



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

**Y Pwyllgor Deisebau
The Petitions Committee**

**Dydd Mawrth, 22 Medi 2009
Tuesday, 22 September 2009**

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

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

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

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

Swyddogion y Cynulliad yn bresennol
Assembly officials in attendance

Dan Collier	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Alun Davidson	Clerc Clerk
Joanest Jackson	Cynghorydd Cyfreithiol Legal Adviser
Andrew Minnis	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 9.28 a.m.
The meeting began at 9.28 a.m.

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **Val Lloyd:** Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the first meeting this term of the Petitions Committee. I remind everyone to turn off their mobile devices. Using the headsets, you can get a translation of the proceedings on channel 1 and the sound amplified on channel 0. No fire drill is planned for this morning, so if you hear the fire alarm, please make your way to the exit.

9.29 a.m.

Deisebau Newydd
New Petitions

[2] **Val Lloyd:** We have eight new petitions this morning, two of which are similar, so I intend to take them together. We will start with the first new petition, P-03-204.

[3] 'We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh government to introduce an open and transparent system to scrutinise the standards of service and value for money offered by the Higher Education sector in Wales, and to ensure changes in service levels are subject to public consultation.'

[4] This petition was raised by Trevor Mayes and collected 13 signatures. The petitioner has provided a supporting statement. What do Members wish to do?

[5] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Our normal course of action is to refer it to the Minister for

Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills for her views. However, I call the committee's attention to the detailed inquiry by the Enterprise and Learning Committee into the value of the higher education sector in Wales, carried out over 12 months, I think. So, we could consider referring it to that committee, or perhaps the clerking team here could look at the report of that inquiry to see whether it includes any quality evidence that could be brought to bear on this petition. When we have that before us, we could discuss it in more detail.

[6] **Val Lloyd:** Thank you, Andrew. It is always helpful when committee members—

[7] **Michael German:** May I just add to that? It is an interesting petition in that it asks the National Assembly for Wales to ask the Welsh Government to scrutinise higher education, and it is also the role of the National Assembly for Wales to scrutinise these things. Apart from doing what Andrew suggested, I wonder whether we ought to seek the views of the Enterprise and Learning Committee on how such proper scrutiny of standards and change should take place. It is that committee's role to discharge precisely that function. I presume that the clerk would put it before the committee.

[8] **Val Lloyd:** Are there any further comments? Shall we take that course of action, then? We will write to the Minister and also, as Mike suggested, to the Enterprise and Learning Committee. You are a member of that committee, are you not, Andrew?

[9] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I am a member, but I caught only the tail end of that inquiry; as I said, I think that it was a 12-month inquiry. Dan would probably remember better, because he was deputy clerk of that committee at the time. It was a 12-month inquiry, was it not?

[10] **Mr Collier:** Yes, and the report will be published in October.

[11] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Okay, so it is not published yet, but it is quite imminent—and pertinent.

[12] **Val Lloyd:** Very pertinent. Let us move to the second petition, P-03-215, on the prohibition of political events in schools. To summarise, the petition asks us to urge the Government to ensure that political organisations be prohibited from organising events or interacting with children without their parents' permission. It was raised by Mr John Tyler, and it collected 19 signatures. What are Members' wishes in relation to it?

[13] **Michael German:** I have some concerns about this, because the second Assembly's Local Government and Public Services Committee took some considerable time investigating this matter, namely how political education takes place in schools. That committee's report is extant, and it went as far as saying that there ought to be a change to the national curriculum to encourage political engagement among young people. It seems to me that there are two sides to this issue. One is whether there should be political engagement with young people, and the Assembly's answer to that, currently on file, is that there should be and it should be done better than has been done so far. I know that we are conscious of this issue in relation to voter turnout at elections, and so on. The other side of the argument is about regulation and how you should manage the process. When we are asking the Minister, we could do two things: ask for her view on both sides of the discussion, not just on the regulation of what we currently do; and ask what political engagement would be appropriate, bearing in mind the report of that committee in the second Assembly.

[14] **Val Lloyd:** Thank you, Mike. That is really helpful. Like other Members, I draw a distinction between political intervention and party political intervention in schools. When we go into schools, we do not talk about our parties, but about the National Assembly for Wales in a neutral sense, so to speak, to raise awareness. There is a difference, although it is still

political. There are times when we are all asked to hustings, when elections are near.

[15] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** The Welsh baccalaureate is a good example. I have attended quite a few lower sixth cross-party political events, which are a part of the Welsh baccalaureate curriculum. In support of what Mike said, I would also seek a view from the Welsh Local Government Association, given that, to a point, it is local education authorities that manage the aspirations of Government, as given to them through guidance on dealing with political events or occasions. It might be worth finding out about the implementation of that guidance on the ground by the 22 local authorities, particularly given the report that Mike referred to from the second Assembly. It might give us a picture that, in one area, it is far different from another area; there may be no universal approach.

[16] **Michael German:** I wish to come back on what you said, Chair, because, in fact, the report says that there should be more party political engagement in schools. That was the result of the committee's visits to several European countries, particularly Denmark, where we took evidence from young people. The report said that there ought to be much more political engagement with young people in schools but that it ought to be managed in a proper and appropriate manner. The other side of the coin is the important thing, namely that you cannot have an open house for political parties—but that is not required. However, there should be political engagement, because the important issue is what we do rather than how we do.

[17] **Val Lloyd:** Could you just repeat your original suggestion, please?

[18] **Michael German:** When we write to the Minister, drawing her attention to the petition, I was suggesting that we remind her of the report of the previous committee, which Ann Jones chaired, clarifying the fact that there are two parts to this issue. One is the nature and extent of political engagement with young people, and the context of that—and we all know about encouraging young people to engage more in the political process—and the second is how it should be managed, which this petition is also about. It is more about how it should be managed than what should happen. You cannot have one and ignore the other.

[19] **Val Lloyd:** Thank you. That is very helpful.

[20] **Bethan Jenkins:** I just want to mention personal and social education lessons. Perhaps we should have something from the Minister on that, as well. Having spoken to young people, I think that that provision is patchy. Perhaps she can provide some guidance on that as well.

[21] **Val Lloyd:** Thank you. Andrew, would you still like to speak to the WLGA?

[22] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Yes, because it is the local education authority that is charged with delivering education locally and with dealing with how schools operate within that environment.

