



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

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau **The Petitions Committee**

Dydd Mawrth, 25 Tachwedd 2014
Tuesday, 25 November 2014

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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
Ann Jones	Llafur (yn dirprwyo ar ran Joyce Watson) Labour (substitute for Joyce Watson)
William Powell	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Welsh Liberal Democrats (Committee Chair)
Lindsay Whittle	Plaid Cymru (yn dirprwyo ar ran Bethan Jenkins) The Party of Wales (substitute for Bethan Jenkins)

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

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

Kayleigh Driscoll	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Steve George	Clerc Clerk
Gareth Howells	Cynghorydd Cyfreithiol Legal Adviser

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 09:01.
The meeting began at 09:01.

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyo
Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **William Powell:** Bore da, bawb. **William Powell:** Good morning, all. A warm Croeso cynnes iawn. welcome.

[2] A warm welcome to our substitutes this morning, Ann Jones and Lindsay Whittle. We have received apologies from Joyce Watson and Bethan Jenkins, and we welcome you both as their substitutes this morning. We hope that we will be joined shortly by our colleague, Russell George. Normal housekeeping arrangements apply, so if there is a fire alarm it is for real and we are in the hands of the ushers. I propose that we now move straight to agenda item 2.

09:02

Trafod y Sesiwn Dystiolaeth ar 11 Tachwedd, 2014—P-04-597: Diogelu Dyfodol y Ddraig Ffyni, Cynulliad Plant a Phobl Ifanc Cymru
Discussion of Evidence Session on 11 November 2014—P-04-597: Protect the Future of Funky Dragon, the Children and Young People's Assembly for Wales

[3] **William Powell:** You have had an opportunity briefly to consider the evidence that you have in transcript form. It was actually a really interesting and useful session. One issue that came up that was new to some of us as Members was that there had been contact at the tendering stage between Children in Wales and Funky Dragon, with basically an overture for dialogue as to a possible collaborative bid. The decision had been not to go forward with that, which was one aspect that had not previously been highlighted. I do not know whether you have any observations on that, from reading the transcript, or if you have any observations in relation to the Funky Dragon issue. Lindsay?

[4] **Lindsay Whittle:** I did open the e-mail first thing this morning, but I have not had time to fully digest it all. Speaking from personal experience, I represent, as you know, the South East Wales region, and I have had a lot of correspondence from mainly young people who are very active about this issue. I know that, in Caerphilly, there was a very active Funky Dragon group. I have been invited to many events in Torfaen by the young people. I do think it was a bit of a retrograde decision not to go ahead with Funky Dragon, because a lot of young people, who we are trying to desperately as all political parties to get interested in politics, were actually really keen on Funky Dragon. I think it has been a huge disappointment to them, and I just wonder what alternative we can offer to them. That is the important thing. If Funky Dragon is gone, and if we have lost that battle, we have to move on. That can be an experience in itself for young people in politics, because we all know that, in politics, you do lose battles.

[5] **William Powell:** There are ups and downs.

[6] **Lindsay Whittle:** That is right, and that is life, as well. So, that is a bit of life experience for the young people. However, I do think now that we need to give them an alternative.

[7] **William Powell:** As a committee, we do everything that we can to engage with young people. In fact, some of the most articulate young people we have met on our travels around Wales were at Prestatyn High School in your constituency, Ann, where we met a range of people. I do not think that they were activists in Funky Dragon—

[8] **Ann Jones:** No, I was going to say that I think that that is part of the problem. I think that Funky Dragon has been inconsistent across Wales. Obviously, you have had some very good experiences with it, whereas, having made contact with Funky Dragon, I do not think that it has been as consistent across north Wales as it could have been. I think that what tends to happen is that it relies on the same set of young people, so if you are going to get involved in Funky Dragon, that is fine and that is a platform for you, but there are quite a few more children. However, I think that, like Lindsay, if it has gone and that is it, it is about what you put in its place to ensure that we engage with young people and that young people understand that they have a right to engage or how to do it in Wales. Perhaps this committee should focus on what the next stages are for the representation of young people.

[9] **William Powell:** Absolutely, and we have some options as to how we can take the discussion of this petition forward. Just one point for clarity, Funky Dragon, in terms of its structure up to this point in terms of staff members and the core funding, has gone but one of the things that was highlighted in the evidence session is that the Funky Dragon trust still exists and has the potential to continue certain things on a project basis, if it is successful in seeking funding or other collaborations. However, clearly, the main point is that the core funding has gone and, therefore, Funky Dragon as we have known it is no longer.

[10] One thing that we were considering last time, and I would value your view on, is whether or not it would be appropriate, as the committee had considered previously, to have a further evidence session. Certain witnesses that come to mind would be Children in Wales, which is going to be taking on a portion of this work, potentially also the Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty—of course, there has been a ministerial change in the period between the decision and implementation—and the Children's Commissioner for Wales has also been an active participant in this discussion, as indeed, have representatives of the Assembly Commission. So, if you would be content for your colleagues for whom you are subbing today to take that forward at a future meeting, I would be happy to help to make that happen.

[11] **Ann Jones:** Would it help to write to Children in Wales and ask it what its proposals

are to—. You have done that.

[12] **William Powell:** We have done that initially, but—

[13] **Ann Jones:** Okay, and you have had no response back then.

[14] **William Powell:** No, we have had a response, but I think that it is ready to—

[15] **Mr George:** We have had a response previously from it, which sets out what its bid was successful for. However, I understand that it would be content to come in and speak to committee members about how things could be taken forward.

