

Ymchwiliad byryn effaith Stormydd Bert a Darragh // 6 March 2025 // Inquiry on the impact of Storms Bert and Darragh

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Written Evidence

- The forecasting for Storm Bert wasn't adequate. The yellow rain warning didn't escalate above a low likelihood and medium impact, which didn't reflect the situation. As a result, preparations and response structures that would normally be established for an Amber weather warning were not in place.
- In Blaenau Gwent, there were 107 residential properties flooded to varying degrees, with a village was cut off from vehicular access for a short period. Due to deprivation, many residents lacked any or suitable property insurance. The flooding has had a detrimental impact on a few communities, resulting in anxiety and concern about future flooding incidents. In addition to the Local Authority support provided, local community groups provided buildings for assistance centres to be established, coordinated donations of furniture, and local residents helped each other with clean up where necessary. The community impact of the landslide in Cwmtillery is substantial. The residents are concerned that there will be a repeat occurrence if there is a storm, homeowners fear they will be unable to sell their homes, and those in social housing in the streets affected do not want to stay in the area.
- Alongside the response to a landslide affecting properties, the Local Authority responded to numerous widespread flooding incidents and a few minor landslide incidents during Storm Bert. Contractors were called in as necessary to make safe collapsed culverts, including one leading from a reservoir. Humanitarian assistance was provided through rest centres for evacuees, assistance centres for those who had been flooded, an emergency accommodation for those unable to return to their homes. In addition to the WG funding, financial support for those with flood / landslide damage was provided by the Local Authority, and Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations (GAVO) was approached to coordinate the funding received through numerous 'go fund me' fundraising platforms established.
- Learning from Storm Dennis was applied to the response to Storm Bert. As in Storm Dennis, humanitarian assistance was a priority and local assistance centres were established quickly to support residents, with door-to-door visits to provide advice and guidance. Donations of furniture and white goods were coordinated by the Local Authority during Storm Dennis, with a decision made for this to be coordinated by the community during Storm Bert. A central record of properties flooded and those visited with no flood damage was held, which aided situational awareness.
- In terms of flooding the response preparation in Wales is acceptable, although aging infrastructure plus increased instances of severe weather should be considered. There is a gap around preparations for widespread power outages, the humanitarian impact of these and identification of vulnerable people affected. Preparations for incidents involving coal tips are underway.

Resilience of infrastructure:

- We have ageing infrastructure which in many instances is at the end of its design life.
- We have insufficient budget to undertake programmed condition surveys and replacement of all drainage assets.
- Our drainage infrastructure as evolved over time, so is piecemeal in nature, as not been designed to meet current standards and consequently is in many cases under capacity in terms of dealing with a major storm event.
- Many of the structures associated with our culverts are substandard and difficult to access and maintain.
- Ownership of many culverts is complicated with many passing through both public and private land which multiple responsibilities for maintenance.
- Highway drainage infrastructure in many cases is substandard due to the age of the road.
- Insufficient budget and human resources to allow full proactive maintenance of highway/land drainage assets, what budget is available is focused on high risk areas but this as proven to be insufficient.

Basically we need funding and resources to effectively manage and overhaul our assets to bring them up to condition to meet the resilience levels called for to meet climate change and the immediate, and growing storm incidents.

Evidence provided by:

Deanne Griffiths

National Advisory Service and Civil Contingencies Manager

Kevin Kinsey

Service Manager – Infrastructure Services