



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

**Y Pwyllgor Deisebau  
The Petitions Committee**

**Dydd Mawrth, 11 Mawrth 2014  
Tuesday, 11 March 2014**

**Cynnwys  
Contents**

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon  
Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions

P-04-472 Gwnewch y Nodyn Cyngor Technegol Mwynau yn ddeddf  
P-04-472 Make the MTAN law

Deisebau Newydd  
New Petitions

Y Wybodaeth Ddiweddaraf am Ddeisebau Blaenorol  
Updates to Previous Petitions

Cofnodir y trafodion yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynddi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal, cynhwysir trawsgrifiad o'r cyfieithu ar y pryd.

The proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in the committee. In addition, a transcription of the simultaneous interpretation is included.

**Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol  
Committee members in attendance**

Russell George	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Bethan Jenkins	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
William Powell	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Welsh Liberal Democrats (Committee Chair)
Joyce Watson	Llafur Labour

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

Kayleigh Driscoll	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Steve George	Clerc Clerk
Helen Roberts	Cynghorydd Cyfreithiol Legal Adviser
Kath Thomas	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk

*Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 09:05.*  
*The meeting began at 09:05.*

**Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon**  
**Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions**

[1] **William Powell:** Bore da a chroeso. **William Powell:** Good morning and welcome.

[2] Welcome to the first Petitions Committee meeting of this second half of term. We have a full complement of Members, although I am advised that my colleague, Russell, is suffering from severe laryngitis and may be measured in his contributions this morning—but we look forward to those. It is great to see Bethan back after being poorly last week. There are no special announcements and normal housekeeping arrangements apply.

**P-04-472 Gwnewch y Nodyn Cyngor Technegol Mwynau yn ddeddf**  
**P-04-472 Make the MTAN law**

[3] **William Powell:** We will move on to agenda item 2, which is our discussion of the evidence that we took on 18 February on petition P-04-472, Make the MTAN law.

[4] May I just remind Members that this submission was submitted by Dr John Cox and was first considered by this committee in April 2013, having collected 680 signatures? An associated petition had collected a further 330. The petition reads:

[5] ‘We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to make the MTAN Guidance Notes, notably those relating to a 500 metre buffer zone around open cast workings, mandatory in planning law for Wales.’

[6] We have the transcript as an aide-memoire for us this morning, from the contributions and the answers that Carl Sargeant gave on 18 February. We also have available in our public papers some comments from Dr John Cox, who, I think it is fair to say, was underwhelmed by the Minister’s readiness to answer some of the questions that were put to him for the reasons that he explains. I would like to open this up to Members; I know that there are strong views around this issue—just as there are strong views held by the petitioners who brought it to us in the first place. I see an indication from Bethan.

[7] **Bethan Jenkins:** You are trying to avoid my eyes, Bill. [*Laughter.*] I would have to say that I do not know whether ‘underwhelmed’ is the expression. I think that it was unsatisfactory really, in terms of the evidence that the Minister gave us. I appreciate that,

within planning law, it is difficult to go into the situation whereby explanations of different planning consents are made. What we were seeking to understand was how the minerals technical advice note is interpreted locally, as it is interpreted in different ways by local planning authorities and by the Planning Inspectorate, and to try to make the law work as it is, as opposed to changing it, but I do not think that the Minister saw this so clearly.

[8] So, I would like to understand whether we could ask the Planning Inspectorate to come in and talk to us about the practical differences that have come to light. I did give the Minister different examples and did not get any reply to them. I was hoping that we could send what the petitioner has written to us to the Minister and ask for his response, especially with regard to the fact that the Minister did not give any examples of local planning—basically, the Minister said that he could not come in to see us because of the Varteg application, but he did not make any reference to that anyway and he had no intention of doing so. Why did he delay the committee time and again and use Varteg as an excuse, when he could have come in and given us the same answers months ago? I think that we need to understand why that delay happened, considering that his advisers were very clear that they were not going to allow the Minister to give any detailed answers in his evidence to us. I think that the petitioners deserve that much.

[9] **William Powell:** It is good to have that clearly stated on the record. In terms of the proposal to invite the Planning Inspectorate, there is quite a bit of merit in that, really, because that is the body that is facing these issues as and when they arise, and seeking to implement and interpret the MTAN. So, I think that would have real merit.

[10] **Bethan Jenkins:** Have we asked local authorities as well? When I talk about discrepancies, we know that that is the case because different local authorities have interpreted it in different ways. It would be helpful—it is mostly the south Wales Valleys area where this happens—if we could ask either the Welsh Local Government Association—

[11] **William Powell:** We could write to Tim Peppin, who I think heads up that section.

[12] **Bethan Jenkins:** I think that it would warrant us having that objective, overarching view as well from local authorities on planning.

[13] **William Powell:** We have not previously had the WLGA, have we?

[14] **Mr George:** I do not think that we have written to it previously.

[15] **William Powell:** I would be happy to write to the WLGA in that connection and, at the same time, if Members are content, to seek input and potentially an evidence session from the Planning Inspectorate on these issues. Joyce, are you content with that approach?

[16] **Joyce Watson:** Yes, fine.

[17] **William Powell:** Also, the Minister has undertaken to forward to us some research from the Royal Town Planning Institute, which I do not think that we have received as yet. It would be useful to chase that, if it does not come in the fairly near future. Good. Thanks. Are there any other comments on that one before we move on? I think there is a suite of actions there.

[18] **Mr George:** On the evidence from the RTPI, we have received it, but it only came in very, very recently.

[19] **William Powell:** Okay. So, it is not an issue of chasing but a question of distributing that, and we can have a chance to consider it at an early future meeting. Good.

09:11

### **Deisebau Newydd New Petitions**

[20] **William Powell:** Moving now to new petitions, we have petition P-04-538, Involving lecturers to ensure a Further Education Inspection Framework that is fit for purpose. This petition was submitted by Ian Whitehead-Ross and collected 145 signatures. It reads:

[21] ‘We believe that: 1. The inclusion of the views of lecturing staff, in the early decision making process would be of great benefit to the development of an inspection framework that is fit for purpose; 2. Due to the increased emphasis there will be on soft skills, professional input from those who understand and work with the complexities of balancing pedagogy, with the demands of students, employers and Welsh Government priorities, it would seem prudent to include those that are at the heart of delivering this agenda; 3. Education services in Wales should be seen as part of a wider family, but are concerned that the FE sector and in this case in particular, FE lecturers are rather excluded from this family and are not being afforded the professional respect that they deserve.’

[22] As you can see, we have some additional information to support our consideration of this petition. I think that, in the first instance, we need to be writing to the Minister for Education and Skills to seek his view on the petition and, potentially, also to see what the parallel process is in terms of informing and influencing the wider education inspection framework. Are there any other suggestions?

[23] **Bethan Jenkins:** I have done some work on this with the University and College Union, not directly with Ian, just for the record. The issue is that it wants to be on the panel that Estyn set up—the advisory panel. At the moment, it is not clear that it would be on that. Estyn has said that it would use UCU as a stakeholder group, but it does not want to be a stakeholder group in terms of being at a meeting; it wants to be on the actual panel.

[24] **William Powell:** It wants to ring-fence a spot or two, or some sort of contribution.

