



**Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru
The National Assembly for Wales**

**Y Pwyllgor Cynaliadwyedd
The Sustainability Committee**

**Dydd Mercher, 3 Mehefin 2009
Wednesday, 3 June 2009**

Cynnwys
Contents

- 3 Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions
- 4 Ymchwiliad i Lifogydd yng Nghymru: Sesiwn Dystiolaeth
Inquiry into Flooding in Wales: Evidence Session
- 32 Ystyried y Ddeiseb ar Fynediad ar hyd Dŵr Mewndirol
Consideration of Petition on Access Along Inland Water
- 35 Papurau i'w Nodi
Papers to Note

Cofnodir y trafodion hyn yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynndi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal, cynhwysir cyfieithiad Saesneg o gyfraniadau yn y Gymraeg. Mae hon yn fersiwn ddrafft o'r cofnod. Cyhoeddir fersiwn derfynol ymhen pum diwrnod gwaith.

These proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in the committee. In addition, an English translation of Welsh speeches is included. This is a draft version of the record. The final version will be published within five working days.

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

Lorraine Barrett	Llafur Labour
Mick Bates	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Welsh Liberal Democrats (Committee Chair)
Angela Burns	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Alun Davies	Llafur Labour
Lesley Griffiths	Llafur Labour
Rhodri Glyn Thomas	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Brynle Williams	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Leanne Wood	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Brett Allen	ITV Cymru ITV Wales
Ian Cameron	BBC
Mary Dhonau	Y Fforwm Llifogydd Cenedlaethol National Flood Forum
Mark Hurrell	BBC
Ruth Wignall	ITV Cymru ITV Wales

Swyddogion Gwasanaeth Seneddol y Cynulliad yn bresennol
Assembly Parliamentary Service officials in attendance

Dr Virginia Hawkins	Clerc Clerk
Meriel Singleton	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 9.07 a.m.
The meeting began at 9.07 a.m.

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **Mick Bates:** Good morning, and welcome to this meeting of the Sustainability Committee. I have a few housekeeping announcements to make. In the event of a fire alarm, you should leave the room by the marked exits and follow the instructions of the ushers and staff. There is no test scheduled for today. Please ensure that all phones, pagers and

BlackBerrys are switched off as otherwise they will interfere with the broadcasting equipment. The National Assembly for Wales operates through the media of both Welsh and English, and headphones are provided through which simultaneous translation may be received; for those who are hard of hearing, the headphones may also be used to amplify the sound. Interpretation is available on channel 1, and verbatim on channel 0. Please do not touch any of the buttons on the microphones as this can disable the system, and please ensure that the red light is on before you speak.

[2] I have received apologies from Lorraine Barrett, who is at a meeting of Legislation Committee No. 4, and Karen Sinclair.

9.08 a.m.

Ymchwiliad i Lifogydd yng Nghymru: Sesiwn Dystiolaeth Inquiry into Flooding in Wales: Evidence Session

[3] **Mick Bates:** Today we are taking evidence as part of our inquiry into flooding. We are fortunate to have four representatives from the media with us, and in the second half of the meeting we will take evidence from the National Flood Forum, having already visited Gloucester to see how the massive incidents there were dealt with. We have also had evidence from the Environment Agency as background to the issue. As part of our evidence-gathering we will use vox pop booths and a bus that will tour north Wales; the first session is this Friday, in the Rhondda, followed by sessions in north Wales, and finally, next week, in mid Wales. This inquiry will look at the impact on people in all the locations where flood-risk management is important.

[4] I will start by asking you to introduce yourselves for the record. Brett, would you begin?

[5] **Mr Allen:** I am Brett Allen, the programme editor of *Wales Tonight*.

[6] **Ms Wignall:** I am Ruth Wignall, ITV Wales' weather presenter and journalist.

[7] **Mr Hurrell:** I am Mark Hurrell, the managing editor at BBC Radio Gloucestershire.

[8] **Mr Cameron:** I am Ian Cameron, the news editor for BBC nations and regions.

[9] **Mick Bates:** Thank you for that, and for your papers. Brett or Ruth, would you like to make some opening remarks?

9.10 a.m.

[10] **Ms Wignall:** I will just give you a bit of background on how our system at ITV Wales works. I am the weather presenter, so I am the contact between the news room, the Met Office and the Environment Agency—the middle man, in a sense. At the end of the day, I am the one who presents the information to our viewers. I get daily briefings on the forecast of the weather from the Met Office. I get a verbal briefing and access to its website, which is updated constantly. We have information on the forecast for up to about four or five days. Anything beyond that we like to term 'guesswork'; it becomes increasingly difficult to be specific after a certain point. In a day and age when people are very quick to take you at your word and quick to criticise if you get something wrong, we are very careful in the way that we present this information.

[11] **Mick Bates:** I think we are well aware of that in our profession.

[12] **Ms Wignall:** We are public enemy No. 1 if we get it wrong, believe me. The Met Office gives us detailed information as to whether it is going to rain and so on, and it then issues warnings at different levels of severity. So, if we are expecting what we now term a 'weather event', which is our new phrase, we are given different levels, from severe to extreme. Thankfully, it is rare for it to be extreme here in Wales, but, nevertheless, these weather events happen and there are flooding situations. So, we are given a general overview for the weather forecast, but we then act in conjunction with information from the Environment Agency. That information is more specifically about flooding—there are flood watches and flood warnings, again at varying levels of severity. Our role is to take this information from the Met Office and the Environment Agency and to present it in a way that our viewers, bless them, can understand. I then hand this information to Brett or whoever is the boss of the day. I can only give Brett the facts; it is for the news desk to decide how we act on the information, if, indeed, we act at all. I suppose that that is where you take over, Brett.

[13] **Mr Allen:** As someone who is looking at the overall programme menu for the day and following days, my difficulty is to work out how important that information is. I think that Ruth would agree that we get an incredible amount of information—almost too much sometimes. Severe weather warnings seem to come continually, and it is a case of trying to work out whether they are just trying to cover their backs or whether it is something that we need to act on quickly. It is often difficult to work that out.

[14] **Ms Wignall:** One of our friends made the comment that, within the space of half an hour, you could receive up to 50 flood watches. We cover a fairly large patch, we are limited in terms of resources to a certain extent, geographically we are somewhat limited, and this is where the balance between newsworthiness and the public interest kicks in.

[15] **Mr Allen:** It is a question of whether the information stays within the weather forecast or becomes a news event in its own right.

[16] **Mick Bates:** Thank you for those opening remarks. There will be questions from Members in the next 40 minutes. Please can we move on to your opening remarks, Mark?

[17] **Mr Hurrell:** Yes, by all means. I have prepared a bit of a spiel. Would you like to hear it? It will not take long.

[18] **Mick Bates:** Yes, please.

[19] **Mr Hurrell:** I am very glad to hear that you have been to Gloucester. That was the epicentre for us, and we had a very busy time for those two weeks. To give you a little bit of background, we are one of 40 BBC local radio stations. I am the managing editor, the station covers the whole of Gloucestershire, we have approximately 100,000 listeners every week, and we employ about 30 members of staff. With regard to the events of that weekend in July, there were in fact five or six big stories. It started on the Friday with heavy rain, the M5 was shut, and it was the first Friday of the school holidays, with that traditional dash to the west country from the Midlands—that was not unusual. However, sadly, it was a sequence of events that all overlapped: there was the flash flooding, the M5 closure, three deaths, 3,000 or 4,000 homes were flooded, and the key thing for us was the failure of the water supply system. Even to this day, there are people who do not understand that we lost all our water for two weeks. Water was provided in bowsers and bottles.

[20] So, how did we cover it? What did we do and what did I do as the boss? Basically, decisions on what we were doing were made on the hoof. I am not afraid to say it; that is how it happened. Although there is an agreed statement between the BBC and the Home Office called 'Connecting in a Crisis', and we have our own strategy on sustainability, on keeping

ourselves on the air, but to a certain extent that went out of the window, and decisions were made hourly. We have experienced teams, as, I am sure, do our colleagues at ITV, and so it was reasonably straightforward.

[21] If I may, Chair, I will give you a brief idea of the framework within which we operate. This relates to the 'Connecting in a Crisis' documentation. I am not sure whether you are familiar with it; I would suggest that you look at it. It is a warning and informing system in the interests of public safety, and it concentrates on delivering essential information quickly—it is not about reporting the wider issues. It is not a solution in itself, but sets out to provide a structure within which solutions can be worked out. It offers guidance to the emergency planning community on how to engage in effective local relationships with the BBC to achieve a shared state of professional readiness. It explains who to contact at the BBC, identifies key information needs, and addresses logistical issues. It highlights good practice and innovative partnership ideas from around the UK, it is a catalyst for systems that will be strong enough to survive the pressures of a major incident, and it encourages planning and preparing together for the unexpected. That was what was in place, but, on that Friday afternoon, although things did not quite unravel, it was a fast-moving event.

[22] There are a couple of points that I want to make. For my job, it is essential that I know all of the key movers and shakers in my county: the chief constable, the chief fire officer, and the chief executive of the county council, Peter Bungard, who I assume that you have met. I know all of these people personally, and they know me, and we have well-established lines of communication, and meet regularly. So there is a dialogue, and my staff are encouraged to have a similar relationship with the various press officers.

[23] During that weekend, we were able to respond quickly to an ever-changing scenario. With just 30 people at our station, we brought in staff from other BBC local radio stations, and regular freelancers, because radio still tends to be the first port of call in an emergency. People turn to the radio when there is snow, floods, or whatever, and that is what happened. Within the first 24 hours, there were two key decisions, in my opinion. The first was on the Saturday morning, when I agreed with my colleagues in television that we would broadcast the first of 13 daily broadcasts of the gold committee. The gold committee was established on the Friday evening at about 6 p.m., and I was told about that. The next day at noon, the chief constable, who chaired the gold committee, decided to hold a press conference, at which were Sky and the BBC news channel, and, of course, we were there as well. That was significant because, first, these became must-see, or must-listen news sources; and, secondly, they gave the public undiluted information. There was no spin or interpretation by journalists—it was pure facts and figures, and the chief constable, who has announced his retirement this week, was an absolute star. He played a blinder by hosting those press conferences because he understood that the most difficult aspect of any emergency is how you, as the authorities, or the fire brigade or the police, get your message out to the public. Ian and I have made various presentations to numerous bodies, and I bang on about this because I often find that however many committees, plans and strategies you have, somebody somewhere has to ensure that that message can get out to the wider public.

[24] So, there were gold committee briefings every day for 13 days on the trot at 12 p.m. for 30 minutes, and they consisted purely of information. That is where Severn Trent Water, the Environment Agency, the county council, the public health service, and the water distribution system, which was controlled by the army, were all able to have their say, and give the local community the facts and figures up to the hour. However, once a better story came along, Sky and BBC News dropped off, and moved on to something else; I am not sure how long that took—Ian may remember—but it may have been three or four days. That is where we came in: we stuck with it, and that is the joy of local radio. It is my trade, and what I do, and I am passionate about the importance of local radio. During that period our audience figures rose by about 50 per cent to approximately 250,000 people, who tuned in every day.

That is the strength of local media.

9.20 a.m.

[25] The second most important decision—and I will shut up after this—was the fact that we doubled our website team. We normally have a team of two people working on our website and we doubled it to four. During that two-week period, we had nearly 8 million hits. That is how people want information these days. There is an insatiable demand for information. People want it now, and we know how impatient people are. Some of the other websites fell down, but we were able to sustain the supply of information. As I said, we had millions of hits—many more than we could have anticipated. One lesson that we learned from this is that, because more and more people are turning to the web for information, there will be a rise in traffic on the website if there is any form of emergency. During the snows in February, we experienced a massive rise in traffic. We were able to serve people's requirement for information, linking to the county council and so on through our website. So, the two things were the emergency gold command broadcast and the website. I have plenty more. I lived it for 13 days, so I could talk about it forever.

