

**"WE HAVE
BEEN
FORGOTTEN
ABOUT."**

**2020 FLOOD
SURVEY
REPORT**

Commissioned by

Leanne Wood MS and Rhondda Cynon Taf
Plaid Cymru Councillors regarding flooding
in Rhondda Cynon Taf in 2020

Written by C. AMOSS.



**Plaid Cymru
Party of Wales**



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Statement by Leanne Wood MS



In February many people's lives were turned upside down when Storm Dennis resulted in water entering their homes and businesses. Some people had been flooded before and some were flooded after that day in February, but more havoc was wreaked during that one weather event than had ever been seen in our communities.

Scientists have been warning for years that the impacts of the climate crisis will be felt by more people as time goes on. As well as working to combat the causes of the climate crisis, governments – both local and national – have a duty to keep people safe and do whatever is possible to prevent people from being flooded. They should also provide support and do everything in their power to protect people and property in the future.

This report analyses the survey responses of those who were flooded in Rhondda Cynon Taf and makes recommendations for action. It also shows the human cost of these floods and the toll it takes on the physical and mental health of many affected – something that has been noticeably absent from the documents produced by the authorities to date.

I will be calling on the Welsh Government to launch an independent inquiry. This must have clear terms of reference to find out what happened. It must work to tight timescales and must recommend courses of action to prevent similar ordeals from happening to people in the future.

We hope that this report will contribute to the case for such an inquiry.

Leanne Wood AS / MS, Rhondda

Supported by the Plaid Cymru Councillors Group on Rhondda Cynon Taf Council: Cllr Pauline Jarman, Leader; Cllr Heledd Fychan, Deputy Leader; Cllr Alison Chapman, Cllr Alun Cox, Cllr John Cullwick, Cllr Geraint Davies, Cllr Joshua Davies, Cllr Sera Evans, Cllr Danny Grehan, Cllr Eleri Griffiths, Cllr Lorraine Jones, Cllr Karen Morgan, Cllr Shelley Rees-Owen, Cllr Elyn Stephens, Cllr Maureen Weaver, Cllr Emyr Webster, Cllr Julie Williams.



Introduction

This report is a summary of surveys conducted by Plaid Cymru in the Rhondda and Pontypridd following the flooding in February and June 2020, as well as evidence from councillors representing the Cynon Valley. Rhondda Cynon Taf Council stated that 1476 properties were flooded in the county. The estimated cost to public infrastructure stands at £60m, with a number of highways, river walls, culverts and bridges suffering significant damage. The council, together with Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water and Natural Resources Wales, are writing their own reports on the floods as part of the Section 19 process. These will be technical reports. However, this report explores the personal stories within the communities. It looks at how people's lives were affected by what happened. It identifies possible failings by the local authority and relevant agencies and calls for the floods to be independently investigated.





Executive Summary

This report explores the events of the floods in Rhondda Cynon Taf on 16th February 2020 as told by those affected, and explores the data gathered from surveys to ascertain what happened during Storm Dennis, starting with Pontypridd. The report will then focus on the floods in the Rhondda, on 16th February 2020 during Storm Dennis and then again four months later on 17th June. There is also evidence from the Cynon Valley, where many communities also suffered severe flooding in February 2020.

The surveys were created to gather the experiences and evidence of the affected communities. The council's Section 19 process is technical and logistical and gives little opportunity to understand the sequence and impact of events from a more people-centred approach. The surveys captured the experiences of those affected in their own words. This was to help inform the work of Leanne Wood MS and the team of Plaid Cymru councillors in Rhondda Cynon Taf, so that they would best be able to help residents and businesses affected. The scale of the devastation that occurred, the inability thus far of agencies to agree who is responsible and liable, as well as the complexity of the impact on so many services, agencies, authorities and citizens has led Plaid Cymru to call for an independent inquiry into the floods.

The survey was conducted in both online and written formats. The online survey was written in Google Forms and community members were invited to contribute via social media platforms, including Facebook. A written survey was handed out also in the Rhondda, to ensure that those with limited internet access could also contribute. A total of 137 responses to the survey were completed across Rhondda and Pontypridd. The questions were a combination of yes/no answer questions and more open questions to enable a personally detailed response. For the Cynon Valley, local councillors have provided evidence to give a picture of the situation affecting communities there.

The survey discovered that not only do 100% of the respondents want an independent inquiry but that there is also confusion and frustration about what happened and why. Responses range from "heavy rain" or "Storm Dennis" to specific cases of blocked culverts stating council failings, to rumours that the flood gates at the Pontsticill Reservoir further up the valley being opened too late, or too quickly, with little communication with flood gates downstream. Many responses stated poor flood defences on the River Taff in Pontypridd, and many in the Rhondda blamed the felled trees on the mountain side and poor drainage systems, which are in the control of the local authority and Natural Resources Wales. Most respondents shared evidence of the crippling impact of the flood, both on people's finances and possessions and on their emotional and mental health.



Executive Summary

Many discussed the stress of it all and the fear of heavy rain, as well as deep worries of being flooded again.

This report identifies perceived key failings on the part of the authorities – for example, poor service and lack of effective communication. It concludes that an independent expert-led inquiry is essential to delve deeper into the issues raised here and examine further evidence.

We must have clarity about what happened and who is responsible for ensuring that any failings are not repeated. Lessons must be learnt to make communities more resilient for future crisis events like this.