[25] **Bethan Jenkins:** I have letters that I could forward to the Petitions Committee from my work as an AM on it, because it is not clear as yet that Estyn is going to allow that or what the detail of how it will carry forward any sort of stakeholder process is. However, it has a valid point in that if it is going to be developing or professionalising the sector, then if you do not have somebody from the sector on the panel, how are you going to fully understand what the tutors and the FE sector want? So, I think that we have to do the two things that you suggested, really, which is to contact Estyn and the Minister, because the Minister has referred it to Estyn in most of the correspondence that I have.

09:15

[26] **William Powell:** A belt-and-braces approach—I will write to them both at this stage. I think that the points that you have picked up very much underscore the main issues that are emphasised in the text of the petition. Joyce, are you content with that approach? What about you, Russell? I see that you are. Excellent; okay, let us do that then. Those actions are agreed.

[27] The next new petition is P-04-539, Save Cardiff Coal Exchange. This petition was submitted just last week by Mr Jon Avent and has collected 389 signatures. An associated petition hosted on another website has already collected 2,680 signatures. Colleagues may be aware that this has already attracted quite significant media interest, which is not surprising given the status and prominence of the building. The petition’s text reads:

[28] ‘This petition seeks a commitment from the Welsh Government to set up a public enquiry into the events surrounding the Coal Exchange and to support public opinion which seeks to protect and conserve the building.

[29] The Coal Exchange is one of Cardiff’s most important buildings and one of the finest buildings in Wales. It’s where the world’s first million pound deal was struck during the city’s industrial heyday (equivalent to over £100m today). Yet far from cherishing this building, Cardiff council proposes to demolish the main body of the building, keeping only the facades.

[30] If this happens, then the magnificent interior with its immense historical significance will be lost forever. This grade 2\* listed building deserves better, and the views of the public need to be heard.

[31] The Council have been claiming for the past year that it is on the point of collapse. No works have been done, yet there is no apparent evidence that the building is about to collapse. It is questioned if Cardiff Council were able to use section 78 powers under the building act to progress their plans, and this needs to be investigated openly.

[32] So much of Cardiff Bay’s social and built heritage has already been destroyed; it seems inconceivable that more can be cast aside with cynical abandon.

[33] It’s unclear why the council refuses to see the value of restoring the Coal Exchange to protect this iconic building for the use and enjoyment of future generations.

[34] The issues are of the highest level of public interest, and it is considered essential that an open public consultation occurs to review matters.’

[35] We had quite a lengthy discussion during lunch time last Tuesday or Wednesday, when this petition came in, with Mr Avent and some of his supporters. It is clear that some of the lead petitioners have a background in engineering and conservation matters, so that is informing some of the themes that they have brought forward in this petition.

[36] There are a number of possible actions and also a degree of urgency on this one, I sense, given the time sensitivity around it. I am very keen to have any suggestions from colleagues. Russell, I call you if you are in a position to share your thoughts.

[37] **Russell George:** I will try to speak in the microphone, Chair. I think that it was very useful to speak to the petitioners last week, but I think that we should write to the county council seeking its views on what it intends to do with the building. That seems to be the main issue from talking to the petitioners last week.

[38] **William Powell:** Okay. So, if we can write to the chief executive of Cardiff Council, and also potentially to the acting leader. I am not quite sure who has taken that role after Councillor Joyce’s decision to step down. Joyce, is she currently in post as far as you are aware?

[39] **Joyce Watson:** I am not a member of Cardiff county council, so I am not going to—

[40] **William Powell:** Okay, I just thought you might have been briefed on that one.

[41] **Joyce Watson:** No.

[42] **William Powell:** Okay; if we write to the person who is leading the council and the

chief executive, that is surely a good starting point. Joyce, you had indicated and I went to Russell in the first instance.

[43] **Joyce Watson:** I had. I agree with what has been said about writing to the county council. Also, I think that we ought to write to Cadw and the Minister for Culture and Sport. It is a grade II\* listed building, so protection is already afforded to some aspects of the building. Cadw will be able to tell you exactly what those protections are and how it is moving forward with ensuring that. At this stage, you are right to say that there is an urgency around this, so to respectfully ask for a speedy response within that would be useful.

[44] **William Powell:** Absolutely. I think that one of the points made by the lead petitioners was that, given that the council had had resort to section 78 powers, in many ways, the nature of those particular powers excluded Cadw from some of its normal functions.

[45] **Joyce Watson:** Well, let us tease that out.

[46] **William Powell:** It would be very useful to get that clarified. Bethan, I know that you take a significant interest in these heritage matters as well.

[47] **Bethan Jenkins:** I wanted to ask—as I am not a specialist—about the Act. The fact that it has been used in this case meant that it did not need to undertake public consultation. It seems to have been an emergency measure in exceptional circumstances. So, perhaps we could ask the council why it took that route as opposed to another. Could the committee, perhaps, have an explanation regarding when that process is triggered by a council or planning authority, so that we understand why it was used in this instance? We have had cases before where certain parts of a building have been listed, but others have not. We need to understand, for the future benefit of Wales, how we can go about protecting key parts of our heritage, considering that they have played such a vital role in shaping Wales. So, Cadw has an important part to play there, although I do not—no, I will not say anything. Perhaps we could go on a site visit, because sometimes I feel, as was the case with the hospital in mid Wales, that it helps us to see what the problems are and where the issues lie. I do not know whether the council would allow that in the short amount of time that we potentially have.

[48] **William Powell:** Seeking a site visit would be really beneficial. I would not rate our chances of gaining access currently, given what we were told last week, but let us see. The one thing that Mr Avent and his colleagues said last week is that these powers are normally used in a situation of real emergency, for example, if an articulated lorry hits a building and it is looking perilously close to falling down, whereas they have been drawn upon here to facilitate certain actions or activity, and then there has been no evidence of work going on over many weeks and months. So, there are some issues here that do not add up.

[49] The final thing, which Russell might also wish to have raised, is the lack of openness with regard to freedom of information requests. There was a complaint that questions went unanswered and then, when an appeal was made to the information manager, they came through at the very last minute and there was a sense of the dragging of feet, which, once again, informs some of the reference in the petition to openness and addressing the public interest. So, we have a good suite of questions there. Joyce.

[50] **Joyce Watson:** Chair, since you have now aired those views in public, it would be only right and proper that we ask Cardiff Council to respond to those.

[51] **William Powell:** Yes, indeed. That will be part of the text of the letter—

[52] **Russell George:** Chair, who have we agreed to write to?

[53] **William Powell:** We have agreed to write to Cardiff Council, to the chief executive and the person who is acting currently as leader, and to Cadw.

[54] **Russell George:** And the Minister.

[55] **William Powell:** Yes, indeed, to the Minister for Culture and Sport. I am sorry for having omitted that. Okay. Good. Thank you very much.

[56] We move on to P-04-540, Stop Sexism In Domestic Abuse. This petition was submitted by Healing Men and collected 211 signatures, and there are an additional 27 signatures on an associated petition. The text of this reads,

[57] ‘We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to stop Domestic Abuse (DA) by treating it as a gender inclusive and human phenomenon in which many men and women share both suffering and responsibility.

