



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

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau **The Petitions Committee**

Dydd Mawrth, 3 Chwefror 2015
Tuesday, 3 February 2015

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

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

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

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

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Lynne Hill	Cyfarwyddwr Polisi, Plant yng Nghymru Policy Director, Children in Wales
Ed Janes	Swyddog Datblygu (Cyfranogiad), Plant yng Nghymru Development Officer (Participation), Children in Wales
Catriona Williams OBE	Prif Weithredwr, Plant yng Nghymru Chief Executive, Children in Wales

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 09:03.
The meeting began at 09:03.

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **William Powell:** Bore da, bawb. **William Powell:** Good morning, all.

[2] Welcome to this meeting of the Petitions Committee. We have a full complement of Members. No apologies. Normal housekeeping arrangements apply. So, if a fire alarm were to go off, we are at the hands of the ushers, and they'll look after us.

09:03

Sesiwn Dystiolaeth: P-04-597, 'Diogelu dyfodol Draig Ffyn-ci, Cynulliad Plant a Phobl Ifanc Cymru'

Evidence Session: P-04-597, 'Protect the future of Funky Dragon, the Children and Young People's Assembly for Wales'

[3] **William Powell:** We move now to agenda item 2, which is the evidence session on

the petition P-04-597, Protect the future of Funky Dragon, the Children and Young People's Assembly for Wales. As Members will recall, this petition was submitted by Trish Jones of Funky Dragon. We first considered it back on 23 September, and it had collected 1,641 signatures. We look forward to welcoming our witnesses shortly.

[4] **Bore da.** Good morning, all. Welcome to this meeting of the Petitions Committee, addressing petition P-04-597 on the future of Funky Dragon. I'd appreciate it if you'd briefly introduce yourself for the record and also to check that everything's working correctly.

[5] **Ms Williams:** Right. I'm Catriona Williams, chief executive of Children in Wales.

[6] **Mr Janes:** I'm Ed Janes, development officer for participation with Children in Wales.

[7] **Ms Hill:** And I'm Lynne Hill, one of the policy directors at Children in Wales.

[8] **William Powell:** Excellent. Well, you're all most welcome. My colleague Joyce Watson is going to kick off straight away with questions, if that's in order. Joyce.

[9] **Joyce Watson:** Thank you. Good morning, all. I want to ask questions around the independent peer-led platform for children and young people and whether you agree, because we've had evidence from Funky Dragon, where they've said, and I quote, that,

[10] 'Wales has become the only country in Europe not to have an independent youth parliament.'

[11] **Ms Williams:** Right. I think one of the issues, really, is around what is an independent youth parliament. If it's an elected body from young people that is representative across Wales, and also if the governance of the organisation is young-people governed—I'm very familiar with Funky Dragon; I actually helped to write the constitution many years ago, in the beginning, and we've been involved throughout—then Wales hasn't got that independent body that is governed by young people and is an elected body.

[12] **Joyce Watson:** Okay. So, I want to explore, then, whether Children in Wales's work with children and young people is intended to be an independent, youth-led, national platform for children and young people.

[13] **Ms Williams:** Right. The situation for Children in Wales was that, for many years, we were core funded to do all of our activity, which is the sort of national body to put forward the voices of the children and families sector, and, as the years have gone by, obviously, children and young people's voices have been part of that—the participation agenda in Wales has developed hugely over the past 20 years, really—and so, as far as we're concerned, we bid to the only grant scheme that was available to us to bid to, which was the children and families delivery grant scheme. And within that, at the time we bid, I was quite hopeful that we could do a partnership, with Funky Dragon as a partner, but fully understanding that each organisation is very independent. And the philosophy of a peer-led organisation, I am familiar with that, because I did take it to the Charity Commission myself, all those years ago. A young-people-led body couldn't possibly be what we were, because we have trustees who are from the professional sector, as well as opportunities for young people, but we're not, you know, definitely young-people governed, because a parliament and, say, 16 to 25-year-olds running an organisation is different. I'm co-chair of Voices from Care with young people, and that structure is young people led, because, at the annual general meeting, the young people have all the power.

[14] **Joyce Watson:** So, do you think—and this is the final question from me—that there

is a need for a platform, as Funky Dragon has stated?

[15] **Ms Williams:** Where we're at the moment is that the young people from Funky Dragon have asked to meet with us, and they've had a very difficult time, let's face it, over the past few months. We were keen, because, across Wales, as I say, the participation agenda has developed so much that we very much welcome the approach. We want to talk. I think, because Wales is a small country, we need to all work together to get something that is going to work, because, I think, when Funky Dragon started, there was no division between Assembly and Government, and I think that is one of the things that we now—. It's a good time to have a look at how we work together, because, in some specific instances, if you've got a very minority vulnerable group that needs a lot of support to give their voices, it's inevitable—and perhaps Lynne could mention young carers—that it's only a smallish group that would be consulted by various bodies.

[16] I think the point that we're at is: we know what we bid for, we're giving the support to both the sector, the professionals—. We've got four strands in our work: the voice of young people; support to professionals to be able to properly engage young people, in other words the skills of how to do it; then we've got the sector's voice, in terms of the workers; and then we've got the representation of what everybody's saying into Government. So, there are four bits to our bid, and so, for instance, if there's an inquiry into young carers, that group of young carers—. We've got over 200 organisational members in touch with children, and they may be asked by the Assembly to give evidence, they may be asked by local government to give evidence and they may be asked by Welsh Government to give evidence. So, I think it's timely for us to be coming together with other groups to actually look at what's best now.

[17] **William Powell:** We're grateful for that. Would you like to contribute at this point, Ms Hill?

[18] **Ms Hill:** I can certainly give you an example of how we work with particular groups like young carers. We've been doing that work for probably the past eight to nine years now, in that we work with the workers on a regular basis and then we've been very fortunate that Welsh Government have supported opportunities to enable young carers to come together, to identify what the issues are for them as a group and to work through how they would want to present those issues. Over the years, we've had regular meetings with Gwenda Thomas, when she was Deputy Minister for health and social services, and they went to meet with her and presented the work that they'd worked up. We were always very clear that what they talked about were the issues for young carers, not, 'This is my story'. It was about saying, 'This is a piece of work that we've done across Wales. We've brought together all these views and these are the key issues for us'.

[19] I have to say, at the last meeting, one of the young carers raised issues about local pharmacies and having challenges in collecting medication, which has been a long-standing issue for young carers. Understandably, pharmacists want to be careful who they give it to, but it does cause real problems for some families. As a result of that meeting, Welsh Government officials then worked with the royal college of pharmacists to sort of begin to tease out an agreement, which was really, really great for the young carers, and they actually got a letter back from the Deputy Minister saying that.

[20] So, there's a whole process for a relatively small, although a growing, number of young people who care. There's a whole process there about supporting that voice through. We've also done pieces of work like producing videos for them, or leaflets for them, which are still being used. They were very heavily promoted through the carers strategy, saying, 'These are young carers' issues; they mirror the needs of adult carers, and these are where their particular needs are different'. So, that's just an example of the work we do.

[21] **William Powell:** That's helpful. Thank you. Russell George.

[22] **Russell George:** Thank you. Good morning. The Minister's view is that funding awarded to Children in Wales is to fund a national participation model. That's his view. Is that your view as well?

