

# Allegations concerning the Welsh Rugby Union

June 2023

## 1. Background

**1.** On 23 January 2023 the BBC broadcast a documentary, Welsh rugby under the spotlight, which included serious allegations about sexism, misogyny, homophobia and racism in the Welsh Rugby Union (WRU). Details of the allegations are available in a BBC news story published on the same day.<sup>1</sup>

**2.** The WRU is an independent organisation that receives a small amount of its income (about 1 per cent) from Sport Wales, the Welsh Government and the National Lottery-funded body responsible for developing sport. But given the severity of the allegations, and the centrality of rugby to Welsh public life, we thought that it was important that the response to these allegations was discussed in the national parliament. The Committee had also received correspondence from a number of parties (including fan representatives the Joint Supporters' Group Cymru, the Leader of the Opposition Andrew RT Davies MS, and three MPs for constituencies in Wales) calling for us to investigate the issue. The Deputy Minister for Art and Sport also said she would “welcome” a Senedd committee inquiry,<sup>2</sup> and the First Minister said that there was:

*“...a potential role for a Senedd committee in helping to secure a path for the WRU to a better future by using the powers that a committee here has to look into the allegations.”<sup>3</sup>*

**3.** We therefore held public meetings with the WRU, the Deputy Minister for Arts and Sport, and Sport Wales. The purpose of these sessions was not to

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<sup>1</sup> BBC News: [Wales rugby: Former women's boss says colleague made rape jibe](#) - 29 January 2023

<sup>2</sup> Record of Proceedings: [Plenary - 25 January 2023, paragraph 186](#)

<sup>3</sup> Record of Proceedings: [Plenary - 24 January 2023, paragraph 24](#)



investigate the allegations themselves. We wanted to explore the WRU's response, and the relationship between the Welsh Government, Sport Wales and the WRU.

**4.** As the Committee wished to respond promptly to a rapidly-evolving situation, this work did not have formal terms of reference. The WRU's invitation letter said:

*"This session will be an opportunity to discuss the issues that have arisen this week as well as explore the Union's planned response in the form of the taskforce you recently announced. The Committee will also be inviting the Welsh Government to explore what actions they are taking in response.*

*The Committee is clear that this is not an inquiry into the allegations. It is an opportunity to explore the issues that have arisen and discuss actions that have already been announced as a result."*<sup>4</sup>

**5.** The Deputy Minister for Arts and Sport's invitation letter noted that the "Committee is also keen to understand the activity of Welsh Government in this matter" and that the session would be "to gather information on the allegations made against the Welsh Rugby Union and what actions the Welsh Government is taking as a result".<sup>5</sup>

**6.** Sport Wales's invitation letter noted:

*"This session will be an opportunity to discuss the issues that have arisen since the programme aired and for the Committee to better understand the role and work of Sport Wales in the actions that have been announced since, and sports governance more broadly."*<sup>6</sup>

## 2. Welsh Rugby Union (WRU)

**7.** The Committee took evidence from Ieuan Evans, WRU Chair, and Nigel Walker, newly-appointed WRU acting-CEO, on 2 February 2023.<sup>7</sup> By this point,

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<sup>4</sup> [Letter from Ieuan Evans MBE, Welsh Rugby Union](#) - 27 January 2023 [PDF 83KB]

<sup>5</sup> [Letter to the Deputy Minister for Arts and Sport and Chief Whip](#) - 27 January 2023 [PDF 83KB]

<sup>6</sup> [Letter to Baroness Grey-Thompson, Sport Wales](#) - 3 February 2023 [PDF 84KB]

<sup>7</sup> [Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee meeting - 2 February 2023](#)

since the documentary broadcast, the WRU had announced that it would set up an external taskforce to examine accusations of sexism, racism and misogyny within the governing body; and the CEO, Steve Phillips, had resigned, to be replaced on an acting basis by Performance Director Nigel Walker.

8. Following the 2 February 2023, meeting, the Committee wrote to the WRU seeking further information and expressing some initial views.<sup>8</sup> The WRU's response is available on the website.<sup>9</sup>

### **The WRU had been “in denial as to the extent of the problem”**

9. Mr Evans told the Committee he had been:

*“... humbled and harrowed by what I've heard, particularly the impact on our female staff and players. I think we all know that we should do more, we need to do more to make the game and our organisation more inclusive, but I was shocked by the personal stories highlighted by our former staff in the programme, and I can only apologise once more to them, and not only them but people elsewhere affected by the allegations in that programme as well, and to say that I will work night and day to ensure that all of our staff feel safe and valued.”<sup>10</sup>*

10. Mr Walker said that the WRU had “been in denial as to the extent of the problem” and that “the warning signs have been there for quite some time”. He explained:

*“When it's presented as graphically as it was during the BBC Wales programme the week before last, it hits you like a 10-tonne truck.”<sup>11</sup>*

### **Independent Review Panel: WRU “committed to implementing those recommendations”**

11. On 26 January 2023, Chair of the WRU Board, Ieuan Evans, told a press conference that he would set up an external taskforce to examine accusations of

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<sup>8</sup> [Letter to the Welsh Rugby Union](#) – 3 February 2023 [PDF 97.3KB]

<sup>9</sup> [Response from the Welsh Rugby Union](#) – 10 February 2023 [PDF 253KB]

<sup>10</sup> Record of Proceedings: [Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee – 2 February 2023, paragraph 12](#)

<sup>11</sup> Record of Proceedings: [Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee – 2 February 2023, paragraph 14](#)

sexism, racism and misogyny within the governing body.<sup>12</sup> On 3 February 2023, the WRU confirmed that Dame Anne Rafferty will chair the WRU Independent Panel, with the following terms of reference:

- *“The culture within the WRU;*
- *The actions and behaviour of leadership [at all levels] within the WRU;*
- *The extent to which employees feel able to voice concerns or to challenge inappropriate and discriminatory language and behaviour;*
- *The effectiveness of the WRU’s Whistleblowing Policy and Procedures;*
- *WRU’s actions in response to individual complaints set out in the BBC Wales Investigates programme of 23 January 2023.”*<sup>13</sup>

**12.** The Review will consider the period from 2017 to the present day, but the WRU said that “emerging evidence might prompt the Chair to adapt the timeframe”.<sup>14</sup>

**13.** Nigel Walker told the Committee that the Review’s report will be public and “we, as a body, have committed to implementing those recommendations.” He stressed that the WRU was:

*“... opening our doors and our books.[...] The review could take any direction that the chair suggests it should take.”*<sup>15</sup>

**14.** Mr Walker was asked if people who were bound by Non-Disclosure Agreements they had entered into with the WRU would be able to contribute to the report:

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<sup>12</sup> BBC Sport: [Welsh Rugby Union: Chair Ieuan Evans launches external taskforce review with Steve Phillips to stay](#) – 25 January 2023

<sup>13</sup> Welsh Rugby Union: [Chair of the WRU Independent Review Panel announced](#) – 3 February 2023

<sup>14</sup> Welsh Rugby Union: [Chair of the WRU Independent Review Panel announced](#) – 3 February 2023

<sup>15</sup> Record of Proceedings: [Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee – 2 February 2023, paragraph 65](#)

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*“If it’s possible, I would look to facilitate it, so that everybody who has been affected, those people who the panel would be interested in interviewing, can be interviewed.”<sup>16</sup>*

**15.** He committed to give the Committee interim updates, and discussed timings:

*“The sooner the panel can report, the sooner we can get on to putting things right. We are doing other things in the background; we’re not waiting for the review panel...But I share your concerns. If it were to take 10 or 12 months, that would be too long as far as I’m concerned.”<sup>17</sup>*

## **Non-disclosure agreements and disciplinary action**

**16.** Following the Committee’s meeting with the WRU, it wrote to the Union asking for details of:

- the number of non-disclosure agreements it has used in the last five years;
- the number of staff members that have been disciplined or subject to grievances related to alleged racism, sexism, misogyny and homophobia over the same period.

