



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

**Y Pwyllgor Deisebau
The Petitions Committee**

**Dydd Iau, 21 Chwefror 2008
Thursday, 21 February 2008**

Cynnwys
Contents

- 3 Cyflwyno, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions
- 4 Penderfyniad i gynnal Busnes yn Breifat
Decision to take Business in Private
- 4 Grŵp Gweithredu Ysgolion Cymunedol Powys
Powys Community Schools Action
- 15 Deisebau Newydd
New Petitions
- 18 Y Wybodaeth Ddiweddaraf am Ddeisebau Blaenorol
Updates on Previous Petitions

Cofnodir y trafodion hyn yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynndi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal,
cynhwysir cyfieithiad Saesneg o gyfraniadau yn y Gymraeg.

These proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in the committee.
In addition, an English translation of Welsh speeches is included.

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

Andrew R.T. Davies	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Michael German	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru Welsh Liberal Democrats
Bethan Jenkins	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Val Lloyd	Llafur (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Labour (Committee Chair)

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Dr Roger Blunden	Grŵp Gweithredu Ysgolion Cymunedol Powys Powys Community Schools Action Group
Ros Garratt	Grŵp Gweithredu Ysgolion Cymunedol Powys Powys Community Schools Action Group
Bob Smith	Grŵp Gweithredu Ysgolion Cymunedol Powys Powys Community Schools Action Group
Kirsty Williams	Aelod Cynulliad, Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru Assembly Member, Welsh Liberal Democrats

Swyddogion Gwasanaeth Seneddol y Cynulliad yn bresennol
Assembly Parliamentary Service officials in attendance

Alun Davidson	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Joanest Jackson	Cynghorydd Cyfreithiol Legal Adviser
Stefan Sanchez	Clerc Clerk

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 12.31 p.m.
The meeting began at 12.31 p.m.

Cyflwyno, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **Val Lloyd:** Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to this afternoon's Petitions Committee meeting. I do not have any apologies—all members are here today; there are, therefore, no substitutions. I invite members to make their declarations of interest. I see that there are none. I remind everyone to turn off any electronic devices, because they interfere with the transmission. Please ensure that you are familiar with the exit, in case we need to use it.

12.32 p.m.

Penderfyniad i gynnal Busnes yn Breifat
Decision to take Business in Private

[2] **Val Lloyd:** Under Standing Order No. 10.37, we must discuss whether we are to take item 6 in private. This is the initial consideration of the petition in relation to the powers of the Children's Commissioner for Wales. I invite Members to express their views.

[3] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** From reading the papers, I am not sure why there is a request to take this petition in private, but I will listen to the advice and be guided by it.

[4] **Val Lloyd:** I will ask for a legal opinion on this, to help us to decide.

[5] **Ms Jackson:** I have read the petition, as have you. The supporting information includes a set of case studies relating to various family proceedings. While there is no identification of children or members of their families, there is identification of social workers and local authorities involved in the proceedings. I would advise that, under those circumstances, you should resolve under Standing Order No. 10.37 to take the initial consideration of the petition in private session.

[6] **Val Lloyd:** That was very clear. Are Members happy to go with the legal advice? I see that you are. I therefore propose that

the committee resolves, under Standing Order No. 10.37, to exclude the public from the discussion on item 6.

[7] I see that you are content. We will take that item in camera.

Derbyniwyd y cynnig.
Motion carried.

12.34 p.m.

Grŵp Gweithredu Ysgolion Cymunedol Powys
Powys Community Schools Action

[8] **Val Lloyd:** I welcome Kirsty Williams to the meeting. It is a great pleasure to have you here, Kirsty. I also welcome the petitioners. This is a petition on Powys community schools. Before we start, please introduce yourself.

[9] **Ms Garratt:** My name is Ros Garratt, and I come from south-east Radnorshire, which is a deeply rural part of the county of Powys. I would like you to note that we are all parents, some of us are governors, and we all live in rural communities in Powys and understand the issues that affect them. We all believe—

[10] **Val Lloyd:** At the moment, I just need your name; this introduction will not be coming from your allotted time. I apologise if I did not make myself clear. Just give your name and tell us if you are a parent, or whatever.

[11] **Dr Blunden:** I am Roger Blunden. I am from the far north of Powys, and I am a school governor.

[12] **Mr Smith:** I am Bob Smith. I am also from the north of Powys, and I am a parent and

a governor. We are all ordinary citizens; we are not experts in politics, education or anything. In other words, we do not have all the answers.

[13] **Val Lloyd:** Thank you, it is a great pleasure to welcome you. I will outline the procedure for you, so that you are aware of it. You have up to 15 minutes, from when I say 'Please start', and how you divide that time between you is entirely up to you. As your Assembly Member, if she wishes to contribute, Kirsty has up to five minutes. We have set up this procedure for all petitioners, with the aim of ensuring that everyone gets their fair share, so to speak. After that, there will be up to 15 minutes of questions or comments, and then we will ask you to adjourn to the public gallery. We will not begin our deliberations until you are in the public gallery, so that you will be able to hear everything. Do you have any questions on procedure? No, I see that it is clear. It is up to you to begin when you are ready.

[14] **Mr Smith:** We thank you for accepting our petition and for giving us the opportunity to present our case in person. We have already introduced ourselves, but I should say that, although I am playing centre forward today, that does not make me the captain. As a group, we try to do everything by consensus—we do not have a leader as such, but someone's name had to appear on the petition, and it just happened to be mine.

[15] In the time available to us, we will not be able to do more than outline the bare essentials of the many points that we have made in our two written submissions. You should have in front of you a summary of those essentials as a set of bullet points. We had hoped that we might get some brownie points by giving you a piece of paper, rather than inflicting another PowerPoint presentation on you.

[16] Our starting point, as it says in the first bullet point, is the belief in the importance to Wales of its rural communities. The worth and importance of those communities is sometimes underestimated, as is the importance to those communities of rural schools. The problem is that both the communities and the local schools are under attack.

[17] In Powys, we have been faced by an inept and damaging approach to primary school reorganisation from the council. The casualties of that approach will be the children and their families, the communities in which they live, the environment, and the language and culture of Wales. Given that the organisation of education provision is a local responsibility, the question arises of why we are bringing this to the Assembly. There are four reasons. First, Powys County Council consistently claims that it is being forced into its programme of closures by the Welsh Assembly Government and Estyn. That is not our claim, it is the county's; we are merely repeating what the county is saying. It is also important to understand that pressure can come from several different places.

12.40 p.m.

