



To: Cllr Andrew Morgan – Leader of the Council
Mr Chris Bradshaw – Chief Executive

Date: 10th December 2020

Dear Cllr Morgan & Chris

RE: SCRUTINY OF FLOODING IN RCT DURING 2020

I have been requested by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee to present the comments and emerging themes arising from the committee's considerations of the Council's response to flooding in Rhondda Cynon Taf in early 2020. In doing so, I have also been requested to present the evidence and information considered from local members, through a scrutiny inquiry session and the written submissions received, inform the findings of the Interval review in advance of Cabinet considerations later this month.

The Chair has asked me to convey his thanks for providing this opportunity to local members and scrutiny to contribute to this review and for the time provided by Officers of the Council to this scrutiny process.

A majority of scrutiny members have acknowledged a number of 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.

A majority of committee members have acknowledged the following key areas arising from the submissions from local Elected Members:

- **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 Wales' long-term response to Climate Change? – Are public bodies 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 response to be effective and efficient.

Through the scrutiny process, evidence from partners has acknowledged the pressure placed upon the response of public agencies and emergency services as 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.

Members of the committee have also asked for me to formally convey their wish to scrutinise and comment upon the Section 19 statutory report and upon the ongoing work that the Council is undertaking into the February Floods as the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) under the Flood and Water Management Act 2010.

When determining to submit this information some members requested the opportunity to clarify their comments as recorded in the attached. The amendments received to date have been reflected in the attached evidence.

Christian Hanagan

Service Director – Democratic Services & Communication – On behalf of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee

CC: Cllr Mark Adams – Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Cllr Wendy Lewis – Vice Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee

WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS RECEIVED FROM:-

1. ABERAMAN SOUTH (Cllr T Williams)
2. ABERDARE EAST (Cllrs S Bradwick & M. Forey)
3. ABERCYNON (Cllrs R. Lewis & E George)
4. CYMMER (Cllr G. Caple)
5. GRAIG (Cllr J Brencher)
6. LABOUR GROUP
7. MOUNTAIN ASH WEST (Cllrs A Morgan & W. Treeby)
8. PLAID CYMRU GROUP
9. RHONDDA (Cllr E. Griffiths)
10. RHYDYFELIN CENTRAL/ILAN WARD (Cllr M Webber)
11. TAFFS WELL (Cllr J Bonetto)
12. TREFOREST (Cllr S Powderhill)

The following two written submissions were received following the Overview & Scrutiny Committee (09.12.20)

13. YNYSHIR (Cllr J Edwards)
14. YNYSYBWL (Cllr S Pickering)

ABERAMAN SOUTH

On 15th February, 2020 an amber weather warning was in place that was later upgraded to a red warning by the UK Met Office, meaning “danger to life”. The local authority of Rhondda Cynon Taf saw unprecedented levels of rainfall due to Storm Dennis, with over 1,000 properties being internally flooded. It was nothing short of a natural disaster, which I hope never occurs again in my lifetime.

In the days preceding Storm Dennis, I undertook pre-storm visits in Aberaman South to check flood risk assets were clear from blockage. Such as, the river adjacent to ‘Glynhafod Club’ which caused flooding approximately 30 years ago. However, it has received significant funding since I was elected as the local member – Nevertheless, it gives me peace of mind knowing they have been inspected by council staff prior to the onset of the severe weather. When I checked these locations there were no issues to report before 10pm.

Unfortunately, I was alerted to the possibility of flooding by local residents within Aberaman South a few hours later. So, I immediately informed the call centre to request sand bags once again to protect their properties. But, I found it difficult to get them despite only waiting around 4 minutes for someone to answer my phone call initially – it became increasingly more difficult afterwards due to the number of calls being made to the call centre. At 3am, I received another phone call with the heart-breaking news that many properties in Bronallt Terrace, Abercwmboi had been internally flooded. Also, their garages (located at the rear) had an ingress of water because of a substantial blockage to the culvert line on phurnacite land. Soon after this fire engines arrived to provide assistance, the council also attended but at this point it was little they could do.

A few days later, I was contacted by Sian Evans from the local authority’s Community Development team to provide assistance following Storm Dennis. On 20th February, 2020 she hosted an advice day alongside myself in Cap Coch Community Centre, Abercwmboi for flood victims within the electoral ward. It was evident from the advice day, support was required to help remove household items damaged during Storm Dennis such as carpets, flooring etc. Therefore, I co-ordinated a “clean-up” with the secretary of Abercwmboi FC, Steve Goodfellow with containers being provided by RCT Council. In addition, I organised a Citizen’s Advice van to help the local residents fill out flood funding applications.

Sian Evans, and myself worked closely together for weeks afterwards to ensure everyone got as much support as possible. But, I must say, the community spirit after such a traumatic experience was fantastic to witness.

The highways depot carried out remedial works in Mostyn Street, Abercwmboi with a new manhole being constructed to improve accessibility. Furthermore, over 100 tonnes of material was removed from the river bed near ‘Glynhafod Club’ – it included a large tree, which was stuck underneath the bridge due to Storm Dennis.

Lessons Learnt

I firmly believe, the local authority have taken a proactive approach since Storm Dennis occurred. For example, a few weeks ago sand bags were distributed in Bronallt Terrace, Abercwmboi following a yellow weather warning being issued. Moreover, I was pleased to hear RCT Council had four bids pending/approved to

upgrade flood defences in Aberaman South. The Welsh Government funded scheme will hopefully be delivered shortly.

Since Storm Dennis, I have managed to accelerate the remedial works required by the Coal Authority in collaboration with RCT Council, MP Beth Winter and MS Vikki Howells. The removal of silt has been ongoing for a few weeks, and it will cost approximately £130,000 in total. Also, they have provided industrial pumps within phurnacite land for inclement weather conditions whilst remedial works are being undertaken.

In conclusion, it appears the internal flooding to properties which occurred was unavoidable due to the amount of rain that fell in such a short amount of time. The sheer volume of water overpowered our highway drainage systems in Bronallt Terrace, Abercwmboi – even though it was upgraded twice, prior to Storm Dennis. However, I want to reassure the constituents of Aberaman South they have my full backing as local councillor to see further improvement works carried out to stop debris off the mountain washing down and blocking the culvert. Moreover, I will continue to fight their corner whenever possible to prevent future flooding events from happening.

Lastly, I just want to thank the Council Leader, Cllr Andrew Morgan for his continued support, during storm Dennis and since, also my thanks to all members of staff. From highway operatives to call centre workers.

Councillor T Williams

Aberaman South Ward Councillor

ABERDARE EAST

This is our response to the flooding that accrued in Aberdare East ward in the Cynon Valley

We will start with Gloucester St, a number of houses were flooded here, mostly the bottom end.

It was caused by the stream that runs at the back of the houses, Cllr Forey and myself along with residents would like to know how this stream flooded, yes, some parts of the stream run between residents' gardens, but it is mainly looked after by the council

This stream runs into the main river near the railway station

Cllr Bradwick was made aware of the flooding by residents while he was out seeing what was happening in the ward not council, he then made contact with the council and council staff did attend with sand bags

Our other concern is the stream that starts on the Mardey Mountain then flows into the ward of Aberaman North, in Maesyffynon Lane, this culvert is on both sides of each ward, we have both over many years have had concerns on this, many calls and emails have been sent regarding this

At the time of the flooding a few houses at the bottom of Wind St as you drive up Maesyffynon Lane were flooded, along with many houses in Cardiff Road, this is not the first time these houses have been flooded, we have lost count.

The problem what we have been told by residents is this stream goes under ground and into the river, but the outlet of this stream is well below the river level, so when the river floods the water backs up as it cannot get to the river

We have been told the flooded, culvert under the road was blocked, so what is going to be put in place to stop this happening again

Again Cllr Bradwick was informed by residents of their flooding, and he made calls and emails to the council, plus sandbags were supplied

We will leave it at this but are more than happy to attend any meetings over the flooding in Aberdare East Ward, and are willing to talk to officers

We both understand, that these floods were like once in a lifetime, but for residents it was total heart breaking

We would like to know what has been done and what will be done to resolve the problems

Just to say, Cllr Bradwick had just come out of hospital after major surgery on his shoulder, yet was hands on with residents

Aberdare East Ward Councillors

Councillors Steve Bradwick and Cllr Mike Forey

ABERCYNON

We write with reference to the flooding that occurred in our ward during Storm Dennis earlier this year.

We fully appreciate that Storm Dennis was an extreme weather event that caused damage across the whole of the County Borough of Rhondda Cynon Taf. That being said, we would like to raise the plight of the residents in Abercynon Ward who had their properties flooded and had to move out for a long period of time. Many of them lost household belongings and personal items of great value.

Three principle areas in Abercynon Ward were affected by flooding as a result of high river levels and culverts that overflowed. These areas have experienced flooding on a number of occasions over the past ten to fifteen years. As one would expect, residents would like the Council to explore measures to prevent flooding in the future.

I will take each area of flooding in turn.