**17.** The WRU’s reply stated:

*“Whilst the Committee asked us about non-disclosure agreements specifically, we will often use these as part of commercial agreements. Settlement or compromise agreements are used from time to time when ending employment for a variety of reasons. In providing the relevant information and as requested by the Committee we have considered settlement agreements in relation to allegations of sexism, racism and homophobia.*

*The WRU Group has entered into a settlement agreement on four occasions in the last five years in relation to a grievance*

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<sup>16</sup> Record of Proceedings: [Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee – 2 February 2023, paragraph 99](#)

<sup>17</sup> Record of Proceedings: [Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee – 2 February 2023, paragraph 75](#)

*that had been raised in relation to these issues. Two or three of the four settlement agreements relate to the issues that might come under the remit of the Taskforce review. I am sure you will understand that for a number of reasons, I cannot provide any further detail of the specific cases but we would of course be happy for those who have entered into settlement agreements to participate in the Taskforce review if they so wished.*

*The WRU Group has been in receipt of six grievances in the last five years that relate to either sexist, racist or homophobic behaviour. With regard to procedures that have been concluded, three members of staff have been subject to disciplinary action following allegations of sexist, racist or homophobic behaviour.”<sup>18</sup>*

## **2021 review into women’s rugby**

**18.** In 2021 the WRU commissioned an independent review to consider what action was required to improve the provision for elite female players and address problems that had arisen within its international structures.<sup>19</sup>

**19.** The report arising from the review was not published, and since the BBC documentary was broadcast the Deputy Minister for Arts and Sport and this Committee have called for it to be made public.

**20.** During our meeting on the 2 February 2023, Nigel Walker said:

*“The report will not make comfortable reading for those involved in the WRU, but I personally have no objection to the report being published.”<sup>20</sup>*

**21.** He explained:

*“When I read the review, I was shocked as to the extent of the problem. There are 40 recommendations in the review, and it was obvious that the Welsh Rugby Union had failed women’s rugby. [...]*

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<sup>18</sup> [Response from the Welsh Rugby Union](#) - 10 February 2023 [PDF 253KB]

<sup>19</sup> Welsh Rugby Union: [Women’s Performance mid-term review](#) - 14 May 2021

<sup>20</sup> Record of Proceedings: [Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 2 February 2023, paragraph 33](#)

*We have made enormous progress against the 40 recommendations. [...] Probably 32 or 33 of those recommendations have been implemented in full.*<sup>21</sup>

**22.** Sport Wales officials told us they had not read the report, and a Welsh Government official told us he was only allowed 20 minutes to read a copy.

**23.** The Committee received the recommendations<sup>22</sup> of the report from the WRU. This document concluded:

*“The WRU is facing a significant number of risks not only in respect of the women’s performance programme, but as a National Governing Body for rugby in Wales. These include:*

- *Strategic failure to deliver the WRU’s overarching strategy, including women’s performance goals. This failure could also apply to community and development objectives as young players drop out or move to England to play and are lost to the Welsh game*
- *Reputational risk – the perceived intransigence and reluctance to fully commit to women’s performance in respect of investment, profile, culture and leadership will only serve to reinforce views of the WRU as a NGB for men’s rugby with little interest in the female game*
- *Legal risk – There is the potential for individuals within the game (currently and formerly) to challenge the WRU with some worrying examples of what could be defined as unfavourable treatment and a lack of equitable provision provided through this review*
- *Financial risk – there is the potential for significant opportunity cost as the WRU has, to date, failed to assess, either in an integrated business planning model, or through discreet planning, the commercial value of women’s rugby. This includes the specific asset value of the*

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<sup>21</sup> Record of Proceedings: [Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee – 2 February 2023, paragraphs 27 and 29](#)

<sup>22</sup> [Welsh Rugby Union: Women’s Performance Rugby: Mid Term Strategy Review Recommendations](#) – July 2021 [PDF 575KB]

*women's performance squad to partners, sponsors, kit suppliers and others."*

### **Amanda Blanc's resignation: "incredibly disappointing"**

**24.** In November 2021, Amanda Blanc – CEO of insurance company Aviva – resigned from the board of the WRU. In June 2022 she explained to the BBC that she felt the Board of the WRU needed modernisation, the women's game needed to be taken seriously and invested in, and that she had not been listened to.<sup>23</sup> In an episode of the BBC Radio 4 programme, Desert Island Discs, she talked about the "misogynistic comments" she received working for the WRU.<sup>24</sup>

**25.** On 2 February 2023, Ieuan Evans discussed Amanda Blanc's resignation:

*"It's incredibly disappointing that a woman of her standing, her reputation, a FTSE 100 company chief executive of, listed in Forbes as one of the most influential people in the world— I pay tribute to her and share her frustration that she felt she had to leave her role on the professional rugby board. We need to learn from our experience and her comments, and I just hope that we never are in that position again. It's obviously outrageous that she had to deal with some appalling comments whilst giving her time to rugby in Wales and she felt frustrated on behalf of our female players. Hopefully, we are making the changes that she would like to see. And I found her comments alarming, and our response to date has not been enough—not been remotely enough—but we are driven to make sure that we are moving forward."<sup>25</sup>*

### **Diversity in rugby: "we're not truly representative of our game and our nation"**

**26.** On 2 February 2023, Ieuan Evans discussed the lack of diversity in rugby, and the game's centrality to Welsh life:

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<sup>23</sup> BBC Sport: [Amanda Blanc: Aviva chief says she left Welsh rugby after 'not being listened to'](#) – 15 June 2023

<sup>24</sup> BBC Sport: [Amanda Blanc: Former Welsh Rugby Union board member discusses experience of misogyny](#) – 12 March 2023

<sup>25</sup> Record of Proceedings: [Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee – 2 February 2023, paragraph 118](#)