[18] We have seen the recent letter from Jane Hutt, and she has made it clear that the guidance that has been issued includes no pressure to close particular schools. However, pressure can arise from a number of different sources and in Powys, in particular, a lot of that pressure has come from Estyn. We do feel that that is most inappropriate for our national inspection body. Rightly or wrongly, the blame is being placed firmly on national bodies.

[19] Secondly, the Welsh Assembly Government is in a position to create a national vision and to communicate that in the form of guidance to local authorities. It is its responsibility to provide a national context for local decisions. Thirdly, many of the issues that I mentioned, such as community, the environment, the Welsh language and culture, are issues of national, not just local, concern. Finally, what is happening in Powys is also happening in other counties, although the timing and the approach may differ. Again, it is a national issue.

[20] Why is the closure of a community school a problem, particularly if it helps to balance the budget, which seems to be the main, or even the sole, motivator for this activity? Educationally speaking, community schools are as good as their larger cousins and, very often, they are actually better. In Wales, the best results at A-level and beyond generally come from those counties with the highest proportion of small rural schools, and we do not think that that is a coincidence. There is also a lot of evidence that the particular atmosphere in community schools helps to give children more confidence and greater personal and interpersonal skills. Also, children who are in some way different are often teased or bullied at larger schools, but within their own community, they are accepted without question. Also, in a small school every child gets to participate in every activity.

[21] Close its school and a village becomes just a place to sleep, so that the young and the economically active are discouraged, leading to an ageing population, which brings its own problems. The school means life and future to the community and the school itself is greatly enhanced by the community's intimate involvement in it. Area schools are not without their merits, but they necessarily destroy the rich and valuable two-way relationship.

[22] Most Welsh-medium schools are community schools and they are doing a brilliant job of nourishing the language and culture of Wales, not only for the traditional needs of the indigenous population, but in encouraging incomers to integrate fully. In my case, my own children are fluent Welsh speakers and I am an enthusiastic Welsh learner only because our local school happened to be a Welsh-medium school. We would not have gone looking for one. If these schools are allowed to close, the language and culture will suffer enormously.

[23] When a school closes, the inevitable response is school transport and, in our view, the widespread bussing of young people about the countryside is little short of an abomination. It is not a solution; it is a problem. In fact, it is a series of problems: it brings out the worst in many children, to the detriment of all; it is a poor and unhealthy substitute for walking or cycling; it prevents participation in before-school and after-school activities; it removes parents' informal contact with each other and with the school; and it is simply disrespectful to treat young children as a raw material to be carted around the countryside. On top of that, of course, transport is no longer cheap. As we now know, to our cost, it never was good for the environment, but with peak oil approaching and climate change already upon us, bussing as a solution is a disaster, both economically and environmentally. Even in the past, when transport costs were lower, studies have shown that costs are such that only marginal savings accrue from closing schools. There is also the point that sustainability is enshrined in the Welsh constitution, and we look to the Welsh Assembly Government to demonstrate leadership by rejecting such backwards steps as this one.

[24] Community schools are already delivering much of what you, as politicians, look for, such as small classes, personal attention, local and global citizenship, a relative absence of problems relating to drugs, truancy and exclusions, community viability, promotion of the Welsh language and culture and local service delivery as a plank of sustainability. Why throw away something that is already working well?

[25] From all points of view, the community schools of Wales should, we believe, be nurtured and not attacked. We ask the Welsh Assembly Government to take the lead on this. I will now hand over to Roger to develop that theme.

[26] **Val Lloyd:** You have around seven minutes left.

[27] **Dr Blunden:** I will press on straight away. I want to cover two issues to develop the relationship between local authorities and the Welsh Assembly Government and to summarise what we would like to happen as a result of our petition.

[28] Bob has just spelled out how the future of education in small communities is too important to leave to individual local authorities. We believe that Jane Hutt's letter to you, Chair, illustrates or supports our view that there is confusion between what the Assembly Government says and how local authorities interpret that. Again, as Jane Hutt acknowledges, there is a need for some updated guidance. The current guidance is circular 23/02 and, of course, it is right to tell local authorities to be cost effective, but the emphasis on surplus places in the absence of broader community issues enables authorities to claim that they are under pressure from the Welsh Assembly Government to close schools. Powys is a case in point.

[29] We would have expected Powys, in its plans, to have done its homework and, as Jane Hutt said, to strategically review provision. She also said that it should look at local knowledge and local needs. In fact, it did neither of those. Powys County Council drew up a list of schools in order of size, picked off the six smallest and said that those were the schools to be closed. Three of those schools happened to be Welsh-medium schools, because, as Bob has already said, they often serve small, local communities.

[30] Powys claims that it is under pressure from the Welsh Assembly Government and I have three one-line quotations from a recent public meeting that illustrate that. A highly placed representative of Powys County Council said that,

[31] 'One of the big drivers from the Welsh Assembly is to reduce surplus places.'

[32] It was also said that,

[33] 'The Welsh Assembly Government is saying that it is really hard to make a school of 24 or 25 viable, so why are you going ahead with plans for that?'

[34] and that

[35] 'The Assembly are saying that you have to deal with surplus places or you will not get funding.'

[36] We could argue the correctness of that interpretation, but our point is that Powys claims that it is under pressure from the Assembly Government to close schools and it is blaming you for doing so.

[37] So, we think that there is a need for issuing updated guidance to local authorities, which Jane Hutt has recognised; she said that a review of current guidance was under way. We welcome that, but hope that it will be wide-ranging and will include the relationship between schools and local communities. We also welcome the commitments in 'One Wales' and in 'The Learning Country', but these focus on narrow, educational issues and we are looking for joined-up thinking, looking at the relationship between schools and communities.

[38] In England, there is a presumption against school closure—that is an official policy. In Scotland, the Scottish Government has made several decisions to overturn the proposed closures of schools, interestingly, partly because of the effect on community regeneration.

[39] We also think that there is a strong case for a rural education policy in Wales. We are surprised, in a way, that such a rural country does not have a rural education policy. There are many constructive ideas to build on. Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg has proposed some innovative ways of funding school buildings and we were interested to see the Assembly Government do some work on a rural health plan and commissioned research on that. Our argument is that rural education deserves equal attention. The guidance to local authorities does need to be strengthened, and we believe that there is a strong case for a rural education

policy for Wales.

12.50 p.m.

