

DETAILED VERBAL REPRESENTATIONS FROM THE SCRUTINY INQUIRY SESSION :-

Councillor T Williams (Aberaman South)

“The two villages Abercwmboi and Cwmaman, the whole place was flooded and patches were coming off the mountain. We had sandbag issues. Money has been spent since and we are waiting for more work to be done”

Councillor R Lewis (Abercynon)

“There were 3 principal areas of Abercynon were affected by the flooding, Wood Road, the top of Nant Y Fedw were overflowing and there was some river flooding in River Row. The culvert worked because the local authority has spent money on flood prevention measures. When residents refer to 1975, there is a perception that there has been little action taken since 1975, that we have known about this for the last two decades and Storm Dennis has been a wakeup call, but should we have been more investment in the culverts and rivers. Ten years of austerity has been difficult.

We set up an Emergency Centre, helped by residents and supported by local businesses. Residents put calls to us but we were overwhelmed by the event. Myself and Councillor E George have written to Council Officers regarding the Abercynon flooding and have had a speedy response. The issue of dredging has been raised”

Councillor E George (Abercynon)

“Opposite River Row there is a natural flood plain, would the banking levels of the river opposite reduce the natural flood plain?”

Councillor G Caple (Cymmer)

“Pumping Stations – The Rhondda ward flooded, one did work in Trehafod, one didn’t in Britannia. Welsh Water indicated that some highways maintained drains were blocked and the culvert was over flowing. The collapse of the river wall caused flooding. There are a whole range of questions.

On the 16th February 2020 there was constant communication with NRW and WW – At 2am the alarms went off in Trehafod and Britannia pumping stations. Are there lessons to be learned from the performance of the pumping stations?

Going forward it is vital that, with regards to the infrastructure around the pumping stations, all parties work together and explain to residents what actions are going to be taken to mitigate the risks. The river walls were smashed away, no help, no explanation, residents need to know.

Dredging – The river was dredged to quicken the flow. Three parties need to get together to inform local councillors and residents and find a strategy.”

Councillor K Morgan (Hirwaun)

“This represents residents and my own feedback during and since.

We feel unsupported by RCT, frustrations with calls to the Call Centre on the night. This meeting has been a long time coming and as local member I echo the residents’ frustrations. I had to chase the Highways van for sand bags. In the Major Incident Recovery Board it mentions the impact on hundreds of properties which were flooded, the damage to a number of culverts and NRW mention the River Cynon culvert which was “deemed a risk to public safety but on private land”.

In Rhigos there was flooding on Rhigos Road, which took the impact of the water coming over the sides of the river embankment from the River Cynon.

I feel unsupported as I am having to chase all organisations.

The NRW report didn't give the events justice and the Chief Executive of NRW stated that "The challenge is bigger than any one organisation can tackle alone."

We need an Independent Inquiry to scrutinise the reports from all those responsible"

Councillor P Jarman (Mountain Ash East)

"NRW have said that the floods in February 2020 were a once in a generation event and yet the maps of the flooding issued by the Environment Agency Wales 40 years ago are the same maps. The infrastructure in Mountain Ash has had very little attention. Why the similarities in 1979 and 2020?

Planning Development in a flood plain- I thank Mr Evans for his presentation – What authority does NRW hold in objecting to proposed developments in flood plains? NRW always say it's up to the local authority whether they grant or not, can you (NRW) formally object?

So much misery could have been relieved if you had displayed the skills to give evacuation warnings. With regards to the forward plans for Treorchy, Rhondda and Treherbert, have any local members been involved?

Mountain Ash – all the impediments of Glan Ffrwd, Mountain Ash was inaccessible for days. Is there ever intention of notifying residents that consultation had been employed by the local authority? Caegarw flooding – why wasn't I notified to co-ordinate and encourage residents to engage?

What is the process after this? Will we be debating the issue?

I have grave concerns regarding the lack of emergency plan for those Members newly elected in 2017. The plan on the website dates from 2011 which has been reviewed, on the 7th March, the new plan had been with SLT one week before. There is no emergency plan to rely on. No-one told me there was a flooding event in Mountain Ash, so how best are we to support our communities?"

Councillor A Morgan (Mountain Ash West)

"The response – the culverts became overwhelmed in the ward and the river was running through the centre. It was on a huge scale but thankfully no-one lost their life. Officers rang me and were with me from 10pm until 2.30am. Cars were being swept down the river in Pontypridd. At 2.24am I and the Council's Emergency Planning Officer were ringing staff to make sure they were all aware of the situation. By 6am, or before, most of the SLT and Emergency Planning Officers were already on hand and dealing with the emergency.

I went around the ward to meet with residents. No officers would have time to ring or email when it happened in the early hours but SLT responded by 6.30am. The Council quickly established the Major Incident Recovery Board.

Calls did get through to make the council aware of the flooding across the county borough. Sandbags did arrive but it was only then that staff realised that they were dealing with a major incident. Details of the Resilient Road funds to repair and future-proof key transport routes across RCT are available to read in the Cabinet reports.

