



Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru **The National Assembly for Wales**

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau **The Petitions Committee**

Dydd Mawrth, 4 Rhagfyr 2012
Tuesday, 4 December 2012

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The proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in the committee. In addition, a transcription of the simultaneous interpretation is included.

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol **Committee members in attendance**

Russell George	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Elin Jones	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
William Powell	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Welsh Liberal Democrats (Committee Chair)
Joyce Watson	Llafur Labour

Swyddogion Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru yn bresennol
National Assembly for Wales officials in attendance

Sarita Marshall	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Victoria Paris	Ymchwilydd Researcher
Helen Roberts	Cynghorydd Cyfreithiol Legal Adviser
Naomi Stocks	Clerc Clerk

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 9.04 a.m.
The meeting began at 9.04 a.m.

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **William Powell:** Bore da a chroeso **William Powell:** Good morning and a warm
cynnes i bawb. welcome to you all.

[2] Welcome to this meeting of the Petitions Committee. Normal housekeeping matters
apply. We do not have any apologies this morning, and there is a full complement of
members. Let us get under way.

P-03-150 Safonau Canser Cenedlaethol—Trafodaeth o'r Dystiolaeth Weinidogol
P-03-150 National Cancer Standards—Discussion of Ministerial Evidence

[3] **William Powell:** We have the opportunity to discuss the evidence that we took in our
last session from the Minister for Health and Social Services. We all have a copy of the
transcript available. Colleagues, would you like to share your views on what we heard?
Things have moved on significantly since this petition was first launched in October 2008, so
we are clearly in a different place now. I thought it was very useful to have the Minister with
us to update us on the proposals for delivery.

[4] **Russell George:** Have there been any approaches by the petitioners? Have they made
any comment to you as Chair on the session?

[5] **William Powell:** Not following the session. Either we will or we have already
circulated the transcript—

[6] **Ms Stocks:** The transcript has gone to the Government, but not to the petitioners as
yet.

[7] **William Powell:** Okay. I think that it would be a good step forward to share this
transcript with the petitioners. There was a lot of new material there, and time has elapsed—it
is almost four years. The petition is from the third Assembly.

[8] **Russell George:** Let us write to them, Chair, and ask for their views on the evidence
session.

[9] **William Powell:** I think that is a sensible way forward. Is that agreed? I see that it is.

9.06 a.m.

Deisebau Newydd New Petitions

[10] **William Powell:** We have P-04-439, on ancient veteran and heritage trees of Wales being given greater protection. This petition was submitted by Coed Cadw Cymru and has 5,320 signatures backing it. It states:

[11] ‘We believe that the ancient, veteran and heritage trees of Wales are a vital and irreplaceable part of the nation’s environment and heritage.’

[12] The petitioners call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to provide greater protection for ancient, veteran and heritage trees in a number of ways. They are looking to place a specific duty on the new single environment body, natural resources Wales; for an amendment to the current tree preservation Order legislation, making it more fit for purpose, in their view; to incorporate a database of ancient and veteran trees, recorded and verified through the Ancient Tree Hunt project; and for any successor to the Wales spatial plan to recognise the particular importance of these trees as ‘trees of special interest’. The petition was presented on 28 November, just last week, and we had an interesting discussion at that time around the issues. We have not, up to this point, taken any action on it. Colleagues, I would appreciate your thoughts on this.

[13] **Joyce Watson:** I very much agree with the principles set out in this petition. To that end, the timing is good, because the new environmental body is being set up. So, writing to the Minister in the way that the petitioners have requested would be a step in the right direction at this stage.

[14] **William Powell:** We can keep writing to the new chair and chief executive of the single environment body in the locker for the future, but, initially, writing to the Minister makes good sense, as the environment body is still in shadow form. Are there any other thoughts or suggestions at this time? I see that there are not. Excellent; that is agreed.

[15] We now move to P-04-440, ‘Say NO to Asset Stripping Bronllys Hospital’. This petition was submitted by Mr Michael Eccles and his colleagues, and has collected approximately 2,200 signatures. I have to declare an interest in this matter in that I know a number of the petitioners and I believe that a couple of family members may have signed this petition, so I think that I need to put that on the record.

[16] The petition calls

[17] ‘upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to reject any attempt by the Powys Teaching Health Board to asset-strip the Bronllys Community hospital by closing or moving its Stroke Unit’.