[23] **Ms Williams:** It is a national participation model. It's not an assembly in terms of the model that Funky Dragon was based on. At the time we bid, we thought that Funky Dragon was still going to be there. I think Lynne has demonstrated a very small group. Ed could give examples of more universal engagement. So, in terms of Government, and influencing Government in particular, although we are having discussions with the Assembly about what the young people's youth engagement in the Assembly is doing, because there will be times when we work together, ours is a national participation model, but it's not an organisation, and I think that's the difference. I don't know, Ed, if you want to say—

09:15

[24] **Mr Janes:** Yes. I think, because you have the Funky Dragon model of participation—the kind of youth Assembly, which is a fantastic model of participation—the model that we have is also a model that we believe will work and that is national, but it is set out in a different way. So, the model that we have focuses on Children in Wales doing work in schools, Children in Wales doing work in empowering the local forum work that's being done by forums—some of the fantastic work that's being done already in the local youth forums and in national youth organisations, as well as with groups like young carers and young disabled people that we've done before, and looked-after children as well. Then, it is using that and, kind of, empowering that work and recognising that work by feeding it into the Welsh Government and then backing that up with the meetings that we want to be arranged with Ministers. So, the bid also included us running meetings between young people and Ministers each year, with the idea being that those young people would have been involved in the different priorities, locally, and then have the chance to, kind of, make sure that it's being fed into the national manner.

[25] **Russell George:** Right. What I wanted to just also clarify is that, last summer, talking about the grant funding that you had and what it was being used for, on your website, you had a statement saying,

[26] 'For clarification, this project is not funded to deliver a National Youth Assembly for Wales.'

[27] I wonder if you could just talk to what was behind that statement, so we can understand that.

[28] **Ms Williams:** I think it was exactly—. I think what I've said previously that it's not an elected body of young people who are, sort of, being politically active, as it were, in terms of representing the nation. I mean, we have got partners, as well as our own organisation: we've got ProMo-Cymru, which, in terms of universal engagement of children and young people—. CLIConline has many, many hits and, for instance, we've just put a poverty video onto that to promote a discussion amongst, hopefully thousands, but certainly hundreds of young people, for them to be able to contribute their views there. But it isn't—. I think, the main point is it's not linked to democracy and representation—that's how, as an assembly, we view it—but we are bringing together groups at national level. And also, we've got a model where we've got four regional links to the youth forums, and also we've got our own links to member organisations already that work with a whole range of children and young people.

[29] So, we're trying to get that sort of loop, for instance, with the child poverty work in

Welsh Government. We're in discussions about how we can have an ongoing relationship between children and young people and the policy makers there. So, I think the key difference is it's not an elected body of representatives from each part of Wales. But I think that's probably the discussion that now needs to take place, because, to be honest, the funding was hugely reduced; there wasn't, in terms of this grant round, the funding that had previously supported both Children in Wales and Funky Dragon together: it was virtually half. So, we bid for what we could deliver and I think that's the—. But, it is a model that contributes to national Government policy development.

[30] **Russell George:** Okay. I've got one last question and I'm conscious that two of my colleagues want to ask questions as well, so it doesn't need a long reply, but I was just curious to know, in your view, who is responsible for ensuring that young people in Wales are also represented at the UK Youth Parliament and also on a European level.

[31] **Ms Williams:** Ed can talk to that.

[32] **Mr Janes:** Thank you. So, that's traditionally been supported by Funky Dragon. Last year, Children in Wales received funding from the Welsh Government as well as John Bercow, through the British Youth Council, to take or to accompany a group of young people from Wales specifically for last year. We're currently in—. Well, the agreement was that it was for last year specifically, with the idea that it would then be looked at in future. We're currently putting together a more detailed report. We've put together a summary, initially, and now we're putting together a more detailed report about the event, about the opportunity, and what the young people got out of it. So, we've been consulting with them, we've been asking them, and we're just putting that report together at the minute.

[33] **Russell George:** It would be useful to have a copy of that report, wouldn't it, Chair, for our committee, if it's available?

[34] **Mr Janes:** Yes, okay.

[35] **Russell George:** Thank you.

[36] **Mr Janes:** So, that includes the opportunity and what it was like, but also, bearing in mind that it was put together at quite late notice and with a specific amount of funding, we've also asked them to kind of comment on the opportunity, but also how they felt—you know, if they felt there could be more support and more of a process in the run-up to the event, where they could get together and have a chance to kind of discuss some of the topics and have a chance to get to know each other so that it's more of an ongoing process rather than what we had, which was a meeting a couple of weeks before, where someone from the British Youth Council came out to introduce the work but also to talk through the security and some of the processes around it and then, two weeks later, the actual two-day trip and two-day event.

[37] **Bethan Jenkins:** Sorry, can I just clarify? Are you carrying on with that work? You say you're talking to young people now about how it worked; I'm just conscious that you say that you're not an assembly or an elected body, so I'm just curious as to if it's continuing and on what basis you would want to continue it, given that you've just explained earlier that you're not that type of organisation.

[38] **Mr Janes:** Well, that report—. Well, we very much—. That was the first time we'd done it. I led it, I very much enjoyed it, and I think we would be interested in doing it again. The report that we're putting in will be used to decide, I guess, if Wales takes part in it this year and in the future, and whether there will be more, you know, and what the funding will enable us to do that we get for it. We have been working with participation officers and youth forums from all of the local authorities around the future of it. They are very interested in us

continuing to do it. Essentially, we are waiting for a decision, but we're also looking at ways to build it into the work that we are doing, the young Wales work, the core work, and whether the campaigns that have been taken on in the wider UK could be built into the campaigns and the priorities that we're going to be doing in Wales. So, it's still being worked out, basically, but the report that we're putting in will be used to work out the best way forward.

[39] **Ms Williams:** Perhaps I could just add to that: basically, it was not within the grant that we were given. I saw Funky's evidence and they're quite right, they hadn't had funding before to do it, which we were. It was very much a sort of last-minute, extra piece of work, which we were very pleased to do, but, obviously with devolution as well, you know, if there's only one of the topics that's Wales relevant that they're discussing, and two or three are totally to do with England policy, there is an evaluation and I believe that the funding that the Minister gave for this last round, on the basis of the report we give, that will be reviewed by Welsh Government. But, on who's responsible, I think that's this Parliament and Government interface, which is, I think, underlying the whole of this discussion.

[40] **William Powell:** Yes. We're very grateful for the candour of those answers. It seems to me that your organisation has been put in quite a difficult position, which is not of your making, and that you've obviously stepped up to the plate, particularly in the context of the international work, which obviously wasn't within the remit. I realise that the arrangements are still at an early stage, but could you give an estimate as to how many children and young people per year will be directly involved in the participation model that you've outlined?

[41] **Ms Williams:** Well, I'll hand over to my colleagues. The one thing we'll say is that we're hoping to hit the target in terms of the electronic, social media, click online to as many thousands of youngsters in Wales as we can get engaged. And through the school work, we're hoping to move that along. I think then it's almost like participation isn't one thing; there're lots of different levels to it. We started from the position of understanding that there were quite a lot of the most vulnerable, most disadvantaged children who weren't able to get their voice heard. And so there's more in-depth work there. So, I don't know if Lynne and Ed would like to add—.

[42] **Ms Hill:** I think if I start off and Ed will come in as well. Certainly, at the moment, we are working with all the participation workers and the youth forums across Wales. We have established a team of workers who are making links regionally, so each participation network forum has a link to us, and we have—. I know we have meetings established with all 22. They haven't all gone through yet, because we started that discussion actually the first week of January; we met with them and talked in great detail about the plan, and they were really on board about engaging. So, there is, first of all, an opportunity for the statutory bodies. Now, there's a bit of a challenge in Gwynedd, because apparently Gwynedd do not have a youth forum at the moment. So, we're looking at how we engage there, but we actually have an office based in Gwynedd and a worker based there who knows the area very well, so we will be making sure—and she also does some work around the youth service—so we'll do that. So, we started that work.

