



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

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau **The Petitions Committee**

Dydd Mawrth, 15 Gorffennaf 2014
Tuesday, 15 July 2014

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Cofnodir y trafodion yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynndi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal, cynhwysir trawsgrifiad o'r cyfieithu ar y pryd.

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

Bethan Jenkins

Ceidwadwyr Cymreig
Welsh Conservatives
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 09:01.
The meeting began at 09:01.

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **William Powell:** Bore da, bawb. Good morning, all. Welcome to the final Petitions Committee meeting of this term. We have no apologies this morning; we have a full complement of Members. The usual housekeeping arrangements apply.

Deisebau Newydd
New Petitions

[2] **William Powell:** We begin with P-04-569, Stop National Tests for Primary School Children. This petition was submitted by Mr Alexander Roberts and has collected 123 signatures. The text reads as follows:

[3] ‘We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to remove national tests for primary school children.’

[4] In the additional information, the petitioner sets out, as we can all see, the particular set of reasons that motivate the petition, in terms of the effect of tests upon young people, which Mr Roberts and his supporters consider to be severe. In the context of the petition, it is pretty clear that we should be writing to Huw Lewis, the Minister for Education and Skills, to see how open he is to the suggestion. Are colleagues happy with that approach? Okay.

[5] The next new petition is P-04-570, Inequitable Access to Treatments That Have Not Been Nationally Appraised in NHS Wales. This petition was submitted by Genetic Alliance UK, the Tuberous Sclerosis Association and the Association of Glycogen Storage Disorders, and it collected 669 signatures. The text reads:

[6] ‘We the undersigned call on the National Assembly for Wales to review the use of the "exceptionality rule" in determining whether a patient can access a treatment through the Individual Patient Funding Request process.’

[7] Again, we have a helpful explanatory note, in terms of additional information, which we have had the opportunity to read, setting out the particular reasons. How should we go

forward with this one, colleagues?

[8] **Bethan Jenkins:** Write to the Minister for Health and Social Services, I would say.

[9] **William Powell:** That would probably be the first step. I note that the petition has collected 1,089 signatures; that is the update that I have received. I should also note that we will be receiving this particular petition later today on the steps of the Senedd, so I look forward to engaging with the petitioners and learning some more about their particular case. As Bethan suggested, with the support of the rest of the committee, I would be happy to write to Mark Drakeford to take that one forward.

[10] The next new petition is P-04-571, Treating Pernicious Anaemia. This petition was submitted by the Pernicious Anaemia Society and has collected 126 signatures. It reads:

[11] ‘We call on the Welsh Government to change the way Pernicious Anaemia is treated away from the current one-size-fits-all format towards a regimen based on the patient’s individual needs and where the patient is offered a choice of how he or she receives their replacement therapy B12 including self-administered injections.’

[12] Again, we have some additional, supporting information there, which the petitioners have kindly supplied to assist us.

[13] **Russell George:** I suggest that we write to the Minister for Health and Social Services in the first instance.

[14] **William Powell:** I think that that is the best way forward. Indeed, colleagues are supporting that. We will send a letter off as soon as we possibly can to Mark Drakeford so that he can consider that in the round.

[15] The next petition is P-04-572, Grants for Flood Resilience. This petition was submitted by Charles Edward Moore and collected 88 signatures. It reads:

[16] ‘We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to approve grants for properties that have recently flooded to fund work to make them more resilient to future flooding.’

[17] **Russell George:** I think, Chair, that the safest thing to say is that we should write to the appropriate Minister, because I am not quite sure who the new Minister is.

[18] **William Powell:** Yes. Okay. I believe that, probably, this will be under the remit of John Griffiths under the new arrangements.

[19] **Russell George:** I would have thought so, yes.

[20] **William Powell:** I believe that that ministry is currently styled as natural resources, culture and sport. Subject to confirming that, I will be very happy to write to John Griffiths on this matter.

[21] We move now to petition P-04-573, Call on the Welsh Government to Investigate the Residential Leasehold System in Wales. This petition was submitted by the residents of the Elba estate and collected 573 signatures. Of course, we had the opportunity to meet some of those petitioners just last week and to learn more about the issues underlying the petition. The text reads as follows:

[22] ‘We the undersigned call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to instigate an investigation into the way in which the residential leasehold system is operating in Wales despite the changes made by the Leasehold Reform Act and to consider whether there should be a cap on increases to leasehold agreements in Wales.’

[23] We have some additional information here, supplied by the petitioners, elaborating upon the increases that have applied in the Elba estate in Gowerton, which apparently have accrued up to 5,000% in some cases, levied by the City and County of Swansea council. Clearly, that is a matter of great concern. I propose that we write to Carl Sargeant to seek his views on this petition.

