



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

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau **The Petitions Committee**

Dydd Mawrth, 20 Ionawr 2015
Tuesday, 20 January 2015

Cynnwys **Contents**

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions

Trafod y Sesiwn Dystiolaeth ar 9 Rhagfyr, 2014 - P-04-481 Cau'r Bwlch ar gyfer Disgyblion
Byddar yng Nghymru
Discussion of Evidence Session on 9 December 2014 - P-04-481 Close the Gap for Deaf
Pupils in Wales

Deisebau Newydd
New Petitions

Y Wybodaeth Ddiweddaraf am Ddeisebau Blaenorol
Updates to Previous Petitions

Adolygiad o'r System Ddeisebau
Review of the Petitions System

Cofnodir y trafodion yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynnddi 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

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

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 09:33.
The meeting began at 09:33.

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **William Powell:** Bore da, a chroeso **William Powell:** Good morning, and a warm
cynnes nôl. welcome back.

[2] And also a happy new year, of course. It's great to see you all back this morning for this first session of the Petitions Committee of 2015. We have no apologies this morning—a full complement of Members—and the usual housekeeping arrangements apply. I am told that a little later this morning we may well be drawn into the Democracy Live focus from the BBC Parliament channel, who may be webcasting some of our deliberations. So, I look forward to that happening a little later.

09:34

Trafod y Sesiwn Dystiolaeth ar 9 Rhagfyr, 2014 - P-04-481 Cau'r Bwlch ar gyfer
Disgyblion Byddar yng Nghymru
Discussion of Evidence Session on 9 December 2014 - P-04-481 Close the Gap for
Deaf Pupils in Wales

[3] **William Powell:** If we move straight to our first item this morning, which is to consider the evidence that we received back on 9 December in relation to petition P-04-481,

close the gap for deaf pupils in Wales. We've got the transcript of that session in our papers today, if you'd like just to have a brief scan over that to refresh your memory of that important session, because it was a number of weeks ago. I'd appreciate any thoughts that you have. I think the one key recommendation that came out of it from my point of view, and the witnesses seemed quite strong on this, was the fact that they'd like us to see at least an example of good practice, in terms of good practice from the acoustics point of view, and I'd very much be interested in being involved in such a visit. But I'd very much appreciate your thoughts on the wider discussion and also on whether you're happy for us to seek to fix a visit at an appropriate early date. Joyce.

[4] **Joyce Watson:** Yes. Thank you, Chair. I think we would benefit from a visit. I thought the session was really good. I thought that everyone presented well and that we gained something from it. So, definitely, I would like to go and have a visit.

[5] **William Powell:** I think it was alarming to some extent to see that we are, in certain respects, somewhere behind the curve in terms of what has been done recently in England in terms of acoustics. I think if we can contribute to a better understanding of what could be done at relatively little cost in many cases, I think that would be doing something of great worth. Would any other colleagues like to add to that, or can we just agree at this point that the next step in our consideration should be—

[6] **Bethan Jenkins:** I mean, I wasn't here for the evidence session, so apologies, but I have visited organisations previously, and I've heard the recordings that you heard in the evidence session to try and empathise with the difficulty in the classroom situation, so I think that's really effective. For me, though, I suppose it would be interesting to look wider at local authorities because, in my area, for example, they're closing some schools and moving other schools there from one site to another. So, some pupils have been going to a perfectly new school, so these things won't be a problem, but then they're moving other children to the old school, which wouldn't be, you know, accessible in many of these ways. So, I think perhaps exploring those issues further as well would be interesting for this.

[7] **William Powell:** That's an interesting point. When you think about the impact of school reorganisation on pupils in general, that can be quite disruptive to learning and so on, to be in a new environment. If you've got pupils who do have hearing impairment, that is an added issue that I've not often heard referred to. Russell George.

[8] **Russell George:** I think, Chair, if I remember from the evidence session, there was also a suggestion that we would be able to experience what it would be like ourselves if we had a hearing impairment, and I think that would be useful. So, yes, I'd support a visit if that can be arranged.

[9] **William Powell:** Okay. Well, I think we've got an endorsement all round for the proposal to go for a visit, and we'll see what can be achieved there. We'll put that in the hands of our clerks to assist us to make that happen. Joyce.

[10] **Joyce Watson:** Can I add one other thing? I was looking for it in the evidence. In the evidence that we did take, it says that the Institute of Acoustics and the Association of Noise Consultants are working together for guidance, and that it would be available early in 2015. Maybe we could have sight of that. Also, in terms of your earlier reference about good things happening in England, could we have some evidence about the fact that they are happening rather than they're deemed to be necessary, because the two things might not quite be the same?

[11] **William Powell:** No, no, absolutely. We need to see solid evidence.

[12] **Joyce Watson:** If it has happened, how has it happened and what can we learn from it?

[13] **William Powell:** Yes, I think that would be good, and that could be achieved in part maybe from pursuing the first suggestion you referenced in terms of the Institute of Acoustics.

[14] **Joyce Watson:** Yes, thank you.

[15] **William Powell:** Good. So, I think that was a really useful session, as we've all agreed, and we can take it forward in the form of a visit.

09:39

Deisebau Newydd New Petitions

[16] **William Powell:** Now we've got agenda item 3: a number of new petitions. First of all—oh, it's one only. I thought we had two or three. Sorry. Absolutely. So, 3.1 is P-04-609, 'Support Small Businesses—Support our High Streets'. This petition was submitted by Lynne Wilson and collected 47 signatures. The text of that new petition reads as follows:

[17] 'We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to extend the relief available for small businesses beyond March 2015. In addition we ask that the decision be made and announced as soon as possible, ideally before the end of 2014, in order that business planning and development is not delayed.'

