250 of the total costs. These projects will reduce flood risk to 511 homes and businesses.

The Welsh Government encourages collaborative working between Risk Management Authorities and other interested parties when considering flood alleviation measures. I am happy to report such collaboration between RCT and NRW where NRW used their Flood maps to identify homes at high risk of flooding. RCT then used this information and their resource to offer flood gates to 133 homes utilising Welsh Government funding. The flood gates and associated property resilience measures are intended to provide a short-term intervention whilst NRW develop more significant flood alleviation projects to manage the wider risk within these communities. RCT is also installing property resilience measures to 100 homes which are at risk of ordinary watercourse flooding, in addition to the 281 homes provided with flood gates in 2020-21.

I acknowledge the emotional impacts and human costs associated with flood events. Research by Public Health England has shown that people experience higher rates of anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after a flood. The research also established the direct costs to the economy associated with treating people who experience these conditions after a flood.

I'm pleased to say we have incorporated such evidence into our flood programme. Economic appraisals for Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management (FCERM) projects can now include accurate estimates of the mental health benefits associated with reducing the risk of flooding, providing further justification for investment in flood alleviation.

The points raised on flood investigations are important in learning lessons and helping identify the causes of flooding. Following a flooding incident, Section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 places a duty on Local Authorities to investigate and report the flood event, providing details on the scale of the flooding. We also ask Local Authorities to provide recommendations on how to reduce future risk, where applicable.

These investigation reports are published for residents, elected members and interested parties to view and may bring forward further recommendations for reducing risk.

RCT have to date published three section 19 reports and an overview report into the Storm Dennis flood events. Crucially, their summary overview report brings together their Section 19 reports in a single document, which has proved helpful in communicating their findings in a shorter and more accessible format. Complementing these Section 19 reports, NRW published their own internal review in October 2020 which provided recommendations for improvements around forecasting, warning and response. The three RCT investigation reports, the RCT summary report and NRW's review into the 2020 flooding provide a comprehensive overview into the flood events.

The Co-operation Agreement between the Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru includes a commitment to commission an independent review of the Section 19 reports produced into extreme weather flooding in Wales in the winter of 2020 and 2021, together with the reports produced by NRW.

I will be exploring with Plaid Cymru representatives the process and timetable for the independent review and will make an announcement in due course.

This work will be carried out in collaboration with the Plaid Cymru designated lead member, as part of the Co-operation Agreement.

Yours sincerely,



**Julie James AS/MS**

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