



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

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau **The Petitions Committee**

Dydd Mawrth, 25 Mawrth 2014
Tuesday, 25 March 2014

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

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

Russell George

Ceidwadwyr Cymreig
Welsh Conservatives

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

**Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance**

Margaret Everson	Uwch Swyddog, Bus Users UK Cymru Senior Officer, Bus Users UK Cymru
Nesta Jones	Swyddog Cydymffurfio Bysiau ar gyfer Gogledd Cymru, Bus Users UK Cymru Bus Compliance Officer for North Wales, Bus Users UK Cymru

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

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

*Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 09:33.
The meeting began at 09:33.*

**Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions**

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

[2] Welcome to this meeting of the Petitions Committee. Normal housekeeping arrangements apply. Therefore, if there is an alarm, it is for real, and we are in the hands of the ushers. We have no apologies this morning, and I hope that we will be joined shortly by our colleague, Joyce Watson.

[3] Exceptionally today, we have no new petitions to consider. However, I am advised that we have a significant number that are gathering signatures and are in the pipeline, so we have no cause to worry on the grounds of workload. We also have a number of members of the public joining us, and we are very pleased that they are taking an interest in our proceedings. Particularly this morning, and probably having travelled the longest distance, we have young Megan Rickard from Milford Haven. She is here with her father, having presented her own petition on the Withybush hospital campaign. It is a particular pleasure to see her in the public gallery this morning joining those others who are joining us for our deliberations. Welcome to you all.

09:35

Y Wybodaeth Ddiweddaraf am Ddeisebau Blaenorol Updates to Previous Petitions

[4] **William Powell:** We start with a particularly important petition, P-04-526, Please make Senedd TV accessible to deaf people. As we will recall, this petition was submitted by Mervyn James and was first considered by this committee in January of this year. It has collected 25 signatures. It reads as follows:

[5] ‘We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to provide subtitling and signed language access to televised debates and proceedings, to enable the 300,000 with hearing loss and deafness in Wales to follow the democratic processes hearing people already enjoy.’

[6] As I said, we considered this back in January and we agreed to write to the Presiding Officer, as Chair of the Assembly Commission, seeking views on this matter. The Presiding Officer’s response to that is among our public papers today, together with an extract from the Record of Proceedings for oral Assembly questions, which were taken to the Assembly Commission back on 25 September 2013. At this stage it would be sensible to get back in touch with the lead petitioner, Mervyn James, to seek his views on what the Presiding Officer has had to say. Are there any other thoughts as to what else would be useful for us to do at this stage of our consideration, colleagues?

[7] **Joyce Watson:** No, that is fine.

[8] **Russell George:** Has the petitioner had a copy of the letter from the Presiding Officer?

[9] **William Powell:** I am proposing that we share that correspondence with the petitioner and seek his views.

[10] **Russell George:** It says in the letter from the Presiding Officer that she welcomes an opportunity to meet with the petitioner, or the staff do—

[11] **William Powell:** I hope that that can go forward at the next stage. That would be really good.

[12] **Bethan Jenkins:** The other thing is that it states that there was a pilot with S4C with regard to this live subtitling service. It is stated that any progress had been put on hold. I wonder whether we could ask either the Presiding Officer or S4C to see the detail of what they actually did and for a further explanation as to why it has been put on hold.

[13] **William Powell:** Yes, we could ask whether it is to do with current budgetary pressures that we are aware of.

[14] **Bethan Jenkins:** We could ask when they are going to understand what is happening from Scotland as well, because the fact that Scotland is conducting research into the provision of British Sign Language is mentioned. It would be useful for us to, perhaps, understand when that will be available for us to learn from the experiences of Scotland.

[15] **William Powell:** Yes. So, in summary, we are happy to write to the petitioner flagging up the Presiding Officer’s kind invitation to meet, which I hope can go forward, and then get in touch to chase up what has already taken place as far as that pilot is concerned and to see whether there is any possibility that it could be resumed. Good.

[16] We now move on to petition P-03-240, Road Safety on the A40 in Llanddewi

Velfrey. This petition was submitted by the Llanddewi Velfrey Community Council. It was first considered by us, or by our predecessor committee actually, in September 2009. At that stage it had the support of 154 signatures. We recall that there were a number of specific actions that the local community was seeking in terms of improving pedestrian safety, including the installation of speed cameras and the utilisation of existing electrical installations for road crossing signs. It was seeking traffic calming measures, as well as a reduction to 30 mph. That was quite a substantial wish list of things. Joyce, I am conscious that you have met with this community council relatively recently as part of the process. We have had ongoing correspondence with Carl Sargeant and now with Mrs Edwina Hart, his successor as Minister for transport. In the final piece of correspondence, Mrs Hart has promised to update us on developments. Joyce, I would be keen to hear your perspective on this, given your ongoing involvement.

[17] **Joyce Watson:** Improvements have happened on the ground. It is fair to say that this is an extremely busy road, and a narrow road in sections, so I understand the concern. What can we do next? I would suggest that we have to write to the Minister to ask for comments on the petitioners' suggestions. They have made other suggestions here, particularly on the speed limit warning sign. I know that it is on the road when you are going east and I know that there is now a warning sign as you are coming in, going west. I know that that is in place. However, they are particularly keen to know about the employers' agent, and I think that that is probably the critical thing in all of this. I think that those are the things that we can and, perhaps, should do.

[18] **Bethan Jenkins:** The only comment that I have is on the letter. I would just like clarification on the fact that they say that the signs that would show the actual speed would be considerably less costly. I wanted to understand whether they had made any costings themselves or whether they had looked into it. They want to replace the flashing signs—

[19] **William Powell:** They want something that quotes the specific speed, which escalates or decreases according to driver behaviour, which we are familiar with.

[20] **Bethan Jenkins:** I suppose that we could just make a point of teasing that out with the letter to the Minister.

[21] **William Powell:** Yes. I think that we need more clarity on that. As Joyce says, crucially, we need some sort of timeline on the employment of the agent to actually take this forward on the ground and to progress it, dealing with stuff like costings, community liaison and all of those other important aspects. I am happy to write to the Minister in that vein, picking up those points.

[22] The next petition is P-04-506, Free bus pass / concessionary travel for benefit claimants, students and under 18s. This petition was submitted by Mark Griffiths and was first considered by our committee in October 2013. It has the support of 60 signatures. Clearly, the aspirations here are to make bus travel more accessible to the different categories of people: benefit claimants, students and under-18s. It is clear from the text and the tenor of the petition that we have in front of us that the petitioner is looking for this as an aspect of social justice, in his perspective. The committee last considered this on 21 January. We wrote to the Minister seeking any further response that he had to the comments that the petitioners had already made. We have the Minister's response this morning in the written papers. Do colleagues have any particular thoughts on this? Later on, we are going to be looking at this in the round, in our evidence session on the wider issues around bus travel and so on within Wales. Specific to this petition, are there any thoughts as to the best way to proceed?