[18] The petitioners go on to make a particular case for the reuse and regeneration of the Bronllys site for future healthcare provision in the south-east of the county of Powys. As yet, we have not taken any action on the petition. In fact, we are due to receive this petition formally from a group of petitioners at 1 p.m. today and I hope that colleagues will be able to attend that occasion.

[19] There is one item I need to update Members on. At the time the papers went out, the consultation was due to close on 30 November. However, because of what has been accepted, I think, as a lack of clarity with regard to the consultation itself, a two-week extension has been granted by Powys Teaching Local Health Board and correspondence on that has been received from the chief executive of the health board, a Mr Andrew Cottom. That takes us up

to the middle of this month. That is the only point of correction. I would welcome colleagues' views on how to proceed on this one.

[20] **Joyce Watson:** Chair, first, I welcome the extension. It is at least a move in the right direction to allow people more time to get their views aired and considered. To that end, perhaps we could write to the health board because what we and the petitioners need to know is when decisions are being made. Apart from the fact that they want this particular decision, they will certainly want to know when it is being made. We need to copy that correspondence to the Minister for Health and Social Services.

[21] **William Powell:** Yes, for consistency.

[22] **Joyce Watson:** And the Health and Social Care Committee. Also, we will be receiving the petition at 1 p.m., which will give us a further opportunity to engage with the petitioners.

[23] **William Powell:** Indeed, and I have been advised that, as well as the lead petitioner, Mr Eccles, Ms Maggie Sims, the chair of the Bronllys Hospital & Community League of Friends, will be present. I am sure that she will be happy to share some of her thoughts and to talk about some of the engagement she has had with the health board already. Are there any additional comments on this at the moment?

[24] **Russell George:** No, I am happy with that.

[25] **William Powell:** Excellent. Okay, we hope that we will have the opportunity to engage further with the petitioners at the presentation later today.

[26] The next new petition is P-04-441, entitled 'Gwaith i Gymru—Work for Wales'. It was submitted by Cerith Rhys Jones and collected 129 signatures. The text is extensive. I will quote the beginning and pick out some key points. It reads:

[27] 'In light of the most recent Welsh youth unemployment figures, Plaid Cymru Youth calls on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to put effective and positive steps in place to ensure a brighter future for this generation of young people.'

[28] It makes some very specific points about the provision of apprenticeships and the young recruits programme. It also stresses the importance of work-based learning and investment in that. It places great stress on how difficult times currently are and, indeed, on the fact that there is a real risk that the current generation of 16 to 24-year-olds could become 'a lost generation', to quote from the petition. It makes a heartfelt appeal for effective and positive steps to be taken

[29] 'now to reverse this alarming trend and ensure that we are creating work for Wales.'

[30] **William Powell:** We have not taken any steps on this at this stage. This is our initial consideration of the petition. I suggest that we write to the Deputy Minister for Skills to seek his views on the content of the petition. I would value your thoughts, colleagues.

[31] **Elin Jones:** I would rather not comment, if that is okay, as it is quite obviously a Plaid Cymru petition.

[32] **William Powell:** That is fine. Are there any other comments from colleagues?

9.15 a.m.

[33] **Joyce Watson:** Yes, I will comment. I am really proud to be a member of this Petitions Committee, that it has been set up, and that it gives access to everyone to petition, particularly those people who would not normally have that avenue open to them. I agree that we should do all of the things that we have discussed, and look at youth unemployment. There is no question about that and I am happy to write to the Deputy Minister to that effect. However, what concerns me is that we should empower those who need empowering, and I am not sure that political parties, or subsets of political parties, fall into that category and the thinking when we set up this Petitions Committee. To that end, I think that we need to have a discussion about that—not about this petition, but about who it is that we are empowering and how we do that. It is not about which particular party it is, but any political party in Wales. I would like to see a wider discussion about that and about how we accept petitions. That is what I have to say at this moment.

[34] I do not want to disenfranchise anyone, because I do not believe in that; I believe in enfranchising individuals. However, we have a clear political lobby emanating from a political party that has seats in the Assembly, and I am not sure that that was really the idea behind setting up this committee when Lord Elis-Thomas did so.

