



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

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau **The Petitions Committee**

Dydd Mawrth, 24 Ionawr 2012
Tuesday, 24 January 2012

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Cofnodir y trafodion hyn yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynddi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal,
cynhwysir cyfieithiad Saesneg o gyfraniadau yn y Gymraeg.

These proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in the committee.
In addition, an English translation of Welsh speeches is included.

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

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

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

Sarita Marshall	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Abigail Phillips	Clerc Clerk
Helen Roberts	Cynghorydd Cyfreithiol Legal Adviser

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 9.31 a.m.
The meeting began at 9.31 a.m.

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **William Powell:** Bore da a chroeso **William Powell:** Good morning and a warm
cynnes i bawb. welcome to everyone.

[2] Welcome to this meeting of the Petitions Committee. I remind participants that they can speak in Welsh or English, as they wish and are able. Headsets are available for translation and amplification: channel 0 is for amplification only; channel 1 is for translation. Please switch off your mobile phones or any other electronic devices. I understand that there are no scheduled fire alarms this morning, so if an alarm goes off it will be the real thing and we will be in the hands of the ushers, who will escort us out of the room. There are no apologies, and we have a full complement of Members this morning.

9.32 a.m.

Deisebau Newydd
New Petitions

[3] **William Powell:** The first petition is P-04-358, which calls for the re-instatement of home support for children with autistic spectrum disorders and their families in the Caerphilly county borough. This petition was submitted by Parents Campaign for CASS and has collected 138 signatures. It reads:

[4] ‘We call upon the National Assembly to urge the Welsh Government to reinstate funding to enable the continuation of Caerphilly Autistic Spectrum Service Home support, accessible by parents for children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders. If this service is not reinstated it will have a fundamental effect on vulnerable children with Autism throughout their formative and teenage years. Please prevent ASD families facing crisis.’

[5] I have written to the Minister in response to this petition. I would also like to note that we are due to receive this petition formally from a representative group of the petitioners tomorrow on the steps of the Senedd at 12.45 p.m.. I welcome any further thoughts at this point regarding how we can take this forward. I see that there are none. Therefore, at this stage, we will await the feedback from the Minister and look forward to meeting the petitioners tomorrow to discuss this a little further.

[6] The next petition is P-04-361, which calls for free bus passes for students under 25 and in full-time education. This was submitted by students from Coleg Llandrillo Cymru and has collected 15 signatures. It reads:

[7] ‘Students under 25 in full time education should be entitled to a free Arriva bus pass because when you’re in college and finish half a day you have to wait for the 5 o’clock bus and some students cannot afford a bus (Arriva) due to parents’ low income and students not being liable to receive EMA or ALG.’

[8] I have written to the Minister about this petition. I should say at this point that this petition was linked to a visit that was made by Darren Millar AM to the college after Christmas, just after the new term had commenced. Incidentally, he was very appreciative of the work that the clerks had done in turning this around so quickly. I think that he had expected a greater delay in its consideration but was pleased to see it on our agenda today. As I said, I have written to the Minister. Are there other ways we could take this forward?

[9] **Russell George:** I looked at this and thought that there was merit in our looking at this in more detail. I wonder whether the committee would agree for us to do more research on this, particularly to do with the cost. Perhaps it would be a good opportunity to hear evidence from the students. I appreciate that they are a long way away in north Wales, so I wonder whether we could explore asking them to give evidence to the committee over video link.

[10] **William Powell:** I would be in favour of that. I hope that colleagues agree that it would be a useful way of hearing the students flesh out their concerns. Are there any other views on this?

[11] **Joyce Watson:** I have no problem with that, but we could not do it with just these students; we would have to do it for all students. You cannot treat one part of the group differently. The group in question is students under the age of 25, and so we would have to bear that in mind.

[12] **William Powell:** Perhaps we could give our research team a brief to look at it in the round.

[13] **Joyce Watson:** Absolutely.

[14] **Bethan Jenkins:** Could we not contact the National Union of Students to get a comprehensive view of the whole agenda?

[15] **William Powell:** That would be a sensible route. This is obviously a specific group—

[16] **Bethan Jenkins:** Is Coleg Llandrillo for higher education as well? I am sorry; I do not know the area. Does it provide higher and further education?

[17] **William Powell:** My sense is that it is a tertiary college. It is outside all our regions.

[18] **Bethan Jenkins:** I know that, when Ieuan Wyn Jones was the Minister for transport, there were pilot schemes on access to travel for young people, one of which was in Bridgend. I am not sure whether that went up to the age of 25, however. It might just have been 16 to 18, but it is worth looking at that for comparison.