[43] We obviously have—. We've identified that we will do six pieces of work in schools. I think we want to be very clear that that doesn't just mean six schools; that means six pieces of work around different issues, around different concerns. And that will obviously address a very wide age range, because we know that our work is actually, you know, from 0 to 25, not solely youth, although we are very aware that there's a youth sector that feels and felt that they weren't sure where their voices would be heard. So, we need to make sure that we're very clear in supporting them, but we also want to be working in primary schools, looking at where younger people are. We have membership with, and very good links with, all the pre-schools, so there may be pieces of work around pre-school issues and so on. So, we need to be able to spread that sort of work.

[44] Alongside that, as I say, we have a longstanding relationship with young carers. We have a long history of working with young disabled people, and there's been lots of work around that. Last Saturday, we did a training event in Wrexham for young people from across north Wales to be doing a piece of training around understanding the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and knowing their rights and expressing their rights. So, we've got those pieces of work going on, as well as then links with our partner organisations, such as Voices, Barnardo's, Action for Children and Tros Gynnal, so we can link with those as well.

[45] So, in terms of numbers, the answer is 'I don't know', but we estimate we will reach a wide range of people both across the age ranges and across their experiences.

[46] **William Powell:** That's very helpful. I think it's come across loud and clear how deep your experiences of serving the needs of some minority and hard-to-reach and disadvantaged groups are, but, given that when you bid for funding last time round you weren't aware that Funky Dragon wouldn't be on the pitch in terms of its activities, what measures have you been able to put in place or you are intending to put in place to ensure that you are also catering for the needs of the mainstream, as well as the groups for whom you have the particular expertise?

09:30

[47] **Ms Williams:** I'll hand over to Ed in a minute, but I think there are some topics that come through from all groups—bullying, for instance, is one. And I think one of the things in our bid that we were very keen to do was to make sure that there was an impact and an outcome for children and young people through that. So, for instance, the connection between— I mean, it's widespread. The first children's commissioner raised bullying as a big issue for children. It comes through from all of our groups. Either it's hate bullying, or it's bullying in schools or whatever. So, as a topic identified by children and young people, that's a chunk of work that will be very universal. We have a worker who is linking with some of the forums, but she is also pulling together the workers on anti-bullying work and we're in the policy groups in Welsh Government. So, I'll hand over to Ed, but that's one, like children's mental health; there are some issues that have come through in the past from Funky Dragon, but also from our groups. Children who are hard to reach are not necessarily different in terms of the bigger issues that affect all children.

[48] **Mr Jones:** I mean, I would say that all the work that's going on in schools is going to be—. Well, unless we decide to do some work in special schools, all of the work in schools will be with mainstream children and young people. The work with the youth forums and the specialist groups: at the minute, the work we're doing in the youth forums is to go out into each one, find out what the local issues are and that will shape the priorities for the work. So, so far, we've been going out and we've been hearing about issues such as bullying, which has come up in all of them, mental health, and rural transport as well. So, all of those ideas, again, are coming from mainstream children and young people that are in youth forums, and then, as well as that, we will look to continue what we've done before in terms of looked-after children, young carers and disability as well. So, we are very much catering for both. And then, as well as that, at the minute, we are developing the young Wales website for the project or for the programme of work. We are developing social media and other methods for young people that maybe aren't in the schools and the forums and the specific groups that we work with—other ways for them to engage with the project as well. So, I think we have—you know, I'm confident that we will have—a programme of work that will bring in the universal children and young people in the mainstream, as well as the groups that we've maybe in the past more traditionally worked with.

[49] **William Powell:** Okay. That's reassuring. I'm conscious that my colleague, Joyce Watson, has been showing great patience before coming in. I have a final question for you for now, and that is whether you've given any consideration to a process of electing young people from across Wales to create some form of representative body, and also an issue that's come up in recent days, which is whether you've been involved in any consultation around the impacts that flow from the recent decision by Welsh Government to radically reduce the funding available to the young farmers movement within Wales, given their particular involvement in the same area of work.

[50] **Ms Williams:** I think, to answer the first question, it's sort of repeating in a way what I said at the beginning that we think it's timely and we have—. You know, we needed to be very sensitive to how upset a lot of the young people were in Funky Dragon. So, we've been in close contact with trustees there, and they now are feeling that it's timely for us. Also, Ed and I have met with Kelly, who's based in the Assembly, in terms of youth engagement. We think it's timely to have a get together to really have a look at whether there is an elected gap. But what we're doing at national level, in the interim, is building a group that is going to advise the whole of our work. Now, that's not elected—that's not an elected structure. I think it's interesting because there are different levels. I mean, I've done a lot of European work and the European youth forum, which is the umbrella, is actually sort of quite old young people; it's between 16 and, in some countries, it is 30-year-olds. There's a difference, and we're actually covering, as Lynne said, zero to 25, basically. So, we want the voices of children and young people. So, that elected model is a youth model, and so I think we feel it's the time to talk with others.

[51] Ed, do you want to come in?

[52] **Mr Janes:** The one thing I would say is, in meeting with participation officers and youth forum workers, it's something that they are still very interested in. We are looking at ways of even bringing together young people on a regional level, or maybe, when we hold—well, looking at potential ways of doing it. But, I guess the one thing that we know is the residential approach that was previously done by Funky Dragon isn't something that we can really achieve, to be honest, with the funding that we have.

[53] **William Powell:** Understood, yes.

[54] **Mr Janes:** That doesn't mean that we don't like—it doesn't mean that we don't support the idea of, like, an Assembly approach to participation; that's not the case at all.

[55] **William Powell:** But you are just constrained financially, effectively, yes.

[56] **Ms Hill:** I was going to say, I think also, what we find now is that many of the local services are also constrained financially, and I think undertaking residential work with young people takes a huge commitment from local staff, and there are often challenges around the time, the travel. It would be a challenge for us on the current project funding, but it would also be a challenge, I think, for many of our partners.

[57] **Ms Williams:** And I think that sort of goes on to your second question, really, that one of the concerns we have across Wales—well, we have two concerns, actually—is the impact on children's organisations per se, in terms of funding, but also particularly on the participation work in many organisations. Because, you know, it is a little bit of a soft target, unfortunately, at local level as well, in terms of the participation workers, to get good participation, proper, linked to the—and we haven't mentioned the participation standards. We are working with the participation workers now to update—not to change, but to update—and get those out there. But, to actually deliver on those standards at local level, there's got to be the capacity in the organisations—you know, the maintained and the non-maintained

organisations—to be able to do the full cycle of informing, working with, listening to children and young people, feeding back, et cetera. That capacity does need to be strengthened, and we certainly have been looking at that.

[58] **William Powell:** Thank you very much. Bethan Jenkins.

[59] **Bethan Jenkins:** Just quickly, because I'm conscious we've already run out of time. When Funky Dragon came in, they said that they were concerned about the fact that the Welsh Government, rather than young people, would be identifying the issues that would go out to be discussed, and they were very concerned about that because they were wanting to set the agenda. So, I just wanted your brief response to that.

[60] **Ms Williams:** Yes, I mean, I think, probably, in fairness to Funky Dragon, they would only have seen what was written down in, sort of, bold on a chart. I think the way it works really is, clearly, what we've been funded to do is to support good policy development in Welsh Government. But, for instance, we wouldn't go out to children and young people, and say, 'This is the latest consultation from Welsh Government; what do you think of it?'. It's more a case of children and young people—and you are probably best speaking to this than me, Ed—identifying what, locally, are really issues to them, and then us—. For instance, if bullying comes up, that means that there's something that can be taken into policy developments across Welsh Government. But, there will be some priority issues that are sort of both Welsh Government priorities—like poverty—and children and young people's issues as well, which marry. I think part of our job is to prioritise what's going to make the best impact—or the young people to prioritise with us.