[23] **Joyce Watson:** It is clear from the Minister's response that she is not going to extend the concessionary bus pass scheme in the way that the petitioner was hoping. She says that

she will keep concessionary travel and eligibility under review. It is clear to us that we have done what we can and that we cannot do any more in terms of getting a positive outcome, but I think that it is worth asking the petitioner for a comment on the letter. However, at the same time, we have to realise that we have come to the end of what we can do.

[24] **William Powell:** I also think that we have probably gone on the journey that we can with this particular petition, but we should give the petitioner the opportunity to express his views on the particular take that the Minister has given. It is clear that there are no current plans to extend, as you say. So, I think that we would be moving to close this petition, if colleagues agree with that. Obviously, we will be conscious of this particular line of argument when we speak later with the bus users and so on. I am happy to write in that vein to the petitioner.

09.45

[25] We now move on to look at petition P-04-456, Dementia—This Could Happen to you. We welcome Helen Jones, the lead petitioner on this particular petition, who joins us in the public gallery this morning. It is good to have her continued interest and support in our deliberations on this important petition. The petition reads as follows:

[26] ‘We, the undersigned, call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to: i. Bring to an end the discrimination against dementia sufferers in Wales who apply for N.H.S. Continuing Care Funding’.

[27] It continues to say that it calls on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to

[28] ‘Direct Local Health Boards to implement the National Framework for N.H.S., Continuing Care Funding correctly’.

[29] Those issues are absolutely central to the petitioner’s concerns and were a very major part of the evidence session that we held some time ago now, which helped to take forward our consideration. We most recently looked at the issue on 21 January, and we agreed to ask the Minister for an update on progress of the review of the continuing NHS healthcare framework, and once the response was received to consider highlighting the petition to the relevant committee, which is the Health and Social Care Committee, chaired by our colleague David Rees. We have the response from the Minister, Professor Mark Drakeford, in the public papers today, along with some further comments from Helen on the content of that letter. For the wider context we also have the earlier letter of 3 August from the Minister so that we can make sense of the whole sequence. We have not been approached, unfortunately, by the Minister’s officials in the terms that were flagged up in the letter of 3 August. It is a matter of regret that that was not actioned by the Minister’s officials. In that context, colleagues, I would very much appreciate your thoughts as to the best way that we should proceed. I call on Russell George.

[30] **Russell George:** It is nice to see Helen here today, but, given that it seemed that we had an assurance from the Minister that her officials would be in contact, it is very disappointing that that does not seem to have happened, unless there is some breakdown that we do not know about. I think that we should, quite urgently now, write to the Minister to point this out, and share Helen’s correspondence with us, and ask her for clarification as to whether an attempt was to be made. Perhaps we are not aware of some information. However, I think that we should do that as quickly as possible.

[31] **Bethan Jenkins:** I think that it is Mark Drakeford, is it not? You said ‘her’.

[32] **Russell George:** I am sorry. Yes; it is Mark Drakeford. I apologise. It is 'him' rather than 'her'.

[33] **William Powell:** Indeed. It is in his court, to be fair.

[34] **Russell George:** I was thinking of the previous Minister. I think that we should do that. I should also add that I undertook some dementia training the week before last. I think that the invitation is open to all Assembly Members and their support staff to undertake it. It is only an hour long, and it was invaluable. It really was excellent to give you an understanding in one hour. I would recommend that to Members.

[35] **William Powell:** I am hoping to take that forward in the context of activities going on in Brecon, to make that community a dementia-friendly community. That was flagged up at the recent event with Ruth Jones and others. Thank you for giving us a lead on that. It would be very constructive if we could seek from the Minister and his officials some reassurance that, even though the consultation exercise that the petitioner was to be invited to has formally closed, there should be an opportunity for redress and for those views to be built in, even at this stage, which is beyond the formal closure of the consultation. Joyce, I would appreciate your views.

[36] **Joyce Watson:** I share the view that it is unfortunate that we are in this situation, and that Helen was not involved. There is also a positive in all of this, is there not? We must not lose sight of that—

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

[38] **Joyce Watson:** It is moving forward. As a consequence, perhaps, Helen has played a part in getting the review, which will have a positive impact at the end of it on all those people who will find themselves needing this service. I agree that we should write back and try to understand how this breakdown of communication has happened. I absolutely agree with that. If it is at all possible, we should facilitate things so that Helen can get a real opportunity to have an input to this. Again, we thank her for bringing this petition to us, because there is movement there, and that is good.

[39] **Bethan Jenkins:** The only thing I would add is that I think that it is really concerning, given that the Minister references regional events and stakeholder meetings, that someone who is this interested in the subject is not aware of what is actually happening. The Government has to be responsible for that.

[40] **William Powell:** Yes, it is not very reassuring.

[41] **Bethan Jenkins:** So, we need to understand how it was advertised and how the Welsh Government went about proactively encouraging people to attend these events. Really, how can we know that the consultation was as effective as it could have been if people like Helen have been totally lost in the system? This is a theme that we see with the health service in Wales at the moment—

[42] **Joyce Watson:** Is it really?

[43] **Bethan Jenkins:** We really need to change that.

[44] **Joyce Watson:** Is that true?

[45] **Russell George:** Chair, we have agreed to write to the Minister. When we get that reply, given that I think there is a sense of urgency with this, can we have this petition back to

the committee as soon as is reasonably possible?

[46] **William Powell:** Yes, and, if that does not fall within the sequence of meetings and so on, we can share it immediately. I will certainly seek not to be a prisoner of procedure in terms of causing any further delay here. I think that we need to move quickly on this for the reasons you have all said, so I am happy to do that. As I said, I am grateful to Helen for being with us today and for taking an ongoing, active interest in the ongoing consideration of this petition. Thank you very much.

[47] We move on to petition P-04-490, Antiretroviral Medication in Cardiff. This petition was submitted by Joerg Thieme and was first considered by the committee in June 2013, having collected 150 signatures. It reads:

[48] ‘We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to act in regards to the very limited supply of antiretroviral HIV medications. Recent changes by the Cardiff University Hospital means that every single patient receiving antiretroviral medications has to come either to the hospital pharmacy with restricted opening times or opt for home delivery. Stable patients with good adherence are seen every 4-6 months for an appointment with the consultant yet distribution of medication is limited to a monthly supply only.’

[49] This has been a case on which we have had an exchange of correspondence on several occasions between this committee and the Minister. Most recently, we considered this petition on 26 November, when we agreed to write to the Minister asking for his views on the petitioner’s feedback on his earlier correspondence. I think that the frustration that the petitioner felt, if I read it correctly, was the way that the savings from handling the prescription of medication in a particular way was estimated to be between £15 million and £50 million and that this was a very generalised approach as that figure of savings is such a broad estimate. What we did not have was a way of addressing the specific concerns of this particular petitioner and, clearly, the group of patients he is representing. Obviously, the 150 signatures must represent a significant body as well. So, we sought to ask the Minister whether the guidance in the NHS in Wales is consistent with what happens elsewhere in the UK. We have a further response from the Minister. As colleagues would have seen, this includes the all-Wales review and guidance for prescribing intervals, which gives the overall picture. However, again, I think that there is something that has not been addressed here. I would very much value your opinions as to whether you think we need to write again to seek one more time to get this specific issue of the antiretroviral drugs addressed.