[58] Practical NOT Politics

[59] The current proposal blames men, and only men, for all violence and puts a radical gender based prejudice before the real needs of women, men and children and where 97% of men do NOT fit this profile.

[60] Fear of repercussions and lack of publicity in Wales have prevented open and vocal dissent.

[61] This Petition invites an alternative approach that recognises that 86% of DA is the responsibility of both women and men. It also offers greater protection to children and removes the discrimination that arises solely from radical gendered prejudice against those people in same sex female relationships.’

[62] I also need to flag up that we have some additional material that relates to this petition. Colleagues, would you like to take a moment, given that it was only on the tables this morning, just to take stock of some of the key points within that additional support material? It cross-references some of the statistics that are quoted within the body of the petition itself. As you know, this is our first consideration of these matters and I would suggest that the first avenue for us is to write to the Minister for Local Government and Government Business, seeking her views on the petition. Colleagues, I do not know whether you have anything else to suggest at this time. Joyce, you have indicated that you wish to speak.

[63] **Joyce Watson:** I agree. I agree that the petition, although it has huge inaccuracies in its data—and I am sure that the Minister will come back and give different statistical evidence—has some merit. What I find difficult with it is that it has used data in a way that contradicts all of the other data that I know. I am not going to spend time reeling those off here today. So, our first call has to be to invite the Minister to respond to it.

[64] I also think that it would be worth asking Welsh Women’s Aid if it has collated any figures—I know that its figures will be the ones that it knows of, but that is exactly the same for all other figures that are held, so the comparisons will be like for like—so that we can get some further information. If this group wants to point us to another body that has helped support same-sex relationships when they have broken down and there has been violence, then I think that that would be useful too. However, I do have to dispute—. We will see what comes from the information that we get back, to inform us, because we want to be informed.

[65] **William Powell:** Very much so. At this stage, you are suggesting that we write to

Welsh Women's Aid to seek its input as well.

[66] **Joyce Watson:** Yes, to see what figures it has.

[67] **Bethan Jenkins:** I do not oppose that, but there are other things, such as Hafan Cymru and other organisations, so I think that if we are going to write to one, we should look at the suite of different organisations.

[68] **Joyce Watson:** I agree. Indeed.

[69] **Bethan Jenkins:** That is all that I would flag up, really. If we have the capacity to do that, or—

[70] **Joyce Watson:** Well, we need to do it.

[71] **William Powell:** It is a question of timing, really, as to when we cast the net that bit wider. Shall we seek the views of the Minister in the first instance and then give a little bit of—? Given that we have some late information here as well, we can actually give some thought to how widely we cast the net, because it is quite a complex area, obviously. We need to do it right, do we not?

[72] **Mr George:** There is not an issue with writing the letters; it is the analysis of the information that comes back in. So, writing to Welsh Women's Aid and to the Minister, possibly, will give us enough information to make a decision.

[73] **Bethan Jenkins:** Okay, but, just for us to be aware that we might get people from other charities saying, 'You've written to one; we do the same type of thing as Women's Aid'.

[74] **William Powell:** Yes. I think that we need to give some thought to it; particularly given some of the really specific areas, there are bound to be some niche organisations that cover these other groups in society.

[75] **Bethan Jenkins:** Also, we know that the domestic abuse Bill is coming through soon, so I would like to understand and perhaps we could ask the Minister where—. It is Carl Sargeant, is it not?

[76] **Joyce Watson:** No.

[77] **William Powell:** No, it is Lesley Griffiths.

[78] **Bethan Jenkins:** Lesley Griffiths, sorry; I am getting confused with the reshuffle.

[79] **William Powell:** Carl Sargeant retains a strong interest in the area.

09:30

[80] **Bethan Jenkins:** The petition clearly says that 'the current proposal blames men'. That is quite a sweeping statement so we need to actually understand from the petitioner, or from the Minister, in response, how they have come up with that analysis. My understanding of any new Bill would be that people would be treated on an equal basis. If that is not the case, then we want to know, but, obviously, you cannot just say that in a statement and not put forward any evidence to support that, because we have to base everything on that evidence, and I do not know how we—. It is the 'blames men' issue that I have at the moment.



[81] **William Powell:** I understand, and also there is particular interest in this issue around same-sex relationships and the manifestation of violence and abuse within that context, which, obviously, we need to drill down into as well. However, that needs a little more thought, potentially.

[82] **Joyce Watson:** There will be violence. There is the potential for violence in any relationship, so I do not dispute that at all in any shape or form or seek to ignore it because that has to be the case. However, what I do dispute are the figures, because I have alternative figures and unless they can provide me—. That is why I said that we should speak to Women's Aid because it holds the figures; it has the refuges and it has access to data right across Wales, and, if anybody else can add other organisations to that, I would welcome their information too.

[83] **William Powell:** Excellent. I think that is a good starting point and I have a sense that this is going to be a very interesting petition to take forward.

[84] **Russell George:** Perhaps we could have a legal brief on this.

[85] **William Powell:** In what context?

[86] **Russell George:** Or a legal note on it, because it is talking about some of the matters or issues within the Bill and it would be useful for us to have a legal note on it.

[87] **William Powell:** I would be happy to ask Helen to comment.

[88] **Ms Roberts:** Could I just respond to that? At the moment, Russell, I have not seen anything relating to the Bill. Mention has been made of, and a commitment has been made to bring forward, a Bill. However, until such time as we have a Bill in front of us, it is very difficult to be able to provide any further—

[89] **Bethan Jenkins:** The Minister will know the way forward.

[90] **William Powell:** Yes, the Minister will probably signpost us. Also, it is interesting to find out at what stage there would be some level of consultation on any draft Bill, because that would be a really important opportunity for the petitioners and other interested parties to have their say. Thanks for that.

09:32

### **Y Wybodaeth Ddiweddaraf am Ddeisebau Blaenorol Updates to Previous Petitions**

[91] **William Powell:** First is P-03-262, Academi Heddwch Cymru/Wales Peace. This petition was submitted by the Welsh Centre for International Affairs, Cymdeithas y Cymod, Cynefin y Werin and CND Cymru and was first considered way back in December 2009, having collected 1,525 signatures. As we know, it was submitted in the third Assembly, but it has very much been an issue that we have had on our agenda sporadically throughout this fourth Assembly, and that culminated in the debate in Plenary on 5 February, which was well received. We also, clearly, have the First Minister's response to the report. We would appreciate Members' views on this. I am not quite clear now, given that we have run the course—

[92] **Bethan Jenkins:** I think we should close the petition. I can say that, because I have been involved since the beginning. [*Laughter.*] I think we should close it now.

[93] **William Powell:** Yes, it has been a long gestation, has it not?

[94] **Bethan Jenkins:** We have done all that we can. We have had a brilliant exercise of views.

[95] **William Powell:** I think that you are uniquely well placed to say that. I do not sense any dissent.

[96] **Bethan Jenkins:** We are all peaceful here. [*Laughter.*]

[97] **William Powell:** Exactly. Let us allow you to make that proposition. I think that everybody is ready to accept it and to thank the coalition of bodies that brought it forward and that has fed back to committee members and others its appreciation for what we have done. I hope that further good may come from that.

