

## Agenda – Petitions Committee

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Meeting Venue:

Committee Room 1 – Senedd

Meeting date: 10 June 2024

Meeting time: 14.00

For further information contact:

Gareth Price – Committee Clerk

0300 200 6565

[Petitions@senedd.wales](mailto:Petitions@senedd.wales)

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- 1 **Motion to elect a temporary Chair under Standing Order 17.22 for this Committee meeting and the next meeting on 24 June 2024**
  
- 2 **Introductions, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest**
  
- 3 **New Petitions**
  - 3.1 P-06-1409 Cease all further planning for road charging in Wales  
(Pages 1 – 5)
  - 3.2 P-06-1420 Make this a condition of employment for MSs – they must use only public transport for all travel  
(Pages 6 – 8)
  - 3.3 P-06-1424 Senedd Reform Bill to be amended to include provisions for constituency approval of MS pay increases  
(Pages 9 – 13)
  - 3.4 P-06-1433 Stop the ban on GB News in the Senedd  
(Page 14)
  - 3.5 P-06-1434 First Minister to intervene & save Welsh Duolingo  
(Pages 15 – 19)
  
- 4 **Updates to previous petitions**
  - 4.1 P-06-1350 Re-open Dyfi Ward at Tywyn Hospital now  
(Pages 20 – 27)



- 4.2 P-06-1365 Re-open railway lines to connect the north and south of Wales  
(Pages 28 – 31)
- 4.3 P-06-1369 Use only Welsh names for places in Wales  
(Pages 32 – 35)
- 4.4 P-06-1380 Make Blue badge Applications Lifelong for individuals who have a  
lifelong diagnosis  
(Pages 36 – 41)
- 4.5 P-06-1396 Introduce a vape licence for dedicated vape shops  
(Pages 42 – 46)

### **Papers to note**

- 5 P-06-1291 Hold an enquiry into the corporate takeover of the  
veterinary profession in Wales  
(Pages 47 – 60)

Document is Restricted

## P-06-1409 Cease all further planning for road charging in Wales

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 10 Mehefin 2024  
Petitions Committee | 10 June 2024

Reference: SR24/8458-1

Petition Number: P-06-1409

Petition title: Cease all further planning for road charging in Wales.

**Text of petition:** The National transport plan 2022-2027 indicates the Welsh government are planning to introduce road charging in Wales. We the Welsh public do not support such a strategy and would like the Welsh government to cease all further planning for such a strategy.

### 1. Background

The introduction of road user charging as tool to increase modal shift away from private cars has been discussed extensively. The [Wales Transport Strategy](#) commits to developing a “fair and equitable road user charging” framework with the [National Transport Delivery Plan](#) (NTDP) giving a timescale of 2022-2026 for this work.



The Welsh Government previously commissioned an independent review of road user charging in Wales, which considered the case for and against.

In its 2020 report, 'Covid-19 Recovery: Renewing the Transport System', Campaign for Better Transport calls for “new sources of raising revenue such as workplace parking levies and road use charges to support the shift to sustainable transport”. More recently, the Centre for Cities 2023 report on Understanding transport in Wales' cities recommends the use of a congestion charge or workplace parking levy in Cardiff, and a workplace parking levy in Swansea, Newport and Wrexham to encourage modal shift.

## Welsh Government powers

The Welsh Government currently has powers under the Transport Act 2000 (the 2000 Act) to introduce charging schemes on the trunk road and motorway network in very limited circumstances. The Environment (Air Quality and Soundscapes) (Wales) Act (the Act), passed by the Senedd in November 2023 amends the 2000 Act to enable schemes to be introduced for the purpose of reducing or limiting air pollution.

The Explanatory Memorandum (the EM) to the Act also outlines the Welsh Government's intention to commence relevant provisions under the 2000 Act to enable local authorities (either by themselves, or in a regional partnership) to fully implement charging schemes on local roads.

## Clean Air Zones

The EM refers to the powers being used to create charging Clean Air Zones (CAZs) where drivers of certain vehicles could be charged for entering a defined zone. During the stage four debate on the Act, the then Minister for Climate Change, Julie James MS stated:

...any such schemes would provide a measure of last resort to tackle localised air-quality issues ... Such zones will only be introduced where evidence makes a sufficiently compelling case for schemes to address persistent air pollution problems, and where other means have not been sufficient to deliver compliance.

There are currently seven CAZs in England and four Low Emission Zones (LEZs) (where access to a certain area is restricted for the most polluting vehicles) in Scotland.

Most breaches of statutory air quality limits within the UK are a result of roadside NO<sub>2</sub>, 80% of which comes from road transport. The burden of poor air in the UK is estimated to be the equivalent of between 29,000 and 43,000 deaths per year.