[16] **Ann Jones:** But what would be the point in that, really, other than raising false hopes for some of these young people that Funky Dragon may return?

[17] **Mr George:** I cannot speak for it—

[18] **Ann Jones:** No, but I do not see the point in fetching it in, if you have, in writing, what it proposes to do. I wonder whether you would raise false hope that it could be saved by having another session. Is it not better to accept, as Lindsay said, that that battle has been lost? Perhaps the committee could write to the Minister in those terms, asking the Minister to keep a close eye on the progress made under the new arrangements and then return to it or leave it as a legacy for somebody.

[19] **William Powell:** Just one point, I suppose, is that Children in Wales was referred to and certain of its activities and overtures to Funky Dragon were referred to and, possibly, it would be useful to give it at least the opportunity to respond and maybe to give its take on what—. That evidence session was after any correspondence that we received from these various parties; it is the most recent thing that has happened.

[20] **Mr George:** I do not think that it was about replacing it or reconfiguring it. It was more about what else could be done.

[21] **William Powell:** No, I think that there is an understanding that Funky Dragon as we have known it is not going to return.

[22] Good morning, Russell. We are just having the discussion about the evidence session that you were part of. We have had full contributions from Lindsay and Ann as to whether or not we go forward with a focused evidence session from a couple of the relevant parties that were referred to in that initial evidence session that we had from the Funky Dragon officers.

[23] **Russell George:** I think that the young people who provided us with evidence presented their evidence in a very productive way. I think that they were very good. I think that there was also a recognition that, 'We are where we are' from them—

[24] **William Powell:** Absolutely. That is the settled view, I think, of the discussions we have had this morning.

[25] **Russell George:** So, in moving forward, we move forward from that position. If we can be involved as a committee—. I do not know whether it is going outside the remit of the petition, but if we can be involved in facilitating discussion and helping them to move forward from that point, I think that we could do that—if that is within the remit of our committee.

[26] **William Powell:** Sure. Just on this point, whether we have an evidence session to

wrap up and potentially close the petition or whether we close at this point is the question. Obviously, it is slightly invidious given that you were the only colleague who was involved in that previous discussion.

[27] **Russell George:** I think that all committee members who were here felt that we wanted to see the process through and support the younger people. We all agreed with the principle that younger people had that voice. So, given that, I would be more inclined to say that we should not quite close it yet; we should give another opportunity to facilitate that future discussion about what happens next, if that is a role for us as a committee.

[28] **William Powell:** That is my sense of view of the other two committee members.

[29] **Ann Jones:** But what do you do if they come in to have another session? How long do you prolong it? How long do you just keep it open?

[30] **William Powell:** No, my sense is that that would be the point at which we would seek to round it off.

[31] **Ann Jones:** What if they come and give you some evidence that you want to go away and—

[32] **William Powell:** Well, we cannot—

[33] **Ann Jones:** But that is the danger with not closing it down. All that time, you are offering what I understand as a false expectation—

[34] **William Powell:** It is a case of expectation management.

[35] **Ann Jones:** All right, the ones who came here may be articulate enough. However, for a lot of youngsters who Funky Dragon has not touched, if they see this or read this or teachers engage with them on this, there is that false sense that something will happen. But, you know, look, I am only subbing on this—

[36] **William Powell:** No, you have made a very useful contribution.

[37] **Ann Jones:** I am loath to put more work on to a committee when I wonder what the outcome is.

[38] **Russell George:** I think, Chair, that I agree with Ann's point that we would not want to set a false expectation, but, given the evidence we have had from the young people, they know where they are at and they are being realistic with that. As a committee, we are clear that our role is coming to an end on this. We have seen through this petition. We are absolutely clear on that, and we say that we are happy to facilitate a further discussion, but we cannot see that our committee can go beyond that. We make it absolutely clear that that is for the purpose only of facilitating a way forward from this point.

[39] **William Powell:** As you have said, we need to take on board very much Ann's point about expectation management and not engaging in an exercise that would be fruitless.

[40] **Ann Jones:** Okay, fine.

[41] **William Powell:** Thanks very much for that contribution. We have concluded that.

09:13

Deisebau Newydd New Petitions

[42] **William Powell:** We have petition P-04-602, Personalisation of Graves. This petition was submitted by Elizabeth Haynes and Catherine Board and has the support of 120 electronic signatures and a further 1,486 signatures on paper. Colleagues may have heard an item on Radio Wales this morning where Councillor Elizabeth Haynes was discussing her campaign on these issues. Last time, on behalf of the committee, I wrote to the Minister for Public Services seeking his views on the petition ahead of our first consideration. We have actually got a very full response from Leighton Andrews. It is quite clear that he has empathy with some of the sensitive issues that were raised by the petitioners. I am sure that colleagues have had an opportunity to see Leighton Andrews's comments. As per our normal practice, I propose that we should forward them to the petitioners so that they can have the opportunity to consider that and let us know their views.

[43] **Russell George:** I did not hear the discussion on Radio Wales this morning. All I heard was a discussion about politicians' wages. However, on this issue, I do not know what our usual practice is, but I sit on the cross-party group on funerals and bereavement. I wonder whether we should send the petition to it for its information or ask for its comment, if that is what we do. I am not sure, but I think that we should at least make the group aware.

09:15

[44] **William Powell:** I believe that that is chaired by our colleague Mark Isherwood.

[45] **Russell George:** Yes, he chairs quite a few cross-party groups, but, yes, that is one that he chairs.

