



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

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau **The Petitions Committee**

Dydd Mawrth, 10 Rhagfyr 2013
Tuesday, 10 December 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

Lindsay Whittle	Plaid Cymru (yn dirprwyo ar ran Bethan Jenkins) The Party of Wales (substituting for Bethan Jenkins)
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
Kath Thomas	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 09:02.
The meeting started at 09:02.

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions

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

[2] A warm welcome to everyone this morning to the final Petitions Committee meeting of this term. We have an apology this morning from Bethan Jenkins, and it is really good to welcome Lindsay Whittle, our colleague, back as a substitute for Bethan this morning. Normal housekeeping arrangements apply with regard to the running of the meeting. There are no scheduled fire alarms, so, if the bell goes off, it is likely to be the real thing, and we are in the hands of the ushers.

Deisebau Newydd
New Petitions

[3] **William Powell:** Moving straight to the new petitions that we have before us, first is P-04-519, Abolition of Park Homes Sales Commission. This petition was submitted by Caerwnon Park Residents Association, and the text reads as follows:

[4] ‘We call upon the National Assembly For Wales to urge the Welsh Government to remove from Legislation the right of Park Owners to demand commission on the private sale of park homes now that they are no longer involved in the selling process.’

[5] We received this in person just last week and had an opportunity to engage with the main petitioners. As yet, we have not undertaken any action on it, because this is our first consideration. I propose that we write to the Minister for Housing and Regeneration to seek his views on the matter, if colleagues are happy with that. Are there any other suggestions as to what we can usefully do? Russell, you have indicated.

[6] **Russell George:** Perhaps we should also write to Peter Black, Assembly Member, seeking his views, given his particular experience in the past on this issue.

[7] **William Powell:** I think that would make eminent sense. Are colleagues happy with that approach? Excellent. Let us do just that, then—there are clear actions from that.

[8] Next is P-04-520, Regarding the Cancellation of All Elective Orthopaedic Surgery by Hywel Dda Health Board During the Winter 2013/14. Now, this petition was submitted by Kate O'Dell, and has the support of 490 signatures.

[9] 'We the undersigned believe the cancellation of all orthopaedic surgery except trauma, during the Winter months 2013/14 undermines the human rights of patients and discriminates against disability. We demand that this decision be urgently revisited. All decisions regarding the priority of patient needs should be made by clinicians rather than the administration making decisions based on financial restrictions. There are seriously urgent cases, other than trauma, already on the waiting list who without surgery are in danger of losing mobility and consequently their livelihood. In a political climate where patients should be listened to, in this case they have not even been informed let alone been consulted, the Hywel Dda decision would appear to be directly in conflict with this principle. Neither can we understand why orthopaedic patients should be targeted. This seems an over simplistic approach to addressing financial problems. Not only are patients affected by such decisions but specialist staff and trainees are not allowed to do the job they are paid for and wish to do. We call upon the Welsh Government to reverse this decision.'

[10] We received this in person from Kate O'Dell and her colleagues recently here in the Senedd. At this stage, I think that the first step is probably to write to the Minister for Health and Social Services. Are colleagues happy that we approach things in that way? Is there anything to add just at this stage? I am aware, Joyce, that you had a recent meeting with some senior officials of the health board.

[11] **Joyce Watson:** I did have a meeting with the health board, and we raised a number of issues, and, of course, this was one of them—Rebecca Evans and I were there. It is the case that people sometimes do have their operations cancelled in the winter in any case, due to demand. The claim that has been out there is that people were having their operations cancelled before the date at which they said they were going to put that into place. So, that was clearly challenged, and it has been challenged here in the Assembly as well—I have challenged it in the Assembly as well. The health board says that that is not the case. I have also had people tell me that their operations have been brought forward. I think that it is only fair to put that on the record as well, because people have written to me saying that they have had their operations brought forward. So, we have to give a balanced view here. To that end, in terms of what we can do as a committee, I think that it is two things: to let the health board know about the strength of feeling, and also to let the Minister know about the strength of feeling, and probably, I would say, the Health and Social Care Committee.

[12] **William Powell:** Okay. I have already proposed, and sense support for, writing to the Minister. There is a suggestion that we also, in view of the particular time sensitivity of this matter, write to the health board's chief executive and chair, and also to the Chair of the health committee, David Rees. Are there any other observations?

[13] **Lindsay Whittle:** Well, Chair, I agree entirely with that, but people are living in some discomfort and pain, and with some immobility as well, no doubt. What sort of urgency are we putting on this? Can we ask that we have a reply sooner rather than later? It is no good writing in December and having a letter back in February.

[14] **William Powell:** I undertake to sign off any correspondence on this before the end of this week.

[15] **Lindsay Whittle:** Okay, thank you.

[16] **William Powell:** And the letter will be framed in those terms.

[17] **Lindsay Whittle:** Thank you, Chair.

[18] **William Powell:** Excellent. Okay, we have agreed actions on that important petition.

[19] We now move to P-04-521, Regulating Caravan Sites. This petition was submitted by Mr Brian Silvester with the support of 37 signatures. It reads:

[20] ‘We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to investigate whether legislation relating to safety of holiday and residential caravan parks in Wales is adequate and/or properly enforced. If not, we urge the Welsh Government to take appropriate action. We are especially concerned about the following safety hazards:

1. The space between caravans;
2. The storage of bottled gas; and
3. The siting of caravans and other combustible structures in the 3 metre clear area round the site boundary.

[21] All of these examples present safety risks which do not appear to be adequately enforced at present.’

[22] I should just declare on this matter that Mr Brian Silvester, being a resident of Ceredigion, and therefore Mid and West Wales, came to me in one of my surgeries in Aberystwyth some time ago to raise these issues. Obviously, he has decided to take forward the issue in this particular manner. I have not been majorly involved in the issue, but I should put that on the record.

[23] **Lindsay Whittle:** I would also put on record that I am a member of the Caravan Club. I do not know whether it is relevant here; I am merely a member and receive a monthly magazine.

[24] **William Powell:** You may be able to get us an early response if we choose to write to it, Lindsay. [*Laughter.*]

[25] **Lindsay Whittle:** I do not know about that. [*Laughter.*] However, I have no financial interest in this.

[26] **Russell George:** Chair, may I suggest that we write, according to our normal protocol, to the Minister in the first instance? Perhaps you are aware that Darren Millar AM has had permission to bring forward a Bill. So, perhaps it would be a good idea to write to him seeking his views, because these issues might be important enough to be incorporated into his Bill.

[27] **William Powell:** Yes, absolutely; Darren Millar is always open to approach and discussion on such matters. I am not quite clear whether it would also be useful to write to Peter Black, given that residential caravans are also referenced here.

[28] **Russell George:** Yes, let us do that as well.

[29] **William Powell:** That would be a belt-and-braces approach. Both Members have

been piloting Member proposed Bills; in the one case, it is on the statute book, and the other is coming up the track. Are colleagues happy with that approach? You are. Good.

[30] We now move on to P-04-522, Asbestos in Schools. This petition was submitted by Cenric Clement-Evans and collected 448 signatures. It reads:

[31] ‘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.