Pontypridd Constituency Flooding





Pontypridd Constituency Flooding

This report is a summary of surveys conducted by Plaid Cymru in the Rhondda and Pontypridd following the flooding in February and June 2020, as well as evidence from councillors representing the Cynon Valley. Rhondda Cynon Taf Council stated that 1476 properties were flooded in the county. The estimated cost to public infrastructure stands at £60m, with a number of highways, river walls, culverts and bridges suffering significant damage. The council, together with Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water and Natural Resources Wales, are writing their own reports on the floods as part of the Section 19 process. These will be technical reports. However, this report explores the personal stories within the communities. It looks at how people's lives were affected by what happened. It identifies possible failings by the local authority and relevant agencies and calls for the floods to be independently investigated.

Further up the valley towards Trehafod, 44 properties were flooded due to the local authority drainage system and Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water's pumping stations becoming overwhelmed with surface water. The main road linking Pontypridd to the Rhondda Valleys, the A4058, became impassable as water poured over the railway line, pooling on the road and flowing back into the village. This made travel impossible and placed additional obstacles in the way of workers and emergency services trying to respond to the dire situation.



The survey asked respondents to describe what happened in their own words. Those affected described the waters rising "quickly" and flowing down the street "like a tsunami" with little time to escape. The waters submerged cars and the first floors of houses. Many said it was incredibly "scary", explaining that it went "from nothing to up to 6ft of water in 15 minutes" and didn't seem like a "normal flood". Many respondents declared the flood was not caused just by heavy rainfall and an overflowing River Taff, that



Pontypridd Constituency Flooding

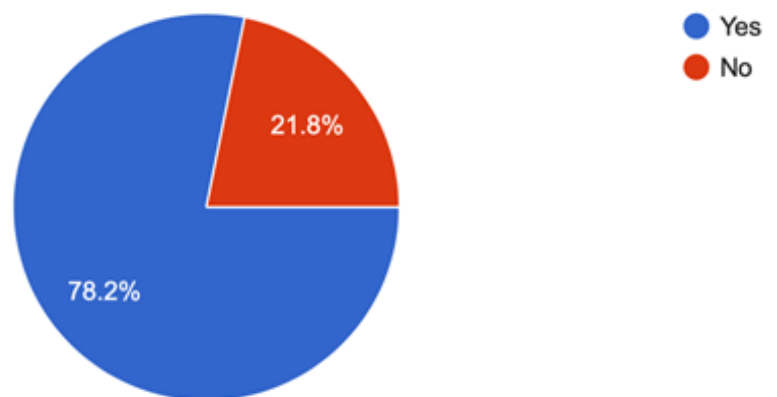
something else must have happened; a few respondents stated that “someone made a huge mistake”. A large majority of the respondents in Pontypridd mention the flood gates at Pontsticill Reservoir “being opened” and excess water flowing down the Taff.

Many respondents speculated that the flood gates in Merthyr were opened but not in Cardiff, leaving the river to build up and burst its banks. This has not been confirmed by any official authorities, and local councillors have been assured that there is no substance to these fears. Communities, however, remain suspicious.

The scale of the damage caused by the floods can be demonstrated by the answers to this question below. The survey for respondents in Pontypridd found that 78.2% of respondents had to move out of their home due to flood damage (graph below).

Did you need to move out?

55 responses



Regarding support and assistance, although many in the survey stated that due to the height of water in the flood, sandbags would have been redundant, 87.3% of those surveyed in Pontypridd had problems getting hold of sandbags beforehand (see graph on the next page).

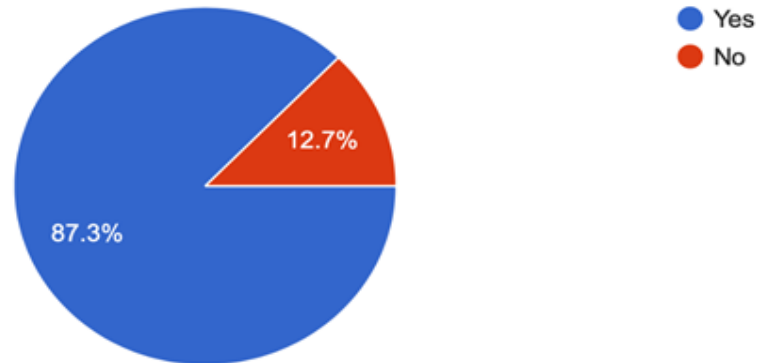
Half of respondents believed flood gates could have stopped water from entering their house; others believed the water was too high. Many respondents stated they did manage to speak to someone “official” from the Council or another authority in the days after the flood. Some however waited weeks, while other respondents still have had no contact from relevant authorities at all.



Pontypridd Constituency Flooding

Did you at any stage have a problem getting hold of sandbags?

55 responses



The Role of Rhondda Cynon Taf Council

When asked about the council's role in the flooding and what they can do to improve, respondents asked for more help and support, both in preparation and in cleaning up. In particular, many respondents claim council "negligence", because "drainage systems were blocked and not maintained" and "sandbags not given" and they felt completely "left alone" to deal with the impact of the flooding. Respondents have requested more support from the council in their call for NRW and Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water to improve flood defences. Many respondents called for dredging the River Taff, if it is appropriate to do so. There are also suggestions of a council scheme or specific funding for providing flood gates for the houses most at risk. The vast majority of respondents also requested more comprehensive drainage maintenance, as they are of the view that this contributed significantly to the surface water flooding. Six respondents suggest that poor drains in their street couldn't cope with a downfall before the flood, with water and large puddles being a regular occurrence. At the time of the survey (July 2020), households were still waiting for the drains to be professionally cleared by the council. Residents in Hawthorn had to clear the drains themselves as best they could as they were too afraid to wait for the council to clear them.