Wood Road

- Flooding occurred when a culvert burst at the top end of the street. This has occurred a number of times in the past ten to fifteen years following heavy rainfall.
- Flood water overwhelmed flood prevention measures that were installed within the past five years.
- The flood water reached a very high level due to the street laying in a 'basin' and the high railway embankment prevents water from flowing or draining away.
- A large water tank to the rear of the properties designed to take floodwater was empty during the storm.
- We ask that officers assess the condition of the culvert with a view to increasing its capacity to take more water. We also ask that Council officers explore the effectiveness of the flood prevention measures that were installed in the past five years.

The top of Nant y Fedw

- Flooding occurred due to an overflowing a culvert that takes the stream from above the road under Nant y Fedw housing estate.
- House No. 263 Abercynon Road was flooded due to the overflowing of a culvert and high water levels in the stream on and adjacent to the property's land. Residents have reported that a device designed to sound when flooding was imminent, did not function.
- Water flowed at a high speed and volume down footpaths at a lower level.
- The force of the water was such that residents had to smash down a wall in order to allow water to flow away.
- The floodwater overwhelmed flood prevention measures installed in the past five years.

- Properties at this location have been flooded on a number of occasions in recent years during heavy rainfall.
- We ask that officers investigate the condition of the the culvert with a view to increasing its capacity and also the effectiveness of the flood prevention measures that have been installed in recent years.

River Row

- Flooding occurred due to high river levels overtopping the river bank.
- This was compounded by the overflowing of the stream adjacent to the Park Road Path.
- Water pools in a number of locations in the street due to the poor road surface that is not aligned with drains. We ask that this is resolved by the resurfacing of the street.
- We ask that officers look at what improvements can be made to river bank flood defences working with Natural Resources Wales and also, working with Transport for Wales officers, seek to increase water capacity on the stream water course.

We know that Council Officers have been extremely stretched during 2020 due to Storm Dennis and the global Covid-19 Pandemic. We kindly ask that officers look at the matters raised in this letter to assess whether additional capital monies from the Welsh Government could be used to improve flood defences.

We would be very grateful if you and Council officers could look at the contents of the letter setting out the concerns of residents in our ward at what is an extremely uncertain and unprecedented time.

Abercynon Ward Councillors

Cllr Rhys Lewis

Cllr Elaine George

CYMMER (Written submission & Photographs)

1. WW admit that alarms in Trehafod and Britannia pumping stations sounded around 2 a.m. on the morning of 16th February, which alerted WW that there were operational problems at both pumping stations as the flood water increased.

2. Both Pumping Stations were visited, by an employee of WW, at around 7 - 7:30 a.m. on the morning of Sunday, 16th February. During the visits, the flood waters, in Trehafod and Britannia, drained away very quickly as the pumps were brought into action. Unfortunately, during the Intervening period between 2 a.m. and 7:30 a.m., over 40 homes were flooded in Trehafod and around 30 homes in Britannia.

3. In a Trehafod Flood Action Group liaison meeting held on Friday, 13th March, at the Heritage Park Hotel, WW suggested that, in Trehafod, RCT maintained highways drains were blocked, thus preventing floodwater flowing into the appropriate drainage network in order to be pumped away. They confirmed that these highways drains were unblocked between Storm Dennis and Storm Jorge.

Furthermore, in a telephone meeting between Chris Bryant M.P. and WW, held on Friday, 24th April, WW suggested that a culvert overflowed and contributed towards the flooding in Britannia, together with the collapse of the river wall. (I am informed by residents that the homes were flooded before the river wall collapsed. It was the force of the floodwater re-entering the river that caused the weakened river wall to collapse.) Furthermore, WW seems to suggest that RCT Council may not have maintained the culvert, which overflowed, thus contributing to the flooding.

WW also suggest that the river wall at Britannia should be reconstructed as a flood defence, even though the pumping station at Britannia is only around 10 years old and was built on the site of the old Lodge Public House (Britannia Hotel) in order to prevent a history of flooding at this location. As far as I am aware, there were no plans to install flood defences along the river banks.

As in the case of Trehafod, I am informed that floodwaters came through the drainage system and toilets and passed sewage into the properties.

4. WW has admitted that the capacity and power of the pumps in Trehafod may have to be increased, presumably due to the age of the pumping station equipment.

The other pumper station in Trehafod, based at Hafod Primary School, seemed to work effectively and prevented flooding in nearby streets, such as, Lewis St., Wayne St., etc., despite the unprecedented volume of water, at this location, which did not hydraulically overload the network and did not overwhelm the pumping station. (I know that Chris Bryant M.P. would be familiar with the pumping station at Hafod Primary, as he was involved in resolving potential flooding by enhancing and improving capacity, around 18 years ago, together with Yvonne Caple, who was a RCT Councillor at the time).

However, Britannia pumping station is a relatively modern construction, being around 10 years old. I believe that there has been no flooding at this location during this time.

5. A financial hardship payment, as a "gesture of goodwill", was given to residents of Trehafod, by WW, as an emergency payment of £1,000 ".....to enable you (the residents) to deal with the immediate aftermath of the flooding incident". Also, a GSS (Guaranteed Standard of Service) payment of approximately £200 was made by

cheque, equivalent to the annual sewerage bill. Furthermore, for those without home insurance, WW offered claims for property/internal damage using WW's insurers Willis.

Therefore, by implication a similar "goodwill gesture" should be made available to the residents of Britannia, as the circumstances are the same. After the Trehafod Flood Action Group meeting with WW, held on 13th March, I asked Steve Wilson if he would give due consideration to a similar compensation scheme for those residents of Britannia, whose homes were similarly devastated by flooding, as a result of Storm Dennis, and he kindly agreed to do so.

6. Also, In his correspondence to residents of Trehafod, Steve Wilson, Director of Wastewater Services, in his opening paragraphs, commented as follows, viz., "We are aware that parts of Trehafod suffered extensive and devastating flooding last weekend as a result of Storm Dennis.

We appreciate the heartbreak caused by this flooding, and while our investigations and monitoring system show the flooding was not caused by the local pumping station and that the station continued to operate as designed, the pumping station was simply overwhelmed by the unprecedented volume of water caused by the storm.

At no point was the pumping station switched off. Some customers noticed a Welsh Water technician visiting the station on 16th February. This visit was triggered by the pumping station alarm indicating that storm water levels were increasing.....

Our investigations show that the flooding was caused by the extreme weather hydraulically overloading the network which was simply unable to cope. It was not caused by the failure of the pumping station. While we do not accept liability and responsibility for the incident, we know the financial hardship caused by such incidents and this is why we are taking the steps.....to make things easier for you.... We will work with you and the local authority over the next few weeks and months to help restore your homes.....".

Surely, these well-meaning sentiments, agreeing to a compensation package for Trehafod, apply equally to residents of Britannia, and yet no compensation scheme or assistance has been forthcoming, in order to alleviate the financial hardship of residents in Britannia affected by flooding.

I believe that both WW and NRW are abrogating their responsibilities and abandoning the residents of Britannia, leaving RCT Council to consider repairing, enhancing and modernising the river walls and flood defences.

During Storm Dennis the river walls, including some of the gardens, between 5 & 8 Eirw Rd., were washed away, completely or partially (see attached photographs).

No. 8 Eirw Rd was eligible for a Flood Recovery Grant of £500, as flood water entered the house.

However, in the case of No. 7, for example, the resident was not eligible for £500 as no flood water entered the house, even though the river wall and garden has been washed away. Is there any discretion, under the regulations, to pay the Flood

Recovery Grant in such circumstances, due to the significant damage incurred to the property?

Furthermore NRW has stated that the walls were not flood defences but river/training walls, therefore the responsibility of the riparian land owner. The insurance companies have also stated that they will not bear the costs of repair to the river wall as they are regarded as flood defences.

A "catch 22" situation indeed.

I shall be obliged if, in due course, you will consider these circumstances and, perhaps, provide advice in relation to eligibility for an Emergency Assistance Payment Grant from Welsh Government, a Community Recovery Grant or Council Tax exemptions.

Councillor G Caple

Cymmer Ward Councillor









Jayne Brencher
The Graig Ward

Whilst residential properties in my ward were mainly unaffected by the extreme rainfall and flooding that occurred in Pontypridd in February, there has undoubtedly been a negative economic and social impact on the town, including businesses in the High Street area. Overnight the town became inaccessible and severe flooding in Taff St and Mill St impacted on all the town's businesses. During the night, we monitored the situation closely but I visited the next morning with Alex Davies-Jones MP after flood water lowered in Taff St. Speaking to various businesses across the town, it was clear that the destruction was overwhelming and a deep despondency of the town's future was expressed.

The loss of the pedestrian access into the Park via the Marks and Spencer bridge was also deeply felt. However, within hours a clean-up operation began by business owners and volunteers, supported by RCT staff and a strong community response became evident.

The role of GTFM as a means of communicating information and organisations such as the Town Council - itself severely impacted - became evident, but most importantly the enormous response of local residents and businesses which was to become an important factor over the coming days. RCT staff were able to focus on responding to extreme immediate emergency call outs and supported local efforts. This role strengthened as the days passed and RCT worked closely with local groups to establish a more co-ordinated support network.

Of prime concern, however, was the situation in households directly affected in the town area such as Sion St and Berw Rd immediately bordering the town.

All local members in the wider Pontypridd area co-ordinated efforts and the Treforest and Trallwn Community Centres established themselves quickly as centres for flooded residents and over the following days they provided a critical support network.