[19] **William Powell:** Perhaps we can frame our approach to the research service to take account of these different things. I think that the video link would be a useful way forward. That is agreed.

[20] **Bethan Jenkins:** As long as Darren Millar is not on the video link.

[21] **Russell George:** I can try to arrange that, Chair.

[22] **William Powell:** He is a retiring kind of chap; he would not crowd them out. I am sure that he would be pleased to let them have their say. Excellent.

[23] P-04-362 is the Penylan 'Not Spot' Petition. This was flagged up last Wednesday in our debate and, as with the last petition, our colleague Jenny Rathbone was pleased with its quick turnaround, because it came straight onto today's agenda. The petition was submitted by residents of Penylan, Cardiff and has collected 348 signatures. It reads:

[24] 'We the residents of Penylan ward of Cardiff Central constituency are being denied full access to the internet.

[25] 'The continued failure of BT and all other telecommunication providers to invest anything in the area between Cyncoed Road and the A48 Llanederyn Interchange means that nearly 500 homes are only able to receive 20% of the minimum UK acceptable internet speed of 2 megabites. The majority of UK households receive speeds of at least 5 to 10 mbs. We call upon the Welsh Government to take action to end the Penylan Not Spot.'

[26] I have already written to the Minister on this, but we have just received correspondence from Bobbie Davies at Grayling on behalf of BT, flagging up investment. As it is a short e-mail and highly relevant to this petition, I will read it, if that is okay with colleagues. I see that it is. It follows a conversation held with the clerk.

9.40 a.m.

[27] 'Further to our conversation regarding the Penylan Not Spot Petition (P-04-360), I thought it would be useful to update you and Members of the Committee on BT's current investment plans in the area.

[28] BT has announced that it is rolling out superfast fibre based broadband technology to the Roath exchange in Cardiff, which serves Penylan.

[29] Once this investment is complete residents will receive speeds of up to 40Mbps, or even faster in the future. This technology will be available on an open, wholesale basis to any internet service providers and is expected to be completed during 2012.

[30] This is part of BT's existing £2.5 billion of investment across the UK, which will bring super-fast broadband to around 40% of Welsh homes by 2014—a year earlier than originally planned.

[31] Please don't hesitate to contact me if you would like any further information about BT's investment in Wales or if you have any questions.'

[32] We have the contact details here for the representative at Grayling. So, that is good news.

[33] **Russell George:** We can forward this e-mail to the petitioners. Further to that, given that my rural constituency has so many not spots, I will suggest to many of my constituents that they petition the Petitions Committee, because this petition has achieved a result.

[34] **William Powell:** I would like to think that we have had a role in this; it seems speedy indeed.

[35] **Russell George:** Let us right to the petitioners to advise them of this. They should be very pleased, should they not?

[36] **William Powell:** I would have thought so, yes. Joyce and I have many more not spots in the region that we do our best to represent, so this is good news. I do not think that, at this stage, there is anything further to do, other than to forward this e-mail and to await the Minister's response. I am sure that the Minister will also be aware of this piece of good news.

9.41 a.m.

Y Wybodaeth Ddiweddaraf am Ddeisebau Blaenorol Updates to Previous Petitions

[37] **William Powell:** Under the education and skills section of our agenda, we have P-03-296, unfair proposals on student loans. This position was submitted by Cerith Rhys Jones and collected 146 signatures. The petition reads as follows:

[38] 'We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to resist the Russell Group of Universities' unfair proposals to force graduates to repay student loans at a faster and steeper rate.'

[39] The background to this petition is no doubt already familiar to us. We have received an extensive response from the Minister for Education and Skills, which we have had a chance to read, and some associated documents from the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales. So, what do colleagues wish to suggest about this one?

[40] **Joyce Watson:** As you say, Chair, we have had a comprehensive reply, within which every single point has been addressed.

[41] **William Powell:** That is what I thought as well.

[42] **Joyce Watson:** The answers are pretty clear. The fact is that students have loans and that once they reach a certain threshold, they must repay those loans. That is not going to change. It is outlined quite clearly here that students are now able to earn £6,000 more before they even start to repay their loans, and that there is a scale with regard to the interest bands for repayment. We would all love to give free education, that is for sure, but that opportunity is not available to us as we speak. I do not think that there is anything else we can do on this.

[43] **Bethan Jenkins:** Have the petitioners seen the Minister's response?

[44] **William Powell:** The first step for us is to find out whether they have seen it.

[45] **Bethan Jenkins:** I would not want to close the petition until they have had access to the response—

[46] **William Powell:** And an opportunity to comment on it.

[47] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes, because we do that generally for people. So, if they have an opportunity to read what the Minister has said and to comment upon it, I would be happier to close it.

