



Cynulliad
Cenedlaethol
Cymru

National
Assembly for
Wales

Cofnod y Trafodion The Record of Proceedings

[Y Pwyllgor Deisebau](#)

[The Petitions Committee](#)

12/07/2016

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Cofnodir y trafodion yn yr iaith y llfarwyd hwy ynnddi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal, cynhwysir trawsgrifiad o'r cyfieithu ar y pryd. Lle y mae cyfranwyr wedi darparu cywiriadau i'w tystiolaeth, nodir y rheini yn y trawsgrifiad.

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. Where contributors have supplied corrections to their evidence, these are noted in the transcript.

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

Gareth Bennett	UKIP Cymru
Bywgraffiad Biography	UKIP Wales
Janet Finch–Saunders	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig
Bywgraffiad Biography	Welsh Conservatives
Mike Hedges	Llafur (Cadeirydd)
Bywgraffiad Biography	Labour (Chair)
Neil McEvoy	Plaid Cymru
Bywgraffiad Biography	The Party of Wales

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

Jessica England	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Steve George	Clerc Clerk
Kath Thomas	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Katie Wyatt	Cynghorydd Cyfreithiol Legal Adviser

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 9:00.

The meeting began at 9:00.

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau, Dirprwyon a Datganiadau o Fuddiant
Introduction, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

[1] **Mike Hedges:** Bore da, good morning, everybody. Can I welcome everybody to the first meeting of the Petitions Committee of this fifth Assembly? Can I just remind everybody that they are welcome to speak in either English or Welsh, and translation headsets are available? There's no need to turn off mobile phones or other electronic devices, but please make sure they're on silent mode. It's highly embarrassing when your phone goes off and makes a noise halfway through a meeting. There are no apologies or substitutions.

**Deisebau Newydd y mae Gweinidogion wedi rhoi Ymateb Cychwynnol
Iddynt
New Petitions—with Ministerial Responses**

[2] **Mike Hedges:** So, we move on now to item 2: new petitions received and initial responses from Ministers. Initial letters seeking the views of the relevant Welsh Government Minister were sent under arrangements agreed by the previous committee. Petition P-04-685, 'Basic Payment Scheme in Wales—a Fairer, Regional Payment Model Required'—this petition was submitted by Farmers for Regional Payments and collected 32 signatures. The first letter was sent to the Minister at the end of the fourth Assembly. A response was received from the Deputy Minister. The Minister's letter is in the public papers for this meeting. A research brief on the background to the issue is also in the public papers. What do we want to do with it? Do we want to write to the new Cabinet Secretary or do we want to close the petition as we've had a reply from the previous Deputy Minister that has addressed the issues it raises? Well, can I suggest that we close it, then, as it has already been addressed by a reply from the previous Deputy Minister, and they haven't written back to us? Is that agreed? Yes, no, maybe? Yes. Thank you.

[3] The next one is P-04-686, 'Install a Traffic Lights System at Cross Hands Roundabout'. A letter was sent to the Minister in the fourth Assembly. A response has been received. They have made no further comments. A research brief on the background issue is also in the public papers. Do we want to write to the Cabinet Secretary again to see if there's any update on the position? I suggest we write to the Cabinet Secretary to see if there's any update, for those people who know Cross Hands roundabout. Okay.

[4] Item 2.3 is P-04-687, 'Review of Scalloping in Cardigan Bay'. Possible answers: if we're content with the Minister's response, we can close it. Otherwise we can write to the new Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs outlining the committee's concerns. Any views? And they haven't come back to us following the reply from the Minister?

[5] **Mr George:** No, but we only very recently have told them that this matter was on the agenda.

[6] **Mike Hedges:** Can we hold it until the next meeting, then? Just note it now, hold it until the next meeting, and see if they do come back to us. Yes? Is everybody happy with that? Yes.

09:03

Deisebau Newydd Erail
Other New Petitions

[7] **Mike Hedges:** Other new petitions: P-05-689, 'Improvements to the Railway Provision at Kidwelly'. A letter has been sent to the Cabinet Secretary for the Economy and Infrastructure seeking his views on the petition. So, shall we await the response from the Cabinet Secretary? Yes.