[50] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes, because it is not clear from the Minister’s response what the percentage of that saving would be within the £15 million to £50 million—

[51] **William Powell:** As a discrete item within this vast big ticket item, we do not appear to have any—

[52] **Bethan Jenkins:** I think that we should ask the petitioners. I am not a specialist in this area. So, on UK comparisons, I would prefer to wait to see what the petitioners say and then comment.

[53] **William Powell:** However, I think that it would be useful, if colleagues feel it appropriate, to write to the Minister again, to try to drill down to this specific aspect. Clearly, there is a sense of frustration felt by the petitioner and also the body of people that this petition is seeking to represent.

[54] **Bethan Jenkins:** It may be that they will not be able to tell us that, because, obviously, there are many, many different drugs. However, we can ask the question.

[55] **William Powell:** Sure. At the moment, I get the sense that there is a rather generalised approach and we have not had the engagement on this issue that would perhaps help us to make some progress.

[56] **Joyce Watson:** There is a lot of detail in here, Chair, and there are a lot of people on very long-term medication. There is a huge cost to giving patients medication that they find they no longer need or they do not get on with in bulk. I know that that is not the case here, but I did a bit of work on that last summer with pharmacies across Wales. What the petitioner wants is a balance between those two things. Of course, he mentions the cost of prescribing things only on a 28-day cycle as not being appropriate. So, I agree with writing to get an explanation perhaps on the specific case—the specific here is that the patient is saying that they are stable on that medication—and see what we get back. There is nothing else, quite frankly, that we can do.

[57] **William Powell:** That is right. As I recall from our earlier engagement with the petitioner, it was having a major impact on people and on their working lives—people who are seeking to get on with their lives and manage their condition and so on; it was eroding that quite severely. So, I think that it is our duty to try to drill down a little further in the way that you suggest, and I am happy to do so.

[58] We will move on now to P-04-492, Diagnosis of autism in children. This petition was submitted by the Pembrokeshire branch of the National Autistic Society and first considered by the committee in June 2013. It had gathered 902 signatures and reads:

[59] ‘We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to ensure timely diagnosis for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder [ASD], regardless of where they live, so that children with autism can be supported and lead fulfilled lives; and review implementation of and ensure compliance with the NICE guidelines on recognition, referral and diagnosis of children and young people on the autism spectrum as part of the Welsh Government’s refresh of its ASD Strategic Action Plan.’

[60] This was last considered on 11 March last year and we agreed to await the Deputy Minister’s update on the implementation of Hywel Dda Local Health Board’s action plan to address the waiting list in Pembrokeshire, and also to return to the petition once the Deputy Minister’s update had been received. That was estimated to be around February of this year. I have noted that, on a couple of occasions, when asked questions in the Chamber, the Deputy Minister, Gwenda Thomas, has specifically referenced this petition and the actions that she is undertaking. So, that is encouraging in itself, to see the level of ministerial response that has been taken on board in other ways, beyond the exchange of correspondence and work. We have a copy in our papers of a detailed letter from the Deputy Minister, Gwenda Thomas, on these matters. There is ongoing concern and the Deputy Minister is concerned, and I think that we should also be concerned, that two health boards have still failed to supply the information that the Deputy Minister was seeking. I think that we may need to resort to other powers that we have at our disposal if that information still does not come forward, because it seems a strange way to be dealing with a Minister of the Government, and with the committee. What are colleagues’ thoughts on this, and also on the response that we have from Lisa Phillips of NAS Pembrokeshire?

10:00

[61] **Russell George:** How long have we been waiting for the reply, Chair?

[62] **William Powell:** Well, the Deputy Minister—

[63] **Bethan Jenkins:** Is it for us, though? Can you just clarify that it is the Deputy Minister who is waiting for the information, or have we written as well?

[64] **William Powell:** We have not written directly, but the Deputy Minister is writing in direct response to us. We are not quite clear on that.

[65] **Mr George:** The Deputy Minister sought the information when she wrote to the health boards in November.

[66] **William Powell:** That was in November of last year, so we are looking at four or five months.

[67] **Bethan Jenkins:** We have to understand whether she is chasing those two health boards up, I suppose.

[68] **Mr George:** She is.

[69] **Bethan Jenkins:** We cannot close the petition until we have full analysis from the other two health boards.

[70] **William Powell:** No, that is right.

[71] **Russell George:** We can write to the Deputy Minister—

[72] **William Powell:** Yes, expressing our displeasure and our concern.

[73] **Russell George:** Yes; we can state where we are on this, and ask her to provide us with information on how this correspondence has been chased up.

[74] **William Powell:** Yes, that is right. We have some useful context, maybe, in the last couple of bullet points of the letter from NAS Pembrokeshire. It notes that it would very much like for the situation to be monitored, to ensure that Abertawe Bro Morgannwg and Cardiff and Vale health boards supply those waiting times, which is what we have just said. It also notes that it would be really helpful to have an update from Hywel Dda health board in respect of progress made, by the end of June. Finally, it highlights the importance of a timely diagnosis, by recommending that the ASD national co-ordinator reports on waiting times as part of his or her duties in ensuring that the action plan is being adhered to. I think that this is a new post that has been created, maybe partly in response to the concerns of this petition, and other concerns. Does that make sense?

[75] **Joyce Watson:** Yes, but it also would make sense if we shared the summary with the Pembrokeshire National Autistic Society branch as well.

[76] **William Powell:** Yes, we are very happy to do that.

[77] **Joyce Watson:** It would also make sense to recognise that Wales is the only country that has this system in place. There is no point in having the system in place if we cannot get the information to know whether it is functioning. That is the issue.

[78] **William Powell:** I think that that is a point well made. I will write to the Deputy Minister, along the lines that you suggest, and also, I think, share the full summary of responses with the branch, as Joyce has just outlined. So, we need to keep the pressure up here—I think that that is clear.

[79] The next petition is P-04-481, Close the Gap for deaf pupils in Wales. This petition

was submitted by the National Deaf Children's Society. It was first considered by the committee in May 2013. The petition reads:

[80] 'We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to develop a national strategy to Close the Gap in educational attainment between deaf pupils and their peers.'

[81] NDCS Cymru presented the petition on what was the second anniversary of virtually the whole of the Assembly—55 Assembly Members—pledging to take action to close the gap for deaf children, as we recall. It also provided a video petition, which I am sure many of us will recall, which stressed the key objectives that it had with regard to appropriate support in schools, particularly around building in effective acoustics for those with deafness or hearing impairment.

[82] We last considered the petition on 21 January and agreed to undertake a couple of actions: to ask the petitioner to highlight a specific area in which we could undertake the piece of work that we had broadly agreed to undertake; and, secondly, to copy in the chair of the cross-party group on these matters, Ann Jones, for her information. We have subsequently received a response from NDCS, which is in our public papers.

[83] In terms of the scope of the piece of work, colleagues, what are your thoughts here? I would like us to look at something around influencing the design features of the schools that the Welsh Government is currently promoting in terms of the twenty-first century schools programme. That would seem to be a sensible way to effect change as efficiently as possible. I do not know whether colleagues have any views on that or other actions that we could usefully take.

