



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

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau **The Petitions Committee**

Dydd Mawrth, 12 Mai 2015
Tuesday, 12 May 2015

Cynnwys
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Cofnodir y trafodion yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynddi 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	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Bethan Jenkins	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
William Powell	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Welsh Liberal Democrats (Committee Chair)
Joyce Watson	Llafur Labour

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

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

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 09:03.
The meeting began at 09:03.

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **William Powell:** Bore da, bawb. **William Powell:** Good morning, all.

[2] A warm welcome to the first Petitions Committee meeting in the post-general election period. We have a full complement of Members, and we have a particular warm welcome this morning, as, in a moment, we'll be joined in the public gallery by two colleagues from the joint committee on public petitions from the Dáil, namely Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn and Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh, together with officials Ronan Lenihan and Anita Gibbons of the clerking team of the petitions committee. They are joining us this morning, and we're very pleased to have our guests from the Republic of Ireland. Also, I've spotted at least one of our petitioners this morning as well. So, that's excellent. Normal housekeeping arrangements apply. So, I suggest that we move straight to agenda item 2.

Deisebau Newydd
New Petitions

[3] **William Powell:** The first petition is petition P-04-630, 'Facebook Regulations for Looked After Children'. This petition was submitted by Christine Williams, and collected 11 signatures. The text reads as follows:

[4] 'We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government: To update the "IRO Handbook: Statutory guidance for independent reviewing officers and local authorities on their functions in relation to case management and review for looked after children" to prevent children under the age of 13 being set up with Facebook accounts; That concerns relating to social media be discussed as part of the Statutory Review; that reporting provisions be made to the Welsh Government; that the current guidance that "computer use should be monitored from time to time" be upgraded to a statutory requirement on at least a weekly basis'.

[5] There's significant additional material that colleagues will have had the opportunity to study. As a background to this, a first-consideration letter was sent to the Minister for Health and Social Services seeking his views on the petition. We've got the response from Mark Drakeford, and the petitioner has also submitted some additional comments, which are available in the public pack. Also, as was promised at the time of the presentation of this petition a couple of weeks ago, we've been sent links to the relevant information on the UK Council for Child Internet Safety—UKCCIS—website, which are included in the public papers. So, it would be useful, I think, probably, at this stage, to share the comments that we've received from the petitioner with the Minister; that would be my proposal. What other actions, colleagues, would you like to take at this time? Joyce.

[6] **Joyce Watson:** This petition is really welcome, in as much as it does focus on a growing area of concern for everybody, regardless of who they are. Your actions are, I think, right, in terms of what we do, and, maybe, it would be worth having a look at how others outside of Wales are approaching this as well, because there are no boundaries in things like this. Therefore, equally, the best practice that we can seek out and use will only be to the advantage of ourselves, those trying to protect the children and the children themselves.

[7] **William Powell:** Okay. As I said, I'm proposing that we share the petitioner's latest comments with the Minister, following the initial response. Also, I think it's probably the right time to involve the children's commissioner to seek her views. Are there any other points that colleagues would suggest at this stage?

[8] **Russell George:** I agree with what you said, Chair.

[9] **William Powell:** Yes, okay. Bethan.

[10] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yn y gorffennol, rŷm ni wedi gofyn i'r Gweinidog a oes modd iddo gwrdd â rhywun i drafod y consŷrn sydd ganddynt am faterion penodol. Nid wyf yn cofio'r mater yn benodol, ond roedd hynny wedi digwydd. Efallai, oherwydd nad yw'r deisebwr wedi bod yn ymwneud â'r Gweinidog ynglŷn â'r rheoliadau gyda'r Bil ar *social care* gallwn ni gynnig bod y deisebwr yn cwrdd â naill ai swyddogion y Gweinidog neu'r Gweinidog ei hun i drafod manylion beth mae hi'n gofyn amdano, oherwydd, wrth gwrs, mae yna bolisiâu cyffredinol yn eu lle fel mae, ond mae hyn yn mynd mewn i amddiffyniad a sut mae pobl yn gallu amddiffyn eu hunain ar y we, sydd bach yn wahanol. Mae hynny jest yn rhywbeth er mwyn ceisio dod â phennau at ei gilydd ar gyfer y broses hynny yn benodol, yn ogystal, efallai, ag ysgrifennu at rhai o'r elusennau plant, a nid dim ond at y Gymdeithas Genedlaethol er Atal Creulondeb i Blant, ond rhai o'r elusennau plant eraill yng Nghymru, efallai. Mae ymbarél Children in Wales, onid oes? Gallem ni ysgrifennu at Children in Wales i ofyn a allen nhw roi mwy o wybodaeth inni am hyn.

Bethan Jenkins: In the past, we have asked the Minister if it would be possible for him to meet with someone to discuss some of the concerns that they have regarding specific issues. I don't recall the case in detail, but it did happen. Perhaps, because the petitioners haven't been involved with the Minister, in terms of the regulations under the social care Bill, we could propose that the petitioner could meet either with officials or the Minister himself to discuss the details of what she's asking for, because, of course, there are general policies in place in terms of the status quo, but this goes into safeguarding and how we protect young people online, which is slightly different. So, I'd just like to bring people together in terms of that specific process, as well as writing to some of the children's charities, and not just the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, but some of the other children's charities. I'm thinking of the Children in Wales umbrella organisation, and perhaps we could write to Children in Wales to ask them whether they could give us more information on this issue.

[11] **William Powell:** I think that's a very well made point, and, also, when sharing the petitioner's comments, we can build into the letter a request, maybe, for a meeting, at least with officials, and see what appetite there is for that. I think that would help to take things forward. Thanks very much indeed.

