

# P-15-1010 Independent inquiry into the 2020 flooding in Rhondda Cynon Taf

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 29 Medi 2020  
Petitions Committee | 29 September 2020

Reference: RS20/13682-10

**Petition Number:** P-15-1010

**Petition title:** An independent inquiry into the 2020 flooding in Rhondda Cynon Taf so that lessons are learned

**Text of petition:**

We, the undersigned, urge the Welsh Government to initiate a full, independent, open and public inquiry into the 2020 flooding of homes and businesses across Rhondda Cynon Taf, and that appropriate steps are taken to rectify any issues so that similar damage can be prevented from reoccurring.

People and businesses across Rhondda Cynon Taf need an inquiry into the flooding that has hit so many of our communities this year, with some affected three times since February. It is time for the voices and experiences of the people and businesses of Pontypridd, Treforest, Taff's Well, Trehafod, Cilfynydd, Rhydyfelin, Nantgarw, Hawthorn, Hirwaun, Abercwmbוי, Mountain Ash, Pentre, Treorchy, Treherbert, Maerdy, Porth and others to be heard, so that lessons are learned for the future.



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# 1. Background

In February 2020, Wales saw some of the worst flooding on record from Storms Ciara and Dennis. The Met Office reported that it had been the wettest February on record for Wales.

During the weekend of the 15 and 16 February Storm Dennis hit the UK. The most affected areas were south Wales and the West Midlands in England. At the peak of the storm there were 61 Flood Alerts, 89 Flood Warnings and two Severe Flood Warnings in force across Wales. On the morning of 16 February, the River Taff reached its highest levels in 40 years at Pontypridd.

The Minister for Environment, Energy, and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths MS ('the Minister') confirmed on 25 February 2020 that more than 1,000 homes and 300 businesses across Wales had been directly impacted by the flooding. It was reported that Storm Dennis impacted 1,000 homes and businesses in Rhondda Cynon Taff (RCT) alone.

RCT was hit by further flooding on the weekend of 29 February 2020 from Storm Jorge, and again for a third time in June 2020.

## 1.1. Responsibility for flood management

The Flood and Water Management Act 2010 (hereafter, the Act) make provisions for the management of flooding and coastal erosion in England and Wales. The Act provides powers to, and makes requirements of, the Welsh Government, Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and Local Lead Flood Authorities (LLFA).

Section 6 of the Act defines the roles and responsibilities of 'Risk Management Authorities', which include all 22 Welsh local authorities (who act as LLFA). The Act also places a duty on local authorities to develop and implement Local Flood Risk Management Strategies to set out objectives for managing local flood risk from surface water, groundwater and ordinary watercourses.

Section 19 of the Act sets out the responsibility of a LLFA to investigate a flood event:

- (1) On becoming aware of a flood in its area, a lead local flood authority must, to the extent that it considers it necessary or appropriate, investigate—
  - (a) which risk management authorities have relevant flood risk management functions, and
  - (b) whether each of those risk management authorities has exercised, or is proposing to exercise, those functions in response to the flood.

(2) Where an authority carries out an investigation under subsection (1) it must—

(a) publish the results of its investigation, and

(b) notify any relevant risk management authorities.

## 1.2. Public inquiries

Public inquiries are held under the *Inquiries Act 2005* (hereafter ‘the 2005 Act’), which provides the framework for establishing an inquiry. It sets out the main points such as how the Chair of the inquiry is appointed, how evidence may be taken and how the report is to be produced. It states that the Welsh Ministers may “cause an inquiry to be held” where it appears that:

(a) particular events have caused, or are capable of causing, public concern, or

(b) there is public concern that particular events may have occurred.

The 2005 Act is supplemented by the *Inquiries Rules 2006* which outline the detailed structure of how an inquiry must be run.

## 2. Welsh Government action

Following the February storms, the Welsh Government made £10m available to help meet the costs of the initial response. Every household affected was able to claim £500, with an additional £500 available for those without flooding insurance. The Welsh Government provided local authorities and NRW with 100% of the funding required to repair damaged defences and culverts.

RCT County Borough Council received £549,500 emergency funding in response to the flooding by the beginning of April 2020, and a further £1.7 million through the emergency financial assistance scheme to fund its initial response.

The Minister confirmed in Plenary on 16 September 2020 that the Welsh Government had funded 100% of what RCT has applied for.

Answering a written question from Andrew RT Davies MS on 26 June 2020 on meetings held in relation to flood defences, the Minister said:

Immediately following the storms I visited communities in Llanrwst, Pontypridd, Mountain Ash, Crickhowell, Tylorstown, Llanhilleth and Bangor-on-Dee.

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The First Minister and I held a meeting at Rhondda Cynon Taf Council offices to discuss the flooding with councillors, emergency responders, local businesses and NRW.

In response to this petition, the Minister disagreed with the need for an independent inquiry 'at this stage', highlighting the responsibility of RCT County Borough Council to produce a flood investigation report (under section 19 of the Act as described above) in the first instance. She stated that:

RCT is currently developing 19 reports to assess the causes of flooding from Storm Dennis and recent events. NRW has confirmed it is working with RCT to support this process. Once completed, the reports must be published by each RMA [Risk Management Authority] so they can be subject to appropriate scrutiny by the public, elected members and all other interested parties.

I have made clear to Wales' RMAs these reviews need to be prioritised to help bring forward scheme proposals to address flood risk

On 24 June 2020, in response to a Plenary question from Leanne Wood MS on whether the Welsh Government supports calls for an independent, expert lead inquiry into the flooding in RCT, the Minister replied:

I think it's important that we let all the investigations come forward. They can be done much quicker than an independent inquiry, and that's what I'm waiting for.

In Plenary on 16 September 2020, Janet Finch-Saunders MS highlighted in a question to the Minister that "seven months on, that [section 19 investigation] report has not been published", and asked if the Minister would "address this urgently by setting a deadline" for publication. In her response, the Minister said that she would "will certainly look at those dates".

### 3. Welsh Parliament action

The flooding in Pentre, RCT in June was discussed on 9 July 2020 in a meeting of the Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs (CCERA) Committee. Jenny Rathbone MS questioned the Minister on why Pentre had flooded again in June, saying that it "gave the impression that we weren't on top of doing something about the much larger flooding that took place in February". In response the Minister said:

...the flooding in June was caused by something like a month's worth of rain that fell in 15 minutes, so it was a very different flooding incident to what we had back in February. Obviously, it's not acceptable to see the same streets flooded, but we still are investigating all the flooding from February.

In Plenary on 16 September 2020, Leanne Wood MS reiterated that “Plaid Cymru wants to see an independent inquiry as to why so many communities in the Rhondda have suddenly become prone to flooding”, but added that this “shouldn't stop any preventative measures or remedial works” taking place.

In the same Plenary session, Mick Antoniw MS highlighted the concerns of residents in RCT “as winter approaches”:

...there are very real concerns for those people who were flooded or live in flood risk areas that the same might happen again, having got their houses in order, to be potentially flooded again if we face more serious storms

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.