[40] We are asking for action at the national level, and that is needed urgently; Powys is not only closing six schools at the moment—we have heard that it is proposing to add, astonishingly, a further 42 to the list for closure. So, we want your help to achieve three things. The first is the immediate clarification of policy and good practice guidance. Ideally, we would like a moratorium on school closures until there is a proper policy. If not, we would certainly like a statement of presumption against closure, as in England. We hope that the review of the circular 23/02 guidance will encourage authorities to acknowledge the benefits of community schools.

[41] Secondly, we would like a comprehensive review of education in rural communities. We have had various conversations with Alun Davies over the last few months, and we understand that the Rural Development Sub-committee would be more than happy to undertake such a review, probably in conjunction with the Enterprise and Learning Committee. So, that is one possible avenue.

[42] **Val Lloyd:** Your time is up; you need to wind up.

[43] **Dr Blunden:** Okay. The third point is to develop a rural education policy for Wales. We would like to see some work on the development of such a policy. We think that there is a tremendous opportunity for the Welsh Assembly Government to show leadership and joined-up thinking in doing this.

[44] **Val Lloyd:** I am terribly sorry, Mrs Garratt, but the 15 minutes is up.

[45] **Ms Garratt:** That is fine; everything has been said.

[46] **Val Lloyd:** I am pleased to call Kirsty Williams to address us.

[47] **Kirsty Williams:** I thank you and the committee for extending the courtesy of allowing me to attend this meeting to speak in support of the petition and the presentation given by Bob, Roger and Ros.

[48] Members of the committee will be more than aware of the huge amount of public concern expressed during the Assembly election with regard to the reconfiguration of community hospitals. As a result of that concern, the Government recognised the need to step in and take a look at how these policies were affecting rural communities. It initiated an immediate moratorium on all potential closures of rural community hospitals. It understood that the delivery of services in rural areas is often very different to the delivery of services in the more urban areas, and that access and other issues of that kind can have a huge impact. It therefore decided to embark on research and consultation to develop a rural health policy. I share the petitioners' concerns that education in rural areas deserves nothing less than what is being done for rural health services.

[49] In urban and rural constituencies alike, local authorities are under huge pressure to tackle the issue of surplus places. I believe, however, that many councils are implementing their policies in the absence of adequate guidance from the Welsh Assembly Government, with insufficient sharing of good practice and research in this particular area. In rural areas, we need a look at how education can be delivered in what would, perhaps, be very different ways to how education needs to be delivered in urban areas. I therefore impress on the committee the points made by the petitioners, in that we need a moratorium on all proposed closures that are objected to. I acknowledge that, in some communities, closures are proposed

without objection, but there should be a moratorium on closures where significant objections have been made.

[50] We need to work with the Government to produce more up-to-date guidance. The Minister has acknowledged, in meetings with us, that the guidance is lacking and is in need of updating, and in her refusal to support Mike German's motion, the need to improve guidance was mentioned. Also, work is needed to spread good practice. The Welsh Local Government Association has done some work in this regard, particularly in Pembrokeshire, but there is no evidence that that has been taken up by other local authorities. We would like to see that developed. All this adds to the development of a rural schools policy.

[51] As you have heard, we understand that the Rural Development Sub-committee is quite willing to undertake this work. In the forward look of the Enterprise and Learning Committee, some consideration has been given to the need to carry out a review of schools and the implementation of schools reorganisation policy in rural and urban settings. So, both those committees recognise the need to further develop policy in this area. We hope that the recommendations that your committee could make to those committees and to the Welsh Assembly Government will give us the space to create policy that will ensure that school closure programmes in the future are carried out on the basis of sound evidence rather than on knee-jerk reactions to tight budgetary pressures.

[52] **Val Lloyd:** We now have 15 minutes in which Members can question the petitioners.

[53] **Michael German:** I will address the issue of the 23/02 circular, which you raised with us. What do you believe are its principal deficiencies, and what do you think should be in it?

[54] **Dr Blunden:** I think that it focuses too narrowly on budgetary and educational issues. It does not give space for issues around community regeneration and the place of the school in the local community. Those issues get a sideways mention, but they do not feature very strongly in that guidance.

[55] **Michael German:** So, it does not talk about the non-educational issues. Would you expect a Minister for education to talk about things that are not to do with education? Perhaps part of the problem is that this is a circular from the Minister for education, which is not about rural regeneration and communities, which come under the portfolio of another Minister. Do you agree?

[56] **Dr Blunden:** Yes. The phrase 'joined-up government' comes to mind. I think that education and rural communities are broader than just the narrow educational focus.

[57] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Thank you for your evidence; it is much appreciated. The one thing that I would highlight from your evidence, Roger, is that you state that we have the divine power; we do not—the Welsh Assembly Government is separate from the Assembly. It is a common occurrence for petitioners to think that when they come here, but the committee only takes evidence, and the Assembly Government delivers policy and is the Executive. You seem to think that there is a chain of command that emanates from this building, or the Assembly Government's building, to shut small schools in Powys, and that Estyn, the executive body, is conspiring with that policy. Why do you think that Estyn is involved in this?

[58] **Dr Blunden:** Perhaps Bob can answer that. We are not saying that there is a conspiracy, but local authorities—Powys, in particular—are telling us that they are under pressure from the Welsh Assembly Government to close schools on the basis of surplus places and that they will be financially penalised if they do not. We understand that that might

not be correct, but that is what they are saying.

[59] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** So, that is what councils are telling you. It is a problem across all areas—Cardiff supposedly has 8,500 surplus places—so it is not just happening in rural areas. I concur with your sentiments that we should look at it more closely. If you go to a school, it is not necessarily empty desks that is the key problem; it is the use of that building within the community. However, there is that budget problem. You can look into it all that you want, but schools are expensive to run, and when you are faced with difficult challenges, how do you reconcile the budgetary aspect with the community aspect? That is what you have to balance. Unless you are prepared to put money into it, how are you going to secure the long-term future of these schools?

[60] **Dr Blunden:** It may require some additional money, but closing small schools that have a relatively small number of places does not make a huge budget saving. If it is just being driven by money, I do not think that this is a particularly effective way of saving money.

[61] **Val Lloyd:** I will bring Kirsty in on this point, but I wish to say that I support Andrew's comments; it is not only happening in Cardiff, but in Swansea and other places too. It is down to the falling birth rate—I know that it has improved slightly this year, but it is continuing to fall. So, it is a problem across the whole of Wales.

1.00 p.m.