[8] Resurfacing of the A40 Raglan-Abergavenny Road—

[9] **Mr George:** Sorry, just to mention that was one that we—

[10] **Mike Hedges:** Oh, yes, we're collecting the petition at 1 o'clock today.

[11] **Gareth Bennett:** Which one is that?

[12] **Mike Hedges:** The one on Kidwelly—railway provision in Kidwelly—at 1 o'clock.

[13] P-05-690, 'Resurfacing of the A40 Raglan-Abergavenny Road', which I think we are again collecting today. Yes?

[14] **Mr George:** Yes, that's at 12.40 p.m.

[15] **Mike Hedges:** At 12.40 p.m. And a letter will be sent to the Cabinet Secretary seeking his views on the petition. Are we happy with that?

[16] **Mr George:** Sorry, that was 2.30 p.m. not 12.40 p.m.

[17] **Mike Hedges:** At 2.30 p.m.—okay.

[18] Petition P-05-691, 'A Fair Deal for Forest Rallying in Wales'. That petition's been received. A letter will be sent, again, to the Cabinet Secretary, and this is the one we'll be collecting at 12.40 p.m.

[19] **Mr George:** And we've also had, since the papers were produced, another letter from the petitioner, or an e-mail from the petitioner, which is in front of you.

[20] **Mike Hedges:** Yes. Well, we're doing what they ask, aren't we? We're taking it up with the Minister and we're formally receiving the petition.

[21] Petition P-05-692, 'Build an International Mother Languages Monument at Cardiff Bay'; agree to send a letter to the Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure seeking their views.

[22] P-05-693, 'Give Every Child in Wales the Meningitis B Vaccine for Free'; send to the Cabinet Secretary for health and well-being. Yes?

[23] P-05-694, 'School Times an Hour Later'; write to the Cabinet Secretary for Education. Yes?

[24] P-05-695, 'Introduce Compulsory Mental Health Education in Secondary Schools'; write to the Cabinet Secretary for Education.

[25] P-05-654, 'Objection to the Current Proposals for the Designation of SAC's for Porpoises', which I'm sure everybody else knows more than I do about; write to the Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs for their view.

[26] P-05-697, '45000 Reasons Wales Needs a Dementia Strategy', which is the petition that we collected this morning at 08:30; write to the Cabinet Secretary for health and well-being.

[27] Those were the new ones. I think we probably won't have as many new ones in the future, but we've got three months' worth of new ones.

09:06

Y Wybodaeth Ddiweddaraf am Ddeisebau Blaenorol Updates to Previous Petitions

[28] **Mike Hedges:** P-04-365, 'Protect Buildings of Note on the Mid Wales Hospital Site': this was considered on 19 January, where they considered correspondence received from the Brecon Beacons National Park and agreed to write to them again to ask for an update on the situation. An update has been received. Possible actions—. Well, this has been going on for four years now and it does, really, fall under the—at least two other people here have served on a council—it really does fall within the council's remit rather than the Assembly's. So, it could be said that this is now really a matter for local

authorities and we should close the petition. Yes? Happy with that?

[29] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Yes.

[30] P-04-445, 'Save Our Welsh Cats & Dogs From Death on the Roads', which has been going on for three years. The Deputy Minister's letter and the study enclosed with it suggest that there is little likelihood of policy being changed in the near future. So, we can either write to the Minister again or close the petition.

[31] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** I suggest we close the petition.

[32] **Mike Hedges:** Right. Is that agreed? Yes.

[33] P-04-544, 'Ban the Shooting of Greenland White-fronted Geese'; last considered on 19 January, when they wrote to the Minister for Natural Resources. There was a reply on 15 March with the details of the consultation. The petitioner was informed. Somebody asked before the meeting about success stories; this is essentially a success story. The Minister agreed to review the current position based, at least in part, on the arguments put forward through this petition. So, I think that this is an example of petitions working. So, shall we close the petition and pat our predecessors on the back? Yes?

