



Cynulliad
Cenedlaethol
Cymru

National
Assembly for
Wales

Cofnod y Trafodion The Record of Proceedings

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau

The Petitions Committee

19/01/2016

Agenda'r Cyfarfod

Meeting Agenda

Trawsgrifiadau'r Pwyllgor

Committee Transcripts



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

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

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

Elin Jones	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
William Powell	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Welsh Liberal Democrats (Committee Chair)
Joyce Watson	Llafur Labour

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

Gill Eveleigh	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Steve George	Clerc Clerk
Kath Thomas	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Katie Wyatt	Cynghorydd Cyfreithiol Legal Adviser

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 09:06.

The meeting began at 09:06.

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions

- [1] **William Powell:** Bore da, bawb—good morning, all.
- [2] Blwyddyn newydd dda. A happy new year to you.
- [3] Welcome to this first meeting of the new year of the Petitions

Committee. There are no fire drills planned this morning, so, if the alarm goes off, it's for real. Otherwise, normal housekeeping arrangements apply. We've received apologies both from Bethan Jenkins and from Russell George, and I'm pleased to welcome Elin Jones as a substitute for Bethan at this morning's meeting.

09:07

Deisebau Newydd New Petitions

[4] **William Powell:** So, with no further ado, we move to agenda item 2—new petitions for consideration. We start with agenda item 2.1, P-04-661, 'Prohibit Online Use and Electronic Voting by Assembly Members in the Senedd Chamber'. This petition was submitted by Sovereign Wales and collected three signatures—ten were not required as the petition was submitted by the organisation Sovereign Wales. The text reads as follows:

[5] 'We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to ensure that Assembly Members are prohibited from using the internet during Senedd sessions and to ensure voting in the Senedd is either done by a show of hands, orally or by paper ballot.'

[6] I'm not quite clear as to whether or not we need to declare an interest in this since it relates to us, but maybe not. A first-consideration letter was sent regarding this petition to the Presiding Officer on 17 November, and the Presiding Officer has sent a full response, which is available in the public papers, together with some further comments from Sovereign Wales. We've got a fairly clear response from the Presiding Officer. I think our normal practice in a situation like this would be to share the comments from the petitioner back with the PO, but I'd welcome a steer from colleagues as to how you'd like to proceed. It's an interesting petition and some of the issues that it raises are quite thought provoking, I think it's fair to say. Joyce, any thoughts on this one?

[7] **Joyce Watson:** Well, I'm using my laptop here this morning, as you can see, to keep up with this committee, and, if I wasn't using it, I'd have many more papers printed out.

[8] **William Powell:** Such is my case.

[9] **Joyce Watson:** So, I think the case here is that the Presiding Officer has been quite clear in her response, but there are two parts to this. One is the use of information technology, which I'm going to continue using, and the other is the electronic voting or show of hands. So, there are two issues. I think it's obvious that the electronic voting is a system that works most of the time and allows a clear record of how people have voted, which is then accessed and available—

[10] **William Powell:** And an efficient use of time, I think it's fair to say, almost always.

[11] **Joyce Watson:** And a very efficient use of time. But, it isn't for us here to decide that. It is for the Presiding Officer and the Commission, and the Presiding Officer's been quite clear. I think that we can send the comments out to the petitioner, to the Presiding Officer and see really where we go from there—and I would suggest also to the Commissioners.

[12] **William Powell:** I think it would be sensible to share it with the PO and the wider Commission. My sense is probably that there's not a huge amount that we can do in terms of taking it further, but, at this stage, I think it would be sensible to give that feedback.

[13] **Elin Jones:** That's fine.

[14] **William Powell:** Excellent. Agenda item 2.2 is P-04-662, 'It is Hard to Conceive What Life Would Have Become Without my Support Worker'. This petition was submitted by Lisa Pritchard and collected 664 signatures. The text reads as follows:

[15] 'After two years of hard, challenging yet rewarding support from my support worker I am today studying at University whilst living a life fuelled by lots of love, hope, happiness and laughter. I'm working to put myself in a position to provide a good life for my family. My support worker is still my daily affirmation to 'Live my Dreams'.'

[16] 'The post is funded by the Supporting People Programme. Without the programme me and my family wouldn't have had that life changing and life-saving support.'

[17] 'I would like the whole of Wales to know what Supporting People money does and I call upon our Welsh Government to continue to support

and commit to protect it in future, so that thousands of people in Wales will get the same kind of life-saving support I received.'

[18] 'I'm grateful for the Supporting People Programme, it helped save my life. If you want to ensure that the same support will always be available to others, please sign my petition.'

[19] It's obviously a very emotive and passionate appeal there from the petitioner. A first-consideration letter was sent to the Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty back on 24 November. We've got a full response from the Minister. We have shared that back to the petitioner, but at the time when our agenda was being assembled, we hadn't heard back. So, I think it would probably be sensible to await a response from the petitioner to the Minister's considered comments.

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

[21] **William Powell:** Colleagues are happy with that; okay. Agenda item 2.3 is P-04-663, 'Food in Welsh Hospitals'. This petition was submitted by Rachel Flint and collected 40 signatures. It reads as follows:

[22] 'We the undersigned call on the Welsh Government to examine the standards of food in hospitals in Wales. Each health board's provision must be investigated to ensure it is fit for purpose for patients, those with dietary needs and medical conditions, and impose standards across the whole of the Welsh NHS. Hospital food should be nutritious, fresh and be a major part of a patient's care package and road to recovery—not make things worse. Dietary needs must be catered for—such as gluten free, lactose intolerant, Celiac, vegetarian and vegan—experience shows this is not currently the case and patients are often made to feel awkward. Food tailored for medical conditions—including those who suffer from bowel conditions or have had surgery—must be standardised, to ensure patients are getting the right nutrition at all times. Currently patients on some wards are being fed all the same food regardless of their conditions, weight and dietary needs—this is not acceptable and can be upsetting and potentially damaging. Hospitals should not rely on relatives to bring in food, eat the same bland meal every day, or allow patients to waste away if they can't have any of the food on offer. Nutrition must be a key part of every patient's care package. We are not asking for Michelin Star quality, just meals that help rather than hinder.'

