



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

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau **The Petitions Committee**

Dydd Mawrth, 24 Medi 2013
Tuesday, 24 September 2013

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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
Bethan Jenkins	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

Kayleigh Driscoll	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Steve George	Clerc Clerk
Helen Roberts	Cynghorydd Cyfreithiol Legal Adviser
Kath Thomas	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 09:00.
The meeting began at 09:00.

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **William Powell:** Bore da, bawb, a **William Powell:** Good morning, everyone, chroeso cynnes iawn i sesiwn gyntaf y tymor and a very warm welcome to this first session newydd. of the new term.

[2] There are no apologies, and I hope that we will shortly be joined by our colleague Russell George. A particular welcome this morning to our new clerk, Steve George, and, indeed, to Kath Thomas, who will be acting in an additional support role to the committee's work from now on.

09:01

Deisebau Newydd
New Petitions

[3] **William Powell:** We have a number of new petitions before us this morning. The first is P-04-496, Through Schools. This petition was submitted by Dawn Dox and collected 10 signatures. It reads:

[4] 'We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to introduce guidance for local education authorities on school mergers and closures involving all-through schools (ie schools which provide primary, secondary and post 16 education on the same site).

[5] We ask such guidance to:

- [6] prevent the creation of dual/multi site schools...
- [7] prevent the creation of dual/multi site schools, involving all-through schools...
- [8] recognise parental and learner preference for all-through schools and require local authorities to meet demand for such schools...
- [9] promote the establishment and continuation of all-through schools'
- [10] and finally to
- [11] 'ensure that no learners, as result of a school closure or merger involving an all-through school, should be forced to travel for more than 45 minutes to access suitable alternative faith education provision.'
- [12] So, there is quite a detailed set of points to support the petition. This is our first consideration of it. I propose that, at this point, we write to the Minister for Education and Skills to seek his views on what the petition is proposing.
- [13] **Joyce Watson:** Agreed.
- [14] **William Powell:** Excellent.
- [15] Moving now to P-04-497, National Graduate Housing Scheme, this was submitted by GWYRDDISM.
- [16] 'We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to support construction of Housing for Graduate Students.'
- [17] You will have read in the supporting statement some of the proposals that this individual or group wishes to see implemented. I think that, at this stage, our best first course is to write to the Minister for Housing and Regeneration to seek his perspective on the petition.
- [18] **Joyce Watson:** Agreed.
- [19] **Bethan Jenkins:** I do not really understand though, to be honest.
- [20] **William Powell:** I am struggling a little as well.
- [21] **Bethan Jenkins:** Graduates would not necessarily stay together after they had graduated.
- [22] **William Powell:** The proposal appears to be to sort of foster communities where there is a critical mass of people of graduate status, to almost—
- [23] **Bethan Jenkins:** Could we ask for clarification from the petitioner, because it would help me to understand? I can appreciate—I have read all of what they said that they want to do, but I am finding it difficult to understand how you would find that critical mass—
- [24] **William Powell:** It is an interesting concept.
- [25] **Bethan Jenkins:** —unless there were, I do not know, lots of jobs in a given area, so they could stay, live together and have their own community, but I do not know how that is possible.

[26] **Joyce Watson:** Neither do I.

[27] **Bethan Jenkins:** I know that the Minister may have a view, but I would just like to understand.

[28] **William Powell:** I think that, in the meantime, there would be no harm at all in seeking further clarification from GWYRDDISM as to how it would see that taking shape in practice. I am happy to do that.

[29] **Mr George:** So, it is to both, is it? To both the Minister and the—

[30] **William Powell:** To the Minister, I think, and—yes. Then we could—. Should the Minister then—. We could then put that forward to the Minister for clarification also.

[31] The next petition is P-04-498, To get Wales educated. This petition was submitted by Matthew Hopkins and collected 12 signatures.

[32] ‘We the undersigned call on the Welsh Government to encourage children from primary school age to stay in education to university level’.

[33] That is obviously quite a broad aspiration, which would probably enjoy a good degree of support from many, but I think we probably have to write again to the Minister for Education and Skills to seek his views, as we normally do.

[34] **Joyce Watson:** Agreed.

[35] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes.

[36] **William Powell:** Excellent. We move on to P-04-499, Kick Start the Welsh Language Curriculum. This petition was submitted by Eva Bowers and Lauren Davies, and has the support of 19 signatures.

[37] ‘We the undersigned call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to change the Welsh Language Curriculum in Secondary Schools; in order to encourage the Welsh Language to be used in a conversational manner rather than teaching Cymraeg to pass an examination’.

[38] Again, an interesting approach in this particular petition.

[39] **Bethan Jenkins:** Do they realise there are oral elements to the curriculum as it stands?

[40] **William Powell:** It is being promoted by two pupils who are in education in Llanelli, so I would imagine that they are aware of the current things, but possibly are looking for a rebalancing or greater focus on colloquial or everyday usage. If we were to write, again, to the Minister for Education and Skills—we are keeping him fairly busy with our concerns—just to get his initial views, that would help. Maybe further down the line we can be in touch with the petitioners to get further clarification as to how they would see that developing.

[41] The next petition is P-04-500, Call for Regulation of Animal Welfare Establishments in Wales. This petition was submitted by Lisa Winnett and collected 265 signatures.

[42] ‘We the undersigned, call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to regulate Animal Welfare Establishments and legislate for compulsory

requirements be met by all animal rescue establishments in line with the report produced by the AWW Animal Welfare Establishments Working Group October 2012. The Welsh Government need to put in place legislation for Wales under the Animal Welfare Act(2006), to protect animals from neglect and abuse’.

[43] So ends the text of the petition. The first principle is that we should be writing to the Minister for Natural Resources and Food to seek his perspective.

[44] **Ms Roberts:** The petition makes reference to the Animal Welfare Act 2006, and therefore I would like to just clarify a few points relating to the Act, which may assist the committee, given that this is the first consideration of this petition. I would just like to say, Chair, that the principal statute in this area was the Protection of Animals Act 1911, and that Act has now been superseded by this present Act, which is the Animal Welfare Act 2006. It is widely regarded as being one of the most significant pieces of animal welfare legislation, and it consolidated 20 other pieces of legislation. It simplifies the law and also modernises the law as well. It is an Act that has 66 sections and two Schedules. In a nutshell, the Act was implemented in Wales on 27 March 2007, and one of the key things to note about the Act is that it extends existing powers to make secondary legislation to promote the welfare of farm animals and non-farm animals. It introduces, for example, a duty of care on owners and keepers of pet, farm and captive wild animals to ensure the welfare of animals. It also includes provisions that deter offenders and sets out penalties, and also allows for codes of practice to be brought forward. Of particular interest to the committee may be section 12, which relates to regulations to promote welfare, and also section 13, which covers the licensing or registration of activities involving animals. The Welsh Government has brought forward various pieces of secondary legislation under the provisions of section 12, for example. The Welsh Government has also published a range of codes relating to animals under this Act. So, that is just to give you some context, Chair.

[45] **William Powell:** Thank you very much indeed. That is going to be helpful to us, and we will probably be looking to you again for some more assistance in considering this matter.

[46] **Joyce Watson:** As I understand it, at the moment, there is a debate going on and an inquiry into the number of people to the number of dogs kept, because the ratio was 1:20. There was a dispute, particularly with regard to breeding dogs, as to whether that was an adequate number, because, obviously, if they are breeding, they have puppies, and so there is a question as to whether you include the puppies in that number or not. I think that I am right in saying that the Minister is reconsidering that, or is giving consideration to that element. That may well be the point that is being made here, where they are asking about regulating rescue centres, as I understand it. I am not even sure that there is any regulation at all at the moment for rescue centres, though they obviously would have the regulation—sorry, ‘any inspection’ is what I meant to say. So, I think that it is an interesting petition—I find it interesting, I have to say. It might be worth writing back. First of all, we have to write to the Minister, but, secondly, we could ask for greater detail about what exactly they would like us to look at, so that it helps to inform what we do.