[61] **Mr Janes:** As I've said already, we are going to each youth forum. We've been to some already, as Lynne has mentioned, and there are others that we have yet to go in to and we will be doing in the next few weeks. With all of them, we're finding out what their local issues are. Things like mental health, bullying and transport are all coming up, and they will be the basis, with the youth forum work as well as the specific groups like young carers—. Local issues will be the basis of the national priorities that we take on.

[62] **Bethan Jenkins:** Okay. I'm just concerned, for the record as well, as with Funky Dragon, this will be going back to one place and not getting out—to the Welsh Government but not to anywhere else, and that's been my criticism of Funky Dragon previously. You know, how does that go up from the youth forum to not only the Welsh Government but the wider institution of the Assembly? So, hopefully, your discussions with the Presiding Officer can lead to a wider-based input to what young people are doing. But, just quickly, because I didn't think I was satisfied with the answer, before we end, when you did apply for the children and family grant scheme, you were clearly aware of the situation with Funky Dragon, because, obviously, you were discussing with them. I just want to understand, because I don't think I understood fully from Funky Dragon's response either, where the communication—if it did; I don't want to put words into your mouth—broke down, as in why they did not then fully engage with you putting forward a plan, because, for me, as a person outside of all of this discussion, it would have made much more sense for them to have been on board at that stage so that they could have built in that representative Assembly side in conjunction with your participation side to complement each other. Now I feel that the elected side is very much on the back foot, and that's what I think we're all concerned about in Wales at the moment.

[63] **Ms Williams:** Yes, thank you for that. I mean, I think, firstly, we're very concerned to work closely with the Assembly, and I think Welsh Government has said that is a good idea—so, in terms of our grant, within that, working with the Presiding Officer. And also, I think it's inevitable that the same groups of children and young people will be supported by us to give evidence in committees as well, particularly those who need more support. Our

members, Barnardo's, Action for Children, and our partners, Tros Gynnal, Voices from Care—we'll all be supporting children and young people to give their views, and the wider results we'll put in the public domain. Any of the universal responses to social media campaigns and so on—that will be information available to the Assembly.

[64] I can remember clearly, you know, it was a matter of principle for the young people in Funky Dragon that they—. There was one meeting that I instigated with the chief executive of Funky Dragon, and I said, 'Look, clearly, there's only one project going to be funded; we should do this together', and he said, 'It's a matter of principle that we are young people-led, and we don't really want to be getting so close to an organisation.' I have to say, in terms of Children in Wales and Funky Dragon, our relationship, long term, has been really good. One of my policy directors has been the chair. You know, it's been a very difficult situation. But, as a matter of principle, from their point of view, they felt that their youth-led autonomy—. They might be being pushed into a merger, which, actually, wasn't the case, but their youth-led autonomy was possibly going to be compromised.

[65] **Bethan Jenkins:** But there's nothing now at all, that's the thing—

[66] **Ms Williams:** I know, I know.

[67] **Bethan Jenkins:** I mean, it's all with the benefit of hindsight, of course, but, at the moment we do not have that national elected body for Wales, which is a massive shame really.

[68] **Ms Williams:** I think, on a positive note, certainly the young people on their board—it's still there as a sort of vestige of an organisation—. That's where the talking is, and, I think, you know, together we've got quite a good opportunity. I mean, actually, one model, going on for many, many years—. Perhaps it is, you know, timely to have a look at what's best for Wales, because we are small and we do need to work all together so that the voices of young people get into each institution.

[69] **William Powell:** I think that's a really positive note on which to end. It's been a very useful evidence session from our perspective to gain greater insights into actually what lay behind the events of last summer and early autumn. We will provide you with a full transcript, which I think, in the context of the discussions we've been having, is particularly important, so that you've got the opportunity to check that for accuracy, and also Members, at an early future date, will have the opportunity to consider the evidence that we've just heard. So, thank you very much indeed for coming this morning and for your contributions. Diolch yn fawr.

09:45

Deisebau Newydd New Petitions

[70] **William Powell:** We move now to agenda item 3: consideration of new petitions. The first is agenda item 3.1, P-04-612, Nationalised Bottled Water. This petition was submitted by Plebeian Laboratories and it has the support of 25 signatures.

[71] 'We, the undersigned, beseech the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to create a Wales-owned not-for-profit Bottled Water Company. This would remove the corporate middle-men making a profit from what should be free as our birthright as Welsh citizens: our own water.'

[72] I have already written to Carl Sargeant, the Minister for Natural Resources, seeking his views on the petition. So, we've got a response from Carl Sargeant on this matter. I'd be very keen to know how you would wish to proceed. Russell George.

[73] **Russell George:** I think, Chair, the Minister's answer is quite clear on what the Welsh Government's view is, so I'd really suggest that we close the petition because we've had that decision from him.

[74] **William Powell:** Yes, we've got absolute clarity from Carl Sargeant; I agree with you on that point.

[75] **Russell George:** I notice we haven't given the petitioner much time to respond, so I suggest we close it, but if the petitioner does write back to us in the next three weeks, say, and there's a new angle and he can provide us with it, then by all means let it come back to the committee.

[76] **William Powell:** Absolutely. Bethan, are you content with that approach?

[77] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes, I'm content. Water is a reserved power as well isn't it with Westminster still? So, I sympathise with the principles—

[78] **William Powell:** The sentiments.

[79] **Bethan Jenkins:** The sentiments of it, but I'm not sure how workable it is, but the Minister said what the Minister said.

[80] **William Powell:** Absolutely, and there's absolute clarity there; crystal clarity.

[81] We move to agenda item 3.2, which is P-04-614, Support the Arriva Trains Wales First Class Service. This petition was submitted by Gareth Peate and has the support of 54 signatures. The text reads as follows:

[82] 'It is believed that Arriva Trains Wales will soon announce their intention to cease the first class service which forms part of their flagship 'Premier Service' which runs each weekday between Holyhead and Cardiff. This will likely be a response to the Welsh Government's decision to end their funding for this service in early 2015. This petition urges the Welsh Government to reconsider their decision to withdraw funding for this valuable and well-loved service, or to at least encourage Arriva Trains Wales to continue the service as best they can via other means.'

[83] I've already written, on receipt of the petition, to Mrs Edwina Hart, Minister for Economy, Science and Transport, seeking her views. The Minister's response, including a recent update on this matter, which obviously is of great importance to the petitioner and the supporters, is available in our public pack. We haven't as yet received a response to that from the petitioner. Russell, you've indicated.

[84] **Russell George:** Yes, I was just going to suggest, Chair, we perhaps need to give the petitioners more time to respond to us before it goes back to committee because they will only have had the response—

[85] **William Powell:** Yes, given the nature of the response, I think it's appropriate.

[86] **Russell George:** As a general principle, I'd say that, but, to me, I'd just like to know what the difference is between first class and business class, because that's the difference here, looking at the letter. Is it possible to write to the Minister in the meantime and ask her

what, in her view, is the difference between the two, or is there another way that we can find that out?

[87] **William Powell:** Or whether that would come from the provider—I'm not quite clear what the best source would be for that information.

[88] **Russell George:** Because that seems to be the crux of it.

[89] **William Powell:** Yes, we need clarity on the definitions and what is provided as part of that service.

[90] **Russell George:** It would seem to me that business class is actually offering what first class offers, pretty much, but I don't know.

[91] **William Powell:** Okay. We can seek that clarity, I think, which will help us in further consideration of this petition. Yes? I see that you're agreed.