[23] So, those are the observations of our petitioner, Rachel Flint. A letter

was sent to the Minister for Health and Social Services back on 25 November and we have a full response. We've also got feedback on that response, and some critical comment and analysis, from Rachel Flint. I think we probably need to share those comments back, given that they're quite detailed in character, with the Minister to see what further action we can take. Joyce, you've indicated.

09:15

[24] **Joyce Watson:** I agree with that, but I also think that we need to inform the health boards, certainly the ones that have been mentioned, about the concerns and see what they have to say about the matter, because, ultimately, the Minister's responsible for the policy, and the aims are delivered by the health board.

[25] **William Powell:** Absolutely. They are obviously in the front line of this, and I suppose the NHS Confederation as well would be usefully copied in—

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

[27] **William Powell:** —because they've helped to facilitate our feedback in recent times. So, I'd be very happy to do that. Also, an issue that isn't dealt with head-on here but which is sort of related to this is the issue of relatives actually feeding people who have difficulty eating, not necessarily because of the meals but because of other situations or their own frailty. So, that's another issue that sort of relates to this. I'd be very interested to see, indeed, what Mark Drakeford has to say in response.

[28] Agenda item 2.4: P-04-664, 'Develop Tynton Farm as a Visitor and Information Centre'. This petition was submitted by Martyn Hooper and collected 112 signatures.

[29] 'We call on the Welsh government to acknowledge the important contribution of Dr Richard Price not only to the eighteenth century Enlightenment, but also to the making of the modern world that we live in today, and develop his birthplace and childhood home into a visitor information centre where people of all nationalities and ages can discover how his significant contributions to theology, mathematics and philosophy have shaped the modern world.'

[30] This is a very interesting petition brought forward in association also

with the Richard Price Society. A letter was sent to Mrs Edwina Hart, Minister for Economy, Science and Transport on 26 November, and we've got a response from Mrs Hart. One of the things that she is flagging up is the potential for heritage lottery funding in this connection, seeking to signpost the petitioners there. We've sought feedback from the petitioner on what the Minister's had to say. We haven't had it as yet. So, I think, in accordance with practice, we should await that, if colleagues are happy.

[31] Agenda item 2.5: P-04-666, 'Democracy in Local Government'. This petition was submitted by Royston Jones, and has the support of 144 signatures. It reads as follows:

[32] 'In recent years we have observed a trend in Welsh local government that has seen unelected officers effectively take control of local authorities. This is invariably achieved with the connivance of a small group of councillors who commit their loyalty to senior officers rather than to the council to which they were elected and those living within the local authority area. A phenomenon that raises a number of concerns. 1. When power is exercised by senior officers and elected representatives are, effectively, excluded from the decision-making process then, clearly, the democratic process has been undermined, and democratic accountability lost. 2. Excluding the majority of the elected representatives from any role other than the cosmetic must call into question why cash-strapped councils need to pay so much money in various forms to political eunuchs. We therefore call on the Welsh Government to be aware of this threat to local democracy and where it becomes clear that senior officers are exerting an unhealthy and undemocratic influence over the running of any local authority to warn that authority publicly that decision-making powers rest solely with the elected representatives and, where such a warning is not heeded, to take that authority into special measures.'

[33] I think it would be appropriate for me to declare that I am a member of a local authority, not that I recognise the description here in terms of my own authority, but I think it would be nevertheless prudent for me to make that declaration. Joyce, I know you've also had experience in local government in the past. A letter was sent to the Minister for Public Services on 26 November, and we've got quite a robust response from Leighton Andrews. The petitioner has also commented on that letter, and both are in the public papers today. I would welcome any comments that Members have in relation to Mr Jones's petition.

[34] **Joyce Watson:** Well, first of all, there is a consultation out on the draft Local Government (Wales) Bill and the petitioner has the right, as everybody does, to have some input into that.

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

[36] **Joyce Watson:** I think that is probably the way forward for the petitioner.

[37] **William Powell:** I believe also that the subject committee is obviously engaged in that work as well as part of its duties.

[38] **Joyce Watson:** Yes, exactly. Again, you know, we can pass the views on to that committee if we are agreed here this morning. The other thing is that we've had the letter from the Minister and all the points that he says. There is no way—in my opinion—that we can take this any further forward, and I would recommend closing it.

[39] **Elin Jones:** I agree.

[40] **William Powell:** Well, it looks as though that decision has been taken in that case. It does raise some very serious issues, and there is the opportunity, as you both indicated, for the petitioner and other concerned colleagues to bring these matters in at the consultation stage. Because I think Joyce and I, particularly, will both recognise issues that have arisen with the difficulties within particular councils within Wales, and there are concerns there. But I think that that's probably the right vehicle to take them forward.

[41] **Joyce Watson:** It's the only vehicle.

[42] **William Powell:** Yes, indeed. Okay; so, we've agreed on that. Moving now to agenda item 2.6, P-04-667, 'Roundabout for the A477/A4075 Junction'. This petition was submitted by Pembroke Town Council, having collected 115 signatures, plus 482 signatures collected later in paper form. The text reads, simply, as follows:

[43] 'We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to replace the Fingerpost Junction on the A477/A4075 with a roundabout. The current road configuration has not resolved the problems on this dangerous stretch of road.'

[44] A first-consideration letter was sent to the Minister for Economy, Science and Transport on 1 December. The Minister has responded and we've got that response in our papers today. The petitioner was asked to comment, but hadn't done so when the papers were finalised. I think it's fair to say—

[45] **Mr George:** We have had a response. I've circulated—

[46] **William Powell:** We have a late response. I'm sorry, that was my oversight. Have colleagues got access to that as well?

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

[48] **William Powell:** Because we need to be cognisant of the cycle of meetings; obviously, the petitioner being a town council. So, we've got a full response that has just come in. Joyce, I'm conscious that you've got particular local knowledge in this location. Have you got any observations at this stage?