[34] P-04-547, 'Ban Polystyrene (EPS) Fast Food and Drinks Packaging'; this goes back—. It was last considered on 2 February.

[35] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** I'd like to sign this.

[36] **Mike Hedges:** They agreed to await the reviews of the petitioners, write to the Minister for Natural Resources and share the information received from Oxford City Council. The then Minister for Natural Resources responded to the committee and his letter is in the public papers. We've not received any further views from the petitioners. It's had extensive consideration by the previous committee, including taking evidence from the petitioner. The petitioner indicated that Oxford City Council was an example of where such a ban had been implemented. Information from Oxford City Council, however, was there was no ban, although some restrictions, which were not just on EPS, had been considered for a small number of traders. The committee's legal advisers have provided a note on the Assembly's legal competence and other background papers, which is in the meeting papers as

a private paper. What do we want to do? We've had the Minister's reply. It could be argued that we've taken it as far as we can.

[37] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Chairman, can I just make a comment on this?

[38] **Mike Hedges:** Please.

[39] **Janet Finch–Saunders continues:** If anybody does take up beach cleaning, as I quite frequently do, they will be aware of the amount of polystyrene litter that we're finding on our beaches and, indeed, our streets. I'm just a little bit concerned that the Minister says here that the data on polystyrene litter are very limited and, as a consequence, it was difficult to assess the scale of the problem across Wales. You don't need to be a rocket scientist to realise that we do have a problem with polystyrene containers on beaches and, as I said, around our more urban areas. Is it possible that we can write to the new Minister now to reiterate our concerns and see whether they would be prepared to work with the Marine Conservation Society—the MCS—and other environmental bodies? Because those data are out there.

[40] **Mike Hedges:** We could, if we agree it.

[41] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** You know, we're talking about tonnes here.

[42] **Mike Hedges:** There's at least one person nodding at this stage. Do we want to take that up? Yes?

[43] **Mr George:** Can I just point out that, in the Minister's letter, it does say that he's agreed—it was 'he' at that time—to the commissioning of a joint research project with the Marine Conservation Society and Swansea University to look into this and other matters.

[44] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** But it'll be a new Minister, won't it? It might not have gone forward, so it would be really good to just—

[45] **Mike Hedges:** If we don't do anything else, can we just ask for an update on that?

[46] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Yes. That'll be fine.

[47] **Mike Hedges:** They've agreed to do something; can they give us an update on it?

[48] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** But if we could stress in the letter that the data collection is important, because without data collection, you don't have the evidence to actually then look at resourcing ways to solve the problem.

[49] **Mike Hedges:** Yes.

[50] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Thank you, everyone.

[51] **Mike Hedges:** Thank you. Is everybody happy with that? Yes?

[52] P-04-572, 'Grants for Flood Resilience'; that was from 8 March 2016, when they were awaiting a response from Natural Resources Wales, and asked the incoming environment committee to consider the issues, and asked the incoming committee to consider carrying out a piece of work itself on the issue raised by the petition. What do we want to do? Perhaps ask the Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee to note the issues raised by the petition and consider it in their forward work programme.

[53] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Yes, definitely.

[54] **Mike Hedges:** Health, well-being and sport; P-04-440, 'Say NO to Asset Stripping Bronllys Hospital'. This was from 20 January 2015, when they wrote to the chief executive of Powys Teaching Local Health Board. There's been an update from Powys teaching health board. This petition has been going for four years. The health board has indicated they are in regular discussion with the petitioner, and it may be that the matter is best taken forward as a local matter. At the end of the day, it's going to be decided by the local health board.

[55] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Yes; I don't think there's more work we can do on this, really.

[56] **Mike Hedges:** Shall we close it and let them carry on talking? If the talks break down, perhaps we might want to get involved again, but as long as they keep on talking, progress could be made. Okay?

