



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

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau **The Petitions Committee**

Dydd Mawrth, 13 Mai 2014
Tuesday, 13 May 2014

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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

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Daniel Thomas	Deisebydd am Gynyddu'r Cyllid ar gyfer Gwasanaethau Bysiau Cymru Petitioner for Increase Funding for Welsh Bus Services
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Swyddogion Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru yn bresennol
National Assembly for Wales officials in attendance

Kayleigh Driscoll	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Steve George	Clerc Clerk

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 09:02.
The meeting began at 09:02.

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **William Powell:** Bore da, bawb, a **William Powell:** Good morning, everyone, chroeso cynnes. and a warm welcome to you.

[2] Welcome, everyone, to this meeting of the Petitions Committee. We have a full complement of Members, so there are no apologies, and normal housekeeping arrangements apply.

09:03

Cynnig o dan Reol Sefydlog 17.42 i Benderfynu Gwahardd y Cyhoedd o'r
Cyfarfod

Motion under Standing Order 17.42 to Resolve to Exclude the Public from the
Meeting

[3] **William Powell:** I move that

the committee resolves to exclude the public for item 2 in accordance with Standing Order 17.42.

[4] I see that the committee is in agreement.

*Derbyniwyd y cynnig.
Motion agreed.*

*Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 09:03.
The public part of the meeting ended at 09:03.*

*Ailymgynullodd y pwyllgor yn gyhoeddus am 09:14.
The committee reconvened in public at 09:14.*

Trafod Sesiwn Dystiolaeth 29 Ebrill 2014 Discussion of Evidence Session on 29 April 2014

[5] **William Powell:** We now return to consider the evidence that we took last time from Mr Phil Hill and his colleagues on petition P-04-471, Mandatory Welsh legislation to ensure Defibrillators in all public places. I think that we would all agree that that was an excellent evidence session from Phil Hill, Richard Lee from the Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust and June Thomas, campaigner on the issue. Colleagues, how would you like to proceed to the next steps with this petition? I think that we all felt inspired by the session and have a desire to take it forward.

09:15

[6] **Joyce Watson:** Yes, Chair. I think that it would be a good debate, actually, for the Assembly. That is my view. I also think that it would be nice to ask the Minister for Health and Social Services after that for any further views. However, I would certainly welcome a Plenary debate.

[7] **William Powell:** I think that we could draw together the strands of our consideration of the petition, drawing on that evidence session and other submissions that we have had. Colleagues, do you think that that would be the right approach, to pull together a succinct report on the issue that could then trigger the Plenary debate that Joyce is suggesting? Of course, that would then have the advantage of bringing the Minister for Health and Social Services in, hopefully to respond, subject to business.

[8] **Russell George:** I think that what is most important is to get this debated in the Chamber, and if the trigger to do that is a report, then so be it. It does not have to be a significant report, but it is important that we debate this in the Chamber, because it was one of the most excellent presentations I have heard since I have been on this committee. I just think that it is something that we, as a committee, need to take an interest in.

[9] **William Powell:** We all went away that day having learned a number of things that we had not previously known, and there was some quite extensive coverage of our proceedings and also of the awareness-raising that took place as a result of it.

[10] **Bethan Jenkins:** Os ydym i fynd am y ddadl yn gyntaf, mae hynny'n iawn, achos mae'n rhaid inni fod yn ymwybodol o'r ffaith nad y Gweinidog iechyd yn unig sydd ynghlwm â hyn. Mae lot o'r hyn a glywsom ynghlwm â'r byd addysg a mynd i mewn i ysgolion hefyd i godi ymwybyddiaeth. Felly, os ydym yn cael dadl, rhaid inni ei gwneud yn glir nad ar gyfer y Gweinidog iechyd yn **Bethan Jenkins:** If we are going to go for the debate first, that is fine, because we need to be aware of the fact that it is not only the Minister for health who is associated with this, but much of what we heard was related to education and going into schools to raise awareness. So, if we are going to have a debate, we need to make it clear that it is not just for the Minister for health specifically

benodol ydyw yn unig, a'n bod yn edrych ar newidiadau yn y sector hwn.

and that we are not only looking at changes in that sector.

[11] Hefyd, yr un pwynt arall yr hoffwn gael bach mwy o eglurder arno yw'r elfen ynghylch y Comisiwn Iechyd a Diogelwch nad yw wedi'i ddatganoli. Mae llawer y gallem ei wneud, ond rwyf jest eisiau deall ai'r HSC sy'n gyfrifol am unrhyw newidiadau cyfreithiol, er mwyn inni ddeall yr elfen honno o'r ddeiseb—gan gymryd mai'r elfen ddatganoledig fyddai'r agwedd addysgol a gweithredu mwy o ymwybyddiaeth o'i defnydd.

Also, one other point that I would like further clarification of is the Health and Safety Commission element, which is not devolved. There is much that we can do, but I just want to understand whether the HSC is responsible for any legal changes, so that we can understand that element of the petition—bearing in mind that the devolved element would be the educational aspect and implementing an increasing awareness of its use.

[12] **William Powell:** Wrth gwrs. That is absolutely true. We need to be aware of that mix of the devolved and reserved in the way that this is written up. As you rightly say, it is very much a cross-cutting issue that involves education. Also, local authorities have a significant part to play in these matters. As was made pretty clear by Mr Phil Hill in his evidence, a whole range of ministries would have a role to play here, because we have a key point for defibrillators to be located—within the transport network—and there are all sorts of relationships there. However, it is fairly clear that the prime person who would likely respond to any debate that would be triggered would probably be Mark Drakeford, but the points that you make are highly relevant. So, I think that that is the first action for us, to pull together a report, hopefully in fairly short order, to get that into the system and then to go forward with a debate. I have a sense that it would be a debate that would attract a fair level of interest and participation, but obviously that is for us to discover. Okay, so we have agreed a set of actions there, and we are happy to go forward on that basis.

09:19

Eitemau a gyfeiriwyd o'r Cyfarfod ar 29 Ebrill 2014 Items Deferred from the meeting on 29 April 2014

[13] **William Powell:** We will now move to agenda item 4. Partly because of the need to allocate appropriate time for that session, we had to defer a number of items from our agenda for our 29 April meeting. We will now return to that agenda. Therefore, our next petition is P-04-494, Robotic assisted laparoscopic prostatectomy must be made available to men in Wales now. This petition was submitted, as you will recall, by Professor Kevin Davies MBE, and we first considered the matter in July of 2013. It had collected at that stage 2,090 signatures. It was a very memorable presentation, as I am sure we would all recall. We last considered the petition on 21 January, and agreed a number of actions: to write to the Minister for Health and Social Services seeking his views on whether the funding provided through the health technologies fund at the University Hospital of Wales will ensure equal access to treatment across the whole of Wales; to seek the petitioner's views on the previous ministerial correspondence; and to seek outstanding responses from health boards, because we had had a rather patchy response to our original letter.

[14] In our public papers today, as you will see, we have got the Minister's response, and we also have further comments from the petitioner. We still lack some of the health board responses, I think. Steve, was there an update on that?

[15] **Mr George:** There is just one response that is outstanding.

[16] **Ms Driscoll:** We have written to Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Local Health

Board twice now on the issue, and have not had a response formally.

[17] **William Powell:** Okay. Since that is a pretty critical board in terms of getting a full picture here, I think that we should write once again, and I suggest that we should probably also copy in Professor Andrew Davies, who is the chair, if I am not mistaken, of that board, because I am sure that that would assist us in getting the response that is now well overdue to us. Colleagues, how would you like to proceed? Are you happy with my writing in that way? Are there any other issues that you think it would be useful to take up just now while we await that response?

