



Department for  
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& Industrial Strategy

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15 February 2021

Dear Stephen,

Thank you for your letter of 8 February and for raising this at BEIS orals on 9 February. I have every sympathy for the residents that have been impacted by the flooding and who are now engaged in the clean-up and keen to be able to move forwards with their lives. As I said in the House, I would be happy to travel to Skewen and meet with you when restrictions are lifted.

I explained in my previous letter that the Coal Authority does not have liability for flooding so residents who have been impacted will need to work with their insurers regarding the damage that has been caused. But we are committed to doing all that we can within the bounds of the legislation and guidance under which the Coal Authority operates to support the community.

The Coal Authority continue to keep me informed of developments and I am pleased that real progress has been made to support the community since the incident happened on January 21<sup>st</sup>.

The Coal Authority negotiated and built a new temporary access road to Goshen Park which opened on 6 February and ensures that all but 3 families now have direct access to their homes. Bespoke support is being provided to those families.

The Coal Authority are providing security for Goshen Park and, at the request of residents, have also provided additional security patrols for the surrounding streets in support of the Police who are providing enhanced patrols of the area.

The clean-up of sludge, mud and debris deposited by the flood water around people's homes started 2 weeks ago and is making a difference. The Coal Authority are making use of a range of local contractors and have multiple crews on site to support this which includes contractors to clear drains which was a specific and additional ask from the community. This work will continue until every house that wants the service has received it. Labour and costs for this work is unlimited and entirely separate from the financial support available to help with garden reinstatement.

Additionally, the Coal Authority are offering up to £500 for materials for each property to support the reinstatement of gardens and outside spaces where they are not covered by insurance. They are also providing reasonable labour to undertake these works.

Now that the temporary access road is in place and once all necessary services have been realigned the Coal Authority will be able to close the main cul-de-sac junction and begin the invasive investigation works needed to finalise designs and options for the new mine water management system and associated mine shaft remediation and to begin those works.

Other financial support has been provided as you are aware. This includes payment of the Welsh Government emergency grant (similar to the Bellwin scheme in England) of a one off payment of £1000 for uninsured properties and £500 for insured properties. Welsh Government and Neath Port Talbot Council have agreed to pay this to all properties evacuated, not just those flooded. In addition, the Coal Authority are reimbursing hotel expenses in full or paying an allowance of £30 per household per night from the 21 January until access was restored to their homes.

Dedicated resident support continues. This includes the Skewen resident's helpline, weekly residents briefings for those who have provided email addresses and the online residents meeting you refer to in your letter. Following that the Coal authority have produced a leaflet which has been sent by email and post to all residents, including those on surrounding streets to ensure that they have the same information and can follow up with questions if they were not able to attend the meeting. Questions are being answered and information and FAQs are also available on Neath Port Talbot Council's website. The Coal Authority will be recruiting a local community support officer who will be based at the site for the time that works are taking place and they are continuing to listen to the feedback of residents and provide further practical support where they are able.

We recognise the concerns of homeowners with relation to insurance, mortgage providers and house prices.

The Coal Authority have encouraged residents to put insurance and mortgage companies in touch with them to provide reassurance about the specific nature of this incident and the level of investment that will be made in the new water management scheme.

The Coal Authority have also committed to providing each resident with an information pack in the next 2 months to explain more about the new scheme and how it will protect the community. This can be used with insurers and mortgage providers and will include Coal Authority contacts so the offer for insurers, mortgage providers and others (eg estate agents) to be able to speak with the Coal Authority for further information will exist in perpetuity. Additionally, the Coal Authority are speaking with the Association of British Insurers (ABI) to help them understand the specific nature of the incident.

These measures have proved helpful in previous cases where local areas have suffered significant subsidence which was subsequently treated.

It is unfortunate that one of the impacts of events such as flooding is that house prices for flooded properties are affected in the short term, particularly while flood recovery is under way. The Coal Authority experience with areas that have faced significant subsidence is that house prices generally do recover in the medium term. 52% of South Wales properties are on the coalfield and the level of investment in Skewen will enhance the protection to the village in the same way that a flood defence would do with regards to communities at risk of flooding from a river. The Coal Authority will also encourage publicity for the new scheme so that it receives positive coverage and showcases the protections in place.

All of these measures combined represent a significant package of support for the community and I am confident that the Coal Authority, with the support of the Department, is doing all it is able to support the affected residents of Skewen in the wake of this deeply sad incident.

As I referred to in my letter to you of 4<sup>th</sup> February, the Coal Authority has already commenced a learning review from this event. One aspect that I would ask for your help with is to encourage anyone who sees anything unusual to report it to the Coal Authority on their 24/7 hotline 01623 646333. It is clear from community feedback that there were warning signs at Skewen in the

hours, days and weeks before the incident that may have prevented or mitigated the extent of the incident. The Coal Authority will be running a wider public awareness campaign and offering specific training for utility company, council staff and working with local resilience forums to help increase the likelihood of such things being reported to them in future.

The Coal Authority inspect mine entries and carry out a range of proactive monitoring and work across Wales and Great Britain every day to help keep people safe. The scale and complexity of our historic mining legacy means that they will never be able to inspect all that is underground. Local people and local workers know their areas best and working together we can encourage them to share any concerns or observations directly with the Coal Authority in future.

cc Rt Hon Simon Hart MP, Secretary of State for Wales  
Lisa Pinney MBE, Chief Executive of the Coal Authority

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anne Marie Trevelyan', with a horizontal line underneath.

**THE RT HON ANNE-MARIE TREVELYAN MP**  
Minister of State for Business, Energy and Clean Growth