



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

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau **The Petitions Committee**

Dydd Mawrth, 26 Tachwedd 2013
Tuesday, 26 November 2013

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

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

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

Russell George

Ceidwadwyr Cymreig
Welsh Conservatives

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

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

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

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 09:03.
The meeting started at 09:03.

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions

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

[2] Welcome to this meeting of the Petitions Committee. We have no apologies. Hopefully, we will be joined by our colleague, Joyce Watson, shortly. Normal housekeeping arrangements apply, and I think, given the sheer scale of the agenda, we had better get straight under way.

Trafod Sesiwn Dystiolaeth 11 Tachwedd
Discussion of Evidence Session on 11 November

[3] **William Powell:** We move on to a discussion of the evidence at our excellent meeting up at Prestatyn High School on 11 November. Agenda items 2.1 and 2.2 are to be grouped, as they were on that occasion. That is a discussion of the oral evidence with regard to petition P-04-466, Medical Emergency—Preventing the introduction of a poorer Health Service for North Wales, and, P-04-479, Tywyn Memorial Hospital X-ray & Minor Injuries Unit Petition.

[4] We have the transcript available to us as an aide-mémoire, and I would also just say that we have had correspondence—good morning, Joyce—since the meeting from Mike Parry, as he undertook to provide to us. That outlines a meeting that he had had, which at the stage of this meeting was still in the future, with Dr Peter Higson, who is the new chair of Betsi Cadwaladr University Local Health Board at Bryn Beryl Hospital on 20 November. Colleagues, I think, have had the opportunity to have a look at that letter, and, overall, Mr Parry seems to have been impressed by that initial meeting. He is optimistic for improvement in a number of areas. However, he is conscious that there is a long way to go. So, that is a piece of positive news regarding the meeting between Michael Parry, who is one of the petitioners, and Dr Peter Higson.

[5] Moving overall to that evidence session, I thought that it was quite a comprehensive one that we had with both sets of petitioners—Mike Parry, Dr Delyth Davies, Brian Mintoft and Jenny Windsor, if you recall. Colleagues, are there any particular thoughts that you have on that matter? I wanted to suggest that we write to the health board regarding the issue of the traffic impact assessment, which was a recurring theme in the evidence that they gave. Would you be supportive of doing that, to check whether it has actually undertaken anything of that kind, demonstrating the impact of transport difficulties, given the terrain?

[6] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes.

[7] **William Powell:** Are there other issues?

[8] **Russell George:** No, that is fine, Chair; I agree with that. Perhaps we could also write to the local health board to ask it to consider the further correspondence that we have received.

[9] **William Powell:** Indeed, and we can share that correspondence with the health board to see what its response is. Having gone through a particularly bad phase in terms of its engagement with the committee and its wider management of correspondence, it is hopefully now in a better place.

[10] **Joyce Watson:** Chair, like you, I cover this area, and very recently—or until very recently—there has been a feeling of being completely ignored on the ground by the local health board. Those appointments have since changed, and, according to the letter that we have received, those things seem to be more positive now.

[11] **William Powell:** That is the initial impression, certainly.

[12] **Joyce Watson:** That is at this stage, you know. That can only be a good thing for those people on the ground. There has been movement in other things, in relation to Tywyn hospital, and also the bus services. So, some of the issues that were initially prevalent on the ground, when we first received the petition, seem to be moving somewhat in the right direction. That is a good thing, and I think that what is important here for us, having taken this evidence, is to relay that and to really say that we hope that that will continue.

[13] **William Powell:** Yes, and we can make some of those points in the next round of correspondence with the board. Bethan, you have indicated.

[14] **Bethan Jenkins:** I just wanted to say that it was a very useful evidence session in Prestatyn. Obviously, some of the issues remain, especially with regard to transport, and the letter that they have given to us refers to wanting to create a hub in Aberystwyth that could assist the rural service, and to improving ambulance services and out-of-hours services as well. I think that we need to emphasise the extra points that they made in that letter to the local health board and keep a close eye on any developments.

[15] **William Powell:** Absolutely. Thank you very much for that. So, we have clear actions arising out of that one.

[16] The next item is P-04-343, Prevent the destruction of amenities on common land—Anglesey. This petition was submitted by J.E. Futter in November 2011 with the support of 156 signatures. I think that this was a particularly useful evidence session, which is captured in the transcript that we have before us. We had been a little unclear as to some of the specifics associated with this petition, and it was really brought to life by the opportunity to engage with the petitioners and their supporters, and also the local councillor, Lewis Davies, who brought his own experience to bear. I recall suggesting at that stage that we write to

Winston Roddick, the North Wales Police and Crime Commissioner, seeking his views on the level of police activity with regard to illegal use of the common. If colleagues would be happy to endorse that approach, I would be grateful. However, I am sure that there are other actions that we should be taking.

[17] **Joyce Watson:** Well, yes, okay, you can write to Winston Roddick if you like, but I want to know why you are not actually writing to the chief constable. He actually is the person who is responsible for—

[18] **William Powell:** For operational matters.

[19] **Joyce Watson:**—operational matters, and we are talking about operational matters.

[20] **William Powell:** Yes, well, I am very happy to do that. That was a suggestion that was made at the time, and I am very happy to write also to the chief constable, because, as you say, that is very much an operational matter, but then, in terms of accountability, the role does flow back to Mr Roddick. So, I would be happy to write to both in that same vein, if colleagues are happy for me to do so. However, we need to extend it to some of the other stakeholders as well. Do colleagues have any thoughts on that?

[21] **Russell George:** We could write to the National Farmers Union and the Farmers Union of Wales.

[22] **William Powell:** Yes, the farming unions would certainly be highly relevant in the context of the evidence that we heard on that day. Also, potentially, within the committee that the three of us sit on, the Environment and Sustainability Committee, we could flag this issue up as an interesting piece of evidence of what is going on on the ground, and it could possibly be taken into account with the emerging environment Bill. Would that be sensible?

[23] **Bethan Jenkins:** I would like to ask a legal question. In the Record of Proceedings, I have just noticed that I talked about the Commons Act 2006 and that, under section 41 of the Act, if the Ministers have not given them the right to go on the land, they can take action against anyone who does that. I was just wondering whether that can be explored, because obviously the petitioners were saying that people were going on to the land without permission and using it without permission. Is that element of the Act effective in this particular scenario, so that we can use the powers that are already there to sort this problem out, potentially?

[24] **William Powell:** Can you give an initial response now, and maybe look into it further?

[25] **Ms Roberts:** Thank you, Bethan, for raising the point. I have done a briefing note previously that outlined the relevant Act, which is the 2006 Act. You are quite right to point out that there are enforcement powers within the Act. Unfortunately, I do not have the information with me now, but I could certainly look further at that for you in light of the visit and all of the evidence that you have collated as a committee. So, in order to provide definitive legal advice, I would like to go back to the Act. I am also aware that not all of the 2006 Act is in force. I am more than happy to do that, and I will do it as an action stemming from this committee.

[26] **Bethan Jenkins:** I was just thinking that, if we are going to go down the route of talking to the police—

[27] **William Powell:** We need to do it on a solid basis.

[28] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes. If things can be explored fully, then that would be helpful.

[29] **William Powell:** I am grateful for that; thank you very much indeed. Okay, so we have a set of actions arising from that.

[30] We will now move on to P-04-496, Through Schools. This petition was submitted by Dawn Docx in November 2013, with the support of 10 signatures. We had quite a detailed session of evidence from Dawn Docx and her colleague, Anna Gresty, who was a fellow parent of a child attending St Brigid's School. If we recall, they had had a positive development in their particular issue with regard to consultation procedures within the county council on the school organisation. Nevertheless, there are wider points that they have flagged up, as colleagues will recall. We have not, as yet, received the reflections of the petitioners on the correspondence from the Minister. We need to await those. Are there any other thoughts at this stage that might be useful? Bethan?

[31] **Bethan Jenkins:** I did suggest at the time that we could write to the Welsh Local Government Association, because they had not explored that avenue. We could also write to the diocese.

[32] **William Powell:** Yes, absolutely. We could write to the Roman Catholic and Anglican diocesan authorities in the area.

[33] **Bethan Jenkins:** I think they said that they would go back and talk to the WLGA, but I suppose that, as a committee, we could always help with that.

[34] **William Powell:** Yes, we have an open channel with the WLGA and it would be sensible to write to it on this matter, because it is ultimately the sector body that is looking after these things across Wales. I am also happy to write to the diocesan authorities to get a bit more clarity on the issue. I see that colleagues are happy with that approach.

[35] We will now move to P-04-432, Stop the Army Recruiting in Schools. This petition was submitted by the Fellowship of Reconciliation in November last year. It has the support of 374 signatures and an associated petition had gathered 700-plus signatures. Of course, this was the reason that we were in Prestatyn High School in the first place, because of the wider context of that. This is possibly the appropriate time to record our thanks to the staff and pupils of Prestatyn High School for making us so welcome on that occasion. It was a particularly useful opportunity to engage with real young people from years 8 and 9, right up to the sixth form.

09:15

[36] **Bethan Jenkins:** Did you say, 'real young people'? [*Laughter.*]

[37] **William Powell:** I have seen from subsequent social media exchanges that some of the sixth formers are looking at bringing a petition to us. It was a really useful occasion to hear their views at first hand.

[38] Turning to the specifics of this petition in terms of actions, I think it would be useful—

[39] **Russell George:** First of all, I echo your thanks to the school, which was very hospitable to us right from the moment when we arrived in the car park. We are very grateful for all the support that we had at the school. I do not have any strong views on this petition, but my feeling is that I do not know if we need to do any more work on it. I just feel that we have taken evidence and that we have done a lot of work on this. My feeling is that perhaps

we could forward our evidence, as it is, on to the Minister, just for his information. I feel that we have exhausted the petition as much as we can, but I do not have strong views on that.