People made further suggestions, including 'flood risk zone' information through council tax sign-up and the establishment of an effective flood alert system as part of the 'zoning'. People also want to see higher flood walls, improved communications with residents, and funding to put measures in place to make sure this doesn't happen again.

The Role of Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water:

When asked about Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water's role in the flooding and what they can do to help, respondents were confused about its duties and responsibilities. Many Pontypridd respondents claim that Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water is responsible for "human error"



Pontypridd Constituency Flooding

with the floodgates at the reservoir being opened too late; with Cardiff at high tide, the water didn't have anywhere to go. Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water should consider how best to address these concerns and clearly communicate with the people affected. Few of the respondents had heard directly from them. Some people complained that Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water didn't turn up to a community meeting they were due to attend. Others said simply they "don't know" what Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water did or did not do.

Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water did engage effectively with the community in some areas, as seems to be the case in Trehafod. Local people who had been flooded were sure that the Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water pumping station had failed at the lower end of the village causing the flood. Over the course of 6 weeks Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water visited properties to advise, helped with some basic level of compensation for uninsured properties and attended local public meetings. There are outstanding concerns that no improvements have been made to the local pump infrastructure; people feel that this leaves the community vulnerable to further flooding in future.

One respondent reported that they had contact with Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water representatives and were told that if the flood gates hadn't been opened when they were "the whole of Pontypridd would have been wiped out". Another respondent claimed that the reason they opened the flood gates was to protect Brecon from flooding. However, the answers to this question are fuelled by speculation, rumour, confusion and frustration, mainly because there has been no explanation and no communication from official authorities which would help to put minds at ease.

The Role of Natural Resources Wales

When asked about Natural Resources Wales' role in the flooding and what they can do to improve their response, respondents stated that flood warnings came too late, and pointed to the complete lack of communication, not just between residents and authorities but between the authorities themselves. Respondents have requested better flood defences, better flood alert systems and a full inquiry into what happened. The overall impression from these responses is one of general confusion about the responsibilities of the authorities involved. There is a sense that all three authorities are implicated as contributing agents during and after the flooding and that mistakes were made by all. There has been buck-passing, and this has frustrated respondents who just want appropriate support and truthful answers.

A large majority of the survey respondents were insured and received pay-outs from their insurance companies for damages. A few of the respondents who were insured and claimed did not get a pay-out due the flooding being "an act of God", or they did not realise that flood damage was not included in their insurance cover.



Pontypridd Constituency Flooding

Others who had insurance, but didn't claim, stated that they didn't want their premiums to rise, and a few others stated that they only had contents insurance and were not covered for the damage. Respondents who weren't insured either didn't give a reason or stated it was because they lived too close to the river to get insurance. Some of the respondents that received a pay-out have seen large increases to their premiums or are expecting their premiums to increase on renewal. Those that didn't have insurance or weren't covered for flooding now say that they are not able to get insurance for future floods.

Leanne Wood MS and Plaid Cymru councillors met with representatives from the organisation Flood RE in July to find out what help and advice they could offer to people in the flooded communities. Flood RE provides government backed specialist and affordable flood insurance, holding 14,000 policies in Wales, with excess set at £250. The main criteria for Flood RE insurance is that the property must be a domestic property and built before 2009. Flood RE collects an annual levy from home insurers each year. The insurer then over the flood risk part of the policy to Flood RE. People who make a valid claim on their insurance will be reimbursed by Flood RE. The organisation wants to work to increase social capital in communities, so will support community awareness raising events. It advises residents to watch out for "cowboy" companies who often move in on flooded communities. Advising them not to spend money or sign up to anything before double and triple checking. Flood RE exists to ensure everyone can have affordable insurance, whether they have been flooded or not and explain that no one should be refused flood insurance.

100% of Pontypridd survey respondents support an independent inquiry into the cause of the floods in Rhondda Cynon Taf and want to see mitigation measures to protect people from future heavy rain, which we will inevitably see as a result of climate change.







Rhondda Constituency Flooding





Rhondda Constituency Flooding

In the Rhondda Valleys, there has been more than one significant flooding incident; on 16th February 2020, the same time as the flooding in Pontypridd, and 4 months later on 17th June. 60% of respondents report being flooded just in February, 18% report being flooded in June, and 18% report being flooded both in February and in June.

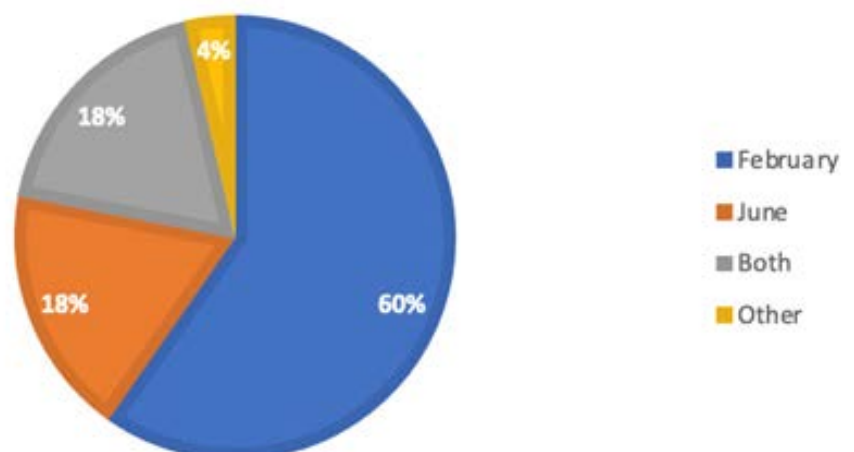
The reasons for the water getting into people's houses in the Rhondda vary considerably. In Pentre and Blaenllechau homes below mountainsides had seen recent tree felling by contractors due to a policy decision to remove all larch. The trees removed had previously held water and channelled watercourses. The leaving behind of some debris is thought to be the cause of the flooding to some homes, despite NRW not accepting this.

