



Evidence paper for Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs for General Scrutiny and Flooding at CCEI Committee

27/03/2025

Information provided to aid the Committee in advance of the Cabinet Secretary's attendance at General Scrutiny and Flooding on 27 March.

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1. Waste including Deposit Return Scheme

In working to deliver on our commitment to securing a stronger, fairer and more sustainable future for Wales, we have been working to develop a Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) for drinks containers in line with the commitment to bring forward a scheme in *Beyond Recycling*, our circular economy strategy, and *Net Zero Wales*, our emissions reduction plan.

On 18 November 2024, the Welsh Government announced that, following discussions with the other governments in the UK, Wales was not able to proceed with the joint process to establish a Deposit Management Organisation. As such the process to do so as part of the wider implementation of the DRS - including the engagement with producers, retailers and wider stakeholders, standing up of the Deposit Management Organisation and oversight of the scheme - will be undertaken by the Welsh Government.

The DRS in Wales will cover PET plastic, steel, aluminium, and glass drinks containers. The timetable for the introduction of the Welsh scheme will be finalised in the next Senedd term.

Since the November 2024 announcement by the Deputy First Minister, policy officials have been meeting regularly with industry and sector representatives. The team has also been actively preparing for continued engagement with stakeholders, taking place across Wales. The sessions will address a range of discussion topics and include myth-busting elements to facilitate constructive conversations that will inform the development and design of a public consultation scheduled to launch this summer. The team is also continuing to engage with activities to develop DRSs in the other UK nations to facilitate interoperability.

Existing Welsh Government resources from within the circular economy and resource efficiency budget will continue to be used to bring forward proposals and the development of a bespoke DRS for Wales.

There will be a consultation on proposals for the scheme during 2025-26. Any additional resources needed to implement a scheme for Wales, which delivers in that context of Wales, which is very different from the rest of the United Kingdom, will be considered, then, in the budget rounds for the future years.

Building on our success to date, we are committed to continuing our journey, recognising both the environmental imperative of the climate and nature emergency and the economic importance for resilience and competitiveness in a decarbonising global economy. Following the recent introduction of our Workplace Recycling Regulations, the implementation of a DRS for Drink Containers in parallel with the introduction of Extended Producer Responsibility for packaging is an important next step.

2. Net Zero Plan

Wales' journey to net zero is mapped out by a series of legislated five-yearly carbon budgets and decadal interim targets. When the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 was passed, it set a target for at least an 80% reduction in emissions in Wales against the baseline¹ by 2050 and a duty to set interim targets for 2020, 2030 and 2040.

In 2019, the Welsh Government published Prosperity for All: A low carbon Wales, which set out how Wales aimed to meet the first carbon budget (2016-2020) and the 2020 interim target.

In 2021, the Senedd amended the 2050 emissions target to net-zero (100% reduction in emissions) and increased the ambition of the 2030 and 2040 targets to reductions of 63% and 89% respectively. The Welsh Government published Net Zero Wales: Carbon Budget 2 which sets out how Wales will meet its second carbon budget (2021-25).

About 60% of the emissions reductions required in Wales by 2050 occur in sectors for which policy is largely reserved to the UK Government. Welsh targets are therefore largely dependent on UK policy and supporting infrastructure delivering sufficiently at scale and to time, alongside Welsh Government action. Close cooperation with UK Government counterparts is essential for Wales to meet its emission reduction targets. Likewise, UK targets are dependent on action in devolved policy areas.

Carbon budgets

Wales outperformed its first carbon budget with an average emission reduction of 28% against the baseline, greater than the 23% goal. Wales's interim 2020 target for a 27% reduction was also exceeded with 2020 emissions being 39% against the baseline, with emissions falling sharply as a result of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The current Welsh Government has responsibility for delivering the second carbon budget, which is set in regulations at an average reduction of 37% against the baseline. Internal analysis suggests that **Wales is on track to meet its second carbon budget**.