[40] **William Powell:** I would quite like to see some of this work being pulled together in the form of a short report, depending on capacity issues and also on what colleagues think. However, I do not disagree that we are probably coming close to the end of our work on it.

[41] **Bethan Jenkins:** The only thing that I would add is that I cannot recall if we contacted the careers service, because I was not on the committee at the time that this evidence was taken in an evidence session. Mr Barons, when he came to give evidence right at the end of session, said that, as a teacher, he would appreciate guidelines not only for the army coming in to school, but also for other people who come into schools. That could be a suggestion in our report if we wanted to do it. However, would it be good if we saw if that was something that was already out there before we did that?

[42] **William Powell:** I think that that would be quite useful. In fact, at a meeting the other day of the construction skills group that Joyce chairs, issues around this topic were brought up about accessing schools and taking in careers information of a wider kind. I do not know if that is a relevant issue to raise at this point.

[43] **Joyce Watson:** I think that it is, Chair. I am sorry that I could not join you all at that meeting, but you will know that I was not able to drive after laying a wreath on the same day. Anyway, I think that it is relevant. What is really going on here is an argument about balance. I read your evidence, and people were suggesting that there is an almost an imbalance that the army is having greater access, and therefore greater influence. I am not sure whether that is a conclusion that I would have drawn, but it is one that we need to explore. The only people to do that with, beyond the schools, is Careers Wales, which we all know has been brought in-house now, and is probably changing as a consequence of that. So, now is probably a good time to engage it in any case, because it is, to all intents and purposes, a new body, so it is the right time to influence it now and to draw these things to its attention.

[44] Having done that, and I support that, I think that we really have gone as far as we can with this information.

[45] **William Powell:** We have previously, as the clerk was reminding me, engaged with it and had some response. However, in the context of having gone out and met practitioners, teachers and young people in the field, it would be useful to go back to them, as Joyce and others are advocating. Would colleagues like this to be drawn together in the form of a short report that might find its way into a Plenary discussion, which I think could be quite illuminating?

[46] **Russell George:** After considering all the evidence, I have pretty much satisfied myself that the army is not going into schools to recruit, as the wording of the petition says. However, I agree with some of the comments made, especially Bethan's, as to whether we can widen this out a bit, because part of the evidence that we took clearly stated that there is a lack of other services going into schools. If we were to widen our report in that vein, I would be happy to proceed.

[47] **William Powell:** I think that the report would reflect the nature of our consideration, which has broadened out and looked at trying to explore a better practice across the whole area. I am happy to work with the clerking team to make that happen. Thank you.

09:20

**Deisebau Newydd
New Petitions**

[48] **William Powell:** We have, first, P-04-514, A Welsh clean coal and/or renewable energy power station instead of the proposed Wylfa B nuclear plant at Anglesey. This petition was submitted by Sovereign Wales and has the support of 104 signatures. I will just read the first section and allow you to check the additional information yourselves:

[49] ‘We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to work with the new owners of Wylfa B, Hitachi, to encourage the use of clean Welsh coal or our other plentiful supplies of viable technologies/resources instead of a dangerous nuclear power plant. In a report on clean coal technology from the 2010 XXI World Energy Congress in Montreal Canada, Hitachi state that they are developing a full portfolio of new clean coal technologies aimed at further efficiency improvement, 90% CO2 reduction, and near-zero emissions of other pollutants. As world leaders in clean coal technology, why don't Hitachi work alongside the Welsh Government to implement this technology at Wylfa B instead of an archaic and poisonous nuclear plant station like the failed Fukushima plants they helped to build?’

[50] I think that, at this stage, we probably need to write to the Minister for Natural Resources and Food and seek his perspective on this. He has quite a strong background in the wider issues and it is within his remit. Are colleagues happy with that as an initial action?

[51] **Russell George:** Yes, I would support that.

[52] **William Powell:** We move on to P-04-515, Increase Funding for Welsh Bus Services. This petition was submitted by Gareth Thomas and Daniel Thomas and has collected 246 signatures. It reads:

[53] ‘We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to provide increased funding to bus services so that it adheres to its own policy aims of reducing poverty and exclusion, ensuring that people across Wales are not socially or economically disadvantaged by their location.’

[54] **Bethan Jenkins:** I should say that Gareth and Daniel work with me in my office.

[55] **William Powell:** Okay, so they are a part of your team, Bethan. Thank you for flagging that up.

[56] **Joyce Watson:** Chair, that is fine as it goes, but there is a misconception within this that only the Government funds bus services, when local authorities also put funding towards bus services.

[57] **William Powell:** They make a contribution, yes.

[58] **Bethan Jenkins:** It is not a misconception; obviously, it has to be within the competence of the National Assembly, and so the money from the Welsh Government is the focus of the petition.

[59] **Joyce Watson:** However, there is a misconception inasmuch as—

[60] **Bethan Jenkins:** No, it is not a misconception.

[61] **Joyce Watson:** —that it is the only funders. That said, let us write to the Minister and

see what the response is.

[62] **William Powell:** Yes. I am very happy to write to the Minister if colleagues are content. Russell, you have been very patient.

[63] **Russell George:** Thank you, Chair. I was just going to say that, regardless of what the preamble says—and this is an opinion—I was thinking of the previous petition on the nuclear plant in Anglesey, alongside which there was a lot of information in the detail that was very strongly opinion. So, I do not think that we can get too much into the opinion of the wording of some of the petitions.

[64] **William Powell:** It was very subjective.

[65] **Russell George:** We just have to take that as somebody's opinion and take it forward from there.

[66] **William Powell:** Absolutely. We have to respect the autonomy and the rights of the petitioners. So long as any petition is admissible—as these clearly are—we take them on the terms in which they are framed.

[67] **Bethan Jenkins:** For the record, the clerking team did work with them on the wording so that it would be pertinent for this committee. I want to add that we have other petitions with regard to bus services—the X94 and the Meirionnydd ones.

[68] **William Powell:** Indeed. We received those when we were in Prestatyn.

[69] **Bethan Jenkins:** I wonder whether we could carry out a short piece of work—as we are minded to do, I think—and incorporate this petition into that, as opposed to writing individually on this petition. That would be my proposition, or we could do both.

[70] **William Powell:** I think that it would be sensible for us to adopt a grouped approach to their further consideration, because there is so much that is common to them in terms of the different funding mechanisms, and some of the challenges out there on the ground, whether you are talking about the urban areas, or the more dispersed, rural locations.

[71] **Joyce Watson:** I quite agree that we should group them, Chair. However, I am sure that I am right in saying that procedure dictates that we ask the individual petitioners whether they are happy with our grouping them. If I remember, we have done that before, on hospital ones.

[72] **William Powell:** I do not believe that we sought permission to group; we have sort of made that—

[73] **Joyce Watson:** I am quite happy for it, but I just want us to get it right.

[74] **William Powell:** I think that we made that judgment call within the committee, but it has not generally led to any kind of adverse feeling, or a feeling that people have been short-changed.

[75] **Russell George:** From my memory, Chair, of previous committee meetings, we have grouped petitions together, but we have agreed that at the committee without asking the petitioners. That is just my recollection.

[76] **William Powell:** Yes, that is my sense—that is what I recall.

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

[78] **William Powell:** I think that that is a useful first action to move forward.

[79] The next petition is P-04-516, Make political science compulsory in education. Again, this is rather relevant to some of the issues that we encountered in our discussion with the pupils at Prestatyn High School, although this does not come from there. This petition was submitted by Mark Griffiths, and it collected 12 signatures. It reads:

[80] ‘We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to make political science a compulsory part of the school curriculum.’

[81] I propose that we write to Huw Lewis, as the Minister for Education and Skills, in the first instance, to get his sense on the petition. I see that Members are agreed.

[82] The next petition is P-04-517, Stop the Welsh Assembly Government from bringing in the monitoring of electively home educated children under the guise of safeguarding. This petition was submitted by New Foundation Home Education, just a few weeks ago on the steps of the Senedd, and it has the support of 864 signatures. The text reads as follows:

[83] ‘Serious case reviews have shown that the authorities not elective home education have let children down. The government signed up to the rights of the child in 2004 which states that they will consult with children before changing things that effect them. They are not consulting our children who have already shown last year that they are against monitoring in a different consultation. We, therefore, call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to stop bringing in the monitoring of electively home educated children under the guise of safeguarding.’

[84] We have as yet not undertaken any action on this, and I think that, once again, we need, in the first instance, to write to the Minister for Education and Skills, to get his perspective on this. I think that the previous petition was under the administration of Leighton Andrews, so it would be useful to see what the new Minister feels in this regard. Bethan has indicated that she wishes to comment, and then Joyce.

[85] **Bethan Jenkins:** I just wondered whether we could specify in that letter the point about the rights of the child. When I talked to the petitioners outside, they were quite animated—

[86] **William Powell:** Yes, very much so.

[87] **Bethan Jenkins:** —about the fact that they wanted to ensure that the UNCRC had been taken into consideration, and that due regard had been given to it. I would like to have that in the initial letter.

[88] **William Powell:** We will ensure that that is explicitly included in the correspondence. Do you wish to comment, Joyce?

[89] **Joyce Watson:** Yes. That is fine, and I support that, but I would also like to get the Deputy Minister for Social Services’ reply as well, because they have mentioned safeguarding, and safeguarding comes under her remit.

[90] **William Powell:** That is useful. I think that, potentially, we should be writing to them both, because it straddles both portfolios.

[91] **Joyce Watson:** There is cross-over.

[92] **William Powell:** Yes, exactly. We are happy to do that.

[93] The next petition is P-04-518, Universal free school lunches. This petition was submitted by Jane Dodds, and it collected 14 signatures. It reads:

[94] ‘We the undersigned call on the Welsh Government to introduce a free hot lunch scheme for all children in reception, year 1 and year 2.’