*“... we’re not truly representative of our game and our nation. We’re the national game of Wales. We thrive on community. We have a sense of community, playing as a nation, like no other. [...] We’re embedded in every community across the country, the length and breadth of the country. We provide an invaluable role in those communities. Where many communities are struggling, where high streets are closing, where there are very few things open, the rugby club stays open. And we have to ensure that that remains. But we also need to be representative. The game is changing. Societal changes mean the game’s changing. We have to be aware of that. We have to be mindful of that. We have to be at the forefront of those changes and be representative.”<sup>26</sup>*

## **Operational changes: WRU not “sitting on our hands”**

**27.** WRU officials were keen to stress to the Committee that they were not, in Nigel Walker’s words “sitting on our hands waiting for the review to present”<sup>27</sup>. In a letter to the Welsh Government in February 2023 the WRU outlined the operational changes that had taken place, or were in train:

- *“We appointed a new People Director a year ago and we have invested in new procedures and widespread mandatory training to make sure that we work together to develop every day working culture which is professional, inclusive and welcoming.*
- *Our HR team has been restructured and a further two team members, including an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager to provide more dedicated support to our teams.*
- *The HR Team has sought external expertise to provide advice and support in reviewing all of its people policies in 2022, which includes our EDI, whistleblowing and*

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<sup>26</sup> Record of Proceedings: [Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee – 2 February 2023, paragraph 133](#)

<sup>27</sup> Record of Proceedings: [Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee – 2 February 2023, paragraph 194](#)

*grievance policies, to ensure these are as robust as possible.*

- *We have an internal working group focused on inclusion and diversity conversations and EDI sponsors at Board and Executive level.*
- *Since 2021, all staff and board members have completed EDI training with external partners.*
- *We engaged with Chwarae Teg last October and have staff currently on their Inclusive Leadership Programme.*
- *We put in place six months ago an anonymous, external whistleblowing line for staff to be able to raise any issues in a safe and supported way.*
- *We have a suggestion box in place where staff can make anonymous suggestions in an informal manner, alongside a new area on our internal intranet where staff can look up how to report any concerns and access support resources.*
- *Our induction has been renewed so that new joiners are now given information on who their HR contact is and how they support and an introduction from our EDI Manager alongside other relevant information when starting.*
- *We carried out a staff survey in September 2022 which has given us valuable insight into our current staff views on the organisation and areas for improvement. We also offered all staff the opportunity to participate in EDI focus groups in August 2022, to gain their feedback on experiences and thoughts on our future priorities.*

- *This is an ongoing process and we have further mandatory EDI training for board members and community game representatives.*<sup>28</sup>

## **Governance: new structures agreed with 97 per cent approval**

**28.** In recent years the WRU had tried to change its governance structures, to bring in diversity of gender and expertise, but has failed to get its membership to vote these changes through. In November 2022, 66 per cent voted for change, below the 75 per cent threshold needed, and the then Chair, Rob Butcher, subsequently resigned.

**29.** Following the BBC documentary, the WRU accelerated plans for an Extraordinary General Meeting to attempt again to vote these changes through.

**30.** On 2 February 2023, WRU Chair Ieuan Evans explained:

*“... we commissioned a board and governance review in 2022. The findings were accepted in full by the board, and a sub-group worked on a set of recommendations, which were then approved by the board. Yesterday, we announced our proposals to change the composition of the board and council. These changes will lead to an independent chair, which was part of the recommendations, and a skills-based, diverse board, which was part of the recommendations. We’re very much signed up to this. We will be taking this to our clubs on 26 March, or earlier if we can. So, we have totally, as a board, accepted it in its entirety.”*<sup>29</sup>

**31.** On 2 February 2023, Mr Walker explained the importance of these changes for the longevity of the game:

*“Changing the board or the governance of the WRU is not going to solve all the ills of the Welsh Rugby Union. By having that focus and that diversity of opinion, diversity of skill set, on the board, you increase the chances of the board challenging the executive and asking them, ‘What are you doing for the game*

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<sup>28</sup> [Letter from the Welsh Rugby Union to the Deputy Minister for Arts and Sport, and Chief Whip - 1 February 2023 \[PDF 222KB\]](#)

<sup>29</sup> Record of Proceedings: [Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 2 February 2023, paragraph 111](#)

*today?' 'What will the game look like in five years, 15 years, 25 years?'"<sup>30</sup>*

**32.** On 26 March 2023, the WRU agreed the changes with 97 per cent of the vote.<sup>31</sup> The WRU will now appoint an Independent Non-Executive Director (INED) as chair and recruit a two further new INEDs to its twelve-person Board, doubling the total number of INEDs to six. In the new configuration four Board members will still come from the WRU Council which is entirely elected by member clubs, one of whom will be the Community Game Board's chair. The remaining two seats on the Board will be filled by the WRU CEO and a new Director role for someone who can support and further the women's game. All changes will take place in context of the overall aspiration to ensure at least five Directors are women.

## **Our view**

**33.** It is unacceptable that it took a BBC documentary for the Welsh Rugby Union to act decisively to tackle long-standing toxic behaviour within the organisation. There is a clear body of evidence that points to opportunities that were missed by the WRU to act on concerning behaviour, or to acknowledge and tackle a pattern of this behaviour. This includes formal complaints; the WRU entering into several settlement agreements in relation to allegations of sexism, racism and homophobia over several years; the review into the women's game; and the resignation of Amanda Blanc. Taken together, these point to systemic failures in the culture of the WRU.

**34.** The fact that senior management did not identify and tackle the problem is a serious failure of governance. Most regrettably, this failure has led to harm being suffered by the individuals involved. It is unacceptable that the people involved had to raise these concerns publicly, waiving their anonymity, for them to be taken seriously and for any action to be taken. Our impression has been that, had these people not spoken to the press, little would have changed at the WRU.

**35.** We welcome the actions taken by the WRU since the documentary was broadcast on 23 January 2023. The contrition of Ieuan Evans and Nigel Walker, and their desire to implement change, was evident at our evidence session on 2 February 2023. The membership voting on 26 March 2023 to make WRU

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<sup>30</sup> Record of Proceedings: [Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 2 February 2023, paragraph 142](#)

<sup>31</sup> Welsh Rugby Union: [WRU EGM result](#) - 26 March 2023

governance more modern and diverse is a welcome sign of an institution embracing its future and testament to the hard work of Mr Evans and Mr Walker.

**36.** It is commendable that the WRU has worked with external experts to establish an Independent Review and that it has indicated that it will accept its recommendations in full. It is welcome that the WRU has opened itself up to external analysis in this way. The proof of this course of action will be in the extent to which the WRU implements changes recommended by the Independent Review, which we will be monitoring. The WRU should update the Committee in the autumn on the steps it has taken to address the issues raised in the BBC documentary.

**Recommendation 1.** When the Independent Review Panel publishes its report the WRU should, as soon as practical, publish an implementation plan showing how and when it will implement its recommendations. It should also attend the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee to explain its current and planned actions in this area.

