



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

9th DECEMBER 2020

POSITION STATEMENT – SCRUTINY OF FLOODING IN RCT DURING 2020

**REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, DEMOCRATIC SERVICES &
COMMUNICATIONS**

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide members with the opportunity to consider the detail (as outlined below) of the recent Scrutiny Enquiry session relating to the severe flooding which impacted across the County Borough during 2020 and to consider the next steps to be taken with this process.
- Detailed verbal accounts from local members (Appendix 1)
 - Written submissions by individual ward members or party groups (Appendix 2);
 - Report to Full Council and Power point presentation (25th November 2020)(Appendix 3)
 - Enclosed summary of information gathered over the last two months.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:-

- 2.1 Consider the information considered to-date from partners, Council Officers and local members
- 2.2 Support the emerging themes identified within this report and request for this information and the comments of members, including written submissions received through the scrutiny inquiry process, to be presented to the Chief Executive and Cabinet, for consideration as part of the internal review. In doing so consider any recommendations or comments committee may wish to make at this point in the scrutiny process.

- 2.3 Confirm committees request to scrutinise how the Council will respond to the Section 19 statutory report that the Council is required to undertake in respect of the February Floods as the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) under the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 (FWMA);

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To summarise the scrutiny of the evidence received from partners, Council Officers and local elected members, with a view to agreeing comments and/or recommendations to be made to the Cabinet;
- 3.2 To present the information considered through the scrutiny process in advance of the interval review process being considered by Cabinet in December; and
- 3.3 For committee to also determine its scrutiny actions on this subject moving forward.

4. BACKGROUND & EVIDENCE PROVIDED FOR CONSIDERATION

- 4.1 The Council's Overview & Scrutiny Committee undertook scrutiny of the Council's response to the severe flooding experienced during 2020 and at its meeting of the [14th October 2020](#) received a report and presentation from Council Officers on the scale of this weather event, the service and community response and lessons learned to-date.
- 4.2 Committee also welcomed representation from NRW in respect of their own organisation response to these challenging circumstances, which highlighted emerging themes, of the then yet-to-be-published NRW report into these events. The meeting can be viewed via the following link:-

<https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Council/CouncillorsCommitteesandMeetings/Committees/Virtualmeetingsduringsocialdistancing.aspx>

- 4.3 To assist in their assessment of the information, Committee were also directed to the Local Flood Risk Management strategies for Rhondda Cynon Taf, in line with the statutory requirements, that the Council is responsible for developing.
- 4.4 At every stage of the review Committee has been directed towards the decisions of the [Major Incident Recovery Board](#) which was established by the Leader of the Council in February 2020, as part of his scheme of delegation. This highlighted the action and approaches taken immediately following the major weather incident, as declared by South Wales Police.
- 4.5 Committee resolved to hold a 'Scrutiny Inquiry Session' to hear the experiences of elected members whose electoral divisions were severely impacted by these flooding events. This session was held on the **9th November 2020** to where those local members of the wards most affected by the flooding were invited to relay their experiences. It was also agreed to again invite the key partners to the meeting to evaluate the events and responses to February's floods. Welsh

Water/Dwr Cymru and Natural Resources Wales (NRW) were in attendance to respond to scrutiny and challenge by committee members.

4.6 **A detailed account of the comments and observations made by local members at this session are set out in Appendix 1 of this report. Included within this section are the written submissions received from political groups and local members as part of this process.**

4.7 A detailed report and power point presentation (both attached at Appendix 3) were provided at [Full Council on the 25th November 2020](#) in order to brief all Elected Members on the operational response of the Council and the scale of this major weather event. This report also served to inform all members of the scrutiny work underway.

4.8 Members have received information via the NRW flood summary report which provides a detailed account of these flooding incidents, a recovery report and the land estate review ; these reports can be viewed on the NRW website;

<https://naturalresources.wales/about-us/news-and-events/statements/our-response-to-storm-ciara-and-storm-dennis/?lang=en>

4.9 Members learned that in addition to the Council's Section 19 statutory report that the Council is undertaking into the February Floods as the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) under the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 (FWMA) there is also an ongoing internal assessment by the Senior Leadership Team (SLT). This review will focus on resources, support, improvements and engagement with relevant partners.

