



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

**Y Pwyllgor Deisebau  
The Petitions Committee**

**Dydd Mawrth, 5 Mai 2009  
Tuesday, 5 May 2009**

**Cynnwys**  
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Cofnodir y trafodion hyn yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynndi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal, cynhwysir cyfieithiad Saesneg o gyfraniadau yn y Gymraeg. Mae hon yn fersiwn ddrafft o'r cofnod. Cyhoeddir fersiwn derfynol ymhen pum diwrnod gwaith.

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. This is a draft version of the record. The final version will be published within five working days.

**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**

John Hosford	Prif Ddeisebydd, Deiseb Adfer Fferi Abertawe-Cork Lead Petitioner, Restore the Swansea-Cork Ferry petition
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**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
Siân Phipps	Clerc Clerk

*Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 9.30 a.m.*  
*The meeting began at 9.30 a.m.*

**Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau, Dirprwyon a Datgan Buddiannau**  
**Introduction, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest**

[1] **Val Lloyd:** Good morning, everyone, and welcome to this morning's meeting of the Petitions Committee. I have not received any apologies for absence; all Members are present. I remind everyone to note where the emergency exits are. We are not expecting a fire drill today, so, if you hear the alarm, it will be for real. Please remember to ensure that your mobile phone and any other devices are switched off. Translation is available via channel 1 on the headsets, and amplification of the sound is available via channel 0.

9.31 a.m.

**Sesiwn Dystiolaeth: Deiseb P-03-172 Fferi Abertawe-Corc**  
**Evidence Session: Petition P-03-172 Swansea-Cork Ferry**

[2] **Val Lloyd:** I welcome Mr John Hosford to our meeting. Thank you for coming along, Mr Hosford.

[3] **Mr Hosford:** It was no problem. You are very welcome.

[4] **Val Lloyd:** We will offer you up to 15 minutes to tell us exactly where we are

regarding the petition on the Swansea-Cork ferry.

[5] **Mr Hosford:** Thank you, Chair. First, I would like to say how privileged I am to be here with our Welsh colleagues and to be given this opportunity to explain the situation. When we set out on the campaign to bring back the Swansea-Cork ferry on 14 April 2008, we were strongly of the opinion that the lobbying and media attention should be very much on both sides of the water, involving a great deal of bilateral negotiation, lobbying and media profiling, and this opportunity also sets that down.

[6] To give you a potted history of the campaign, my friend, Adrian Brentnall, who is originally from England but moved over and now lives in Ballydehob, set up one of our farmers' markets. It was a travesty that we did not have the Swansea-Cork ferry and I asked, 'What are we going to do about it?'. We suggested the idea of setting up a website, which we duly did, and it went live on 14 April 2008.

[7] The website has been a great international platform to promote the ferry campaign. It has got the message out here in the United Kingdom, and it has also got the message across into our land bridge. We realise that there are beneficial effects for both countries from the land bridge traffic that will come from continental Europe; you have Germany with a population of 84 million, and you also have many of the Benelux countries. I know of people travelling to our area, Baltimore, who have been coming there since 1974, and have a round trip of some 1,100 km. For you in Wales, we feel that that also has beneficial effects in terms of bed-night deliverance, footfall and so on, in that people have to have accommodation and so on. Therefore, we see a lot of benefit from it.

[8] At the end of February, we had public meetings in the port of Swansea in association with Associated British Ports, which went extremely well. Our colleagues from the BBC came along, and I thank the British media, and the Welsh media in particular, for being bastions of support in this campaign. I commend the BBC, ITV, BBC Radio Wales, the local stations in Swansea, and the *South Wales Evening Post*, and I thank them for their continuing interest, solidarity and support, which has been most welcome.

[9] There is great interest in the campaign, and in this vital infrastructure between our two countries. The ease and freedom of access that the ferry brings is vital if we are to maximise the economic, social and cultural potential of both our nations. There is a warm bond of friendship between our two countries and there is a strong and tangible desire to restore this historic and vital link. Almost 4,000 people—3,949 at the time of writing this speech on Saturday—have signed up to the petition worldwide. There is a lot of emotion, strong feeling and a great desire to restore and renew the link. There are stories of real pain, both economic and social, related to the lack of this service. People have not only signed up to the petition, but feel strongly about the matter. Many people's lives were planned around the access that the ferry provided to and from our countries; I know of a rector in a parish in west Cork who had an ageing parent in the UK, and moved back to the UK because of the lack of the ferry and the inconvenience of other modes of transport. There are a lot of stories like that, and a lot of social and familial connections between our countries; there are some 3 million people of Irish ethnic background in the United Kingdom.

[10] We also realise the importance of the M4 corridor as an artery of access. As I said, the lack of the ferry has been a loss to the regions and nations on both sides of the water. We believe that, no matter how challenging the economic times, whether globally, bilaterally or nationally, important corridors of access for the efficient logistic movement of people and goods have to be maintained. The Swansea-Cork ferry route is a niche route and cannot be replicated for ease of access, reduction in driving times, reduction in carbon footprint and a reduction in road maintenance in both our countries. I know that that fits in with transport policies in south-west Wales.

[11] The ferry ticks all the boxes of your domestic policies here in Wales, as well as those of the European Union, and its encouragement of a modal shift from land to sea. We believe that subvention could be retrospectively applied to the service under the EU's Marco Polo and motorways of the sea initiatives. The ferry fits into those policies and the desired modal shift from land to sea. We encourage a bilateral pursuit of these funding opportunities, and we urge your colleagues in the European Parliament who represent Wales—and equally, MEPs from our side, in Cork—to pursue those funds for the common good.

[12] In the long term, sea transportation should be put on a more equitable footing vis-à-vis air transportation. Some air routes are subvented to the tune of several million euros, and, given our carbon footprint, there is a moral obligation to at least put ferry transportation on an equal footing as regards subvention, as a public obligatory service.

[13] People using their own cars and other modes of transport derive strong and tangible benefits from the ease of access of the ferry, and tourists make better use of their time. Tourists with their own cars can penetrate isolated peninsulas like Cork and west Wales and develop the tourism market in rural areas. Tourists who use cheap flights will often just take a city break, and the surrounding rural areas do not benefit. The ferry allows a vibrancy and diversity of opportunity for accommodation, catering and food service providers in the surrounding areas. I believe that it keeps alive many traditional and artisan skills, which remain buoyant because of this equity of access. These opportunities are open at both ends of the route.

[14] Political lobbying is under way at a local, national, UK, Wales and European Union level. Our campaign has written to all town councils in County Cork, and has had a private meeting with the Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Micheál Martin TD, in Cork. We brought the matter to his attention, explained the aim of the campaign and tried to highlight to him the urgency of the service's return.

