

## **Sustainability Committee: INQUIRY INTO FLOODING IN WALES**

### **Speech given by Angela Burns AM/AC at the Launch into the Inquiry into Flooding in Wales conducted by the Sustainability Committee. 11<sup>th</sup> February 2010**

This report is all about people, something easily lost amongst departments and laws and red tape and funding issues. The stories we heard, the evidence we saw, brought home time and time again the complete devastation a flood can cause and the absolute misery, the emotional and physical impact and financial hardship that serial flooding causes.

We spoke to people who have suffered a 1 in 100 year flood, 2 years running and unless something radically changes, it's on the cards for this year too. We saw elderly folk trying to clear up and cope without help & support, young children frightened to move back into their home in case the water came in the night whilst they slept and people simply struggling, who lie awake at night whenever there is persistent rain, who have lost weight through stress, who can't sleep properly, who are on anti-depressants and sleeping pills, who won't leave their homes for any length of time and who are quietly going broke.

This report is about the human story, it's a report informed by people, for people.

But make no mistake; this is not a sentimental report.

These stories formed the backdrop but we then investigated the cold hard facts, the realities of over stretched services and under funded solutions. We looked at some of the crass stupidities of building in areas of high flood risk, of not protecting the vital infrastructure we need to keep going, of the mish mash of communications, the confusion of multiple agencies dealing with different types of water, the vested interests of some groups, the enormity of the problem and the science that tells all of us that this issue isn't going away and the time has come to deal with it. And that time is here, now, today, tomorrow, this year. Because if we don't the consequences will become immeasurably more difficult to deal with, people will lose heart and faith and the financial costs to the public and private purse will become unmanageable.

Of these important recommendations I would like to pick out just a few for special attention here.

Recommendation 1 is that we have ONE organisation to become THE single point of contact. Time and time again we heard of the complete confusion felt by those being flooded as to whom they should call. Was their water to be dealt with by their Local Council, the Environment Agency, Welsh Water, the Highways Agency? People were being pushed around from pillar to post and what happens when the water pouring in through your back door is coming from the stream behind your house and the water through your front door is coming from the skies bouncing off the roads and out of the overwhelmed drains? And this one agency approach should have the remit to ensure that all the other agencies involved in this issue take action. And so Minister, our Number One Recommendation is One Agency, which is what we, the Committee, believe to be the most important step forward and it is what the people need and want.

Recommendations 22 and 23. We learnt the lessons of Gloucester and we understand how key it is to protect infrastructure, not just hospitals and fire stations but fresh water sources, sewage treatment facilities, pumping stations, telecoms. If we are flooded we need these vital tools to be able to respond and recover

Recommendation 24, the Government must look at how we mitigate the spiralling costs of insurance. We met too many people who have done all they can to mitigate the effects of flooding in their homes but still face annual premiums of £2,500 plus or excesses of £5,000. When you earn £21,000 a year, the so called average wage for Wales, those insurance figures are a no go. So after the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> flood incident people stop claiming or stop insuring, but what has to stop is this situation.

And finally; our last recommendation. Recommendation 28 which along with Recommendation 1 is probably the most important. Stop building on flood plains and in areas where the experts say floods are likely and if you do, if you authorise, sanction or override that advice then you pay. You pay for an indemnity so there is financial protection for the people, for business, for the state. And maybe this recommendation above all, this recommendation which tackles the tricky area of fiscal accountability and responsibility might just be the one that stops some of the reckless developments we have seen, gives pause for thought as the pen is put to paper and ultimately restores public confidence and affords protection for us all.

On a personal note I would like to thank all those who came to give evidence, the people who allowed me into their homes to see the devastation for myself, the clerking team, my fellow members of the committee and Mick Bates for his stewardship of this Inquiry.

*Angela Burns is the Welsh Conservative Assembly Member for Carmarthen West & South Pembrokeshire. She is also the Shadow Minister for the Environment and Planning and is a member of the Sustainability Committee*

Ends.

### **Full list of recommendations:**

**Recommendation 1.** The Committee recommends that the Welsh government identifies and funds an agency/organisation to become a single point of contact or 'one stop shop' for all enquiries regarding flooding incidences and flood advice.

**Recommendation 2.** The Committee recommends that the Minister places a requirement on the Environment Agency to engage the community when developing new flood maps and produce evidence on how this information is utilised.

**Recommendation 3.** The Committee recommends that the Minister investigates the opportunity for establishing Internal Drainage Boards on a Wales wide basis.