[46] **William Powell:** Indeed. He is very active in that field. I would be happy to forward that to him. Just to correct one aspect of what I said earlier, we have actually had quite a significant and detailed response from the petitioners. I think that, in the light of that, we should share that response with Leighton Andrews, given his evident interest in the subject matter of this petition, if colleagues are happy with that.

[47] **Lindsay Whittle:** I do agree, Chair. I heard the radio this morning. I cannot understand why Torfaen County Borough Council was so bullish, really, in its attitude. This is really an extremely sensitive issue.

[48] **William Powell:** That came across in our discussion when we met the petitioners.

[49] **Lindsay Whittle:** Yes. It must have been very distressing for the individuals concerned. I think that clear policies are needed. I do not know whether you need an all-Wales policy on graves or not. I think that it is for democratically elected local authority members who control the municipal cemeteries, at least, to perhaps decide that, as opposed to a government deciding it. Nevertheless, I think that what you have suggested is a good idea. I do think that Torfaen council was very heavy-handed in this.

[50] **William Powell:** It seemed to be at the level of some of the individual representatives of the council itself and the way in which they were interpreting things. Some quite distressing examples were shared with us. Clearly, that is a matter that Leighton Andrews has expressed some concern about. That is to be welcomed. I am happy to share the petitioners' comments with him so as to further the matter. Thanks very much.

[51] We move to P-04-603, Helping Babies Born at 22 Weeks to Survive. This petition was submitted by Emma Jones, who is in the public gallery this morning and is most welcome. The petition collected 2,543 electronic signatures and a further 216 signatures on paper, totalling 2,759. On behalf of the committee, I wrote to Professor Mark Drakeford, Minister for Health and Social Services, seeking his views on the petition ahead of our first consideration. As you can see, we have the Minister's response in the public papers today. We also have feedback from Emma Jones with regard to some of the comments that the Minister has made. I very much welcome your thoughts on this. There clearly are some points of detail where the petitioner feels that the Minister is maybe conflating two issues, I think.

[52] **Russell George:** I remember very well this petition being handed in. I think that you and I were there, speaking with Emma and her husband or partner and family. It was something that remained on my mind for some time afterwards, because it is not every day that you get a petition that is so emotive, really. What struck me was that there was different guidance on each side of the border. I would like us, as a committee, to understand about the different practices across different parts of the UK and understand the differences that there are in Wales that Emma was suggesting to us. It is certainly a petition that I would want to take forward very seriously because it is a very important issue to me.

[53] **William Powell:** Yes. The petitioner, in her comments, specifically urges us to bring the question to the Minister as to his views on whether medical assistance should be given to babies who are born alive and breathing. It is not a stillbirth; it is a completely different situation, and it is in terms of the resuscitation. So, in the light of her comments, I would be happy to seek further clarification from the Minister on that particular point, and also potentially to write—. Are you suggesting that we should write to the ministry of health?

[54] **Russell George:** No. Perhaps we could just have a research briefing for when this comes back to committee, just explaining the different practices across each administration in the UK.

[55] **William Powell:** I am happy to do that if my colleagues are content.

[56] **Lindsay Whittle:** May I just say, Chair, that this strikes a chord with me today? As I explained before the meeting started, my daughter is currently expecting a child on Sunday. She has been scanned regularly, each week—she lives in Devon, by the way—but she has been scanned each week since she was 20 weeks pregnant because there was a fear that the child was due to arrive prematurely. Thankfully, she has run the full course of the pregnancy. We, as a family, did not know that. There is no such thing—the only safe birth is one that has actually happened. We have seen, time and again in our newspapers, stories about young children who are now growing and healthy, who have survived at this rate. For me, this is an extremely touching part of this meeting and I would like to thank Emma Jones personally, because this must have been a most distressing time for her, and if anything could be done to prevent this happening to anybody else, I am sure that that would be a wonderful tribute to this lady and her little boy.

[57] **William Powell:** Indeed, when we met back on 14 October, as Russell said, that was something that struck all of us who were present—her resilience but also her commitment that lessons should be learnt from her experience.

[58] **Lindsay Whittle:** Hear, hear.

[59] **William Powell:** So, in light of that, I shall write to the Minister and we will commission a short and focused research brief also.

[60] We now move to P-04-604, Regarding the closure of Diabetes Patient Reference

Groups and the cancellation of meetings of the Diabetic Planning and Delivery Group in Powys. This petition was submitted by Robert V. Wright and had the support of 40 signatures. Members can familiarise themselves with the details of the petition in front of them. I wrote to the Minister for Health and Social Services seeking his views on the petition and we have the Minister's response in our public papers. We have sought feedback from the petitioner, particularly in light of what seems to be a positive outcome here. I propose that we write again to the petitioner to seek his views on the outcome. Given that we have a positive result, I think we are also moving to close the petition because there is no point—in the sentiments that Ann expressed earlier—in prolonging things that do not need to be prolonged. So, congratulations to Mr Wright on bringing this particular niche, but important, issue forward.

[61] **Russell George:** Mr Wright is extremely persistent. I know that we had a meeting with him—I had a meeting with him and Powys local health board, and in that meeting all of his requests were confirmed. I think that he was quite taken aback. So, on that basis, we are moving to close the petition, but if we need to seek clarification with Mr Wright first that he is happy, then we should do that.

[62] **William Powell:** For our records, absolutely. I am also grateful to Mr Bob Hudson, who wrote to me on this issue. Mr Hudson is the chief executive of the local health board, so he was confirming that decision also. So, both the Minister and the chief executive are very much coming from the same place on this issue, so this will be of great solace to diabetes patients throughout the county of Powys. Thank you very much.