[24] **Bethan Jenkins:** I want to declare that I have been supporting the petitioners. All that I wanted to add was to ask whether, because we have the break during the summer, there is any way we can write to the Welsh Local Government Association as well. I know that we do not want to look at just Swansea, and it would be helpful, I think, for us and the petitioners to understand how other councils currently operate so that we can get a comprehensive analysis. I am only suggesting it because we do not have any meetings now until September.

[25] **William Powell:** I would be very happy to write to Steve Thomas as well in the WLGA to get that organisation’s perspective, because I think it would be helpful. Are colleagues happy with that?

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

[27] **William Powell:** Excellent.

[28] The next petition is P-04-574, Bus Services in Burryport. This petition was submitted by John James and collected 572 signatures. We were able to meet Mr James and his supporters not last week but the week before when they presented it. It reads simply:

[29] ‘We the undersigned, request that the direct service from Burryport to Prince Philip Hospital be reinstated with immediate effect.’

[30] I propose that we write to the Minister for the Economy, Science and Transport and various other areas of Government business seeking her views on the petition. Are colleagues happy with that approach?

[31] **Joyce Watson:** Also, Chair, it is the bus operator, I would think, who has decided this, probably with the local council for commissioning, so if we are going to—

[32] **William Powell:** So, Carmarthenshire County Council in that context.

[33] **Joyce Watson:** Yes, and the bus company. We can try to get some more information. Like Bethan said, we are going into recess—

[34] **William Powell:** For consistency, I think that that would make quite a lot of sense, so I am happy to investigate the details of the particular operator and then we can write and at least get the ball rolling.

[35] **Bethan Jenkins:** Would it be the transport consortium? I am not sure how they came to the decision.

[36] **William Powell:** If we drill down just a little and write appropriately to the most relevant agencies. Okay. We are happy with that.

[37] Next is petition P-04-575, Call in All Opencast Mining Planning Applications. This petition was submitted—

[38] I wish to verify that that is correct.

[39] **Mr George:** Yes. That should be Terry Evans.

[40] **William Powell:** It was Terry Evans. I should, at this point, declare that I have had some association with Terry Evans and his campaign. I am aware that others may wish to similarly declare. I have addressed a couple of the campaign's gatherings—one at the council headquarters at Ystrad Mynach, in Caerphilly, and one here, at the Senedd. Did you wish to declare anything?

[41] **Bethan Jenkins:** I will declare an interest, because I chair the Wales against opencast mining group, where we discussed this only yesterday. The group has local feelings, but we know what the Minister feels in terms of having views on local planning applications. I think that we should write to the Minister on this wider policy so that we can, over the summer, get that answer back. Also, just for clarity, because I know that two or three of you sit on the Environment and Sustainability Committee—

[42] **William Powell:** Three of us sit on it.

[43] **Bethan Jenkins:** I would like to know where we are with the planning Bill, because I think that people in this field, who are campaigning, have been told that the planning Bill has been put on hold. I am not sure whether someone can shine a light on what is happening.

[44] **William Powell:** That does not tie in with our understanding as a committee, I think, in terms of what we have learned up to this point.

[45] **Bethan Jenkins:** I am just wondering whether people's efforts can be put into the planning Bill, if that is still the way forward.

[46] **William Powell:** Yes. I am sure that that would be a main vehicle, to be honest.

[47] **Bethan Jenkins:** Okay. So, that is still on track, is it?

[48] **William Powell:** Yes. That is my understanding, unless we hear anything different. I do not think that it will be affected by—

[49] **Bethan Jenkins:** I know that I am taking a liberty on this, but I am wondering whether we could look at what that says, to see whether there is anything in that Bill that could be looked at for these types of areas. I do not know whether that is something that we could do over the summer.

[50] **William Powell:** There was a consultation on the draft Bill some months ago, was there not? That will have been an opportunity.

[51] **Mr George:** Of course, when the committee comes to look at it, to scrutinise it, there will be a consultation at that point as well. That will not be until after the summer recess.

[52] **William Powell:** No, it will be in the autumn.

[53] **Bethan Jenkins:** It is probably just a matter of flagging that up with petitioners, in terms of the dates of that.

[54] **William Powell:** Absolutely. Just before we pursue the discussion, I think that, for consistency and for the record, I should read the text of the petition. As I said, it was submitted by Terry Evans, and it collected 572 signatures. An associated petition on a specific planning issue within this field of interest collected over 6,500 signatures. The text of Mr Evans's petition reads as follows:

[55] 'We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to call in all opencast mining planning applications over 10 years duration or over 350 hectares in size because the implications of these developments are far reaching and long standing with effects beyond the immediate locality.'

