



Welsh Affairs Committee

Monday, 23 February 2026

Rt Hon Jo Stevens MP
Secretary of State for Wales

Dear Secretary of State,

Thank you again to yourself, Minister McMorris and Wales Office Director Ciarán Hayes for giving evidence to the Committee on 11 February.

There are a couple of issues on which we would like to follow up:

- Simon Hoare asked about negotiations on an EU-UK SPS agreement and engagement with the Welsh agriculture industry (Q41). Can you set out the engagement Wales Office Ministers or other Departmental Ministers have had with the agricultural community in Wales?
- Ann Davies asked about formal requests for devolution of powers made by the Welsh Government (Q54). It would be helpful if you could clarify whether any written requests have been made by a Welsh Minister, to the UK Government, since the 2024 General Election, for further powers to be devolved, be that (a) changes to the Senedd's legislative competence or (b) the transfer of executive functions to Welsh Ministers
- You mentioned the Brand Wales programme (Q64). Would you be able to provide more information on when the programme will launch, how long it will run for, when the fund that the overseas network can bid into will open, and how much funding will be available?
- Ben Lake (Q78) raised the legacy of disused metal mines, and asked whether the potential hazards arising from such mines could be added to the National Risk Register. Would you be able to provide an update on any conversations with Ministerial colleagues, and the outcome of such conversations?

Finally, I noted that the Committee has recently launched an inquiry into cross-border healthcare arrangements between England and Wales. The call for written evidence closes on 27 March and I would be grateful for written evidence from the UK Government.

Yours sincerely,

Ruth Jones MP
Chair of the Welsh Affairs Committee



Wales Office
Swyddfa Cymru

Ref: 008MISC26

Rt Hon Jo Stevens MP
Secretary of State for Wales
Ysgrifennydd Gwladol Cymru

Ruth Jones MP

Chair of the Welsh Affairs Committee
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16 March 2026

Dear Ruth,

Thank you for inviting me to give evidence to the Welsh Affairs Committee on the 11th of February and your follow-up letter of 23rd February. My responses to your additional questions are set out in the paragraphs below.

Negotiations on an EU-UK SPS Agreement and Engagement with Welsh Agriculture Industry

As DEFRA-related matters are in the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State's portfolio, she has regular engagements with representatives of the farming sector in Wales.

The farming unions are a key partner for the Wales Office. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State and I are committed to working with them and maintaining an active dialogue. Minister McMorris has had the privilege of meeting National Farmers Union (NFU) Cymru and the Farmers Union of Wales (FUW) several times since October, including a visit to the farm run by the new NFU Cymru President Abi Reader and to a farm run by a FUW member.

The UK has begun negotiations with the EU on an SPS agreement to make agrifood trade with our biggest market cheaper and easier, cutting costs and removing barriers to trade for British producers and retailers. This agreement could slash costs for exporters and reduce border delays making supply chains more resilient, further opening up opportunities for Welsh farmers to benefit and helping reduce pressure on food prices.

Requests for devolution of powers made by the Welsh Government

The UK Government is firmly committed to devolution and will always update the settlement to ensure it delivers the best outcomes for people and communities across Wales. I was pleased to announce when we met that we will consult on devolving powers to the Senedd to enable it to introduce a vacant land tax in Wales.



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This builds on the significant progress we have made on delivering our manifesto commitments for Wales that includes updating and providing increased flexibility within the fiscal framework, and funding for the Welsh Government to deliver an Economic Inactivity Trailblazer. We have also worked together with Welsh Government more broadly to reform our approach to the regulation of water, taking forward the recommendations of the joint Independent Commission for Water. Positive intergovernmental relations such as this rely on mutual trust and regular dialogue. In that regard, I am sure that the Committee would not expect me to recount the detail of private discussions or correspondence I have with Welsh Government Ministers.

Brand Wales Programme

The Brand Wales programme of work is funded for the three years covered by this Spending Review and will therefore launch on 1st April 2026 and run until the end of March 2029. The Spending Review allocated £2.4m over three years to the Wales Office to deliver Brand Wales. As we discussed, there are several elements of the Brand Wales programme, including Ministerial led international visits and events to promote Welsh trade and investment opportunities. In addition, from April 2026 we will launch a Fund for the Overseas Network, with £200,000 available for the first year of the Fund.

Legacy of Disused Metal Mines

Pollution from disused metal mines falls under the chronic risks assessment framework. The Cabinet Office currently identifies 26 chronic risks, including Pollution and Environmental Degradation. These risks represent medium-to-long-term challenges that gradually degrade the environment and national security.

Yours sincerely,

Rt Hon Jo Stevens MP
Secretary of State for Wales
Ysgrifennydd Gwladol Cymru