



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

**Y Pwyllgor Deisebau
The Petitions Committee**

**Dydd Iau, 10 Ebrill 2008
Thursday, 10 April 2008**

Cynnwys
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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

Tracy Davis	Deisebydd Petitioner
Lynne Feakes	Rhieni dros Addysg Gymraeg (RhAG) Sir Fynwy Parents for Welsh-Language Education Monmouthshire
Douglas Harris	Deisebydd Petitioner
Emma Hill	Cadeirydd, Rhieni dros Addysg Gymraeg (RhAG) Sir Fynwy Chair, Parents for Welsh-Language Education Monmouthshire
Trish Law	Aelod Cynulliad, Annibynnol Assembly Member, Independent
Elin Maher	Rhieni dros Addysg Gymraeg (RhAG) Sir Fynwy Parents for Welsh-Language Education Monmouthshire
Brian Thomas	Deisebydd Petitioner

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 12.32 p.m.
The meeting began at 12.32 p.m.

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **Val Lloyd:** I welcome everyone to this meeting of the Petitions Committee. I do not have any apologies or substitutions to announce as we have our full complement of Members. I remind people to turn off any mobile devices because they will interfere with the broadcasting equipment. I also inform everyone that we use English and Welsh, and the headsets will provide the translation and amplify the sound, which I find useful.

12.33 p.m.

P-03-092 Ffordd Cymorth A465, Tafarnaubach
P-03-092 A465 Relief Road, Tafarnaubach

[2] **Val Lloyd:** For our first petition this morning, I am delighted to welcome Trish Law, the AM for Blaenau Gwent, who is here to support the petitioners for the A465 relief road at Tafarnaubach. Could the petitioners please introduce themselves?

[3] **Mr Harris:** Good afternoon. My name is Douglas Harris.

[4] **Ms Davis:** My name is Tracy Davis.

[5] **Mr Thomas:** I am Councillor Brian Thomas.

[6] **Val Lloyd:** Thank you; I will just mention the procedure. We will go straight to hearing your evidence. We allow the petitioners 15 minutes in which to speak—I do not include the time that I am taking to speak right now—and we do keep to that. How you divide that time up between yourselves is up to you, but I will ask you to conclude when the 15 minutes are up. We will offer Trish five minutes in which to comment. After that time, we will ask you all to retire. So who will go first?

[7] **Mr Harris:** I will. I thank you all for inviting us here today. In 1994, plans were being drawn up for the dualling of the Dowlais to Tredegar A465. Many objections were put forward about the route that the new road would take. I understand that Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council submitted plans for the A465 to pass north of Tafarnaubach industrial estate. However, the Secretary of State for Wales confirmed in 1995 that the route was to follow the old road. Road junctions, flyovers and bridges were planned along this route. Residents from Princetown raised queries about vehicle access to the Tafarnaubach industrial estate. The Welsh Office replied that it was not considered appropriate to provide additional access to the Tafarnaubach industrial estate from the new road. At the time, the Welsh Office paid scant regard to parents taking their children to Bryn Bach Primary School or to those children walking to school alongside a very busy road used by heavy goods vehicles to convey goods to and from the industrial estate.

[8] I have lived in Lakeside close for six years. Like all residents, I thought that the slip road was to be built during the work to dual the A465, thus taking HGVs away from Merthyr Road. One morning, I filmed these HGVs going over the speed bumps. On looking down the road towards the school, I was able to see HGVs mounting the pavement while children were walking to school. I am a grandfather, so I feel a sense of responsibility for children. My neighbour's children attend this school; during the filming, one of the children standing on the pavement when the HGV mounted the pavement was my neighbour's son. I contacted the headmaster of the school and requested permission to film near the school. I did this for three days before the summer holidays and three days after. I visited Tredegar police station and showed the inspector the film recording.

[9] By this time, all of the parents supported what I was doing and gave me permission to film and take photographs. Councillor Brian Thomas took an interest and supported me throughout. Support was also received from Trish Law AM, Dai Davies MP, Mohammad Asghar AM for South Wales East, and from councillors from Oakdale and Caerphilly, and the *South Wales Argus* and *Gwent Gazette*. Other councillors from Blaenau Gwent have shown very little interest.

[10] I then commenced my petition to get HGVs off Merthyr Road with a relief road to be put in off the A465. That was also to stop HGVs from travelling through Princetown, where

there are a number of crèches. Never in my police service did I experience a road like this outside a school. It is an accident waiting to happen. What cost can be put on a child's life? I visited every industrial unit on the Tafarnaubach industrial estate, and a large number of HGV drivers expressed their concern regarding the dangerous situation of driving past a school throughout the day. Some expressed concerns about driving through Princetown to avoid the school. All agreed that the relief road should have been built. I stood for many days outside the school gates and have witnessed on many occasions HGVs mounting the footpath. I have seen children touching the sides of the HGVs as they pass. Every parent fears for the safety of their children. During school hours, outside activities take place. This could mean boarding a bus for school trips or to go swimming. Children also walk from the school to Bryn Bach park and the surrounding streets, escorted by teachers. On every occasion, HGVs have to pass these children.

12.40 p.m.

[11] Work is shortly due to start on the next phase of the dualling of the Heads of the Valley road; this will affect Merthyr Road, as I am sure that traffic will be diverted from the Heads of the Valleys road through Princetown and Merthyr Road. As a result of AMs getting involved, a meeting was held on 19 November 2007 at 10.45 a.m. on the bridge over the A465 near Bryn Bach Park with Ieuan Wyn Jones, the Deputy First Minister. He was able to see for himself the number of HGVs using Merthyr Road to gain access to Tafarnaubach industrial estate. I was able to point out where slip roads could be put in off the A465, but these proposals were rejected on the grounds that the gradient was wrong and that the next intersection was too close. A further meeting was to take place at the Welsh Assembly Government offices. On Wednesday 16 January that meeting was chaired by Ieuan Wyn Jones, the Deputy First Minister, and documents were produced. Capita Symonds had been commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government to carry out a feasibility study into the slip roads—I will give you copies of the report—and all the objections were rejected. On 23 January I submitted a further proposal to Ian Davis of Transport Wales—again, I will give you copies of that. Mr Davis then submitted the proposals to Clive Rogers, the chief technical officer for Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council. The proposals have now been sent back to the Assembly Government for the attention of Ian Davis. I also submitted the proposals to various councillors from Caerphilly County Borough.

[12] I then met a Mr Bowen, a farmer whose land would be crossed by the proposed relief road, and he informed me that he would have no objections to it if the remuneration was to his favour. Some of the land in question is owned by Caerphilly council.

[13] On Wednesday 19 March, *BBC Wales Today* filmed a report from the site. John Hughes, a heavy goods vehicle driver working for Steven Hughes Transport, was interviewed and stated that he was frightened to drive past the school. He informed me that it was difficult to see children on the pavement, and that, furthermore, HGV drivers in left-hand-drive vehicles could not see them at all. I respectfully ask that you look at my photographs.

[14] **Val Lloyd:** You are next, Ms Davis.

[15] **Ms Davis:** As a parent and resident of Tafarnaubach, I would like to express the concerns of parents and neighbours about how this affects us on a daily basis, with the lorries passing close to our houses. As you have heard from Doug's comments, and seen in his photos, the problem does not only occur immediately outside the school during school hours, it also affects a stretch of the Merthyr road that is approximately two miles long, and the passing of the lorries affects everybody else along that stretch of road.

[16] My children go to the affected school, and I live in the village that the lorries pass through. The school is used in the morning for breakfast clubs, for other activities after school

hours, and there is a nursery. At such times, although children are using the school, there are no attendants at the zebra crossing outside, so the children are using the school at their own risk until the parents collect them. Parents have expressed concern that the children have to stand outside the school gates in order to be collected—that is, on the pavement adjacent to the main road.

[17] There are two childcare facilities in the village, which have also been affected by the problems with walking along the stretch of road to Bryn Bach park, though they are walking from the opposite direction to the school. They like to go there on day trips, or to take the children for a walk, and to use the facilities in the park. The school has now stopped using the park, because of the number of vehicles passing along that stretch of road. On one side of the road there is no footpath at all, and on the other, it is very narrow. The force of the lorries going up and down the road frightens the children, and can push them off the pavement.

[18] The village also has a pub, and library lorries need to park along the road, and there is not much room for the lorries to pass. The villagers have complained to the local authorities about damage caused to their cars, and there have been incidents where their cars have been hit. The authorities have said that there is nothing that they can do until there is a fatality.

[19] The volume of traffic in the surrounding area demonstrates that the volume of traffic in the surrounding area has increased as a result of the increase in the number of businesses in the village and the attractions at Bryn Bach park. Over the years, since the industrial estate was built, the volume of traffic and businesses has increased in the area, which has caused problems because lorries go back and forth past the school.

[20] **Val Lloyd:** Thank you. Councillor Thomas, you have four minutes.

[21] **Mr Thomas:** On Thursday 7 February, a planning committee meeting received an application to build a new steel recycling factory at Tafarnaubach, which would provide 18 jobs from the existing factory at Crosskeys, plus another 40 jobs. Objections were received from Tafarnaubach and Princetown residents. I requested a site visit to discuss environmental impact issues, which took place on Monday 25 February. The vice-chairman of planning, Councillor Derek Morris, and Councillor Denzil Hancock, ward members Dennis Owens and Bill Davies, and I visited the site. Following the visit, which members of the public from Tafarnaubach and Princetown also attended, the meeting was reconvened at the council chambers in the civic centre, at which all interested parties were present. I asked the applicant how many heavy lorries would travel to the new factory each day, and was told that it would be around 30. There was a general discussion and it was recommended that the application be refused on the grounds of environmental issues.

[22] On 20 March, the planning committee reported to the sub-committee and recommended a refusal of the application. A letter was received from the developer and the full planning committee accepted the refusal. Another application by a developer who wanted to build 26 houses on Merthyr road was also refused due to the traffic problems near Bryn Bach school. Without a slip road for the Heads of the Valleys road, no development will take place. Refusing planning for these developments could cost Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council tens of thousands of pounds if the developers win on appeal. The planning committee feels justified in supporting the local ward members in refusing planning permission because of the danger to schoolchildren.

[23] **Val Lloyd:** Thank you, Councillor Thomas; you kept well within your time. I call on Trish to speak for up to five minutes.

[24] **Trish Law:** Thank you, Val, and to committee members for agreeing, at a meeting in north Wales on 6 March, to give this petition further consideration. As a mother and

grandmother, I have been appalled by the perilous conditions that prevail and are of extreme danger to young children outside Bryn Bach Primary School on Merthyr road, Tredegar. I can honestly say that I have never known of a more hazardous situation outside a school. I believe that you have all been sent the BBC Wales clip, which illustrates the seriousness of the situation; it is an accident waiting to happen. Of course, the main problem is that Merthyr road is used by many very heavy goods lorries, which wind their way to and from Tafarnaubach industrial estate. I will never know why on earth the powers that be, 30 years ago, did not make proper provision for access to and from the A465 Heads of the Valleys road.

[25] The Tafarnaubach industrial estate has been a victim of its own success. As you have heard from Councillor Brian Thomas, new business is being discouraged from locating at Tafarnaubach, which is most distressing, given that the unemployment rate in Blaenau Gwent is currently 7.3 per cent and is the highest in Wales. We desperately need new business in Blaenau Gwent, and we certainly cannot afford to be turning away new job opportunities in this way.

[26] You have heard the testimonies given by Doug, Tracy and Brian, and you may think that the problems that prevail at the school are matters for the local authority. However, I would suggest that, while the problems exist at the school, the solution relates to the A465 trunk road, which is very much the responsibility, and is within the remit, of the National Assembly. I would also suggest that, in terms of Tafarnaubach industrial estate, the Assembly has an interest in the economy and inward investment, particularly when prospective inward investors are being turned away. The Assembly also has a vested interest in ensuring that children get to and from school safely, otherwise why would the Government be spending so much on Safe Routes to School—almost £300,000 in my constituency in this financial year?