[49] **Joyce Watson:** Well, it's fairly obvious that the feelings are pretty strong about the configuration of this road. I actually drove this section of the road last weekend anyway. They do ask here for a meeting with the Minister in this very late letter that we've got in front of us, and I suppose it's right and proper that we return this to the Minister with the various requests.

[50] **William Powell:** Yes. I mean, it is very detailed in terms of the way that it addresses the points that the Minister had made, isn't it?

[51] **Joyce Watson:** As we would normally do—and await her response to it. I'm more than happy, myself, living fairly close, to go and meet on site if the petitioners so wish in any case.

[52] **William Powell:** Yes, and I'd be happy to make myself available on a similar basis.

[53] **Joyce Watson:** Yes, because we've done that before. We've done it particularly on road safety issues.

[54] **William Powell:** Yes, Llanddewi Velfrey is one example.

[55] **Joyce Watson:** Yes, exactly. So, in terms of consistency of our

approach as members of this committee, I think that is right and proper as well.

[56] **William Powell:** Yes. No, I think that's sensible enough.

[57] **Joyce Watson:** But we need to tell them about the time frame that we are under, as Assembly Members, when we do.

[58] **William Powell:** Clearly. Absolutely, and with 5 April approaching rapidly, we need to be cognisant of that.

[59] **Joyce Watson:** If you find that acceptable.

[60] **Elin Jones:** Yes.

[61] **William Powell:** Yes. Excellent. Okay, I think that's a sensible way forward. That concludes agenda item 2.

09:24

Y Wybodaeth Ddiweddaraf am Ddeisebau Blaenorol Updates to Previous Petitions

[62] **William Powell:** We now move to a very substantial number of updates to previous petitions. We start with agenda item 3.1, P-04-365, 'Protect Buildings of Note on the Mid Wales Hospital Site'. This petition was submitted by John Tushingham and was first considered on 28 February 2012, and has the support of 206 signatures. I think colleagues will recall the text and the issues underlying this petition. There was also a site visit back in November 2013 in relation to this matter. We last considered the petition on 22 September 2015 and agreed to write to the national park authority, seeking a response to the committee's original letter. Having contacted Brecon Beacons National Park Authority, it became clear that they had in fact responded to earlier correspondence, which had been overlooked due to an administrative error. These responses are available today in the public papers.

[63] Given the length of time since these responses, the committee secretariat wrote again on 3 December to ask for an update on the current situation. A response has not been received, but I am aware of a number of issues that are happening relating to the site, and I think that would warrant

an update. I hope that will be forthcoming from the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority's team, if colleagues are happy with that approach. Okay. Good.

[64] Agenda item 3.2 is P-04-544, 'Ban the Shooting of Greenland White-fronted Geese'. This petition was submitted by Aaron Davies and was first considered on 29 April, having collected 240 signatures. An associated petition has collected in excess of 3,500 signatures on an alternative petitions website. We recall the detailed wording of the petition here, and the level of concern of Mr Davies and his colleagues with regard to the sustainability of the population of Greenland white-fronted geese, and the effect of shooting on their livelihood. The committee last considered the petition on 10 November and agreed to write to the Minister, asking him what action Welsh Government would take should the numbers of Greenland white-fronted geese drop below the trigger level for action under the African-European water bird agreement. Colleagues will recall that this petition has straddled both the incumbency of Alun Davies, who took a particular robust view earlier on, and now Carl Sargeant, as the current Minister for Natural Resources. We've got a recent response, and I think we see a change of approach, particularly in the light of the population levels that Carl Sargeant says are of concern to him. So, I think that's really important. We've also got a late response from Mr Aaron Davies as petitioner, which clearly is reflecting the fact that they're pleased with this change of approach. What do colleagues think is the best way forward? I think this is quite a significant development. Joyce.

[65] **Joyce Watson:** I welcome the change, as you well know; as a bird lover, I would. But I think what's important here is the point that's made in the late correspondence that's in front of us, and that is that those people who need to know, who would want to be engaged in this consultation, do know that this consultation is happening. To that end, I think a letter asking the Minister or his department how they're going to ensure that those people who need to know about this consultation actually do know about this consultation. We all know—and I'm a member of the RSPB myself, and various other groups—that those groups will be very aware, but there's the other side. There are always two sides to a petition, those who will support it and those who might not support it, like the landowners.

[66] **William Powell:** Absolutely. There are organisations such as BASC, the British Association of Shooting and Conservation, that may take a different view.

[67] **Joyce Watson:** So, that's my observation, and with that in mind, I welcome this response.

[68] **William Powell:** Absolutely. I think I'd be very happy to write to the Minister urging him to crank up the communications operation to get the message out about the—

[69] **Elin Jones:** Well, it should be a public consultation.

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

09:30

[71] **Elin Jones:** It shouldn't be a consultation with stakeholders. It should just be a public consultation, and then that would cover everybody, and it would be advertised in the usual way. I think that the petition itself can come to an end then and be referred to the Government's public consultation.

[72] **William Powell:** Having achieved its principle objective, hopefully.

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

[74] **William Powell:** Excellent. It may well be that this will attract some further interest and comment as well. Thanks to colleagues for their contributions.

[75] Agenda item 3.3 is P-04-623, 'Improve the Provision of Disabled-friendly Housing in Wales'. This petition was submitted by Rhian Stangroom-Teel on behalf of Leonard Cheshire Disability. It was first considered by us as a committee on 28 April 2015. It has the support of 788 signatures. We recall the moving account, when we met the petitioners, of the difficulties that they face because of the lack of appropriate housing.

[76] We also considered this petition on 22 September, and agreed to share the petitioner's response with the Minister and also to ask that he update the committee on the progress of work before the end of this Assembly. The Minister has written to update us on the latest state of affairs and the petitioners have written directly to the Minister. So, it's clear now that we have a two-way dialogue at that level, which I think is a very positive development and maybe suggests that the petitions process has played its

part to the best effect. I'm not sure that it wouldn't be best if we took a step back and closed the petition, given that there is now such dialogue under way. What are your views, colleagues?