[47] **William Powell:** I think that there is scope for us possibly to undertake a focused piece of work on this issue—

[48] **Joyce Watson:** I think so.

[49] **William Powell:**—for the very reason that you highlighted, namely that there is an absence of regulation in this particular area.

[50] **Joyce Watson:** The regulation is there to protect animals; it is whether there are any inspections.

[51] **William Powell:** But in relation to the centres and so on. Yes.

[52] **Russell George:** It may be useful, Chair, for us to have a copy of the transcript of the legal advice that we have just received in our agenda next time. That would be useful for us, if that is—.

[53] **William Powell:** Yes, it would be good to have that summary to aid the next consideration.

[54] **Ms Roberts:** Chair, thank you for the points that you have raised. Obviously, this is the first consideration of this particular petition. I have not done any further work in looking at the detail of it as yet, but I take your point and I will look into whether current regulations are in place and what the current framework is that may cover this. I am more than happy to provide a legal briefing note to the committee that will be, hopefully, concise and clear.

[55] **William Powell:** Excellent. Thank you very much.

[56] The next petition is P-04-501, Day Centres for the elderly in Wales to be made statutory. This petition was submitted by Pamela Hughes, and collected 204 signatures.

[57] ‘We call on the Welsh Government to make Day Care Centres for older people a statutory requirement for the whole of Wales.’

[58] We have previously considered, and will do so later under today’s agenda, issues around a particular day centre in Aberystwyth. There may well be a need to look back at this issue in the light of that when we come back to the issue later in the agenda. How do you propose to proceed on this one, colleagues, in the first instance?

[59] **Joyce Watson:** I think that we have to write to the Minister for Health and Social Services. Again, I find this an interesting petition. I do not know that there is any area of Wales—I talk about any area, but I mean any local authority or unitary authority—that does not provide day centres. I do not expect to find that it is the case that they are not. It may be that that is why it is not statutory, if it is not—again, I am not sure about that—because it happens anyway. Again, I would like to know exactly what is behind the petition. However, I do find it interesting, and I know that people avail themselves of excellent day care centres right across Wales.

09:15

[60] **Bethan Jenkins:** It would come within the social services budget of the council. Obviously, there is the wider discussion, with some people calling to amalgamate health and social services, because obviously—

[61] **William Powell:** Absolutely, with pooled budgets and all that.

[62] **Bethan Jenkins:** Some councils would choose to close day care centres because of affordability, potentially, so we would have to anticipate that.

[63] **William Powell:** Picking off non-statutory services in order to deliver what—

[64] **Bethan Jenkins:** Libraries being one of the other easier areas for local councils to consult on closure.

[65] **William Powell:** Yes, with the dilemmas that they face.

[66] **Russell George:** I think that we have to write to the Minister for Health and Social Services as the first step, Chair.

[67] **William Powell:** Yes; I shall do that in the first instance on behalf of the committee. This is one that we will be doing some further work on, as Joyce indicated.

[68] The next item is P-04-502, Wellbeing Centre for Wales. This petition was submitted by Wellbeing Wales and collected 52 signatures.

[69] ‘We the undersigned call on the Welsh Assembly to urge the Welsh Government to establish a new Wellbeing Centre for Wales that would put individual and community wellbeing...at the heart of Welsh politics, and that would be core-funded by government.’

[70] This is quite some aspiration. Again, in line with normal practice, we should write, in the first instance, to the relevant Minister, the Minister for Health and Social Services, to seek his perspective on the petition. I see that colleagues are agreed.

[71] We move now to P-04-503, Regeneration of Ton and Pentre. This petition was submitted by Mike Powell and collected 389 signatures.

[72] ‘We call on the National Assembly to urge the Welsh Government to give special consideration for the use of European Regional Funding to redevelop Ton and Pentre in the Rhondda Valley.’

[73] At this initial stage, we need to write to the Minister for Housing and Regeneration to see what his take is on what the petitioner is proposing. Are we agreed? I see that we are. Excellent.

09:17

Y Wybodaeth Ddiweddaraf am Ddeisebau Blaenorol Updates to Previous Petitions

[74] **William Powell:** We now move to a very full section of our agenda, which is agenda item 3 on the updates to previous petitions. We start with P-03-240, Road safety on the A40 in Llanddewi Velfrey. Colleagues will recall that this was submitted by Llanddewi Velfrey Community Council back in the early days of this Assembly, in July 2011, and had the support of 154 signatures. We have considered this on a number of occasions, and you can see detailed in the original text of the petition a whole range of improvements and enhancements to road safety, the driver experience and the safety of pedestrians that the petitioners were looking to advance. It is fair to say that a number of those have been delivered. Joyce, I am keen to ask for your perspective on this because I know that you have met the petitioners relatively recently and you fed into a previous meeting on this. The Minister has now responded following our most recent correspondence, and we have also got comments back from the petitioner on her response. Joyce, may I ask you to come in on this one?

[75] **Joyce Watson:** I went there and stood in the rain—it does sometimes rain in Wales—with the petitioners. We were incredibly close to the heavy goods traffic that was coming along the road, so I have first-hand knowledge and experience of what it is that they are talking about, as they have every single day. I think that the Minister’s letter does give some hope, certainly to me—I welcome it—and to the residents. The fact that she says that she is going to appoint an employer’s agent to progress this is positive, and I am hoping that that

will be fairly soon; I understand that it will be. If we do anything further, it may be to try to ascertain when that programme might happen.

[76] **William Powell:** Indeed. We are probably not far from being in a position to close the petition. However, I think that that might be premature just at the moment, while we wait for the next step.

[77] **Joyce Watson:** I would not close it until that has happened.

[78] **William Powell:** No. I think that we are all very happy to note the positive tone of the Minister's response.

[79] **Joyce Watson:** Indeed; it is positive.

[80] **William Powell:** We will get back to the Minister, asking her just to keep us up to date with the next steps in the process. We can hopefully regard this as a significant success story for that community, and the rest of us who use that road and cross that community on our travels will have cause to note and, obviously, to comply with any new restrictions that apply. So, that is how we shall take that one.

[81] The next petition is P-04-363, Town Centre Improvement Scheme for Fishguard. This petition was submitted by Councillor Bob Kilmister in February 2012, with the support of 1,042 signatures. We last considered it back in July, and we agreed to undertake a number of things. We wrote to the South West Wales Integrated Transport Consortium, asking for an update on the progress of the Fishguard proposals. We also wrote to Pembrokeshire County Council, highlighting the correspondence that we had previously had from the Welsh Government, and encouraging it to progress the new regeneration scheme. As you will have seen, we have responses from SWWITCH and from Pembrokeshire council. It is fairly clear that there is no current funding in place under the Vibrant and Viable Places regeneration scheme that the Minister had initially referred to. However, again, we are close to the next budget round for local authorities, as they are looking into 2013-14, and beyond. I wonder whether it would be worth our while, as a committee, to still seek to monitor the situation going into the next year. What do colleagues think on this one? I know that those of us who are familiar with Fishguard know that this scheme is highly desirable, for similar reasons to the ones that Joyce outlined in relation to pedestrian safety with the previous petition, which is an important aspect. Joyce, as you are the most local to this immediate situation in terms of where you live, would you like to comment on this?

[82] **Joyce Watson:** I also know a little of the history, as a former Pembrokeshire councillor. I would not want to see the scheme dead and buried, because people in that area really hope for the improvement to happen. It is a matter of how it happens for those people, and when it happens—sooner rather than later, I am sure. We can only note what is in front of us as a committee. We know that it will not be done this year. However, you are quite right to say that there will be another round, and that there might be other criteria. It is worth writing back to SWWITCH—and copying in Fishguard councillors, and Pembrokeshire County Council—stating that we hope that it can be considered in a future programme of theirs, the council and the Government. This sort of scheme is a sort of tripartite arrangement, really.

[83] **William Powell:** Yes, and joint funding would need to apply, would it not? May I double check something? Have we, as yet, shared the responses back to the petitioner?

[84] **Mr George:** Yes, and we have had a short response from the petitioner.