[56] Bethan has already proposed, and I think that I sense support for that, that I write to the Minister for Housing and Regeneration, Carl Sargeant, to seek his views on this important and live issue.

[57] **Mr George:** If the committee wishes, we can also tell the petitioners the timetable that we are aware of for the planning Bill.

[58] **William Powell:** Yes. We can brief the petitioners on that, and we can double check any glitches that may have crept in in terms of the timetable for the planning Bill. That is excellent. Good.

[59] We now move to P-04-576, Allow Children in Wales to Have a Family Holiday During Term Time. This petition was submitted by Bethany Walpole-Wroe, and collected 1,008 signatures. An associated e-petition has collected over 10,300 signatures. We also received some information yesterday. I think that all Members have had an e-mail from Josie Coggins in support of this. It also relates to a meeting that this particular group had had with our colleague Paul Davies AM, who has obviously engaged with the issue as well. Anyway, the text of the actual petition reads as follows:

09:15

[60] 'We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to review the guidance to Local Authorities on head teachers being able to authorise absence for family holidays during term time. Many families from poor backgrounds can only afford to go on holiday during term time, as holidays are about 60% more expensive during the holiday period. Also, many families where parents work are unable to take time off during the school holidays. Holidays can be extremely educational, giving the children awareness of the world in which we live.'

[61] It is clearly quite a heartfelt petition, with a significant level of support across Wales. I propose that we write to Huw Lewis to seek his views on this. Russell, you have indicated.

[62] **Russell George:** I was wondering, as we have the summer recess, whether there are any other bodies, perhaps the children's commissioner, to which we could write. I do not know whether that is in line with what we normally do.

[63] **William Powell:** Possibly also the Welsh Local Government Association, and Chris Llewelyn, I think, is the director of the relevant section of the WLGA—

[64] **Bethan Jenkins:** The only thing that I would say is that we have recently had a Bill whereby we have harmonised school terms so that different local authorities are not taking holidays at different times, because that increases the cost on families. Therefore, we have already had a debate about when people are in school and when they are not in school. I just want to flag that up, and perhaps the Minister will say that. I do not know whether we can

look back at that legislation, because—

[65] **William Powell:** Are you suggesting that it would be sensible to let the petitioners know of that if they are not aware of that recent development?

[66] **Bethan Jenkins:** It does not directly talk about school holidays in this sense, but what it did was say that it was expensive for parents who, say, worked in one local authority, but whose children went to school in another, and they had to take separate holidays. I think—. What I am trying to say is that it is a difficult circle to square when changes are already going to be put in place now as a result of the Minister putting that Bill forward.

[67] **Russell George:** I welcome the petition, Chair, because I have been contacted about this as a constituency Assembly Member and I think this is an issue in which there is a great deal of interest. I have a lot of sympathy with this view. I think that there is a view that these decisions should perhaps be made at a local level with the headteacher, which I tend to favour more, probably. However, the point is that it is good that the petition has come in, because it is good that this is an issue that people are talking about, and it is an issue that concerns people, so I welcome its coming to our committee.

[68] **William Powell:** As do I. I think that you have probably nudged me into thinking that I should possibly declare an interest in this matter in terms of being a school governor. This issue does come up within the governing body because one of the other issues is with regard to unauthorised absence and the impact that that then has on the way in which the school is regarded by Estyn in terms of attendance levels. That is another factor that will come up in our deliberations. However, I am happy to write to Huw Lewis to seek his views, to the WLGA, and, as Russell suggested, to the children's commissioner. I am happy to do that if colleagues feel that that is useful. Okay. That is agreed.

[69] We move on now to P-04-577, Reinstate Funding to the Real Opportunities Project. This petition was submitted by Aled Davies and has the support of 25 signatures, and an associated e-petition collected 226 signatures. The text reads as follows:

[70] ‘We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to reinstate funding to the Real Opportunities project previously funded by the European Social Fund in Wales, or some new similar project that has the same values as Real Opportunities. The project is vital to helping 14 to 19-year-olds with a learning disability or autistic spectrum disorder to gain life skills and independence.’