[95] I should note that Jane Dodds is someone who is known to me, and that she has recently been selected as the parliamentary candidate for the Liberal Democrats in the Montgomeryshire constituency. Therefore, I shall put that on the record. Having said that, I think that we probably need to write to the Minister for Education and Skills to seek his perspective on this one. Are Members happy with that? I see that you are. Thank you, colleagues.

09:30

[96] **Joyce Watson:** I am happy to do that, Chair, and I think that that is right and proper. However, it would also involve implementation on the ground, so do you think that it would be worth seeking the views of Powys County Council at this moment? My understanding is that, at the moment, it is thinking of closing all of its kitchens; certainly, a proposal was put to the last council that it was going to shut all of its kitchens and just provide cold lunches, in any case. I think that it is important to get both sides here, because it is all very well and good to ask us to back an implementation policy of this kind, but if, in reality, it cannot be delivered because of proposals by the council, we need to have the full information. That is my view.

[97] **William Powell:** It is useful to have that input, Joyce. Ms Dodds appears to be looking at this from an all-Wales perspective, but, clearly, particular decisions by individual councils will have a bearing. I am not sure whether we should necessarily single out a particular council at this first stage, but, potentially, we could be writing to the Welsh Local Government Association and to a range of councils, or possibly all councils across Wales, at a follow-up stage.

[98] **Bethan Jenkins:** I think that we should write to the WLGA first of all. We could do both.

[99] **William Powell:** Yes; we will write to the Minister for Education and Skills and the WLGA. It may well be that there are specific issues, as you have raised, in individual councils, but since they are not name-checked in the text of the petition, perhaps that would be a little premature.

[100] **Joyce Watson:** Write to the WLGA.

[101] **William Powell:** It is an interesting point that I appreciate you bringing up.

09:31

Y Wybodaeth Ddiweddaraf am Ddeisebau Blaenorol Updates to Previous Petitions

[102] **William Powell:** We now turn to updates to previous petitions, and we have a goodly number to deal with, so, if we can maintain progress, I think that that is in everybody's interest.

[103] We move to P-04-483, A plain English /Cymraeg *clir* policy for all Welsh Assembly and Government communications. This petition was submitted by Sovereign Wales in May 2013 with the support of 450 signatures. We last considered it on 16 July, and we agreed to write to a series of stakeholders seeking their views: the Plain English Campaign and the Cymraeg *Clir* unit at Canolfan Bedwyr. We also received quite a full response from Claire Clancy here in the National Assembly and, indeed, from the Welsh Government. Colleagues, given that we have a substantial body of information here, I would appreciate a steer from you as to how you would like to proceed on this one.

[104] **Bethan Jenkins:** Canolfan Bedwyr suggests the bringing together of a short document that would clarify the guidelines, the crystal mark and *Cymraeg clir* for the Welsh language. I am wondering whether people have suggestions; I think that the petitioner suggests an awareness campaign. Is there something that we can pull together, like a short document, on what we have had so far? I am not sure whether we would need to take more evidence.

[105] **William Powell:** No; I think that we have a substantial body. It is about drilling down. We have really quite substantial documentation, have we not?

[106] **Bethan Jenkins:** There are quite a few recommendations, so I would be conscious of either writing to the Minister with the recommendations that have been made by various parties or pulling together a short document outlining the evidence that we have had; I am flexible.

[107] **William Powell:** I think that a short summary document, maybe, would be of benefit. One of the characteristics of a lot of what we have in our papers is that it is really quite dense and not necessarily accessible in itself because it is so comprehensive. It would, perhaps, be useful to pull together a short summary of the responses. I think that that would be sensible.

[108] **Bethan Jenkins:** We can then pull out some of the suggestions that have been made, like the one-stop shop, the short document and the awareness campaign, and then people can make of that what they wish.

[109] **William Powell:** Have we had a full response from the petitioner with regard to the responses that we have received? That would, possibly, be useful as well, to see what Sovereign Wales's perspective is on the body of evidence that we have already received. I am happy to chase that one up on behalf of the committee.

[110] **Bethan Jenkins:** I think that it has given a response, has it not? I am not sure whether it has given a response to all of the correspondence.

[111] **William Powell:** I think that there may be some—

[112] **Mr George:** My apologies; there was a letter.

[113] **Bethan Jenkins:** It has mentioned the 16 July committee meeting. I think that we have enough, to be honest.

[114] **William Powell:** Okay, so if we can do a short summary of the issues that arise from the response that we have had. That would be of use to take forward.

[115] The next petition is P-03-315, New Dyfi River Crossing Petition, which was submitted by south Meirionnydd older people's forum back in February 2011 and had the support of 3,204 signatures. There is a very substantial block of support for this petition. It

was submitted in the third Assembly, but we last considered it in May of last year and we wrote to the petitioners urging them to take part in the public consultation that was due to take place this autumn. The Minister has now written to me, drawing attention to her written statement on 10 July, which included commitments to funding studies for further work on the Dyfi bridge. The Minister has kindly agreed to meet members of the business community in Machynlleth and the Machynlleth Town Council later this week on related matters. I am not quite clear that we can do a whole lot more on this one at the moment. Russell, I would like your perspective on it.

[116] **Russell George:** This petition has moved forward considerably since it was first brought to the committee in February 2011, before I was on this committee or elected here. The letter to you from the Minister states that further investigation is under way on the four options. It would be useful for us to have a timescale for when she anticipates that piece of work, resulting from the options, moving forward. It would be very useful if you could write as Chair in that regard.

[117] **William Powell:** Yes, in terms of getting an overall time frame, I think that that would be sensible. The work commissioned at the moment is important, but it is only a staging post along the way to resolving this long-standing problem. One issue that we are facing is a lack of response from the petitioners. Given the age of the petition it is possible that the forum has moved on to deal with other matters or is not quite as focused on this issue. It would be useful to write one more time to seek that response that we have been waiting for for some time.

[118] **Joyce Watson:** Yes, it is a very long-standing problem and it is a huge issue. I have covered this area, as you know, for some time now. When this is closed the diversion route is quite a challenge for most people, and I have done it.

[119] **William Powell:** It is torturous.

[120] **Joyce Watson:** It is good to hear that this is on the Minister's portfolio of things to do and that she has initiated studies to move this forward. I agree that we need timescales. While I welcome the statement, I would welcome a timetable on it as well. To that end, I agree that we seek that. Also, we should seek to understand whether it is the case that the petitioners are still there as a forum, because if they are not, that leaves us in somewhat of a peculiar situation, where we have nobody to engage with. Therefore, if they do not come back to us, and if there is no forum, I am afraid that we will have to close the petition because there is nobody to engage with.

[121] **William Powell:** That is a fair comment.

[122] **Russell George:** This is an interesting point. There are other petitions in this category as well, but this petition was signed by 3,204 people. If the lead petitioner who organised it has dropped away for whatever reason and has not taken it forward, there remains 3,203 people who will want to know how it progresses.

[123] **William Powell:** It is clear that there was and still is a significant body of concerned people, so maybe we can do a bit more proactive research to try to resuscitate the leadership of the petition.

[124] **Russell George:** I think that we should try hard to engage with the petitioners for the sake of the other people who signed it. If there is no mechanism for that, then, perhaps at some point in the future, we can discuss whether somebody else can take over a petition if somebody else lacks interest.

[125] **William Powell:** That it is an interesting point. I think that we can address that in the future.

[126] We now move on to the next petition, which is P-04-319, Newton traffic petition, which, I think, still has quite a lively stewardship. It was submitted by Paul Pavia in June 2011 with the support of 10 signatures. An associated petition collected approximately 5,000 signatures. We are familiar with this important topic. Also, a lot of work has been going on on the margins, and, indeed, the Minister has maintained a very strong interest in the delivery of this project. We last considered correspondence on the petition in July and we agreed to await the findings of the options review on the Newtown bypass, and also to write to the petitioner informing him of the Minister for Economy, Science and Transport's recent statement. We now have a further update from Edwina Hart, which is in our public papers, and which you will have had an opportunity to see. Again, with this one, as you were advocating earlier, it is the issue of timescales and so on that we need to keep in our minds. We need to write to the Minister, surely, to be kept fully informed of further developments as they take place. I see that a couple of Members have indicated to speak. Russell is first.

[127] **Russell George:** I would just like to declare an interest as somebody who was heavily involved in collecting signatures for this petition, before I was a Member of this committee. I also declare, just for the record, that the petitioner is a member of staff who works in my office. I agree with your proposal. I think that we just need to await the Minister's further updates on this.

[128] **William Powell:** Are colleagues happy with that approach for now? I see that you are. Good.

[129] The next petition is P-04-393, Llanymynech and Pant Bypass Action Group. It was submitted by Duncan Borthwick in May 2012, with the support of 84 signatures. On our return from Prestatyn, we drove along this stretch of road and we were made aware of the particularly narrow and busy road that there is there and had the opportunity, as passengers, heading back from north Wales to take stock of some of the issues. To be able to see the situation on the ground was a useful experience. The cross-border dimension here is the particularly salient point, I think. I propose that we write to the Minister for us to be kept informed of the results of the traffic monitoring in the coming 12 months, which has been referred to, and also to be told if there are any further developments in relation to the work with the English equivalent body, the Highways Agency. That is probably as much as we can realistically undertake at the moment.

[130] **Russell George:** I was pleased that the committee was able have a look at the road layout as we drove past on the way back from north Wales. I was speaking this week to my colleague Glyn Davies, the MP for Montgomeryshire, about this and he very much hopes to raise this as a cross-border issue in Parliament this week. I think that all we can do for the moment is—the Minister has said that she will come back to us once this work reaches conclusion. So, whether we need to write to her or whether we should just wait for her further correspondence, I do not know. However, I am happy with that.