In 2018, the Welsh Government was taken to court for breaches of NO<sub>2</sub> and has subsequently introduced 50mph speed limits at five sites on the trunk road and motorway network. It's previously been reported in the media that CAZs could be introduced at two of these sites (the M4 in Newport and the A740 in Pontypridd) if the reduced speed limit does not lower pollution.

## Plans in Cardiff

There are plans in Cardiff to consider the introduction of a road user payment scheme. Cardiff Council says it “wants to look at a range of schemes including, but not limited to, road user payments, congestion zones, clean air zones and workplace parking levies”. It suggests any such scheme could be implemented from around 2027.

Plans for road user charging were initially proposed in the Council's 2020 Transport White Paper. The proposals prompted the Welsh Government to commission it's independent review of road user charging discussed earlier.

## 2. Welsh Government action

In his letter to the Chair dated 10 May 2024, the Cabinet Secretary for North Wales and Transport, Ken Skates MS says the Welsh Government “have no plans to introduce road user charging on the strategic trunk road network”.

Although a matter for local authorities, the Cabinet Secretary does not refer to the potential introduction of road user charging on local roads.

## 3. Welsh Parliament action

The use of road user charging has been discussed in the Senedd on many occasions, including during scrutiny of the *Environment (Air Quality and Soundscapes) (Wales) Act* as discussed above.

In November 2023 Andrew R.T. Davies MS asked whether the Welsh Government had plans to adopt any of the Centre for Cities report recommendations (outlined earlier in this brief). The Welsh Government responded it had “no plans to take

forward its recommendations on congestion charging, road user charging, speed limits for buses or workplace parking levies”.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

**Ken Skates AS/MS**  
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Drafnidiaeth a Gogledd Cymru  
Cabinet Secretary for North Wales and Transport



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-06-1409  
Ein cyf/Our ref LW/00547/24

Jack Sargeant MS  
Chair - Petitions committee

10 May 2024

Dear Jack,

Thank you for your letter of 18 March, addressed to the previous Deputy Minister for Climate Change, regarding Petition P-06-1409 – Cease all further planning for road charging in Wales.

As we have said in response to questions, we have no plans to introduce road user charging on the strategic trunk road network. I hope this helps to clarify our position.

Powers to implement universal road charging and to retain revenues are held by the UK Secretary of State for Transport.

Yours sincerely,

**Ken Skates AS/MS**  
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Drafnidiaeth a Gogledd Cymru  
Cabinet Secretary for North Wales and Transport

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

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We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.



# Agenda Item 3.2

**P-06-1420 Make this a condition of employment for MSs - they must use only public transport for all travel.**

This petition was submitted by Catherine Williams, having collected a total of 1,359 signatures.

**Text of Petition:**

The current anti-car, anti-motorist agenda is against the wishes of the people of Wales. We need our cars. We need to go faster than 20mph. Public transport in Wales is too slow, not at the times we need it, not to enough destinations, not reliable, not affordable, not viable for taking heavy equipment. MSs need to be forced to use it for every journey so they sort it out for everyone. They should not be allowed to travel by car. They should experience the frustration of Wales' transport system.

**Additional Information;**

The Senedd keeps making it harder for us to live our lives using cars. Their new 20mph scheme is causing businesses to work longer and harder, families spend less time together because parents and children now have to allow extra time to get to work and school. Carers can't see patients for as long. The Senedd says they want to encourage use of public transport, but it's not fit for purpose. People who work odd hours with heavy equipment can't travel by public transport. Rural areas aren't served. There aren't any public toilets at most bus shelters or train stops. MSs need to experience reality of life without a car. The First Minister must not be allowed to have a chauffeur driven car while he preaches cycling.

**Senedd Constituency and Region**

- Bridgend
- South Wales West

**P-06-1420 Make this a condition of employment for MSs - they must use only public transport for all travel, Correspondence from the petitioner, 04 June 2024**

Hi

I don't really have anything to add to what I wrote on the petition, except to say as a musician, I frequently don't finish work until late in the evening and could not possibly do my job by public transport. It isn't even possible to get from Porthcawl to Swansea hospitals via one bus. There are no toilets at most bus stops. Also I am saddened to see the way the big petition to scrap 20mph has been overruled and ignored by Welsh Labour. I have no faith in the democratic process in Wales any more.

Best wishes

# Senedd Reform Bill to be amended to include provisions for constituency approval of MS pay increases

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 10 Mehefin 2024  
Petitions Committee | 10 June 2024

Reference: SR24/8458/14

Petition Number: P-06-1424

Petition title: Senedd Reform Bill to be amended to include provisions for constituency approval of MS pay increases

Text of petition:

We demand that the Senedd develop and institute an approval system for all MS Pay Rises and that the procedure must be incorporated in the "Senedd Reform Bill.