[98] We move now to P-03-315, New Dyfi River Crossing Petition. This was submitted by South Meirionnydd Older People's Forum. It was first considered by the committee in February 2011, so, in the third Assembly. It had collected 3,204 signatures, calling on support for the creation of

[99] 'a new crossing of the Dyfi River (or the re-routing of the A487) linking South Meirionnydd with Powys, Dyfed and'—

[100] to use the word here, 'Ceredigion'. Obviously, Ceredigion is incorporated within the old Dyfed—

[101] 'to accommodate and suite the demands of modern day traffic and urge prioritisation of funding and action. We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to create this crossing as a matter of priority.'

[102] We last considered this petition as a committee on 26 November 2013. We agreed a number of actions, the first of which was to ask the Minister for further information on the time frame for the study announced in her recent statement. We were also to write to the petitioners asking whether they had any response to the Minister's statement. Now, in some respects, this petition has been given new life by a not directly related issue that I raised in Plenary regarding this back in the late summer/early autumn, when I asked the Minister whether she would be prepared to come to meet some local stakeholders and businesspeople, which she duly did in November. One of the people who came to that meeting in Machynlleth—and I am very grateful indeed that the Minister came—was former Councillor Morgan Vaughan. I think that he is a former leader of Gwynedd Council. He is no longer a member of the council but is still a very active veteran representative from the Tywyn area. He referred to this at this meeting where the Minister was present—and this was very much in a regional AM role and not anything else—and that alerted us again to the petition.

[103] So, we have a situation where a number of announcements have been made by the Minister, which I think have been welcomed. Russell George, Joyce and I in our various representative roles have welcomed the renewed pace of progress there appears to be on this important crossing, and particularly with regard to the fact that the business community and the town council in Machynlleth are particularly keen that this should not be any form of bypass because that would be highly detrimental to the commercial future of the town. However, we have a relatively recent update from the Minister with a suite of actions and, indeed, a number of us raised questions again to the Minister in Plenary just last week, picking up these points. So, I think that this is really encouraging.

[104] The one thing that we do not have is a hotline, or indeed any line, to the petitioners, but the petition now has a sort of momentum of its own, I think, and we may well be in a position to reconnect with the petitioners if we perhaps gave it one more heave. If, as recently as 2011, there were 3,000 of them, I would hope that somebody within that group would come forward if this forum still exists. Clearly, the aspiration still exists on both sides of the Dyfi. I am open to comments from colleagues. Joyce, you have indicated that you want to say something.

[105] **Joyce Watson:** You are right to say that the aspiration to do something about this bridge exists, because it clearly does. It floods and it causes all sorts of problems. I really welcome, as you do, the fact that the Minister met with you and that we now have a programme of action, regular updates and a promise from the Minister to give quarterly updates to us, which is fantastic. That said, we are dealing with the petition that was brought to us, and we have to follow the same protocol with this—

[106] **William Powell:** Absolutely.

[107] **Joyce Watson:** So, it is about trying to get a response from them. We will see whether that comes. If that happens, if we can get a response from the petitioning group to the Minister's response—

[108] **William Powell:** We need to revert to procedure—

[109] **Joyce Watson:** —that will be useful, but we will have to follow the procedure, which, if somebody does not respond to us, will result in our having to close the petition. However, that does not mean that we take a watching brief away from what is happening, which is completely separate. I think, however, that the people need to understand that we are bound by protocol—

[110] **William Powell:** Absolutely.

[111] **Joyce Watson:** —and that, with regard to petitions, is the protocol. So, when we write, we need perhaps to make that clear.

[112] **William Powell:** Indeed. Thank you, Joyce, for that. I think that it would be helpful if I could supply the clerking team with the contact details of Morgan Vaughan, former councillor for Tywyn, whose details I think that I have within the office, because I am pretty clear that he would have been a member of this particular forum. He is a veteran councillor, and I think that he would be a link to re-establishing that.

[113] **Joyce Watson:** I have no problem with anyone, Chair, as long as we get the answer.

[114] **William Powell:** If colleagues are happy to proceed on that basis—. He is a long-standing independent councillor, and it clearly mattered enough to him to pitch up at this particular meeting.

[115] **Joyce Watson:** That is fine.

[116] **William Powell:** I think that that may be our best chance to kind of reconnect with the people who have been the source of this petition. Are Members content with that approach? Excellent. Thank you very much.

[117] We now move to another issue of great local importance, this time to Chepstow Town Council. This is P-04-468, Road Safety Concerns A48 Chepstow. This petition was submitted by Chepstow Town Council and it was first considered by us in March of last year. It has the

support of 1,000 signatures. There is also quite an involvement from the young people of the town, as I think that those of us present at the presentation of the petition will recall. It simply reads:

[118] ‘We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to reduce the speed limit on the A48 Bridge at Chepstow from 50mph to 30mph.’

[119] We last considered this petition on 26 November, and we agreed to thank the Minister, first, for her further response, and also to be kept informed of developments, and to ask the petitioners whether they had any response to the Minister’s letter. Indeed, that was duly received from the town council. We have a letter, signed off by Sandra Bushell, town clerk to Chepstow Town Council. The final page of the letter was missing from the set of papers, but it is among your papers today. Perhaps you would care to take a moment just to read that final paragraph. Possibly, in the context of us receiving it late, I will just read that final paragraph quickly:

[120] ‘The Minister’s unwillingness to be more responsive to the petition seems strange’—

[121] says the town clerk—

[122] ‘particularly given the Government’s interest in promoting safe routes to school, and in promoting young people’s interest in the democratic process and government. The one shining light’—

[123] so says the town clerk—

[124] ‘is that at least the Petitions Committee is taking the matter seriously and trying to get answers, and for that we are most grateful. I hope that you are able to pursue the matter further and that an urgent and positive response from Government is forthcoming.’

[125] Clearly, we have a degree of appreciation there from the town council of the work that we have been seeking to advance. The Minister has given some clear response that has not found favour with the petitioners in one or two of their key demands. I am happy to open this up for any further discussion, because we do appear to have a clear view here. I would be very happy, given the thoroughness of the response from the town council, to share that with the Minister, Mrs Edwina Hart.

[126] **Joyce Watson:** I think that that would be—

[127] **William Powell:** Is that the best thing at this stage, just to see whether there is potentially any room for a greater coming together on the issue?

[128] **Bethan Jenkins:** Especially as the petitioners have asked for a reduction in the speed limit. That is the main core of their argument, and I think that the fact that the Minister has not said that she would push forward with that seems to be the main issue from the points that we have here.

[129] **William Powell:** Yes, we are coming close to a finale perhaps on this one, but I think that we have to seek to—

[130] **Bethan Jenkins:** It is specifically point 8, is it not? That is the most interesting point, about the fact that it was 60 mph initially. Of course, they did not have an issue with it going down to 50 mph because, obviously, that was the order at the time. However, now it is a different discussion about having it at 30 mph, so, we need more of an explanation on that, I would have thought.

[131] **William Powell:** Absolutely, because I suppose that it will partly be around the impacts to the overall transport system of having such a further radical reduction. However, ultimately, we know from other answers of the Minister's commitment to public safety and pedestrian safety because we have seen that clearly enough in other settings. I think that it would be sensible to forward that with a covering letter seeking Mrs Hart's further comments on that petition, particularly addressing point 8. Are colleagues happy with that? Okay.

