



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

**Y Pwyllgor Materion Ewropeaidd ac Allanol
The Committee on European and External Affairs**

**Dydd Mawrth, 12 Ionawr 2010
Tuesday, 12 January 2010**

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.

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

Nick Bourne	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Jeff Cuthbert	Llafur Labour
Michael German	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru Welsh Liberal Democrats
Sandy Mewies	Llafur (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Labour (Committee Chair)
Rhodri Glyn Thomas	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Katie Cavell	Swyddfa Cymdeithas Llywodraeth Leol Cymru ym Mrwsel Welsh Local Government Association Office in Brussels
Christine Chapman	Aelod Cynulliad, Llafur (aelod o Bwyllgor y Rhanbarthau) Assembly Member, Labour (member of the Committee of the Regions)
Chris Holley	Aelod o Bwyllgor y Rhanbarthau Committee of the Regions Member
Andy Klom	Swyddfa Comisiwn Ewrop yng Nghymru European Commission Office in Wales
Janet Ryder	Aelod Cynulliad, Plaid Cymru (cadeirydd cangen Cymru, Cymdeithas Seneddol y Gymanwlad) Assembly Member, The Party of Wales (chair of Wales branch, Commonwealth Parliamentary Association)

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

Lara Date	Clerc Clerk
Al Davies	Rheolwr Cysylltiadau Rhyngwladol, Tîm Cysylltiadau Rhyngwladol International Relations Manager, International Relations Team
Gregg Jones	Pennaeth Swyddfa UE Cymru, Gwasanaeth Ymchwil yr Aelodau Head of Wales EU Office, Members' Research Service
Sarita Marshall	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 9.01 a.m.
The meeting began at 9.01 a.m.

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **Sandy Mewies:** Good morning, colleagues. It is nice to welcome you here in the new year.

9.01 a.m.

**Pwyllgor y Rhanbarthau—Y Wybodaeth Ddiweddaraf am Weithgareddau a
Blaenoriaethau gan Aelodau Cymreig o Ddirprwyaeth y DU
Committee of the Regions—Update on Activities and Priorities from Welsh
Members of UK Delegation**

[2] **Sandy Mewies:** I will start straight away because we have with us today Christine Chapman and Councillor Chris Holley. Welcome to you both, and to Katie Cavell. They are going to give us the latest update on the Committee of the Regions. You can presume that everyone will have read your papers. Looking at them, it is interesting to see the way the Committee of the Regions is revving up, from a Welsh point of view, with its members co-operating with one another and making a mark. So, it is over to you, Chris, if you would like to start. Members will ask questions later.

[3] **Christine Chapman:** Thank you, Sandy. First, I wish you all a happy new year. The Committee of the Regions is commencing its new mandate, and that is going to affect me and Rhodri Glyn who, I am pleased to say, is going to be my new alternate on the Committee of the Regions. I will continue to sit on the economic and social commission and Rhodri Glyn Thomas will sit on the natural resources commission. I welcome the fact that Rhodri will be there to share the workload.

[4] The new mandate, as a result of the Treaty of Lisbon, will now be five years instead of four years and, with our local government colleagues, Councillors Bob Bright and Chris Holley, we can be a force at the heart of Europe, representing Wales. We will employ a good team approach. It is anticipated that we will have stronger working links with the Welsh Members of the European Parliament. Since I have been on the Committee of the Regions, I have tried to keep the MEPs in the loop as much as possible.

[5] Yesterday, there was supposed to be a meeting of the UK delegation, but because of the problems with the snow, that event had to be cancelled. It is a shame, but that happens. It would have helped Wales's profile, particularly within the UK, on the Committee of the Regions. I thank all the staff involved because I know that some excellent work was done by National Assembly staff to make that event happen, and I hope that it will be rearranged at a future date. There would have been important elections yesterday, but I understand that they will now be carried out by postal vote, so we are trying to accommodate those.

[6] I will briefly talk about my opinion because that has been my focus on the Committee of the Regions over the last six months. My opinion, as you know, on the future of the Lisbon strategy post 2010 was adopted on 3 December, with almost unanimous backing. If I recall, there were 22 amendments and I accepted most of them. There were some compromises, but they were not contentious at all and I was pleased that there was such a lot of support. I would like to thank Gregg Jones for the marvellous support that he provided when I was coming up with the opinion.

[7] I will just recap the key messages. First, economic strategy should be set within the limits of sustainability set by a finite planet. It must be set within the context of a socially just and cohesive society and, of course, it must include the regional and local tiers of government, because without those, the economy will not succeed in the next 10 years because the regional tiers and the local region tiers are closer to the people. It is about access to the ordinary citizen. The green agenda is also a vital part of the economic strategy in terms of jobs, research and development. We must include the small and medium-sized enterprises as well. So, those were the key messages. I am aware that the opinion reflects the thinking of this committee, as well as that of the Welsh Local Government Association. The timing was good because of the European Commission's consultation on the strategy, the EU 2020, and

therefore it was the right time to do this.

[8] My points of concern are reflected in the paper, and I made those points strongly at the meeting in December. In the consultation on the EU 2020 strategy, there was a failure to talk up the regional and local roles, and the words 'region' and 'regional' are used only four times. So, I used the opportunity, when preparing my opinion, to stress that. I also said in my contribution at Brussels on 3 December that we expect better from the commission. The other concern that I raised was the lack of mention of the European Union's cohesion policy. Again, I made that point strongly.

[9] All in all, I was pleased with the response and the publicity that I had, both in Wales and in Brussels. There was a short feature on ITV Wales, which was an attempt to humanise what the opinion is all about—some of you may have seen it. For example, we know that anything to do with Europe is often seen as remote by ordinary citizens. So it is important that whenever we are talking about Europe, we try to make it relevant to the public.

[10] That is not the end of the story. I was pleased that the opinion went through, but my intention now is to make sure that we follow through on the response and keep it alive. I have been invited by the Spanish presidency to make a contribution to a number of seminars that are coming up in the next few weeks. It is important that the Committee of the Regions follows this through. As I said, it is about a profile of Wales, but equally it is about building on the consensus that I have witnessed across Europe.

[11] **Sandy Mewies:** Thank you very much indeed, Chris. My personal congratulations to you for what you have done. You know that we have echoed the particular points that you have raised. The committee supports them and we have stated that clearly, in whichever arena we felt was appropriate. Are there any questions for Chris? Mike, I see that you have a question.

[12] **Michael German:** In looking at your paper, Chris, I congratulate you on your report. My first question is a process question about paragraphs 34 to 40, and then I have a question about the content of paragraph 41.