[32] Given the health risks associated with the presence of asbestos in public buildings, we believe parents and guardians across Wales have the right;

[33] to know if asbestos is located in their school;

[34] to know whether, where asbestos is present, it is being managed in line with the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012;

[35] to access that information easily online’.

[36] Again, in connection with this, I should register the fact that I am a school governor and that I have been leading on a particular asbestos-related issue in the school of which I am a governor. Secondly, and separately, I have met Mr Clement-Evans and his colleague, Mr Michael Imperato, to discuss some of these matters, but in a general sense and not in a way that is relevant to the petition. Colleagues, what are your views on the first steps here?

[37] **Joyce Watson:** We should write to the Minister for Education and Skills.

[38] **William Powell:** Okay, we will write to Huw Lewis to seek his views on this petition in the first instance. I think that is the best way to kick things off. Are you happy with that approach? You are.

[39] We now move to P-04-523, Protect the elderly and vulnerable in care homes. This petition was submitted by Justice for Jasmine and collected 132 signatures.

[40] ‘We, the undersigned, call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to hold a Public Inquiry into the events that led to Operation Jasmine, which investigated alleged neglect of older people in nursing homes in Wales.’

[41] Additional information is supplied as follows:

[42] ‘With the collapse of Operation Jasmine, where the police investigated more than 100 cases of alleged neglect and spent more than £13 million, it has meant that those affected have had no justice and those responsible for the neglect have not been held accountable. We call for a Public Inquiry to take place to ensure that all aspects of the cause of neglect are fully investigated and that new legislation is passed to make certain that people in nursing homes will receive a higher standard of care and if they do not, that they can then obtain redress via the appropriate agencies and the legal system.’

[43] We have not undertaken any action on this petition, but colleagues will be aware of—and probably will have been present for—the recent statement by the First Minister, Carwyn Jones, on this and associated matters. We have the petitioner’s letter and, indeed, a copy of that statement in our public papers today. Lindsay, if you do not mind, I would like to refer to you on this in the first instance, given your local connection.

[44] **Lindsay Whittle:** Thanks, Chair. Some of these homes were in the Caerphilly county borough, where I was the leader of the authority for a total of nine years. I know of the difficulties that many of these residents have faced. The First Minister, in his statement just last week, said that he has appointed Dr Margaret Flynn to lead the review. Personally, I welcome that statement and look forward to that review. Dr Flynn has a very good reputation in this field, and I am sure that she will leave no stone unturned in her inquiry. Personally, I think that we should await the results of that inquiry before we proceed any further. A public inquiry would cost a lot of money, and if money has to be spent, so be it, but as we have an inquiry at the moment, I think that that is the best course of action.

09:15

[45] **William Powell:** Thank you very much for that contribution.

[46] **Russell George:** Perhaps it would also be worth writing to the petitioners to advise them of the First Minister's statement. I am sure that they would have seen it, but we should not assume that, and then we could ask them for their views on the First Minister's statement also.

[47] **William Powell:** Absolutely. Later today, we will have the opportunity to meet some of those petitioners at a presentation at 1.00 p.m. on the steps of the Senedd. So, we can engage with them—

[48] **Mr George:** It is tomorrow.

[49] **William Powell:** It is actually tomorrow; sorry about that. It will be a useful opportunity to gauge their views and to take it forward in the way suggested.

[50] **Lindsay Whittle:** Chair, it is important that these families have some justice and closure because of the trauma that they and their relatives have suffered. I am sorry that the owner of Puretruce Health Care Limited is ill at the moment, but there is still a case to look at and I am pleased that the Department for Work and Pensions has kept the case open.

[51] **William Powell:** Thank you very much indeed.

09:16

Y Wybodaeth Ddiweddaraf am Ddeisebau Blaenorol Updates to Previous Petitions

[52] **William Powell:** The first update is on P-03-240, Road safety on the A40 in Llanddewi Velfrey, submitted by Llanddewi Velfrey Community Council in July 2011 and supported by 154 signatures. This relates to their concerns regarding a whole range of safety issues associated with increased volumes of traffic on the A40, which are detailed here, together with a number of the petitioners' aspirations for improved safety measures. I am a fairly frequent user of this road—I cannot claim to be quite as frequent a user as Joyce, who lives beyond this point within our region. I know also, Joyce, that you have had some engagement with the community council relatively recently.

[53] We last considered this petition back on 24 September, and we agreed to note the full response from the Minister for Economy, Science and Transport, Edwina Hart. We also asked her to keep this committee up to date with a time frame for developments regarding the additional safety measures. She has now written to us with a time frame, but we have not had any feedback as yet from the petitioners—the community council. We should probably write to them on one more occasion, given that I am not quite clear as to how frequently they

meet—it may be monthly or six-weekly, or something of that kind. So, it may well be sensible to write to them on a final occasion just to seek their views, but we are probably moving quite close to the closure of this petition, because they seem to have had a measure of satisfaction in terms of what they are seeking. Are colleagues happy that I should write seeking views on the time frame laid out by Edwina Hart?

[54] **Joyce Watson:** Yes, absolutely.

[55] **William Powell:** Okay, good. The next update is on P-04-470, Against the nationalisation of Cardiff Airport. This petition was submitted by Madeleine Thornton in April of this year with the support of 196 signatures. It calls upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to come forward with a full justification of its purchase of Cardiff Airport, which has been termed here as the ‘nationalisation’ of the airport. We last considered this back in June, and we agreed to write to the petitioner seeking her views on what was then the First Minister’s recent letter, and the supporting documents that he had supplied. We also agreed to write to the Chair of the Enterprise and Business Committee, Nick Ramsay, highlighting the petition in the context of his committee’s recent work.

[56] We have not heard from the petitioner, despite prompting. It seems to me that, given the way that this one has moved on and the absence of any feedback, we should consider closure. I see that Russell George has indicated.

[57] **Russell George:** I am aware of the petitioner, who seemed very passionate about this issue when she came to speak to me about it.

[58] **William Powell:** Was that at the time or more recently?

[59] **Russell George:** It was before the petition was submitted. I occasionally see the petitioner, so I am surprised that she has not responded, but what I would suggest is that we give the petitioner one final prompt and then, if we do not hear anything within a reasonable timescale, we should close the petition.

[60] **William Powell:** Thank you very much for that contribution. Joyce is next.

[61] **Joyce Watson:** I hear what Russell is saying, but we have done our work, they have not responded and I propose that we close the petition.

[62] **Lindsay Whittle:** I would like to second Joyce Watson, Chair. I think that the National Assembly and the Welsh Government have already justified their decision to purchase Cardiff Airport and I am fully in favour of it.

[63] **Russell George:** When was the last time that we wrote to the petitioner?

[64] **William Powell:** I am just double checking.

[65] **Russell George:** What was the date on that?

[66] **Mr George:** We would have written within the last few weeks, because we usually do so before a meeting to make sure whether they want to respond. There are all sorts of reasons why people do not reply and they may not have been around.