[12] Agenda item 2.2 is P-04-63, Save our service—Large Animal Rescue in North Wales. This petition was submitted by Sabina Dunkling and collected 1,394 signatures. The text reads as follows:

[13] 'This is a call for action. We the undersigned want the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to intervene to prevent North Wales Fire and Rescue stopping their large animal rescue service. We believe that stopping this service will put animals at risk and have a negative impact on welfare in north Wales. There is also a human risk element as people will put themselves in situations of danger to help rescue animals if there is not a service to help them.

[14] 'Large animal rescue is a highly specialised service and requires extensive training and equipment which cannot be provided by any other organisation at present. We ask that the decision is reversed and additional funding is given to enable this or other sustainable funding models are put in place. Thank you.'

[15] There is additional information, once again, in support of this petition. As colleagues will be aware, our first-consideration letter was sent to the Minister for Public Services, seeking his views on the petition, and we've got a pretty clear response from Leighton Andrews on this matter, saying, basically, that it's an operational issue for the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority. I very much appreciate your thoughts on this. Russell George, you've indicated.

[16] **Russell George:** Chair, some information has been provided here, but I just don't know—. I haven't got a strong view of the accuracy, so I wonder if we could write to the RSPCA and ask them for their views on this petition and what the petitioner has raised. Also, it is an issue as well for the local authority. They've got a responsibility here, so I think we should share the information with them and ask them for their view as well.

[17] **William Powell:** So, the fire and rescue authority in this case—that's what you're suggesting.

[18] **Russell George:** Yes, but—. Yes, Chair.

[19] **William Powell:** I think that would make sense. Maybe there will be a role for the Welsh Local Government Association later, but I think that's probably sufficient for now. Bethan.

[20] **Bethan Jenkins:** A allwn ni ysgrifennu hefyd at Undeb y Brigadau Tân, oherwydd rwy'n gwybod, pan mae toriadau wedi bod yn y gorffennol, gyda chau gorsafoedd tân—. Mae lot o hyn wedi digwydd oherwydd toriadau gan y cynghorau penodol er mwyn ariannu'r awdurdodau tân dros Gymru gyfan. Felly, byddai'n syniad ysgrifennu atyn nhw er mwyn gweld a yw'r un math o symudiad yn mynd i ddiwydd, nid yn unig yn y gogledd, ond yn y **Bethan Jenkins:** Could we write as well to the Fire Brigades Union, because I know that when there have been cuts in the past, leading to the closure of fire stations—. A lot of this has happened as a result of cuts from specific councils in order to finance the fire authorities across Wales. Therefore, it would be an idea to write to them to see whether the same sort of movement is going to happen, not only in north Wales, but in mid and south Wales. So, there's that as well.

canolbarth ac yn y de hefyd. Felly, mae hynny hefyd.

[21] **William Powell:** I'd be very happy to do that. I recall, at our last meeting, we actually wrote to several petitioners that related to different fire issues and things that were to do with particular fire stations and so on. I think the Fire Brigades Union may well have some useful input there also. So, with colleagues' agreement, that's what we shall do. Okay. Thank you very much.

[22] Agenda item 2.3 is P-04-632, Mynyddoedd Pawb. This petition was submitted by Mynyddoedd Pawb and collected 1,026 signatures online.

[23] 'We call on the National Assembly for Wales to encourage the Welsh Government to persuade bodies and organisations to protect and respect our wealth of place names in order to:

'1) stimulate respect and interest in the Welsh language and to secure and increase the use of it.

'2) increase the sense of identity among local communities by sharing the wealth of our cultural heritage with others.

'3) engage the interest and awareness of visitors of the richness of our local heritage and thereby bring educational and economic benefits to areas.

'This could be achieved through:

'•working with outdoor centres in order to raise their awareness of traditional indigenous place names, and in order to support them to use Welsh place names in their day to day work.

'•highlight the richness of our place names in terms of our cultural heritage, and what they can communicate through the teaching of history, geography, mythology and historical land use in our country.

'•persuade the Welsh Government to bring traditional and long standing place names under planning control.'

[24] There is also an additional petition that was running at that time, and that's subsequently been forthcoming and it has an additional 494 signatures. We had the opportunity to meet the petitioners just about 10 days ago now and a very interesting background discussion was had.

[25] Our first-consideration letter was sent to the Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism, Ken Skates, and we've got that response in our public papers. We've also got additional comments that have come through from the petitioner, which are available here. So, I think we probably need to share those back with the Minister, given the nature of those comments and some of the additional material. I think the Welsh Language Commissioner probably ought to be involved at this point. Any other thoughts as to how best to proceed? Bethan.

09:15

[26] **Bethan Jenkins:** Ie. Jest yn y llythyr, **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes. It is just that, in the yn y trydydd paragraff i lawr, mae'r letter, in the third paragraph down, the Llywodraeth yn dweud nad oes ganddi Government states that it doesn't have direct

