# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE** | **Publication of the Independent review of the local government section 19 and Natural Resources Wales reports into extreme flooding in winter 2020-21** |
| **DATE** | **31 August 2023** |
| **BY** | **Julie James MS, Minister for Climate Change** |

I am pleased to announce the publication of Professor Evans’ independent review of local government section 19 and Natural Resources Wales reports into extreme flooding in winter 2020-21. This review, led by Professor Elwen Evans KC, is an important step in helping us understand the flood response in Wales and deliver against the climate emergency.

I would like to thank Professor Evans for her work, and I am grateful to the Local Authorities, NRW, and Senedd Members who contributed to the process.

The publication of the report sees the delivery of another commitment under the joint co-operation agreement with Plaid Cymru and is an important step in improving how flood risk management, including the response to flooding and their aftermath is delivered across Wales. The report recognises the work that has already been done by our Risk Management Authorities in reducing the risk to our communities but also recognises there is more to do. This desk-based review highlights both strategic, policy and practical changes that could strengthen the flood investigation process whilst recognising the limitations within the current framework.

As Wales contends with the impacts of climate change, we have all witnessed the devastation flooding can inflict on communities across Wales. We will never be able to prevent all flooding, but the work set out in our Programme for Government and Co-operation Agreement and through our sustained investment demonstrates our commitment to reducing the risk to our ‘at risk’ communities across Wales, helping them to have greater awareness and better prepared should the worst happen.

In the three years since the storms, our flood risk management programme has provided risk management authorities with £194 million in funding to reduce the risk of flooding to communities across Wales.

We have provided over £13m to local authorities via our Small Scale Works grant. That is nearly 300 schemes to improve smaller pieces of infrastructure. We estimate this has reduced the risk of flooding to over 6,500 properties.

Additionally in the 18 months following Storm Dennis, the Welsh Government awarded Local Authorities and NRW nearly £9.3m in emergency funding to repair critical flood infrastructure damaged by numerous storms.

Through the Co-operation Agreement, looking to the longer term, the National Infrastructure Commission has been tasked with considering how the nationwide likelihood of flooding can be minimised by 2050.

Nature-based solutions are also critical to protecting and enhancing our environment, whilst tackling issues resulting from the climate and nature emergencies. Sustainable land management actions such as restoring wetlands, planting trees and hedging and creating leaky barriers, which will not only help reduce the risk of flooding but contribute to a broad range of our goals to tackle climate change and the nature crisis, such as improved biodiversity, increased carbon capture, and pollution reduction. These innovative solutions are vital for the sustainable management of our natural resources.

Welsh Government is supporting natural flood management (NFM) projects across Wales, with more than £3 million in grant funding made available through our Natural Flood Management programme promoting 15 projects which are being delivered by 10 different Risk Management Authorities (RMAs). Future projects will also see greater collaboration between RMAs and land managers to deliver nature based solutions to reduce flood risk

We know that the impacts of flooding would have been worse in recent years, if it was not for our network of defences and the tireless work of our Risk Management Authorities. That is why we continue to provide record levels of investment, to provide our Risk Management Authorities with the means to construct and maintain the infrastructure we rely on to keep our communities safe from the challenges posed by climate change.

As a result of the complex nature of flood risk management the findings from this review will need to be considered in the context of other reviews and reports that have been completed and that are yet to finish. The focus of this review was one important piece of the wider reporting ecosystem and will need to be considered alongside other ongoing reviews being carried out by the National Infrastructure Commission Wales, and the Flood and Coastal Erosion Committee and work already being delivered as part of the National Strategy. The continuous improvement within this area supported by this government will help the way we support communities adapt and prepare in this changing climate.

My officials will be considering Professor Evans’ findings and recommendations in line with the broader reviews carried out by Audit Wales, the Flood and Coastal Erosion Committee and by the National Infrastructure Commission Wales and how these are taken forward.

This statement is being issued during recess in order to keep members informed. Following the publication of this report I shall be delivering an oral statement on the 12 September in the Senedd.