[18] **Bethan Jenkins:** Just the timeline is really unclear to me. They are saying that it is procuring now, and while they are waiting they are still not getting the treatment, I would not have thought. It is just whether we can get an idea of—

[19] **William Powell:** It is a very time-sensitive matter, obviously.

[20] **Bethan Jenkins:** Because what the petitioner says is that it is still about whether some health boards will put money into this regional service, because they are so tight. I do not know. I cannot remember, but this may be an additional question that ABMU can answer as well: how realistic is it that it will put money towards that regional service, so that people in all areas of south Wales get access to that treatment when it comes about? I welcome the fact that it will be regional, because I think that that was unclear before, but we have to make sure that the health boards are fully signed up to supporting it when it does come about.

[21] **William Powell:** Exactly. In terms of financial planning, there needs to be clarity on that, with in-year pressures, as well. We certainly need to get a response from ABMU.

[22] **Bethan Jenkins:** I do not know whether that is something that the health board said to us before, in terms of the finance issue. I know that it is time consuming to write to it again, but if ABMU has not answered, it might be able to—

[23] **Mr George:** The Minister's response on 5 March does imply that all the health boards in the region are signed up to this. ABMU has not confirmed that, but that is certainly what is implied from the Minister's letter. It would be surprising if it now said that it was not. Obviously, we need to chase up on that. We could put that point to the Minister, as well. I would have thought that he should be able to give us an answer on that.

[24] **William Powell:** Have we as yet shared the correspondence from the Minister for health on 5 March with the petitioner?

[25] **Mr George:** Yes, the petitioner has seen that, and that is what he is commenting on. However, we have not shared the petitioner's comments with the Minister.

[26] **Bethan Jenkins:** We could do that and add the point then about the—

[27] **William Powell:** Yes, and make it clear that we have written to ABMU seeking the responses that are now well overdue, and that we will come back to this at an early future meeting. Is that agreed?

[28] **Joyce Watson:** Would it not be worth mentioning to the Minister that the local health boards have all answered except for ABMU when we write?

[29] **William Powell:** Yes, I think that it is useful for the Minister to be aware of any deficiency there. It is only right and proper. I am happy to bring that to Mark Drakeford's attention.

[30] The next petition is P-04-527, Campaign for a Special Cancer Drug Fund in Wales. This petition was submitted by Councillor Sean Aspey, on behalf of Porthcawl First. We first considered it as a committee in January of this year, and it has the support of 247 signatures. We agreed last time to write to the Minister for Health and Social Services, to Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Local Health Board, and to the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry Cymru. Interestingly, we see a pattern developing here: we have responses from the Minister and from ABPI, but, again, the health board has not responded. I think that we need to write again. We have not had a late response on this one, have we? I see that we have not. So, we have a second case here where we have not had a response to the particular issue.

[31] The Minister's response is pretty clear. We have also, of course, had the statement that the Minister made on 30 March regarding access to medicines, which is relevant to the wider issue. We can see that ABPI has suggested that, potentially, we could write to the All Wales Medicines Strategy Group, to seek clarity on its processes for evaluating cancer drugs of the sort that are referred to, which I think would have some merit. I see that Members are in agreement. The alternative would have been to close, but I think really that it would be sensible to go down that avenue, particularly also not having heard from the health board. I think, again, that we need to doubly make sure that the Minister for health is aware that we have some problems there in terms of a timely response to correspondence from this committee, which is not acceptable, and I think that we need to follow it through. So, we have two actions there. Are we all agreed? I see that we are. Okay, excellent—let us move forward on that basis.

[32] The next petition is P-04-459, A direct rail connection from Cardiff Airport to Cardiff central and west Wales. This petition was submitted by Sovereign Wales, and we first considered it in March 2013. It has the support of 35 signatures. We last considered it back in October of last year, and we agreed to await an update from the Minister for Economy, Science and Transport. As good as her word, we have an update from the Minister on this matter, and it is a response that the petitioner is content with. So, I think that that is to be welcomed. I think that, in the context of wider developments, it is probably sensible for us to await a further update from the Minister later in this summer term, once we have further information on the metro implementation group, to see how this fits in with the wider south-east Wales strategy. Is that a sensible way of approaching things? I see that Members are agreed. Okay, let us do that then, and keep the petitioner in the loop as well.

[33] The next petition is P-04-506, Free bus pass/concessionary travel for benefit claimants, students and under 18s. This petition was submitted by Mark Griffiths, and we first considered it in October 2013. It had 60 signatures in support. The background here is that the Assembly last considered it on 25 March, and we agreed to write to the petitioner, asking for any comments on the Minister's letter, and, in doing so, we also indicated that we would be minded to close the petition, given that the Minister had no plans to extend eligibility criteria for concessionary bus passes. Again, we have the petitioner's response to that. We seem to have got to something of an impasse really on this particular matter: we have a clear ministerial stance, and the petitioner is clearly not happy about that. However, I have a sense that we have probably come to the end of the line with this petition, and that we should move to close. Is that the right approach?

[34] **Joyce Watson:** Yes. There is a pilot scheme that has just been launched by the Minister—it was announced a couple of weeks ago—in mid Wales. So, it might be worth letting—

[35] **William Powell:** Mid Wales and the Vale, I think.

[36] **Joyce Watson:** Yes, absolutely—Ceredigion, I think, and the Vale. I think that it would be worth letting the petitioner know about that. However, equally, we cannot do any more.

[37] **William Powell:** Yes. I would be happy to flag that up, and to send through details, so that he can, potentially, monitor how that develops. Colleagues are agreed on that basis, so we will do just that.

09:30

[38] Moving on to P-04-510, Public inquiry into the Breckman case in Carmarthenshire, this petition was submitted by Alan Evans and was first considered by this committee in November 2013. It had the support of 63 signatures. We considered correspondence on the petition back on 18 February and also agreed to seek a legal briefing before taking things any further. We have that briefing in our private papers today. It is an interesting set of options that we face. The advice that we have been given is that we could take this further, but is it expedient and appropriate to do so? What are your thoughts?

[39] **Bethan Jenkins:** I do not know, actually, what my thoughts are. It is really difficult because there has been an ombudsman's report. I am a bit hesitant to get involved in something that has gone through that process. I know that they are not happy with the local authority's attitude, but for me as an Assembly Member, if I was going to ask more of the local authority, I would want to talk to it and get more evidence from it. I am not sure whether that is appropriate because of the processes that have already been gone through.

[40] **William Powell:** The due process has happened. That is my sense of it.

[41] **Bethan Jenkins:** I do not want the petitioners to think that we are not looking into it, but what I do not want to do is go over things that have been addressed by the ombudsman. The ombudsman is the ultimate person to go to when things have got to this stage. I am confused.

[42] **William Powell:** That is my sense also. It is a fine judgment.

[43] **Russell George:** As a committee, we are not the decision makers; our role is to make sure that process is followed. It is being followed, so I do not know what we can add at the moment, or at all.

[44] **Joyce Watson:** I agree with Russell. I do not think that we can go any further with this. I do think that we ought to close it.

[45] **William Powell:** In that case, we have an emerging consensus, which is to be welcomed. We will do just that and alert the petitioner to that outcome.

09:32

Deisebau Newydd New Petitions

[46] **William Powell:** Normally, we would be considering new petitions earlier in the meeting, but because of the order of our agenda, arising out of last time, we are now at agenda item 5 and looking at some important new petitions.