gyfrifoldeb uniongyrchol, ond bod gan amryw o gyrff cyhoeddus rôl mewn penderfynu. Wel, rwyf i jest eisiau deall yn gyfreithlon a ydyw'n bosib iddyn nhw newid y sefyllfa lle bo lot o gyrff gwahanol yn cael cyfrifoldeb, iddyn nhw wneud rhywbeth statudol yng nghyd-destun y broses yma. Oherwydd, pan wnes i gwrdd â'r deisebwr, fe wnes i ddweud bod y Bil treftadaeth diwylliannol yn dod gerbron ac mai hynny fyddai'r lle i edrych nawr. Ond nid yw'r geiriad yn glir i mi yng nghyd-destun beth mae'r Gweinidog yn gallu ei wneud. Ie, wrth gwrs, rwy'n credu y dylem ysgrifennu at Gomisiwn Brenhinol Henebion Cymru i weld beth yn gymwys maen nhw'n ei wneud gyda Casgliad y Werin, ond os oes rhywbeth yn gallu cael ei wneud gan y Llywodraeth i uno popeth, achos dyna holl bwynt y Bil treftadaeth: bod pobl yn gallu deall beth sy'n digwydd yn y sector yn haws a bod pobl yn gallu ymwneud â'r sector yn haws—pobl fel y deisebwr, sydd eisiau cadw treftadaeth yn fyw. Felly, ysgrifennu yn ôl at y Llywodraeth yn hynny o beth, a hefyd ysgrifennu at Gomisiwn Brenhinol Henebion Cymru i weld beth yn gymwys y maen nhw'n ei wneud yn y sector hwnnw.

responsibility, but that various public bodies have a role in decision making. Well, I just want to understand legally whether it's possible for them to change the situation where a lot of different bodies have responsibility, so that they could do something statutory in the context of this process. Because, when I met with the petitioner, I said that the cultural heritage Bill is on the way and that that would be the place to consider it now. However, the wording isn't clear to me in the context of what the Minister can do. Yes, of course, I think that we should write to the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales to see what exactly they are doing with the People's Collection, but if there is something that can be done by the Government to unite everything, because the whole purpose of the heritage Bill is that people can understand what's happening in the sector more easily and that people can engage with the sector more easily—people such as the petitioner, who want to keep the heritage alive. So, I would suggest writing back to the Government about that, and also writing to the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales to see what exactly they are doing in that sector.

[27] **William Powell:** I'm very happy to do that. I wonder whether it would be of merit to ask for any initial legal advice at this stage on the wider context.

[28] **Ms Roberts:** Thank you, Chair. I'd just like to say thanks to Bethan for raising the issue. I haven't considered this point in any detail. In order to provide definitive legal advice, obviously I will need to consider a few things. So, I hope it's okay for me to go away, look at the issues, and come back to you, as I do sometimes.

[29] **Bethan Jenkins:** Diolch.

[30] **Ms Roberts:** Thank you.

[31] **William Powell:** Yes. But this is really very timely because of the Bill coming forward just at the moment. That would be really good. So, the Welsh Language Commissioner, and as you said also, the royal commission, Bethan. Also, given the tourism angle here, I think potentially we should be writing to Visit Wales and the tourism arm of Welsh Government, but also maybe the trade body, the Wales Tourism Alliance, because they may well have a perspective on this as well because of the importance of the sense of place and issues within the development of tourism in Wales. Are colleagues happy with that approach? Good. Okay.

[32] Agenda item 2.4 is petition P-04-633, 'To Raise Awareness of the Poor Broadband in Our Area'. This petition was submitted by Geraint and Jane Evans and collected 60 signatures on paper. The petition reads as follows:

[33] ‘Superfast Cymru is coming to the Maerdy Exchange but will we get an improved service? Some locations will not benefit at all because they are too far from the cab and the cable is aluminium which does not conduct broadband properly. The real answer is a cab in the village. Please sign to support this petition.’

[34] This petition was forwarded to us by Lord Dafydd Elis-Thomas, our colleague, on behalf of the petitioners. A first-consideration letter was sent to the Deputy Minister for skills seeking her views, and indeed, we’ve got a response from the Minister. In fact, there is potentially some good news, I think, in the Minister’s letter. This was my reading. We have forwarded the Minister’s response and, as yet, we’ve not heard back from Geraint and Jane Evans. So, I think we probably need to give them the opportunity to respond. Any comments that colleagues have with regard to this? Joyce.

[35] **Joyce Watson:** This is not new, is it, to any of us? This is why the superfast broadband is being rolled out and supported in other ways that’s mentioned in the Minister’s letter. I think the fact that we have sent the letter to the petitioner and we are awaiting a response from them, I think, as long as the time frame on this hasn’t expired in terms of what we would normally expect—. If it has, we need to follow it through, and then wait before we take any further action, if we need to take any further action.

[36] **William Powell:** Yes, but I think there is a positive tone to the Minister’s letter.

[37] **Joyce Watson:** There is a very positive tone.

[38] **William Powell:** I’d like to see what the petitioners have to say. Russell George.

[39] **Russell George:** Well, before I read the Minister’s response I thought that there should be a fairly good response to this petitioner because the Superfast Cymru broadband project aims to reach 96 per cent of the population of Wales, and the other 4 per cent would be filled with an infill project. That’s the Welsh Government’s goal. So, in that regard, I would have thought that they would have got a good response from the Minister, which they have done. I just think we’ve got to share that with the petitioners and wait for their response.

[40] **William Powell:** Which we’ve done, absolutely.

[41] **Russell George:** I would hope that they would write back to us and say, ‘Well, this is good; great’, and then we can close the petition at the next meeting.

[42] **William Powell:** Yes, let’s hope that that will be possible.

09:20

Y Wybodaeth Ddiweddaraf am Ddeisebau Blaenorol Updates to Previous Petitions

[43] **William Powell:** Moving now to agenda item 3, updates to previous petitions, the first we have is agenda item 3.1, P-03-236, ‘The Charter for Grandchildren’. This petition was submitted by Grandparents Apart Wales and was first considered back in our very first meeting, I believe, of this Assembly in June 2011, and has the support of 19 signatures. It calls upon the National Assembly for Wales,

[44] ‘to urge the Welsh Government to adopt The Charter for Grandchildren and to make the Charter mandatory for professional workers who are employed in the welfare of children.’