Achieving the third carbon budget will be extremely challenging and will require difficult decisions across all ministerial portfolios. Out-performing the statutory second carbon budget target would be advantageous for meeting future targets; we accepted the Climate Change Committee's 2020 recommendation to out-perform the 37% target for this reason. Wales' third carbon budget (2026-2030) requires an average 58% reduction in emissions and a 2030 target of 63% reduction in emissions against the baseline. Work is underway to develop a draft plan to deliver the third carbon budget – the next Net Zero Plan – which must be published by the end of 2026. It will be the responsibility of the next Welsh Government to agree the plan and deliver the third carbon budget.

Achieving the third carbon budget will require action from all sectors of the economy, including the public sector, businesses, communities and the general public, with policy stimulus from both the UK and Welsh governments. Targets must be met in a cost-effective way, which shares the burden, maximises the benefits fairly and mitigates the

¹ Carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide use a 1990 baseline. All other greenhouse gases use a 1995 baseline.

risks. Currently, work is focused on developing the cost-effective pathways for decarbonisation and marrying that with carbon-quantified policies that will deliver the pathway for the third carbon budget. It is our intent to publish carbon and economic data with the next Net Zero Plan, to aid Senedd and public scrutiny. We are also currently considering options for engagement with stakeholders, the general public and Senedd in the development of the Plan, or more broadly on topics linked to the longer-term transition to a net zero economy.

Cross-portfolio policy coordination through regular meetings between the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs and relevant Cabinet Secretaries, the Director General-led Climate Change Portfolio Board, national climate communications, stakeholder and public engagement (through activities such as Wales Climate Week and the Climate Conversations Fund), and internal capability building are all supporting planning efforts for the third carbon budget. Central coordination is also supported by sector-level plans and cross-cutting strategies, such as the Climate Adaptation Strategy published in October 2024.

On 14 May 2025, the Climate Change Committee will publish advice to the Welsh Government on the level of Wales's fourth carbon budget (2031-2035) and a recommended high-level policy framework to deliver the target, in ways which are cost-effective and will enable a just transition. The Climate Change Committee advice will be drawn from analysis which will inform advice to the UK Government on their seventh carbon budget (2038-42) and was published on 26 February 2025. Following the Climate Change Committee's fourth carbon budget advice, **the Welsh Government will lay regulations for its fourth carbon budget before the end of 2025** and in line with duties contained within the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

Further key information

Decarbonisation poses a range of challenges for society. The Welsh Government is committed to a **just transition** to help ensure actions to reach net zero create a more balanced and inclusive economy that avoids creating new or exacerbating existing inequalities. Just transition principles will underpin the plan to deliver the third carbon budget.

The Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru commissioned an independent group to explore potential pathways to achieve Net Zero by 2035. **The Net Zero Challenge Group** reported on its findings in September 2024, exploring how the country can speed up its transition to net zero. The Group's recommendations are being assessed and considered as part of the development of the third carbon budget plan.

Wales is a founding member of the **Under2 Coalition**, the largest global network of states and regions committed to achieving net zero emissions by 2050 at the latest. The network is central to sharing good practice and maximising the Welsh Government's voice on the international stage, particularly with regards to the UN Climate Change Conferences, with **COP30 taking place in November 2025** in Brazil.

3. Sustainable Farming Scheme

The Welsh Government published the **Sustainable Farming Scheme: proposed scheme outline (2024)** on 25 November which is being used to carry out an economic analysis and impact assessment. This will include an assessment of the proposals against the four Sustainable Land Management objectives and the impact, for example on farm business income for a range of different farm types and sizes so that we can understand what the Scheme will mean for farmers and wider society.

The positive response from stakeholders - as included within the **press notice** - on the Scheme Outline demonstrates the considerable work which has taken place during 2024 to get us all to this positive outcome.

Working with stakeholders we have reduced the overall number of Universal Actions from 17 to 12, and have made significant amendments to the majority of the remaining 12.

The Scheme will support all farmers in Wales through a Universal Payment, based on the completion of a set of Universal Actions. These Actions will be familiar to farmers in Wales, whether beef, dairy, arable, upland, lowland, extensive or intensive. They are actions many of them already take on a day-to-day basis. Some actions will not apply to every farm - for example, Universal Action 15, Animal health and welfare would not apply to arable only farms.

There will be additional support for farmers through the Optional and Collaborative Layers of the Scheme which build on the foundation provided by the Universal Layer. This support will be a combination of capital and revenue grants, alongside effective advice, guidance and knowledge transfer. The range of Optional Actions available will include, for example, actions on productivity, sustainable farm practice, habitat restoration and continued small grants support.