[13] You would expect the Committee of the Regions to support fully the multilevel governance issue, which of course is crucial to local regional authorities. Would you say that, in process terms, this was the biggest message that you were trying to put out? Others will be repeating other messages, but you are probably the best body to make this point. Would you say that this is a message that is going to be difficult to transmit to others? Do you think that the Parliament, the council and other institutions in Europe are going to find this one particularly difficult or do you think that, having put it in here, it is going to make a difference? In other words, where is it going next, particularly this area of multilevel governance?

9.10 a.m.

[14] On paragraph 41, the dissatisfaction with gross domestic product has been around for a long time but, of course, the big issue is finding the alternative. I note that other methods of measuring are stated. Have you got any particular measures in mind? If so, why did you not give any steer as to the alternatives that you might prefer? That is not an easy one to answer.

[15] **Christine Chapman:** On multilevel governance, I would not say that it is the biggest message. It is a critical part of the opinion. Probably the biggest message for me was the green agenda and sustainability. I see sustainability working closely with the multilevel governance. That is essential. However, it probably was not the biggest message, but sustainability comes with the ability for local people to make a difference on the ground. The

sustainability message was very important.

[16] With regard to how difficult it is for Europe to follow this through, we took an awful lot of evidence. We looked at case studies across Europe, which are not always reflected in the opinion. We made a lot of information available, but there was a lot of evidence out there to show that more involvement at the local level adds to the success of the economy. Also, the point that I made about making sure that we keep this opinion alive is very important. As I said, there are two seminars over the coming weeks, which the Spanish presidency has invited me to speak at. One is on the role of local authorities, so I think that that is important. I tried to involve as many people as possible in taking evidence for this opinion. It was not a question of going away and coming up with this. We were involving everybody—all the key players—and this is the way forward.

[17] On the GDP issue, I am dissatisfied with the fact that GDP is seen as the only indicator. I suppose that time would not allow us to come up with an alternative. In the paper, we reflected work that had been done by France on this, but it was a signpost to say that further work must be done on this issue because it is clear that if we are going to make the economy much more inclusive, we need to include many more indicators. I do not know whether Gregg would like to clarify some of the discussions that we would have had on this.

[18] **Sandy Mewies:** Chris Holley has not spoken at all yet and I will be moving on shortly. We will finish questions to Christine. Can you keep it quite short Gregg?

[19] **Mr Jones:** Yes. I would reiterate what Chris has said. It was a signpost. There is work going on. It is a relatively early stage to try to determine what the alternative indicators should be. There is an initiative beyond GDP which the commission has also been involved with, and President Sarkozy from France has been a key player in pushing that initiative. So we did not feel we were in the right position to say, 'This is how it should be done', but the debate needs to take place and be very much at the forefront of the future of the Lisbon strategy.

[20] **Sandy Mewies:** Thank you, Gregg. I will bring in Nick and Jeff with their questions. If we have time, we will come back to that later.

[21] **Nick Bourne:** Thank you, Chris, for the report and congratulations on this new career you seem to be developing. It says a lot about the impact that you have had, so well done. Also, congratulations to Rhodri on becoming the alternate member.

[22] It is more a question about process than anything related to the content, which I am fine about. I find this extremely useful. I know Chris cannot always be here. Obviously, Rhodri is a member of the committee, but if you, Chris and Bob are able to provide an update for each meeting as to what is happening on the Committee of the Regions, we would find it useful. I certainly would.

[23] **Christine Chapman:** Yes, that is fine. There is an awful lot going on in the Committee of the Regions. It has been a bit of a secret and it is important that we as an Assembly work closely with it. There is so much good practice there and it is about sharing good practice across Europe.

[24] **Sandy Mewies:** I agree with Nick totally. I hope that there will be reports coming back to this committee because the Assembly is working with the WLGA and it is very representative of views in Wales. Taking our views forward and reflecting them back through this committee would be very useful indeed.

[25] **Jeff Cuthbert:** I will be brief, Chair. I add my congratulations to Mike and Nick's for

the paper and the work that you have done, which is clearly having an important impact.

[26] On the opinion, I share your view that we need a better name than the ‘Lisbon agenda’ because that means nothing. It does to us because we are in that business, but out there it means nothing. Some of the suggestions that you have here are very good and if you can say anything more on whether it will have a better name in the future, I would be grateful. I also support the issue of ensuring that skills and employment are linked very much to sustainability, and I see no reason why sustainability should not be integral to vocational and competency-based qualifications that may well arise out of the Lisbon agenda.

[27] Is there a role for the Committee of the Regions, not in doing the work, but in overseeing the standardisation of training and qualifications across the EU member states to ensure that issues like sustainability are properly included in any training and qualification structures that may emerge, to ensure consistency and that good lessons and good practices are cascaded across Europe? It would seem to me that the Committee of the Regions could have an important role in that.

[28] **Christine Chapman:** I am not sure about that, but I know that the message in the opinion was that training is important, particularly around the crisis at the moment with young people’s unemployment. As I said, the message is there and there was unanimous support for that, but I am not sure whether it would be standardisation. That might be more difficult to achieve. However, all the partners signed up to the idea that training in the green agenda—in sustainability issues—is a vital part of this. It was interesting that, because we are in difficult times at the moment—and we have had debates about whether we should be talking to businesses about the green agenda in these difficult times—people think that this is a bit of a luxury and that we need to be talking about more mainstream approaches. What has come out of this is the fact that it could be a solution to the economic downturn. It is a solution and, again, there was a lot of consensus on that. If we look at other countries—Denmark for example—we can see some good examples. They have been doing this for many years. In Wales, we are relatively new to this, but if you look at countries such as Denmark, they have been signed up to this agenda for many years very successfully.

[29] I am not sure whether that answers the question. This is up for discussion, but the message is very strong.

[30] **Sandy Mewies:** We will move on to Councillor Chris Holley. Welcome to you. I am sure you will give us the WLGA perspective.

[31] **Mr Holley:** I will do my best. You have all had the copy of the paper that we have prepared and you will see that Councillor Bob Bright from Newport is the full member of the CoR and I am the alternate member. Bob is a member of EDUC, which is the commission for education, youth, culture and health. I sit on COTER, which is the commission responsible for territorial cohesion policy, including structural funds, transport and territorial co-operation. Quite a mouthful, is it not? Over the last year, the most successful issue that Bob has been able to put forward is his rapporteurship on local broadband access for everyone, which is an issue that become very apparent over the last year throughout Europe, especially in countries such as Finland and Sweden where access to broadband is considerably more difficult than in many other countries.

9.20 a.m.