[63] We move to P-04-605, Save the Cwmcarn Forest Drive from Indefinite or Permanent Closure. This petition was submitted by Robert Jeffrey Southall, and collected 2,392 electronic signatures and a further 602 on paper, totalling 2,994. I wrote to Carl Sargeant, the Minister for Natural Resources, seeking his views ahead of our first consideration, and we have a response from Carl Sargeant in our papers. We have also been in touch with the petitioner, Mr Southall, but we have not as yet had a response from him. So, I think it would probably be sensible for us to await that response. Are there any actions that colleagues would suggest that we undertake in the meantime? Lindsay, I am clear that this is within your own region—do you have any particular local insights into this particular issue?

[64] **Lindsay Whittle:** Not really. Cwmcarn forest drive is a wonderful drive. It is ironic that you cannot drive through the forest and that other users can walk and cycle. It is a pretty hair-raising mountain bike ride, if ever you have the chance. It is certainly something I would not undertake on a mountain bike. I find it unusual that other forest parks are only facing minimal—. In Wentwood forest, they have had a similar problem with larch disease. I think it would be a great shame. I do not think there is any threat of it permanently closing. I am sure that all the authorities and powers that be will eventually, when this disease is hopefully eliminated, reinstate some of the trees and hopefully reinstate the road. Undoubtedly, a lot of damage will be caused by removing so many large trees. This forest caught fire a few years and it was horrific to watch, but it was managed to be saved. I am sure that, with a bit of good will and the help of Robert Southall, who I know personally, and the help of all the people behind him—and there are a lot—something can eventually be worked out between the powers that be.

[65] **William Powell:** Okay. We await Mr Southall's formal response and it may well be that we will seek to be in touch with NRW at officer level to get a clearer understanding of a potential way forward on this one.

[66] **Lindsay Whittle:** I am not sure if I ought to declare an interest, but Caerphilly county council will be involved as well. That is a good thing—if it is still around, of course.

[67] **William Powell:** Okay. That is helpful for the record, Lindsay. I appreciate that.

09:26

Y Wybodaeth Ddiweddaraf am Ddeisebau Blaenorol Updates to Previous Petitions

[68] **William Powell:** We start with P-04-319, Newtown traffic petition. This petition was submitted by Mr Paul Pavia and was first considered way back on 21 June 2011, which was one of the first Petitions Committee meetings of this fourth Assembly. It had collected 10 electronic signatures, but an associated traditional paper petition had collected in excess of 5,000. We last considered this petition back on 23 September and agreed to thank the Minister, Mrs Edwina Hart, for her reply and to ask for ongoing updates and for any comments from the lead petitioner. We had a brief comment via e-mail from Mr Pavia and the Minister has provided us with an update, which is available in the public papers.

[69] **Russell George:** Chair, I will declare an interest as being involved in this petition, as I have before. The only comment I would make is that the Minister has agreed to keep us updated, so let us leave it at this point and wait for further updates.

[70] **William Powell:** Absolutely. I think that is the sensible way to go. The Minister for transport has been as good as her word in this as with other petitions. I am sure she will continue to do so, but it is useful to keep it on the agenda as things develop. Excellent, thank you.

[71] The next is P-04-393, Llanyrnech and Pant Bypass Action Group. This petition was submitted by Duncan Borthwick and was first considered on 29 May 2012. It has the support of 84 signatures and we have the full text here, stressing the benefits in terms of connectivity but also in terms of the quality of life for locals that would be delivered by this bypass. Recent research that I undertook suggested that the campaign in this community goes way back to the mid 1970s, from when they have been aspiring to have this bypass. Our last consideration of the petition was back on 26 November. It was agreed that we would ask the Minister to keep us informed of the results of traffic monitoring over the coming 12 months and to be told of any further developments with the Highways Agency in England. As you can see, Mrs Edwina Hart has written to us with an update. Among the issues there is her undertaking to write to the Secretary of State for Transport at Westminster, with a view to bringing about further impetus in this long-standing project, or would-be project. Are there any comments from colleagues?

[72] **Russell George:** Chair, can we write to the Minister to thank her for her letter and to ask her to keep us updated when she receives a reply from the Minister of the UK Government?

[73] **William Powell:** Absolutely. We would all welcome the fresh impetus that appears to be under way in trying to bring this improvement about. Thank you.

09:30

[74] The next petition is P-04-416, North-South Rail Services. This petition was submitted by Neil Taylor and was first considered on 2 October 2012. It has the support of 19 signatures. I suppose that I should declare an interest as a fairly frequent user of this line, although not as far north as my colleague sitting to my right.

[75] **Ann Jones:** No. I declare an interest, as it is my only method of transport between north Wales and Cardiff.

[76] **William Powell:** Okay. We last considered the petition on 21 October. At that time, it was agreed that we would write to the Minister for Economy, Science and Transport to seek an update in the light of her previous written statement and the comments supplied by Mr Taylor, to seek further clarity on her preparations ahead of the franchise renewal, due in 2018, including how she will be collecting and collating information received on views expressed relating to the provision of rail services, and to draw the petitioner's attention to the upcoming tender.

[77] Again, we have a response from the Minister in our pack. At this stage, however, we are awaiting comments from Mr Neil Taylor, so I think that we should probably chase on that one to get a response from him on the matter. That probably is all that we can do at this particular juncture. However, I know how much I rely—and, indeed, Ann has said that she also relies—on a quality service on this line, and anything that can be done to enhance it further would be appreciated.

