

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

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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.

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](http://www.gov.wales/live-fear-free)

Email: [info@livefearfreehelpline.wales](mailto: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**

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