[131] **William Powell:** It is always useful to keep things on the radar. The Minister often sends back a short, focused response assuring us of her intention. So, that is what I am happy to do.

[132] **Bethan Jenkins:** Is there not a memorandum that we saw initially about the relationship between the UK Government and Wales? Does that have any bearing on cross-border work and cross-funding?

[133] **Mr George:** I think that it was provided at the last meeting or the last occasion that

this was considered. That memorandum was very high level and was about inter-governmental relations. I do not think that it offered any particular help at operational level.

[134] **Bethan Jenkins:** So, it would just be whether they would find the money, not strategic—

[135] **Mr George:** Yes. It is about day-to-day liaison between the two Governments.

09:45

[136] **William Powell:** However, this cross-border dimension affects transport, and very much affects health issues and a number of the other issues, including training provision, which Joyce sometimes raises in the context of the construction and skills agenda. So, we need to be focused on tight cross-border communication in that regard.

[137] The next petition is P-04-446, Business Rate Relief for Welsh Charity Shops. This is another issue that has cross-border dimension, particularly since the petitioner is based in England. It was submitted by the Charity Retail Association in January 2013. An associated petition has collected 22,000 signatures; there is an enormous level of interest here. We last considered the petition on 16 April and agreed to await the decision of the Minister in relation to the task and finish group recommendations. The Minister responded on 9 October, following her statement to Plenary on 1 October. We also have a response from the petitioners to what the Ministers had to say, and all of that is in our public papers today. It is interesting that the Minister is keeping these recommendations very much under review at the moment and has written to the UK and other devolved administrations to ascertain how they propose to go forward on this. She seems minded to move forward, if possible, with some degree of consensus as to how to take the issue forward. So, at the moment, it is not clear that we can do a great deal more than to await the responses that the Minister gets from the other administrations to which she has written. Is that the best way of approaching things now?

[138] **Bethan Jenkins:** I think that we could also forward the petitioners' response to the Minister, because they say in their response to us that the task and finish group did not have evidence to suggest that this was the best way forward. So, we need to understand why the Minister is potentially pursuing it, if it is not something that others have found in evidence and have supported.

[139] **William Powell:** I am very happy to forward the considered response to this matter that we have received from the petitioners. A number of us have had the opportunity to visit individual charity shops and those people who have raised their issues with us on a constituency or regional level. If we can share those concerns with the Minister by sharing the correspondence, that can only be helpful.

[140] The next petition is P-04-468, Road Safety Concerns A48 Chepstow. The petition was submitted by Chepstow Town Council in March, and an associated petition has collected over 1,000 signatures. The petition reads as follows:

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

[142] We have a clear response from the Minister, which was received on 1 November. She has asked her officials, as you can see, to consider issues, particularly the use of the bridge by school children and pedestrians, and to look for a feasibility study to be carried out in the 2014-15 financial year as to any engineering solutions that can be brought in to increase pedestrian safety, which will probably be of some comfort to the petitioners. However, clearly, the Minister is not minded to take forward the speed reduction, which was the thing

that they were aiming for. So, I would like very much to write on behalf of the committee, thanking the Minister for her further response and to ask for us to be kept informed of developments. By the same token, we need to write to the petitioners, asking them whether they have any reflections on the Minister's response. I suspect that they may be somewhat disappointed with regard to the speed issue, but, on the other hand, it would be useful to gauge their views on the proposal for a feasibility study. Are colleagues happy with that?

[143] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes.

[144] **William Powell:** Okay. Let us do that.

[145] The next petition is P-04-475, Wanted—Buses for Meirionnydd. This petition was submitted by Barbara Snowball in April 2013 with the support of 174 signatures. Again, this is very much in this family of petitions on bus services, which was referred to during consideration of the new petition earlier. We considered correspondence on the petition in June of this year and we agreed to write to stakeholders, which included Gwynedd Council, Disability Wales, Age Cymru, the Older People's Commissioner for Wales and the Children's Commissioner for Wales. You will recall that Joyce Watson kindly informed the committee of her findings. Would you like to speak very briefly to that, to refresh our recollections, Joyce, of your rapporteur visit on that occasion?

[146] **Joyce Watson:** Things have changed since my last meeting and extra buses have now been provided on some of the routes that were of concern. However, there is a much wider issue at play here in terms of public transport and connectedness, and this was the theme here: connecting people to the places where they need to be, at the time that they need to be there. Whether that means having a bus to catch a train and that it meets the train—

[147] **William Powell:** Yes. That integrated transport approach.

[148] **Joyce Watson:** It is an absolute integrated transport issue on one level. However, it is also about much wider access to be able to, in some cases, access education, healthcare and all of those things that most people take for granted in an urban setting, as opposed to living in a rural setting. It is about how best we can fit those things together, in a sparsely—by comparison—populated area, which is the other challenge, of course. The group that I met is very innovative and forward thinking. As a consequence of having the extra buses and in recognising, because there are quite a lot of issues here, that some people do not understand timetables, that group of people has printed its own leaflets and booklets in simple, plain language, which goes back to a previous petition, and made it accessible to people on the ground.

[149] **William Powell:** So, it has been doing quite a bit of promotion.

[150] **Joyce Watson:** It has been doing that. I will be meeting with the group again in a couple of weeks' time, so I will feed back again then. We have to pay tribute to the people who have worked consistently hard on this and really tried to drive it forward. Of course, the additional services are a six-month pilot—

[151] **William Powell:** Hence their keenness, presumably, to promote the services to the full.

[152] **Joyce Watson:** Yes. I welcome that and I welcome Gwynedd Council supporting that, and everybody else who has done so. When the review comes out at the end, it will reflect that six-month winter period, rather than the summer period, so whether it will capture a true picture is what I will try to discuss with the group in a couple of weeks' time.

[153] Therefore, we have had real concerns, and we cannot really separate looking at transport from looking at access to health services, education or looking at life generally for these people. You talked earlier, Chair, about bringing all of these petitions together as one. It is probably an ideal opportunity for us to really look at this and to understand what is in the way. What is in the way is the deregulation of bus services. The change in the finance is favourable to us, and consequently, to local authorities. So, it is a very complex piece of work that I feel would certainly be of advantage to us if we have the capacity, and I also think that it is the right time to do it.

[154] **William Powell:** Yes. It is very much at the top of the agendas of people across Wales. We see that from the cluster of petitions that we currently have and other issues that we encounter in casework and in the correspondence that we get. So, there is consensus that we should be looking at undertaking a short, focused piece of work on this. Bethan advocated that just a little earlier.

[155] **Bethan Jenkins:** I am thinking of the impact on the cut from the Welsh Government and then how the local authorities made the decision in lots of areas to change or to cut services as a result of the Welsh Government funding cuts. I think that it would be good if we could take some evidence or do some research across Wales on how that impacted on how councils commission services differently. In some areas—not that I wish to name names—there was no consultation at all, and services were cut. I think that we need to understand that there should be a process by which changes are made so that users are aware of the changes, and so that they can have a view on the said changes.

[156] With regard to deregulation, I have been working on this for years. When the Labour Party was in the UK Government, it was not keen on re-regulating bus services. If that has changed, that is great news for me. If we can include that as part of it—if that is within our competence, of course—that would be good, because, obviously, the more that we can have ownership over our own public services the more that we can have flexibility within the system.

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

[158] **Bethan Jenkins:** I think that we need to take all of the petitions together, because most of them are probably saying the same things.

[159] **William Powell:** Yes. Also, among a couple of issues that I have come across in relation to this is the role of the small and medium-sized transport companies in individual localities. I have also come across, which was a bit of a surprise to me, the Welsh Government's investment in some rolling stock. That is a complication that I raised with the Minister. I think that she acknowledged that there had been some selective investment by Welsh Government in acquiring buses and having either a whole or part stake. I think that we need to drill down to find out what is going on in that area, which relates, at an operational level, to some of the issues that you have spoken of. The only concern or reflection that I have is whether or not there is scope. You spoke of remit; I do not know whether the Enterprise and Business Committee, on which you sit, Joyce, would have any capacity to take this forward. You said that some work has been done. I do not know whether it is worth writing to Nick Ramsay, as Chair of that committee, to check this issue out before we go forward in undertaking a piece of work, because we want to avoid duplication. Would you speak briefly about any work that has been done by that committee?

[160] **Joyce Watson:** Yes. There has been work done. Deregulation is the key here. The gap that we fill—local authorities and Welsh Government—is the non-profitable bits of bus services. It is particularly prevalent in bus services. The money that we have to do that is being more and more restricted, with the £1.7 billion reduction in our budget. I think that we

should certainly look at what was done by the Enterprise and Business Committee. I cannot recall the whole remit and terms of reference of that work right now, but I think that if we hone it down and are very mindful of our terms of reference in what we want to look at—I have briefly outlined where I think that it needs to go—I think that we can then add some value to that.

[161] **William Powell:** To what has already been done.

[162] **Joyce Watson:** We can also be mindful of the fact that the Minister has made some very clear statements about continually supporting some of the main routes that were cut very recently as a consequence of deregulation and the investment that—

[163] **William Powell:** Perhaps we could identify more strategic routes.

[164] **Joyce Watson:** Yes, exactly. She has made investments. We could also link that to the statements that have been made by the Minister for Health and Social Services on how he is reviewing the provisions of transport to access healthcare. I think that pulling all of those things together would be useful, particularly because we would purely be looking at the rurality issue. I think that that is the difference.

[165] **William Powell:** That has added quite a lot of clarity to our discussion here, Joyce. If the Enterprise and Business Committee has undertaken a wider piece of work, we clearly need to draw on that in any shorter focused piece that we are doing. It also probably reduces the likelihood that it would be wishing to do the piece of work that we wish to do. We can just confirm that in informal contact with the Chair, but I propose that we go forward on the kind of basis that you have outlined.