[47] We start with P-04-550, Planning Powers. This petition was submitted by St Mellons action group and a number of us were there to receive this, as indeed was our colleague

Vaughan Gething, who is the local constituency Assembly Member. It collected 41 signatures and a further 109 signatures represented via a paper petition. The text reads:

[48] ‘We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to investigate how devolved planning powers could be used to bring vacant or derelict sites of land into beneficial use. We are especially concerned that vacant or derelict sites like the former Kwik Save site in St Mellons, Cardiff can become a blight upon communities and attract anti-social behaviour. We wish the investigation to consider whether current powers to take action against landowners of vacant or derelict land are adequate, including the potential to compel owners to take action at their own expense to remove eyesores or derelict structures. We call for an investigation to take place before the proposed Planning Bill is passed by the Assembly.’

[49] At this stage, we have not undertaken any action, although I think it was the subject of an exchange of questions and responses with the Minister for planning in Plenary a couple of weeks ago. What are your thoughts on how we should go forward with this?

[50] **Russell George:** With most new petitions, we write to the Minister in the first instance. We should do that. Can we copy in the Environment and Sustainability Committee for its information?

[51] **William Powell:** Yes. I think that that would make sense.

[52] **Russell George:** As it is looking at the planning Bill, obviously—

[53] **William Powell:** Absolutely. I think that it would also be sensible—

[54] **Bethan Jenkins:** Is the committee looking at the planning Bill now? I am not on the committee.

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

[56] **William Powell:** Yes, we are.

[57] **Russell George:** Sorry, yes. The committee is scrutinising the planning Bill and taking evidence. I think that it would be—

[58] **William Powell:** I think that we should alert the clerk and the Chair.

[59] **Russell George:** I think that it would be background information, so that the committee is aware of the letter and the petition.

[60] **William Powell:** I am happy to do that. I think that we should also, in the light of the particular interest shown at the time of presentation, keep Vaughan Gething in the loop as to any actions that we undertake on the petition. Are Members happy with that? I see that you are.

[61] We now move forward to petition P-04-551, Basic First Aid To Be Taught In Schools. This petition was submitted by Tim Clarke on behalf of Ysgol Bro Gwaun. It collected 11 signatures.

[62] ‘We, the undersigned, hereby call upon the Welsh Government to make it compulsory for all pupils in their GCSE years to undergo basic First Aid training. We believe that first aid is an essential life saving skill that every young person has the right to have and as such should become a compulsory part of secondary education. Being trained in first aid

can carry a lot of responsibility but has a lot of benefits. In dangerous situations first aid training can make the difference between life or death. So just knowing how to put someone in the recovery position or even by calling an ambulance effectively can save lives.’

[63] Probably, at this stage, it would be right to write to the Minister for Education and Skills to seek his views. Are Members happy with that?

[64] **Bethan Jenkins:** The only thing that I will say is that we had a petition from the British Heart Foundation, which was this.

[65] **Joyce Watson:** We did.

[66] **William Powell:** It was quite close, was it not? It was under the previous Minister, I believe, but I may be wrong.

[67] **Bethan Jenkins:** I am just wondering where that got to and where we can refresh our minds. I do not want to replicate writing to Ministers.

[68] **William Powell:** It would be sensible to revisit that. You are absolutely right. That was in around 2012, I think.

[69] **Bethan Jenkins:** I think that we took evidence as well.

[70] **Joyce Watson:** We did.

[71] **Mr George:** Do you want to wait until the next meeting and to see those papers before writing to the Minister?

[72] **Bethan Jenkins:** I would just like us to know where we got to with it because I think that it is very similar, if not identical.

[73] **William Powell:** My understanding is that the previous Minister, Leighton Andrews, certainly set his face against changing policy in this area, but we have had a change of Minister.

[74] **Bethan Jenkins:** Okay, then; perhaps we could say in the letter to the new Minister, ‘We did write to your previous Minister. Do you have a different view on it?’.

[75] **William Powell:** Yes. It is sensible to be aware of our previous activity, as you say. I am happy to follow that through.

[76] **Bethan Jenkins:** It is a valid cause, but I just do not want us to be replicating things.

[77] **William Powell:** No, exactly. That is understood.

[78] We now move to P-04-552, Child Protection. This petition was submitted by the Montessori Centre Wales and had the support of 40 signatures. The wording of the petition is as follows:

[79] ‘We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to review and strengthen child protection criteria and consider establishing a regulatory body for Wales. This should aim to ensure that those who have charge of children, whether that's in schools, youth clubs, charities where children are the main focus, or people coming into contact or being invited in as patrons, governors, ambassadors, public servants or anybody appointed by children's charities are assessed as to their suitability to work with and around

children.’

[80] The petitioners go on to highlight issues that are of concern to them and, clearly, their concerns have also been further inflamed by the recent Jimmy Savile and Ian Watkins issues, and so on.

[81] I think that, probably, at this stage, we should write to the Minister. Joyce has a contribution to make.

[82] **Joyce Watson:** I do, because I agree with this petition wholeheartedly. I welcome it, quite frankly. I think that the Minister for Health and Social Services is one thing, but I think that the Welsh Local Government Association in itself is another, because it particularly mentioned councillors and open-door access policies. So, I think that it is another major player here. I think that education is obviously a major player here. I think that, in fact, every facet of society, where children and adults meet, where people, by virtue of their office or status in life—. We have learnt some hard lessons in the UK, have we not, about having an open-door policy because people are whoever they happen to be according to their title? So, to that end, I welcome it. I think that we need to go further than the Minister for Health and Social Services in correspondence terms, quite frankly.

[83] **William Powell:** Okay. I will be happy to write to the Minister for Health and Social Services, and to Steve Thomas, the chief executive of the Welsh Local Government Association for an overview in local government.

[84] **Joyce Watson:** However, I would like, in that letter, to ask the WLGA what its protocols are, because we might find that they are in place. ‘We do not know’ is the answer at the moment. We might find that there are checks in place, but we need to find that out. However, this is not just about elected members; it is about anybody who happens to have that access. The other area where there is fairly open access to children—and I am sure that those people are checked—is in sports facilities and suchlike. However, there is a different set of criteria at play there.

[85] **Bethan Jenkins:** I know that Criminal Records Bureau checks and so forth are carried out but, for me, people who work in certain sectors should have more regular spot checks. We have had two instances in schools in south Wales where teachers have been arrested for allegations of indecent behaviour. So, for me, it is not about the initial checks on people but the ongoing scrutiny of what happens, not only in health and education but, obviously, in public life. That would be something that we could perhaps tease out of this situation.

[86] **Joyce Watson:** That is a good point.

[87] **William Powell:** Okay. I think that would be covered by the letter not just to the Minister but, extending the remit, as Joyce suggested—and I sense you agree—to the WLGA at this first consideration.

[88] **Joyce Watson:** Absolutely, yes.

[89] **William Powell:** Okay, that is agreed. I will follow that up on behalf of the committee.

[90] The next petition is P-04-553, calling for a full and independent investigation into the health risks of wireless and mobile phone technologies in Wales, including all schools. This petition was submitted by Sovereign Wales and has the support of 11 signatures. It reads:

[91] ‘We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to conduct a full and independent investigation in to the effects of Electro Magnetic Fields created and emitted by wireless technologies, phone masts, mobile phones and other frequency emitters and domestic appliances on the health and general well being of humans and the natural world. There is now an enormous body of evidence demonstrating that the bombardment of modern traffic in electro magnetic fields can be harmful, causing DNA and cellular damage, having an impact on immune function and causing an increased risk of cancer and a loss of fertility—with children being especially susceptible to these threats.’