[26] **Mick Bates:** Thank you very much. Ian, please make your opening remarks.

[27] **Mr Cameron:** Thank you. I am Ian Cameron, and I am a journalist by trade, but I am also a geek because I am doing a masters degree in civil protection. I did not realise before that the letter 'm' in MA stood for 'masochist'. *[Laughter.]* I am also a member of the National Steering Committee on Warning and Informing the Public, which advises the Cabinet Office. Stop me if I become too theoretical.

[28] The main thing to say is that, after the lessons that we picked up from Mark after the floods, we brought many BBC people together at a conference in London and invited the emergency responders, both category 1 and category 2, so the blue-light services, as well as the utilities and so on. We had a big conference to review what had happened and the coverage of it. Three initials summed up what came out of that: AIC. 'A' stands for 'audiences', as the audiences turning to us during these events for warnings and advice are huge. 'I' stands for 'interaction'. There is a huge amount of interaction with the audience. People are no longer passive during these events: they provide as much information as we give them back, and they provide lots of little pieces of the jigsaw.

[29] To give you a flavour of how online services have grown, with the Boscastle floods, Radio Cornwall got 70,000 hits on its website that night. Six months later, there were the Carlisle floods, and Radio Cumbria's website had 3 million hits in three days. At the time of the fire at Buncefield, the BBC network received 6,000 e-mails, pictures and text messages by lunchtime; that figure was 18,000 by the close of play. Coming right up to date, during the coverage of the heavy snows on 2 February, the BBC website received 5.3 million hits, which compares with 4.8 million hits for the election of Obama last November. So, the number of people coming to our online services is exponential, which means that we have to look at their resilience. In the past, we have run radio stations, which we have always seen as the most resilient form, but we must recognise that many people are now coming to websites.

[30] The letter 'C' stands for 'consistency'. There were stations, such as Radio Gloucestershire that performed very well; others did not perform as well. Likewise, we found that some blue-light services performed fantastically well while others did not. In some places, we were given access to gold and silver control and we were getting the information straight away; on others, we were told that we could not come in, despite previous agreements to that end through the local resilience fora and regional media emergency fora. So, again, we asked for consistency, and we have done quite a bit of work since then. For example, working through NSCWIP, which I am involved with, the Association of Chief Police Officers has

agreed a procedure whereby a media cell will be placed next to silver control so that we can get that information. It does not want us in the room because, obviously, sensitive discussions take place there and it does not want the media affecting that, but we have worked on some of those things.

[31] From the conference, we got a consensus view. For the first time, we started to hear the phrase ‘community resilience’, and it was clear that the scale of the events in 2007 threatened to overwhelm the blue-light services. There was a need to educate people about what the blue-light services can and cannot do. A lot of people were ringing up, expecting the fire service to turn up to pump out their garage, but the service was trying to explain that saving lives was its priority. The concept of community resilience came to the fore: people took more responsibility for their own safety and getting hold of things like grab bags. The Pitt review listened to the public and found out what the public felt. Several things came out of that, but I think that it is the element of community resilience that is most important.

[32] Our feeling was that we needed to try to provide information to the public so that it could take steps in advance. So, initially, we did a three-day campaign called What if?, which ran on 42 local radio stations. Radio Wales also carried some stuff on its *Good Morning* programme. We asked people what they would do if there were a flood, a chemical leak, or pandemic outbreak. We are looking at working up some extra stuff on warning and informing later in the year and to revisit that.

[33] As a final bit from me at this stage, after doing my master’s and coming back and looking at our stuff, I see the three key areas as being communication, people and technology. When I say ‘communication’, I mean things like the language that we use. If we use words such as ‘This is likely’ or ‘This is probable’, they mean different things to different people, and they can mean different things within an organisation. We are saying that it is essential that we exercise and rehearse together. BBC Wales does that—it invites blue-light services and agencies in to its exercises. I know that my colleagues, Ruth Sully and Margaret Callaghan—the news editors at the BBC—have gone to take part in some of the exercises. I think that that is important. It is about getting to know people face to face.

[34] The other thing is never to underestimate the human behaviour element in all this. If you look at disasters, such as the Columbia and the Challenger shuttle disasters, which were 18 years apart, you see that although they were caused by different things—one was caused by O-rings and the other by foam tiles—when you scratch away at the surface, you find that there were cultural problems that meant that people felt as though they could not report certain things. So, you start to find these common lessons. It was the same with the Bradford City Football Club and King’s Cross fires, which were both caused by dirt underneath the stadium stands and the escalators. When they looked, they realised that there were a number of fires every week, but the culture was such that they were treated as everyday incidents. These are the things that you need to tease out. If you are looking at emergency planning, you need to tease these things out and ask how people will behave in such a situation.

[35] We have plans for a pandemic outbreak. For instance, we expect our people to work from home if things get really bad. That is one of our contingency plans and it is the same if people cannot get to work due to flooding. A lot of other companies throughout the UK also have such plans. If you go down the path of expecting people to work from home, you need to check whether it will work in practice—and I do not just mean the technology, but also people’s behaviour. After Buncefield and the Manchester IRA bomb, certain companies expected staff to work from home and, after about four days, found that people really hated it. They were saying, ‘Why is everyone else from my corral doing this and I am not?’. They started to question what was going on and they felt very isolated, so I think that these things need to be looked at. The other point involves technology and how it interlinks. It is a bit like a car engine in that it is not about what the pistons or the batteries are doing, but how all the

parts interlink to make the engine go.

[36] **Mick Bates:** Thank you for those fascinating opening remarks. I am certain that our Members will have a series of questions. Leanne, do you want to start?

[37] **Leanne Wood:** Yes. We have been to Gloucester and it provides an excellent example for us to learn lessons from for this inquiry. You said that you relied a lot on interactive contact and that you had to make decisions very quickly. Did you ever get it wrong?

[38] **Mr Hurrell:** I probably did, but I cannot remember a particular example, to be honest with you. I can tell you—and this is one thing that I did not mention in my address—that we had about 12,000 phone calls, which were very difficult for us to answer, because we are only a small radio station of 30 people. It is not big at all. However, during those two weeks, I never heard anything really bad. Nobody really lost the plot, and there was no shouting, screaming or hysterics. Everyone worked virtually on the trot. I am sure that we did get some things wrong.

9.30 a.m.

[39] Perhaps one mistake—although I suppose that it is more of an internal thing—was that I was not sure how much I was listening. The thing about a radio service is that you think that you are doing the right things, but you need other people from outside to confirm that. I did ring some of my editor colleagues in other parts of the country and asked them to listen online to ensure that we had got it right. We did not know, and that is what it is like when you are under intense pressure, when the phones start ringing at 5 a.m. and do not stop until 3 a.m. the next day. The trouble with any event like this, as I am sure you will understand, is that we have hundreds of people calling us from Gloucestershire and the rest of England, asking, ‘How is my Aunt Nelly doing in Cheltenham?’. Given that it was a big media event during the summer, which, dare I say it, is a quiet time, we had radio stations and television stations all over the world getting in touch, asking us to do a two-way on the story.

[40] As far as the website is concerned, I am not quite sure how much traffic we got requesting answers. We got some questions, but most people were seeking information. So, most of the questions came from punters, some of them sounded off because their browser had not been filled and asked when the water would be coming to their street, and others slagged off the services. Severn Trent in particular got a lot of grief. I know that I did not answer your question, but—

[41] **Leanne Wood:** I am guessing that you must have got a lot of it right or your figures would not have been so high. People would not have had confidence in you if they thought that the information that they were getting was inaccurate. So, presumably, you did get a lot right.

[42] **Mr Cameron:** Elsewhere in the country, there were places where it could have been better, and it did not work quite as well as it did with Mark. Given that they had been involved in exercises through these local resilience fora and so on, they had the face-to-face contact, and they could pick up the phone and speak to each other. That is so important. Elsewhere, there were instances in which people started to send emergency broadcasts only for the police force to tell them that they were over-egging it and hyping it up, and asking them to stop. Actually, they did stop for a while, although it turned out that there were two Sea King helicopters above that city airlifting people off cars at a car park. So, it is about communication. That particular force has a very good senior officer who normally has a good relationship with the media; it just happened that that person was off that day. If one person is out of the chain, the whole relationship can suddenly break down, so your contingency

planning must involve a number of people.

[43] We experienced something similar during the snow. When some snow fell on a busy road, trapping people overnight, it took the local force, which is normally one of the best at dealing with emergencies, three hours before it could release somebody to the BBC to answer questions. In emergencies, the first two hours are critical. We get a lot of information in, but we want to bounce that off the emergency services to verify it and authenticate it before we use it. If you do not fill that gap, rumours will start. We will do our best to stop that, but, in the absence of information, people will start to go on social networking sites such as Twitter, and things will go that way.

[44] **Leanne Wood:** You mentioned that you are close to the gold and silver command teams when they are set up but that you cannot be involved in their meetings. It would make sense to me to have someone with a communications hat on involved in those meetings. Can you explain why that is not appropriate?

[45] **Mr Cameron:** I think that it is because the police have their own communications officers in the gold and silver teams. From their point of view, they have to take some difficult decisions, and there can sometimes be arguments between a chief fire officer and a chief police officer or a local authority, for example. They need to be able to speak very sharply, bluntly and quickly to one another, and so they may be worried about the media going on the fact that there was an argument rather than concentrating on the warning and on issuing information.

[46] **Leanne Wood:** Is there no way, perhaps using protocols, for you to go in and leave your journalist hat outside the room to become a part of the team?

[47] **Mr Cameron:** That has happened, in Lincolnshire.

[48] **Mick Bates:** We will delete your answer, because we are not going to believe it anyway. [*Laughter.*]

[49] **Mr Cameron:** Somebody once asked me whether, if there was a fight between a chief constable and a fire officer, that is what we would want to report, and I said, 'Look, we do not have to be in the room for that; if there were such a fight, not only would we hear about it from six officers, they would sell us tickets to the rematch'. [*Laughter.*] You accept that they are working under stress; the protocol is that there is a media cell just outside—it is just the room outside—and we could be banging on the door, and so on. That is the main thing. If we get information through, we want to be able to bounce it off the police and our staff.

[50] **Mick Bates:** I wish to move on. Does ITV Wales have a similar internal mechanism to the one that the BBC has?

[51] **Mr Allen:** It is nowhere near as detailed. We approach these types of stories on a weekly basis. We have internal plans for how we deal with big events, such as a major news event or a weather event—it falls into the same planning process for us. ITV Wales is also part of the ITV News Group. Compared with the national resources that the BBC has to call upon across Britain, we are probably much more slimmed down. We have a very small and experienced group that we can call on, not just in Wales but in places such as Bristol, and through Granada and Central. We can build a team on the basis of the resources that we have, but we are not on the same planning level as the BBC.

[52] **Mick Bates:** How would you primarily receive information about flooding, for example?

[53] **Ms Wignall:** I am effectively the first point of contact, which is done through daily briefings and a media briefing service. It is as basic as faxes and e-mails coming in.

[54] **Mr Allen:** Our traffic increases massively when these types of events happen, such as snow and flooding. We are inundated with telephone calls, because people want to tell us where the story is happening in their area. The difficulty is in trying to get through that information, filter it and find where the story is within that. That can prove difficult, especially if it comes on an August day when only half the staff are in the office.

[55] **Brynle Williams:** Good morning. I was interested in your comment, Mr Cameron, and I will come back to Ms Wignall on my other point. Terminology is extremely important. How can we use credible terminology that people will believe? You are in a very unfortunate position as a weather forecaster; a severe weather warning could go out for north Wales, for example—regrettably we had one a few months ago—but how could you try to close that down? North Wales is quite a big area. Someone may say, ‘This young woman gave us a severe weather warning, but it never happened’.