[67] **William Powell:** We will check that there has been an approach within the last four to six weeks. If there has, I would agree with the emerging majority view here. If for some reason that has not occurred, then, for the sake of consistency, I would take the approach that you are advocating, Russell. We will check what the facts of the situation are, if colleagues

are content with that, just for the sake of consistency, which I know is important to all of us. Thanks very much indeed.

[68] We move now to petition P-04-486, Act Now and Help Save the High Street Shops. This is a matter of concern to all of us. This petition was submitted by Keith Davies in June 2013 and we are happy to welcome Mr Davies to the public gallery today, where he is following our deliberations. The petition has collected 12 signatures.

[69] ‘We call on the National Assembly to urge the Welsh Government to provide support for independent traders in our towns by extending the small Business Relief Scheme to a greater number of businesses.’

[70] It also references the Scottish model and finally it comments that the Welsh Government’s decision to postpone the revaluation of businesses from 2015 to 2017 does not allow the impact of the recent economic downturn to be reflected in the level of business rates.

[71] We last considered the petition on 24 September and we agreed to a number of actions. The first was to take oral evidence on the petition and the second was to request a research brief on the current approach taken elsewhere in the UK, notably in Scotland, given that it was name-checked in the petition. We have that briefing in our papers today. We also agreed to a site visit in due course and to be in touch with the recently formed cross-party group on small shops, which is chaired by Janet Finch-Saunders. We also wrote to the Minister for Economy, Science and Transport asking for fuller information on her recent analysis of business rates. We have a response from Edwina Hart and we have additional comments from the petitioner. We also have further feedback from the cross-party group.

[72] I am keen to draw on colleagues’ views on this matter because, between us, we represent a very large chunk of Wales, which has a patchwork of towns and villages that are suffering acutely in the current circumstances. Joyce, did you indicate?

[73] **Joyce Watson:** Yes. We have done a piece of work on the high street in the Enterprise and Business Committee quite recently, quite frankly. We took an awful lot of evidence and did site visits. So, I do not know whether us doing any of that is going to make any difference. The hard facts are that more and more people are buying online and the other fact is that small businesses are struggling. I took a very active approach last Saturday, on Small Business Saturday, and I went and spoke to businesses—I happened to be in Harlech, but I have done the same repeatedly. There are quite clearly issues with the high street, with multiple empty shops and those that are surviving are struggling; there is no question about that. I think that the real question for me, and for those traders, is how we move forward with our high street. I do not know if we do a piece of work on the back of the piece of work that has just been done, that we are going to add anything to it; if I thought that we would, I would say, ‘Let’s do it’, but I am not sure that we will. That is the quandary that I have been considering since I read this yesterday. In that respect, I am not saying, ‘Don’t do it’, or, ‘Do it’, but I would just like to know what purpose it would serve.

[74] I am a great believer in giving everyone their day, if you like, and I used to be in business myself—and the retail business as well—so I understand the concerns. However, I want us to be real about what we are doing, and about whether we are going to actually look at something that has not already been looked at. Is there another approach beyond going down the high street to see, in some cases, the real devastation of those high streets in terms of businesses, when we do that anyway, all of the time? Therefore, if someone can tell me exactly what we are going to do that has not been done before, that would be fine and I would say, ‘Let’s do it’, but if our time would be better spent doing something to help those businesses in a different way, which we felt we could add value to, then I would certainly be

up for that.

[75] **William Powell:** I appreciate that. I am conscious that we are in the presence of someone who is a businessman and a shopkeeper, and I would be disappointed if Russell did not have a contribution to make in a moment. However, if I might just say, Joyce, I understand your concern regarding the potential for duplication, but we do have our own remit, and, clearly, this petition has been brought to us. One particular issue that is of current concern to me is the possibility that we are going to see an acceleration, in the time to come, of prime retail areas—or formerly prime retail areas—being sterilised for all time, in terms of conversion to residential use. There is a possibility—certainly in key, prime retail locations—that developers will be going for a relatively quick buck in terms of doing that, and that planning authorities may not be affording sufficient protection to think in the longer term that retail is developing in different ways. There are also hybrid models, where you have shops that have a retail presence on the high street, but which also operate online, in a more local fashion. I know that Russell may well have particular issues to raise here. There are also the pop-up shops and other innovative, shorter term models to keep some vibrancy in the high street.

[76] I have led to some expectation that you have a contribution to make, Russell; I am sure that you have.

[77] **Russell George:** Thank you, Chair. Like Joyce, I also visited a number of shops on Saturday—Small Business Saturday was an important day—in Llanidloes and in Newtown. I think that there could be a lot that we could learn from the Scottish model here. I think that we have to accept that high streets are changing, because of out-of-town supermarkets and the internet. Sometimes, people say that they want to see the town as it was 20 years ago, but it is changing—

[78] **William Powell:** And it always has changed.

[79] **Russell George:** Yes, and it will continue to change. However, I think that it is important that we have a vibrant high street, and that we support our independent shops, particularly.

[80] **William Powell:** That clearly motivates the petitioner and his supporters.

[81] **Russell George:** Yes, that is quite right. I think that this is a piece of work that I would like the committee to do some more work on. I think that it would perhaps be relevant for us to ask the Minister to come in, and for us to take evidence from the Minister, and from the petitioners as well.

[82] **William Powell:** I am sure that, subject to diary commitments, the Minister would give due consideration to that, and I sense that the petitioner would be in a position to help us with some potential witnesses who would add value to this one. Do you wish to come in on this, Joyce?

09:30

[83] **Joyce Watson:** Yes, I want to continue from where I started. We have to be doing something different. If we are going to look at this again, and I speak as someone who is passionate about buying local and keeping those streets going, there is no point and there would be no added value if we do the same thing that everybody else has already done. We need to come back with an agenda that demonstrates a piece of work where we can add some value and have some real meaning and which would take something forward into the future, because we are looking at the future viability, so there is no point in regurgitating everything

that has gone before and doing it again. So, my plea is: if we are going to do a piece of work, it has to be different and forward looking.

[84] **William Powell:** We need to take clear account of the work that has already been done by the committee of which you are a member. I understand that, and I think there is probably scope for that. We need to work up a proposal, and then bring it back to committee before scheduling the session that we discussed. Are you happy with that approach? Thank you very much and thanks once again to the petitioner for taking the trouble to make the journey to join us today.

[85] We now move to P-04-504, A483 Maerdy bridge Road Junction safety. The petition was submitted by Llandrinio and Arddleen Community Council in October this year with the support of 740 signatures, which is no mean feat in a community of that scale.

[86] ‘We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to improve the safety of the Maerdy Bridge Road junction on the A483 by adding a central reservation and by the installation of street lighting.’

[87] We last considered this on 8 October and agreed to write to seek views on the petition from Powys County Council and the Minister for Economy, Science and Transport. We have correspondence from the then cabinet member on Powys County Council and the Minister, which is among our papers for today. I think, potentially, it would be useful to get a bit more clarity from the Minister on the phrase she included in her letter:

[88] ‘Lighting is not considered appropriate at this junction.’