[35] **William Powell:** I appreciate those comments, Joyce. There may well be a case early in the new year for us to have a short, focused discussion on issues around admissibility, possibly looking at any case for the review of Standing Orders in relation to this and other matters, but I agree fully that we must give this petition absolutely thorough scrutiny, as we do any other. On previous occasions in the last six to nine months, we have received petitions that may have had a footer with another political party in terms of the text of the petition, but I think that this is the first time that we have had a political party explicitly named in the text of the petition itself. However, I think that the points are well made and I hope that colleagues would be happy to commit some time to discussing this early in the new year in a wider context.

[36] **Elin Jones:** Yes, I certainly agree with what Joyce is proposing, because I think that an understanding as to, and clarification on, the role of political parties in the submission of petitions would be useful for the political parties and their various constituent parts. What is so obvious in this petition is that the Plaid Cymru name is in the petition.

[37] **William Powell:** Indeed.

[38] **Elin Jones:** I have only been on this committee for a very short number of weeks and I have already seen petitions submitted in the names of parliamentary candidates. They may not have mentioned their political party in the text—

[39] **William Powell:** There are different degrees, are there not?

[40] **Elin Jones:** So, I would want some clarity on how we can be consistent with all, because some can hide their political colourings and some are far more honest and upfront about who they are, as in this case.

[41] **William Powell:** Absolutely. You can have some done by proxy and others more directly. It could even be that our colleague Russell George may have, not a confession, but something to put in context in his earlier petitioning career.

[42] **Russell George:** I do not disagree with anything that Joyce Watson or Elin Jones have said, and I welcome your comments, Chair, about looking in the new year at what is admissible to the committee and the way that petitions are worded. For me, it is not so much that a political party is mentioned in the petition, but the pointedness of how the wording of the petition has been accepted by the committee, I suppose. You have said that we will have a

look at this in the new year, so I am happy with that.

[43] **William Powell:** I think that that was a valuable discussion, but that is not to detract from the importance of actually looking in real detail at the issues that have been raised, which are obviously matters of heartfelt concern and are of real importance. There is no question about the value of that discussion. For now, we will be writing to the Deputy Minister for Skills to seek his initial views on it.

[44] **Russell George:** Just to add to that, Chair, I think that it is good that young people are getting involved in political debate and political parties. That is something that we as a committee should be encouraging. The wider point is that it is very pleasing to see younger people involved in political debate and political parties, and with this committee.

[45] **William Powell:** Absolutely, and some of the most memorable evidence sessions that we have had have been from people in the 18 to 24 age group. The Wrexham session in particular comes to mind, and other occasions. Excellent.

[46] We move on now to P-04-442, on guaranteeing good support close to home for disabled children and their families. This petition was submitted by Scope Cymru and has collected 2,415 signatures.

[47] ‘We the undersigned, call upon the Welsh Government to guarantee good support close to home for disabled children and their families. In order to achieve this, we call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to make sure that the new Educational (Wales) Bill includes a ‘Provide Local’ principle in the Bill that will: ensure inclusive and accessible services in the local area, and; put a duty on local agencies to introduce new, inclusive and accessible services if they don’t exist, through better planning, partnership and the involvement of local parents’.

[48] We are due to receive this petition at 12.30 p.m., ahead of the one that I mentioned earlier—it will be quite a busy lunchtime today—on the steps of the Senedd. I look forward to meeting some of the petitioners. On this occasion, we have not as yet got any action in hand. Do you want to suggest a way forward? Joyce, you have indicated that you wish to speak.

[49] **Joyce Watson:** First of all, we will have another opportunity at 12.30 p.m. to meet the petitioners, and over the years for which I have been an Assembly Member, I have had a huge amount of casework on this very issue. In other words, what they are saying I know to be factually the case. So, we could write to the Minister for Education and Skills and seek his views on the petition, asking whether he can incorporate something in a draft Bill. The petition is timely and well thought out. I think that that is the first step that we have to take, and then receive the petition. Given that I have had so much casework on this—and I do not know whether others have—I wonder whether we could see whether we have the time to have a session with the Minister, if possible, to try to thrash some of this out. That is how I feel. It is up to you. I know that we do not have huge amounts of time, but I think that it would be time well spent.

[50] **William Powell:** Similarly, I have had a number of cases in the past few months that touch on this area, and the importance of local provision in the context of the support structure is relevant, as well as the need, on occasion, for respite support in intense cases. Do colleagues have any additional comments at the moment?