We will continue to work with the Officials Group and Ministerial Roundtable to ensure the Scheme truly works for farmers and helps support meeting our nature and climate objectives. It is important to highlight that the outline scheme published is not the final Scheme and Welsh Ministers have not made any final decisions on it. The economic analysis and impact assessment will be provided alongside the final scheme detail to enable Welsh Ministers to make an informed decision on whether the scheme is appropriate for farmers in Wales.

The final Scheme will be published in Summer 2025, ahead of the Scheme year starting on 1 January 2026.

Nature and climate considerations

Food production is and has always been the cornerstone of the SFS proposals. However, the ongoing impacts of climate change - including greater frequency of flood and drought are the greatest risk to food production. Investing in the adaptation and mitigation of climate change is vitally important, and our ecosystems are our best tool to adapt to climate change. For this reason the design of SFS has nature and the environment at its heart.

We have retained the scheme requirement for 10% habitat on farms in the Scheme. This recognises the positive relationship nature and the environment has to profitable sustainable food production.

We will include management of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in the Universal Baseline Payment. This will recognise farmers' efforts in managing these areas, for all our benefits and ensure these sites are integrated within wider farm management, balancing food production and actions that improve the prospects of nature and freshwater habitats.

We are also developing Optional and Collaborative Actions, many of which will be available from 2026 to support those farmers who want to do more. Officials are currently discussing the range of Optional and Collaborative Actions to be made available in 2026, but these are likely to include opportunity to progress with additional economic, environmental and social actions. The Scheme will provide additional opportunities to undertake actions at a farm and landscape scale to enhance these habitats and ensure they are brought into effective management whilst also providing opportunities to create new and improve the connectivity between habitats.

The most contentious issue with the SFS has been the Scheme Requirement for at least 10% tree cover on each farm. The proposed Requirement has been removed. However, we have not moved away from tree planting entirely. New trees and hedges must be part of our response to adapting and mitigating to climate change. The 10% tree cover requirement has been replaced with a 'Tree Planting and Hedgerow Creation Opportunity Plan', so farmers can identify new trees and hedges which can be integrated and add value to the farm. Subsequent planting would be supported through Optional Actions. See Woodlands Section below for more detail.

4. Woodlands for Wales Strategy

Woodlands for Wales (WfW) is the Welsh Government's 50-year overarching strategy for woodlands and trees. It's four strategic themes are responding to climate change; woodlands for people; a competitive and integrated forest sector; and environmental quality.

The last Action plan covered the 5-year period from 2015-2020. This was followed, in June 2021, by the then Deputy Minister for Climate Change's **Trees and Timber Deep Dive exercise**. During the deep dive, a task force of experts worked together to develop the **Trees and Timber Task Force: recommendations** to drive change. **These contributed towards the delivery of the WfW strategy.**

The **Woodlands for Wales indicators** are currently being updated to ensure they remain relevant and fit-for-purpose. The revised indicators will be used to inform areas of land-use policy in Wales, such as the development of the **National Forest for Wales (NFFW)**, to ensure that these meet the requirements of the **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015** and the **Environment (Wales) Act 2016**.

Theme 1: Responding to climate change

WfW committed to achieving a tree planting rate of at least 2000 ha per year. We are also working towards the UK Committee on Climate Change (CCC) recommendation that Wales should achieve 43k hectares of tree planting by 2030 and 180k hectares by 2050 to ensure Wales can deliver its net zero pathway. Average woodland creation figures over the last four years have seen positive progress and are c.700ha per annum, but planting remains significantly below where we need to be.

To help improve this situation we consulted farmers on proposals to make the Woodland Creation Grants more attractive and flexible. We are introducing these changes from March 2025. With the SFS minimum tree cover Scheme Rule now removed, farmers will need to complete a tree planting and hedgerow creation opportunity plan and demonstrate progress in delivering their plan by 2030. Scheme level targets for additional tree cover and hedgerow creation will also be agreed.