In other communities – for example, Porth and Ynyshir – the river burst through defences or flooded houses because of bridge blockages. We have less of an understanding as to the cause in Maerdy during the flash floods of June 2020, as the trees to the rear of North Terrace are yet to be felled.

Homes in Ystrad, Ynyshir, Llwynypia, Treherbert and Treorci were flooded due to mountain water run-off. Some of these homes have had water enter in the past – some have never had water in before. There have since been many reports of blocked drains and culverts and altered waterways on the mountains for various reasons. All of these concerns deserve further investigation.

There are also reports of other instances of flooding that were reported as happening at other times. Please see below graph.

WHEN WERE YOU FLOODED?





Rhondda Constituency Flooding

February Floods: Storm Dennis hit the south of Wales on 15th and 16th February, where, as previously stated, a “severe” weather and flood warning was given and an “incredible volume of rain fell”. As with the Pontypridd survey, Rhondda survey respondents had the opportunity to describe what happened in their own words. The responses include some speculation and many respondents display clear frustration, again mainly due to the lack of communication from official authorities. The waters began to rise during the early hours of 16th February. Many respondents describe waking in the middle of the night to waters rising at an “alarming rate” in their houses. Many say the waters didn’t go down until what witnesses say was the pump being “turned on” in the morning, at which point it was like the “plug being pulled in a sink full of water”. There was also a significant mudslide in Tylorstown (picture below), causing blockages to the river below and wiping out sections of the Rhondda Fach cycle trail. Respondents listed three reasons as to why they believed the area flooded; firstly, recent tree felling on the mountain and minimal clearing; secondly, the drains and culverts being blocked by debris from the felling during heavy rainfall; and thirdly, the pumping station not turned on/failing/not working.



June Floods: 17th June saw another large rainfall which resulted in many of the same areas that were flooded in February flooding again. This time, flooding occurred during the day and quite a few respondents had the opportunity to channel the water through their houses or block the water with sandbags. Depending on the location some houses were flooded as badly as, if not worse than, in February. Many of those flooded in June hadn’t been able to move back home after the damage of the February floods. Respondents believe that the reasons behind the flooding in June was that the drains and culverts had not been cleared from the February floods. People also said that the pump did not kick in until it reached a few feet of water.

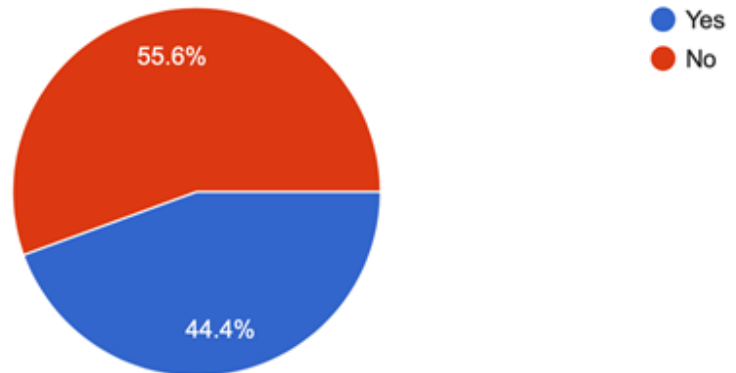


Rhondda Constituency Flooding

As per the graph below, 44.4% of respondents in the Rhondda had to move out of their house due to the damage. Many still weren't home at the time of the survey in July.

Did you have to move out?

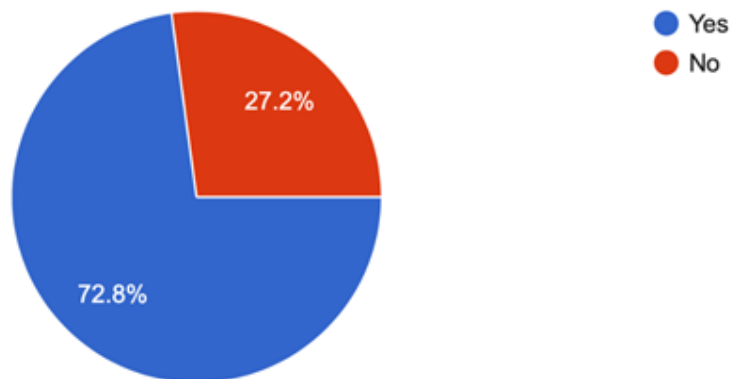
81 responses



Regarding assistance with sandbags, a similar picture is painted in the Rhondda as in Pontypridd. 72.8% of respondents in the Rhondda had difficulty getting hold of sandbags (graph below), as well as receiving little communication from the local authorities.

Did you at any stage have a problem getting hold of sandbags?

81 responses



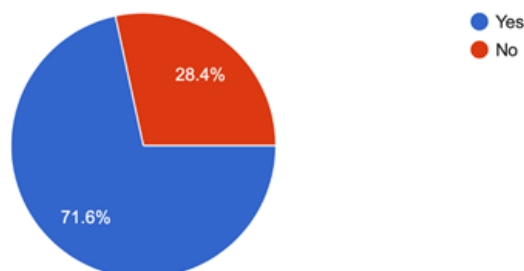
71.6%, a large majority of Rhondda respondents strongly believe that flood gates could have prevented water from entering their houses (see graph).