[57] P-04-553, 'A full and independent investigation in to the health risks of wireless and mobile phone technologies in Wales including all schools'. It was on 19 January that it was considered. There's the response we had from the Minister for Health and Social Services. They've had a response and, in

light of the Minister's letter, can we close the petition? Yes?

[58] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Just on that, though, before you do—sorry, Chairman—it says here,

[59] 'I can confirm the additional information provided by the petitioner was forwarded to the Public Health England Centre for Radiation, Chemical and Environmental Hazards (PHECRCE).'

[60] But we don't know what the response was.

[61] **Mr George:** To explain, the petitioner has provided a lot of information, which we've asked the Minister to put before the organisation that advises both the Welsh Government and, I think, the UK Government on these matters, and that's what the Minister has said that he's done. So, all the information the petitioner's provided has now gone to this body. It was a lot of information.

[62] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** It'd be nice to have a response from them as to whether it's actually identified any issues that they are now going to be taking forward to solve. Could we not send them a letter?

[63] **Mr George:** We can do that.

[64] **Mike Hedges:** I think Janet raises an important point: we receive petitions, we send them on to the Minister, the Minister sends them on to somewhere else, the Minister then is progressing it, but we don't complete the circle by us finding out exactly what's happened at the end of it. It might be worthwhile, once a year, having a go-back check, and saying, 'Well, this has gone off to these organisations; is it now fully resolved?'

[65] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** They may not have responded, or they could have responded with a really good answer, and then the petitioner feels confidence in what they've carried out.

09:15

[66] **Mike Hedges:** Sort of mopping up once a year on things that have gone off.

[67] P-04-564, 'Restoration of Inpatient Beds, Minor Injuries Cover and X-

Ray Unit to the Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital'; this was done on 19 January, when the petitioner's comments were shared with the Minister. The then Minister for health has responded. The paper also comments on the Minister's letter. What do you want to do? The Minister's response indicates that he continues to believe that concerns need to be resolved locally.

[68] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** How long has this one been out, again?

[69] **Mike Hedges:** 17 June 2014.

[70] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** I know there's a lot of passion behind this particular petition, by the very nature of, you know—because there is a feeling, I mean, it's not my patch, but I know there is a huge feeling that there is insufficient inpatient beds and minor injuries cover. And then, of course, they are not happy with the response that they had from the health Secretary, or Minister, at the time. Could we perhaps, again, just ask the new Minister for some update on whether he has got any plans to address the concerns raised?

[71] **Mike Hedges:** Yes. Everybody happy with that?

[72] P-04-663, 'Food in Welsh Hospitals'; the committee considered the petition on 19 January. The Minister for Health and Social Services, seeking a response to the petitioner's comments; the local health board, seeking their views on the issue—. A response has been received from the then Minister for Health and Social Services, and six local health boards, and available in the public papers. We've had comprehensive responses. And that's a question that I perhaps should have asked before the meeting. I know that the Auditor General for Wales has done substantial work on food in hospitals. Are we able to make this petition available to the auditor general?

[73] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Yes, and can I just say on this one—? It is a difficult issue, really, because with coeliacs and people who have particular issues, it is a bit of a one-size-fits-all. My father's in hospital at the moment, and it's just—the menu is the menu. And I know that this was put forward by the journalist, who's now been withdrawn, Rachel Flint, who herself had some issues in hospital. They literally—she couldn't eat while she was in hospital because they didn't have anything on the menu that would be able to sustain her dietary needs, which were quite complex.

[74] **Mike Hedges:** Yes, but the Auditor General has done some substantial

work on this.

[75] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Yes, but—

[76] **Mike Hedges:** No, it really is—if we're going to try and take this forward, I would suggest the Auditor General, who has done work on this, who has done follow-up work on this, might be the best person to keep on going.

[77] **Mr George:** And, in terms of the individual, I mean, one of the things that has come through from this is that there's been meetings arranged between the petitioner and the health board, and I think the health board has accepted that they didn't meet Ms Flint's dietary needs on this occasion. So, I think there was an exceptional circumstance—

[78] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** That's an individual case though, isn't it? There could be people across Wales having the same worries and the same concerns. And so, it may have been addressed for one individual, but there is a bigger issue here.

