

Heledd Fychan

Aelod o'r Senedd dros

Ganol De Cymru

—
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South Wales Central

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Pwnc | Subject: Support for flooded communities in South Wales Central

Dear Deputy First Minister,

As you will be aware, Storm Bert left its mark on many of the communities I represent in South Wales Central. A significant number of homes and businesses were devastated by flooding, many for the second, third and fourth time since 2020. People are devastated, and many are also angry.

Questions are again being asked why no independent inquiry took place after the floods of 2020. People are also angry that progress has been slow, or non-existent in some instances. Lessons that should have been learnt after they were last flooded were not heeded resulting in many experiencing the same issues and frustrations as they did when previously flooded namely:

- receiving flood warnings via Natural Resources Wales once water was already in their home or business;
- not receiving sandbags prior to being flooded, and not able to get through on the phone to ask for sandbags when they saw the water rising and knew they were likely to flood;
- being denied flood gates and/or barriers and being told they were unlikely to flood again (despite other people on the same street receiving flood gates and having far less damage in their properties, or no flooding at all this time.)

Most homes flooded are covered by insurance, and I have been proactive in recent years in making everyone in my region aware of the Flood Re scheme. However, as you are aware, there is no such scheme for businesses – something which I've raised countless times with the Welsh Government since being elected to the Senedd in 2021.

I have met with the Association of British Insurers on this matter and would ask that Welsh Government explores effective and immediate options to support businesses who are in this position. Where there is no mitigating flood alleviation works planned and we know there are businesses that are uninsured, there should be a Welsh Government business support scheme in place to ensure these businesses can recoup their losses and furnished in a way that minimises damage.

The First Minister stated in a news interview with Newyddion on 25.11.24 in relation to support for businesses who can't get insurance: *"Yn amlwg mi fydd rhaid i ni weld beth fyddwn ni'n gallu ei wneud iddyn nhw o ran helpu nhw gyda yswiriant a pethau felly, ond bydd rhaid cael y trafodaeth yna gan y Llywodraeth a gweld beth allwn ni wneud"* (Translates to: *"Obviously we will have to see what we can do for them in terms of helping them with insurance and things like that, but we will have to have that discussion from the Government and see what we can do".*)

Can you please clarify what the First Minister meant in relation to helping with insurance so that I can share with the businesses that have been in touch with me? One business estimates that they have lost circa £25,000 worth of stock, and I'm sure that many others will be in a similar situation.

But even for those covered by insurance, the trauma of what's happened will stay with them and they will be fearful every time it rains heavily that they will be flooded again. Greater support is needed for at risk communities, and I would be grateful if you could also provide answers to the following questions:

1. How will residents and business owners be able to access flood protection measures such as building adaptations, flood gates, electrical rewiring for future proofing etc and who should they contact to be assessed for these measures so that they can receive the ones most suitable for them?
2. What progress has been made on the recommendations set out in Professor Elwen Evans KC's Review of Local Government Section 19 and Natural Resources Wales' reports into extreme flooding in Wales, 2020-21?
3. Does Natural Resources Wales now have enough staff and budget to undertake their duties in relation to flood prevention? I note that their review into the 2020 floods stated the following: *"Delivering key improvements to the service will require adequate support in both funding and resources and those discussions will continue with the Welsh Government. It is roughly estimated that 60-70 additional members of staff are needed over the long term to sustain the overall service and to address the actions set out in our flood review. Additional resources will also be required to address the recommendations made to reduce flood risk as set out in the land management review."*¹

How has this recommendation been addressed? I'd be grateful if you could please outline how many staff they had in February 2021 and how many they have now working on addressing the actions set out in the review and also outline the budget made available to them in every consecutive budget since then? One resident has been told by a NRW member of staff that there has been a decrease in terms of staff and budget since 2021 – complete transparency on this is essential.

4. What support is being made available to take a whole community approach to flood prevention and mitigation? Taking Pontypridd as an example, are there plans to develop a plan for the town centre as a whole, and nearby streets such as Berw Road and Sion Street? Currently, every home and every business on an individual basis is looking into protective measures and trying to access funding. Will the Welsh Government commit to funding a holistic approach?
5. The First Minister has said that thousands of homes were saved as a result of investment made since 2020, and yesterday in plenary, you stated that hundreds had been saved. Whilst I very much hope that is the case as the funding was part of the Cooperation Agreement, will you publish the data which evidences this please as it will help businesses and residents in terms of insurance premiums if this information is made publicly available? And if you don't have the information yet, please can you outline when this will be available and be mindful of the messaging in the meantime? I worry that we are giving communities who are at risk a false sense of security with such sweeping statements, unless they can be evidenced.

During Storm Dennis (2020), South Wales experienced intense, short-duration rainfall with severe impacts. For example, 130.4mm of rain fell in 24 hours at Nant yr Ysfa, equivalent to 72% of a month's rainfall, while Tyn-Y-Waun recorded 132.4mm in 24 hours (62% of a month's rainfall).

River Taffat Pontypridd saw a peak flow of 805 m³/s, the highest on record, causing extensive flooding, with 2,765 properties affected across South Wales.

February 2020 followed months of persistent wet weather, meaning ground conditions were already saturated, worsening flooding impacts.

Storm Bert (2024) produced higher cumulative rainfall over 48 hours (171.6mm recorded at Tyn-Y-Waun) but spread over a longer duration, reducing peak intensity and the immediate risk of flooding.

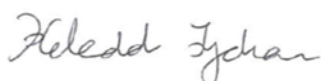
Provisional data suggests lower peak river flows during Storm Bert compared to Storm Dennis, contributing to fewer properties flooded (200–300 in RCT).

While flood defences may have played a role in reducing property impacts during Storm Bert, the lower flood intensity, drier antecedent ground conditions, and longer rainfall duration were significant factors. The Welsh Government's claims overlook these hydrological differences and do not provide evidence of flood defence performance under conditions comparable to Storm Dennis.

6. The National Flood Forum is paid to support several communities in Wales and is very effective at supporting communities. However, the funding they receive is sporadic and normally short-term. Whilst Natural Resources Wales has information on the website in terms of community resilience, they do not have capacity to support flood action groups in every at-risk community in Wales. There is also a question regarding if this is a role they should play, as they are not seen as a neutral party by communities that suffer flooding. Will the Welsh Government commit to working with the National Flood Forum on the establishment of a Welsh Flood Forum, as has happened in Scotland? I would be very happy to facilitate a meeting between the National Flood Forum and work with relevant officers to explore how we could take this proposal forward, as Hefin David did when he was commissioned to undertake the Transitions to Employment Report.
7. Taking Clydach Terrace as an example, nearly five years after Storm Dennis, residents continue to be at risk and options are still being considered. How can we now progress so that there is a resolution?
8. Two coal tips have now slipped because of more extreme weather, one in my region in 2020, and one in another region this week. Many communities that I represent live in the shadow on these tips, many of which are Category D, and are terrified that another Aberfan may happen again. What work is now being done to assess all coal tips following Storm Bert, and what assurances can be provided to these communities? Will you now be seeking urgent additional funding from the UK Government to ensure all coal tips are made safe?

I'm grateful that you've agreed to meet with me next week and I look forward to being able to discuss these matters with you directly.

Regards,



Heledd Fychan MS