[62] **Kirsty Williams:** I will assist Andrew in terms of the questions that he asked. On Estyn, Powys County Council was subject to a local education authority report by Estyn—rather than providing individual reports on its schools, Estyn looked at how Powys County Council dealt with education, corporately. The Estyn inspectors made it clear to Powys County Council that, unless they saw immediate action on surplus places, it would be given a lower grading than would be the case if it demonstrated that it was doing something. There was what I would describe as genuine panic in the council about the need to be seen to be doing something quickly, to report back to Estyn prior to the publication of its grading. I am in no doubt that Estyn put a huge amount of pressure on the council to move in this particular direction, with the threat of a less-than-glowing report on the performance of the education authority. As we have seen in other areas, that can have dire consequences for an education authority.

[63] On the issue of financing, work done by the WLGA notes that anticipated savings as a result of school closures are often not accrued. I point the committee to that evidence in that regard.

[64] **Val Lloyd:** May I clarify the Estyn point? Was that clear in the report? I understand that Estyn examined the local authority, because all our local authorities have the same inspection in their turn, but was it spelt out in the report? I ask so that we can access that evidence and review it; we have not yet had it.

[65] **Kirsty Williams:** No, you cannot access it, because the report was published after the council made the decision to go ahead with the consultation on the closure of the six schools. However, I am sure that, if you write to councillors in Powys, they could corroborate what I said. It is a well-known and understood fact within the council that it was under huge pressure from Estyn, and I can supply you with the names of councillors who will support what I have just said.

[66] **Val Lloyd:** I do not doubt a word that you said, Kirsty, you know that. It is just that the committee has to look at the written evidence, if there is any.

[67] **Kirsty Williams:** I know, but that demonstrates how difficult it is for parents, teachers and constituents, who are not party to these discussions. They are not party to Estyn saying to the council, 'You will get this grade, unless we see you do something, in which case you will get this grade'. That is what is so frustrating for the petitioners. They cannot engage in that kind of debate. That is why the Welsh Assembly Government's needs to address guidance and to develop policy in this particular area that will allow ordinary people, up and down Wales, to contribute. At the moment, they cannot contribute to what Estyn is saying or to what the Welsh Assembly Government is saying, because we are not subject to a wholesale policy review, which would allow communities and individuals to participate and help shape policy in this particular area.

[68] **Bethan Jenkins:** I have just a few questions. Thank you for your report today. During the meeting with the Minister, did you raise these concerns? Did you say that you would like to see an expansion of the policy on a rural education plan initiated by the Welsh Assembly Government?

[69] **Dr Blunden:** Yes, we did. The response that we got was, 'Thank you, we are very interested. Thank you and goodbye'. Certainly, the Minister did not reject what we were saying, and remained open to our offer to contribute to a new review.

[70] **Bethan Jenkins:** Has there been any correspondence since then, beyond what was received at that meeting?

[71] **Dr Blunden:** We have had a report of the meeting—there were minutes of the meeting.

[72] **Bethan Jenkins:** Have you been in discussion with other campaign groups in other parts of Wales that are having similar problems? Perhaps there would then be evidence in Estyn reports that you could compare with your experience.

[73] **Mr Smith:** We have certainly been in touch with organisations with similar interests, and we named those organisations in our original submission; the National Association for Small Schools is obviously interested in this and has a wealth of information and detail about the worth of small schools, which we would call upon if necessary. We have also talked to the Association of Communities in Wales with Small Schools, which is a partnership of large organisations, such as the Farmers Union of Wales and the Women's Institute and so on, that are very concerned with these issues. We have been in touch with people in Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire and Gwynedd, so we are reasonably aware of what is going on elsewhere.

[74] We have not specifically spoken to any of those organisations about the Estyn issue. I think that we would not want to make too much of that, in one sense. If I had had a chance—if the 15 minutes had not elapsed—in my summing up, I was going to say that we would like to see the process that we have initiated being co-operative and constructive rather than confrontational. We would rather start from where we are today and look for creative solutions to national and local problems, rather than picking over what has happened in the past and pointing the finger of blame. Equally, it has to be said that we are concerned about the role of Estyn, particularly, as Kirsty has said, because it is going on behind closed doors and people are not aware of what is happening and the pressures that are being applied. We think that that is something that the Welsh Assembly Government would be well advised to look into.

[75] **Val Lloyd:** I have a quick question for you. Could I just clarify something? Have you engaged directly, or in any other way, with your local authority on this issue? I am not certain from your evidence whether you have had any direct discussions with the authority.

[76] **Mr Smith:** The answer to that, I think, is ‘no’. The reason for that is a practical one. Several of us are involved with schools that are directly affected by the council’s proposals, which makes it very difficult for us to swap hats. Also, some members of the group, by their position and perhaps their relationship with the council, would not be able to engage in that kind of dialogue. It is not an ideal situation, but, to date, the opportunity has not really arisen for us to engage the council in a way that would be useful.

[77] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I understand that you are asking for a moratorium, which is clearly not in the gift of this committee. The only person who has that in her gift is the Minister, as it is a governmental decision. You talked of six schools that are under threat of closure now, with the possibility of a further 42 or 46 being under threat—I cannot remember the number. So, without that moratorium coming into place, a proportion of those schools will close, irrespective of any review that would be undertaken by any committee of this institution. Would I be correct in saying that?

[78] **Dr Blunden:** Yes. That is our fear.

[79] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** That would mean the six schools that you mentioned, with the potential to move on to the 42 or 46, or whatever you said that the number was.

[80] **Dr Blunden:** Plans for the closure of the six schools are now well under way.

[81] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Would that be for the new academic year, in September?

[82] **Dr Blunden:** Yes. I think that two of them will close in the next academic year.

[83] **Kirsty Williams:** My understanding is that notices for closure have already been issued for two of the schools. They have been objected to and will be determined by the Minister, but there is the potential for closure at the end of the summer—they would not reopen in September. The other four schools are subject to further discussions at county level. As they are Montgomeryshire schools, I am not so aware of their exact fate, but for the two schools in Brecon and Radnorshire, official notices have already been issued.

[84] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** That gives me a feel for what you are talking about. Two different parts of this institution are involved in this: there is the Government side and then there is the scrutiny side of this institution that could shine a light onto what you are asking for, if we were so minded.

[85] **Val Lloyd:** We have a little time left. Do you have any direct evidence that the local authority is, as you say, simply following orders? The meeting that you had with the Minister and the letter that we have had from the Minister—

1.10 p.m.

[86] **Ms Garratt:** We do not suggest that the local authority is following orders, but we do suggest that our local authority—it is probably the case for other local authorities in Wales too—is interpreting Welsh Assembly guidance to enable it to take the easiest route to deal with its budgetary constraints. That is how I would put it.

[87] **Val Lloyd:** Thank you; that is a very clear answer.