[48] **William Powell:** I agree with Joyce's sentiments. It would be sensible for us to do that and to invite them to comment on it. So, that is the direction in which we are heading. Are we all agreed on that approach? Let us do that, then. We will forward this and the associated documents the Minister included with his response to the petitioners and await their feedback.

[49] The next petition is P-04-349 on Welsh-medium Provision in Caerphilly. We received this petition before Christmas and considered it on 29 November. It reads:

[50] 'We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Minister for Education and Skills at the Welsh Assembly Government to afford urgent priority to the bid submitted by Caerphilly County Borough Council for monies to finance the badly needed additional Welsh medium secondary provision by 2013'.

[51] Again, we have a comprehensive response from Minister Leighton Andrews, and he has also flagged up the statement he gave to Members before Christmas with regard to twenty-first century schools. You will have noticed the allocation of £92 million overall for Caerphilly County Borough Council—including, in one of the headings, Welsh-medium provision. What I am not clear about is how that relates to this. On the face of it, it would seem to be positive news, and is probably intended to address this, but I would suggest that we forward that information to the petitioners—I suspect they will have sourced it from elsewhere, anyway—and invite them to comment upon it. Is that a sensible way to go about things? At the moment, it would not be sensible to undertake anything further. We could just see how that relates to their particular circumstances and aspirations. When I met the representatives it was clearly an issue of real concern to them. We will see whether this is going a fair way to addressing it.

[52] The next petition is P-03-262 on the Wales peace institute, or academi heddwch Cymru. This petition was submitted by the Welsh Centre for International Affairs and a coalition of other groups and collected 1,525 signatures. You will recall its wording:

[53] 'We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to investigate the potential and practicality of Wales having a peace institute concerned with peace and human rights comparable with those supported by state governments in Flanders, Catalonia and elsewhere in Europe'.

[54] If you recall, this petition has been in the system for some time, and we made a fresh call for evidence on the subject, which closed just before Christmas, on 14 December. Like me, you will have had the opportunity to study those responses. Bethan, because of your involvement in the previous committee and your chairmanship of the relevant cross-party group, I ask you to give your thoughts first on this one.

[55] **Bethan Jenkins:** Obviously, there have been quite a lot of responses in comparison to the other consultations we have had. My concern with suggesting that they go back and set up a working group is that the very reason they came to us was that they wanted Government or National Assembly involvement in setting up a peace institute. As someone with an interest in this, I do not feel that they would be very happy if we were to recommend that they go away and look at costing and so forth. I know that Jill Evans suggested that there might be an

opening through the education portfolio, or perhaps we could even suggest that the cross-party group looks into it. What they are looking for is an endorsement from this institution, which I know is difficult—we have rehearsed the arguments. It is a case of finding a way forward without handing the whole process back to them.

[56] **William Powell:** What occurred to me was that the cross-party group—which you have some influence over, and which I am involved in—could play a role.

[57] **Bethan Jenkins:** We do not have any money, though; that is the problem. My cross-party group has no secretariat, and, as other Assembly Members will know, you get sponsorship—we do not have a pot of money to enable us to look at funding.

9.50 a.m.

[58] **William Powell:** However, potentially, that level of accreditation might assist in the process.

[59] **Ms Phillips:** The petitioners have made it clear that they are not looking for funding at this stage. Hopefully, that will alleviate any fears you may have.

[60] **William Powell:** The Assembly cross-party group is one of the structures that would perhaps bring in an extra layer of credibility.

[61] **Bethan Jenkins:** Okay. If we base it on the consultations that could be a suggestion. However, realistically, the cross-party group does not have that many meetings. People would have to understand that you would not be able to come up with a concept straight away; it would be a matter of minds and ideas coming together in a more fluid sense.

[62] **William Powell:** Could we get this put on the agenda for the next meeting, or possibly even call a special meeting? It depends on capacity, obviously.

[63] **Bethan Jenkins:** Amnesty is the secretariat, but staff have left. People do not really need to know this, but the staff member involved has left, so we have not set a date for the next meeting yet. However, potentially, this could go on the agenda for the next one.

[64] **William Powell:** I think that the petitioners would welcome that.

[65] **Bethan Jenkins:** Can we give the consultation responses to the petitioners first, or in parallel, to see that they are happy with—

[66] **William Powell:** I think that that would be sensible.

[67] **Bethan Jenkins:** I know that they will bombard me with e-mails post-meeting.

[68] **William Powell:** Will they? Okay, then let us take that approach so that they have access to the very healthy response you commented on earlier. In parallel, we will see whether we can work something up.

[69] **Bethan Jenkins:** We have these Member debates now, as well, so they could lobby Assembly Members to introduce a debate on this issue.