Rhondda respondents report that many heard from a local authority official in the days and weeks after the flooding. However, quite a few respondents state that it was mostly local councillors and neighbours on hand in the clean-up effort and not the relevant authorities.



Rhondda Constituency Flooding

Do you think a flood gate on your front or back doors would have prevented water coming in?
81 responses



Pentre

In February and June 2020, houses in Pentre were affected by flooding. Some houses were flooded four times. The main flood in February, caused by Storm Dennis, created havoc for the residents of Lewis Street, Pleasant Street, and parts of Treharne and Roberts Streets, to name but a few. The flooding caused absolute destruction to the community of Pentre. On the Sunday morning of the floods, the mud was ankle deep on roads and pavements in these streets. People were emptying their downstairs furniture onto the pavements, due to the damage caused by the dirty, muddy water that entered their homes. Kitchen equipment and living room furniture had to be thrown away due to contamination. People had been left without electricity and heating.

There is a strong view among affected residents that the flood was either caused by or, at the very least, worsened significantly by the debris left behind by logging operations by NRW on the mountains above the town in recent years. While the rainfall was heavy it had nowhere to go after dragging incredible amounts of large-sized timbers, branches and twigs down the mountain and over an important culvert. After this culvert was blocked by tonnes of material, the water had nowhere to go. It came over the top and down into the town causing devastation for hundreds of residents. The evidence of this mountain debris was there for all to see. Large branches were wedged beneath damaged cars. Sawdust and twigs encased in mud covered many of the affected streets and the belongings that people removed from their homes.

The flash floods in June saw many properties flooded throughout Pentre. These floods differed from the February floods as they were not exclusive to a few streets. This time, houses from many more streets were flooded due to the gullies not being able to absorb the intense rainfall. Debris was removed from deep inside the pipes by the council and a camera-mapping exercise identified a number of damaged and broken pipes. It is unclear at the moment if these pipes were damaged as a result of the debris that came down the mountain and blocked the culverts during Storm Dennis.



Rhondda Constituency Flooding

We hope the Section 19 report will clarify whether this is the case. August saw two properties, who had previously been flooded, flood again. It is believed that a Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water pipe was responsible.



Ynyshir

Flooding in Ynyshir occurred in two separate incidents during the early hours of 16th February. The first occurrence was when the Rhondda Fach burst its banks between Avon Terrace and Riverside Close. This was caused by the build-up of debris, mostly trees and other vegetation, under the road bridge between Station Road and Avon Terrace. This resulted in severe flooding to all the properties in Riverside Close and one house in Station Road. Several properties in Avon Terrace and Standard View were also flooded. The river had not flooded here before this in living memory.

The second occurrence was at the southern end of Heath Terrace. This was caused by a blocked culvert on the mountain behind the properties. Local residents and other volunteers worked through the night and the following days to remove the debris from under the bridge and clear the blocked culvert. An elderly couple in Riverside Close were rescued from their house by the fire service. A builders' merchant in Wattstown supplied sand and bags which volunteers filled and delivered to vulnerable properties. Many of those affected were not insured due to the proximity of the river.

Blaenllechau

The flooding in Blaenllechau occurred on 16th February and, according to official council records, 15 houses were affected. Residents believe that, similar to other areas, the tree felling by NRW was a contributing factor to the floods that damaged their homes. Debris that had been left behind blocked the culverts and water diversion courses along the mountain top. Usually the water would have been taken away from the homes to the waterfall located at the Glyn and drained away to the river below Blaenllechau. Due to the diversion courses being blocked, residents report the waterfall



Rhondda Constituency Flooding

as being very dry in the weeks leading up to the floods. They believe the water had started to make its own natural course down the mountainside, pooling in areas and that this is what led to the amount of water entering their homes in February.

Britannia, Porth

The flooding in Britannia occurred on 16th February in the early hours of the morning. The residents there believe there were accumulating factors that resulted in the extensive flooding and damage to their homes. According to council records, 30 homes were affected. Firstly, residents have attributed the lack of maintenance of the drainage system in the area as a contributor. Complaints had been made to Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council prior to the flooding about the silt and rubbish build-up – some drains blocked completely. The river wall was also in need of remedial work, the amount of rainfall caused the river to breach the wall, causing enough damage to the wall that a car was washed into the river. With nowhere else to go, due to the drains being blocked, the water made its way towards the houses. Residents have also questioned the functionality of Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water pumping stations. Many believe that there was a delay in these stations kicking in and when they did finally start the reduction in water was vast and at an incredibly fast pace. They believe that, if these stations had been in operation when the flooding began, the damage would not have been as extensive.

Treorci

Storm Dennis brought havoc for many communities in Rhondda Cynon Taf and each instance had various causes. The Treorchy ward experienced four flooding instances on 16th February and the main river wall at Swn yr Afon also failed.

Dumfries Street and town centre. This was the most severe flooding instance in the area. The culvert drain at the top of the lane at Column Street has blocked on a number of occasions over the years, causing some major issues for residents, particularly Dumfries Street. The breach that occurred on 16th February was the worst experienced by Dumfries Street and also affected houses in adjacent streets including Luton Street, Stuart Street and the town centre. The flood water and debris went as far down as Stag Square, flowing from Luton Street and down the main road. The culvert drain structure that failed was quite simply inadequate. There is a much larger drain and debris capture system just a few yards downstream which does a great job at preventing flooding, but is rendered useless when the culvert upstream fails. There have also been reports made that the blockage experienced was made worse when a dam that was upstream broke, sending further debris down into the system including tyres.