[85] **William Powell:** Okay, I had overlooked that. I think that that is probably the best way forward. Are you happy with that approach, colleagues, that we seek to promote the

scheme within the next budget round, or at least that it is kept there for consideration?

[86] **Bethan Jenkins:** I have one point. I am not an expert on this particular area, but, in the letter from the director of development of Pembrokeshire County Council, he says that the scheme does not score well under the current arrangements of the Vibrant and Viable Places regeneration scheme. Perhaps there is potential to go back and look at the plans to see how they could fit better, if that is the case, and if they need to be amended in any way so that the criteria are met.

[87] **William Powell:** Yes, so that they are a better fit as such.

[88] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes, so that the criteria are met, so that we are not in the same position again with rejection being the first port of call, because perhaps some of the schemes within the development would not necessarily fit.

[89] **William Powell:** So, the concept might need to be refined in some way, to fit and to be eligible.

[90] **Bethan Jenkins:** It is just something that we can throw back at them and say, 'We will keep it open, but perhaps you could explore these opportunities'.

[91] **William Powell:** Yes, so as to refine whatever has been proposed. Okay, good. Thanks for that. That is the way in which we shall proceed.

[92] We have previously agreed to group the next three petitions. They are P-04-406, Against Proposed MCZ zones in North Wales; P-04-411, Petition Against Marine Conservation Zones in Pembrokeshire; and the counter petition, effectively, P-04-415, Support for Designation of Highly Protected Marine Conservation Zones. You may recall that, as a committee, we received the first petition, the north Wales one, when we were on an outreach visit and held our committee meeting in Wrexham, some significant time ago. The whole issue has moved on, in relation to a ministerial announcement. I think that it would be fair to say that the first two petitions have broadly been vindicated in terms of what the Minister has announced. So, I think that it would probably be sensible to draw the first two, P-04-406 and P-04-411, to a conclusion. Russell, you have indicated that you wanted to speak.

[93] **Russell George:** I was just going to suggest what you just suggested, Chair. I think that we have been quite diligent on this petition. We have met the petitioners. If you look at the wording of the petitions, you will see that they have now largely been addressed by the Minister's statement. So, I think that we should close the petitions.

[94] **William Powell:** Yes, the first two, certainly. I need to draw to your attention to something that came in after 9 p.m. last night. We have had an update in the form of an article from the petitioner in relation to P-04-415, which will be shared among committee members. As a courtesy to that petitioner, although it was a fairly late submission for our deliberations today, we should give that some further consideration. That is the final of the three petitions. However, I sense that the direction of travel is fairly clear, given the announcements. I will look to make that available to all colleagues.

[95] **Russell George:** Are you suggesting that we do not close that one petition for the moment, until we have had chance to look at that?

[96] **William Powell:** I think that there is a limited prospect of change, but I just thought that, given that we have information from the petitioner, it might be better, procedurally, for us to—

[97] **Bethan Jenkins:** It is difficult for us to make a decision when we have not seen what you are talking about.

[98] **William Powell:** Absolutely. I received this information at 8.50 a.m. this morning and I am just alerting you to it now. That is why I thought that it was unwise to formally close it.

[99] **Bethan Jenkins:** I am okay with that. It is flexible.

[100] **William Powell:** That was the advice that I received. The first two are clearly closed and I think that we are all happy with an outbreak of consensus on that one. Excellent. We will revisit P-04-415 next time.

[101] The next petition is P-04-426, Introduce a mandatory 40mph speed limit on the A487 at Blaenporth Ceredigion. This petition was submitted by Aberporth Community Council in October 2012 and we last considered it back in May. We considered correspondence on the petition and agreed to await the completion of the speed limit review and to write to the petitioner with an update on progress. Now we have confirmation that, subject to statutory consultation, which needs to take place, the 40 mph speed limit will be introduced in accordance with the petitioners' wishes. So, for this community, this is a particularly good outcome. We have clarity in the Minister's letter that their aspirations have been met. So, congratulations to them. So, I think that we should close this, and there could be an opportunity to use it as an example of what communities can achieve by engaging with us and using the petitions process. So, I am really pleased for them and I agree that we should close it. Do you want to come in there, Joyce?

09:30

[102] **Joyce Watson:** Yes. I am very pleased with the Minister's response here; she has clearly responded to the petitioners. I drive along there regularly, as does Elin Jones, whom I have spotted in the public gallery. I know that she supports this, as well. It is a case of success and a very determined group of individuals doing the right thing for their area, which is fantastic. In my view, it should have been a 40 mph speed limit a long time ago, but it is going to happen and it is great. I sincerely hope that nobody objects—they certainly should not object—and holds up that process.

[103] **William Powell:** Absolutely. Thanks for that. Also, I know that our colleague Rebecca Evans has taken some interest in this in her regional role. I should make reference to that as well. Excellent.

[104] **Bethan Jenkins:** In previous Petitions Committee meetings, we have talked about perhaps producing something short when we have had successes—not now, but potentially at the end of the year—something with all of the petitions that have been successful and quotes from the petitioners, or from the Assembly Members who have been involved. Even petitions that have morphed into successes in other ways could be included. I know that the Welsh Government, for example, has announced a scheme to award people through the St David's Awards, which started off as a petition. So, I think that we have to be conscious of showing people how this is a door to the Assembly.

[105] **William Powell:** Absolutely. We have to communicate this, so that people understand how they can engage with us and take forward things that matter to them. Agreed.

[106] We move on to P-04-435, Wales & Border Railways Franchise 2018 to be Operated on a Not-for-Dividend Basis. This petition was submitted by Merlyn Cooper in November

2012 and collected 35 signatures. It says,

[107] ‘We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to ensure that the next the Wales & the Border franchise is operated on a not-for-dividend basis.’

[108] We last considered this on 18 June and we agreed at that time to write to the Minister for Economy, Science and Transport asking that the petitioner be included on the consultation list for the future consultation. We received a response from the Minister on 8 July and, to be fair, she has agreed to do this. So, we are having a series of positive experiences of this Minister in today’s meeting, which is really good.

[109] We have had no significant comment back from the petitioner, but it is fair to say that there is a degree of satisfaction that awareness of the whole issue has been raised, and some recent press articles were forwarded to us by the petitioner in that connection. Given that this renewal is not up for consideration until midway into the next Assembly, this has probably run as far as it usefully can, so I propose that we close it. Are colleagues happy with that approach?

[110] **Joyce Watson:** I agree.

[111] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes.

[112] **William Powell:** The next item is P-04-486. This is a matter that is never far from the headlines these days—Act Now and Help Save the High Street Shops. It was submitted by Keith Davies in June 2013 and collected 12 signatures. It says,

[113] ‘We call on the National Assembly to urge the Welsh Government to provide support for independent traders in our towns by extending the small Business Relief Scheme to a greater number of businesses.’

[114] We as a committee considered this petition for the first time in June and I think that the petitioner might well be in the public gallery. Is that correct? I see that it is indeed, so welcome. We considered this on 4 June and wrote to the Minister for Economy, Science and Transport seeking her views. We also wrote to the petitioner asking to what extent he had engaged with other chambers of trade. The Minister wrote back on 20 June. The petitioner has seen the Minister’s letter and, indeed, has indicated that a number of fellow chambers of trade across Ceredigion are in support of the petition. We also have the correspondence received in our papers today. What are the possible actions on this one?

[115] **Russell George:** I should put on the record that I do have a small business myself, which pays business rates. However, as a result I do understand the concerns of small businesses and the challenges that they have at the moment, particularly on the high street. I think that it would be very useful if we could do some further work on this. I appreciate that we do not have a great deal of time, but perhaps we could schedule an oral session to take evidence from the petitioner, and perhaps the Federation of Small Businesses.

[116] **William Powell:** The FSB can have a role, absolutely.

[117] **Russell George:** We could include other bodies, possibly chambers of trade, and perhaps we could also have some research briefing on the issues in Scotland and how the system works there. That would also be useful for us, as would some information on the situation in England. However, I would like to do some further work on this, Chair.

