



Ein cyf/Our ref: TO/HIDCC/00317/26

March 2026

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your email of 2 March to Huw Irranca-Davies MS, Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs MS regarding Channel 4's Dirty Business programme and your concerns about sewage pollution, the role of regulators, and the health of our rivers in Wales. I have been asked to reply on the Deputy First Minister's behalf.

Dirty Business exposes serious failures, and we fully recognise the strength of public feeling generated by the programme. The Welsh Government takes these issues extremely seriously; sewage pollution is unacceptable, and the programme reinforces the importance of the work already underway in Wales to improve our rivers and coastal waters. The Welsh Government is acting decisively to protect our rivers, our coastal waters, and the communities who depend upon them.

Water and sewerage services in Wales operate within a separate regulatory system from that shown in the programme, which focused primarily on events in England. In Wales, water companies are required to invest significantly in upgrading wastewater and storm overflow systems, and this work is closely scrutinised by Natural Resources Wales (NRW).

We continue to work with NRW, Ofwat and the water utilities industry to target the most harmful sewer overflows, backed by over £1.1 billion of investment by 2030. We have also 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. Taken together, these measures reflect our commitment to strengthening environmental protections in Wales and delivering lasting improvements to river and coastal waters.

You asked about the appointment of Sir James Bevan as a Non-Executive Director of Glas Cymru, which owns and operates Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water (DCWW). Glas Cymru is a private company and the Welsh Government is not responsible for who they choose to appoint to their board of directors. More information about this appointment is available on

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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.

DCWW's website - <https://corporate.dwrcymru.com/en/news-media/2025/sir-james-bevan-joins-glas-cymru-board-as-non-executive-director>

Unlike other water and sewage utility companies operating in the UK, DCWW do not have shareholders and therefore do not pay out profit dividends. Our focus as the Welsh Government remains on ensuring that DCWW delivers for customers in Wales and continues to make the environmental improvements required across its network.

We recognise sewage pollution is an ongoing issue in the river Usk. DCWW Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) spills data shows that CSO spills into the River Usk are intermittent. This data can be viewed on DCWW's website -

<https://corporate.dwrcymru.com/en/community/environment/storm-overflow-map>. NRW, who regulate water companies in Wales and set conditions for CSO permits, have confirmed that CSO spills are only allowed to operate in exceptional circumstances, like heavy rain or to prevent sewer flooding. Overflow discharges outside permit conditions are illegal and NRW investigates and takes action. Enforcement can include prosecutions, fines, cautions, warnings or civil sanctions, depending on severity and evidence.

NRW regularly test the water quality in the river Usk. The data from these samples is used to inform the classification of the environmental status of the waterbody and can be viewed on the DataMapWales website -

https://datamap.gov.wales/layergroups/geonode:nrw_wfd_cycle_3_classifications.

River Usk is currently failing to meet environmental targets due to pollution pressures from a variety of sources, including diffuse pollution from agricultural sources and highway drainage, as well as DCWW effluent outfalls and CSOs. Welsh Government is working closely with NRW and DCWW to drive improvements, including tightening regulatory expectations, supporting investment in wastewater infrastructure, and ensuring stronger accountability to reduce pollution and restore the health of the River Usk.

We are also moving forward with the next phase of work following the Independent Water Commission's review, which was led by Sir Jon Cunliffe. The review set out a clear path for reform, and we are now consulting publicly on the proposed package of measures to strengthen accountability, improve environmental outcomes and ensure the sector is better equipped to meet future challenges. We encourage stakeholders and members of the public to engage with this consultation and help shape the future direction of water services in Wales. The consultation can be accessed through the Welsh Government website - <https://www.gov.wales/green-paper-shaping-future-water-governance-wales>

Improving water quality in the river Usk and across Wales requires long-term commitment and genuine collaboration. No single organisation can solve these challenges alone. That's why we are working closely with NRW, DCWW, local authorities, farmers, environmental groups, and communities to develop shared solutions. This was evidenced at the recent Ministerial led Water Summit, which sought to reduce the agricultural sector's impact on water quality. By combining robust data, statutory responsibilities, and local knowledge, we can deliver meaningful change not just for river Usk, but also for rivers and ecosystems across Wales. This is about protecting our natural environment for future generations, and we remain fully committed to that goal.

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

Yours sincerely,

Water Branch
Climate Change & Rural Affairs Group
Welsh Government