[45] We most recently considered this back on 19 March, given that the petition had been inactive for some period of time, and it's good that the petitioner has come back to us and indicated, in fact, that their own particular situation had found resolution, which I think, obviously, is good.

[46] **Russell George:** Can I suggest, Chair, that we close the petition?

[47] **William Powell:** Yes, absolutely, and in doing so, I'd like to write to the petitioner thanking him for his thoughtful reply to us and thanking him for engaging with the petitions process as well. Okay? Good.

[48] Agenda item 3.2 is P-04-587, 'A Dedicated Support Team for Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (M.E.), Chronic Fatigue Syndrome & Fibromyalgia Sufferers in South East Wales'. This petition was submitted by M.E.S.I.G., which is the M.E Support in Glamorgan group, and was first considered by us back on 23 September 2014, with the support of 368 electronic signatures and a further 826 on paper, totalling 1,196. We last considered correspondence on this on 20 January. We agreed to write to the Minister, firstly to draw his attention to the petitioners' further comments in relation to their concerns that these conditions were being viewed as psychological rather than neurological in character, and also seeking further information on the progress of establishing the all-Wales implementation group. We've got a response from the Minister in the public papers, but we haven't as yet heard back from the group, from the petitioners. So, I think we need, for the cause of consistency, to await a response from the petitioners, but I think probably it would be sensible to contact the Minister also to thank him for the helpful response. Are there any other particular details that you'd like to include within that?

[49] **Russell George:** I think you've said them all—all the actions that could be possible, Chair. So, I agree with you.

[50] **William Powell:** The issue about the implementation group and the timescale of that is something that I think we need to be aware of, because it could be coming up—it was due to be coming up, I think, this week. So, that's something that it's worth flagging up in the response. Good.

[51] Agenda item 3.3 is P-04-363, 'Town Centre Improvement Scheme for Fishguard'. This petition was submitted by Councillor Bob Kilmister and was first considered in February 2012, with the support of 1,042 signatures. It was last considered by this committee on 10 March, again, having been inactive for some time. We had a short, focused response from the petitioner, requesting that we keep the matter live and seek further updates. I'd welcome any thoughts on this. Joyce, given your immediate proximity to the Fishguard area and your involvement, what thoughts do you have on this one?

[52] **Joyce Watson:** Well, it's a very lively area, and there are an awful lot of things happening, or potentially about to happen. We have had a very limited response from the petitioner, I think it's fair to say, and I'm sure that he's as keen as ever to see this through, but he doesn't actually tell us anything. It might be helpful if we wrote back to the petitioner asking for a more detailed update of where, by keeping this alive, we might add some value, because according to the response that we've had, I can't actually see anything that tells us why we need to keep this petition alive. Not that I have any wish to close it, because I don't, but I do think that probably the timing wasn't great—there was something called a 'general election' that just happened. So, maybe with a bit more time, we'll get a more detailed response and if we don't, I think we need perhaps to go elsewhere.

[53] **William Powell:** Do colleagues think there would be any merit in writing to the Minister for Economy, Science and Transport, particularly in the light of recent updates on

European structural funds and other funds that have come to light?

[54] **Russell George:** I don't think there's any harm in us doing that, Chair. I think we can do that as well, taking on board what Joyce has said.

[55] **Joyce Watson:** And to Pembrokeshire County Council—

[56] **William Powell:** And to Pembrokeshire County Council, which is emerging from a period of turbulence and may be able to focus on this.

[57] **Joyce Watson:** —who will be leading on this.

[58] **William Powell:** Good; excellent. Moving on to agenda item 3.4, P-04-522, 'Asbestos in Schools', a warm welcome to Cenric Clement-Evans, the lead petitioner on this petition, which was first considered by us on 10 December 2013, with the support of 448 signatures, as we recall, calling,

[59] 'on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to put measures in place to ensure that parents and guardians of children across Wales can easily access information about the presence and management of asbestos in all school buildings.'

[60] We most recently considered this back on 3 February 2015 and agreed to ask the Minister to respond to the petitioner's detailed additional comment, especially around the three requests on the final page of that response, and to consider in the light of that response also whether it would be appropriate to take oral evidence from the petitioner and the Minister. We've got a letter back from Huw Lewis as Minister, which I think actually does change the perspective somewhat and is actually quite encouraging. Bethan, how do you read that?

[61] **Bethan Jenkins:** Rwy'n credu ei fod wedi dechrau stepio i ffwrdd o'r sefyllfa lle nad oedd yn cymryd unrhyw fath o gyfrifoldeb. Felly, mae wedi bod yn bwysig i ni gadw ymlaen i ysgrifennu ato. Ond y pwynt roeddwn eisiau ei godi o lythyr y deisebwr oedd y cynnig i greu grŵp llywio fel oedd wedi digwydd yn San Steffan, er mwyn fframio'r drafodaeth o gwmpas unrhyw gamau ymlaen yma yng Nghymru. Felly, yr hyn y byddem yn ei hoffi, pan fyddwn yn ysgrifennu at y Gweinidog, yw i ni ganolbwyntio ar hynny ac i ddweud, 'Diolch am edrych i mewn i'r peth nawr, ond a fedrwch chi gael y grŵp llywio sy'n mynd i gynnwys arbenigwyr o bob sector o'r gymdeithas er mwyn i ni allu cael trafodaeth genedlaethol am y peth?' Rwy'n credu wedyn y gallwn ni ddod at bolisi cryf yma yng Nghymru ar gyfer y mater yma. Dyna'r hyn y byddem yn cymryd o'r llythyr gan y deisebwr.