[32] Everyone thinks of Korea with its massive download capacity running into double figures, with 50 megabits per second. However, what many people do not realise is that the majority of that is only available in certain cities in Korea and is not spread right across the whole of the country. If you look at countries such as America, again, the same thing is true.

In their cities, they have a massive download capacity, but throughout their rural areas there is very little.

[33] So, what Europe has decided to do, and Bob actually promoted this, was to look at ways in which places such as Wales, with predominantly rural areas, could enhance broadband capacity through wireless connection or other connections. It has been taken on board very successfully and there is a huge amount of support for it. I cannot remember how many interventions there were—there were a few—but it went down extremely well.

[34] The other intervention that we had was on the ‘leaked’ document on the budget. That is the nicest way of putting it.

[35] **Sandy Mewies:** That is what we called it.

[36] **Mr Holley:** Many of you know that part of that, and what Christine has just said, was about the way in which GDP and the split-up of funds were going to be allocated in the new mandates. The reality is that it certainly did not help Wales and it certainly does not help smaller nations. As a result, we have put forward a number of amendments to it and it is going to be quite hotly debated in the European Parliament. Plus, with pressure from us and other people on the Committee of the Regions, and in other organisations in Europe, we will see some changes in that.

[37] I also represent the WLGA on the Council for European Municipalities and Regions, which had a very interesting debate the other day with Fabrizio Barca, the Italian economist who was one of those who thought up structural funds. It was very interesting to listen to him on where we go from here, how we should look at the 75 per cent of GDP, and whether there should be a tapering mechanism from there down to zero, where we would go to the type of pattern that JESSICA will eventually take over, and that is a loan system. There is an awful lot of work to do on that before we can successfully say that that is the way in which we will have to go in a few years’ time.

[38] Due to the current financial situation in the UK, we are particularly harder hit than any other of our colleagues in Europe that have a form of JESSICA, and especially because of our structure within the UK. I will not go into the details of it, because life is too short for doing so, but it would appear that in other countries it has been a lot more successful and the implementation is going to be a lot easier than in Wales. We need to understand that and we will need to understand how that process has been different in other countries than in Wales.

[39] We are in an era of greater co-operation between the MEPs and us, and we are now making arrangements to meet regularly. Unfortunately, as Christine said, yesterday’s meeting was called off because of the fear of weather and not the actual weather. That was perhaps more of a UK thing than it would be a European thing and another thing that we have to learn about as well. I will leave it at that and if there are any questions, I will do my best to answer them.

[40] **Jeff Cuthbert:** I will be brief. I am interested to hear what you said about JESSICA, but that may require a more detailed discussion at another time. I am sure that we will return to that.

[41] In the written report that Katie prepared, on the second page, in the second paragraph, Councillor Bright gave a report about education in Wales and the impact of devolution. I do not know whether you will feel able to comment on this, but I wonder what reception he had to what he said about some of the key initiatives that we are developing here in Wales and whether interest was expressed in terms of similar approaches, perhaps in other parts of Europe, and indeed whether, as a result of that discussion, there are ideas from other parts of

Europe on education that may be useful here. Are you able to expand on that?

[42] **Mr Holley:** All I can say is that there are two things that I know about in that context. The first is the Danish method of education from the age of three—nursery education—because I know that Councillor Bright is having a look at that. His interest is based more on the governance of it and how it is operated through the various municipalities and regions. The other one that I know a little bit about is the Bretagne Government's attachment to our Welsh Language Act 1993, which it is hoping to be able to put through its national Parliament.

[43] **Michael German:** I echo the sentiment that it was a shame that the Committee of the Regions' UK delegation did not meet here yesterday and today. It would have been a good opportunity for us to have been able to engage with the work and to share some common agendas. I hope that if another meeting comes up and even if it is not about elections—I know that elections always tend to get the biggest attendance—I wonder whether the Assembly could extend an invitation to host that meeting here and perhaps ensure that we engaged with that pretty rapidly.

[44] The question that I have is about the multilevel governance issue again. It seems to me that the battleground for funding a number of strategies is where the decisions lie, who makes the decisions and how the impact counts. We have already seen moves in the new constitution, the new arrangements for Europe, where there is going to be more engagement but frequently, as mentioned in the paragraph at the top of the second page, we are coming up against the difficulty of regions and municipalities being able to express their view and to be able to get that point argued well in front of those who make the decisions. Am I right in saying that, in the view of the Committee of the Regions, Parliament is a place where we can engage and where we can get support and there will likely be a large number of supporters in the European Parliament for multi-level governance, but the real battleground is the Council of Ministers? If I am right in that, how is the Committee of the Regions addressing that?

[45] **Mr Holley:** There are two issues there about how we engage with the Council of Ministers. It is a question of how much pressure we can put through the MEPs, on the European Parliament. It is not just about how the level of funding is going to operate. You are right about who makes the decision, but it is also about the fact that whoever makes the decision will always have one eye elsewhere and we need to look at how the members of the Council of Ministers operate in their own countries. Part of what we need to do, as the Committee of the Regions, is to look at how we influence people in our own native countries to react in the Council of Ministers. It is about having a united front in the Committee of the Regions. Showing the Ministers that we have a united front will put a lot of pressure on them.

9.30 a.m.

[46] What has become apparent during this discussion about the cohesion policy is that every country in Europe realises that these funds that come from the centre are going to be of huge importance over the next few years. One of the things that people are afraid of is the fact that not using that opportunity wisely now may not lead to a second opportunity, and, as a result, there is a lot of political pressure on the Council of Ministers to engage back in their native countries with their members of the COR.

[47] **Sandy Mewies:** Are there any more questions? Is there anything you would like to add, Gregg? I see that there is not. I thank the three of you for coming. I am aware of the effort that has gone into the papers and the presentations, and I thank you for answering questions today. It is terribly important that this united front for Wales is presented, but I would like to emphasise Christine's point about the simplification of the language and the demystification of Europe for people not just in Wales, but in the UK. It is almost a case of

smoke and mirrors, is it not? Until that goes, I do not think that the public will engage with what is happening in Europe because, quite frankly, it is so difficult to understand and is not made any easier by the papers that come out sometimes. It has been good to see that the papers presented today are very easy to understand. People will engage once they understand what the process is and how important it is to them. I wish you well in the future, and I am sure that this committee will enjoy hearing reports from you on a regular basis. Thank you very much indeed.