[118] **William Powell:** That ties in with my views. I suppose that, given your declaration, I should declare that I am a director of the Talgarth mill regeneration scheme, which

incorporates a shop and retail activity. Therefore, just for the sake of completeness, I should make that declaration. However, I would certainly favour taking this a step forward and I would just like to gauge other colleagues' views as to how best to—

[119] **Bethan Jenkins:** If we take oral evidence, could we go out to an area, perhaps? I am happy to go to the petitioner's area to see what the experiences are because, sometimes, when we take oral evidence here it is difficult to get an idea of the everyday pressures. It would be interesting to have a site visit.

[120] **William Powell:** Yes, and also to see a couple of high streets in context.

[121] **Bethan Jenkins:** Exactly.

[122] **William Powell:** I know that Joyce's committee, for example, went on a visit to Narberth in relation to similar issues.

[123] **Bethan Jenkins:** I also know that the petitioner has contacted other chambers of trade in his vicinity.

[124] **William Powell:** Yes, outside Ceredigion.

[125] **Bethan Jenkins:** I know that there are others across Wales.

[126] **William Powell:** In your region and elsewhere.

[127] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes; they would be really interested. I know that there are lots, but I think that if we are going to do something, it would warrant contacting lots of the town ones.

[128] **William Powell:** Yes, we need to home in on one or two.

[129] **Bethan Jenkins:** We could then get a fully comprehensive view across Wales and then compare and contrast people's opinions. There might be very similar opinions, but there might be different views in bigger towns, smaller towns and so forth.

[130] **Joyce Watson:** Chair, you are quite right to say that we did a piece of work on rates in the Enterprise and Business Committee, which was undertaken very recently. I think that the first thing that you might need to do is apprise yourselves of some of the work that has been done there. You will then find the research paper that was suggested.

[131] The other thing is that the Minister, in her reply, has said that this is an ongoing piece of work. Perhaps it would be worth finding out when the task and finish group will report its findings about costing, because we have to be clear. I always shop locally. Like everyone else, I have seen the devastation on the high street, which is happening around us. At the end of the day, it is not just the Assembly and the Assembly alone that feeds into rate relief, or even rate-setting, as you will find when you read the report that was compiled earlier this year. There were a few things: first of all, get hold of that report; secondly, ask the Minister, which I believe is absolutely vital, when her piece of work will be finished—

[132] **William Powell:** At the same time as that, perhaps we could also highlight the further concerns of the petitioners, which the Minister will not have had the opportunity, as yet, to see.

[133] **Joyce Watson:** Quite clearly. I will go anywhere in Wales to listen to people. I cover two-thirds of it, as you do, so I am well travelled. In Ceredigion, the main shopping centre—well, there are three, probably. So, it is Cardigan, Aberaeron and Aberystwyth—and

Machynlleth, I suppose. No, Machynlleth is just the other side.

[134] **William Powell:** It is just across the border.

[135] **Joyce Watson:** So, those three would be main shopping areas—because we are talking about shops. If you are going to go for the middle, you would go to Aberaeron, would you not? If you wanted people to travel, you would go to Aberaeron, as it is almost equidistant from Cardigan and Aberystwyth.

[136] **William Powell:** I think that we can sort out the fine details of the itinerary and so on nearer the time.

[137] **Russell George:** Joyce makes a good point about the timing. We could write to the Minister about the timing of the task and finish group. Potentially, if we could do this piece of work and feed into the Minister's task and finish group, it would be beneficial.

[138] **William Powell:** That would be a joined-up way of approaching it, would it not?

[139] **Joyce Watson:** Aberaeron has the Ceredigion County Council HQ; I am sure that they can give us a room.

[140] **Bethan Jenkins:** Also, there is a new cross-party group.

[141] **William Powell:** Yes, one has just been launched.

[142] **Bethan Jenkins:** I know that we do not refer to cross-party groups any more, but it may be useful, just to let the group know—

[143] **William Powell:** To draw on their thoughts or whatever.

[144] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes. If we are going to do a piece of work, it may be useful for them to be aware of it.

[145] **William Powell:** I think that that is right. Clearly, this petition stimulates considerable interest, and there are a number of things that we will be following up. I am grateful to the lead petitioner for taking the trouble to join us in the public gallery again this morning.

[146] We move now to P-04-343, Prevent the destruction of amenities on common land—Anglesey. This petition was submitted by J.E. Futter in November 2011 and it collected 156 signatures. It states:

[147] ‘We call upon the Welsh Government to examine ways to prevent the destruction of amenities on common land, including for example the Marian Common in Llangoed, Ynys Môn.’

[148] We considered correspondence on this petition back on 16 July in our final meeting of the last term, and we agreed to write to the Minister for Culture and Sport, under whose remit common land falls, asking what support could be given to communities such as the one where the petitioners live. Dependent upon the programme of events, we considered the possibility of a site visit. I suspect that that now, in terms of our autumn programme, is not likely to fit in. However, we gave some thought to the possibility of inviting these petitioners to come across to the meeting that we are contemplating having in north Wales on 11 November. Would colleagues welcome the opportunity to have a short presentation from these petitioners, or a short meeting with them, if they were interested and prepared to come

when we are in north Wales? Would that make a lot of sense?

[149] **Joyce Watson:** Yes, I would be happy with that.

[150] **William Powell:** That is probably the principal action for us to undertake on that one: to write to them to see if they can join us.

[151] **Ms Roberts:** Chair, given that the Commons Act has been referred to in the correspondence from the Minister, it may be of assistance if I concisely clarify a few points. The current legal framework relating to these issues is contained in the Commons Registration Act 1965 and in the Commons Act 2006. Basically, the Commons Act 2006 includes provisions for updating and maintaining common land registers in Wales and England. The Welsh Government is responsible for implementing that Act in Wales, and the Welsh Ministers act as the appropriate national authority in Wales. The key aims of the Act—just two of them—are to protect common land from development and to improve the protection of common land from neglect and abuse. Part 3 of the Act covers works, and, as the letter from the Minister dated 14 August 2013 outlines, section 38 is of particular relevance to this particular petition, because it relates to prohibition on works without consent. Section 41 of the Commons Act 2006 is also relevant, because it relates to enforcement. The letter is very useful; it sets out the law and it sets out the analysis relating to this particular petition. I just thought that I would clarify those points.

[152] **William Powell:** That is a very useful context. If we can also have the transcript of that for that future meeting where we will hopefully have the opportunity to meet the petitioner and colleagues, it would be really useful to inform the discussion. Thank you very much.

09:45

[153] We now move on to an update on P-04-399, Slaughter Practices. This petition was submitted by Royce Clifford in June 2012 and collected 400 signatures. It calls upon the National Assembly,

[154] ‘to urge the Welsh Government to ban the practise of slaughtering animals without pre-stunning them.’

[155] We considered correspondence relating to this petition at our meeting on 2 July, and we agreed at that stage to write to the Minister for Natural Resources and Food asking for a timetable for consideration of this issue. On 28 July, the Minister responded to that, and the petitioner has also given his perspective on that response. We have both sets of correspondence with us today. There is a timetable laid down in relation to the new EC regulation on this matter. I would like to draw on colleagues’ views as to how best to proceed with this particular petition.

[156] **Joyce Watson:** I think that I would write back to the petitioners and say, ‘We received this, here is the timetable’, and ask whether they feel that there is anything else that we can do, because I am not sure that there is anything else that we can do.

[157] **William Powell:** There is quite an extended timetable before—

[158] **Joyce Watson:** Yes, I think that it is at its conclusion. Let us afford the petitioners an opportunity, but I think that the petition has reached its conclusion.

[159] **William Powell:** I agree on that one. So, if we highlight the likely timetable to the petitioner, which I think he is probably already aware of, in fact, and then move to close it,

are colleagues happy with that approach?

[160] **Bethan Jenkins:** Is this the one on the slaughter—

[161] **William Powell:** It is not the CCTV in slaughterhouses petition. This is focused on—

[162] **Bethan Jenkins:** Is it P-04-399?

[163] **William Powell:** Yes.