This would mean that once any pay rise is recommended by the Remuneration Board, each Member's Constituents have a binding vote to approve or veto each of their individual representatives' receipt of the agreed pay rise based on their performance as a good incumbent.

This system to be applied to both Constituency and Regional Representatives.

The above-described system would allow the Electorate to give clear and effective feedback to Members by linking their pay rise to their actual performance in serving the best interests of their voters, while also saving money from the Welsh Budget!

Voting could be online to further minimise costs to Welsh budget.



## 1. Members' Remuneration

Pay, pensions and allowances for Members of the Senedd are set by the Independent Remuneration Board of the Senedd. The Board was established by the [\*National Assembly for Wales \(Remuneration\) Measure 2010\*](#).

The Board publishes a Determination at the start of each Senedd term to set out the rules about what Members are entitled to claim for, which is then reviewed annually.

The [\*Determination on Members' Pay and Allowances 2024-25\*](#) took effect on 1 April 2024.

Chapter 3 of the Determination sets out Members' remuneration.

A Member's salary is currently £72,057 plus any additional office holder salary they are entitled to, for example, if they are a Minister or the Chair of a Committee.

The pay of Members and office holders is adjusted in April of each year by the change in the [\*Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings\*](#), annual gross median earnings for full-time employee jobs in Wales over the previous 12 months. This adjustment can be no lower than zero per cent and no higher than three per cent.

The Board may make no more than one determination on Members' salaries in each Senedd term, except in exceptional circumstances.

The Board is conducting a thematic review of [\*Members Remuneration and Personal Support\*](#) as part of its [\*strategic work programme\*](#) in the Sixth Senedd. This will inform its annual reviews of the Determination and the new Determination for the Seventh Senedd.

## 2. Senedd Cymru (Members and Elections) Bill

The [\*Senedd Cymru \(Members and Elections\) Bill\*](#) was introduced on 17 September 2023.

The Bill addresses some of the recommendations made by the [\*Special Purpose Committee on Senedd Reform\*](#), which reported in May 2022.

The changes proposed by the Bill include:

- Replacing the constituency and regional model with larger multi-member constituencies;
- Increasing the number of Members of the Senedd from 60 to 96;
- Introducing a closed-list proportional electoral system to elect Members;
- A return to the Senedd being elected for four-year terms;
- Enabling the Senedd to elect a second Deputy Presiding Officer;
- Increasing the maximum number of Welsh Ministers from 12 to 17 (with potential to increase to 19);
- Putting provisions in place for reviews of Senedd constituency boundaries to be undertaken; and
- Making it a requirement for candidates to, and Members of, the Senedd to be registered to vote at an address in Wales.

The Senedd voted by 43 to 16 to approve the Bill at its **Stage 4 proceedings** on 8 May 2024.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

**Mick Antoniw AS/MS**  
**Y Cwnsler Cyffredinol**  
**Counsel General**



**Llywodraeth Cymru**  
**Welsh Government**

Eich cyf/Your ref: P-06-1424  
Ein cyf/Our ref CG/00049/24

Jack Sargeant MS  
Chair  
Petitions Committee

08 May 2024

Dear Jack,

Thank you for your letter of 19 March regarding petition P-06-1424 with regards to the amendment of the Senedd Reform Bill to include provisions for constituency approval of MS pay increases.

The Welsh Government has not sought to amend the Senedd Cymru (Members and Elections) Bill to include provisions for each member's Constituents have a binding vote to approve or veto an agreed pay rise based on performance. The Senedd Cymru (Members and Elections) Bill is a Bill of the Senedd, and I have looked to constructively engage with amendments put forward to the Bill throughout its legislative scrutiny. However, it is important in a representative democracy that a Member can express their opinion, including when it may be unpopular, without fear or favour. I would wish to avoid any circumstance in which different Members could feel that they had different levels of freedom to express their political opinion, by dint of their personal financial situations.

I also note that the provisions in the Senedd Cymru (Members and Elections) Bill will increase the frequency of elections to the Senedd, thereby providing more opportunities for democratic renewal, and increasing the accountability of Members by allowing the electorate to more frequently express their opinion on Members' performance.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the petition.

Yours sincerely,

**Mick Antoniw AS/MS**  
**Y Cwnsler Cyffredinol**  
**Counsel General**

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

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**P-06-1424 Senedd Reform Bill to be amended to include provisions for constituency approval of MS pay increases – Correspondence from the Petitioner to the Committee, 03 June 2024**

The argument made by Mick Antoniw AS/AM;

"However, it is important in a representative democracy that a Member can express their opinion, including when it may be unpopular, without fear or favour. I would wish to avoid any circumstance in which different Members could feel that they had different levels of freedom to express their political opinion, by dint of their personal financial situations.!