[77] **Elin Jones:** I agree.

[78] **Joyce Watson:** And I agree.

[79] **William Powell:** Okay. I think we should write to Leonard Cheshire Disability, thanking them for engaging with us and wishing them well for progressing this matter.

[80] Agenda item 3.4 is P-04-653, 'Ban the Use of Wild Animals in Circuses in Wales'. This petition was submitted by RSPCA Cymru and was first considered on 20 October 2015, having collected 517 online signatures and 7,268 signatures on an alternative petition website. Colleagues will recall the objectives here and also the public outcry in the latter part of last year regarding a particular touring circus that was causing concern to animal welfare campaigners across Wales.

[81] The petition was considered by committee for the first time on 20 October and we agreed to write to the Deputy Minister for Farming and Food, asking her to comment on the further views submitted by the RSPCA and for more information on the review that she'd referred to, including what the time frame is likely to be, how that would be carried out and what organisations will be contacted. It's interesting, in relation to that, the comments that Elin made on public consultation a moment or two ago. We also asked her to comment on whether powers under section 12 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 can be used to implement prohibition, if the evidence of the independent review on the use of wild animals in circuses points to the need for it and, finally, whether she believes that primary legislation would be needed.

[82] As colleagues will recall, the Deputy Minister made a written statement on 1 December, announcing an independent review on the whole matter. She also wrote to us, as a committee, on 9 December and both of those letters are in the public papers. The petitioners have responded and their comments are available to us as a private paper. I think there is a degree of sensitivity around the implications of the provisions of the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014 with regard to the forthcoming election, which may account for this degree of

sensitivity, hence the private paper that colleagues have had the opportunity to read.

[83] However, I think it would be only appropriate for us to welcome the review and, in the light of that review, to seek further information as to whether or not there is to be a place for wild animals in circuses in the future. But the problem we face, of course, is that as this committee comes to the end of its life with the Assembly, potentially this is the end of our involvement in the matter, because if the petitioners are not prepared to engage further with us because of their separate concerns, we can't really advance it further. I'd appreciate colleagues' views on this.

[84] **Joyce Watson:** You're absolutely right. Under the lobbying Bill, they're a bit nervous that they might get caught within that. I know that people will have very strong views around the table about the use of wild animals. I'm one of them and there'll be others. But, there was a case, I understand, in Powys, where the council, because licences are issued, aren't they—

[85] **William Powell:** Yes, there is a local authority involvement, you could say.

[86] **Joyce Watson:** —on whether you can have an event, albeit a circus in this case, within the domains of that authority or not. So, maybe that's another way around this if things don't resolve in this term. But, in terms of this actual petition, we can't go any further, you're right.

[87] **William Powell:** Particularly if we don't have a willing partner in that sense.

[88] **Joyce Watson:** Not because of us, but because of the lobbying Bill and the way that it's caught other bodies and probably will—

[89] **William Powell:** Absolutely, the unintended consequences of that legislation.

[90] **Joyce Watson:** Absolutely. So, it is with regret that we will—

[91] **William Powell:** But, I think we would all—

[92] **Joyce Watson:** But, we've had some movement, so that's good.

[93] **William Powell:** Absolutely. I think we'd all encourage as full an engagement with this review as possible, in the terms that Elin Jones was referring to earlier. Good.

[94] Moving now to agenda item 3.5, P-04-500, 'Call For Regulation of Animal Welfare Establishments in Wales'. This petition was submitted by Lisa Winnett and was first considered on 24 September 2013. It had the support of 265 signatures. Again, colleagues will recall there was quite a lot of difficult material that came as private papers associated with this petition, which was quite harrowing. It's clear that the relevant authorities were undertaking action to safeguard the situation. We, as a committee, last considered this on 22 September and agreed to seek the Minister's views on the petitioner's most recent correspondence. We've got a response from the Minister, which is available in our pack today. The petitioner has been asked to comment, but we hadn't received that at the time we were putting this together. I think, in many ways, for different reasons, we may have reached the same point as with the previous petition, because the issues have been dealt with and we've had a significant lack of engagement over recent times from the petitioner also. So, would colleagues be content to draw this petition to a close?

[95] **Joyce Watson:** We have to.

[96] **William Powell:** I think that's the only way for us to proceed really. Colleagues are agreed, thank you very much.

[97] Agenda item 3.6 is P-04-397, 'Living Wage'. This petition was submitted by Save the Children and was first considered on 19 June 2012, having collected 196 signatures.

[98] 'We call on the Welsh Government to stand by their promise to work towards a living wage for every worker in Wales and tell us when and how they will make it happen.'

[99] So starts the text of the petition. We last considered this on 10 November 2015 and agreed to write to the Minister seeking his views on the petitioner's latest comments and also a further update on progress, including the latest consideration by the workforce partnership council. Colleagues will recall that it took some time for this to get on the agenda of a meeting of that council, but it clearly has very much become mainstream now. We've also had a response from the Minister for Public Services, which

is available in the public papers. We've also had a response from the petitioners and that response is also available. I think it's clear that there's been movement here in terms of the Government's acceptance of the principles enshrined in the petition and the workforce partnership council has clearly engaged with this in an ongoing way. But, the petitioners, in the most recent response, seem to be asking the committee to take on a sort of ongoing watchdog role, which I think is probably beyond our remit—

[100] **Joyce Watson:** It is.

[101] **William Powell:** —and beyond the life expectancy of this particular committee. So, again, I think we may well need to close this, but write to the petitioners, thanking them for engaging with us and for bringing about some progress. What do colleagues think?

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

[103] **Elin Jones:** I agree.

[104] **William Powell:** Okay. So, we close petition P-04-397.