12.50 p.m.

[27] On Safe Routes to School, I see no way of providing a safe route to Bryn Bach school without getting rid of these juggernauts on Merthyr road. All that is being requested today is that a feasibility study be undertaken to find a possible solution, as Doug has outlined to you. Some options have already been considered by Capita Symonds, but they have come to nothing. I very much hope that the committee will see fit to instigate a study into the feasibility of creating this slip road off the A465, for the safety of children on their way to and from school is paramount and cannot in any way be compromised.

[28] Finally, I publicly thank Doug Harris, who has tenaciously steered this campaign for several months, and has made it abundantly clear that he will not rest until the children of Bryn Bach school are able to get to school in complete safety. I would also like to thank Councillor Brian Thomas, who has been at Doug's shoulder throughout, and for the support of Tracey Davis and other parents, who just want, and deserve, the peace of mind of knowing that their children are safe. I thank you, Val, and the members of your committee.

[29] **Val Lloyd:** Thank you, Trish; you finished well within time too. Petitioners, the procedure is that the committee will now have up to 15 minutes to ask you questions on your presentation or any other matters related to the issue that you have raised. Trish, please feel free to join in the question-and-answer session. It is now open to the floor.

[30] **Michael German:** I will start by asking a few questions to put this into context. The A465—the Heads of the Valleys road—runs right behind the school. The nearest interchange that currently exists is probably half a mile or three quarters of a mile further to the east—I may have got my figures slightly wrong, but it is some distance. Is there any way, using the existing interchange at Tredegar, that a relief road could be built from that roundabout? If that is impossible, when you put your views to the Deputy First Minister—you reported to us that

all your objections had been rejected, which I took to mean that everything you put forward had been rejected—was any solution offered by any of the Welsh Assembly Government officials?

[31] **Mr Harris:** Yes, one of the options was to move the school. Another option was to divert all the HGVs through a residential area, which was unacceptable. The other option was to put a lay-by outside the school for 24 cars; that did not take the HGVs off the road, so it would be extremely dangerous for any parent or any person leaving the lay-by to go on to the Merthyr road while the HGVs were coming down the road.

[32] **Michael German:** What about the other question about using the existing access—

[33] **Mr Harris:** No, it cannot be done. That is the Nant-y-Bwch roundabout and they are going to put a flyover there as part of the second phase.

[34] **Michael German:** Can you tell us where you think that the Welsh Assembly Government is now? Apart from the three proposals that it made to you—one being to move the school, which, presumably, is not being considered by the local authority, a second being to put in a lay-by and a third being to divert the traffic through housing—has it said anything else about what it will do next? Has any proposal been put forward on this?

[35] **Mr Harris:** None whatsoever. I spoke to the chief technical officer this morning, who has now returned my proposals to the National Assembly, for its design department to look at them again.

[36] **Andrew R. T. Davies:** Thank you for coming along and presenting your evidence today. I have the responsibility for transport in my party group, and, time and again, we come across instances like this. One of the most poignant things that I heard in the evidence today, and it is an eventuality that I find perverse, is that you need a fatality, almost, before safety measures kick in. As a regional AM, I go to many places that are crying out for similar sorts of projects, but, because they have not had a fatality, they do not move up the list. So, I have enormous sympathy with what you said, but sympathy does not get things done.

[37] Trish made the point about the feasibility study, and we have heard in the evidence about the various solutions and options that have been put forward. I want to know what the Minister's response was, when you asked him for a feasibility study. We tend to roll out feasibility studies quite often in this institution, because they are almost a way of holding things up, to my mind. However, you also need to have feasibility studies to pull all the strands together. Was it put to the Minister at the time that a feasibility study be undertaken so that an overview could be taken and that we could see the best way forward? We, as a committee, have no remit to commission a feasibility study; we can only make representations to the Minister to ask him to undertake such an action.

[38] **Mr Harris:** Yes, sir. The Deputy Minister, having attended and seen the heavy goods vehicles for himself, convened a meeting in this building. Of course, having gone through the report by Capita Symonds and having turned down all the proposals, he suggested that we go away and come up with a further proposal. I went away and took photographs from Llechryd bridge, which is towards Rhymney bridge, to the west of Bryn Bach park. I met a farmer and he said, 'Are we the only two idiots who have thought of this? I brought this up in 1994, and the only way forward is to cross my land to the existing road that runs around the industrial estate'. That would take all the traffic from Princetown and outside the school, and would not involve any buildings being taken down. It would just run straight across the field and join up with the industrial estate road.

[39] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** However, that has not been officially recognised by a study or

survey.

[40] **Mr Harris:** No, sir.

[41] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Many a time, before I joined this institution—and I am sure that it has happened to many others—I stood in a place and thought that I had the solution to hand. However, it does take that expert eye and expert opinion to quantify what is involved. Going back to my original question, was the Deputy First Minister averse to having a full, in-depth feasibility study to look at the solutions?

[42] **Mr Harris:** No, he was 100 per cent behind me. I will say that, because he called a further meeting in his office, having stood up there for 20 minutes instead of 10 minutes. It was only this morning that I rang the chief technical officer. I put these proposals in on 23 January, and they did not have the decency to let me know, until I came here this morning, that—

[43] **Trish Law:** Excuse me, Doug, just to be clear, that is Blaenau Gwent council, not the Assembly.

[44] **Mr Harris:** Blaenau Gwent council never even told me. That is the upsetting part. It just does not want to know.

[45] **Val Lloyd:** May I clarify something? It is on the point that Andrew raised, and that is why I have come in. Earlier, you said that the designs that you suggested, via the farm, were returned to the Assembly for reconsideration. Am I right or did I misunderstand you when you said that they are now with the Assembly for consideration, which I presume would be some form of feasibility study?

[46] **Mr Harris:** You are right.

[47] **Val Lloyd:** That you for that clarification.

[48] **Bethan Jenkins:** Thank you for coming to speak to us today. I wanted to ask about the recycling centre issue. Is the council now rejecting any more developments in the area as a result of the heavy traffic on the road? As you said, it may hinder the economic development of the area, and that could relate to another part of the Deputy First Minister's portfolio, given that he is also the Minister for Economy and Transport.

[49] **Trish Law:** I think that councillor Brian Thomas, who is a member of Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council, will be able answer that one better than me.

[50] **Mr Thomas:** As I have said, we had a site visit and the developer of the recycling plant wanted to go into Tafarnaubach park with 30 lorries every day of the week. As far as we were concerned, we turned down the proposals because of the traffic, but we could not say that, because there is a road there anyway, so we cited the environmental impact on the village as well. However, yes, we turned it down and it has been rubber-stamped by the full planning committee. There was an application for a housing development of 26 houses in that area, but we have also turned that down, because of the congestion that would be caused by the extra traffic on the road. Anything for that area that goes through the planning system will have to be turned down. There is an application in at the moment for Tafarnaubach park. The Welsh Assembly is seeking outline planning permission for six houses. We have already created a precedent by turning down 26 houses, so obviously we will have to turn down the six additional houses that the Assembly wants approved as well.

1.00 p.m.

[51] **Bethan Jenkins:** Do you believe that, unless you have some movement on the road situation, you will continue to reject new plans that come before you?

[52] **Mr Thomas:** Without a doubt. We have already started to do that, but we will continue to turn down any new proposals until a slip road is eventually put in place.

[53] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** May I clarify, Councillor Thomas, whether that is the advice of the council's highway engineers? Any planning application goes to them for their opinion on the highway situation. At council, it is not the councillors' opinion that is voted on; the councillors must decide whether to endorse the recommendation of the highway engineers. You make the point that, if this goes to appeal, the council stands to be held liable for costs. The costs situation kicks in only if the council is deemed to have been unreasonable. Are you, as councillors, going against the professional advice of your highway engineers regarding the suitability of that road for those applications?

[54] **Mr Thomas:** Given that the highway engineers recommended permission for that development, we could not turn it down on highway grounds, and so that is why we turned it down on grounds of environmental impact. If the developers go to appeal, which I think they will, I honestly believe that we will lose, and it will cost us hundreds of thousands of pounds in compensation payable to the developers. However, we are prepared to accept that.

[55] **Michael German:** May I also clarify my understanding of where the three proposals came from, including the proposals to build a lay-by and to have another school? Did they come from Capita Symonds? Capita Symonds was commissioned by the council—

[56] **Mr Harris:** No, it was commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government.

[57] **Michael German:** So, Capita Symonds was commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government, and those were the three alternatives that it produced. Is that right?

[58] **Mr Harris:** There were six altogether.

[59] **Michael German:** You have mentioned three. Was a slip road included among the other three?

[60] **Mr Harris:** Yes. A very good slip road was included. I had already proposed a slip road, along with councillors and industrialists.

[61] **Michael German:** So, Capita Symonds, which is a credible body for carrying out this kind of work, has actually identified six options, of which three were based upon slip roads.

[62] **Mr Harris:** That is right.

[63] **Michael German:** And Capita Symonds was commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government, and went to the Welsh Assembly Government with the proposals, and the Welsh Assembly Government rejected all of them.

[64] **Mr Harris:** Mr Ian Davis rejected them, sir, during our meeting chaired by the Deputy First Minister.

[65] **Michael German:** Did he reject all six of them?

[66] **Mr Harris:** Yes.

[67] **Michael German:** As you understand it, does the Welsh Assembly Government have any alternative proposals at the moment?

[68] **Mr Harris:** Only the ones that I have sent in, which have just come back from Blaenau Gwent council.

[69] **Michael German:** Did Capita Symonds make a recommendation as to which of the six options was preferred?

[70] **Mr Harris:** It said that it would prefer a lay-by, which would be nothing to do with the Welsh Assembly Government, as it is Blaenau Gwent's road, you see. It did not come up with anything other than saying that it would prefer that. It did the drawings—

[71] **Michael German:** Did it rank the options in order of preference, saying that a slip road would be the preferred option?

[72] **Mr Thomas:** Yes, Capita Symonds did all that, and it looked good on paper, but Mr Ian Davis rejected it, and said that he would not allow it.

[73] **Val Lloyd:** So, were all six options rejected?

[74] **Mr Harris:** No, ma'am. The one with the lay-by was not.

[75] **Val Lloyd:** The lay-by was the preferred option.

[76] **Mr Thomas:** It was to do with Blaenau Gwent.

[77] **Val Lloyd:** Are there any further questions from Members? Trish, did you want to add anything?

[78] **Trish Law:** Just that at that meeting with the Deputy First Minister, Ieuan told the council to go back to look at the options and come back to him with any other solution that it found. I must say that a lay-by is certainly not the answer.

[79] **Val Lloyd:** That is linked to the question that I asked you, Mr Harris. Is the Assembly Government now looking at the feasibility of your study, involving the farm?

[80] **Mr Harris:** That is what I was told this morning.

[81] **Val Lloyd:** Thank you. I think that we have now exhausted that. The procedure is that we now have another petition to be heard, so, if you will retire to the public gallery, we will discuss the way forward for your petition after that.

[82] **Mr Harris:** Would you like me to leave my papers with you?

[83] **Val Lloyd:** That would probably be helpful. We will ensure that you get them back. Thank you to all the petitioners, and to the local Member.

1.06 p.m.

**Addysg Cyfrwng Cymraeg yn Sir Fynwy
Welsh-medium Education in Monmouthshire**

[84] **Val Lloyd:** Good afternoon, ladies. I will start by inviting you to introduce yourselves to the members of the committee.

[85] **Ms Hill:** I am Emma Hill, and I am the chair of Rhieni dros Addysg Gymraeg, gogledd sir Fynwy.