[84] **Joyce Watson:** I agree with that. If we are building schools, they should be schools that help and include everybody, whoever they are. We can all remember the days when it was impossible for anybody with any sort of physical disability to access a school, and all sorts of ramps were put in place. Schools are not built like that anymore, thankfully. Here we are with a group of people identifying to us where we could improve them further for people with hearing impairment or hearing difficulties. Now is a good time for us to take note of that and move that forward on their behalf. I fully support that.

[85] **William Powell:** Good, and in terms of how best to take forward the piece of work—

[86] **Bethan Jenkins:** Are we are concentrating on the first page of the letter—the building regulations and compliance with building bulletin 93? Is that what we will focus on?

[87] **William Powell:** I think that makes a lot of sense because we are only a couple of years into having control of building regulations.

[88] **Bethan Jenkins:** So, we want to see how it is working at the moment and where, and in the old schools, we want to see whether there would be any scope for enhancing the changes that can be made to make them more effective in terms of the acoustic levels. If we do too wide a scope, then we will—

[89] **William Powell:** Exactly. We must have a reasonably sharp focus.

[90] **Bethan Jenkins:** On those two things, I agree.

[91] **William Powell:** In terms of the way to take forward the piece of work, and oral evidence as opposed to a potential visit, or maybe both, what are your thoughts?

[92] **Joyce Watson:** I am chair, as you know, of the cross-party group on construction. You cannot do a piece of work like this without having industry involvement. That is key, in the first place.

[93] **William Powell:** Maybe somebody like Willmott Dixon, or one of these substantial—

[94] **Joyce Watson:** Anyway, let us talk to people who build schools is what I say, rather than—

[95] **William Powell:** Naming a particular contractor.

[96] **Joyce Watson:** Yes. That would be a good start. Also, there are the user groups. That is what we need here; we need both sides. There will be costs that will have to come out of it and, again, costs to both parties: the cost to those who cannot be involved and the cost of putting it right so that they can be involved. That is where we need to focus. There are plenty of people out there who will be able to provide that.

[97] **William Powell:** We can take some soundings as to the best range of contributors to help us to take this forward.

[98] **Russell George:** I agree with Joyce, but rather than inviting the people who build schools, we need to invite the people who decide how schools are built. I do not know whether that is Welsh Government, as I suspect, or whoever advises it. We need to—

[99] **Joyce Watson:** It is local government.

[100] **William Powell:** Maybe the WLGA has a lead on this that could perhaps—

[101] **Russell George:** I appreciate that it is local authorities that build schools, but there will be some guidance somewhere.

[102] **Joyce Watson:** Anyway, let us have a look.

[103] **William Powell:** Let us take that forward in that way. An oral evidence session would certainly help us to focus on the key points.

[104] The next petition is P-04-516, Make political science compulsory in education. This petition was submitted by Mark Griffiths and was first considered by this committee in November 2013, having collected 12 signatures. It reads:

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

[106] We last considered correspondence on the petition on 21 January, and we agreed to forward comments from Mr Mark Griffiths, the lead petitioner, to the Minister to ask whether he has any further views on those points, and, secondly, to highlight the petition to the Assembly’s education team.

[107] We have a thoughtful response from the Minister for Education and Skills in the public papers. I will also flag up that the education team is currently circulating a questionnaire, seeking the views of children and young people who are participating in their classroom sessions. So, I would wish to share the Minister’s correspondence, which, as I said, goes into some depth in engaging with the issues, with Mr Griffiths to seek his views. Also, we will probably await the results of this survey process that is currently being undertaken by

the education service.

[108] **Bethan Jenkins:** I have two comments. I have a fundamental problem with personal and social education, because I have done a freedom of information request with regard to financial education and Cardiff University is carrying out some research for me with regard to what it does in terms of wellbeing, and it is so patchy, in both of those very different elements, in terms of how it is delivered, when it is delivered and who delivers it, within the PSE framework. Yes, it is statutory, but the same applies to political education, whereby some schools will put hours into it, and some will put nearly nothing into it. I do not know whether we have the capacity to write to schools in Wales to ask them—because the questionnaire is different—how many hours they invest in this particular area of education. As the Minister said, it is up to the headteachers. So, before we close any petition on this, we need to understand what the picture is in these schools. I think that it may be quite stark in some areas, but it may be very good in others.

[109] **William Powell:** It could well reveal mixed practices.

[110] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes, and I think it would help us as a committee, because we keep coming back to this. We have had similar petitions since I have been on this committee. The other element is with regard to the Welsh baccalaureate, and the Minister mentions that there is a steering group that has been established that will look into what the core will be. Can we find out from this steering group what exactly it is looking at, in terms of this area of political education, because I do not know, and I think that it would be helpful for the petitioners to know?

[111] **William Powell:** So, you would like us to write to all schools and sixth-form colleges within Wales.

[112] **Bethan Jenkins:** It would not be obligatory in sixth forms, because it would not be statutory in post-16 education. So, I would say that we should write to all secondary schools.

[113] **Joyce Watson:** I would suggest that you try to find out through the local education authorities.

[114] **William Powell:** You are suggesting that we try to find out through the 22 LEAs.

[115] **Bethan Jenkins:** I think that you would get a better picture through the schools themselves.

[116] **Joyce Watson:** I think that you will find that there are an awful lot of schools, and I do not know how equipped we would be to write to every single school, because that would be a mammoth task.

[117] **Bethan Jenkins:** Oh, I do not know.

[118] **William Powell:** We are talking about secondary schools.

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

[120] **William Powell:** What about a guesstimate?

[121] **Mr George:** I think that writing a letter to all schools in Wales is not a mammoth task; I think—

[122] **Bethan Jenkins:** All of them do not have to reply, but we can at least try.

[123] **Mr George:** I think that analysing the responses could be a considerable undertaking. I would have to ask colleagues in the Research Service what that would involve.

[124] **William Powell:** If we could scope that out—.

[125] **Mr George:** If you are saying that we should write to all schools simply asking, ‘What do you do?’, obviously the responses that we will get back will be diverse and will require some analysis. If, on the other hand, you are talking about a fairly simple survey-type approach, it would be easier to analyse the results. Without talking to colleagues in the Research Service, I do not know what the scope is, but I imagine that it might be quite a large undertaking.

[126] **William Powell:** We could guide the shape of the questions with that in mind. If we can seek the views of the Research Service—.

[127] **Mr George:** I will ask colleagues in the Research Service and come back to the next meeting with a report on what might be possible.

[128] **Bethan Jenkins:** It does not have to involve a huge amount of questioning.

[129] **Mr George:** Meanwhile, the work that is being done by the education team might be available, and that might give some better feel and a snapshot of the situation.

10:15

[130] **Bethan Jenkins:** We could always ask the Minister whether he has some sort of analysis, before we do this, to potentially save time, but I think that we need to know.

[131] **William Powell:** Yes. I would be very happy to play my part in making that happen, but if we could just drill down via the Research Service into how best to shape that, then that would make a lot of sense.