[48] **Michael German:** May I raise a process issue with you, Chair? We have asked this question before about the representatives on the COR. We are told that they are the National Assembly for Wales representatives, and it says so in paragraph 2, but, of course, we do not have a vote in the National Assembly and we do not have confirmation. Can we clarify at some stage properly that these are the National Assembly for Wales representatives? There will obviously be a vote in favour of nominations from the Government, and that is fair enough, but are they National Assembly for Wales representatives or Welsh Assembly Government's representatives? I believe that paragraph 2 is correct, but the Presiding Officer has not yet taken cognisance that we need to adopt that process in some way.

[49] **Sandy Mewies:** This is an opportune time to do it, Mike. We have looked at this before. They are not the WLGA's representatives, but our own. I will ask the clerk to take that forward and perhaps report as soon as possible, by e-mail, and before the next meeting anyway. Thank you very much indeed.

9.32 a.m.

Adolygiad Cyllideb yr UE—Papur Cwmpasu ar gyfer yr Ymchwiliad Craffu Arfaethedig EU Budget Review—Scoping Paper for the Proposed Scrutiny Inquiry

[50] **Sandy Mewies:** We now move on to item 3. Gregg, you have been heavily involved in this, so please feel free to say a few words at the beginning. The process has become slightly disjointed because of all sorts of issues, including elections and so on. Just to remind Members, we have a Members' research service paper, and the terms of reference and key issues to be addressed are included, as is a list of potential witnesses. You may want to comment on potential witnesses, but not all witnesses have to be put forward today. So, if people want to think about the list, names can be added after this meeting.

[51] **Mr Jones:** The paper is fairly self-explanatory as regards what we are proposing. It is worth saying a couple of words about the context in which the debate is taking place in Brussels, the impact that that could have in terms of availability of witnesses, and the timing of when would be best to carry out the inquiry or the specific sessions.

[52] The European Commission has nominated a new college of commissioners. They are going through hearings in the European Parliament this week and for the rest of this month. Until they are fully endorsed, and assuming they will be endorsed, there is a sense in which things at the European level are a little on hold. So that, to a certain extent, impacts on when this inquiry could start, but also it means that the priorities and initial sort of actions that the commission will focus on once they are properly in place means that the budget review may well be pushed a little down their list of priorities. The EU 2020 strategy is the No. 1 priority for the president. So that impacts a little on section 2, which is on page 2, where we have suggested two phases to the inquiry, the first of which would be from January to March to get the commission's view and the UK Government's position on the emerging debate, because this is a debate. There is not going to be a set position as such now. The position will develop during 2010, and beyond to a certain extent. That may be a bit ambitious and we have had initial feedback on our initial attempts to sound out whether the secretariat-general, for

example, would be available, but that may be difficult.

[53] **Sandy Mewies:** I will ask Lara, after you have finished, to—

[54] **Mr Jones:** I would say that the timing issue may be tricky, and it may shunt the inquiry further down and beyond 2010. However, in terms of the areas that we have proposed, the context is the debate that we have already covered on cohesion policy, and, as we have suggested, on the common agricultural policy. These would be the two big budget lines, and then there is the wider debate about the overall priorities of the EU, which will probably be framed in terms of the EU 2020 strategy. That is the context in which the budget debate will take place. So, I do not think that that changes particularly.

[55] Similarly, as regards section 6 on the terms of reference and the witnesses we would propose, I do not think that that will change either. It is a question of when we can realistically take evidence from the right people. For this issue, it is critical that we get the right people to give evidence because it is so important on the ground here.

[56] **Sandy Mewies:** I am assuming that you will be keeping in contact. There is not a lot the committee can do about that anyway; it is entirely out of our hands. We need to monitor what is going on and make sure that intervention happens at the correct time. Before I ask for Members' comments and questions, Lara, I have only just had sight of an e-mail that has come in, so perhaps you would like to—

[57] **Ms Date:** To back up what Gregg said, we have had a response from the secretary-general's office saying that now would not be the right time for them to give evidence. They said that President Barosso has indicated that given the importance of the EU 2020 strategy to the EU's political prioritisation, the new college will start to focus on the budget review once the European Council and the European Parliament have reached conclusions on that strategy. So, they would like to look at giving evidence to us once that has moved forward a bit further.

[58] **Sandy Mewies:** Are there any questions or comments on this?

[59] **Michael German:** I have some small points to make. First, I am very much in favour of asking the Chancellor of the Exchequer to give us evidence. Good luck, Lara, and we will hold you to account if it does not happen. [*Laughter.*]

[60] The word 'possibly' appears in relation to the European Parliament. It is important, given the role of the Parliament now, that we speak to the chair and members of the budget committee, and of other committees such as the regional committee. I think that we should remove the word 'possibly' and make it a definite.

[61] This may be a silly point, but my only other query is about the use of the word 'clarify' in the first, second and third bullet points on the terms of reference. I was trying to find an alternative word, but I came up with two. What we are trying to do is to 'understand' the position and to 'evaluate' it in terms of the Welsh interest. So, I would suggest that we use the words 'understand' and 'evaluate' rather than 'clarify', because clarify means simply that we know what they are saying, rather than knowing and understanding what they are saying and wanting it to suit our own interests.

[62] **Sandy Mewies:** Is everyone happy with that view? I certainly am. Is everyone happy with that? I see that you are. Are there any other comments? May I take it from that, with those caveats and alterations, that the terms of reference and key issues are agreed? As regards the potential witnesses—.

[63] **Michael German:** Lara ought to be held to account on that. [*Laughter.*]

[64] **Sandy Mewies:** It will be very interesting. I do not think that this can be a hard-and-fast list because the situation is so fast changing; it can be added to over time. Are there any other comments on this?

[65] **Michael German:** If we are going to be taking evidence from witnesses that are predominantly Brussels-based then, presumably, Chair, it would be much better done in Brussels.

[66] **Sandy Mewies:** I was going to suggest that. It probably would be easier, and people would be more accessible, Gregg, if this committee visited Brussels, rather than the other way around.

9.40 a.m.

[67] **Mr Jones:** May I add one point? We were conscious that the cohesion inquiry had already carried out a lot of evidence gathering, and we did not want to repeat that process, which is why we kept that fairly focused. So, that was a deliberate choice.

[68] **Sandy Mewies:** There is a very brief timescale for this inquiry, but letters have already gone out to the commissioners and to the Treasury. We look forward to the responses that we get.

9.40 a.m.

**Cysylltiadau Rhyngwladol—Papur Trafod ar gyfer yr Ymchwiliad Craffu
Arfaethedig
International Relations—Overview Paper for Proposed Scrutiny Inquiry**

[69] **Sandy Mewies:** I am sure that you will all remember that one thing that this committee has decided to do is look at the jigsaw of what is happening. This discussion is a part of putting that together. Members, feel free to make any comments on the paper, particularly the paragraphs in bold. Would you like an introduction or are you happy to go straight into questions?