10:00

[166] **Bethan Jenkins:** If we could see terms of reference, I would be grateful.

[167] **William Powell:** I will ask for that to be shared and commented on before the work gets under way.

[168] **Mr George:** Sorry; the terms of reference for—

[169] **Bethan Jenkins:** For the work that we carry out as a committee. If we do that—are we doing that?

[170] **William Powell:** Yes, that is the emerging consensus: that we should do a short piece of work. Did this lead to a report, Joyce, of the Enterprise and Business Committee, as you recall?

[171] **Joyce Watson:** I think that it did, but I cannot remember.

[172] **William Powell:** Maybe we can have that circulated as a link; I think that that would be helpful as well.

[173] **Bethan Jenkins:** It is about whether we need to take evidence from certain people: the bodies that represent the bus operators—

[174] **William Powell:** The regional consortia—

[175] **Bethan Jenkins:** The regional consortia and so forth.

[176] **William Powell:** Some of the user groups, potentially, as well.

[177] **Joyce Watson:** That should be in the terms of reference.

[178] **William Powell:** Yes; let us make sure that they are circulated and available for comment.

[179] The next petition is P-04-508, Restore the Glandyfi view. This petition was submitted by Nigel Callaghan in October of this year, with the support of 83 signatures. We recall the issue here; we considered the petition on the first occasion on 8 October, and we agreed to write to Mrs Edwina Hart on these matters. We have quite a clear response, which is available in our public papers. The Minister flags up that there is a viewing point that was included as part of the improvement work. However, it is clear that the Minister is resolute on the issue that there will not be a wider reduction of the wall to afford the wider view that the people are seeking. In view of such a clear response, we have no choice but to close the petition. Are colleagues happy that we adopt that approach?

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

[181] **William Powell:** Good; thank you.

[182] The next item is P-04-362, Ambulance Services in Monmouth. This petition was submitted in February 2013 by Mathew Davies, and has the support of 450 signatures. We also recall the particularly poignant circumstances around the ambulance service experiences of the petitioner, which he shared with us on the occasion of presenting the petition.

[183] We last considered this on 16 July and agreed to write to the Health and Social Care Committee asking the committee to inform us when decisions were made in terms of its forward work programme. David Rees AM, Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee, has now responded, confirming that we will be kept informed as to if and when the committee undertakes a specific piece of work into ambulance services in future. However, there was no indication of that being an imminent piece of work. Of course, the wider McClelland review is the background to this, in taking forward those proposals.

[184] We have a couple of options, as I see it: to wait for the decision of the Health and Social Care Committee or, potentially, closing the petition and writing to the Chair of that committee asking him to be in direct touch with the petitioner. I would appreciate your thoughts on this matter.

[185] **Bethan Jenkins:** I think that we should close it now and wait for the Health and Social Care Committee to take the matter forward.

[186] **Joyce Watson:** Yes; I agree.

[187] **William Powell:** I think that that is probably the best approach. Excellent; we have agreement on that. Let us do as you suggest.

[188] The next petition is P-04-448, Improve Sexual health services for Western Vale. This petition was submitted by Rebecca Lowrie in January 2013 with the support of 16 signatures. We last considered correspondence on this back on 16 April, and we agreed to write to Cardiff and Vale University Local Health Board requesting further information on the time frame of its upcoming review into sexual health services. We were then going to review the petition once that review had been completed. Despite a number of reminders, we have had no further correspondence from the LHB, which I find less than satisfactory. I would like to write on one more occasion to the chief executive of the LHB expressing concern about this,

and, given the nature of the problem over correspondence, we probably ought to be copying in the Minister for Health and Social Services, so that he is aware of the problems that we are encountering in getting this matter taken seriously. Are colleagues happy with that? Good.

[189] Next is P-04-452, Equal Rights for Tube-fed Youngsters. The petition was submitted by Dr Tymandra Blewett-Silcock in January 2013, with the support of 142 signatures. We last took evidence on this from the petitioner in an evidence session on 16 July and there were a number of actions that we agreed out of that: first, to write to the Minister for Health and Social Services raising the issue of the review of direct payments, and also to write to the Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee to highlight the issues in advance of the further scrutiny of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Bill, which we know is so central to their agenda currently in terms of all the amendments that are being considered, and to collect further case studies on the matter. We have now had a response from the Minister and from David Rees. We have their letters here. As I referred to earlier, the social services Bill is currently receiving Stage 2 consideration at committee and keeping our colleagues pretty busy. At this stage, I would like to write to the petitioner to seek views on the Minister's letter. Are there any other actions we should do at the moment?

[190] **Bethan Jenkins:** The letter says that this will be discussed in the wellbeing Bill. So, we need to get an update from the Minister on whether this will be clarified.

[191] **William Powell:** Once Stage 2 has been completed?

[192] **Mr George:** Stage 2 is very long, because of the number of amendments.

[193] **William Powell:** It is colossal.

[194] **Mr George:** There are six different meetings of the health committee to consider it, I think, so it will be some time before that is finished. The Minister will then, I guess, need time to take stock of what that means.

[195] **William Powell:** Okay, so the first action would be to write to the petitioner seeking her views.

[196] **Bethan Jenkins:** As long as the petitioner is aware that we have no control over that, obviously.

[197] **William Powell:** Absolutely. In writing to the petitioner, we can refer to the sheer scale of the Stage 2 considerations and the fact that there is a degree of time lapse in that matter.

[198] Next are two petitions that we have previously grouped and had a joint evidence session on, P-04-457, The Charitable Chaplaincy Campaign, and P-04-474, Support for NHS chaplaincy services. The first of those petitions was submitted by the charitable chaplaincy campaign in February 2013 and, in April 2013, we received P-04-474, Support for NHS chaplaincy services, which is quite explicitly a counter petition, which enjoyed the support of in excess of 1,000 signatures. We had quite a rewarding evidence session earlier in the year on 18 June. We wrote to individual LHBs asking how they record data with regard to charitable chaplaincy. We also wrote to the Minister for Health and Social Services informing him of what we had undertaken to date with regard to the consideration of this petition and highlighted the charitable chaplaincy petition's concerns about the definitions of spiritual and religious care and asking for further clarity. We have received considerable response from both the Minister and some of the health boards. The petitioner for the charitable chaplaincy campaign has also written, setting out views on those responses, and we are grateful to him for that. All those are in our public papers. At this stage, I am interested as to which way we

go. There would be the possibility of a further evidence session, but I would hope that we can draw the strands together, maybe in the form of a report. Russell has indicated; it would be useful to have your perspectives.

[199] **Russell George:** I have a few observations. How many health boards responded to our letters? I could only see a few in the pack.

[200] **William Powell:** It was a bit patchy, to be honest.

[201] **Mr George:** These are the responses that we received.

[202] **William Powell:** We wrote to all the health boards.

[203] **Russell George:** I was going to be slightly critical of Powys local health board. It has replied, but it has replied stating that it is replying to the committee's freedom in information request. I do not think that the Petitions Committee submitted a freedom of information request. That is a bit of a gripe with me; every time I have requested information from Powys local health board, it treats it as a freedom of information request, which is a bit strange. However, I cannot be too critical of it, because at least it has replied.

[204] **William Powell:** Procedurally, it is a bit curious as to how it manages its information system.

[205] **Russell George:** What I did observe is that the two petitions, although they are opposite in view, both seem to recognise the importance of the chaplaincy service, albeit that they think it should be funded in different ways.

[206] **William Powell:** That was common ground, to a degree, was it not?

[207] **Russell George:** Yes. I noticed that, in the letter from Adam Cairns, the chief executive of Cardiff and Vale health board, he was talking about the work that is done by chaplains. There are visits by request at a bedside, emergency callout 24/7, support for staff, and facilitating guidance to staff on faith and cultural issues. My only observation was that, although the petitioners agree on the importance of the service, if it was funded by charity alone, there could be gaps in the service that is provided across the country. That was my only observation. The last observation was that Mark Drakeford, the Minister, has responded, but he seems to indicate that there is not going to be any change. So, we may need to consider whether we need to do any further work on this.

[208] **William Powell:** Previously, that has triggered our decision to close a petition, or, in this case, both petitions. We could do that. I just wondered whether there was an appetite for these matters to be aired in a short report, drawing the strands together, possibly in Plenary. If there is not such an appetite, then I am quite happy for us to draw the line and to close the petition. It really depends on—

[209] **Russell George:** I am just conscious of the level of work. If we have had a response from the Minister, which looks to me to be fairly detailed—

[210] **William Powell:** To be consistent with the approach that we have adopted elsewhere, we will move to close the petition, if colleagues are happy with that approach.

[211] **Bethan Jenkins:** I just have one question, if somebody can clarify. In the consideration of the Minister's response, the petitioners have said that the Minister has interpreted section 47 of the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Act 2003 as a commitment to fund chaplaincy services, but they interpret it as not being statutory.

Therefore, their definition of commitment would be different from the Minister's. I am wondering whether there is clarification on that. To me, that would be the fundamental point in terms of their concern about how it is funded, and if it should be funded.

[212] **Mr George:** I do not think that the Minister's response says that there is a statutory requirement. He simply says that section 47 of the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Act 2003 allows them to introduce standards and that the standards they introduced give the commitment to fund those services. However, I do not think that the Minister is saying that they have to.

[213] **William Powell:** It is not a requirement. It provides for it, does it not?

[214] **Mr George:** Yes, it just allows them to do it, and, having agreed that they should do it, they have agreed to fund it.

[215] **William Powell:** That was my reading as well.