[132] **Bethan Jenkins:** Otherwise, I think we will just have more petitions in the future saying that it is not adequate and we cannot just keep on—

[133] **William Powell:** No. You have the longer term picture to consider as well.

[134] **Joyce Watson:** There is a review going on as well anyway. So, it is worth keeping in mind whether we need to wait for the review that is being undertaken in education, and see what that comes up with before we do what we intend to do. Otherwise, what real meaning will it have?

[135] **William Powell:** Okay. Let us await the feedback from the Research Service on how that could happen and I will play whatever part I can to ensure that it does.

[136] We move on now to P-04-522, Asbestos in Schools. This petition was submitted by Cenric Clement-Evans and I am pleased to welcome Cenric to the public gallery today to watch our deliberations on this petition. It was first considered by the committee in December 2013, having collected 448 signatures. It says,

[137] ‘We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to put measures in place to ensure that parents and guardians of children across Wales can easily access information about the presence and management of asbestos in all school buildings.

[138] Given the health risks associated with the presence of asbestos in public buildings, we believe parents and guardians across Wales have the right to know if asbestos is located in their school; to know whether, where asbestos is present, it is being managed in line with the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012; to access that information easily online.'

[139] We last considered correspondence on the petition on 21 January and we agreed to write to the Minister for Education and Skills, sharing the petitioner's correspondence and asking whether his views differ in the light of that correspondence. Secondly, we agreed to seek a legal brief clarifying whose remit the issue falls within. I think that it may be useful for me, at this point, to defer to our legal adviser to give us a flavour of that brief, because I know that she has been looking into how the issue falls.

[140] **Ms Roberts:** Thank you very much, Chair. What I propose to do, as briefly as I can in the circumstances, is to outline the current legislative picture—what the current law says—then look at the responsibilities of duty holders and also update you on the recent developments.

[141] I have looked at this purely from a legal perspective, in terms of looking at what the legislation says and at the responsibilities that are set out in that legislation. So, Members may be aware that the current law in this area is mainly set out in the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974. That requires employers to protect employees at work from harm to their health and safety. In a school context, that would cover pupils, visitors and other people too.

[142] The second key piece of legislation in this area, it appears to me, is the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012. Those regulations basically set out minimum standards for the protection of employees from asbestos-related risks. They came into force on 6 April 2012 and they updated and replaced the 2006 regulations, which were the previous regulations. The most relevant regulation from those is regulation 4, because what that does is impose a duty on those who manage non-domestic premises. For the purpose of these regulations, non-domestic premises would obviously include schools. So, the regulation does not expressly state schools, but they would be covered by this regulation. For the purposes of regulation 4, it defines who the duty holders are in the context. Basically, a duty holder is anyone who has an obligation for the maintenance or the repair of non-domestic premises. That is set out in regulation 4.

[143] So, in the school context, who would the duty holders be? The duty holders would normally be the employer. As Members are aware, obviously we have different categories of schools in Wales, so the employer will differ in relation to each one of those categories. For example, in relation to maintained nursery schools, community schools et cetera, the employer will be the local authority, whereas in relation to voluntary aided and foundation schools the employer will be the governing body. Then, in relation to independent schools, it could be the proprietor, the governors, the trustees, et cetera.

[144] So, in practice, there are responsibilities on the Health and Safety Executive. As you know, that was the body created by the 1974 Act, and it has legal responsibilities to enforce the legislation. Basically, the 2012 regulations are Secretary of State regulations. They apply to the whole of Great Britain. In relation to the HSE, if the HSE is aware of a breach of those regulations, which would be a criminal offence, by the way, the HSE should investigate and obviously enforce, basically. So, the duties fall on the HSE to enforce, and the duty to manage asbestos in schools will then fall on the employer, often in conjunction with the HSE. In practice, they tend to work together.

[145] One thing that I want to say is that, in relation to the current framework, as far as I can see, the duty holder's responsibilities, under the 2012 regulations, would include maintaining an up-to-date record and up-to-date details on the location and condition of

asbestos-containing material. What is specifically required under this legislation is that there is a written asbestos management plan, and that should provide all of the details and information. Similarly, under the current legislation, an asbestos register is also required.

[146] Another thing that I will say is that the HSE has provided a lot of guidance. There is a lot of information on its website. There is guidance that covers the regulations, et cetera, and sets out a code of conduct or code of practice, and that is 116 pages. Its website specifically refers to the fact that, in relation to schools, there are currently no statutory provisions in health and safety legislation that require schools to notify parents. That is what is stated on its website. However, the website does acknowledge that some schools do this as a matter of course because, obviously, that is one way of assuring parents that they are effectively managing asbestos in schools.

[147] The final thing that I would like to say is that, in relation to the correspondence that we have received from the Minister, having looked at what the position is, I agree with what the Minister says. I agree with that. Basically, it seems—particularly in the light of the letter on 2 January 2014, referring to the last paragraph of the letter—that the expectation is that the type of information that the petitioners refer to should be included in a management of asbestos plan in any event. That is how it appears to me, from reading the correspondence. As the Minister points out, that really is part of the health and safety function, which is not devolved. It is not devolved and, basically, the Minister does not have the legislative powers to compel authorities to make the information available to parents and guardians.

[148] The only other thing that I wanted to say was that—as Members will be aware—the Welsh Government has now issued its guidance. It was issued in February 2014. Again, paragraph 8 on page 5 refers to asbestos records and plans. Paragraph 10 refers to the asbestos register and paragraph 11 refers to the asbestos management plan.

[149] **William Powell:** Thank you very much for that comprehensive update from the legal perspective. It is very clear that health and safety, as you say, is a reserved matter. Nevertheless, the correspondence that was shared with us by the petitioner, from David Laws, the Minister, to Annette Brooke MP, makes it clear that there is quite a distinct approach taken in England on these matters and that they regard there to be an element of responsibility on the part of Welsh Government for aspects of the communication of this and the management of this important issue. Colleagues, I wonder whether you have perspectives on this from your reading of this correspondence because it seems, in a way, that the letter of 3 March does, in some respects, move away from the key issue that the petitioners are concerned about.

[150] **Bethan Jenkins:** I welcome the legal advice. I suppose the frustration I feel—and that the petitioner feels—is that England has gone further in terms of the work it has done—

[151] **William Powell:** Well, the review that concluded—

[152] **Bethan Jenkins:** —communicating the issue to schools, and setting up a steering group and asking it to consider the vulnerability of children in exposure to asbestos. So, I think that we should at least show the Welsh Minister what England is doing in terms of those further steps. However, I would want to take advice on what we could do as a committee in terms of contacting the HSE to ask why there was no statutory requirement to inform students and parents and whether they are minded to amend that in future. I wonder whether we could understand what the content of some asbestos management plans would look like, perhaps, to satisfy ourselves as to why the petitioner feels that, in Wales, we are not promoting that information as much as we could be. I think that is where the problem lies—how that communication is being put forward to pupils and parents in Wales in an effective manner. I appreciate that there is guidance, but we would not have the petition if that was working

effectively.