[89] If we can drill down as to what the officials advising the Minister had in mind—I am not sure the Minister has been on site herself—it would be useful to gain a better understanding.

[90] **Russell George:** I agree, Chair. I see that the community council has written back to the committee questioning that, because it has a different view. So, I fully agree with your view. I think we should write to the Minister asking for a more detailed explanation.

[91] **William Powell:** Happy to do that. Good.

[92] We move to P-04-365, protect buildings of note on the Mid Wales Hospital site. The petition was submitted by Mr John Tushingam in February last year and collected 206 signatures.

[93] ‘We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to list or otherwise protect buildings of note on the former Mid Wales Hospital site.’

[94] Bethan Jenkins and I were joined by the clerking team on 10 November for a rapporteur visit, which was the first stage of our outreach visit that ended up in our meeting in Prestatyn on the following day. We have a pictorial record of that visit, together with comments from Mr Phil Collins, who is the site owner, and some additional material from the petitioner. The site owner has raised a number of points about the committee’s procedures and the petitioner has also raised some information and questions regarding the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority and its approach to decision making on local listing. There are a couple of things to say here. Again, I declare that the petitioners are known to me and that the site is also known to me as it is pretty much in my back yard. I recently had a meeting with the chief executive of Brecon Beacons National Park Authority and the head of planning at the national park and raised this particular issue regarding local listing. Finally, I recently undertook a private visit to Parc Pen-y-Fal, the former psychiatric hospital just on the edge of

Abergavenny, which, according to the testimony of Mr Graham Frecknall, the architect who undertook that renovation project, was, at the time of its renovation, in a state no worse than the dereliction that we see in the pictures of the mid Wales hospital site, and where a blend of new build and a high degree of renovation and conservation-friendly building was undertaken to make that the development that it is today. I would like to open this up to colleagues. I am conscious that Bethan is the only member of the committee who visited with us on that occasion and she is not with us today, but it would be interesting to have your perspectives on what you see and what you have read.

[95] **Lindsay Whittle:** I think, Chair, from the photograph of the hospital chapel, it looks like a particularly grand building.

[96] **William Powell:** It is a very fine building.

[97] **Lindsay Whittle:** One would hope that that would be saved. It looks in a fairly reasonable condition from the photograph.

[98] **William Powell:** That, I think, is the aspiration of Mr Collins, to be fair.

[99] **Lindsay Whittle:** I cannot tell, with respect—. Looking at the photographs on pages 2, 3 and 4, quite frankly, that looks like a derelict building that is extremely dangerous, and what would be its after use?

[100] **William Powell:** Well, that is the issue, really. A report has been presented by Mr Collins, which is an outline appraisal of the structural safety, but no substantive structural report has been undertaken on it. Clearly, visually, it is not pretty. However, as I say, Mr Frecknall was present on the day and, in relatively recent times, a building of this kind has been subject to a comprehensive renovation, but then there is the whole issue around economics and economic repair and everything stacking up. That is clearly a concern for the current owner of the site, Mr Collins.

[101] **Lindsay Whittle:** When I was 20 years of age, I became involved in a campaign to save the Van Mansion, which was in a far worse condition than this. It was just four walls, but it was a magnificent old mansion building. Everyone said that we were wasting our time and that it should be knocked down.

[102] **William Powell:** What was the outcome of that?

[103] **Lindsay Whittle:** It is now for sale—it has been renovated into a beautiful home—for almost £900,000. So, no building is beyond saving. No building is beyond saving; you can always do something with a building with good architects, good builders and good stone masons—that is a plug for stone masons. However, it is the after use that I am concerned about. I am passionate about saving old buildings. I live in the oldest house in my village, and it costs a lot of money to live in an old house, because it always needs something doing to it. However, I would like to see what the after use would be. The hospital chapel looks superb and I would certainly say that that should be saved.

[104] **William Powell:** One thing that would be useful, I think, is if we were to write to Mr Collins, because he has proactively written to us, explaining some issues around our procedures and the way that we do our business according to Standing Orders and practice. Also, as I said, I had a meeting with the national park authority on other matters where this came up briefly, but I think that it would be sensible for us to write, asking for an update from the national park on the current position, including the issue of the local listing, and to ask for an update on the proposals for the local development plan, which I think is due to be adopted in about a week's time at an extraordinary general meeting of the national park authority.

Finally, the inspector recommended that any redevelopment of this site—whether it was partial or substantial demolition or whatever—should be subject to a development brief. If we could seek clarity from the national park authority as to what kind of specification it has in terms of a development brief on a site of this kind, it would also be helpful.

[105] **Russell George:** I am happy with all those suggestions, Chair.

[106] **Joyce Watson:** Chair, I am getting a bit confused or concerned—both, probably—about the role of this committee and whether we are at all times acting within our remit or sometimes going beyond it. This petition is perhaps a case in point. We have had the petition, you have had your site visit and we have drawn up our conclusions. We can write, we can influence, and we can do all of those things, and we have to do all of those things, because that is within our remit. That is what we do. However, in terms of trying to go beyond our remit, I would urge some caution, and I am not sure whether or not I am hearing a little bit of that here this morning.

[107] I have also lived in one of the oldest houses in Haverfordwest and I understand what Lindsay is saying about money and after use, but that is not what this is about. This is about these buildings being put on a list by the people who have the power to do that. We only have the power to influence—that is what I am trying to say. We only have the power to, not even influence, because we do not even have that power—

[108] **William Powell:** Well, on a good day, Joyce.

[109] **Joyce Watson:** We only have the power to draw to the attention of those who have the power to influence an opinion that has been expressed to us.

[110] **Russell George:** May I ask if we could move it on, Chair?

[111] **Joyce Watson:** That is what I am saying that we need to do, and not go beyond it. That is my concern. I have to say it.

[112] **William Powell:** We should be cautious and seek advice, if necessary, regarding the content of any correspondence, and I appreciate your expression of caution.

[113] **Russell George:** If it helps to move the discussion on, Chair, you made some suggestions before Joyce spoke, and I am happy to move that we go forward with your suggestions.

[114] **William Powell:** Okay. Thank you for that, and thank you, Joyce, for your contribution and timely concerns. Good.

[115] We move on now to petition P-04-487, A Welsh Government deposit loan scheme for first time Welsh home buyers. This was submitted by Sovereign Wales in June this year with the support of 17 signatures. Clearly, it does what it says on the can. It calls

[116] ‘on the Welsh Assembly to urge the Welsh Government to offer an annual deposit loan scheme for first time Welsh house buyers and/or renters.’

[117] The background to this is that we considered related correspondence on 8 October and we agreed to seek the Minister’s views on the petitioner’s further comments. The Minister has responded, and, indeed, we have had further response from the petitioner. So, it is quite an interactive approach here. I suppose that, to maintain our previous practice and to be consistent, we could forward the additional comments to the Minister to seek views. Clearly, this cannot go on indefinitely in terms of exchanging of views, because of concern.

However, on this occasion, if we forward those to elicit a potential response, we then have to be conscious of the Minister's remit and readiness to engage in an exchange. However, if colleagues are happy for me to forward that to seek any views in that context, then I am happy to do so.