[216] **Bethan Jenkins:** Okay. I just wanted to clarify that, because I was not sure whether that is how the petitioners had interpreted what the Minister had interpreted, if you know what I am saying. That is, that he had seen it as a commitment to fund. If that is the case, then I am comfortable with that. I think that we should just pull it all together now. I am not sure that we could take more evidence.

[217] **Russell George:** I have one quick question. Usually, in our information packs, we have the number of signatures on each petition. I can see the number of signatures on one petition, but not the other. Do we know what the level of signatures was on the other petition?

[218] **Mr George:** I am sure that we do, but possibly not just now.

10:15

[219] **Russell George:** I remember looking at it last time and noting then that it was not recorded then either.

[220] **Mr George:** It was submitted by an organisation. So, it did not require a minimum number of signatures. Whether it attracted other signatures, I could not say at this stage.

[221] **Russell George:** It does not make a significant difference; that is fine. I do not know, Chair, what we can—

[222] **William Powell:** I would be interested to hear Joyce's view on this one as well. Do you feel, Joyce, that it would be useful to draw these strands together in a short report that we could then share with Plenary or should we not take that extra step? We seem a bit balanced at the moment as to which way to go.

[223] **Bethan Jenkins:** Does it all have to go to Plenary, or could we draw it together as a paper?

[224] **William Powell:** No, it does not necessarily need to. However, sometimes, it can be quite rewarding, as we remember from recent experience.

[225] **Joyce Watson:** I am quite happy to go with the majority on this. I do not have a firm view on whether it should go to Plenary or whether it should be a report in that regard. If it is the case that others feel that it is important that it is discussed in Plenary, I am quite happy to go along with that. If the alternative view is the case, I am happy to go along with that.

[226] **Russell George:** The only other option, Chair, is a halfway point. I am thinking of the level of work of doing a report for Plenary and for the committee. Perhaps we could draw it together in the form of a letter to the Minister, drawing attention to the evidence that we have taken.

[227] **William Powell:** If we draw the strands together, we can then decide as to how to proceed and whether we then close these petitions jointly.

[228] **Bethan Jenkins:** I think that we can close them, definitely.

[229] **Joyce Watson:** Yes. I agree with closing.

[230] **William Powell:** Okay. We will draw the strands together, and, in doing so, close both petitions, because they have been well aired and they have brought some interesting issues to our attention that we certainly would not otherwise have been aware of.

[231] Moving swiftly now to P-04-463, Reduction of Salt Levels in Food, the petition was submitted by Harry Hayfield in March 2013 and has the support of 11 signatures. It calls upon

[232] ‘the Welsh Government to reduce the amount of salt in food so that people are able to choose healthy lifestyles in Wales.’

[233] We last considered correspondence on the petition on 24 September in our first meeting of this term, and we agreed to offer the petitioner a further opportunity to see whether he was satisfied by the Minister’s response. We have now had a response from Mr Hayfield, which is available in our public papers. We previously had, as has been referred to earlier, a legal briefing paper from the Assembly’s Legal Services on the competence areas here of the Welsh Ministers and the Assembly’s powers in this field, and we have had this recirculated to Members. Given that the Minister has provided us with a pretty comprehensive response, and has indicated the action that is currently being taken forward and what, indeed, is possible, it is probably time to close the petition. However, I would be happy to write to the Minister, drawing his attention to the petitioner’s wish to engage with him further on this issue, if diary commitments allow for that. Are colleagues happy with that approach?

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

[235] **William Powell:** Excellent.

[236] Next is P-04-490, Antiretroviral Medication in Cardiff. This petition was submitted by Joerg Thieme in June 2013, with the support of 150 signatures, calling upon

[237] ‘the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to act in regards to the very limited supply of antiretroviral HIV medications.’

[238] We recall that this is a highly specific case that was flagged up by the petitioner, and he and his colleagues shared more detail with us when the petition presentation was made in June. We considered it for the first time on 18 June, and we agreed to write to the Minister and to the Cardiff and the Vale board. We have a response from the Minister, and the petitioner has also supplied some comments and some critique of that ministerial response. We have all that information in our public papers. The issue that is clearly of some concern to the petitioner is that the Minister’s comments about the savings in terms of a more cautious approach to prescription and so on—savings of between £15 million and £50 million—were very much grossed up across the whole area of the prescription of drugs, whereas the petitioner has a very specific issue that he is flagging up, which does not seem to be addressed

in that level of detail. I wonder whether colleagues would be agreeable to my writing on behalf of the committee to Professor Mark Drakeford to flag up the details of the issue here and to seek some further clarity. Clearly, that is what the petitioner is seeking in his response. I am not quite clear whether we have received correspondence from the health board.

[239] **Mr George:** We have. The correspondence from the health board was received late, so we have given copies to Members today. There is also a response to that from the petitioner, which was only received yesterday. However, it is essentially the same issue.

[240] **William Powell:** Okay. So, the detail has been lost, really.

[241] **Mr George:** I think that the petitioner just does not accept the points that have been put by the health board or by the Minister for a variety of reasons that he has set out.

[242] **William Powell:** This practice seems to be unique to this particular health board.

[243] **Mr George:** The petitioner says so.

[244] **Bethan Jenkins:** Just from scanning the letter from the health board, it says that evidence of the actual problems being incurred by patients in receiving medicines in practice have been sought from sexual health consultants and is yet to be provided. So, we need to see that. Also, from scanning what the petitioners have said as regards the options that have been put forward as part of the health board's ideas about continuation of monthly dispensing and so forth, they have not been consulted on that. That is something that we need to raise with the health board. They seem quite angry about the fact that changes are potentially going to happen without the users themselves having a view.

[245] **William Powell:** It was also impacting very adversely on their quality of life and ability to go about their day-to-day business. I remember that it was having an impact on their work lives, as well, in relation to the disruption caused, so there is some further detail for us to drill down to on this one.

[246] **Bethan Jenkins:** Perhaps the clerks could take a better look at it, because we have not had a chance to be totally in depth here, this morning.

[247] **William Powell:** Yes, it was a late response.

[248] **Bethan Jenkins:** So, if there are extra points that the clerks can look at, then I am sure that they can talk to the petitioners if there is something that we can add to the letter to the health board.

[249] **William Powell:** Yes, we need to make sure that the most salient points of the petitioner's concerns are included in the correspondence that we send both to the health board and to the Minister. There is some further detail that we need to capture here.

[250] We move on now to P-04-501, Day Centres for the elderly in Wales to be made statutory. It calls on the Welsh Government to make day care centres a statutory requirement for the whole of Wales. We first considered this on 24 September, when we agreed to write to the Minister for Health and Social Services. In fact, it is the Deputy Minister for Social Services who has responded, because it falls directly within her remit, and the petitioners have also commented on the letter received from Gwenda Thomas. We have both documents here in our papers. We could, potentially, invite the Deputy Minister and perhaps representatives associated with the petition to an oral evidence session to air some of these issues. I do not know whether colleagues feel that that would be a useful approach in that particular instance.

[251] **Joyce Watson:** I absolutely support looking at this piece of work, but I am also realising that we are a very small committee and we are talking about an awful lot of work that, to be honest, I do not know how we will manage. My suggestion would be that we approach the main committee responsible for this—the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee—to see if it has capacity to take on some work in this area, before we commit ourselves, and I would argue that it would be overcommitting ourselves to doing any more work that we cannot do well, because of capacity. So, that is my view on it. Like everyone here, I absolutely support getting to the bottom of this and seeing what the functions of day care centres are and so on, but my first reaction to your suggestion, Chair, is to ask the other committee whether it has the capacity, simply because it has a larger membership than us.

[252] **William Powell:** Clearly, the Health and Social Care Committee will also be kind of relevant to this, and I think that we can be totally confident that it has no capacity. As you said, it would be the local government that would be the delivery body and therefore it is relevant to that committee. If we can write to the Chair of the committee to explore that, that would probably be a sensible way forward before then reassessing whether we take any further steps. Are colleagues happy with that?

[253] **Bethan Jenkins:** What I will say—and probably some people will not appreciate what I am just about to say—is that the Deputy Minister is making suggestions to us. The Deputy Minister is the person with responsibility for this area. For me to read:

[254] ‘I would suggest the Petitions’ Committee explores the purpose of day centres and the needs they are designed to address’,

[255] I feel that the Deputy Minister should know that and should be doing that work anyway. So, why do we not write back to the Deputy Minister saying, ‘It is nice of you to suggest this to us, but can you tell us what you think in this regard?’.

[256] **William Powell:** I suppose that that would be achieved through an evidence session.

[257] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes, potentially. At the end of the day, as has been said, we are doing a lot of work on different pieces of work. The Ministers are the ones who can change things instantly, if they wish. They have the departments, advisers and lawyers. They can perhaps put—*[Inaudible.]*

[258] **William Powell:** Yes; they have all of the apparatus of government.

[259] **Bethan Jenkins:** We can take an evidence session from the Deputy Minister.

[260] **William Powell:** However, if I write in the first instance to the relevant committee just to explore that capacity issue, I sense that we may well return to the approach that you are suggesting. Joyce just wanted to add something.

[261] **Joyce Watson:** I think that it is about clarity. I think that day care centres are provided locally in different ways because each locality is different from the next and the needs of the people in each are different. I think, quite clearly, that what the Minister is saying in her letter refers to the need to have a look at that to see why they are being supported locally and what those functions are. I think that you will find that they are many and varied. She has drawn out two examples, one of which is respite care and another is to prevent isolation and loneliness.

[262] **William Powell:** Yes, socialisation.

[263] **Joyce Watson:** Sometimes it will be both. I think that it is a very valid piece of work that needs doing, and that is why I suggested handing it over to a main committee to give it due respect. If that committee does not have the capacity, we will have to do it. I am happy for us to find time to do that.

[264] **William Powell:** Excellent. I think that we have a clear route-map here as to what we need to do. First, I will write to the Chair of the relevant committee—the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee—and then we will revisit that in the light of the response that we get. Are colleagues happy? I see that you are. Good.