[153] **William Powell:** No. I think that there is obviously real pressure around this issue and a significant amount of unease out there across Wales and beyond about this issue. I also wonder whether there will be any amendment of practice coming from the most recent review that has taken place in England on these issues. England has obviously put quite a resource into digging into this issue and trying to get an up-to-date assessment of the state of the issue.

[154] **Joyce Watson:** Right. For clarification, did I hear you say that, even if the Assembly wanted to issue an order to schools that said that they must produce a record of asbestos management et cetera within schools, we do not have the power to do it? Is that what I heard you say?

[155] **Ms Roberts:** Yes. The legislation, Joyce, as I have outlined, is basically health and safety legislation, and I think that the point the Government is making is that, obviously, the area of health and safety is outside its remit. It is not devolved; it is an exception in Schedule 7 of the Government of Wales Act 2006. So, basically, as I said, the requirement to have a written asbestos management plan and the requirement to have a register are contained within that type of legislation. So, that is my understanding as well.

[156] **Joyce Watson:** So, in terms of us moving this forward, the Assembly cannot actually enforce any actions on the schools with regard to the things that are being asked for in this petition. That is the way I understand it.

[157] **Ms Roberts:** Yes. The enforcement of health and safety legislation et cetera is a matter for the HSE. That is my understanding, Joyce.

[158] **Joyce Watson:** And even keeping the registers and all of those things—that falls within the remit of the HSE.

[159] **Ms Roberts:** That is what the Government is saying. Based on the research that I have done—

[160] **Joyce Watson:** You agree with that.

[161] **Ms Roberts:** I agree with that, yes.

[162] **William Powell:** Thanks for that. I do not think that that was a matter of contention. It was access to information that was the issue, as I understand it, rather than issues around enforcement. However, I think it may be useful if we were to write to the HSE as a committee to seek its perspective on this, as Bethan outlined. I think that Joyce is right that there is no issue with regard to—

[163] **Joyce Watson:** I wanted to know that because I am trying to see—

[164] **William Powell:** No, it was really useful to have that restated—

[165] **Joyce Watson:** —where we could go with that.

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

[167] **Bethan Jenkins:** Also, there are the petitioner's comments about what extra work is being done.

[168] **William Powell:** Yes, absolutely. We need to build that in. Evidently, Annette

Brooke and Lord Wigley have both been very active on this front, among others.

10:30

[169] **Bethan Jenkins:** We may want to get comments on the legal advice, because I know that we asked to have the legal advice before the committee meeting. We have only just had the legal advice, and so, I think, if we can, we should ask the petitioner what his views are on that advice.

[170] **William Powell:** It would be very useful.

[171] **Bethan Jenkins:** I thought that we were going to get a written document before this committee meeting on the legal advice, which we did not get—

[172] **William Powell:** No, but we have had a very comprehensive assessment of it now.

[173] **Bethan Jenkins:** We are all reacting as it is happening now as a result of that.

[174] **William Powell:** I would be very happy to write to the petitioner, who has been listening intently to proceedings. Thank you very much for that, colleagues; I am conscious that time is also pressing.

[175] **Joyce Watson:** Yes, it is.

10:30

**Llythyr gan Gadeirydd y Pwyllgor Cymunedau, Cydraddoldeb a Llywodraeth
Leol—Cyfrifoldeb dros Faterion y Gymraeg
Letter from Chair of Communities, Equality and Local Government
Committee—Responsibility for Welsh-language Issues**

[176] **William Powell:** I think that, at this stage, we can note the contents of this letter.

10:31

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

[177] **William Powell:** This is an important evidence session on issues that have exercised the committee for some time, namely bus services in Wales. We have two people coming to join us this morning, who will be with us in a moment, who have significant backgrounds on the issue.

[178] Good morning. It is good to welcome Margaret Everson, senior officer, Bus Users UK Cymru and Nesta Jones, bus compliance officer for north Wales, Bus Users UK Cymru, here this morning. Could you introduce yourselves briefly for the sound levels? If you would like to make any initial comments, please feel free to do so, and then we will get straight down to questions on this important matter.

[179] **Ms Everson:** Thank you, Chair. Good morning. I am pleased to be here and to see some familiar faces as well. I hope that we can be of use to you this morning. As you say, my name is Margaret Everson. I head up Bus Users Cymru, we are part of Bus Users UK, but Bus Users Cymru is 100% funded by the Welsh Government, and Bus Users Scotland is 100% funded by the Scottish Government as well. So, we are truly independent; we are not funded

by the industry. My job is to lead on strategy and policy and, generally, to lead us in the right direction. Nesta is a bus compliance officer who works across north Wales and north Powys, and I shall let her introduce herself.

[180] **Ms Jones:** I am Nesta Jones. I am based in Wrexham, north Wales, and I am a bus compliance officer for Bus Users Cymru. My main role is to make sure that buses are complying with their registered particulars on punctuality, reliability and destinations, and to work with the operators and local authorities to try to resolve any issues quickly so that the public is not inconvenienced by any problems that may have occurred.

[181] **William Powell:** Excellent. Thank you very much. Just as a reminder, this session arises out of our consideration of three related petitions, which we have chosen to group because of the close similarity of the issues. They are P-04-475, Wanted—Buses for Meirionnydd, P-04-513, Save the Wrexham/Barmouth X94 bus service, which will be particularly familiar to one of our witnesses, and P-04-515, Increase Funding for Welsh Bus Services. So, in that context, if I could, I will kick off with an overall, opening question, which is to ask you both whether, in your view, the provision of bus services across Wales, particularly the number, quality and cost of those services, has broadly been getting better or worse in the last few years, just to give us a context.

[182] **Ms Everson:** I shall start, Chair. When funding is tight operators look at their networks to see what can be cut, and peripheral services are usually the first to be considered, because generally they struggle to cover their costs. Having said that, over the last few years, bus provision has probably been as good as it has ever been in Wales. There have been various funding streams that have all been brought together to enable bus operators to invest in new vehicles and to try different services to see whether they are going to be viable. I will leave Nesta to say what she thinks it is like in north Wales.

[183] **Mr Jones:** I have been doing this job for 10 and a half years—I was with the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency before Bus Users Cymru—and I would say that the level of service provision in north Wales definitely has improved, and the quality of the provision has improved, but I can see that it is going to go rapidly downhill. Already, services are to be withdrawn from May as a result of the change in funding.

[184] **William Powell:** What accounts for the fact, in your view, that the number of bus passenger journeys in Wales, according to data that are available to us, has decreased more quickly in Wales than in any other part of the UK in the year ending December 2013? What might lie behind that, particularly given the issues with regard to quality that Margaret Everson has outlined?

[185] **Ms Everson:** I had some research done for this evidence for you today.

[186] **William Powell:** Please share that with us.

[187] **Ms Everson:** I do not carry that level of detail in my head, so, if you do not mind, I will refer to notes. My researcher has said that, in 2011-12, bus fares rose by 5.9%, and in 2012-13 they rose by 6.9%. In the past, cost increases were partially due to world fuel prices, but now, fare increases announced in 2014 are publicised by operators as being due to the changed funding regime. However, since 2011, average wages have not increased significantly, so bus travel is seen to be more expensive. As to whether it is or not, we do not have the statistical research to prove that, but it is seen as being more expensive. Timetable changes—there have been quite a few timetable changes over the last couple of years, and that brings insecurity and uncertainty. If people are not sure and are not confident, they think, ‘We’ll take the car, perhaps. We won’t risk it’. Wales has many rural areas as well, with a lower density of population, and a quick tour of the high street will see so many closed shops.