[56] **Ms Wignall:** I get this on a daily basis—someone will say, ‘You said...’. [*Laughter.*]

[57] **Brynle Williams:** Can you tighten that up, to defend the terminology, so that when a severe weather warning goes out, you try to localise it, as much as possible—not just for north Wales or mid Wales—although I know that you cannot narrow it down to a specific town? The credibility of a severe weather warning becomes questionable when people say, ‘We did not have severe weather; we only had a few spots of rain’. When the warning is for real, no-one takes any notice of it. What are the views of all witnesses on that?

[58] **Ms Wignall:** This is the difficulty that we have. I never promise anything and I never say ‘At 3 p.m. in upper Cwmtwrch, it is going to...’. It is very difficult. Geographically, we have quite a wide patch to cover. Technologically speaking, we are now much more advanced, and the Met Office and the Environment Agency are better able to give us more specific information. You made the point in your question: it is about filtering the information for people in Caernarfon, who will not be affected, and for people in Wrexham, who will be affected. It is about a balance. We are not trying to say that severe weather will affect the whole of north Wales—we try to be as detailed as we can—but, at the same time, we are always mindful that what is relevant to Mr Smith in one area is not necessarily relevant to Joe Bloggs in another area. These are the issues that we are faced with on a daily basis. It is difficult and viewers are a little more savvy now and therefore accept that—

9.40 a.m.

[59] **Brynle Williams:** Is there room for national companies, such as yours, to disseminate some of this information, so that it can be localised, and say, ‘There is a severe weather warning for north Wales, but it will predominantly be in Anglesey’? People could then go to their local radio station—in that particular case, it would be Coast FM—and it could push the message out continuously to batten down the hatches. I saw that done effectively in Australia a few years ago, when severe weather warnings were given locally. It happens regularly there and people specifically tune in to the radio station for the weather. Is it possible for you to disseminate this information to the smaller, independent companies or local radio?

[60] **Ms Wignall:** It is a relationship that we have tried to forge over the years, and we have forged relationships with commercial stations, for example, Red Dragon in Cardiff and The Wave in Swansea. We find that, on occasions when there are—I hate to use this phrase—severe weather events, be they flooding, snow or heat waves, they come to us, so I can do an interview on Red Dragon about a weather event. There are links and relationships, but our

resources are much more limited, which is blindingly obvious from listening to our friends here. We are limited, but we do the best with what we have.

[61] **Mick Bates:** Would you like to comment on terminology?

[62] **Mr Cameron:** Yes. In terms of the language, coming back to the point about exercises—I know that I keep banging on about them—they are important, because they tease out a lot of the issues to do with language, and you start thinking about what we would say. One of the best warnings is, ‘Run’, and a lot of work is being done on this, to the extent of looking at phrases such as, ‘Go in, stay in, tune in’, and whether they make the audience passive as opposed to a more active audience.

[63] On forecasting, you may have picked up that one of the recommendations of the Pitt review on the floods was that localised forecasting should be improved. I know that the University of Southampton’s department of mathematics and computer science is looking at things called mash-ups, working with the Environment Agency and the Met Office to develop them. To give you an example, on the website of Demos, a Whitehall thinktank, there is quite a bit on community resilience. There is the example of a website in California, where the fire service has a retired fireman who takes something like a Google map and then, through Twitter, asks people to tell him where fires are. That soft information from the audience is transferred into hard information on a map, and a pattern can be built up of where the forest fires are spreading and the service can direct its resources accordingly. That is one thing that is happening, and people are looking that type of thing in the UK at the moment.

[64] Language was also picked up by Pitt—what do things like ‘fluvial flooding’ mean? When ‘flooding is imminent’ is used, how soon is ‘imminent’? Is it two minutes, is it the next hour or something else? Again, the Environment Agency is working on that. Consideration is also being given to whether the environmental flood warning system should be an opt-out system or an opt-in system. If you live in a flood area, maybe it should happen automatically. In addition, just so that you are aware of it, work is also being done at Lancaster University on how people receive flood warnings and so on, Dr Hugh Deeming has looked at three coastal communities in quite a bit of detail on this. The underpinning issue is trust. Why should an audience believe the warning? It comes down to trust and the relationship. Apparently, you can get three types of links: there is a bonded link, which tends to be a family-type link, then there is a bridged link, which might be your work colleagues or links through sports clubs and things like that—for example you do not work with these people, but every Tuesday night you play five-a-side football with them—and the third group would be your association with outside bodies and so on. They are looking at ways to reach people with information and realising that maybe the way to contact people is through things like sports clubs, church and different communities like that. There are different ways to reach people and get messages across in terms of when they will accept the message and when they will not.

[65] It is interesting, in terms of perception and authority, that when the survey was undertaken, feedback was given saying that the Environment Agency was doing a really good job with regard to coastal flooding and so on, and yet there was often criticism of the local authority, with people saying, ‘They never come and clean the drains out; no wonder there is flooding’. So, work is going on along those lines.

[66] **Ms Wignall:** On your point about the language, I have given an example—you should be able to see it in the papers before you—of the language and terminology that the Met Office uses. It is all down to interpretation. It talks about a low risk, moderate risk, or high risk of extreme weather being imminent and so on. The language itself is open to interpretation, and it is very important that we process and portray that information in a way in which the average viewer sitting at home will understand. The phrase ‘severe weather

event' suddenly became very popular—it is one of your favourites, is it not, Brett? It is about putting that information across. What on earth is a severe weather event?

[67] **Brynle Williams:** On this point, 40-odd years ago, when I was in school, schools very rarely closed, and I lived in a rural area. Now, if we see half an inch of snow, the schools close.

[68] **Ms Wignall:** I think that that is your fault, not ours. [*Laughter.*]

[69] **Mick Bates:** Powys was an interesting case in point last year.

[70] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** It is one thing to cover an event, but warning about an event is very different. Forecasting the weather is not an exact science. How do you decide? There is the classic Michael Fish incident, when he said, 'Calm down, there is not going to be a storm'.

[71] **Ms Wignall:** I wondered how long it would take for that to come up. [*Laughter.*]

[72] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** The other side of the coin has as many implications though, does it not? If you say that there is going to be a storm, mass flooding or heavy snow, that has tremendous implications, not only with schools closing. When London was hit by snow, everybody stayed at home. I happened to phone my son who works in London but was brought up in rural Wales, and when I asked where he was, he said 'I'm in work. There is only me here; everybody else stayed at home. It's only a few inches of snow; I walked in'. How do you decide? Do you go on a gut feeling or do you have a protocol that you follow to ensure that you do not create unnecessary fears?

[73] **Mr Allen:** In our role, that is one of the most difficult things that we have to do on a day-to-day basis. These warnings come in frequently, particularly in the winter, and you have to work out how far to go with them. You have to decide whether it is just a case of asking Ruth to ensure that her weather forecasts cover all that, or whether it is going to be a news event in itself, which means that we need to start getting that information out. It can be very difficult. It is made more difficult, particularly in the case of snow, if, say, three weeks before, you have had a big snowfall that has caused massive disruption. You get this warning that it might come again, and people think, 'Should we be gearing up, getting out there, getting to the gritting stations?', but then you come in the next day and there is not a drop of it anywhere. This comes back to the point made earlier about standing back sometimes and looking at what you are saying and the message that you are portraying, because it is easy to become engulfed by the whole idea that there is going to be incredible disruption overnight and that we need to gear up, get people in, get everywhere and tell everyone to stay at home. It is a difficult balancing act, and the simple answer is that it has to come down to judgment, along with consideration of the advice that we get from the various agencies.

[74] **Ms Wignall:** As you said, it is not an exact science, although it is more exact now than it ever has been, and it is slightly more advanced than it was for poor old Michael Fish. In theory, that should never happen again but, at the end of the day, there is always room for error.

[75] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** We will note that: Ruth Wignall said that it should never happen again. [*Laughter.*]

[76] **Mr Hurrell:** Unfortunately, I do not have the pleasure of seeing Ruth on the television, but I am sure that she builds up a relationship with her audience, and the audience trusts what she says. She has the luxury of being able to say in vision, 'We are not quite sure how this is going to work out'. It is about having that sense of honesty. Our weather

forecaster in Bristol is Richard Angwin, who has been around for some time, and I am sure that it is about a sense of trust, whether that is trusting the weather forecasters or our trusting the Met Office and having a discussion with it equally, whether it is a sense of trust from our blue-light services as to the sort of reaction that they will get if, for example, the chief constable rings me up. As he knows me and I know him, he knows that I will do something about it.

9.50 a.m.

[77] **Leanne Wood:** How much store do you set by that? That would assume that people would have had to have been in post, doing that job for a good few years—

[78] **Mr Hurrell:** No, I do not think so. I will give you a brief example. I have worked elsewhere—in Wiltshire—for the last eight months. I came back to Gloucestershire a couple of weeks ago. The first person I went to see was the chief constable, because I have to build a relationship with him as to what he can expect from me and my staff.

[79] **Ms Wignall:** As an industry, we have worked very hard to get over the Michael Fish incident. It has taken quite a while for the public to gain trust in us and for us to gain trust in the Met Office. That had quite a knock-on effect—not only for Michael Fish, who has been dining out on that for over 20 years; he has done very well. We had a lot of work to do to get over that, and people do, increasingly, trust us. People stop me on the street and ask what the weather will be a week next Tuesday in Marbella. You get that, and you get looks when sometimes you have to say, ‘Actually, I do not quite know.’ It is all about being a face, if you like, and rebuilding the relationship and repairing the damage that was done. That incident caused a lot of damage; I think that we are now getting over it, although it has taken a long time. As I say, we never promise; we are open and honest. Mistakes are made, but it is about transparency and our viewers realising that we are only human and that we do make mistakes, but, to the best of our knowledge, we will impart this information in the way that we can.

[80] **Leanne Wood:** On online interaction, Twitter mapping and the other things that you were talking about, what happens if the whole broadband and internet system goes down? It is good that people are going onto the internet to access information, and that you are providing it in that way, but there must be a contingency plan if that goes down.

[81] **Mr Cameron:** We have back-up servers. When the snow fell, for instance, there was such a huge demand for the online services that we stole some space from Radio 5 live—we were lucky that there was not a rugby international match; if it had happened over the weekend, things might have been different. As a result of that, the system is now built in. To answer your other question on how we plan, you have to start getting things in position in advance. For instance, on the Friday before the snow fell, when it was said that Monday and Tuesday of the following week were looking pretty bad, we alerted our editors around the country and said, ‘Make sure that you ring your emergency planners to see what they are doing, and whether they are gearing up’, and so on. You have to start getting things in position beforehand, because if you leave it until something happens, it is too late; especially with regard to news gathering, as you will not get your crews there, because the roads are either flooded or impassable. So, you need to put things in place. Again, at the BBC we have a business continuity team, which I am a part of. Part of our job is to look at systems and ask, ‘Do we have enough capacity on these servers?’. We have invested a lot in making sure that our servers are resilient.

[82] During the Gloucestershire floods, when Severn Trent Water’s system keeled over, BBC Radio Gloucestershire carried the information for it on its servers. During the recent snow crisis, it was interesting because—I mentioned consistency before—many local authorities were very poor at getting information on school closures to us. A couple of good

examples were Norfolk and Gloucestershire, where there are automated systems. Headteachers can dial a number and enter a code word, which verifies that it is a genuine call. That sends a signal to the county council computer system to say that the school is closed, but it also sends another signal that says that to the media—the BBC, ITV and the local press. That saves a lot of time. It is a great system, but again it comes down to the fact that, although technology is providing us with much more information, could it be a single point of failure? That is one thing that you always have to look at. It is like home working: you could be with one broadband supplier and I could be with another, but do they all go through the same little node at the end of the street? Those issues are being looked at by telecommunications companies and different people at the moment.

[83] **Mick Bates:** The last question is from Angela.