The culvert at Heol Tyle-du completely blocked on the night of 17th



Rhondda Constituency Flooding

February and caused the water to flow down over the pavement and highway of Heol Tyle-du subsequently causing flooding issues at Glyncoli Close, before re-entering the drainage system and being safely carried away. It was not until the morning that it was finally unblocked by residents. This culvert is difficult to access due to overgrowth and is accessed by a small path and dilapidated gate. For this reason, it cannot be accessed by machinery to maintain and clear the culvert structure. Clearance work must be done by hand, and as a result has experienced significant build-up of debris for many years. Storm Dennis simply displaced enough further debris to overwhelm the capture structure that was already near capacity.

The mountain stream that flows behind the old Ynysfeio Colliery site enters the local drainage system at Painter's Row, where it is taken directly to the main river on the valley floor. 86 Baglan Street flooded when a manhole cover burst, causing water to flow through the property and business workshop and subsequently flooding the lane behind Rheidol Close. On the night of the flooding, a boulder had entered the system and subsequently blocked the pipe under 86 Baglan Street, causing the torrent to back up and burst the manhole cover. There is also no protective guard on the pipe entrance at the Ynysfeio site, which allowed debris to freely enter the drainage system. The system entrance pipe is 600mm in diameter but reduces in size to 450mm. A boulder bigger than 450mm entered the system but became blocked at the smaller pipe.

At Swn yr Afon, Storm Dennis caused serious ramifications for the future stability of the land and river wall, although NRW has said that this breach does not represent a present flood danger. During the storm, a large sink hole appeared at the river wall at Swn yr Afon. The river wall was constructed in the 1960s or 1970s and runs the entire length of the river from the top of Pentre up to Ynyswen. The river wall failed because the foundations of the river wall may have been eroding for a while, but the heavy flows during Storm Dennis eventually reached the ground on the other side of the wall, causing the ground to collapse. This erosion occurred where the flow of water hits the wall at the 'outside' bend in the river. A few years ago, the river fence was renewed on the opposite side of the river and tonnes of rocks were left on that side of the riverbed, forcing the flow of water even more onto the side with the failed wall. Both Natural Resources Wales and the council have said that the structure is not their responsibility, and that this lies with the landowner under their riparian rights.

The landowner in this case is the developer of Swn yr Afon, who went out of business a number of years ago.

The culvert that runs behind Tynybedw Terrace and above Troedryhiw



Rhondda Constituency Flooding

Terrace drains water from the mountain and transports it debris capture structure at the Treorchy Rugby Club car park and then on to the main river. The culvert drain cover at the top of Troedyrhiw Terrace blocked, causing the water to enter the highway and flow down Myrtle Hill, flooding a few properties. The culvert drain is of a significant size and relatively new in construction, but simply could not cope with the amount of debris that entered the culvert.

There have also been other instances of flooding in this area. Properties on High Street have suffered flooding events three times in just seven years, although they escaped the carnage caused by Storm Dennis. Other properties in High Street and Tynybedw Street also experienced flooding in their homes. In December 2013 the pumping station at Regent Street failed, causing flooding to some thirty properties. Engineers who had previously done maintenance work at the pumping station had failed to restore power to the pumps on completion of their work. This meant that the pumps did not start when the flood water came. Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water accepted responsibility for the failure at the time.

On June 16th 2020 a severe rain downpour overwhelmed the drainage system flooding many of the same properties that flooded in 2013. This downpour also flooded several houses in Tynybedw Street and further up the road in High Street. A tremendous amount of rain fell in a period of less than half an hour at around 7pm. Neither the council nor Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water has given an explanation of what happened but reports from Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water engineers indicate that their assets functioned well within parameters. This would indicate that the highway drainage system could not transfer the surface water fast enough from the highway into the Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water system. In some instances, the combined drain and sewer networks backed up, with many residents being flooded with foul water from the back of the property through to the front.

In October 2020, residents of High Street experienced flooding, although to a lesser degree. In the early hours of 8th October, water started rising again on High Street, entering some homes. That evening, a 'brownout' on the local electricity network caused the Regent Street pumping station to lose power, while the emergency generator had a problem and did not activate. Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water have again denied that this caused the flooding.

Ystrad

We are aware of three instances of flooding which affected residents in Tyntyla Road, Penrhys Road and Danycoed and Danygraig. The flooding at Tyntyla Road occurred during the period Storm Dennis hit. The culvert behind Tyntyla Road had blocked, resulting in water coming through the back of a house and on to the main road.



Rhondda Constituency Flooding

During the aftermath of Storm Dennis, we were made aware of the flooding in Penrhys Road. This affected less than 10 houses. The water had come down off the back of the mountain. The culvert there was blocked with brambles and brash. After speaking to residents, they were certain that the overgrowth in the lane behind them also played a part in not allowing the water to reach the drains there, resulting in flooding through the back.

The flooding in Danycoed and Danygraig occurred a few weeks later. Luckily the water didn't reach the houses, as the fire service had been called to the scene and was able to pump out the water in time. Again, as these streets back on to the mountain, the main concern is the speed that the water is coming from the mountains. Lack of maintenance of the drainage system is also a concern.

Maerdy

The flooding on North Terrace and Wrgant Place in Maerdy occurred because the drains along the sunken footpath in front of the houses became blocked, giving the rainwater nowhere to go. Apart from the normal rainfall water, the water came gushing down Park Road and Wood Street from the streets above and from the mountainside, and onto the footpaths of North Terrace and Wrgant Place with nowhere to go but into the houses. Other homes were affected by flooding on High Street, Richard Street, Glyncoed and Station Terrace.