[51] **Elin Jones:** I support what Joyce Watson has said. I think that it might be useful at this stage for us to write to the Minister to seek his views, and then to suggest to him that we may wish to discuss it further with him and in more detail, so that he knows that we are particularly interested in this petition and in his views on how he intends to meet some of the

aspirations of the petitioners.

[52] **William Powell:** Particularly as we are at the stage that we are at with the draft Bill. If we can put a marker down for a potential evidence session, that would be helpful.

[53] **Joyce Watson:** We could also ask Scope Cymru to come and give evidence. We need a balance, so we need both.

[54] **William Powell:** Absolutely, and I am sure that Scope Cymru would readily take up that opportunity. Excellent. So, we have an agreed plan of action on that one. That concludes the consideration of the new petitions. I emphasise again that we have two presentations: at 12.30 p.m. there is the Scope Cymru petition, and at 1 p.m. there is the Bronllys Hospital petition.

9.25 a.m.

Y Wybodaeth Ddiweddaraf am Ddeisebau Blaenorol Updates to Previous Petitions

[55] **William Powell:** The first petition under this item today is P-04-424, to retain services at Neath Port Talbot Hospital. This petition was submitted by Carolyn Edwards in October of this year, and it has the support of 193 signatures. Associated petitions gathered locally have in excess of 5,000 signatures. It states:

[56] ‘We the undersigned call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to halt the decision to move all CT2 Doctors from Neath Port Talbot Hospital in the autumn, without prior consultation with the public.’

[57] Initially, we considered this matter back in October and wrote to Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Local Health Board. We have the response in our pack today. We also copied our correspondence to the Minister for Health and Social Services and to the Health and Social Care Committee. At this stage, we have not identified further actions. The petitioners have provided further information, and that is also here for us. So, as you can see, we have quite a difficult situation, given the petitioners’ aspirations, and there appearing to be something of an impasse. I would appreciate any observations that colleagues may have as to how best to proceed.

[58] **Elin Jones:** Do we know whether the specific change is under a three-month consultation at this point, or is it more general changes that Abertawe Bro Morgannwg is consulting on?

[59] **Ms Stocks:** The health board says in its correspondence that it is undertaking a three-month pre-engagement with the public on longer-term proposals.

[60] **Elin Jones:** It is not a specific change, is it? I do not think so.

[61] **William Powell:** One potential action that we could take to progress this one is to write directly to the Wales Deanery, asking whether staffing issues of this kind are acting as a driver for service reconfiguration. We can also ask what consideration is being given to the impact on the hospital of the decision to withdraw this category of CT2 doctors. That is something that we could do in the meantime to try to progress things. Would colleagues favour that approach, to write to the deanery? I see that you would. I think that it is probably the best way forward, and then we can come back to this matter early in the new year when we have had a response. Clearly, we cannot leave the matter hanging, and this would be a

useful next step. Okay, we have that action agreed, and we will come back when we have a response from the deanery.

[62] We move on now to P-04-346, which calls for free childcare for three to four-year-olds in Wales. This petition was submitted by Zelda Smith in November 2011, and it has 67 signatures in support.

[63] ‘We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to ensure that free childcare for 3-4 year olds is delivered more flexibly across Wales allowing parents, and in particular working parents, to choose when and where they access the free childcare.’

[64] We have previously written to the Minister and the WLGA, and we have agreed to invite them to give oral evidence. I have also agreed to write to the Minister for Education and Skills looking for clarity on two specific points before deciding whether to proceed with the oral evidence session. We have the responses from the WLGA and the Minister before us, and I think that it would be useful to get some more clarity from the Welsh Government on the time frame for the review that is mentioned in the Minister’s letter. What do you think, colleagues, on this one?

9.30 a.m.

[65] **Russell George:** I agree, Chair, that we need more information on this. So, I support what you said. Let us seek that clarity.

[66] **William Powell:** Yes, we will write back to the Minister to see whether some clarity is emerging on the time frame for delivering that.

[67] **Joyce Watson:** This is a really important petition, because we have working mothers—or fathers—wanting to access their free childcare, which I think is 10 or 15 hours a week. Being able to access that childcare can be the difference between make or break for some families, as it can enable them to keep themselves afloat and go out to work. With the tidal wave of squeezes coming from Westminster, which will hit them like a tsunami in April, we need to sort out this access to free childcare sooner rather than later. That said, we need to see when the Minister will make some sort of decision and come to some conclusions—

[68] **William Powell:** Yes, we need clarity on the timescale, do we not?