[84] **Angela Burns:** I would just like some brief answers on two areas that I would like to explore. You have both—and Ms Wignall in particular—talked about the fact that you are offering part of a news round-up, which is part and parcel of what the general public wants. What sense of obligation do your respective organisations have to provide this kind of information during crises and emergencies? Do you feel that it is a bit more of a pick-and-choose situation, and that you do it at the moment because it is what the general public wants? If it were not something that the general public were crying out for, is there that mandate within your organisations to say that it is an obligation?

[85] If there is an obligation, what do you put in place to get information out to people who are harder to reach, for example, people who are severely disabled or who belong to ethnic minority communities, for whom accessing the media in the way that you provide it is not quite the same? Do you just say, ‘We only deal with our bit. The obligation to get information out about danger is down to someone else: the Environment Agency, the Government, the police or whoever.’

[86] **Ms Wignall:** I will pass the buck on this one. Brett would be the one to talk about the corporate stance.

[87] **Mr Allen:** As you say, the demand is there, and we are always going to want to cover those kinds of events. There is always an obligation on us as a public service broadcaster to rise to the challenge and make sure that we are disseminating information as easily and as quickly as we can. We, at ITV Wales, have to work within the constraints and with the resources that we have. We will always endeavour to ensure that we are serving every community within Wales. It is not always easy; I accept that, and sometimes we can be stretched. However, the key thing is planning, as we said, and getting things in place early, as soon as we can, so that we can be where we need to be. As to whether it is an obligation, yes, I accept that it probably is an obligation.

[88] **Angela Burns:** Would you, for example, make more use of sign language at a time of crisis?

[89] **Mr Allen:** I am not in a position to comment on sign language. It is a difficult subject for us at the moment, and that is at a level above me.

[90] **Angela Burns:** I shall ask the BBC as well. Let us try to think of another example that is perhaps not quite so contentious.

[91] **Mr Cameron:** I will give you an example from my point of view. There is a high ethnic minority population in Leicestershire, and the issue is about how to reach them. I talked earlier about people working together in advance. Through the regional media emergency forum for the east midlands, how to reach the vulnerable in a crisis was identified

as a potential problem. So, the BBC worked with the RMEF, the fire service and the multi-faith organisations, and produced a DVD about decontamination. So, if there were a chemical spillage or a chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear incident, the DVD shows people what would happen—going through the tent, having to strip off and so on. For certain faiths, that is obviously quite a difficult subject area. That DVD has been produced and can be used by other authorities.

[92] It is important that the RMEF identifies these problems in advance. It is a two-way dialogue; we speak with the Cabinet Office on those issues. Within the last year, the Cabinet Office has issued guidelines on dealing with those who are vulnerable during emergencies. The main point is that broadcasters should be aware that this is not just about people with disability issues: it could also be about the guy next door who is lonely, who never listens to the radio and who could therefore miss the information. The issue is how you spot that. A lot of work is going on to encourage people to knock on their neighbours' doors and so on. Some police forces are using loudhailers, and work on the basis that one person will do six houses and various techniques. A lot of work is going on.

[93] With regard to our public stance on our commitment to this, that is what Connecting in a Crisis is all about. It was a way of saying, 'Look, we believe in this'. We have a long track record, which goes back to Flixborough. Across the water is Taunton and BBC Radio Somerset. That was set up only 40 years ago because of a snow crisis. A team was sent down from BBC Radio Bristol, which went there and never came back; it just carried on.

[94] **Ms Wignall:** We are still looking for it.

[95] **Mr Cameron:** There must be some good cider down there. So, that commitment is there. That is what Connecting in a Crisis is about: saying, 'We need to engage before the event'. That is why BBC Wales, for instance, has its own Connecting in a Crisis page. It is publicly available on the web, and it is our published commitment to warning and informing.

[96] **Angela Burns:** May I ask a quick question? I know, Mark, that you wanted to come in. If there were a severe flooding crisis here in Wales, would you be able to trail information across the bottom of an outgoing programme? I am trying to think of a BBC programme, but any popular daytime programme.

[97] **Mr Hurrell:** Eastenders.

[98] **Angela Burns:** Yes; Eastenders, for example.

10.00 a.m.

[99] **Mr Cameron:** You are right, they can do that. BBC Wales can do that as can the news channel, which was formerly called News 24. During the Gloucestershire floods, because it had the airtime, it was carrying a lot more information and was giving out, for example, the local radio station frequencies. It was taking straplines from the local radio stations and putting them along the bottom of the screen. You have that ability. That is part of the multi-platform approach, which ITV does as well. You provide radio, online, text and mobile services.

[100] **Mr Hurrell:** That is the trouble, in a way. I do not like to use the phrase 'That is what we are up against', because it is not fair, but we represent the BBC, which is, in theory, a joined-up organisation. These guys are effectively an independent television production company without strong links with the local radio services because of the commercial nature of their operation. Real Radio might say that it wants nothing to do with these guys because there is a conflict of interest.

[101] I would like to say one thing about neighbourliness. One of the things that we did during those two weeks was to tell people to check on their neighbours. It did work. It was very interesting that the crime figures during that July dropped massively and the crime figures have not recovered to the previous levels. The chief constable puts that down to the fact that people became far more aware of their neighbours. That was one of the few benefits of the flooding crisis.

[102] **Ms Wignall:** As far as ITV Wales is concerned, these are difficult times. Our resources are being cut left, right and centre. However, news might be disappearing, but the one thing that still stands alone and for which we are sponsored are the weather forecasts. We have lost an afternoon news bulletin, but we still have a sponsored weather forecast. In a nutshell, that demonstrates the importance and the saleability of weather information and the fact that our viewers are interested in it. There is still a need for it. So, the news might be going, but I am still there sponsored by BMI Baby.

[103] **Angela Burns:** That is a good plug.

[104] **Ms Wignall:** I will not sing the theme tune. [*Laughter.*]

[105] **Mr Hurrell:** The other thing that I would like to say to reassure you is that, in times of crisis, professional broadcasters talk to each other. We may be employed by different parts of the media, but in my own case, in Gloucestershire, we have a very strong relationship with the local newspapers and with our colleagues at what was Severn Sound, which is now Heart. We know each other, we talk, and I am sure that Ruth would talk to her colleagues at BBC Wales. You asked earlier when it becomes a big emergency. If we are getting slightly conflicting information, Brett and his colleagues at BBC Wales may have a phone call to ask, 'How heavy are you going on this; how high is this going?'

[106] **Ms Wignall:** For example, we pool resources on royal visits. There are pool arrangements. There is always a way.

[107] **Alun Davies:** Thank you very much for your evidence this morning; it has been very interesting. I want to continue the theme begun by Angela in terms of your role as public service broadcasters. To a lesser or greater extent, you both represent public service broadcasters and both have significant public subvention. In your case and in that of ITV, it has been through a licence and in the case of the BBC, it is through the licence fee. Mr Allen, in your responses to questions so far, you have differentiated the role of ITV from the role of Sky and you said that you were there when Sky went away—

[108] **Mr Allen:** It was Mark who said that.

[109] **Mr Hurrell:** Yes, I said that.

[110] **Alun Davies:** I am sorry, Mark said that.

[111] You answered the last question by saying that the demand is there, when you talked about news, with regard to serving the community and news values. I can appreciate that from a journalistic point of view and from a news management point of view, but do you agree that you have a role that goes beyond simply responding to demand and that you have a role as a public service broadcaster in proactively seeking to serve the community? If you do not mind my saying so, you side-stepped the question on sign language; you did not answer that question and I would appreciate it if you would. You then went on to discuss how you see ITV's potential future role. We understand the issues about news and the wider political debate that is taking place at the moment, but I would argue that, as a public service

broadcaster, you have a significant role to go further than Sky, for example. How do you plan to do that? What is your corporate philosophy for that? Does it go beyond simply responding to the demands of the news agenda? Does ITV actively seek to play a role, which Mr Cameron described, in informing the public? If so, what structures do you have in place to work with the Environment Agency, the Welsh Assembly Government, local government, the police and so on that go beyond the processes that Ms Wignall has described in terms of providing basic, daily information?

[112] **Mr Allen:** The primary purpose of ITV Wales news is to serve the people of Wales. That is why we are here, irrespective of what the story is. Our purpose is to give them information about the place in which they live and what is happening. That has to be why we exist. Therefore, whether it is a weather-related story, or anything else for that matter, is irrelevant. During big events, we need to rise to the challenge. You asked me about sign language; I cannot make a commitment on that because I am not in a position to do so, but whether we are talking about deaf people, blind people or ethnic minorities, ITV local news is here to serve everyone; we are not here for just one particular group. We strive through the whole newsgathering process to ensure that we represent the diversity of Wales.

[113] **Alun Davies:** So, how do you do that? How do you serve blind or deaf people? What structures do you have in place to provide a service that is tailored to those groups that you have already listed?

[114] **Ms Wignall:** Quite honestly, we do not have a structure in place to provide services for specific groups. You have to understand that our resources are very limited. We cannot provide specific information for specific groups. We have to be general by virtue of our funding and by virtue of the number of people who work in our building. We are nowhere near as well resourced as the BBC. We have to work to the best of our ability within the available resources. So, as much as we would like to tailor broadcasts and so on to specific groups, we are, by our own admission, limited.

[115] **Alun Davies:** Thank you for that robust answer, but what structures do you have in place to work alongside other agencies and public bodies to act as a public service broadcaster at a time of crisis and to seek out factual information and to then communicate that to viewers and online users?

[116] **Mr Allen:** First, going back to sign language and the deaf community, as a result of the debate on sign language on ITV, more formal links have been established. There are regular meetings with the deaf community to try to build up stronger relationships. Hopefully, that will deliver for that community a service that is better than that which it thinks it currently gets. I do not know, but we are not here to talk about that in particular.

[117] We are not in the same situation as the BBC, which has big, formal plans in place. We do not operate like that. We were described as a production company earlier and that is largely what we are now. We operate out of a small newsroom with a limited team. Therefore, planning to that level does not exist: for example, having regular rehearsals with blue-light services and meetings with chief constables and so on. Our work is very much done on the basis of our network of reporters and correspondents and their contacts, who are spread across Wales. We rely heavily on them and the flow of information that comes to us via the usual channels such as news wires and the Press Association. Our news desk keeps in touch with the relevant authorities, but we do not have a team that is dedicated to working on emergency planning for news. We are simply not that big an organisation.

[118] **Alun Davies:** Your argument is that ITV does not have the resources to fulfil this role. So, you—

[119] **Mr Allen:** I am not arguing that ITV does not have the resources; I am here to talk about ITV Wales and its resources. We do not have the resources to have a separate emergency planning team. We have a team to cover news, and that is on a planned basis—it is planned as well as we can possibly plan it.

[120] **Alun Davies:** Following a diary.

[121] **Mr Allen:** Yes.

[122] **Alun Davies:** You are therefore unaware of any structures that exist in Wales to work in the way that Mr Cameron and Mr Hurrell have discussed this morning in terms of a public service broadcaster's role. ITV is still a public service broadcaster, despite everything, but let us not go down that road today.

[123] 10.10 a.m.

[124] You still have a significant role, simply in terms of your viewers and web users, to provide communications to the public at a time when the public requires fast, accurate information. So, you are unaware of any structures that exist in Wales that would replicate the sorts of communication and planning structures that have been discussed by your colleagues from the BBC, are you?

[125] **Ms Wignall:** I think that it is unfair to say that we are unaware of any such structures; the point that we are making is that we do not have those structures in place.

[126] **Mick Bates:** Are there any other questions that Members would like to ask before I draw this session to a close?

[127] **Lesley Griffiths:** I represent Wrexham, which is on the border of England and Wales. Is there any sharing of information across the border?

[128] **Mr Allen:** Yes, particularly between the Granada newsrooms and the teams. We speak to them daily. There is no formal information sharing between authorities in that patch, but we liaise very heavily with Granada because there is obviously an overlap of coverage up there. So, 'yes' is the answer.