Local churches and volunteers must also be commended for their huge efforts over the following weeks. Hot meals were provided by Coedpenmaen Baptist Church and other local churches in addition to support from the Mormon church which was celebrated later.

Donations came from across the UK and clothing became such an issue that through social media we were able to establish the need for cleaning items (humidifiers etc.) to focus donations. The health and safety aspects of cleaning properties were quickly highlighted and RCT officers were able to offer advice.

The presence of a lady from Save the Children fund helped in the disaster relief operation and local volunteers should be commended for their professional approach supporting our officers and staff.

Once personal well-being and alternative accommodation for those effected was established and all residents checked by local members and RCT staff, issues emerged relating to insurance and volunteer solicitor William Watkins attended the Trallwn Centre on behalf of Capital Law to give free advice on insurance issues. RCT mobile library also visited to offer advice to residents and at Trallwn we set up Citizens Advice - and they, with RCT officers, were able to navigate those affected through the grant processes and other post flooding challenges.

It is notable that all local members worked closely together and regular meetings with RCT officers were established at the centre until officers were able to move the remaining donations and allowed the centres to continue their normal functions. The outcomes were that, as a result of this extraordinary response, affected families were not only receiving practical support but were really moved and warmed by the responses from within the town and beyond.

This community spirit was again evident with the Covid 19 volunteer groups that sprang up across the area and there is growing confidence in the community that the town is resilient enough to cope with anything!

Lessons learned

- The vital need for quick response coordination which would include the Pontypridd Town Council and community centres and local volunteer groups-a contact network and emergency response strategy constantly updated with key partners.
- Communications with volunteers etc through local media and social media coordination to avoid misinformation and data security –names and addresses of those needing support were sometimes shared openly.



Date: 12th November 2020

RE: RCT Labour Group's Response to Storm Dennis

We are writing to you to provide an overview of some of the RCT Labour Group Member's experiences and feedback on the truly devastating weather events in mid-February, which not only saw residents and businesses affected by flooding on an unprecedented scale, but also saw a significant amount of the Council's own infrastructure sustaining damage, including highways, river walls, culverts and bridges. This was, of course, exacerbated by the landslip at Llanwonno/Tylorstown, which saw 60,000 tonnes of material fall away from the mountainside, thankfully at no loss of life.

With almost 1,500 of our residents and businesses affected, Storm Dennis brought the worst flooding episode that Rhondda Cynon Taf has ever witnessed, and this was also the case in a number of communities spread across England and Wales. The weather event has since been classified as a 1-in-290 year event that brought a month's worth of rain in just 48 hours, with 160mm of rain falling in Maerdy between midday on the Friday and Sunday, 16th February – this was the highest level recorded in Wales and was closely followed by recordings in Hirwaun. The scale of the event prompted the Met Office to issue the highest level (Red) weather warning which poses a severe risk to life and prompted a major incident to be declared in RCT by the emergency services. This was clearly an extraordinary weather event.

It is evident from the initial investigations that the causes of the flooding were complex and multifaceted, with pluvial flooding prevalent in a number of communities in the northern areas of the County, and river flooding the primary cause in more southern areas. The two are, however, inexorably linked, with the significant rainfall further up the valleys driving the three rivers situated in the County to record their highest levels for a generation – including the River Taff, which broke a 40 year record by 80cm in reaching a level of over 5m.

With regards to the Council's response on the night, crews did largely attend the vast majority of calls, with some responses (particularly during the early parts of the night) particularly swift and others many hours later, although we fully recognise that this was due to the sheer volume of calls being received from across the entire County. Several main artery roads were rendered impassable due to deep flood water, which also hampered crews in getting to some locations. Furthermore, in some instances, the severity of the flooding was so great that Council staff could do very little even when they did attend. Some Members have relayed that even with Council

staff and emergency services attending the scene and pumping water, the volume of rainfall was so great that the actions had little to no effect.

The consensus amongst Members of this Group is that whilst the Council did take the necessary steps to prepare for the weather event by sourcing additional Highways and Call Centre staff, as well as additional plant and machinery via external contractors, the intensity of the weather event and their widespread nature created challenging circumstances for the Council and emergency services.

It is our view that, given the severity and the scale of the damage and destruction caused by Storm Dennis, that the Council's response in the aftermath of the event was timely, effective and concentrated the help and support it provided in the right areas. Through the establishment of the Major Incident Recovery Board, the £1.5m released from the general reserves and the further £500,000 were able to be allocated to supporting priority individuals and households via initiatives such as the Community Flood Recovery Grant – Hardship Payment and four weeks of free school meals; small and medium-sized businesses through the £1,000 payments and the provision of skips to those internally flooded; and emergency infrastructure assessments and works. We would also like to recognise the hard work of Council staff and Officers in assisting those who had been affected both on the night and over the course of the following weeks and months.

It is widely accepted that the increasing impact of climate change is likely to mean that we experience more severe weather events more often. It is important that the Council now focuses on potential courses of action that can be taken forward to mitigate the risks of such devastating flooding occurring again in the future – both in preparedness for such events through the further development of a comprehensive programme of flood defence works (which we note to already be ongoing), and also in terms of responding to major instances of flooding.

To conclude, while the Council took the necessary steps to prepare in advance for the impact of Storm Dennis, this was clearly an event that none of us have ever experienced previously and it is vital that – in light of the factors outlined above – the necessary lessons are learned to inform the future planning and response. We would welcome the Council bringing forward a detailed plan of investment over the next 3-5 years in addressing these key flooding areas within the Council's responsibility; but also progressing discussions with both NRW and the Welsh Government about wider river flood protection assets. The Council needs to use this as an opportunity to review all of its functions and responses to such a major event.

Submitted on behalf of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Labour Group

13th November 2020

RE: Local Submission from the Councillors for Mountain Ash West

We are writing jointly to share our local experience during the unprecedented flooding events caused by Storm Dennis on the weekend of Saturday, 15th and Sunday, 16th February.

We were first made aware of flooding issues in the Glenboi area at around 10:15pm – due to the horrendous weather and torrential rain. At this point, we experienced no issue in getting through to the Council's call centre and reporting the incident, which was promptly attended by the Council's Highways crews. We also made a 999 call to the South Wales Fire and Rescue service responded to to assist in pumping water.

Despite Highways Officers checking the pumping station at the location, which was working at maximum capacity, and the Fire Engines in attendance pumping the water with 2 appliances, the water levels continued to quickly rise due to the sheer volume of the rainfall. At around midnight, Emergency Planning Officers were contacted as we became aware of further issues of flooding arising in other locations across Mountain Ash and evacuations were needed.

By the early hours of the morning, the situation had sadly deteriorated further, with significant flooding of some key routes in and around Mountain Ash, including the town centre and Miskin Road, as well as a section of the major A4059 route, meaning it was almost impossible to get in or out of Mountain Ash by the early morning.

In all of the local cases of flooding that we reported, the Council's crews did attend, albeit in some cases it was many hours later due to the sheer volume of calls that were being received on a County-wide basis. Furthermore, the flooding was so severe in some instances that there was little that staff could do even when they did attend.

In the days following the flooding, we had a number of site visits with Council Officers and Natural Resources Wales, and we are pleased to see that progress is being made in carrying out some of the repairs and improvement works. Whilst work is only being carried out at a few sites so far, we are aware that investigations and design works at many other sites across RCT are ongoing and will need to be prioritised as part of the Council-wide programme.

In both of our experiences, it was certainly the worst flooding episode in Mountain Ash that either of us can recall. We both share the view that we were able to contact the Council until around midnight to report issues and Officers responded as well as they possibly could, especially before the situation drastically turned for the worse across the County at around 12am-1am as the storm intensified.

In terms of the recovery, the use of the library bus supported by CAB was something that was well received by residents as a point for information. Residents clearly remain anxious whenever there is bad weather so the Council needs to lay out a programme of flood alleviation works for the next 2 to 3 years.

Yours sincerely,

Councillor Andrew Morgan
Councillor Wendy Treeby

Mountain Ash West

November 2020

Plaid Cymru Group Submission to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee relating to the Floods

Unprecedented. Devastating. Traumatizing.

Those are the three most often used words in relation to the floods that hit so many communities across RCT this year. And we weren't the only communities affected, with similar scenes being seen across the country.

All Councils affected have been overwhelmed, and it has been estimated that at least £500m more is needed in the next decade if Wales is to avoid significant flooding.

Unfortunately, though for those communities affected, many of the questions they have remain unanswered nine months on, with some suffering further floods as recently as August. Every time there is now heavy rainfall, people are naturally anxious. Nothing done to date has alleviated their fears.

A number of reports have either been published or are pending, but it is clear that they are limited in scope and are conducted by the organisations themselves rather than by an external agency. We believe, as do thousands of residents, that there must be an independent inquiry to bring together all those reports, scrutinise them and bring together the evidence and experiences of residents and businesses. It is the only way that we can secure the answers and justice for the residents and businesses affected.

At the recent meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 9 November 2020, we were limited to a maximum of 5 minutes to present our views. It should be noted this was the only time we have been asked for our evidence, though we have asked for the opportunity to do so a number of times since February. This is not sufficient if the Council is serious about learning lessons from its response to the floods, to help inform future investment as well as response in an emergency situation.