[265] We now move to P-04-505, Eating Disorder Unit in Wales. This petition was submitted by Keira Marlow in October 2013 with the support of 526 signatures. The petition reads as follows:

[266] ‘We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to inform the Welsh Government of the urgency and necessity to provide a specialist eating disorder unit in Wales.’

[267] We first considered this petition on 8 October and we agreed to write to the Minister for Health and Social Services seeking his views on the petition. He responded on 3 November and the petitioners also commented on his reply to us. At this stage, I think that we need to note the responses of both, and surely to return to the petition, but also considering some of the wider issues because, in parallel to this petition coming in, we had the related but distinct evidence session from Helen Missen and colleagues, back in the heart of the autumn, as colleagues will recall.

[268] **Bethan Jenkins:** Are we putting a report together on that? I am happy to consider the other ones, but as long as we know that we are putting a piece of work together on it as a committee. That is what I thought that we were doing.

10:30

[269] **William Powell:** Yes; I think that we were minded to do a piece of work on this, but also to await the outcome of the announcements that the Minister had made with regard to the additional funding injection.

[270] **Bethan Jenkins:** That has only just happened, so I do not think that we can wait for the effects of that to bed in, because, obviously, the money has just been announced. I thought that we were going to pull together the evidence session and put a short report together.

[271] **William Powell:** I believe that that was our decision.

[272] **Mr George:** I cannot recall exactly, to be honest.

[273] **William Powell:** No, we will need to revisit the notes and the commitments that we made in relation to that.

[274] **Bethan Jenkins:** May I suggest it now, so that we do not have to discuss it again? If we did agree to do it, can we do it, and, if we did not, can we agree to it now?

[275] **William Powell:** So that the outcome will be the same in any event. The importance of that evidence session, and this related petition coming in, makes it even more urgent that we do so, and, obviously, the work that you undertake with the cross-party group is also very relevant and supportive of this. Also, we were concerned, as I recall, about the future provision of information, given the threat to the sustainability of the Beat funding, because it

was coming to the end of its lottery support, for all the work that it undertakes in this area. So, we will revisit that, but we have made that commitment today to undertake that piece of work, as you suggest.

[276] P-04-363, Town Centre Improvement Scheme for Fishguard, was submitted by Councillor Bob Kilmister in February 2012, and it had the support of in excess of 1,000 signatures. We last considered correspondence on this petition on 24 September, and we agreed to write to South West Wales Integrated Transport Consortium, copying in also Pembrokeshire County Council with a number of requested actions. SWWITCH has now responded, and the reply is among the public papers. I think that, in accordance with practice elsewhere, we should chase up a response from the petitioner before taking any further action, but also, I think that we are due some response from the county council, which has a critical role in the delivery of regeneration within Pembrokeshire. So, are colleagues happy with that approach for now? I see that you are.

[277] P-04-419, Wind Farm Moratorium, was submitted by James Shepherd Foster in October 2012 and collected 1,332 signatures, calling for a moratorium on windfarm developments. The committee last considered correspondence on this petition on 24 September, and we agreed to ask the petitioner to forward to us a copy of the chief executive of Natural Resources Wales's response to his letter, and to seek further information from the Minister on the new information presented by the petitioner. We have a pretty clear view from the Minister that he is not minded to go down this route. The Minister has written it with characteristic robustness. I think that, probably, this petition is not really likely to have much further life in it, but I see a number of indications; Russell, you indicated first.

[278] **Russell George:** I think, Chair, that you have underestimated that. I think that it is not 'pretty clear', but very clear. The petitioner is asking for a moratorium on windfarms, and the Minister has said

[279] 'I do not support the introduction of a moratorium on wind farm applications.'

[280] So, it is very clear, but not particularly a surprise. I noticed that, in the Minister's reply, he says that there was plenty of public consultation around technical advice note 8, which is behind what the petitioner is asking for. All I would note is that the Minister, in his letter, has gone to great lengths to say that it was consulted on widely in 2004, which is 10 years ago, and:

[281] 'All Members of Parliament, Assembly Members, and local planning authorities were consulted.'

[282] There have been a few changes since that time. There are different Members of Parliament, Assembly Members and members of local planning authorities, and technology has changed greatly in those 10 years with regard to renewable energy technology and windfarms. So, my only view would be one that I have stated before, which is that it would be very valuable, I am sure, to have a review of TAN 8. That is my only contribution, I think, to that, Chair.

[283] **William Powell:** Just last week, this matter was also discussed in the House of Commons, given that some of these issues are clearly subject to the national infrastructure directorate, and Jonathan Edwards, the MP for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr, led that debate, I believe, on the impact within the Brechfa forest area. That was referenced in Plenary just last week. Whatever one's perspective on the issue, I believe that Joyce was indicating that this should close at this stage, and I think that is probably the settled view of the committee, regardless of where we come from on the issue.

[284] **Joyce Watson:** There is no mileage.

[285] **William Powell:** There is no further scope for it to go anywhere, given the clarity of the Minister's response.

[286] **Joyce Watson:** I absolutely agree.

[287] **William Powell:** On P-04-423, Brooklands Nursing Home, this petition was submitted by Darren Umanee in October 2012, and collected 115 signatures. Associated petitions had the support of in excess of 4,000 signatures. Clearly, we can see from the petitioner's response that he has concerns about the possible future intentions of Pembrokeshire County Council resubmitting the application. I had a meeting last week with Tegryn Jones, the chief executive of Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority, when this topic was briefly on our agenda. I think, regardless of the concerns that the petitioner has, at the moment the situation is that the application has been withdrawn, and there is no particular indication or timescale as to the likelihood of it being resubmitted. The reading that we had the opportunity to undertake of the officer's report that was presented—or would have been presented—to the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park planning committee made it quite clear that there were fundamental problems with the application. Therefore, this is now in the realm of the hypothetical because there is not an application. My sense is that we should move to close the petition at this time. Are colleagues happy with that approach?

[288] **Joyce Watson:** Chair, it is the case that any applicant for planning consent has the right to resubmit. As yet, in this case, that has not happened. I do not know whether it will or whether it will not. As you are right to say, that is hypothetical, but even if they did, I do not know where the role of this committee would come into that in any case. That is the bit that I am struggling with. My suspicions tell me that there will be another application, and my huge experience tells me that that will be the case. Putting that aside, I do not want to raise false expectations; I do not want the petitioners to think that, by keeping this open, at this stage, we can therefore influence that application. That is the bit that I think we have to have clarity on. It is the case that we cannot, but, of course, the right to repetition is open to anybody at any time, should another application be forthcoming. So, I do agree that we need to close it. I think that we need to make clear to the petitioners the reasons for closing it, and I think I have started, at least, to briefly outline some of those. We have that duty to petitioners to make it clear in terms of what we can help with, and what we cannot. In this case, I do not think that we can help anymore, at this stage, but that does not mean that we could not in the future.

[289] **William Powell:** There is always the opportunity open to them to resubmit in the light of a freshened and different application. I would also like to note with sorrow that the father of one of the lead petitioners, Mr Adam Crawley, has passed away in the last few days. I know that he had been very supportive of Darren Umanee in submitting this petition and in maintaining the pressure on the relevant authorities. I think that it is appropriate to note that with our sorrow, and I would like to send our condolences to Mr Crawley on his loss.

[290] We now move to P-04-469, Remove the Right-To-Buy Regional Price Cap. It was submitted by James Jackson in April 2013 with the support of 171 signatures. Clearly, we have something of an ideological divide here. The Minister's response makes it quite clear what the Government's intentions are here. I think that we need to move to close. Are we agreed, colleagues? I see that we are.

[291] The next petition is P-04-473, Wind Farm Public Inquiry Financial Support, submitted by John Christopher Day in April 2013 and supported by in excess of 1,000 signatures. Again, in the light of the correspondence that we have here, it seems that the correspondence from the Department of Energy and Climate Change really closes the final potential avenue. The Welsh Government has already made its position crystal clear on this

issue. I think that we do need to move to close, and, in doing so, I should register the fact that I am a member of Powys County Council, which has taken the decision to pursue this matter at very significant public cost, which is obviously of wider concern. Russell, you may wish to contribute.

[292] **Russell George:** Thank you, Chair; I will just make the same declaration as you did. I am also a member of Powys County Council, for the record. I think that the petitioner will be frustrated by the letters received from DECC and the Welsh Government, because one is saying that the other is responsible, really. I would just highlight the petitioner's response, and I would just like to read that out:

[293] 'It is because of the lack of clarity and guidance in the Welsh Assembly Government planning processes and the outdated Technical Advice, that Powys County Council has been forced into their current position. The Council is being unfairly penalised for carrying out their legal and moral duty whilst representing the residents of Powys.'

[294] That is the view of the petitioner, Chair, and I have to agree with his view. However, I cannot see any other avenue for this petition to take, because we have had clear responses from both the UK Government and the Welsh Government on their positions.

[295] **William Powell:** I am grateful to you for having put that on the record. Certainly, I pay tribute to John Day for his fortitude in pursuing this particular issue. However, I do think that we need to move to close in any event. I sense that that is the consensus.

[296] **Joyce Watson:** Yes, that is the consensus. As county councillors, of course, you took the decision to spend that money in that direction. I move to close, thank you.

[297] **William Powell:** Thank you very much.

[298] **Russell George:** Chair, if I may, I should just comment on that. County councillors, of course, did not decide to spend the money on the public inquiry; the public inquiry was triggered. So, it was not councillors who decided to spend this level of money. It is important to point out that we should not expect a county council to approve inappropriate applications just because of a financial implication that might occur.

[299] **William Powell:** Okay; I think that that is a useful way of rounding that discussion off.