[18] Then, in the additional notes, clearly, there is reference there to the central role that small businesses play in town centres and high streets in the view of the petitioner and the supporters. Now, I wrote, on receipt of this petition, to the Minister for Education and Skills, seeking his views on the petition. We've got the view expressed by the Minister in the public papers, and we also have, already, a response from the petitioner. Now, I think one thing that's clear from the exchange that we have is that the petitioner wasn't actually aware of the level to which some of the aspirations contained in the petition are actually already in train. So, we are maybe not able to add enormous value to that, but I'd appreciate colleagues' views as to how we might proceed before closure. Joyce, you've indicated.

[19] **Joyce Watson:** Yeah. I think that that really is the issue here, isn't it—the lack of awareness? You know, the petitioner draws our attention in their reply to the fact that they didn't know that this was out there. It isn't really about putting fault any way here; it's about trying to understand a problem and trying to resolve it. So, it might be, in my opinion, worth trying to find out where, you know, this information sits and how easy it is to access it for people, because I'm sure that, you know, we could end up with another petition asking the same questions. If it's only the case that it's narrowly understood by all people, then, you know, it's not really going to help the people it's designed to help.

[20] **William Powell:** Yeah, I think, sometimes, we forget in this place, when you've got announcements, written statements, oral statements, and so on, and you've got a community of people who are waiting avidly for what comes out—. But, if you've got businesses up and down Wales struggling to get on with their day job, and I'm conscious I'm in the presence of a small business man at the table today, who may well have a view on the issue as well—. So, it's really a communications issue, as much as anything else, to make sure that that information is effectively accessible to people across Wales. Russell, I sense an indication from you.

[21] **Russell George:** Well, you did mention that the petitioner had responded to the Minister's letter, but I haven't got a copy of that. I was wondering what that said. What was there?

[22] **William Powell:** Well, the nub of the issue was that the petitioner wasn't—. There we are, you've got it to hand?

[23] **Russell George:** Oh, yes. I do see it, yes.

[24] **William Powell:** The petitioner wasn't aware of the substance of what the Minister had referenced in her letter to us.

[25] **Russell George:** Oh, sorry, yes, I understand. I can see the petitioner has replied to the Minister's letter.

[26] **William Powell:** Yes. That's right, yes—just commenting on the ministerial correspondence we received.

[27] **Russell George:** I mean, it might be worth us as a committee sharing that correspondence back with the Minister.

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

[29] **William Powell:** Absolutely. And drawing on some of the points that Joyce made earlier.

[30] **Russell George:** What's particularly important is that the petitioner wasn't aware of it, and that will be the experience of many other businesses up and down the country.

[31] **William Powell:** Exactly.

[32] **Russell George:** I think that's what we could point out, perhaps, to the Minister when we write back and perhaps ask her to address some sort of communication plan in that regard.

[33] **William Powell:** Exactly. We need to commit additional resource to getting the message out, really.

[34] **Bethan Jenkins:** But I think surely that's what, you know, the Federation of Small Businesses and others should be doing. So, I'd be interested to understand how they're not engaging effectively, if these types of businesses don't know, because they would be the catch-all organisation for, you know, the sole traders of this world.

[35] **William Powell:** Absolutely. They're the principal organisation. I mean, in my experience, they are very active both here and out there across the regions of Wales. But, not all businesses, I suppose, are going to be members, therefore they wouldn't be receiving their circulars and stuff. But the point is a good one.

[36] **Russell George:** I wonder if chambers of trades are also aware, because I actually had a chamber of trade locally contact me about this issue some months ago and they weren't aware and I told them. So, I think, obviously, a lot of businesses aren't members of the FSB—I take the point that Bethan made—but I think, perhaps, there is a bigger strategic plan—

[37] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yeah. Chambers of trade as well, definitely.

[38] **William Powell:** Yeah, and more informal business clusters and such bodies around Wales. I think there probably does need to be some additional energy going into getting the message out. Joyce.

[39] **Joyce Watson:** I'd also include local authorities, because we all know who collects business rates.

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

[41] **Joyce Watson:** So, without a doubt, you know, they are a key player.

09:45

[42] **William Powell:** And there might well be the possibility of some updates being included within the very demands for payment or whatever. So, there's always a way of doing that. Maybe that's happening in parts of Wales, but I'm not sure that it's as uniform good practice. Okay, I think that's a useful reflection on that, so we'll share the petitioner's comments back with the Minister, and, in our covering letter, flag up this issue around communication.

[43] **Mr George:** Can I just be clear? Do you want us to ask the Minister for comments on the issues about the FSB, chambers of trades and local authorities, or do you want us to actually approach these organisations ourselves? It might even—

[44] **Bethan Jenkins:** I think, in the first instance, it's easier to contact the Minister, because, otherwise—. There are a lot of chambers of trades across Wales.

[45] **William Powell:** If we keep it tight and then see what the next step might be.

[46] **Mr George:** Thank you.

[47] **Joyce Watson:** If I can, Chair?

[48] **William Powell:** Sure.

[49] **Joyce Watson:** I think, in light of my last comment about local authorities being the bodies who collect, I think writing to those—the Welsh Local Government Association certainly—so that we can get that information back at the same time, would be worthwhile.

[50] **William Powell:** Yeah. I think maybe we could write to—I think Tim Peppin is the director of regeneration, which is probably the closest, or to Steve Thomas, as the overall director. That's a good point and I'm happy to do that. Okay, good.