[164] **Bethan Jenkins:** I want to ask for clarification, because the regulations are being consulted on but then the Minister says that he will consider the need for legislative proposals. Does that mean that this specific issue would be addressed by the regulations, or that there would be a wider welfare issue? I was not clear from reading that.

[165] **William Powell:** My understanding is that it would be a wider one.

[166] **Bethan Jenkins:** The Minister's letter states:

[167] 'These Regulations include provisions for the welfare of animals at slaughterhouses.'

[168] However, the second paragraph states that he would consider the needs for legislative proposals in relation to this specific issue.

[169] **Mr George:** I think what has to happen here is that the Welsh Government has to bring forward a statutory instrument to implement the European legislation, which is on the stocks somewhere. It has to do that; I would guess that is part of its EC responsibilities. Thereafter, it could look to see what changes and wriggle room it has within the statutory framework to implement other changes that it wants to make. My reading was that it wanted first to make sure that it had implemented properly the European legislation. So, that is what is going to happen over the winter, and it would be later that there would be any further changes, if it considers that to be appropriate.

[170] **William Powell:** So, it could be late next year, or even—

[171] **Bethan Jenkins:** Sorry, but I am just not clear whether the EC changes would include what the petition is calling for on the pre-stun.

[172] **Mr George:** No, because the EC passes laws in its own way, but they generally have to be implemented by Ministers in the UK, and they do that by statutory instrument.

[173] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes, I understand that.

[174] **Mr George:** So, that is what it is doing there. It has to do that first, and then it would consider in policy terms, I would guess, what changes it wants to make.

[175] **William Powell:** That is a political judgment for the Minister here.

[176] **Bethan Jenkins:** So, I think that we still need to keep the petition open then, because we do not know whether, with the detail further on, we still need to—. That is what I was trying to get at. It might not address the issue in the long term.

[177] **Mr George:** You could ask the Minister for more detail on the timetable.

[178] **William Powell:** The alternative to closing the petition is that we park it for the fairly

long term until that is clear.

[179] **Russell George:** It does say, Chair, at the end of the Minister's letter:

[180] 'I will contact you once I receive further information'.

[181] **Mr George:** That is in the relation to the subsequent petition.

[182] **Russell George:** Okay, right.

[183] **William Powell:** Yes, the CCTV one. Okay, in the light of that concern, I think that that is probably a sensible alternative, and let us do that.

[184] We move on to the following petition, again with regard to slaughter practices, P-04-433, CCTV in Slaughterhouses. This petition was submitted by Animal Aid in November 2012 and collected 1,066 signatures. It calls upon the National Assembly

[185] 'to urge the Welsh Government to introduce mandatory CCTV in slaughterhouses to help vets with better regulation and monitoring'

[186] and so on. We considered correspondence on 2 July. Russell, you referred to the Minister's response; we asked him for a time frame for consideration of the issue. The Minister, to be fair, dealt with both matters in that single letter. So, we have a holding response that he sent to us just after the Royal Welsh Show on 28 July, and he has promised to contact us again. So, at this stage, I think that we have no choice but to also park this petition until we get that fuller response from Alun Davies.

[187] **Joyce Watson:** Agreed.

[188] **Russell George:** Yes, agreed.

[189] **William Powell:** Next is petition P-04-439, Ancient, veteran and heritage trees of Wales to be given greater protection. This petition was submitted by Coed Cadw in December 2012 and collected 5,320 signatures. I will just read the first couple of lines of the petition:

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

[191] The petitioners go on to detail specific proposals that they would like to see implemented. We considered correspondence on this in our meeting on 4 June, and we wrote to a number of different bodies, including the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee and the Environment and Sustainability Committee. We also sought the petitioners' views on previous correspondence from Natural Resources Wales. We have the response from the Chair of the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee; the petitioners also have that response in our public papers. We have agreed to undertake a visit to woodland near Gregynog in Montgomeryshire as part of our outreach visit on 10 and 11 November. I think that it is probably better for us to consider the matter further in the context of that visit. I do not think that there is anything that we can usefully do ahead of that, but I am very much looking forward to the visit.

[192] **Bethan Jenkins:** I am just picking up from Coed Cadw's letter that it obviously wanted this to be included in the environment Bill, and it will now be included in the planning Bill. I have not had a chance to read it yet, but the Welsh Government commissioned an independent study into what the scope of the planning Bill would look like. I intend to read it, but perhaps the clerking team can look at it too to see whether the forthcoming planning Bill

will indeed incorporate what the petition is calling for—

[193] **William Powell:** The level of protection that they are seeking for these precious trees.

[194] **Bethan Jenkins:** —considering that the decision has been made to move this from one Bill to another. We want to be sure—

[195] **William Powell:** That it does not slip down the—

[196] **Bethan Jenkins:** —that this is going to be addressed.

[197] **William Powell:** Exactly.

[198] **Bethan Jenkins:** It is a long piece of work, but perhaps there are elements in the independent report that we can go straight to in relation to this issue; that is all that I wanted to add.

[199] **William Powell:** That is a really useful reference point. Let us make sure that we do that, particularly given the change to which you referred. I very much look forward to that visit, joining colleagues up at Gregynog, and to meeting petitioners and others on the ground.

[200] Next is petition P-04-465, Save Welsh milk, its infrastructure & its jobs. This petition was submitted by Richard Arnold in March of this year and collected 426 signatures. It calls upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to protect Welsh milk production, processing and dairy infrastructure in Wales. We last considered it back in April, when it was agreed to seek the petitioner's views on the correspondence from the Minister. Obviously, we will be aware that, due to Proper Welsh Milk going into administration, various things have flowed from that, and, unfortunately, the petitioner is also of the view that his aspirations have not been met and are not really realistic any longer. Would you like to comment on this one, Joyce?

[201] **Joyce Watson:** Not really. The fact is that things have moved on. It is always sad when we have an outcome where businesses go into administration and, as the letter quite clearly says, are no longer managed in Wales. We want to keep those things here as much as we can. I am not really sure, in terms of this particular one, whether there is anything we can do.

[202] **William Powell:** I sense that we probably need to move to close this, and that the petitioners expect that.

[203] **Joyce Watson:** This has happened; we cannot influence it or change it, sadly. So, I think that we have to close it.

[204] **William Powell:** As you say, whether it is milk production and processing or the red meat sector, the more that moves out of Wales, the more there is a loss of control and a loss of other benefits, including jobs and keeping the food miles as low as possible. So, clearly, it is with sadness we have to close the petition, because that is just facing reality, really.

[205] Moving to petition P-04-366, I referred to this earlier on in relation to the new petition on day centres becoming statutory. This petition is in relation to the closure of Aberystwyth day centre. It was submitted by Pamela Ellis in February 2012 and collected 10 signatures, but there was an associated petition that had in excess of 6,000 signatures. There has been an extensive period of exchange of correspondence on this. A number of us attended a meeting on site that was facilitated by Ceredigion council and the then new council leader,

councillor Ellen ap Gwynn, and we were very grateful to the council for affording us that opportunity. Colleagues will recall that there were a number of practical issues that have been brought to resolution. There are others that remain.

[206] **Bethan Jenkins:** What are the ones that remain—because I obviously came off the committee for a while and Elin Jones took over?

[207] **William Powell:** They are related to the issue of the ramp and the wet weather—

[208] **Bethan Jenkins:** Have they all been dealt with?

[209] **William Powell:** That is an aspiration, but it has not been dealt with. That is in the forward planning, I think. A number of the other issues have been addressed in terms of access and so on, but the petitioners remain quite discontent with what they see as a significant dilution of the service previously enjoyed.

[210] **Bethan Jenkins:** Perhaps we can have a compromise and deal with the other petition that they put in on the statutory element and then, obviously, the everyday workings would have to be for the council. We cannot micro manage the council in terms of the updates it does.

[211] **William Powell:** No, that is beyond the remit of this committee and we all have to accept that. However, the wider themes are captured in the new petition. We could close this petition or group them together for future consideration while we get final clarity on where things stand, because, as you said, there is a degree of uncertainty as to what has been delivered and what is—

[212] **Bethan Jenkins:** I am just uncertain because I have not been on the committee. If you can tell me, then that is fine, I would be satisfied. It is just that we do not want to close it before we know those things.