[69] **Joyce Watson:** The other thing that runs alongside this is that people not only have to be able to access this but they have to give advance notice that they wish to access it so that places are secured for their children. So, we really need to move this forward. I feel quite strongly about this, as you might have picked up, but we have to provide equality of opportunity. This is in our area, because we are all from Mid and West Wales, where there could be potential problems, one of which is highlighted in the paper. There is no immediate provision or available provision within a statutory setting to allow people to access this elsewhere. So, I would really like to understand what is going on, to get the WLGA to take some of these things a bit more seriously, and for the Minister to give us a time frame. That is my view.

[70] **William Powell:** That is right, particularly given the changes that are receiving, quite rightly, so much air time at the moment. This is a critical issue. Therefore, we need that clarity. If colleagues are happy for us to write immediately, I will ensure that a letter is dispatched by the end of this week to the Minister, so that we can get feedback straight away, hopefully for our first meeting of the new year.

[71] **Russell George:** I agree with everything that Joyce Watson has said. I have been acting on behalf of one of my constituents who faced this particular issue. His family was unable to access the free hours but a neighbour, or at least a person living very nearby, just across the road, was able to do so. It seemed very unfair. I wrote to the Minister, and the Minister wrote back, the headline being that it was a matter for the local authority, but when I wrote to the local authority, it said that it was down to the Minister.

[72] **William Powell:** So, we have a game of ping-pong here.

[73] **Russell George:** That is the headline, although there was more detail in it. I will be watching this petition work its way through our committee very carefully, because I am very interested in this.

[74] **William Powell:** That is right. In all our surgeries, we see examples on a fairly regular basis and, as Joyce has indicated, I think that this will be a growing rather than a diminishing trend. Okay, we have an agreed plan to go forward there,

[75] We will now move to petition P-04-427, on a new Welsh-language law for Wales. This petition was submitted by Gethin Kurtis Sugar in October 2012 and has the support of 93 signatures. The petition reads,

[76] ‘We call on the Welsh Assembly to create a new Welsh language law as we feel that the current laws regarding the Welsh language do not go far enough to protect the rights of Welsh speakers.’

[77] This was considered initially in October, and we agreed to write to the Minister for Education and Skills and also to the Minister for Business, Enterprise, Technology and Science. A response has been received from both Ministers, and these are in our paper pack today. We can see fairly clearly the direction of travel there. I would suggest at this point that we share that correspondence with the petitioners and seek their views as to how they would wish to proceed. Are colleagues happy with that approach? I see that you are.

[78] We will move on to P-04-383, which is a petition against the nitrate vulnerable zone designation for Llangorse lake. This petition was submitted by Kaye Davies in March of this year and has collected 43 signatures.

[79] ‘We call on the Welsh Assembly Government to overturn the proposed NVZ on the basin of Llangorse lake, which is likely to affect approximately 25 farm businesses.’

[80] We initially considered this back in October and we agreed to write to the Minister. Also, back in the summer, we had a site visit up in Denbighshire, where the Williams family were kind enough to share with us their experience, which was useful for context setting. The response from the Minister is in our papers today. The critical issues here, as far as I read it, are the decision of the Welsh Planning Inspectorate on the designation and to see what is the current state of play. Do colleagues have any reflections on this petition or the wider context?

[81] **Joyce Watson:** We have had an in-depth response from the Minister and it is certainly worth giving that back to the petitioner and seeing whether that satisfies some of the issues that have been raised.

[82] **William Powell:** I fear that satisfaction is perhaps—

[83] **Joyce Watson:** Well, ‘covers’ the issues then.

[84] **William Powell:** Yes, it is certainly a comprehensive response.

[85] **Joyce Watson:** It is a comprehensive response. That is what I would suggest.

[86] **William Powell:** The petitioner must have the opportunity to read that; she has not, as yet, had access to it. That would be a sensible way forward for us to proceed. Clearly, this is a matter of great concern, not just in this particular community, but obviously this is an area-specific petition to the Llangorse area. So, let us do that; we will send a copy of that correspondence to Kaye Davies and her colleagues and await feedback in the new year.