[92] Moving to agenda item 3.3, P04-615, A Fair Student Loan Payment in the Final Year of Training. This petition was submitted by Maryanne Bray and has collected 47 signatures. The text reads as follows:

[93] 'Payment for midwifery and health care students in the final year is reduced dramatically as it does not take into account the extra weeks studying or in placement in August. This loan payment is repaid when in employment but affects the final year by as much as £150 per term. Healthcare is a completely different degree in relation to theory and placement and continues into August when other courses have broken up for summer holidays.'

[94] 'We would like the student loan system to take the third year course content into account and this be reflected in the student loan payments made to midwifery students and healthcare students alike.'

[95] Now, on behalf of the committee, I wrote to the Minister for Education and Skills, Huw Lewis, seeking his views, and we've got a response from him in our papers today. Colleagues, I'd be pleased to know your preferred way forward on this one. Bethan Jenkins.

[96] **Bethan Jenkins:** The one issue that I found most compelling was the fact that the petitioner said that she had a letter back from the Student Loans Company saying that they get funded till the end of summer, as that is when their course ends, but it isn't true of midwifery and they carry on throughout the summer. So, I think we would need to pinpoint that with the Minister, because, obviously, if the courses are different—longer, for example——

[97] **William Powell:** Then we need to look at the funding implications.

[98] **Bethan Jenkins:** We need to extend the definition of 'holiday' and the application process with the Student Loans Company. So, that's what I would want to focus in on, really, back to the Minister.

[99] **William Powell:** We did have a good, detailed response, as you say, from the petitioner. I think we need to have a response from Huw Lewis on that matter. Are colleagues agreed on that approach? Well, that's the way we'll take things forward.

[100] Agenda item 3.4: P-04-616, 'Please Prevent Fireworks From Being Sold to the General Public'. This petition was submitted by Kathy Peart and collected 110 signatures. I'll just give you a flavour of the text here:

[101] ‘We want to request a change in legislation so that only licensed events with can organise firework displays and use fireworks. We want to ban the sale of any fireworks to the general public. We want to ban the use of fireworks by the general public. As we all know, since the Millennium, fireworks are no longer a “once a year” event. Every year fireworks are going off more than a week before November the 5th and generally continue in spits and spats until the New Year celebrations start them off in full swing again.’

[102] It continues in that vein and also references, in the text of the petition, RSPCA data with regard to the impact upon domestic animals and others. Clearly, this is a matter that Kathy Peart and her colleagues feel very strongly about. I wrote to Leighton Andrews, Minister for Public Services, on this matter, and his response is available in our public papers today. He points out, quite rightly, that the sale of fireworks is not a devolved matter. We’ve invited the petitioner to comment, but as yet haven’t received a response. We’ve also sought legal advice, as colleagues will be aware, on the Minister’s contention that the sale of fireworks is not a devolved matter, and we have a private paper on that issue. That advice, in the detail, takes account of recent Supreme Court rulings, while the Minister’s advice may have been based on a somewhat narrower interpretation of competence issues. I think it would probably be sensible for us to write to Leighton Andrews, just clarifying the position regarding competence that’s come to us via our legal service. Are colleagues happy with that approach?

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

[104] **William Powell:** Excellent. Thank you very much.

[105] We’ve recovered some of our lost time from earlier. We now move to agenda item 4, updates to previous petitions.

09:54

Y Wybodaeth Ddiweddaraf am Ddeisebau Blaenorol Updates to Previous Petitions

[106] **William Powell:** We go straight away to agenda item 4.1, which is P-04-448, to improve sexual health services for the western Vale. This petition, as you will recall, was submitted by Rebecca Lowrie and was first considered on 29 January 2013. It has the support of 16 signatories. Colleagues will recall that we considered this at our most recent meeting on 20 January, and we agreed to produce a paper drawing together information that we have experienced as a committee with regard to gaining a timely and appropriate response from health boards on a number of petitions. This information is available to us as a public paper, and colleagues will have had the opportunity to consider that. In the round, it isn’t an absolutely comprehensive list, but, nevertheless, I think it gives us an indication as to the challenges that we faced in doing our business because of the failures elsewhere. A response was also received immediately after the last meeting, it has to be said, from Cardiff and Vale University Local Health Board, from chief executive Adam Cairns, and that’s available in the public pack. We’ve invited the petitioner to comment, but, as yet, we haven’t received a response. I think, in the context of the time that the petitioner has had to wait, it probably is sensible for us to give the petitioner on this occasion a little more time and to chase for a response, if colleagues are happy with that approach.

[107] **Joyce Watson:** We are.

[108] **William Powell:** Yes? Excellent.

[109] **Joyce Watson:** Well, I am. Sorry. [*Laughter.*]

[110] **William Powell:** On the wider point, we'll also write to David Rees as Chair of Health and Social Care Committee to express our concerns with regard to the responsiveness issue. Colleagues happy?

[111] **Russell George:** Chair, I mean, we should name them. So, it's Hywel Dda Local Health Board: it takes six months to reply to our letter, and we've still not had a reply. We've got Cardiff and Vale: 10 months. We wrote to them last March and still not had a reply. Ten months. Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Local Health Board: seven months, and still not had a reply. Oh, for some of them, a reply was received but after that length of time. I mean, it's terrible.

[112] **William Powell:** Yes. As I said on the record last time, it is showing a degree of contempt for the committees within this Assembly. And, indeed, on the last occasion, I think colleagues will recall that the Minister himself had been aware of this and had actually shown in correspondence that he was also really unhappy about this. I think we clearly need to see significant improvement. That's why I think raising the issue again with the Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee as well would be helpful. But I appreciate the fact that you've highlighted that, because it is a major issue.

[113] **Russell George:** What I would just say, Chair, is that, when we do get replies, I would like us as a committee to write and ask: why did it take so long? Did they not get them? Is there a breakdown somewhere? What is the reason?

[114] **William Powell:** Yes, we need answers, absolutely. So, I'm happy to write on behalf of the committee to our colleague, David Rees, but also I think we should take this up further with the Minister, who's already aware of some of the detailed concerns but possibly not of the picture in the round, because it is very unhelpful indeed to us carrying out the work that we're charged with. So, if colleagues are happy, I'll take those two actions on the behalf of this committee. Thank you.

[115] Moving now to the next agenda item, colleagues will recall that we previously considered the following petitions in a grouped manner, and that's 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4: P-04-466, P-04-479 and P-04-564. However, on this occasion, the only petition within that group upon which we have an update is P-04-564, the Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital petition, 'Preventing the introduction of a poorer Health Service for North Wales'. Now, this petition was submitted by Mike Parry and was first considered back on 19 March 2013. It's got the support of 306 signatories. We've got a response. We last considered the petition back on 9 December 2014, following a letter from the Minister for Health and Social Services. At that point, we agreed to seek comments from the petitioner. Also, that was the occasion when we decided the grouping approach. We've now received a detailed response from the petitioner, including some further correspondence between the petitioner and the Minister. This correspondence, as colleagues are aware, is presented to us as a private paper. I'd appreciate your views as to how best to proceed on this matter. Joyce Watson.

10:00

[116] **Joyce Watson:** Thank you, Chair. I think there are a number of issues here. The first issue is that we can't actually refer to lots of the correspondence we have, because it's so personal and therefore unhelpful in that respect.

[117] **William Powell:** Understood.

[118] **Joyce Watson:** But I think, if we get to the key issues rather than everything else around it, there was a very clear process for considering the healthcare needs in all authorities and, as part of that process, there was local determination within that, which was in the hands of the community health council. The CHC did not refer the content, really, of this petition to the Minister, because they felt duly satisfied—and we understand that other people have other opinions. The Minister reiterates that in his letter.