[129] **Lesley Griffiths:** When you say that there is an overlap, I would say that most people in my constituency look to the north-west of England for their television service, unfortunately.

[130] **Brynle Williams:** Can you guarantee me good weather in three weeks' time, so that I have a week to get my hay in? In three weeks' time, I want some decent weather, please. *[Laughter.]*

[131] **Alun Davies:** I am not sure that I can follow that. In terms of the BBC and the way in which the BBC plays a role as a public service broadcaster in these issues, the paper that Mr Cameron has provided is excellent. When we take evidence, we learn a lot about what is going on internally, in different corporate structures, and there is certainly a lot in that paper that I was completely unaware of in terms of forward planning. I am very grateful for that paper. In terms of the BBC's structures—again, I am looking at how you operate internally and how you think—have you Mr Hurrell, for example, had an opportunity to speak to your colleagues across the rest of the United Kingdom to say, 'This is what happened to us; this is what you will need to be aware of'? Has there been an opportunity to share that experience and best practice within the BBC? Do you, Mr Cameron, lead a process whereby the Welsh management gets together regularly with management across the United Kingdom, from

Scotland, Northern Ireland and elsewhere, to talk about how the BBC would proactively respond? We are very aware of what Ms Wignall has spoken about in terms of news judgments, news values and making judgment calls. Do you, within the BBC, share that practice and enable each constituent part of the BBC to be up to speed in experience and knowledge?

[132] **Mr Cameron:** Yes, I chair a group called the nations and regions emergency planning champions. We meet about every three months. We last met at the beginning of May. What I tend to do is bring in external speakers to address the meeting. The meeting includes the nations of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales as well as the English regions. There is a technical representative and an editorial representative from each of those places. I bring in external guests. I brought in an expert on counter-terrorism to talk about the latest events and whether we need to be employing greater measures for our own security and to get a feel of what is happening across the UK. I also brought somebody in from the Health Protection Agency to brief us about the pandemic and whether a more virulent strain of the disease was likely to come back in the autumn and winter. We also have a session that is about sharing information. The place where it is run is called the SONAR Centre—sharing opportunities across nations and regions. It is designed to allow us to share best practice and to learn from each other. We are in the process of setting up a database so that we can share this information very quickly.

[133] **Alun Davies:** Thank you for that. The Cabinet Office has the National Steering Committee on Warning and Informing the Public, which is as Orwellian a title as I could imagine. Is the Welsh Assembly Government represented on that?

[134] **Mr Cameron:** Yes, it is. It does have a representative on that committee.

[135] **Mr Hurrell:** To answer your question, Alun, yes, I have shared the experiences of Gloucester, and I think that it is fair to say, without being too big-headed, that we are held up as a beacon for the way in which we responded. Ian and I have addressed at least half a dozen committees such as this in similar events at which we have shared what we learned, within the organisation and externally, and that has drawn praise from Mark Thompson, our director general, down—not that we rest on our laurels, of course. We hope that we do not have another opportunity to put what we have learned into practice. However, that best practice has been shared.

[136] **Mick Bates:** I have just one final point to make about that. In these groups that you address, I assume that Welsh-language broadcasting is represented. Is that the case?

[137] **Mr Cameron:** Yes, because the news editors are bilingual—our head of news attends.

[138] **Mick Bates:** Thank you for what has been an extremely interesting session, in which we gained fascinating insights into the operation of the media. We will send a draft transcript of the meeting to you. If, on reading through it, you find anything that you need to change, let us know quickly.

[139] On behalf of the committee, I thank you for your written and oral evidence. It has been extremely interesting and helpful to us in our inquiry. Thank you.

10.18 a.m.

**Ymchwiliad i Lifogydd yng Nghymru: Sesiwn Dystiolaeth
Inquiry into Flooding in Wales: Evidence Session**

[140] **Mick Bates:** It is a pleasure to welcome Mary Dhonau of the National Flood Forum. As you are aware, we are conducting an inquiry into flooding in Wales, from the point of view of the people of Wales in particular, in order to gain a better understanding of all aspects of dealing with floods, particularly communications. You may have heard the previous session with the media. We have been to Gloucester to see the impact of flooding there, and we have been to Barry, just down the road, where a school was flooded. As part of our evidence gathering, we shall take a booth out to the public in all our constituencies and a bus out in the north of Wales to gather information from our constituents. That information will form part of our evidence. It is therefore a great pleasure to welcome you here this morning, Mary.

[141] Your may make your opening remarks now, but please keep your presentation brief.

[142] **Ms Dhonau:** I will. Thank you very much for inviting me. I will give you a whizzy presentation, but it is essential that the presentation gives a flavour of what the National Flood Forum does, how it came about, and what we stand for. I will just talk through it very quickly—which is something that I am good at doing.

10.20 a.m.

[143] The forum has its origins in Bewdley in Worcestershire, and it was the brainchild of the Bewdley residents' flood committee. It was started as a direct result of the floods in 2000. Bewdley is a small market town, as you can see from the photo, and 140 properties were flooded. It is a small town—nothing like the size of Gloucester—but the floods devastated Bewdley. Three hundred people were displaced for an average of nine months. When the then Prime Minister, Tony Blair, came to visit, he said:

[144] 'Government can offer a partnership to local people to rebuild a community...What works is when communities are empowered to control their own destiny and shape it...This can only be done together'.

[145] It is on that ethos that the national flood forum is founded.

[146] When the Bewdley committee held its first flood defence exhibition, it proved to be a huge catalyst for change because it encouraged the idea of self-help. After the exhibition, the telephones did not stop ringing with requests for help from communities all over the country. We identified a need for a national body to represent the interests of all communities affected by flooding; hence, the national flood forum.

[147] We were initially given a generous start-up grant by the Environment Agency, and we are a registered charity run by a board of trustees who have either been flooded themselves, or have had first-hand experience of supporting the victims of flooding. The trustees at the moment come from many areas across England. Our chairman has the very unfortunate name of Laurence Waterhouse. [*Laughter.*] He lives in Yorkshire and is a qualified flood practitioner. He has millions of Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management initials after his name, and he acts regularly as a flood consultant. He has made his own home flood-resilient.

[148] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Do you have any trustees from Wales?

[149] **Ms Dhonau:** We do not. We have a couple of trustees from the borders of Wales, and I will tell you where they are from, but we have asked in our community groups for trustees from Wales and no-one has applied as yet. However, we have not concentrated our work in Wales, and we have only nine groups in Wales while we have 150 in England.

[150] These next photos are of flooding in Pershore, Northampton, and rural Gloucestershire. Rural communities are often overlooked. This photo is of groundwater flooding Hambledon in Hampshire. These are photos of Bucklebury in Berkshire, which is again a very small village, and 98 per cent of the village was taken out by the flooding. These are photos of flooding in Hull, Cheshire and Flintshire, where we have a representative who works for the Countryside Council for Wales, and who is an expert on sewer flooding.

[151] Our staff come from areas that have been flooded such as Carlisle, Pentre in Shropshire, a mere 3 miles from the borders of Wales, and Bewdley, and I am from Worcester. While Worcester is infamous for flooding, I do not live on a flood plain. I was one of the two thirds of Worcester's population who made an insurance claim last time, and who suffered from urban flooding. My flooding was raw sewage. I remember walking downstairs and seeing blue toilet paper floating around my living room. I thought, 'That is not my toilet paper; I do not use blue toilet paper'. I have had it up to here, and I have experienced flooding on 12 occasions.

[152] In a nutshell, I took Severn Trent Water on and beat it, but I worked with the company in a very constructive way, rather than against it. The company kindly asked me to open its £1.2 million pumping station, which alleviated the causes of 80 years of flooding in the county. However, I declined the company's kind offer to name the station after me. *[Laughter.]*

[153] Our aim is to provide support and advice to communities and individuals who have been flooded or who are at risk of flooding, and to be a collective authoritative voice to influence central and local government, the insurance industry, which, believe me, needs influencing, and all agencies that manage flood risk. We run a telephone support service, and our phones do not stop ringing during a flood. We specialise in facilitating the formation of community-led groups, which are an excellent point of focus for those who manage flood risk. We offer advice on how to speak about preparing for a flood in plain English, and we are more than willing to do it in plain Welsh. We signpost people to the correct direction regarding their individual flooding problems, because, when you get flooded, you do not automatically receive a handbook on how to deal with it or its aftermath. We also give advice on flood resilience and flood resistance, which is a speciality of mine.

[154] Here is a photo of our fact sheets. They are not glossy, all-singing, all-dancing brochures; they are produced on plain, cheap paper.

[155] We open up two-way communications, which often break down following a flood, and sometimes neighbours will fall out. We encourage agencies that manage flood risk to share their knowledge and resources and to work in partnership, which was highlighted as part of the Pitt review, and we build trust between the agencies that manage flood risk and the communities that they serve, because we are the honest broker. We know the constraints that the Government, the Environment Agency and local authorities work under, and we can fight in their corner, but from our end.

[156] We also support flood action groups. This next slide is of us with Lewes Flood Action at Downing Street. This is me with a Liberal Democrat MP and councillors from Lewes handing in a petition to No. 11 asking for more money for flood defences. We believe that those who are affected by or who are at risk of flooding need to be included in flood risk management through public meetings; we need to know what is going on. There should be flood warden schemes, so that the community is involved, local information on flooding during floods, and emergency planning exercises. I took part in one at which the powers that be said that they would evacuate people to the local school in the event of a flood, and then a local resident pointed out that the school floods, too. So, local knowledge is vital. As we have done with Mick, we have organised several flood fairs and flood awareness days, and, most

importantly, we have planned with the people affected and not for them.

[157] We have 10 trustees from all over the country, three paid members of staff, and one in the newly formed Scottish flood forum. I had an hour-long meeting with the Minister last week, and she is keen to open up a Welsh branch to concentrate on Wales. There are about 150 groups, as I said, and we are a united body that can lobby on behalf of all those who are at risk of flooding. This next slide is of me with one of my best friends, Hilary Benn, who regularly invites me to flooding summits. Post Pitt, he pulls everyone who is involved in flooding around the table, and I sit with him. I am very involved, and they listen to what we say, which is essential. We also offer advice on insurance problems.

[158] This slide is of our much-visited website. I will breeze over the next slide, as I have said it all. We print four newsletters a year, of which I am very proud, because they have evolved as we have grown. They are a joint platform for those who manage flood risks, so we have had the perspectives of the Met Office, the BBC, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Department for Communities and Local Government, and the communities, all on the same platform. The Minister is also keen to write from Wales. We also provide a focal point for the media. I have been on *Richard and Judy* and on ITV's *This Morning* with the lovely Phillip Schofield, talking about what people can do to help themselves. We also organise conferences for those who manage flood risks, which, again, is a unique platform. This slide is of David Richardson, who has now retired from DEFRA, speaking at one, but flood victims also speak at these conferences, as you can see from this next slide. We have lively 'Any questions?' panels, as you can imagine. We also say thank you with our tongue-in-cheek golden sandbag award, which we present to the Environment Agency, water companies, local authorities and communities if we think that they have gone that extra mile to help us.

[159] We believe that there ought to be more understanding of the stress and distress suffered, and this is a picture of one of our former members of staff. You have all seen pictures such as those on this slide, but these are people's homes. The people who owned the house in the picture with the fireplace had been married for three weeks. Their sense of humour won the day, because they said that they had managed to get rid of the fireplace, which they did not like. These are more pictures of normal homes. You can see bananas in the bowl in the picture on this slide. These are pictures of people's kitchens, which have been completely annihilated just outside Gloucester. The picture in the next slide is from Upton-upon-Severn. These are familiar scenes to you all and they are familiar scenes in the media, but these are people's homes. That house in Upton-upon-Severn still has not been sold, two years on. When the Minister and the media have gone, this slide shows what we all live with and the devastation afterwards.