### 3. Welsh Government

**37.** The Welsh Government does not directly provide ongoing funding for the WRU's core activities. Sport Wales (the national organisation for developing sport, which distributes WG and National Lottery funding) provides annual funding to the WRU to support the community game and development of the women's and girl's game (see section 4 for further details of Sport Wales' relationship with the WRU).

**38.** However, the Welsh Government's relationship with the WRU spans a number of areas, as you would expect for a stakeholder of the scale and cultural importance of the WRU. The nature of this relationship includes the Welsh Government refinancing a COVID-related loan for the WRU, long-standing links as part of the Welsh Government's international relations work, and the Welsh Government lobbying the WRU according to its policy priorities. This relationship is fleshed out below. The Deputy Minister gave evidence to the Committee on 2 February 2023.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Record of Proceedings: [Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 2 February 2023, item 5](#)

## Relationship with the WRU

**39.** On 25 January 2023, the Deputy Minister for Arts and Sport responded to a topical question in Plenary about discussions between the Welsh Government and the WRU regarding the claims of a sexist culture reported by the BBC. She explained that, despite the independence of the WRU from the Welsh Government, the cultural importance of the WRU meant that it needed to espouse “the values of this nation”:

*“as a Government, clearly, we do not run the WRU. We don’t own the WRU. They are an independent business, and we must be clear about where the decisions about the game in Wales are taken. And they are not taken by Welsh Government. But the whole point, and I think the point that you were making, Alun, is that rugby union, and international rugby union in particular, is so fundamental to the culture of this nation that we have to have an organisation that espouses the values of this nation as well.”<sup>33</sup>*

**40.** She noted the financial relationship between the two organisations, and the moral responsibility that this entailed for the WRU:

*“... the Welsh Government clearly does have a long-standing financial relationship with the WRU, which is based on basically advancing public and economic objectives. And as one of our major partners, we have very, very clear expectations about what an organisation looks like and behaves like to be in receipt of public funds, and that that is something that we will be watching very, very carefully in future.”<sup>34</sup>*

**41.** In the past financial year the WRU received £816,000 from Sport Wales, of which £644,000 is from the Welsh Government (the remainder being from the National Lottery).

**42.** In recent years the WRU has received some COVID funding directly from the Welsh Government (e.g. £5.4m from the Spectator Sports Survival Fund), and is

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<sup>33</sup> Record of Proceedings: [Plenary - 25 January 2023, paragraph 192](#)

<sup>34</sup> Record of Proceedings: [Plenary - 25 January 2023, paragraph 203](#)

currently repaying a £18 million loan from the Welsh Government<sup>35</sup> (restructuring other loans the WRU had taken out during the pandemic), agreed in March 2022.

**43.** A Welsh Government official explained that the relationship between the Welsh Government and WRU spanned a number of areas of work:

*“... we have a connection via Sport Wales on the funding side, on the annual revenue funding side, but we also have connections in other bits of Welsh Government work—so, specifically, Visit Wales and Event Wales, where we have a relationship with them and have had for many, many years, which has been, largely, a very positive relationship.”<sup>36</sup>*

### **Welsh Government policy context**

**44.** The Economic Contract<sup>37</sup> is an agreement between the Welsh Government and the businesses it supports. It is a “commitment to provide public investment that prioritises the social and environmental needs of Wales whilst building a more resilient and prosperous wellbeing economy”. It is not a legally enforceable contract, and has been in place since May 2018.

**45.** Through the Economic Contract businesses demonstrate the contribution they will make to these principles and the Welsh Government sets out the non-financial support it will give it in return. One of the areas covered is “fair work”, which includes “tackling inequality”.

**46.** On 2 February 2023, a Welsh Government official advised the Committee:

*“In terms of an economic contract, there is one in place between the Welsh Government and the WRU as a grant recipient, and that’s a pledge to work together on issues such as sustainability, fair work, health and well-being et cetera.”<sup>38</sup>*

**47.** The Welsh Government has a Violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence strategy which includes the aim to “make Wales the safest place to be a woman”. This strategy advocates a “whole society” approach, and says that

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<sup>35</sup> Welsh Rugby Union: [Major refinance agreement reached](#) - 22 March 2022

<sup>36</sup> Record of Proceedings: [Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 2 February 2023, paragraph 305](#)

<sup>37</sup> Welsh Government: [The Economic Contract](#)

<sup>38</sup> Record of Proceedings: [Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 2 February 2023, paragraph 334](#)

tackling violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence is “everyone’s business”:

*“It is the responsibility of the individual, the family, the community the institutions the sectors, government, and the nation as a whole.”<sup>39</sup>*

**48.** The Welsh Government’s Programme for Government says that it will “strengthen” the strategy to “include a focus on violence against women in the street and workplace as well as the home”.<sup>40</sup>

**49.** On 11 April 2023, the Minister for Economy wrote to the Director of CBI Wales following allegations of misconduct at the CBI, including sexual harassment and rape. The Minister informed the CBI that he is pausing all engagement with the organisation, though the letter states:

*“Officials at Deputy Director level will continue to engage with the CBI in circumstances where other social partners and/or stakeholders are present. However, this engagement will also be contingent upon assurances regarding the handling of the reported allegations and the CBI’s commitment to taking swift and appropriate action pending the outcome of the independent investigation that I understand is underway.”<sup>41</sup>*

## **Knowledge of the allegations**

**50.** On 9 May 2022, Tonia Antoniazzi MP wrote to the Deputy Minister for Arts and Sport raising concerns about a “deep seated culture of sexism within the WRU”.<sup>42</sup> Key points in the letter included:

- *“There is a deep seated culture of sexism within the WRU which I am afraid will soon become public and that will paint the Welsh Government and those that fund the WRU such as the sponsors and Sport Wales in a negative light. I am concerned that the WRU are not held to account for*

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<sup>39</sup> Welsh Government: [Violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence: strategy 2022 to 2026](#) – 24 May 2022

<sup>40</sup> Welsh Government: [Programme for Government – update](#) – 7 December 2021 [PDF 203KB]

<sup>41</sup> [Letter from the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee to the Minister for Economy: Retained EU Law \(Revocation and Reform\) Bill](#) – 8 February 2023 [PDF 104KB]

<sup>42</sup> [Correspondence from Tonia Antoniazzi MP to the Deputy Minister for Arts and Sport, and Chief Whip – 9 May 2022](#) [PDF 42KB]

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*their behaviour and for their actions as their governance system is archaic and this has resulted in problems within the institution not being dealt with properly and transparently.”*

- *“I have been unable to speak to and contact the other women myself, but I am very aware of someone in the media having built a comprehensive list of women who are all prepared to go public. From within the WRU, I have spoken to 3 people who have shared my concerns and more concerningly confirmed what I already knew about the organisation.”*
- *“This is not just a case of one or two people having a spat with the WRU, this is a huge problem on the scale of racism in Yorkshire cricket. I am asking you to speak to these individuals in confidence in order to collaborate the concerns I have raised in this email”.*