[71] We again have some useful additional information provided by Mr Davies and his supporters regarding the number of 14 to 19-year-olds with special learning needs or on the autistic spectrum who have benefitted in previous years from the Real Opportunities project. It is a difficult one to gauge here; I think that, probably, this is one to go in the first instance to the Minister for Health and Social Services, but there is also a finance dimension here, so I do not know whether we should possibly write to both Ministers and see who would pick it up, because, obviously, the Minister for Finance has overview of the ESF funding and stuff. So, are colleagues happy that we write to both Ministers and see who takes the lead on this particular matter? Joyce, are you happy with that approach?

[72] **Joyce Watson:** Yes, Chair, but it is about learning as well, is it not?

[73] **William Powell:** Yes, indeed. It is a difficult one—it is on the cusp of two or three different remits.

[74] **Joyce Watson:** I would find it difficult not to write to the Minister for Education and Skills, when they are specifically pointing to learning. So, I do not think—

[75] **William Powell:** We should probably include Huw Lewis there.

[76] **Joyce Watson:** I do not think that we can leave Huw Lewis out of it.

[77] **William Powell:** No. Okay. Well, I would be happy to write to all three in that context to see who then will lead for the Government. Excellent. Good.

[78] We now move to P-04-578, Noise Mitigation Works on the M4 to the West of Junction 32. This petition was submitted by Margaret Watt and has the support of 19 signatures. It simply reads:

[79] ‘We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to take action to reduce the noise from the M4 motorway to the west of junction 32 as it passes over the valley of the river Taff’.

[80] Now, obviously, the motorway falls within the remit of the Minister for Economy, Science and Transport. I think that, probably, it would be sensible to write to her, to get her perspective on this petition at this stage. Good.

09:22

Y Wybodaeth Ddiweddaraf am Ddeisebau Blaenorol Updates to Previous Petitions

[81] **William Powell:** The first update is on P-04-541, Support for the Mentrau Iaith (Language Initiatives). This petition was submitted back in the spring by Heini Gruffudd, and was first considered on 29 April. It has the support of 1,346 signatures. It seeks a range of additional support and resources for the mentrau iaith, and stresses the value of their work. Now, we first considered it, as I said, on 29 April, and agreed to write to the First Minister. Now, we have got a response—a very full response—from the First Minister, and, indeed, we have got a response to the First Minister’s correspondence from Heini Gruffudd and his supporters—we have got that available to us. I think that, probably, consistent with previously, we should share that petitioner response back with the First Minister. They do express the wish to have the opportunity to present their case, but I think that, probably, if we adopt a step-by-step approach, and first of all get the First Minister’s response, that would make sense. Are colleagues happy? Okay.

[82] Next is P-04-548, The Reintroduction of Welsh Classes in Rennes. This petition was submitted by Cedric Choplin, and was first considered on 29 April 2014. It has the support of 14 signatures. It reads:

[83] ‘We are visitors from Brittany and we would like the National Assembly for Wales to discuss the reintroduction of Welsh classes in Rennes University.’

[84] Now, we first considered this novel petition on 29 April, and we agreed to write to the First Minister to seek his views, because, if you recall, there was correspondence from him previously, but it was not in relation to the petition, so we only had a flavour of his views; indeed, we can see the First Minister’s response in our papers today. Clearly, he is of the view that it is pretty unlikely that the Welsh Government is going to be able to step in to support this, so there would be a clear rationale for closing the petition. Having said that, we could write to the universities within Wales to see whether this might be consistent with some partnership approach that is already under way. I would welcome a steer from colleagues as to which way you would like to go on it.

[85] **Bethan Jenkins:** Would writing to Higher Education Wales be easiest, because it represents the higher education institutions, as opposed to writing to them all individually? That might be a catch-all approach.

[86] **William Powell:** I would be happy to do that, in case something is unlocked there that might take this forward. Obviously, fresh resources from Welsh Government are not going to happen.

[87] **Bethan Jenkins:** They can decide themselves, as institutions, to fund certain courses. So, it is not necessarily the case that, because the First Minister says that it cannot be funded—. They might see a benefit from doing it, and there might be a twinning scheme that they could initiate and see benefits from.

[88] **William Powell:** Absolutely. There might be some sort of pilot project or something that could be initiated. Who is to know? I would be very happy to write on that basis if colleagues are content. You are. Okay.

[89] We now move on to P-04-480, Address Private Sector Student Housing Standards. This petition has previously been grouped with P-04-529, A Letting Agents Ombudsman for Wales, which follows. The first petition was submitted by Aberystwyth Students Union, and was first considered on 15 May 2013. It has the support of 188 signatures. Prior to that, we had the opportunity to meet some of the students on the steps of the Senedd, who shared their concerns and some of their wider research with us. We last considered correspondence on 16 July 2013. We agreed to write to a number of specified stakeholders, seeking views, and to undertake a written consultation, as well as writing to the relevant Minister. In fact, we had a somewhat disappointing response to that consultation. There were about six or seven responses, I believe—[*Interruption.*] Six responses came through on that. Nevertheless, some very interesting points came through.