I organised and held a public meeting in my ward and updated residents myself. Afterwards I made the decision to leave my ward and drive the 4x4 jeep, it took over an hour to get to Abercynon and we failed to get through the B4275. We were flagged down by a Fire Engine asking for assistance, a 7.5 tonne vehicle was lost in deep water on the A4059 and the Emergency Services couldn't get through. With the best intentions, some locations just couldn't be reached.

We need to look at events but we can't respond to a natural disaster, which needs local plans, understanding and partnership working.

Welsh Government is funding everything that the council submits but it will take a sustained approach. Staff did all they could on the day."

Councillor S Rees-Owen (Pentre)

"I saw the devastation. I was awoken at 3.30am and saw the videos.

The NRW report talks about better communication, Pentre was never vulnerable to flooding until the felling of the trees. Both residents and volunteers helped out.

Communications & Support – Local residents look to their local members for help and support. It's difficult to be able to support them without the information they need e.g. Facebook posts about people being awarded £500 grants and sessions for filling in forms but soon only Covid-19 related matters were reported, I had to chase up these matters and officers responses on behalf of residents.

Sandbags were lacking. The Call Centre advised that only those areas already flooded were eligible for sandbags. There was a lack of criteria.

I wasn't aware that the council had made the decision to stop the collection of household goods, I was told it had been withdrawn, although Mr Wheeler did collect the furniture.

We have had flooding since and things have improved. Mr Daniel Hitchings has gone above and beyond. When there is a forecast for bad weather I ask questions and I can communicate to residents.

Could Mr Owen Griffiths spend some time with us to go through his power point presentation he delivered in the meeting?

What the NRW report said to Pentre residents is the reason for the Independent Enquiry as there are many, many lessons to learn. Communication and Support need to be improved."

Councillor Weaver (Pentre)

"There was a blocked culvert.

I regularly contact residents to ask how they are, they are frightened of another flood. Work is still being carried out and residents need to be put at ease, to know that their homes will be safer, flood doors are a good idea.

Communication needs to be improved, it wasn't very good. I walked the streets with sandwiches. The Salvation Army helped and other religious groups in the main.

We need to feedback to our residents. They need support and Councillors need support to ease the stress, we are out on a limb. There is no-one to support me to support others.”

Councillor H Fychan (Pontypridd Town)

“Every resident and business deserves to have their say.

The key recommendation is to support an Independent Enquiry. In 5 minutes I can't do justice to the evidence and the Overview & Scrutiny Committee doesn't have the capacity to investigate without full information. Are we best placed to investigate ourselves?

As referenced by Councillor Jarman, we haven't looked at why the Emergency Plan was outdated which was a failing. We have received no training since the floods.

Why was there an IT upgrade that weekend? We couldn't access the numbers and emails etc. It was impossible to contact everyone. There are lessons to be learned such as a text alert to Members which would provide them quickly with the relevant links. It could be one message to everyone. Communication was not as good as it could have been.

Mr Owen Griffiths mentioned the volunteers and coordinators. I'm still not sure the Cabinet understood what a key role Councillors played. I contacted the Leader on the 16th February offering to coordinate support; I was asked not to do anything for 24hrs and not to contact Council officers but there must be someone to communicate with us. We set up a Community Centre with Councillor Powell and Councillor Eleri Griffiths, had it not been for that there would have not been a central support.

We heard from the Leader that there are no reserves, I understand the role of the authority is to better prepare. I must be able to explain to residents and businesses and protect them in the future. We need an Independent Inquiry.”

Councillor T Leyshon (Rhondda Ward)

“In lower Trehafod there was up to 4ft of water in homes. The pumps have been replaced but residents are not confident. The warnings and alarm systems came after the floods, this needs to be looked at. The height of the river is a concern, it came within inches of the top of the Trehafod wall. Natural Resources Wales always used to dredge the river, I would like to see that resumed.

Residents were the saviours of the day as was the community centre who opened their doors. We had IT connected to the community centre which was great. It worked well and we got laptops out to residents.”

Councillor E Griffiths (Rhondda Ward)

“On the first day of the flooding I was unable to reach Trehafod so I took the opportunity to support Pontypridd and Trallwn. I came across Council Housing Officers which were of good support and by the time I reached Trehafod they had already put things in place. Volunteers helped greatly. I was expected to answer questions about council services such as could residents stay in their homes or did they need council accommodation? I had no training to deal with it. I had a phone a number of officers.

One recommendation is to look at communication so that information is passed on. I did expect there to be a community hub within 48 hours to share information. I and fellow councillors knocked on doors to check on residents, should be part of an Emergency Plan.

There was a meeting in Pontypridd on how to clean houses, Councillor Powell said it should have been given to everyone where there was filthy water. The information came from Public health Wales. I did receive communication from Welsh Water about the pumping station.

I must praise the volunteers. I have read the Emergency plan now, it does say it would bring the volunteers together, to work with them, the local network need to reinforce how they support their communities.