[213] **Joyce Watson:** Chair, I think that we have to be careful not to overstep our reach.

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

[215] **Joyce Watson:** Our reach in the first place was about trying to save this particular centre that has been closed. That is what the petition says. The fact that, to the credit of the petitioners, they have made us aware of many, many things over many, many months—

[216] **William Powell:** And they have been very tenacious in doing so.

[217] **Joyce Watson:** They have, and are right to do so. To let elected Members know is a really good thing, but our committee is not about dealing with those issues, unless those issues were in the petition in the first place, which they were not. I do not want us to get into a situation where all the good work that has been done is marred by work that should not have been done by us. So, I would move to close this petition, but to let the petitioners know that we are both regional Members, that there are other local Members, and that we are more than happy—as Assembly Members, not as members of this committee—to pursue any outstanding issues that they have.

10:00

[218] I think that it is right and proper to do that. I understand why they are aggrieved, because I visited in the very early days when they were in a purpose-built facility, and people do not like change. So, I think that we have no choice but to close the petition, because the

other issues that are now outstanding are operational matters for that unitary authority, not for us.

[219] **William Powell:** Indeed, and we need to be mindful of our relationship with the local government sector and our remit, which is the most important thing of all.

[220] **Joyce Watson:** Indeed, and if we set that out clearly, I am sure that the petitioners will understand that and that we have done absolutely everything we can with this. However, there is another petition and we can look at this there.

[221] **William Powell:** As Bethan emphasised, we can take forward the broader issues in the context of the other petition that we considered this morning. Okay; that is agreed.

[222] We now move to discuss P-04-440, Say NO to Asset Stripping Bronllys Hospital. I have previously declared my local involvement and awareness of this issue, and the fact that I have some association with some of the petitioners, but I will restate that for the record. This petition was submitted by Mr Michael Eccles in December 2012 and it has the support of 3,144 signatures. The petition calls upon the National Assembly for Wales,

[223] ‘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’

[224] and other services. We last considered correspondence on the petition on 2 July, and we agreed to write to Powys Teaching Local Health Board, seeking an update on these matters. We have received a letter from Andrew Cottom, which outlines the situation as it is. Rather surprisingly, given his previous proactive approach, we have not heard back from the petitioner, but we are in a position to give him a final opportunity to do so. Clearly, the issue around the business case that the health board will be looking at is central to this, and the chief executive has agreed to provide this to the committee when it is available in February or March. Therefore, I seek your agreement to park this until that time, and hopefully we will hear in the meantime from the petitioner if he has any issues to raise.

[225] **Joyce Watson:** I agree.

[226] **William Powell:** Excellent. Thank you very much. We will now discuss P-04-456, Dementia—This Could Happen to you. I would like to give a warm welcome to Helen Jones, the lead petitioner for this particular petition, which was subject to a recent scrutiny session of ours back in the summer. Helen joins us today in the public gallery. This petition was submitted in February 2013 and has collected 1,413 signatures. The petition is worded as follows:

[227] ‘We, the undersigned, call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to:

- i. Bring to an end the discrimination against dementia sufferers in Wales who apply for N.H.S. Continuing Care Funding, by allowing for the cognition category of need (known as the domain) to go up to the level Severe in the Welsh version of the Decision Support Tool. This would bring it in line with the English version; and
- ii. Direct Local Health Boards to implement the National Framework for N.H.S., Continuing Care Funding correctly in terms of patient eligibility and without regard to budgetary constraints.’

[228] At our meeting of 16 July, the committee discussed the evidence session that we previously held, involving Helen and her colleagues, on 2 July. We agreed to write to the

Minister for Health and Social Services, copying in the Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee, asking that the petitioner be included in discussions with stakeholders around the development of the framework. We also highlighted the specific issues that have been raised in the oral evidence. Back on 3 August, the Minister responded and, I am pleased to say, has agreed to include the petitioners as part of the process of reviewing the NHS CHC framework. At this stage, colleagues, I would very much welcome a steer from you as to how you would like to take forward this important issue.

[229] **Russell George:** Given our interest in this, and our session before the summer, I do not think that I would like to do anything as rash as closing the petition until we have the views of the petitioner. We have had a fairly positive response from the Minister.

[230] **William Powell:** Indeed. That is clear; we clearly have the support of the Minister.

[231] **Russell George:** I would like to hear Helen Jones's view. Perhaps we could write to her—although she is watching us now—and ask her to let us have her formal views on the Minister's response.

[232] **William Powell:** It is vital that we have a detailed response from the petitioner to the Minister's correspondence of 3 August. We will consider at a future stage whether and how to take this forward. Again, I would strongly endorse what Russell said about the positive tone and content of the Minister's correspondence, which is to be welcomed. Thank you very much.

[233] We now move on to P-04-463, Reduction of Salt Levels in Food. This petition was submitted by Harry Hayfield in March 2013 and has collected 11 signatures. It reads as follows:

[234] 'We, the undersigned, call upon the Welsh Government to reduce the amount of salt in food so that people are able to choose healthy lifestyles in Wales.'

[235] We considered correspondence relating to this petition on 18 June and we agreed to write to the Minister for Health and Social Services to seek his views. We received a response on 5 July. Mark Drakeford's response is in the public papers. We have not, however, received any response from the petitioner, so maybe we could afford the petitioner one further opportunity to let us know what his response is to that letter of 5 July. Beyond that, I suspect that this petition may well have run its course. We will review that the next time that we consider this.

[236] We will move on to P-04-466, Medical Emergency—Preventing the introduction of a poorer Health Service for North Wales. This petition was submitted by Mike Parry in March 2013 and has collected 306 signatures. It reads as follows:

[237] 'We the undersigned call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to ensure that the proposals contained within the Betsi Cadwalader University Health Board consultation ... does not result in poorer health provision and unnecessary deaths and suffering.'

[238] We considered this petition for the first time in our meeting on 19 March. We agreed to write to Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board seeking its views on the petition. At the same time, in accordance with the practice that we have set up, we copied in the Minister for Health and Social Services and also the Health and Social Care Committee. That was in March. On 19 August, we received a response from the acting chief executive—there has obviously been a fair degree of turbulence within the health board, to put it mildly—which included an apology for the disappointing delay in responding to us. The petitioners have also

responded to the health board's letter. We have both of those responses in front of us today.

[239] Clearly, the petitioners are far from content with the situation that they find themselves in, which they seem to view as a symptom of a dysfunction within the board. We are also aware that the Public Accounts Committee is currently undertaking an inquiry into the Betsi Cadwaladr health board. Given that we are going to be in north Wales on 10 and particularly 11 November, I wonder whether that would provide a sensible opportunity for us to invite the petitioners to join us around the table to take this issue forward. Do colleagues think that that would be a sensible approach? I see that they do. In the meantime, colleagues can take up issues, but it would be ideal to get everybody around the table, and by then, we may have some further clarity on some of these issues.

[240] I think that we may come back to the same possibility in relation to the next petition, which is P-04-479, Tywyn Memorial Hospital X-ray & Minor Injuries Unit Petition. This petition was submitted by Tywyn and District healthcare action group in May 2013, and has the support of 4,486 signatures, which, again, in a predominantly rural area, is really quite a significant petition. It calls upon the National Assembly for Wales

[241] 'to urge the Welsh Government to stop the withdrawal of X-ray facilities & the reduction in provision of services by the Minor Injuries Unit as a matter of urgency.'

[242] The same issues apply with regard to the very significant delay in response, for which, again, the acting chief executive of Betsi Cadwaladr health board has expressed regret. We must accept the apology with some disappointment. That letter, which colleagues will have seen, also explains that agreement has now been reached for the x-ray service to continue for two sessions a week. So, there is at least a partial result there. However, on an equal basis, would it be useful to invite these petitioners to come to share their views with us when we are in north Wales?

