

Julie James AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Newid Hinsawdd
Minister for Climate Change



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref
Ein cyf/Our ref JJ/PO/101/24

Llyr Gruffydd MS,
Chair, Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee
Welsh Parliament,
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14 March 2024

Dear Llyr Gruffydd MS,

Thank you for your letter of 5 February on behalf of the Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee, enclosing the Committee's *Report on performance of Dŵr Cymru*. Our water sector is facing immediate and unprecedented challenge; it must achieve decarbonisation, climate resilience and reverse biodiversity loss, all against the backdrop of the current cost of living crisis. I have, however, said many times before, both in and out of the Senedd, that Welsh Government expects both water companies in Wales to work much harder to deliver excellent services for customers across all areas of operation.

I note that of the 12 recommendations outlined in the report, eight are directed to Dŵr Cymru and Ofwat. They will respond separately and I will read their response with interest expecting to see ambition, partnership in approach and a drive for improvement. Please find a response to each of the remaining four recommendations directed at Welsh Government, as follows:

Recommendation 4. *The Welsh Government should seek to introduce a ban on wet wipes containing plastic as soon as possible. It should report back to the Committee on the outcome of the joint consultation on a proposed ban and on the timeframe it is working towards for the introduction of a ban in Wales.*

Accept in principle: Following the recent UK-wide consultation, we are analysing the responses, some of which have been detailed and scientific in nature. We will publish a Summary of Responses report shortly. This will outline our next steps and provide an indicative timetable for any future actions. I will write to the Committee and the Senedd as part of the publication process.

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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.

Recommendation 8. *The Welsh Government and its key partners, including Dŵr Cymru, should identify ways to effectively communicate Wales' approach to tackling sewage discharges from storm overflows to improve public understanding of the approach.*

Accept: The Welsh Government has regularly made our approach to tackling storm overflows public through Senedd Written and Oral Statements, including the Oral Statement on Water Quality I most recently delivered on 12 December. As the Committee will be aware, I have also given evidence on our approach to storm overflows at your evidence sessions. Additionally, I have provided written evidence to the UK Parliament's Welsh Affairs Committee Inquiry into Water Quality (see [Water quality in Wales - Committees - UK Parliament](#)). We will continue to communicate our approach through these formal avenues, as well as more informally via the Welsh Government's social media channels, to ensure the greatest public understanding of our approach. Furthermore, both I and my officials regularly meet with Dŵr Cymru to discuss all areas of operation and we will continue these discussions, including on communication of storm overflows.

Recommendation 10. *The Welsh Government should consider extending NRW's enforcement powers to enable the regulator to accept environmental undertakings for permit breaches under the Environmental Permitting Regulations (England and Wales) 2016. It should report back to the Committee on the outcome of its consideration.*

Accept in principle: Civil sanctions such as Environmental Undertakings (EU) can be a useful enforcement tool in addition to other enforcement powers. I note that Natural Resources Wales already has powers to use EU in certain instances although this is not currently extended to the Environmental Permitting Regulations. We will consider this recommendation further and report back to the Committee in due course.

Recommendation 12. *The Minister should provide an update on action taken to relieve pressure on the sewage system since the publication of the Committee's Report on storm overflows in Wales (March 2022). This should include progress towards implementation of the recommendations arising from the review of Sustainable Drainage Systems.*

Accept: In July 2022, the Better River Quality Taskforce was established across government and industry to evaluate the current approach to the management and regulation of overflows in Wales and to set out detailed plans to drive rapid change and improvement. It has published a storm overflows roadmap for Wales, available online at [Wales Better River Quality Taskforce | GOV.WALES](#). These plans set out clear objectives and measurable outcomes for delivering improvements to overflow management from the immediate through to the long term.

With regards to Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS), the Committee will be aware that the review undertaken by Arup was [published](#) in July 2023 and made more than 70 recommendations covering legislation, guidance and implementation. My officials have since undertaken a programme of review and stakeholder engagement to develop an implementation strategy for the recommendations. We have made good progress so far. This includes establishing a Community of Practice (CoP) group, which first met in December; scoping an All-Wales Commuted Sums Calculator; and developing a SuDS Action Plan, which I will publish in due course.

May I take this opportunity to thank the Committee for its continued work to scrutinise the actions being taken to improve our water quality in Wales. There is much still to do, but I am

confident we are on the right track to continue delivering meaningful improvements for our water environment.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Julie James". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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