[92] We have a significant body of additional information in the supporting materials that the petitioner has submitted for our consideration. Shall we write in the first instance to the Minister for Health and Social Services to seek his perspective on these matters?

[93] **Russell George:** Yes, I think that we should do that as part of the normal process. I seem to remember that this was something that was discussed at great length going back some years, and since then it has not seemed to be so much in the public domain for discussion. However, I wonder whether Ofcom Wales would also have a view. It may well be aware of research that has been done in recent times.

[94] **William Powell:** I would be happy to write to Rhodri Williams to seek his perspective on that as well. I think that that would be a good step forward.

[95] **Bethan Jenkins:** I think that this was to do with the fact that, a few years ago, they were putting lots of masts by schools—

[96] **William Powell:** Yes, there was a roll-out of TETRA masts as well.

[97] **Bethan Jenkins:** So, I think that it is about the timing of when the roll-outs happen as well. That can ignite local opposition.

[98] **William Powell:** Yes, it happens in phases.

[99] **Bethan Jenkins:** I agree that we should write to Ofcom, because it will be keeping a close eye on things like this as well.

[100] **William Powell:** Okay. I am happy to write in those two directions on the petition.

09:45

[101] Moving on, petition P-04-554 calls for an official Welsh Government policy that prohibits non-transparent training organisations from working within public bodies. This petition was submitted by Sovereign Wales and has the support of 10 signatures. It reads:

[102] ‘We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to form an official policy that prohibits non transparent training organisations, consultancies and charities from operating within the Welsh Government, civil service, local Government and within public funded bodies in Wales in general; in the form of in house training or otherwise. Unaccountable training organisations, consultancies and charities using public money should be refrained from—’

[103] **Bethan Jenkins:** Could get some clarification?

[104] **Joyce Watson:** Yes—

[105] **William Powell:** I think that, before I go on, I have some further questions and I

sense that, colleagues, you have also. I would be happy to write on our behalf to the petitioner, before taking it any further, to seek any additional information that would enable us to give proper consideration to this matter.

[106] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes, because I do not know what it means by ‘non-transparent’. Perhaps it can give examples, without defaming anybody, obviously.

[107] **William Powell:** Naturally. My sense is that, at the moment, it is too lacking in clarity and it needs a specific reference for us to be able to engage with it.

[108] **Joyce Watson:** It is the same with the next one.

[109] **William Powell:** Just to give that petition consideration, P-04-555, Stop the unethical and draconian proposed compulsory microchipping of dogs, was submitted by Sovereign Wales and ChipMeNot. It had collected 11 signatures. It calls on

[110] ‘the Welsh Assembly to urge the Welsh Government to stop their proposed planned compulsory microchipping of dogs.’

[111] The petitioners contend that

[112] ‘Microchipping of dogs has not been proven to be more effective, cheaper or kinder to dogs. It has proven to be far more expensive than normal methods—’

[113] **Joyce Watson:** Chair, I hate to interrupt you—

[114] **William Powell:** No, not at all. I can see that you have indicated, Joyce, and you have already expressed a view, and I would like you just to clarify your position.

[115] **Joyce Watson:** My position is this: we have two petitions here, one that we have already said that we need more information on, and here is another one that is exactly the same. We had one the last time that we met. I do not even know why they are in front of us, quite frankly. That is the first point. Surely, there is a system that goes straight back to people and says, ‘You know, this isn’t even clear and, therefore, there is such lack of clarity in what you’re saying’ so that, before it came to us, that would have happened. So, that is my first point.

[116] The second point, and the final one for now, is that there is nothing here that supports this claim. So, let us go and ask for that before we go any further.

[117] **William Powell:** Thank you, Joyce. I certainly feel in the case of the former one that there was a fog around the issues that were being addressed and we need clarity on them. I did not have quite the same sense here, but your comments are well made, and we always need to revisit our practices around the admission of petitions and agenda setting, so those comments are helpful in taking the work forward. Are there any other views on this, at the moment, from colleagues? I am very happy to write to the petitioners, ChipMeNot and Sovereign Wales, to seek some further background information on this that would substantiate the claims and enable us to give a fuller consideration to the matters that, obviously, are concerning the petitioners at this time. So, I shall write in that vein to both.

[118] Moving to P-04-556—on an issue that is absolutely crystal clear, in contrast—and that is: No to Junction 41 closure. This petition was submitted by Rose David and has the support of 1,654 signatures. It reads:

[119] ‘We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government not to

close Junction 41 of the M4 for the following reasons: 1. The closure will negatively impact the town centre traders and businesses. 2. The closure will cause traffic chaos in the town as residents try to access the motorway. 3. There has been insufficient consultation with the townspeople. 4. Further research is needed into alternative solutions. 5. The new train station cannot be a transport hub if it is not easily accessible. 6. It will adversely affect the town redevelopment.’

[120] We have a number of other references here and some more supporting information. We will also have the opportunity to attend the presentation of this petition in the Senedd at 1p.m. today. In the context of your involvement in this, Bethan, could I ask you to give us some additional background information, please, on your understanding of this issue?

[121] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes, I have been involved in this. I know that there are people coming down on buses today from Port Talbot. Basically, the Minister put out an additional statement at the end of last week, after we had all left the Senedd, to tell us that they were going to change the system whereby it would close as a pilot scheme, full stop. Now it is only going to close at peak times, but the Minister will review this after the pilot scheme takes place. So, it is a reprieve of sorts, but obviously not the full reprieve that campaigners want. Obviously, I and other AMs have written asking for research into the rationale behind this, which we are yet to receive. Also, these traffic orders do not have to be consulted on, but why was there no consultation, given the fact that it would affect so many people? A packed public meeting in Port Talbot, a room of probably 500 people, said the same thing. So, it is not just me.

[122] Obviously, we do have plans for the new train station from Network Rail and the businesses that would be affected by these two junction closures, so we really need to ask the Minister how she has balanced the way this affects the town with the perception that pollution rates would potentially be lessened by this measure, and congestion issues, which was the other rationale for doing this. There are those questions, but also I would like to write to the council to see what its view is with regard to the money that it has received. It will still be getting the mitigating-measure money from the Welsh Government but, obviously, that will change now in light of the response last week that it will be open at non-peak times. I would like to understand when it knew, because the council claims that it did not know early enough, but, last week, there seemed to be quite a lot of co-ordination between Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council and the Welsh Government on the announcement. We need transparency in this system somewhere, which local people feel quite sincerely has not been there to date. If they were happy with the process, they would not need to complain, but the fact that there has been no consultation has meant that they have had to complain, because their lives are going to be affected by this.

[123] **William Powell:** Thank you very much for that.

[124] **Bethan Jenkins:** I do not know if you got all of those points, but I have letters, if you want to see them.

[125] **William Powell:** I think we have captured the essence of that. I also failed to say earlier that we have been alerted by our colleague David Rees AM, the constituency Member for the area affected, that there is going to be an additional petition with up to 20,000 signatures that is to be handed in as well. I am very happy to write to the Minister for transport on this issue, but also to Councillor Ali Thomas, who I believe is the leader of Neath Port Talbot council, to pursue the issues that you have outlined. Joyce, did you indicate?

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

[127] **William Powell:** Okay. It was my impression that you did.