9.40 a.m.

[15] We in this campaign appreciate the interest of this House and your Government here in Wales in the service's restoration and warmly welcome investment from Wales. Paul O'Brien from our recently formed West Cork Tourism Co-operative welcomes private and public investment from Wales. The new co-operative is pleased to engage in discussions and, as I say, welcomes private or public investment from Wales or the greater United Kingdom.

[16] Businesses, particularly those in tourism, will benefit from sound investment and from the extra footfall through their premises. If you make life easy for people by providing convenient access they will utilise the service. The consequent regular utilisation of the service will sustain it, and we know that 80 per cent of people surveyed on the website said that they would travel at least twice a year.

[17] Locally, we have a very strong commitment from Cork County Council to marketing the service, together with Fáilte Ireland, formerly Bord Fáilte. A sum of some €250,000 has been committed by Cork County Council, with matching funds from Fáilte Ireland, for marketing the service. Further support is expected from Cork City Council and Kerry County Council. I acknowledge with much thanks the assistance and total solidarity of the mayor of Cork county, Mr Noel Harrington, member of Cork County Council. He has given strong support to the reintroduction of the Swansea-Cork route. He has made its restoration one of the chief priorities of his 12-month term of office. We acknowledge his great and steadfast commitment.

[18] The port of Cork, in parallel commitment with Associated British Ports, which

operates the ferry port in Swansea, is very proactive in working towards the common goal of early restoration of the service. They have agreed mutually attractive incentives and discounted port charges to help in this regard. Special thanks should be given for the commitment of Captain Michael McCarthy, the commercial manager at the port of Cork. He and his colleagues have committed tremendous time and effort and put their wide scope of skills and experience at the disposal of all interested parties. Associated British Ports here in Wales has demonstrated reciprocal proactivity in pursuance of this mutually beneficial service. We have had a very warm welcome from Associated British Ports and there has been tremendous publicity. I would like to thank the Welsh media—the BBC, ITV and all the media—for their excellent coverage of our visit to Swansea. Thank you very much.

[19] We in Cork look forward to many years and generations of working together for the common good of both our regions. It is a mutual thing—a two-way road. We hope to set down foundations on a firm and lasting footing, built to endure long into the future.

[20] International transport consultants were engaged by the port of Cork and submitted their initial business plan prior to Christmas 2008. Personnel from the consultants SDS International accompanied the joint presentation team, which made public presentations in Cork, Kerry and Swansea in February and March this year. More than €2.9 million has been raised in a month in west Cork towards the setting up of the co-operative. The money is now held in a Cork solicitor's account, awaiting the resumption of the service. Shares in the co-operative are in units of €10,000, and details are available from Paul O'Brien if anyone needs those; he is the acting general manager. There are also opportunities for people—or even groups or hotel groups—to put syndicates together; tourism organisations could form alliances. There is also an opportunity via PayPal on the website, if people feel suitably moved, to defray the legal and set-up costs of the campaign. There have been a lot of legal costs, so people are committing money to that too. That is accessible at [www.bringbacktheswanseacorkferry.com](http://www.bringbacktheswanseacorkferry.com).

[21] On where we are at the moment, active negotiations on securing a suitable vessel are ongoing. A vessel has been identified, and negotiations are at a critical point but are moving positively in the right direction.

[22] Despite these being economically challenging times, there are many advantages in securing the vessel and resuming the service now. The vessel is cheaper. It was probably £13 million or £14 million a year or two ago, but it can be secured at a substantially lower amount now. Due to the economic downturn, good-quality personnel are now available. The board has brought this to my attention. These personnel are really talented people, without naming anyone, who are now available to run the service. Another advantage is that fuel prices are not as high as they were.

[23] A fatigue factor with airports has set in with a lot of people. There are hidden charges, you spend a longer time going through security, and there are penalties for exceeding weight restrictions. If you travel by ferry, it is healthier and more relaxing. It has unique advantages: you cannot pack your caravan or motor home into the overhead locker of a Ryanair plane.

[24] **Val Lloyd:** Some people would try. [*Laughter.*]

[25] **Mr Hosford:** People with holiday homes in both countries and expatriate people travelling in each direction need more weight allowance and the freedom to transport bulky and heavy luggage, and you can carry more weight and have a freedom of travel when you take your own vehicle on a ferry. That benefits rural communities and allows them to thrive and be vibrant on both sides of the water.

[26] **Val Lloyd:** I would just like to alert you to the fact that you have only one minute left.

[27] **Mr Hosford:** Fine; no problem.

[28] There are people who will not fly because of green considerations or because they are afraid of flying. A good-quality vessel allows large volumes of people to travel at the same time to attend rugby or soccer matches, festivals, concerts and so on. The motorway can be quickly accessed on the Welsh side from Swansea. The vessel can be a travelling shop window and can showcase the best of our regions to a captive audience on the 10-hour outward and return crossings. We know that there is already a lot of cultural interchange going on.

[29] If any of the Members or the media want to discuss any other matters in detail with us, we would be delighted to do so. Again, I thank you for this opportunity and for making your time available and for affording me such courtesy. It has been an honour to talk to you this morning in the National Assembly for Wales.

[30] **Val Lloyd:** Thank you, Mr Hosford. Are you happy to take questions on the subject from us now?

[31] **Mr Hosford:** Yes.

[32] **Val Lloyd:** Before we start the questions, I will declare an interest as a constituency Member, as I do whenever this petition comes before us. I will take part in the discussion, but I will not contribute to the decision-making process.

[33] I will begin the questions, Mr Hosford. Are there any remaining barriers to be overcome and, if so, what needs to be done about them and by whom?

[34] **Mr Hosford:** The remaining barriers are that the vessel, which has been identified in Finland, is going through a legal procedure at present. It has been held up by a liquidation court and is being processed at present. In west Cork, a management team is being set up to run this, and we would welcome communications and input from this side, so that we can work together. Active negotiations are going on. They are at quite a sensitive stage, but we are very positive about the whole thing.

[35] **Val Lloyd:** Would you be able to hazard a guess about when the new service is likely to start, and about how often it will run?

9.50 a.m.

[36] **Mr Hosford:** I can hazard a guess. The feeling, from talking to the board on a regular basis, is that the service should recommence in late February or March 2010.

[37] **Bethan Jenkins:** Thank you for coming to give evidence today, and as a person who has family ties with Ireland, and who does not like flying, I would use the facilities quite often. My question is about the economic benefits of reinstating the service. The petition mentioned that it would bring about substantial economic benefits, but I note from the Minister's letter of 24 April that he wanted to look again at the business plan to see the effects on the Welsh economy. Do you have any clear evidence as to how it will benefit the Welsh economy, and how the freight service coming to an end has been detrimental to it?