[23] **Val Lloyd:** I think that that will give us a pretty full picture. Thank you.

[24] The third petition, P-03-234, from Coed Cadw, the Woodland Trust, collected more than 2,000 signatures. It has provided a paper in support of the petition, but it begins like this.

[25] 'Wales needs more native trees! We, the undersigned, welcome the Forestry Commission Wales target to create 1,500 hectares of new woodland over the next three years and call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government and the Forestry Commission to fulfil this target.'

[26] It goes on a little more, but it is extolling the positive points of native trees.

[27] **Michael German:** The level of wood cover in Wales is a growing and long-standing issue. The challenge is that there is a target without there necessarily being an action plan to achieve that, so we need to ask the Minister what action plan she has in place to achieve the target. May I ask what may seem to be a rude and impertinent question? Why have I received an e-mail from the committee support officer saying that we will receive this petition at 12.30 p.m. today, when we already have it?

[28] **Val Lloyd:** That is simply because none of us was available to accept it before, but that is perfectly in order. We wanted to put it on the agenda, and I know that we will all probably be there at 12.30 p.m. when the petitioners want to present it. There is nothing irregular about it.

[29] **Michael German:** No, I was not suggesting that there was. [*Laughter.*]

[30] **Val Lloyd:** Does anyone wish to add anything to what Mike said? I see that no-one does. Thank you. We will write to the Minister, as suggested.

9.40 a.m.

[31] We now move to the fourth new petition, P-03-237.

[32] ‘We call upon the National Assembly...to urge the Welsh Government to prevent the destruction of the Welsh countryside by making sure that large industrial buildings such as power plants and factories are built on brown field sites, are environmentally friendly and are not an eyesore.’

[33] This petition was submitted by Mr Siôn Gilbey and collected 43 signatures. Do Members have any comments?

[34] **Michael German:** It is a planning policy issue. We need to identify what guidance exists on brownfield sites and the presumptions in this matter. We should ask the Minister to clarify.

[35] **Val Lloyd:** We should therefore write to the Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing.

[36] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** The petition before us relates specifically to industrial buildings, but retail is also relevant given the sprawl of retail development. As a Member, I have raised this matter with the Minister on several occasions. I want to note my regret that the petition does not touch on out-of-town developments.

[37] **Val Lloyd:** I am afraid that we cannot include it.

[38] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I appreciate that. It is just a shame that it relates only to industrial policy rather than to a wider plan.

[39] **Val Lloyd:** You are very much on the ball this morning.

[40] **Bethan Jenkins:** It also relates to the economy portfolio. Are we just writing to—

[41] **Val Lloyd:** There is always a tension between development and—

[42] **Bethan Jenkins:** It is just because industrial buildings are mentioned as well as

power plants. There are two elements there. Surely—

[43] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Planning and guidance to planning departments are specifically in Jane Davidson's portfolio.

[44] **Val Lloyd:** Whatever went there would have to have planning consent.

[45] **Michael German:** Whatever sort of activity it might be.

[46] **Bethan Jenkins:** Okay.

[47] **Val Lloyd:** We may need to write to the Deputy First Minister and Minister for the Economy and Transport.

[48] **Bethan Jenkins:** I know that the Minister for environment is seeking powers over planning permission from Westminster on certain power developments over 50 MW. However, she can tell us that officially.

[49] **Michael German:** An application would have to be made for planning permission under the planning rules that have been laid down.

[50] **Val Lloyd:** Thank you. With your agreement, I will take petitions 5 and 8 together, because they are dealing with the same issue. I will read both petitions out before we discuss them. Petition 5, P-03-238, comes from Rhys Williams and collected 2,240 signatures. This petition is from Carmarthenshire residents, and requests

[51] 'a public inquiry by the Welsh Assembly Government into the sewage pollution of the Burry Inlet and Carmarthen Bay'.

[52] Petition 8, P-03-241, is entitled 'Save our Sewers' and is from the *Llanelli Star*.

[53] 'We support the Llanelli Star's campaign to sort out the sewers, paving the way for hundreds of jobs to come to the area and stopping sewage spills wrecking our environment.'

[54] That is the essence of it, is it not? Untreated sewage is going into the estuary and is affecting the cockle industry.

[55] **Michael German:** I am positive that there is some sort of guidance and instruction at all sorts of levels—from Europe down to Assembly level—on the discharge of raw sewage. Perhaps we need to identify who has responsibility and what action the Assembly Minister believes can be taken to ensure that raw sewage is not polluting Carmarthen bay.

[56] **Val Lloyd:** The problem occurs when the sewerage system is upgraded. However, from what I have read in the papers, this work is not planned to finish until 2010. The EU regulations have been breached several times. Environment Agency Wales is very much aware of it and is working on the problem now, and is hoping to finish before 2010. However, that is the given date at the moment. It is when there is an outflow. Anyway, whenever it is, it is not pleasant and it is wrecking the cockle industry.

[57] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Our usual course of action with a new petition is to seek the relevant Minister's response. However, it might also be timely to refer this petition to the Sustainability Committee. While this is specific to the Llanelli area, there are wider concerns around Wales—in my region, for example—and it might be worth flagging this up to that committee. As it considers its forward work programme, it might want to look into this to assess compliance with EU guidance in the first place and the impact on the coastline of

Wales. Not many months go by without hearing about a raw sewage spill or discharge along the coastline of Wales. If we flag that up at an early stage to the Sustainability Committee, it might well have a view on that.

[58] **Val Lloyd:** I am happy with that.

[59] **Michael German:** Am I right in saying that, if there is an infraction of a European directive—that would appear to be case, but we are not certain—action will be taken against the Welsh Assembly Government? I look to our legal adviser for an answer to that question.

[60] **Ms Jackson:** Normally, the action would be taken against the United Kingdom, as the member state. However, any fines that might arise from an infraction would most likely be sought from Wales.

[61] **Michael German:** So, someone would come down from London and say ‘cough up’? Could we ask the Minister to clarify that point?

[62] **Val Lloyd:** Could you provide us with a note on that, Joanest?

[63] **Ms Jackson:** Yes.

[64] **Val Lloyd:** Thank you; we would appreciate that. So, we will ask for a ministerial response and we will refer the subject to the Sustainability Committee, to see if it would like to take it forward.

