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British Red Cross Submission to the Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee on the impact of storms Bert and Darragh in Wales.

21 February 2025

[About the British Red Cross in Wales](#)

The British Red Cross provides a wide range of services throughout Wales, helping people in crisis, whoever and wherever they are. We are part of a global voluntary network, responding to conflicts, natural disasters and individual emergencies and help vulnerable people prepare for, withstand and recover from emergencies in their own communities.

We work to tackle health inequalities by providing services in partnership with the NHS and local authorities, having supported over 420,000 people by working in a range of settings from Hospital Emergency departments to individuals' homes in 2024. We are the largest independent provider of refugee and asylum support, and our network of volunteers responds to emergencies such as fires and floods, as well as provided a leading role in the voluntary sector during the Covid pandemic. In Wales, our Emergency Response service operates from six strategic locations, offering emotional and practical support (including cash-based assistance) to people in crisis, at any time of the day or night all year round.

The British Red Cross recently published [Vulnerability and Resilience](#), our report contains findings and recommendations from our national survey investigating public perceptions of flooding and flood risk. The survey reached over 3,300 people across the UK, including 500 respondents in Wales. Relevant findings from this work are included below.

[1. On whether forecasting, warning, and alert systems were adequate.](#)

Our survey found evidence of a disconnect between flood warning systems and members of the public. Only 16% of respondents (UK and in Wales) reported that they were signed up to receive them, including only one in three people (33%) people who had personally experienced flooding in the previous ten years. Of those who were not signed up - despite also reporting that they lived in an area at high risk of flooding - 36% of respondents in Wales said this was because they did not know how to or had not heard of them, while 55% said this was because the alerts were not relevant to them. One factor that may contribute to this under-utilisation of flood warnings and alerts may be digital exclusion. We know from our work with the NHS in Wales that some of the

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areas worst affected by storms Bert and Darragh also feature some of the lowest levels of access to digital healthcare.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1) These findings make a strong case for Welsh Government investment in clear and accessible public communication, specifically on the purpose, value and method by which households should sign up to receive flood warnings and alerts.

Furthermore, our UK finding that the proportion signed up from the lowest income households (9%), is significantly lower than those signed up from the highest income households (31%) - suggesting a case for targeted approaches. These should be designed to account for high digital exclusion levels, potentially through partnerships with digital inclusion initiatives such as Digital Communities Wales.ⁱ

2. On the resilience of infrastructure to storm-related impacts, including water and sewerage systems, electricity distribution infrastructure, and transport networks.

No submission.

3. On the impact on communities, and the response role of community and third sector organisations.

Third sector organisations played a vital role in responding to the impact of the flooding, illustrated by the work of the British Red Cross detailed below. However, our response work in one area was held back by a delay in issuing the request to deploy by the local authority. This meant that British Red Cross volunteers were unnecessarily delayed in being deployed approximately for the first 24 hours. Once the request to deploy had been received, the following interventions were mobilised.

British Red Cross volunteers from the Pontypridd team, Cardiff team and Swansea team deployed response units to the areas affected, every day of the week following the storm, (usually two teams per day), to offer emotional and practical support to the affected communities. In total, the British Red Cross supported over 300 people in 47 households in the first week of the response.

Two British Red Cross corporate partnerships were leveraged to provide bottled water (through the Tesco agreement) and cleaning supplies (through the Kingfisher agreement) to the affected communities. The following week, a support line was set up, through which British Red Cross volunteers from across Wales continued to support people affected with emotional support and cash-based assistance. During the week of physical deployments to various locations, volunteers disbursed £12,250 in cash-based assistance to 134 people across 47 households affected by the flooding. So that everyone in the worst affected areas could access support, a volunteer-led telephone

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support line was set up for the following week (02/12- 06/12, 10am-2pm). Volunteers conducted a letter drop to the properties affected that we hadn't yet supported, providing each property with a unique reference number and a telephone number for them to contact us, verify their identity and be provided with cash-based assistance remotely. This work continued for two weeks, with our support being stood down on the 6th of December.