[38] **Mr Hosford:** There is no doubt that it will benefit the Welsh economy. If you have people travelling, they are going to need accommodation, petrol, food and catering facilities,

and so on. I have heard figures of £60 and £70 million being bandied about for the Welsh economy, and about £50 million for Cork.

[39] **Bethan Jenkins:** Where have those figures been generated?

[40] **Mr Hosford:** They seem to come from various media sources; in Cork I think that they came from the University College Cork. Over here, I have seen figures of £60 and £70 million being mentioned in the media. I do not know whether concrete research has been done, but I have seen on several occasions the figures £60 and £70 million being mentioned.

[41] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Can I just clarify two things? You were saying that those figures have been bandied about in the media. You—or the company, I should say—have not done market research to provide hard-and-fast evidence of what the foot count and the financial benefits to the immediate and wider area would be. Obviously, there is a limited pound, and if you are asking for money—from a Government institution for argument's sake—plenty of other organisations are queuing up, and it depends on where that pound has the biggest impact.

[42] **Mr Hosford:** Yes, absolutely. There is a business plan that is available from the Port of Cork Company that will show some of the nuts and bolts of the financial package, and the financial benefits and footfall on both sides of the water.

[43] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Are those assumptions or are they hard-and-fast, analysed figures? Forgive me, but my impression was that, perhaps, they were more assumptions than hard-and-fast predictions that could be backed up with evidence that had been looked at on both sides of the water as to market penetration. Will you just be dislodging travel from one port to another, and not necessarily creating a new footfall and a new element of wealth?

[44] **Mr Hosford:** There may be a certain amount of dislodgement, but I believe that there is a new element of wealth because of the niche market. If you are travelling into the Cork and Kerry area from this region, and if you enter and exit the Republic of Ireland via the Rosslare port, in Cork and Kerry you are talking about a three to five-hour trip in a lot of cases. That is the reason why a lot of people want the service reinstated. People from this side who travel back and forth frequently are articulating that many will not travel because of the length of the journey. It is a punishingly long journey at three to five hours. There is definitely a lot of demand and interest from freight traffic. We know that that is a hard fact, having talked around the board table at the Port of Cork. For the purposes of the meeting, I am not a board member of West Cork Tourism. I am in regular, daily contact with the board; my position is that I was the co-founder of the campaign and am its media spokesman, but I am not on the board. I am a shareholder of the new co-operative, which will run the service.

[45] We feel that, definitely in respect of statistical, statutory and logistical requirements, there is a lot of business to be done by going back and forth to Wales through the Cork route, because it ticks the boxes in relation to the tachograph, and means that you can make more use of the day, perhaps coming in during the early hours of the morning from Rosslare into Fishguard. You park up for a couple of hours and then it takes around three hours to travel from Swansea to London. There is the freight side of it. Many people in Wales travel back and forth on a regular basis. I know that there is a huge amount of business to be done with rugby. There is cultural exchange. In our local garden centre, we have the Swansea Male Voice Choir coming across with an official from Swansea council. All that is waiting to re-start. In terms of logistical and tachograph requirements, that is a definite, solid thing that can be done. In Cork, for example, there is a lot of business around the harbour that will use the service that comes over here, such as the pharmaceutical industry. There is also a strong agricultural base.



[46] Over 3,000 people who are interested in travelling have already signed up to the preliminary e-mail for Fastnet Line. The survey shows that 80 per cent of the people will travel at least twice, although some will travel every month. Many people said through the survey that they have given up travelling because of the lack of easy access. So, there is no doubt that there is a strong niche market, because of the convenience of moving in. I remind Members that, in the Cork/Kerry area alone, there is a population pool of 500,000. That has tangible benefits. There are over 420,000 people living in Cork and around 100,000 living in Kerry. People from other places, such as south Tipperary, Clare and areas along the west coast, will also use the ferry

[47] **Bethan Jenkins:** The freight-only service failed in 2007. Do you know why that happened and how that could be prevented from happening again if the service were reinstated?

[48] **Mr Hosford:** The service failed in 2007?

[49] **Bethan Jenkins:** It stopped, did it not? It came to an end.

[50] **Mr Hosford:** It stopped in October 2006. The vessel at the time was sold to a middle eastern operator and the operator failed to secure a new vessel. Other negotiations are going on, but I am not at liberty to divulge the full details. However, I know that the former operators sold the vessel and, despite other efforts to get a new vessel, it did not secure one. As I said earlier, vessels are much cheaper now. The vessel that it was looking at at that time cost around £13 million or £14 million. That price has substantially reduced today.

[51] **Bethan Jenkins:** So, that was the main hindrance preventing it from being sustained, was it?

[52] **Mr Hosford:** There are a few things that are necessary for the port of Swansea—you have to have a certain draught and a certain length. You can bring very large vessels into Cork, but the draught and the depth of the draught of the vessel coming into Swansea has to be considered. You have to have a vessel that is suitable for that route. Such a vessel has now been identified and, hopefully, the discussions will come to a successful conclusion. As I said, there has been a lot of activity with the setting up of a co-operative and a lot of due diligence is going on. We have an excellent board in West Cork Tourism at the moment, which would be delighted to work with you in Wales. Once the vessel has been secured and once the service is up and running, you will see a lot of talent on board and a very good quality service. The vessel that is being looked at at the moment is a four-star cruise ferry.

[53] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** What is the scale? Four stars out of how many? Is it one to five or one to 10?

[54] **Mr Hosford:** Four stars out of five.

[55] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** So, it is like the classification for accommodation.

[56] **Mr Hosford:** Yes.

[57] **Michael German:** I would like to follow up on the vessel, because you have identified two of the key problems, one of which is that there has to be a sufficiently limited draught for it to access Swansea port.

10.00 a.m.

[58] **Mr Hosford:** That is right.

[59] **Michael German:** Secondly, the feasibility study that was done stated that the ferry had to carry a mix of freight and passengers with, I suspect, a preponderance of freight because of the nature of the route. The big problem for passengers in terms of the Swansea-Cork ferry is that it is a long route that is subject to Atlantic swells and, therefore, draught and stability are important. So, given the limited draught, does this vessel have stabilisers? Was it constructed in the last 20 years or is it older than that and what sort of route has it been running on? Has it been on sheltered routes or has it been exposed?

[60] **Mr Hosford:** It has been on several routes. Its last route was the Helsinki to St Petersburg route.

[61] **Michael German:** That is very sheltered, is it not?