**Recommendation 4.** The Committee recommends that the Environment Agency updates their communication strategy, following a period of public consultation, to set out clearly the role of the Agency, public and other interested organisations in public engagement.

**Recommendation 5.** The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government works with first responders and the National Flood Forum to identify a suite of options for responding to flooding incidents.

**Recommendation 6.** The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government produces guidance for first responders on how to implement response options.

**Recommendation 7.** The Committee recommends that the *Flood and Water Management Bill* is amended to give the Fire and Rescue Service a statutory duty and necessary resources to carry out the rescue of persons from floods

**Recommendation 8.** The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government, working with colleagues in the Environment Agency, and Local Authorities provides the necessary resources to establish a Welsh Flood Forum, along the lines of the Scottish model.

**Recommendation 9.** The Committee recommends the Welsh Government co-ordinate the development of a website and information pack which contains information on dealing with a flood, who the best people to contact are, areas of flood risk and other relevant information in an easy to read, easy to use format to reach as many people as possible. This could be modelled on the Scottish Environment Protection Agency website.

**Recommendation 10.** The Committee recommend an annual flood awareness week is arranged in Wales which would highlight what people need to do during a flooding incident and emphasises the need to prepare.

**Recommendation 11.** The Committee recommends that the Minister develops a scheme and provides funding to aid those who are at greatest flood risk to take the necessary steps to retrofit their houses to become more flood resilient, similar to that operating in England.

**Recommendation 12.** The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government works with Community Councils and Local Resilience Fora to develop a strategy for identifying vulnerable individuals within communities.

**Recommendation 13.** The Committee recommends that the Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning produces guidance for all schools in Wales about developing a flood plan and raising the awareness of pupils with regards to the risks of flooding.

**Recommendation 14.** The Committee recommends that the Minister for Economy and Transport develops guidance for businesses, about developing flood plans and raising awareness of flood risk.

**Recommendation 15.** The Committee recommends that the Ministers with responsibility for Local Government and Public Service Delivery work with key partners to develop flooding plans for vulnerable groups such as hospital patients and care home residents.

**Recommendation 16.** The Committee recommends that TAN 15 is redrafted to ensure that flood risk is better reflected through a presumption against building on a flood plain and the requirement for strategic flood consequence assessments to be built into Local Development Plans.

**Recommendation 17.** The Committee recommends that the second generation of Development Advice Maps are updated on an annual basis.

**Recommendation 18.** The Committee recommends that a requirement be placed on Local Authorities to consult with their neighbouring authorities when applications for development which could affect flooding/river levels in an adjacent authority are being considered.

**Recommendation 19.** The Committee recommends that the Welsh government fund a number of community flood wardens across Wales on a trial basis. They would have responsibility for maintenance and communicating flood warnings and risk. This post could also help with the identification of vulnerable people during a flood, and help raise flood awareness in the community.

**Recommendation 20.** The Committee recommends the Welsh Government produce guidance for riparian owners which clearly sets out their roles and responsibilities.

**Recommendation 21.** The Committee recommends that Local Authorities identify the watercourses at particular risk from flooding and ensure that the riparian owners are maintaining the river and banks to the required standards.

**Recommendation 22.** The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government identify the key infrastructure in Wales, and has a co-ordinating role in ensuring the relevant organisations have up-to-date flood plans. This should help provide a strategic oversight to the plans. The Committee recommends that this is reviewed on an annual basis.

**Recommendation 23.** The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government work with the other UK administrations to ensure that a consistent level of protection has been afforded to key structures across the UK.

**Recommendation 24.** The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government works with relevant partners to have in place, by the end of 2010, opportunities for those homes which are at significant flood risk and have taken measures to minimise that risk, but still attract high insurance excesses and premiums, to access affordable insurance.

**Recommendation 25.** The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government and the Environment Agency work with the insurance industry to ensure that the information the companies use to judge flood risk is representative of the nature of flood risk in the local area.

**Recommendation 26.** The Committee recommends the Welsh Government ensures all homes in a flood risk area are provided with advice on possible actions that can be taken in order to mitigate against flood risk and are provided with all the necessary information on the process of making an insurance flood claim if necessary.

**Recommendation 27.** The Committee recommends information on whether a property is susceptible to flooding is included in the Home Information Packs for all house purchases in Wales.

**Recommendation 28.** The Committee recommends that any authority which gives planning permission to develop on flood plains, against the advice of the strategic flood consequence

assessment, should be required to take out an indemnity policy for future flooding in these developments