[86] **Ms Feakes:** I am Lynne Feakes, and I am the secretary of RhAG in south Wales.

[87] **Val Lloyd:** I did not quite catch your surname.

[88] **Ms Feakes:** Lynne Feakes. It is an unusual name.

[89] **Val Lloyd:** Thank you. It is probably down to my hearing rather than your diction.

[90] **Ms Maher:** Elin Maher wyf i, rhiant yng Nghasnewydd. Yr wyf yn gweithio fel swyddog datblygu cenedlaethol i Rieni dros Addysg Gymraeg. **Ms Maher:** I am Elin Maher, and I am a parent in Newport. I work as a national development officer for Rhieni dros Addysg Gymraeg.

[91] **Val Lloyd:** I am sorry, but I missed your name, too.

[92] **Ms Maher:** Elin Maher.

[93] **Val Lloyd:** Thank you. We will ask you to present your case, and you will have 15 minutes in which to do so. I have not included the time that you just spent introducing yourselves. You can allocate that time how you like, but we do keep to the time limit. Following that, the members of the committee will have up to 15 minutes to ask you questions. I will explain the rest after that. Whichever of you would like to start, please do so.

[94] **Ms Feakes:** First, we thank the committee for giving us the opportunity to attend today's meeting. We have already introduced ourselves, and, by way of a preamble, we welcome such Assembly initiatives as 'Iaith Pawb', which recognise the importance of bilingualism in Wales, as well as the pivotal contribution of Welsh-medium education to increasing the percentage of Welsh speakers. We do feel, however, that there is a lack of national planning and co-ordination with local planning to achieve the aims set out in that document. Our problem, of course, is the situation with Welsh-medium education in our particular corner of Monmouthshire and Newport. We thought that, just to you give you a flavour and a context, we would explain the situation with primary education in the county.

[95] There is strong growth in Welsh-medium education in Newport and in Monmouthshire. We have two Welsh-medium primary schools in Monmouthshire at present. One is Ysgol y Fenni, which is a single-form entry in the north of the county, and that will be almost full to capacity in September 2008. The other is in the south: Ysgol y Ffin. Ysgol y Fenni was finally moved to a purpose-built building in Abergavenny in 2007 after been housed in a youth centre, and we welcome the authority's actions in providing suitable accommodation there. Similarly, Ysgol y Ffin had been in temporary accommodation for almost six years, and will be moved to a more suitable facility in September 2008. We welcome that initiative from the local education authority in response to parents' concerns and RhAG's concerns.

[96] In Newport, there is a two-form primary school in the east of the city, which is full to capacity. As a result of that, Newport LEA is opening a second primary school in the north west of the city in September 2008. It will have a nursery facility, a reception class and a year 1, I believe.

[97] It seems that there are also capital plans in the council's programme for the provision of a third Welsh-medium primary school in Monmouthshire. That will probably be in

Monmouth, but it needs evidence that it can fill surplus places at the other schools before that can happen. We feel that those surplus places are not realistically filled by children from Monmouth, because the travel times between Monmouth and Chepstow, Caldicot and Abergavenny are very long, especially for primary school children.

1.10 p.m.

[98] We welcome the fact that there has been some movement on facilities for primary education, but we would also like to note that the LEA, in its statutory notice on the movement of Ysgol y Ffin, admitted that it had actively suppressed Welsh-medium education in the area by not providing suitable facilities. A recent survey of the demand for Welsh-medium education identified that demand at the primary level was suppressed by the failure to provide progression to key stage 3, as there is no secondary school within easy travelling distance.

[99] Moving on to the comprehensive schools in the Gwent area, we do not have a Welsh-medium secondary school in Monmouthshire and Newport. Pupils from Welsh-medium primary schools must attend English-medium comprehensives or face a very long journey to Ysgol Gyfun Gwynllyw in Torfaen. For most Monmouthshire schoolchildren, Ysgol Gyfun Gwynllyw is a three-hour round trip every day. I stress that this is not for children in rural areas, but for those in the towns of Chepstow, Caldicot and Monmouth. That is the travelling distance. We feel that that is excessively long. In addition, Ysgol Gyfun Gwynllyw will be oversubscribed by 343 places in 2009. We are aware that the LEAs in the area, as a consortium, have been meeting to address this overcapacity issue and short-term and medium-term plans have now been put in place for 2008 to ensure that the children who were turned away this year can be accommodated.

[100] There is a long-term plan to put capital expenditure into the school, which I believe has come forward today. This will take the situation forward to around 2012, so they will be able to accommodate most of Monmouthshire's schoolchildren until that point. We feel that that is not really a long-term plan but a short-term plan, and they will run into trouble very quickly. The schools in the area are expanding, and there is strong growth in the whole of the primary sector. There are probably at least two new primary schools being planned in addition to the new school opening in Newport. That gives us a problem for the future and we feel that they need to start planning now.

[101] As I have mentioned, this year, 80 per cent of Monmouthshire's pupils in Ysgol y Ffin were refused admission to Gwynllyw. Those children will probably now be accommodated, but the situation for secondary schools is very difficult because the adjacent schools are also almost full to capacity. In 2009, Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni, which is the next available Welsh-medium school, will also be full. So, we will see a squeeze on places across the area. Moving west, you are probably more than aware of the situation in Cardiff and the phenomenal growth that has occurred there. So, there is nowhere for children from Monmouthshire and Newport to go at the moment, other than Gwynllyw. The other schools are far too distant; three hours is far too long for a round trip, and adding to that would be reprehensible. Sorry, I should have put this slide up earlier to give you an idea of the travelling times to and from the school. We believe that these are some of the longest travelling times in the UK for schoolchildren, and they underline our case for the need for additional provision within the area.

[102] What are the options to solve the problem? The expansion of Gwynllyw will solve the problem only in the short term, and it will not resolve unacceptable travelling times to the school for children in Monmouthshire. We welcome that expansion in the short term, because new schools cannot be built overnight. However, we feel that planning for a new secondary school is needed urgently. The LEA's projections for the expansion of Gwynllyw over the

next years will take it through to 2012. That is not far away in terms of planning for a new school, so we would like pressure to be brought to bear urgently for it to start that planning and to start identifying a capital fund to build a new school within the Monmouthshire and Newport area that is accessible to those pupils, to start identifying sites, and to involve parents and local groups in that planning process so that we are fully aware of what is going on. We have been aware of a problem with Gwynllyw for several years, and Torfaen's school organisation plan in 2005 identified that the school would be over-full by 300 places in 2009.

[103] We have met with the LEAs and explained to them that we think that there is a problem. Up until this point, we have always been kicked back and told that Gwynllyw will accommodate the pupils, but earlier this year, it became clear that it could not. So, we feel that there needs to be much more pressure from national Government to ensure that the LEAs plan appropriately for Welsh-medium provision in the area and that something is done about this crisis in Monmouthshire as soon as possible.

[104] So, from our perspective, we need capital funding for a new school. Sites for new schools do not become available overnight. While it is easier at the primary level to find old sites that new schools can be started in, secondary school sites are more difficult to find. We also need somewhere that has access to major road networks to reduce travel time. A major problem with Gwynllyw at the moment is that it is on a twisty road way up the Valleys. Even if you get children onto a bus up the A48, the M4 and up to Cwmbran, they face quite a long travelling time from there onwards. So we need somewhere that is accessible to all of the different pupils in that area.

[105] So, we have a few questions that Elin will follow up in terms of national planning. On 'Iaith Pawb', is the Assembly truly committed to that goal? If so, how will the Assembly ensure that LEAs plan appropriately for that? We appreciate that it is difficult for LEAs to plan independently for Welsh-medium education, particularly in the south east, because, as individual LEAs, they have relatively small numbers in the county—that is certainly the case for Monmouthshire LEA—so they need to plan at more of a consortium level. So, we would like to see more planning at that level. The responses that we have had to this current crisis from the Schools Management Division at the Assembly has been less than encouraging.

[106] **Val Lloyd:** Ms Maher, you have about four and a half minutes.

[107] **Ms Maher:** Hoffwn ategu'r hyn y mae Lynne wedi ei ddweud. Deallwn y problemau sydd gan awdurdodau lleol i sicrhau bod lleoedd gwag yn cael eu llenwi a bod hwnnw'n gorfod cael ei bwysu a'i fesur gyda darpariaeth addysg Gymraeg. Deallwn y cymhlethdodau trefnu addysgol o fewn lleoliadau addysg. Fodd bynnag, erbyn hyn, teimlwn, yn enwedig yn ein hardal ni, fel y mae Lynne wedi ei bwysleisio, nad yw'r awdurdodau lleol yn gallu cynnal ysgolion uwchradd cyfrwng Cymraeg. Nid yw'n bosibl am resymau ariannol ac o ran adnoddau, felly mae angen edrych ar ffyrdd newydd o weithio ar draws consortiwm.

Ms Maher: I wish to endorse what Lynne has said. We understand the problems that local authorities have with ensuring that surplus places are filled and that that has to be balanced with the provision of Welsh-medium education. We understand the complexities of making arrangements for education in education settings. However, by now, we feel that, particularly in our area, as Lynne has emphasised, the local authorities are unable to maintain Welsh-medium secondary schools. It is not possible for reasons of finance and resources, therefore we need to look at new ways of working across a consortium.

[108] Yr ydym yn falch iawn o'r hyn sydd wedi digwydd hyd yn hyn ac yr ydym wedi derbyn newyddion heddiw bod y consortiwm wedi dod i benderfyniad ac yr ydym yn

We are very pleased about what has happened to date and we have received news today that the consortium has reached a decision and we applaud that. However, we

canmol hwnnw. Fodd bynnag, mae angen sefydlu dilysrwydd y consortiwm hwnnw yn gyfreithiol fel nad ydym yn wynebu heriau yn y dyfodol. Drwy hynny, yr wyf yn golygu ein bod yn edrych ar systemau mynediad ysgolion ar lefel consortiwm yn hytrach nag ar lefel awdurdod lleol, gan fod anghysonderau o ran polisiau mynediad pob sir sy'n golygu ei fod yn anodd cael cydraddoldeb o ran sut y mae'r plant yn cael mynediad i ysgolion. Felly, mae angen edrych ar ddilysu'r lefel consortiwm fel bod pob sir yn cael perchnogaeth ar yr ysgol yn hytrach na bod lleoliad ysgol yn pennu perchnogaeth.

[109] Hyd yn hyn, mae awdurdod lleol Tor-faen wedi gorfod edrych ar sefyllfa Gwynllyw oherwydd dyna lle mae'r ysgol wedi ei lleoli. Yr ydym yn sôn am ysgol a oedd ar y cychwyn wedi ei sefydlu yn yr hen Gwent, ond sydd bellach mewn sir newydd, sef Tor-faen. Felly, mae angen edrych ar ddilysrwydd y consortiwm fel ei fod yn cael ei wireddu er mwyn sicrhau nad ydym yn wynebu sefyllfa o'r fath yn y dyfodol.

[110] Pwysleisiaf unwaith eto fod angen strategaeth addysg cyfrwng Cymraeg cenedlaethol i fynd i'r afael â materion o'r fath ar lefelau lleol fel bod cynlluniau penodol ar gyfer anawsterau neu heriau rhanbarthol yn cael eu hystyried ac er mwyn i ni allu osgoi sefyllfaoedd o'r fath yn y dyfodol ac osgoi gorfod dod i bwyllgorau fel hyn. Nid ydym am fod yma, ond, yn anffodus, rhaid i ni fod yma y tro hwn. Nid ydym yn ymddiheuro ychwaith am lenwi'ch blychau e-byst tan eu bod yn orlawn. Yr ydych wedi gweld y pwysau sydd y tu ôl i'r cyfan yr ydym wedi bod yn ei drafod â chi dros y pythefnos neu dair wythnos diwethaf, ac yn gofyn arnoch, felly, i symud ymlaen gyda hyn ar lefel genedlaethol ac annog yr awdurdodau lleol hefyd i weithio gyda'i gilydd.