[65] We now move on to P-03-239, Lifelong Learning at Cardiff University, which calls on the National Assembly:

[66] ‘to urge the Welsh Government to require Welsh Universities to provide a full and varied lifelong learning programme by making this a condition of any public funding they receive’.

[67] This petition was raised by Nick Jones, who collected 10 signatures. In addition, the petitioner collected over 3,000 signatures in an associated petition. The petitioner has provided supporting information.

[68] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Given that the Enterprise and Learning Committee’s inquiry report is due in October and that that looked at all aspects of higher education, from constraints on funding to courses to be delivered in Wales, perhaps we should run this petition alongside the publication of that report and seek the Minister’s view on how she is formulating her new funding structure in Wales to support universities.

[69] **Val Lloyd:** Is that with the lifelong learning programme?

[70] **Andrew R. T. Davies:** Yes.

[71] **Bethan Jenkins:** Could we first ask the petitioners whether they think the report would address their concerns? I do not know what is in the report, so it may not address their concerns.

[72] **Val Lloyd:** We could write to the Minister, but perhaps we should first wait for the report to be published. You said that it would be published in October.

[73] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** We could ask Dan, because he is the deputy clerk of the Enterprise and Learning Committee.

[74] **Val Lloyd:** Yes; it is useful to have you here, Dan.

[75] **Mr Collier:** It will be published in October.

[76] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** It is a 12-month piece of work that was comprehensive, from start to finish—it did not only look at one aspect of higher education, but at the whole gamut.

[77] **Val Lloyd:** Therefore, I suggest that we write to the Minister specifically on this petition, bearing in mind that this report is coming out in October. It is nearly the end of September, so we do not have to wait too long. We will get a round picture after that is published.

[78] We will now move on to petition P-03-240, on improvements to the A40 in Llanddewi Velfrey. There are increasing levels of traffic, particularly heavy goods vehicles, on the A40. The petitioners request, as a matter of urgency, improved road safety in their village of Llanddewi Velfrey near Narberth by implementing the five measures that they request. They list the five measures: pavements, speed cameras, road crossings to provide flashing warning lights for children, traffic calming measures and speed reduction. This petition was raised by the Llanddewi Velfrey Community Council and collected 154 signatures.

[79] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Considerable time has been spent on the A40 by the local Assembly Members through short debates in Plenary. There was also a public inquiry into a particular stretch of the A40—

[80] **Michael German:** It was not a public inquiry—the Assembly’s Standing Order No. 25 Committee discussed it. I was a member of that committee.

[81] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Mike has spent considerable time on this.

[82] **Michael German:** I was not the only one.

[83] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** He worked with other Members. This petition calls for calming measures and most people would support such measures, particularly if they knew that stretch of road. It would be pertinent to find out from the Deputy First Minister whether he will be making funding available to make the changes that the villagers are seeking, on what is a particularly busy stretch of road.

9.50 a.m.

[84] **Val Lloyd:** We can ask him for the latest information, which would include whether he is going to make funding available.

[85] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** The important thing is that this petition is seeking traffic-calming measures. If my mind serves me correctly, most other inquiries that we have had regarding the A40 have been about widening or upgrading the road, whereas this petition is seeking traffic-calming measures.

[86] **Val Lloyd:** Okay; we will be more direct. We will ask him to—

[87] **Michael German:** Having been deeply involved with this stretch of road for a large number of weeks, along with other Members, I think that the issue is that the Assembly has completed its work and the timescale for building the by-pass is by 2014, but the question that the petition raises is whether measures could be taken to improve pedestrian safety in that

village between now and then. Having walked along the road and been involved with this campaign closely, I know that the road is very dangerous. From the papers that are before us, it would appear that the petitioners are asking for a temporary measure to be able to protect pedestrians in some way between now and 2014. Once this section of by-pass is completed in 2014, it will not be a problem whatsoever, but until then it will be and it is. I think that we ought to be clear when we ask the Deputy First Minister that we are looking for interim solutions before his planned road changes in 2014.

[88] **Val Lloyd:** I think that that is a fair assessment. We are glad of your advice. Something came out of you sitting on that Standing Order No. 25 committee.

[89] **Michael German:** I think that many Members of this Assembly are grateful that they were not sitting on that committee.

[90] **Val Lloyd:** That completes the new petitions.

9.52 a.m.

Y Wybodaeth Ddiweddaraf am Ddeisebau Blaenorol Updates on Previous Petitions

[91] **Val Lloyd:** We now move to the second part of the agenda, where we have 26 updates on previous petitions. We will start with the first one, P-03-088, on rural bus services in Taliesin. This petition was considered by the committee in March, May and June 2008. The clerking team sought to contact the lead petitioner on numerous occasions, but the team eventually found out that she has moved to Australia and no longer wants to pursue the petition.

[92] **Michael German:** We should refer the comments to the Australian Parliament.

[93] **Val Lloyd:** Could I suggest that we close this petition?

[94] **Michael German:** Yes, close the petition.

[95] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Although the lead petitioner has gone to Australia, this petition concerned a general issue about rural bus services. Have we contacted anyone on this, because our normal procedure would be to send whatever evidence we have gathered to the lead petitioner? I presume that there is someone else to whom the information could be sent. It would be a shame for the work to be lost, if there is a group in the community or a second or deputy to the individual who could receive that information.

[96] **Mr Davidson:** We did discuss this with the lead petitioner. She said that she was going to contact a neighbour to see if they would be interested in taking it up, but she did not get back to us and that was some time ago now.

[97] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Could we send the information to the community council? I presume that there is a community council in the area. A great deal of work has been done on this and, obviously, the issue has not gone away just because the lead petitioner has gone off to Australia, so maybe the community council would like to have that information. Yes, you should close the petition, but it would be a shame to lose that information.

[98] **Val Lloyd:** We will follow that up. We will formally close the petition, but we will see if we can get another point of contact.

[99] The next petition, P-03-098, is on abolishing the school name 'Ysgol Gyfun

Rhydfelen'. This issue has been with us in some form or other for some considerable time. I think that we formally considered it in January and April 2008 and May 2009. We have had further responses. What are the committee's wishes?

[100] **Bethan Jenkins:** I do not think that it can be taken any further. It is disappointing that the Minister could not recognise the fact that people in the school felt that their feelings were being ignored or disregarded. She has had information to advise her that the appropriate channels of consultation were followed, but I think that this undermines the views of the school council, which, evidently, felt differently. While I understand and acknowledge her response, I am nonetheless disappointed. However, I do not think that we can take the matter any further if the Minister is not willing to change the guidelines in any way, shape or form. I do not know what else we as a committee can do.