09:45

[132] We now move to P-04-504, the A483 Maerdy bridge Road Junction safety. This is a similar petition in its theme, submitted by Llandrinio and Arddleen Community Council with the support of 740, and first considered by the committee in October 2013, calling on the National Assembly for Wales

[133] 'to urge the Welsh Government to improve the safety of the Maerdy Bridge Road junction on the A483 by adding a central reservation and by the installation of street lighting'.

[134] We last considered this in our final meeting before Christmas and agreed to write to the Minister seeking clarification on her view that, and I quote from her letter,

[135] 'lighting is not considered appropriate'.

[136] We now have clarity from the Minister in the form of her response, which is in our public papers. I propose to share that back with the petitioners, because that is what they were seeking. Is there any other input at this time that you think would be useful? Probably it is a question of just sharing that matter back. I shall write formally to the petitioners seeking their response in that case to the ministerial letter.

[137] Next is P-04-525, Funding for CREST Awards in Wales. This was submitted by See Science, the British Science Association, and first considered by the committee in January this year. It has the support of 210 signatures.

[138] 'We, the undersigned, call on the Welsh Government to reinstate the required funding for the Crest Awards in Wales, and want the National Science Academy to recognise the value of the Crest Awards to primary and secondary education, and the requirement of funding for the Crest Awards to continue.'

[139] There we have a reminder of some of the key statistics that relate to the CREST awards, and the contribution that they make to the promotion of science in the five to 19 sector here. We first considered this petition on 21 January and we agreed to write the Minister for Economy, Science and Transport seeking her views on the petition, and we have those here in our public papers. I would be very happy to have your input on this one. Clearly, it is a matter of considerable concern, particularly given the status of science and its importance for the future of our economy and wider society.

[140] **Joyce Watson:** The Minister states clearly in her letter to us that there has been discussion between the British Science Association and officials, and that the Government has asked the British Science Association to work up a business case that supports provision of funding. I take that to mean that the Minister is listening to their plea.

[141] **William Powell:** That was my impression as well.

[142] **Joyce Watson:** It seems to be the case now that it is down to those people who run the CREST awards to make their case and to make it clearly to the Minister, so that she can

consider any funding that might come forward. I am sure that we have passed this on to the petitioners. If we have not—

[143] **William Powell:** That is something that I will be seeking your approval to do, with the letter signed off, seeking their involvement, really, to take this opportunity up.

[144] **Joyce Watson:** That is going to take its course now—they must be aware of it, because the Minister is in discussion—and then we will revisit it as and when they feel it is appropriate.

[145] **William Powell:** That makes a lot of sense. I propose to write formally to the petitioners to seek their views on this letter, which I think is quite encouraging in its tone. We also need to get a sense of their ability and capacity to put together that worked-up business case, but I am sure that it is something, from the flavour that we already have of what they have submitted to us, where they would not necessarily take too long to assemble their material. Also, we need to write to the Minister to ask her to keep us notified of the outcome of any request once received. Are colleagues happy with that?

[146] **Joyce Watson:** I agree.

[147] **William Powell:** The next update is to P-04-531, Renaming Cardiff Airport after Welsh Icon. This petition was submitted by Justin Lilley and was first considered by the committee in January of this year with the support of 11 signatures. It calls upon the Welsh Assembly Government

[148] ‘to rename Cardiff Airport the Robert Owen International Airport of Wales after the Welsh hero of the Co-operative Movement’.

[149] The ministerial letter that we have received is to the point, factual and clear. It reads, just for the benefit of anyone out there listening to us:

[150] ‘Thank you for your letter of 31 January regarding the petition you have received from Mr Justin Lilley to rename Cardiff International Airport the Robert Owen International Airport of Wales. There are currently no plans to change the name of Cardiff Airport.’

[151] **Joyce Watson:** Close.

[152] **William Powell:** We have a proposition here to close this interesting but, maybe, ultimately ill-fated petition. Are colleagues happy that we do that?

[153] **Bethan Jenkins:** Unless they go and paint the name over the current name, which I do not advocate. [*Laughter.*]

[154] **William Powell:** We are not looking for civil unrest.

[155] **Bethan Jenkins:** They are not going to change it very soon, are they?

[156] **William Powell:** I have a sense that there is a settled ministerial will on this one, and as much as some of us would have been warm to the idea, it is an idea that is maybe ahead of its time.

[157] **Russell George:** The Minister’s response does, however, say that there are ‘currently no plans’ to change the name. She did not actually say that she will not do so. However, I would agree with the rest of the committee.

[158] **William Powell:** I think that Joyce has managed to assemble a majority on this one. Excellent. Good. We will thank Mr Lilley for bringing it forward when I write formally to him to share the ministerial response.

[159] The next update is to P-04-422, Fracking. This petition was submitted by Mr Gareth Clubb and was first considered by the committee in October 2012. It has the support of 914 signatures. It calls upon the National Assembly for Wales

[160] ‘to urge the Minister for Environment, Planning and Housing to produce a Ministerial Interim Minerals Planning Policy Statement as well as a new technical advice note to strengthen the precautionary principle with regard to planning applications for onshore oil and gas, including fracking. All reasonable scientific doubt that there is any risk of adverse impacts must be eliminated, and strongest consideration must be given to the urgent need to mitigate climate change.’

[161] So reads the full text of this petition, which we most recently considered back on 10 December 2013. We agreed to write to the petitioners seeking their views. Indeed, we have a comprehensive response from Mr Gareth Clubb of Friends of the Earth Cymru regarding issues around regulation, employment and a response to a letter from the First Minister, which the petitioner had separately received earlier this year on 19 February. We have a copy of the letter from the First Minister in our papers here. That is interesting, because it was kind of the petitioner to feed this in, given that it was not a response to a letter that we had sent. Nonetheless, it is of considerable interest and relevance, particularly given the First Minister’s overarching responsibility for energy matters.

[162] I would be very keen to have Members’ input into this. It seems that we should share this response from Mr Clubb with Mr Alun Davies, the Minister for Natural Resources and Food, to seek his views, particularly the request from Mr Clubb and from other stakeholders that further guidance should be made available. Are colleagues happy with that approach?

[163] **Joyce Watson:** Yes.

[164] **William Powell:** What about the letter from the First Minister? How do colleagues want to play that?

[165] **Joyce Watson:** Chair, we could write asking for further details about his view that the current regulatory structures are appropriate.

[166] **William Powell:** I think that that would make sense, and we could reference the letter that he had sent, possibly even including a copy, since it would not be within the stream of correspondence coming from this committee. So, we could include that, for his reference.

[167] **Joyce Watson:** Indeed.

[168] **Bethan Jenkins:** The letter is comprehensive in outlining the different responses that Gareth Clubb has been given, but I wonder whether we could write to the bodies that he mentions, such as Natural Resources Wales and the Environment Agency, and ask him about who the industry spokesperson was who stated that

[169] ‘regulation is to be welcomed and will not add any significant costs’.

[170] I think that it would be good for us to get the evidence as a committee, although, obviously, I trust that Friends of the Earth have it. It may be useful for us to tease that out—

[171] **William Powell:** It would be useful to drill down to some more detail on that, would

it not? We will recall that the Welsh Local Government Association has written previously in support of a Welsh framework or guidance on fracking.