4.10 Scrutiny is advised that the opportunity is available through this process, for its findings, comments and recommendations including the information and evidence received to-date to be presented in advance of the Internal Review being considered by the Cabinet before the end of this calendar year.

5. **SCRUTINY BRIEFING/ ENQUIRY SESSION**

5.1 Following recognition of the need to provide the opportunity for local Members to express their views and personal experiences of these flooding events, Committee determined to convene a Scrutiny Enquiry Session to hear the views of local members as part of the scrutiny process.

5.2 On the 9th November 2020, an invitation was extended to councillors who have experienced incidents of flooding within their wards to attend an overview presentation which provided detail of the impact of flooding, contributing factors of flooding, action undertaken and the community resilience response. Members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee also had the opportunity to question the invited partners, namely Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and Welsh Water/Dwr Cymru. The session lasted for three hours and twenty minutes and provided a strong evidence base for the scrutiny committee to continue its work.

- 5.3 Each local member had up to five minutes to present their views and subsequently eighteen members contributed oral evidence to committee. A detailed account of these representations are attached at Appendix 1.
- 5.4 In addition to this opportunity, the Chair extended an invitation to both Committee and local members to submit representations in writing, a message which was later reiterated at the Full Council meeting on the 25th November to all members of the Council. (Twelve submissions have been received and are attached at Appendix 2)
- 5.5 Subject to the consent of committee, it is proposed that the themes and commonalities arising from the verbal and written evidence should be referred to the Chief Executive and Cabinet for consideration in the context of the wider internal review currently taking place. It is also proposed that the issues highlighted should support future work undertaken by the committee, in particular scrutiny of the Council's Section 19 report.
- 5.6 The Overview & Scrutiny Committee may wish to maintain an interest in scrutinising the Council's flood risk management arrangements and emergency planning arrangements following the outcome of the Council's Internal review, taking forward scrutiny and monitoring of progress, including any quarter performance information in respect of these areas.

6. EMERGING THEMES FROM EVIDENCE RECEIVED

- 6.1 The scrutiny enquiry session sought to deliver upon a commitment made by the Leader of the Council to facilitate the engagement of local members in the 'lessons learned' work which the Council is already taking forward, but also as part of the development of future plans and severe weather response arrangements.
- 6.2 In addition to receiving oral evidence from 18 members, who were each allocated five minutes to present their experiences and observations, the Scrutiny Inquiry session facilitated presentations from Rhondda Cynon Taf Officers, Natural Resources Wales and Dwr Cymru/ Welsh Water who were present to respond to queries raised by members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee in its formal role.
- 6.3 Whilst scrutiny is ongoing the common themes to have emerged from the inquiry session and the discussions of committee, as follows:-
- Overall there was much praise for the response to the February flooding from emergency services, community volunteers, neighbours and Council staff;
 - The views of members highlighted a number of areas where further work is needed and improvements could be made including communication with Elected Members and facilitating a better understanding of the Council emergency response procedures.

- The process has already identified the development of more precise forecasting by NRW which would enable early warning procedures to be delivered and to give communities time to respond. This was identified as a key ask by the Committee. (with the added caveat that there is a need to be as realistic as possible to identify major events);
- Members acknowledged that Storm Dennis was significant and its impact felt county wide. It was declared a major weather incident by South Wales Police and under these circumstances it was recognised that flooding cannot always be prevented. However, Members did feel that the risk can be managed and actions can be taken to minimise the harm caused by flooding as far as possible.
- The process has already identified the importance of training for Elected Members, particularly newly Elected Members, to identify roles and responsibilities in the case of flooding emergencies in addition to being able to signpost residents.

This detail was reported to the recent Council meeting and committee members may wish to develop these areas of thought.