[90] As for possible actions, we could look at calling an evidence session or look at doing something jointly with the following petition. I think that, for the sake of clarity, I will just remind colleagues of that petition, P-04-529. This petition calls for a letting agents ombudsman for Wales. The petition was submitted by the campaigning organisation Let Down in Cardiff. It was first considered on 21 January 2014 and had 22 signatures in support. We considered it again on 11 March 2014 and, because of the common ground, we agreed at that point to group it with the student-based petition. On that petition, P-04-529, we have comments that have come in from the Minister on the comments that had been made previously by the Let Down group. So, I would be happy, if colleagues are content, to seek views from the Minister on what the petitioners have had to say, to take that one forward. Clearly, the wider context of this is the recent passage of the Housing (Wales) Bill, in which a number of these issues have been addressed. Some of the issues were brought up in amendments, some of which were successful and others not. I would welcome a steer from colleagues as to the best way forward on this one. Certainly, I think that we should write to the Minister to seek views on the petitioners' comments. Are there any other thoughts?

[91] **Bethan Jenkins:** I do not see what the harm is in organising an evidence session on the first petition. I think we need to write on the second one first before we agree to amalgamate the evidence sessions, because, as has been noted, we do not want to take evidence if the Minister has already said that the issue has been overtaken by the housing Bill. It is about where we can take it, with that being the main vehicle for progress for them. So, on the first one, I think we should move ahead with evidence, and, on the second one, write back to the Minister with the petitioners' comments. We can then reassess in the new term.

[92] **William Powell:** Of course, when the Bill is passed, there will be the issue of

technical guidance that accompanies the legislation. Although the Bill itself is no longer subject to influence, there could potentially be useful input there at guidance level.

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

[94] **William Powell:** Are colleagues happy with that differentiated approach? I am content to write on that basis. Good.

09:30

[95] P-03-315, New Dyfi River Crossing Petition, was, as you will recall, submitted by South Meirionnydd Older People's Forum and was first considered in the third Assembly in March 2011. It had the support of 3,204 signatures at that time, calling for,

[96] 'a new crossing of the Dyfi River (or the re-routing of the A487)',

[97] near Machynlleth,

[98] 'linking South Meirionnydd with Powys, Dyfed and Ceredigion'.

[99] There is ongoing feasibility work that is being promoted by the Minister for transport. We have an update on progress and, indeed, we have been promised another update, a quarterly update, in September. So, if colleagues are happy, I propose to write to the Minister, Mrs Edwina Hart, asking for her comments on the petitioners' views. Clearly, the petitioners are somewhat sceptical about the particular approach that the Minister has adopted, but I think that those of us who have been engaged with the issue on a more local basis will realise that the Minister's view is fairly close to the priorities of the residents of Machynlleth in terms of the future of their town.

[100] **Russell George:** I think that it is also worth saying that it is perhaps not the view of the petitioners, but of the lead petitioner, because, from my experience, there is a view that bypassing the town would be a bad move, and many people who may have signed the petition may well be of that view. So, I think that it is important that we say that it is the view of the lead petitioner and not of all the petitioners.

[101] **William Powell:** Absolutely. We do recall, I am sure, the fact that the petition had become a little dormant for a period, so there may be some disengagement in that respect, but certainly the views that I and others have heard from in and around Machynlleth are more in accord with the Minister's approach. Nevertheless, we should seek comments from the Minister on what the petitioner has to say. That is agreed.

[102] We move now to P-04-399, Slaughter Practices. For practical purposes, because of the ex-Minister's identical response to both, we can consider it together with P-04-433, CCTV in Slaughterhouses, although I think that there are very substantial differences of emphasis in the petitions, and I would caution against a formal grouping of them because of that. However, the previous Minister did issue us with a response that was identical.

[103] The first petition was submitted by Royce Clifford and we considered it initially in June 2012. Mr Clifford had secured 400 signatures in support, calling,

[104] 'upon the National Assembly to urge the Welsh Government to ban the practise of slaughtering animals without pre-stunning them.'