This is simply a way of saying Assembly Members should not be held accountable for their actions! This gentleman clearly doesn't grasp that the most important word is *representative* and demonstrates he clearly subscribes to the Political theory of "I am not here to do what my voters **WANT** but what **I** believe is best for them"!

The whole point of a *Representative Democracy* is that the Representative is Democratically elected to Represent the constituents who elected them and their wishes as their representative! It is not to choose an Oligarch who then proceeds to advance his own beliefs in preference to those of his constituents. As such AMs are the employees of their constituents and as such my amendment simply introduces "performance related pay" why should AMs be able to ignore or overrule the desires of their constituents and still automatically receive any financial increment that's going! In any other job if you do a bad job you don't get a raise and no-one in the Senedd is in such financial straits that the refusal of an annual increment is going to cause them excessive hardship!

"I also note that the provisions in the Senedd Cymru (Members and Elections) Bill will increase the frequency of elections to the Senedd, thereby providing more opportunities for democratic renewal, and increasing the accountability of Members by allowing the electorate to more frequently express their opinion on Members' performance."

The above is a very poor substitute for the provisions of my Amendment!



# Agenda Item 3.4

## **P-06-1433 Stop the ban on GB News in the Senedd**

This petition was submitted by Mark Griffiths, having collected a total of 309 signatures.

### **Text of Petition:**

How can the Senedd Commission simply ban a news broadcaster's show being shown in the Senedd? This is how Dictatorship starts.

GB news – some will like it, others won't – but in my opinion at least they offer a genuine debate with all sides of the argument being invited.

### **Senedd Constituency and Region**

- Cardiff West
- South Wales Central

# First Minister to intervene and save Welsh Duolingo

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 10 Mehefin 2024  
Petitions Committee | 10 June 2024

Reference: SR248622-3

**Petition Number:** P-06-1434

**Petition title:** First Minister to intervene and save Welsh Duolingo

**Text of petition:** Duolingo will no longer update its Welsh course from the end of Oct 2023, with no further development.

This petition is to call for the First Minister to personally intervene with Luis von Ahn, the CEO of Duolingo, with the aim of saving the Welsh course.

## 1. Background

The Welsh Government's ambition is to see the number of Welsh speakers in Wales increase to 1 million by 2050, which would almost double the current number of Welsh speakers in Wales. The 2021 Census results showed that 538,300 people in Wales aged 3 and over reported they could speak Welsh. This is a decrease of around 23,700 people since Census 2011.

Expanding Welsh-medium provision and opportunities to learn and use the language are key themes in the Cymraeg 2050 Welsh language strategy. It notes



of the Learn Welsh provision, which is provided predominantly via the National Centre for Learning Welsh, that the:

sector has an important contribution to make to our aim of achieving a million Welsh speakers. It will do so by enabling adults of all ages and abilities to improve their skills, resume their study of Welsh or learn afresh to give them the confidence to be able to use Welsh in the workplace, socially or within the family.

The Welsh Government directly funds the National Centre for Learning Welsh. The Centre (which runs its programmes under the banner – Learn Welsh) distributes funding to 11 course providers across Wales.

However, there are also other ways to learn Welsh which complement the National Centre for Learning Welsh's provision. Say Something in Welsh (SSiW), a Welsh company, developed an online learning platform and Duolingo, an app-based global learning platform provide other ways to learn Welsh. Both SSiW and Duolingo also work in partnerships with the National Centre for Learning Welsh to enable access and consistency across Welsh learning provision.

## 2. Duolingo

Duolingo is a US educational technology company established in 2011 and launched in June 2012. It offers online courses through its apps in more than 40 languages, including Welsh. The company was established by Professor Luis von Ahn, who is its current CEO.

It's reported that Duolingo generated revenue of \$531 million (US Dollar) and made \$16.1 million profit in 2023. It is estimated to have over 500 million registered users and around 37 million active daily users worldwide. Learners can use Duolingo for free, although a premium subscription called Super Duolingo costs £5 a month, which provides ad free content and additional applications and services.

### 2.1. Development of Duolingo in Welsh

In 2016, a group of volunteers – led by a Welsh language tutor, Richard Morse – began on the work to develop and maintain the Welsh language course on Duolingo. This arrangement remained in place until 2021 when responsibility transferred to the National Centre for Learning Welsh. According to the Welsh

Government's final report on the [Welsh language technology action Plan](#), the National Centre for Learning Welsh "looked after the content of Duolingo Welsh courses" between November 2021 and November 2023. It stated that:

in that time the Centre ensured that the Welsh Duolingo course was aligned with the Centre's 'Sylfaen' and 'Mynediad' courses so the Centre's learners could use Duolingo as a resource to review and practise their Welsh.

The Centre had a pre-existing relationship with Duolingo after establishing a [new partnership in 2017](#) to share its learning resources with the language App. This, the Centre noted, would ensure that "the Welsh version of Duolingo's free language-learning app uses the same language patterns and vocabulary taught on Welsh for Adults courses".