09:46

Y Wybodaeth Ddiweddaraf am Ddeisebau Blaenorol Updates to Previous Petitions

[51] **William Powell:** Moving now to agenda item 4, updates to previous petitions, the first is agenda item 4.1, P-04-440, Say NO to Asset Stripping at Bronllys Hospital. Now, this petition was submitted by Mr Michael Eccles, and was first considered back on 4 December 2012 and has the support of 3,144 signatures. I think, as I've previously done, I'll also do now, which is to put on the record that I do know some of these petitioners and this particular site is just adjacent to the boundary of my own county council ward in Powys and I'm pretty aware of some of these matters. So, the petition was last considered by us on 23 September

2014 and it was agreed to write to Powys Teaching Local Health Board asking for an update from its perspective, and also asking for views on the petitioner's letter and proposals that were emerging from the action group. No response had been received when the papers were put together, and I understand that we've not heard subsequently. The clerk is acknowledging that we've still not heard as yet. There certainly is some issue around proposed development initiatives at the Bronllys Hospital site, and I believe that a group related to the petitioners had a meeting with some officials just last week at Cathays park. So, clearly, things are happening, but what we've not heard, and I think it's important that we go back to them, is anything official from Powys Teaching Local Health Board. In that context, I think it would be useful to write to the relatively new chief executive, Bob Hudson, to ensure that he is fully up to speed with this and can share the full facts.

[52] **Russell George:** I think it's a new chair again, isn't it now, I think—apparently.

[53] **William Powell:** Yes. The chair is Viv Harpwood, I believe.

[54] **Russell George:** I think Bob Hudson has—

[55] **William Powell:** Bob Hudson as chief exec is still in, and the chair has—. There's been a recent change in terms of the chair, I understand.

[56] **Russell George:** Whoever that is, I think it's not very good if we haven't had a response to our letter of 17 October.

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

[58] **Russell George:** I mean, there's people who have to wait a great deal of time for treatment, but I think having a reply to a letter—. It should be sent to us fairly swiftly.

[59] **William Powell:** Yeah. I fully agree with that. And if we can send a chaser as soon as possible, I think it's—. We've had adverse experiences with other health boards but I think the Powys Teaching Local Health Board hasn't actually up to this point been too tardy in responding to correspondence, but this is an exception. So, if colleagues are happy, I'll write in that vein seeking further information. Good.

[60] Agenda item 4.2, P-04-448, Improve Sexual health services for Western Vale: this petition was submitted by Rebecca Lowrie and was first considered by us on 29 January 2013, having collected 16 signatures. Now, we last considered correspondence on this back in June of this year and agreed to write to the Minister expressing serious concern at the lack of response from Cardiff and Vale University Local Health Board, and also to the community health council, similarly expressing concerns about the lack of response. Now, we do have correspondence from the Minister to Maria Battle, Chair of Cardiff and Vale University Local Health Board. The Minister's letter wasn't originally received by the clerking team, and that's why it's dated September 2014. A response from Cardiff and Vale ULHB has still not been forthcoming, so picking up my earlier reference to problems with correspondence, and, I think, really, we need to write again to the Minister, expressing our very serious concern at this lack of response, because I think a committee of this Assembly does deserve a greater courtesy than that so that we can proceed with our business. And maybe we should also write to Adam Cairns, the chief executive of the health board, as well, if we've not done so, to double our chance, maybe, of a response. I think that would be in order, if colleagues are agreed.

[61] **Bethan Jenkins:** I kind of think we should ask them to come in, because, time and again, we have people not answering our letters, and I think we should say, 'We'd expect you to come in now, and to talk about these issues', because we can't keep writing back and forth,

and I think—

[62] **William Powell:** Well, it's debilitating, and it's undermining our work, really.

[63] **Bethan Jenkins:** —it's a respect to give to us. So, that's what I'd say in this letter, in the letters that we write back: 'We would like to take evidence from you on this issue.'

[64] **William Powell:** I think there's merit in that. Joyce.

[65] **Joyce Watson:** I'm not at all happy that we haven't been replied to, and I agree wholeheartedly that it is now undermining our role. So, that does concern me. I'm not against having them in, as Bethan has suggested, because, if they can't write to us, they might see some merit in coming in front of us. So, I'm quite happy to do both, to say, 'Where is your reply?'—

[66] **William Powell:** I think we need to do that now, because this has just reached absurd proportions.

[67] **Mr George:** Can I just make one point, which is that this is one particular health authority that hasn't responded on this occasion? They're not the only ones, so—

[68] **Bethan Jenkins:** But the petition is from this area.

[69] **Mr George:** Yes. I'm just wondering: is it from this particular health authority—or health board, rather—or more generally that you'd like to take evidence?

[70] **William Powell:** Bethan, then Joyce.

[71] **Bethan Jenkins:** Well, it's about this area, isn't it? That's the thing. The petitioner is specifically looking at this.

[72] **William Powell:** For this specific discussion, absolutely, yes.

[73] **Bethan Jenkins:** I mean, it was a general point, in that we haven't had some correspondence from other health boards, so I wouldn't want to single them out, per se, but I think that it gets to a point where, if people are not responding, then—. That's all. It's just my reaction is, well, we should ask them to come in, then, if they can't be bothered to write to us.

[74] **William Powell:** Well, that's right, and I think that is within our rights, isn't it, as a committee? Joyce, you'd indicated.

[75] **Joyce Watson:** But it's a fair point—you know, they're not the only health board. We've just heard about Powys LHB not responding to us in the previous correspondence. And, you know, we do have to treat people equally, because that's something we've always done. So, I think, you know, we have to consider, if we're calling one health board in because they haven't replied, do we then call all health boards in, or do we call no health boards in? And I think it's a fair point. So, I think it's something we need to think about. And I'm not against, actually, calling them in—whoever they are—if they fail to respond.

[76] **William Powell:** I think, if we take that step, we then need to adopt a consistent approach.