[78] **Ann Jones:** Just on that, I wonder what the petition is attempting to get, given that we have seen quite an improvement in the number of direct trains that run north-south, or south-north—whichever way we want to go. You know, they are every two hours, and, when it runs well, it runs well, and, like everything else, when it is bad, it is horrible, but that is the nature of the beast. I wonder what is behind it, in terms of express services, because the express services are the difficult ones to measure, given that a lot of people rely on travel-to-work times or travel-to-work areas. So, if you are going to do an express that stops only at certain points along the north Wales coast, you actually are disadvantaging quite a lot of people who could use the hop-on, hop-off.

[79] **William Powell:** Yes, absolutely—their local station.

[80] **Ann Jones:** You would also disadvantage the school bus on one of the services, if you get whatever train it is from here—children get on at Hereford and use the stops, like a school bus.

[81] **William Powell:** Yes, the Abergavenny-Hereford link is a particularly busy one.

[82] **Ann Jones:** Yes, and I think that it is from Hereford onwards, northwards, as well. So, you have to be careful about asking for express services.

[83] **William Powell:** Yes, which would be at the expense of—

[84] **Ann Jones:** —which would be at the expense of commuter services.

[85] **William Powell:** Yes, indeed.

[86] **Ann Jones:** I think that, for me, part of what I will be doing when I talk to the Minister about the franchise renewal, will be about rolling stock—which is not what this petition is about—because, for me, that is the main one. It will be interesting to see what he comes back with, because I am not sure what exactly the petition is seeking to do.

[87] **William Powell:** Yes. I would agree strongly with you in terms of the importance of the quality of the rolling stock, and even some of the facilities, even if it is as simple as some of the—

[88] **Ann Jones:** A cup of tea, sometimes, would be very nice.

[89] **William Powell:** A cup of tea is one issue, and the availability of plugs to keep the

various devices alive—that is another issue that is of importance to many who are trying to do some work as well. Excellent. Thanks for those insights, Ann.

[90] **Ann Jones:** Okay.

[91] **William Powell:** I think that we are ready to receive the comments from Mr Taylor on that petition.

[92] The next petition is P-04-468, Road Safety Concerns on the A48 at Chepstow. This petition was submitted by Chepstow Town Council and was first considered by us on 19 March 2013. An associated petition collected in excess of 1,000 signatures. Also, when this was originally presented, I seem to recall that there was quite a delegation of young people as well, who shared the concern of their town council with respect to this. We last considered the petition on 21 October 2014 and agreed to write to the Minister for Economy, Science and Transport, drawing her attention to the petitioners' views, and, in particular, what the petitioner had stressed, which is the relative ease with which the speed limit could be adjusted back to 30 mph, and asking her to provide further information, including, ideally, a timeline for the feasibility study mentioned in her letter of 7 October. We have the Minister's response to this in our public papers, for which I am grateful. We have a further response from the petitioner, because it is being very assiduous in following up these issues. In that context, it would probably be sensible to share that response with the Minister.

[93] **Russell George:** Yes, Chair. I agree that we should write back to the Minister with the petitioner's comments and ask her to respond to the petitioner's latest correspondence with us.

[94] **William Powell:** Excellent. Lindsay, given that this falls within your own region, are there any particular issues—

[95] **Lindsay Whittle:** The photographic evidence is there that children clearly are walking on the road.

[96] **William Powell:** In peak hours, that will be—

[97] **Lindsay Whittle:** Well, that will be quite dangerous, but at least if there was a railing there, that would be a good start for them. It would protect the pedestrians on the bridge.

[98] **William Powell:** Sure. Absolutely. Good.

[99] The following three petitions will be considered together, because we previously decided to do that. They are P-04-475, Wanted—Buses for Meirionnydd, P-04-513, Save the Wrexham/Barmouth X94 bus service, and P-04-515, Increase Funding for Welsh Bus Services. We took evidence on this group of petitions back in our meeting at Prestatyn High School, if I recall correctly.

[100] **Mr George:** Yes, and since then—

[101] **William Powell:** Yes, we have had further feedback since then to contribute to our short inquiry on these matters. The Minister has previously been reluctant to attend committee to consider these petitions. She previously agreed to provide some written answers to the committee and we do not have a set of answers, as such, but the Minister forwarded us, for our reference, a statement that she had issued. What we have from the petitioners is that they seem to be of the view—and I would tend to share that—that the statement that we have received does not really address a number of the points and seems rather more generic in character.

[102] **Russell George:** On that particular issue, Chair, I suggest that we write back to the Minister, perhaps a bit more forcefully, showing our frustration that not all of the questions have been answered.

[103] **William Powell:** I am reluctant to contemplate being forceful with the Minister. [*Laughter.*] I think that we need to be clearer, certainly.

[104] **Russell George:** Well, I can suggest that, because your name would be at the bottom of the letter, not mine. [*Laughter.*]

[105] **Ann Jones:** You are right there. This is coming from the Member who, you know—

[106] **William Powell:** The honourable Member for Montgomeryshire.

[107] **Russell George:** I think we should be a bit more forceful, because it is frustrating that the questions have not been addressed, as we had expected.

[108] **William Powell:** Yes. I am sure that it would be the Minister's wish that the points were addressed more clearly and I think there may have been some failure along the line. I would be very happy to do that and I think that the petitioners would expect us to do that. It is our job to do that, so if colleagues are content, I shall write and I shall phrase it in a circumspect way, but making our points.