[105] The more recent petition was submitted by Animal Aid, and that is P-04-433, CCTV in Slaughterhouses. This petition was first considered by our committee on 6 November 2012,

having collected 1,066 signatures, calling,

[106] ‘on the National Assembly to urge the Welsh Government to introduce mandatory CCTV in slaughterhouses to help vets with better regulation and monitoring’,

[107] of welfare standards. As I have previously mentioned when we have considered this, this petition enjoyed the particular support of our colleague Rebecca Evans, who has now, obviously, got ministerial responsibility for some of these matters, so, I daresay that she will continue to take that interest. The former Minister, in his correspondence, referred to the report of the farm animal welfare committee to the Welsh Government. I suggest that we await an update from that Minister’s successor as to what the timescale is for that animal welfare committee report to be delivered. Are colleagues happy with that for the moment? I see that you are.

[108] The next item is P-04-537, Planting Trees to Reduce Flooding. This petition was submitted by Coed Cadw and it was first considered by us on 18 February 2014. It has the support of 2,708 signatures. It calls on the Welsh Assembly to urge the Welsh Government to reduce flood risk to thousands of homes across the country by supporting a very large-scale planting operation of at least 10 million trees over the coming five years.

[109] We first considered the petition and wrote at that time to the Minister for Natural Resources and Food, of the day, and also to the Minister for Housing and Regeneration, given the obvious impact there. We received a response from the former Minister for Natural Resources and Food, and we have that available in our pack. I propose that we write to the new Minister with responsibility for this area of policy to seek views on what the petitioners have had to say—we have a full response from the petitioners on the earlier ministerial correspondence. Are colleagues happy for that to happen? I see that you are. Good.

[110] The next petition is P-04-532, Improving specialised neuromuscular services in Wales. This petition was submitted by Muscular Dystrophy Campaign and was first considered by us on 4 February this year. It calls on,

[111] ‘the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to ensure that Health Boards implement the investment proposed by the Welsh Neuromuscular Network Vision Document for improving specialised neuromuscular services in Wales.’

[112] We first considered this petition, as I said, back on 4 February and we agreed to write, seeking views from a number of different bodies, including the Minister himself and all health boards. Responses have now been received from the Minister and, indeed, from three of the health boards. The petitioners have welcomed the responses that we have received so far and, indeed, we have received comments on them—they are in the public pack today. What potentially would be useful, I think, would be if we were to write to the Minister to ask about the progress in appointing a successor to Dr Goodall as chair of the network, given his recent promotion to other duties. Is that a sensible way forward?

[113] **Bethan Jenkins:** I chair the cross-party group on muscular dystrophy, and Dr Goodall attended all meetings. To be fair, he was really good. What I think they are trying to understand is how the Welsh Government can engage, because, basically, Dr Goodall would feed back to the Welsh Government. So, the campaigners need to be assured that there is a listening person there. Also, in the response from the Muscular Dystrophy Campaign, they say that they are happy with the responses so far, and so I would want to chase up the health boards, because we have had some responses, but not from them all, and we need to have a comprehensive view of what is happening across Wales, because it is patchy, especially in terms of physiotherapy and care workers. If we could chase that up over the summer as well as writing back to the Minister, that would be useful. Then, potentially, we could consider a

debate, such as they have asked for, when we have brought all those ideas together.

[114] **William Powell:** It is actually really useful to be reminded of the fact that Dr Goodall was so engaged in this particular work. It may even be sensible to make that point in the letter to the Minister, because he set the bar pretty high in terms of getting involved.

[115] **Bethan Jenkins:** You do not often see it, because in some cross-party groups, you do not get that involvement from so high up, and it is really useful and, you know, a good way of engaging with campaigners, and it could happen across the board, I would say, time allowing. So, yes, I am happy for that point to be made.

[116] **William Powell:** Okay. Excellent. Are colleagues happy with that approach? I see that you are. Good.

[117] The next petition is P-04-545, Aneurin Bevan Hospital Procedures. This petition was submitted by Paul Ward and was first considered by our committee on 29 April 2014. It had the support of 20 signatures. It reads,

[118] ‘We the undersigned call upon the Welsh Assembly to urge the Welsh Government to order a review into Aneurin Bevan LHB procedures regarding the following: 1. Discharging vulnerable patients late at night without hospital transport 2. The Virtual Inpatient Scheme 3. Aneurin Bevan LHB Complaints Procedures, especially when a patient is still in poor health or pain 4. Dealing with mental health patients in general hospitals’.