[243] **Joyce Watson:** Yes, Chair, but I am sure that you must be aware, given that you represent the area, that there has been a major announcement for Tywyn hospital over the summer, so that might be worth noting as well.

[244] **William Powell:** That will inform our discussion further, particularly with colleagues from outside the region. That was the announcement of 17 July by Mark Drakeford; thank you for referencing it. Excellent. We will take that forward, with a view to inviting both set of petitioners to come to share their views. Clearly, in the case of the second set of petitioners, it was a more positive outcome, as opposed to the first set of petitioners.

[245] The next item is P-04-492, Diagnosis of autism in children. This petition was submitted by the Pembrokeshire branch of the National Autistic Society in June 2013 and has collected 902 signatures. It calls upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to do a number of things. It calls on them to

[246] 'ensure timely diagnosis for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder [ASD], regardless of where they live'

[247] and to

[248] 'review implementation of and ensure compliance with the NICE guidelines on recognition, referral and diagnosis of children and young people on the autism spectrum as part of the Welsh Government's refresh of its ASD Strategic Action Plan.'

[249] We last considered this petition on 18 June and we agreed to write to the Minister for Education and Skills. In fact, it is the Deputy Minister for Social Services who, having had

the correspondence forwarded to her, replied on 17 August, and we have also had comments back from the petitioners on what has come in from the Deputy Minister for Social Services. Both letters are in front of us. What we have there from Gwenda Thomas is a very positive response and my understanding from the letter that has come in from the Pembrokeshire branch is that it is very heartened to see this. It seems to me that it would be sensible for us to revisit this matter after six months of the action plan being implemented, which is what the petitioners refer to. Would colleagues be happy with that approach of keeping a watching brief on this, just after that six-month period?

10:15

[250] The date of February was referred to, but that would rely on an implementation almost immediately. Therefore, six months, or February—whichever is the first. Are Members happy with that? Are there any other thoughts on this?

[251] **Bethan Jenkins:** The other comment was with regard to the letter from the National Autistic Society Cymru, stating that it would want the Deputy Minister for Social Services to ask the seven health boards to update the advisory group of current waiting times, and of how they are implementing the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines. Therefore, could we write to the Deputy Minister, asking for—

[252] **William Powell:** Yes, I think that it would be useful to write to the Deputy Minister, Gwenda Thomas, highlighting that aspiration of the petitioners as well, because that would then spread the benefits across Wales, in this important area. Excellent. Again, I think that the positive tone and content of the Deputy Minister's letter is very encouraging. Good.

[253] We now move to petition P-04-419, Wind Farm Moratorium. This petition was submitted by James Shepherd Foster in October 2012, and collected 1,332 signatures, as we will recall. The petition calls on the National Assembly for Wales to ask the Welsh Government for a moratorium on windfarm and wind turbine developments, for which it has devolved responsibility. It also asks that the all-party committee be allowed to commission independent research on the devolved issues of health, social wellbeing and tourism, with respect to wind turbines, and to agree to a set of standards for devolved wind energy, which will priorities the care of the local environment, amenity land, habitat and nature. Finally, there was the call for a referendum, within a radius of 5 km, as to whether or not such developments should go ahead.

[254] We last considered this in our meeting on 4 June. We agreed to write to Natural Resources Wales, and we have received correspondence from Emyr Roberts on this issue, dated 8 July. The petitioner has also responded, with a very substantial set of comments on that response, as well as addressing wider issues; that is part of our set of papers today. Again, it is pretty clear where NRW is coming from on this. May I ask colleagues for a steer as to how you would suggest taking this forward?

[255] **Russell George:** I think that we could write to the petitioner, and ask him for a copy of the response that he receives from Emyr Roberts, when he receives that. However, the petitioner has also written a lengthy letter to you as well, as the committee Chair. I think that all that we can do is to share that correspondence with the Minister, and ask him for his comments on the petitioner's points.

[256] **William Powell:** Yes, absolutely; I think that that is probably the only way forward. It is not clear that there is a lot further that can be achieved in this particular direction. However, I think that we need to afford that courtesy, as we have done to others.

[257] We now move to petition P-04-423, Brooklands Nursing Home. This petition was

submitted by Darren Umanee in October 2012, and collected 115 signatures; associated petitions had collected in excess of 4,484 signatures. I think that it is fair to say that this had become something of a cause celebre in this part of Pembrokeshire as well. The petition calls on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to consider whether residents of Brooklands Nursing Home would have their human rights infringed by the siting of the civic amenity site 30m from the nursing home.

[258] We considered correspondence on the petition back on 2 July. We agreed at that stage to write to Pembrokeshire County Council, copying in Tegryn Jones of the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority, asking whether there are plans to resubmit an application. We have had a response from the chief executive of Pembrokeshire council, Bryn Parry-Jones, on 5 August; we have that clearly visible for all to see. The wording there is interesting. This proposal has not been totally ruled out and they reserve the right to resubmit. However, at the moment, it is fair to say that there is no proposal, because of the withdrawal of the application. Therefore, it is a difficult one. I should declare that I had an update meeting with the petitioner during the summer. I know that he, the residents and the families of the residents, as well as the wider community, still have the apprehension that something is likely to come forward.

[259] **Joyce Watson:** I think that they are right to be apprehensive that something will come forward, because every applicant with a planning application has the right to resubmit. I have no doubt that that might well happen—I do not know that it will definitely happen. So, I do not think that closing it at this stage is an option.

[260] **William Powell:** No. I would certainly agree with you on that one.

[261] **Joyce Watson:** I will be keeping a watching brief on this. I have been involved in it and have made my views known. I am against it. I am not sitting on the fence at all on this one. I think that we just need to watch this space and see how it goes.

[262] **William Powell:** I think that it would be sensible if I, on behalf of the committee, wrote again to the petitioner to seek, for the whole committee's benefit, his perspective on the current situation, just to keep that contact live. We will give that one further opportunity to Mr Darren Umanee, as lead petitioner, to do that, if colleagues are content.

[263] **Joyce Watson:** Yes, you can do that.

[264] **William Powell:** We now move to P-04-423, Moratorium on Local Development Plans (LDPs) in potential City Regions. This petition was submitted by Councillor Neil McEvoy in July 2013 and has collected 170 signatures. It states:

[265] 'We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to bring about a moratorium on LDPs in those areas that have been recommended to be part of two new city regions'.

[266] We considered this petition for the first time on 2 July and agreed to write to the Minister for Housing and Regeneration seeking his views on the petition. I think that it is fair to say that we have received a detailed and robust response from Carl Sargeant on this matter. His letter is in front of us.

[267] **Russell George:** Chair, I recommend that we close the petition.

[268] **Joyce Watson:** I agree.

[269] **William Powell:** That enjoys the support of the committee. In light of the clarity of

the Minister's response, that is a sensible way forward.

[270] We now move to P-04-436, Government Expenditure and Revenue Wales. This petition was submitted by Stuart Evans in January 2013 and has the support of 27 signatures. It states:

[271] 'We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to put together a Government Expenditure and Revenue Wales report'.

[272] It references practice in Scotland, where they have such a scheme. It is regarding Scotland as a model that Wales could follow. We last considered correspondence on this petition on 16 July and we agreed at that point to write to the Minister for Finance highlighting the petitioner's views and asking when such revenue information will be released. We have a response from Jane Hutt dated 31 July and we also have the petitioner's response to her comments; both are in our papers. What is your view on this?

[273] **Bethan Jenkins:** I think that we should write back to the Minister, because I agree with the petitioner that the Minister has misinterpreted the first paragraph. The petitioner has written back saying that

[274] 'the point was to provide a financial breakdown of all revenue and expenditure for Wales, both devolved and non-devolved'.

[275] Perhaps we could encourage the Minister to look at what the petitioner is saying in this regard.

[276] **William Powell:** Yes, in the context that the petitioner had intended. I am happy to write to the Minister in that vein. Russell, are you happy with that?

[277] **Russell George:** The Minister just needs to have a copy of the correspondence that has come back to us. I think that we should ask the Minister for comments on that, as well.