[119] Moving on from that, of course, in history, there has been a review of rural healthcare in north Wales, there has been a report, and there will be progress according to that report—and, again, the Minister alludes quite clearly to that. I think that that has to be worked through before, you know, we can see anything else. I'm not really clear that, as a committee, we can necessarily go any further with this. I think we've, in a way, done our work. That isn't to suggest there isn't further work to be done, but I'm not sure that this committee is now the right venue for that work to be done. I think we've highlighted, we've taken on board, we've written, we've asked all the questions that we can. I think the only course of action open to us at the moment is for us to be kept informed of the developments and, in the near future, we will undoubtedly have to close this petition.

[120] **William Powell:** Yes, okay. I sense that colleagues are in accord with that view, and that reflects also my own view on things. So, we do request to be kept informed, but I think we also need to move to close this petition, given that it's probably come close to running its course.

[121] **Joyce Watson:** Very close.

[122] **William Powell:** Yes, agreed.

[123] **Bethan Jenkins:** I think, if we can keep it open until we know about the developments of the new health facilities, that would be helpful, because then, the petitioners may come back with comment on that, be it positive or negative. In terms of the detail, it's hard for us, as a committee. You know, we can't say to the Minister, 'You must put more services back there'. I know that's what the petitioners want, but that's the same as what I would've wanted when they downgraded Neath Port Talbot hospital, you know, so I sympathise on that level. So, if we can just keep a watching brief over it, but for the petitioners to understand fully we can't make the Government change their minds over this.

[124] **William Powell:** No, that's beyond our remit.

[125] **Bethan Jenkins:** I think we've given this a very—. You know, we've taken evidence, we've scrutinised this and I hope they think we've done all we can.

[126] **William Powell:** Yes, well, I also hope so, and it's useful to recall what Joyce said with regard to the CHC, because they're obviously charged with safeguarding services, and they took the view that they did. So, that's an agreed course of action. Good. Thank you.

[127] Agenda item 4.5, P-04-570, is on inequitable access to treatments that have not been nationally appraised by the NHS. Now, this petition was submitted by Genetic Alliance UK, the Tuberous Sclerosis Association, and the Association of Glycogen Storage Disorders. It was first considered back on 15 July 2014. It's got the support of 455 signatories. It was requested by the petitioners to ask the Minister to outline timescales for developing interim commissioning policies. Potentially, we could take that forward with the Minister. What are colleagues' thoughts in that respect?

[128] **Russell George:** Chair, the petitioner has asked us to ask the Minister a series of questions, so let's just do that.

[129] **William Powell:** Yes, I think we can take that forward. We've had a useful exchange with the Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee, David Rees, on these matters. I think since that's what Genetic Alliance UK has sought from us, then we can happily deliver on that point, if colleagues are agreed. Good.

[130] Agenda item 4.6, P-04-604, Regarding the closure of Diabetes Patient Reference Groups and the cancellation of meetings of the Diabetic Planning and Delivery Group in Powys: now, this petition was submitted by Mr Robert V. Wright and was first considered by us as recently as 25 November 2014. It's got the support of 40 signatures. I think it's fair to say that this particular petition probably resulted in one of the most swift turnarounds and results of any petition in recent times. We considered correspondence on this petition on 25 November for the first time, and agreed to write to the petitioner seeking his views on whether the aims of the petition had been met by correspondence that we received from the Minister regarding the re-establishment of the diabetes planning and delivery group. We've got a response from Mr Wright, and Russell George and I are familiar with the petitioner, so if you'd like to take the lead on this one, Russell.

[131] **Russell George:** I did facilitate a meeting between Mr Wright and Powys Teaching Local Health Board, and the Powys local health board, within the meeting, said everything that Mr Wright would want them to say. He was very happy and very content. So, I think, on that basis, we can close the petition, and it's a very successful outcome.

[132] **William Powell:** If we can close the petition with a happy petitioner then I think it's a positive result all round, and also, most importantly, for the particular group of patients that Mr Wright has done so much to be an advocate for. So, happy with that approach if colleagues are content.

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

[134] **William Powell:** Good. Agenda item 4.7, P-04-602, Personalisation of Graves: this petition was submitted by Elizabeth Haynes and Catherine Board, and we first considered it at the same meeting—25 November. It has collected 120 electronic signatures and a further 1,486 in paper form. Obviously, this is a very sensitive matter, and colleagues who were present for the presentation of this petition will recall the engagement that we had at that time with the petitioners themselves. Now, we considered this for the first time back on 25 November, and we agreed to highlight the petition to the chair of the cross-party group for funerals and bereavement, our colleague Mark Isherwood AM, who's taken quite a proactive approach in consulting members of that group, and also to forward the petitioners' comments to the Minister, given the thoughtful and sensitive way in which he wrote to us on this matter. We've now got a further response from the Minister, Leighton Andrews, and his letter is in our public papers. We have sought a further comment from the petitioners, but at the time that the agenda was being pulled together, we hadn't received that, and I don't believe we've had any late correspondence either. In that context, are colleagues happy for me to seek further comment from the petitioners?

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

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

[137] **William Powell:** Because I think it's moving in a positive direction, and I think it would be a pity to stall that. Good. Excellent.

[138] Moving now to agenda item 4.8, P-04-522, Asbestos in Schools, this petition was submitted by Cenric Clement-Evans, and first considered on 10 December 2013. It's got the

support of 448 signatures and has been a very high-profile issue over some time. It's also good to welcome Mr Cenric Clement-Evans to the public gallery today to be part of our deliberations. Now, we considered correspondence on the petition on 21 October 2014 and we agreed to write to the Minister for Education and Skills, Huw Lewis, seeking his views on the further correspondence that we had received, and also, to ask that he keep the committee informed of his consideration of the consultation under way in England, asking him to outline the reasons for not carrying out a consultation at this present time, and also conveying our view that it is an area where Wales should be more proactive, and expressing regret if Wales were to lag behind England in matters around the accessibility of information around the presence and management of asbestos in school buildings. We have now got a response from Huw Lewis, and also further detailed comments from the petitioner. I'd value an indication as to how colleagues would like to take this forward. Bethan Jenkins.

[139] **Bethan Jenkins:** In the second paragraph from the Minister, he says that he is aware that the consultation process ended in March 2014, with regard to the Department for Education, and that no outcome has been published.

[140] 'I therefore do not intend to consider this matter further at this time.'

[141] Well, that was some time ago now, so I wonder whether we can ask the Department for Education when they will be publishing it. It seems to me that the Minister is basing his action on that and, therefore, he's not doing anything in the interim.

[142] **William Powell:** And on the time lag that they've shown, yes.

[143] **Bethan Jenkins:** The petitioner's point about the twenty-first century schools programme being in place since 2011, and us waiting on UK Government action, there seems to be—. The rationale for that doesn't seem to be very clear, so I'd like to go back on that point. But also, there are questions at the end from the petitioner with regard to, again, the responsibility for asbestos policy in schools, and the fact that the Minister is wrong to say that the petitioner is calling for a duty to inform parents; that's not what the petitioner says, so we need to clarify that. For me, I care deeply about this particular issue and I've talked to the National Union of Teachers this week, who are deeply frustrated about the fact that the Welsh Government are not taking responsibility for this. But how long can we go back and forth without the Welsh Government acknowledging their responsibility? So, I'm minded to suggest that we come up with a report that we could potentially debate in Plenary because, while I appreciate the hard work the petitioner has put in, I personally feel that if we had a debate about it and we drew the petition to a close, we could then have an hour-long debate in the Assembly and really, really get to grips with it. I don't see the point in continuously going back and forth, however noble the cause is, in which I personally do see a lot of merit, because it is a massive, massive issue—a ticking time bomb. So, that's where I sit. I think we should go back to the Minister this one last time and then move to just bring all of it together, say what the UK Government has said, what the Welsh Government has said, what our view is and debate that fully in the Chamber.