1.20 p.m.

[111] **Val Lloyd:** Thank you. If you want to speak, Mrs Hill, you have one minute.

[112] **Ms Hill:** No, thank you.

[113] **Val Lloyd:** Thank you very much for your presentation. We will now open it up to questions from the Members. We, too, have to keep to the 15-minute rule. Does anyone wish

need to establish the validity of that consortium on a legal basis so that we do not face challenges in the future. By that, I mean that we need to consider issues of access to schools on the consortium level rather than on the local authority level, because there are inconsistencies in terms of the access policies of the various counties, which makes it difficult to achieve equality in how the children access schools. So we need to validate the consortium level so that every county can take ownership of the school rather than a school site determining ownership.

Up until now, Torfaen local authority has had to look at the position of Gwynllyw because that is where the school is located. We are talking about a school that was originally located in the old county of Gwent, but is now in the new county of Torfaen. So we need to consider the validity of the consortium so that that is achieved and so that we do not face such a situation in the future.

I emphasise once again the need for a national Welsh-medium education strategy to get to grips with these issues at a local level so that specific plans are considered to tackle regional difficulties or challenges and so that we can avoid such situations in the future and our having to come to committees like this. We do not want to be here, but, unfortunately, we have to be here on this occasion. We do not apologise either for filling up your e-mail inboxes until they are overflowing. You have seen what the pressures are behind everything that we have discussed with you over the last two or three weeks, and we therefore ask you to progress with this at a national level and also to encourage local authorities to collaborate.

to start?

[114] Michael German: I will, Chair. The problem—and I have experienced it through my own casework in relation to people who have not been able to get into Gwynllyw this year—is that we are dealing with a big problem that should have been anticipated. However, that does not solve what you should do next, and we have people who have real problems and have been waiting with bated breath to get their children into the school of their choice and then find that that is not possible. That is not always based on distance either, because sometimes they live quite close to Gwynllyw.

[115] You talked about a consortium, and mentioned Monmouthshire council, Newport City Council and Torfaen County Borough Council independently. Do you believe that, from where we are standing at the moment, a consortium approach—in other words, the three councils talking together and planning Welsh-medium provision together—is the right approach, or do you think that Monmouthshire, Torfaen and Newport should go off on their own? I then have a second question, depending on your thoughts on that.

[116] Ms Feakes: We feel that the consortium approach is the right approach, in that within Monmouthshire itself, from our perspective, we do not have sufficient numbers to justify an independent school at this point. However, with feeders from other areas, we feel that there is the possibility to set up a school that would have 50 to 100 entrants a year immediately, from Newport and Monmouthshire, without prejudicing the growth of Gwynllyw dramatically. With Welsh-medium education, you are taking children from a broad area and therefore a consortium approach is appropriate, especially considering that there is rapid growth in the sector across the whole of south-east Wales. There needs to be a more centralised planning approach in order to ensure that the provision is in the appropriate place at the appropriate time, allowing plenty of access for all children, so that we do not reach crisis point again.

[117] Ms Maher: Yr hyn sy'n amlwg yw bod pob sir yn unigol, yn eironig efallai, yn cynllunio ar lefel unigol yn y sector cynradd, ond gan nad oes digon o blant gyda hwy yn y sector hwnnw ar hyn o bryd, nid ydynt yn teimlo bod rheidrwydd arnynt eto—yr wyf yn dweud 'eto', oherwydd maent wedi dweud, erbyn 2020, bydd yn rhaid i bob sir edrych ar y ddarpariaeth o fewn eu siroedd hwy—i wneud hynny. Yr hyn sy'n eironig, gyda'r elfennau o fewn y cyfnod sylfaen—lle bydd dwyieithrwydd yn datblygu'n ran allweddol—yw bod mwy o gyfle erbyn hyn yn y cyfnod cynradd, lle mae'r Gymraeg yn datblygu ar raddfa gyflymach, ond mae angen edrych wedyn ar yr un datblygiad yn y cyfnod uwchradd.

Ms Maher: What has become apparent is that, perhaps ironically, every individual council plans at an individual level in the primary sector, but because, at present, there are not enough children in that sector, they do not feel that it is necessary yet—I say 'yet', because they have said that by 2020, every county will have to look at the provision within their own counties—to do that. What is ironic, given the elements within the foundation phase—of which bilingualism will become a key part—is that there is more opportunity within the primary sector, where the Welsh language is developing at a quicker pace, but we also then have to look at the same development coming right through into the secondary sector.

[118] Un peth sy'n dda o ran cynllunio consortiwm yw eich bod yn gwneud mwy o dir ar gael o ran lleoliad ysgol. Efallai nad oes gan un sir leoliad pwrpasol ar gyfer ysgol, ond bod un gan sir arall, felly mae'r elfen hon yn adroddiad Beecham o weithio ar draws y ffiniau yn hollbwysig, er mwyn inni sicrhau bod y gwasanaethau yn cyrraedd y bobl yn uniongyrchol.

One good thing about consortium planning is that you are opening up the land available for a school site. One county may not have a proper site available, but another county may, so this element in the Beecham report of working across boundaries is crucial, in order for us to ensure that the services are delivered directly to the people.

[119] Michael German: One of the problems with Beecham is that it is tended to look at what is within councils rather than between council areas. Cross-border services are the most difficult of all to deal with where you have unitary authorities. The consortium approach could deliver a second school in Cwmbran, of course, which is very accessible, but would also then be in Torfaen, if that would be an inappropriate approach. If local authorities are to be forced to work together, can you tell us what has happened so far between the three local authorities concerned in terms of any planning in this respect, and what do they say is the problem with proceeding with getting to the next stage of having a planned secondary school?

[120] Ms Maher: Mae pedwar awdurdod lleol; mae Blaenau Gwent yn rhan o'r hafaliad hwn hefyd. Mae Caerffili a Chaerdydd hefyd yn dod i mewn ar rai materion o fewn y consortiwm, ac addysg yw un ohonynt.

Ms Maher: There are four local authorities; Blaenau Gwent is also part of this equation. Caerphilly and Cardiff also come in on some issues within the consortium, and education is one of them.

[121] Cynhaliwyd cyfarfodydd y flwyddyn hon, a chyn hynny, i ystyried y mater, ac mae gwaith yn mynd rhagddo, ond mae problem o ran cyllid—mae mor syml a hynny. Mae pob cyngor yn cyfeirio at gyllid drwy'r amser. Credaf fod yr awydd yno ymysg y cynghorau, ac mae rhieni yn gofyn am hyn. Cafwyd arolygon yng Nghasnewydd a sir Fynwy sy'n dangos bod angen mwy o leoliadau a darpariaethau addysg cynradd Cymraeg, ac mae darparu addysg uwchradd Cymraeg yn ychwanegol at hynny. Fodd bynnag, mae'n dod yn ôl at gyllid bob tro.

Meetings have been held this year, and before then, to consider the issue, and work is ongoing, but funding is a problem—it is as simple as that. Every authority refers to funding all the time. I think that the will is there among authorities, and parents are asking for this provision. Surveys have been conducted in Newport and Monmouthshire that show that more Welsh-medium schools and provision are needed in the primary sector, and the provision of Welsh-medium secondary education is additional to that. However, it comes down to funding every time.

[122] Bethan Jenkins: Diolch i chi am ddod yma heddiw. A ydych wedi ystyried cysylltu â'r Gweinidog neu a ydych wedi bod yn gweithredu ar lefel leol? Bu ichi sôn am gael strategaeth genedlaethol. A ydych yn credu y byddai system addysg uwch gyda choleg ffederal yn cael ei thanseilio oherwydd diffyg yn y sectorau addysg cynradd ac uwchradd ar hyn o bryd?

Bethan Jenkins: Thank you for coming here today. Have you considered getting in touch with the Minister or have you been acting on a local level? You mentioned the need for a national strategy. Do you believe that a federal college in higher education could be undermined because of the shortage of provision in the primary and secondary sectors?

[123] Ms Feakes: Yr ydym wedi bod yn cysylltu â'r Is-adran Rheolaeth Ysgolion ynglŷn â'r broblem gydag ysgol Gwynllyw, ond mae problem ehangach.

Ms Feakes: We have been in touch with the Schools Management Division regarding the problem with Gwynllyw school, but there is a broader issue.

[124] Ms Maher: Yn genedlaethol, bu'r mudiad yn trafod y mater gyda'r Gweinidog, a bu inni drafod dogfen gyda hi'n ddiweddar. Yn anffodus, ni anfonais y ddogfen honno atoch, ond gallaf wneud hynny ar ôl y cyfarfod hwn os byddai hynny o fudd. Mae'r ddogfen yn amlinellu'r chwe pwynt y teimlwn yn genedlaethol y dylid eu cynnwys

Ms Maher: On a national level, the organisation has discussed this issue with the Minister, and we have discussed a document with her recently. Unfortunately, I did not forward that document to you, but I can do so following this meeting if that would be of use. The document outlines the six points that we feel, nationally, should be included in the

yn y strategaeth, sy'n cynnwys: hwyluso a phrysuro twf ysgolion Cymraeg; sicrhau darpariaeth Gymraeg mewn siroedd lled wledig; sicrhau dilyniant rhwng addysg cyn ysgol ac addysg cynradd, uwchradd, bellach ac uwch; sicrhau cydweithrediad traws-sirol; a chludiant. Mae awgrymiadau yn y ddogfen ar sut y dylai strategaeth addysg Gymraeg fod pan gaiff ei llunio a'i hargraffu. Felly, yr ydym wedi bod yn trafod hyn ar lefel genedlaethol ond yr ydym hefyd wedi bod yn trafod y mater yn lleol gyda chynghorwyr, rhieni, Aelodau Seneddol ac Aelodau Cynulliad.

strategy, which include: facilitating and speeding up the growth of Welsh-medium schools; ensuring that there is Welsh-medium provision in semi-rural counties; ensuring continuity between pre-school education and primary, secondary, further and higher education; ensuring cross-border collaboration; and transport. There are suggestions in the document as to what we think a Welsh-medium education strategy should look like once it has been drawn up and published. Therefore, we have discussed this on a national level, but we have also discussed it on a local level with councillors, parents, Members of Parliament and Assembly Members.

[125] Bethan Jenkins: O ran yr ochr leol, a ydych wedi dod ar draws enghreifftiau o bobl sydd wedi gorfod anfon eu plant i ysgolion cyfrwng Saesneg oherwydd nad oes ysgol uwchradd Gymraeg ar gael, neu a oes trefniadau tymor byr er mwyn osgoi hynny?

Bethan Jenkins: On the local side, have you come across examples of people who have had to send their children to English-medium schools because there is not a Welsh-medium secondary school available, or are there short-term arrangements in place to avoid that?

[126] Ms Hill: Yn sir Fynwy, mae plant wedi gorfod mynd i ysgolion Saesneg oherwydd bod eu rhieni yn meddwl ei bod yn rhy bell iddynt deithio i ysgol Gwynllyw.

Ms Hill: In Monmouthshire, children have had to go to English schools because their parents feel that it is too far for them to travel to Gwynllyw school.

[127] Ms Feakes: Mae'r un peth yn wir o ran Ysgol y Ffin. Mae un rhiant wedi anfon ei blentyn i ysgol Saesneg eleni oherwydd y pellter.

Ms Feakes: The same is true of Ysgol y Ffin. One parent has sent a child to an English school this year because of the distance.

[128] Bethan Jenkins: A oes gennych ystadegau clir ar hynny?

Bethan Jenkins: Do you have any clear statistics on that?