The Role of Rhondda Cynon Taf Council

When asked about the council's role in the flooding and ways it could improve, respondents described the council as "useless", "negligent" and "slow". Many stated that they felt the council should have assessed the culverts and drainage after the felling, to ensure no blockage. One particular resident stated that they noticed slow drainage before the February flood; they stated that they called the council about a possible blockage and were referred to Natural Resources Wales. NRW referred them to Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water, who in turn referred them back to the council. Nothing was done. Survey responses included suggestions for improvement which include monitoring and regular maintenance and upgrading of drains and culverts, and water pumps updated/maintained and added. They also include suggestions of floodgates – or, even better, robust, kite-marked flood doors – to be provided to those at most risk, the installation of storm drains, and the provision of better warning systems. Many respondents also suggest better communication with other relevant authorities. They suggest assessing the felling on the mountain, together with other authorities, to ensure that it is carried out with risk assessments and to the highest standards, and that the debris is appropriately cleared so that it cannot be washed into the drains and culverts.

Respondents say that the council should appropriately police



Rhondda Constituency Flooding

other authorities by completing consultations and risk assessments on work that could impact residents. People also request that the council be accountable, honest, and provide appropriate support to those affected.

The Role of Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water

When asked about Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water's role in the flooding and ways they could improve moving forward, a large majority of respondents mention failed pumps in the area pumping stations run by Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water. Many respondents were frustrated when they witnessed Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water arrive and turn pumps on after their houses had been ruined by the floods. Respondents say that after this the water drained away in minutes. One respondent states they were told by a firefighter helping them that the reason for the floods were that the pumps weren't on. Another respondent states that a Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water representative that visited the street was sympathetic about the issue, but denied it was Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water's fault. Questions asked within the survey around this particular issue include: What happened to the pumps? Were they on? Did they fail? Had they been maintained recently? Suggestions regarding improvements from Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water include better maintenance of pumps.

The Role of Natural Resources Wales

When asked about Natural Resources Wales' role in the flooding and ways it could improve, many respondents expressed anger towards NRW. Many respondents place almost total blame on NRW for the flooding. A large majority of respondents state NRW's "total negligence", with specific reference to the felling on the mountainside and the "shocking mess" that was left. Throughout the survey, respondents describe the felling debris from the mountain that blocked the culvert and drainage, leading to the flood. It is not disputed that this debris was left by NRW. Other comments regarding future improvements that NRW can make include regular assessments and maintenance of culverts, ensuring that bridges over the rivers are kept clear of debris and undergrowth, and respondents wanting NRW to "clean up their mess".

As with Pontypridd respondents, a large majority of the survey respondents were insured and received pay-outs. A few of the respondents who were insured and tried to claim did not realise that flood damage was not part of their insurance. Others who had insurance didn't claim without stating the reason why; others stated they only had contents insurance and were not covered for the building damage. There were respondents who weren't insured, but none commented on how they are paying for repairs. Many respondents that claimed flood damage and received their pay-out have seen their premiums increase or are expecting their premiums to increase on renewal.



Rhondda Constituency Flooding

100% of Rhondda survey respondents support an independent inquiry into the cause of the floods in Rhondda and potential mitigation measures to protect people from future heavy rain.







Cynon Valley Constituency Flooding





Cynon Valley Constituency Flooding

Nine months on from the February floods, and there are many communities across the Cynon Valley which are still reeling from the impact. In the areas most badly affected, many residents are yet to return to their homes with building work and repairs ongoing.

Amongst the areas affected was Clydach Terrace in Ynysybwl, with 19 houses flooded with water that was over head height. One resident reported having to swim under the water to reach safety, and it is clear that many people remain traumatised by what they experienced. They are desperate for answers as to what happened, and assurances that steps are being taken to safeguard their homes in the future. Many concerns relate to the fact that the shoal material removal from the Nant Clydach had not been done every 5 years as it should, and that trees and debris were not being cleared from the river. Many residents also reported feeling neglected and are considering their own legal action against Natural Resources Wales. They also support an independent inquiry into the floods.

There is no doubt that the floods endured in Mountain Ash were a mirror image of the December 1979 flood event. This is evidenced by aerial photographs taken of the River Cynon and flooding in Henry Street in the town centre – in 1979 by the then Environment Agency, and in 2020 by its successor Natural Resources Wales – which are available online. In the evidence she had submitted, Cllr Pauline Jarman, who has represented Mountain Ash East since 1976, has stated that both incidents were eerily similar. She therefore disputes the claims by Natural Resources Wales and Rhondda Cynon Taf Council that this is a once in a generation event, having witnessed them twice herself in her time as a councillor. She recalls the rain in 1979 being described as “unprecedented”, just as it has been this year.

Natural Resources Wales claim that the lessons learned, and the flood work undertaken following the 1979 flood incident had a positive effect, and that the 2020 event would have been even worse without this work. The community is therefore left asking why did Natural Resources Wales not object to three planning applications on that site in the last three years, despite the land remaining in the flood plain?

A number of Cllr Jarman’s constituents in Mountain Ash East which experienced flooding related to the Nant Ffrwd Culvert have asked for her support in seeking the answers to the questions they have. Whilst grateful for the clean-up operation they remain angry that it had happened in the first instance. Many have claimed that they believe that the council were negligent in not properly maintaining the Nant Ffrwd Culvert and tunnels that went under their properties, despite the culvert being their responsibility. They want long-term solutions and assurances.



Cynon Valley Constituency Flooding

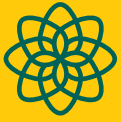
There was also significant flooding in February at Hirwaun, with 16 homes flooded adjacent to the River Cynon and 6 houses at four other locations in the village. There were significant landslides to the (disused) railway embankment leading to Penderyn Road, flooding from Hirwaun Ponds and damage to a sewerage pipe across the River Cynon.