[101] **Michael German:** The only issue, it seems to me, is that, back in his early letter to you, Val, of 29 April, Gareth Jones reaches the same conclusion that Bethan has just reached, but he also says that the only option remaining would be to have legislation proposed by a Member or committee. That option is still available to that committee. I think that we have simply to say that it is our intention to close this petition, refer it back to that committee, and say, 'We note your view that there could be legislation proposed by a Member or committee, and that is a matter for your committee; perhaps you wish to reconsider the issue as a committee'.

[102] **Val Lloyd:** I think that that is all we can do, really. Andrew, do you have anything to add?

[103] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I vividly recall the petitioners coming in and giving evidence, and the way in which the head boy, in particular, gave a very articulate account of how the school had progressed the argument, with the involvement of the school council and the community. We talk time and again in this institution about community involvement and the desire to promote school councils, and it is a source of bitter regret on my part that common sense and the wish of the school and the school council could not prevail in this matter. It would be a shame to lose the work done here—I respect the Minister's view on this; she has had information telling her what is happening, and it is her role as Minister to make the decision. However, I think that there is scope in future for some form of legislation or regulation to be passed to allow schools to operate with a degree of autonomy and, in particular, to reflect the wishes of the community and the school council. I would support Mike and Bethan in their proposal to try to push this back to the Enterprise and Learning Committee to see whether its members wish to take it up.

[104] **Bethan Jenkins:** I do not know whether anybody else knows, but a review of school governance is currently under way.

[105] **Val Lloyd:** Yes. The Minister mentions it in her letter.

[106] **Bethan Jenkins:** Is that something that we can consider?

[107] **Ms Jackson:** I would point out the significant amount of paperwork attached to this matter. Also, the Minister has indicated that she does not require any legislation to be passed to allow her to make changes to the regulations. Therefore, an executive power exists, but it does not, of course, preclude pushing for something at a higher level, but I make that point to make the information clear.

[108] **Michael German:** With regard to legislation, the Assembly is paramount, and its backbenchers are always in the majority.

[109] **Val Lloyd:** I note that, in her letter to us of June this year, the Minister says that she has been advised that, since the matter first arose, a new headteacher has been appointed, and that she is content with the name of the school. We should remember that the current policy was followed, however, in that the LEA consulted on the proposals and the governing body and the LEA could not agree—I understand the predicament that both sides found themselves in. As the legislation stands, under such circumstances, the LEA has the right to decide. We have given this petition a good airing, and we all understand the reasons behind why it was proposed. So, we will formally close it, and perhaps write to the Enterprise and Learning Committee, as Mike suggested.

[110] The next petition is P-03-099, on the multi-user path at Talybont-on-Usk. I may have been off sick for a while, but I remember many of these petitions. If you recall, this petition asked the National Assembly to provide a non-motorised multi-user track alongside the A40 between the picnic lay-by at Bwlch and the new junction at Talybont-on-Usk. We first discussed this petition in February 2008, and then discussed it in May 2008, and in March, May and July of 2009. We have had an update from the Deputy First Minister, in which he says that there is a report, but that it is still in draft form and being considered by the mid Wales trunk road agency. It was hoped that a copy would be received by the end of the summer for consideration by the end of the year to allow the potential inclusion of any works in next year's budget. Shall we ask for a copy of the report?

10.00 a.m.

[111] **Michael German:** Yes, as we have, apparently, today entered some equinox or other which takes us officially into autumn. The summer has definitely ended.

[112] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** We will probably get the decision by winter.

[113] **Val Lloyd:** We will ask for a copy of the report and confirmation of this decision in relation to including the work in next year's budget.

[114] The next update is on petition P-03-137, Hypothyroidism in Wales. We considered this twice in 2008 and in February, May and July of this year. Since our last meeting, we have had an update from the Royal College of Physicians, and the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence has also confirmed that it has decided not to develop guidance on hypothyroidism.

[115] **Michael German:** I think that we have taken this as far as we can, because NICE has decided not to develop guidance. Unless we were to investigate the three reasons given at the bottom of page 48 of the report on why NICE has taken that decision, I do not see where else we can go with this petition.

[116] **Val Lloyd:** NICE, in its conduct, has used experts and members of the lay public. I think that it is beyond our scope to discuss it further. I am sure that its decision has been properly arrived at.

[117] **Michael German:** The route is always open to petitioners if they want to address the NICE issue, because they could send us a petition on that matter.

[118] **Val Lloyd:** Are you all in agreement that we should formally close the petition? I see that you are. Thank you.

[119] The next update is on petition P-03-157, Coleg Ffederal Cymraeg, which was first raised with us in July 2008. We discussed it again in October and November of that year, and in January of this year. The Chair wrote to Cymdeithas yr Iaith following our meeting on 13

January to seek its views on the Minister's letter, but we have not had a response as yet.

[120] **Bethan Jenkins:** Knowing the members of Cymdeithas yr Iaith, I can only assume that they are happy with what is happening with the *coleg ffederal*, otherwise they would have responded by now. The concept of the *coleg ffederal* is progressing, and we should allow the group to continue its work with the Government. I think that we should close the petition.

[121] **Val Lloyd:** Yes, I agree, especially as we have not had a response since January. We will close it.

[122] The next update is on petition P-03-170, Mencap Cymru, in relation to employment. This petition was raised with us by Mencap, calling upon us to urge the Assembly Commission and the Welsh Assembly Government to take a lead in employing more people with a learning disability. We considered it in January, February, May and July of this year. Mencap Cymru has responded to the Minister's letter and it says that, unfortunately, it feels that the Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills's response does not answer its concerns, and that it still has some real issues of contention with the Minister's response. Mencap then highlights areas of policy that are not, in its view, being realised in practice, and areas where it believes there is need for a new policy.

[123] **Michael German:** It is clear that Mencap is now seeking a review of policy. We should ask the Minister directly whether she is prepared to consider a review of the policy and strategy in relation to the employment of people with a learning disability. This is an issue which will just disappear behind a curtain if you do not keep it at the forefront of your imagination. Once again, can we approach to the Enterprise and Learning Committee and say, 'This is an area worthy of consideration; we have received this petition that concerns policy matters; would you be interested in undertaking any work in this area'?