Bethan Jenkins: I think he's started to step away from the situation where he wasn't taking any sort of responsibility. So, it has been important for us to keep on writing to him. But the point that I wanted to raise from the petitioner's letter was the proposal to create a steering group such as the one that was in Westminster, in order to frame the discussion around any steps forward. What I, therefore, would like to see, when we write to the Minister, is for us to concentrate on that and to say, 'Thank you for looking into this, but can you now establish a steering group that will include experts from every sector in society so that we can have a national debate about this?' I think then that we can arrive at a strong policy here in Wales for this issue. That is what I would take from the letter by the petitioner.

[62] **William Powell:** Yes, I agree with you. It's encouraging that we've got movement and recognition from the Minister that there are issues here that we can actually take a more proactive responsibility for. So, I'd be happy to write to the Minister, sharing the petitioner's

latest comments, which have also come in, and asking for a further written update as well by 5 June, which was the date referred to. Are colleagues happy with that approach and then to await the update from the Minister? Excellent. It's really, really positive in that regard and thanks to the petitioner for his ongoing proactive approach to the matter.

[63] Agenda item 3.5 is P-04-581, 'Opposition to Cuts in Provision for Learners of English as an Additional Language'. This petition, submitted by Helen Myers, was first considered on 23 September 2014, with the support of 37 signatures. We last considered the petition back on 3 February 2015 and agreed to ask the Minister for his comments on the petitioner's response, particularly whether adequate priority was being given to EAL learners in Cardiff, in Newport and in Swansea. The Minister's response is available in the public papers along with the information that was previously requested from Swansea council. The petitioner has been informed of that correspondence, but, as yet, we haven't received a further update.

09:30

[64] This wasn't one that we had late, was it? No. We're still awaiting a response there. So, in the light of that, I'd very much like to write to the Minister asking for his perspective on what Swansea city council's had to say, because I thought that was quite illuminating, in a way—they seemed to have considerable sympathy with the petitioner in this regard in wanting to improve the situation. Do any colleagues have comments on this?

[65] **Joyce Watson:** I think that's right, and I think we need to await comments from the petitioner.

[66] **William Powell:** Absolutely.

[67] **Bethan Jenkins:** I don't actually have the letter from Swansea council in front of me in my pack, but—

[68] **William Powell:** Okay. We'll certainly ensure that you have a copy.

[69] **Bethan Jenkins:** So, I can't really comment.

[70] **William Powell:** No, no. Well, if there's been a glitch and you haven't got that letter, then we'll get it to you. But it clearly does indicate—. Oh, there we are. We'll get it to you just now, particularly given that it's in your own region.

[71] **Bethan Jenkins:** I've had e-mails about it.

[72] **William Powell:** Sure. Absolutely. I'll just give you a moment to get up to speed.

[73] **Bethan Jenkins:** Oh, it doesn't matter: I'll comment the next time that we—

[74] **William Powell:** Okay, but the point is that they're taking the matter very seriously. I think the Minister would benefit from having sight of that letter. Good. Okay.

[75] Agenda item 3.6 is P-04-615, 'A Fair Student Loan Payment in the Final Year of Training'. This was a very specific issue in this petition. It was submitted by Maryanne Bray and was first considered on 3 February this year, having collected 47 signatures. As we said, we last considered this back in February and agreed to ask the Minister to respond to the detailed issues raised by the petitioner, and particularly whether he's prepared to extend the definition of 'term' to include the summer holidays if students are still engaged in study at that time. The Minister's response is available in the public papers, and it looks as though,

from his perspective, there is funding available to include that period, but as yet we've not had any response back from the petitioners on what the Minister's had to say.

[76] **Russell George:** Shall we wait for the petitioners to respond and then bring it back to committee?

[77] **William Powell:** Exactly. I think that would be sensible. Do colleagues agree? Good.

[78] **Bethan Jenkins:** Nid wyf yn credu ei fod e'n glir yn y llythyr cyntaf bod hynny yn— Roedd yn rhaid inni ysgrifennu yn ôl at y Gweinidog er mwyn i hynny i gael ei gyflwyno i ni. Felly, rwy'n credu ei bod yn bwysig i aros am y deisebwr oherwydd hynny. **Bethan Jenkins:** I don't think that it was clear in the first letter that that—. We had to write back to the Minister for that information to be presented to us. So I think it is important to wait for the petitioner because of that.

[79] **William Powell:** Absolutely. There's certainly no sense in moving to close, or anything, until we've got clarity on it. Yes.

[80] Agenda item 3.7 is P-04-537, 'Planting Trees to Reduce Flooding'. This petition was submitted by Coed Cadw and was first considered on 18 February 2014, with the support of 2,708 signatures. We've got late correspondence on this one, haven't we, from Angharad of Coed Cadw? We last considered this on 3 February and agreed to seek the Minister's views on the petitioner's comments, and we've got a pretty full response there from Carl Sargeant, and now we've got a substantial response, as I said, from Coed Cadw. I think we need to share that. Given some of the points made within it, I think we need to share that back with Carl Sargeant, because it's a substantial issue, it's a real issue of concern, and it did come up just last week in relation to Natural Resources Wales as one strand of the work that the Environment and Sustainability Committee were scrutinising them on quite hard. I think it's important that we get the opportunity for the Minister to comment back on what Coed Cadw has had to say in that regard. Happy? Good.