According to the Office for National Statistics, 58% of journeys are for leisure and shopping, so if people do not have as much money as they did, they will not go shopping, and if the high street is suffering, there is no point in going. Do you have anything to add to that, Nesta?

[188] **Ms Jones:** No, not really, because I actually do not travel much on the buses, so passenger numbers are not something that I notice. I am looking at the buses. There have been an awful lot of new buses coming on. Arriva has invested millions in north Wales in new vehicles, and there are statistics from Arriva about the new services that they have put on—the sapphire services. Michael Morton, the managing director of Arriva Buses Wales, came and did a talk in Llandudno a couple of months ago, and where they have put on good vehicles, the usage of those routes does increase. It was quite significant, was it not, Margaret? There is free Wi-Fi, leather seats, frequent services—they go out and they really market these routes, but these are high-usage routes for which they will get really good revenue. However, the people in the rural areas do not get the leather seats and the Wi-Fi.

[189] **William Powell:** I have certainly seen that occasionally, on using the Newtown-to-Cardiff route. It is much more comfortable than any bus that I had previously encountered.

[190] I would like to ask one further question at this point. Have there been any particular trends in the issues that are raised with you in bus users' surgeries, which I presume are a fairly important aspect of your engagement with passengers in the last year or so?

[191] **Ms Everson:** It is one of our core activities, of course. We handle complaints from the public and then we give them the opportunity to talk to their transport operator. So, we take very seriously the surgeries.

[192] Percentage-wise, there is a significant change. In 2011-12, some 11% of written and telephone complaints were about the level of service. If we take the first half of 2013-14, we see that it has risen to 48% of people who are complaining that they will not have a bus or that the buses are less frequent.

[193] **William Powell:** That is useful. I call on Joyce Watson.

[194] **Joyce Watson:** Good morning, both. I have met two sets of users: one in Barmouth, which is an area you cover, and another in Aberystwyth. The meetings were in response to the sudden withdrawal of buses from certain routes. So, I would like to focus on that aspect of information that you might have received, and I suspect that those that you have just quoted might have something to do with that. We know that we have a six-month interim service in place, particularly in north Wales, and that it is being reviewed. That being the case, it will take note of the funding that is available, so I do not know whether you will be able to answer the question. However, do you have an opinion on the recent Welsh Government announcements on bus funding levels and on the new bus service support grant and the funding for concessionary travel?

[195] **Ms Everson:** We see the effects of the changes. There has been a lot of reaction in the press on the reduction of reimbursement levels for the concessionary travel pass. We believe that all operators are now looking at their networks to decide what is commercially viable and what is not. The committee will be aware, I am sure, of the legal challenge from Stagecoach UK. I thought that it was Stagecoach in south Wales, but I am told that it is Stagecoach UK that is taking the legal challenge on the concessionary fare reimbursement level. The reaction to the reduction in other revenue grants, which henceforth will be known as the bus services support grant, is more quiet, because we do not think that the travelling public yet realises how much it could affect it. Having said that, the X94 is such an essential service, my question was: if you live in Bala, how will you get to hospital in Wrexham? You have no other way of getting there. I believe that funding will be put in to keep services like

that going and I believe that support is necessary for such services. In fact, we have just finished doing a series of 10 or 11 surgeries across the whole area to gather passenger views so that the tenders that are going out for these services can deliver what the passenger wants instead of what the operators think the passengers might want.

[196] **Joyce Watson:** Do you believe that has been the problem then and has delivered some of those issues? That is, that there has not been enough engagement to see what people want rather than service providers giving what they think people might want.

10:45

[197] **Ms Everson:** I believe that probably has been the case in the past, because operators are commercial organisations and they run what they think will be commercially viable. The other thing, which Nesta picked up on earlier and which is very relevant, is that bus operators are not very good at marketing their services. They sometimes have a very fine product and nobody knows about it. So, if you can add commercial viability to good marketing and some revenue funding, if it is a socially necessary service, then let us say that it is a socially necessary service, let us support it and let the market sort out the other services.

[198] **Joyce Watson:** That is a very good point, because I know that that was the case particularly in the Barmouth area, because the bus user group said that one individual was trying to put that information out. That should not be the case. Could I ask you also for a comment on the estimation that 10% of all buses on the road could be taken out of service, and that many rural lifelines could be lost altogether?

[199] **Ms Everson:** I think that was a judgment we took because Cardiff Bus announced in a public meeting that it was going to be reducing services by 10%. Stagecoach, in conversation, also said that the concessionary fare reimbursement reduction to operators would result in an 11% change to its bottom line. So, it is reasonable to suggest that if it has an 11% hit to its bottom line, it might be looking for an equal percentage drop in the services. It will look at its main networks and see that a service runs every 15 minutes, but perhaps it will take that to every 20 minutes. It will then look at the peripheral services and say, 'We only get 50 people a day perhaps on that service'. There is a service in Barry that carries 100 passengers a day, I understand, and that just about covers its cost. If all those 100 people are concessionary pass holders, the bus operator's revenue is going to drop by whatever percentage the final concessionary fare drops by. So, it will really have to look at it. I know that there have been campaigns to save the 98 service, which has not been at risk too seriously up to now, but services like that could be at risk from now on. A lady in Pentyrch writes to us and says that she has no bus at all after 6.30 p.m.

[200] **Russell George:** I represent quite a rural constituency in north Powys, and I have a fairly large postbag of correspondence from constituents in the most rural parts of the constituency, usually elderly constituents, concerned about the reduction in services, because, without a service, they are unable to access healthcare or go out on a social basis. What are your views and opinions on the difference of impact between rural and urban areas?

[201] **Ms Jones:** I work in northern Powys. I am not quite sure what area—Tanat Valley—

[202] **Russell George:** Tanat Valley, yes.

[203] **Ms Jones:** In the Tanat Valley, they run small buses into the small villages, and I monitor these. I have not long been monitoring them, and they were fine. However, I see lots of elderly people coming in to Welshpool on market day—

[204] **William Powell:** It is their lifeline.

[205] **Ms Jones:** It really is their lifeline. I would say that almost all those using this service are concessionary fares users. They run on market days into places like Welshpool and Newtown. People's lives revolve around coming shopping on those days. Also, in the Wrexham area, there is the Ceiriog Valley with places such as Glyn Ceiriog and Llanarmon, and they have GHA Coaches running services up there that are wholly subsidised. Those are all going to be cancelled. They have not been cancelled yet, but—. We are not talking about small villages, as there are actually a lot of people living up there, and Oswestry and Wrexham are the commuter towns for them. These people will not even have buses to go to work. One bus goes to the orthopaedic hospital and another goes to Wrexham Maelor Hospital. From Chirk, you have a rail line, but people need to get down there. From Chirk, it is about 10 miles to the top of the Ceiriog Valley. There is a sizeable population along those routes, but probably not enough to run these services commercially. GHA Coaches might experiment and see whether it can reduce it and maybe run them commercially, but it is very touch and go, especially with the reduction in concessionary—

[206] **Russell George:** Sorry to interrupt. I think that your answer is that the impact is significantly different in a rural area than in an urban area. Is that right?