## 2.2. Duolingo pauses further development

In [October 2023](#), Duolingo announced that it would pause development of the Welsh course on its app, as part of a wider review of its courses. According to this [BBC Wales news article](#), Duolingo would be "channelling its resources into courses that were more popular among users". This was despite the fact that Duolingo had stated in [2020 that the Welsh language was considered the fastest growing in the UK](#), with an increase of 44% in new learners compared to 2019 figures. It was also deemed the ninth most popular language to learn in the UK of all languages available on the app.

Responding to the announcement, Richard Morse, who led the group of volunteers that developed the Welsh course on the App, told [Nation Cymru](#) that:

Duolingo is 'sunsetting the development of the Welsh course' (and many others). But they have promised to keep the course available.

It will no longer be possible to edit the course after this month so please note anything that possibly needs to be changed, ideally with a screenshot.

## 3. Welsh Government action

Following the announcement by Duolingo, the [Minister for Education and Welsh Language at the time, Jeremy Miles MS](#), wrote to [Luis von Ahn](#), CEO of Duolingo to

express concern about the decision. In his letter, dated 25 October 2023, the Minister stated:

Whilst I appreciate that the Welsh from English course will remain on the Duolingo platform, I fear the decision not to update its content will be detrimental in the longer term as the course could start to lose its relevance for learners. I am requesting therefore that Duolingo reconsider its decision to pause development of the Welsh course.

The Minister noted in a [response to the Culture and Welsh Language Committee](#) that Luis von Ahn responded to the Minister's concerns on 29 October stating that the:

decision to pause the development of new content of the Welsh course had not been an easy one.

Nevertheless, the Minister noted that Duolingo was keen to ensure that it had a "continued role to play in helping languages like Welsh thrive", and had asked members of his team to "reach out" to the Minister's office to "see how Duolingo could continue to support Cymraeg 2050".

Whilst the partnership is between the National Centre and Duolingo, Welsh Government officials met with Duolingo's Head of Government Affairs in November 2023. The Minister noted that Duolingo highlighted the:

significant challenges it faces in developing new content and that, whilst it was pausing the development of new content, **the door is not closed on future developments**. Duolingo was also keen to emphasise that its experience of working with the Centre as a partner organisation has been a positive and constructive one, and praised the commitment shown by the Centre to developing the Welsh Duolingo course and to increasing the number of users.

The Welsh Government was, in the short-term, to continue its discussions with Duolingo to understand the challenges, and where practical help could be provided. It was also looking to the long-term, to see what role Duolingo might have as a "resource to support teaching and learning as people progress along the continuum".

Regardless of the issues with updating the course, Duolingo noted that it was committed to "ensure that the Welsh course will always be available free of charge to users". Dialogue between [Duolingo, the National Centre and Welsh](#)

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Government officials will also continue to “allow us to review if updates to the Welsh course are required in the future”.

## 4. Welsh Parliament action

Following news of Duolingo’s decision to pause further developments and updates to the Welsh language course on its app, the Chair of the Culture and Welsh Language Committee wrote to the then Minister for Education and Welsh Language, Jeremy Miles MS. The Chair expressed concern about the decision and its impact on the platform’s users, and asked for a response to a series of questions.

The Minister responded on 30 November 2023 confirming that “the Welsh course will still be available on the Duolingo platform and will remain free for all learners to use”. The Minister also stated that meetings with the company since the announcement had led to it agreeing on a “number of actions to ensure that the company’s commitment to the Welsh language continues”.

During Plenary on 25 October 2023, Samuel Kurtz MS asked the then Minister about Duolingo’s decision:

It was announced that the popular language app Duolingo is stopping several language courses, including Welsh. And whilst the course will not be removed, it does mean that the content will not be updated or added to... Your department has been in touch with the company. May I ask what proposals the Welsh Government has made, and whether any response has been received from Duolingo management?

The Minister to the question noting that:

Duolingo is one of the means that people use to access the Welsh language—one of the many means, of course—and it continues to be an attractive route, for reasons we could fully understand. I have written to Duolingo, asking them to reconsider the decision that they have taken. But as the Member mentioned, the Welsh language won’t be removed from the platform—it will remain there. And as the Member may recall, the Welsh language is one of the few examples—perhaps the only example—where it’s not volunteers that create the content for the app. **For some time now, the National Centre for Learning Welsh has been responsible for developing the content of the app in the Welsh language, and they have built on the excellent work done by volunteers**

**prior to that.** So, in light of that, my understanding is that there has been more and swifter development for the Welsh language on the app than in some other languages. So it's possible that the impact will be less detrimental on the Welsh language than on some other languages. **But I would like to see Duolingo reversing its decision,** structure in place that is funded in Wales and is ready to continue to develop content on the app.