[88] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** On evidence that we have had from Estyn, it is clear, through its report, that it believes that schools must be closed, otherwise there will be consequences.

[89] **Ms Garratt:** Kirsty has told us that she knows that that has happened—that Estyn has told our local authority to close schools and to reduce surplus places. My argument is that it interprets that instruction in its own way. It immediately looked at its list of the smallest primary schools in the county in the remotest areas—the ones that several generations of officials have probably been wanting to close because they do not have much interest in them. It is a historic approach by local authority officials.

[90] **Val Lloyd:** We are out of time, Kirsty, but I will allow you to make one last comment.

[91] **Kirsty Williams:** While trying not to belittle the problems that face the council, the petitioners are saying that the way in which the council has gone about choosing the schools to close is not, perhaps, as robust and logical as it could be. However, from my perspective and that of the petitioners, this is not necessarily about saving individual schools. It is, ultimately, about developing policy in a way that means that robust decisions can be made. We understand, collectively, the problems that it faces. We cannot do much about the birth rate—although some of us have done the best that we can to do something about it—but any future reorganisation of schools should be done on the basis of good practice and strong guidance and it should be set in the context of Welsh Assembly Government policy.

[92] **Val Lloyd:** Thank you. I must now draw this discussion to a close, because we have run over by two minutes. I thank Mrs Garratt, Dr Blunden and Mr Smith for the presentation. We will await your arrival in the gallery before we begin our discussion, so that you can hear it in its entirety.

[93] The petitioners have now reached the gallery, so we will resume our discussion.

[94] **Michael German:** I am trying to work out where we would want to take this and how far we should go. It seems that there are several strands to this. First, if Estyn is giving that strong and powerful advice to local authorities, we need to be clear about Estyn's role and how it views its role as an interpreter of the current circular. So, there are questions for Estyn that need to be answered.

[95] The nub of this seems to be a desire for a policy and, subsequently, a new circular. As was the case with the post offices issue, this is about the relationship with communities as well as with the education sector. They tie together. I do not know how much of an offer was made, but it may be that both committees could conduct a review—whether that would be just a quick, sharp and short one, I have no idea—of rural education policy and its impact on communities. We would want to see and encourage that. Should we write to the Chairs of those committees, to ask whether they are content to work together to produce guidance on these issues, or to review them, with the aim of leading to a strengthened circular? I do not know what the timescale is for the Minister to tell us when she will produce a new circular, but—

[96] **Val Lloyd:** It is under review.

[97] **Michael German:** So, it might be useful to have that go from one to the other. I would favour having a rural education policy and some sort of review of the impact on the communities that a school serves, if that can be achieved by the two committees. I would also like some answers from Estyn as to how far it interpreted the current circular in what it says to local authorities, and how far that affects its scoring of them. It does not seem to be the best approach to policy for local authorities to be told that they will get a black mark for not doing something, but if they do it, it is fine and they will not get a black mark.

[98] **Val Lloyd:** I agree that we ought to concern ourselves with that aspect of Estyn. It is

not really how you would expect a public body to conduct its business, if that is the case.

[99] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** The wording of the petition clearly refers to the pressure on Powys council. We heard the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire refer in graphic terms to the pressure applied via an Estyn report. If it is within this committee's remit, would it be opportune to invite Estyn here to talk to that report? Let us have sight of that report, because it is quite an accusation to make about Estyn's conduct. It might be that Powys is not an isolated case, but we can look at only the one petition at a time. I think that you, madam Chair, and my good self have school place issues in our constituencies, but that is a wider issue. However, this petition specifies that pressure is being brought to bear on a local authority. We heard that that is contained in a particular report that interprets Government policy, and I would like the opportunity to address the matter with Estyn. I think that a hearing would be beneficial in that regard.

[100] I concur with Mike German that there is benefit in seeking the approval of the Chairs of the relevant committees to take the matter forward, because there is a wider issue to be addressed, and good scrutiny, jointly or by either committee, would be beneficial. We saw yesterday in Plenary what can happen when two reports are presented on similar problems; in that instance, it was to do with the fallout from the foot-and-mouth disease outbreak. Many of the issues were diluted or lost, and so a joint report from the relevant committees looking at the rural and urban aspects of educational establishments would be beneficial.

[101] **Val Lloyd:** Thank you. Are there any comments on that?

[102] **Bethan Jenkins:** I agree that the committee should perform that, but I am concerned about the timescale. This is taking place now across Wales, and is not just affecting Powys. I am also concerned about whether this will bear fruit with regard to the consultation that the Minister is due to undertake on the circular. We may want to raise that concern if we do write to the committees.

[103] On the back of Andrew R.T. Davies's request that someone from Estyn come in, the petitioners have told us that they have not really discussed the matter directly with the local authorities. Is Estyn then able to give an overview of the authority's opinion, if we were to write to it, or if it were to send a representative to the committee?

1.20 p.m.

[104] **Val Lloyd:** I do not think that Estyn could give an overview of the authority's opinion; that would have to come from the authority. Estyn can speak only on behalf of itself and its own actions. I think that we need to approach Estyn seriously, but perhaps we should first send a letter outlining what we have heard today, and offering it an opportunity to reply in writing or to come to talk to us, rather than just saying, 'Come to talk with us'. That would be its choice, but I think that we do need to give it the opportunity to clarify the issue. So, are we agreed on that point? I see that we are. It is quite clear that the committee feels that it should ask the rural affairs committee and the education committee—

[105] **Michael German:** They have posh titles now.

[106] **Val Lloyd:** I was going to say the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee, but that was its title in the second Assembly.

[107] **Kirsty Williams:** It is the Enterprise and Learning Committee.

[108] **Val Lloyd:** I will use the shorthand version, as it is quite clear for this purpose. We will ask them to conduct a joint inquiry into the issues that have been raised. Bethan, we can

write to the Minister to ask her for the timescale for the revision of this guidance. Her letter was very helpful.

[109] **Michael German:** It depends on the replies from the two Chairs. If you receive quite a quick reply from them saying that they are prepared to have a go at this, it would be useful for the Minister to know their timescale, so that she can take on board what is said, rather than issuing a circular before the report comes from the committees only to have to revise it again. We should try to get the timing right, if we can.

[110] **Val Lloyd:** Out of courtesy to the Minister for education, we will write to her to say that we are asking for that inquiry, and that we will write to her again once we have the timescale, so that everyone is fully in the frame.

1.21 p.m.