Why should there be an inquiry?

Limitations of Section 19 reports

The reports referenced in section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act do not differentiate between a major incident of flooding and more localised flooding. We believe this to be inadequate in light of the severity of the flooding that occurred in RCT this year.

In effect, the act also asks Councils to investigate themselves as part of the process, something which is surprising given the important role Local Authorities also play in flood prevention.

Businesses and residents affected do not have any opportunity to input their own experiences as part of this process and submit evidence. Again, given the scale of what occurred, this means that all reports published or are pending are limited in what they will reveal. Video footage and photographs would greatly help

investigators to better understand what happened in each of the locations affected, as the reasons differ widely and include potential lack of maintenance of drains and flood defences, failed pumps, trees been cut from mountainsides and debris left in rivers and much much more. The only way we can plan to prevent flooding in the future is by understanding what happened. Only an independent inquiry will be able to achieve this, by taking a holistic overview of what took place and why, and also, if anything could have been done differently that would have prevented homes and businesses from being affected to the extent they were. It would also help us understand the Council's preparedness for floods, as well as response to the floods this year and help us learn lessons for the future.

Climate Emergency

In 2019, the Welsh Government declared a climate emergency. The Future Trends report, published in 2018, predicted that by 2030 the predicted potential impacts on Wales include flooding, coastal changes, drought, shortages of water, risks to health and wellbeing from high temperatures, and risks to nature.

An independent inquiry would help us understand the role the changes to the climate played in the flooding and determine what actions we need to take now – rather than in years to come – in response to climate change. It would also help determine how we should best invest to prevent flooding. RCT Council are taking some steps to try and prevent some further flooding but these are sticky plaster solutions rather than permanent ones. We need a plan that takes into account both the whole of RCT, and arguably the whole of Wales if we are serious in responding to the Climate Emergency.

Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015

We are fortunate to have in place in Wales the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, meaning that all public bodies – including Local Authorities and Natural Resources Wales – must embed the act in all that they do. Obviously, the 2010 act does not take this into account, and therefore is focused on finding out what happened in a local area at a point in time rather than also being focused on future outcomes. An independent inquiry would need to apply the principles of the act to their work, making it a much more worthwhile and insightful process than simply a Section 19 report.

Impact on physical and mental health

An independent inquiry needs to include looking at the impact the floods have had on the health and wellbeing of residents affected, both children and adults. The Section 19 report looks at the material elements, eg, if pumps drained properly but it does not in any way look at the human side of the impact. As local Councillors representing areas affected, we have seen with our own eyes the toll the floods have had on the physical and mental health of children and adults. There is a long-term impact that needs to be considered, and none of this is being looked into at present.

Impact to the local economy

Many of those affected had been costed out of insurance or did not have cover for flood damage. This has had a huge financial impact on them, and also means they are either not able to secure insurance for the future or are facing extremely high premiums. We must look at how we can support businesses and residents in these areas, so that if the worse happens again in the future, they are protected.

Many businesses that were flooded are also lacking confidence in the way the reasons for the floods are being addressed, and are now considering re-locating to an area where there is a lower risk of floods. Given the importance of businesses as employers, especially in an area such as the Treforest Industrial Estate, it would be a huge blow to an area that already has high unemployment and high dependency on food banks. This would further increase child poverty in the area.

Conclusion

Whilst it is intended that our five minute presentations will feed into the Section 19 report, given the limitations of what we could present in such a short time and that no in-depth evidence has been sought from us nor the residents and businesses affected, it is clear that the report will not be able to take into account the many issues that the local communities have raised. It will mainly relate to technical matters and will be limited in being able to help us understand how the Council responded, and the lessons that we need to learn. Hence the need for an independent inquiry.

The precedence for commissioning an Independent Investigation was made in the first National Assembly for Wales in 2000.

The Environment, Planning and Transport Committee under the Chairmanship of Richard Edwards AM commissioned an Independent report to LEARN any relevant lessons and INFORM future policy on waste disposal in Wales. This is known as the Purchon Report on the Nant Y Gwyddon Landfill Site dated 12th December 2001.¹

Like flooding there was a regulatory framework covering waste disposal but it did not stop that committee with the full support of Sue Essex AM - the then Government Minister who had portfolio responsibility - from supporting an independent Investigation to learn the lessons and drive forward policy in Wales

The terms of reference were set by the Committee in consultation with the Minister and used as headings to format the final published report. The infamous Tip was operating throughout the investigation but closed following the publication of a very damning report. Many agencies regulating the hazardous waste at a national and local level were held to account in the final report, as was RCT and its predecessor Council. The Environment Agency, Audit Commission, Wales Office and National Assembly also had questions to answer.

1

<https://senedd.wales/Committee%20Documents/Independent%20Investigation.%20Nantygwyddon%20Landfill%20Site.%20Investigator's%20Report-12122001-29740/3c1086e5000c772400005cdd00000000-English.pdf>

There is a striking comment highlighted in the report in relation to information being withheld by public bodies who relied on “commercial confidentiality” to defend their position.

“When seeking to investigate matters of great public interest, where virtually all the business concerns public money and where the risks, financial, health and environmental, fall on the public, and its purse, lack of transparency is unsatisfactory”.

The report also says,

“ The procedure was entirely new and required a degree of innovation, tolerance, flexibility, patience and good will from all those involved “ and also “ The search for facts, relevant data and opinion is never easy and in the UK we are not used to non-adversarial governance or inquiry procedures. The National Assembly for Wales has sought to conduct an entirely open investigation and I feel honoured to be part of that approach in the early days of the Assembly’s history. “

We hope that this brief reminder of the innovative way that the first Assembly, in its infancy some two decades ago, dealt with a very high profile environmental disaster in the Rhondda will persuade the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Cabinet to use all its influence to support an independent inquiry.

We have nothing to lose, but everything to gain if we allow for proper scrutiny of the floods and our preparedness and response. Those affected must be given the opportunity to have their say, and receive the answers they deserve about why the flooding occurred. This will help us better understand how to prevent flooding in the future, as far as is possible, and inform where investment is needed. It will also help inform how best to support the children, adults and businesses affected in a cohesive and joined up way as well.

Importantly and crucially, it would help us as a Council to understand if we could have done anything differently, before, during and after the floods. None of the reports currently underway or published will provide that honest and frank assessment which is essential if we are serious about learning lessons for the future.

Appendix A:

Evidence sent to Cllr Heledd Fychan from affected residents and businesses, and why they believe an independent inquiry is essential, as part of the campaign for an Independent Inquiry.

"I've been left with bronchitis since the floods. I'm still on antibiotics and steroids I'm not well at all they wanted me to go into hospital yesterday but I said I can't because my son is gonna uni on Monday and I've got two other children. Now we are in lock down I'm not good with my mental health either"

"I honestly feel like this experience has pushed me to the brink. It's been one of the worst things I've ever experienced and still affects me every day in some way. Even filling in this survey and thinking back to it all I've cried. I had 6 weeks off work with stress, I can't sleep or relax when it's raining badly. I don't know if I'll ever be the same again, I've spoken to many neighbours who all agree it's like we have PTSD. The mental and emotional stress of the whole situation has absolutely shocked me, I've always regarded myself as a very strong person but this almost broke me. Waking up at 5am to the sound of running water and going downstairs to dirty water pouring in your house and looking out the window to see a literal river raging past your house and taking cars with it, with absolutely no warning at all, it makes me sick to my stomach thinking about it even now. How are we ever supposed to relax in our homes again when there's bad weather? We can't trust NRW or RCT for that matter. My sense of safety in my home has been robbed from me and my family. We've been moved into an unfurnished flat in a strange area and then we went into lockdown as well, we literally have a bed and a tv because we lost everything else and then with lockdown getting furniture was practically impossible. Then on top of all that stress we have the stress of trying to rebuild our houses and lives, deal with insurance companies who are basically soulless monsters in some cases, source 2 new cars. If I ever had to go through this again... well, I don't think I could. I'd be in a psychiatric hospital. They need to protect us before they take more of us and more from us than they already have, we can't survive another instance like this."

"I'm disabled the help we received we zero we had to do all the work ourselves."

"I feel extremely let down by authorities, we have been forgotten about and no one wants to own up to their part in what has happened. The council think that by giving some money it will go away and welsh water/natural resources won't take won't accept liability, and I as the innocent party am now paying the price, I have had no help off anyone because I've had insurance which is unfair as I've done the correct thing. I have lived in Treforest for nearly 12 years and loved it up until that night, I no longer wish to live in the area if no one can help prevent this from happening again but will not be able to sell now and am stuck there."

"Our eldest daughter (20) has been diagnosed with PTSD as a result of the flood. She is on medication, receiving counselling and although she tried, she has been unable to return to work and as a result has had to leave her post with BT. Her wellbeing is very much our focus. We cannot believe that we have never had that much rain before, there must be a more rational explanation . Someone is

responsible, we are desperately worried that this may happen again. We need reassurance that steps will be taken to prevent another disaster. Anxiety levels are high every time it rains."