[62] **Mr Hosford:** Yes. That route stopped due to political considerations there; the company went into liquidation, which was one of the reasons for the delay as it had to go through the process of liquidation in court. In Finland, there is a bank charge, insurance company involvement and there is a corollary debt from the previous owner. The vessel is around 28 years old.

[63] **Michael German:** The Helsinki to St Petersburg route is a very sheltered one, but you would never describe the Swansea to Cork route in those terms.

[64] **Mr Hosford:** Absolutely not.

[65] **Michael German:** So, has the vessel ever run on a deep sea or large swell, which would test its stability?

[66] **Mr Hosford:** I do not think that it has been on any transatlantic routes, but it has certainly been on several routes around Europe. It has been checked out in the Cork port, which would have all the details on stability and safety and so on. Various experts and members of the board of west Cork tourism have been to see the vessel at least twice in Kotka, where it is held at the moment. It is about two and a half hours outside of Helsinki.

[67] **Michael German:** Did you give us the name of the new co-operative purchasing it?

[68] **Mr Hosford:** It calls itself Fastnet Line.

[69] **Michael German:** That is the name of the co-operative.

[70] **Mr Hosford:** It is the West Cork Tourism Co-operative Ltd.

[71] **Michael German:** I am sorry, but what is the name of the company that has offered €2.9 million and that is bidding for a ferry that is probably worth around €9 million?

[72] **Mr Hosford:** The West Cork Tourism Co-operative Ltd, which will probably trade as Fastnet Line.

[73] **Michael German:** Okay, thank you.

[74] **Val Lloyd:** Unfortunately we are running out of time and I wish to concentrate on questions about the Welsh Government's involvement, which is the section that we have not yet touched on. Would you like to start on that, Mike?

[75] **Michael German:** It relates to this funding gap, which is always the issue. You have

raised €2.9 million and you are going for a vessel that is probably worth around €9 million. That is a substantial funding gap. There has been an offer of €125,000 from Cork and there will probably be more from there. How much external support are you looking for from the Welsh Assembly Government?

[76] **Mr Hosford:** We would welcome any support. I heard figures of €500,000 being mentioned at one stage, but the co-operative would certainly be interested in talking to the Welsh Assembly Government in order to work mutually with it. It also hopes, in the autumn, to get a €2 million business expansion fund, which would also be run in Cork. Obviously, the co-operative is still taking funding.

[77] **Michael German:** Do you know whether the co-operative has started negotiations with the Welsh Assembly Government for funding?

[78] **Mr Hosford:** No.

[79] **Michael German:** It has not, or you do not know?

[80] **Mr Hosford:** It has not. I have been the main point of contact with Wales and therefore I know that it has not.

[81] **Michael German:** I take it that there is no other intermediary operating on behalf of the co-operative and that it should be undertaken by the co-operative itself.

[82] **Mr Hosford:** Yes, the west Cork tourism co-operative itself, which now has a board in place, chaired by Conor Buckley. It has an interim manager and it is now appointing various personnel as well.

[83] **Michael German:** Forgive me, but if you are expecting £0.5 million from the Welsh Assembly Government and you have roughly £3 million in the bank, there will be a fair gap between that and the cost of running the service. From where do you expect to raise that sort of funding? Are there any other forms of funding that the Welsh Assembly Government could help you with, for example, the European Investment Bank?

[84] **Mr Hosford:** I believe that the European Investment Bank also does INTERREG IV, which is a bilateral Welsh-Irish access point. We would welcome your consideration in terms of INTERREG IV, which we know could be of use with strategic things to our mutual benefit. I know that there is INTERREG IV. We are also lobbying back in Ireland as the European elections are coming up. We welcome the intervention of the European Parliament through the motorways of the sea and the Marco Polo policies. Those policies, in my opinion, from what I have been told, provide funding to help with the operating costs retrospectively, post the service commencement.

[85] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I am just seeking clarification in relation to Mike's point. We have a letter here from Ieuan Wyn Jones, the Deputy First Minister and Minister for the Economy and Transport, dated 24 April, mentioning the company British-Irish Lines Ltd. Am I right to assume that that would be the operating company of the ferry?

[86] **Mr Hosford:** It could potentially be one of the operators, but what is going to happen is that the co-operative is going to vet several different operators and then it will decide. British-Irish Lines Ltd is one of the potential operators, but it has not been decided who will operate it yet.

[87] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** You will forgive me for seeming somewhat confused, because the letter goes on to mention an application for €400,000 to assist with the purchase of a new

ferry. So, it clearly identifies an operator, British-Irish Lines Ltd, which has made an application to the Welsh Assembly Government for a specific sum of money for the purchase of a new ferry. It is for €400,000, but with the conversion rate as it is today, it is not far off £400,000.

[88] **Mr Hosford:** A few things have changed. British-Irish Lines Ltd is a shelf company, set up by a gentleman called Frank Allen. There are various people involved at the moment. The thinking at the moment is that the co-operative itself will buy the vessel and then an operator will operate it on behalf of the co-operative. There are a lot of negotiations going on at the moment, but the co-operative is the main organisation. I appreciate your confusion regarding the various facts and figures and so on, but the thinking is that the co-operative will control it. We believe that it would allow better financial control if the co-operative were to have control of it rather than any particular operator. One of the things that it definitely wants to do, which is why it has taken a bit longer, is all the due diligence with all the various people; it want to look into all the different factors to make sure that there is a firm financial footing going forward, so that we do not have another situation where we are almost three years without a vital service serving south-west Wales and the south-west region of Ireland.

[89] **Michael German:** Is Frank Allen a member of the board of the co-operative?

[90] **Mr Hosford:** No, he is not.

[91] **Val Lloyd:** I am conscious of the fact that I have been very generous with the time allowed because we needed to sort out matters. If anyone has one burning question left, I will allow them to ask it.

[92] **Michael German:** When would you say that the co-operative will be in a position to open discussions and negotiations with the Welsh Assembly Government?

[93] **Mr Hosford:** I would say that the co-operative would be willing to open negotiations with the Welsh Assembly Government at a very early date, within the next month.

10.10 a.m.

[94] **Val Lloyd:** Thank you very much for giving of your time, Mr Hosford. If you retire to the seats at the back, we will discuss the way forward for this committee.

[95] We have heard very interesting information from Mr Hosford. It has been worthwhile. What do Members suggest?