[77] **Bethan Jenkins:** Well, okay, then, we can write to them again, and say, 'Please answer us. If you don't next time, we will expect you to come in', because it's—

[78] **Mr George:** What I was going to suggest was that, if you let us produce a paper, detailing where we've had difficulties getting responses from health boards on a number of petitions, you can then decide where you want to focus your energies.

[79] **William Powell:** Yeah, that's right. I think that makes sense. The thing that's unique about this particular example is that we've got correspondence from the Minister berating them on their lack of response, and that's ratcheting things up further, really.

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

[81] **William Powell:** And I'm a bit puzzled by that. Okay, I think that's a—. I think we've got a united approach there, which is good.

[82] Agenda item 4.3, P-04-587 A Dedicated Support Team for Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (M.E.), Chronic Fatigue Syndrome & Fibromyalgia Sufferers in South East Wales: now, the committee considered the petition for the first time in September of last year, and we agreed to write to the Minister for Health and Social Services, seeking his views. The Minister's response, which includes the ME and CFS and FM task and finish group's report and recommendations is available in our public papers, together with a full response from the petitioners. I think we probably, at this point, ought to be writing to the Minister, drawing his attention to some of the additional comments made, asking for more information. What do colleagues think is the best way forward? Any specific other points, or are we happy with that? Okay, we're happy to take that forward in that way.

[83] Agenda item 4.4, P-04-600, Petition to save general practice—Wales. Now, this petition was submitted by the Royal College of General Practitioners and was first considered on 7 October 2014, and it's got the support of 15,000 paper signatures and over 500 electronic signatures on our alternative e-petition website. I think we get a clear indication from that level of support across Wales quite how seriously the future of general practice is concerning people the length and breadth of the country. Now, we last considered this, or rather the first consideration was back in October of 2014 and we agreed to write to the Minister for Health and Social Services, Mark Drakeford, seeking his views on the petition, and we've got a response from the Minister, together with further feedback from the petitioners. Colleagues, I would value your thoughts as to how we best proceed with this one.

[84] **Bethan Jenkins:** I think most of it is to do with funding and the lack of recognition of the funding cut in real terms to the sector, and so I think writing back to the Minister, sort of highlighting those key points in what the petitioners have told us—. I think, not only are the Royal College of General Practitioners rightly concerned about the sustainability and the flexibility, but the people of Wales are too, and while new funding is welcome, there are still services that are not happening in a flexible way. You know, people who are working are finding it very difficult to access GPs still, and so I think it's something that is a ticking time-bomb really, because we want to stop people going to A&E but they are going to A&E because they can't get to go to the GP within their working lives. So, I think that's where we need to go on that, and to refer it to the health committee. I know they're really pressured as well, but I suppose it's for them to look at.

[85] **William Powell:** Yes, well, I think perhaps it's worth us giving a little more consideration to a formal referral of this petition to the Health and Social Care Committee, because if we do that, my understanding is that we can, rather than just asking them to consider their forward work programme, because this is so central to the future of health provision in this country and is affecting rural communities, valley communities and urban centres, I just wondered whether it would be worth us doing what we've done very sparingly, I think, in recent times, which is to formally refer it to the Health and Social Care Committee because—

[86] **Bethan Jenkins:** That doesn't mean that they have to do anything with it anyway, does it though?

[87] **William Powell:** Can I ask our clerk to come in on that point as it's something to have some discussion about.

[88] **Mr George:** It means effectively that they become the committee that's responsible for the petition, so they would then decide what action to take on it and—

[89] **Williams Powell:** They haven't actually done that in the fourth Assembly, have they?

[90] **Mr George:** No

[91] **William Powell:** Not in my recollection, but possibly in your previous experience in the third Assembly.

[92] **Mr George:** They would become responsible for the petition. They would be responsible for pursuing it and, if they felt it appropriate, for closing it. Obviously, this committee would still keep a sort of watching brief on that and we'd report back.

[93] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yeah.

[94] **William Powell:** I think it would be a recognition of the seriousness with which we hold the matter and that they are the committee with the particular remit to undertake further work on it. I'd appreciate your thoughts though, because we don't do so lightly. Joyce.

[95] **Joyce Watson:** No, we can't do so lightly, and, you know, the point here is that there are many issues. It's not just funding, which has been mentioned, although I'm sure that plays a part, but there are training issues, recruitment issues; you know, there are many many issues underpinning this, and it's about capacity, of course, to explore it. If we sent it formally to the Petitions Committee—this is my question—

[96] **William Powell:** To health and social care.

[97] **Joyce Watson:** If they then say they haven't got the capacity to look at it, what then? I think that's a fundamental question we need to have the answer to.

[98] **William Powell:** Maybe at this stage, it would be sensible to have informal contact with the clerking team and with David Rees as Chair, to ascertain that, and then, in a more informed way, we can decide how to proceed at an early future meeting. Is that sensible?

10:00

[99] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes, but I also think, on process—whether this is for a private discussion—. Sincerely, now, having been on this committee for quite some time, I think it would be very, very useful if we had an idea of each committee's working programmes, so that we can actually see where we could, potentially, fit in a petition, and so that we are not, sort of, unaware of what committees are doing, because, you know—

[100] **William Powell:** I think it's a point that's well made.

[101] **Bethan Jenkins:** —there are some spaces some times, but I know from education that we've got legislation all the time at the moment—

[102] **William Powell:** Yes. Similarly with the Environment and Sustainability Committee.

[103] **Bethan Jenkins:** —so, it's in between legislation where we can do these things effectively and it would really help. I know it may change, but at least if we had an outline from the other committees, it might help, I think.

[104] **William Powell:** I think that would be useful for our information, because then we could sort of consider things more in the round. But, what we must ensure is that this isn't—wherever this is taken forward—prematurely closed, because it's an issue that we're just at the start of in my view.

[105] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yeah, exactly.