Many of the residents affected attended a meeting with Councillor Karen Morgan after the floods to discuss their experiences both during and following the event and to ensure they were receiving any support available. Concerns raised at the meeting included anger that responsible agencies should be proactive rather than reactive in managing flood risk. Examples included questions around dredging of the River Cynon, maintenance of culverts and drains, and responsibilities of flood plain owners. Questions were also raised about the impact of the opencast restoration works because of flooding at Rhigos Road, the A465 and a property adjacent to the A465. Although the River Cynon had burst its banks at Cae Felin Parc, residents maintained that water also came from manholes and drains and a nearby culvert which were the responsibility of Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water and Rhondda Cynon Taf Council. They felt that all agencies should meet with those affected to hear their evidence and to provide answers to their many questions.

Residents also expressed concern about the lack of support from the local authority on the night and were grateful to the fire service for their assistance. They expressed frustration regarding communication with the out of hours emergency line especially when requesting sandbags – “we were told we could only have sandbags if there was threat to life or water was coming in to our homes, we were told to ring back when the water was coming in”. They felt that communication was poor and that there was an overreliance on social media.

By far the residents’ biggest concern was that they would not get answers to their questions and that lessons would not be learnt if those responsible did not listen to them. They were keen to be involved in any decision-making and to receive support to protect their homes from any further flooding.

Cilfynydd, Aberaman, Abercynon, and Cwmbach were also affected with many residents contacting Plaid Cymru to support calls for an independent inquiry.



Impacts and After Effects: Conclusion





Impact and After Effects: Conclusion

We need to look at all the evidence received and draw out key themes that need to be addressed. In the surveys, when asked if there was anything else the respondents would like to add, some discussed the cost of damage to property and cars, others mentioned the lack of communication from authorities and the feeling of being “forgotten about”. There are many expressions of anger and frustration towards the local authorities involved and their perceived “negligence”. The fact there were no warnings, or if there were warnings, many people did not receive them (especially in June) as well as what they felt was minimal support is the source of much of that frustration. Many respondents are also worried about their house being uninsurable or the value of their properties going down and not being able to sell in the future.

The main overwhelming common theme is the psychological and emotional impact of the flooding in all of the communities affected in Pontypridd, Rhondda and the Cynon Valley. People are living in fear of heavy rain because they haven’t been given adequate information about what happened, if it is going to happen again or if the issue has been fixed. Many report children to be terrified of it raining and in “floods of tears” when it does. Many respondents and their families are on medication for PTSD and various others report anxiety and stress disorders. Many describe having regular nightmares about it happening again.

The impact of the floods on these communities goes beyond the events themselves: the shock and trauma have had lasting effects that are detrimental to the people involved. The flooding itself is enough to cause mental health impacts, but in the middle of a pandemic, many people feel that little is being done to help them and they are unable to or put their minds at ease.

Finally, many respondents talk of the support from the communities themselves, as well as from Leanne Wood MS and councillors. Thanks are also expressed to the emergency responders, neighbours and local community centres, who all came together to help each other as best they could in all affected areas.



Recommendations:

It is clear from the evidence collated that an independent, expert-led inquiry is essential so that we can:

Understand what went wrong and why, by inviting evidence from all residents and businesses affected, alongside scrutinising all official reports into the floods.

Learn lessons for the future.

Secure investment in flood prevention measures and flood defences in response to the changes to the climate, and the increased risk of extreme weather and flooding.

Provide greater support for residents and businesses affected, or who are at risk of flooding in the future.

Ensure that those affected are compensated, should negligence be determined as a contributing factor to the flooding of homes and businesses.

It is also recommended that the following steps are actioned:

Make robust, kite-marked doors available to every at-risk property that could benefit from one, free of charge.

Consider giving responsibility to one body for all aspects of flooding, rather than a multi-agency approach, which can lead to a dis-jointed approach. This would include flood prevention and a support helpline.

Invest in a tree planting programme, alongside a full risk assessment of the impact on watercourses of existing tree felling programmes. This should also include full clearance of debris.

Make flood risk zone information available through council tax sign-up.

Improve communications with residents and businesses, including a flood alert system.



Appendix A



Appendix A

Below is some of the evidence received from affected residents and businesses, and why they believe an Independent Inquiry is essential.

"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. [...] 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."

"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"

"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."

"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."

"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."

"I just wish there had been a warning system in place and we could have tried to mitigate our losses. I feel WW and RCT etc were not proactive and I just hope measures are to be put in place to stop this from happening again"

"This could have been prevented by the actions of NRW and the council. We are now living in fear of what is going to happen again when we have some rain fall. We are concerned that our properties maybe devalued as a result of this and more difficult to sell if we wish to."

"If this can be prevented then it needs to be done!! No one should ever have to suffer and lose everything due to someone else's negligence"



Appendix A

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"

"I think it could have been prevented and someone has messed up somewhere and we need answers"

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

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

"The banks by our house did not burst, but the water came down Treforest estate like a tsunami from further up by the factory's. It happened so fast, and the amount of water was unbelievable. It came through the back and front doors and through the walls and windows. We have had a lot of rain fall on many occasions and the river has held, but on this night, something else happened. This was NOT just a lot of rain that's for sure."

"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."

"Council did nothing till it was too late."

"Not enough support no am or mp in sight in Ponty"

"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 taxpayer 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 would love to get some answers of WHAT HAPPENED THAT NIGHT!"



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