

02 March 2023

Dear

ATISN 17110 - WRU Correspondence

Thank you for your request which I received on 02 February 2023. You asked for:

All correspondence and minutes of meetings between the Deputy Minister for Arts and Sport, Dawn Bowden, and the Welsh Rugby Union since 09 May 2022.

Our response

The requested correspondence and minutes are attached in the Annexes below. For reference I have included a table with links to each item:

Annex 1	Letter – DM to WRU - Trans inclusion policy	19 October 2022
Annex 2	Meeting notes - Deputy Minister/WRU meeting	11 January 2023
Annex 3	Meeting notes - Deputy Minister/WRU meeting	23 January 2023
Annex 4	Meeting notes - Deputy Minister/WRU meeting	25 January 2023
Annex 5	Letter – DM to Ieuan Evans	27 January 2023

Next steps

If you are dissatisfied with the Welsh Government's handling of your request, you can ask for an internal review within 40 working days of the date of this response. Requests for an internal review should be addressed to the Welsh Government's Freedom of Information Officer at:

Information Rights Unit,
Welsh Government,
Cathays Park,
Cardiff,
CF10 3NQ

or Email: Freedom.ofinformation@gov.wales

Please remember to quote the ATISN reference number above.

You also have the right to complain to the Information Commissioner. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF.

However, please note that the Commissioner will not normally investigate a complaint until it has been through our own internal review process.

Yours sincerely

Annex 1:
DM to WRU letter - Trans inclusion policy - 19 October 2022

Dawn Bowden AS/MS
Dirprwy Weinidog y Celfyddydau a Chwaraeon, a'r Prif Chwip
Deputy Minister for Arts and Sport, and Chief Whip

Hannah Blythyn AS/MS
Y Dirprwy Weinidog Partneriaeth Gymdeithasol Deputy Minister for Social
Partnership



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref DB/767/22

Rob Butcher
Chair
Welsh Rugby Union

[Personal details redacted]

19 October 2022

Dear Rob,

We are writing to you regarding your recently published transgender policy from our respective ministerial portfolios for social justice (including LGBTQ+ equality), and sport. We are concerned by the blanket exclusion of trans women and girls from rugby that your policy recommends. The Welsh Government believes that decisions on transgender people's participation in any part of society should come from a starting point of inclusion. LGBTQ+ rights, including trans rights, are human rights. Sport should be for everyone. A place where everyone can take part and where everyone is treated with kindness, dignity and respect. Our preferred position is to follow a case-by-case approach, rather than a blanket exclusion of transgender people.

We acknowledge that you have engaged with officials in both our departments to advise that this policy was in development. It would be useful to understand why the WRU feels it needs a policy of this nature, one that does not start from a point of inclusivity or use a case-by-case approach, and why at this time, given there are no registered transgender players in the community game in Wales. It would also be useful to know why the policy has a different approach for the treatment of trans men and trans women.

You have said that in coming to your stated policy position you engaged across the community. We would like to understand which organisations or communities you consulted with during the development of this policy, and what their respective views were.

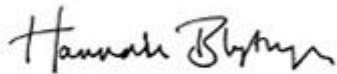
If it would help, we would be happy to meet prior to receiving a formal response to this letter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dawn Bowden', written in a cursive style.

Dawn Bowden AS/MS

Dirprwy Weinidog y Celfyddydau a Chwaraeon, a'r Prif Chwip
Deputy Minister for Arts and Sport, and Chief Whip

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Hannah Blythyn AS/MS

Y Dirprwy Weinidog Partneriaeth Gymdeithasol
Deputy Minister for Social Partnership

Annex 2:

Deputy Minister/WRU meeting 11 January 2023

Present;

Dawn Bowden, Deputy Minister

Ieuan Evans, Chair WRU

Steve Phillips, CEO WRU

Louisa Scadden, Communications Director WRU

Neil Welch, Welsh Government

The Deputy Minister (DM) welcomed Ieuan Evans (IE) and Louisa Scadden (LS) to their respective new roles and wished them every success.

The first issue discussed was the proposed changes to Governance that the WRU had attempted to introduce at their AGM but failed, leading to IE's appointment. They (WRU) outlined from their perspective what the issues had evaluated the opposition to the changes and were intending to hold an EGM in the new year (probably March) to re-present the changes with a view to persuading those in opposition that they were in the best interests of the game in Wales. IE was also intending to go on a 'tour' to meet all of the regions with a view to 'selling' the changes. The DM wished him all the best and asked to be kept up to date when the EGM might happen.