[79] **Mike Hedges:** Very much so. Can we refer this information on to the auditor general, who's doing work on it at the moment?

[80] **Gareth Bennett:** Why is it the auditor general's field?

[81] **Mike Hedges:** Because he does value-for-money works on different places, and there are problems with variation in cost, and variation in wastage, which are more substantial than you would expect—substantially more than you would expect. I mean, in some hospitals, if you went into hospital today, you'd have the food that the person who was in that bed yesterday ordered, whether you wanted it or not, and things like that. It's very regimented. Some places allow—as they all should—relatives to help, mainly the elderly and infirm, to eat. Others throw the relatives out, and some just put the food next to the patient, and then half an hour, they take it away, without actually taking any interest in whether their patient has eaten any of it or not. It's that sort of thing—that's why it falls under the auditor general. Okay?

[82] P-04-668, 'Support Yearly Screening for Ovarian Cancer (CA125 blood test)'; this was in February 2016. They've written to the Minister for Health and Social Services, and the Minister has responded. The petitioner also

submitted detailed comments on the then Minister's response, which are available in the public papers. The options are: do we want to do some work on it or do we want to ask the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee to look at the petition?

[83] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Yes, that would be a good idea.

[84] **Mike Hedges:** I would strongly urge that we do a piece of work on it. We've not picked up any of the other petitions up until now, so we have got an opportunity to get the petitioner and the Minister in to discuss it. And I think it is a matter of public concern. Yes? Are we happy with that? Yes.

[85] **Economy and Infrastructure:** P-04-446, 'Business Rate Relief for Welsh Charity Shops'. We discussed the petition on 4 February. The then Minister for the Economy, Science and Transport set out the latest position. We have not received any response from the petitioner. It's been under consideration for three years. I think—and I look to be contradicted by somebody—this was when the Minister was considering making charity shops pay rates. That threat has now disappeared, but it did concern a large number of charity shops, especially the larger ones, so I think we can—. The Minister backed down or didn't take that forward, whichever way you prefer to look at it, and that hasn't happened. So, could we close the petition? That could be seen as a success.

[86] **P-04-468, 'Road Safety Concerns A48 Chepstow':** first considered 19 March 2013. It's been open for three years. So, what we're going to do—. It's been open for three years; it was last considered 19 January. They wrote to the Minister for Economy, Science and Transport. A response was received, this has been sent to the petitioner, but the petitioner has not responded. That was sent on 19 or 20 January.

[87] **Mr George:** Yes. The petitioner in this case is actually the local town council, effectively. It does mean that, because they have to meet and all the rest of it, they sometimes are a bit a slow in responding, so—.

[88] **Mike Hedges:** Every town council that I know meets at least monthly.

[89] **Mr George:** I think the issue here, really, was that this actually has had quite a lot of correspondence going back and forth and the response from the Minister seems to indicate, you know, that's as far as they're going to take it. It's really whether the committee can add anything further at this

point.

[90] **Mike Hedges:** Well, can we close the petition now? Because I think that they will have met in February, March—possibly not April. They will have certainly met in May and June. They've had four opportunities to meet. If they haven't come back to us, we're keeping something alive that they're not. But can we note it?

[91] P-04-539, 'Save Cardiff Coal Exchange': well, that's been going around since—. Considered on 2 February; it's been going on for a long time. I'm trying to find the original date—11 March 2014. The petitioner responded and asked that the transcript of a House of Commons debate led by Stephen Doughty be drawn to this committee's attention. The committee's had it under consideration for some time. Another action: the previous committee visited the Coal Exchange to see its condition. However—. I assume Neil's going to be able to help us with this. However, much of the petitioner's concern is about the action of Cardiff city council and the committee will note the local Member of Parliament also voiced some concerns in the House of Commons debate. Later information from the then Minister was that the city council were considering a number of opportunities for the exchange, including private commercial investment. However, the Minister also felt the matter is the council's responsibility and it would be inappropriate for her to comment further.