[128] **Bethan Jenkins:** Would you indulge me, Chair? I do not know whether we can look at other junctions, because I do not understand the rationale for it being this junction, in terms of congestion. When people drive down to Cardiff, there is always congestion at junction 33. I think this is a point, to be fair, that Ali Thomas made. Also, on the A470, there is congestion all the time. So, I would really like to understand from the Minister why it is this particular area that has been looked at more than other areas of Wales, just to give us a national perspective.

[129] **William Powell:** I am sure that that would be interesting, and I think that this is also an issue that has been exercising the Minister's mind in the context of the proposals around the M4 as well. With our environment and sustainability hat on, we have had a number of interesting presentations looking at traffic flows, projections and so on. So, I am happy to build that into the correspondence. My understanding was that the presentation was at 12.45 p.m., which is a little earlier than I indicated.

[130] **Bethan Jenkins:** I think that the bus left at 9.30 a.m., so they are going to be here soon anyway. They are very keen.

[131] **William Powell:** Okay. Well, in that case, it would be sensible for us to be there as soon after 12.30 p.m. as we can. So, we will look forward to meeting the campaigners and gaining a closer understanding of that matter while signing off the two letters that we have agreed. Excellent.

09:55

Y Wybodaeth Ddiweddaraf am Ddeisebau Blaenorol Updates to Previous Petitions

[132] **William Powell:** This item is updates to previous petitions, round 2. The first is P-04-385, Petition regarding balloon and lantern releases. Colleagues will recall that this petition was submitted by Bryony Bromley and was first considered in May 2012. It had the support at that time of 564 signatures. It calls upon

[133] 'the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to legislate against the intentional release of balloons and Chinese (or Air) lanterns into the air.'

[134] We last considered this matter on 4 February, and we agreed to write to the Secretary of State, asking for a reply to the committee's original letter, and also to keep our colleague Antoinette Sandbach AM aware of the developments here, given her earlier interest—I think that she was also promoting a Member's debate on the wider issues. So, we indeed have the response to our letter now from Owen Paterson, now that he has had a period of convalescence after his eye operation. I should note that, in the correspondence, there is a reference to Alun Michael AC/AM. I think that that must be an inadvertent confusion with another noted, but current, member of the Cabinet, Alun Davies AM. I just want to make that point for the record. Colleagues, how do you feel that we should proceed here? It does not appear that there is a lot more mileage at this time.

[135] **Joyce Watson:** We cannot do any more, but it is worth noting that some councils have brought in bans.

[136] **William Powell:** Indeed.

[137] **Joyce Watson:** So, that is good news, as far as I am concerned. However, in terms of

what we can do, we cannot do any more, quite frankly. So, with that being the case, I think that there is only one option, and that is to close it.

[138] **William Powell:** While forwarding the Minister's response, so that the petitioner has the opportunity to see it and, I think, probably to convince herself that we are doing all we can.

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

[140] **William Powell:** Excellent. Thank you very much. I sense uniformity on the issue. Yes? Are we agreed?

[141] **Russell George:** Chair, I think that we should at least wait for the petitioners to reply first, if that is the majority view of the committee.

[142] **Bethan Jenkins:** I do not mind that; I just feel that I do not know where we can go with it. That is all.

[143] **Russell George:** That is fine.

[144] **William Powell:** I sense unanimity of view between Alun Davies and Owen Paterson on the issue as well. In the face of that body of evidence, I would tend to support Joyce on this one.

[145] We move now to P-04-439, Ancient veteran and heritage trees of Wales to be given greater protection. This petition was submitted by Coed Cadw Cymru and first considered by us in December 2012, having collected 5,320 signatures. We last considered the petition on 8 February and agreed to write to the Minister, welcoming his response and asking him to notify the committee of the structure and membership of the relevant task and finish group, and also to ask the Minister whether he would consider a nominee from Coed Cadw for that task and finish group, and, finally, to share the findings of the group with us once its work was complete, together with any associated action plan. Well, as you will have read, Coed Cadw is in fact represented already on that, so that is a matter of reassurance. I think that, at this time, all we can realistically do is to await the Minister's response informing the committee of the outcome of what that task and finish group comes up with. Is that the right way of dealing with things? I see that we are agreed.

10:00

[146] The next is P-04-445, Save our Welsh cats & dogs from death on the roads. This petition was submitted by Monima O'Connor and was first considered by the committee in January 2013. It collected 10 signatures, and an associated petition also collected approximately 500 signatures. We last considered correspondence on this petition on 2 February, and we agreed at that time to keep a watching brief until the review of the current regulations had taken place. We also agreed to forward to the Minister copies of all responses received from the petitioner and other stakeholders during the consideration of the petition. We have a response on this one from Alun Davies in our public papers, together with an invitation from Ms O'Connor to the committee to visit premises in England where an invisible fence has been installed. I would welcome a steer from colleagues as to how we might take this issue forward, and whether you are minded to accept the kind invitation of the petitioner to show us these facilities on location.

[147] **Joyce Watson:** Chair, I certainly will not be going, and if I did go, I would take the fence down, but that is another matter. You know how I feel about this—

[148] **William Powell:** You have been consistent, Joyce.

[149] **Joyce Watson:** Yes, and I will continue to be consistent, so I am definitely, absolutely not going anywhere to see this in action. If the Minister feels that he wants to go, that is entirely up to him, but I will not be going, and I will not be going because I just could not bear to see what I believe is the cruelty behind it.

[150] **William Powell:** I appreciate the clarity of your contribution, Joyce, and your consistent approach to this. It may well be that this matter is more something that the Minister might wish to look at. I know that the previous Minister who presided over the introduction of these regulations commented during her membership of this committee earlier in the Assembly that there were aspects of unintended consequence that she was aware of in retrospect. However, I think that it would probably be inappropriate and not expedient for us to undertake a visit, but if the petitioner is prepared to extend that invitation to the Minister, or, indeed, the Minister's officials, he might well give that a fair wind. So, with your permission, I would be very happy to write to the petitioner to seek any possible invitation that she may wish to extend, given the passion with which she pursues these matters, because, ultimately, it is the Minister who decides.

[151] **Joyce Watson:** Ultimately, it is.

[152] **Russell George:** Yes, the Minister is the decision maker, so I think that that should be the course of action.

[153] **William Powell:** He is very dynamic in terms of seeing things on the ground, and this might be another such case. Okay, thank you very much.

[154] The next is P-04-458, Keep Further Education in the Public Sector. This petition was submitted by the University and College Union Crosskeys branch and was first considered by the committee in February 2013, having collected 246 signatures. It reads as follows:

[155] 'We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to ensure:

1. Further education, along with publicly funded assets, is retained within the public sector.
2. Colleges continue to be bound by the national agreements in FE, such as the national pay scales.
3. The introduction of an all-Wales contract for FE lecturers.
4. Welsh Ministers do not dissolve colleges and give colleges the ability to transfer the property, rights and liabilities to another body.'

[156] We have a substantial body of additional information that was submitted by the petitioners at that time. We last considered correspondence on the petition on 18 February 2014, and we agreed that points 1, 2 and 4 of the petition had been overtaken by events and could not profitably be further considered. However, we agreed to write to the Minister for Education and Skills regarding point 3, which asks for a time frame for the introduction of the all-Wales contract for further education lecturers. We have a response in our public papers. Given that response, what do you think would be the appropriate course of action now?

[157] **Bethan Jenkins:** The only thing that I would say—and I do not want to keep things open for the sake of it—is that, on point 3, we know that one college has not yet agreed to it.

Could we write directly to ColegauCymru to ask it what the ongoing discussions are because we have agreed on the other points, which is fine? However, the issue with point 3 on the common contracts is that we still do not know for sure whether all colleges will be pursuing it. That was a strong point in the petition. That does not mean that we should go on and on indefinitely, but perhaps if ColegauCymru has more information for the Minister, we could clarify that one point.