[70] **William Powell:** Absolutely. That would expand the lobbying activity and take it forward to the whole Assembly.

[71] This next item comes under the environment and sustainable development section of

our agenda. It is P-04-341, on waste and incineration. The petition was submitted by Terry Evans in November 2011, with 21 signatories. There is an associated petition, however, that has 31,286 signatories to it. I think that we all received an e-mail from Dr Walters on Thursday last week that relates directly to this petition, with some additional information we need to take account of. I will just remind you of the wording.

[72] ‘We call upon the National Assembly to urge the Welsh Government to review:

[73] Prosiect Gwyrdd, which is against WAG policy of localised facilities, and allow our councils to choose their own waste technology and waste management procurement;

[74] The flawed Wales waste survey that only gave people a 2 choice option on waste disposal;

[75] By 2020, make it illegal to burn recyclable waste which would promote councils to recycle.’

[76] As you know, we have issued a consultation on this, and we have extensive responses in the overall pack. We have the response, of course, from the committee that two of us serve on: the Environment and Sustainability Committee. Also, in the context of the energy inquiry that we are currently undertaking, we need to take a particular section of questioning forward in that arena, I would suggest. Are there any other ideas that you think would be appropriate at this time?

[77] **Russell George:** Yes. I was just wondering whether it is a sensible idea to write to the petitioners. Do they know that the Environment and Sustainability Committee is going to look at that? Have we informed them of that yet?

[78] **William Powell:** In my response to Dr Walters, I flagged that up, and I think that he probably would have been aware of it from following our wider proceedings. However, perhaps we need to make it absolutely explicit.

[79] **Russell George:** Perhaps we could write to them to inform them of that and to ask them whether there are any particular areas, other than those they have already expressed to us, that they would like us to pursue in that committee?

[80] **William Powell:** Yes; that could help to guide us.

[81] **Bethan Jenkins:** Is that committee looking specifically at incineration?

[82] **William Powell:** We are looking at overall energy from waste, so that is a pretty big part of it.

[83] **Bethan Jenkins:** It is a big part of it, is it?

[84] **William Powell:** Yes, but the overall inquiry is into energy as a whole, so it is about all manner of things.

[85] **Bethan Jenkins:** I am just looking at the different responses. Is it worth our holding an evidence session ourselves because of the variance of opinions we have had as a committee?

[86] **William Powell:** Given the quality and detail of the response we have received—

[87] **Bethan Jenkins:** We could even get the Minister in, because people have contested

that the Minister has allowed for different options to be looked at in terms of incineration. The NBT technology is advanced in other areas, but people do not seem to feel that it is an option that has been available in Wales, so we need to know why that is the case and have various people before us. I do not want to conflict with what is happening in your committee, but perhaps you will not be able to afford that degree of scrutiny of this particular issue.

[88] **William Powell:** I think that that is a fair point. The energy inquiry that is being undertaken by the Environment and Sustainability Committee is much broader, and I think that an evidence session for the Petitions Committee would be in order. We are still in the first six months of a new person being in the Minister for Environment and Sustainability post with regard to that, so it would make a lot of sense.

[89] **Russell George:** I support what Bethan suggested.

[90] **Joyce Watson:** And I do.

[91] **William Powell:** Excellent; let us do that then and take up all three of those options.

[92] The next update is on P-04-344 on the Freshwater East public sewer. There have been some developments on this one, as you will have seen. The petition was submitted by Royston Thomas in November 2011 and it collected 106 signatures. It reads:

[93] ‘We the undersigned householders of Freshwater East, ask the Welsh Government not to take enforcement action against Dwr Cymru Welsh Water concerning the installation of a public sewer in Freshwater East.’

[94] You will recall that we considered this petition for the first time on Tuesday 29 November. Since then, we have had responses from Welsh Water. However, the interesting development is that the original request for a sewer to be installed came from Lamphey Community Council. We have been informed by the petitioners that the community council has now requested for the enforcement action not to go ahead pending further consultation. So, there has been a change here. I will double-check with our clerk whether we have been in contact with the clerk of Lamphey Community Council to confirm that that is the case. We have heard from the petitioners, so there is no reason to assume that that is not correct.

[95] **Ms Phillips:** We have received a note that a vote was passed by the council that was recorded in the way stated.

[96] **William Powell:** Okay, that is good enough for us. I would welcome the views of colleagues on this, because the ground seems to have moved, so to speak, since we originally looked at this one. I could write to the Minister on behalf of the committee highlighting this decision recently taken by Lamphey Community Council, but I imagine that he would probably already know that.