[160] I can say with my hand on my heart that one of the main problems is that people fear—more than being flooded again—having the builders in, having to deal with the insurance industry and non-communicative loss adjusters. I could give you an entire presentation, which would be a long one, showing pictures of what people have been through and the trouble that they have dealt with. It has compounded their stress and the trauma that they have experienced.

10.30 a.m.

[161] Can you imagine living in this for two years? This is a picture of Uckinghall, just outside Upton-upon-Severn, near Tewkesbury. A lady moved back into her home just two days ago. She has been living there in -5 degrees with bubble wrap at her window. I have also been through the trauma. The picture with the chocolatey stuff, although it was not chocolate, is a picture of the floor outside my house being swept up, which we will not forget. I believe very strongly that, as communities, we have to help ourselves. The slideshow features a

picture of Noah, who is obviously my favourite person for being aware of the risk and taking action.

[162] I feel very passionately about banning sandbags because this is an excellent picture of sandbags not working. Sandbags are really no more than a placebo-effect comfort blanket. They are not waterproof, and they get incredibly contaminated once they have been flooded.

[163] We all know of the temporary defences and how they saved Walham station, but there are things that local authorities can use to replace sandbags, and they can be washed down and used again. This next picture of a door board is a good example. Homeowners use this method, if they have a steep drive, to stop the water coming down and in through their front doors. This can be put up very quickly to protect buildings.

[164] The device illustrated in the next picture is a bit like a Pampers nappy for giants. These are sandbag replacements, which absorb 20 litres of water. They are so light that you can balance an inflated one on your finger, so they are ideal for the elderly and the vulnerable. This is a picture of a house in Morpeth at which this was used during a lesser flood, and the house did not flood. It was on the peripheries of Morpeth and the householders blocked up their air bricks and their front doors and they did not flood. You can see the water line. Again, I have another picture of a door board. Something like this can stop flooding from happening, particularly in a flashy catchment area where the flood water goes in through the front door and out through the back, annihilating the home.

[165] Two thirds of insurance claims in the summer were from urban flooding, and many people told me that the flood went through their air bricks. Simple things like the Elastoplast device, which costs £10 for two in B&Q, or the air brick cover that you can fit on and place over the top can prevent that. This method is my favourite; it is a replacement air brick. You can remove the air bricks, put this in, and you can see that there is a series of little balls that rise up when the flood water comes. They also rise up when it is very windy, so it is also good for the environment. When the flood water has gone, the balls go down and the place can continue to be ventilated. They cost under £100 and the more you buy, the cheaper they get. Someone in Gloucester who was very badly flooded in 2007 used one of these and, when a similar flood occurred in 2008, his house was not flooded. His next-door neighbour's house was flooded but he has now put these air-bricks in place.

[166] Anti-backflow valves are also easily fitted and effective. I keep finding more and more products on the market. This slide shows a huge plastic bag that you can put your belongings in. You can even put your car in it if you get desperate. However, white goods can be put in there. There are such things as toilet bungs, pumps and flood alarms for your garden, particularly in flashy areas, to give you some chance to fit your flood door. All these items are relatively cheap and can now be found in B&Q.

[167] This is a picture of Abergavenny. It shows a more expensive example of a retractable membrane that you can pull up. A restaurant in Wales used one of these. The restaurant was very badly flooded and was out of business for six months, but the next time the river rose very quickly, the restaurant was wrapped up in this and was open for business the next day. So, it kept it going. It is an expensive item, but if you have an expensive business or a valuable home, it is well worth the investment.

[168] All the things that I have been talking to you about, and loads more, can be found in the blue pages directory on our website. We also print it out as a hard copy for people who do not have the internet, and we take them with us to flood surgeries, awareness days, and flood protection exhibitions.

[169] I believe passionately about this, because I believe that every hard defence and flood

protection product will be overwhelmed one day. We must adapt the way in which we live. My house was flooded in 2007, and I answered the helpline knee-deep in water; the pumping station that I spoke so fondly of was taken out by a power cut. Only one house flooded in my area, and it was mine—a bit ironic. I had made my home flood-resilient, and I knew that I could continue to man the helpline for the flood forum safe in the knowledge that I would not be making an insurance claim.

[170] I will give you a few examples of resilience. This slide shows a prototype house that was retrofitted. It was flooded via innocuous little ditches, as so many houses are. This shows the aftermath of a flood in the kitchen. They put down ceramic floors, limelite plaster on the walls, and plastic skirting boards, which may sound awful, but do not look too bad. They used rising butt hinges to hang lightweight doors. When my house flooded, my kids had got my lightweight doors off before I even got home. We have a family flood plan, and they had everything sorted. The sockets were raised above the dado rail, and the bottom step was concreted. All the appliances sit on plinths, and the appliance in this slide is stainless steel.

[171] This next picture is an example of a home in Worcester that was flooded, and which has now been made flood-resilient. This is a non-insurance claim in 2007 in Oxford, where again, they have taken off the barge boards, raised the white goods, and installed a drain in a slightly sloping floor. This slide shows the water pumping out. The man who lives there said that it was not a picnic, but the house did not flood, and he did not have to move out. This is his DIY flood door, and at one point, when they had run out of silicone sealant, he even used chewing gum, which shows that you do not have to spend an awful lot of money. This is the kitchen, which looks absolutely normal, but has removable cupboards and a plastic carpet, so that it can be washed out following a flood. As I said, the bottle of wine is obligatory—flood victims tend to turn to the bottle. This next house is in north Yorkshire, and is fitted with a stainless steel kitchen. They do not cost too much, and again, they can be washed down so that people can carry on living there. I will shut up now, and finish by emphasising the message that we are working together for change. Thank you.

[172] **Mick Bates:** Thank you for whizzing through that presentation, which was fascinating. I was pleased to hear you mention working with the Minister here in Wales. What other contact do you have with the Environment Agency Wales, or local authorities in Wales?

[173] **Ms Dhonau:** I have a good working relationship with Environment Agency Wales, in both offices, and with John Mosedale, the flood risk manager—who I believe is leaving. I also work regularly with Tim England at the St Mellons office of Environment Agency Wales.

[174] **Mick Bates:** Obviously, there are cross-border issues, and you have to work with agencies on both sides.

[175] **Ms Dhonau:** Yes.

[176] **Mick Bates:** Do you have regular meetings with those agencies?

[177] **Ms Dhonau:** Yes, I come across them quite regularly. For instance, I worked alongside them in Hereford. I will give you a quick example of what happened there: Hereford needed a flood defence, but the Environment Agency were not so hot on communication, and just told the community what it was getting. That was a 1.8m high flood defence that would completely obliterate all views of the city and the river, and as Hereford relies on tourism, there was a huge outcry. I managed to intervene and mediate between the Environment Agency and the victims, and we came to an agreement that they would build a lower defence, so that people could still see Hereford, supplemented by demountable defences that could be slipped in if the flood was high. When I attend meetings, in Hereford,

for instance, and the Environment Agency is there, we will have a little chat outside the meeting and sort out what we will do and how we will go about it. I have an extremely good working relationship with the agency.

[178] **Lesley Griffiths:** You gave us lots of examples in your presentation, but what information do people specifically need to deal with planning, and what are the main barriers to accessing that information?

[179] **Ms Dhonau:** First, people need to know how to cope with a flood, and how to prepare their family and community. I have a family flood plan, which is something that I advocate; the minute that I think there will be a flood, it is put into action. People's mindset has changed a lot. Years ago, people banded together as communities to help themselves during a flood. One conversation that sticks in my mind from 2007 was with someone who complained that they had waited for three hours for the council to come, and no-one came—but they had not thought as a community to help themselves.

10.40 a.m.

[180] So, we have got to change people's mindsets and get people to take on board the fact that it is their home and belongings. They need to think about Mrs Smith next door who uses a Zimmer frame, and if communities are cut off they need to become more resilient to help themselves. However, that must be addressed in a very tactful way. Quite often, I found that the man from the ministry, the Environment Agency or the local authority was not accepted terribly well, because communities do not like to be told what to do by an outside person. That is where the flood forum has come into its own. We can go in and say the same as everybody else, but, because we have been there ourselves, we can understand and empathise, and at the same time we can get people enthused and empowered to move forward as a community.

[181] **Lesley Griffiths:** So you think that self-help skills are the main thing that you can contribute?

[182] **Ms Dhonau:** I do, yes.

[183] **Mick Bates:** We have heard this term 'community resilience'; is your self-help approach about that concept—communities helping themselves?

[184] **Ms Dhonau:** It is, yes. I have been working closely with the Cabinet Office on getting communities to become resilient so that, if a huge disaster happens, the village or community can band together to survive. That is taking the resilience aspect one step further, so that it is not just about flooding—all disasters could be dealt with.

[185] **Alun Davies:** I have been making some notes on what you have been saying. I am very interested in what you said about self-help and the role of the community—an activist community, if you like. Can you outline how you see communities taking responsibility for managing flood risk and for managing a flood event—the strategic, proactive approach before any flooding and the process for managing a flood if and when it occurs?

[186] **Ms Dhonau:** It is difficult, as I have found through my own experience, to get community buy-in if there has not been a recent flood. I will give you an example of a flood protection exhibition—I do not like to call them 'flood fairs' any more, because I think that people arrive thinking that they are going to go on a helter-skelter ride with water running down it, when it needs to have a serious edge. When I went to the first one in Witney, there were well over 1,000 people there; there were people trying to get in before the doors were open and we were having to kick them out at the end. However, 18 months later, we revisited

Witney and I spoke to half a dozen people. I find that quite shocking, because it is still very much on my mind, and, whenever I talk to people, they say that when the weather forecast is for rough weather, they worry that there will be a flood—you get that ridiculous pain in your stomach when you think that that is going to happen.

[187] The best time to get buy-in is immediately after an emergency, whatever the emergency was, because you find that that is when the protests start, the active groups get set up, people want something done and they want the Government to stop it happening. When I go to angry meetings I always pick out ‘Mr Cross’ and ‘Mrs Angry’ because they are the strong people, and I work with and educate them and get them, with their huge personalities, to form a group and start to deliver resilience. However, you need to get community buy-in in the first place. It is not an easy thing to do.

[188] **Alun Davies:** You have spoken about your relationship with the Environment Agency Wales. How would you characterise the relationship between the Environment Agency and local government in terms of flood risk management and their relationship with communities?

[189] **Ms Dhonau:** The relationship with communities?

[190] **Alun Davies:** How would you characterise the management of flood risk on the part of the Environment Agency and local authorities and the way in which they work with local communities to manage that risk?

[191] **Ms Dhonau:** I think that the communication strategy is improving. It used to be absolutely appalling. It used to be a case of, ‘We will work for you, but not with you; we will tell you’. Something that the Environment Agency is not particularly good at doing—although it is getting better—is accepting local knowledge. Many local residents have lived with that river or drain all their life and know what triggers an event and what happens, and their input into flood risk management is invaluable. Post the Pitt review, things are changing a little. I have been banging on the doors of the Environment Agency’s head office and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for nine years now, and I feel that something has happened—I cannot put my finger on what it is—in the last year. I feel that our input is far more welcome. Initially, we were looked at as a pressure group. Although we are not a pressure group, we are: we are a critical friend and we will tell them when it goes wrong and how things can be improved. Things are moving in the right direction, and it is essential that they continue to do so.

[192] I do a lot of training of local authorities. Due to the problems that I have had, I believe that local authorities need to change their mindset with regard to how things are delivered, particularly when it comes to flooding. I can give you a prime example. I went to north Yorkshire to talk about the alternatives for dealing with flooding, and I was practically booed by two or three local authority officers who felt that sandbags are the be all and end all and should be delivered. There is a place for sandbags, but not for an 82-year-old lady. You need at least 10 sandbags per property. The workload for the local authority in delivering 10 sandbags per property in Barry, for instance, would be tremendous, when one floodgate and a couple of air-brick covers would do it. So, we have to change everybody’s mindsets: those of the local authorities for the reason that I have just mentioned, that of the Environment Agency with regard to its communication strategy, and those of communities, who have to start thinking, ‘We have to help ourselves now; it is not just Government that is going to provide us with help’. So, it is an uphill struggle.