[106] **Joyce Watson:** And we need to write back, don't we, to the Minister, asking for views on the comments of—

[107] **William Powell:** Absolutely. We must do that in any event. Absolutely. Yeah, I'm committed to doing that. Good. Thanks for your contributions there.

[108] Agenda item 4.5, P-04-546, Rearing of Animals in Unnatural Conditions. Now, this petition was submitted by Jeanii Colbourne and was first considered on 29 April 2014. It has the support of 23 signatures. Now, if you recall, when we first considered it, we agreed to write to the petitioner to seek a little additional clarification to enable us to take forward our consideration of the petition. Now, we've got that additional clarity, which I think does give us some help in considering it. In the light of that, are colleagues happy for me to write on behalf of the committee to Rebecca Evans, Deputy Minister for Farming and Food, seeking her opinion on the matter?

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

[110] **William Powell:** Are colleagues agreed on that?

[111] **Bethan Jenkins:** Agreed.

[112] **William Powell:** Good.

[113] Moving now to agenda item 4.6, P-04-540, Stop Sexism in Domestic Abuse. This petition was submitted, as we will recall, by Healing Men campaign group, and was first considered on 11 March 2014. It's got the support of 238 signatures. Now, we last considered correspondence on this on 11 September and we did agree—I'm sorry; 11 November 2014, my apologies—and we agreed to write to await the petitioner's further comments. These have now been received and are available in the public pack. Some of the petitioner's key points, as you'll note, have been highlighted by him to aid our consideration of his points.

[114] Now, clearly, we were, on the last occasion, minded to close the petition in the context of the work that's gone into the gender-based violence Bill, which is currently under consideration. It might still have merit for us to write to Leighton Andrews, Minister for Public Services, to get his perspective on Mr Stott's recent submission, and I'm open to either approach, really, I'd appreciate your thoughts on taking this forward. Joyce.

[115] **Joyce Watson:** I actually asked—suggested—closing last time.

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

[117] **Joyce Watson:** So, I'm going to be consistent, because I'm going to ask the same

thing now. The gender-based violence Bill has changed again and the title of it has changed again. It's specifically about women and children, as my understanding is, so it's worth checking that the title name has changed. We can, if we like, ask the Minister for Public Services for his views on it—that's fine—and we can send those back to the petitioner, but I am minded to close this petition because I think we've done everything we can and I think all we're going to do from here on is go back and forth with those two individuals, perhaps, writing to each other.

[118] **William Powell:** I'm grateful for the clarity on the renaming of the emerging legislation and also your indication that you think Leighton Andrews might have something to add to this in terms of considering the petitioner's views. Russell is keen to make a contribution.

[119] **Russell George:** Yes, Chair. It's quite a detailed letter, so I would agree with Joyce that we should share this letter with the Minister. Obviously, when we have a reply, we can let the petitioner know. But, in that case, the petition is staying open because we're still in the process of dealing with it.

[120] **William Powell:** I think consistency, probably, with other petitions would require that to be the case, but we are moving towards the end of our consideration. Joyce is clearly of that view.

[121] **Russell George:** I'd agree we're moving towards the end, but I would propose that we do send this letter to the Minister.

[122] **William Powell:** I would be interested in Mr Andrews's perspective on these matters, particularly given the dynamic situation that Joyce has described in terms of the approach to the Bill, and particularly even to its title.

[123] **Bethan Jenkins:** I've heard issues with the Dyn Project before from people, but I just want to understand from the petitioner why he believes that an organisation called Wales Women's Aid wouldn't be able to support men in a non-equal way. He's saying that it's intricately connected with Safer Wales and Wales Women's Aid and founded on the same gendered understanding that men and only men are violent. I just don't understand why they have that initial reaction to thinking that a helpline that is supposed to help men, because it's run by these organisations would, just by implication then, be thinking that men would be treated in that way. Because, obviously, if that is the case, and the stats with regard to the corresponding information on men and screening men—. We need to be aware, if that's happening, that that's not acceptable, but, then again, why does the petitioner presume that it would be a negative thing for such an organisation to be run by Safer Wales and Wales Women's Aid? I think the way it's all being talked about is as if that is an issue and they have an issue with how those organisations are run. We are not here to do that per se, but, if the issues are true, then I think the Minister is the person to deal with it. There's only so much—. We can't change how these organisations are funded, how they are run. The Minister has to react to them.

[124] The other thing was a hypothetical issue on page 81 of our packs, about a boy not being able to go into a refuge. Well, my understanding is that boys can go into refuge. I've known of an experience where a boy wasn't because of his behaviour, but if it's a hypothetical example, we need to know if that's based on evidence that they've had or whether it's just something that they've come up with, because I know that that's not always the case. And it wouldn't just be because they were a boy; it would be because they would be other circumstances around that child—

[125] **William Powell:** Yes, behaviours or other issues that make it difficult to manage.

[126] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes, behaviours that that child would have. So, you know, I think we are going to be going back and forth, back and forth on this, because they clearly have issues with the organisations in question.

[127] **William Powell:** Given those couple of questions you've just asked about why they think this, it seems to me the only way we could achieve an answer is to ask them, but I didn't sense an appetite to do that before. What should we do first? Should we be writing to the Minister highlighting these matters—

[128] **Bethan Jenkins:** I just keep sort of opening up new avenues.

[129] **William Powell:** Well, absolutely, yes, that's right. We're not here to shut them down, but—

[130] **Russell George:** No. I would agree, actually, that the way that they've approached this is a bit—. They could've done it differently, I think. But, in one sense, it's perhaps not for our committee to start questioning the details behind the petitions. It's for us to pass this on to the Minister and for the Minister, perhaps—

[131] **Bethan Jenkins:** Well, and the Bill. If they could've given evidence—I don't know whether they've asked to give evidence to the committee on the Bill—that would've been perfect for them because—

[132] **William Powell:** It certainly would, yes.

