

A meeting for and with residents of Eskifjörður was held on Tuesday, 22 December 2020 and streamed live on the Fjarðabyggð municipality website. A video recording of this meeting may be viewed by clicking here.

The residents' meeting was to review the situation, with the following people sitting on the panel: Jón Björn Hákonarson, mayor of Fjarðabyggð; Margrét María Sigurðardóttir, the East Iceland District Police Commissioner; Harpa Grímsdóttir, a specialist from the Icelandic Meteorological Office; Ingibjörg Lilja Ómarsdóttir, from the Department of Civil Protection and Emergency Management; and Kristján Ólafur Guðnason, Chief Superintendent of Police, Eskifjörður.

Jón Björn Hákonarson opened the meeting and briefly reviewed what happened at Eskifjörður over the weekend. He explained how important it was to call such a meeting in order to hear residents' comments on how the events were handled. This for instance made it possible to incorporate such comments into improved arrangements before the next time any similar situation occurred. **Jón Björn** told about a meeting earlier today with government ministers. His emphasis while talking with the ministers, in view of the recent events, had been on the importance of undertaking a new risk analysis for Eskifjörður. In addition, the avalanche defence structures in Fjarðabyggð needed finishing, like in other areas of Iceland where they were necessary.

In her speech, **Margrét María Sigurðardóttir** emphasised how important it was not to play down the events at Eskifjörður. The required operation had been a major one; however, it had gone well. She expressed gratitude to those taking part in the work at Eskifjörður and to all town residents, and emphasised the importance of such meetings for learning more and finding out ways to perform better.

Harpa Grímsdóttir gave an overview of last weekend's events at Eskifjörður. From the 9th to 13th of December, warnings were issued of avalanche risks in East Iceland. On Tuesday, 15 December, an Uncertainty Level was declared regarding avalanches in the East. On 16 December, residents along the Lambeyrará and Grjótá rivers in Eskifjörður received messages to be cautious due to the risk of landslides from those river channels.

In the preceding days there was heavy precipitation, especially from the 14th to 16th December, giving reason to pay close attention to known landslide areas above the town. On Friday, 18 December, cracks formed in the highway up to Oddsskarð [the road to the skiing area]. These cracks lay above the settlement of Eskifjörður and continued to lengthen and widen into the morning of 19 December. Because the size of the area involved was uncertain, the decision was taken to recommend the evacuation of a fairly large area, so as to be entirely certain of ensuring resident safety. Once the cracks were discovered, developments were closely monitored by setting up measuring devices in that area and taking photographs. **Since 19 December, little or no movement has been detected.**

As the situation stands now, the Meteorological Office believes that two separate areas have been in motion. There are no indications of movements in any large area; instead, the movements seem connected to localised land features. Considering the status at the moment, the slopes are felt to be stable because the groundwater pressure has fallen. **Close monitoring of the area will continue and has in fact already begun, including measurements and photographs.**

Ingibjörg Lilja Ómarsdóttir discussed the importance of being able to contact the Department of Civil Protection and Emergency Management disaster relief centre at Seyðisfjörður, since the services offered by that centre are also available to Eskifjörður residents. More information can be found on the Department website, www.almannavarnir.is [which offers English, French and Polish in addition

to Icelandic]. The website provides answers to questions that may arise and offers psychological support as well.

Kristján Ólafur Guðnason presented a timeline of events, as seen by the Department of Civil Protection and Emergency Management. The Icelandic Meteorological Office contacted the police at about 17:30 in regard to evacuating the area. The Crisis Coordination Centre was thereupon summoned and the Red Cross was contacted, which then organised registration work as well as a disaster relief station in the Eskifjörður church. The evacuation went extremely well, soon ensuring that everyone had left the area. During the one-and-a-half days that the evacuation lasted, eight news notifications were sent to the media, the Fjarðabyggð website and the police, as well as being entered in Facebook pages. However, not all text messages (SMS) which were sent out were delivered. This was due to technical difficulties that remain unsolved and are not limited to this particular event.

Jón Björn then addressed questions which had been sent to the meeting. One of these asked when the first notification arrived of cracks forming on the road to Oddsskarð pass. The answer was that avalanche patrollers had contacted the Meteorological Office at about 17:00 and given notification.

In closing, **Jón Björn** mentioned that the meeting had been recorded. It would thus be possible to look at the footage and send in any questions that came to mind; these would be answered insofar as possible.