[193] **Brynle Williams:** How can we get to the communities? When we were in Gloucester, we saw examples of people in private houses who had, effectively, taken ownership of drainage ditches behind their houses. They had put bridges in and what have

you, which was exacerbating the problem. How do you also get this message over to local authorities? I hear what you say, but we are talking about ditches, drains, culverts and flooding, and a lot could be done to alleviate the problem. Are you satisfied that you are getting enough out of councils with regard to their cleaning ditches, opening drains and ensuring that water can get away freely?

[194] **Ms Dhonau:** In a word, ‘no’. There is yet to be buy-in, but with the draft floods and water management Bill, which Wales is signed up to, I believe that there is going to be a shift. I have noticed that some of the case studies that I have provided about people causing flooding for others through lack of maintenance are in that draft Bill. That is not just about local authorities; it is also about people dumping their mattresses, grass cuttings and so on. Two classic examples stick in my mind. An elderly lady of 89 rang me in tears. She lived in a bungalow, and her next-door neighbour had changed the contour of his drive, so every time it rained, her home flooded. She went round to see him, and he was very aggressive and would do nothing about it. There is no place in law for redress for that kind of thing at present. Also, it is no-one’s water. The Environment Agency and the local authority did not want to know, and the neighbour would not do anything about it, so this lady of 89 was in a lose-lose situation. A similar situation was where a mill owner in south Yorkshire had tarmacked over a big car park, which sent overland runoff down a steep hill into 30 terraced houses, and he would do nothing about it. So the whole aspect of riparian ownership and statutory nuisance flooding has to be addressed, and the only way in which it can be addressed is through the law. Whether it happens or not is another thing.

[195] **Brynle Williams:** We are in an awkward situation with riparian ownership. On the one hand, the public wants riparian rights—they want ownership of the land—but you are saying that we also have to push back ownership to the owner of the property. So, we are in a dilemma.

10.50 a.m.

[196] **Ms Dhonau:** We are in a dilemma. I know that, during the flood, people in one village were told that if they went into the river to try to clear out the weeds, and so on, the Environment Agency would sue them. It is a murky situation. The Environment Agency can be quite disparate, because it says in its ‘Living on the Edge’ brochure that up to halfway across belongs to the riparian owner, and that that is the owner’s responsibility. However, if there is a lesser-spotted hunchbacked newt in it, and someone cleans it out, the other side of the Environment Agency tells them off. It is very difficult, and that needs to be sorted out.

[197] **Mick Bates:** On that issue, many local authorities contract out cleansing services, road maintenance and so on. We have lost the old lengthsman who used to have particular knowledge about a locality. Is there any evidence to suggest that, if you were to reintroduce a person who was dedicated to a particular area, you would solve some or, in fact, all of the issues relating to maintenance?

[198] **Ms Dhonau:** I believe that they ought to be reinstated. Having gone around the country, everyone says, ‘When the lengthsman was there, this happened and that happened. Bring him back.’ Local knowledge is important. Having someone locally can alleviate a potential flooding situation.

[199] **Mick Bates:** That is so true. Has the National Flood Forum done any costing on that? When I put it to my council, it said that it could not afford it.

[200] **Ms Dhonau:** No, we have not. As you have probably gathered, we are a very small organisation.

[201] **Mick Bates:** You seem to do a lot.

[202] **Ms Dhonau:** We need funding for many more of me—God forbid—but we need to clone and to get a load of us out into the country so that we can do that. This week alone I have been in London twice; I am here today and will be London tomorrow—I am in Hereford tomorrow night as well, because we cannot afford to take on more staff. So, in an ideal world I would like to cost it, but there are not ten days in the week; there are only nine.

[203] **Mick Bates:** I was just going to say that you have found nine.

[204] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** What are your experiences of working with people who have had difficulties with insurance companies? Many people now find themselves on a floodplain although they did not realise that when they bought the house. Many problems then develop, with insurance companies refusing to pay up.

[205] **Ms Dhonau:** I am quite cross with some insurance companies at the moment—am I allowed to name one? It is now called Aviva, but it was Norwich Union. I think that it has treated people particularly badly, because it decided to give people a policy-increase holiday of a year, but once that year came to an end, people who had just moved back into their homes and had dealt with all the trauma found, suddenly, that they had letters from Norwich Union and its umbrella organisations saying, ‘We are going to put your excess up to between £10,000 and £30,000’. Most people do not have that much money stashed under their mattress to pay the first £30,000 or even £10,000; I certainly do not. It said, ‘We might work with you if you get a letter from the Environment Agency or the local authority to say what they have done to reduce your flood risk. If you have taken steps to help yourself, we want you to get a full, individual, property-based flood-risk assessment,’—for which the average price is between £50 and £1,000—and ‘We will only reduce your excess once you have done that and have proved that you have stopped your house from being flooded.’

[206] I have a good relationship with the Association of British Insurers, which I meet with regularly. If people are having problems, they come to us and I can accelerate the process of dealing with the problem by taking it to the Association of British Insurers. I have had many cases in which problems have been dealt with. There is one specialist broker that will insure people that are at risk of flooding. There is one pub on the River Severn that has been flooded 12 times, but has insurance cover. It is an uphill struggle, but things are moving forward. In 2007, for example, someone rang me and said, ‘I was flooded 10 days ago, and I have worms growing in my carpet. No-one from the insurance company has come to help me; nobody has been to see me. I do not know what to do’. The more that I delved into that, I found that there was no proper guidance from the insurance industry on dealing with the flood in the here and now. I managed to work with the insurance industry, and we called all of the companies to a meeting such as this. We wrote down a guidance note, which is on their websites and ours—we have it in hard copy—on managing a major flood claim from beginning to end. That is the handbook. Managing a flood claim is a minefield. I would like to think that, if that happens again, that process would be easier for those who are affected by flooding.

[207] **Mick Bates:** Thank you, that is very interesting. The ABI will be coming in to give evidence in a couple of weeks’ time.

[208] **Ms Dhonau:** Will it be Justin Jacobs?

[209] **Mick Bates:** Yes, it will.

[210] Those comments regarding the protocol being established were very interesting. Are there still differences between individual companies?

[211] **Ms Dhonau:** Yes, there are differences between companies. At a recent conference, I tackled the ABI, because, as everyone will be aware, different people living on the same street would be treated differently by different insurance firms. This is why neighbours fall out with each other. Someone will be stood waiting for something to happen while the person next door has the walls of their home knocked down and dehumidifiers installed. Next door but one, there may be dehumidifiers in place, but the insurance company may have said that the walls do not need to be knocked down. At the conference, someone challenged the ABI about this and it said that, if the customer did not like the way in which they were treated, all they need to do when their policy is due to be renewed is to go to a company that they liked. I had to say, 'I am really sorry; you are married to that insurance company until it chooses to divorce you'. There is no chance of shopping around.

[212] **Brynle Williams:** Am I right to assume that that insurance company would be passing on information to other companies? We might know that that area is a floodplain, but, more and more, if you are guilty of a motoring offence, you have to declare it to the insurance company when you move from one to another. As you said, you are married to them.

[213] **Ms Dhonau:** It is already happening. The insurance industry is aware which areas have flooded. I know that some flood victims have been too scared to make an insurance claim because they are scared of having their home blighted, but it is through sheer ignorance. If their next door neighbours and other neighbours have made a claim, their home is blighted whether they put in an insurance claim or not. That is, again, something that has to be looked at.

[214] **Brynle Williams:** There are two or three houses in my constituency, in Towyn, that, although it is 20 years since the flood, have not yet been renovated. The houses are still empty and people are living in mobile homes.

[215] **Angela Burns:** Mary, I would like to thank you very much for your evidence. It is a pleasure to listen to someone who is both informed and committed, and who is focused on a subject. You touched very briefly on the proposed floods and water management Bill and you mentioned a couple of things that you thought should be, could be, or are in it. Can you expand on that? Is there anything else that you would like to see in that Bill? Do you also feel that the Environment Agency's remit should be extended?

[216] **Ms Dhonau:** What I would like to see—and I said this in my evidence to Pitt, but it was not listened to—is one agency to manage flood risk. However, I am not saying that this should be in one big ivory tower. I believe very strongly in partnership working and that the Environment Agency, local authorities and water companies locally ought to work together and share knowledge. I know that it is different in Wales, but water companies will not publish details of houses that are on their at-risk register through fear of being sued in the litigious world in which we live. So, they do not add to the jigsaw puzzle when people are sharing evidence.

[217] I would much rather see everything pared down locally, working with local knowledge and working in an individual river basin. I believe that that is the way forward. I wonder whether the Environment Agency will be able to take on all the powers that it has been given and the workload, such as the strategic overview for the coast, for example, and surface water flooding. It worries me, but, at the same time, I am aware that local authorities now have to take on the local knowledge for surface water flooding. However, again, local authorities' expertise is being pared right down. It worries me and many others that the drainage engineers do not have the necessary expertise to rise to the challenge. I find the current situation worrying and I will feel more relaxed when I see it working. It works in some areas, but we need it to work everywhere.

11.00 a.m.

[218] **Angela Burns:** I will now ask you a completely different question. Having seen the effect of floods and demonstrated that so well today, what are your views on abandoning settlements and on the outright banning of development on floodplains?

[219] **Ms Dhonau:** I think that there should be a presumption against building on a floodplain, but one of my main concerns, as I said at a Chartered Institute of Water and Environmental Management conference last week, is the infrastructure that we have today and the fact that we have all paved over our drives and that our drains are not built to deal with the sudden run-off from everyone's drives. An equivalent of 24 Hyde Parks are paved over in London alone according to one study, and you can imagine the impact that that has on London. We have all done it. I recently moved into a small housing estate, and every drive is paved. That worries me, but I know that planning permission now has to be given for paving over drives. There is not enough guidance for people to inform them about porous surfaces and how to mitigate flooding. So, that needs to be upgraded.

[220] There is so much here and now that we have not dealt with, for example, sustainable urban drainages and swales in new housing developments. I will give you an example of the frequent knock-on effect of a new housing development: I went to an 82-year-old's house in Rotherham; he had lived there all of his life, as had his father before him. His home had never been flooded, but it flooded in 2007 and he maintained that that was because the flood meadow at the bottom of the road had been built on. The flood meadow was not flooded because it had been built according to Government guidelines, but the knock-on effect was that communities further down the stream had been flooded. That often happens, which is why water companies have to be statutory consultees on such matters. Section 106 or section 109 of the Water Act 2003 will remove automatic right to connection. Again, consultation has to be undertaken, not only with the Environment Agency, but also with water companies to determine whether the little village down the road will cope with the added water put into the infrastructure and whether that village will flood as a result of the new development. So, in an ideal world, I would like to see a presumption against building on floodplains.

[221] **Angela Burns:** What are your views on abandonment?

[222] **Ms Dhonau:** Are we talking about abandonment with coastal erosion?

[223] **Angela Burns:** Yes and the prediction of the rise in sea levels, particularly in places in north Wales, such as Kinmel Bay and Rhyl and places above Aberystwyth like Borth, which are already under pressure. If sea levels rise, how do we defend those places and what are your views on whether we try to defend or—and I am certainly not advocating this—whether we take a strategic view on that. At what point do you think Government will have to take a strategic view on that?

[224] **Ms Dhonau:** If we continue in the same direction in which we are going, we will have nothing but a 25ft-high concrete wall around the whole of the UK and that is not practical or possible. Even though it sounds harsh, I feel that roll-back has to happen—we have to be practical. However, you cannot just tell a community, 'Sorry', because you have to work with communities and provide some form of compensation. The current options being considered include 'buy back', where the Government buys a home from someone so that they can move elsewhere, and then they stay there and rent the property. You have to try to rebuild communities and work within them; you cannot arrive and say that you are not doing that because compensation has to be the order of the day. It is not an easy subject and in my view it has not been sufficiently tackled even though the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has done quite a lot of research on it.