[70] **Nick Bourne:** I have a comment, Sandy. Paragraph 16 gives a list of offices ‘overseas’—and this is the sort of thing that incenses me. It includes Australia, China, France, blah blah blah, and then England and the USA. When I last looked, England was not overseas. It is not abroad; it is a partner nation within the United Kingdom.

[71] **Sandy Mewies:** I am sure that that comment will be noted.

[72] **Nick Bourne:** And corrected, I hope.

[73] **Sandy Mewies:** It will be corrected in the minutes, if you so wish.

[74] **Nick Bourne:** I do, please—very strongly.

[75] **Michael German:** I refer to paragraph 21, in bold. There is merit in the First Minister reporting to this committee, but we need to be tighter on what we want from that and smarter about the rest of it. I agree with the thrust of the paragraph, but I would not wish to lose the opportunity to scrutinise the First Minister on current issues and developments. On the longer term process, we may find a much better way of dealing with the Government, as is implicit in that paragraph, but I would not want to lose the opportunity to put the First Minister on the

spot for things that are happening in the short term.

[76] **Sandy Mewies:** I do not know, but it may be that this committee wants some indication of what is likely to be in the First Minister's report, and I mean in very general terms. That could be circulated to Members, who would then have time to formulate questions. That is the thing: having the time to think about what is coming up and about which questions to ask.

[77] **Nick Bourne:** Do we know whether it is Carwyn's intention to carry on in much the same way as Rhodri did?

[78] **Sandy Mewies:** I have no idea. That has not been canvassed yet.

[79] **Nick Bourne:** We need to sound him out on that, as I always found those sessions with Rhodri useful.

[80] **Sandy Mewies:** Apart from that, are you happy with that paragraph?

[81] **Michael German:** Yes, apart from that. I wanted to amplify what was just said. In some ways, having a list of what Ministers have been doing in the previous months is useful, but having a report that dwells on and amplifies that is better, rather than simply having it in front of us so that we can ask questions as appropriate. The thrust of what scrutiny should be about is the Welsh interest and how it is being played out with the Council of Ministers, COREPER, the Committee of Permanent Representatives, or the committee of UK Government Ministers who have responsibility for Europe and so on. Those are the key issues for us, and we can ask questions about the other issues. So, it is an information report and very much a business report on the Welsh agenda. That sort of scrutiny is more important than having a discussion with the First Minister about all the meetings that have taken place.

[82] **Sandy Mewies:** I would agree with you on that. I wonder whether Members also consider that it is the noises from the report that are guiding, very often. Perhaps what this committee wants to know is the policy of the Welsh Government, and how it is being formulated and developed. It may be that there needs to be discussions between the committee Chair and the Office of the First Minister to make those requests before the next meeting, provided you are happy with that.

[83] **Nick Bourne:** I agree entirely with that, but one point that I made to Rhodri on his final report was that it is also useful to have a proactive look at what the First Minister and the Government is about to do, including any visits that they are about to undertake, because we may have ideas to feed through.

[84] **Sandy Mewies:** In some ways, it is a policy aspect to ask where he is going, is it not?

[85] **Nick Bourne:** Yes, but perhaps it could be linked in with a diary, because we do not always know what visits are happening.

[86] **Sandy Mewies:** I see that Jeff wants to come in. Is your point on this paragraph or is it a general one?

[87] **Jeff Cuthbert:** It is about paragraphs 25 and 26, which are later on in the paper. I know that the next item on the agenda is the report from the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, but we ought to give a bit more attention to Commonwealth work, because Commonwealth countries account for some 35 per cent of world trade. It is a huge organisation and we have tended to view our links there as being more on the educational side in helping to prepare parliamentarians, both here and overseas, but perhaps there is scope for

more detailed reports on how we can work well with other Commonwealth countries and on what is happening in the Commonwealth, given its size and influence.

[88] **Sandy Mewies:** Perhaps we can discuss that with Janet when she comes in.

[89] **Michael German:** Sorry to interrupt, but there is a difference between the role of the CPA and the Commonwealth itself. I agree with Jeff. We talk about the parliamentarian's role—and there is a difficulty for us here because it is an organisation of which we are all members—it is not an Assembly organisation, it is a Members' organisation. However, I want to support Jeff's view that how we work with the Commonwealth in other ways is an issue that does not get touched upon, because the CPA does not address that agenda.

[90] **Sandy Mewies:** Would you want to the clerk to explore ways of getting that done, or do you have ideas, Jeff, that you would like to put forward?

[91] **Jeff Cuthbert:** I do not have any ideas that I can articulate the moment, but I would be happy to have a discussion with the clerk on that.

[92] **Sandy Mewies:** I think that we would all be happy with that as a way forward. We need to be a bit careful, but it is part of this jigsaw, and this committee is going to have to look at it in future, if only because no-else is doing so. As part of its external affairs role, this committee ought to be looking at what is going on in that regard.

[93] **Michael German:** For example, we have visitors from Nepal on Thursday through the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. We understand why the visitors are coming here, but in the geopolitics of that part of southern Asia democracies can play a very important role, and perhaps we ought to treat them with a bit more intent and look at what we should be doing in this respect.

[94] **Sandy Mewies:** There are two further paragraphs in bold. Are there any comments on those? The second paragraph is quite a general comment.

[95] **Michael German:** On the last one, there is the usual problem of how we can make a quart fit into a pint pot—I do not know what that is non-metric terms; perhaps it is fitting a litre into a millilitre pot, or whatever. With such a broad agenda, and with such a limited amount of time, my view is that we should focus on doing a smaller number of things, but doing them well and in depth, rather than trying to cover the whole pitch.

[96] **Sandy Mewies:** I do not disagree with the thinking behind those paragraphs, but this is a small committee with a lot of scrutiny work. Perhaps we could accept the general principles in the paragraphs and work towards them when we are able to do so.

[97] **Michael German:** Maybe we could have information reports as part of the agenda. They might get only a few minutes at the end, or none at all, but they would be on the record.

[98] **Sandy Mewies:** There is nothing wrong with information reports if they are circulated before the meeting so that Members can read them and have the opportunity to comment if they want to do so. Papers to note are sometimes too much of an afterthought, are they not? Is everyone okay with that? I see that you are. We will move on swiftly. Our witnesses have not arrived yet, so we will take a short break.