[87] The next petition is P-04-417, 'Save Morfa Beach and Prevent the Closure of Public Footpaths 92 and 93'. This petition was submitted by Save Morfa Beach (Friends of Morfa) in October of this year and has collected 1,191 signatures.

[88] 'We ask the Welsh Assembly & Neath Port Talbot Council to preserve and maintain all rights of way on Margam Burrows, & to liaise with Tata Steel to ensure that public access to the beach is continued.'

[89] Our initial consideration of this was back in October and we agreed to write to the Minister, Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council and also to Tata Steel. We have received a response from all three and we have quite a comprehensive response in our public papers. I note particularly that Tata Steel has set the context of the nature of the wider site and the status of the particular rights of way. What we have not done as yet is to share any of these responses with the petitioners. Indeed, that is the next step, to get feedback from the petitioners, the Friends of Morfa, on the different submissions that we have received recently. So, if we agree to do that, we will then be in a better place early in 2013 to progress this petition. I see that everyone is agreed.

[90] The next petition is P-04-422 on fracking. This petition was submitted by Friends of the Earth Cymru in October 2012 and has collected approximately 1,000 signatures.

[91] 'We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Minister for Environment and Sustainable Development to produce a Ministerial Interim Minerals Planning Policy Statement as well as a new technical advice note to strengthen the precautionary principle with regard to planning applications for onshore oil and gas, including fracking.'

[92] We were obviously particularly busy in our October meeting because this was also considered for the first time in October 2012 and we agreed to write to the Minister for Environment and Sustainable Development to seek his views on this. Indeed, the petitioners have also been kind enough to provide quite a substantial piece of additional information. Both of those are available to us for consideration today.

[93] We probably need to extend this petition to the Welsh Local Government Association to get a steer from it as it represents a wider family of local authorities. Would colleagues support writing to Tim Peppin, the relevant director at the WLGA on planning and energy policy? Are there actions that you would suggest?

[94] **Elin Jones:** It is certainly worth exploring the views of the WLGA on whether it believes that the guidance available to it, in ultimately having to take views on potential applications, is robust enough at this stage.

[95] **William Powell:** We need its perspective, do we not?

[96] **Elin Jones:** This is a new element of work for local authorities and we need to be assured that they feel competent to undertake and be guided in that work. So, it is worth doing that and sharing the views of the Minister at this stage. In light of the response, it would also

be useful to pursue the issue with the Minister and the relevant committee. Are any of you members of the Environment and Sustainability Committee? I do not know whether that committee is undertaking any work on this.

[97] **William Powell:** This has not been a major focus for that committee. It was at the margins of our energy inquiry. It is fair to say that there was reference to it, but we did not undertake a significant piece of work on that. I do not know whether the Enterprise and Business Committee has touched on it in its wider remit on energy.

[98] **Joyce Watson:** No, it has not, but I think I hear what Elin is trying to say—I would never presume to speak for Elin, but only to support that if what she is saying is that we should go back and ask the committee for a particular focus on this, then I would support that.

[99] **Elin Jones:** Yes, it is. Thank you for anticipating what I was thinking. I think that I mixed up the Minister and the committee in what I said. If the committee were minded to do some work on this, then it would be useful for us to know because, if it were not, then perhaps it is an area that we could designate some time to and some scrutiny of the Minister's responses to us.

[100] **William Powell:** That suggestion is very timely, particularly in the context of some of the forward information that we are getting about the content of the autumn statement in relation to the wider issues around fracking. There is real merit in that suggestion.

[101] **Russell George:** Both the Chair and I are members of the Environment and Sustainability committee and I would support that suggestion. We should write to the committee on that. A very detailed piece of work has been carried out and I would not want the Minister not to see it. So, as a committee, we should share it with him.

[102] **William Powell:** That is an excellent idea. On his return from Doha, we would appreciate him giving this some further consideration because it is quite an in-depth piece of work and we need to ensure that it is on his desk and is getting the necessary attention. So, there is raft of actions there and I look forward to us returning to this in the new year in the light of the information that we receive.

9.45 a.m.

[103] Our next petition P-04-423, on Brooklands Nursing Home, was submitted by Darren Umanee in October 2012 and collected 115 signatures. Associated petitions collected in excess of 4,400 signatures. It reads:

[104] 'We call on the National Assembly of Wales to urge the Welsh Government to consider if residents of Brooklands Nursing Home would have their human rights infringed by the siting of the civic amenity site 30 metres from the home.'