[81] Agenda item 3.8 is P-04-544, 'Ban the Shooting of Greenland White-fronted Geese'. This petition was submitted, as you'll recall, by Aaron Davies, and first considered on 29 April 2014, and has got the support of 240 signatures. We last considered it back on 9 December 2014, and agreed to ask the noted expert in this field, Professor Fox, via the petitioner, if he was able to supply evidence of shooting incidents of the Greenland white-fronted geese since 2009, as requested by Welsh Government officials. Indeed, we've got a response in the public papers, and quite a full response, if colleagues would like to turn to that just to refresh their memory. I'll just turn to it myself—. It seems very, very strange, given the relative danger of this population facing extinction in our particular area that we don't have a stronger response from Welsh Government. I don't know what colleagues think on this. Joyce, you've indicated.

[82] **Joyce Watson:** Well, I absolutely share that view that you've just expressed, and I'm a bit baffled as to why there is no protection. I've spoken with people in Government on this and I know that they've come to various agreements, and that information is here. But, if I remember the figures rightly, and I think I do, there were 30, now down to 26, in the Dyfi estuary; some have turned up in Anglesey for the first time. The whole thrust of argument here is, as far as I'm concerned, right—that, because there is no legal protection, whilst there are agreements that seem to, perhaps, be holding, anyone, at any time, can shoot one of these Greenland white-fronted geese without any fear of prosecution whatsoever, and also to the detriment of the bird population. I would very much welcome sending Professor Fox's letter to the Minister, but also asking if they will reconsider their position on this. I feel quite strongly: it's not very often that I do speak out, but I do feel quite strongly that we need to

seriously examine why we're not protecting this particular species of bird. I look forward to seeing the response.

[83] **William Powell:** Absolutely. Maybe, Russell George, as the immediate local Member for the birds affected, you've got a perspective. [*Laughter.*] Because I think there should be an opportunity to reconsider affording greater protection—in my view, certainly.

[84] **Russell George:** Well, it does seem very strange—it just seems inconsistent, really, with what you would expect.

[85] **William Powell:** With the level of protection afforded to animals that are under considerably less danger of extinction.

[86] **Russell George:** Well, that's right—and in other parts of the UK as well, so I'm a bit surprised by the Welsh Government's response.

[87] **William Powell:** Absolutely. It may well be that we'll find a change of heart from Carl Sargeant when confronted with the facts.

[88] **Joyce Watson:** I'd also like to declare that I am a member of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, just in case it's relevant in this case, and a very, very keen birdwatcher.

[89] **William Powell:** Absolutely. Excellent. Thank you very much indeed. I'd be very happy to bring that to the attention of Carl Sargeant. Good.

[90] Moving to agenda item 3.9, P-04-539, 'Save Cardiff Coal Exchange'. This petition was submitted by Jon Avent, and first considered by us on 11 March 2014, having collected 389 signatures. An associated petition hosted on another website collected 2,680 signatures. I think it's also fair to comment that since that time there have been additional campaigns involving local elected representatives as well, who've put themselves behind the cause of the Cardiff Coal Exchange. We last considered this petition on 24 February 2014, and we agreed at that time to write again to Cardiff county council to establish the latest position, and also to ask the Minister to keep our committee updated on any developments. We've got a response from the Minister in the public papers, and also a response from Councillor Phil Bale, currently leader of Cardiff council. The letter, although dated 13 February, didn't reach our clerking team until very recently. We've also got additional information from the petitioner in the public papers, and amongst those papers from the petitioner is the fact that he's been successful in challenging the information management section of Cardiff council and, as colleagues can see, he has reached, at least at the first stage of his appeal, a successful outcome from his perspective that the council should release additional information. Obviously, he needs to be congratulated on his tenacity in this matter. There's clearly an appetite for taking this further. Bethan, given that you lead on these heritage matters, I wonder whether you'd like to share your thoughts on this one.

[91] **Bethan Jenkins:** Well, I keep coming back to the point the petitioners keep making that we are somehow sitting on this visit. We've been asking to visit the Coal Exchange for some time, so it's not for want of trying. So, I'd like that to be clear on the record.

[92] **William Powell:** Absolutely.

[93] **Bethan Jenkins:** The other thing is I think there's concern with the petitioners about the nature of who's doing the work on the Coal Exchange now and how that came about. It doesn't seem that the contractors are on the Cadw approved listing of those who are experts in the heritage field.

[94] **William Powell:** Well, that's a matter of concern if that's borne out, isn't it?

[95] **Bethan Jenkins:** I was just wondering whether we could ask the Minister for the process by which that was undertaken and whether that's publicly available. I know that she's not very open with sharing information about stakeholder groups and so forth, so perhaps she might change her mind on this—who knows? Because it seems to have changed hands from the culture Minister to her, and so we'd like to—well, I would—to have some understanding as to how and why that happened.

[96] **William Powell:** I share that view and I'm sure colleagues do.

[97] **Bethan Jenkins:** Those are the issues that really sort of—

[98] **William Powell:** Well, I'd be very happy to write to Mrs Edwina Hart asking to see the results of the initial feasibility study that's been carried out. Also, I reiterate the comments you've made with regard to our appetite to go forward with a visit. I mean, this is a key building in the heart of Cardiff bay. I think we would, and I've been discussing this at some length with our clerk—. There's nothing to prevent us undertaking a limited visit to the outside of the building and, hopefully, gaining some further insights from that. Steve, if you'd like to speak briefly to that point.

[99] **Mr George:** I've done it myself. It's a five-minute walk there and back.

[100] **Bethan Jenkins:** Well, I've been there loads of times for concerts and—

[101] **William Powell:** Absolutely.

[102] **Mr George:** You probably haven't seen the state it's in recently.

[103] **Bethan Jenkins:** No, I know, but I don't know how looking outside it is going to help us.