The women's game was discussed next, and the DM expressed her thanks for the hospitality in New Zealand when she attended the World Cup and how delighted she was with the progress of the game in Wales. The introduction of the U18 regional development competition which was due to start and also in the tri nations competition for those players just under the national squad. The women's game in Wales was on a strong upward trajectory and the DM would be monitoring developments. SP invited the DM to the 6 Nations home games in April which she stated she would be delighted to attend.

The WRU transgender policy was discussed, and the DM stated that the WG were disappointed in the difference in treatment between trans men and trans women. SP outlined the rationale and that they had followed the guidance from the sports councils and World Rugby and that the issue centred around safety. The DM stated that a consistent approach of considering participation on a case by case basis across both groups as opposed to the blanket ban for transwomen playing. SP stated that as it had been considered as a safety issue the liability that may sit with the WRU made it difficult for them to change their approach. It was agreed that officials would look into this and engage further with the WRU.

Due to time constraints the other agenda items were not covered in detail but mention was given to the loan arrangement between WG and WRU and the DM asked SP to work with officials in the first instance and she would consider their advice accordingly. With regard to the rating revaluation letter she had received the DM stated the Minister for Finance & Local Government would be the appropriate minister to consider that and respond. SP also mentioned that the team sports (rugby, football, hockey, netball and cricket) had met and would be writing to the DM regarding the Sport Wales new investment model. They were all concerned of the negative impact it would have on team sports, who were all losing out significant amounts of funding in the new model.

Annex 3: Meeting notes of WRU meeting – 23 January 2023

Present:

Deputy Minister

Steve Phillips WRU

Louisa Scadden WRU

Alex Bevan, Welsh Government

Steffan Roberts, Welsh Government

- SP informed officials on Friday on the BBC documentary being aired on Monday evening (23 Jan). He outlined some of the information likely to come out but full detail was unknown. Some information was already in the press.
- SP provided some context around the individual cases that had gone through an internal process and via an external legal firm. There was a high degree of frustration by WRU around the BBC reporting and the lack of balance offered.
- SP emphasised that sexism, misogyny and racism has no role in the WRU and was determined to clarify the steps it had taken and future action.
- DM welcomed being informed of the issues being raised ahead of the documentary and highlighted that the focus should be on action to restore trust in the organisation. The clustering of individual cases was extremely damaging and the link being made to the wider culture of the organisation. There was also a link between the cases being to be of detriment to the development of the women's game.
- There was a discussion about the call in the documentary around establishing an independent body to oversee complaints about Wales' sports governing bodies. There was no detail around the proposal at this stage and this would require further consideration.
- WG and WRU agreed to maintain contact and further discussion following the documentary being aired.

Annex 4: Meeting notes of WRU meeting – 25 January 2023

Present:

Deputy Minister

Steve Phillips WRU

Louisa Scadden WRU

Alex Bevan, Welsh Government

Steffan Roberts, Welsh Government

- DM highlighted that she wants to see a functioning governing body. WG is supportive of their efforts to restore confidence in the organisation and put a plan in place to do that. It is for the WRU to do that.
- DM highlighted the FM's comments in Plenary yesterday. DM has a Topical Question in the afternoon which will draw out the views of Senedd Members in greater detail.
- DM stated that she will be encouraging the WRU to release the report into the women's game and she would also welcome sight of their wider governance review to see for herself the range of reforms they have previously considering. SP said he already gave commitments in yesterday's media interview and therefore a positive response is expected.
- DM recalled her previous discussion with SP and Ieuan Evans around the reforms they are looking to implement, beyond the recent attempt to establish an independent chair. DM asked for specific examples of actions being undertaken – these include a People Director, staff engagement, training and refreshing HR and EDI policies. SP offered an invite for DM to meet some of his staff.
- DM highlighted the importance of the WRU to the nation and how important it was to get things back on track, but changing an organisations' culture is extremely challenging.
- WRU shared that Ieuan Evans was leading a press conference later in the afternoon.
- All would reconvene following the day's events.

Annex 5:
Letter – DM to Ieuan Evans – 27 January 2023

Dawn Bowden AS/MS
Dirprwy Weinidog y Celfyddydau a Chwaraeon, a'r Prif Chwip
Deputy Minister for Arts and Sport, and Chief Whip



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref DB/PO/26/23

Ieuan Evans
Chair
Welsh Rugby Union

27 January 2023

Dear Ieuan,

This has been a distressing week for Welsh rugby with significant implications for former and current WRU staff as well as players, clubs and communities across Wales. The details in the testimonies provided in the BBC Wales Investigates programme were devastating and I recognise the courage it takes for anyone to speak out after experiencing abuse, harassment, or bullying.