[105] This has been an extremely controversial matter in this area of Pembrokeshire. We initially considered the matter back in October and we agreed at the time to write to John Griffiths seeking his views. Indeed, we have his response among our papers today. He makes a particular reference to the role of technical advice note 21 relating to siting of this kind. We have also received correspondence from Pembrokeshire County Council and, indeed, from the petitioners themselves. All of that is contained in our papers, as you will have read. We also agreed to commission a focused piece of research on this. That was a proposal made by Joyce Watson back in October. We have access to that as a private paper to inform our consideration of this. That has all been very useful indeed. I think that we should consider writing to Pembrokeshire County Council on this to share the further correspondence we have had from the petitioners and to seek some answers. Would colleagues support that approach?

[106] **Joyce Watson:** I will declare an interest because I have been against this planning application from the start. I visited the care home to speak to users and their relatives and the owners just two weeks ago. I will put that on the record. I had a site visit, which just confirmed my views yet again. I do not know whether any of you have also received this, but I have had in-depth correspondence from Pembrokeshire County Council on this particular application. In any case, that was in response to the letter that I sent to the council before the petition came to us. I am quite happy to share that with you because I think that it is right that we all have the same information. We should certainly share with the petitioners the response from the Minister, John Griffiths, directing us to TAN 21. We should definitely send that letter to them. As a committee, I think that we need to write to Pembrokeshire County Council. The thing to remember at this stage is that there is no planning application, but, from all the evidence that I have been given, which I will now share with the committee, there seems to be a move in that direction.

[107] **William Powell:** I think that it is definitely moving in that direction. A significant amount of resource has been put in by the county council and I think that it is minded to go to Pembrokeshire Coast National Park with this application early in the new year. I would also like to register my own strong objection in principle to this particular application. My office has also undertaken a visit and I will be looking to follow that up myself, so I need to join you in making that declaration of interest, Joyce. However, it would also be very helpful if you could share the information you have with us as a committee, as you have indicated that you are ready to do. That would be useful. Thanks very much. Are there any other comments on this one, colleagues? I see that there are none.

[108] The next petition is P-03-263, 'List Stradey Park'. This is one of our more mature petitions. It was submitted by Vaughan Jones in November 2009 and collected 4,383 signatures. It reads:

[109] 'We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Minister for Heritage to grant listed status to Stradey Park, in order to protect the heritage of this world famous rugby ground and cultural icon for the people of Wales.'

[110] We last considered this petition in October when we agreed to write to the Minister for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage. We have his response in our papers today. There is a reference to a forthcoming report, which would be relevant to how this is determined. Realistically, we should await the publication of that report, and the indication is that it is imminent. That is probably the best way forward. It would be difficult to do anything without the benefit of that report. So, that is an agreed action: to return to this in the new year with the benefit of the report.

[111] We now move to petition P-04-322, which is a call to revise Cadw's hold upon churches in Wales. This petition was submitted by Graham John in June 2011, and it collected 147 signatures. The wording of the petition is as follows:

[112] 'We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to investigate the inflexible way in which Cadw enforces its regulations upon active, vibrant congregations using listed buildings across Wales, thereby keeping them in a state of architectural inertia, unable to take advantage of modern developments in building materials and making it difficult for churches to make changes necessary for them to serve the coming generation and the local community.'

[113] We last considered this petition in October and we wrote, again, to the Minister for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage. We have his response before us today. Russell, you indicated that you wished to speak.

[114] **Russell George:** I agree with the sentiments of this petition. I think that it is a very important petition. I have read the letter from the Minister. He stated that he has tasked his officials in Cadw with initiating a task and finish group in the new year; so, all that we can do at this present time is write to the Minister and ask him to keep us up to date on the developments.

[115] **William Powell:** Yes; and we need to know when the task and finish group will be established, who will be serving on it, and that these issues are very much on the group's agenda. Just last week, in that Minister's question session in Plenary, there were two questions relating to places of worship and their wider use. I know that Elin Jones is dealing with a particular issue with regard to the Roman Catholic community in Aberystwyth and its attachment to its particular church. I do not know whether that is listed or not.

[116] **Elin Jones:** It is not. That is the problem.

[117] **William Powell:** This is clearly a matter of grave importance across Wales.

[118] **Russell George:** I agree. Let us write with the points that you have raised.