[124] **Bethan Jenkins:** If that committee does not have time, perhaps we could ask the Equality of Opportunity Committee.

[125] **Val Lloyd:** That might be a good idea because we place quite a lot of work upon the Enterprise and Learning Committee.

[126] **Michael German:** It might find it appropriate to refer the matter to the Equality of Opportunity Committee in any case.

[127] **Val Lloyd:** The Chair of the Enterprise and Learning Committee sometimes used to say to me 'When are you going to send us some work?' but he has stopped saying that now. *[Laughter.]* I can take a hint.

[128] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** May I also draw the committee's attention to a piece of work by the Enterprise and Learning Committee on a petition from this committee about post-19 educational opportunities for people with learning disabilities? That is not specific to education because, often, people from other areas work alongside those who work on accessing educational opportunities. So, an element of work has been done. It may have been in isolation or perhaps the committee looked at it together with this petition, but that debate came to Plenary. That work is finished and it could complement what Mencap is seeking here regarding employment.

[129] **Bethan Jenkins:** I think that petition came for us, did it not?

[130] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Yes.

[131] **Val Lloyd:** We will refer to it later in today's programme. I am sorry, I have lost my

thread. Shall we send it to the Enterprise and Learning Committee or—

[132] **Michael German:** We should send it to the Enterprise and Learning Committee saying that we recognise that we are overloading it with very worthy projects—I am paraphrasing here—and if it feels that it would be appropriate, it could pass this on to the Equality of Opportunity Committee. We would give the committee the first choice.

[133] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I would ask whichever committee that this finally sits with—and if it does not sit with another committee, we should look at it ourselves—to have regard for the piece of work and the investigation that has been undertaken on post-19 educational opportunities, because education and employment are two critical component parts that work together.

[134] **Val Lloyd:** We will also contact the Minister for the review of policies.

[135] On to the next petition, P-03-172, Restore the Swansea-Cork Ferry. As always, I declare an interest in this. I can take part in the discussion, but not in any vote on its outcome.

[136] **Michael German:** As far as I can remember, we were expecting something to have happened on this by now—

[137] **Val Lloyd:** It has happened. I am sorry, I should have introduced the petition on restoring the Swansea-Cork ferry properly. In my local paper and on BBC radio, it has been announced that they have now bought a ship.

[138] **Michael German:** But it is not running.

[139] **Val Lloyd:** Not yet. It is not due to run until next March. That is what I read in the paper.

[140] **Michael German:** So, presumably, all that we need is an update on progress. It seems to be going in the right direction, back and forth between here and Cork.

[141] **Val Lloyd:** We will write to Mr Hosford.

[142] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** From memory—please forgive me if I am wrong—there was an issue regarding the port authority. There were the operators of the ferry, but was there not an issue with the port authority—Associated British Ports—asking for engagement with the Assembly Government’s Department for the Economy and Transport?

[143] **Bethan Jenkins:** This letter from the Deputy First Minister refers to ‘regular contact’ with the ABP.

[144] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** We should also tackle the Deputy First Minister over Bethan’s point about the letter on 9 March to see whether that dialogue and those meetings are coming up with anything constructive.

[145] **Val Lloyd:** Perhaps we could link that to the fact that a ship has been bought by the consortium with a plan to set sail in March for the summer season and ask what discussions have been had.

[146] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** From the back of my mind, I believe that they were looking for a figure of about £0.5 million.

[147] **Val Lloyd:** There was a definite shortfall.

[148] **Bethan Jenkins:** We have another letter here saying that the Government is in talks and is discussing the business plan.

[149] ‘The plan is currently being appraised and I will write to you again when this has been completed.’

[150] **Val Lloyd:** That was only in July, so I do not think that we need to write a letter; that would be over-egging it slightly. However, this will come back to us and if we do not hear soon, we will write a letter. To be reasonable, as it was the summer season, we should give the Deputy First Minister some time.

[151] Andrew, the next petition is P-03-179, Post 19 Students with Additional Learning Needs, allied to another petition, P-03-203, on further education for young people with complex impairments from Scope. We considered this in November last year and in January, February and May this year. We have received an update from the Minister, in which she says that she has accepted the Enterprise and Learning Committee’s recommendations in principle. A Plenary debate was held on 24 June.

10.10 a.m.

[152] **Michael German:** It seems to me that, once we have had a report from another committee and that that committee’s recommendations have been accepted in principle, it is that committee’s responsibility to pursue the implementation of the recommendations. I think that we should close this petition now, but perhaps, in some gentle way, we could say to the Enterprise and Learning Committee that we look forward to seeing it continuing to monitor the recommendations of its report, which resulted from this petition.

[153] **Val Lloyd:** We will close the petition but perhaps we could send that closing letter to the—

[154] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** To be fair, in his introduction, Gareth indicated that, when it came to Plenary, the committee would be revisiting this to see how many of the proposals have been implemented or what progress was being made. It seems almost common and good practice for committee Chairs to say that we will be revisiting these matters. It is easy to say that we accept recommendations in principle in the Chamber and then 18 months later we find that nothing has really happened.

[155] **Val Lloyd:** Shall we ask him to apprise us of his review?

[156] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Yes, without a doubt.

[157] **Val Lloyd:** We now turn to petition P-03-181 on pernicious anaemia. We considered this petition earlier in the year and we have had an update from the Minister saying that she has not received correspondence from the Pernicious Anaemia Society in relation to a research grant. It may want to apply for the next round of funding and she encourages the society to engage with the NHS. At our last meeting, we agreed to seek the petitioners’ views of the Minister’s letter. The response from the petitioners raises a number of more specific issues, which are itemised in their letter. Shall we write to the Minister for Health and Social Services to make her aware of the petitioners’ response, and ask that the pharmaceutical officer provide an update on progress in getting a hydroxocobalamin licence for subcutaneous use? [ASSEMBLY MEMBERS: ‘Yes’.]

[158] **Val Lloyd:** Is there anything else? I see that there is not. The next petition is P-03-182 on European funding which calls upon the Enterprise and Learning Committee—

[*Laughter.*]

[159] **Michael German:** It is the famous committee again.

[160] **Val Lloyd:** Although it is not a funny matter, it is amusing to see the Enterprise and Learning Committee coming up again. This petition calls on that committee:

[161] ‘to launch an investigation into the economic use of the European funding received by Wales since 2000 and into the proposed mechanisms for delivery of the Convergence funds in 2007-14.’