[133] **Bethan Jenkins:** —that's where legislation is being made now, not here, you know.

[134] **William Powell:** No, absolutely.

[135] **Mr George:** We did draw the petition to the attention of the committee that was considering the Bill. I don't know what weight they gave to it.

[136] **William Powell:** Who chairs the relevant committee, just to be clear?

[137] **Ms Thomas:** Christine Chapman.

[138] **William Powell:** Christine Chapman.

[139] **Mr George:** It's the communities committee.

[140] **William Powell:** Right, okay.

[141] **Bethan Jenkins:** Okay. You know, I don't take away from what they feel, but I do believe that they have an issue with some organisations, and that's their focus then, as opposed to, you know, where they want to take it—

[142] **William Powell:** And that informs their further thinking.

[143] **Bethan Jenkins:** They'll probably lambast me for that, but you know, hey, we're living in a democracy.

[144] **William Powell:** Absolutely, but I think in the covering letter that I send to Leighton Andrews I need to—

[145] **Mr George:** [*Inaudible.*]

[146] **William Powell:** Right, okay. Written evidence has actually been submitted by Mr Stott and his colleagues to the committee that's scrutinising the Bill, so that's reassuring to know. In my letter to Leighton Andrews, I can certainly flag up specifically some of the issues that you've just raised, Bethan, to alert him to those particular issues of concern.

[147] **Bethan Jenkins:** Because it's for the record, the projects that they mention are supposed to be gender-neutral in the sense that, you know, men would ring for equal access to support.

[148] **William Powell:** They're giving counsel and support regardless of gender, yes.

[149] **Bethan Jenkins:** So, you know, if there's an issue around that, then that's for the Minister to look at by virtue of the funding that they get. I'm sure that the organisations in question would say that they don't act in that way, but we have evidence here—

[150] **William Powell:** There's always room for improvement, and there's always training and support that can make that happen, if it's not currently happening. Joyce.

[151] **Joyce Watson:** I wasn't going to open up the debate—

[152] **Bethan Jenkins:** Sorry, it was my fault.

[153] **Joyce Watson:** You said you have, so I'll join in. I have to support what Bethan said. I've worked with Women's Aid for many years, and it is clearly not the case that a 13-year-old boy, as they state here, for no other reason other than the fact that he's a boy, would be refused entry into a refuge. That is not true, and I know it not to be true. So, terming it as a hypothetical doesn't actually help, in my opinion, to make a case—certainly not with me it doesn't. But, there are other issues that have been raised, and Bethan has raised some of them. The Minister can answer those. I think, because Women's Aid have been mentioned here so very often within this, in a not very pleasant manner—and it isn't pleasant; the whole thing is—. They talk about a bias. There's a clear bias in another direction within all of this. But, that being said, I think it's only fair that Women's Aid have a chance to answer some of the allegations that are sitting in front of us by another organisation. I think we need to give them that opportunity. I think we do need to write to the Minister, and if they have given evidence, and they've taken the opportunity to give the evidence, to the committee that is taking forward the piece of legislation, that is a good thing, because it will be considered within that. That is the right place at the moment, as Bethan has quite rightly said, for these people to be seeking an opinion on their views. I am somewhat concerned that there has been an attack within the letter that we have received on an organisation that only really, in my opinion, seeks to discredit that organisation, and absolutely nothing else. I think that we have to give them an opportunity to answer those. Whether we ask the Minister, of course, in the letter that we send, to seek those answers is entirely up to us.

[154] **William Powell:** I'd be happy to build that into my covering letter. It's a letter that needs to be quite carefully crafted together to draw on the points that you've just made, but I'm happy for that to happen, and to give it some priority as well, because obviously this meeting is happening today, and people are watching our deliberations in different parts of Wales and beyond, and I think that we need to make sure that these matters aren't left to fester. We need to have some clarity.

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

[156] **William Powell:** Agreed? Okay. Thank you very much for your full contributions in

that regard.

[157] Moving now to agenda item 4.7, which is P-04-516, Make political science compulsory in education, this petition was submitted by Mark Griffiths and we first considered it on 26 November 2013. It's got the support of 12 signatures.

10:15

[158] We last considered correspondence on this almost one year after receiving it, on 11 November 2014, and we agreed to seek further comments from the petitioner on the correspondence that we've received from Professor Donaldson, who is carrying out a review of the curriculum in Wales. We've also got Professor Donaldson's letter and a further response from the petitioner, here in our public papers. I think, at this stage, it would clearly be sensible to share those comments back with Professor Donaldson. In doing so, we could also draw this to a close, or I would be happy to take advice from colleagues. Bethan.

[159] **Bethan Jenkins:** Sorry, I know I don't want to keep them open unnecessarily, but there's no guarantee—. Donaldson should be reporting soon; there's no guarantee that it will include anything substantial on this, yet—not that I'm saying that it wouldn't. So, personally, I would like to keep it open until we know that, because I go into schools with the outreach team quite a lot, and even though they're interested when I go there—obviously—their level of understanding isn't that great. I think it's a massive issue, actually, for young people, especially because, potentially, they'll get to vote in the income tax referendum. So, I think I would personally prefer to leave it open until we have some understanding from Donaldson, but I don't know if anybody agrees with me.

[160] **William Powell:** I'm happy to be advised on that.

[161] **Russell George:** That's fine.

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

[163] **William Powell:** Okay, I think we've got consensus there that it would be premature to close just yet, and I'm happy to share the comments with Professor Donaldson and to see what feedback we receive, and the wider publication of that piece of work.