[118] **Joyce Watson:** Yes, agreed.

[119] **William Powell:** Thank you. We move on to another petition from Sovereign Wales: P-04-489, A National affordable and priority housing Act of Wales. It calls,

[120] 'on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to create a National Housing Act of Wales to regulate the building of new houses in accordance with sustainable, affordable local and national needs and capabilities'.

[121] This was considered on 8 October and we sought the Minister's views. To be fair, the Minister has responded again, and, as previously, we have a response from the petitioner to those ministerial comments. So, if colleagues were content previously to share those on the same basis with the Minister, then I would be happy to make sure that that is the approach that we take. Are you happy, colleagues?

[122] **Russell George:** Agreed.

[123] **William Powell:** We move on now to petition P-04-402, Council Prayers. This was submitted by the Reverend Alan Hewitt in July last year with the support of 155 signatures. It calls

[124] 'upon the Welsh Government to amend the Local Government Act 1972 to afford each local authority in Wales the opportunity to decide whether it would like to hold council prayers during each council meeting and have it formally recorded on the official business agenda.'

[125] We considered correspondence on this on 8 October and we agreed to write to the Minister seeking further clarification on the need for legislation, which the Minister has supplied, and also to seek legal advice on the wider context. At this stage, I think, given that we previously sought that advice, it would be useful, particularly with Lindsay present, not having had previous involvement in this but having a wide local government background, to have an update from Helen on the legal perspective. If you could offer us just a brief overview, that would be great.

09:45

[126] **Ms Roberts:** I am very happy to do that, Chair. Thank you for asking me to contribute to this morning's deliberations. It may be useful for me to just very quickly summarise the progress that this petition has made so far. It was quite useful for me to look back at all of the correspondence. This matter came before you for consideration first on 2 July 2012, and today is the seventh time that you have considered the petition. Members will recall that I provided initial legal advice, which dealt specifically with the wording of the petition. Also, there have been, in all, three letters from Welsh Government Ministers—from Carl Sargeant AM and Lesley Griffiths AM. Obviously, there was a change in the portfolio et cetera.

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

[128] **Ms Roberts:** The main letters were, as some Members will recall, correspondence dated 31 July 2012, 9 April 2013 and 6 November 2013. In addition to that, in relation to this

particular petition, the Welsh Government also issued a written statement. It was issued by Lesley Griffiths AM on 6 August 2013. That may be coincidence, or it may be as a result of the work undertaken by this committee in thoroughly considering this petition. In addition to that, Chair, during the course of the committee's deliberations, the Welsh Local Government Association has been engaged, as has One Voice Wales and the national parks of Wales, and we have had correspondence from a number of different groups et cetera.

[129] My advice dealt with the specific issues relating to the wording of the petition. Of course, the wording of the petition is crucially important in the committee's consideration. Members will recall that the petitioners are actually asking for Welsh Government and Welsh Ministers to introduce legislation that specifically enables local authorities in Wales to introduce prayers as part of the formal proceedings of council meetings. The petition specifically referred to the Local Government Act 1972. As you will recall, in my initial advice, which I gave in July 2012, I outlined the main provisions of the legislation. These include section 111(1) of the Local Government Act 1972. The leading case is outlined there. I did go into quite a lot of detail, because it was directly relevant to the wording of this petition. Following that, in correspondence, Welsh Government has also highlighted other legislative powers that are potentially available to local authorities in Wales. These include section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000, for example.

[130] The points that I want to make, Chair, are that my legal advice is relevant to the wording, the case is relevant to the wording and to the legislation et cetera. The case itself relates to a council in England—

[131] **William Powell:** Bideford, I believe.

[132] **Ms Roberts:** That is right. It was Bideford town council. That case is specific to the facts, and there were a number of facts that were relevant to that particular case. Other cases that come before the courts have to be decided on the facts of those particular cases. For example, there may be wider issues, such as issues related to the Equality Act 2010, particularly section 19, which deals with indirect discrimination, and section 149, which deals with the public sector equality duty. Arguments could be presented in future cases, which raise issues related to articles 9 and 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The point that I want to make is that, in order to achieve what the petitioners are seeking to achieve, based on their wording, it would require a change in legislation. Welsh Government has been very consistent. It has very carefully thought about this. The letter on 31 July 2012 specifically said that it had given very careful thought to this issue. It had decided that it was not appropriate to bring forward legislation. Again, when you re-read the ministerial statement issued on 6 August 2013, you will see that it confirms that the Government is not going to bring forward legislation in this area.

[133] As Members are aware, there are other avenues in relation to the Government of Wales Act in terms of bringing forward legislation. One is a Member-proposed Bill, akin to a private Members' Bill in England. One thing that I wanted to draw to your attention was that there is a development in England. You will recall that my advice outlines how the position in England is different because, in England, they have section 1 of the Localism Act 2011, which gives a general power of competence to local authorities. The Welsh Government decided not to follow that particular provision and to enable local authorities in Wales to make their own decisions. That is the Government view: it believes that local authorities should take their own decisions based on their own particular circumstances. However, it is interesting to note, and I came across this on the Parliament website, that there is a private Members' Bill—the Local Government (Religious etc. Observances) Bill. It appears to have been brought forward by Dr Matthew Offord MP, who is the Member in charge of the Bill. Having read the Bill, I can tell you that it relates specifically to the Bideford case and it basically tries to deal with the issue of allowing councils, if they so decide, to say prayers as

part of their formal proceedings, because that is what the issue was in Bideford. Prayers were being said as part of the formal proceedings of the council and were being minuted et cetera; that was the issue.

[134] **Russell George:** Could I ask a question about that? This new legislation is being proposed in Parliament, but there are English councils that are now having prayers as part of their meetings. Why is there a need for legislation to be brought forward in the UK Parliament?

[135] **Ms Roberts:** Thank you for your question, Russell. I think that this whole area really does show that there are some inconsistencies, but also that there is legal uncertainty. That is widely regarded, in terms of some of the commentators who have commented on this particular issue. I think that it is down to legal uncertainty, and that was something that the Welsh Local Government Association referred to in its correspondence to the council, which you may recall.

[136] **William Powell:** Yes, earlier on in the process.

[137] **Russell George:** Would it be right for a local authority in England to seek advice from the UK Government and for an authority in Wales to seek advice from the Welsh Government on what they are and are not legally able to do? I would have thought that that would be the case.

[138] **William Powell:** I think that we have that, in terms of the consistent message from successive Ministers, have we not?

[139] **Russell George:** However, is the Minister not saying, 'It is a matter for you to decide', rather than giving advice?

[140] **William Powell:** I wonder whether I could call upon a former council leader, who may have a view on this.