[129] Ms Feakes: Gallwn greu ystadegau clir. Mae'r niferoedd yn isel iawn, felly mae'n anodd creu ystadegau, ond gallwch gael y niferoedd.

Ms Feakes: We can create clear statistics. The numbers are very low, so creating statistics is difficult, but we can give you the numbers.

[130] Ms Maher: Yr anhawster gyda hynny yw, unwaith bod rhieni wedi gwneud penderfyniad, yr ydym yn eu colli neu maent yn diflannu i mewn i'r system. Mae'n anodd iawn tracio'r ymatebion i'r math hwnnw o ymchwil. Hoffem roi holiadur i rieni i ofyn a wnaethant ystyried addysg Cymraeg ac, os dewisant addysg Saesneg, beth oedd y rheswm am hynny. Mae'n anodd iawn tracio a dadansoddi y math hynny o ddata. Byddai'n well ac yn fwy rhagweithiol pe bai'r dewis yn amlwg i rieni o'r cychwyn. Un o fanteision

Ms Maher: The difficulty with that is that, once parents have made a decision, we lose them or they disappear into the system. It is then very difficult to track the responses to that type of research. We would like to give parents a questionnaire that asks them whether they considered Welsh-medium education and, if they did not, why that was the case. It is very difficult to track and analyse that sort of data. It would be easier and more proactive if the choice was apparent to parents from the outset. One of

cynnal arolwg yn gynnar iawn ym mywyd plant—pan bod y plentyn yn 18 mis oed—yw fod rhieni yn cael amser i feddwl am y math o addysg y maent ei eisiau yn hytrach na'u bod yn mynd gyda'r llif a bod eu plant yn mynd i'r ysgol agosaf, er enghraifft, heb iddynt wybod am y dewis sydd ar gael a manteision y dewis hwnnw.

[131] **Ms Feakes:** Hoffwn ategu rhywbeth at y pwynt hwnnw. Mae sir Fynwy wedi cynnal arolwg ar y cynnydd mewn addysg Gymraeg ac i weld beth mae rhieni ei eisiau o ran addysg. Dywed yr arolwg:

[132] 'significant numbers of respondents reported that even if they sent their children to a Welsh-language primary school, they would still be reluctant to send them on to Ysgol Gyfun Gwynllyw'.

[133] Dywed hefyd fod y ffaith nad oes ysgol uwchradd Gymraeg lleol yn effeithio ar y niferoedd o bobl sy'n anfon eu plant i ysgolion cynradd Cymraeg. Mae pobl yn ystyried ysgolion uwchradd pan maent yn dewis ysgol gynradd, ac mae hynny'n cael effaith ar y niferoedd sy'n mynd i mewn i'r sector Cymraeg.

the benefits of conducting a survey very early on in a child's life—when the child is 18 months old—is that parents have time to think about the type of education that they want, rather than going with the flow and sending their children to the nearest school, for example, without knowing about the options that are available and the benefits of those options.

Ms Feakes: I wish to add something on that point. Monmouthshire has conducted a review on the increase in Welsh-medium education and to see what parents want in terms of education. The review states that:

It also states that the fact that there is no local Welsh-medium secondary school affects the numbers of people who send their children to Welsh-medium primary school. People consider secondary schools when they choose a primary school, and that affects the numbers who go into the Welsh-medium sector.

1.30 p.m.

[134] **Bethan Jenkins:** Felly, pe bai'r awdurdod lleol yn cynnal rhyw fath o holiadur o ddechrau oes plentyn, byddai hwnnw'n hwyluso datblygiad y system addysg Gymraeg.

Bethan Jenkins: So, if the local authority conducted some sort of survey at the start of a child's life, that would facilitate the development of the Welsh-medium education system.

[135] **Ms Hill:** Yn bendant.

Ms Hill: Definitely.

[136] **Val Lloyd:** What is the capacity of the current Welsh-medium secondary school, Ysgol Gyfun Gwynllyw?

[137] **Ms Maher:** In 2007, there were 780 pupils.

[138] **Val Lloyd:** That is at maximum capacity, with no room to expand.

[139] **Michael German:** They are in the Terrapins.

[140] **Ms Maher:** Yn ogystal, mae adolygiad o rifau statudol pob ysgol uwchradd ar hyn o bryd, sydd yn golygu bod nifer disgyblion Ysgol Gwynllyw wedi cwmpo. Mae'r adolygiad o ysgolion cynradd wedi ei wneud yn barod, ac yr wyf yn credu y bydd yr adolygiad o ysgolion uwchradd yn dod i mewn yn 2009.

Ms Maher: In addition, there is currently a review of the statutory numbers of each secondary school, which means that the number of pupils in Ysgol Gwynllyw has fallen. The review of primary schools has already been done, and I believe that the review of secondary schools will come in in 2009.

[141] **Val Lloyd:** I know that, in your answer to Bethan, you explained why you thought that you did not have absolutely correct figures for those who wish to attend a Welsh-medium comprehensive, but could you give us your best guess? I appreciate that it will be a guess.

[142] **Ms Feakes:** I missed a section of that question, I am afraid.

[143] **Val Lloyd:** When you were replying to Bethan's question, you said that you were unable to give us figures for the desire for a Welsh-medium secondary education, because people, knowing it was unavailable, perhaps made other choices. However, could you give us a guess as to the figures? I accept that it will be an estimate.

[144] **Ms Maher:** Pe baech wedi gofyn beth fyddai'r twf yn y nifer o blant a fyddai eisiau addysg uwchradd Gymraeg yng Nghaerdydd llynedd, byddai neb wedi dweud y byddai'n 10 y cant. Nid wyf yn credu ei fod yn deg gofyn beth fyddai'r twf heb wybod yn union beth yw'r angen, ond hefyd mae'r angen yn mynd gyda'r ddarpariaeth, felly, os bydd darpariaeth, bydd hynny'n effeithio ar yr angen. Dyma a welwn dro ar ôl tro gydag addysg cyfrwng Gymraeg: pan fod darpariaeth ar gael, bydd mwy o rieni yn ymateb iddi.

Ms Maher: Had you asked what the increase would have been in the number of children who wanted a Welsh-medium secondary education in Cardiff last year, no-one would have said that it would have been 10 per cent. I do not think that it is fair to ask what the increase would be without knowing exactly what the demand is, but demand goes hand in hand with provision, therefore, if the provision exists, that will affect demand. We see this time and again with Welsh-medium education: when provision is available, there is a greater parental response.

[145] **Ms Feakes:** I would like to add that it is probably a moving target. In the survey that Monmouthshire conducted into the demand for Welsh-medium education, it reported that there was a rise, from 17 per cent to 23 per cent, in the proportion of respondents saying that they would be very or quite likely to send a child to a Welsh-medium primary school. That is a 6 per cent increase in one year, so it is a moving target, but there is an increase.

[146] **Val Lloyd:** I would accept that, but I was trying to get some feel for the scale of the problem. Are there any further questions?

[147] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I am sorry that I have not had the chance to digest this Monmouthshire County Council survey of school choices, but it was only set before us as we sat down. Just looking through it, I see that some of the figures are based on 59 people responding, so it does not look as if, in certain sections, there was a big response from people. However, I look forward to digesting it later, and it might give me a better picture. We are an Assembly committee, and many people are loath to interfere in local government decisions, because a local authority must make the decisions in its remit and area, must it not? It is charged with running local education services in its patch. What would you like us as a committee to do to engage with this, and how would you like us to instruct the Welsh Assembly Government? I am a new Member, and came in in May, and there is a cross-party drive and push to try to make the Welsh language, and Welsh-medium education in particular, as accessible as possible to everyone in Wales to encourage the growth of the language. So what exactly are you looking for from the Welsh Assembly Government or the National Assembly for Wales that is not a dictatorial stance against local authorities providing services in their own patches? At the end of the day, a local authority is elected by local people to deliver local services.

[148] **Ms Feakes:** We appreciate that, but the problem is that Welsh-medium education presents a unique challenge to local authorities, because of the growth that has been experienced, and in terms of the policies that local education authorities put in place in the

past to track and to plan for new schools. They were based on such things as birth rates, which are of very little use in developing policies for Welsh-medium education, because they simply do not reflect the growth that we see in the sector.

[149] Also, in terms of planning, it is very difficult for LEAs, especially rural LEAs, to be able to plan effectively to provide education capital funding for these sorts of projects when they are going to have to find new money to do it. In that respect, we would like to see the National Assembly reviewing and developing its guidelines and thinking strategically about how it is going to deliver the goals of 'Iaith Pawb' in those unique situations where LEAs cannot respond individually to the growth in demand that they are seeing in the sector.

[150] **Ms Maher:** Yn syml iawn, mae **Ms Maher:** Quite simply, there is a need for angen strategaeth addysg Gymraeg a national Welsh-medium education strategy. genedlaethol.

[151] Quite simply, there needs to be a framework. Everybody else in education works within a framework, so why not in Welsh-medium education?

[152] Pam na allwn gael fframwaith Why can we not have a Welsh-medium addysg Gymraeg yn ogystal? education framework as well?

[153] **Ms Feakes:** We obviously do not want Monmouthshire County Council to be spending money that it does not have. We want to see a strategy and it will save money if people work together as a consortium to provide appropriately within a slightly wider area than that which an individual LEA can respond to. I think that there would probably be financial benefits to the Assembly in looking at this, in addition to the educational benefits that will be provided. There will also be benefits in terms of achieving the goals in 'Iaith Pawb'.

[154] **Val Lloyd:** That is a perfect end to our allotted time. It was almost spot on. The clock ticked over to the right figure as you finished speaking and so I am pleased that you were able to finish what you were saying. Thank you very much for your presentation and for answering our questions.

[155] The format now is that you will retire to the public gallery and we will discuss the issues raised by the previous petitioners. By the time that you are settled in your seats, we will have dealt with the first one and then we will be reviewing your case.

[156] **Ms Maher:** Diolch yn fawr. **Ms Maher:** Thank you.

[157] **Val Lloyd:** Thank you for the paperwork and the presentation.

[158] We will now revert to discussing our first petition on the A465 relief road. I open up the meeting for comments.

[159] **Michael German:** It is very difficult for Members to appreciate the closeness of the Heads of the Valleys road, the topography of the area and the difficulty of finding an alternative route. It would have been wonderful to have had a nice big plan or a map on which it could have been drawn. I wonder whether a site visit might be appropriate. I also think that we ought to find out precisely what the responsibilities are for such a relief road for both the Welsh Assembly Government and the local authority because there may be a difference between one and the other. Perhaps we also ought to find out what positions Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council and the Welsh Assembly Government are taking on the provision of relief and what they consider to be the alternatives.

[160] **Val Lloyd:** I think that that is a very clear way forward. I was going to point out that we have not yet had a response from the Minister to our letter. We would need that further information. Some new issues were raised in the oral evidence. I asked twice about a feasibility study, based on Mr Harris's proposals. I think that we should do as Mike suggests, if other Members are content with that. Would anyone like to add something else?

[161] **Bethan Jenkins:** I thought that the petitioners said that a feasibility study on sliproads was being conducted by the Deputy First Minister.

[162] **Michael German:** They were told that it had been rejected.

[163] **Bethan Jenkins:** On sliproads—

[164] **Michael German:** That was part of the same Capita Symonds report. It was one of the six options.

[165] **Bethan Jenkins:** Right.

[166] **Val Lloyd:** I clarified it with Mr Harris twice because it was different from anything that Capita Symonds had put forward. Its preferred option, when it did it, was the lay-by, but it did not really rate any of them particularly highly, presumably because of the topography, which Mike has mentioned. I was very startled when I saw the film that had been provided; it was quite scary, really. Mr Harris said that he had sent the new proposal to the Deputy First Minister. Shall we take that forward and ask the Deputy First Minister where we are, as well as try to find out the individual responsibilities in this matter, because it clearly is not only trunk roads?