To oversee and support tree planting and hedgerow creation, the Trees and Hedges Stakeholder Delivery Group was established and first met on 6 February. Comprising government, farming, forestry, and eNGO representatives, the group advises the Deputy First Minister on setting targets and monitoring progress, recommending actions if targets are not met. Initially focused on the SFS, the group's priority is tackling barriers to tree planting more broadly.

Theme 2: Environmental quality

Environmental quality is embedded in how we deliver the Woodlands for Wales strategy. Funding provided for tree planting is compliant with the UK Forestry Standard, ensuring that sensitive features including deep peat, priority habitats, acid sensitive catchments and historical features are protected. This ensures that woodland creation, essential to mitigation of climate change, is also supportive of our policies to tackle our nature crisis.

We amended the Forestry Act 1967 to allow environmental conditions to be added to felling licences, providing better protection for wildlife and the environment during felling operations.

Appropriate woodland management is important in improving the condition and resilience of our woodlands. We are examining how woodland management can be supported in future schemes, particularly through the Sustainable Farming Scheme.

We are considering our approach to strengthening the protections for ancient woodlands as part of our Programme for Government. NRW have reviewed their prioritisation of ancient woodlands and remain committed through their Corporate Plan to 2030 to gradually restoring ancient woodlands on the Welsh Government Woodland Estate.

Theme 3: Woodlands for People

The National Forest for Wales (NFFW) includes over 100 sites totalling over 68,000 hectares. This includes 0.4ha of new planting at Oakfield Primary School in Barry up to large areas of forest like Wentwood, one of the largest ancient woodlands in Wales. There is a potential pipeline of 156 prospective sites that Forest Liaison Officers are engaging with.

Future work includes planning and feasibility assessments for a National Forest Trail and developing a landscape scale approach to expansion of the NFFW with over £500,000 of funding having been provided to trial 12 collaborative projects.

The National Forest programme has funded the creation of three Commemorative Woodlands to remember those that lost their lives to Covid -19.

The Woodland Investment Grant (TWIG) has awarded £7,168,766 to 41 NFFW projects so far to create, restore and enhance woodlands, including ancient woodlands.

Theme 4: A competitive and integrated forest sector

The **Trees and Timber Deep Dive** identified priority areas for a timber industrial strategy that can develop and sustain the high value production and processing of Welsh wood. A **Consultation document** was launched on 22 Jan 2025, closing on 16 April 2025. The proposals seek to deliver against the priorities set out in Woodlands for Wales, with a particular focus on supporting a competitive and integrated forestry sector, supporting thriving forest and wood-based industries. The consultation outlines six priorities: increasing timber supply; increasing resilience in our forests; resource efficiency and circular economy; instilling confidence in demand; developing sector capacity; and behaviour change. The Timber Industrial Strategy will be published summer 2025.

In November 2024, Welsh Government added the Forestry and Timber sectors to their **Flexible Skills Programme**. Revenue grant support is currently available to businesses for training and skills development for their employees, supporting the development of forestry and timber related skills across Wales.

We are currently developing a successor scheme to the Timber Business Investment Scheme (TBIS) and the Forestry Industry Recovery Scheme (FIRS). This will build on the success of previous schemes in improving the capabilities of the timber sector in Wales, focussed providing capital grants to support forest planting and management activities, timber harvesting and/or timber processing.

The **Agricultural Diversification and Horticulture Scheme** is a capital grant scheme available to farmers in Wales. The objectives of the scheme are to support the establishment of new viable agricultural diversification enterprises on farms. This includes support for the processing of farm-produced timber and/or non-wood forest products.

5. Agricultural Pollution Regulations

The 4-year review of the Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations has effectively concluded and is expected to be published by the 31 March. As part of the review process, Dr Susannah Bolton, appointed to independently oversee the review, has been engaging with a wide range of stakeholders across the agricultural and environmental sectors, to complement the analysis of the technical evidence underpinning the review.