[158] **William Powell:** I would be happy to write to Mr Graystone of ColegauCymru just to seek clarity on that issue. I think that we have put the wider points to bed previously, but on that point, there is still information that would be useful for the consideration of the petition.

[159] **Bethan Jenkins:** We could then move to close it.

[160] **William Powell:** We will do that then. Good.

[161] We now move to P-04-518, Universal Free School Lunches. This petition was submitted by Jane Dodds and was first considered by the committee in November 2013. It collected 14 signatures. It calls on the Welsh Government

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

[163] As I previously stated, I will declare again that I have some association with Jane Dodds, who is a selected Liberal Democrat candidate for Parliament for the Montgomeryshire constituency. Clearly, there is an underlying party-related theme here in relation to recent policy developments. We last considered correspondence on this petition from the Minister back on 11 March 2014 and we agreed to write to the petitioner. Indeed, Ms Dodds has supplied us with her response. According to normal practice, shall we share Ms Dodds’s comments with the Minister for Education and Skills to see whether he has anything further to offer? Joyce, do I sense correctly that you wish to comment?

[164] **Joyce Watson:** Yes, you do sense correctly. You should not use this committee for further political gain. I have said it before, so I will say it again. So, yes, you do sense that, because that is what this is about quite frankly. It does not make me less pleased in that respect, because this committee is supposed to be open to the public. I have said it time and again, so I will be consistent: this committee is not here for political parties to use for political gain. So, I have said it and it is now on the record.

[165] Like others in the room, I am also quite aware that the Minister has made his statement on free school meals by, I believe, responding in a debate that was brought to the Chamber by your party.

[166] **William Powell:** That is correct.

[167] **Joyce Watson:** He was clear about his policy and that he is not minded to do what this petition asks. So, in terms of consistency with other petitions, I do not know exactly what we expect to get from the Minister. If you can enlighten me and think that there is something further to get from the Minister, then we will ask for his views yet again, and I will go along with that. However, if that is not the case, I suggest that we close it because all avenues have been explored.

[168] **William Powell:** Thank you very much for that contribution, Joyce, and your comments are on the record. I am certainly not seeking any preferential treatment for the petitioner or this petition, but in terms of the consistency of treatment, we have had only one exchange with the Minister on the petition; it is not as though we have had a game of ping-pong on this. We may well anticipate his forthcoming response, but in terms of procedural

consistency, we could share her correspondence with him and see what comes of it, even if we feel that we have some certainty as to what that response will be. So, if colleagues are happy with that for the sake of consistency, then I am happy to sign it off.

[169] **Russell George:** I am happy with that, Chair.

[170] **William Powell:** You are content with that.

[171] **Bethan Jenkins:** Just for the record, I understand Joyce's view, but people who are in a political party are also members of the public, and we cannot stop people putting petitions in if they have a political opinion, because, obviously, this is what the National Assembly is for. I would not want to stop people—

[172] **William Powell:** We have had previous examples of a more explicit statement—

[173] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes. I am passionate about this, because we do not want to stop people from feeling that they can take part in the petitions process either, regardless of their political colour.

[174] **William Powell:** Correct and understood. I am grateful for that.

[175] **Joyce Watson:** Chair, just for the record, that was not what I was saying. I think that that was clear, because everybody, we hope, has a political opinion, whether that is political with a big 'P' or a small 'p', and the Petitions Committee is to allow expressions of that. However, this is pure party politics and you have heard my views on party politics before. There are political parties for those to air their views; they have representation here from all parties and those people, quite rightly, can go through those avenues, which are very open to them, especially when you are elected to fight a seat. You cannot pretend not to know about those due processes, so that was not what I was getting at.

[176] **William Powell:** I appreciate that. I think that we all agree that this committee operates at its best when we leave our guns at the door and deal with the issues that matter. I think that we all sign up to that.

[177] **Bethan Jenkins:** I am a pacifist, so I do not have a gun at the door. *[Laughter.]*

[178] **William Powell:** Excellent. Thank you very much for that, I look forward to signing off the letter to Huw Lewis on these matters.

[179] We move on now to P-04-533, Environmental Planning for Small Scale Wind Turbine Sites. This petition was submitted by GALAR and was first considered by the committee in February 2014, having collected 433 signatures. We have some highly specific points that the petitioner is advancing here in the text of this petition. We last considered the petition on 4 February and we agreed at that time to write to Carl Sargeant, Minister for Housing and Regeneration, to seek his perspective. Both the Minister's response and, indeed, further comments from the petitioner are available in the public papers today.

[180] However, despite the fact that the petitioners have made what I would consider to be a fairly comprehensive response, they say that they would appreciate further time to produce a more detailed response to Carl Sargeant's letter. I think that we have to allow them to have the time that they consider necessary to do a fuller response, so we should park that for the moment until that response is forthcoming.

[181] **Joyce Watson:** Yes, I agree.

[182] **William Powell:** The next petition is P-04-534, A campaign to secure CARDIGAN HOSPITAL. This petition was submitted by Cardigan Hospital and Community League of Friends and was first considered by the committee in February 2014 after a particularly high-profile presentation of their petition, which has the support of 11,042 signatures. It calls upon us to show our support for Cardigan town council and Cardigan Hospital and Community League of Friends in calling for Hywel Dda health board to

[183] ‘(a) overturn the recent decision to close all in-patient beds in Cardigan Community Hospital;

(b) provide a clear timetable regarding future health provision in the Cardigan area;

(c) proceed with plans to provide a new Cardigan Hospital, with beds, as soon as possible.’

[184] We considered this for the first time on 4 February 2014 and agreed to write to the Minister for Health and Social Services and, indeed, to Hywel Dda health board to seek their views and we have responses from both. Actually, we have really quite a substantive response here from Hywel Dda health board on these matters. Colleagues, how would you like to proceed in the light of what we have received?

[185] **Joyce Watson:** I am quite happy to go back to the petitioners for their views.

[186] **William Powell:** I think that that is probably the right thing to do just now. I hope that there will be at least some sense of satisfaction that we have some important steps forward there. However, let us see what the petitioners have to say in the detail. Good.

[187] Next is P-04-539, Save Cardiff Coal Exchange. This petition was submitted by Jon Avent and was first considered by our committee in March 2014. It has the support of 389 signatures. An associated petition, which was hosted on another website, collected a further 2,680 signatures. We understand the issues at play here. The Coal Exchange is obviously one of Cardiff’s most important iconic buildings, one of the finest buildings in Wales, and a building of enormous heritage and importance.

10:15

[188] We considered this for the first time on 25 March 2014, and we agreed to write to the Minister for Culture and Sport, seeking his views, as well as clarification on the use of the section 78 powers that were cited by the petitioner, and which the petitioner felt were being used in an inappropriate fashion. We also agreed to write to Cadw, seeking clarification of the issues that were raised by the petitioner, and also to write to the chief executive and the leader of Cardiff Council, asking for their views on the overall petition, for further information regarding plans for the Coal Exchange building, and also, and importantly, whether there will be circumstances where we as a committee would have the opportunity to visit the building. That would probably be one of our most convenient rapporteur visits, if we were able to undertake such a visit. However, as yet, we have not heard from the council on these matters. However, we do have a detailed response from the Minister, and we also have a very substantial and detailed response—in some senses a rebuttal—from Mr Avent, commenting on the specifics of the response from the Minister.