[109] **Ann Jones:** Our clerks are very good at writing those letters. [*Laughter.*]

[110] **William Powell:** We move now to P-04-562, Caernarfon Heritage Centre. This petition was submitted by the Caernarfon Civic Society and we first considered it back on 17 June this year. Our most recent consideration of it was on 11 November when we agreed to seek further comments from the petitioner following letters that we had received from the Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism, and also from the head of economy and community at Gwynedd Council. We now have a full response from the petitioner and that is in our public papers. Possibly, we need to bring those comprehensive comments back to the attention of Gwynedd Council in that respect and possibly also Cadw, via Ken Skates, asking whether he would be prepared to meet the petitioners to discuss a potential way forward here. It occurs to me that one thing that perhaps we could have done and have not done is to write to Caernarfon Town Council. I presume that it would have a potential interest in this matter. I do not know whether we have done so to date. I think that that would be a useful action.

[111] **Russell George:** I agree with your suggested action. Let us do that.

[112] **Lindsay Whittle:** Chair, across the whole of Wales—we have 700 castles in Wales—many towns complain that they have no museum. I agree with every town that complains. I think that every town should remember its past. They are expensive, but we have the buildings there, so why do we not utilise them?

[113] **Ann Jones:** That is right.

[114] **Lindsay Whittle:** Sometimes, you go into these castles—. I confess that I have never been in to Caernarfon castle, but I have walked around the outside. I am sure that there are many rooms there that could be adapted, a lot more cost-effectively.

[115] **William Powell:** A lot of it can be down to the innovative use of interpretation as well, which is another way forward.

[116] **Lindsay Whittle:** Caerphilly castle does put on small exhibitions. So, if Caerphilly can do it, others can.

[117] **William Powell:** Yes. I notice, from recent years, that another castle in your region, Raglan castle, has also upped its game in terms of interpretation. That is another route. So, there are a number of actions to pursue there. I look forward to the feedback from Gwynedd, Cadw and potentially also from Caernarfon Town Council. Good.

[118] We now turn to P-04-561, Promotion of Grassroots Rugby in Wales to Encourage Take-Up of the Sport. This petition was submitted by Inside Welsh Rugby TV and was first considered by us back on 17 June this year. It has the support of 334 signatures. We considered the petition for the first time and agreed to write to the then Minister for culture and sport, John Griffiths, and the Welsh Rugby Union seeking their views. We have received a response from John's successor, Ken Skates, AM, Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism. This is available in our public pack. Despite chasing, we have yet to receive a response from the WRU, but we do have a set of responses from the petitioners to the comments in the Deputy Minister's letter. I think that one of the concerns that has come to light here since the original consideration is the fact that at the heart of this is the issue of broadcasting, which, obviously, is not devolved to us. The wording of the petition in terms of promotion did not really make that absolutely explicit. So, it might well be useful to send a final chaser to the WRU, but I think that we have come close to closing this petition as well, because, clearly, we cannot progress matters that are beyond our powers. So, I would be happy to do both of those actions.

[119] **Lindsay Whittle:** I find it very disappointing that the WRU does not respond to the Welsh Government. I have written personally to the WRU. This year is the one-hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of the sailing of the Mimoso to Patagonia, the Welsh speaking part of Argentina. I suggested to it that a tour of Argentina and Patagonia by the Welsh rugby team would be a magnificent way of highlighting that anniversary. There has been not a single solitary acknowledgment from it of my correspondence. If it is going to continually ignore individual Assembly Members and the Assembly as a corporate body, perhaps we should consider the funding to the WRU.

[120] **Ann Jones:** Yes.

[121] **Lindsay Whittle:** It is only polite to respond.

[122] **William Powell:** I shall write to Roger Lewis in this vein. I hope that, on this occasion, we will have the courtesy of a response.

[123] **Ann Jones:** I think that you should close the petition, however, given that it is around the broadcasting, which is—

[124] **William Powell:** Yes, exactly, which is beyond our—. I am happy to undertake both of those actions.

[125] We now move to P-04-397, Living Wage. This petition was submitted by Save the Children, and we first considered it back on 19 June 2012. It has the support of 196 signatures. Our most recent consideration was on 17 October this year. We agreed to seek further comments from the petitioner and also to write to the Minister seeking assurances that the matter would be discussed at the December meeting of the workforce partnership council, which was a meeting that had been postponed on two previous occasions, if memory serves me correctly. We have a short sharp response from the Minister on the issue, where he confirms that the meeting will take place in December but that, ultimately, the agenda is a matter for others. I hope that this will have some air time at that meeting. We also have a

response from Save the Children. I think, in the context of this, the only thing that we can reasonably do is to wait for the outcome of the meeting.

09:45

[126] **Russell George:** Let us wait, Chair.

[127] **William Powell:** Thank you for that.

[128] Next is P-04-485, Abuse of casual contracts in Further Education. This petition was submitted by Briony Knibbs, and was first considered by us back on 4 June 2013. It has the support of 674 signatures. We last considered it back on 7 October this year and agreed to write to the Minister seeking an update on his view of the current position and then to await the review of the position that will become clearer in the spring of 2015. We have a response from the Minister for Education and Skills. In the context of that, do colleagues agree that the best approach is to await the review that is referred to again in his most recent correspondence?

[129] Next is P-04-518, Universal Free School Lunches. This petition was submitted by Jane Dodds and was first considered on 26 November 2013. It has the support of 14 signatures. I declare that I have some association with Ms Jane Dodds, who is the parliamentary candidate for Montgomeryshire constituency for the Liberal Democrats. Clearly, we have a restatement of the Government's position here in the Minister's response, and in the light of that, and the fact that we have not heard from Ms Dodds in the most recent period, I think that we should close this petition, if colleagues are content.

[130] **Ann Jones:** I agree.