In April 2024, the Welsh Government confirmed that £20m has been committed for two schemes to further support farmers reach compliance with the Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations. The Nutrient Management Investment Scheme and the Small Grants – Yard Coverings scheme application windows opened during summer 2024. Both schemes are designed to support Welsh farms to improve nutrient management. The Yard Coverings Scheme supports roofing over existing yards to separate rainwater from slurry. The Nutrient Management Investment scheme supports a range of capital investments which contribute to pollution prevention, including slurry and manure storage. The Nutrient Management Investment Scheme received 485 full applications, worth potential grant funding of £18.2m. Further information on the contracts awarded will be available in April, once the appraisal and contract award process has been completed. Since the regulations were introduced, a total of £52m has been committed by Welsh Government to support on-farm infrastructure investments.

A further £1.58m has been agreed in principle to support Natural Resources Wales' delivery of the Service Level Agreement (SLA) on the enforcement of the Regulations for the financial year 2025/2026. The compliance data collected to date is concerning. However, the SLA represents a step-change in the approach to enforcing agricultural pollution regulations, which have a long history of limited enforcement and high levels of non-compliance. The delivery of the SLA is key to ensuring farmer engagement with the regulations and, therefore, to the intended outcomes. We are already seeing improvements in compliance as a result of implementing the SLA.

To complement the current review of the Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations, the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs has initiated a review of the broader regulatory regimes governing the spreading of all types of organic material to identify how these arrangements could be made more effective. This wider review is expected to provide recommendations in the Autumn of this year. The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs will decide on the actions to be taken following the completion of each review.

6. Air Quality Targets

A key commitment under the National Air Quality Strategy (the Clean Air Plan for Wales) and the Programme for Government was to introduce a Clean Air Act for Wales, consistent with World Health Organisation (WHO) guidelines and extend air quality monitoring. This has been delivered through the introduction of the Environment (Air Quality and Soundscapes) (Wales) Act 2024 (the Act), which gained Royal Assent on 14 February 2024. The Act includes powers and duties for Ministers to set legally binding air quality targets for the protection of public health and the environment in Wales. New targets are important to achieve sustained improvements in Wales' air quality and associated public and environmental health outcomes over the long-term.

The Act contains two duties on Welsh Ministers to set targets for pollutants:

- a duty to set a target for fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) within 3 years of Royal Assent (February 2027); and
- a duty to set a target within 6 years of Royal Assent (February 2030) for one of the following: ammonia; particulate matter (PM₁₀); ground level ozone; nitrogen dioxide; carbon monoxide; and sulphur dioxide.

In setting new targets, the Act requires Welsh Ministers to seek independent expert advice, have regard to scientific knowledge on air pollution, have regard to the most recent WHO air quality guidelines, and to be satisfied that any targets set can be met. Independent and expert advice is being provided by Welsh Government's Clean Air Advisory Panel (CAAP) which receives input from other multi-disciplinary UK experts with subject matter expertise such as health, transport, climate change etc.

The target setting process is being informed by several sources of evidence including scientific data and modelling, historical datasets, and assessments of what is feasible from a socio-economic perspective.

The development of targets is being delivered in two phases. As PM_{2.5} is the pollutant for which there is the greatest body of evidence of harm to public health, the first phase is focused on the development of the draft PM_{2.5} regulations prior to consultation in autumn 2025. Work is on track to meet the statutory deadline for their introduction by February 2027. The assessments and development of expert advice is an iterative process. The modelling assessments of PM_{2.5} target options are currently being analysed and reviewed to ensure alignment with the target metrics advice received from CAAP, and costed options for the assessment of progress made towards the target metrics are being commissioned prior to Ministerial consideration.

The second phase is currently being worked on alongside the work on PM_{2.5} target development. This work is focused on the development of options to underpin the duty to set an additional target within six years of Royal Assent (February 2030). It is intended that Ministers will consider advice on the options and associated next steps later in 2025, although this is subject to the development of independent expert advice and associated technical assessments of options based on that advice.

Indicative costs and timings anticipated at the time of the introduction of the Bill were described in the Explanatory Memorandum. Work is ongoing to refine the costs and timelines associated with pollutant-specific targets based on the independent and expert advice and assessments informing the development of the targets policy and regulations.

7. Flooding

This year (2024-2025), we have maintained our record levels of funding for flood risk management at £75 million, through our Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Programme. The 2025-2026 FCERM Programme will be announced in Spring 2025.

