Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref: TO/HIDCC/00326/26

[redacted]

19 March 2026

Dear [redacted]

Thank you for your correspondence of 02 March to Huw Irranca-Davies MS, Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs, regarding concerns around ongoing sewage discharges into Welsh rivers. I have been asked to reply on the Deputy First Minister's behalf.

The Welsh Government takes sewage pollution extremely seriously and expects all water companies to ensure storm overflows operate legally and only as a last resort, with sustained year-on-year reductions in pollution incidents. Significant investment is underway: we are working with Natural Resources Wales (NRW), Ofwat and the sector to target the most harmful storm overflows, backed by £1.1 billion of investment by 2030 to improve infrastructure and reduce pollution. We have provided NRW with an additional £5 million in 2025-26 to strengthen regulation and enforcement, and we are working with them on the 2026-27 programme to build long-term capability, modernise enforcement and support sustainable, catchment-based solutions that enhance water quality.

As you have raised a number of specific points, I think it is important to respond to each of them directly. I have set out below a clear response to the issues you highlight, addressing your questions individually.

In response to your question about the action being taken to reduce sewage discharges in Wales, NRW is the environmental regulator responsible for ensuring that water companies comply with their permits and take action to prevent and reduce pollution. Following the publication of the Storm Overflow Reduction Plan by the Better River Quality Taskforce and NRW, Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water is now delivering its largest ever investment programme, focused on upgrading infrastructure, reducing storm overflow discharges, and improving its overall environmental performance.

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

[Address]

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre
0300 0604400

In relation to your question about whether governance arrangements at Welsh Water provide sufficient accountability to the public, the Welsh Government has strengthened oversight through the Water (Special Measures) Act 2025, which gives us new powers to hold water company leaders to account. We are also consulting on a wider package of reforms following Sir Jon Cunliffe's National Review of the Water Sector, to ensure that governance, transparency and accountability continue to improve across the industry.

On the matter of assurances that board appointments and regulatory relationships will prioritise environmental protection, it is important to note that board appointments are a matter for each water company, including Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water. In Wales, environmental protection is safeguarded by NRW as the independent regulator, which scrutinises water company business plans, monitors compliance and enforces improvements through the National Environment Plan and the permit system. These regulatory checks ensure that environmental outcomes are prioritised regardless of internal corporate governance decisions.

Looking ahead to the question of long-term infrastructure investment to protect our rivers and coastal waters, Ofwat is the economic regulator responsible for ensuring that the investment plans proposed by water companies in Wales are financially sustainable, affordable for customers, and capable of delivering the environmental improvements we expect. This includes ensuring long-term resilience in wastewater infrastructure, treatment capacity and storm overflow management. Finally, we are seeking views through our public consultation on the Welsh Government's reform package, developed in response to Sir Jon Cunliffe's Review, and we encourage all interested parties to contribute to this important work.

Protecting Wales's natural resources is a core priority, and we are committed to ensuring that water companies, regulators and all relevant partners meet the highest standards of transparency, accountability and environmental stewardship. We will continue to take a firm, evidence-led approach to improving water quality, strengthening oversight and driving the long-term investment needed to safeguard our waterways for communities across Wales.

Thank you for writing to us on this important matter and we hope you find this response helpful.

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]
Water Branch
Climate Change & Rural Affairs Group
Welsh Government