*Gohiriwyd y cyfarfod rhwng 9.50 a.m. a 9.57 a.m.
The meeting adjourned between 9.50 a.m. and 9.57 a.m.*

**Cymdeithas Seneddol y Gymanwlad—Y Wybodaeth Ddiweddaraf am
Weithgareddau
Commonwealth Parliamentary Association—Update on Activities**

[99] **Sandy Mewies:** Welcome back. I remind everyone about turning off mobile phones and any other electronic devices, and the use of the translation system. I did not have the time to do that earlier, as we were a bit late starting.

[100] It is quite a long time since we last received a CPA report, and it is important that we know what is going on. I welcome Janet Ryder, the chair of the Wales branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, and Al Davies from the international relations team. We do not have a briefing on this, Members, so your questions will be your own. Janet, would you like to introduce your report?

[101] **Janet Ryder:** Thank you, Chair. I believe that you have received a report from us.

[102] **Sandy Mewies:** Yes, it is just that we do not have a briefing on it.

[103] **Janet Ryder:** Thank you for the invitation to give evidence to the committee this morning. I last attended this committee back in 2008. I will not go into too much detail about the branch. All Members of the Assembly are members of the branch. The executive committee is made up of one Member from each party group. At the moment, I chair that committee, and you have two of my vice-chairs on this committee: Jeff Cuthbert and Mike German. Alun Cairns is the other member.

[104] Over the last couple of years, we have maintained the position of being a very active branch of the CPA. We have sent delegates to conferences and seminars in the UK and overseas, and we have also welcomed a range of visitors into the Assembly from across the Commonwealth. Our membership has allowed us to play quite an active role. It gives us the ability to be members of a professional body along with other parliamentarians and therefore to learn from others' experiences as well as to share our experiences in the Assembly. It also gives us the opportunity to attend conferences to learn about and to share those experiences and to exchange best practice on issues that are important to the Assembly, such as sustainability, human trafficking and the effectiveness of aid. We have hosted a range of visitors, as I have said, and, over the past few months, we have been able to influence significantly, we hope, the association itself and how it is run. Mike has been to Lesotho on a number of occasions, and has been there as an election observer, which is a valuable role. I visited the Northern Ireland Assembly a few months ago to talk to its branch about how it could develop relationships like that which we have with Lesotho. So, we have reached out to other branches in the British Isles and Mediterranean region.

10.00 a.m.

[105] To go back to perhaps a more significant part of the work of the branch during the past 15 months, we have taken a very proactive role with regard to the governance of the CPA. That can be traced back to concerns that were first raised after the annual general meeting of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in 2008. That was held in Kuala Lumpur and a number of the branches in our region—we are part of the British Isles and Mediterranean region—were expressing concerns. Following a request from this branch at the regional meeting earlier on this year a working group was established, which I led, and it brought together members from around the Commonwealth, from the Falkland Islands, from Gibraltar, Malta and the Isle of Man, and we have put together a working paper, 'Enhancing Government', of which you have a copy, or copies can be made available of that paper should you want to see it. We have one or two concerns about the internal organisation of the

Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and we felt it better that internal finance committees be established to keep track of everything and that is the thrust of the paper, in trying to put forward principles of good governance. That paper was accepted. Mike and Jeff both represented this branch at the AGM this year and, through a lot of hard work on their part as well, that was accepted in our region. We hope that it will be accepted by other regions within the Commonwealth and finally accepted by the Commonwealth itself. If that is the case then a small branch, such as we are in Wales, will have changed the way that the CPA works.

[106] **Sandy Mewies:** Thank you, Janet. Are there any questions or comments from Members? Jeff, is there anything you would like to add?

[107] **Jeff Cuthbert:** I would endorse the points that Janet has made. The CPA plays an extremely valuable role, primarily on the educational side, for parliamentarians across the Commonwealth, and we are certainly proactive in that. I endorse the remarks that Janet made about the internal governance of the CPA and our attempts, which look as if they could well be successful, to improve transparency and, certainly, cost effectiveness in terms of spending our income in line with good practice. I would also say that, as is mentioned here, Wales is regarded very seriously within the CPA. We punch above our weight. Our comments were well received at the executive committee in Bermuda and when Mike and I attended the annual conference in Tanzania we contributed fully to the debates. On the CPA website you can read the reports that we have prepared of those conferences.

[108] **Michael German:** I do not want to repeat what is in the paper or reiterate what the CPA has done but the point that we raised earlier might be one that Janet might like to consider, which is that the CPA, as a member body, has as its primary role the support and development of democracies and the support of parliamentarians throughout the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth itself, as an organisation, is also very important to us with regard to the part that we can play. Earlier on this morning we had a brief discussion on whether and how the Commonwealth itself and the work that we do with the Commonwealth could be developed. In the report we talk about the Royal Commonwealth Society and Commonwealth Day. We are involved in a number of things that are not necessarily CPA things, but Commonwealth things. This is putting you on the spot, I know, but I wonder whether you feel that there is anything that we could usefully do as an Assembly to develop the role of the Commonwealth, as opposed to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

[109] **Janet Ryder:** If you define the work of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association as developing principles of good governance and developing the capacity of parliamentarians within the Commonwealth, ourselves included, then the work that we have done on the governance paper would contribute considerably towards that. That is a contribution with regard to the association itself. If you want to look at seeing how we can reach out to other countries and nations within the Commonwealth and work with them, that also has many benefits to it. We know from our own experience—you know, Mike, from the work that you have done with Dolen Cymru—that we have been able to work with Lesotho, in particular, quite extensively and to support it. We have exchanged committee clerks; its clerks have visited here, as have members of its parliament, and have observed our committees, and have seen how they are run. We have not as yet, unfortunately, had a report back from Lesotho as to how effective that has been, which would be very beneficial to help us assess that and see the impact that that has had so that we could perhaps alter it or see how we can take it further forward.

[110] It would be desirable to be able to extend that to other Commonwealth countries, but we are a small Assembly and anything like that puts an extra strain on the resources that we have and I would not like to see us committing to something that we cannot fully support. There is perhaps still some work to be done with Lesotho; that can be developed further.

Whether that work has now gone perhaps beyond the realms of what the branch can organise and now needs to be put on the Assembly's agenda, perhaps through the Commission, and to be taken on as a formal agreement, would need to be considered. If you are talking about more in-depth support then the impact that that would have on committee clerks and everyone else supporting the work of this Assembly needs to be considered.

[111] **Sandy Mewies:** I think that you are on the starting block now and that this needs to be developed in the future.