[172] **Bethan Jenkins:** We just have to ask the Minister why the Government believes that its guidance is robust enough, considering the fact that so many other people say that it is not. That is the question that we have to ask.

[173] **William Powell:** Including the parent body of local government in Wales, which, ultimately, is at the front line of dealing with any applications. I would be happy to write in that vein, because there are some further points that we could usefully tease out there.

[174] **Joyce Watson:** That is what we have just said, is it not? We are going to ask the First Minister if he thinks—

[175] **William Powell:** Yes, we are going to ask the First Minister, but Bethan was advocating getting in touch directly with other bodies.

[176] **Joyce Watson:** Okay; that is fine.

[177] **William Powell:** I think that that is an useful set of actions on that one.

[178] Next is P-04-500, Call For Regulation of Animal Welfare Establishments in Wales. This was submitted by Lisa Winnett, and we first considered it in committee in September 2013. It had collected 265 signatures. It calls upon

[179] ‘the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to regulate Animal Welfare Establishments and legislate for compulsory requirements be met by all animal rescue establishments in line with the report produced by the AWW Animal Welfare Establishments Working Group October 2012.’

[180] We most recently considered the petition on 21 January and we agreed to await comments from the petitioners. If colleagues recall, the Minister was seeking specific evidence or statistics to back up the issues that the petitioners were raising in the petition, and we have available to us today as a private paper, given the sensitivity of this matter, the petitioners’ response. Just as a reminder to the committee, the paper is private, but this discussion and any reference that we make to it are on the record, so we need to be aware of that. Are colleagues happy to draw on your views on this matter? It is obviously an issue of considerable sensitivity and, indeed, the matters raised within this correspondence are of considerable concern, and we have some quite challenging photographs that have been taken as part of this body of material. The photographs date from different points during last year and cause us, I think, significant concern.

[181] **Joyce Watson:** We cannot discuss the evidence that has been provided today, because of its nature. It names people, both the accused and the accuser, and it cannot be aired today, but neither can it be ignored that it has been given to us. So, I think that the first thing that we have to do as a committee is to ascertain our role as people holding that information and whether we should urgently refer it on to the RSPCA. We understand, from the testimony that has been given us by the petitioners, that they say that that has been done, but we cannot trust that or ignore that piece of evidence that we have been given, because it is quite clearly disturbing, if any of it is true. So, that is the first thing that we need to agree.

10:00

[182] I cannot recall whether we have written to the Minister or whether we have had a response from him.



[183] **William Powell:** This paper is a response to the Minister's call for specific evidence and examples. We must therefore share this, on the same basis that we have it here today, with the Minister, because it is an answer to the call that he made for this to be substantiated.

[184] **Joyce Watson:** Okay. We will then await his response to it.

[185] **William Powell:** Yes, I think that that is the best way forward. I will send a covering letter to go with this material, which the petitioner has assembled. We are also grateful to the petitioner for having taken the trouble to assemble this, which I hope will help to progress this important matter.

[186] **Joyce Watson:** The other thing, Chair, is that there will be—even though there is no absolute regulation—bodies that regulate and have a duty to regulate in any case. I am pretty confident that county councils have a duty to take action when we are talking about establishments that have been set up for the protection of animals but which it is claimed are causing hardship to them. So, we need to contact those bodies, somewhat urgently, to see whether any action has been taken, or if they can substantiate—which, if they inspect, they will be able to—the claims being made to us so that we can take this forward.

[187] **William Powell:** Yes, that is right. I would be very happy indeed to do that. In fact, according to the covering note from Lisa Winnett, there may have been already some level of contact in the context of constituency work by the Minister with regard to some of the people who have submitted this petition. However, it is our duty, as you correctly said, to forward this. Given the swift and comprehensive ministerial response to the fly-grazing crisis that led to the recent legislation, I would expect the Minister to treat this with the seriousness that the matter deserves.

[188] **Joyce Watson:** I am sure that he will.

[189] **Williams Powell:** Would any colleagues like to add to that? I see not. Therefore, if colleagues are happy with that approach, I will write to the Minister in that vein, accompanying a copy of this report from the petitioner. I see that you are. Good; thank you very much for that.

[190] We now turn to P-04-450, Barry & Vale needs a fully functioning hospital. This petition was submitted by Jeffrey Heathfield and was first considered by this committee back in January 2013. It had the support, at that time, of 50 signatures. It reads as follows:

[191] 'We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to ensure that Barry Hospital has a fully functioning minor injuries unit that is open to patients 8 hours a day, 5 days a week.'

[192] We had a significant body of supporting information at that time also, and colleagues have had the opportunity to refresh their memories. We last considered correspondence on this on 10 December, in our final meeting before Christmas, and we agreed to write to the petitioner once again to seek his views on the letter received from the health board. I wrote on 16 December and signed that off ahead of Christmas. No response has been received. Here, I am in two minds, but I think that, on balance, we have given the petitioner sufficient opportunity to come back to us, because that was not the first time that we had been in touch. I believe that the issue may well have moved on and, potentially, the petitioner as well. So, I propose that we close this, if colleagues agree. I see that you do. I believe that that is the best way forward at this time. I will write to Mr Heathfield to thank him for bringing it forward.

[193] We move on to P-03-150, National Cancer Standards. This petition was submitted by

Rhondda Breast Friends and was considered by our predecessor committee for the first time very early on in the Petitions Committee's life in July 2008. It collected 43 signatures at the time, but there was an associated petition that had the support of 1,475 signatories. It calls,

[194] 'upon the National Assembly for Wales to investigate whether Local Health Boards have the necessary strategies and action plans in place to deliver the target to comply with the National Cancer Standards by March 2009 in RCT and throughout Wales, as a matter of urgency.'

[195] We considered correspondence on this on 18 June 2013 and we agreed to write to Public Health Wales in order for it to clarify its role in relation to patient information about cancer services. I will just turn to the information that we have received on this matter. Rather surprisingly, the response was dated 14 February 2014, so, again, as with one or two of the other health-related bodies, we see something of a tardy response here from Public Health Wales, although it has now produced quite a—. It does express its considerable apologies for that. Clearly, Mr Huw George, the interim chief executive and successor to Mr Bob Hudson who has now moved to Powys to head up the local health board there, states in this comprehensive response—it is now a comprehensive one—his apology for that.

[196] This petition has been around for a very considerable time. The issues remain of importance, but, obviously, a lot of things have moved on. Colleagues, how would you like to take this forward in the light of the response that we have from Public Health Wales? There are a number of different things there that we could potentially follow up on.

[197] **Bethan Jenkins:** We need to find out the timeline on the individual patient information service. I think that that is one of the key areas that the petitioner has outlined to us. I think that the petitioner is quite happy with a lot of the issues. Most of it is about the timeline and discrepancies still in the services—. We hear all of the time about postcode lotteries, so, we should, perhaps, flag up some of the issues in the letter with the Minister and go from there.