[97] **Joyce Watson:** This seems to have twisted and turned in so many directions that it took a bit of reading to catch it all up, which I have done, as I am sure everyone else has. However, it seems that the most pertinent correspondence we have had, according to the wording of the petition, was the request for the Minister not to take the enforcement action. We have had a letter telling us that that has not happened, so in that respect it answers the petitioner’s question, and, as you say, that has been backed up by a change of view by Lamphey Community Council. So, we could just let them know that.

[98] **William Powell:** That is probably the best way forward. I sense that we are not far from closing this petition in the circumstances, but let us to wait to get that clarity and move to close it if that is the best way forward, which seems to be the case.

[99] We now move to the local government and communities section of the agenda. The next update is on P-04-345 on rail and bus links between Aberystwyth and Carmarthen. As you will recall, this petition was submitted by Craig Owen Lewis in November last year and it collected 566 signatures. It reads:

[100] ‘We call upon the National Assembly of Wales to urge the Welsh Government to restore and/or improve rail and bus links between Carmarthen in the county of Carmarthenshire and Aberystwyth in the county of Ceredigion.’

10.00 a.m.

[101] Our consultation has now closed and in contrast to some of the previous consultation sessions that we looked at, this did not attract a high level of response at all. We had just the two that are available to you. You will see the Minister’s response is in line with the consultation responses that we have had. It states the unsurprising view that reinstating the railway line would be extremely expensive, current bus services are good and further improvements are being made. Obviously, in order to reinstate the rail link we would have to have a wholesale exercise of compulsory purchase and demolition of dwellings. That could potentially cause civil unrest, I would have thought, in the area, given the level of disruption caused. Do colleagues have any opinions on this one? Clearly, there was a concern, and because it commanded over 500 signatures it is surprising that there was not a little bit more of a response.

[102] **Joyce Watson:** Considering, as you say Chair, that there were 556 signatures, it is disappointing that more people did not respond. In an ideal world, I would love to see the railway, as everybody would, reinstated there.

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

[104] **Joyce Watson:** It would be fantastic, because these roads—we all travel them, or you and I, perhaps—are not the best, although they have been improved.

[105] **William Powell:** It would be an incredibly welcome service.

[106] **Joyce Watson:** I would probably be one of the first to use it. Having said that, we have not got that money. That would be a major exercise in itself and it would be many years down the line. Of course, the petitioners would say ‘that is no reason not to start the process.’ Those opportunities are there for them if they want to put it forward in the national transport plan as an option. In terms of where we are with the petition, we can give the petitioners what the Minister has given us. He refers to 13 return journeys between Carmarthen and Aberystwyth. Perhaps we can say that, in an ideal world, we would like the railway to be reinstated, and point them to any ways in which they can take it forward in the national transport plan, because that is a major piece of work.

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

[108] **Joyce Watson:** We can await their reply regarding the bus service and see if they agree. If they do, then we can close it. It is a shame.

[109] **William Powell:** I find it surprising that there was not a greater response to our consultation because it was covered in the *Carmarthen Journal*, where the whole issue was flagged up, and, possibly, it also featured in the *Cambrian News*. There was coverage of our activity and what we were up to in the two main newspapers in this particular part of the world. Are there any other observations on this at the moment?

[110] **Bethan Jenkins:** This was November 2011, and these 13 bus journeys have not just miraculously appeared because of the petition.

[111] **William Powell:** No.

[112] **Bethan Jenkins:** It would be interesting to know why they still feel there are problems with the road link, because this is a new petition. So, there must be underlying problems that we need to be aware of. We need to give the petitioners the Minister's response and the consultation response, but also try to delve into what they see as the problems.

[113] **William Powell:** If we can drill down and find out what their particular concerns are, we can feed that back in so that it can find its way in to the forward plan, which is probably the best way forward.

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

[115] **William Powell:** Good. Thanks. We move on to P-04-328, the MCA Modernising Coastguard Proposals. As we all recall, this petition was submitted by Graham Warlow in July 2011. It collected 293 signatures. There has been a lot of related petitioning activity going on concerning this important and controversial issue. It reads:

[116] 'We the undersigned call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to conduct independent risk impact assessments on the safety of coastal tourists, of the closure of MRCC Milford Haven, MRCC Holyhead, and the downgrading of MRCC Swansea to daylight hours'.

[117] We are aware that things have radically changed during the life of this petition and over the last six months. We are aware of the state of play at present. We have in our papers a draft report. In normal practice, such a report can be considered in private session, in accordance with the Standing Orders. My instinct on this one—not just because we are currently looking at issues around openness, but because of the nature of the report—is that I do not see an obvious reason to exclude the public from our deliberations. Are Members comfortable with considering this in public session? I see that you are. A comprehensive draft report is available to us. Joyce will lead on this because she has been involved with this particular matter for longer than I have.