"In some respects The lack of support from the local authorities as far as they are concerned we have insurance so that's our problem bear in mind many insurance companies have got out paying out or underpaying. The lack of any report, any sign of prevention, even just answering our questions or having a meeting. I have to reassure my wife and young children it won't happen again and I honestly cannot tell them that it won't. Also I would really want to know why major funding campaigns were set up separately rather jointly as we are all RCT and we were all affected."

"We needed advice on what to do to the house (in absence of insurance company guidance). This advice was very difficult to get despite contacting RCT many times. They responded once our local councillor expedited our request. We are now very anxious each time it rains. We need answers to whether this was a natural event or whether there is blame. If there is blame, then we will hopefully rest easier during future rain storms as we would live in hope that lessons would have been learnt."

"We had a lot of presence from council, dwr cymru and NRW etc in Treforest immediately following the flood. Almost 6 months on much of the discussion seems to focus further up the valley and Treforest residents and effect in Treforest (not Pontypridd Town or Pentre) is largely forgotten. We would like to safeguard our house by moving entrance ways to the property to higher ground, is funding or can funding be made available to strengthen personal flood defenses."

"It was very traumatic when it happened - it has caused my mental health to worsen and I live in fear that when I am able to move back that it will happen again. Where I am living now I feel isolated and alone -trying to cope one day at a time to stop myself from feeling suicidal And depending on people to chat with on phone Especially past few months due to COVID not able to visit my elderly parents or friends and family."

"I would like to know what happened that night. It wasn't just the rain it was something much more significant that morning on the 16th February. We are devastated and will always live that nightmare. Also Financially it's devastated me bringing up two children of GCSE ages on my own."

"The stress and financial effects of having my business closed due to flooding has affected me greatly I have never had time of work before but haven't worked now for four and a half months and I'm one of the lucky ones that had the builders in straight away regardless of covid."

"Yeah since being in the floods I haven't long come off medication because I had newmonia and chest infection several hospital visits and tests and they said it was because I was up to my waist in water now I've been left with bronchitis for rest of my life"

"I also lost my car in the flood. It's been a Very stressful time. I am a single person. I am now living with my parents In a small 1 1/2 bedroom house. I am still going to work. The whole experience has been horrific and very upsetting."

"Because of covid Prehaps the council could have helped with priority supplies of plaster etc that would have helped immensely. I am extremely worried about the increase and availability of insurance for next year."

"it has been an horrific time for myself and family. We have had to move out while repairs are taking place as the house was unlivable. It will be 6 months in total before we will be able to return"

"It has tipped our life's upside down, our 3 children's houses were effected too, to see that much water and devastation in our house has been horrendous and it's hasn't helped with Covid 19"

"We are concerned about the impact on resale of our home (We has planned to sell this year) as well as insurance premiums and of course the impact of future floods on our home and our lives"

"It's destroyed our lives, the difficulty with the insurance is unbelievable, 5 months on and nothing done at property, they are looking to knock down 7&8 Rhyd-Yr-Helyg and rebuild"

"Just that I think it could have been prevented and someone has messed up somewhere and we need answers, my dads last months should have been in his own home not in a Temp house"

"There was no help we was left to fight the floods ourselves with our neighbors .if wasn't for my neighbours helping me I would have been in more mess"

"The level of response for Trefforest was less than anywhere else, they had council employees cleaning the park before helping with peoples houses!!!"

"How it's turned out lives upside down. Petrified when we have bad weather. Kids asking are we going to flood again. Living in fear."

"Haven't cleaned up the roads and pavement after the flood and haven't collected the sand bags from Trehafod all over the pavement"

"We lost our pet. Our dog was downstairs. Our children are traumatised knowing she suffered and drowned. We want answers"

"It was one of the worst experiences ever which is still going on.. mentally, physically and emotionally draining."

"We took the brunt of the water because we were directly in its path we have left our home structurally unsafe"

"Just the devastation it caused to the community and the community spirit shown by everyone was superb"

"my car was written off. I am £600 out of pocket from car hire charges because it was a natural event"

"We are still in temporary accomadation that one night has kept us from our home and neighbours"

"I just hope nobody else goes through it,my wife was in tears,all of our family photos are gone."

"I never want to experience this again abd I am scared to return to my home when it's finished"

"The lack of sympathy that was shown by the council left us for 3 days with nothing"

"I have lots to say, including being insured is irrelevant. We are not in our home."

"It's been the worst experience ever and would never want to go through it again."

"I live on my own and I was petrified as it was on the fourth step of my stairs. No warnings. Middle of the night. Rescued by boat the officers were brilliant!"

"Felt like we were on our own watching all our treasures going down the drain"

"It's just heart breaking and mentally put strain on our family."

"Was not alerted quickly and not enough time to move possessions"

"Council did nothing till it was too late."

"Not enough support no am or mp in sight"

"It's really bad and stops your life"

"I have mental health issues since the floods. Please help me."

"If I may share my experience briefly - my business is located within Rizla House (the former Rizla factory building) in one of the units to the rear, north facing side. We look out to the substation which separates us from what is known as Power Station Hill i.e. Tonteg Road. We were therefore in the 'firing line' when the flood water came and had around 14 inches of water inside our unit which resulted in a great deal of the equipment stored there being affected and around three months of work to save the vast majority of it! I remember watching the aerial images of the river rising and seeing the path that the flood water took. I noted that the river breached its bank at the rear of the small industrial estate at the other side of Power Station Hill, known as Taf Business Centre. This breach was adjacent to the old transport cafe at the rear of the site. In the days following, I did a little recce of the area and observed that contractors had been at work in that exact area on the river bank installing perimeter fencing. Now, I cannot prove that they did anything to compromise the bank there, but it did seem at the time that there were less trees there and that the bank was perhaps a little lower compared to images found on Google Street View from a couple of years prior. Regardless, of any issues of liability, it is clear to me that this section of the river bank needs building up in the same way as has been done further along Tonteg Road - opposite the Hutchings

Vauxhall and other car dealerships. At no point did the flood water breach the built-up embankment there. Thank you once again and here's hoping that answers are found and something can be done to protect residents and businesses from such catastrophic events in future"

"While our area of Hawthorn was not actually flooded, it was a 'close' call. Mentally it caused myself (even while with family in NZ) and neighbours, many hours of worry watching the water 'lap' at the very top of the flood bank, near us!!

It still does worry me personally, as of course this could/will re-occur??I would support an Independent enquiry because -

- a. Worst flooding in my living memory and I am 70 years old*
- b. Overall COST financially of the floods to the tax payer AND the negative impact this has on our RCT area. Seeing photos of the town centre under several feet of water.*
- c. The impact mentally, physically and financially to residents and businesses on the area. Again, on a negative note many businesses may be considering relocating? These businesses need to know things will not be 'brushed under the carpet'. We want them to be convinced and confident to remain in RCT.*
- d. No political bias. A party majority, would likely result in actual or perceived bias!*
- e. Independence infers fairness, truth, facts AND no 'bulls..t*
- f. 'Scotch' rumours replace them with facts*
- g. Result in recommendations which can be audited and properly action planned/supervised.*
- h. If needed, not only genuinely learn from any errors but also, bring people/organisations to account."*

"We are at Lewis St Pentre and we were flooded in February and high water levels in June.....

The trees were removed from the mountain in Pentre and when we had rain the brash washed into the culvert blocking it so the water overflowed into the lower streets of Pentre

We had been renovating for a year and we were moving in in 3 weeks time, then got flooded so we're unable to move in until the end of May.

We were not insured as the house was classed as empty so not able to insure an empty property

WE ARE LIVING IN FEAR OF MORE FLOODING EVERY TIME IT RAINS!!!"

RHONDDA

Additionally I would like to re-iterate the point I raised verbally during the meeting regarding the situation in Trehafod specifically. I attempt to capture them here:

1. As a councillor I was unprepared for the events and unfamiliar with the expectation on local councillors during an emergency situation in my ward. Based on this I would like to see a thorough training programme implemented.

2 Local councillors were the only people available on day 1, 2 and 3 in Trehafod to be a liaison between the population and council services. We were seen as representatives of the council by local volunteer groups and by members of the public. We were expected to know what was going on, what help was available, what the council could or could not provide. Access to this information was slow and difficult to come by, leading to frustration for myself as a councillor and frustration for local people.

3 Dealing with the anger and upset that was expressed by local people was difficult and potentially explosive. This should be considered in any future training provision

4 I feel strongly that local volunteer networks and councillors should be a key part of recovery work post emergency. This doesn't not seem to be planned for by the local resilience forum nor by RCT emergency plan with the content in these plans being far more strategic. Work is needed on a Community level to ensure there is a network of people ready to kick in with relevant training and designated tasks in such events. These volunteers could also potentially be active in monitoring local issues that are relevant to emergency situations.

5 Having one central point of contact was not sufficient for the needs of councillor and volunteers trying to help families in desperate conditions. Direct contact details of key individuals that were available to support, were known about through ad-hoc means and due to coincidence.

There is far more to share in terms of wider impact of the floods, that is relevant to all named agencies as well as agencies not currently part of a section 19 investigation, such as the local health board. This is why I support an independent enquiry.