Deisebau Newydd New Petitions

[111] **Val Lloyd:** I am going to change the order of the next few petitions slightly. We were to consider the petition on Rhyl flats first, but I am now going to take the petition on the bridleway in Talybont-on-Usk first, given that Kirsty is here. She is the local Member, and so it would expedite matters if she could stay. That is petition P-03-099. You have the papers in front of you. We have a copy of the letter from Ieuan Wyn Jones to you, Kirsty, as part of our evidence. I open it up to Members for discussion.

[112] **Michael German:** I have been given some information by Sustrans. It supports this particular petition, and is meeting with the trunk road agency to discuss it in the near future. So, it has a bigger and broader context.

[113] **Val Lloyd:** Is this in your region?

[114] **Michael German:** No.

[115] **Val Lloyd:** This is the second time that Sustrans has contacted an individual Member. I wonder whether it is normal policy to go through the Chair or the secretariat.

[116] **Michael German:** I got this information in a phone call, I think. I have written it down on a yellow sticky note.

[117] **Val Lloyd:** Thank you for the information.

[118] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** We do appreciate it.

[119] **Michael German:** I will pass the yellow sticky note around; it is all here for you to see. [*Laughter.*]

[120] **Val Lloyd:** My comments were addressed more to Sustrans than to you.

[121] **Kirsty Williams:** I am the local Member, and my constituent and I have been—

[122] **Val Lloyd:** Sorry, but I must ask whether the committee is content for Kirsty to address us because, normally, only petitioners address the committee. If we set a precedent—

[123] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** —they would all want to come in. Think of the press statements.

[124] **Michael German:** I am happy for Kirsty to speak.

[125] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** So am I.

[126] **Bethan Jenkins:** I agree.

[127] **Kirsty Williams:** All I want to say is that this is a last resort for the petitioner, because she feels that further correspondence with the Minister would not be particularly fruitful. I would be grateful if the committee could consider calling the petitioner to give evidence, so that she can demonstrate the flaws and factual errors that she feels are in the information being put forward by the Deputy First Minister and Minister for the Economy and Transport and his officials. Perhaps the committee would get a different perspective if it heard evidence directly from the petitioners.

[128] **Bethan Jenkins:** Have you been in contact with the Deputy First Minister to tell him that some of the information is incorrect?

[129] **Kirsty Williams:** Oh, yes. We have had a long correspondence, and I would be quite happy to give all my files to the committee, if you would like to see it. It is ongoing correspondence and not particularly fruitful.

[130] **Bethan Jenkins:** Is it not sufficient that he has said that officials would look into the matter and develop the design if future resources were to come into place?

[131] **Kirsty Williams:** If you would hear from my constituent, you could get the very technical details of the factual mistakes made in the evidence put forward by the Minister. I am not an expert on the design of bridleways, but the petitioner is. For instance, what the Minister proposes will have a hefty price tag, because he is talking about a gold-plated design, but, given the amount of money to be spent, what has been proposed is way above and beyond what is required by law. A much cheaper project could be perfectly within the law and would deliver what the petitioners are asking for. There may be things that could be tested, if you were minded to do so.

[132] **Val Lloyd:** I wonder whether we could write to the Deputy First Minister to seek clarification of what he calls the prioritisation process, out of fairness. We could also write to the petitioner to ask for the evidence. Kirsty said that it would be technical in nature and, if so, such evidence can be presented in writing as equally well as in person.

[133] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I have been reading the letter and I see that the Deputy First Minister alludes to the fact that the cost would be more than £100,000 even if relatively cheap materials were used. So, he is not looking at a gold-plated model, but at a cheap model. I suggest that, as a first approach, we go to the Mid Wales Trunk Road Agency, because I expect that it did the groundwork on this in order to provide the Minister with his information. I am not averse to the petitioner coming here. If people want to travel here to give us evidence, they may do so by all means. However, I am not quite sure whether it would be worth her coming down without our trying to understand, in the first instance, how the Minister arrived at his facts and figures. We could then hear both sides of the argument, if we decided to invite the petitioner to give her side of it. It seems to me that the Mid Wales Trunk Road Agency is the body that has pulled the groundwork together on this to furnish the Minister with a reply.

[134] **Michael German:** I agree with Andrew, in the sense that we are not all experts on designing bridleways, but we need to know the differences between the petitioner's side and the Government's side. We need to have those before us so that we can compare the two and

ask the right questions. Unless Joanest is also an expert in bridleways, I think that it may be a bit too much of a challenge for this committee to address the issue without having that information. It may be that, as a first stage, we should find out what makes that figure add up for the Government side but not for the other side. We can then look at the differences, and make a judgment as to where we want to take it next time.

[135] **Kirsty Williams:** Document 24 of the full presentation reveals that one of the issues is to do with the fact that the Government says that you have to have a solid fence running alongside the A40, but the British Horse Society says that that is completely over the top and that a post-and-rail fence would be perfectly adequate to protect horses and riders. As you can imagine, there is a huge difference between the cost of that and the cost of a solid fence. I am not quite sure that we would want a solid fence running along the A40 in the middle of the Brecon Beacons National Park; I do not think that it would look particularly attractive, as compared with a post-and-rail fence. I am sure that you would agree that it would probably cost an awful lot less. In fact, Andrew probably knows all about that.

[136] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** It would cost about £10 a metre.

[137] **Val Lloyd:** I am minded to do the next stage by correspondence. We are asking one set of people to explain the suggestion of using planings and the justifications given, which can easily be done in writing. In the same way, we are asking the trunk road agency to elaborate its position, also in writing. If we feel that that information is not adequate when it arrives, we can take it a stage further.

[138] **Michael German:** I think that we will want to take it a stage further, because we will probably be presented with two contradictory arguments. I presume that we will then be able to test them when we have the two sides in front of us. Despite Andrew offering to put in a post-and-rail fence at £10 per metre, I do not think it possible to call it at this stage and, like any good guy, I want to test the water first.

1.30 p.m.

[139] **Val Lloyd:** We will get detailed views from both sides in writing and we will then be able to make a more informed decision on the next stage.

[140] **Kirsty Williams:** Thank you, Chair, for your kindness and indulgence this afternoon. I am quite gutted, because this committee is clearly great fun. I will have to see whether I can persuade Mike to swap with me.

[141] **Michael German:** No.

[142] **Val Lloyd:** The one thing about this committee is that it is never dull. There is always something different, so you cannot go on auto pilot.

[143] **Kirsty Williams:** I think that it is a wonderful opportunity for people to engage with the processes of the Assembly. We should be very proud of what we have created. I admit that I have the longest petitions coming your way.