[198] **William Powell:** Yes, we do need to go through the Public Health Wales response, which, as I said, despite the lack of timeliness, is a very comprehensive and considered view. At least the benefit of it coming rather more recently is that it is obviously up-to-date. We need to go through this and highlight the key points, as you say, in a letter to Professor Mark Drakeford, stressing the key issues, because our most recent consideration of it, I think, was before his appointment, or around the time of his appointment, so it would be his first real engagement with this as a petition. He has a track record of engaging very keenly with this process. So, I think that the sensible thing for us to do is to go through this with some care, highlighting the key points that have been flagged up by Public Health Wales and picking up the points that you mentioned.

[199] **Bethan Jenkins:** Is it for the Minister, or this person in Public Health Wales, to address the concerns, or both? I do not know whether it is Public Health Wales's position to address the concerns that we would have, as opposed to the Minister, given that he is the person who is taking charge of the cancer plan.

[200] **William Powell:** At the very least, we need to copy the Minister and his officials in, but, probably, on reflection, you are right to suggest that, because he has ownership of this—

[201] **Bethan Jenkins:** He is the person doing the day-to-day stuff and it sounds like that would be more comprehensive.

[202] **William Powell:** Okay. We can write to the named person in Public Health Wales and copy in the Minister, but also perhaps the time has come, given that this is probably our

most long-standing petition now—it must be within the top two or three—to request a short and focused piece of research work to draw the strands together. It is difficult to take account of all the work that has been done on this, even in the previous Assembly. We have membership—Bethan—going back to that period, but it would be useful to draw the strands together, because it is a vital topic and the petition is coming up to its sixth birthday. Let us do that; I see that colleagues are agreed on that approach.

[203] We move on now to P-04-530, Bilingual Labelling. This petition was submitted by Simon Foster of Cymru Rydd and was first considered by the Petitions Committee in January of this year. It has the support of 98 signatures. It reads as follows:

[204] ‘Like all self-respecting officially bilingual countries, (such as Canada), Wales needs legislation to ensure that all food products sold in Wales be labelled in both Welsh and English. We therefore demand that the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government enact said legislation without undue delay.’

[205] We considered this for the first time in January of this year and we wrote to the Minister for Natural Resources and Food and, indeed, to the First Minister seeking their views. We have a ministerial response available in our public papers. I will just turn to that. The interesting thing here from Mark Drakeford is around the issue of EU competence, which is highly relevant to this matter. We need to share this correspondence from Professor Mark Drakeford with Mr Foster and seek his response to the letter. Would colleagues also value a short legal brief on this if there is capacity to do so?

[206] **Joyce Watson:** If we could share the information at this point and see—

[207] **William Powell:** Okay. Let us take it step by step.

[208] **Bethan Jenkins:** The only other question that I had—. I mean, we can wait to hear what the petitioner has to say, but the Minister in his letter says that it is not possible for domestic legislation to impose a blanket requirement that all food labelling is to be in English and Welsh and that, instead, each piece of EU legislation needs to be considered on an individual basis to ascertain whether bilingual labelling is permissible. I would like to understand when and where the Welsh Government triggers that process. It does not seem clear to me what happens within the Government’s structures when it has that flexibility when legislation comes through, even if it cannot be a blanket opportunity such as what the petitioner is asking for, or whether that is outlined in legislation—

[209] **William Powell:** I think that that would be the merit of a legal brief either now or, as Joyce is advocating, a step down the line. I think that we need it at some point—

[210] **Bethan Jenkins:** I do not know whether a legal brief is needed or whether it is more a case of asking the Government what its process would be. I do not know—

[211] **William Powell:** A procedural memo, really.

[212] **Bethan Jenkins:** I do not know whether the legal team can tell us that or give examples of where they have done it in the past.

[213] **Ms Roberts:** There have been some examples in Welsh regulations when labelling and issues around languages other than English have arisen. One set of regulations spring to mind, which is the Natural Mineral Water, Spring Water and Bottled Drinking Water (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2011. Regulation 2, subsection (3) states that,

[214] ‘Nothing in these Regulations prevents a bottle being marked or labelled with any

other language in addition to English.’

[215] So, I think that that issue arose there. However, in terms of the comments that you made earlier, the actions available to the committee are outlined in Standing Orders and, as you indicated, we can go back to the Government to seek further clarification on it. However, if you want further information from me—I have not really considered this in any detail, to be honest—in a legal brief at any stage, I am obviously happy to provide it. In terms of how you take it forward, it is a matter for the committee.

[216] **William Powell:** If we do what Joyce advocated in the first instance—

[217] **Bethan Jenkins:** The petitioner will probably make some of the comments that I have made so we can wait for those. It is just that I would like to personally understand how that process works.

[218] **William Powell:** Exactly, as I would. If the legal department can stand ready to do that little piece of work, that would be really helpful for us. Are colleagues agreed? I see that you are.

10:15

[219] We now move to P-04-476, Restructuring in National Museum Wales. This was submitted by the PCS Union and it was first considered by the committee in April last year, and it enjoyed the support at that time of 1,617 signatures. The petition called upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to reconsider its funding settlement, at that time, for National Museum Wales, with a view to protecting the museum’s services and jobs, pay and conditions of its staff. That was submitted ahead of its 2013-14 budget round. We are approaching the end of that financial year. We considered the correspondence from National Museum Wales on 10 December, and we agreed to ask the petitioners for any further comments. I wrote again and signed off, ahead of Christmas, a letter on 16 December. I have not had a response, and a follow-up e-mail was even sent on 26 February, but there was no response.

[220] **Bethan Jenkins:** May I be as crude as to ask to whom you sent the e-mail?

[221] **William Powell:** As to the specific e-mail address, I am not clear. I assume that we were writing to the branch secretary.

[222] **Mr George:** We probably wrote to Darren Williams.

[223] **William Powell:** We wrote to Mr Williams of PCS.

[224] **Bethan Jenkins:** I know that we do not refer things to cross-party groups anymore, but I wonder whether we could flag this up with Julie Morgan and Rhodri Glyn, as they jointly chair the PCS cross-party group. There may be merit in saying, ‘Look, this has not been answered’, and perhaps you could chase Darren Williams to answer. I cannot understand this, as he answers e-mails really well, usually. So, I cannot understand this.

[225] **William Powell:** Yes, it seems rather strange.

[226] **Joyce Watson:** I do not disagree with anything that has been said, but I disagree with treating two things differently. We closed an earlier petition because we had not had a response from a petitioner.

[227] **William Powell:** You refer to Mr Heathfield, for example.

[228] **Joyce Watson:** Yes. We wrote to him on exactly the same date.

[229] **William Powell:** Yes, we wrote to him on the same date and time.

[230] **Joyce Watson:** If we were closing that due to non-response and we were quite happy that that was the right action, and I believe that it was, we cannot then decide that in this case it is not the right action. All I am saying is that we have to be consistent and clear in our message as to the reasons we are closing a petition. That is my comment.

[231] **William Powell:** Maybe we can achieve a consensus on this one by moving to close the petition, in the cause of consistency, while copying this to the cross-party group and, as a final act, to be in touch with Mr Williams by e-mail, or, potentially, a letter in the Royal Mail. We might depart from our normal procedures to make sure that we are taking a belt-and-braces approach. We will communicate that we are closing it and that we are grateful to them for bringing it forward, and then we can all be content.

