



Generosity after devastation

IN JANUARY, many parts of the UK felt the effects of Storm Christoph and none more so than the residents of the small village of Skewen in West Glamorgan.

Around one hundred families were evacuated from their homes when the old mine shafts, buried deep below the houses, failed to cope with the volume of water coming off the mountain sending torrents of copper-tainted water through homes. An investigation into the actual cause continues but it is expected to take months before some residents can return to their homes, if at all.

I paid a visit to the local Salvation Army which coordinates the emergency supplies to families. Food, clothes, furniture, buckets, mops, bleach, rubber gloves... the list goes on. All these were donated by the local community and arrived without delay at their centre ready for distribution to the families.

It is also about the things you don't consider. Major Mary Wolfe of the Salvation Army told me about the residents of the care home who had to be evacuated, many distressed at leaving their familiar surroundings. Families had to leave their homes quickly and without vital medication. Emergency workers – wet, dirty, cold and working twelve hour shifts – in desperate need of a blanket, hot food and drinks. The Salvation Army were able to set up a mobile food unit to supply them. Families staying in hotel rooms needed meals that could be heated



Debra Evans-Williams enjoying a cup of tea with the Salvation Army mobile food unit outside an evacuated care home

by a kettle or in a microwave as hotel restaurants were closed due to COVID-19.

Police officers who responded to the 999 calls painted a picture of standing waist-high in water, being handed children and family pets through windows. They told me of one family with young children sitting watching TV when their locked back door was blown off its hinges and their home became knee-deep in water within seconds. One of them described having to persuade

an elderly lady to leave her home when she had lived there for sixty years; all this as water levels were rising and while respecting her dignity.

A number of the families do not have home insurance. A number of houses have subsidence and will never be lived in again. This village is where my father was born, where I went to primary school and where my great-grandparents had a corner shop.

As High Sheriff I was pleased to be given the opportunity to visit and acknowledge the emergency services, local authority staff and volunteers, all working hard to repair the physical and psychological damage. The generosity of the local – and indeed wider – community was humbling.

◆ Debra Evans-Williams
High Sheriff of West Glamorgan 2020-21

Below left: Debra Evans-Williams with volunteers at the Salvation Army depot in Skewen sorting through many kind donations of clothes and food

Below right: Debra Evans-Williams with police officers who responded to the 999 call for assistance and continue to stand watch over the evacuated houses from this mobile police incident unit