Improving flood resilience for communities across Wales requires not just significant investment but also constant evaluation of resilience processes, knowledge and frameworks; especially following storm events as significant as Storms Bert and Darragh in November and December. The Welsh Government is pursuing several overarching workstreams with this objective:

Emergency Alerts

The emergency alert, issued jointly by the UK and Welsh governments, on Friday 6 December informed approximately 3 million people about the impending Storm Darragh. This was the most significant use of the emergency alert capability since the UK-wide test of the system in April 2023.

The Welsh Government is of the view, having consulted with local partners, that the actions of the public in heeding the warnings and the emergency alert, which gave advice on how to stay safe, truly helped the emergency services in responding to the significant impacts of the storm across Wales and to reduce the risks of injury to the public.

Every effort is made to ensure the functionality of the alert system. All Mobile Network Operators run regular testing of the system to provide appropriate levels of assurance there will be no issues with the alert if activated. Where some people may not have received an alert or it was delayed, this may have been because of factors such as network coverage, as the alert is not compatible with 2G/3G network or Wi-Fi only devices. Other potential factors include handset problems, handset airplane mode and the manual disabling of the functionality on the handset.

The Welsh and UK governments are conducting a review of the use of the emergency alert system in relation to Storm Darragh, which will explore any technical issues or lessons identified. A UK-wide test of the emergency alert system is planned for later in 2025.

Emergency alerts have been subsequently deployed in Northern Ireland and Scotland in relation to Storm Eowyn. The decisions of the Scottish Government and Northern Ireland Executive to issue alerts were informed by Welsh Government officials' advice given the learning during Storm Darragh.

Natural Resources Wales' new Flood Warning Information Service

In July 2024, Natural Resources Wales launched their new Flood Warning Information Service for Wales (FWISfW). This was a significant business critical capital investment project which received almost £6 million funding from the Welsh Government and has enabled NRW to provide a service tailored to the needs of customers in Wales. The new

service has delivered improvements to warning message content and process efficiencies that lessen the pressure on the duty officers during flood events, allowing them to focus on the big risks.

Storms Bert and Darragh were the first significant storm events to occur since the roll-out of the new service, issuing approximately 343,000 warning messages to 40,000 people. NRW are undertaking an evaluation exercise to establish any necessary improvements to the service.

Learning Lessons

Learning the lessons from disruptive challenges is a fundamental component of our broader effort to strengthen Wales' resilience. The Deputy First Minister has led debriefs with emergency responders following major incidents, including the recent flooding during Storm Bert. This gave an early chance for reflection from responder leaders to help identifying what worked well and where improvements need to be made.

A key priority for the Welsh Government is to learn the lessons from exercises and emergencies, and to help us, and the responder community, prepare for future incidents. It is also important we learn from past mistakes.

To support our approach to the implementation of lessons identified from inquiries, exercises and incidents, we are developing a new internal lessons management system, which enables improved prioritisation, coordination and monitoring of implementation. By introducing this new management system, we aim to close the loop between identifying lessons and achieving positive, lasting, improvements in practice.

As part of the development of the Wales Resilience Framework, we will also work with partners in Local Resilience Forums to develop pan-Wales lessons management system, which will support us in providing clear and auditable evidence to show how lessons have been learned and how and where that learning has been applied at all levels.

Communities and Third Sector

Welsh Government recognises that working with local and national partners and the people in communities is crucial. We will continue to iterate the multi-agency JIGSO system to ensure that partners can identify our most vulnerable citizens in times of an emergency. We will continue to engage with equality and community groups to develop the data available, in line with data protection legislation.

Our whole of society approach to resilience means it is essential for communities and individuals to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to support resilience at a local level. We are committed to building our knowledge and understanding of the underlying vulnerabilities within our communities, including ensuring we, and our partners, are better able to identify vulnerable and at-risk groups to ensure more specific and tailored support can be prioritised in any incident.

In the context of flood risk management specifically, community engagement is a key aspect of building community flood resilience and many at-risk communities own and develop their own flood plans. There are currently at least 76 community flood plans

across Wales; namely in 35 communities in South Wales, 14 in Mid Wales, and 27 in North Wales taking action to understand, prepare for and manage potential flood risks in their area.