[232] **Joyce Watson:** Absolutely.

[233] **William Powell:** Are colleagues happy with that? I see that you are. However, I agree that it is somewhat strange that we have not had that response, and I was somewhat disappointed.

[234] We will now move to P-04-478, A simple info pack for all the people of Wales explaining how they can stand as candidates. This petition was submitted by Sovereign Wales. It was first considered by the committee in May 2013 and has the support of 11 signatures. The petition calls upon the National Assembly for Wales

[235] ‘to urge the Welsh Government to send out a clear understandable leaflet to all people of voting age in Wales, explaining how they can stand in local, national or Britain wide elections if they so wish.’

[236] We conducted quite a significant set of correspondence on this matter and considered correspondence on 16 July of last year. We wrote to a number of stakeholders, with the WLGA's, One Voice Wales and the Electoral Commission being among them. We were pleased to receive response from the Electoral Commission and Plaid Cymru. This correspondence is available. We are grateful to those who took the trouble and showed the courtesy to respond to us.

[237] **Bethan Jenkins:** Did the other political parties get a letter?

[238] **William Powell:** I certainly signed off a letter to all political parties, and Kay Jenkins of the Electoral Commission was in touch.

[239] **Bethan Jenkins:** We are all about openness and democracy, you see.

[240] **William Powell:** I sense, given the clarity of the Electoral Commission's view here, that we probably do need to close the petition. I am very grateful to the commission and, indeed, to Plaid Cymru for taking the trouble to respond to the correspondence that we issued. I am very grateful to Sovereign Wales for flagging this issue up because we know that issues around promoting participation in democracy but also communicating issues around eligibility, qualification and disqualification are really important.

[241] **Joyce Watson:** Can we close it?

[242] **William Powell:** It is closed. Moving on to petition P-04-487, it calls for a Welsh Government deposit loan scheme for Welsh first-time buyers. Again, this was submitted by Sovereign Wales and was first considered by us in June 2013. It has the support of 17 signatures. You will recall that the emphasis here was on an annual deposit loan scheme for Welsh first-time buyers. It proposed that there would be an opportunity for Welsh mortgage companies to participate in this scheme, which would be of considerable benefit to up to 15,000 Welsh first-time buyers. Reference was made by the petitioner to good practice within the Peak District National Park and the North York Moors National Park. We have had correspondence from the Minister, Carl Sargeant, on these matters. We have also had significant feedback—thoughtful feedback—from the petitioner. Probably, as Joyce would advocate for the cause of consistency, we should write back to the Minister sharing the petitioners’ views.

[243] **Joyce Watson:** Agreed.

[244] **William Powell:** Are you happy with that, Joyce? And are colleagues happy? You are. Excellent.

[245] We now move to petition P-04-521 on regulating caravan sites. The petition was submitted by Mr Brian Silvester of Ceredigion and was first considered by this committee in December 2013. It has the support of 37 signatures. It reads:

[246] ‘We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to investigate whether legislation relating to safety of holiday and residential caravan parks in Wales is adequate and/or properly enforced.’

[247] When we considered this petition for the first time, we agreed to write to a number of people, including, again, Carl Sargeant as Minister, and Darren Millar and Peter Black, given their well-established interest in the field of caravans and their regulation. We have the ministerial response available within our public papers together with further information from Mr Silvester. Given the comments that arise again from the petitioner, I think that there would be merit in our writing to the fire and rescue authorities in Wales to seek their views on the petition and the risks flagged up by the petitioner. Are colleagues happy that we do that?

[248] **Bethan Jenkins:** Also, the Minister says in the last paragraph that fire safety and holiday or residential mobile home sites are not within his portfolio. So, I believe that we should write to the relevant Minister, who I believe would be Lesley Griffiths, if I have got it right this time. [*Laughter.*]

[249] **William Powell:** I think you have, and I think that Lesley Griffiths would obviously have something to bring to the table on the issue as well. So, we can move our focus across to Lesley Griffiths. It would also be useful to seek the views of some of the umbrella bodies that take an interest in the caravan and park home sectors, namely the British Holiday and Home Parks Association, the National Caravan Council and the National Association of Caravan Owners. All three bodies, I hope, will have something to contribute on this matter.

[250] Moving on to petition P-04-529, which is on a letting agents ombudsman for Wales. The petitioner submitted by Let Down in Cardiff and was first considered by the committee just this January. It has the support of 22 signatures. It reads:

[251] ‘We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to give the people of Wales a ‘Letting Agents Ombudsman’ by including it within their Housing Bill.’

[252] I think that, probably, it would be useful to seek—

[253] **Joyce Watson:** A response to the Minister's letter.

[254] **William Powell:** Yes, absolutely, we should seek a response to the response we have had from the Minister. That would be useful.

[255] **Joyce Watson:** I think so.

[256] **William Powell:** There was also the issue of grouping. If Members will recall, we had a substantial petition brought to us, namely petition P-04-480, Address Private Sector Student Housing Standards, from the student union welfare officer at Aberystwyth. A significant piece of work had been undertaken by them in terms of their annual housing survey. Are colleagues happy to confirm the grouping of those two? I see that you are. Then, in the context of the Minister's commitment to introduce compulsory registration and licensing for the sector, it might well be useful to defer our wider consideration until we have some more clarity on how that will operate in practice.

[257] **Joyce Watson:** Chair, I think that we should pass the letter. I think that it is great that we are going to take some legislation forward here because we have all had cases of tenants who have had issues. We have also had them the other way around. So, it works both ways sometimes. I think that it is great that we are bringing legislation forward. I think that it is worth letting both groups know that—and I am sure that they already do—and perhaps inviting, if they have read the proposed legislation, anything back to the Minister or us, whichever the case might be.

[258] **William Powell:** Yes, that is right. It would be useful to have some feedback perhaps in an evidence session at a future time on this. I know that the students' union elections in Aberystwyth have just taken place, but I am sure that there will be a follow-up report for the more recent year that could feed in.

[259] Finally, we turn to look at petition P-04-518, Universal Free School Lunches.

[260] **Joyce Watson:** It is not going to happen.

[261] **William Powell:** This petition—the final one on our agenda today—was submitted by Ms Jane Dodds and was first considered by the committee in November 2013. It has the support of 14 signatures, quite simply calling upon the Welsh Government

[262] 'to introduce a free hot lunch scheme for all children in reception, year 1 and year 2.'

[263] I should declare that I know Jane Dodds, who was relatively recently selected as parliamentary candidate for Westminster election for the Montgomeryshire constituency. I think that it would only be fair, given his interest in school lunches and portion sizes, to ask whether Russell would like to lead on this issue.

[264] **Russell George:** I do not think so, Chair.

[265] **William Powell:** I just thought that it would be courteous to give you the first opportunity. Given that we have a ministerial response, which is clear, from Huw Lewis, I think that we should write to Ms Dodds to formally seek her response to what Huw Lewis has had to say.

[266] Thank you very much, Members, for your contributions and input this morning. There are no petition presentations scheduled for this week, so I look forward to a quieter week on that front. I also give you notice that the next Petitions Committee meeting is due to

take place on 25 March. Thank you very much indeed. Diolch yn fawr.

*Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 10:29.*  
*The meeting ended at 10:29.*