[144] **Andrew Davies:** You are not going to come here for every one, are you? [*Laughter.*]

[145] **Val Lloyd:** She has already set a precedent. Thank you, Kirsty. We will now return to the agenda. I thank the committee for agreeing to change the order; it would have been a waste of having the local Member here otherwise.

[146] We will therefore now go back to consider petition P-03-068, on Rhyl flats. We have

some papers on that. We are going to north Wales for our next meeting and so to speed up the process, I suggest that it would be sensible, practical, and an example of good communication, to get the petitioners to speak to us when we are in north Wales. Are you happy with that? I see that you are. I will just note that down.

[147] That takes us to the next petition, which is P-03-082, on Ysgol Hen Felin. This petition was submitted by the pupils of Ysgol Hen Felin in Ystrad Rhondda. Again, to expedite matters, I think that we should ask this group to come to talk to us, obviously not at our next meeting, because we are in north Wales, but at the one after that. I see that you are happy with that. I wish that everything went as smoothly as this.

[148] Next is 03-085, on surgeries in Flintshire, which was brought in by Assembly Member, Sandy Mewies.

[149] **Michael German:** There is a policy issue here, is there not? That is what the petitioners are after. It is about who pays for GP surgeries and primary care centres and what the programming of those is. Initially, it would be useful to find out the policy on new build and how it is being executed, presumably by the local health board in Flintshire. I would guess that it is responsible for the capital programme. I am happy to agree to inviting people to talk to us, but, at this stage, I would like to know what the local health board's policy is.

[150] **Val Lloyd:** Do you want to write to the Minister as well as to the LHB?

[151] **Bethan Jenkins:** The Minister could clarify why there has been a stop in discussions or in progress on what is happening because of the new appointment.

[152] **Val Lloyd:** I doubt whether it is as straightforward as it seems here. It would be good for us to get to the bottom of it and that could inform our next move. So, we will write to the LHB and to the Minister.

[153] The next petition is P-03-096, the North Wales Neurological Unit. This is the one in which petitioners express their total opposition to the idea of moving all neurological surgery services from north Wales to Swansea and/or Cardiff. They ask for an appropriate centre nearer north and mid Wales, or for them to be allowed to be referred to centres in England, as is the case. Now, a wide review is under way, and the Minister has said that it is, as you know, a grass-roots, total review. It is being conducted by an independent observer. Normally, I would be content to write back to the petitioners explaining that in detail, but as we are in north Wales in a fortnight's time, I wonder whether the petitioners might like to come to expand on their case.

[154] **Michael German:** That is an excellent idea, Chair. It would perhaps be useful for the clerk to explain to them that the review is going on and for the proceedings of this committee to be transmitted to the reviewer, whoever that is. We may want to inform the reviewer that we are taking this petition and ask whether the reviewer wants to attend the meeting to listen or participate or whatever. That might be possible. I do not know whether he would want to or not; I do not even know who it is.

[155] **Val Lloyd:** We could offer him or her the opportunity. Are Members content with that? I see that you are.

1.36 a.m.

Y Wybodaeth Ddiweddaraf am Ddeisebau Blaenorol Updates on Previous Petitions

[156] **Val Lloyd:** The first update is on the petition on the miners' welfare ground in Tŷ Du, Nelson, which has been with us for a little while. We now have a letter from the Minister, of which you have a copy, and it informs us that her department has received requests to call in the application on this site and that it is not currently in a position to decide. I would imagine that it would be helpful to wait for an update from the Minister.

[157] **Michael German:** The problem, as I understand it, is that she does not give herself much time—she only gives herself three days. I will ask Joaneest for some help on this. Does this mean that the Minister has just three days in which to decide whether to call it in? Once it goes to the planning committee for determination, it is too late for the Minister to effect call-in. Have I got that right?

[158] **Ms Jackson:** I think that she can still call it in after it has made a determination.

[159] **Michael German:** Until when? I am sorry, but I do not know the answer to this. There is a nice briefing note from the Assembly Parliamentary Service, which is helpful on this matter. Once it has been determined by a local authority, it cannot be called in.

[160] **Ms Jackson:** It can still be called in.

[161] **Val Lloyd:** It can be called in.

[162] **Michael German:** It can be called in after—

[163] **Val Lloyd:** After a decision is taken, if it is contrary to the unitary development plan.

[164] **Ms Jackson:** There are criteria for call-ins. For example, often matters are called in where a local authority is intending to depart from an established policy. The decision can then still be called in, and it may often be the case that an authority will be directed if it decides to take a certain course of action in a particular category of cases. However, there will be an automatic call-in on some matters.

[165] **Michael German:** That is fine, then. I just wanted to know the timescale.

[166] **Val Lloyd:** We will await the Minister's update.

[167] Out next one is P-03-073, on work permits for foreign nurses. We have had a very helpful letter from Edwina Hart, the Minister for Health and Social Services. I cannot explain the disparity in the dates on the letter. My office has no trace of it coming in or being sent to the secretariat, but we do have a different secretariat now. If you notice, the letter is not stamped. If it is the fault of my office, then I apologise, but it has not been deliberately held back. I do not know where it was. It has come from the ether.

1.40 p.m.

[168] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** The letter explains the situation as it was in November and that will carry on into the third quarter of 2008, but this has not finalised the situation. A temporary measure has been put in place, and my understanding of it—and I have a limited understanding of this—is that the implication for the health service is great. We are limited as a committee in what we can do but I would be loath to close the petition, because there needs to be a watching brief on this and, hopefully, some sort of permanent measure can be put in place to alleviate the effects of this Order.

[169] **Michael German:** I would like to make a suggestion. I cannot remember exactly the terms of reference but the Committee on Equality of Opportunity is doing a review on

migrant workers at present. Does this fit within that committee's terms of reference? It is doing a very extensive review; it is not going to be short. The key issue here is in the last sentence. Large numbers of Filipino people, particularly from Wales, are being sent home because their employers cannot afford the £7.02 per hour wage level. If there is a committee that could take this on board as part of a review that this could fit within, I think that that would be appropriate. If not, I would like to have a view from the relevant human rights commissioner on this issue, because I know that there is severe disquiet among organisations such as the Welsh Refugee Council and others who have real worries about the people who are going back because of this sort of issue. It needs to be delved into a bit more. It would be good if the committee were prepared to take it on board, because it is an ongoing problem.

[170] **Val Lloyd:** It is relevant that the Minister ends her letter with:

[171] 'I would be happy to keep the Petitions Committee updated on progress.'

[172] So, she expects more developments in this area.