There is a strong case for an Independent Inquiry, to look at the role of the three large organisations. We need an overall picture of the situation.”

Councillor Webber (Rhydyfelin Central & Ilan Ward)

“With regards to Councillor Fychan’s comments about Cabinet and not being aware, please don’t assume we’re not aware.

My ward has been flooded many times in a year. Lots of families are from Newydd Housing who are responsible for some of the houses following the floods. Many homes need to have flood doors put onto their properties. The water took away a retaining wall in the ward.

Councillor Powderhill called by 3pm and by 9pm the community centre was open for families to safely bring their children. No one could expect to get through to the call centre.

The amount of culverts that are there, the ward below gets flooded which affects the cottages in Upper Boat as there’s an area in the river where its course changes but I don’t want to be an expert in this area.

We represent our communities to the best of our abilities but there are lessons to be learned. My ward is a lucky recipient of a Flood Prevention Scheme. I bought myself a megaphone with a siren to prepare for such events. I do suggest that NRW give people advance warnings as a number of individuals in my ward have been flooded.

I have to pay tribute to the staff, they worked themselves to the bone and they did their best.”

Councillor Bonetto (Taffs Well Ward)

“By the time Nantgarw got the warnings it was under water, the basement flats on Cardiff Road were flooded.

The community was fantastic, they set up sites for clothes and food distribution and thanks to the contractors Mr Owen Griffiths arranged.

On Sunday we couldn’t access Nantgarw, the only exit was on a dinghy. This has left the residents nervous and when it rains they live on their nerves. If higher defence walls are built it will only shift the flooding further down.

How can I reassure my residents? Every drop of rain that falls they start to panic. I thanks everyone who worked so hard.”

Councillor M Powell (Trallwn Ward)

“I was elected as a local member to Trallwn in 1999 and I know that lots of places are built on flood plains with pluvial flooding as an additional problem.

On Sunday, 16th February I was standing in Zion Street next to a senior council officer of the Council. I diverted the Housing Officer to Coedpenmaen Community Church to help. I was organising a 4x4 to help get people out. I asked for the Fire Brigade to come and rescue an elderly couple. One resident collapsed with a heart attack and died. I couldn’t get the emergency services to come in and help.

This needs to be resolved.

I asked for a leaflet to be provided and laminated so residents would know how to contact the relevant services and officers. Vehicles were left outside and without warnings were left in the wrong place and couldn’t be moved. The River Taff was swelling 800 cubic metres per second.

I’ll be supporting the call for an Independent Inquiry. This local authority has done nothing to protect the bridge which is our heritage.

I opened the Community Centre in Trallwn with little support from the local authority, initially until the end of the week, we used it for three and a half weeks supplying food to Pentre and the Rhondda ward. I note that Ynysybwl have not been included on the list today. Our communities helped each other.”

Councillor S Powderhill (Treforest Ward)

“Treforest had three different types of flooding. Officers were amazing and the culverts were cleared quickly. The blocking of the Castle Inn Bridge was caused by debris and objects and caused the flooding in Cardiff Road. Niagra Street and surrounding streets were flooded up to the first floor of the properties.

Our Officers were amazing, this was a National disaster. I knew where to go and what to do from day one. I set up the Community Centre that morning and there were many other councillors like me. These were unprecedented times.

How can we alleviate the flooding to Niagra Street, Egypt Street, Nile Street? If we build up the flood walls it will push the problem to Rhydyfelin and Hawthorn.

I look forward to the section 19 report. I thank the community, they are angry but all things in place we did an amazing job.”

Councillor E Webster (Treorchy Ward)

“There was major flooding in Column Street because the culvert failed and debris from the water course. This may be a case for litigation. The culvert isn’t suitable for the volume of water, there are serious problems and we are looking to get an additional backup system to give residents confidence.

There was flooding from Dumfries Street up to the main street to Stag Square, residents were unblocking one of the culverts.

I would like to thank Owen Griffiths for looking at measures on the mountainside so in future less water will come down into the system.

Swn-Yr-Afon – The river wall eroded and a sink hole opened up and took the ground away. Natural Resources Wales are denying it and no one is taking responsibility for the failing, meanwhile the hole is getting bigger.

High Street – This has been flooded three times and after the flash flooding Welsh Water assessed the pump house which functioned perfectly but that RCT drainage system couldn't cope as the drainage system blocked further up.

No one has accepted responsibility and residents need to know what needs to be done.

There are private individuals who have land on the mountainside and often lanes aren't adopted but the council won't take responsibility. I have cleared drains myself but responsibility needs to be taken for these assets.

The members Services line is great but isn't effective under these circumstances. Is the line fit for purpose?"

Councillor W Jones (Treherbert)

"We didn't experience anything like everyone else but the response from the Council was very quick. I have issues with NRW. We live at the top of the valley. The river wall is in terrible condition and the force of the water pulled the trees and rubble away and took it down the valley. I hope NRW will take responsibility."