[105] Moving now to 3.7, P-04-63, 'Save our Service—Large Animal Rescue in North Wales'. The petition was submitted by Sabina Dunkling and it was first considered on 12 May 2015, having collected 1,394 signatures. Colleagues will recall our concern about what we learned with regard to the developments and the withdrawal of this service, but, in fact, I think, as a result of our consideration, we've gained some insight into the overall situation that applies across Wales. It was last considered by this committee on 20 October 2015, and we agreed a series of actions: firstly, to await comments back from Sabina Dunkling; to seek a response from the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority; to seek the views of the south Wales and mid and west Wales authorities; and to forward them the views that the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals had expressed, and also to make them aware of those views—to make all of them aware of those views. Responses have now been received, both from north Wales and mid and west fire services, and they're available in the public papers.

[106] It's interesting to see the comments about the level of—well, in terms of the other authorities, considering potentially withdrawing this service, but also the reference to the very rare event of actually being called in to carry out this service, and the fact that, frequently, as colleagues will have seen in

the correspondence, they say that it's usually other local partners—farmers, or others—who actually get involved in, literally, doing the heavy lifting. And it's interesting also to read about the fact that small animal rescue is no longer the norm, as it once was. So, again, I think we may be in some difficulty taking this much further, but I'd welcome colleagues' comments.

[107] **Joyce Watson:** I think you're right. There is nothing more that we can do, whatever we feel. And in that light and the role of the committee, we will have to close it. That's my view.

[108] **William Powell:** Yes. Elin's of like mind. So, we're agreed to close the petition at agenda item 3.7.

[109] Now agenda item 3.8, P-04-650, 'Scrap Local Government Councillors' Salaries'. I feel a declaration of interest coming on, which I duly make. The petition was submitted by Geraint Williams and was first considered on 6 October 2015, with the support of 82 online signatures. Clearly, the views of the petitioner are made explicit here in the short and snappy text of this petition. We considered it for the first time on 6 October, and we agreed to write to the Minister for Public Services, asking him to clarify some of the issues that were raised in the wording of the petition, and also to await the petitioner's views on the Minister's original correspondence. We've now got a response from the Minister to our follow-up letter, and that's in the public domain. The petitioner has been asked to comment, but, I believe, at the stage when our agenda was being assembled, we hadn't heard back. So, I think, realistically, we need to do so, but I'd welcome any comments from colleagues at this stage.

[110] **Joyce Watson:** Close it.

[111] **Elin Jones:** Close.

[112] **William Powell:** Yes, I think that's probably the best way forward. That's 3.8, so that's to be closed.

[113] Moving now to the next section of the agenda, 3.9, P-04-468, 'Road Safety Concerns A48 Chepstow'. Now, this petition was submitted by Chepstow Town Council and was first considered on 19 March 2013. An associated petition collected 1,000 signatures. We also recall the involvement of pupils from Wydean School as well, who had played a key role in raising their concerns. The petition was last considered by us on 24 November 2015,

and we agreed to write to the Minister, supporting the comments from Chepstow Town Council and also asking for an urgent update on this petition.

09:45

[114] We've got a point-by-point response from the Minister. We've also got a quite detailed rebuttal comment from members of the council—from the clerk and the chair of the council—in respect of the Minister's letter, and that's also available for us to study in the public papers. I think we've probably got to give the Minister the opportunity to comment, given that there are some specific issues that the council raise in their response. Any other thoughts that colleagues have as to the best way forward?

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

[116] **Elin Jones:** That's fine.

[117] **William Powell:** Okay. In that case, we'll feed that back to Mrs Edwina Hart for her further comment.

[118] Agenda item 3.10, P-04-556, 'No to Junction 41 Closure'. This petition was submitted by Rose David and was first considered by us on 13 May 2014, having collected 1,654 signatures. An associated petition collected 22,467. We recall the level of concern in the community with regard to the junction 41 closure and the rumbustious presentation, including Captain Beany and musical accompaniment, on the steps of the Senedd. We last considered this petition on 10 November 2015 and we agreed to seek the Minister's views on the petitioner's interim comments and, as requested, to allow the petitioner further time to consult members of the action group and to consider any supplementary comments. We've now got a response from the Minister for Economy, Science and Transport, and it's available in the public papers. The petitioner was asked to comment but hadn't done so by the most recent time. I think we remember that there is the need for the petitioner to liaise with her action group, and I think we probably need to respect that wish again today.

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

[120] **William Powell:** Okay, good.

[121] Agenda item 3.11, P-04-657, 'Charging for Parking and the Relationship to High Streets and Their Success'. This petition was submitted by Ann Dierikx, and was first considered by the committee on 24 November, having collected 89 signatures online and 60 further in paper form. We recall the nature of the concern that Mrs Dierikx had brought forward. We first considered it on 24 November, and we agreed to seek further comment from the petitioner on the Minister's letter and also to write to the Minister asking what action she had taken particularly to liaise with local authorities, following the publication of the research to examine the relationship between car park charging and town-centre footfall in Wales. The Minister has now responded and we've got that letter in the public papers. I recall saying on the previous occasion that the petitioner had been unwell and hadn't responded. In fact, we've still not heard back, but I think it would appear that, given the consistency of the Minister's view here, probably, there is little more that we can do to advance this petition either. I don't know what colleagues feel.

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

[123] **Elin Jones:** I agree.

[124] **Joyce Watson:** This is a matter for local government. They set the charges. We've done our bit, so it's over to them now, I'm afraid.

[125] **William Powell:** I think that's the case, and I'd be happy to write on behalf of the committee to Mrs Dierikx thanking her for bringing it forward. It's helped to air some very important issues.

[126] Agenda item 3.12, P-04-492, 'Diagnosis of Autism in Children'. This petition was submitted by the National Autistic Society Pembrokeshire branch. It was first considered on 18 June 2013 and has the support of 902 signatures. We last considered this on 6 October 2015, when we agreed to await the publication of the task and finish group's report and also, in the meantime, to write to the Minister asking him to provide the committee with the time frame for the review and to ask for his views on the comments from Professor Trevor Purt's call in correspondence—which, obviously, was, by this stage, historic, given that Professor Purt has been moved on—for further policy guidance on the relative contributions of community child health and community paediatrics and of child and adolescent mental health services.