[278] **William Powell:** Yes, I am happy to build both in. That would be a sensible way forward.

[279] Moving on, the next item is P-04-441, Gwaith i Gymru - Work for Wales. This petition was submitted by Cerith Rhys Jones in December 2012, with the support of 129 signatures. It says:

[280] '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.'

[281] Just a reminder to colleagues that this petition was submitted before the review of admission criteria in relation to political parties submitting petitions. If you recall, we have had a review since then, in case that was a matter of interest.

[282] The committee last considered correspondence on the petition in April and we agreed to write to ColegauCymru, the National Training Federation of Wales and Careers Wales. Careers Wales and NTFW have responded; we have those responses here. Unfortunately, we do not have a response from ColegauCymru, despite an undertaking to provide one, and its role is so central to this that we need its response—

[283] **Russell George:** Could we follow that up?

[284] **William Powell:** Indeed. I will follow that up.

[285] **Bethan Jenkins:** I was off the committee for a while, but I will say, for the record—I know that this is a Plaid Cymru petition, but if it was a Labour youth one, or a Conservative youth one, I would say the same thing—we have to encourage young people from across the political spectrum, and if we stop them from submitting petitions, it might hinder the political process. Obviously, this was determined when I was not on the committee, but this has been submitted in good faith—

[286] **William Powell:** Yes, there is no question of the good faith of the petition.

[287] **Bethan Jenkins:** If people put it in with a name on it, at least they are being upfront on behalf of the organisation of which they are a member. I would like to look at that again, because I really am passionate about young people having a view. I do not think that people are trying to score party political points by putting these private petitions in. I just wanted to put that on the record.

[288] **William Powell:** That is fine.

[289] **Joyce Watson:** Equally, I want to go on record, because I raised the issue about the Petitions Committee not being a vehicle for political parties that have other vehicles and avenues to exercise their views, and that it is in no way to deny young people, or anybody of any age, an opportunity that they do not already have to express their views. More importantly, it is to avoid the Petitions Committee becoming just that: a committee on which there is political lobbying, whether it is overt or covert. You are right, Bethan, to say that this is clearly—

[290] **Bethan Jenkins:** It would not be covert then, would it not? People would put petitions in as individuals—

[291] **Joyce Watson:** That is already happening. I could name a few individuals here—

[292] **Bethan Jenkins:** Exactly. So, why not encourage them. I do have to disagree.

[293] **Joyce Watson:** Anyway, we have had the debate and you were not here—

[294] **Russell George:** Could we stick to the agenda, because I have to leave in a quarter of an hour?

[295] **Joyce Watson:** So have I.

[296] **William Powell:** I am conscious of time pressure. I also regret having flagged the issue. Nevertheless, we can reissue the—

[297] **Bethan Jenkins:** I want to contest—

[298] **William Powell:** Yes. We can reissue the guidance as a starting point for that.

[299] **Mr George:** The admissibility of petitions is a matter, formally, for the Presiding Officer. So, having listened to what you have said, that is certainly something that we can take up with her. However, it is, formally, a matter for her, rather than the committee. So, the committee disposes rather than proposes in that sense.

[300] **William Powell:** Recognising the time constraints, we move on to item P-04-488, the right to decide: an end to the compulsory study of Welsh to GCSE. This was submitted by

David Fitzpatrick in June 2013 with the support of 51 signatures.

10:30

[301] We last considered this petition on 18 June and agreed to write to the Minister for Education and Skills to seek his views, which we have duly received. It would probably be sensible for us to await the review that is currently being undertaken into the teaching of Welsh as a second language at key stages 3 and 4. Does that make sense on this occasion?

[302] **Russell George:** I agree.

[303] **Joyce Watson:** Yes.

[304] **William Powell:** Again, I am not convinced that that particular petition will be going a lot further forward in the light of the Minister's response. However, that is for the future.

[305] We now move to petition P-04-447, Campaign for Statue of Henry VII in Pembroke. This petition was submitted by Nathen Amin in January 2013, with the support of 144 signatures. It calls for that monument to be erected in Pembroke, the town of birth of not just Henry VII, but the Tudor dynasty. We have written to a number of different agencies and we have had a limited response. I think that it is fair to say that we still have not heard from Pembrokeshire Castle Trust or indeed from Pembroke Town Council on the matter. We have a response from the Minister for Culture and Sport, and we also have the petitioner's response. There are two options here, really: as we have done earlier, we could give a final chase to the bodies that have not responded—

[306] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes.

[307] **William Powell:** I sense that that is the wish of the meeting, so, let us do that. We could then potentially move to close the petition when we next discuss it.

[308] The next item is P-04-476, Restructuring in National Museum Wales. This petition was submitted by the Public and Commercial Services Union in April 2013 and it had the support of 1,617 signatures. The petition reads as follows:

[309] 'We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to reconsider its funding settlement for National Museum Wales, with a view to protecting the Museum's services and the jobs, pay and conditions of its staff.'

[310] We then have a substantial additional text that explains the reasons for that. We considered the petition for the first time on 30 April and agreed to write to the Minister for Culture and Sport, and also to the National Museum Wales to seek its views. We have received correspondence from the Minister and indeed from the director general of the museum, which you will see in our papers. It would be useful at this point to write back to PCS to seek its views. Do colleagues agree?

[311] **Joyce Watson:** Yes.

[312] **Bethan Jenkins:** We also know that this letter is from 24 May and that the National Museum Wales is stating that it would be implementing the changes from June. Perhaps we could ask for an update. I have had a meeting in my portfolio role with the museum, but I have not had an update yet on the changes. At the time, it was making the changes to the staff structures, and this letter is obviously out of date in that sense.

[313] **William Powell:** Things will have happened in the meantime.

[314] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes. I think that we need to clarify what actually happened, and also get PCS's view.

[315] **William Powell:** Therefore, the update that you would be seeking would be from the museum. Is that correct?

[316] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes, from the museum itself because it is obviously administering this. Just for the record, I think that it is a worry because a large percentage of the national museum's budget is staff and I think that that should have been considered before any cuts were made. Obviously, a large percentage of the changes has had to include staff, whereas the national museum obviously would not have wanted that to happen ideally.

[317] **William Powell:** Yes, because the staff budget is so central.

[318] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes. So, perhaps we could just wait for PCS because it is vitally important that it has a view.

[319] **William Powell:** Yes. So, we need to hear from PCS and also get that update from the DG of the museum as to how things have gone forward since June.

[320] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes.

[321] **William Powell:** Good. That is agreed. We now move to P-04-397, Living Wage. This petition was submitted by Save the Children in June 2012, and had the support of 196 signatures. It calls on,

[322] 'the Welsh Government to stand by their promise to work towards a living wage for every worker in Wales and tell us when and how they will make it happen.'

[323] We last considered this in our meeting on 2 July, and agreed to seek a response from the Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty. The Minister responded on 16 August, and the petitioners have also commented. I think that probably it would be sensible for us to seek information as to the Welsh Government advisory group on the living wage, which we have not really got in the correspondence to date, have we?

[324] **Bethan Jenkins:** I think, from what the petitioners have said, that they would like to know the status of the advisory group.

[325] **William Powell:** How it is constituted, and what its role will be.

[326] **Bethan Jenkins:** They note in their letter that it has not met for some months now. Considering that young people put this petition forward, they would appreciate the detail.

[327] **William Powell:** As you said in earlier comments, it is really important to encourage the kind of engagement that they are showing. So, yes.

[328] **Joyce Watson:** I support that.

[329] **William Powell:** Okay; thank you, colleagues. I will make sure that that happens.

10:36

**Cynnig o dan Reol Sefydlog 17.42 i Benderfynu Gwahardd y Cyhoedd o'r
Cyfarfod**
**Motion under Standing Order 17.42 to Resolve to Exclude the Public from the
Meeting**

[330] **William Powell:** I move that,

the committee resolves to exclude the public from the remainder of the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 17.42.

[331] I see that the committee is in agreement.

*Derbyniwyd y cynnig.
Motion agreed.*

*Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 10:36.
The public part of the meeting ended at 10:36.*