[189] I think that, at this stage, probably the most important thing for us to do, given the time sensitivity of this—and the section 78 powers would indicate at least some perception from the council’s point of view that there is some urgency here—is that we really should seek a response from Cardiff Council. I know that there has been a little bit of turbulence there just recently, but, if we can get some clarity on the issues, particularly around potential access to the building—. Would colleagues support that approach?

[190] **Bethan Jenkins:** Could we send them the updated information from the Minister and from—

[191] **William Powell:** Absolutely, I think that, if we share the letter from the Minister—

[192] **Bethan Jenkins:** To the council.

[193] **William Powell:** —and from Mr Avent.

[194] **Bethan Jenkins:** Given that the council has not responded, there is more information here that it could consider.

[195] **William Powell:** It would make for a more meaningful response, would it not?

[196] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes, because, obviously, the issues around demolishing large parts of the building is an area of concern.

[197] **William Powell:** Yes, it could be lost forever, potentially.

[198] **Bethan Jenkins:** To me, it is quite heartening that the Welsh Government letter is quite detailed—it is a change from some of the letters that I have had about other things that have been demolished. So, I am glad that it seems to be quite aware of the situation, and of the urgency of the situation.

[199] **William Powell:** Absolutely. I would be very happy to send that to the chief executive and to the leader of Cardiff Council so that we can get some movement and some clarity on the issue. Excellent.

10:18

Sesiwn Dystiolaeth—Gwasanaethau Bws yng Nghymru Evidence Session—Bus Services in Wales

[200] **William Powell:** Finally, we have our evidence session on bus services in Wales, as well as the grouped petitions P-04-475, Wanted—Buses for Meirionnydd, P-04-513, Save the Wrexham/Barmouth X94 bus service, and, finally, P-04-515, Increase funding for Welsh bus services. We have a research brief that has kindly been supplied for our consideration. Most importantly of all, we are able to welcome Daniel Thomas, the petitioner for P-04-515, Increase funding for Welsh bus services, to join us this morning. Croeso, Daniel; it is great that you are able to join us. May I ask you please just to introduce yourself for the record to check that the levels are right, and also to make any initial statement that you may wish to make?

[201] **Mr Thomas:** Okay. I am Daniel Thomas. I am from Neath. Basically, the reason I put this petition in is that residents and constituents in Neath and South Wales West have contacted us in relation to routes being cut. In Neath, where I live, there are no weekend or bank holiday services any longer. I think that changes to the bus users' grant need to be looked at, because the evidence—I have put some things together—shows how it has affected people further up the Valleys in getting to work, et cetera.

[202] **William Powell:** Excellent. Thank you very much for taking the trouble to follow up the petition by coming to join us here this morning to explain your motivation in bringing the matter forward. Can you elaborate on the discussions you have had with local authorities and

bus operators, particularly any indications you have of the likely future effects of funding changes that are in the pipeline?

[203] **Mr Thomas:** Yes, well, as you know, the bus users grant changed last year. All local authorities, South Wales Transport and First Cymru are all in agreement that, since the changes, they cannot run routes that are not viable to them any longer. That means that services that people use will no longer run. They are relying on community transport a lot more, but there are not a lot of funds to run those services. So, I think something needs to be put in place, whether that be more money being put into First Cymru, South Wales Transport, et cetera, or going down the avenue of community transport, such as a not-for-profit organisation, say, who would run those routes without looking for profit for shareholders.

[204] **William Powell:** Are there some specific services and some concrete examples that you can cite of communities and groups that have been particularly affected by a recent withdrawal of bus services?

[205] **Mr Thomas:** Well, as I said, there is Neath, for example. You cannot get a bus on a Sunday, which is going to affect shift workers, et cetera. On bank holidays, you cannot go anywhere; you have to rely on trains, but trains do not start until—. The earliest train from Neath to Cardiff is 9 a.m. on a Sunday.

[206] **William Powell:** So, you cannot make a good, early start. Just in the last few days, I have had a number of contacts about a proposal to remove the long-standing No. 39 service that comes from Hereford and goes all the way across to Brecon, replacing the railway route that was historically in place. That is just another example.

[207] Colleagues, can I ask you to come in with your lines of questioning?

[208] **Russell George:** Yes. What kind of users are going to be most affected, or have been most affected, by the changes?

[209] **Mr Thomas:** Like I said, I think pensioners will be, because you are taking away their independence. Also shift workers, as I said, because if you cannot get to work on a Sunday—. Also, I think, people on benefits. They are trying to get people back into work, but if you live somewhere with poor transport links, you cannot take a job in Cardiff or Swansea if you cannot get there on a Sunday, or—.

[210] **Russell George:** What have been the consequences of the changes? How have you seen people adapt?

[211] **Mr Thomas:** Well, I do not think that they have, to be honest. It is very limited, what they can use. I know that they are running community transport, but that is not on a regular basis.

[212] **Russell George:** So, the people who were using the transport to get to work previously, what do they have to do now?

[213] **Mr Thomas:** Taxis, trains—it is not cost effective in the long run.

[214] **Russell George:** So, the consequences are that it is costing the user a lot more money.

[215] **Mr Thomas:** A lot, lot more, yes. Especially if they are single parents and they have childcare costs, and they have to leave earlier to go to work.

[216] **Russell George:** What about pensioners? Are they using other services or are they not going out as much?

[217] **Mr Thomas:** I think they do not go out as much. They obviously have a bus pass, but they do not have the regular service to nip back and forth to Neath to the shops or wherever they need to go.

[218] **William Powell:** Joyce is next.

[219] **Joyce Watson:** Good morning, Daniel, and thanks for coming and bringing your petition. To help us get some understanding of the changes, can you tell us what buses were running on a Sunday and how frequent they were, so that we get a sense of the loss?

[220] **Mr Thomas:** If I look at my area, we had the regular 227 and 226 that linked Port Talbot and Neath and the Neath Port Talbot hospital for visiting patients and family. That no longer runs. There was the X5 to Glynneath, which normally ran on a Sunday.

[221] **Joyce Watson:** How regularly were they running on a Sunday, that is what I am—

[222] **Mr Thomas:** They were running on a Sunday, but they were not brilliant on a Sunday, because they would not start until the afternoon, but you had some sort of transport.

[223] **Joyce Watson:** I am just trying to get a sense of the loss that you are talking about. So, they were not running until the afternoon. So, that would not really have helped people going to work in the morning in any case.

[224] **Mr Thomas:** Well, no, but it should be restructuring to improve the service, not taking more away.

[225] **Joyce Watson:** No, no. I am just trying to get the sense of loss. Do you think, then, that some of the answers might reside in looking at community transport? Are you aware of the Bwcabus scheme, for example, which operates in Pembrokeshire and Ceredigion?

[226] **Mr Thomas:** No.

[227] **Joyce Watson:** Okay. It is basically what it says—people can use a bus to get to the next mode of transport or to the end route by booking it in advance. It operates quite well, actually, so it might be worth having a look at that.

[228] **Mr Thomas:** It is worth looking into, yes.

[229] **Joyce Watson:** If I may, Chair—

[230] **William Powell:** Yes, please do.

[231] **Joyce Watson:** We need to be looking to the future. You are quite right that we need to identify what was lost and where we ought to be going. There is clearly reduced funding all round—that is the case—so who do you think should be addressing this? It has always been a partnership between the local authority and the Welsh Government in terms of funding, so how do you think we can best resolve some of the issues that you have raised?