[131] **William Powell:** Our next petition is P-04-593, Advise Schools on Visits to Noah's Ark Zoo Farm. This was submitted by Jane Henderson, and we first considered it on 23 September. It had the support of 220 signatures. Clearly, she had some specific concerns about the suitability of Noah's Ark Zoo Farm for visits for pupils from Welsh schools. We considered the petition for the first time on 23 September this year and agreed to write to Huw Lewis, the Minister for Education and Skills, seeking his views and to forward correspondence received from Noah's Ark Zoo Farm and, indeed, the petitioner. We now have responses both from the Minister for Education and Skills and the petitioner, both of which are in our papers today. I would appreciate a steer from colleagues as to how to move on this one.

[132] **Ann Jones:** I think that it has gone as far as it is going to go. The Minister is quite clear in his response and I think that, in the response back from the petitioners, they are quite happy with the response. That is how I have read it.

[133] **William Powell:** I think that you are probably right. They have aired their concerns; the Minister has given his response. Whether it would be appropriate to draw this to the attention of local education authorities in Wales or maybe—. Did we engage the Welsh Local Government Association and Mr Chris Llewelyn in this matter, because that might be a way of disseminating this and raising this point, as a last action maybe, as well as close it?

[134] **Ann Jones:** Close it. Write to the WLGA and just say 'This is the correspondence'. Close it, because I do not think that you are going to go any further.

[135] **William Powell:** Are colleagues happy with that approach? I see that you are.

[136] Next is P-04-592, A Letting Agency Ombudsman for Wales. This petition was

submitted by Let Down in Cardiff and was first considered on 21 January 2014. We last considered it as recently as 7 October and agreed to ask the Minister to respond to the specific points that had been made by Let Down in Cardiff. We were then considering holding an evidence session that would also incorporate representatives of the petitioners for the other, longer-standing petition—P-04-480, Private Sector Student Housing Standards. As colleagues will see, we have responses both from the Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty and the petitioner, both of which are available in our public papers today. I do not know whether colleagues have a view here. Russell George, you—

[137] **Russell George:** I am still thinking.

[138] **William Powell:** You are giving your thoughts to whether there would be merit in drawing together an evidence session, because we had quite an extensive body of information from the private sector student housing group, which was based in Aberystwyth, but was picking up concerns from across Wales.

[139] **Russell George:** We can do, but, on the other hand, the Minister has made his position clear, so there is a question as to what further we can do. It goes back to Ann's point.

[140] **William Powell:** Yes, absolutely.

[141] **Ann Jones:** I do not think it can go any further; I think that you should close it.

[142] **William Powell:** I think, on balance, you are probably right on this one, because we have got such clarity from the Minister, and the previous petition had a fair degree of air time and consideration before—

[143] **Russell George:** It is no reflection on what this committee thinks, but our remit is to provide the answers from Ministers.

[144] **William Powell:** Absolutely, in the cause of moving progress and maintaining the flow of work. So, let us move to close. Thank you.

[145] Next is P-04-573, Call on the Welsh Government to Investigate the Residential Leasehold System in Wales. This petition was submitted by residents of the Elba estate and was first considered by us on 15 July. It has the support of 263 signatures. We last considered it much more recently on 7 October, and we agreed to ask the Minister to respond to specific points that had been made by the petitioners and also about the possible effect on smaller numbers of householders, requesting that the Minister keep us informed of the outcome of the lease report. We have got a response from the Minister and we also have further correspondence from our colleague, Byron Davies AM, relating to an individual case that had come to light in his mailbag related to this wider issue. As colleagues will recall, there was a media report that suggested that this matter was coming to resolution, but it seems that there are still some issues that perhaps need attention.

[146] **Russell George:** I think, Chair, that I would suggest that we write back to the Minister with the petitioner's comments, incorporating the letters that Byron Davies, Assembly Member, sent and ask the Minister to address those specific issues raised.

[147] **William Powell:** As ever, we are grateful to other Members of the Assembly for getting involved in the wider petitions agenda and offering their thoughts. So, I would be happy to do that, if colleagues are content. Okay.

[148] Next is P-04-532, Improving specialised neuromuscular services in Wales. This petition was submitted by the Muscular Dystrophy Campaign. We first considered it back on

4 February this year. Our most recent consideration was on 15 July. At that stage, we agreed to write to the Minister, asking about progress in appointing a successor to Dr Andrew Goodall, as chair of the Welsh neuromuscular network, and also inquiring about progress on other issues that were flagged up by the petitioners, and, at the same time, to seek responses from those health boards that had not responded to our original letter. Now we have got a response from the Minister for Health and Social Services and, indeed, the petitioner has also responded. I think that it would probably be sensible for us to ask the Minister to keep us up to speed as to the progress of the appointments process to replace Dr Goodall, because it is clear that that position is key in moving progress.

[149] **Russell George:** We are still awaiting correspondence, are we?

[150] **William Powell:** We are awaiting a response. It is running now to several months, and, true to previous form, a number of the health boards have failed to respond to us. I am as disappointed about that as Lindsay was in relation to the WRU earlier. I think that we should expect at least the courtesy of a response.

[151] **Russell George:** Which health boards have not responded?

[152] **Mr George:** There are three responses outstanding.

[153] **William Powell:** It should not be too much to ask.

[154] **Mr George:** It was some time in the summer recess.

[155] **Russell George:** It is just unbelievable that people just do not bother responding to letters.

[156] **William Powell:** I think it would also be useful to copy the Minister's office into our chaser, because it is useful for the Minister to be aware of the kind of response that Assembly committees are receiving in relation to their work.