[164] We're moving now to agenda item 4.8, P-04-589, Reduce the Number of Councillors and Executive Members in Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council. This petition was submitted by Julian Price and was first considered on 23 September 2014, and Mr Price has got the support of 34 fellow signatories, seeking to slim down the membership of Blaenau Gwent council. Now, we considered the petition for the first time on 23 September 2014, when we agreed to write to Leighton Andrews, the Minister for Public Services, seeking his views. Indeed, we have a robust and clear response from the Minister for Public Services, basically pointing out that this would be a somewhat futile exercise in the context of the delivery of the Williams review into local government. So, I'd be happy to write to the petitioner asking for his comments on Leighton Andrews's letter, but my sense is that this petition is not really something we can usefully take much further. I would appreciate colleagues' comments. Russell George.

[165] **Russell George:** Well, you've already written once asking for his comments, so can I suggest that you write just asking him to confirm that he received the original letter?

[166] **William Powell:** And indicating our proposal to close.

[167] **Russell George:** And indicating our proposal to close, unless we hear any further

comments. If we don't hear any comments within a month, then close the petition.

[168] **William Powell:** I think that's a sensible way forward to bring it to a more express conclusion. Thank you very much.

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

[170] **William Powell:** Agenda item 4.9, P-04-591, Fair Funding for Local Government. This petition was submitted by Unison and was first considered on 23 September 2014. It's got the support of 180 electronic signatures and in excess of 800 signatures collected by an associated petition. We considered the petition for the first time back on 23 September, and agreed to write to the Minister for Public Services, seeking his views. We've got, again, a clear response from Leighton Andrews on this particular petition, but, as yet, we've not received a response from the petitioner. Probably, it might be sensible to adopt exactly the same approach with regard to this petition.

[171] **Russell George:** Chair, do the same thing.

[172] **William Powell:** We'll chase it up, but I'm not clear that we can do a whole lot more about this petition, either, in the light of the Minister's comments.

[173] **Joyce Watson:** We can't.

[174] **William Powell:** So, if colleagues are happy with that approach, I'll make sure that the correspondence goes off in a timely fashion to keep the pace of our work.

10:19

Adolygiad o'r System Ddeisebau Review of the Petitions System

[175] **William Powell:** Now, at 10.19 a.m., we move to agenda item 5, the review of the petitions system. We've got correspondence, for which we are grateful, from the Presiding Officer, who always takes a keen interest in our deliberations. We received a letter on 17 December, and colleagues have had the opportunity to give some study to that. I'm also grateful to the clerking team for providing us with a private paper to give some shape to our review of the petitions system, which we hope will contribute, in no small way, to becoming a kind of legacy report, in time, for the work of this committee in the fourth Assembly. First of all, I need to gauge with colleagues that you're happy to proceed with the piece of work that the Presiding Officer is requesting that we do. It seems on balance a sensible approach, but I may be sitting—

[176] **Bethan Jenkins:** What would happen if we said 'no'? [*Laughter.*]

[177] **William Powell:** It's unlike you to be provocative, Bethan, but let's just speculate for a moment.

[178] **Bethan Jenkins:** Naturally, I'd love to do the piece of work.

[179] **William Powell:** Yes. Excellent. Is Russell George the centre of rebellion? [*Laughter.*]

[180] **Bethan Jenkins:** He's a Tory.

[181] **Russell George:** I'll consider the Presiding Officer's request and I'm happy to follow

her request. I'm happy that we do a piece of work on it. That seems sensible to me that we do.

[182] **Bethan Jenkins:** He wants something off her.

[183] **William Powell:** In that case, it's all down to Joyce.

[184] **Joyce Watson:** I think it's an excellent idea that we do this piece of work. In all seriousness, it's a piece of work that we've identified in our committee about what are we doing, how are we doing it, sometimes why are we doing it, and how can we improve it for the people out there, because people take petitions very seriously, and we deal with some very, very serious issues—we've already done that this morning. So, anything that can help us to help the petitioners has to be of benefit. So, absolutely.

[185] **Bethan Jenkins:** We're going to have to consult on this though, aren't we? We can't just decide ourselves because there are questions in there like, 'Should political parties put petitions in?' and so forth. We can't just sort of—

[186] **William Powell:** We've got a significant job of work to do in terms of drawing on the views of stakeholders. Also it's quite instructive, I find, that when we occasionally have substitutes that come to the committee, they sometimes ask questions about our procedures and are genuinely interested—I'm thinking about Ann and Lindsay who've subbed in recent times; they bring some quite interesting thoughts. So, I think clearly that fellow Assembly Members also need to be part of this process, so that they've got ownership as well and understand what we do.

[187] If I could refer you to pages 108 and 109 of the private paper, we've got a really helpful outline of a possible approach to this review that's been constructed by the clerking team. What are your thoughts regarding that? Also, in annex 3, there is a proposed timeline for this piece of work that basically will be running concurrently with the rest of our work during the remainder of this calendar year.

[188] **Joyce Watson:** I think it's okay.

[189] **Russell George:** To me, Chair, I think that our consultation—. I'd prefer it if we were more involved in looking at how other institutions conduct their business and their petitions, rather than asking members of the public, because I'm not quite sure, if they've not been involved in the process at all, how much benefit it would be in asking a member of the public who is not even aware of the system as it is already.

[190] **Bethan Jenkins:** They might not be aware because we haven't explained it in a way that—.

[191] **William Powell:** I think it would also be useful to go back to previous customers, so to speak, in terms of people who have made use of the process.

[192] **Bethan Jenkins:** 'Citizens', I would say, not 'customers'; I hate the word 'customers'.

[193] **William Powell:** Okay, that was the wrong choice of words; those who've been part of the petitions process in this Assembly.

[194] **Bethan Jenkins:** They elect us.