[92] **Mr George:** Can I just—? I should explain that petitions are not admissible if they're about the operational decisions of local authorities. The reason this particular petition was allowed was because of the role that the Welsh Government has, via Cadw, in listing buildings and so forth and so on. But it does rather get into local authority matters.

[93] **Neil McEvoy:** I think it was more the propriety of what they've done, rather than the operational decisions.

[94] **Mike Hedges:** We've got two choices, or three choices: we can either close the petition, we can ask the Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure and the leader of the council to give oral evidence, or we can ask them to give a written update, which is what I would prefer at the moment. When we have a written update, then we could, if we so wished, ask them in. I don't know where it is at the moment, but the last thing I heard—again, I look to be contradicted by people who know more about it than I do—is that somebody was looking to take it over to do something with it. So, that may

well turn out to be a success.

[95] P-04-594, 'Cilmeri Community Council Appeal for The Prince Llywelyn Monument', 23 September 2014, last considered 8 March. Response from the Minister for Economy, Science and Transport—this has been sent to the petitioner, but no response has been received from them. What do we want to do? The Minister says that the matter appears to be resolved satisfactorily.

[96] **Mr George:** I think those are probably my words, rather than the Minister's. The Minister's then officials were in the process of considering proposals for new signs to signpost the monument, which is what the local council were after.

[97] **Mike Hedges:** What can we ask them? Can we just write to the Minister and ask what's happened? If the signs are in, then we can—. This could be another success.

[98] P-04-667, 'Roundabout for the A477/A4075 Junction': Pembroke Town Council submitted it; considered on 19 January 2016. We've written to the Minister for Economy, Science and Transport. The Minister responded and we've had a response from the petitioners to it.

[99] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** As you said, this again is more for the budget-setting priorities of the local authority, and maybe we could close it.

[100] **Mr George:** The reason that petitions are allowed on particular roads is because they're major trunk roads, so they're a responsibility of the Welsh Government.

[101] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Yes, of course.

[102] **Mike Hedges:** Well, the previous Minister's response indicated that this matter would be taken forward through a stage 4 road safety audit and the petitioner's view will be taken into account. Can we write and ask where we are with it?

[103] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Yes, ask for an update.

[104] **Mike Hedges:** Ask for an update. Everybody happy with that?

[105] P-04-678, 'Infirm Supports': considered on 23 February 2016, when it

was first considered. What action do you want to take? The petitioners appear content. The petitioner has raised awareness of the issue and, prompted by the Minister, she has previously received a full response from the Community Transport Association, which addressed a number of her concerns. It looks like another success, so, can we close it? Okay.

[106] P-04-658, 'The Brimmon Oak': first considered 8 December 2015, last considered 23 February 2016. We've had further comments from the petitioners and we've had a reply from the Cabinet Secretary and previous assurance that the Brimmon Oak appears to be saved. So, they've actually achieved what they wanted, which is saving the Brimmon Oak. So, can we close the petition?

[107] P-04-637, 'To Protect the Future of Youth Music in Wales': last considered 8 March, when it was agreed to write to the WJEC seeking an outstanding response to previous correspondence, to write to the WLGA to seek information on how local authorities are taking matters forward, and to write to the Minister to ask him to respond to petitioners' further comments. A response was received from the Minister for Education and Skills as well as the WLGA; both are available in the public pack. No response has been received from the WJEC. We've had comprehensive responses. I will say publicly I'm hugely disappointed that WJEC has not responded. I would suggest that we write back to them and ask them again.

[108] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Yes.

[109] **Mike Hedges:** I think a body that is funded substantially through public money should respond to letters from us.

[110] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Absolutely right.

[111] **Mike Hedges:** They might not like it and they might send us a letter back we don't like, but I think we've got a right to expect to be treated with respect and get a response. So, can we remind them they haven't responded and then we can deal with it at that time?