On 6 December 2023, Andrew R.T. Davies MS tabled a written question for the Minister for Education and Welsh Language at the time about any further planned talks with Duolingo;

Does the Minister have further talks planned with Duolingo about maintaining support for the Welsh language Duolingo course, following the increase in users taking up the course?

The Minister responded on 14 December 2023 noting that:

A meeting was held with Duolingo on 13 November 2023, where the company confirmed that the Welsh course will continue to be available on the Duolingo platform and will remain free for all learners to use.

We have also agreed to meet regularly to review Duolingo's contribution to the Cymraeg 2050 Strategy.

On 30 January 2024, the Minister during a debate in Plenary on the Welsh Language Commissioner's Annual Report reflected further on Duolingo's decision not to continue updating the Welsh course, stating that:

In general, I would be surprised if 99 per cent of the people who use the [Duolingo] app realised that there was a difference. So, we do need to take some comfort from that. It's not great, but the Welsh language is treated differently from the major languages, but this is part of a broader programme by Duolingo. In terms of the Welsh language, one of the encouraging things, I thought, was Duolingo's response to the campaign by Welsh speakers. They hadn't seen anything of the like before, so it does demonstrate the passion for learning Welsh.

On 13 March 2024, Andrew R.T. Davies MS tabled another written question for the Minister at the time about the actions taken to "ensure that any errors on Duolingo are corrected and released to the 700K users who learn Welsh using it?"

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The Minister responded, noting that:

Concerns about errors in course content have recently been submitted by individuals directly to Duolingo. I understand that Duolingo has considered all of the matters raised but has **concluded that only a few of the requests for revisions were due to valid errors**. They are in the process of making those revisions.

Duolingo has indicated that it is **willing to correct errors** in the Welsh course. Any concerns should be raised, either **directly with Duolingo** or through the National Centre for Learning Welsh, for it to consider.

During a recent Culture Committee evidence session, Tom Giffard MS asked the Chief Executive of the National Centre for Learning Welsh about Duolingo's decision:

Around six months ago, Duolingo said that they weren't going to continue updating the app. What impact has that had to date in terms of your efforts?

In response, the Chief Executive noted that:

The good news is that the course still exists. So, the Welsh language Duolingo course is still there, and many people are turning to it. What ended was the updating of the course. So, to be entirely honest, I **wouldn't anticipate there being a huge impact as a result of that**. The resource is still available and people are turning to it in exactly the same way. We have aligned some of the Duolingo course with our courses, so people can take advantage of both. But, again, I would encourage people to **use Duolingo to add to what we do**, in order to practice their skills and help them to use the Welsh language. So, no huge impact, if truth be told.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.



**Jeremy Miles AS/MS**  
**Gweinidog y Gymraeg ac Addysg**  
**Minister for Education and Welsh Language**



**Llywodraeth Cymru**  
**Welsh Government**

Delyth Jewell AS  
Committee Chair  
Culture, Communications, Welsh Language,  
Sport, and International Relations Committee  
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30 November 2023

Dear Delyth

Thank you for your letter of 25 October asking for further information following recent reports that Duolingo will not continue to edit or update the Welsh course from October 2023. You also wrote to me on 22 November seeking an update following our discussions with Duolingo; I am pleased to update you following the meeting on 13 November in this response.

It is important to note at the outset that the Welsh course will still be available on the Duolingo platform and will remain free for all learners to use. Since starting their partnership with Duolingo in January 2022, the National Centre for Learning Welsh (“the Centre”) has ensured that the content on Duolingo is matched to the Centre’s curriculum for its foundation and entry level courses. This means that learners can use Duolingo as a valuable resource and practicing tool alongside courses they undertake with the Centre. The Welsh course on Duolingo is comprehensive and this is supported by the high number of active users. I am pleased, therefore, that the course will continue to be available to learners to support their Welsh language learning.

From November 2023, Duolingo is pausing work on all its courses that are developed with partner organisations such as the Centre; focussing for the time being on developing language courses in-house using their own staff. As developing content requires a significant number of specialist staff, Duolingo is focussing on the larger languages first.

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay  
Caerdydd • Cardiff  
CF99 1SN

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:  
0300 0604400

[Gohebiaeth.Jeremy.Miles@llyw.cymru](mailto:Gohebiaeth.Jeremy.Miles@llyw.cymru)  
[Correspondence.Jeremy.Miles@gov.wales](mailto:Correspondence.Jeremy.Miles@gov.wales)

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

I sent a letter to Dr Luis von Ahn, founder and CEO of Duolingo on 25 October, shortly after becoming formally aware of their plans, asking him to re-consider the company's decision to suspend the developments on Duolingo's Welsh language content. That letter has been published on the Government's website:

<https://www.gov.wales/letter-duolingo>

I received a reply from Dr von Ahn on 29 October stating that the decision to pause the development of new content of the Welsh course had not been an easy one. However, Dr von Ahn stated that he believes the company has a continued role to play in helping languages like Welsh thrive and noted that he had asked members of his team to reach out to my office to see how Duolingo could continue to support Cymraeg 2050.