[119] We first considered this petition on 29 April, and agreed to write to the Minister for Health and Social Services, Mark Drakeford, and to the Aneurin Bevan Local Health Board, seeking their views, and also to the relevant community health council to seek its views on the petition, particularly with regard to the complaints procedure and any similar concerns that have been raised directly with it. We now have a full suite of responses from the Minister, from the health board and the CHC. The Minister, in his response, clearly shows that he is keen to learn more about what is styled here as ‘the Virtual Inpatient Scheme’; in other health boards I have heard it referred to as something very similar, namely ‘the virtual ward approach’. The Minister expresses interest in knowing more about this and, probably, the best way of doing that is to share the response from Aneurin Bevan Local Health Board, which goes into some detail about the way in which that scheme operates, and it is obviously fairly pleased with the pilot work that is being done in that area. So, I am happy to share that correspondence, which meets the Minister’s request, but also to ask the petitioners for their comments on the wider correspondence. Are colleagues happy with that? I see that you are.

[120] We now move on to P-04-543, No Increase to University Tuition Fees. This petition was submitted by a wide range of A-level students who attended this year’s government and politics education workshop, and was first considered by our committee, once again, in that busy meeting on 29 April. It reads,

[121] ‘We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government not to increase tuition fees for Welsh students for a minimum of five years.’

[122] We considered it and agreed to write to the Minister for Education and Skills to seek his views. We have a clear response from the Minister in our public papers. It would probably be useful for us to ask the Minister to be kept informed when Sir Ian Diamond’s review is published, so that we can share that, in time, with the petitioners. If we need to make further efforts to re-engage with the petitioners, given that they came together from diverse schools and colleges across Wales, it is not necessarily as easy as it is normally to engage with them. So, we need to endeavour to re-engage with the principal petitioners who brought this petition forward.

[123] **Bethan Jenkins:** Could we have some sort of rapporteur thing, because the president of the National Union of Students is on the Diamond review? She gave evidence to us recently on the Children, Young People and Education Committee about something else, but stated that she was on the group. If we cannot connect with every one of the students, could a delegation of them meet with the president of the NUS? I do not know whether Sir Ian Diamond has time, but even if he does not, the NUS president could meet them alongside one or two of us, and perhaps that could feed into the Diamond review. They would feel more included, then, in the process and in what is happening. If they are just told that there is an ongoing review until 2016, they might not feel as engaged. I was just throwing that in there as an idea.

[124] **William Powell:** That could incentivise them to provide a greater response. We have had difficulties at the moment.

[125] **Mr George:** There is a slight issue with this petition, because it was presented as a result of the conference that was held here. Given the way that it was presented, we have very little contact with the petitioners, because they were here as part of school groups, and so on. So, in practical terms—

[126] **Bethan Jenkins:** We have to think about that, then, do we not?

[127] **Mr George:** Yes, for future petitions.

[128] **Bethan Jenkins:** If school groups put in petitions after coming together for a day, we need to ensure that there is sustainability in the system.

[129] **William Powell:** Yes, to ensure that it is meaningful.

09:45

[130] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes, meaningful for them and for us.

[131] **William Powell:** Sure.

[132] **Mr George:** What we could think about is contacting some of the teachers who are involved to see whether there is any way that we can follow through on that. The difficulty is that these were A-level students back in April and I am not even sure—

[133] **William Powell:** It is not clear whether they were year 12 or 13.

[134] **Mr George:** Some would be—. We can check which schools are involved. We can certainly pursue that. I agree that it is an issue.

[135] **Bethan Jenkins:** It is just so that we can, you know—. If it is going to happen that these types of things come to light in future—that they put petitions in—we want to make best use of it, do we not?

[136] **William Powell:** Yes. There are some learning points there, definitely. I agree with that and we will put that in hand. Okay. There are a number of actions there, but I think that your ideas, if we can re-establish that contact, have real merit in terms of involving them in feeding into the review. Good.

[137] We move on now to P-04-540, Stop Sexism In Domestic Abuse. This petition was submitted by Healing Men and was first considered by the committee on 11 March 2014. It

has the support of 238 signatures. We have the text of the petition and supporting comments in front of us. We last considered this as a committee on 1 July and we agreed to await the response of Welsh Women's Aid, which I think, had been a little late coming because of an administrative issue, and also to inform the petitioner of arrangements for Stage 1 scrutiny of the Gender-based Violence, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Bill and to invite Mr Stott to contribute to that process.

[138] We now have a comprehensive response, for which we are grateful, from Welsh Women's Aid; its letter is in the public papers. We also have an initial response from the petitioner, but Mr Stott has requested more time to give a more considered and fuller response to the committee. We have previously granted petitioners that request when they have made it and I would be happy to do so again, but I would very much welcome comments from colleagues. Russell George, you have indicated.

[139] **Russell George:** Chair, as we are approaching the recess, there is not much work that we can do as a committee between now and when we meet back here in September, so I would be more than happy to agree to the petitioner's request.