[141] **Lindsay Whittle:** I have been attending council meetings since 1968, when I was 14 years of age, and Caerphilly Urban District Council, as it was prior to local government reorganisation, always had prayers at its meetings. This year, at Caerphilly County Borough Council's annual general meeting, the mayor, Councillor Michael Gray, had a minister say prayers, and those prayers were minuted. However, that was only for the full council meeting; it does not occur at every committee meeting. This petition does not even tell us whether the petitioners want it at every committee meeting. You will find that there are, possibly, 10 meetings a week in a council, and you would not want prayers at every single meeting, I am sure. Personally, I really cannot see what the fuss is about, if the mayor wants to have prayers. Certainly, the mayor this year did not ask anyone's permission, to my knowledge; no-one objected and the minister said a prayer and those who wanted to say 'Amen' at the end could do so. I really do not see what the fuss is about, to be honest.

[142] **William Powell:** Russell, I am conscious that you need to leave for a brief meeting—

[143] **Russell George:** I just need some clarity. It could be that, in that meeting, the prayers were said before the formal meeting started, because that is how some councils were getting around the issue. So, I think that that is what may have happened. We had the petitioners give us some evidence on that.

[144] **William Powell:** I think that we need to progress these matters, and in view of the advice that we have had, I think that it is probably time to close this matter, particularly, as Helen has flagged up, as this has been taken forward in the UK Parliament as a matter of

private Member's legislation, which is a vehicle open to all of us, should we be successful in the ballot and prioritise the matter. So, I propose on this occasion, after substantial consideration since July of last year, that we close the matter, aware that it may well return to another arena not far from here. Thank you for that comprehensive advice drawing on the Bideford case and the wider context.

[145] The next item is the first in a series of items previously deferred on 26 November. This petition was submitted by Friends of the Earth in October of last year with the support of 914 signatures, calling

[146] 'upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Minister for Environment and Sustainable Development to produce a Ministerial Interim Minerals Planning Policy Statement as well as a new technical advice note to strengthen the precautionary principle with regard to planning applications for onshore oil and gas, including fracking'.

[147] We last considered this matter on 16 July and agreed to write to the Minister for Natural Resources and Food seeking information on the level of expertise available for considering fracking issues. We also wrote to Lord Dafydd Elis-Thomas, Chair of the Environment and Sustainability Committee, seeking an update on the recent oral evidence session received by that committee. We also agreed to write to the Welsh Affairs Committee highlighting the committee's consideration of this issue given its work in this area.

[148] I would value colleagues' views as to how best to take this matter forward. Clearly, the whole issue around fracking continues to weigh heavily on the minds of many people. Joyce, do you have a proposal as to how we best take this forward? What we do not have is a response from the petitioners to the most recent correspondence.

[149] **Joyce Watson:** The point is that there is an awful lot happening here at the moment, is there not? I was watching that debate in the Welsh Affairs Committee with interest, and the petitioners undoubtedly were doing the same. I think that you have had a request from the Welsh Affairs Committee to let you know of any other petitions in the future.

[150] **William Powell:** I think that that is good dialogue.

[151] **Joyce Watson:** That is excellent dialogue, and I congratulate you on it. The point is that we have to deal with what we have. I do not know whether you want to write to it and just ask—

[152] **William Powell:** I would be very happy to write to Mr Clubb of Friends of the Earth.

[153] **Joyce Watson:** You could ask Friends of the Earth whether it has any intention of replying to us. If it does not, we will close it.

[154] **William Powell:** I know that it has a number of different campaigns on at the moment, and it may have capacity issues. It is a huge organisation. I would be very happy to write to seek its response to the information that we have. Are colleagues happy? Let us do that, then.

[155] The next petition is P-04-439, Ancient veteran and heritage trees of Wales to be given greater protection. This was submitted by Coed Cadw Cymru in December 2012 with the support of 5,320 signatures, believing that,

[156] 'the ancient, veteran and heritage trees of Wales are a vital and irreplaceable part of the nation's environment and heritage'.

[157] We have some detailed points there that the petitioners were calling for in terms of placing a duty on the single environmental body, which has since been styled as NRW. There are also issues around amending the current tree preservation order legislation, and incorporating also a database of trees to be verified through the ancient tree hunt project. On the occasion of our recent visit, on 10 November, to Gregynog, we encountered some really impassioned activists in the field of ancient and veteran trees, and we also have a pictorial record of some of our work. One or two members of the committee and, indeed, the clerking team showed admirable resilience in difficult footing and managed to stay upright, which was a significant triumph in a couple of cases. So, it was a really productive visit that gave us a flavour of some of those special qualities of the trees from the record that we have and the associated write-up, for which we are grateful.

10:00

[158] I would be happy to make good on the commitment that we gave that day to write to the Minister for Natural Resources and Food, to seek his readiness to actually afford the ancient, veteran and heritage trees further protection in forthcoming legislation. I believe that I raised something quite close to that in a question in Plenary just a couple of weeks ago and had a favourable response. I would be happy, if the committee is so minded, to write to Alun Davies, seeking written clarification on that matter. Are colleagues happy for me to write in that vein?

[159] **Joyce Watson:** Fine.

[160] **Lindsay Whittle:** I would be happy, Chair. I am loving the Reverend Francis Kilvert's description of trees on page 56. It is a tremendous description; it sounds like me at times:

[161] 'grey, gnarled, low-browed, knock-kneed, bowed, bent'.

[162] I think it is fantastic. What a poet that man was.

[163] **William Powell:** Absolutely. It is great to have captured it in poetic form. In a slightly less poetic form, I shall write to Alun Davies, seeking his support in taking these matters further.

[164] **Lindsay Whittle:** I agree.

[165] **William Powell:** Excellent; good.

[166] We now move to P-04-444, Dig for Victory. This, again, is an item deferred from the 26 November meeting. The petition was submitted by Plaid Cymru Aberavon in January this year with the support of 13 signatures. It calls on the National Assembly for Wales to

[167] 'urge the Welsh Government to introduce via local Councils a modern day Dig For Victory campaign',

[168] regarding local growing, allotment provision and related initiatives. We considered correspondence on this back in June and agreed to seek the petitioner's views. We now have additional views from the petitioner. From the overall tenor of the petitioners' remarks, they seem to be content with the most recent developments. I think that there is probably a consensus to close.

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

[170] **William Powell:** Okay, and we are grateful to that particular set of petitioners for bringing the matter forward.

[171] The next item is P-04-445, Save our Welsh cats & dogs from death on the roads. Again, this was deferred on the previous occasion. It reads:

[172] ‘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.’

[173] We have undertaken a range of actions here: we considered this last on 2 July and 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. We had a full response from Alun Davies on 24 September, and the petitioner has responded to his comments. In addition, colleagues will recall that we had an unsolicited letter from the RSPCA, outlining its reasons for supporting the retention of the current ban. The petitioners responded to the correspondence that we received, and both are in our public papers, to which you have access.

[174] It could potentially be useful to write to the Minister on this matter, asking to be kept informed of progress of the review that he has given an undertaking will take place. I know that, when she was a member of this committee for some months, Elin Jones, the former Minister who introduced this legislation, commented that she considered there to be some unintended consequences that she thought were potentially worthy of looking at again, if I may paraphrase the comments she made at that time. Colleagues, do you have any thoughts on this?

[175] **Joyce Watson:** She did say that, but she is not the Minister now, is she?