6.4 Based on the written submissions from Elected Members the following matters have been raised:

- **Members recognise the huge effort of staff and the mobilisation of resources to respond to these unprecedented weather events.** Many contributions recognise the swift response of the Council on the ground to support communities in the aftermath of the storm.
- **The contributions made acknowledge the huge scale of this weather event.** Contributions from members recognised the unprecedented nature of the flooding which spread resources and the support efforts of the Council across a range of communities. They acknowledge that despite this logistical challenge, a positive effort was made by staff to respond with the required resources to support communities.
- **The capacity and capability of the current flood water infrastructure to cope with extreme weather events** - Much of the infrastructure was built to deal with 1:100 year flood events, however, these measurements have significantly changed in recent years. Communities need confidence that the Council, NRW and Dwr Cymru will invest to ensure that new and existing infrastructure will be future proofed to deal with more frequent extreme events;
- **The management of forestry, the mountainsides and private land** – a number of the flood events appears to have been caused by the way in which NRW has managed its commercial forestry business, clearing

hillsides of trees and leaving natural debris on the hillside, which has found itself in blocked culverts on the valley floor;

- **The first few days in the aftermath of Storm Dennis – communication with local elected members** - a number of members have referred to the immediate aftermath of the storm and being able to access information on the action of the Council to respond in their respective community;
- **The human impact of the Storm in terms of individual's mental health and well-being** – inevitably the experience of having your home flooded, destroying your personal effects and possessions and the impact that this has on your confidence of feeling safe and secure at home is considerable. We need to understand the long-term effects of this and ensure support is available;
- **What is the Country's long-term response to Climate Change? – Are we doing enough and at a sufficient pace to tackle this issue to protect future generations?** – National targets have been set and progress has been made to reduce our reliance on carbon fuels but not at the pace required to prevent future extreme weather events becoming even more prevalent and damaging;
- **The swift recovery response of the Council** – members recognise the recovery arrangements and support made available to residents and businesses and the swift way in which they were made deployed in challenging circumstances. The continued support made available to support residents and local members over the last nine months has also been acknowledged;
- **The majority of responses speak positively about the Council's response in challenging circumstances.** A number of responses deem the response of the Council to be effective and efficient.

6.5 Members agreement is sought to formally present this information in summary to the Council's Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council to inform the findings of the Interval review in advance of Cabinet considerations.

6.6 Through the scrutiny process, evidence from partners has acknowledged the pressure placed upon the response of public agencies and emergency service as a result of the scale of the severe weather. Natural Resources Wales and Dwr Cymru Welsh Water contributions also acknowledge that services and the response efforts were initially overwhelmed by the severity of the weather and the geographical spread of the impact.

- 6.7 Scrutiny has already indicated its wish to scrutinise and comment upon the Section 19 statutory reports on conclusion of the ongoing investigations that the Council is undertaking into the February Floods as the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) under the Flood and Water Management Act 2010. The recommendations contained within this report seek committee's approval to formally request this opportunity.

7. CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT

- 7.1 The process of engagement with key partners and local members will continue to steer Scrutiny's consideration and methodology going forward.

8. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Equality and diversity implications are to be considered as part of the Scrutiny review and subsequent recommendations to the Council's S19 report.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Financial and resource implications will be considered as part of any subsequent recommendations made for winter weather arrangements going forward

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 10.1 There are no legal implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

11. LINKS TO THE COUNCILS CORPORATE PLAN / OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES.

- 11.1 The Well-being of Future Generations Act asks public bodies to work better with people, communities and each other to meet the Sustainable Development principle. The Council's approach to the implementation of the Act agreed by Cabinet is to make sure that its requirements are embedded into the everyday business.

- 11.2 Engagement with Stakeholders will inform the Scrutiny review will support the Working Group apply the Sustainable Development principle of the Act through the five ways of working, namely, Integration, Collaboration, Long term thinking, Involvement and Prevention and maximise the contribution to the 7 national Well-being goals.

12. CONCLUSION

- 12.1 This report summarises the scrutiny activity to date and the evidence available for scrutiny to consider. It is proposed that scrutiny considers the overarching issues emerging from the flooding event and considers any areas it may wish to make representations upon. Scrutiny may wish to utilise the opportunity for

the information gathered to inform the future response of the Council through its Section 19 report.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

9th DECEMBER 2020

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, DEMOCRATIC SERVICES &

COMMUNICATION