[112] P-04-655, 'Demanding our Rights for the Welsh Language in the Private Sector', from Cymdeithas yr Iaith, 17 November 2015. Last considered 2 February 2016. The Welsh Language Commissioner's and the First Minister's views have been sought. The Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee have recently taken oral evidence from the

commissioner on this point and we asked them to take into account the petitioner's comments. We received a response from the First Minister, the Welsh Language Commissioner and the former Chair of the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee, all of which are available in the pack. In view of what responses we've received and the recommendation of CELG, close the petition, yes?

09:30

[113] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Yes.

[114] **Mike Hedges:** Yes.

[115] P-04-660, 'Additional Pressures on Funding for Education Provision Faced by Sparsely Populated Areas', last considered 8 March, write to the Minister—sorry, I'll start again. The committee last considered it and they decided to write to the Minister asking for his comments and to forward details of the petition to the committee tasked with scrutinising the local government Wales Bill when it is introduced so that they can take the issues raised into consideration. A response has been received from the former Minister for Education and Skills. The petition was also forwarded to the clerk of the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee, but, as a responsible committee has only recently been established, no response is available. I think that this has fallen into the crack of the election and us reforming committees. I would think that the petition is about a general issue of local authority funding—we are aware that the petitioners have specific concerns about a local school and the situation it faces. Given this, and the response from the Minister, we can either close the petition or write to the education Minister and the finance Minister asking them to consider it in terms of the next budget.

[116] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Yes, I agree. Or is it—

[117] **Mike Hedges:** So, we'll send it to them and ask them to consider it. They take advice and take correspondence from different organisations on the budget. This could be part of the budget process. So, it goes to the committee and the two Ministers. Is that okay?

[118] **Mr George:** Sorry, to the finance—

[119] **Mike Hedges:** The Finance Committee and the two Ministers.

[120] P-04-677, 'Equal Access to Welsh Language', submitted 23 February 2016, considered on 23 February: a response from the former Minister for education has been received and is available in the public pack. I think the response, again, is a very positive one. So, shall we close the petition? I'm not sure some of these are successes as petitions, but they're certainly successes on what the petitioners want.

[121] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Yes.

[122] **Neil McEvoy:** I'm not sure if it was too successful really, because—
[*Inaudible.*] We don't know what the outcome of them looking at it is.

[123] **Mike Hedges:** Well, shall we ask them to respond when they've looked into it?

[124] **Neil McEvoy:** Yes, I think so.

[125] **Mike Hedges:** Yes, I think you're right there. You can look into it. That can be what, as someone who's served on local governments, is known as a holding response—'We're going to look at it'—and what it means is that it'll keep you happy for a few months and, hopefully, you'll forget about it.

[126] P-04-656, 'Establishing a Conscientious Objectors Day in Wales', last considered 19 January: a response has been received from the First Minister and the former Presiding Officer. Both responses have been sent to the petitioners for their comments. No response has been received as yet. When did they go to the petitioners?

[127] **Mr George:** I'm not sure, but it would have been—

[128] **Mike Hedges:** In January?

[129] **Mr George:** January or February.

[130] **Mike Hedges:** So they've had four or five—

[131] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** If they haven't come back—

[132] **Mike Hedges:** If they haven't come back then I suggest we close it. If you give people an opportunity to come back and they don't come back

within three months, I would always close it.

[133] P-04-661, 'Prohibit Online Use and Electronic Voting by Assembly Members in the Senedd Chamber': considered on 19 January and it was agreed to forward the petitioners' comments to the Presiding Officer and the Assembly Commission to seek their views. A response has been received from the former Presiding Officer and is available in the public pack. The response has also been forwarded to the petitioners but no response has been received as yet.

[134] I think, probably, it's an educational issue. One of the reasons we vote electronically is because you can then record everybody's vote accurately. If we did it by show of hands, you could lose something in accuracy and you're relying on people to count. Many of us have been in meetings where counting has seemed to be different to the number of hands that have gone up. So, it is really important that we have a public record of how everybody votes on every occasion. So, I don't think, unless you had a division lobby, which would add a substantial amount of time to the amount of time we took for voting, then I think it really is important that we do have that opportunity to let everybody know how we vote so we can be held accountable for how we vote.