[173] **Bethan Jenkins:** As Mike said, it is a good idea to refer it to the Committee on Equality of Opportunity, because we are trying to take in every aspect of migrant workers. This is a pressing matter and we have not really begun our investigations yet, so we could start with this.

[174] **Val Lloyd:** When are you starting on this work?

[175] **Bethan Jenkins:** Next week.

[176] **Val Lloyd:** I was supporting what you were saying, because the Minister does not feel that there is closure on this. That is what I was saying in a short-hand way. Is the committee happy with the suggestion to ask the Committee on Equality of Opportunity to consider this? I see that you are.

[177] **Michael German:** I would ask the committee to consider it as a matter of urgency, as an item in its report, if possible, because this is a pressing issue.

[178] **Val Lloyd:** I am not certain that we can request that the committee deals with it as a pressing issue. I do not believe that we could instruct that.

[179] **Michael German:** No, but we could request it.

[180] **Val Lloyd:** We now move on to the petition on Nant Cylla, which is closed, technically, but we have had a helpful letter from the Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing, giving us more information about it. Shall we note the information from the Minister? I see that you are happy to do that. We have already closed the petition.

[181] **Michael German:** We could send that letter to the petitioners too.

[182] **Val Lloyd:** Yes.

[183] **Mr Sanchez:** It is in the public domain; it is on the website.

[184] **Michael German:** I know, but it would be nice to send it to the petitioners, because they raised it. That would show that there has been an outcome. Not everybody spends their evenings trawling through the National Assembly for Wales's website.

[185] **Val Lloyd:** I think that one of the petitioners might.

[186] We now move on to the Edwardsville swimming baths, petition P-03-094.

[187] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I think that we need to wait for further information. We are waiting for the Minister for Heritage to come back to us.

[188] **Val Lloyd:** We are, yes.

[189] **Michael German:** So, are we keeping it open until we get a response?

[190] **Val Lloyd:** We are waiting for a response from the Minister for Heritage.

[191] **Michael German:** Yes, so we will keep it open until we get his response.

[192] **Val Lloyd:** Do we have any idea when we wrote to him?

[193] **Mr Sanchez:** We wrote to him following the meeting on 31 January.

[194] **Val Lloyd:** Thanks. It is only the middle of February now, to be reasonable.

[195] Turning to the regional waste plan reviews, if you remember, as well as the petition on the south-east Wales plan, we also had a petition on the plan in north Wales. We are asking a petitioner from north Wales to come to our meeting in a fortnight's time. We can only hear evidence from three people—it is up to them to decide who would come—but I wonder whether we could invite one of the petitioners from south-east Wales to make the journey to north Wales to join the petitioners there. That means that everyone will get a chance to speak.

[196] We have an update on some petitions. I will take them page by page, so if you wish to raise anything, let me know. Is there anything on page 1?

[197] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** On the petition from the Welsh Kidney Patients' Association, it states that we are currently awaiting a response from the Minister. Where are we in terms of that response? I thought that we had passed this on.

[198] **Val Lloyd:** As far as I am concerned, the Health, Wellbeing and Local Government Committee has started its review on it. It has gone out to very wide consultation and is arranging meetings in order to hear evidence. We are talking about going to Madrid to look at the Spanish system. So, there is quite a lot in progress. We have examples of flyers and questionnaires and we are liaising with the schools service, because it is quite keen on coming on board. So, an awful lot of work has got under way in the last fortnight on this issue.

[199] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** So, it is not this committee that is awaiting a response from the Minister. I am a bit thrown by this, because we have not discussed it for some time. What are we waiting for?

[200] **Val Lloyd:** We sent the letter on 11 October, and I thought that we had received a response.

[201] **Mr Sanchez:** We will check.

[202] **Val Lloyd:** Yes, we will check, and we will let Members know via e-mail. It is well in hand by the committee to which we referred it. In fact, when I went to buy a sandwich today, I had a 20 minute discussion with the clerk on that subject.

[203] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Did you get a sandwich?

[204] **Val Lloyd:** Yes, but I walked off without paying for it and had to go back.
[*Laughter.*]

[205] Is there anything on page 2 that you wish to comment on?

[206] **Michael German:** How long are we going to wait for the Members' research service paper, Chair? We have some control over this matter.

[207] **Val Lloyd:** This is an earlier petition. We had to wait quite a long time for the City and County of Swansea council to send us its report. We then brought it to committee, and asked for a paper. So, we did not write to MRS on 20 September. I have been advised that it will be available for the next meeting.

[208] **Bethan Jenkins:** Is the letter that we received from Gwenda Thomas yesterday on the petition on young carers?

[209] **Val Lloyd:** Yes. We have that response from the Minister.

[210] I am now on pages 4 and 5.

[211] **Michael German:** Could you tell us where the committee has got to on cancer screening? Is it undertaking a review?

[212] **Val Lloyd:** It did a very comprehensive review towards the end of the second Assembly. The petition would have gone to the Chair of the committee. It did come to the committee just before the recess; it was in the papers.

1.50 p.m.

[213] **Michael German:** The committee may need to be prompted that it needs to respond, in one way or another. It could be done clerk to clerk.

[214] **Val Lloyd:** Are there any comments on pages 6, 7 and 8? This includes details of some of the new petitions that are waiting to be confirmed as admissible. Is there anything further on that?

[215] **Michael German:** Is the north Wales neurological association petition the one that we just agreed to?

[216] **Val Lloyd:** Yes.

[217] **Michael German:** So, it has not long been confirmed as admissible, if we have just accepted it.

[218] **Val Lloyd:** It came in on 8 January.

[219] **Michael German:** Surely that has been accepted.

[220] **Val Lloyd:** No, that is the association one; the one that we had was from Merched y Wawr.

[221] **Michael German:** But it is about the same issue. If they are together, are similar, and if we are dealing with it, should we extend an opportunity for them to—

[222] **Val Lloyd:** Shall we have the proviso—

[223] **Mr Sanchez:** It is the same one.

[224] **Val Lloyd:** It is the same, so we should ask them to come in as well.

[225] **Mr Sanchez:** It is the same one; I think that that is just an error in this documentation. Sorry about that.

[226] **Michael German:** That is noted.

[227] **Val Lloyd:** That is okay; no harm done. So, they are coming anyway; we have already decided on that.

[228] In line with our earlier decision, the committee will now go into private session, under Standing Order No. 10.37. I ask for the gallery to be cleared and for the sound system to be in our control.

*Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 1.52 p.m.
The public part of the meeting ended at 1.52 p.m.*