[195] **William Powell:** We've had some occasions when we've been able to deliver some or all of what petitioners want; on other occasions, unfortunately, we've not, and that's the

nature of life.

[196] **Russell George:** I think that's a fair comment, Chair, but I'd just rather put our emphasis slightly more on looking at how other institutions conduct their business. Once we've done that piece of work, that might then result in us perhaps involving members of the public to say, 'Well, this is what we suggest, what do you think?'

[197] **William Powell:** Yes, as we refine our thoughts then. We have over the months, and the last couple of years, hosted fact-finding visits;

[198] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes, we have—Scotland.

[199] **William Powell:** We had Andrew Lansley and Tom Brake from Westminster, who came to share part of our meeting, and then we had some discussion around that. We've hosted a group of people from the Scottish Parliament. We've had interest from Ireland. We've also had some academic interest from Dr Catherine Bochel who did a piece of work about 18 months or two years ago that would be worth us—

[200] **Russell George:** They've been asking us questions; we need to be asking them.

[201] **William Powell:** We need to do the reverse.

[202] **Bethan Jenkins:** I went to Scotland.

[203] **Russell George:** Did you? Okay.

[204] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes, we went to Scotland. When was it?

[205] **William Powell:** That didn't involve any of us.

[206] **Russell George:** Not this committee.

[207] **Mr George:** That was a long time ago.

[208] **William Powell:** I think that was in your previous role in the third Assembly.

[209] **Bethan Jenkins:** Exactly. So, we have done fact-finding. It would be good to look at other countries, not just Scotland, if they have such systems.

[210] **William Powell:** Joyce and I have the privilege to be members of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, which brings together a number of these jurisdictions—both the Irish Republic and Stormont, and the remaining jurisdictions within the UK. I hope that we can, in the margins of that, gain some traction with them.

[211] **Russell George:** You would have my support, you know, for the both of you, if you've got colleagues on there that are involved in the system, to discuss that in a formal capacity with them, because I think that would be useful.

[212] **William Powell:** That would be helpful.

[213] I am also conscious that, among the MEPs, I believe Jill Evans has done a particular piece of work exploring the role of petitions, and actually assisted some groups in south-west Wales on issues around that in terms of harnessing the petitions process in the European Parliament. It might well be useful to seek her experience, and maybe other colleagues. I think she's, of the four Welsh MEPs, probably the most active in that particular field of the

Parliament's work.

[214] **Joyce Watson:** I think, Chair, that, you know, allowing people an opportunity that's been emulated by Westminster—because they've now got a petitions committee: we were first; they were second to do that—is always a good thing to be doing. You never know what's coming through your door, so you don't control it and that is absolutely right. In terms of us both being on BIPA, the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, I think we can use that as a vehicle, in that it doesn't cost more time than is necessary for us to do a piece of work, and I'm quite happy and I welcome Russell's comments in that direction—and any other bodies that we happen to be on, as well. I think there are organisations out there that perhaps don't know that there are avenues open to them, and they might be pursuing pieces of work, but do not know where to take those pieces of work to gain some influence. So, I think it would be worth it. But I agree with the terms of reference, which is what we're asked to do today.

[215] **William Powell:** Yes, they're comprehensive aren't they, to be fair?

[216] **Joyce Watson:** And we can look at the list of consultees and decide on those.

[217] **William Powell:** Also, with an emphasis on outreach, both at our sort of regular events, such as the Eisteddfod and the Royal Welsh Show, but also other listening sessions, with us in listening mode in north Wales and west Wales, I think it's really important that that's being factored in there. I think it's very useful that we are properly in listening mode, to see what members of the public come back to. But probably, as Russell George said, it would be useful for that to be a little later, once we've undertaken some more focused work from those who have been involved in the petitions process, and also other legislatures that may have got experience to share with us.

[218] **Russell George:** I think, Chair, the timetable, I would suggest, should be perhaps turned around a bit, so that we do the piece of work of looking at how other institutions do their business first, come up with some recommendations, and then we consult on that and do it that way around, rather than asking the public for their views and then going forward.

[219] **William Powell:** Okay. So, you're suggesting sort of February, April, and then February, July—probably for that to be switched, in a sense.

[220] **Russell George:** Yeah.

[221] **Joyce Watson:** I'm happy with that, and I think it makes sense, because at least we'll have some options to present then to the public. I think that makes sense.

[222] **William Powell:** Yeah. And if we can all four be involved in different ways with any rapporteur work, as necessary, to sort of share that workload, I think that would be good.

[223] **Joyce Watson:** Yeah. I will be involved in some rapporteur work with yourself, Chair, in Dublin.

[224] **Russell George:** I think, Chair, it would be useful if we all agree between ourselves, because we're all involved in different aspects, including yourself and Joyce, but if any of us feels that we've got an opportunity to meet, perhaps without the whole committee, and one of us can meet somebody to discuss it, then perhaps we raise it with you, and we can perhaps do—

[225] **William Powell:** Yeah, okay. As long as it's done in a coherent way and the clerk is fully involved.

[226] **Russell George:** Sometimes, we don't need to make a big issue. We can do some work perhaps in a more economical way with our time, as well.

10:30

[227] **William Powell:** Absolutely. I am conscious that, in recent weeks, we've had a significant volume of correspondence going through, with the busy agendas for the meetings that we've had in the last couple of meetings of 2014. There's going to be a lot of work coming up the track, and, no doubt, there will be an influx of new petitions in the coming weeks. As we draw our discussion on this, and, indeed, this meeting, to a close today, I note that there are no petition presentations this week. So, just to confirm, there are no petition presentations on this week, but we look forward very much to taking forward this important review. Thank you very much for your attendance and contributions today. Diolch yn fawr iawn.

*Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 10:30.
The meeting ended at 10:30.*