My comments are offered in the spirit of learning and developing strong robust provision for the future. This is essential considering the climate change context. I am aware how hard everyone worked during this period and how many are still working now to deal with the aftermath of Storm Denis. It is important now that we identify what worked and what improvements can be made. I also recognising that people -officers, councillor and community volunteers worked as hard as they could during these hard times and am grateful for this.

Eleri Griffiths

Cynghorydd Ward y Rhondda Ward Councillor

Response to Storm Dennis in Rhydyfelin Central/Ilan Ward

As has been said a number of times, the flooding events of February this year through three named weather events brought unprecedented levels of destruction and damage to communities across Rhondda Cynon Taf, with Storm Dennis seeing the worst flooding episode in a generation.

Communities in the constituent parts of the County were impacted – including many across the length and breadth of RCT that had no previous experience of flooding, and this extended across the Rhondda, the Cynon Valley and Taff Ely. Unfortunately, areas in the Rhydyfelin Central/Ilan ward, which I represent, were also affected by Storm Dennis.

It is important that in reflecting on the flooding events that we recognise the scale and magnitude of the event that impacted our communities earlier this year – Storm Dennis has been classified as a 1 in 290 year weather event. Many areas in the south of the County were impacted by river flooding – and the monitoring gauge for the River Taff at Hawthorn showed that the water levels were at their highest in over forty years and a full 80cm higher than the records for the 1979 floods.

This was a truly exceptional weather event that placed a significant pressure on many communities across Rhondda Cynon Taf through widespread devastation, with almost 1,500 homes and businesses affected. I would like to record my thanks to all of the Council staff who provided support and assistance to those residents and businesses affected by flooding, both on the night and over the days, weeks and months that followed. This has, of course, been made all the more difficult by the global COVID-19 pandemic which followed shortly after.

It is my view that the response from the Council in the Rhydyfelin Central/Ilan ward on the night was prompt and effective in assisting and offering advice to the residents affected. Furthermore, my own experience and that of my residents, has been that information from the Council in the aftermath of the event was relayed in a clear and swift way, particularly concerning the financial support available to those who had suffered internal flood damage via the Community Flood Recovery Grant – Hardship Payment and also in terms of the updates of the Major Incident Recovery Board.

Councillor Maureen Webber
Rhydyfelin Central/Ilan

TAFFS WELL WARD

February's Storm Dennis reaped considerable damage to both Taff's Well and Nantgarw. All basement flats and rooms were under at least 4foot of water in Cardiff Road, Taff's Well. The local Park was under feet of water which destroyed the changing rooms, kitchen and Playgroup cloakroom, consequently emergency accommodation had to be found for the Playgroup to continue.

Nantgarw was badly hit and only 10 houses were not under water, all downstairs in these homes were destroyed. Residents were vacated from their homes via dinghies as there was no other way to access these homes.

Reports from residents were that by the time they received the warning of flooding they were already under about 4-5 feet of water with no time to remove any of their possessions to higher ground. Many of the residents were not insured and this as caused considerable stress and anxiety in trying to get their homes back to being fit to live in. Some houses are only just having work started on them and many still living in rented accommodation away from their Community.

These homes are situated on a flood plain, flooding was not caused by culverts or drainage but by the sheer amount of water from the river, residents are constantly living on their nerves and when heavy rain fall's they are terrified that they will back in the same situation as the beginning of the year.

My question is what can be put in place to help alleviate any future flooding of the flood plain as NRW have stated that to build higher river banking will only push the problem down further towards Cardiff

Residents need some reassurance that something will be put in place to help mitigate any future flooding that may take place and feel secure that they can go to bed at night without worrying of further flooding.

Councillor Jill Bonetto
Taffs Well Ward Councillor

Treforest Ward (Submission & Photographs)

Dear Chair, thank you for the invitation to write to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, I have as you are aware had the opportunity to speak to the committee and at to Cabinet at their meeting.

I would like to put on record my thanks to officers for the assistance I had on the Saturday Afternoon and subsequent early hours on the Sunday and throughout the period following the devastating flood and also for answering my queries about what actually happened in my ward.

Saturday afternoon 15th February

Having had warnings about the heavy rainfall we had been receiving and were due to receive even more I inspected my ward and paid particular attention to areas which are prone to flooding.

One of these was Cemetery Road Glyntaff which was already showing signs of flooding. I walked through the flood and went up behind the Crematorium to a culvert which is prone to block.

It had blocked and try as I did alone I failed to clear it and had to call out Streetcare for emergency assistance. Up to our waists in water we managed to clear the culvert and stop the water which was flooding Cemetery Road. I will attach photographs.

We cleared the debris from the numerous street drains which had quickly blocked with pine needles and blocked university traffic which was still driving through the flood causing waves to potentially flood the homes.

On this occasion Streetcare had saved the street from flooding but as it is a regular occurrence it will need to be addressed, I believe it already has agreed proposals for the work to be done.

I returned home to change and shower.

That evening the warnings got more severe, I had already posted Emergency Telephone numbers on Social Media so my community had the information to hand.

I had spoken to a residents of Cardiff Rd stating my concerns and that time the answer was in forty years we haven't flooded but my concerns still stood.

I went to bed hoping that this storm would pass by but as we all know it didn't. I was contacted in the early hours by residents who were devastated the river had burst its banks flooding Egypt St, Nile St, Niagra St and Cardiff Rd. I contacted my neighbouring ward elected member who I work closely with and we discussed the implications.

As I had been contacted by Egypt St Residents I went to Cardiff Rd first to make sure they were awake and prepared but it was too late the Castle Inn Bridge had blocked with debris and trees and caused the river to flood the street, which was also

subject to a problem with a culvert officers informed me at a later date. Cardiff Road was completely blocked to traffic.

I then went to Egypt St I had to walk from Broadway because of the flooding. This was absolutely devastating cars completely submerged and houses flooded completely. Emergency services were in assistance. We made sure everyone was out of the properties, some of these house were student houses and bedrooms were downstairs a very worrying fact. I contacted the Community Centre and they opened up to setup an emergency centre. Everyone who needed emergency accommodation was transported there where officers had already set up and started ringing around. Again the professionalism of officers helped us enormously.

Throughout the day and followings weeks we continued to work as a community through the emergency centre to take and distribute donations of food, clothing, cleaning products and household goods.

This was without doubt the most devastating incident of my elected member tenure but not the first time I have seen the floods because as a professional newspaper photographer I had covered them before but it was the very first time I have had to deal with them as a community leader and representative and I can assure you that it is a very heavy burden to carry and hopefully it will be the last time I have to.

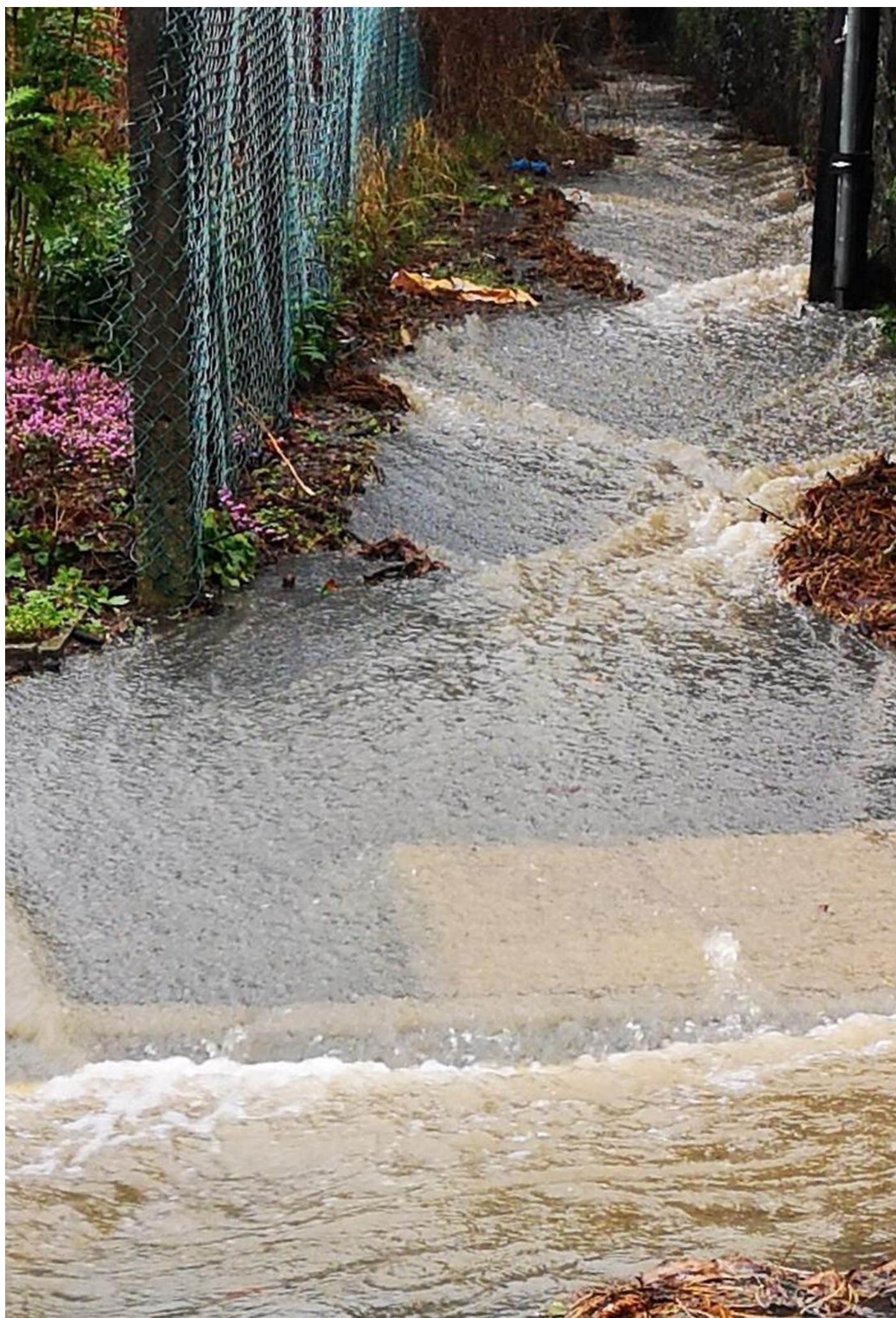
I do not need an enquiry to tell me how and why my ward suffered these floods I already know.