[232] **Mr Thomas:** I think that it has got to come from the top down, personally, because I think you need to invest in the long term. By investing, as I said, you get people back into work, so it is an investment in the economy. People will go into shops on a Sunday. Neath town centre is like a ghost town on a Sunday lately, so shops are losing money. However, I

also think that councils need to run community transport. Like you said, that scheme might work, and it is something that we can look at, but councils' budgets have been slashed as well, so I think that everybody is in the same boat. If you restructure it from the top down to run even a basic service on a weekend, I think it will be better than nothing at all.

[233] **Joyce Watson:** There is just one more question from me, Chair. It is common practice, it seems to me—and I do not know whether you have investigated it—that, if an area loses its bus on a Sunday, it automatically loses it on a bank holiday, because there is a classification that puts the two together. I know of other services that have suffered the same fate. So, I would like your opinion—just on that, quite frankly.

[234] **Mr Thomas:** Well, maybe it should not be classed as the same branch because I think that Sundays and bank holidays are completely separate. You only get a few bank holidays a year. I think that Sundays should be included in the weekdays or you should branch that together with the weekend service maybe.

[235] **Joyce Watson:** Okay, thank you for that. Thank you, Chair.

[236] **William Powell:** Russell George is next.

[237] **Russell George:** My colleague, Joyce Watson, has mentioned—and you have acknowledged yourself—that there have been reductions in funding, and it is a partnership between county councils and Welsh Government. Is there anything that the county council is funding now that you think the money for which could be diverted into bus services instead?

[238] **Mr Thomas:** I think that there are a lot of things that councils fund that should not be funded, but I will not go into that. [*Laughter.*]

[239] **Russell George:** It is a wide question, and I am putting you on the spot.

[240] **William Powell:** Harsh but fair.

[241] **Russell George:** What I am perhaps saying is that it is a joint approach between the Welsh Government and local authorities, and the funding has been cut to local authorities, as we know. Are there any areas where, perhaps even within the transport budget, you think that funding could be better used in some way to achieve what you want to achieve?

[242] **Mr Thomas:** I think that some of the things that are put in place are, as you say, a partnership, which stops for-profit companies only picking viable routes to run. I think that there needs to be a structure in place that says that you have to run x number of buses on these routes even though you do not make x amount of money on them—

[243] **Russell George:** As part of the contract.

[244] **Mr Thomas:** Yes, as part of the contract, because, at the moment, they seem to be picking routes that are viable for them, and routes that are non-profitable are scrapped completely.

10:30

[245] **Russell George:** I would have thought that that would have been perhaps part of the council's contract, but do you think that it is not part of the contract?

[246] **Mr Thomas:** Maybe it is not. Maybe it sometimes needs to be added onto the contract.

[247] **Russell George:** Do you think that some of that needs to be investigated?

[248] **Mr Thomas:** Maybe the Welsh Government could put guidance in place for local authorities to follow.

[249] **Russell George:** Yes. All right, thank you.

[250] **William Powell:** Joyce, you wanted to follow up on that particular point.

[251] **Joyce Watson:** On that particular point, there is legislation that rests in Westminster. It is called the deregulation of bus services. I do not know whether you are aware of it, but the Minister for transport is currently looking at a review to consider packages in the way that you describe, although not necessarily exactly as you have described, looking at how best we can resolve some of the major issues. However, we do not have—and I am sure that I am right in saying this—all the powers in terms of the deregulation of bus services. To give you an example, I do not know whether you are aware, but if a company decides to run a set route because it is profitable, and we were equally running a set route because it was profitable so that we could run another, we could do nothing about that company running it for profit. That is what the deregulation was all about. It might be worth you just having a look at that.

[252] **Mr Thomas:** Yes. You were talking about partnerships, and maybe the Welsh Government should work in partnership with Westminster to try to improve that in the long term.

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

[254] **Bethan Jenkins:** We did have some evidence where we asked about deregulation.

[255] **William Powell:** We asked Mr Pockett, did we not, the last time?

[256] **Bethan Jenkins:** And the users. The woman who gave evidence from the user group said that she did not use buses, which I found quite interesting. [*Laughter.*] She did. It is on public record. The group said that it would not make so much difference now, in terms of reregulating, but, for me, I would need to understand why it believes that, and get to the depth of that question. The point that Daniel and Joyce are making—

[257] **William Powell:** That is the nub of the issue, is it not?

[258] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes, it is the nub of the issue in the sense that companies can run their companies in a profitable way because of the fact that the whole industry was deregulated, which has caused this problem, and they cannot cross-subsidise. So, if they believe that they could run a service, even though it was not profitable, in a different part of Neath, for example, they would not be allowed to in terms of their company rules. So, I think that it is not just a Welsh Government issue.

[259] **William Powell:** It is hugely restrictive in that sense, is it not?

[260] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes. It is a UK Government issue, unfortunately, that we have to try to grapple with there.

[261] **William Powell:** Daniel, have you had any involvement with the local business community? You referred to the fact that, on the retail side, Neath is very, very quiet, particularly on a Sunday.

[262] **Mr Thomas:** It is very, very quiet.

[263] **William Powell:** Have you had any dealings with them, or any way of gauging the impact that has been suffered by local businesses in concrete terms?

[264] **Mr Thomas:** Yes, I have spoken to traders on many occasions during chamber of trade meetings. They are all in agreement that, due to poor transport—and I know that it was only a basic service before, but shoppers would still come into the town—footfall is down since these cuts have come in. You only have to look to Neath to see the empty shops lying around at the moment. I think that that is the same in every town and city at the moment, though. I think that the key to growth is a reliable and strong transport link, and I do not think that Wales has got that at all.

[265] **William Powell:** So as to maximise the economic potential of a retail centre, like Neath, to blossom again, as it previously did.

[266] **Mr Thomas:** Yes.

[267] **Bethan Jenkins:** Sorry, I feel as if I am giving evidence now, but there is a new Love Neath campaign happening at the moment, run by the chamber of trade.

[268] **William Powell:** Is that linked to the FYI:Neath web portal?

[269] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes. Obviously, that is good, but it is not just Neath in terms of town centres; it is also other areas across south Wales, where the same transport problems exist. The people are just not going in because they have to pay for parking in the middle of town, but they can go out of town for free.

[270] **William Powell:** Where you get all of those benefits.

[271] **Bethan Jenkins:** If there were more incentives to use public transport to come into town, then—. The transport issue is linked, I suppose, with the town centre issue.

[272] **William Powell:** Daniel, if there are any further reviews, such as the Minister has indicated that she will be undertaking on the issue around regulation, if you would be prepared to contribute to that as a petitioner, with those that are supporting your petition, that would be really helpful. We are moving now towards drawing our work on this to a conclusion. One thing that we shall do is provide you with a transcript of today's session. Hopefully, you have had the opportunity to study the bus users' contributions and, indeed, Mr Pockett's evidence session last time, so that you have a rounded view. We want to make sure that you are kept up to speed with the next stage in the development of this petition and the group petition. Thank you very much for coming today.

[273] Diolch yn fawr am ddod heddiw. Thank you very much for coming today.

[274] We look forward to staying in touch with you on these matters.

[275] **Mr Thomas:** Thank you very much.

[276] **William Powell:** I remind Members that we will shortly be joined by a large number of petitioners who are concerned about the proposed junction changes on the M4. Ideally, if we could be there as soon after 12.30 p.m. as possible, that would seem to make sense in the context of that gathering.

[277] I also wish to say that the committee's next meeting will be on Tuesday, 3 June.

Thank you very much for your contributions and your time today.

Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 10:36.
The meeting ended at 10:36.