[119] **William Powell:** I will be happy to do so. Are there any other points on this petition, colleagues? I see that there are none. I assume that you are happy to proceed.

[120] We will now move to petition P-04-403, 'Saving Plas Cwrt yn Dre/Old Parliament', which was submitted by Sian Ifan in July 2012 and collected 218 signatures. The petition is worded as follows:

[121] 'We call upon the National Assembly of Wales to instruct the Welsh Government to purchase Plas Cwrt yn Dre also known as Dolgellau's Old Parliament House before this national treasure is sold on the open market and lost for ever.'

[122] As you recall, we most recently considered this petition in October, and we agreed, once again, to write to the Minister for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage to seek his views on this matter. Once again, we have had quite a substantial response from him. What are your views on this petition, in light of what Huw Lewis has to say?

[123] **Joyce Watson:** I think that, first, we should simply seek the petitioner's views on the correspondence that we have received. Once we get that response, perhaps we can move to the next stage.

[124] **William Powell:** We would then have a steer as to how they wish to proceed. Are there any other comments on this petition at this stage? I see that there are none. Therefore, let us agree to do that, and we will return to it in the new year.

[125] We now move to petition P-04-420, Construct an Owain Glyndwr Monument. This petition was submitted by Russell Gwilym Morris in October 2012 and collected 74 signatures. It reads:

[126] 'We call upon the Welsh Government to construct a Monument to Owain Glyndwr on the scale and grandeur of the William Wallace Monument at Stirling, Scotland.'

[127] We made our initial consideration of this back in October, and indeed once again wrote to Huw Lewis on the issue. We have his response here in our papers. In the cause of consistency we should seek Mr Gwilym Morris's views and the views of his fellow petitioners on what Huw Lewis has said in his letter. Also, probably, in the context of that

letter, we could ask whether there has been any consideration given to a monument funded by public subscription or donation, which has been flagged up in the correspondence. Is that a sensible way forward? I see that you are agreed, so we will do that.

[128] Now we move to the equalities section of our agenda and P-03-301, calling for equality for the transgender community. This petition was submitted by Transgender Wales in September 2010 and has the support of 113 signatures. It reads:

[129] ‘We the undersigned call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to ensure that the transgender community is given equal support and direct assistance comparable to that given to other communities such as Sexual Orientation support groups to promote equality and awareness for the transgender community.’

[130] We last considered this petition back in September of last year, and we agreed to await the results of the review of the Wales gender dysphoria policy. The Welsh Government has provided quite a detailed update saying that the Welsh health specialist services committee has now completed its review of this policy area, which is accessible to the wider public. This report made six recommendations, which you have detailed before you. There are some quite specific issues there. It would probably be wise for us to go back to the petitioners—particularly given that there has been a bit of a hiatus in consideration of this from September last year, and the petition has been taken on by the wider group again—and seek their views. We have a substantial piece of work here for them to respond to. Are there any actions, colleagues, that you would like us to undertake at this time? If I write to the lead petitioners on the matter, I think that that is probably best. Then we can come to consider this afresh in the new year in the light of their responses. Are Members happy with that? I see that you are.

[131] That brings us to the end of our agenda, and actually to quite a poignant moment, because the lady sitting to my extreme left, Sarita Marshall, is going to be moving on. This is, in fact, her last day. It has been 11 years that she has worked for the National Assembly and, indeed, in the fourth Assembly she has been a major contributor to the work of the Petitions Committee in her role as deputy clerk. I would like to put on record my thanks, and the thanks of the committee, to Sarita for that.

[132] Diolch o galon, a phob lwc yn y Sincere thanks for that, and good luck in the
gwaith newydd. new work.

[133] I think that it is really important. Sarita is moving to work for the Welsh Government, and she has a great future ahead. We shall miss her significantly, and I am sure that colleagues are of like mind.

[134] I wish all colleagues, Members and the clerking team:

[135] Nadolig llawen a blwyddyn newydd a merry Christmas and a happy new year.
dda.

[136] The first meeting of the spring term will be on 15 January. I just remind you, colleagues, that we have a double petition presentation: at 12.30 p.m. the Scope petition, and at 1 p.m. the Bronllys Hospital petition. I look forward to catching up with you and the petitioners later on.

Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 10.00 a.m.
The meeting ended at 10.00 a.m.