I need answers from NRW, Rhondda Cynon Taff CBC, Dwr Cymru and Welsh Government to ensure that should anything like this "190 year occurrence" ever happen again we have done our best to protect the homes, businesses and lives.

I want the section 19 reports to enable me to be able communicate with my ward and give them them the assurance we will within our powers do everything we can to stop this happening again.

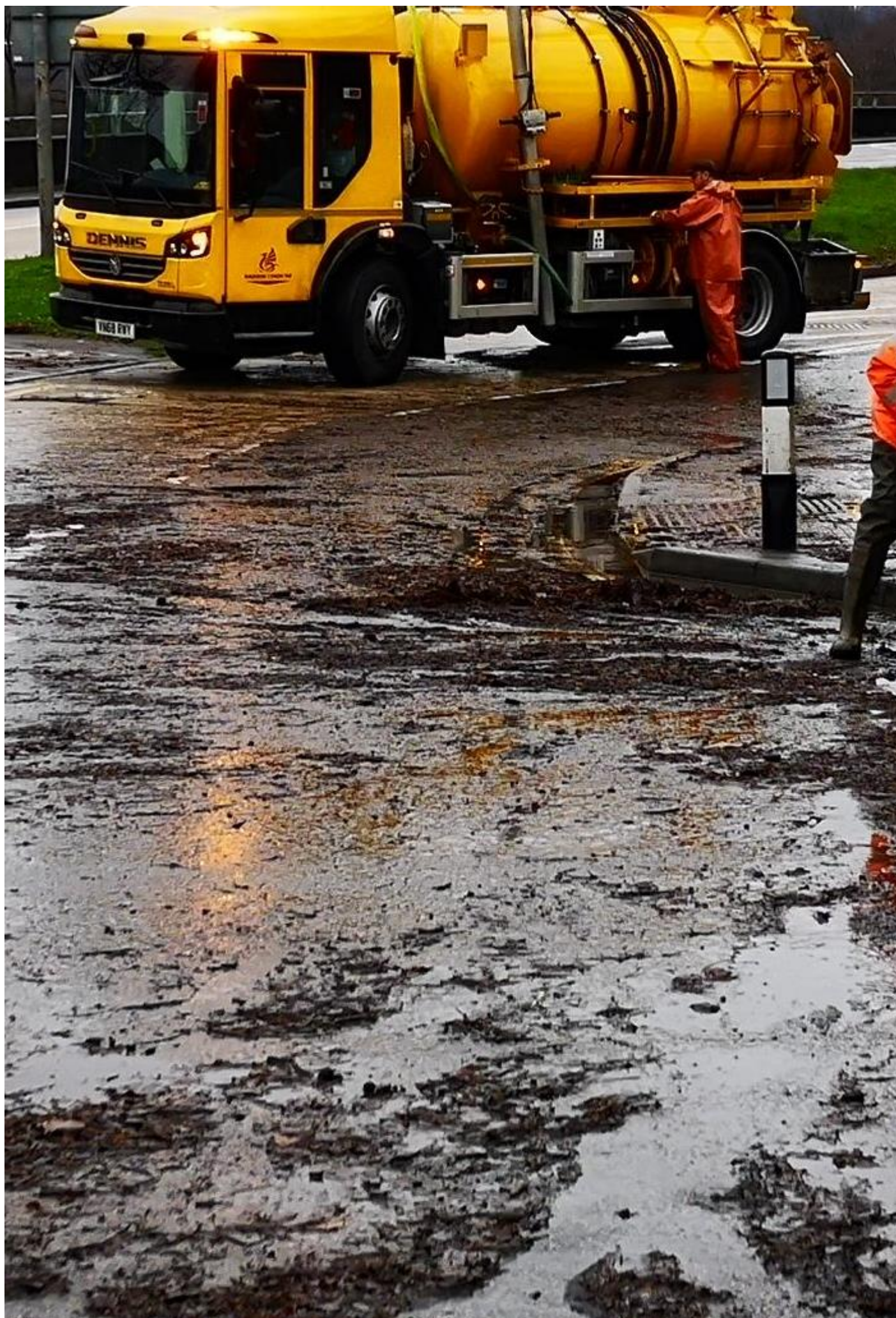
Thank You

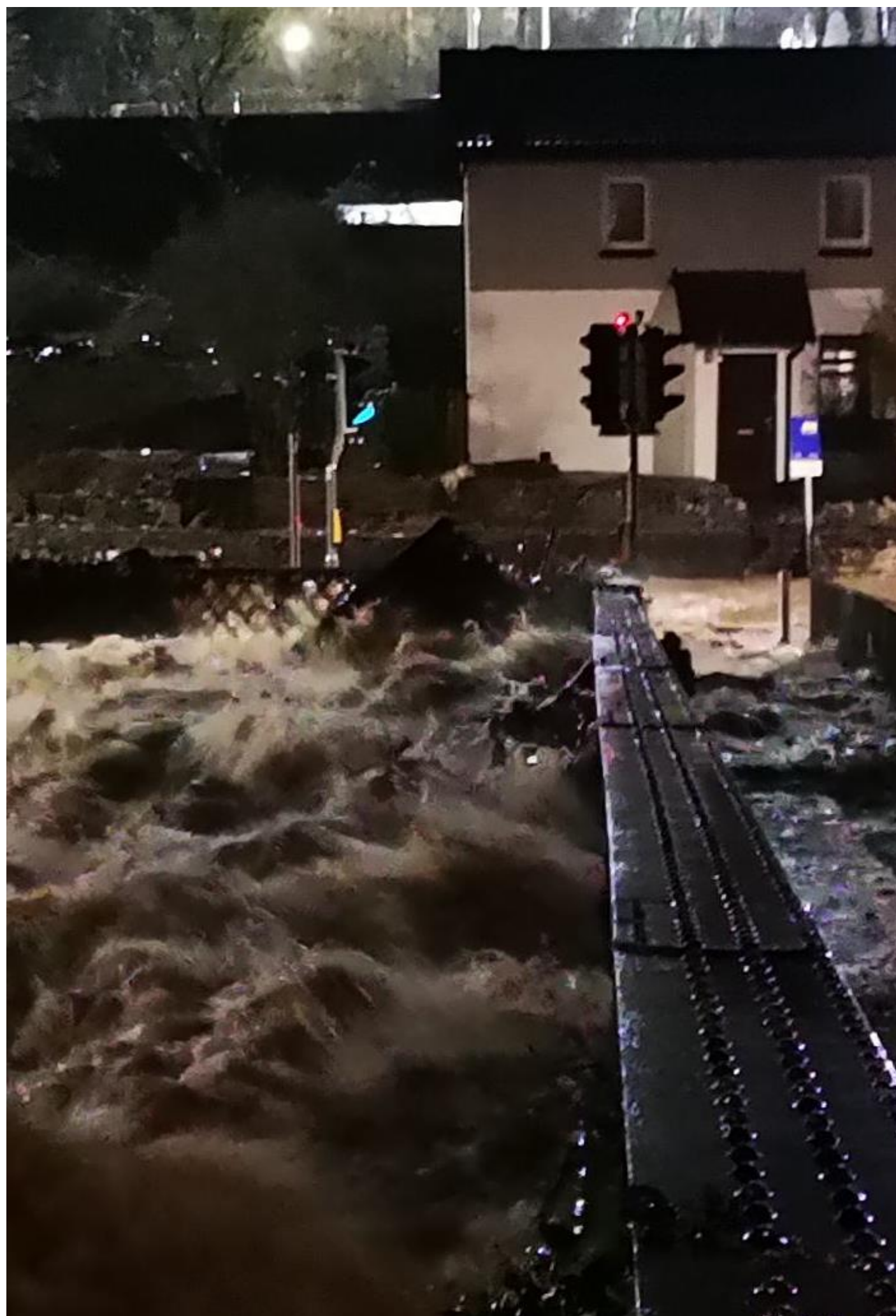
Cllr Steve Powderhill
Treforest



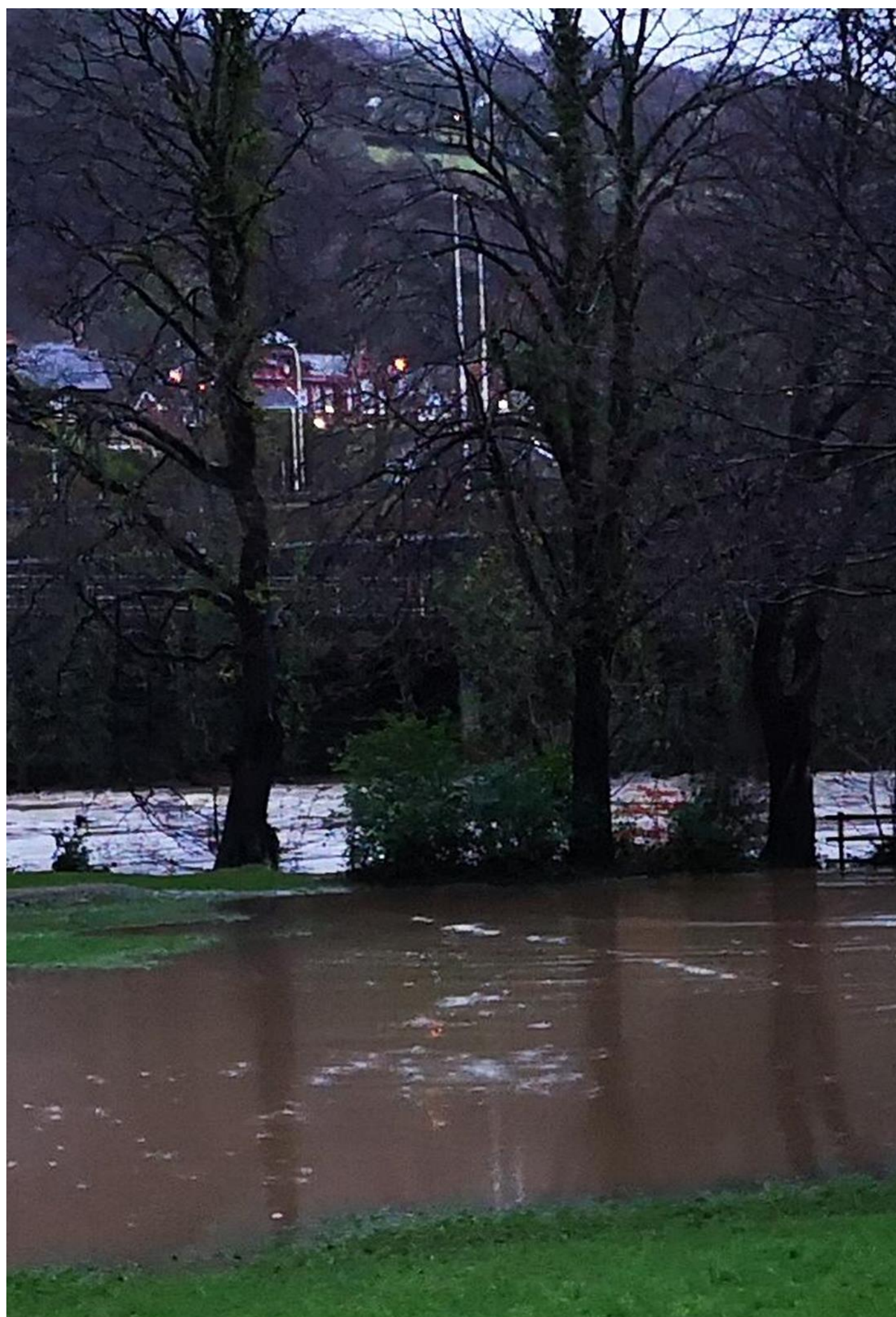














YNYSHIR

On the Sunday morning, when the call came in, I couldn't believe my eyes as I seen people's lives devastated. In over 100 years Ynyshir has never been a victim of such ruin. Ynyshir was flooded in several areas, caused by a catalogue of issues within the community.

The river in Ynyshir dammed, clogged by debris and overgrowth that remains to this day, all the way down from Maerdy. In addition, the drains were blocked and couldn't cope with the additional water either. The two contributory factors caused flooding on both sides of the bridge with one family experiencing danger to life.

On the street high above the valley floor, culverts blocked and water created watercourses through people's homes, never seen before. Other culverts failing caused water to come off the mountainside and into homes on the valley floor.

NRW who manage the river have since said that the blockage underneath the bridge is because of the height of the bridge and will be a contributory factor moving forward. I challenged the officer as residents and I believe that if the overgrowth was better managed then less debris would be present to cause any blocking!

I'm pleased to see that the culvert behind Heath Terrace is due to be fixed however, residents have already invested thousands of pounds in creating their own flood defences for the future. Other culverts still need exploring.

In such devastation though, we must acknowledge the resolve of others. Communities pulled together to distribute cleaning products and food items to those who'd been impacted. People did what they could to help others showing that the spirit in the Valleys remains.

Councillor J Edwards Ynyshir

Ynysybwl

As you know, Clydach Terrace in Ynysybwl was severely flooded in February during Storm Dennis. The Nant Clydach River burst its banks in the early hours of February 16 2020, and overflowed over the wall opposite the houses and rushed, I am told, like a Tsunami up the street.

The water reached up to seven feet high in the houses in Clydach Terrace and residents had to be rescued from upstairs by the Fire Service, who brought them out on a raft.

One resident was knocked off his feet and ended up under the water, in what he describes as a 'washing machine' and another disabled resident, who sleeps downstairs, only just made it to the stairs with the water up to her neck. Truly frightening experiences as you will agree, I am sure.

All the residents lost everything and saw possessions and vehicles floating down the street. Some have not yet moved back into their homes. Some were not insured as they couldn't afford the high cost of living so close to a river. It has been devastating and changed lives of many residents.

NRW have done significant work on the river, removing huge amounts of shoal and debris, and I have had assurance that this stretch of the river will be monitored and worked on at regular intervals. Unfortunately it hadn't been done for several years and the river bed had risen and fallen trees and debris littered the river, which residents feel contributed to the flooding.

The authority provided numerous skips and removed many household items free of charge in the aftermath of the flood, and continue to monitor the drains along Clydach Road and Terrace, clearing when necessary and provide a sweeper for the leaves when required. The authority has also built a wall in a small area adjacent to the lowest part of the river. There is a bigger, longer part of wall which residents would like to see made higher as well.

Residents are naturally extremely anxious that this will happen again and live in fear every time it rains.