[118] **Joyce Watson:** Everybody was over the moon when it was announced that the Milford Haven coastguard station was not closing. Then, they were hugely disappointed to find that Swansea became the target for closure not long after that announcement. The petition is as it is, and the facts are much the same in terms of the safety of tourists. Tourists do not stay in one location only. The effect on tourism needs to be considered, and we have had plenty of representation on that. We all understand—I am no different to anybody else—that the UK Minister, Mike Penning, has said that that is the end of the matter. Whether we can influence that further or whether they have decided absolutely that that is the end, I do not know. I always feel that we should not give up easily on these things, because they are too important. Perhaps we should say 'This is the evidence that we have had and these are the concerns. We know that you have made this statement, but please think beyond your thinking'. It seems to me as if the thinking was that they could afford to lose the public sector jobs. That was the statement that was made, rather than 'We can keep the waterways safe'—as it says in this letter.

[119] **William Powell:** That is a very strange dimension to bring into the discussion.

[120] **Joyce Watson:** Especially when it is supposed to be about risk assessment. This

report is all about risk assessment. People still think that there is an awful lot of risk out there that has not been assessed. Those are my views.

[121] **Bethan Jenkins:** The Welsh Minister, Carl Sargeant, says that the Welsh Government is unable to carry out assessments because it is non-devolved. Is it within his control? We have suggested in the report that the Welsh Government carries out risk assessments, and in his letter he says that it is not within his power. Is that the same assessment process or a different one?

[122] **William Powell:** We will draw on some legal support.

[123] **Ms Roberts:** Joyce made some points earlier related to tourism. Tourism is a matter that falls within Schedule 7 to the Government of Wales Act 2006. The wording relates to risk impact assessments on the safety of coastal tourism, whereas the broader picture is that coastguard services are non-devolved—as the Welsh Minister correctly points out.

[124] **Bethan Jenkins:** It would just be on that particular element then?

[125] **Ms Roberts:** That is my understanding of it. The wording of the petition is to do with risk assessments for the safety of coastal tourists. Joyce made some valid points earlier on issues to do with tourists and the possibility that tourists could be put off from visiting in future because of issues to do with their safety and so on, and because they know that some of these stations have closed.

[126] **William Powell:** That is picked up in the responses we have had from Tegryn Jones at Pembrokeshire Coast National Park and from some of the regional tourism partnerships. That undercuts this issue of it being a reserved matter because it is very much not a reserved matter with regards to the future of our tourism industry.

[127] **Joyce Watson:** It is a reserved matter, in that the risk assessment that is mentioned by Westminster is about managing the waterway according to the coastguards. The risk assessment came after the initial decision, and I was, as you said Chair, very heavily involved in this. So, the original decision was made without a risk assessment in any shape or form. The risk assessment that we are talking about is not quite land-based, because that would be ridiculous, but in some cases, not absolutely ridiculous because people do enter the waterway from the land. I suppose therefore that there is a separation. We could certainly look at a risk assessment. You can only look at it as a perception in some ways, but also in terms of actual data that we have had, where coastguards have been called to deal with incidents that we can directly attribute to holidaymakers and tourism. It is not necessarily always holidaymakers because people offer a package of enjoyment on the coast that local people actually enjoy too. So, the risk to businesses if people choose not to take up those opportunities could be high at a time when people are struggling in any case.

[128] **Bethan Jenkins:** I know that most of the evidence that we have had was against the closures. I know that the petitioners have adapted their petition to be relevant to the devolved nations, but I know that Ministers here have said that they have concerns. Is there any way that we could put in an additional recommendation, where we would urge the Welsh Government to reinstate or reopen discussions with the UK Government with regard to the whole closure agenda? The petition refers to cutting the Swansea service ‘to daylight hours’, whereas we know that that is now about closure. Is that something that we can try to include in the wording? Just making one recommendation does not seem proportionate to the wealth of protest out there in Wales with regard to these changes. I have heard in the last few days as well that because of what happened to the ship in Italy, the Government—

[129] **William Powell:** Of course, it is going to be higher in our minds as well because of

that.

[130] **Bethan Jenkins:** There was a Facebook article on the actual coastguard website about maybe reconsidering, in light of the fact that that happened, and considering how the UK would cope if something similar happened on its seas. We could make it stronger.

[131] **William Powell:** The coverage of that tragedy has been very high profile and it gives people cause for further reflection. So, you would like to see a second recommendation picking up some of those themes. Joyce, how do you feel about that?

