

OFFICIAL – SENSITIVE - CABINET

Cabinet will wish to note that these minutes, except those items in italics, will be published in week commencing 6th April 2020

**The Welsh Government
Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet
25th February 2020**

Present: Rt. Hon. Mark Drakeford AM (Chair)
Rebecca Evans AM
Vaughan Gething AM
Lesley Griffiths AM
Julie James AM (from item 3)
Ken Skates AM
Kirsty Williams AM
Jeremy Miles AM
Jane Hutt AM

Shan Morgan, Permanent Secretary
Carys Evans, Principal Private Secretary to the First Minister
Will Whiteley, Head of Cabinet Division
Toby Mason, Head of Strategic Communications
Jane Runeckles, Special Adviser
Alex Bevan, Special Adviser
Dan Butler, Special Adviser
Paul Griffiths, Special Adviser
Sara Faye, Special Adviser
NR Special Adviser
Clare Jenkins, Special Adviser
Tom Woodward, Special Adviser
Christopher W Morgan, Cabinet Secretariat (minutes)
Name Redacted Cabinet Secretariat

Apologies: Eluned Morgan AM

Item 1: Minutes of the previous meeting

- 1.1 Cymeradwydd y Cabinet gofnodion y 4 a 10 Chwefror/ Cabinet approved the minutes of 4 and 10 February.

Item 2: Government Plenary Business

- 2.1 Cabinet noted the contents of the Plenary grid.

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Item 3: Round Table Update on Storms Ciara and Dennis

- 3.1 Cabinet discussed the aftermath of Storms Ciara and Dennis. As a result of Storm Ciara, a significant number of homes and businesses had flooded in and around Llanrwst, Llanfair Talhaiarn, Trefriw, Denbigh, Colwyn Bay and St Asaph as well as isolated incidents elsewhere, both inland and along the coast.
- 3.2 During the peak of Storm Dennis, 61 Flood Alerts, 89 Flood Warnings and 2 Severe Flood Warnings were in force. The Taff and Rhondda catchments received more than 160mm in some places, which was more than a month's rainfall in a day and both the Taff and Usk reached their highest levels in over 40 years. Local Authorities had reported that over 1000 homes suffered internal flooding with over 300 businesses directly affected.
- 3.3 The number of properties involved and the damage and losses caused was devastating for those concerned. Nevertheless, emerging data from Natural Resources Wales (NRW) indicated that over 9000 homes were protected from flooding on the River Taff. Across Wales the figure was somewhere in the region of 73,000 with many more benefitting from smaller defences managed by Local Authorities. Without these defences the flooding could have been a lot worse.
- 3.4 These were significant storm events and it was recognised that climate change experts had been reporting that Wales should expect both increased frequency and severity of weather events.
- 3.5 The transport network had also been severely affected and staff across the entire sector had worked hard to support the travelling public and re-open the public transport and road networks. Some roads were still closed and it would be sometime before certain rail routes would be reopened. However, the entire bus network was operational.
- 3.6 The Welsh Government offices at Treforest and Bedwas had closed due to flooding and the clean-up was expected to take at least six weeks.
- 3.7 Ministers had visited communities across Wales, discussed matters with those directly affected, while witnessing the incredible response from communities and volunteers.
- 3.8 The floods had a significant financial impact. Therefore, Ministers had agreed that all households affected by flooding throughout Wales would receive £500 from the Welsh Government, and an extra £500 would be available to those without home insurance cover. People were likely to receive an initial payment within 24 hours of an application being processed, providing they had an appropriate bank account. The UK Government had confirmed that such payments would not have any implications for those in receipt of benefits.

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- 3.9 Funding had also been made available for Emergency repairs to flood risk infrastructure, including defences and culverts. Furthermore, the Emergency Financial Assistance Scheme was available to support Local Authorities with the revenue costs of the response to the flooding.
- 3.10 Business Wales was ready to support affected businesses with post-flood recovery, while options were being explored with the Development Bank of Wales on how funding could be allocated to help with flood recovery costs.
- 3.11 The First Minister had, the previous day, discussed the safety of coal tips with the Secretary of State for Wales. NRW, the coal authority and relevant Local Authorities had a shared approach to tip management, which was to identify on a scale those that caused the greatest concern. Assurances had been provided at the meeting that all those at the top of that list would be investigated by the end of that week. A number had already been investigated and engineers had indicated that they do not pose a risk to life or property. However, those assessments had been made against the standards used over the previous decades and they may not be satisfactory for the future.
- 3.12 Cabinet put on record its thanks to all those who had helped in the emergency response and ongoing recovery, which included the emergency services. Local Authorities, NRW, other agencies and volunteers, who had all worked tirelessly to help deal with the flooding and help mitigate the impact. In particular, Ministers commended the leader of Rhondda Cynon Taf, for his leadership.
- 3.13 Ministers felt that the Welsh Government's response had been rapid and effective with exemplary support from officials across the government.
- 3.14 Ministers noted that the funding had been identified from Departmental underspends.
- 3.15 While there may be room to make a modest amount of additional funding available next year to support the flood response, it was reported that the Minister for Finance had written to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury to signal that the Welsh Government may need to access UK Treasury Reserves, outside of the normal Barnett process, to cover the exceptional costs. Furthermore, the UK Government had been asked to consider making a claim to the EU Solidarity Fund.
- 3.16 It was important to ensure that all households across Wales that were at risk of flooding were made aware of the 'Flood Re' scheme, which allowed everyone to access affordable home insurance.
- 3.17 Cabinet agreed that there was a need to separate out what needed to be done immediately in response to the storms to ensure that lives could return to normal as quickly as possible and then consider what would need to be reviewed over the longer term.

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- 3.18 In the short term, there may be a need to redirect certain budgets to help deal with the aftermath of the storm, but Ministers agreed that there was a need to continue to put pressure on the UK Government to seek additional funding. Without this, there would be significant implications on the Welsh Government's capital budget in 2020-21.
- 3.19 Ministers agreed that they should continue to visit communities affected by the storm damage.

Item 4: Any other business

- 4.1 The Minister for Health and Social Services provided Cabinet with an update on the Coronavirus virus (COVID19).
- 4.2 The Minister was issuing weekly Written Statements to Senedd Members and the Chief Medical Officer was also providing regular updates for the public and had issued guidance to those who may develop symptoms after returning from abroad. Travel advice had recently been updated to reflect the increase in cases in a number of countries, including Italy. Furthermore, the Public Health Wales website was being updated on a daily basis.
- 4.3 The worldwide response was still in the containment stage and risk assessment for the UK was currently moderate, but this would change should there be a sustained transmission in Europe or in any country that had close connections with the UK and or the failure of certain countries to reduce the spread of the virus.
- 4.4 Information was being shared across all four UK Nations.
- 4.5 It was noted that relevant Ministers would be meeting on a regular basis to consider the implications of the spread the virus.