[207] **Ms Jones:** I would certainly say so. If you live on the Wrexham to Chester route or along the north Wales coast, you can see an Arriva bus every five minutes, but if you live in a rural area, you are up the creek without a paddle.

[208] **Russell George:** That is right. Thank you.

[209] **William Powell:** Bethan Jenkins is next.

[210] **Bethan Jenkins:** I just want to go back to an issue that you mentioned earlier about subsidies. When bus services have been cut in my area, I have sought meetings with the operators. What they have said is that they cannot cross-subsidise to fulfil obligations for the less popular routes. So, they have asked me to talk to the smaller operators that may take it upon themselves to put those routes on again. Is that the appropriate way of dealing with bus routes in Wales or do you think that there should be more of an obligation on the Welsh Government to look strategically at where bus services are and that there should be a more consistent pattern as to where there should be some sort of bus service, even if it is not commercially viable? In some areas it is even worse than 6.30 p.m. For example, in some areas of my constituency, such as Cwmgors and other areas, there are no buses at all on weekends. How do we get over that situation where people are increasingly isolated—not just elderly people—because they cannot access any form of service?

[211] **Ms Everson:** It is very difficult. Bus companies are commercial organisations; they have to run to a profit. Even Cardiff Bus, which is wholly owned by Cardiff Council, is not allowed to make a loss—it does not have to make a huge profit, but is not allowed to run at a loss. If it says that it will get no passengers after 6 p.m., then nothing in the world will make it run services after 6 p.m. The local authorities are then expected to buy in the extra services to fill those gaps. If the smaller operators—you are quite right that the smaller operators do pick up the evening and Sunday services—cannot be offered sufficient revenue by the local authority to make it worth while for them, then we are looking at community transport. I understand from something that I read yesterday that the revenue funding for local authorities used to have 10% of that amount ring-fenced for community transport work, but I understand that that has now been reduced. So, you have a reduction in the community transport ring-fence funding in a smaller pot.

[212] **Bethan Jenkins:** Looking to the future, do you think that there would be a case for the Welsh Government to seek partial or full re-regulation of bus services. That is what some

of us have been calling for in Wales. Is that something that you would have sympathy with?

[213] **Ms Everson:** I think that far more use could be made of quality partnerships. I worked in the regulated bus industry and I have worked in the free market industry too, and we had all sorts of problems in the regulated market. It stifled any competition; nobody bothered to buy new buses and they just carried on. If you could find that happy medium where you do not have to go back to full regulation—. You can do it in London—it has money and there is a tighter area—but doing it here—. I would like to see us going down the quality partnerships route. I would like franchises, I would like tenders and I would like operators to have to work within the confines of a quality partnership.

[214] **Bethan Jenkins:** I have a third question, if I may, on integrated transport. It is a frustration of mine that all of the talk is about integrated transport, but in a lot of areas the buses will be at different times to the trains or the trains will be located far from the buses so that it takes time to walk or even to get a taxi or another bus to the train. You cannot cross-ticket in many instances—. You can in some instances, but it is not very well advertised on trains. However, in some areas, if you want to use a different bus company, it will not let you use that ticket. How do you see integrated transport working if the system at the moment is so clunky and so averse to working together in this integrated manner?

[215] **Ms Everson:** You would think that it would be simple, would you not, especially when you find that the train company and the bus company have the same parent company? You would think that it would be easy, but with timetable changes—. Trains change their timetables twice a year and bus operators are now changing their timetables weekly, and sometimes daily, as they try to get it right. Quality partnerships would help in that—

[216] **Bethan Jenkins:** Why is that not happening already? Why is it so difficult to get that co-ordination at the moment?

[217] **Ms Everson:** I cannot answer that question. I could do a bit of research and come back to it, if you wish, but I do not think that I can answer that question. I do not have the knowledge.

[218] **Bethan Jenkins:** I think that that is why people are not engaging in public transport; it is so difficult. They have to plan two or three hours in advance before leaving the house to know exactly where they are going, and if a train or a bus is cancelled, then that is another diversion to their day. So, if you are willing to look into that, I would welcome it because it is one of the biggest elements that people come to see me with, namely that clear frustration that they would take public transport more if it was as easy as getting into a car and knowing that the service was there.

[219] **William Powell:** It is that certainty and predictability that is important, is it not?

[220] **Ms Everson:** You touch on an incredibly important issue, which is the inter-availability of ticketing and being able to have one ticket and get on one mode of transport and then get on another. Would that not be wonderful? However, you need an honest broker for that. Bus operators cannot even sit in the same room as each other without having to register that with the Office of Fair Trading or the Competition Commission—whichever of those. I run other events and I invite the managing directors of bus companies to come, and they have to register that and say what they talked about, which is usually a football game of some kind. They have to register that because the Competition Commission is very, very strict on that.

[221] **William Powell:** It would be useful to have a little bit more clarity on that, so could you maybe expand on that a little when you write to us? You have said that you would do

that.

[222] **Bethan Jenkins:** The Welsh Government did say that it was going to look into having a sort of Oyster card system for Wales, but it was so long ago. I am not even sure where it is at in looking at that. I visited Newport Bus a few years ago and it has a similar system, but it is just for Newport. That works really well. Why can we not have a Wales-wide one? I know that it is probably to do with computers and data systems, but that would seem to me to be a way forward. We are a nation of only three million people, so I think that it should be possible.

[223] **Ms Jones:** There are tickets available, but sometimes they are difficult to understand. There is the North Wales Rover, so you pay, I do not know, about £26 a day and you can travel on all trains and buses in north Wales. You can pay for a sector and have an all-Wales one, but sometimes they are not easy to understand.

[224] **William Powell:** They are not well enough communicated really, are they?

[225] **Ms Jones:** No, and then, if you are getting on the first bus or the first train of the day, you have to depend on the driver or the ticket person understanding the ticketing system and advising you on the correct ticket to have. So, yes, that would be clear ticketing.

[226] **William Powell:** I am afraid that we have been beaten by the clock. Margaret Everson and Nesta Jones, diolch yn fawr iawn. Thank you very much indeed for coming today and for sharing the diverse experience that you have gathered from bus users across Wales. It has been extremely helpful to us. We will supply you with a copy of the transcript so that you can check it for accuracy and also for any undertakings that you have made in terms of supplying additional information to us, which we greatly appreciate. This session has been very helpful in considering this group of petitions that we have received and that we are committed to taking forward. Thank you very much indeed.

[227] I remind remaining colleagues that there are no petition presentations scheduled today and I wish you, Bethan, a very happy Easter. We meet again on 29 April for our first meeting of the new term. Diolch yn fawr.

*Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 10:59.
The meeting ended at 10:59.*