[96] **Michael German:** I suspect, Chair, that we are now ahead of the game with the Welsh Assembly Government in knowing the current position, and this information would be useful, given the importance of this issue to the Welsh economy and, symbolically, to the relationship between Ireland and Wales. We cannot act as an intermediary by pointing the Minister towards what we have said, but there seems to be an urgent need for the Welsh Assembly Government to engage with the co-operative, which will be the owner of the line. Rather like a Network Rail franchise, it is to franchise an operator to operate on its behalf, but the co-operative will be the holding company and the owner of the vessel, which is crucial in this matter. We will probably apprise the Minister of what is happening anyway, but perhaps we should also give the parties sufficient time to discuss the matter, after which we should take evidence from the Minister or his officials to see what they consider to be the current state of play. With the start date less than a year away, 11 months from now, putting the financial package in place will be crucial.

[97] **Val Lloyd:** Does anybody wish to add to that?

[98] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I would not dissent from that, Chair. The evidence that we have heard this morning has given us a feel for the various avenues being pursued at the moment. It is critical that the evidence that we have gathered here today is forwarded to the Minister and his officials, because, as I said in my closing question, I am a little confused about the various holding companies and this particular line—the British and Irish Line—which apparently made the initial request for the €400,000 to help towards the purchase of the ferry. Clarification is needed. I can understand the dilemma that the Assembly Government finds itself in, in that you need clear lines of engagement and you need to know exactly where the money is going, but we have heard three or four different lines today.

[99] We have also heard about the court action that the ferry company is tied up in at the moment, which, hopefully, will be resolved shortly. However, this committee needs to take a watching brief while ensuring that the Welsh Assembly Government is furnished with the evidence that we have gathered, to help it to facilitate this important economic line between south Wales and the Republic of Ireland.

[100] **Val Lloyd:** Thank you, Andrew. Bethan, do you want to add anything?

[101] **Bethan Jenkins:** The only point that I have to make is that one of the main issues in the Minister's letter was the need to look at the economic impact. It would probably be useful to have the university research that the petitioner hinted at. Was it from University College Cork? That seems to be the Government's line for needing more time to research the economic impact. That is the other element, I think.

[102] **Val Lloyd:** Three things have been suggested.

[103] **Michael German:** There is one small thing, which is the suitability for deep sea work of the vessel being looked at. I am sure that all committee members are aware that travelling on the old vessel was a bit difficult if you did not have very good sea legs. I think that we have enough information to look at the history of the vessel and its route, although not in the commercial sense, but we now need to look at its capability for deep sea operations—size, draught and that sort of thing, as well as its previous operating routes.

[104] **Val Lloyd:** Where would we get that information?

[105] **Michael German:** We can get that from Lloyd's of London.

[106] **Val Lloyd:** Right. That is the only name that I know, anyway.

[107] Three things have been suggested, and we will take them forward. We will apprise the Minister of the information from today's meeting. We will seek the research on the economic interests, as outlined by the university, and we will seek the information about the vessel's suitability, as outlined by Mike.

[108] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Can we ensure that we revisit this matter by the end of term?

[109] **Val Lloyd:** I took that as read.

[110] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** If we have it marked down, if action is needed to push the matter to some formal conclusion, it can take place.

[111] **Val Lloyd:** Certainly. I took that for granted. We will return to it. Thank you for taking the time and trouble to share your views with us, Mr Hosford. We appreciate it.

10.15 a.m.

**Deisebau Newydd  
New Petitions**

[112] **Val Lloyd:** We have four new petitions, and the first, P-03-206, is for free swimming for children and young people all year round. This is the hundred and fiftieth petition that we have received, and the presentation of it was very pleasant and received excellent publicity.

[113] ‘The Youth club of Ammanford Junior Gateway would like to ask if you would sign our petition which will be submitted to the Welsh Assembly and the local council. For free all year round Leisure Facilities for children and young people.’

[114] I open it up for discussion.

[115] **Bethan Jenkins:** We need to write to the Minister for Heritage to see what he is doing to improve the leisure services that are already available. The Audit Committee reviewed physical activity in Wales quite recently, and the Minister responded to key recommendations on the time allocated to free swimming and how councils were dealing with the issues surrounding accessibility, timing and the general services available for physical activity. So, we should refer to that and pick up on some of the points from it. We undertook a strong investigation into it, as well as writing to the Minister. There may be a two-pronged attack in picking up on some of the key issues surrounding this.

[116] **Val Lloyd:** What was the report?

[117] **Bethan Jenkins:** It was a report into physical activity in Wales. The Auditor General for Wales produced a report and the committee also undertook an inquiry, which came up with key recommendations for the Government. That was mainly because there seemed to be a lack of clarity over which department was responsible for physical activity in Wales, whether health or heritage. That was creating difficulties with the promotion of physical activity and reaching targets.

[118] **Val Lloyd:** Thank you. I was unaware of that report.

[119] **Michael German:** Just to reinforce that, it is very important to bear in mind that when we say we will write to the Minister, there are a number of Ministers responsible, as well as local government. We need to make absolutely clear that we want the Minister who has the funding decision for this to respond. However, the report is important because it points out all the cracks down which this issue falls. The only additional thing that I wanted to say, apart from what Bethan said, is that the key difference in this petition is the words ‘all year round’. The Government currently funds leisure during holiday times, so it is about who would have responsibility for all-year-round funding, is it not?

[120] **Val Lloyd:** So, when we say that we will write to the Minister, to which Minister should we write?

[121] **Michael German:** We need to do some investigation to find out which Minister has paid for—

[122] **Bethan Jenkins:** That is the Minister for Heritage.

[123] **Michael German:** However, if you look at the report, you might find that it should be someone else’s responsibility. That is part of the problem that we have, because it sometimes falls down the cracks.

[124] **Val Lloyd:** Should we review this at the next meeting after we have had the opportunity to read the report?

[125] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** The other Minister would be Andrew Davies, who is Minister for Finance and Public Service Delivery. So, he is ultimately responsible for any aspect of public service delivery.

[126] **Michael German:** Well, yes and no. The way it works is that he will not want to interfere in the powerful work of one Minister, as he would be treading on toes. That is why the Audit Committee's report is important if it points to the fact that things fall down the cracks between different departments because no-one has absolute responsibility. We will probably need to review that report to know who to write to.

[127] **Bethan Jenkins:** It was the Minister for Heritage who responded to the report.

[128] **Michael German:** Yes, but whether that was correct is another matter.

10.20 a.m.

[129] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes, but it is for us to decide whether we need to do more work on the issue. Do you understand what I am saying?

[130] **Val Lloyd:** So that we can get a better handle on it, I suggest that we bring this forward to the next meeting, which will give us time to review the report. So, we will be better informed than we are now. I am certainly not informed enough to make a—

[131] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Ultimately, it would be for the First Minister, would it not, if it falls between so many portfolios?

[132] **Michael German:** It falls into someone's portfolio budget, so the question is whose.