**51.** The Deputy Minister responded to Tonia Antoniazzi MP by letter notifying her she had not received specific details of any cases and stating that any individual or groups wishing to raise complaints or concerns should follow the organisation’s complaints or whistleblowing processes in the first instance, before deciding whether or not to escalate matters further.<sup>43</sup>

**52.** The Deputy Minister discussed the Tonia Antoniazzi letter with the Committee on 2 February 2023. She said:

*“Primarily, that letter was setting out concerns about the women’s game. Much of those concerns, of course, were already in the public domain by that time. Certainly, before that letter from Tonia, I’d been having conversations with the WRU about the women’s game and about the report and about where we needed to go with that. She set that out in her letter. She also set out her concerns about the resignation of Amanda Blanc from the WRU executive board, and she also set out concerns about anonymous complaints that she was aware of, again, some of which were in the public domain. I*

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<sup>43</sup> [Response from the Deputy Minister for Arts and Sport, and Chief Whip to Tonia Antoniazzi MP.- 24 May 2022](#) [PDF 148KB]

*think the anonymous complaints were in the Mail Online around about March of last year, which was about the employment tribunal case, which we subsequently found out more about in the BBC programme. But, that was in the public domain as well, as was the Amanda Blanc resignation. She referred to some anonymous complainants who had other concerns about issues of sexism and misogyny.*

*So, in general terms, that was the extent of my knowledge. I was aware that there were concerns around sexism and misogyny.”<sup>44</sup>*

**53.** The Deputy Minister told the Committee that general concerns about sexism and misogyny in the WRU were “widely known within the WRU” for decades:

*“The letter that I had gave me no detail; it just talked in general terms about sexism and misogyny, which I think it had been widely known within the WRU, probably for many, many years, probably going back 20 years, that that had been something that was of concern. I heard the previous evidence session where you talked about a Government review back in 2014 when some of these things were raised. So, I don’t think any of that was new. The decisive action did come after the BBC programme because that was the first time that we had heard the extent and the detail of the issues. That is not to say that, at any point during that previous 12-month period, I had not been having discussions with the WRU about a whole range of these issues; in fact, I had.”<sup>45</sup>*

## **Welsh Government action**

**54.** The Welsh Government has provided the Committee with a timeline of the Deputy Minister’s interactions with the WRU from November 2021 to January 2023.<sup>46</sup> This timeline shows the Deputy Minister and her officials having a number of meetings with the WRU over this period, including after she received the Tonia Antoniazzi letter. It does not show the Deputy Minister raising the concerns

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<sup>44</sup> Record of Proceedings: [Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee – 2 February 2023, paragraph 243](#)

<sup>45</sup> Record of Proceedings: [Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee – 2 February 2023, paragraphs 243 and 244](#)

<sup>46</sup> [Letter from the Deputy Minister for Arts and Sport, and Chief Whip – 3 March 2023](#) [PDF 290KB]

outlined by Tonia Antoniazzi MP with the WRU. This timeline shows the next meeting with the WRU following receiving the letter in May 2022 was in January 2023, and that the Deputy Minister:

*“... met with the former Chief Executive and recently elected Chair of the WRU for a wide-ranging discussion which covered governance and the review, funding, matchday experience, WRU Transgender policy, Sport Wales Investment model, Investment in women’s rugby, and Business Rates revaluation.”*

**55.** Reporting by the BBC<sup>47</sup> has found that in October 2022 the Deputy Minister, and the Deputy Minister for Social Partnership, wrote to the Welsh Rugby Union expressing “concern” about its ban on transgender women competing in female-only games. Further details are available in a Freedom of Information release from 8 March 2023.<sup>48</sup>

**56.** Since the BBC documentary was aired, the Deputy Minister for Arts and Sport has met the WRU to discuss the response to the issues raised by the BBC documentary. She told Plenary on 25 January 2023:

*“The conversation I had with the Chief Executive this morning was that he set out to me a number of actions that the WRU has already taken. I told him in no uncertain terms that I felt that that needed to be far more explicit, that he needed to be public about what the WRU has done to address some of these issues, primarily in light of the report on the women’s game.”<sup>49</sup>*

**57.** The Deputy Minister was clear that the nature of the Welsh Government’s relationship with the WRU meant that there were limits on the action she could take, telling the Committee:

*“Even since the BBC programme on Monday, there have been constraints on what I’ve been able to do. I’ve only been able to set out to the WRU—and I’ve done that very forcefully—what my expectations are. But, at the end of the day, it is for the WRU to make the changes and to implement those changes.”<sup>50</sup>*

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<sup>47</sup> BBC News: [‘Concern’ over WRU trans women ban in female-only games](#) - 2 March 2023

<sup>48</sup> Welsh Government: [FOI release 17082&17109: Welsh Rugby Union](#) - 13 March 2023

<sup>49</sup> Record of Proceedings: [Plenary - 25 January 2023, paragraph 198](#)

<sup>50</sup> Record of Proceedings: [Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 2 February 2023, paragraph 251](#)

**58.** On 27 January 2023, the Deputy Minister wrote to the WRU in response to the allegations in the BBC documentary to:

*“... set out our expectations as you develop what must be an urgent, transparent and comprehensive response to these incredibly serious challenges and allegations.”<sup>51</sup>*

**59.** She said:

*“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.”<sup>52</sup>*

**60.** She noted a series of contacts with the WRU since the documentary was broadcast:

*“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.”<sup>53</sup>*

### **Is there a gap in sports governance?**

**61.** Both the Deputy Minister and Sport Wales (see below) stressed, in evidence to the Committee, that there were limits to the extent to which they could demand change from the WRU. The Deputy Minister told the Committee:

*“... one of the things that we have to consider is: is there a gap? Is there a gap beyond the national governing bodies—”<sup>54</sup>*

**62.** The UK Government has recently set out plans to introduce an independent regulator for professional football in the English leagues in its football governance white paper.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Welsh Government: [FOI release 17148: Welsh Rugby Union](#) - 13 March 2023

<sup>52</sup> Welsh Government: [FOI release 17148: Welsh Rugby Union](#) - 13 March 2023

<sup>53</sup> Welsh Government: [FOI release 17148: Welsh Rugby Union](#) - 13 March 2023

<sup>54</sup> Record of Proceedings: [Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 2 February 2023, paragraph 408](#)

<sup>55</sup> Welsh Government: [A sustainable future - reforming club football governance](#) - 23 February 2023

## Our view

**63.** The Deputy Minister is correct to observe that there are restrictions on the extent to which she can direct the WRU, which is an independent organisation. We also note the fact that the Deputy Minister's interventions since the documentary was broadcast demonstrate the considerable impact that the Welsh Government's informal action can have in this area.

**64.** The Committee did not agree on whether the Deputy Minister should have raised concerns earlier with the WRU about the allegations (in the press, and in the letter from Tonia Antoniazzi MP) that it had a cultural problem with women.