Due to the National Centre's formal contract with Duolingo, all interaction regarding the Welsh course prior to the announcement was between those two parties. Officials from the Cymraeg 2050 Division met with Duolingo's Head of Government Affairs on 13 November. During the meeting Duolingo highlighted the significant challenges it faces in developing new content and that, whilst it was pausing the development of new content, the door is not closed on future developments. Duolingo was also keen to emphasise that its experience of working with the Centre as a partner organisation has been a positive and constructive one, and praised the commitment shown by the Centre to developing the Welsh Duolingo course and to increasing the number of users.

I am pleased to say that through this meeting we have forged a positive relationship with Duolingo and have agreed on a number of actions to ensure that the company's commitment to the Welsh language continues. In the short-term we have agreed to have an on-going discussion to better understand the challenges that Duolingo face in developing new content and to see if there is any practical help we can offer to facilitate this work in the future. We have also agreed to look at ways in which we might work in partnership with Duolingo the Centre to continue to increase the number of people that use the Welsh course as a learning aid and to promote progression opportunities for learners who have come to the end of the Duolingo course.

In the longer-term we have agreed to meet regularly as we develop the proposals in the Welsh Education Bill and a single continuum for learning Welsh, and to consider if Duolingo has a role as a resource to support teaching and learning as people progress along the continuum.

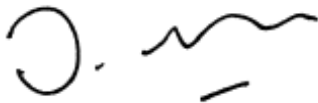
Duolingo has also committed to share their expertise to help with our mission to engage with young learners and offer free Welsh lessons to 16-25 year olds. A significant proportion of Duolingo's users worldwide are within that age bracket and I am pleased, therefore, that we can draw upon their experiences as we look for the best ways to attract young people to learn Welsh.

Duolingo also reaffirmed its commitment to ensure that the Welsh course will always be available free of charge to users, and that it is willing to have a regular dialogue with us and the Centre which will allow us to review if updates to the Welsh course are required in the future.

The Centre are satisfied with the current Welsh course on Duolingo corresponds approximately to A2 on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The Centre has worked with Duolingo to develop this content so that it is a valuable teaching aid for its learners, which can help them along their journey to becoming Welsh speakers. At this stage it is not possible to determine the financial implications of developing new content, but both Duolingo and the Centre have indicated that developing the Welsh course to intermediate level (up to B2 on the CEFR continuum) would require a significant amount of additional resource in terms of staff time.

As outlined above, we are keen to maintain a dialogue with Duolingo to better understand the challenges it faces and to ensure that any future developments support the creation and delivery of a continuum for Welsh language learning.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large 'J' followed by a series of wavy lines and a short horizontal stroke at the end.

**Jeremy Miles AS/MS**  
Gweinidog y Gymraeg ac Addysg  
Minister for Education and Welsh Language



**P-06-1434 First Minister to intervene & save Welsh Duolingo –  
Correspondence from the Petitioner to the Committee, 05 June 2024**

Diolch am eich ebost.

Thank for your your email.

I very much welcome the news that my petition will be discussed by the Pwyllgor.

I wish to state that I received a very favourable response to my petition, with a large number of people commenting that they were disappointed to learn that the Duolingo Cymraeg course would no longer be updated. I am a learner, with a very modest social media following. I genuinely believe that if I had a larger reach on social media, there would have been a much stronger response to the survey.

As an adult learner, I have become very passionate about Cymraeg, and I aim to be able to live my life through the media of Cymraeg where possible.

I feel that Cymraeg should not just survive, but it should be able to thrive, with the residents of Cymru, and those who identify as Cymry (wherever they live), being able to converse in our beautiful and historical language with confidence. This confidence will only be developed through exposure to the language, and its use.

Each and every person who signed the petition can (and should) be counted towards the 1m Cymraeg speakers target, and we as a nation should be doing everything that we can to support them in their learning journeys.

I note and commend Mr Miles' comments in relation to the provision of free Cymraeg learning for those aged between 16 and 25 years of age. Though I feel that we must recognise that there will be a large number of people in this age range who are not in formal education, and for whom their only access to learning Cymraeg comes through a mobile app.

In addition, there are adults who are outside of this age range, who will be looking for any reliable resources to (1) supplement their learning, or (2) will use a mobile app as their one and only resource.

The risk we (collectively, as native speakers, learners and everyone in between) have is that for a massive company like Duolingo to stop updating a very popular resource, is that it could lead to learners stopping their learning altogether. I feel that this could then have very serious implications for the 1m speakers target.