[127] The Deputy Minister for health's response is available in the public

papers. The petitioner was asked to comment, but no comment had been received when we were assembling the agenda. I think this has been a real example of consistent engagement with our committee and quite a lot has been achieved over the months with the current Minister and the previous Minister. I'm not sure that there's a whole lot more that can be done in the light of the full response we've got from the Minister now. What do colleagues think? Joyce.

[128] **Joyce Watson:** We can't. I think we need to close the petition, but to thank them for bringing it forward, obviously. The main thrust of the petition has been achieved, and there has been, by them, the petitioners, an acceptance that there has been a move in the direction that they wish to see. That being the case, our work is done.

[129] **William Powell:** Absolutely. Well, I'd be happy to write to the petitioners on behalf of the committee, thanking them. Also, I believe, this evening the National Autistic Society is having a reception here in the Senedd with the national chief executive, Mark Lever. So, that may be an opportunity to see some of these petitioners in that context. I think they've worked well with us, and I think they've achieved some important outcomes. So, overall, a good result.

[130] Agenda item 3.1, P-04-523, 'Protect the Elderly and Vulnerable in Care Homes'. Now, this petition was submitted by Justice for Jasmine, first considered on 10 December 2013, with the support of 4,216 signatures. Colleagues will recall again the very difficult issues that arose around this petition, and there's been much time rightly allocated to this in Plenary and in the media also. We last considered this petition on 22 September and we agreed to write to the First Minister, asking him to inform us as a committee once he'd met the petitioners. We had a response from the First Minister on 26 November, which is in the papers here. He had also, as I referred to earlier, responded formally in Plenary on 6 October, as well as meeting the campaigners. The petitioners have also written in, and their letter, along with that from Carwyn Jones, is in the public pack. I think, given that the petitioners are saying that they're now in direct dialogue with the First Minister, they've asked for us to withdraw the petition. Given the progress that has been made in this difficult situation, we've got to respect that wish and close the petition.

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

[132] **Elin Jones:** Yes.

[133] **William Powell:** Okay. Agreed. Agenda item 3.14, P-04-553, 'A Full and Independent Investigation in to the Health Risks of Wireless and Mobile Phone Technologies in Wales Including all Schools'. This petition was submitted by Cymru Sofren/Sovereign Wales and was first considered on 13 May 2014, and has the support of 11 signatures. Colleagues will recall the concerns harboured by the petitioner. We last considered the petition on 24 February 2015 and, as previously agreed, decided to write to the Minister for Health and Social Services, seeking his views on the evidence and information provided previously by the Office of Communications, and whether the Public Health England's Centre for Radiation, Chemical and Environmental Hazards takes account of evidence from within Wales in providing advice to the Welsh Government. To some extent, there's a parallel there with the asbestos situation that we've been considering in relation to a different petition. The Minister responded in May of last year, and a copy of that letter is in the public papers. Again, there's been an administrative oversight there. The Minister's letter was not recorded as received until only recently. Our team have written to the petitioner to apologise for that oversight, and that apology has been accepted. In that context, I would appreciate Members' thoughts as to the best way forward here. I think, probably, we need to share his comments, as the petitioner, back with the Minister, particularly given the length of time that's elapsed. It could be just to seek reassurance on the points that he raises.

[134] **Joyce Watson:** Okay.

[135] **William Powell:** Are colleagues happy with that approach? Good.

[136] Agenda item 3.15, P-04-564, 'Restoration of Inpatient Beds, Minor Injuries Cover and X-Ray Unit to the Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital'. This petition was submitted by Geraint Vaughn Jones, and was first considered by the committee on 17 June 2014. It has the support of 2,754 signatures, a substantial support for the concerns in that community. Colleagues will recall the key issues here and the fact that, over time, we've seen something—we've seen not exactly a meeting of minds between the Minister and the campaigners with regard to the facilities at Ffestiniog. We've got the most recent exchange between the Minister and Mr Vaughn Jones in our public papers. Colleagues, I'd appreciate a steer from you as to the best way to proceed. I would put on record the fact that I have, in the context of casework, met the campaigners relatively recently up in Porthmadog, and

have taken on board and gained a bit more insight into the specific issues that they're concerned about. Joyce, any thoughts?

[137] **Joyce Watson:** Well, I've met them in the past, too, and, like you, probably done lots of casework. I think we've probably gone as far as we can on this issue, but, before we close the petition, I think it's worth asking the Minister to respond to the petitioners and see if there's anything he has further to add.

[138] **William Powell:** Yes. I think a final exchange in that way would make sense, but, given the limited number of meetings that we have available to us, I suspect this may be the final exchange of this run.

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

[140] **William Powell:** Yes. Are colleagues happy? Yes. Okay.

[141] Agenda item 3.16, P-04-587, 'A Dedicated Support Team for Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (M.E.), Chronic Fatigue Syndrome & Fibromyalgia Sufferers in South East Wales': this petition was submitted by MESiG, the ME Support in Glamorgan group, and was first considered on 23 September 2014, having collected 1,196 signatures.

[142] We recall the objectives of this petition, which we last considered on 22 September 2015 and agreed to ask the Minister to respond to the questions and points made in the petitioner's letter. We've now got a full response from the Minister and further comment back from the petitioners. I think we're moving towards, probably, a stage where we should consider closing this petition. There's obviously been some progress. Joyce, I don't know whether you have got any further observations or suggestions with regard to this.

[143] **Joyce Watson:** Well, there has been progress, and the issue I've got with the last round of correspondence with the petitioners is that they're now widening the original.

[144] **William Powell:** Absolutely, yes. I think that's probably a need for a separate petition, maybe in a future Assembly.

[145] **Joyce Watson:** It is. And, I think, you know—. We should close, but I think we should also pay due respect to the petitioner in terms of saying that

we're closing because, from the original petition, we've now achieved the aims as requested, but also point out that the latter points—

[146] **William Powell:** Yes. The issue around awareness raising and so on, yes.

[147] **Joyce Watson:** —will have to form, perhaps, another petition, just so that they're fully aware of why we're closing—

[148] **William Powell:** Yes, our terms of engagement and the fact that we've dealt, as far as we can, with the current petition.