[144] **William Powell:** Joyce has indicated. I'd be very happy to write to Huw Lewis one final time in that vein. Did I gather from your earlier comments that you'd also favour us writing to Nicky Morgan, the Secretary of State for Education in England, to seek clarity on timescales and so on?

[145] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes, with regard to the second paragraph from the Welsh Minister, saying that they're waiting for that consultation report.

[146] **William Powell:** To gain absolute clarity on that point. I sense Russell is broadly in agreement with that.

- [147] **Russell George:** I agree, Chair.
- [148] **William Powell:** Joyce, you indicated.
- [149] **Joyce Watson:** I don't disagree with anything so far, but if we're going to have a debate, I would have preferred more detailed information, personally. At the moment—
- [150] **Bethan Jenkins:** There's loads of information.
- [151] **Joyce Watson:** I know we've got lots of information, but further clarification of some of the points that have been raised.
- [152] **William Powell:** Hopefully, that will flow from some of the final letters—
- [153] **Joyce Watson:** You know, when we—. It is normal practice that we would have had some evidence sessions where we could have thrashed out some detail before we had a debate. That's all I'm saying. I'm not saying I'm against a debate. I'm saying it's about processes—
- [154] **Bethan Jenkins:** I don't mind either way.
- [155] **Joyce Watson:** That's all I'm saying.
- [156] **Bethan Jenkins:** If we want to have an evidence session, we've got a lot of correspondence.
- [157] **Joyce Watson:** I know we have, but we—
- [158] **Bethan Jenkins:** It's just thinking of a way forward.
- [159] **William Powell:** Yes, yes, understood.
- [160] **Joyce Watson:** I don't disagree with you.
- [161] **William Powell:** We could potentially bring together the two proposals to see if we can—
- [162] **Bethan Jenkins:** We can leave it to the clerking team to have absolute clarity.
- [163] **William Powell:** Yes, absolutely. We need to identify time slots in terms of the forward work programme on the potential for an evidence session, but I think that could, as Joyce said bring some further clarity. Clearly, it is early doors and we need to get those two letters off.
- 10:15
- [164] **Joyce Watson:** I agree.
- [165] **William Powell:** One to Huw Lewis, and one to Nicky Morgan on those distinct points.
- [166] **Joyce Watson:** I agree.
- [167] **William Powell:** Then we'll scope out the potential for an evidence session. I think

that it would certainly be premature to close this petition, because it is very much something that we need to gather our thoughts together on.

[168] **Bethan Jenkins:** It's not that I want to, but what I'm trying to say is: if we're not going to be able to pin down the Welsh Government after all of these letters, how do we best do it?

[169] **William Powell:** No, no. I think that in the form of drawing together a report based on the fullest information that we can gather, that would hopefully trigger a Plenary debate, which I think will bring greater focus on these important matters.

[170] **Bethan Jenkins:** I'm comfortable if Joyce thinks that we should have another evidence session just to investigate it further.

[171] **William Powell:** Yes. Well, I think that we need to investigate that. Absolutely.

[172] **Joyce Watson:** I think so. It's just process. I'm not against the principle.

[173] **William Powell:** Yes; absolutely. Ultimately, the Minister himself and his team, but also Mr Cenric Evans and everybody he would wish to accompany him to such a session—. I'm happy to take that suggestion of Joyce's forward. Excellent. Agreed.

[174] Moving to agenda item 4.9, P-04-581, Opposition to cuts in provision for learners of English as an Additional Language: now, this petition was submitted by Helen Myers and was first considered on 23 September 2014. It's got the support of 37 signatures. We first considered this petition on 23 September 2014 and we agreed to write to the Minister for Education and Skills, and also to the City and County of Swansea council seeking their perspective on the petition. We got a response from the Minister on 14 January, and we've also got a response back from the petitioner. I think that it's correct to say that we haven't as yet heard from Swansea council. So, that's one gap. I think that we need to, maybe, chase that, but also ask the Minister for his perspective on the particular concerns that the petitioners brought forward in terms of EAL provision in Cardiff, Newport and, indeed, Swansea.

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

[176] **William Powell:** Okay. So, if colleagues are happy with that approach, that's good.

[177] Agenda item 4.10, P-04-537, Planting Trees to Reduce Flooding: this petition was submitted by Coed Cadw and was first considered by us on 18 February 2014. It's got the support of 2,708 signatures. We considered correspondence on this petition back on 10 October of last year, and agreed to seek further comments from the petitioner. We've duly received those. Her letter is in the public domain. I think that it would be useful to share those considered comments with the Minister, to see what Carl Sargeant thinks of that. That would, I think, be his first opportunity to comment since taking on that portfolio. So, it would be interesting to see his particular perspective. Are colleagues happy?

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

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

[180] **William Powell:** Okay. Good.

[181] Agenda item 4.11, P-04-575, Call in All Opencast Mining Planning Applications: this petition was submitted by United Valleys Action Group and was first considered on 15 July

2014. It's got the support of 130 signatures. An associated petition relating to a specific application collected in excess of 6,500 signatures. At this point I think I should declare that I have spoken in public on a couple of occasions on this matter, both outside the headquarters of the relevant local authority in Caerphilly and also on the steps of the Senedd in broad support of this matter. I believe that at least one colleague has also had an involvement. Perhaps I could invite Bethan to acknowledge that.

[182] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes, I can.

[183] **William Powell:** Excellent. Okay. We last considered correspondence on the petition, and agreed to await the outcome of the Environment and Sustainability Committee's consideration of its forward work programme. We've now received correspondence from our colleague Alun Ffred Jones regarding the committee's consideration of that forward work programme. Three of us know only too well how busy that committee currently is, and Alun Ffred's response is in the public papers. We've also got a response from the petitioners, who are clearly disappointed with that particular turn of events. I'd appreciate colleagues' thoughts on how best to proceed. Joyce Watson.

[184] **Joyce Watson:** I understand the United Valleys Action Group's disappointment that the Environment and Sustainability Committee can't investigate, but there are three of us on that committee and we've got three Bills going through—

[185] **William Powell:** Yes, and we're under the cosh, I have to say.

[186] **Joyce Watson:** So, we simply haven't got the room, and I think it's to make—. I hope that they'll understand that, rather than the subject matter at hand. But they do say that, you know, we did suggest, as a committee, that the petition go to Plenary and there is the planning Bill actually going through, and whilst they say that the planning Bill actually supports it, it's not actually a planning Bill as yet; it's a consultation process for a Bill to come forward. So, it's about being clear about those things.

[187] **William Powell:** Yes, it's about terminology as well.

[188] **Joyce Watson:** Because it is critically important. But I think, you know, a debate in Plenary; I'm not against that. It's what the petitioners want. I don't know about anybody else around here, but I suspect that might be supported. And then I think we will have to close the petition after that, because we really can't go any further.

[189] **William Powell:** We'd then be at the end of the road. Understood.

[190] **Joyce Watson:** We really have exhausted absolutely everything that we can do.

[191] **William Powell:** Yes. I'd be keen to know of any—. I'm not quite sure—it's obviously not a major issue in Montgomeryshire at this time—whether, Russell, you're broadly supportive of Joyce's proposal, because a couple of us are somewhat conflicted.

[192] **Russell George:** Yes, I'm happy with what Joyce said, Chair.