We are also exploring whether the National Flood Forum (NFF) can help us to engage with at-risk communities in Wales. We know from meeting with affected communities that this is a greatly valued resource and appreciated form of support. For example, we are currently funding the NFF to support the residents of Clydach Terrace in Ynysybwl who were particularly affected by Storm Dennis in 2020.

Where incidents of significant flooding have occurred, we have been quick to operationalise local financial support. We provided emergency support payments of £500 and £1000 to households impacted by Storms Bert and Darragh through the Emergency Financial Assistance Scheme. This was to assist them in their recovery following the significant impacts associated with two major storm events.

Preparation and Response

As part of the Welsh Government's new Wales Resilience Framework, which is due to be published in May 2025, significant work has been undertaken to review our preparedness and response processes and structures including both external and internal governance arrangements.

During 2024-25, Welsh Government provided funding to our four local resilience forums (LRFs), and we will continue to provide further funding to support the vital work undertaken by our LRFs in supporting multi-agency planning and preparedness across a range of risks and ensure any capability gaps are addressed.

Over the last two years, work has been undertaken on creating a suite of risk evidence documents to provide an improved risk evidence base for Welsh responders and the Welsh Government. Our risk register is a classified assessment of the most significant risks to Wales over the medium term (next two to five years). This Wales-specific evidence base provides:

- Higher quality information to raise awareness and collective understanding of short, medium and long-term civil protection risks and to inform emergency preparedness and response and recovery capability building work.
- Identification and assessment of concurrent risks to help inform preparedness and consequence management planning.
- An assessment of preparedness of each of the four Local Resilience Forums in Wales against the common consequences that could arise should any given risk materialise in future, and specific preparedness assessments against each system-wide disruptive challenge identified in the UK National Security Risk Assessment. This preparedness element of the risk register is unique in terms of national risk assessments in the UK and contributes to the development of our capabilities programme.
- Help to inform the Welsh Government's risk management and preparedness work while complementing emergency responders' work at

the local level by supporting them in fulfilling their statutory risk assessment and emergency planning obligations.

The Welsh Government's restrengthened and simplified response structures were tested significantly as a result of the impacts of Storm Darragh in early December 2024. This was the most significant national test of Wales' resilience since the Covid pandemic in 2020-22.

With the Met Office forecast highlighting red warning for wind and amber warnings for rain, the Welsh Government preparedness structure transitioned swiftly to response, with activation of First Response, to complement the activation of response structures of Wales' four LRFs. This initial response helped with mutual aid, the issuing of an emergency alert, warning and informing arrangements, including a statement from the First Minister, and coordination into UK Government including power supply restoration. Given the severity of the situation, this was escalated to a Level 2 response, as set out in the Pan Wales Response Plan, convening the Wales Civil Contingencies Committee to bring together leaders from the responder community and senior officials from the Welsh Government and UK Government's COBR unit.

Maintenance of Flood Risk Assets

Storms Bert and Darragh highlighted the particular importance of resilient infrastructure to minimise storm impacts, including landslips, culvert damage and sinkhole formation. Welsh Government provided emergency capital funding of up to £8.1 million to Risk Management Authorities to repair damaged infrastructure in the wake of the storms.

It is vital that we understand where our flood assets are located in order to maintain them to a sufficient standard. Flood Risk Management Authorities have a duty to maintain a register of flood assets under the Flood and Water Management Act 2010.

Local Authorities and NRW already have their own detailed records of their assets in different formats, but Welsh Government has worked with NRW, WLGA and Local Authorities to bring everything together in one public facing platform. The National Asset Database is available on NRW's website and ensures that consistent information is gathered, stored and displayed on our flood and coastal assets. It will increase our resilience to flooding by improving our understanding of flood assets and eventually their condition.

There are several significant workstreams which Welsh Government is progressing to inform our longer-term flood policy priorities. For example, in August 2023 Professor Elwen Evans QC published her independent review of Section 19 flood investigation reports, and in October 2024 the National Infrastructure Commission for Wales (NICW) published their report assessing how flooding in Wales can be minimised by 2050. These, together with NRW's Long Term Investment Requirements report published in January 2024, will inform the longer-term direction of policymaking over the coming decades. Welsh Government will provide a formal response to the NICW report later in the spring but we are currently considering the findings of all three reports together to inform our decision-making.