[176] **William Powell:** No, absolutely not. I understand that.

[177] **Joyce Watson:** Also, we have had a letter from the person who is the Minister now.

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

[179] **Joyce Watson:** So, again, let us deal with what we have. I would close this petition, quite frankly, but it seems that you want to give them the right to go back to the Minister once again. I will not stand in the way of that, but my feeling is that I would close it.

[180] **William Powell:** Given their unsolicited letter to us, for which we are grateful, I would also like to write to the RSPCA to ask for its views on the response that we have received from Monima O’Connor on 23 November. If colleagues would support that, then I would show the RSPCA the courtesy of being asked for its views, given that it has engaged in this fresh round of contribution to the petition. However, I hear your concern, Joyce, regarding the fact that we cannot maintain things in perpetuity and that there will be a time, before long, when this matter needs to be drawn to a conclusion.

[181] **Joyce Watson:** We will write back and then I think we will close it. That would be my suggestion.

[182] **Lindsay Whittle:** I have a cat that is nearly 20 and I would not dream of putting an electronic collar on him, because he is too old and I would be frightened that it would hurt him. I am terrified of him being knocked down. I live by a busy road, and I supervise him,

sometimes; it is worse than having a child, because of the way we are with pets.

[183] **William Powell:** I am sure that the cat in question enjoys visiting all of the parts of the house that you referred to earlier.

[184] **Lindsay Whittle:** Taffy the cat is the ruler of the house. However, I can assure you that I really would not support electronic collars; they really should be banned. Personally, I would close this straight away and would not take it any further. I will follow your guidance, obviously.

[185] **William Powell:** I am very grateful for that impassioned contribution.

[186] **Lindsay Whittle:** It was made on behalf of Taffy. He has been mentioned now in an Assembly committee. [*Laughter.*]

[187] **Joyce Watson:** I share your passion.

[188] **William Powell:** That will help the Christmas dinner to go down well in due time. Good. Thank you, colleagues.

[189] We now move on to P-04-432, Stop the Army Recruiting in Schools. This was submitted by the Fellowship of Reconciliation in November 2012 and had the support of 374 signatures. An associated petition collected approximately 700 signatures. It reads:

[190] ‘We call on the National Assembly to urge the Welsh Government to recommend that the armed forces should not go into schools to recruit.’

[191] In the further text, reference is made to practice elsewhere in the European Union. As colleagues will recall from the evidence session that we held some months ago, there was some sort of reinterpretation of the term ‘recruit’ and the point was made that promotional activity is not necessarily recruitment. This matter was last considered on 26 November, when we had the opportunity to discuss the evidence that we had heard in Prestatyn High School. It was agreed that we summarise the committee’s consideration of the petition, expanding on the wider issues and including the role of Careers Wales in the overall service that it is providing.

[192] I would like to be in a position to ask our team to draw the strands of this together and bring it forward to a future meeting, because it has proved to be a particularly rewarding petition in terms of the engagement that we had, particularly with the young people who contributed so eloquently and with such interest in Prestatyn, but also in terms of the quite interactive and sparky evidence session that we had previously. Joyce, what is your perspective on this?

[193] **Joyce Watson:** I go along with what you have just said.

[194] **William Powell:** If that is the case, and, Lindsay, if you are broadly content with that also, then we will take that approach.

[195] **Lindsay Whittle:** Yes, that is fine.

[196] **William Powell:** We move on to P-04-441, Gwaith i Gymru—Work for Wales. Once again, this was deferred from our 26 November meeting. This petition was submitted by Cerith Rhys Jones in December 2012, with the support of 129 signatures. It reads:

[197] ‘In light of the most recent Welsh youth unemployment figures, Plaid Cymru Youth

calls on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to put effective and positive steps in place to ensure a brighter future for this generation of young people.’

[198] As I said, it was deferred from 26 November, but we last considered correspondence back on 26 September, and we agreed to await the views of the petitioner and the umbrella organisation, ColegauCymru. We have now received that from ColegauCymru, and it is in our public papers. We also wrote to the petitioner, but we have not heard from the petitioner for some time with regard to this. In the context of that, and that we are clear that there have been appropriate follow-ups, it is probably the time to close this particular petition. Are colleagues happy with that approach? I see that you are.

[199] We move now to P-04-443, Welsh History. This petition was submitted by Balchder Cymru/Pride of Wales in January 2013 with the support of 597 signatures. It calls on the National Assembly for Wales

[200] ‘to urge the Welsh Government to make Welsh History Compulsory in our schools from the age of 7.’

[201] We last considered this on 19 March and agreed to seek the petitioner’s views. There has been no contact from Balchder Cymru in recent times. Given the level of attention that we have paid to this and the important issues raised, it is probably time, for the sake of consistency, to close the petition.

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

[203] **William Powell:** We will do just that then. The next petition is P-04-484, EMA for all! This was deferred as an agenda item on 26 November. This was submitted in June 2013 by Jack Gillum, who is an active member of Funky Dragon, and it collected 10 signatures. It calls upon the National Assembly for Wales,

[204] ‘to urge the Welsh Government to allow All children aged 16-19 and in full time education should receive the full £30 a week EMA regardless of their parents income.’

[205] We considered correspondence back on 8 October, and we agreed to write to Jack Gillum seeking a response to the Minister’s letter. We have that response, and, as Jack is content with the Minister’s response, I propose that we close the petition while noting our thanks to him for bringing forward a petition that was of concern to him and to a wider number of people. If colleagues are content, that is great.

[206] Finally, we move to the last groups of petitions. The next petition is P-04-447, Campaign for Statue of Henry VII in Pembroke. This was submitted by Nathen Amin in January 2013 and collected 144 signatures. It calls upon the National Assembly for Wales

[207] ‘to urge the Welsh Government to fund a statue of Henry VII in Pembroke, town of his birth and birthplace of the Tudor Dynasty.’

[208] We also congratulate Mr Nathen Amin on the level of publicity and support that he has attracted from the Pembrokeshire print media and the national Welsh press for this particular project, which has captured a number of imaginations. We last considered this petition on 24 September. With your agreement, I wrote to Pembroke Castle Trust and Pembroke Town Council. We now have favourable responses from both and they are available in our public papers. However, despite prompting, we have not had any comment back on those responses from the petitioner. I do not know if it was just a single letter that we forwarded on that one. Given that we have some fresh positive responses, it would be appropriate to do a final chase-up and then to judge the future of the petition or otherwise in

the light of that response. If colleagues are happy with that, that is good.

[209] The next petition is P-04-476, Restructuring in National Museum Wales. This was submitted by the Public and Commercial Services Union in April 2013 and collected 1,617 signatures. It calls upon the National Assembly for Wales

[210] ‘to urge the Welsh Government to reconsider its funding settlement for National Museum Wales, with a view to protecting the Museum’s services and the jobs, pay and conditions of its staff.’