[193] **William Powell:** You're happy to endorse Joyce's view, which I think the rest of us will be content with. So, if we can pull together the strands of the consideration that's already taken place on this matter, then that would be necessary to formulate a report, which then would be considered by Business Committee. I think it's important for us to acknowledge that it isn't in our gift as to what is subject to Plenary debate, but, obviously, if we submit a report, then, hopefully, Business Committee will look favourably on that proposal. Yes?

[194] **Bethan Jenkins:** Okay, yes.

[195] **William Powell:** Excellent. Good.

[196] Agenda item 4.12, P-04-393, Llanymynech and Pant Bypass Action Group: this petition was submitted by Duncan Borthwick and was first considered by us back on 29 May 2012. It's got the support of 84 signatures. We are familiar with this long-standing problem, which is of real concern to that particular Montgomeryshire community and also the community the other side of the border in Shropshire. We last considered correspondence on this matter on 25 November and we agreed to write to Mrs Edwina Hart, thanking her for her update and also requesting that she keep the committee up to speed as to developments in this area, and also to any response from the Secretary of State in Westminster. We've now received an update, and that includes further correspondence from the Secretary of State for Transport and the correspondence from both Mrs Hart and Mr Patrick McLoughlin is in our public papers. We've asked the petitioners for feedback, and we'd not received it at the time the agenda was pulled together—no late response. So, I think, in the context of this long-standing issue, we should seek their views. Russell has indicated.

[197] **Russell George:** Chair, I was just wondering when we last heard from the petitioner. I'm not asking for detail. Is it weeks or months? I'm just conscious that there are other people involved in this wider—

[198] **William Powell:** Maybe we need to send some feelers out as to whether or not—

[199] **Mr George:** I think months rather than weeks.

[200] **Russell George:** Months. I only say that because maybe I can facilitate a reply, because there are people in the community who are very keen on this petition, but, the petitioner, I'm not quite sure whether he's still involved.

[201] **William Powell:** And that would include members of the community council.

[202] **Russell George:** Absolutely, so—

[203] **William Powell:** I think, between us, we could do some work on that.

[204] **Russell George:** We could do some work on that, yes.

[205] **William Powell:** Okay.

[206] **Russell George:** Other than that, I think, Chair, we should just write back to the Minister and thank her for keeping us updated.

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

[208] **Russell George:** I think, in fairness to the Minister, with all petitions, she does actually keep us updated, and I think we should be grateful for that.

[209] **William Powell:** Absolutely, and we really appreciate that and also the very focused style of correspondence as well, which is consistent with the person we're dealing with. Absolutely. Good.

[210] We move now to agenda item 4.13, P-04-475, which is Wanted—Buses for Meirionnydd. Now, this is one of a group of three that we've been considering together, the second being item 4.14, P-04-513, Save the Wrexham/Barmouth X94 bus service, which was

promoted by Karen Dunford, and, indeed, presented to us during our outreach visit to Prestatyn in late 2013. We first considered that on 11 November 2013. It has the support of 494 signatures. Finally, we have item 4.15, P-04-515, which was by Daniel Thomas, and he was calling for an increase in funding for Welsh bus services. We last considered correspondence on that petition back on 25 November 2014 and agreed to write to the Minister, expressing some disappointment that, uncharacteristically, that response didn't actually address some of the key questions that the committee had with regard to that, and requesting that she focus on that in a more detailed way. We have now received that detailed response that we were seeking from the Minister, and that's included in our public papers. My sense, colleagues, is that it's probably time for us to pull together a draft report on this contentious issue, which is a Wales-wide concern, with a view to constructing a report that we can then consider at an early future meeting. Are colleagues happy with that—

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

[212] **William Powell:** —way forward, because I think we probably do need to make progress?

[213] **Bethan Jenkins:** So long as we know that we've sent it out to petitioners—because I declare that Dan is an intern with me; he put it in independently of the office—

[214] **William Powell:** Yes, understood.

[215] **Bethan Jenkins:** —so that they get time to respond to the letter from Edwina Hart. I know that they've had the letter. Because I think that it's important that they—you know, it's a comprehensive letter that they need to—

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

[217] **Bethan Jenkins:** The other petitioners need to digest it, so that can be formed as part of any—

[218] **William Powell:** Yes, they need to be given due time. They're not professional petitioners; they've got lives as well and that needs factoring in. Absolutely.

[219] **Bethan Jenkins:** Because I think, just for the record, in the letter, Edwina Hart mentions the sector, and I think it would be perhaps interesting to find out what the sector says to the fact that they have higher profits and that they could be putting more into certain routes. We've heard that for the first time from the Minister, so I think that that is something that would be interesting to hear views on. I don't know how you'd—

[220] **William Powell:** No, I think that's right. I mean—

[221] **Bethan Jenkins:** —do that, or if there's a collective body that could—

[222] **William Powell:** Yes, but in drawing together that—

[223] **Mr George:** You'll remember that we took evidence from—

[224] **William Powell:** There was Mr Pocket.

[225] **Mr George:** That's right, yes.

[226] **William Powell:** Was one of the—

[227] **Mr George:** So, I suppose that would be the group we could write to to ask for their views on the Minister's letter.

[228] **Bethan Jenkins:** I don't want to go to all the different providers, you know.

[229] **Mr George:** So, if we go back to the people who gave evidence orally.

[230] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes, I think so. I think that would be useful just to tidy it all up.

[231] **William Powell:** We had two or three evidence sessions in total, didn't we, on that matter? There was the consultative group as well and then Mr Pocket gave advice—

[232] **Bethan Jenkins:** Oh yes, with the bus users—

[233] **William Powell:** Sure, sure, absolutely. Yes, I think we need to go back to them, so then we can elicit a response and that will help to inform the report. Good. Excellent. I think that's a good way forward.

[234] Moving now to agenda item 4.16, P-04-468, Road Safety Concerns A48 Chepstow. This petition was submitted by Chepstow Town Council and was first considered on 19 March 2013, and an associated petition had collected in excess of 1,000 signatures. It calls upon,

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

[236] Now, we most recently considered this petition on 25 November, and we agreed a series of actions, to write to the Minister drawing her attention to the most recent petitioners' letter and also specifically their concerns about the delays that were concerning them about extending the 30 mph speed limit to cross the Wye bridge.

10:30

[237] We've received a response on that specific point from the Minister, and her officials have now completed the speed limit review of all trunk roads. That will be available shortly. Mrs Edwina Hart's letter is in our public papers today. We have asked the petitioners for feedback, but we haven't received it as yet. That may be due to the cycle of meetings of the town council, and I daresay that we'll receive that shortly, if colleagues are content with that approach.

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

[239] **William Powell:** Okay. Excellent. That concludes the agenda up to the end of item 4.

**Cynnig o dan Reol Sefydlog 17.42 i Benderfynu Gwahardd y Cyhoedd o'r
Cyfarfod**

**Motion under Standing Order 17.42 to Resolve to Exclude the Public from the
Meeting**

[240] **William Powell:** I propose that, under Standing Order 17.42, we resolve to exclude the public from the remainder of the meeting for the consideration of our forward work programme.

Cynnig:

Motion:

y pwyllgor yn penderfynu gwahardd y cyhoedd o weddill y cyfarfod yn unol â Rheol Sefydlog 17.42(vi). *the committee resolves to exclude the public from the remainder of the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 17.42(vi).*

Cynigiwyd y cynnig.
Motion moved.

[241] Are colleagues content? Okay. I see no opposition to that. So, we will move into private. Excellent.

Derbyniwyd y cynnig.
Motion agreed.

Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 10:31.
The public part of the meeting ended at 10:31.