[133] **Val Lloyd:** Thank you, we will do that.

[134] We will move to the next new petition, P-03-211, on care facilities for dementia sufferers.

[135] 'The GMB - Britain's General Union calls upon the Welsh Assembly Government to ensure that there is sufficient and appropriate provision of specialist EMI [Elderly Mentally Infirm] /Dementia Care & Homes/Centres across Wales.'

[136] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I suggest that we seek clarification from the petitioner as to what it perceives to be the exact deficit. Although the petition highlights the broad strand—and there is nothing to stop us from looking at the whole scope of what it seeks—there could be a definitive aspect that it wants us to look at and try to get answers on. In parallel with that, I suggest that it may be good practice to write to the Minister, so that the two strands come together and the petition does not get delayed.

[137] **Val Lloyd:** Your idea of writing to the petitioner so that we can pinpoint what it seeks is excellent, but would we not need that information before we wrote to the Minister?

[138] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I concur with that point, but the petition is as it stands. The wording of the petition is relatively clear in a broad sense and, hopefully, with a broad response from the Minister, we might be able to pursue the petition that much more quickly.

[139] **Bethan Jenkins:** I think that we should write to the petitioner first, because then we would not have to write to the Minister twice.

[140] **Val Lloyd:** We could then hone our questions to the Minister. I agree with Bethan; if we are to ask for more specific information, we need to have it before we write to the Minister.

[141] The third petition is P-03-212, on traffic relief for St Asaph.

[142] 'I agree that St Asaph needs a North/South relief road.'

[143] This petition was raised by St Asaph Town Council and it collected more than 5,000 signatures.

[144] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** That is short, sharp and to the point. [*Laughter.*]

[145] **Michael German:** This is a road-programming issue. We want to know whether it is in anyone's forward plan. The petitioners need to know whether it is on the Government's horizon, and, if not, they may need to take action to put it there. At the moment, we do not even know whether it features on anyone's forward road programme, or whether it would be the Welsh Assembly Government or local government that would execute that work. Would it be a trunk road or not? We need to find out first of all where the responsibility for this road would lie, and then find out from the relevant Minister whether there is anything in the budget or forward plan regarding it.

[146] **Val Lloyd:** So, should we write to the Deputy First Minister and Minister for the Economy and Transport to find out?

[147] **Michael German:** Yes, if it is a local authority scheme, we also need to know whether there is a local authority plan for it.

[148] **Bethan Jenkins:** Given that mention is made of other AMs in the letter, it might be worth looking at the Record to see whether Members have raised it with Ministers previously.

[149] **Val Lloyd:** It looks as though the petition has pretty strong support from north Wales AMs.

[150] **Bethan Jenkins:** It would just be to track whether the Deputy First Minister has responded in any way in Plenary questions.

[151] **Val Lloyd:** In oral questions or in written questions.

[152] **Michael German:** If the search mechanism does not work to find out whether there has been any response, we will know who to blame. Sorry, that is an internal matter to do with our intranet.

[153] **Val Lloyd:** The fourth new petition is P-03-213, on abandoning the badger cull. This petition was raised by Secret World Wildlife Rescue and it collected 14,098 signatures, which is quite a lot, is it not?

[154] 'We call upon the Welsh Assembly Government to abandon its proposed cull of badgers as part of its Bovine TB Eradication programme.'

[155] **Michael German:** Given that the Assembly has made a decision on this, and voted on it, I suppose that the only thing in the petition that will make people change their minds are



the words,

[156] ‘in the light of overwhelming evidence of sound science’.

[157] Perhaps we should ask the Minister what her attitude is to those words. Perhaps we should also seek further information as to what else will be done in terms of an effective vaccine.

[158] **Val Lloyd:** Did we vote on it or was it a statement?

[159] **Bethan Jenkins:** We had a vote on it, which was followed by a statement on the actual pilot scheme and how that would take place.

[160] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I would concur with what Mike says. The Minister for Rural Affairs is clearly the Minister responsible for this. While a vote has been undertaken in Plenary the petition clearly talks of ‘overwhelming evidence of sound science’, and it would be interesting to see the Government’s response to such an accusation.

[161] **Val Lloyd:** Yes; I agree. I think that that is our way forward.

[162] **Ms Phipps:** I have been speaking to the clerk of the Rural Development Subcommittee, and I think that we need to keep the sub-committee informed of whatever action we take here, because, apparently, it keeps its report on this under review constantly.

[163] **Val Lloyd:** Are you happy with that, Members?

[164] **Michael German:** Keep them in the dark, Chair. [*Laughter.*]

[165] **Val Lloyd:** We would not like it if someone kept us in the dark, so I do not think that we should do that.

[166] **Michael German:** I am only teasing.

10.26 a.m.

### **Hynt Deisebau Blaenorol Updates to Previous Petitions**

[167] **Val Lloyd:** The first petition to be considered under this item is petition P-03-072 on the Young Carers Measure, which has been with us since October 2007. We have now had a response from the Minister for Health and Social Services, which states that it is within the Assembly’s competence—we have the legislative competence to bring the Measure. However, that will be subject to support by the Government and the National Assembly. Shall we add this legislative proposal to the proposed legislation bank?

[168] **Michael German:** Can we also e-mail all Members?

[169] **Bethan Jenkins:** I think that that was something that we were going to put together through the legislation bank and then let Members know—

[170] **Michael German:** Yes, but there is a deadline for Wednesday. We suspended Standing Orders last week.

[171] **Val Lloyd:** Yes, until 8 May.

- [172] **Michael German:** That is the next day.
- [173] **Val Lloyd:** I am sure that I saw 8 May on the agenda.
- [174] **Michael German:** Therefore, it is Thursday. There is a deadline to meet. If we want to put a proposal around, Thursday will be the day.
- [175] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Yes.
- [176] **Val Lloyd:** Friday is 8 May.
- [177] **Michael German:** Sorry. I forgot; it is my birthday. [*Laughter.*]
- [178] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** You are getting to the age where you want to forget, Mike. [*Laughter.*]
- [179] **Val Lloyd:** Is that a cry for a card? [*Laughter.*]
- [180] **Michael German:** I am trying very hard. I should not wish it on myself. However, regarding the legislation bank, I agree. Unless it will be ready by Friday, perhaps we should e-mail the paper to Members who are thinking of putting in a proposal, 'Here is the report of the Petitions Committee if you want to consider it'.
- [181] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I concur with that.
- [182] **Val Lloyd:** That is all that we can do, given the timing, is it not?
- [183] **Michael German:** It is in the legislation bank in any case.
- [184] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** It is also worth informing the Health, Wellbeing and Local Government Committee as a formality, because committees also have the right to do that.
- [185] **Val Lloyd:** Yes. It will give us extra work to do—
- [186] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** As a matter of formality, we should pass it on.
- [187] **Ms Jackson:** Just to clarify, I am aware that the proposed legislative competence Order on carers has finished its scrutiny at the Assembly, but I am not certain whether it has yet concluded Westminster's scrutiny and whether it has been made. Therefore, do not get too excited about this bank.
- [188] **Michael German:** Right. In that case, if it is not, it could not be put to the ballot yet.
- [189] **Ms Jackson:** I do not think that it has finished its scrutiny through Westminster yet. If it has, it may not have gone to the Privy Council, in which case it will not be in Schedule 5 for this ballot.
- [190] **Michael German:** It will not be there for Thursday.
- [191] **Ms Jackson:** It would not be there for this ballot.
- [192] **Michael German:** Okay. In that case, ignore all of my previous comments. [*Laughter.*]
- [193] **Val Lloyd:** Thank you, Joanest. We can still add it to the bank and send it to the