[225] **Angela Burns:** I appreciate the honesty of your answer; it is a question that most people try hard to avoid answering because the truth is unpalatable.

[226] **Mick Bates:** Are there any further questions from the committee? I see that there are not. In that case, Mary, thank you very much for your presentation and your answers to our questions this morning. It has given us an insight into your work and into lots of things that can be done. I am certain that it will be very helpful when we come to making recommendations, when we produce our final report. We will send you a copy of that report. You will also receive a draft transcript of this session for you to look at, and change if necessary.

[227] **Ms Dhonau:** May I just make one plea to you all? I am passionate about moving into Wales. I really think that there is a need for a Welsh flood forum. I know that we have ministerial buy-in, but money has to be found to do it. So, I ask you to put that into your recommendations. There is EU convergence funding for working with communities. I really feel that this is an ideal time for us to move into Wales and I ask you to put that in your recommendations too.

[228] **Mick Bates:** It is on our minds already, but thank you for bringing that home to us. We look forward to seeing you again; I am certain that we will.

11.06 a.m.

Ystyried y Ddeiseb ar Fynediad ar hyd Dŵr Mewndirol Consideration of Petition on Access Along Inland Water

[229] **Mick Bates:** Most of you are already aware of this. What has happened so far is that we have received a letter that Val Lloyd sent to both me and Janice Gregory, the chair of the Communities and Culture Committee. Janice has replied to say that the Communities and Culture Committee does not think that it has time to undertake an inquiry. I would like this committee's views on whether we should pursue this invitation to undertake scrutiny of the issue, on the grounds that the Petitions Committee has made a few recommendations.

[230] I will give you an outline. If we are to agree to this, we need to note the Minister's letter, in which she says that on 5 June she will be issuing a strategy about water-based recreation in Wales, and putting some £400,000 towards it. If we were to have our own inquiry based on the petition that has been presented to the Petitions Committee, we could fit it in—we have looked at the timetable—if that is Members' wish. If we agreed on it today, we could launch a consultation over the summer recess. We could possibly launch it at the Royal Welsh Show and start to gather evidence in the autumn. I have looked at the possibilities. However, I would like Members' opinions on it. I am sure that some of you already know a little bit about it anyway.

[231] **Angela Burns:** All I want to add to the mix here is to say that, both in my role as shadow Minister for the environment and in my role as a constituency AM, I receive an awful lot of correspondence on this. I have views from all sides, including riparian owners, anglers, canoeists and people who like to use the water for other recreational purposes. I feel that unless we look at this issue very fairly and clearly and come up with some nice, good, concrete, honest recommendations, it will get really nasty. It is an issue about which people are very emotional. There is a lot of aggression being built into it. A lot of people write in to tell me about punch-ups that they have had with people on it. It is across all sides—there is no baddie or goodie—for these are all people who want to use water or who own bits of water and want to protect it or do not understand what people are doing on it, or who were prepared to welcome people onto their water and then found that it was being abused, or they are people who have the right to use water and just cannot get to it. It is a real mess and I feel that

somebody somewhere—I would ask if not us, who?—needs to have long hard look at this and come up with something that is fair, equitable and reasonable for all involved because this is a running sore.

[232] **Mick Bates:** Thank you very much for your views.

[233] **Leanne Wood:** I was going to suggest that we do not make a decision on this today, until we have had a chance to see the Minister's strategy, to see whether there is anything that arises from that that we could develop further.

[234] **Brynle Williams:** To reiterate what Angela has said, it is about where we stand legally on this.

[235] **Mick Bates:** Sorry—

[236] **Brynle Williams:** When I say, 'legally', there are riparian owners, businesses and fishing clubs that have spent millions of pounds. There are canoeists who have spent an awful lot of money. I am just wondering about this. Yes, we can discuss it and take evidence on it, but, at the end of the day, where do we stand legally? Is the Welsh Assembly Government going to buy up all riparian rights? Is it going to nationalise this? I just do not know.

11.10 a.m.

[237] **Mick Bates:** As a scrutiny committee, we would scrutinise evidence from all organisations involved in this argument and the Government, so our recommendations would not be based solely on a legal position. While it would be one of our concerns, we cannot say until we have the evidence and have made our recommendations. Someone has to scrutinise the Government on this, however.

[238] **Alun Davies:** For the same reasons that Angela outlined, I would agree and propose that we take this forward. Like Angela—those of us who represent the more rural areas probably receive more lobbying on this issue—I find that the issues are certainly raised, shall we say?

[239] **Leanne Wood:** It is a matter for the Rural Development Sub-committee, then.

[240] **Alun Davies:** Nice try. I think that there is a wider issue about planning; it is not simply a rural issue. I mentioned the rural aspect, because of the use that is made of it. I agree with the points that Angela has made, and I have received similar representations, expressed with a similar level of emotion. We need to investigate this matter and resolve it. I do not share Brynle's concerns, nor do I share Angela's concerns about taking a hard, honest and unbiased view—I think that that is how the committee works, and that we can work in that way on this issue.

[241] With regard to the points that Brynle made, we can, and do, make law in the Assembly, and we should not shy away from that where we believe that there is legal redress for the issues presented to us. I would like to look at this issue, and I would like us to take a hard look at the evidence from all sides, after which we will reach our own conclusions. We should be informed and guided by the work of the Petitions Committee, but we should not be constrained by it. We should approach this issue from our own perspective, starting with the evidence that we have received and from the position as it is today, and then we should reach our own conclusions. If those conclusions are that the committee should bring forward an LCO, then we should not shy away from that. However, that should be the end of the process, rather than our starting with the view that we want an LCO on this, and therefore will collect the evidence to sustain that view. We should collect the evidence first, and reach our

conclusions at the end.

[242] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** I agree with what Alun has said. We should look at it. Somebody has to, and it seems to me that this is the only committee that is prepared to do it. It will not be easy, and it will not be easy to reach a consensus at the end of the process. I think that people will have very different ideas about what is needed in this situation. However, everybody who is interested in this matter has a right to give evidence, and to feel that we have listened to what they have to say, even if they do not agree with our conclusions in the end. I totally agree with Alun that we should start with a totally fresh approach to this matter. We should not start with the Petitions Committee's recommendations—in holding an inquiry into this issue, we should start from scratch, with a blank page. It will take time, because there is a lot of evidence to get through, and many people will want to give evidence.

[243] **Mick Bates:** Thank you for your views.

[244] **Brynle Williams:** I can assure you that I am not against this. I just wonder what the legal implications are. It is important that we do not have to cram this work into a small timeslot, because this will be a massive piece of work. The number of people that we need to get to give evidence means that this will be a massive piece of work, and I do not want it compressed into a short time. Everybody must have the opportunity to express their views.

[245] **Mick Bates:** When I scoped this, there were two issues. I noted that it was going to take at least six meetings. However, in the consultation, we will gather evidence from many sources in written form, and we can invite witnesses in on that basis. Not everyone who provides a response will be invited here as a witness. We will make judgments about who we call in. If we agree to undertake this inquiry, your own experiences and knowledge of rural areas may produce witnesses who will prove valuable to this inquiry. As always, I will be asking you to do that. Are there any further views?

[246] **Angela Burns:** I want to clarify that when I said that someone should take a long, hard, fair, look at this, I was not implying that this committee would not do so—I was saying that someone has to do it. The representations that I have had from both sides have been very emotionally stated. So, it needs a body such as this committee to take a very pragmatic and down-the-middle look at it, because otherwise it will be endlessly open to passionate lobby groups—[*Inaudible.*]

[247] **Mick Bates:** The majority of Members are in favour of moving immediately to an inquiry, but Leanne raised the point about the Minister's announcement on her strategy on 5 June. If the Government undertakes an inquiry, it does not stop us from doing the same. So, at the moment—and I can see heads nodding—we are agreed that we will undertake an inquiry.

[248] **Leanne Wood:** I am fine with that, Chair. I am just keen to ensure that we do not duplicate work or start a piece of work that is superseded by an announcement.

[249] **Mick Bates:** I will make sure of that.

[250] **Alun Davies:** Leanne's point is well made. The view of the Government is quite important on this issue, because if the Government, for argument's sake, announces in its strategic approach that it will seek powers to bring forward legislation, it would fundamentally change the context in which any investigation takes place. So, we need to have a view from Government on how it is taking this forward, and that could be a part of the scoping exercise that we would need to undertake before we begin an investigation on this issue. From what you said on taking this forward, Mick, if we agree to do it in principle today, it would be useful to undertake a scoping exercise, agree the terms of reference and go out to consultation over the summer. I think that holding a full hearing at the Royal Welsh

Show would be a good way to kick-start this investigation, because many of the people who would seek to address the issues would be at that event, and it might be a good opportunity for us to start this investigation in public, and involve a large number of stakeholders.

[251] **Mick Bates:** Thank you very much for your opinions. Subject to the announcement on 5 June, we will go ahead.

11.17 a.m.

Papurau i'w Nodi Papers to Note

[252] **Mick Bates:** The papers to note are the forward work programme and also correspondence from Brian Gibbons.

[253] **Alun Davies:** I thank the clerk and her staff for the forward work programme. In terms of how we take the flood inquiry forward, it has been very good to hear the different evidence. It is important to do the outreach work that we are doing over this period. At the same time, it is important that we provide a hard scrutiny of public bodies, particularly the Assembly Government, in terms of how it responds to flooding in Wales. In terms of our work programme, we need to ensure that we have a balance in scrutinising the Government and Government bodies on their response to flood planning. One of the issues that concerned me from the evidence that we received this morning, particularly from ITV Wales, was that there does not appear to be the communications planning in Wales that we saw and heard about in Gloucester, in terms of how lessons have been learned from the flooding there and how a communication strategy and a public information strategy are planned on that. So, we need to go further in terms of scrutinising public bodies and Government on how they plan for flood-risk management, how they seek to manage emergency responses and how they are developing a policy approach to flood-risk management. We need to shift the emphasis from evidence gathering to scrutiny as we take the investigation forward.

[254] **Mick Bates:** The point is taken. Next week, we will have the Minister in for scrutiny, and the reference in that regard is to the draft floods and water management Bill, which contains many of the issues that the Pitt review raised, and on which we are already gathering evidence. However, I take your point. At the end of July, we have a meeting of the stakeholder group, from which I think we will have more recommendations, which will help our final evidence-gathering sessions on flooding.

11.20 a.m.

[255] **Alun Davies:** I agree, and the round-table approach is a good way to collect views, but—and I am sorry to keep coming back to this—we need to scrutinise the individuals who should be accountable for providing the management and the strategic approach. That is a critical role for this committee. The issue with round tables, which are good at generating ideas and responses, is that they do not provide an opportunity for scrutiny.

[256] **Leanne Wood:** I support Alun on that. I also want to add that it is more useful to hold our scrutiny at the end of the evidence-gathering process, so that we can scrutinise what has already—

[257] **Mick Bates:** Absolutely. My intention is to return to that. The reason I mentioned the stakeholder group is because it may provide other issues that we need to scrutinise. That was the point of putting that there. Do we all agree on that? I see that we do. The next meeting is to be held on Wednesday, 10 June, when we will be scrutinising the Deputy First Minister and Minister for Economy and Transport on mainstreaming sustainability in his portfolio. We

will also take evidence from the Environment Agency and Welsh Water on the draft floods and water management Bill. Sorry, the Deputy First Minister will be coming in on 24 June, so that will follow the evidence session. Thank you very much for your attendance at what was an extremely interesting meeting.

Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 11.21 a.m.
The meeting ended at 11.21 a.m.