[132] **Joyce Watson:** My views are absolutely clear on this. It was ill thought out and there are huge problems with closing that station. Anything that we could do to make representation, even at the eleventh hour, we have to do, and I am encouraged if Bethan has read something that says that there might be a rethinking; that would be very welcome.

[133] **William Powell:** If you can forward that information to our team, it would be good to bring this together at the earliest possible time because we can feed it in—

[134] **Bethan Jenkins:** That was a separate point, about wanting to word something; that was additional. The point I wanted to make in here was that, if we can, we should try to make the wording reflect the fact that what we have heard from the petition in general is a view against what has been decided upon on a UK level. I would like that reflected more in the conclusion and recommendation.

[135] **William Powell:** To make that a bit more robust really. When we come to air the report in the Chamber—

10.15 a.m.

[136] **Bethan Jenkins:** I proposed a Members' debate on this, along with four other AMs, but it has never been chosen by the Business Committee to come before the National Assembly.

[137] **William Powell:** Therefore, this is our opportunity to debate it.

[138] **Bethan Jenkins:** Maybe that could be mentioned in the report as well. I do not know. I am a bit angry about the fact that it has never been chosen as a Plenary debate. Perhaps we could ensure that this issue is discussed in Plenary.

[139] **William Powell:** I think that this would be a good vehicle for making that happen, and we could channel that anger in that way.

[140] **Joyce Watson:** That is fine. However, if we are going to start down that track, I would like to note that there has been a Members' debate here in the very early stages, which I led.

[141] **Bethan Jenkins:** However, this would be debated anyway as a committee report, would it not?

[142] **Joyce Watson:** I am just putting the record straight—given that we are on record—that there has been a debate. I led that short debate in the very early stages. So, this has been discussed in Plenary. We know that the Welsh Government is on our side on this. We know that it has made many representations. I would welcome the opportunity to debate this matter again in the Chamber. We all would. I cannot think of anyone who thinks that this is a good idea.

[143] **Bethan Jenkins:** For the record, I was not saying that you had not put forward a short debate. I was saying that a Members' debate had been refused by the Business Committee.

[144] **William Powell:** I recall that turn of events, which is more recent than the debate to which Joyce is referring. Okay, are Members content with this course of action? We can work with the draft and try to button it down as soon as possible, so we can get moving with a Chamber debate on this as soon as business allows.

[145] **Bethan Jenkins:** Could we send this to the Welsh Affairs Select Committee as well? It might be interesting for them to receive it because it has been an issue in both Houses.

[146] **William Powell:** We could send it to David T.C. Davies and his colleagues, could we not? I see that Members are content with that. Excellent.

10.17 a.m.

**Trafodaeth ynghylch y Dystiolaeth a Gafwyd gan y Gweinidog—y Cyfarfod a
Gynhaliwyd ar 10 Ionawr**
Discussion of Minister's Oral Evidence—10 January Meeting

[147] **William Powell:** We now move on to the next item. As we know, the Minister for Local Government and Communities was unavailable for us to conduct a scrutiny session with him today on issues relating to P-04-331, the petition on filming and recording of council meetings, and P-04-332, the associated petition from Ms Jacqui Thompson regarding details of local authority spending of over £500. We shall therefore be postponing our consideration of those items with the Minister until the earliest time when he is available. At this point, we have an ideal opportunity to reflect on the session that we had with him at our last meeting, when we considered P-03-261, a petition relating to the proposed Newtown bypass; P-03-144, which is about shared space; and P-03-162, which is about road safety on the A40 in Llanspyddid. Do Members all have access to a transcript of that meeting, so they can refresh their memories? I see that they do.

[148] **Bethan Jenkins:** I am sure that Russell has some comments to make on this.

[149] **William Powell:** We turn first to P-03-144, which is about guide dogs for the blind and shared space. In our transcripts, we should turn to the section in which the Minister dealt with that, just to refresh our memories.

[150] **Bethan Jenkins:** He said that there is still work to be done on the Welsh Government's response to the UK Government's review.

[151] **William Powell:** Indeed. If you recall, the Minister is still awaiting the outcome of that piece of work. Joyce, what are your views on this?

[152] **Joyce Watson:** I am still trying to find the correct section of transcript. As I recall, there was work to be done, and the Minister seemed to be quite relaxed about shared spaces—I have found the right transcript section now—and about where we are at. He said that he had had evidence from both sides. As a Minister, he did not express an opinion either way.

[153] **William Powell:** He wanted an evidence-based piece of work to be completed, did he not?

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

[155] **William Powell:** We probably have to work to that timescale, realistically. There is nothing substantial we can do until that has been produced. We can consider it further then with him and feed that back to the petitioners at the appropriate time.

[156] **Bethan Jenkins:** Have the petitioners come back with a view on the transcript?

