

Culture, Communications,
Welsh Language, Sport, and
International Relations Committee
Y Senedd
Pierhead Street
Cardiff CF99 1SN

29th January 2023

Re: Committee Meeting with WRU Chair and Welsh Government Deputy Minister for Arts and Sport, 2nd February 2023

Dear Committee Members

I am writing to you as a former Rugby Safeguarding Officer and Committee Member of Cardiff Harlequins and CRICC RFC. I am also a member of Cardiff RFC and have spent several decades campaigning for the reform of the Welsh Rugby Union as part of Welsh rugby fans' network Gwladrugby (<https://gwladrugby.wordpress.com/> - a copy of this letter has been published there today).

I understand that you will be interviewing Ieuan Evans, the Chairman of the WRU, and also Dawn Bowden MS, Deputy Minister for Arts and Sport at your meeting next Thursday 2nd February.

I would like to draw your attention to a number of issues which are relevant to the "existential crisis" (the words of the new CEO Nigel Walker) that the WRU has brought upon itself.

Whilst we welcome the belated resignation of former CEO Steve Phillips, many of us who are involved in the game firmly hope that his removal is the beginning and not the end of this matter.

The disgraceful events which have prompted you to call Mr Evans and Ms Bowden to appear at your committee this week are well-documented and have been universally condemned across the sport, media and wider society. It is quite clear that misogyny, sexism, sexual harassment and racism have been systemic problems at the WRU for many years. The cases documented in the recent BBC documentary are by no means isolated and I sincerely hope that every single case can now be reviewed and acted upon in the appropriate way.

The WRU's modus operandi in dealing with such cases has always been to silence and shut down. The use of Non-Disclosure Agreements has been routine and widespread in the treatment of employees leaving the organisation for many years. The current Chairman has been on the WRU Board for nearly 3 years and as such he should be well acquainted with the background to these cases. It should certainly not have come as a surprise to him when he watched the BBC programme last Monday evening, although his reaction in statements he has made since then would appear to suggest that he was unaware of the extent and seriousness of the issues raised.

If this is the case then one has to question whether he is a capable and appropriate person to Chair a modern multi-million pound business. His prior experience would suggest that he is not.

WRU Governance

In response to the issues raised in the BBC programme, the WRU Chair has promised to set up an external "Taskforce," although its remit and representation have not been made clear. I would urge you to ask the WRU Chair to clarify the terms of reference of the Taskforce and provide the names and qualifications of the people who will be involved in its activity. It is also vital that we have the WRU's assurance that the results of this review are published in full.

Over the past decades the WRU has convened several similar "reviews," the findings of which have been kept private and have never been fully acted upon. As far back as 2002, Sir Tasker Watkins, the former President of the WRU, produced a comprehensive report into the governance of the WRU. This report was ignored by the union. There have been several similar reports since; all have been a waste of time and money.

It is obvious to many of us involved in the game that the WRU itself is incapable of recognising, let alone acting upon, the core issues within its rotten Victorian governance system. We do not trust the WRU Board to make the governance changes which are needed. The WRU is a professional organisation with multi-million pound revenues which is run largely by self-serving amateurs. This has to change. If the WRU is unwilling to change this then it needs to be forced to.

The Welsh Government has the means to apply pressure on the WRU to effect this change. The WRU has been in receipt of significant financial support from Welsh Government over the years. I would recommend that Welsh Government withholds all future financial support until the WRU makes the changes which are needed.

The WRU Board in its current form needs to be disbanded and replaced with a board of non-executive representatives with real business and sports administration experience. Serving on the committee of your local rugby club does not count as relevant sports administration or business experience.

The professional and amateur arms of the game need to be separated in the new governance structure. The amateur game must not be allowed to control the professional game which provides Welsh rugby with all of its revenue.

Toxic corporate culture

I hope that your meeting on Thursday is not the end of your interest in this particular matter. I would urge you to call the WRU People Director, Lydia Stirling, to give evidence at your committee. It is important to understand why basic HR processes at the WRU have failed to protect so many employees from sexism, misogyny, sexual harassment, bullying and racism.

Relationship with Professional Rugby Clubs and Women's Rugby

Since the formation of the new professional rugby ("Regional") teams in 2003, the relationship between these teams and the union has been fractious and at many points has broken down all together.

At the moment there is a funding crisis in Welsh rugby which is almost entirely of the WRU's making. The former CEO actively sought to destroy the businesses and livelihoods of the Welsh professional rugby clubs and discussions with them have never been conducted in good faith.

This has resulted in dozens of Welsh professional rugby players finding themselves in the situation where they do not know whether they will have a job at the end of the 2022-23 season. Many have already decided to move to clubs in other countries or leave the game altogether. This situation was entirely avoidable and it is the responsibility of the WRU to fix it.

If it is not fixed then professional rugby in Wales outside the national men's team will cease to exist within the next couple of years. Professional rugby brings millions of pounds into the Welsh economy as well as supporting hundreds of local business across the country. This would be a catastrophic loss to the Welsh nation.

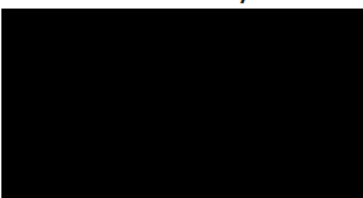
I urge you to call the new WRU Chief Executive and former Performance Director Nigel Walker to give evidence to your committee. I suggest that you to ask him how he plans to repair the broken relationship with the professional clubs to prevent the imminent death of our domestic professional game.

I would also ask Mr Walker how he plans to safeguard and develop Women's rugby in Wales, from the national team all the way down to local and junior level. The WRU's attitude to Women's rugby (as evidenced in the recent report they tried to cover up and their treatment of Charlotte Wathan and Amanda Blanc) has been shamefully inadequate, bordering on the insulting. Mr Walker is responsible for this and he needs to tell us how he plans to fix it.

Finally, what is needed to fix Welsh rugby is inclusivity. The WRU needs to become an open, outward-looking and welcoming organisation. There are many talented people involved in our game and in wider Welsh society and business who have a huge amount of experience and expertise which can help to improve the way our game is run. We need a union that encourages these people to be involved rather than dismissing them as disgruntled troublemakers.

I thank you for your interest in this matter and would be happy to support in any way I can.

Yours sincerely



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