In addition to the delay in receiving the request to deploy, the effectiveness of reaching those most likely to require assistance was hampered by the inability of local councils to share people's personal data with us. This meant that we were unable to directly contact people who the council knew had been directly impacted by the flood, but who we hadn't already supported. This may have led to unnecessary delays in reaching some of those impacted and may have resulted in some of the most vulnerable residents being missed.

We know from both previous operational experience and our polling research that socio-economic deprivation is linked to worse outcomes from flooding and diminished ability to recover. Lower income households are less likely to be insured, less financially resilient, more likely to be disadvantaged by underlying health conditions, less likely to be signed up to receive flood warnings, less likely to have adapted their home to mitigate flood risk and less likely to report confidence in knowing what to do in a flood or how to prepare.

RECOMMENDATIONS

These findings suggest a case for:

- 2) Local authorities developing standard operating procedures and data sharing protocols with Voluntary and Charity Sector (VCS) responders to better define deployment process in advance of future flooding incidents.
- 3) Welsh government and local authorities targeting resources for flood resilience and recovery to households and areas with high levels of deprivation.

4. On the response of public and private authorities.

Local authorities in the worst hit areas welcomed the response input from the British Red Cross, Citizens' Advice and others, who deployed alongside them in key areas that were badly affected over the recovery period. This collocation of support resources allowed people affected by the floods to receive support from multiple agencies at one location, which was a marked improvement on previous flood responses.

Our survey findings suggest that approximately half (46%) of people who experience flooding in the UK receive some form of practical support such as evacuation assistance or temporary accommodation. Most received this support from family, friends or community members. Under half (43%) reported receiving financial assistance in the aftermath of flood, mostly from insurance companies (23%). 24%

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reported that the support they received was inadequate, while 21% who reported a need for financial support also said they received none. Only 5% reported receiving financial support from their local council.

40% of those who had experienced a flood in the UK reported experiencing moderate or severe mental health needs. While 39% reported that they received mental health support, about a quarter (24%) received this from informal sources such as family and friends. A similar proportion (26%) reported that mental health support after a flood was inadequate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

These findings suggest a case for Welsh government to:

- 4) Improve the availability of crisis support grants and emergency cash assistance to households affected by flooding. For example, by explicitly include flood damage to home in the eligibility criteria for the Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF)ⁱⁱ.
- 5) Improve access to qualified sources of mental health support to flood survivors.

They also underscore the importance of recommendation 3 above, to enable VCS organisations with capacity for providing practical, mental health and cash-based assistance to maximise their reach and responsiveness to local needs.

5. On whether relevant organisations have learnt lessons following previous winter storms, particularly Storm Dennis in 2020, and how these lessons inform the current approach.

The British Red Cross identified a gap in our capacity to respond to a large-scale flooding incident in Pontypridd (and other areas of the valleys) following the severe effects of Storm Dennis in 2020. Over the course of the ensuing 5 years, the British Red Cross Emergency Response service has developed an Emergency Response team based out of Pontypridd fire station, including sourcing an Emergency Response vehicle and stock, as well as a recruitment campaign to recruit volunteers from in and around the area. The team was launched in 2023 and have been serving the community well ever since. This meant that we were ready to respond in force when Storm Bert hit in November 2024.

6. On using the case studies of Storms Bert and Darragh to gain an overarching view of the current storm preparation and response framework in Wales and identifying any gaps.

Our experience of responding to needs in the aftermath of storms Bert and Darragh, as with previous storms, has underscored how those living with underlying forms of disadvantage suffer the worst consequences of flood and storm damage. Those living

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with economic deprivation, for example, are more likely to live in areas with higher flood risk, are less likely to be insured or otherwise well prepared and are least able to find alternative accommodation or to repair damage to their home. The ongoing gap in Welsh preparation and response capabilities is to map these and other determinants of vulnerability to flooding and to use this information to guide planning and investment decisions, including adoption of recommendations 1-5 above.

ⁱ Welsh Government, accessed 19 February 2025 from <https://www.digitalcommunities.gov.wales>

ⁱⁱ Welsh Government, accessed 19 February 2025 from <https://www.gov.wales/discretionary-assistance-fund-daf/eligibility>