1.40 p.m.

[167] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** May I seek clarification on this? I am not averse to visiting the site, I think that that is a sensible proposition, but given what this committee can achieve, other than to gain a better understanding, I am not quite sure how a site visit would be beneficial.

[168] Secondly, on the feasibility study, it is indicated on page 2 of the notes that the Welsh Assembly Government has conducted a feasibility study—

[169] **Michael German:** That is a Capita Symonds feasibility study.

[170] **Michael German:** My reason for suggesting that we have a look at the site is that, whenever anything falls between two stools—in this case the Welsh Assembly Government and Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council—there is a temptation for each one to say, 'Let the other one do it, because it is the other one's responsibility'. What we have is a school that has a road with heavy traffic at the front, and a dual carriageway, which is the Heads of the Valleys road, at the back. We need to see what the geography is like, because a plan is flat and it is not flat around that part of the world. Even if we cannot go to see it, we need some visual understanding of the site, otherwise, when we get the replies back, we will be working in the dark.

[171] **Val Lloyd:** I was going to suggest that we do two things—write to the Minister and the local authority, and, in the interim, while we wait for those replies, either furnish ourselves with a small-scale map and/or for any two or more Members to informally visit the site. I would not want us to have a hugely formal visit, but we need to go to look at the site ourselves, which we could arrange in addition to writing to the Minister and local authority. What do Members think about that?

[172] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I agree with that course of action.

[173] **Val Lloyd:** I see that we are all content on that.

[174] **Mr Sanchez:** May I just clarify that you are writing to the Minister and the local authority to determine where the lines of responsibility are drawn?

[175] **Michael German:** To determine what their intentions are.

[176] **Val Lloyd:** We could draw into that the feasibility study and the new suggestions that Mr Harris has sent to the Deputy First Minister—I put it that way, in case it gets mixed up with the previous Capita Symonds study. We will also look at whether we can find a slot where at least two, if not more, of us can visit the site, or get a map.

[177] **Michael German:** On a general point of principle, it would be useful, when petitioners submit this sort of petition in the future, to receive a map or clear plan of some sort if possible.

[178] **Val Lloyd:** I tried looking at my road map, but it was less than helpful. When I looked at the film, I was quite startled and tried to follow it through. I think that that is probably a good idea.

[179] **Mr Sanchez:** We could certainly advise petitioners to bring something of that sort along with them when they bring an issue like this to our attention.

[180] **Val Lloyd:** Thank you. We now turn to P-03-103, Welsh-medium education in Monmouthshire. I open this up for discussion.

[181] **Michael German:** There are two things that we need to know before we go any further, one of which is what the Government's proposals are for a Welsh language strategic plan, taking forward 'Iaith Pawb' into firmer action. Secondly, what level of discussion has there been between the four local authorities concerned and what were the outcomes of those discussions? Have they have communicated a joint view to the Government for support? In other words, do they have a plan?

[182] **Bethan Jenkins:** I did not know that Cardiff was involved as well—perhaps you understand it more. Are the consortia already quantified bodies or have they come about because of the problems that they have in their own areas?

[183] **Michael German:** I was not clear on that either. Gwynllyw school currently serves three local authorities and some parts of Blaenau Gwent. The route from Blaenau Gwent to the school is tricky—all of the routes are. There is Welsh-language secondary provision in Caerphilly and Cardiff, which is growing, and they are dealing with that. Some children who live in Monmouthshire, Blaenau Gwent or Newport will want to come to Cardiff, but, in general, people want a local solution.

[184] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** It is not a viable option for those living in Chepstow—they are already travelling for three hours.

[185] **Val Lloyd:** My understanding is that they were brought in to say that that is not an answer because it is too far, and that they are stretched themselves.

[186] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I would like to hear the views of the consortia and the councils and how they propose to address this issue. From the numbers, it is clear that, in isolation, the

authorities are not capable of doing this. This is a balancing act; you have to spend to accumulate, and you must start the ball rolling. However, we can also appreciate the difficulty in finding that resource within a difficult budget. Are you going to rob Peter, namely English-medium education, to pay Paul? If it is possible, I wish to hear their opinion on how they could strategically make this provision, which is clearly in demand.

[187] **Val Lloyd:** I think that that was Mike's suggestion, was it not, namely that we approach the four authorities to see whether they wish to comment?

[188] **Michael German:** Yes. We should also approach the Welsh Assembly Government.

[189] **Val Lloyd:** Yes; we should also ask the Government about its strategy for 'Iaith Pawb'. The other issue is that Andrew Davies is the Minister for Finance and Public Service Delivery, and there is spoken and unspoken agreement that service delivery can cut across boundaries. The Assembly Government is proposing that we should be considering more where we can have more effective service delivery for users.

[190] **Michael German:** I agree with that. Beecham got it absolutely right on this matter, but the emphasis has been on getting bodies within councils working together and setting up service boards, and so on, and perhaps not enough attention has been paid to the other part, which is about what services can be better provided across council borders, and this service is certainly one of those.

[191] **Val Lloyd:** So, this is also ticking that box. We are agreed on the way forward; we will request the Government's proposals for the strategic planning for 'Iaith Pawb' and get in touch with the four relevant local authorities to ask their views on the consortia and what planning is taking place, and explain our reasons for doing so.

[192] **Michael German:** We should perhaps explain to the petitioners who are here that this is only the next step in the process; it is not the end.

[193] **Val Lloyd:** Yes. Following the steps that we have outlined, we will review the issue when we receive the replies. I thank Mike for reminding me to make that clear. Our next step depends on the replies that we receive. We often take that for granted.

[194] **Michael German:** Yes, but often the petitioners will not have heard that message before.

[195] **Val Lloyd:** You are quite right to remind us.

1.49 p.m.

Deisebau Newydd New Petitions

[196] **Val Lloyd:** We have nine new petitions before us today. We will start with—

[197] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Before we go on, may I make a correction? The first petition was not submitted by my good self; I received it on behalf of the Petitions Committee and it was forwarded by my office. I wish to clarify that to ensure that there is no conflict of interest.

[198] **Michael German:** I liked the bit that states that the petitioner was obviously unclear about the distinction between the National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Assembly

Government. I was looking forward to blaming him for that.

[199] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I was asked to attend a cross-party reception on behalf of the committee; perhaps that is how the conflict arose.

[200] **Val Lloyd:** I do not know, but you were right to raise this, because there is an issue in that regard.

[201] Let us move on to the petition, namely P-03-106, which I will open up for discussion.

[202] 1.50 p.m.

[203] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** If I may start, there is a real issue here with regard to support from the National Assembly. The petitioners made a presentation back in the autumn about the town of Barry, which is our largest town. We have seen other examples in the Heads of the Valleys project over money coming from this institution to support projects. This is an example of an area that is, if you like, on the other side of the coin, and it has created a considerable amount of local interest. I have not been involved in this, except from a distance, and I would very much like to hear the evidence that petitioners feel they can contribute to expand on what they have presented to us already, because I think it is necessary to look into what is going on in Barry, particularly as it is our largest town.

[204] **Val Lloyd:** I am not adverse to that, but before we do that, or perhaps at the same time, we should perhaps write to the Welsh Assembly Government to get background information so that we can put that with the petitioners' views. Are Members content with that?

[205] **Bethan Jenkins:** If it brings some clarity to matters.

[206] **Val Lloyd:** Yes, because we may want to follow it up further, as we usually do after we have heard the petitioners. However, we will have the first response, and we can then build on that. I would like to suggest, in addition to your proposal, that we ask about the amount of money received from the sale of the docklands, what proportion has been invested and what is the total investment, so that we get a rounded picture.

[207] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I concur, Chair. That was part of the presentation made last October. Equally, we have before us a paper on a question that a Member asked yesterday in the Chamber of the Deputy First Minister, and that adds a degree of clarity; unfortunately, I think that it says, 'Zero', but it does clarify the point as well.

[208] I do take your point on board, and if we could do the two in tandem, then the committee would be greatly enriched by the evidence that could be presented to us, thereby taking the process forward.

[209] **Val Lloyd:** Yes. I think that we are agreed on that.

[210] We will move on to the next one, which is P-03-107, on a Welsh-language daily newspaper. The papers provided for us on this are correspondence between representatives of Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg and the relevant Minister, Rhodri Glyn Thomas.

[211] **Bethan Jenkins:** Credaf i'r **Bethan Jenkins:** I believe that the Minister Gweinidog ofyn i bobl dendro yn y sector has invited people to tender in that sector. hwn. Ar hyn o bryd, mae nifer o fudiadau Currently, several parties have bid for the wedi cynnig ar gyfer yr arian a gyhoeddodd money that Rhodri Glyn Thomas announced. Rhodri Glyn Thomas. Felly, fe hoffwn inni I would therefore prefer us to wait until

aros nes bod Rhodri Glyn Thomas yn Rhodri Glyn Thomas makes his statement
gwneud y datganiad hwnnw cyn inni weld y before we see the petitioners. I am
deisebwyr. Yr wyf yn hollol agored wedyn i completely open thereafter to inviting the
alw'r deisebwyr i mewn iddynt roi eu petitioners in to present their evidence to
tystiolaeth i'r pwyllgor. committee.

[212] **Val Lloyd:** That seems very sensible to me. Does anybody have anything to add to that? I see that you do not. We will therefore act on your wise words, Bethan.

[213] Our next petition is very topical. It concerns allotments, a subject that was raised in yesterday's short debate. It was an interesting debate. I was pleased that I was able to attend, as I found it very interesting.

[214] The Minister, if I may start on it, raised some important issues. I know that we have an excellent MRS briefing paper, but the Minister also raised some issues regarding private allotments, as did the MRS paper, as well as some issues relating to the wishes of people who want allotments and the statutory duty on local authorities to provide them. I do not know whether any of the other committee members were at the debate. Basically, what we have here in this particular petition concerns private allotments, so it is a matter between the landlord and the tenants of the allotments. That would be a civil issue, and not one for the Assembly. However, the Minister also—

[215] **Bethan Jenkins:** Perhaps I did not hear correctly, but I thought that the local authority was obligated to find significant plots even if it was private land.

[216] **Val Lloyd:** I am just coming to that bit. However, I do not know whether that interpretation is right; I cannot answer either way. If people make a request for allotments from the local authority, the authority has a statutory duty to provide them. I am sure that that does not mean that they have to be provided in that exact area, because they would have to look for appropriate land.

[217] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Allotments are an emotive subject, and I hear that the situation varies between allotments, regarding the differences in ownership and all the rest of it. I appreciate that, in this case, the allotment tenants are working to a timeframe that may mean that, sadly, nothing can be achieved by this institution. However, there is an argument and a discussion to be had here. As a Member, I would certainly benefit from gaining a better insight into the experiences of these allotment holders, and maybe from building up a case history, I will get a better understanding of the issue.

[218] **Val Lloyd:** I am not opposed to that, but the difficulty for me is that this is a private allotment. So, there is nothing that we can do about it, is there?

[219] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I fully understand that, Chair, but this will not be the last time that this issue comes before us. Although we should make it clear to the allotment holders in this instance that, sadly, we doubt whether there is much that we can do, as an institution, we should offer them the opportunity to present something to us so that we have a better understanding of it should the situation arise again.

[220] **Val Lloyd:** Could we reach some sort of compromise and write to them in the first instance to ask for more evidence—in writing, unless the issue requires elaboration? As you said, in this instance, the problem is—

[221] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** The timescale.

[222] **Val Lloyd:** Not only the timescale, but the fact that it is a private matter for them and

their landlord. No matter how we dress it up, we cannot do anything.

[223] **Michael German:** The only issue—and it is a planning issue—is what a local authority’s local development plan says about the use of that site. For example, if it said that land would never be earmarked for residential use, that would create a planning presumption against that. I do not know whether the planning directions or the local development plan guidance provided by the Welsh Assembly Government include anything at all about what should be designated for land already being used for allotments.