[162] We first considered the petition in November 2008 and the Enterprise and Learning Committee undertook an investigation. The Deputy First Minister and Minister for the Economy and Transport has submitted a written response to that committee’s report, and there was also a Plenary debate. Recommendation 16 is the most relevant.

[163] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I believe that this petition was taken in the context of a wider review or scrutiny of the Welsh economy. I am aware that the petitioner felt somewhat aggrieved by that as he felt that convergence funding merited its own investigation. I have no more information other than what I picked up, namely that he was pushing for a specific investigation into convergence funding and development. The petitioner felt that it may have been overtaken by the wider review that the Enterprise and Learning Committee was considering on the response of the Welsh Assembly Government to the recession—or the economic downturn, rather. Before we suggest closing this petition, could we go back to the lead petitioner and ask him, in the light of the report from the Enterprise and Learning Committee, whether he thinks that his observations or aspirations for this petition were met or considered by that report?

[164] **Val Lloyd:** Does anyone have any comments to make? I see that no-one does. We will therefore take Andrew’s suggestion and go back to the petitioner to ask—

[165] **Bethan Jenkins:** We could ask the Enterprise and Learning Committee to write another report specifically on convergence funding. [*Laughter.*]

[166] **Val Lloyd:** We will now turn to the update on petition P-03-183 on improving rail services in Aberystwyth for access to Coleg Ceredigion. The petition reads as follows:

[167] ‘We, the students of Coleg Ceredigion ask the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Assembly Government to improve the rail service in Aberystwyth.’

[168] Ten pupils have signed the petition, and updates have been received from the Deputy First Minister and Minister for the Economy and Transport and TraCC. TraCC has agreed to meet with the petitioners to discuss their concerns.

[169] **Michael German:** I think that we will reach a successful outcome for this petition. However, reflecting on what we did with the last petition, a little bit of me thinks that when we reach that conclusion we ought to at least advise the petitioners that we are minded to close the petition because we believe that we have gone as far as we can go and we have sought and achieved an outcome. That is just to advise them, although the petitioners may want to reflect on it. That would give them the final word, so that we are not closing it without confirming with them—unless we have already done that.

[170] **Mr Davidson:** The only additional information that we have received is that the meeting with TraCC is going ahead. Mencap has informed us that that has been organised and is happening.

[171] **Bethan Jenkins:** Are we talking about the fact that there is going to be an hourly service?

[172] **Mr Davidson:** It has received that correspondence.

[173] **Bethan Jenkins:** Okay.

[174] **Michael German:** It is stated in a consultation document that there will be an hourly service from 2011, but it does not actually commit to that. I am not suggesting that that will not happen, but we need to be clear that the petitioners themselves are comfortable with where we have got to before we close this petition.

[175] **Val Lloyd:** Would they be the same petitioners who started off with this petition, because we have been dealing with it now for coming up to a year?

[176] **Michael German:** I do not know whether they are still around.

[177] **Mr Davidson:** As far as I know they are.

[178] **Val Lloyd:** Okay, we will take Mike's advice then.

[179] **Bethan Jenkins:** I would be pleased to know also whether TraCC has actually listened to their concerns. It may just listen and do nothing following on from that. So I think that we should keep it open until we hear about that.

[180] **Val Lloyd:** We will write to the petitioners as suggested.

[181] The next petition is P-03-188, on the special care baby unit at the Royal Glamorgan Hospital, which was downgraded to a level 2 high dependency unit because of a shortage of middle-grade doctors. We have considered this five times already and the latest update from the Minister for Health and Social Services has been received, in which she recognises the difficulties in recruiting middle-grade doctors and comments on the reasons for that.

[182] **Michael German:** We need to be kept updated on this petition.

[183] **Val Lloyd:** This issue is not just relevant to this petition, which, of course, is our immediate concern, but it is of interest generally.

[184] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Could we perhaps send this to the chair of the Health, Wellbeing and Local Government Committee? Val and I are members of that committee, and the issue of recruitment within the NHS is of major concern to all parties.

[185] **Val Lloyd:** Of this grade of doctor, yes.

[186] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Exactly, and it raises some issues that could do with airing.

[187] **Michael German:** To me, what needs airing in the broader context is the attitude of the UK Border Agency and the UK Government towards doctors and nurses from overseas. Contrary to the public view that we are pinching other countries' best doctors, there is strong evidence that developing and assisting people from overseas in careers in this country promotes and strengthens the health service in their home countries. That may appear counterintuitive, but there is strong evidence to that effect from agencies that deal with this issue. So, it might be worth our while to try to secure the current policy, which the Minister objects to—she says in her letter of 30 June that she has written to them to clarify and make

representation on the effect of the changes. Perhaps we could also look at those changes in the regulations to see what we could do to support the Minister in her work here on the source of the problem that has been raised by the petition.

[188] **Val Lloyd:** I think that that would be a good idea to try to take this forward. I do not hear a contrary view. Save the Vulcan—

[189] **Michael German:** Hear, hear. [*Laughter.*]

[190] **Val Lloyd:** Save the Vulcan, P-03-197, is the next petition. This petition has been very interesting. There was a meeting, at which I was not present, but we have now received a letter update from the Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing and a letter from the Welsh Local Government Association on the issue of strengthening local listing powers. The Minister has given us further information regarding article 4 directions.

[191] **Michael German:** One of the interesting things about this petition is that it has raised huge policy issues, which were slightly hidden before. The first issue is the nature of listing, and a review of listing is going to take place. We have unearthed something. We have a letter from the Welsh Local Government Association and a letter from the Minister, both of which indicate that a little more work may need to be done here. Could we produce a report about listing and local listing? This petition has drawn out those issues, and we may want to see a change in policy overall. ‘Simplification’ is probably the word that I am looking for.

10.20 a.m.

[192] **Val Lloyd:** We have uncovered such a lot here, I think that producing a report would be a very good idea. Does everybody agree?

[193] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Hopefully, it would complement the review that the Minister will undertake at the tail-end of this year.

[194] **Val Lloyd:** It could feed into that, could it not?

[195] **Bethan Jenkins:** What would be the purpose of our doing a review? Where would we put it?

[196] **Val Lloyd:** We would just be drafting a report on what we have discovered here.

[197] **Bethan Jenkins:** So, it would just highlight what we have done.