[112] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Mae'n amlwg o'r papur bod cangen Cymru yn dylanwadu ar Gymdeithas Seneddol y Gymanwlad yn effeithiol, a'ch bod wedi llwyddo dylanwadu ar nifer o brosesau o fewn Cymdeithas Seneddol y Gymanwlad. Fodd bynnag, yr wyf am edrych ar yr ochr arall—yr oedd Mike wedi cyffwrdd â hyn, a chithau wrth ymateb iddo—o ran sut mae modd bwydo'r gwaith y mae'r gangen yn ei wneud i fywyd y Cynulliad, ac nid i'r pwyllgorau yn unig, ond i bopeth sy'n digwydd fan hyn. Gwn fod gan bob blaid ei chynrychiolydd ar y pwyllgor canolog, ac yr wyf yn ymwybodol o'r cylchlythyr y mae'r gangen yn ei anfon allan, a bod cyfarfod blynyddol, ond, yn fwy na hynny, sut mae modd datblygu'r perthynas rhwng y gangen a'r holl Aelodau etholedig yma a'r cyfan sydd yn digwydd o fewn y Cynulliad?

Rhodri Glyn Thomas: It is clear from this paper that the Wales branch influences the CPA effectively and that you have been successful in influencing a number of processes within the CPA. However, I want to look at the other side of it—Mike touched upon this, as did you in your response to him—in terms of how we can feed the work that the branch does into the life of the Assembly, and not just into the committees but into everything that happens here. I know that every party has its representative on the CPA and I am aware of the circular that the branch sends out, and that there is an annual meeting, but, over and above that, how can we develop the relationship that exists between the branch and all elected Members here and everything that goes on within the Assembly?

[113] **Janet Ryder:** You have mentioned the group representatives, and perhaps we all fall short on reporting back to groups in different ways, but the other way in which Members can get involved is by applying for some of the courses that are advertised. We have to apply quite a substantial assessment of those who apply for the courses now because the cost of sending people on these courses has to be borne in mind and we do need, as you say, to see a return in the Assembly. So when people apply for the courses we ask them to submit a business case and to tell us exactly what they think they would get out of the course and how they intend to feed that back into the Assembly so that the Assembly as a whole can benefit, and then what contribution they feel that they could give to that event. If we look ahead to the next AGM of the region in the Isle of Man in the summer, that is going to be centred around e-democracy. The Assembly has a great deal of experience in e-democracy and I would hope that we may be able to encourage different Members in the Assembly to lead workshops, or ask the CPA to allow them to do so, to give presentations on the work that is going on here. I would hope that we would be able to have quite an active input into that.

10.10 a.m.

[114] One of the biggest things that the CPA has done over the last couple of years is the Commonwealth Day celebrations. Just before Christmas, for the Commonwealth at 60 celebrations, we had over 130 visitors in the Assembly, representing over 20 Commonwealth nations, who now live in Wales. They are Welsh citizens, who vote in the Assembly's elections, and who came to visit the Assembly for the first time. It was a great advert for the Assembly, but it was also an opportunity for Members to come to meet people from their own communities, people from ethnic minority communities and people from the different communities in Wales who had come to the Assembly. I know Members' time is always hard

pressed, but it would have been nice to see a few Members. I know that Mike, Jeff and Nick were there—there were Members there—but it would have been a great opportunity for more Members to meet people from their communities, to make links with Commonwealth groups in those communities and to see how they could link into the commonwealth association.

[115] When Members have brought groups from Commonwealth countries that work in Wales to our attention, we have tried to link up with them to see how we can support them and how we can work with them. To some extent, the work of the association goes back to what Mike was saying: it is to develop the strength of parliamentarians within that group and therefore attending the conferences and courses that are available is the best thing that Assembly Members can do because they will then make the links themselves. They will make links with people from other countries that they can follow up later on. Those links mean that when something occurs in a committee, you might remember that you had been talking to somebody about the subject. They might have been from Australia or Canada, but you would remember that they had been talking about it and that they did it differently or that they had an insight into how it was done, and you would then have that personal link. Once that personal link is in place, it is much easier to pick up the phone and speak to someone. That is how we can bring the wealth of knowledge from around the Commonwealth back into the Assembly.

[116] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Yr wyf yn derbyn bod cyfleoedd ar gael, ond a ydwyf yn bod yn annheg drwy ddweud mai'r argraff a gaf yw mai nifer fach iawn o Aelodau sy'n ymwneud â'r gangen yn y fan hon? Mae'r Aelodau hynny yn frwdfrydig iawn am y gangen, ond nid yw mwyafrif Aelodau'r Cynulliad yn ymwneud â'r gangen o gwbl, ac yr wyf yn cynnwys fy hun fel rhywun sydd wedi bod yma am 10 mlynedd a heb wneud braidd dim o ran hynny—mynychais un gynhadledd yn Jersey gyda Mike. Heblaw am hynny, nid wyf wedi ymwneud llawer â'r gangen, ac yr wyf yn amau mai perthynas debyg sydd gan fwyafrif yr Aelodau â'r gangen. Mae gennym gyfrifoldeb, wrth reswm, i wneud mwy ac i fanteisio'n fwy ar y cyfleoedd hyn, ond a oes rhywbeth y gall y gangen ei wneud i estyn allan yn bellach?

Rhodri Glyn Thomas: I accept that there are opportunities available, but am I being unfair in saying that the impression that I get is that the branch here is something that very few Members are involved in? The Members who are involved are very enthusiastic about it, but the majority of Assembly Members do not concern themselves with the branch at all, and I include myself in that as someone who has been here for a decade and who has done hardly anything in that regard—I attended one conference in Jersey with Mike. Apart from that, my involvement with the branch has not been great, and I suspect that that is the type of relationship that most Members have with the branch. We have a certain responsibility, of course, to do more and to take advantage of the opportunities available, but is there anything that the branch can do to reach out more?

[117] **Janet Ryder:** If you have any ideas on how we could do that, we would welcome them. Notices are sent out about everything, including every course that people can apply for. For the latest course in Westminster, looking at its structures, we have had two applicants. Some courses have been advertised and nobody has applied. In some cases, because we thought that it was a valuable course that people should attend, we have asked people to go to their groups to see if people can go. It is a question of reading those e-mails. Al sends the e-mails out and perhaps he might like to say something on this. All of those courses are advertised. The water is there; what people have to do is come and drink it.

[118] **Sandy Mewies:** We will move on from that now. Janet is absolutely right that Members do know about the activities and we are kept informed—I saw that e-mail. It is up to Members to decide if they have the time to attend. Sometimes, it is a timing issue because we are a small and very busy body, but the opportunities are there. I have to say that this paper shows the work that you are doing. It is absolutely fascinating. You have your website,

but maybe there could be a little newsletter now and again. As Members know, I am not into looking at websites. We could look at websites all day every day, trying to track down information. I know that the newsletter on European matters that Gregg prepares has enhanced interest and knowledge and maybe you might think about issuing a little newsletter now and again. This is an interesting report and I bet that most Assembly Members would be very surprised to see the amount of work that goes on.