[224] **Bethan Jenkins:** I think that that is what Leanne’s letter—

[225] **Val Lloyd:** Yes, but that is Leanne’s letter, and Leanne is not a member of this committee. We thank her for her letter, but we cannot accept it as evidence. It was not presented in time for the meeting. We thank her for bringing the matter to our attention, but I do not think that we can consider it. I think that we need to come at it from another direction.

[226] **Bethan Jenkins:** On various occasions, we have received e-mails from petitioners prior to receiving the information formally, and we have been happy to consider those. So, for clarification, if we receive e-mails like this, is it the protocol that we do not discuss them?

[227] **Mr Sanchez:** The point is that it came in at the very last minute and Members had not had enough time to consider it properly. Perhaps it could be considered at the next meeting if Members will have had time to think about it.

[228] **Bethan Jenkins:** I think that that was due to the fact that they found out about it at the last minute themselves, and so they had to write a letter of this nature, because of the situation with the timeline for the closure of the allotments.

[229] **Val Lloyd:** We are not referring to the petitioners’ letter, but to Leanne’s. I am sorry to be repetitive, but it remains the fact that, whatever the timeline, we would be unable to do anything on this, because the allotments are privately owned.

[230] The local development plan is open for consultation for a considerable time, and the inspector will look at all the objections before it is finalised.

[231] **Michael German:** I was referring to the stage before that. Does the Welsh Assembly Government issue any guidance on allotments to local authorities, outlining what they should do when land is currently allotment land, whether it is in private or other ownership?

[232] **Val Lloyd:** We could write to the Minister and ask that, could we not? It could be in the planning policy guidelines.

2.00 p.m.

[233] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** It would be open to the owner to appeal at the inspection stage, and, if it were in a built-up or surrounded area, as most allotments are, it would be an anomaly not to—

[234] **Michael German:** Guidance of this sort tends to become presumption, and then the presumption is challengeable—

[235] **Val Lloyd:** I think that the whole thrust of the principle of allotments is first class; I am just trying to think about how we can deal with this. This petition focuses on the specifics, but we need to focus on the general, if anything. That is where I am coming from, because there is nothing that we can do about the particulars.

[236] **Michael German:** The petition's wording asks whether there are steps that the Assembly can take to protect allotments throughout Wales, which is the point that I was trying to make about the development plans.

[237] **Mr Sanchez:** In yesterday's short debate, a copy of which I have here, there was a statement citing 'Planning Policy Wales'.

[238] 'Allotments should be retained, particularly where they have an important open space function and contribute to sustainable development. A proposal to appropriate or dispose of statutory allotments for a different use would usually require the local authority to apply for the consent of the Assembly under Section 8 of the Allotments Act 1925.'

[239] **Michael German:** However, that refers to statutory allotments as opposed to private allotments, which is what this is about.

[240] **Val Lloyd:** Earlier in the Minister's reply, she made the comment that—shall I read it out? I will not read all of it out, as I printed only these two pages.

[241] 'Disputes between allotment holders and the landowner relating to private allotments are civil matters and Welsh Ministers cannot intervene.'

[242] **Michael German:** But that is about disputes, is it not, as opposed to the point that we were talking about earlier, on how you designate land?

[243] **Val Lloyd:** I agree that they are two separate issues, but you asked about private allotments.

[244] **Michael German:** I am referring to the local development plan and not to the dispute.

[245] **Val Lloyd:** We need to sort out what can be put in the local development—

[246] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I suggest that we go ahead with your earlier recommendation.

[247] **Val Lloyd:** Thank you very much. That will save me going through it all again.

[248] We will therefore move on to petition, P-03-109 on anti bullying schemes in schools. This is from pupils at Pembroke school who wish the Welsh Assembly Government to fund anti-bullying schemes in schools and the wider community, which would be inclusive. I think that we need to take evidence directly from the school pupils, and I wonder whether we could make an informal visit.

[249] **Michael German:** As opposed to a formal visit?

[250] **Val Lloyd:** I do not mind.

[251] **Michael German:** A formal visit is much more difficult to arrange, is it not?

[252] **Val Lloyd:** That is why I said 'informal'. We could visit the school and then have a session to report back on it. It would also be less stressful for the pupils.

[253] **Bethan Jenkins:** That would probably be best. Having been to the European Parliament and seen how it does things, I think that that method works well.

[254] **Val Lloyd:** I think that that would be beneficial to the pupils. So, let us look at making those arrangements outside committee. I think that at least two Members should go, because we need to pick up on a balance of views. More than two Members could go, but it depends on people's diaries and on when the school could accommodate us. However, we must have two Members—any two—so that we have two different views coming back, although they will probably be the same.

[255] **Bethan Jenkins:** Perhaps this is something to raise during an informal meeting, but there may be a conflict of interest if the places that we visit are in committee members' regions or constituencies. Perhaps we should visit places that are not in our own constituencies or areas.

[256] **Val Lloyd:** That is probably a good idea.

[257] **Michael German:** In addition, a Member who has a constituency interest should not be a member of the evidence-taking panel. That should not preclude them from attending, but they should not be a part of the panel.

[258] **Val Lloyd:** That is a good principle that we should maintain throughout the committee. I know that we are fair, but we want to be seen to be fair and unbiased.

[259] Petition P-03-110, on north Wales hospitals, reads as follows.

[260] 'We/I the undersigned urge that North Wales links with hospitals in Liverpool be continued and object to the centralising in Cardiff and Swansea.'

[261] I think that we covered this in the last meeting, did we not?

[262] **Michael German:** What we have not done, and what I suggest we do, is ask the Minister to write a response that we can then pass on to the petitioner. I know that the Minister feels strongly about petitions being answered, and so, asking her to provide an answer to the petitioners should not be a problem. However, I suggest that, instead of informing the Minister, we ask her to give us a response to this matter—which she has done, anyway. We have it, so we could just pass it on to the petitioner.

[263] **Val Lloyd:** I am quite content with that. If it gives more comfort to the petitioners, that is fine.

[264] I imagine that the same thing will apply to the next petition, P-03-111, which is on Llandudno breast unit, given that the Minister has publicly said that it is staying, following the review. So, we will write to the Minister formally on both of these, and send her reply to the petitioners. Thank you for that suggestion, Mike.

[265] The next petition, P-03-113, is on screening for prostate cancer.

[266] **Michael German:** This is a very important issue, which I think we should get the petitioner to talk to us about. Although we may not want to deal with it ourselves, but refer it to another committee, those in the profession certainly have a range of views about whether screening is appropriate.

[267] **Bethan Jenkins:** May I ask a question? Is this from the Screening Matters campaign, which we have been receiving e-mails from? I thought that the Minister had made a statement about it, but it may be totally different.

[268] **Val Lloyd:** I do not think that the Minister has made a statement on this prostate

cancer campaign. The Minister has made statements on breast screening, cervical screening, and bowel screening, because those are the three types of screening that are proven to be most effective.

[269] **Bethan Jenkins:** Okay, I just wanted to clarify that.

[270] **Michael German:** Prostate cancer is the most common cancer among men, and there is a difference of view among the medical profession as to whether screening is a good idea. I have heard eminent practitioners making the argument for both sides, and so it is a very tricky one indeed. Having the petitioner in seems to me to be a good starting point, but we may have to go a long way further with it—or perhaps another committee will have to do so.

[271] **Bethan Jenkins:** Will we also ask the Minister about the current policy?

[272] **Val Lloyd:** Yes, we could do that.

[273] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I think that the last line focuses everyone's mind:

[274] 'The five year survival rate of prostate cancer in the USA is 98.5%, compared with just 70% here'.

[275] **Michael German:** You wait until you hear the figures—

[276] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** That is why I said that the important thing is for us to get inside the issue.

[277] **Val Lloyd:** That is right. There is more to this than meets the eye.

[278] **Michael German:** Part of the argument, as I understand it, is that prostate specific antigen tests are slightly inexact, and so can give false—what do you call them?

[279] **Val Lloyd:** False positives, and of course a false positive result would be a worry for the gentleman involved. However, let us save that discussion for outside the public meeting.

[280] **Michael German:** It should also be said that prostate cancer is likely to affect all men if they live long enough.

[281] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** With my fortieth birthday this week, you have really cheered me up. [*Laughter.*]

[282] **Michael German:** I only know that because I sponsored a presentation here.

[283] **Val Lloyd:** It is certainly an interesting situation that needs airing. We will write to the Minister for her initial response, because we may need to write to her again after we have had evidence from the petitioners.

[284] The next petition, P-03-114, is entitled 'safe roads for schools'. I am not certain about this one. The petition does not relate to the Safe Routes to School initiative, but is petitioning for safe roads outside schools. Is that right?

[285] **Michael German:** It is related to the petition that we heard earlier, is it not?

[286] **Val Lloyd:** It could have so many meanings. Why do we not write to the Minister first, and see whether to take it further when we get her reply?

[287] **Bethan Jenkins:** Perhaps we should clarify what the petitioners mean by this problem. We have seen the problem in Blaenau Gwent very clearly, and if we had more of an idea of this school's circumstances, with evidence from the school—

[288] **Val Lloyd:** That is a good idea. Let us do that. We will ask the lead petitioner to elaborate on the problem.

[289] **Mr Sanchez:** So, just to clarify, are we inviting the petitioner to make a presentation?

[290] **Val Lloyd:** No.

[291] **Mr Sanchez:** Are we writing to her?

[292] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes, to ask her to clarify the problems faced.

[293] **Val Lloyd:** Moving on to, P-03-116, the last new petition—and you should not get too comfortable, as we have yet to deal with the existing ones—relates to Dyfnant forest windfarm. There seems to be a tension between the forest's rainbow trails and the siting of the industrial windfarm.

[294] **Michael German:** I had a word with the Chair of the Sustainability Committee today, and I understand that it is shortly to undertake a review of TAN 8, which will include a review of the siting of windfarms. Although I am quite happy to hear the lead petitioner's case, I wonder whether we may be able to pass on this petition to the committee as it is undertaking a review of this issue anyway.

2.10 p.m.

[295] **Val Lloyd:** That is a very sensible idea, but perhaps there is some way of our getting more precise information on this before passing it on to the Sustainability Committee, without having to ask the petitioners to come in to see us as they may be called in by that committee. Shall we ask the Members' research service to do that for us?

[296] **Michael German:** Yes. The key issue—and I am only repeating what I heard this morning—is the level of felling that you have to undertake in order to set up a windfarm. You cannot just cut down three trees.

[297] **Val Lloyd:** You cannot just drop it in. I am sure that the Minister will take that on board. That concludes that item.

2.11 p.m.

Y Wybodaeth Ddiweddaraf am Ddeisebau Blaenorol Updates on Previous Petitions

[298] **Val Lloyd:** The first petition under this item concerns the Swansea-Mumbles railway. We have received the further information that we requested from MRS, which provides an update on the situation following the feasibility study that was undertaken more than five years ago.

[299] **Michael German:** I am perfectly content to call in the petitioners on this matter because there seems to be a proposal that is not too dissimilar on light rail, or whatever they call it—

[300] **Val Lloyd:** It runs on wheels, and is commonly referred to as a bendy bus. MRS says

that there is no land left as the highways have been adjusted and the site next to the sea, where possible, has been turned into a pathway for walkers and cyclists. This is offered as a way of transporting people. If Members will allow me, I will bring in some local knowledge—it is not in my constituency, but in the neighbouring constituency, but my constituents visit the area, as do people from all our constituencies. The area is congested, and there is now a proposal for a park-and-ride facility, as this is the only area of the city that does not benefit from having such a facility. I am open to listening to Members' wishes. It is the local authority's decision, of course—

[301] **Michael German:** Is it not the transport grant that is the problem?