The Welsh Government will not be a bystander to abuse, and we are committed to tackling harassment, bullying and all forms of violence against women head on. Women and girls should be and feel safe in all aspects of their lives, including the workplace. We expect the same level of commitment from all our partners, stakeholders and citizens, including the WRU.

The WRU occupies a special place in Wales' sporting, economic and civic life. Its history is interwoven with the nation's story and the game is a vehicle for unique Welsh expression on a global scale. The institution reaches into villages, towns and cities across Wales and has the power to bring people together.

All of us have an interest in seeing a well led, modern WRU that supports grassroots and elite level success while protecting the rights and wellbeing of its employees and promoting Wales to the world.

It is important that the WRU's status as an independent business is clear and well understood. While the Welsh Government will play an active role in addressing the serious issues in hand, I am clear that it is for the WRU to take the necessary action to ensure that the business emerges with the governance, policies and culture that are fit for the future.

I would like to set out our expectations as you develop what must be an urgent, transparent and comprehensive response to these incredibly serious challenges and allegations.

As I stated in the Senedd, a healthy workplace would not be subject to complaints of the scale and nature exposed in the BBC Wales programme. Our firm view is that victims

should be believed when they come forward. In the interests of employee welfare, I urge you to ensure that all WRU staff are now provided with information on the support that is available to them.

Live Fear Free is a free, confidential helpline for anyone experiencing any form of violence against women, harassment or abuse.

Live Fear Free

Call: 0808 80 10 800

Text: 07860077333

Live Chat: www.gov.wales/live-fear-free

Email: info@livefearfreehelpline.wales

Employees who require advice on their rights at work can also access information and advice via ACAS and their trade union. Where there is no trade union representation, employees may wish to access the union finder [tool](#) hosted by the TUC.

In addition to providing clear signposting for all employees, the organisation should work urgently to assess what immediate actions are required to support staff wellbeing and address incidents and behaviours that require interventions that cannot be delayed by any external review. Where disciplinary action – including dismissal – is necessary, such proceedings should not be postponed until the outcome of a broader review. It is crucial that these matters are acted on in a robust and consistent manner.

My recent discussions with the WRU have not provided me with a reassurance that such action has been taken and I remain concerned that the issues raised by complainants are not being acted on in a manner that upholds workplace policies and employment protections.

Looking ahead, any external review ought to address the workplace culture and support WRU to implement the necessary changes to allow women, and all employees, to enjoy a safe workplace free from harassment, abuse and bullying of all forms.

I note the commitment made by the Chair in the press conference earlier this week to undertake an ‘external investigation’ and the need for close engagement with partners, including the Welsh Government.

I welcome the opportunity to meet earlier today to hear about your intended next steps and reiterate here the need for a process that is truly independent, transparent and informed by partners to help restore trust within a plan that ensures positive and lasting change.

I must stress that openness and transparency are paramount, and I would expect to see the findings and recommendations made public.

In the same spirit of openness and transparency, I am repeating my request for you to publish the review you conducted into the women's game in 2021.

If individuals have concerns that they may be identified as a result, there are well-established methods you can employ which would maintain their anonymity. I would further request a public statement from the WRU on how you have responded to the review and how you are planning for the further development of the women's game. I have seen for myself that the WRU has made positive recent progress in developing the women's game in Wales with professional contracts for the national team and a newly formed development team, to outline a few examples, all increasing the opportunities for women and girls in rugby.

As the Deputy Minister for Sport, I am taking the matters raised in the BBC documentary extremely seriously and will continue to press in the strongest possible way for immediate and transformative reform in the WRU, to restore trust in an organisation that has a truly unique contribution to make.

I am ambitious about the future of Welsh rugby and I pay tribute to all those who continue to dedicate so much to the game with a passion that does Wales proud. The volunteers who give their time to invest in the game at a local level help to sustain local communities and fuel a system that produces the talent has seen Wales teams, clubs and regions reach incredible feats.

This a bad moment for Welsh rugby but my hope is that we can now work together – alongside wider partners – to restore trust and confidence in an organisation that is capable of bringing pride and, at times, sheer joy to the lives of so many across Wales. They deserve better and we are truly invested in this opportunity to help everyone feel positive about the future of Welsh rugby.

I am grateful for the way you have communicated with me in recent days and would be grateful for a further meeting with you next week.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Senedd Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, International Relations and Sport Committee.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dawn Bowden', written in a cursive style.

Dawn Bowden AS/MS

Dirprwy Weinidog y Celfyddydau a Chwaraeon, a'r Prif Chwip
Deputy Minister for Arts and Sport, and Chief Whip