committee.

10.30 a.m.

[194] The next one is P-03-081 on student loan regulations. This has been with us for some time, has it not?

[195] **Michael German:** If you read the correspondence, Chair, there is a letter from the Minister saying that optometry and pharmacy were not included in the review that was announced in April, and then you wrote another letter, and the Minister replied in July, I think.

[196] **Val Lloyd:** They have not been specifically included in the review

[197] **Michael German:** You then wrote back again, and the most recent reply, which is always the one that you want to look at, deals with the issue of the board looking at the modernisation of pharmacies. That only applies to pharmacy, of course, and not optometry. There is a programme board looking at pharmacy, and I would suggest that we might want to ask it to look at the pharmacy issues, although that does not answer the optometry issues—I do not quite know where we go with that. Perhaps we ought to write to the Minister and thank her for her answer on pharmacy, but ask her to tell us about optometry as well.

[198] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** You are hoping that we get 50 per cent.

[199] **Val Lloyd:** Yes, because it remains unanswered. I agree with that. Does anyone object? I see that you do not.

[200] The next petition is P-03-137 on hypothyroidism. There was a very clear statement on this in February from the Royal College of Physicians.

[201] **Bethan Jenkins:** It seems to contradict the petitioners, so perhaps we should write to the Royal College of Physicians to ask for its view on this petition in light of the fact that the petitioners do not seem to concur that it should be the only treatment available to those who suffer from hypothyroidism.

[202] **Michael German:** We could write to the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence as well.

[203] **Val Lloyd:** Yes—we will write to the RCP and to NICE asking for their views. I think that that is the only way that we can take this forward. Thank you.

[204] The next petition is P-03-162 on the improvements to the A40 near Llanspyddid.

[205] **Michael German:** We need to wait for the review.

[206] **Val Lloyd:** Yes—we need to wait for the safety review. We have had a further reply from the Deputy First Minister, and we need to wait for the review.

[207] Moving on to petition P-03-185 on Llantwit Major regeneration, it is interesting, is it not? We have had a comprehensive letter from the Minister for Rural Affairs.

[208] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** The petitioners have been afforded a comprehensive debrief in the hope that further funding might become available for future applications. It is always lamentable when an application does not succeed, but it is a fact of life that these things happen. In the Minister's response, she has indicated that detailed negotiations are ongoing,

and the Vale of Glamorgan succeeded in 80 per cent of its applications, so I am not quite sure where this petition goes from here—other than for the petitioners to be asked if they are happy with the level of response from the Minister in offering a debrief.

[209] **Val Lloyd:** They have had quite a lot of money for the approved projects as well.

[210] **Michael German:** Presumably, they can always put new applications in, having had the advice as to what went wrong, and how they can improve.

[211] **Val Lloyd:** Shall we close it, or write to the petitioners?

[212] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** It would be good to write to the petitioners in the first instance just to seek their opinion on the detailed letter that the Minister has sent us. I cannot see how much further we can take this.

[213] **Val Lloyd:** Nor can I.

[214] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Applications for grants are in the gift of others.

[215] **Michael German:** Given that advice has been offered on how a future application might be improved, that is something that the petitioners need to be aware of. I would always recommend taking that advice. If someone says that you could have improved your application—

[216] **Val Lloyd:** It is pointing you in the right direction.

[217] **Michael German:** Yes.

[218] **Val Lloyd:** Okay. We will write to the petitioner regarding their views.

[219] Moving on to petition P-03-187 on abolishing the Severn bridge tolls, I thank the Members' research service for the paper, which was very interesting and to the point.

[220] **Bethan Jenkins:** The only issue that I had with this is that, in his letter of 6 April, the Minister says that he has had no discussions with the Department for Transport and has not conducted any investigations, but, in answer to a question in Plenary on 18 February, Ieuan Wyn Jones said that he would talk to the UK Secretary of State about it. I do not know how that can be squared: in response to us he says that he has not done that, and has no intention of doing that, but in answer to, I think, Nick Ramsay's question of whether he would engage in discussions, he said that he would.

[221] **Michael German:** As you might expect, Chair, I take the view that, although it may not be within the legislative competence of the Welsh Assembly Government, it is certainly within its economic competence. It has a huge impact on the economic affairs of south-east Wales in particular. This paper deals only with the issue of abolishing tolls. It does not deal with a raft of other issues that I and others have been raising with Ministers over the past 12 months, particularly with regard to cash and credit card payments. In the responses that I have had in the Chamber, the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister have said that they intend to have discussions with the Ministers.

[222] This petition is very narrowly about the abolition of the Severn bridge tolls. I understand what will happen: when it reaches £1 billion, at 1989 prices, the bridge will move into public ownership. That is a very important issue, but at present there are other key issues. I do not think that there has ever been a response to any of the questions that I have asked to say, 'No, this is nothing to do with us'. The Welsh Assembly Government recognises that the

tolls have a very important economic implication for business and tourism in south Wales. I would like the Government to make a statement of what it believes. If it has said that it is going to intervene, in what ways has it intervened? What has it said to the UK Government and what has the UK Government said in response?

[223] **Val Lloyd:** How do we square that with the letter that we have received? I accept what you have said about credit cards. That is a totally different issue, which is not raised in this petition. This petition concerns the abolition of the tolls.