[302] **Val Lloyd:** No, not in this regard. Transport grant is available for what they call 'the metro', but not for this as they have not applied for it.

[303] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I am not sure how much further we can go on this. We have received an in-depth document from MRS, so is there not a case for closing the petition?

[304] **Val Lloyd:** I think that there is, simply because we cannot achieve anything, and it is unfair to keep on raising the hopes of petitioners. I would dearly love it if I could wave a magic wand and deliver what the petitioners have requested.

[305] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** The only caveat is that, although Mike said that he would not object to inviting the petitioners to come in, and I would not object to that, we must have something to offer them. Is there something that I have missed that we would be able to offer them if they came in and gave us their evidence?

[306] **Michael German:** I suppose that the only thing that you would get from that is what their attitude is towards the council's proposal, which would occupy most of this land anyway and follow the same route—

[307] **Val Lloyd:** No; there is no route left because the Mumbles train route that the petitioners refer to has been built on—Bethan is nodding. For example, the county hall covers part of the site.

[308] **Andrew R. T. Davies:** We could ask them if they were prepared to push that. *[Laughter.]*

[309] **Val Lloyd:** There is a library now, for which I am told the attendance figures are huge, as well as the county hall. It is not as clear-cut as one might think. There is a road that has taken up part of the area, but all sorts of local businesses are being built over it as well. If there was a site there, I would be the first to ask that we carry on with this, but I do not think that we will be able to do anything with this. So, are we agreed that we will close this petition? I see that we are, thank you.

[310] We now turn to the Miners' Welfare Ground at Nelson.

[311] **Michael German:** The planning application is determined, Chair, but what is not determined is what the Minister with responsibility for economic development proposes to do with the land, because receiving planning permission does not mean that the Minister must go ahead with a certain proposal; he can choose to do something different. The ball now falls in a different Minister's court, and, to start off with, we ought to seek the views of that Minister on whether part or all of this site should be retained as a welfare site.

[312] **Val Lloyd:** We have not had any response from the Minister expressing his views on returning the land to local ownership, so shall we take that forward? We raised two points in

our letter, and he has responded, but not fully. It was probably an oversight.

[313] We move on to cancer screening. The ministerial response is that she will attend next week's meeting of the Health, Wellbeing and Local Government Committee for a scrutiny session, and Members will have an opportunity to discuss the update with her there. If it is any comfort to this committee, I am a member of that committee.

[314] **Michael German:** We will wait and see what you have to say after you have attended the meeting, Chair. We ask you to bear the petition in mind when you question the Minister.

[315] **Val Lloyd:** We move on to Old School House. Joaneest, would you like to comment? I know that you have been wrestling with this.

[316] **Ms Jackson:** We have just received further correspondence, but I have not yet been able to go through it to determine how appropriate it is to consider it.

[317] **Michael German:** We will ask Joaneest to give a report next time.

[318] **Val Lloyd:** It would be preferable for the committee if she were to do that.

[319] Next we come to student loan regulations. We have had a letter from the Minister, which tells us that,

[320] 'Government Departments were last consulted at the end of 2006, and the result was the list that you describe in your letter'.

[321] It goes on to say that the,

[322] 'Department of Health (DH) reviews this list annually'.

[323] Part of what we asked was for the Westminster Government and part was for the Assembly Government. The Minister is hoping to make an announcement late in the year, shall we wait for that before we close the petition, or is there any action that we can take?

[324] **Michael German:** We at least ought to ask the Minister to write to us when she has made the decision. That way, we will not be waiting for an announcement; we will be taking the initiative.

[325] **Val Lloyd:** Does everyone agree to that? I see that you do.

[326] We move onto surgeries in Flintshire. We had a response from the local health board, but we have not had a response from the Minister yet, have we?

[327] **Andrew R. T. Davies:** I do not think that take this forward until we get a response.

[328] **Val Lloyd:** From the Minister? No, we cannot. We need a ministerial response.

[329] Regarding Powys community schools action, we had a very interesting letter from Estyn.

[330] **Bethan Jenkins:** I think that there is a Rural Affairs Sub-committee report on this now.

[331] **Val Lloyd:** We will have to wait, because we have passed it on to that committee, so

we will have to await its response.

[332] **Michael German:** Can we make sure the Estyn response gets to the petitioners? I presume that it will do so, but I want to make absolutely sure that we do that.

[333] **Val Lloyd:** I am sure that that has been heard.

[334] We turn to Aberthaw; this was interesting, was it not?

2.20 p.m.

[335] **Michael German:** It was a very clear legal document. Perhaps the clerk could explain it to us.

[336] **Bethan Jenkins:** In detail, please.

[337] **Val Lloyd:** This is from Friends of the Earth regarding Aberthaw power station. It asks us to address weaknesses in the new licence for Aberthaw. However, it is not a draft licence; it is now a full licence, because the consultation period has passed. We could invite the petitioners to give evidence. I am not against their coming in; it might be a good idea. However, Friends of the Earth is not a statutory consultee; the Countryside Council for Wales is the relevant body, and it has raised some objections, to which the petitioners refer. Would you like to get the petitioners in?

[338] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** It would offer them a platform. As you said, they are not statutory consultees, and it would offer them a platform to bring an opinion to the table, which is what this system is about.

[339] **Bethan Jenkins:** The response of the Environment Agency is comprehensive, but it does not agree with that. So, clarity for us in that respect is needed.

[340] **Val Lloyd:** This is an ideal place for them to present their case. We will invite them at a suitable time.

[341] The last petition in this section is that of Ysgol Gyfun Gartholwg.

[342] **Bethan Jenkins:** I will use my discretion and say that I am disappointed with the Minister's response.

[343] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** She is your Minister.

[344] **Bethan Jenkins:** I do not care; I am disappointed with her response. Even though it is only one school, I believe that it has been a massive problem for the school. Therefore, it could have been taken into consideration for future reference. It seems odd that she has said that this may stop confusion when two schools have the same sites, when this is the very problem that exists in this area. There is a primary school with the name Garth Olwg, and a secondary school that has the same name. So, I do not understand the fourth paragraph. However, I do not see where else we can take it, because of the Minister's position. Apart from writing to her again, I do not see what else can be done, unless the petitioners take another route. Can anyone else think of anything?

[345] **Michael German:** Since the Government is not prepared to take the legislation forward, either a committee or an individual Member could take legislation forward. I do not know whether the view of the committee is that this is something that it might want to do, but I commend an individual Member who might want to promote the legislation.

[346] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I have sympathy with what Mike has said. I find it odd that a school that unanimously wants to retain its name—of which we have seen passionate and powerful evidence—cannot do so. I appreciate that, from what I have seen, no-one has broken any rules or regulations. However, the authority holds the power to tell the school what it wants it to be called. There seems to be an anomaly when the wishes of the school and those of the community can be overridden. As far as this petition is concerned—and we can grandstand as much as we want—there is not a lot that we can do. However, there may be merit in referring it to the Enterprise and Learning Committee to look into the anomaly that schools do not have this power and to consider whether there is a way of changing the law through an individual AM—as Mike suggested—or through a committee. I would have thought that it would be worth the Enterprise and Learning Committee looking at this to try to empower schools to get that power back in their own hands.

[347] **Val Lloyd:** The Minister had given us her answer previously, but we did not close the petition because we had asked for the letter from Lord Prys-Davies to be considered. This letter is a response to that. So, the Minister reiterates the fact that it is currently in law for the local authority to decide on this, and she will not take Lord Prys-Davies's request forward. I think that this is a case for an individual Member to try to do something about it.

[348] **Michael German:** There is no harm in referring it to the committee. We could say that the Minister has determined that there is to be no change in legislation from the Government side, that, as a committee, we know that it would be open to any Member or any committee to move forward on changing the legislation, and that we forward this petition for consideration. We would not be making any recommendations as to what that committee might do, but I am sure that it would not mind looking at it.

[349] **Val Lloyd:** No.

[350] **Bethan Jenkins:** However, it is also something that could be considered for a minority party debate, or something that individual Members could propose for Plenary.

[351] **Michael German:** Yes, but the way to get change is to change the legislation. That is what we have to do here—

[352] **Val Lloyd:** We cannot suggest a Member to take this on, but we can pass it to a committee. I know that it is in the public domain now, and if a Member wants to take it up, then that is all well and good, but we must be a little more formal, and so we will pass this to the Enterprise and Learning Committee. Is everyone happy with that?

[353] **Mr Sanchez:** Are we are closing the petition after we have passed it on for consideration by that committee? Or are we expecting the committee to reply to us?

[354] **Michael German:** It is always helpful to have a reply, saying what is to be done; at least we know where we are then.

[355] **Bethan Jenkins:** We could then close it.

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

[357] That brings us to the final item on petitions that we have seen previously. I will not go through them one by one, because of course there is more information every time. So, if you wish to raise issues about any of them, please do so. This is just a position paper, really, for your information.

[358] **Michael German:** On P-03-100, on page 8, I note that we are said to be awaiting a decision. That is not the same as awaiting a response—it is a decision. That is regarding Tesco junction. However, we were seeking information. Did we have a reply from the Deputy First Minister about this matter?

[359] **Mr Sanchez:** I do not think that we have as yet.

[360] **Val Lloyd:** You would have brought it forward if we had.

[361] **Michael German:** Would it not be sensible to ask for a response?

[362] **Mr Sanchez:** The problem with this petition is that it was addressed to the Deputy First Minister, so, although we accepted it, we sent it directly to him for his information, and requested a response. When we receive that response—and we can certainly chase it, if that is what you would like—

[363] **Michael German:** Yes, I would like a response. It has come through the committee, so we should have a response that we can forward on.

[364] **Mr Sanchez:** They were directly petitioning the Deputy First Minister.

[365] **Michael German:** I understand that.

[366] **Val Lloyd:** Are there any more?

[367] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Can I just raise one issue, or two issues, really, as other business. First, we are getting more witnesses coming in now, and I think that it would be helpful if there was a clock that they could work to. Some witnesses tend to take a lot more time than others, and it is disorientating for them. If housekeeping could—

[368] **Michael German:** There is a clock over there.

[369] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Yes, but it does not run like a stopwatch—it is not like the clock in the Chamber, is it? I think that that would be beneficial to put people at their ease.

[370] **Val Lloyd:** Somebody would have to set the clock.

[371] **Michael German:** That is not going to put people at ease—having a clock ticking down in front of them.

[372] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** My second point is that we had many new papers before us when we came in today, and others were passed across by petitioners. I thought that we had agreed that there would be no papers handed over during evidence-gathering, because we are meant to be listening to the petitioners rather than looking at photographs and other bits and pieces. We need to be strict about the deadline for getting papers to Members, and about handing materials across the table during a meeting.

[373] **Val Lloyd:** You are absolutely right. If we are to have a full view of everything, we need to be able to consider papers whether they come from petitioners, and whether they come internally or externally—let me put it that way. We must look at setting a deadline for that—that is in everyone's interest.

[374] **Bethan Jenkins:** However, we should not discount any information that comes before us until we have put those guidelines in place.

[375] **Val Lloyd:** We could have an informal Chair's ruling.

[376] **Bethan Jenkins:** We cannot discount some of the information that we had today because of guidelines—at the moment, there are no guidelines.

[377] **Val Lloyd:** Perhaps we should have an informal meeting to decide these things. We can arrange that.

[378] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Could we do that, Chair? There was a weight of information today, and we need to set a deadline and say that, if we do not receive a paper by that deadline—

[379] **Michael German:** Should we do this informally, Chair?

[380] **Val Lloyd:** Yes—these things are better done informally. We have managed, in two previous informal meetings, to produce some sensible guidance, which is of benefit to petitioners as well as the committee. I formally close the meeting.

*Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 2.30 p.m.
The meeting ended at 2.30 p.m.*