[119] Are there any other questions or comments that people would like to make? Al, do you want to come in?

[120] **Mr Davies:** Yr wyf yn credu bod Rhodri Glyn yn codi pwynt dilys ac yr wyf yn cydnabod efallai nad ydym wedi estyn allan i gymaint o Aelodau ag y gallem fod wedi ei wneud.

Mr Davies: I think that Rhodri Glyn has a point and I acknowledge that perhaps we have not reached out to as many Members as we could have done.

O ran cyfathrebu'n fwy effeithiol gydag Aelodau, efallai eich bod wedi gweld bod cylchlythyr newydd misol i'w gyhoeddi gan glerc y Cynulliad. Bydd hynny'n ffordd effeithiol iawn o gyfathrebu'n uniongyrchol gydag Aelodau. Byddaf, yn bersonol, yn sicrhau bod y cylchlythyr yn cynnwys unrhyw gyfleoedd addas ar gyfer Aelodau, gan gynnwys, er enghraifft, cynadleddau. Hefyd, bydd cyfarfod blynyddol y gangen a oedd i fod i ddigwydd ar 1 Rhagfyr yn awr yn cael ei gynnal ar 26 Ionawr. Byddwn yn gwneud yn fawr o'r cyfle er mwyn i Janet hysbysu Aelodau am y cynadleddau a fydd yn digwydd cyn hir—yn benodol yr un ar Ynys Manaw yr wyf yn gobeithio y bydd o ddiddordeb mawr i Aelodau.

As regards more effective communication with Members, perhaps you have seen that there is to be a new monthly newsletter issued by the clerk to the Assembly. That will be a very effective way of communicating directly with Members. I will personally ensure that the newsletter includes any opportunities for Members to attend conferences, for example. You will also see that the annual general meeting of the branch that was supposed to take place on 1 December will now be held on 26 January. That meeting will afford Janet the opportunity to notify members of future conferences—specifically the one on the Isle of Man that I hope will be of great interest to Members.

[121] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Yr wyf am nodi, Gadeirydd, nad oeddwn yn bwriadu beirniadu'r gangen mewn unrhyw ffordd. Nid oeddwn ond am fynegi rhywfaint o siom fod cymaint o Aelodau, fel fi, nad ydynt yn cymryd fawr o ddiddordeb yng ngwaith y gangen, oherwydd mae'n amlwg fod y gangen yn cyflawni gwaith pwysig iawn. Yr wyf yn gwerthfawrogi'r ymateb yn fawr, ond nid oeddwn yn bwriadu beirniadu'r gangen yn fy sylwadau.

Rhodri Glyn Thomas: I wish to note, Chair, that I did not intend to criticise the branch in any way. I just wanted to express some disappointment that so many Members—myself included—do not take much of an interest in the work of the branch, because it is clear that the branch undertakes some very important work. I appreciate the response greatly, but it was not my intention to criticise the branch in my comments.

[122] **Sandy Mewies:** Thank you very much, Janet. I hope that, in future, you will visit the committee more regularly. I would not want you to come to every meeting because I know you are very busy, but it is interesting to learn what is going on and to be able to question you about that. Thank you very much for coming to today's meeting.

[123] **Janet Ryder:** Thank you, Chair. I will remind members that the annual general meeting that was postponed before Christmas will be held on 26 January after Plenary. Thank you.

[124] **Sandy Mewies:** Thank you. I need to ask Members to note papers 6 and 7 and the minutes of the previous meeting. Are you happy to do that? I see that you are.

[125] As you know, this is my last meeting as Chair of this committee. I would like to say how much I have enjoyed chairing this committee since 2003. I have enjoyed it because of the contributions that have been made by Members past and present, who have been very supportive of both me and the concepts and philosophy of what we are trying to do in Europe and what we hope that Europe can do for Wales. There are also people like Andy Klom who have attended as standing invitees. I will be writing to you, Andy, but I thank you now for your contribution and am grateful for that of your predecessors. Those contributions have been very useful in relation to what has happened here.

[126] I will be writing to the Government to thank people like Des, Gary and Phil Bird for what they have done, and to the MEPs and other people. I thank all the people who are here today for their support. I thank the clerks, the assistant clerks and the staff of the Members' research service who have had to work very hard. We have moved this committee on so that it has a very exciting future, where it will be playing a much bigger part in promoting Wales as a region in Europe. I wish you all well in the future.

[127] **Michael German:** We reciprocate, Sandy. We have very much appreciated your chairing, which has made this a very pleasant committee—one which has looked at a huge range of issues. We have applied more focus and that is down to your chairing. So, thank you very much.

[128] **Nick Bourne:** Hear, hear. I second that. I am sure that we have all experienced good and bad chairs, but you have been absolutely exemplary and, as somebody on the other side of the political fence, I think that you have been a first-class chairman. I wish you all the best in your future career in the Assembly, wherever that may take you. If you could pass on to your successor how you have kept us all to time in an exemplary way, that might be a message worth sending.

[129] **Sandy Mewies:** It is the stick under the table, Nick, is it not? *[Laughter.]*

[130] **Jeff Cuthbert:** I third that, Chair, and express my appreciation. I know that chairing meetings is not always easy, especially when dealing with the breadth of issues that we deal with. We probably deal with more than any other in terms of this committee's span and depth. Chairing meetings of that nature is not an easy task, but you have kept us to time and kept us focused, which is important. You will be sorely missed, Chair.

10.20 a.m.

[131] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** I would like to show my appreciation as well. As well as everything else that has been said, you have been a very fair Chair to all the members of this committee, and that is something that members deeply appreciate.

[132] **Mr Klom:** I would like to add our thanks and appreciation for having been able to participate here over the past five years under your guidance and chairpersonship? I express our hope that, in the future, your successor may be able to provide the same type of support and guidance as you have given over the past years.

[133] **Sandy Mewies:** Thank you for your comments, which are very much appreciated. You all know that, philosophically, I am convinced of the value of Europe, therefore I can assure everyone that I will continue to take an interest in the work of the commission and our Brussels office, because I have appreciated the work of Gregg and the other people who have helped us in the past so much. I will be watching closely what goes on because we ignore

Europe at our peril. We are now moving into a bold new era where Wales has to firmly set out its stall and work very hard in Europe on what we can do for Europe, without always asking what Europe can do for us.

[134] Thank you very much indeed. The next meeting will be on 26 January 2010. I wish you all a happy new year.

Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 10.21 a.m.
The meeting ended at 10.21 a.m.