**65.** Some members think that she should, and that this action would have sent a signal that sexism was unacceptable, and that a positive relationship with the Welsh Government depended on the WRU getting a grip on the issue. This action would be comparable with that taken by the Minister for the Economy recently in response to allegations against the CBI. These members would point to the fact that after the Deputy Minister had been warned by Tonia Antoniazzi MP about endemic sexism within the WRU, the Deputy Minister wrote to the WRU about its transgender policy, but did not, (according to the timeline of events provided by the Welsh Government) raise the issue of sexism. They would also note that the Deputy Minister acting earlier to address sexism within the WRU would have been consistent with the Welsh Government's Violence against Women strategy and Economic Contract, which is intended to promote fair work.

**66.** Other Members note the Welsh Government's lack of formal power over the WRU and do not agree that the Deputy Minister could have raised concerns with the WRU prior to the BBC documentary. Contrary to the views expressed in paragraph 66, Members dispute the comparison with the Minister's intervention with the CBI as these were specific allegations against a named individual. The allegations raised in the letter from Tonia Antoniazzi MP to the Deputy Minister were unspecific and anonymous and therefore not subject to direct intervention. Of the cases that were not anonymous, one case was subject to legal action. Members also noted that no other Senedd Members of any party raised any issues prior to the BBC documentary.

**67.** The Welsh Government's Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence strategy, and Economic Contract provide a policy context in which the Welsh Government should encourage its partners, such as the WRU, to tackle sexism. The Welsh Government should therefore consider its future support for the WRU in the light of its efforts to tackle sexism.

**Recommendation 2.** The Welsh Government should ensure that any future financial support it provides to the WRU is compatible with all aspects of the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence strategy and the Economic Contract.

**Recommendation 3.** The Welsh Government should set out how concerns around an organisation's culture will be factored into the Welsh Government's decisions on whether to provide that organisation with financial support.

**Recommendation 4.** The Welsh Government should review its protocols for responding to concerns raised with Ministers, Deputy Ministers and civil servants about inappropriate behaviour in organisations in Wales. It should report back to the Committee within the next six months on the outcome of this review and should set out what steps it will take as a result.

## 4. Sport Wales

**68.** Sport Wales is the Welsh Government and National Lottery-funded body responsible for developing sport. It is the main adviser on sport to the Welsh Government, and has also been advising the WRU on the establishment of their Independent Review. Sport Wales distributes funding for sports, including annual funding to national governing bodies. In the financial year 2021/22 Sport Wales had provided the WRU with £816,000, which is slightly less than 1 per cent of the Union's annual turnover. This funding is not for the professional game, but to support the community game and women and girls' pathway development.

**69.** The WRU also occasionally receives funding from Sport Wales through its various funding schemes. For example, the WRU recently received capital funding for a sustainability project. The 2022 WRU Annual Report notes:

*"We have also continued to support clubs to access external funding and for 2021/22 the amount of funding accessed through the Sport Wales Be Active Wales Fund (BAWF) since the new team have been in post is c.£319k."<sup>56</sup>*

**70.** Sport Wales CEO Brian Davies explained how the organisation monitors the WRU's use of Sport Wales funding:

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<sup>56</sup> Welsh Rugby Union: [2022 Annual Report](#), page 40 [PDF 7.5MB]

*“There are multiple ways we get the insight that we need to know whether the public funding has been used appropriately. There’s obviously the finance reviews that we can instigate, and two of those were instigated with the WRU in February 2021 and March 2022, and those financial reviews were passed. The governance review that was instigated with AlphaValue was another method that we had to check on how the WRU was operating within the realms of the areas that we have control over. And I think those methods, together with other methods of reporting we asked the WRU to give us with regard to the funding, were pretty sufficient. I don’t think we can be accused of not checking on how the WRU were using the money we were investing in them.*

*It’s effectively less than 1 per cent of their total turnover, the public investment into the WRU, but we do ask quite a bit of reporting back in return for that investment. Obviously, for other governing bodies, that’s a significant proportion of their income; for the WRU, it isn’t. But it was specific: it was for the hub programme and the women and girls’ pathway development. So, we do have reports from the WRU about how the money was used and we have wider financial reports about the health of the WRU and its processes, and we also had the governance review from AlphaValue, which identified it needed to make improvements, and we asked for a plan.”<sup>57</sup>*

## **Knowledge of allegations**

**71.** Sport Wales CEO Brian Davies explained the level of knowledge he had of the allegations in the documentary prior to its broadcast:

*“Nothing formal. We were aware of some things that were in the public domain, but, in terms of the specific allegations that were aired, no, nothing had been raised directly with us.”<sup>58</sup>*

**72.** Baroness Grey-Thompson, Sport Wales Chair, explained:

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<sup>57</sup> Record of Proceedings: [Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 15 February 2023, paragraphs 130 and 131](#)

<sup>58</sup> Record of Proceedings: [Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 15 February 2023, paragraph 42](#)

*“... after the programme was aired, I asked Brian and all the team, and also asked to go back and check with former employees or people who have been involved with the WRU over the year, what did Sport Wales know. The answer was ‘nothing’. If you’re talking about culture within governing bodies and culture within sport, then there, we are aware that there are lots of parts of the sporting world where the culture isn’t great. In terms of the really specific allegations, absolutely not.”<sup>59</sup>*

**73.** Brian Davies said that he was only aware of one Non-Disclosure Agreement being used by the WRU in relation to these allegations.

**74.** Brian Davies explained that Sport Wales was limited in the extent to which it could investigate allegations of inappropriate behaviour in sports governing bodies:

*“We’re the agency responsible for promoting and developing sport and physical activity in Wales. We’re not an investigatory body. We’re not resourced that way. We’re not established that way. We have no legislative power. We do have duties. As an organisation, we’re bound by certain legal duties. But, in terms of the sector, we don’t really have that kind of responsibility. Whether we should is another matter. So, if someone does raise something informally with us, there is a limit to what we can do.”<sup>60</sup>*

**75.** Baroness Grey-Thompson explained the constraints on how Sport Wales can intervene in sports governing bodies:

*“... we’re not a regulator. Our ability to step in on other areas is challenging. There’s a big discussion going on at the moment in British sport about regulation, whether there should be a football regulator. I’ve talked about an ombudsman who has that role, who can actually step in, audit and challenge—”<sup>61</sup>*

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<sup>59</sup> Record of Proceedings: [Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 15 February 2023, paragraph 89](#)

<sup>60</sup> Record of Proceedings: [Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 15 February 2023, paragraph 47](#)

<sup>61</sup> Record of Proceedings: [Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 15 February 2023, paragraph 138](#)



**76.** She developed her suggestion of a sports regulator later in the session:

*“... one of the reasons I recommended an ombudsman was not because of some great big power grab, or wanting to invent this huge organisation—it was actually to help governing bodies look at their internal policy, process, culture and think about how they could do things in a different and a more modern way. Different governing bodies have embraced it and struggled with it—capacity, capability; there’s all sorts of things with it ...”<sup>62</sup>*