[149] **Joyce Watson:** But, equally, I would feel quite comfortable passing those on to the Minister, as well.

[150] **William Powell:** Absolutely. I think that would be appropriate. But there's definitely progress there and I think that's to be welcomed.

[151] Agenda item 3.17, P-04-608, 'Inquiry into the Welsh NHS', submitted by P.J. Vanston and first considered on 9 December 2014 with the support of 146 signatures: we last considered correspondence on this back on 24 March of last year and agreed to ask the Minister for a response to the petitioner's comments. Following a reminder, the Minister has now responded and that is in the public papers.

[152] The petitioner has been asked to comment, but, as yet, we haven't had a response. Given the terms of what the Minister has had to say and the time that's elapsed since, and the way in which things have moved on, I think probably we need to look to move to close this petition. If we've got support from you both, also, I think that's the way forward.

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

10:00

[154] **William Powell:** Agenda item 3.18, P-04-638, 'Emergency Services—Power of Entry': this petition was submitted by Mr Fran Richley and first considered on 16 June 2015, having collected 67 signatures. An interesting one here. We last considered this and correspondence from the Deputy Minister for Health on 8 December 2015, and we agreed to seek the outstanding response from the Welsh ambulance service and also to seek the

views of the petitioner on the earlier comments of the Deputy Minister, and then to return to the matter now, as we are doing, in the new year, when we've got those responses. We've got an interesting response from the Welsh ambulance service, and the petitioner has been asked to comment on that, but hadn't done so at the time we were assembling our agenda items. But it's clear that this right does, in appropriate circumstances, already exist, which accounts for why the Deputy Minister said it hadn't been raised with the Government. So, I think, probably, even in the absence of further comment from the petitioner, in the light of the facts, it's probably the appropriate time to close the petition.

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

[156] **William Powell:** So, we'll do that.

[157] Agenda item 3.19, P-04-511, 'Support for Children and Young People Participation Standards': the committee last considered this, which was submitted by Powys Youth Forum—. It was first considered on 11 November 2013, supported by 39 signatures. We last looked at it on 20 October of last year and we agreed to forward the responses from Children in Wales and Powys Youth Forum to the Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty, asking for her views and to ask whether she's satisfied with the progress that's been made, and also to ask Children in Wales to respond to the petitioners' concerns. The Minister has responded, as, indeed, has Children in Wales, and those responses are both in the public papers. The petitioners have also commented and their response is also available. It would be interesting to know what colleagues would propose in terms of further action here. My sense is that there has been some movement, but what are your thoughts, colleagues?

[158] **Joyce Watson:** There has been movement. Again, like I stated in an earlier petition, we're now falling outside the original petition, you know, in the latest correspondence. I'd be minded to close it, but I do think, firstly, I'd want to ask Children in Wales to respond to those comments—

[159] **William Powell:** I think that's only fair, yes.

[160] **Joyce Watson:** I think it's fair and I also think that we need to remind the petitioners of their original petition and our role here, which means that we can only consider that.

[161] **William Powell:** Absolutely. If there are shifting sands in terms of the agenda—

[162] **Joyce Watson:** They need to revisit and take—

[163] **William Powell:** There's an opportunity to resubmit at a future time, yes.

[164] **Elin Jones:** Can I just ask, as a point of clarification—? All petitions will close—cease—at the end of this Assembly and will not be transferred into the next Assembly.

[165] **William Powell:** No, that's not the case. It so happens that there's a whole collection of the ones that we've been considering today that have gone in that particular direction.

[166] **Elin Jones:** So, they do roll on.

[167] **William Powell:** I'll hand over to Steve, just to clarify the discussions we've been having, ongoing.

[168] **Mr George:** Essentially, it's a matter for the committee. The committee could, for instance, decide at its last meeting to close all the open petitions at that point. But, if it doesn't, they will continue and they will be picked up by the incoming committee.

[169] **Elin Jones:** Okay. Fine.

[170] **William Powell:** An interesting point to raise. Thanks. Good.

[171] Now, the following items have been previously grouped, and I think it's sensible to group them again today: 3.20, P-04-643, 'Save Croeserw Flying Start', and 3.21, P-04-645, 'Save Glyncoerrwg Flying Start'. Both petitions were submitted in the summer of 2015, and we considered them jointly back on 22 September of last year and agreed to ask Children in Wales for their views on the robust correspondence that we'd received from Neath Port Talbot council and also to pursue the petitioners for any further comments they might have. Action for Children has now responded and, as ever, there are two sides to any particular issue, as we see from this correspondence again. Their letter's in the public papers. We've also shared that with Neath Port Talbot council and offered them the opportunity to

respond. They haven't done so as yet. The petitioners have also been informed of the correspondence but no comment had been received from either petitioner at that stage. Given that this issue appears to have moved on in terms of the provision in this area, and the lack of response in recent times from the petitioners, I think we may well need to move to close this petition also.

[172] **Joyce Watson:** I'd recommend closing.

[173] **William Powell:** Yes. I sense that's unanimous, and applies to both of those petitions.

[174] Agenda item 3.22, which is P-04-576, 'Allow Children in Wales to Have a Family Holiday During Term Time': this has previously been considered in association with agenda item 3.23, which is P-04-606, 'Ensure Schools Exercise Their Statutory Powers Under Regulation 7 of The Education (Pupil Registration) (Wales) Regulations 2010 Without Interference or Bias'. Now, the first of these petitions was submitted by Bethany Walpole-Wroe and was first considered on 21 January 2014, having received 1,008 signatures. An associated petition collected over 10,300 signatures. In relation to the second petition, to ensure that schools exercise their statutory powers under regulation 7, as I mentioned earlier, this petition was submitted by Pembrokeshire Parents Want a Say/Rhieni Pembrokeshire Eisiau Cael Dweud, and was first considered on 9 December 2014, having collected 812 signatures. Now, we last considered both petitions on 24 November 2015, and did so in private when considering previous oral evidence that had been received, and agreed to write to the Minister for Education and Skills to express concerns about the position in the light of advice and factual evidence that we'd received. I wrote to the Minister on 3 December and indeed the Minister came back just before Christmas, on 15 December. Both letters are in the public domain. We're also aware that the Minister has written to all headteachers in Wales on this matter. This, alongside associated frequently asked questions, is also in the public pack.