[104] **Mr George:** I think it might be helpful for you to get some perspective on the state of decay that the building is in, which is very obvious. But it also might mean that we can meet the petitioner, I'm hoping. It's not the visit that was originally requested, but, frankly, I don't think we're ever going to get that, because the parts of it that we'd be really interested in seeing are apparently dangerous because of asbestos and other materials. The building is, though, actually open to the public in some parts, because there are still offices in there, which is peculiar, but not the bits we'd probably be interested in seeing.

[105] **William Powell:** I believe, until relatively recently, the former MEPs Glenys Kinnock and Eluned Morgan had their offices there, if I recall correctly.

[106] **Bethan Jenkins:** Not in the asbestos areas.

[107] **William Powell:** Well, I would've thought not. This was, perhaps, in the early 2000s or whenever they were still in that position, but I do recall that being their base at that time.

[108] I think it's really important that we do that and maybe we can schedule that into an early future meeting. Also, I think it would be much enhanced by having Mr Avent's perspective, if we could schedule it in such a way as to have the opportunity for him to give us some updates, not just on the visit, but also maybe on the latest stage of his appeal, because I think we share his experience of a degree of obfuscation from Cardiff council, if that's not putting it too strongly, with regard to giving us access and taking our concern seriously.

[109] **Bethan Jenkins:** I also share his view that, you know, it's the same with opencast mining: companies will take people to court and councils will say they can't afford it, yet all the money spent on this court action could've been spent on the Coal Exchange, and I'm sorry that it got to that situation.

[110] **William Powell:** Yes, absolutely. It's misdirected, isn't it? Indeed.

[111] Agenda item 3.10 is P-04-617, 'Stop the Wholesale Hiving off of Public Libraries to the Voluntary Sector'. This petition was submitted by Adam Riley on behalf of Save Rhose Library and was first considered on 24 February this year, having the support of 66 signatures. We last considered this, as I said, back on 24 February, and we agreed at that time to write to the Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism, Ken Skates, seeking his views on the petitioner's additional comments. We've got comments from Ken Skates with regard to that. What would be a sensible way forward on this, colleagues? Russell George.

09:45

[112] **Russell George:** Thank you, Chair. We could write to the Minister again asking for an update, Chair. I think that's the first action that could be undertaken.

[113] **William Powell:** And, potentially also, to share earlier ministerial comments with the relevant section of the Welsh Local Government Association, since they're grappling across Wales with these issues around library services and how to sustain them. I think that would probably have some merit. Okay, if colleagues are happy with that approach, we will move now to agenda item 3.11, P-04-578, 'Noise Mitigation Works on the M4 to the West of Junction 32'. This petition was submitted by Margaret Watt and was first considered by us on 15 July 2014 and had collected 19 signatures. Mrs Watt calls 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. We considered the petition for the first time and agreed to write to the Minister for Economy, Science and Transport seeking her views on the petition. We received a response from the Minister back in mid September, but this was missed due to an unfortunate administrative oversight. Additional comments have been received from the petitioner and are available in the public papers.

[114] **Russell George:** Can we write again to the Minister, Chair—I think that would be the best thing to do—and ask her for an estimate of when the work to improve the situation's likely to happen?

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

[116] **William Powell:** There is reference to that in the ministerial letter, and given the time slippage, I think that would make sense. I'm not clear as to what merit there would be in a site visit, by the nature of the particular issue. I think we'd probably end up observing that there is a high degree of noise coming from the motorway, but that would hardly be surprising.

[117] **Bethan Jenkins:** It would be more beneficial probably if there was some sort of noise monitoring that took place, potentially, but I don't know how it works, to be honest.

[118] **William Powell:** In daytime or night-time, yes. Potentially, that would be—

[119] **Russell George:** When we write back to the Minister, could we ask her to—

[120] **William Powell:** That may be built into what's already happened.

[121] **Mr George:** The Minister's letter and the maps that are associated with it, which you can access, do seem to indicate that the area concerned is already—

[122] **William Powell:** Within the focus—.

[123] **Mr George:** They've accepted that there's high levels of noise, so I assume there's no further need to—

[124] **William Powell:** That's not a point that's been disputed, absolutely. I think that's the best way forward on that one.

[125] Agenda item 3.12 is P-04-609, 'Support Small Businesses—Support our High Streets'. This petition was submitted by Lynne Wilson, and was first considered on 20 January 2015. It has the support of 47 signatures. It calls upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to extend the relief available for small businesses beyond March 2015. We considered correspondence on this petition and agreed to draw the petitioner's comments to the attention of the Minister, in particular, the apparent lack of information and communication around this issue, and also to ask the Minister for her views as to what role the Federation of Small Businesses, and indeed chambers of trade and commerce, might have in disseminating information with regard to rate relief, and also to write to the WLGA, asking what role local authorities could usefully play in providing information to support and sustain small businesses. We've got a response from the Minister in our pack. We haven't, as yet, had a response from the WLGA, and maybe we could chase in that regard because I think the role of local authorities is obviously key. Nor have we had, at this stage, any further response from the petitioner. There wasn't a late response in this case. No. What do colleagues think?

[126] **Russell George:** I was going to say that it looks like the main part of this petition is drawing to a close.

[127] **William Powell:** Well, the Minister has come to meet the petitioner's concerns.

[128] **Russell George:** So, on that basis, I think we could probably close the petition, but whether we want to just wait for the petitioner's response first—

[129] **William Powell:** I think for the sake of consistency, that would be the right thing to do, but I agree with you.

[130] **Russell George:** Can we agree in the meeting now, so that it doesn't have to come back to this meeting, that if the petitioners come back with a response that indicates they're happy, let's just agree?