**77.** Mr Davies noted the challenges that came with this proposal:

*“It would be really interesting to see how that could be done, because you start treading on the toes of international federations here, who quite often throw in the fact that there should be no political interference in their sport.”<sup>63</sup>*

**78.** Mr Davies was asked why Sport Wales did not explore the reasons for Amanda Blanc’s resignation, and explained:

*“... Amanda Blanc was chair of the Professional Rugby Board, which is obviously, by definition, the professional aspect of the sport. We don’t have any dealings with the WRU in respect of professional sport. Ours is all about grass roots and the development of the women’s game and pathway, so that’s where the public investment goes into the WRU. We have no remit on the professional side of the game, and we certainly can’t invest lottery funds in anything to do with the professional side of the game. So, we might have been interested, but, as far as I could tell at the time, Amanda wasn’t saying why she left. She made no public statement.”<sup>64</sup>*

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<sup>62</sup> Record of Proceedings: [Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 15 February 2023, paragraph 166](#)

<sup>63</sup> Record of Proceedings: [Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 15 February 2023, paragraph 190](#)

<sup>64</sup> Record of Proceedings: [Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 15 February 2023, paragraph 54](#)

## **Sport Wales and sports governance**

**79.** Sport Wales has developed, with the sector, a Governance and Leadership Framework.<sup>65</sup> This has seven principles and key behaviours to be used by boards to help lead an organisation. These include:

*“Principle 1: INTEGRITY – ACTING FOR THE FUTURE OF THE SPORT, RECREATION, ACTIVITY OR AREA.*

*The board is the ultimate decision-making body of an organisation and it must lead by example. It should uphold and exemplify the very highest standards of integrity.*

*It is important to have some fundamentals in place to protect the reputation and legitimacy of the organisation and to safeguard all participants. The board also needs to develop and drive the growth of the organisation securing its ongoing success.*

*Principle 4: BALANCED, INCLUSIVE AND SKILLED BOARD*

*The board should be made up of individuals with the relevant balance of skills, knowledge and experience to meet the needs of the organisation and represent the diversity of the community it serves currently, and in the future. The organisation should have the appropriate recruitment policies in place to enable this.”*

**80.** In 2018, the Sport Wales Board agreed a policy objective for all Sport National Governing Bodies and National Partners to achieve gender parity on their Boards.<sup>66</sup>

**81.** The [2022 WRU Annual Report](#) notes:

*“In March 2016, the Board committed to support the Sport Wales Governance and Leadership Framework for Wales (the ‘Framework’). The Board continues to consider how best to implement the Principles and Behaviours set out in the Framework in a way that is most suitable for the Group and*

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<sup>65</sup> Sport Wales: [Governance and Leadership Framework](#)

<sup>66</sup> Sport Wales: [Board Diversity](#)

*how it can maintain and improve good governance and leadership within the Group.*<sup>67</sup>

**82.** Sport Wales also has a Capability Framework, which has two key aims:

- to ensure that Sport Wales is investing public money appropriately and has confidence in the organisations it is working with, and
- to support the continuous improvement of partner organisations so they are best prepared to achieve their potential.<sup>68</sup>

**83.** The Capability Framework guidance explains:

*“The essential and minimum requirements complement the newly refreshed Governance and Leadership Framework for Wales (GLFW2019). Significant progress has been made towards well run, well governed organisations with balanced, skilled and inclusive Boards since the GLFW came into effect.”*<sup>69</sup>

**84.** In the 2 February 2023 Committee meeting, a Welsh Government official explained how the Sport Wales Capability Framework had triggered a WRU governance review:

*“... the annual funding WRU receives from Sport Wales, underpinning all that is the Capability Framework, and Sport Wales has the responsibility to ensure that public funding is invested appropriately. And that’s around key governance areas, around funding, around board composition et cetera. And the WRU completed an assessment back in 2022, and that triggered the governance review that was spoken about earlier. So, that just shows the process linked from funding through to governance and continuing improvement.”*<sup>70</sup>

**85.** Brian Davies expanded on Sport Wales’s role in driving improvements in WRU governance:

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<sup>67</sup> Welsh Rugby Union: [2022 Annual Report](#), page 118 [PDF 7.5MB]

<sup>68</sup> Sport Wales: [Capability Framework Guidance](#) [PDF 2.3MB]

<sup>69</sup> Sport Wales: [Capability Framework Guidance](#), page 3 [PDF 2.3MB]

<sup>70</sup> Record of Proceedings: [Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee – 2 February 2023, paragraph 308](#)

*“Where we do have an influence is on hard governance, and we were pushing the WRU to change its constitution to bring in an independent chair, to do some of the changes that the governance review that AlphaValue had conducted in 2022, and to be implemented. When things like that are implemented, hopefully those kinds of incidents or areas that Amanda Blanc might have had concerns over are fewer and far between, or are dealt with more appropriately, because the hard governance structure is in place to deal with it properly.”<sup>71</sup>*

**86.** He explained the difficulties Sport Wales faced when trying to drive cultural change:

*“The hard governance [...] is really important and is something that we are comfortable with trying to enact with partners. The culture piece we’re not comfortable with because it’s difficult, uncertain and complex. But with Tanni and with the will of the other bodies in the UK, maybe we can make additions to that Capability Framework that involves culture in its wider sense.”<sup>72</sup>*

**87.** Following the WRU’s failure to agree governance changes at its October 2022 AGM, Mr Davies explained:

*“We wrote a letter to the WRU asking what their implementation plan was now for the governance review changes that had been recommended by AlphaValue in its governance review that was commissioned by the WRU. We gave them until the end of next month to give us that implementation plan. Without it, there was no public funding going to be made available. Obviously, a few things have happened since we wrote that letter, and therefore at the moment the WRU get no money publicly from Sport Wales ...”<sup>73</sup>*

**88.** Mr Davies hoped that the allegations about the WRU could spur improvements in governance across sport:

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<sup>71</sup> Record of Proceedings: [Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 15 February 2023, paragraph 56](#)

<sup>72</sup> Record of Proceedings: [Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 15 February 2023, paragraph 174](#)

<sup>73</sup> Record of Proceedings: [Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 15 February 2023, paragraph 58](#)

*“The optimist in me sees this as a potential accelerator for the hard governance changes that some governing bodies still need to make, including the WRU.”<sup>74</sup>*

## **Sport Wales relationship with the Welsh Government**

**89.** Sport Wales is the main adviser to Welsh Government on sport and supports the delivery of its strategic priorities. It was allocated £31 million in the 2022/23 draft budget, broadly the same as it was allocated in the previous year’s budget. Sport Wales also distributes National Lottery grants (£13 million in 2019/20) to elite and grassroots sports.