10:15

[211] In the follow-up text, we have some detail of the financial settlement that was of particular concern to the petitioners in terms of potential impacts on their livelihoods, but also on the quality of provision at the museum. We considered correspondence on this on 24 September and we agreed to await the views of the petitioners on correspondence that we had received, both from the Minister John Griffiths and the National Museum Wales. We also agreed to seek a further update from National Museum Wales. We have since received a letter from the director of the museum and that response is in our public papers, but we have still not received anything from the petitioners. To be consistent with the approach taken with a previous petition, I am happy to write to the relevant official in PCS on a final occasion to gain their views, after which I think we will need to think seriously about closing the petition, particularly in the event of a non-response.

[212] The next petition is P-04-450, Barry & Vale needs a fully functioning hospital. This petition was submitted by Jeffrey Heathfield in January 2013. It has the support of 50 signatures and states the following:

[213] ‘We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to ensure that Barry Hospital has a fully functioning minor injuries unit that is open to patients 8 hours a day, 5 days a week.’

[214] We considered correspondence on this petition on 8 October and we agreed to forward the petitioner’s further comments to Cardiff and Vale University Local Health Board. We have a response in the public papers. I think that it would be consistent with our normal practice to write to Mr Heathfield seeking his views on what the health board has to say.

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

[216] **William Powell:** Thank you, colleagues. Our next petition is P-04-471, Mandatory Welsh legislation to ensure Defibrillators in all public places. This petition was submitted by Phil Hill in April 2013 and has the support of 78 signatures. It states the following:

[217] ‘We call on the Welsh Government to provide funding to ensure that, as with basic fire fighting equipment (eg. Extinguishers), Automated External Defibrillators are available in all Welsh Public places (either NHS, Charity or Privately funded) to ensure the rapid treatment of any Victim of Cardiac arrest.’

[218] We last considered correspondence on the petition on 2 July. We agreed to write to the Welsh Ambulance Service NHS Trust, the British Heart Foundation and each of the LHBs to ask for an update on progress. We have received a range of responses from Gwent Police, the Welsh Ambulance Service NHS Trust, Betsi Cadwaladr University Local Health Board, Powys Teaching Local Health Board and Cardiff and Vale University Local Health Board. The petitioner has also provided some additional supporting evidence. If colleagues are content and think that it would be of interest, I would be happy to ask the petitioner to come

to present and flesh out his proposals, particularly with regard to funding and the logistics, at a future meeting of this committee.

[219] **Joyce Watson:** I am quite happy with that.

[220] **William Powell:** I see that colleagues are happy with that approach. In parallel, I could seek further comments from the Minister in the light of the responses that we have received from a number of stakeholders.

[221] The next petition is P-04-507, A Welsh bill of rights for women and girls: adhering to CEDAW. This petition was submitted by Women's Equality Network Wales in October 2013 with the support of 152 signatures. The petition reads as follows:

[222] 'We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to adhere to the principles of the international Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). This would allow the Welsh Government to display a clear commitment to women's equality in Wales and ensure clear priorities for achieving this.'

[223] We last considered this petition on 8 October and we agreed to write to the Minister responsible for equalities, seeking his views on the petition. We have the Minister's response, but we have yet to receive comments back from the petitioner. I think that seeking those comments is probably the next step that we need to take. I am conscious that the committee today includes Joyce, who has taken a leading role in these issues over a significant period of time, as well as Lindsay, who is Plaid Cymru's spokesperson on these matters, so it would be very interesting to have your views. I will ask for your views first of all, Joyce.

[224] **Joyce Watson:** My views are my views, but I think that I will give the views as a member of this committee, which might not be the same. The point is that WEN, as it is called—the Wales Equality Network—is representing the views of many women across Wales. As you quite rightly say, we have seen the response from the Minister. However, if we were going to do a piece of work, I would certainly look at doing one around this. Fifty-three per cent of the population happen to be female, and if we are talking about doing work that has some outcomes, I think that this would certainly be worthy.

[225] **William Powell:** I think that, at the moment, the most important thing is that we get some response back from the people who are promoting the petition.

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

[227] **William Powell:** I am very happy to write to them, to chase up a response, because, without that, we are not well placed to take it further forward. Are colleagues happy with that approach?

[228] **Joyce Watson:** I am quite happy with that.

[229] **Lindsay Whittle:** I have asked many questions in the Chamber on this issue—of the First Minister and of Ministers. There is a great deal of work taking place across the Welsh Government, as Jeff Cuthbert has said, but there is still a long way to go. However, to be fair, I do not think that the Welsh Government is complacent in this matter; I think that it is doing its best, but it is catch-up all the time. There is steady progress, but it could be better, perhaps. We are going in the right direction.

[230] **William Powell:** Yes, it is a B+, but we have a lot more to do to.

[231] **Lindsay Whittle:** Yes, exactly.

[232] **Joyce Watson:** I agree with all those comments.

[233] **William Powell:** Finally today, we have P-04-436, Government Expenditure and Revenue Wales. This is the final item to have been deferred from the 26 November meeting. This petition was submitted by Stuart Evans in January 2013, with the support of 27 signatures. The petition reads as follows:

[234] ‘We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to put together a Government Expenditure and Revenue Wales report.’

[235] The petitioner references the practice in Scotland, which he feels would enhance the situation. As I said, we deferred this petition last time. We considered correspondence on 24 September, and we agreed to write to the Minister to respond to the additional points that have been made by the petitioner. The Minister has indeed responded, and the petitioner has responded to her letter; we have the text of both of those in our public papers. There are a couple of options here. We could write to the Minister, one final time, to seek clarity on the implications of the recent Silk announcement. I will just double-check the timing of that response. There was an e-mail—if the response was before the Silk announcement, then, potentially, there would be merit in writing one final time. Therefore, in that context, if colleagues are happy for me to write, now that the sequence has been agreed, I will do that, and we will draw this to a conclusion.

[236] I have a few important final announcements to make, now that we have reached the end of the formal agenda. First, I wish to remind Members that we are receiving a petition at 1 p.m. tomorrow on the steps of the Senedd, namely the petition to urge the Welsh Government to hold a public inquiry into the events that led to Operation Jasmine. So, that is at 1 p.m. tomorrow. Secondly, I remind Members that the committee’s next meeting will be on 21 January, which seems to be some time away.

[237] We also have another announcement to make. It is good news—it is not necessarily good news for us, but it is good news for Sian Giddins. *Llongyfarchiadau mawr* to you, Sian, on your gaining an internal promotion to join the Plenary secretariat team. Sian has played an important and key role in the work of this committee over quite some time. A lot of that work has been behind the scenes, but we really appreciate all that you have done, in terms of liaising with petitioners, and making them feel welcome and valued and fully engaged in the process. So, as I said, it is our loss, but it is a gain for the Plenary secretariat. We wish you all the very best.

[238] I would like to say ‘*Nadolig Llawn a Blwyddyn Newydd Dda*’ to everyone. Thank you very much for all your work and contributions. Thank you for joining us today, Lindsay. We hope that you, and your cat—and your wider family—have a happy Christmas, along with everyone else. [*Laughter.*] Thank you very much indeed. *Diolch yn fawr iawn.*

*Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 10:25.
The meeting ended at 10:25.*