[300] We now need to move, particularly with an eye on the clock, to P-04-497, National Graduate Housing Scheme. This petition was submitted by GWYRDDISM in September 2013, and it called on the National Assembly for Wales

[301] 'to urge the Welsh Government to support construction of Housing for Graduate Students.'

[302] We first considered this on 24 September and agreed to write to the Minister for Housing and Regeneration, whose response we have before us. We also had further clarity from the petitioner. We have a submission, also from the petitioner, for which I am grateful.

10:45

[303] It is necessary to close this petition at this time, but we are very grateful to the petitioner for having shared this proposal with us. It is a particularly innovative scheme that he is proposing, but I sense that it may be a scheme for which the time is not yet right. That seems to be the clear view of the Minister.

[304] **Russell George:** We should be very grateful to the petitioner for providing us with the level of detail that he has. I am sure that we have all read the information and taken it into account. The petitioner will also be very pleased that you have written to the Minister and raised his views, and the Minister has also replied to those views. So, the petitioner should be very pleased that we have raised it to the level of taking it to the Minister.

[305] **William Powell:** Absolutely; it has been aired at the highest level.

[306] **Russell George:** It has indeed. However, we have now had that answer and we should close the petition and make sure that we thank the petitioner for all his work on this.

[307] **William Powell:** Absolutely. Excellent, thank you very much.

[308] We will move now to P-04-503, Regeneration of Ton and Pentre. This was submitted by Mike Powell in September 2013, with the support of 389 signatures. It calls on the National Assembly to

[309] ‘urge the Welsh Government to give special consideration for the use of European Regional Funding to redevelop Ton and Pentre in the Rhondda Valley.’

[310] We last considered it on 24 September. We wrote to Carl Sargeant, seeking his views, and we have those. Indeed, we have received comments back from the petitioner as well. In the light of the clarity of the Minister’s response and what appears to be the petitioner’s acceptance of this particular position in the light of the letter we have received, it is probably time to close this petition. Are colleagues happy to do that? I see that you are.

[311] We move on to P-04-397, Living Wage. This was submitted by Save the Children in June 2012, with the support of 196 signatures. We last considered it back in September, and we agreed to seek more information on the Welsh Government advisory group. The Minister has responded and, indeed, has explained that work on the living wage has been referred to the workforce partnership council. In the light of that, we should probably ask the WPC to keep the petitioner directly informed of developments while closing the petition, because it appears to have been actioned in the way in which the petitioner would wish.

[312] **Bethan Jenkins:** The only thing that I would say is that the specific wording asks when this will happen.

[313] **William Powell:** We need a time frame.

[314] **Bethan Jenkins:** I am personally concerned about the fact that it has been referred to the workforce partnership council and we do not know from the letter when this will happen. Perhaps we could write to it directly to see if it could tell us what timescale it has as a body.

[315] **William Powell:** I would be happy to do that.

[316] **Bethan Jenkins:** That might make everybody feel a bit more comfortable about closing this petition.

[317] **William Powell:** Once again, as with some of the other issues, if we are moving to close, then it is useful to know the time frame that is involved.

[318] **Bethan Jenkins:** We could do that and then close, because that is what the wording of the petition says.

[319] **William Powell:** I am happy to do that. Is that the consensus on that? I see that it is.

[320] We move on to P-04-454, Call to end Councillor and Assembly Member Dual Role. This petition was submitted by Nortridge Perrott in January this year with the support of 52 signatures. We last considered this on 18 June and agreed to write to a range of stakeholders, from whom we have responses. All but One Voice Wales have responded. At this stage, we probably need to contact Mr Perrott and see what his views are on this matter. Once again, I note that I am in this situation of having a dual mandate.

[321] **Russell George:** Chair, I will just quickly say, in order to put it on the record, that I am also an Assembly Member and county councillor, so I will not make any suggestion on this. I will leave it to other colleagues to take this forward.

[322] **William Powell:** Good. In the light of time pressure, and I am aware that the lead petitioner on a petition that we are about to consider is here, I seek the committee's agreement to reorder our agenda slightly to bring forward consideration of agenda item 4.30 after the consideration of the P-04-495, Stop People Trafficking & Slavery in Wales. Shall we do item 4.27 first, and then move a few agenda items forward in the light of the presence of the petitioner, which seems to be the courteous thing to do? If colleagues are happy with that approach, let us move to P-04-495, Stop People Trafficking & Slavery in Wales. This was supported by Ignite/Big Ideas and had the support of 2,622 signatures. It reads as follows:

[323] 'We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to do all within its power to make Wales free from the illegal activity of people trafficking and slavery.'

[324] We last considered this petition on 16 July, and we agreed to write to the Minister for Local Government and Government Business seeking her views on the petition, and also to consider the possibility of taking oral evidence on this matter. We have the ministerial response in our public papers today. We see this issue as well in the context of the horrific revelations of recent days with regard to slavery and the detention of people against their will elsewhere in the UK, which will have shocked us. Joyce, I would like to ask you to speak very briefly on this one, given the lead that you have taken in this area.

[325] **Joyce Watson:** I believe, Chair, that another committee is doing this as a piece of work.

[326] **William Powell:** The Communities, Equalities and Local Government Committee?

[327] **Joyce Watson:** Yes. If that is the case, there is no point in us doing it as well. So, I think that that is the way forward for this.

[328] **Mr George:** I believe that the local government committee has been scrutinising and taking evidence fairly recently from the anti-slavery co-ordinator, who is referred to in the Minister's letter. So, the committee has been active on this issue.

[329] **William Powell:** In that context, Joyce, are you proposing that we close this petition?

[330] **Joyce Watson:** The post is actually called the 'anti-human trafficking co-ordinator'; let us get it right.

[331] **William Powell:** Indeed. Are you suggesting, therefore, that we close this petition in the light of the fact that this issue is being taken forward with thoroughness by one of our fellow committees?

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

[333] **William Powell:** Okay. Are colleagues happy with that approach?

[334] **Bethan Jenkins:** That is fine, as long as we know that that investigation is still ongoing and that it can follow it through.

[335] **William Powell:** Excellent. Given that we have limited time left, we are going to have to consider the remainder of the updates to petitions on a future occasion, and move directly to P-04-445, Save our Welsh cats & dogs from death on the roads. This petition was submitted by Monima O'Connor in January 2013 with the support of 10 signatures. An associated petition had collected approximately 500 signatures. I am pleased to welcome Monima who is watching our proceedings in the public gallery today. The petition states that

[336] 'We, the undersigned, call on all Welsh Residents who own cats and dogs to support our petition to the Welsh Government to remove the ban on electronic collars linked with invisible boundary fencing/hidden fencing so that we can protect our companion pets from harm either from: a) Road Traffic b) Straying into Danger c) Causing accidents for which we owners of cats & dogs might legally be held liable.'

[337] We last considered correspondence on the petition on 2 July, and we agreed to write to the Minister for Natural Resources and Food highlighting that the Companion Animal Welfare Council is supportive of the petition's aims, and asking whether further consideration will be taken on this matter. Alun Davies responded on 24 September, and the petitioner has responded to his comments. In addition, as colleagues will be aware, we have received an unsolicited letter from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals outlining the reasons for its support for the current ban. So, in many ways, it is the RSPCA's letter that has opened up the issue. I would very much like to have your perspective on this, Joyce.

[338] **Joyce Watson:** I would close the petition. It is fairly obvious that a review is going on, and that there is clear legislation in place that stands until the review starts in the summer. We have had all sorts of letters on this; it has been going on for a long time. There is never going to be agreement on it in any case, because we have people with diametrically opposed views—the RSPCA on the one hand and the petitioners on the other. What is critical in all of this is that we have had the legislation, there will not be a review until next summer and there is nothing to suggest that, when that review happens, it will make any difference to the regulations that currently exist in terms of using collars in the way that the petitioner is asking for. That is my view.

[339] **William Powell:** To look at this procedurally, we have had correspondence from the RSPCA, but the petitioner has not had the opportunity to respond to that.

[340] **Mr George:** The petitioner has responded to that letter. It is just that it arrived very late; it is not in the public papers. We have only just received it.

[341] **William Powell:** Okay. It is—

[342] **Bethan Jenkins:** I have scanned the letter and, to be honest, I think that it refers to a different thing—it is talking about the electric fencing system, not collars. I am just saying that now—I have not had a lot of time to read the letter.

[343] **William Powell:** Yes, and in the light of the fact that—

[344] **Bethan Jenkins:** The petitioner is differentiating between the two things. I would like to have time to read it properly first.

[345] **William Powell:** Absolutely. I would like to have time to consider that response more fully. I also recall that when Elin Jones was serving for a short time on the committee, she had previously been the Minister during the time when this was introduced. It was clear that there were issues of unintended consequence around this that were of some concern. It is good that the Minister is undertaking this review. I think that it is important that the Minister engages with the petitioner, and listens to the view that the petitioner represents, to take this forward. It may well be that the petition is close to its conclusion, but I think that it would be premature to close it today in the light of such a recent response. If this is not going to be happening until next summer, then there are many other issues that we are involved in that are longer term than this. I would suggest that we maintain it as an open and live petition, but take the opportunity to read the response that we have received in a more settled way, with the benefit of time.

[346] I would like to thank you very much for your attendance today. I am sorry that the agenda has defeated us slightly, but we will return to these matters on our final meeting of this term, which is on 10 December.

[347] May I remind Members of some forthcoming petition presentations? On Tuesday, 26 November—today—we have the petition regarding the cancellation of orthopaedic surgery during the winter months in 2013-14. That will be today at 1 p.m. On Wednesday, 4 December at 1 p.m., we have the petition regarding holiday park homes.

[348] Thank you very much for your attendance and your contributions. Diolch yn fawr.

*Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 10:58.
The meeting ended at 10:58.*