**90.** Sport Wales uses its Welsh Government funding in accordance with a remit letter from the Welsh Government. The 2018-21 remit letter includes the following objective:

*“Sport Wales is an exemplar organisation driving a culture that promotes well-being, equality, and sustainability.”<sup>75</sup>*

And the following outcome:

*“A system that delivers continuous elite sport success while ensuring the safety, wellbeing and welfare of all sportsmen and sportswomen.”<sup>76</sup>*

**91.** The 2021-26 remit letter says that shared goals of the two organisations should include “addressing all inequality and achieving an anti-racist Wales”. It also says that the Deputy Minister would like Sport Wales to “prioritise diversity, inclusion and equality throughout the sector to ensure we understand and overcome barriers to participation”.<sup>77</sup>

**92.** In 2017 the Welsh Government published an Independent report on Sport Wales, which said:

*“The review team received a clear and consistent message from stakeholders that Sport Wales is an organization at a crossroads in its strategic direction and the role it plays in the*

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<sup>74</sup> Record of Proceedings: Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 15 February 2023, paragraph 165

<sup>75</sup> Welsh Government: Sport Wales remit letter: 2018 to 2021 - 9 February 2018

<sup>76</sup> Welsh Government: Sport Wales remit letter: 2018 to 2021 - 9 February 2018

<sup>77</sup> Welsh Government: Sport Wales remit letter: 2021 to 2026 - 22 December 2021

*delivery of the wellbeing goals and government policy. It remains a very strong advocate for sport and is rightly credited for strengthening the governance and leadership of National Governing Bodies. The contribution Sport Wales' elite team has made to the success of Welsh athletes is also recognized and commended by partners. However, the increasing focus on sport's contribution to the wider policy priorities, in a climate of reduced public expenditure budgets, requires Sport Wales to lead the sector through transformational change.”<sup>78</sup>*

**93.** It recommended that Sport Wales should:

*“...consider how best to manage their relationships with National Governing Bodies and local authorities so that the level of check and challenge is proportionate and balanced with providing advice and added value.”<sup>79</sup>*

**94.** The 2018-21 remit letter from the Deputy Minister says:

*“During the term of this Remit Letter I expect the recommendations of the Independent Review of Sport Wales (July 2017) to be implemented in full.”<sup>80</sup>*

**95.** Mr Davies explained the ambiguity in the Remit Letter. Regarding the equality aims, he said:

*“... we take that as investing in the appropriate areas of the sport to improve access for all intersectional issues, not so much maybe the other areas that are achieving focus here, which are the fact that a governing body has a culture that promotes equality and stuff like that. So, it depends on interpretation.”<sup>81</sup>*

## **Sport Wales action**

**96.** Following the broadcast of the BBC documentary, Sport Wales advised the WRU on the appointment of an independent body to lead an independent

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<sup>78</sup> Welsh Government: [Sport Wales Review: An Independent Report](#) – June 2017 [PDF 757KB]

<sup>79</sup> Welsh Government: [Sport Wales Review: An Independent Report](#) – June 2017 [PDF 757KB]

<sup>80</sup> Welsh Government: [Sport Wales remit letter: 2018 to 2021](#) – 9 February 2018

<sup>81</sup> Record of Proceedings: [Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee – 15 February 2023, paragraph 203](#)

review. The WRU commissioned Sport Resolutions on the advice of Sport Wales. Sport Resolutions is a UK-based independent, not for profit sport-specialist provider of dispute resolutions and investigation services.

**97.** Sport Wales CEO Brian Davies explained the ongoing role of Sport Wales in the WRU Independent Review:

*“So, the independent panel is exactly that—it’s an independent panel that has the terms of reference agreed, and it will operate now under the auspices of Dame Anne Rafferty. But there is a Commissioning Advisory Group. So, the panel has been commissioned by the WRU—someone has to commission it, so, the WRU will be covering the costs, and therefore are the commissioning party. But there is an advisory group, consisting of a representative of the Welsh Rugby Union, a representative of Sport Wales, and a further independent person, and that’s the commissioning advisory group. It effectively sits there to help the panel if it requests it. It is asking for monthly updates from the panel, but its role is basically to check on progress and that everything the panel wants and needs is being received.”<sup>82</sup>*

**98.** The Commissioning Advisory Group will also be consulted if the Chair wants to change the terms of reference of the review.

**99.** Brian Davies noted that the review’s recommendations may be focused on “soft changes” within the WRU:

*“... what the WRU are currently proposing is some hard governance changes, which are really very welcome and needed, and have been needed for a while. But the soft changes are more difficult, and that’s maybe where the panel’s recommendations will be focused. I don’t know if that makes sense—hard changes: the rules; soft changes: how things are implemented, what the culture within the organisation looks like and how that can be improved or monitored or regulated.”<sup>83</sup>*

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<sup>82</sup> Record of Proceedings: [Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 15 February 2023, paragraph 17](#)

<sup>83</sup> Record of Proceedings: [Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 15 February 2023, paragraph 35](#)

## Our view

**100.** Officials at Sport Wales have played a positive role since the documentary was broadcast, convening the WRU and Sport Resolutions to establish the Independent Panel. It is also encouraging that the governance reforms Sport Wales has advocated were approved by the WRU at its March 2023 EGM.

**101.** Despite having a general awareness of allegations made against the WRU prior to the documentary broadcast, it seems that no external body - such as the Welsh Government or Sport Wales - has the capacity or power to intervene. This has led to calls from some quarters for an independent sports regulator.

**102.** This is far from the first failure of sports governance in the UK in recent years. It follows scandals including racism in cricket and abuse in gymnastics. It was striking in our evidence that no body outside of the WRU felt empowered to drive improvements in the WRU, which itself seemed reluctant or unable to do so. This led to an impasse, which could only be broken by journalists, and brave individuals willing to speak to them.

**103.** We are not currently convinced that this gap in governance should be filled by politicians. But the more failures in sports governance that emerge, and the longer the sports community fails to get its house in order, the greater the case for political involvement will become.

**104.** We note Sports Wales CEO Brian Davies's observation that what is required from some of the equality aims in the organisation's remit letter from the Welsh Government "depends on interpretation".<sup>84</sup> This ambiguity makes scrutiny of the delivery of these aims difficult - from both the Welsh Government and this Committee. We question the value of including broad aims within remit letters, rather than tangible, deliverable requirements.

**105.** Baroness Grey-Thompson observed that Sport Wales is "not a regulator". This is accurate, but does not mean that the allegations relating to the WRU are not relevant to Sport Wales's work. We are concerned that Sport Wales-funded work to develop the women and girl's game may have involved women and girls entering a sexist environment in the WRU. We think that Sport Wales should consider the funding it provides to national governing bodies in light of any allegations of inappropriate behaviour within these governing bodies.

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<sup>84</sup> Record of Proceedings: [Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 15 February 2023, paragraph 203](#)



**Recommendation 5.** The Welsh Government should set out how the organisations it funds should use this funding in remit letters. Good scrutiny rests on being able to assess whether these aims have been delivered. To this end, the Welsh Government should ensure that the requirements in remit letters of the organisations it funds are clear and tangible.

**Recommendation 6.** Sport Wales should consider the funding it provides to national governing bodies in light of any allegations of inappropriate behaviour within these governing bodies.