[131] **William Powell:** Absolutely. I think that's a sensible way forward. Good.

[132] Agenda item 3.13 is P-04-614, 'Support the Arriva Trains Wales First Class Service'. This petition was submitted by Gareth Peate and was first considered on 20 January 2015, and had collected 64 signatures. This petition is with regard to the premier service between Holyhead and Cardiff and the decision by Welsh Government to cease funding that in early 2015. We considered correspondence on this petition and agreed to write to the petitioner, asking for comments on the initial letter that we'd received from the Minister, also, asking the Minister for clarity on the practical difference between the first-class service previously offered and what's now being styled as a business-class service. Again, we've got that described here in the Minister's response. She details the issues for us. We've not had any further comment from Mr Peate. I think, probably, we must be close to drawing this petition

to a close also, but maybe we should make a final chase of Mr Peate, just to draw things together.

[133] **Joyce Watson:** For consistency, I think we deal with this exactly the same as we dealt with the previous one.

[134] **William Powell:** The previous one. Absolutely. As suggest by Russell George. Agreed.

[135] Item 3.14 is P-04-459, 'A Direct Rail Connection from Cardiff Airport to Cardiff Central and West Wales'. This petition was submitted by Sovereign Wales and was first considered on 5 March 2013 with the support of 35 signatures. We most recently considered correspondence on this back on 10 March of this year, and we agreed to ask the Minister for an update on the Cardiff Airport link. Now, we've got a response, again, from the Minister, but we've not had a response back from the petitioner, which is fairly unusual in terms of the practice of Sovereign Wales in other petitions that we've received, so I think that we probably need to await those comments, and in the cause of consistency again. But, it's clear that the Minister's response in this letter suggests that, actually, the subject of the petition isn't subject to a devolved area and, therefore, I think there's probably not a lot more life in this particular petition either, but, awaiting the comments of Sovereign Wales.

[136] Agenda item 3.15 is P-04-416, 'North-South Rail Services'. This petition was submitted by Neil Taylor and first considered on 2 October 2012 with the support of 19 signatures.

[137] 'We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to work with Arriva Trains to increase the number of direct express rail services between Holyhead and Cardiff.'

[138] We last considered correspondence on the petition on 10 March, and agreed to write to Mrs Edwina Hart, Minister for Economy, Science and Transport, seeking further comments in the light of Mr Taylor's views, and also an update on the position in respect of the renewal of the north-south premier service, which is scheduled for renewal in May, and also when she's likely to be able to make an announcement on the wider north-south express. The Minister's response is in the public papers, and we also received a recent letter, which Members have got.

[139] **Mr George:** It was inadvertently left out of the public pack, so, apologies for that, but you have a copy now.

[140] **William Powell:** Absolutely. So, would it be a sensible way forward to share that fairly comprehensive response with the Minister, so that we can gauge her response to that?

[141] **Russell George:** I haven't read this, Chair, but, yes, if it's a comprehensive response, I'd write to the Minister asking for a—.

[142] **William Powell:** Yes, I think it does help to take things forward. And that concludes the updates on the other recent petitions.

09:54

Gohebiaeth Correspondence

[143] **William Powell:** Agenda item 4, we have correspondence to note, and that is a letter that we have received from our colleague, David Rees, Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee, and this, as colleagues will recall, is with regard to the experience that we've had—fairly consistent issues—around timeliness and adequacy of response from the various health boards. We shared, at the will of this committee, our concerns with the relevant subject committee. As you can see, the comments from David Rees suggest that they haven't experienced the same difficulties that we've encountered—certainly not of late—with regard to late correspondence. But, they've made a suggestion, which I think has some merit, in terms of going through the Welsh NHS Confederation, because they seem to have found that a more satisfactory route to gaining response in a timely manner.

[144] **Russell George:** Are they saying that's what they do, then?

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

[146] **Russell George:** Okay. So, they're doing that every time they write to a health board.

[147] **Mr George:** I think they pretty much either—

[148] **William Powell:** Whether they copy them in, or whether they—

[149] **Mr George:** Either copy them in, or they use the—

[150] **William Powell:** As a kind of conduit to that.

[151] **Mr George:** Yes, as a kind of progress chaser for them.

[152] **Russell George:** Well, whatever procedure they use, let's use ourselves, because it obviously works.

[153] **William Powell:** Absolutely. Well, I think it's just a sharing of good practice, really, in that regard.

[154] **Bethan Jenkins:** It could be the fact that we might be asking them more difficult questions. [*Laughter.*]

[155] **Joyce Watson:** [*Inaudible.*] Let's try it.

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

[157] **William Powell:** Absolutely. If it's worked for them, then let's see whether we can adopt that approach.

09:56

Cynnig o dan Reol Sefydlog 17.42 i Benderfynu Gwahardd y Cyhoedd o'r Cyfarfod

Motion under Standing Order 17.42 to Resolve to Exclude the Public from the Meeting

[158] **William Powell:** And now, as at the start of the meeting I welcomed our colleagues

from the Republic of Ireland joint committee on public petitions, we're about to be joined by them, so that we can have some discussion.

Cynnig:

Motion:

bod y pwyllgor yn penderfynu gwahardd y cyhoedd o weddill y cyfarfod yn unol â Rheol Sefydlog 17.42(vi).

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

Cynigiwyd y cynnig.

Motion moved.

[159] **William Powell:** In that context, I move that we move into private session for the remainder of the meeting. I see no objection, so we move into private session now.

Derbyniwyd y cynnig.

Motion agreed.

Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 09:56.

The public part of the meeting ended at 09:56.