[157] **William Powell:** I have not received any feedback as yet, but perhaps the clerk can say something about that.

[158] **Ms Phillips:** The transcript is due to be published today so the petitioners will not have seen it yet.

[159] **William Powell:** Okay, so there will be an opportunity for them to express their views on that.

[160] I suggest we look at the Llanspyddid A40 road safety issues and then conclude on the pair of petitions relevant to the different positions on the Newtown bypass. We had quite a useful discussion with Carl Sargeant on the relevance of accident statistics, and so on.

[161] **Bethan Jenkins:** I am still not convinced that, because there has not been an accident in the evening, lighting is not needed on the road. As I said to the Minister, we have darkness in most areas of Wales from 3 p.m. onwards. So when do you define evening and darkness as beginning in that case? He said that he would send us more information about collisions and the trigger for putting safety mechanisms in place—

[162] **William Powell:** Yes, and monitoring devices and what have you.

[163] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes, and I would want to read that before deciding anything. I think that the petitioners would want to see that as well.

[164] **William Powell:** Yes. I look forward to seeing how the local community in Llanspyddid responds to the evidence session. As I said, the relevant community council will meet in the next couple of weeks. It would be very useful if we were to alert the relevant clerk as well as, in the front rank of things, the petitioners themselves—to see what feedback we get on that.

[165] **Bethan Jenkins:** The Minister announced yesterday that more measures will be put in place to stop road traffic accidents.

[166] **William Powell:** Perhaps that will be relevant at some point. I have not yet seen the detail.

[167] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes, we could send the detail of that on to the petitioners as well. We need to look at it first to see whether it has any influence on this part of the world, but it will probably be relevant in some way.

[168] **William Powell:** That would be helpful.

[169] **Joyce Watson:** Yes, I agree with all of that.

[170] **William Powell:** Okay, so we will flag up the transcript to them again and take it a stage further.

[171] Moving to the pair of petitions on the Newtown bypass, you will recall that, at one

stage, I had misinterpreted the Minister's reluctance to comment as a shutdown. In fact, it was a particular aspect that he did not want to be raised rather than wanting to suppress debate and scrutiny. Russell, as this issue occupies quite a number of your waking hours—it also occupies Joyce and me in a broader way—what are your feelings about this now that you have had a chance to reflect and to refresh your memory of the transcript?

[172] **Russell George:** I was pleased with what the Minister said. I assume that we will be writing to both sets of petitioners to give them the transcript. Is that what normally happens?

[173] **William Powell:** Yes.

[174] **Russell George:** I think that the most important element was the last bit of what the Minister said, namely that he would be more than happy to share the data from his before-and-after study with the committee. He said that he will share that with us when it is available. Perhaps it would be useful to write to the Minister to thank him for coming to the committee, if that is in order, and just to give him a reminder on that in case it was seen as a loose arrangement that he would give us that information should we wish it. I would rather write to him to thank him for agreeing to share those data with us, acknowledging that he expects that study to be completed next month and asking him to share the data with us as soon as they are available.

[175] **William Powell:** That would be sensible as a follow-up action.

[176] **Bethan Jenkins:** We might as well include the request for information on Llanspyddid.

[177] **William Powell:** Indeed, we will wrap it up in the same correspondence. Since the evidence session, issues have come to my attention with regard to the fact that some of the local businesses, in particular a pub and a home and caravan development, are concerned about the lack of clarity about timescales and so on. There is a potential blight on some of the businesses in and around Newtown because they are close to the preferred route. The sooner that we can bring this forward for many reasons, the better. That was one issue that we did not have the opportunity to raise in the evidence session, but it is another factor that weighs on local individuals and businesses.

[178] **Russell George:** I am pleased that, following the committee meeting, I met with Carl, the Minister for Local Government and Communities, to discuss the bypass in more detail. I brought up the case that you referred to, and he agreed that his officials would go out to see the people.

[179] **William Powell:** That is excellent news, and I will bring that to their attention.

[180] I would like to thank Bethan for the visit that we undertook on Thursday afternoon to the renal unit at Prince Charles Hospital in Merthyr Tydfil, which was a useful opportunity to engage with petitioners. We will be putting a report together to distribute to the full committee on the key outcomes of that fruitful visit. All of us are looking forward to the fuller away-day session in Carmarthenshire next month. Dates and details will be finalised, but it will be an opportunity for useful community engagement.

[181] In the meantime, thank you for your attendance and contributions this morning. I look forward to seeing you tomorrow on the steps of the Senedd for the official collection of the petition on support for children with autistic spectrum disorder in Caerphilly. Diolch yn fawr.

*Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 10.27 a.m.
The meeting ended at 10.27 a.m.*