[157] **Russell George:** That is a good idea, Chair. Let us express our disappointment that we have not received a letter and copy in the Minister to that.

[158] **William Powell:** Hopefully, by the time we get a response, we will have news of the appointment of Dr Goodall's successor.

[159] Moving now to a perennial topic, P-04-582, Much Needed Change to the Rules in our Schools with Regards to Head Lice and Nits, this petition was submitted by Marnie Hill and was first considered on 23 September 2014, with the support of 31 signatures. We last considered this as a committee on 23 September and we agreed to write to the Minister for Education and Skills, and, indeed, the Minister for Health and Social Services, seeking their views. The response has come—so the lead Minister in the matter of head lice and nits is, clearly, the Minister for Health and Social Services. We are grateful for that response. We have also received some unsolicited correspondence from an organisation called the Hairforce—Lice Assassins. This appears to be a company active in the field of head lice and nit removal. The petitioners have been asked for comments, but clearly they are busy doing other things—we should, I think, sensibly chase that up for a response, and then we can potentially bring that whole package of responses to the attention of Mark Drakeford to take these matters forward, if colleagues are content.

[160] Now we have P-04-601, Proposed Ban on the Use of e-cigarettes in Public Places. This petition was submitted by Simon Thurlow and was first considered by us on 7 October. It has the support of 1,196 signatures. We, as I said, considered it on 7 October and agreed to

write to the Minister for Health and Social Services, seeking his views on the petition and, indeed, we have a response from the Minister. The petitioner was asked for his comments, and I think we had a late response, which colleagues have in hard-copy form. It came in on 20 November, after the agenda was published. In this context, we have a number of quite specific points and international comparisons made by the petitioner drawing on academic research and other things they consider to be relevant to this issue. I think it would only be fair to share this substantial response from the petitioner with Mark Drakeford, so that he can consider the matter further as he takes policy forward. Any other comments from colleagues on this one?

[161] **Ann Jones:** I think that is a fair comment but, as we will be discussing this in future legislation, I do not see the point of keeping this petition open. You have noted it, you have sent the stuff on to the Minister, and I should imagine that members of this committee or others may raise that issue when the legislation is being debated. So, I, for one, think it should be closed. I do not know what good you are going to do by keeping it open.

[162] **William Powell:** Thanks, Ann, for that.

[163] **Russell George:** We have asked the petitioner for these further comments, and we have had them back.

[164] **Mr George:** It was a late response.

[165] **Russell George:** I have not seen that yet, so I have not digested that.

[166] **William Powell:** Apologies for that. As Joyce Watson often says, for the sake of consistency, I think we need to stick with our practice of sharing, particularly such a full response, with the Minister. However, I think you may well be right in the sense that this is going to be resolved elsewhere shortly, so you may well be—

[167] **Mr George:** I am just wondering, if Members have not had a chance to look at the response, if you would like us to put it on the agenda for the next meeting, so you can consider it.

[168] **William Powell:** Given that this was a late response in the first place, but that does not prevent—. We can put it on the next agenda, but there is no point in holding back from sharing it with the Minister.

[169] **Russell George:** Why do we not share that with the Minister, and when the Minister has responded, bring it back to committee? Let us do that.

[170] **William Powell:** Okay, that will be more productive, taking on board the points that Ann quite rightly made.

10:00

[171] Moving to P-04-544, Ban the Shooting of Greenland White-fronted Geese, this petition was submitted by Aaron Davies, and was first considered on 29 April 2014. It has the support of 240 signatures. We last considered this on 23 September. We agreed to write to the new Minister for Natural Resources, seeking his views on the petitioner's comments because we had had a previous stance from Alun Davies, the previous Minister for Natural Resources and Food. We thought there might be a possible policy development in this particular regard with the arrival of Carl Sargeant. We have a ministerial response; I think it would probably be sensible to share Carl Sargeant's views with Mr Davies and his fellow petitioners. That is agreed. We are happy to do that.

[172] Finally is P-04-577, Reinstate Funding to the Real Opportunities Project. This petition was submitted by Aled Davies, and was first considered on 15 July 2014. It has the support of 25 signatures, but an associated e-petition adds a further 226 signatures, so therefore there is a total of 251 in all supporting this. We last considered correspondence on the petition on 23 September and we agreed to seek the Minister's views on the outline proposal put forward by the petitioners. We have a response from Jane Hutt, as the Minister for Finance and Government Business; it is available in our public papers. We also have a very full response from the petitioner, which has been received from Mr Davies. I would be very happy—if colleagues are content—to share that fulsome response with Jane Hutt, and particularly to flag up the invitation that the petitioners have issued to meet the petitioners to discuss their proposal and to make her aware of the event that is being held here at the Senedd on 11 September, as part of the Real Opportunities evaluation process.

[173] **Ann Jones:** It is on 11 December.

[174] **William Powell:** It is on 11 December, sorry—a blind spot there. Thanks, Ann, for that. If we could also be aware of that for our own diaries, if we are available—and other committee colleagues—it might be useful because, clearly, there is a feeling that there are some really broad benefits to the Real Opportunities project and it might well be useful for us to have the opportunity to meet some of those who have benefitted first-hand.

[175] **Russell George:** I agree, Chair, with that suggestion.

[176] **William Powell:** Excellent. Thanks for that. That brings us to the end of our agenda for today. I am very grateful for your attendance and contributions, particularly to Ann and to Lindsay for substituting and for taking such a full part in the meeting. There are no scheduled petition presentations this week. That being the case—thanks once again—I declare the meeting closed.

*Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 10:03.
The meeting ended at 10:03.*