[175] I think it's fair to say that this issue has captured the public imagination and concern, and there have been a number of other related issues that have arisen, including issues around the validity of some of the fining regimes that have applied, particularly in Cardiff and in RCT.

[176] **Joyce Watson:** [*Inaudible.*]

[177] **William Powell:** Absolutely, yes. I'd be very interested in colleagues' views on this matter.

[178] **Joyce Watson:** I think, in terms of the petition—and we've got to stick to the petition, not related matters—we need to be consistent. Any other matters that they feel they want us to take forward, we can inform them that they fall outside the petition, so do exactly the same as you've already done twice today. I think there's a real movement here. It seems a long time ago that I first went to the house of the original petitioners to discuss it with them. So, I think we've achieved our aims, and I would be minded to close the petition, but to advise them, on matters that fall outside that they feel we might be able to assist with, to go back through the procedure.

[179] **William Powell:** I think it would be very interesting—

[180] **Joyce Watson:** And thank them, of course, for bringing what is a significant issue for a number of people to our attention, and the Minister's attention.

[181] **William Powell:** I've been very grateful for the energetic engagement that the Minister has shown over recent times with regard to this matter, and I think the petitioners, insofar as they've expressed their views to me, take a similar view. It would be very interesting indeed to get a synopsis of the responses that come back from the Minister in relation to the correspondence that he receives back from local authorities, because it has clearly been something of a hornet's nest that's been stirred up here. I would like to write to him to express that, if colleagues would be interested in a synopsis. Clearly, we wouldn't get all the detailed response, but just to get an overview of that, while recognising that this committee and these petitions are probably coming towards the end of their life, because as you rightly say, there are secondary issues that probably need to be brought forward in a separate form, or the Minister makes clear that there are other solutions that maybe involve the courts and can't involve us directly.

[182] **Joyce Watson:** Yes, indeed, and it might be the case that they want to write to the education committee as well.

[183] **William Powell:** I think it would be appropriate to—. I think we've shared at an earlier, haven't we?

[184] **Joyce Watson:** Yes, we did.

[185] **Mr George:** And the education committee, actually, has had a copy of the latest correspondence, which they noted at their last meeting.

[186] **William Powell:** Excellent. Okay. But, certainly in writing to the Minister, I will thank him on behalf of the committee for his most recent engagement with the matter, and also make sure that we keep the petitioners up-to-speed as to developments.

[187] **Joyce Watson:** But did we agree to close?

[188] **William Powell:** We're moving to close it—

[189] **Joyce Watson:** Because that's what I suggested.

[190] **William Powell:** Yes, absolutely. We've got that—. Okay, that agreement has been made, and I'll write to the Minister in that vein. Good.

[191] Agenda item 3.24 is P-04-651, 'To Work to Protect Local Government When Determining the Budgets this Autumn', submitted by Neath Port Talbot Unison and first considered on 22 September 2015, having collected 196 signatures. We considered the petition for the first time on 22 September and we agreed to write to the Minister for Finance and Government Business seeking views on the petitioners' further comments, and also to ask the Finance Committee to consider the petition as part of their scrutiny of the forthcoming budget. We've got a full response from the Minister, which is in our public papers. The Finance Committee have received the committee's request, and we understand that the petition will be taken into account as they're scrutinising the budget. I suppose the elephant in the room is the fact that the budget is very much nearing its final form, and therefore I suppose we should be moving to close this petition, if colleagues are minded so to do. Joyce.

[192] **Joyce Watson:** In terms of what we can do to implement—well, we've done it. We can't do anymore because this is being discussed in the process that is set up—legally set up. So, in terms of whether we can influence it any further—no, we can't. That being the case, I think we've done our job and we will have to close the petition.

[193] **William Powell:** Yes. I'd be happy to agree with that, but also to write to our colleague Jocelyn Davies to ask that the Finance Committee takes

account of the most recent comments.

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

[195] **William Powell:** Excellent. And we have the final agenda item: 3.25, P-04-656, 'Establishing a Conscientious Objectors Day in Wales'. The petition was submitted by Jane Harries on behalf of Conscientious Objectors' Day Cymru. It was first considered on 10 November, having collected approximately 400 signatures on paper. Conscientious Objectors' Day Cymru represents a number of peace organisations in Wales, including Cymdeithas y Cymod, CND Cymru, National Justice and Peace Network, Quakers in Wales and the United Nations Association Cardiff branch, so it's quite a coalition of people of like mind.

[196] We considered the petition for the first time on 10 November, and we agreed to write to our First Minister, Carwyn Jones, to ask what the Welsh Government does to commemorate and to mark 15 May, and whether it would consider doing more, and also to write to the Presiding Officer, as chair of the Assembly Commission, to ask whether there are any Assembly events that specifically commemorate 15 May, and whether consideration could be given to doing more. We've got some detailed responses from both the First Minister and from the Presiding Officer; they'll be in our public papers. The petitioners have written also to comment on those. Clearly, they would like to see more action. I suppose, at this stage, it would only be fair to share those comments from the petitioners with both the First Minister and the Presiding Officer, if colleagues are happy with that approach. Is that sensible?

10:15

[197] **Elin Jones:** Yes, it is.

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

[199] **Elin Jones:** And I think that both the responses from the First Minister and the Presiding Officer are very open to seeing further engagement on this day—

[200] **William Powell:** Absolutely. I think that's the message that I picked up as well. Excellent. That concludes the agenda today. All I would do is to thank you very much for your attendance and contributions, and also to flag

up that there is a petition presentation on a new petition, 'Trees in Towns', and that's to be received on Tuesday of next week, 26 January, at 1 o'clock. Thank you very much indeed. Diolch yn fawr.

Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 10:15.

The meeting ended at 10:15.