[198] **Val Lloyd:** Yes, it would highlight what we have discovered—about the processes rather than the specifics with regard to the Vulcan. It would deal with the processes that we have gone through and which have led us into local listing and the other issues.

[199] **Bethan Jenkins:** Would we then give that to the Minister?

[200] **Val Lloyd:** Yes. We would publish it.

[201] **Michael German:** It would be a matter of public record too.

[202] **Val Lloyd:** We would publish it as a committee report arising from a petition, and it would aid a Minister or anybody else wanting to take things forward.

[203] **Michael German:** If possible, the report should raise the issues that we think need to be addressed. It would not do so as strongly as making a recommendation, although, where it

is possible, we might do that, but would certainly raise the issues that need to be addressed that we have uncovered through this petition. In some ways, it is rather like the petition on the discharge of sewage into the river in—

[204] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Llanelli.

[205] **Val Lloyd:** No, it was in Caerphilly. It was an early petition.

[206] **Michael German:** We unearthed a hole in the legislation that was sort of, but not quite, there.

[207] **Val Lloyd:** That was a long time ago; it was a very early petition.

[208] The next petition is P-03-200, on the Glamorganshire canal. Mr John Williams wanted our support for the creation of a historical Glamorganshire canal trail, from Merthyr to Cardiff bay, including major locations en route. He gave us some examples. We considered the petition in May, and we have had an update from the Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing. She outlines some difficulties, because a substantial amount of the original route has been developed, but she suggests that it be allied to the Taff trail.

[209] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** The Minister highlighted two aspects in her response, one on funding and one on the right of way, and it might be worthwhile seeking the petitioner's view on the Minister's response to inform a wider debate that this committee could have on taking this petition forward if it wished.

[210] **Val Lloyd:** The funding she mentions is for longer-term maintenance of the route, but I agree that we should ask the petitioner for his view.

[211] The next petition, P-03-202, is on the education maintenance allowance. We sent this to the Enterprise and Learning Committee.

[212] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Looking at the papers that we have, I am not quite sure how much further we can take it.

[213] **Michael German:** In the light of what we have said before about other committees' reports and recommendations being accepted in principle, perhaps it is again a matter of asking the committee to ensure that it follows through its recommendations to see whether they have been implemented.

[214] **Val Lloyd:** Shall we close it but ask to be kept up to date?

[215] **Michael German:** Yes, as we did before.

[216] **Val Lloyd:** There is nothing more that we can do, but the committee could be kept up to date. We will close the petition.

[217] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Could the clerk make a note of the reviews related to petitions? This came to Plenary on 9 July 2009. Hopefully, we could get an update on it sometime before the next summer recess. If we do not make a note of them, they could get lost in the system until someone at some point thinks, 'It would be a good idea to chase that up'.

[218] **Val Lloyd:** Yes, you have to allow time for—

[219] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** We have the updates at the back of our files on how things are

progressing. Perhaps we could have a small annex, not on a weekly or fortnightly basis, but periodically, to say that we as a committee should be chasing up this or that, and, for example, that the Enterprise and Learning Committee is looking at something—as in this instance—or that the Sustainability Committee is waiting to do this or that. Once a petition does go to another committee, we tend to rely on that committee, with its additional workload, to execute what we hope will be the result of the petition.

[220] **Mr Davidson:** So you would like more of an update on the other committees' progress in that area, prior to reporting.

[221] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Yes.

[222] **Mr Davidson:** Okay, that is no problem.

[223] **Val Lloyd:** The next petition is P-03-206, on free swimming all year round, from Ammanford Junior Gateway.

[224] **Michael German:** The idea of us doing a video of the responses is excellent.

[225] **Val Lloyd:** I think so too.

[226] **Michael German:** We could then get the petitioners to respond to it. That would be very helpful to Mencap.

[227] **Val Lloyd:** Are we all agreed? I see that we are.

[228] The next petition is P-03-207, on support for the unemployed in Monmouth, which was raised by Monmouth Town Council's community affairs committee. We first discussed it in March; we have now had an update from the UK Government's Department for Work and Pensions providing information on the alternative provisions available to jobseekers. The petitioners have also provided a response to that.

[229] **Michael German:** The petitioners had received all the letters before sending us the response, is that correct? That is, the petitioners' response has come back after having received all the other letters, in April and so on.

[230] **Mr Davidson:** No.

[231] **Val Lloyd:** The petitioners' response was received on 21 June, and we received a letter from the Minister on 19 August.

[232] **Michael German:** I was just wondering whether we should give the petitioners a chance to have a look at the two letters in August before closing it, in order to see whether the petitioners have any comment to make.

[233] **Val Lloyd:** There is very little that we can do. The issue is devolved, is it not?

[234] **Michael German:** I know, but there may be something that the petitioners may have seen that we have not seen. They have not had a chance yet to see the letters of 4 August and 19 August.

[235] **Val Lloyd:** Okay, we shall send the petitioners those two letters, and take it from there.

[236] The next petition is P-03-209, 'Abolish top-up fees in Wales'. CymruX has sent us a

petition to urge the Government to abolish tuition fees for Welsh-domiciled students at higher education institutions. It has been considered by the committee and an update has been received from the Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills. Shall we ask the petitioners to provide us with a written response to the Minister's letter?

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

[238] **Val Lloyd:** The next petition is P-03-212, 'Traffic relief for St Asaph'. I think that we have to refer it to Denbighshire County Council. We have had a reply from the Deputy First Minister, in which he points out that it is the responsibility of Denbighshire County Council. Therefore, we shall close the petition and send a letter to the petitioners.

[239] The next two petitions are P-03-213, 'Abandon the badger cull', from Secret World Wildlife Rescue, to which there is an impressive number of signatures—there are over 14,000; the second is P-03-235, an RSPCA petition along similar lines, which again has a number of signatures. We have received an update from the Minister for Rural Affairs, which she sent us in late July. In it she tells us—

[240] **Bethan Jenkins:** It mentions the intensive action pilot area.

[241] **Val Lloyd:** Yes. Shall we wait until the findings from the pilot study that have come out? I cannot see what else we can do, unless anyone has any good ideas.

[242] **Michael German:** What is the timing of the intensive action pilot study?

[243] **Val Lloyd:** I was just trying to find that.

[244] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I think that the Minister has identified the area, has she not?