[140] **William Powell:** Okay. Joyce, you have indicated.

[141] **Joyce Watson:** I have indicated. I am named several times in the correspondence—

[142] **William Powell:** Indeed, and you have an obvious right to comment and reply.

[143] **Joyce Watson:** I absolutely stand by everything that I said. I am not at all happy with a comment in the reply that we have had from Healing Men, in the fifth bullet point, where it says that Welsh Women's Aid has

[144] 'a commercial imperative to ensure DA continues'.

[145] I think that that is outrageous. I think that we need to share those comments with Welsh Women's Aid so that it can, at least, have an opportunity to respond to that, because I do think that that is absolutely outrageous. I will say it quite clearly on the record. It is interesting that the petitioner has partly conceded that, saying that 50% —'half the problem'—was not 'strictly correct', and then he goes on to say that we must have evidence-based research. Well, that gives me a bit of a problem, also.

[146] We have a Bill that is going through and I will stand by that Bill, but I have always consistently said that you cannot ever talk about ending violence against women without also saying 'children'. In fact, in all of the campaigns that I have run, I have said 'ending violence against women and children'. It is obvious that, where children are present in a home where there is violence by one partner towards another, irrespective of gender, the children suffer. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that. The cyclical nature sometimes born in those circumstances makes it very difficult. Those are my comments. I certainly would like him to come back with some proper evidence, rather than allegations against a reputable, well-respected organisation that I, personally, find offensive. I would like its comments.

[147] **William Powell:** I am sure those views are shared, Joyce. I would be happy to share the comments, which clearly reference Welsh Women's Aid throughout the whole text. It needs to have the opportunity to respond, even though it is a third party. There is no alternative in that respect. Bethan, you have indicated that you would like to comment.

[148] **Bethan Jenkins:** I would like to reiterate that view in terms of the commercial imperative to ensure that domestic abuse continues. I think that it is really appalling and I would like it to be retracted, because nobody wants to suffer domestic abuse. However, on a

more progressive note, I would like to say that I do not know whether it is beneficial for us to go back and forth, back and forth. Yes, Welsh Women's Aid needs to be able to respond to those points, but I think that the Bill is the way forward now. I would like to move to close the petition, because I think that we can sit here and debate the merits of what each organisation believes or what the petitioners believe to be true or not true, but that Bill is where they can influence it. If they believe that they are being disenfranchised in any way, that is where they can lobby AMs who will be on the committee debating this. I do not think that the Petitions Committee is the vehicle to bring those voices further forward. I would move to close this petition, but having put that back to Welsh Women's Aid.

[149] **William Powell:** We need to share those comments, as Joyce has advocated, with Welsh Women's Aid. We have previously given petitioners the opportunity to respond more fully when they have requested that. I think that it would be a difficult precedent to cut this off in mid-flow. It also gives Mr Stott the opportunity to consider the comments that he has made, to amend them and retract them.

[150] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes, do that and then move to close. I did not mean to cut it off now.

[151] **William Powell:** No, absolutely.

[152] **Bethan Jenkins:** We cut it off after we have had that response.

[153] **William Powell:** Correct, that is probably consistent with Russell's original proposal.

[154] **Russell George:** Yes. I originally proposed that we give the petitioners more time and allow them to reply. Then I think we should discuss it again. We need to be consistent with other petitions, but I agree that it is moving towards the stage of closure.

[155] **William Powell:** I am grateful to Joyce and Bethan for their important contributions to the consideration of this. Okay; I think that we have some clear ways forward.

[156] On that consensual note, we reach the end of our agenda. I just want to remind you that there is a petition presentation at lunchtime today with regard to the exceptionality ruling determining patient access to treatments on the individual patient funding request. Tomorrow, there is a petition presentation at 1 p.m. regarding the potential closure of Porth fire station. I also want to bring to the attention of colleagues the fact that this committee will be represented on 22 and 23 July at the Royal Welsh show. I am looking forward very much to that occasion. Also, on 5 and 6 August, the committee will be represented at the Eisteddfod Genedlaethol in Llanelli. On 16 August, it will be represented at Pride Cymru in Cardiff and once again at the Cardiff Multicultural Mela on 14 September in Cardiff bay. Members' presence would be most welcome on all of those occasions, if you are able to attend.

[157] The next meeting of this committee is on 23 September—it seems a long way away, but it will soon come. I would like to wish Members and the wider team a relaxing and enjoyable summer. Stay healthy and I look forward to seeing you again in the autumn. Diolch yn fawr iawn.

*Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 09:55.
The meeting ended at 09:55.*