[224] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** The issue is that the petition, sadly, is so narrow in its wording, in referring to abolition. Therefore, I suppose that the letter is correct to a point in that, in legislative terms, the Assembly Government has no role to address the petition, because it does not have the competency to abolish the tolls. The other side of the argument is that the bridge is a key economic artery for prosperity in Wales as a whole, I would suggest—although it directly serves only south-east and west Wales. Therefore, I would suggest that there is a moral obligation on the Welsh Assembly Government to champion, in the first instance, easier ways of paying the toll, such as by credit card, and, secondly, to take up the challenge to see what sort of economic incentives it can put in place for the bridge's operators, which might involve some sort of subsidised use of the bridge. However, I agree with you, Chair, that the petition itself calls just for abolition of the tolls.

[225] **Michael German:** There is a much longer-term argument. When we reach the point of the bridge being returned to public ownership, then what? It may be only five six, or seven years away. This is the time to start making those arguments. When the Dartford tunnel was returned to public ownership—

[226] **Val Lloyd:** I am sorry, but we are straying slightly here. I accept what you are saying, but I think that it would have to be pursued in a different way. This petition is quite clear that it is asking for abolition of the tolls. As much as I accept and agree with much of what you have said, it should be pursued elsewhere.

[227] **Michael German:** The petition does not say when the tolls should be abolished; that is the issue. Should the tolls be abolished when the bridge returns to public ownership?

[228] **Val Lloyd:** That is a different argument, is it not? The petition is asking for the tolls to be abolished.

[229] **Michael German:** Yes, but it does not say when.

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

[231] **Michael German:** I think that the discussion needs to be had. My view is that we ought to ask the Minister to clarify the point that Bethan has made about whether or not there have been discussions—

10.40 a.m.

[232] **Bethan Jenkins:** I think that that is the strongest argument. If he said in a Plenary meeting that he will look into it when we have had a letter saying that he has no intention of doing that, we need to clarify that point.

[233] **Val Lloyd:** I agree.

[234] **Michael German:** The other issue is that of what the Welsh Assembly Government's attitude will be when the bridges return to public ownership. Should it start abolishing the

tolls now?

[235] **Val Lloyd:** I do not think that the petitioner has asked about that. The petitioner has asked for abolition. You are right: there are two public statements that are not the same, and we should take that up and ask for clarification.

[236] **Bethan Jenkins:** I also wanted to ask about what has happened in Scotland with the Abolition of Bridge Tolls (Scotland) Act 2008? Would it be possible for the Government to seek something similar?

[237] **Val Lloyd:** I think that that will have to be taken up in a different arena.

[238] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I do not think that that is possible with the Severn bridge.

[239] **Michael German:** Well, it could buy it out.

[240] **Val Lloyd:** We will come back to this, and we will ask the Minister for clarification on the apparently conflicting comments.

[241] The next petition is P-03-188 on the special care baby unit. We had a further letter from the Minister on 25 March. The problem remains with the middle-grade doctors, does it not?

[242] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I suggest that we write to the Minister to seek clarification on what the position is at the moment. I appreciate that she indicated the actions that have been put in place to try to address the concerns, and it is important that we understand what the up-to-date situation is. I am aware of certain improvements in the service, and it would be good to clarify exactly how that is progressing. I am not sure how, as a Petitions Committee, we can advance this further, other than by keeping the spotlight on it.

[243] **Val Lloyd:** I was tempted for a while to say that we should also consider how that spreads out in general, but then I am falling into something that I just disagreed with with regard to a previous issue, so I will perhaps pursue that separately.

[244] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** It is very specific.

[245] **Val Lloyd:** Yes. The loss of those personnel meant that the unit was moved to a lower level, which means more travelling for parents and children who have to go elsewhere.

[246] The next petition is P-03-197 on saving the Vulcan. We have received information that this has been looked at again, and Cadw does not recommend listing the building.

[247] **Michael German:** The Minister's letter of 27 April to you, Val, said that he is minded to accept Cadw's assessment but that his officials are seeking comments on it. One of the comments might be the petitioners' comment. I am sure that they are going to do it anyway, but as we are the vehicle for it to happen, could we refer the letter—and the petitioners may have already seen it—with the Cadw assessment, to the petitioners and ask them whether they feel that there is any further action that could be taken on this petition. It is about the interpretation of those two pages.

[248] **Bethan Jenkins:** I thought that Cadw was changing its listing criteria anyway, but that will not impact on this. I cannot quite recall—

[249] **Michael German:** Perhaps we could check that out. It is a very good point.

[250] **Val Lloyd:** So, you think that we should check when Cadw is changing its guidelines.

[251] **Bethan Jenkins:** When we took evidence from Cadw representatives, they said that they were changing the guidelines. I thought that they said that they would let us know about that.

[252] **Val Lloyd:** But this could probably not be looked at this retrospectively.

[253] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** It has to be dealt with in the here and now.

[254] **Val Lloyd:** It would be interesting to find out, though. There is also the suggestion that we send this letter and the information from Cadw to the petitioners.

[255] **Michael German:** We could ask them whether they have any views on whether there is anything more that we can do.

[256] **Val Lloyd:** Is there any merit in the committee making a visit?

[257] **Michael German:** Absolutely.

[258] **Bethan Jenkins:** The second option was for the local planning authority to seek legal agreement with the owners for the relocation of the Vulcan. If this fails, that is the second option. So, perhaps it would be on that basis.

[259] **Michael German:** We could have a site visit and ask Stephen Phillips, the former employee of the Welsh Assembly Government, to be there as well, and also to ask Cadw to come with its document. We could then see whether we can understand the positions of both sides.

[260] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Cadw made the strong point that it believes that the powers that local authorities had—

[261] **Michael German:** That is why the local authority person would be there.

[262] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I am just saying that the point that it made was important, namely that it was a bit perplexed as to why the local authority had not been more proactive, given its understanding of the powers that the local authority has.

[263] **Michael German:** That is why it is suggested that we have them both there on site. We can then have an informal discussion with both on site as to who is right. That is one discussion I would like to have.

[264] **Val Lloyd:** The last petition is petition P-03-202 on the education maintenance allowance. I actually bumped into the petitioner—one of those chance things—just after she had given evidence to the Enterprise and Learning Committee. Is anybody here on that committee? I see that there is not.

[265] **Michael German:** We are going to wait, as presumably someone else is looking at it. Do not give yourselves more work.

[266] **Val Lloyd:** We will have to keep a watching a brief on that.

[267] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** From looking at the agenda, I think that the committee has only just started looking at it, either last week or this week.

[268] **Ms Phipps:** I believe the clerk told me that they were hoping to report by 21 May.

[269] **Val Lloyd:** So, we should have it after recess.

[270] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** It is either on last week's agenda or this week's agenda. It is one of the two.

[271] **Val Lloyd:** I have not looked at the agenda. That brings us to the end of today's meeting; we are only two minutes late. Thank you all very much.

*Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 10.47 a.m.  
The meeting ended at 10.47 a.m.*