I hope I have explained as much as possible the events of that night and the devastation of residents.

Councillor S Pickering Ynysybwl

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 sediment and debris emanating from Nant Ffrwd culvert meant that Mountain Ash was inaccessible for days. Was there ever any intention of notifying residents that consultants have been employed by the local authority regarding Caegarw flooding? Why wasn't I notified so that I could 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?

The NRW report – residents don't have faith in organisations investigating themselves, that is the reason for calling for an 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 this committee should make is that there should be an Independent Enquiry into the floods. In 5 minutes I can't do justice to the evidence of all the businesses and residents affected in my ward, and the Overview & Scrutiny Committee doesn't have the capacity to fully investigate and compile all the evidence. And even if we were able to as a Council, 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 nor before. Neither was the plan implemented as it should have been. There has been no scrutiny of this.

Also, I have never received an answer it why was there an IT upgrade that weekend when officers knew that a serious event was likely? We couldn't access the contact numbers and emails etc, nor information about what support the Council would provide for residents. Also, why was there no communication with all Councillors? 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 good enough.

Mr Owen Griffiths mentioned the volunteers and coordinators. I'm still not sure the Cabinet understand how important a role the volunteers played, and that this wasn't coordinated by the Council but rather by themselves with support from us as Councillors. I contacted the Leader on the 16th February offering to coordinate support; I was asked not to do anything for 24hrs and that I would receive more information on the Wednesday, and that I was not to contact Council officers. So I was out helping flood victims, and yet had no support or information from the Council and felt like I was being treated as a nuisance, rather than part of the response. 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 no coordinated support for those affected.

I must be able to explain to residents and businesses how we are going to protect them in the future and what lessons we have learnt in order to do so. 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 Griffith's construction (Taffs Well Metro Depot)

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 a major flooding in Dumfries Street that flowed down from Callum Street when the culvert failed because of debris from the water course. There may be a case for litigation as there have been reports of illegal structures being built in the water course upstream. The culvert isn’t suitable to deal with the excess debris. There are serious problems and we are asking the council to get an additional backup drainage system to give residents confidence.

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

I would like to thank Owen Griffiths for looking at measures on the mountainside to divert the watercourse to go behind the cemetery so in future less water will come down into the system and into the residential area.

Swn-Yr-Afon – The river wall eroded and a sink hole opened up and took the ground away. Natural Resources Wales are denying responsibility for the wall as is the council, meanwhile the hole is getting bigger.

High Street – This has been flooded three times in the past 7 years and after the flash flooding in June, Welsh Water assessed the pump house which functioned within limits but the RCT drainage system couldn’t cope on the highway. No-one has accepted responsibility and residents need to know what needs to be done to prevent this happening again.

There are private landowners 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. Mountain water runoff is a major problem for many of our residents and we need to find ways of forcing these landowners to ensure the safety and integrity of adjacent properties.

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.”