[245] **Val Lloyd:** She says:

[246] 'I am not in a position to make a decision on the timescales involved in the implementation or evaluation.'

[247] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I think that the logistics are now being worked out. The area has been identified; now it is about the logistics.

[248] **Val Lloyd:** So we have to wait until we get the results of the study, but she is not in a position to tell us when that will be. Shall we put it in abeyance until we hear back?

[249] **Bethan Jenkins:** The people concerned do not want the study to take place at all, but I do not see what else we can do until we have a comprehensive analysis of how it has gone.

[250] **Val Lloyd:** The next petition is P-03-217, which calls on us to reverse the National Library of Wales's decision to close on Sunday. We have had updates—

[251] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** It is Saturday.

10.30 a.m.

[252] **Val Lloyd:** Yes, it is Saturday, sorry. We have had updates from the Minister for Heritage and the National Library of Wales.

[253] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I have heard various Members raise this issue in the Chamber in questions to the Minister for Heritage, who has come back on several occasions to say that

he is in dialogue with the National Library of Wales. I am not quite sure how that dialogue has progressed; perhaps I should be aware of it, but I cannot profess to have seen anything lately. This is an issue for the Communities and Culture Committee in some respects, as it involves access to a national institution. For many people, especially given work commitments and so on, the weekend is the prime time, and it is when they can avail themselves of the ability to go to the library. I understand that this is solely down to finance; it has nothing to do with refurbishment, an inability to attract staff, or demand and so on. I think that the figure is something in the region of £125,000—I stand to be corrected on that. It could make quite a substantial saving by closing on a Saturday. It is a question of whether more resources can be made available to facilitate that opening.

[254] **Val Lloyd:** We have received a very comprehensive letter from Andrew Green, the Librarian. The Minister for Heritage tells us that he has six-monthly meetings with the library, at which this subject has been raised. We should perhaps pass this on to the Communities and Culture Committee. Does it consider the issue of funding when it scrutinises the National Library of Wales? The budget would be scrutinised, rather than the library itself.

[255] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** The figure is £80,000; I stand corrected. It is not £125,000.

[256] **Val Lloyd:** It is nearly a third of its required savings.

[257] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** The overall saving is £250,000.

[258] **Val Lloyd:** Are you happy with proceeding in that way?

[259] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Yes.

[260] **Val Lloyd:** The next petition is P-03-220, 'Lower the speed limit on the A40 near Abergavenny'.

[261] **Michael German:** What is interesting is that this particular stretch of road is closed today, I think. I understand that a set of guidelines will be coming out. We ought to press the Deputy First Minister, because he said that the guidelines would be published later in the summer. We have now ended the summer; the equinox has arrived, and we are in the autumn. Where are they? We should perhaps consider it again when we have the guidelines, and consider how they relate to this.

[262] **Val Lloyd:** We shall gently remind him, perhaps, and say that we are eagerly awaiting—

[263] **Michael German:** Yes. Remind him of the equinox.

[264] **Val Lloyd:** The next petition is P-03-221, 'Improved NHS chiropody treatment'. I know that this has come from petitioners in the Cwm Taf trust area, in the Cynon valley, but this is an issue for many parts of Wales, and certainly mine. We last considered it in June, and we have received updates from Cwm Taf NHS Trust, the Minister for Health and Social Services, and the petitioners. Shall we send a copy of the petitioners' report to the Minister and to the trust, and see whether we can broker a meeting between the head of podiatry at Cwm Taf NHS Trust and the Cynon valley's older people's group?

[265] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** That would be a very sensible course of action.

[266] **Val Lloyd:** That would put it all together.

[267] The next petition is P-03-224 in relation to Stepping Stones Nursery, which was

calling on us to intervene to halt the closure of the nursery on the Ebbw Vale campus of Coleg Gwent. We have had an update from the Deputy Minister for Regeneration and, crucially, from the Deputy Minister for Skills.

[268] **Michael German:** I understand that it has closed now.

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

[270] **Bethan Jenkins:** I know that they were talking about this particular issue, but on a wider level, the Deputy Minister for Skills says in the letter that there will be a review of the childcare sufficiency audits, and that

[271] ‘This review will form the basis of the next Childcare Strategy for Wales.’

[272] Could we ask for timelines on that and ask the petitioners whether they would like to feed into the process, considering their misfortune with the provision in their area closing? If we give them that opportunity, it could determine best practice in the future.

[273] **Val Lloyd:** Is everyone happy with that approach? I see that you are.

[274] The next petition is P-03-226 from Sands, the stillbirth and neonatal death charity. We considered this first in July, and we have had an update from the Minister for Health and Social Services.

[275] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** It is important that Sands has the opportunity to respond to the Minister’s letter. Many of us will remember the presentation that it made in the Oriel. So, hopefully, it will respond to what the Minister had to say.

[276] **Val Lloyd:** Is everyone agreed? I see that you are. Petition P-03-231 on the proximity of wind turbines to residential dwellings was raised by Glyncoirwg Action Group. We have had an update from the Minister on that.

[277] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Was the Wales Audit Office looking into this issue? I remember the Wales Audit Office being mentioned somewhere along the line.

[278] **Val Lloyd:** No, that relates to the next petition.

[279] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Sorry, I stand corrected—the pages are stuck together.

[280] **Michael German:** The Government here is supporting a policy for a 500m buffer zone, whereas in Scotland they have a 2,000m buffer zone. They obviously decided on that policy for their own reasons, but it would be worth comparing the two policies. Could we write to the Scottish Government to ask for its reasoning for choosing 2,000m not 500m?

[281] **Val Lloyd:** That would inform our way forward. I think that that is a good idea. The last petition for today is P-03-232 on Ffynnone and Cilgwyn woods in north Pembrokeshire. We considered it in July and we have had updates from the Auditor General for Wales, Calon yn Tyfu Cyf., Forestry Commission Wales and the Minister for Rural Affairs.

[282] **Michael German:** The Wales Audit Office is investigating Forestry Commission Wales’s handling of this matter. When that is complete, we should ask the audit office to tell us what it discovered during its investigation of the matter.

[283] **Val Lloyd:** Yes, I think that we should. As it is in the middle of an investigation, I think that it would be prudent of us to wait until we receive a response. Are we agreed on

that? I see that we are. That concludes today's meeting. Thank you very much.

Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 10.37 a.m.
The meeting ended at 10.37 a.m.