[135] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** In terms of transparency and accountability, it's a good way forward.

[136] **Mike Hedges:** So, shall we close the petition? Yes. P-04-674, 'Say No to Dyfed'—the petition was first considered on 23 February. Can we hold the petition, rather than close it? At the moment, I understand the Minister's view is that of not making the substantial changes the previous Minister considered, but can we hold that petition until such time that another set of local government proposals come forward? It just saves them resubmitting it. I mean, I don't think that Dyfed is likely to come back under the current Minister, but I also know the current Minister will not be the Minister forever, so if it does come back we've got it held then ready. Is that okay with everybody? Okay.

[137] P-04-684, 'We Demand Better more Effective Welsh HMO Planning Laws and a New Use Classes Order'—this petition was collected in Swansea and had 11 signatures. It was considered for the first time on 8 March. It was agreed to write to the Minister asking him to respond. The then Minister responded and his response is available in the public papers. There has been

recent legislation in this area. This is very much a sort of Swansea, Cardiff, Treforest, Bangor, Aberystwyth situation, where you have a university and you have lots of houses in multiple occupation clustered in certain areas. I know the petitioner and I can understand the petitioner's frustration with where we are, but there is legislation and I think we can write to the—. Have we written to the petitioner telling him about the legislation, and directing him to it?

[138] **Mr George:** He would have received the Minister's letter.

[139] **Mike Hedges:** Okay, fine. Everybody happy to close the petition then? Can I just remind people about the petition handovers at 12.40 p.m., 1 o'clock and 2.30 p.m.? And I hope we can do our utmost to attend as many of these petition handovers as possible; I think it's appreciated by the petitioners, but I think if we are intending to be a public-facing committee, then I think it really is important that we do go out there and meet with people. Sorry, Neil, you were going to say something.

[140] **Neil McEvoy:** One o'clock may be difficult because I've arranged to meet somebody, but the other one, definitely.

[141] **Mike Hedges:** Okay, that's fine. I think we'll rarely get all four of us available at any one time for all these things, but I think it is important that there are representatives of this committee, and, can I just say, it doesn't have to be me? If I'm not available and other members of the committee are available—. And also, for Janet probably more than anybody else, if it helps people to hand it over in north Wales to Janet, I would have no problem—and somebody else has nodded—rather than making somebody from Llandudno come down here to hand a petition in—

[142] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** They could do it in the Assembly building.

[143] **Mike Hedges:** You could do it in the Assembly building in Llandudno, so that people can hand it in, because we're an Assembly for the whole of Wales, not the whole of Cardiff, and it is important that people do realise that. So, if people want to hand a petition in in north Wales, if Janet could collect them, would that be okay?

[144] **Mr George:** No problem at all.

[145] **Mike Hedges:** And you're okay with that, Janet?

[146] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Happy to do that, yes.

[147] **Gareth Bennett:** Chair, which ones are being collected today?

[148] **Mike Hedges:** The Raglan one, the one regarding rally driving in the forests and somebody can help me with what the other one is.

[149] **Mr George:** The Kidwelly railway station.

[150] **Mike Hedges:** The Kidwelly railway station.

[151] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** And what time and where do they meet?

[152] **Mike Hedges:** At 12.40 p.m., 1 o'clock and 2.30 p.m., and they'll be either just inside or just outside, on the first floor.

[153] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** On the Senedd steps?

[154] **Mike Hedges:** Yes.

[155] **Mr George:** We've sent you a diary request so Hannah will be aware of it.

[156] **Gareth Bennett:** Which one is the rallying one? What time is that?

[157] **Mr George:** At 12.40 p.m.

[158] **Mike Hedges:** Okay. The next meeting will be on 13 September. Can I just say: can people make themselves available early in the morning and at lunch time on the thirteenth in case we get any petitions over summer? And after that, then, it should calm down a bit. Okay, thank you very much.

Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 09:40.

The meeting ended at 09:40.