The demand for this resource is there, we just need for it to be supplied (and maintained) so that it does not stagnate.

Any support or intervention that can be provided or made in order to continue the development of a Cymraeg Course will undoubtedly go some way to helping meet this demand.

Diolch. Thank you.

# Agenda Item 4.1

## **P-06-1350 Re-open Dyfi Ward at Tywyn Hospital now**

This petition was submitted by Jane Eleanor Seddon Barraclough, having collected, 1,314 signatures online and 4,214 signatures on paper, making for a total of 5,528 signatures.

### **Text of Petition:**

We are devastated by Betsi Cadwaladr's decision to 'temporarily' close the inpatient ward at Tywyn Hospital. We want it reopened now.

The action to close this ward without any consultation or notice is premeditated and lacks transparency; it is a misappropriation of our community's public service.

Please show us support by signing the petition. Diolch am eich cefnogaeth.

### **Additional Information:**

Staff and patients were told on Thursday that they would be moved to Dolgellau hospital by Tuesday.

No notice, no consultation, no discussion, no rationale.

If staff didn't want to move to Dolgellau they would not have a job. Tywyn is a new hospital which has excellent equipment and facilities. Our hospital has superb staff working there. Our relatives and friends have been provided with the best possible care you could wish for.

The health board have said that it is unable to recruit sufficient staff to fill posts. We want to see what evidence the health board have to show that they ever actively recruited staff for our hospital.

This hospital is a vital resource in our community. Please support our cause.

### **Senedd Constituency and Region**

- Dwyfor Meirionnydd
- Mid and West Wales



Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol  
Betsi Cadwaladr  
University Health Board

Bloc 5, Llys Carlton, Parc Busnes Llanelwy,  
Llanelwy, LL17 0JG

-----  
Block 5, Carlton Court, St Asaph Business  
Park, St Asaph, LL17 0JG

Jack Sargeant, MS  
Chair - Petitions Committee,  
Welsh Parliament,  
Cardiff Bay,  
Cardiff,  
CF99 1SN

**Ein cyf / Our ref:** CS/EG(CE24/0513)

**☎:** 01745 448788 ext 6382

**Gofynnwch am / Ask for:** Emma Hughes

**E-bost / Email:** [emma.hughes19@wales.nhs.uk](mailto:emma.hughes19@wales.nhs.uk)

**Dyddiad / Date:** 10<sup>th</sup> May 2024

Dear Jack,

**RE: Petition P-06-1350 Re-open Dyfi Ward at Tywyn Hospital**

The Committee has asked for an update on two areas:

**1) Update on recruitment efforts, including efforts to recruit out of area (within the UK).**

The Dyfi inpatient ward at Tywyn Hospital remains closed until there is a safe level of staffing to ensure patient safety, quality and standards of care in line with the Nurse Staffing Levels (Wales) Act (Sept. 2016). It has been a significant challenge to recruit despite numerous attempts.

Efforts to recruit continues and posts have regularly been advertised on a national basis via NHS Jobs. A targeted recruitment campaign on social media has continued and career opportunities have been advertised locally with the help of the Tywyn community.

Two internationally trained nurses have been successfully recruited to posts at Tywyn Hospital and I am glad to report that they have recently completed required competencies to practice as a registered nurse in the UK. However, to allow the inpatient Dyfi Ward to re-open, with safe care to Level 1-2 patients in 1-8 beds 24 hours per day, a further 1.72 WTE Registered Nurse (B5) need to be recruited. To manage patients of a higher acuity, or to open further beds, additional staffing resource would be required.

I am very pleased that an additional two internationally trained nurses have been appointed and arrangements for these two nurses to travel to the UK are in progress with a view to filling the remaining vacant posts in Tywyn hospital. We are yet to have a firm timeline and they will of course need to complete the required competencies upon arrival.

The Committee may also be interested in some of the other services and actions the health board are taking to ensure there is a breadth of health services available to the people in the Tywyn region.

---

**Cyfeiriad Gohebiaeth ar gyfer y Cadeirydd a'r Prif Weithredwr / Correspondence address for Chairman and Chief Executive:**  
Swyddfa'r Gweithredwyr / Executives' Office  
Ysbyty Gwynedd, Penrhosgarnedd  
Bangor, Gwynedd LL57 2PW

**Paec Page 51** [www.bcu.wales.nhs.uk](http://www.bcu.wales.nhs.uk) / **Web:** [www.bcu.wales.nhs.uk](http://www.bcu.wales.nhs.uk)

Mae Swyddfa'r Prif Weithredwr yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg a bydd yn sicrhau y darperir ymateb yn Gymraeg heb oedi.  
The Chief Executive's Office welcomes correspondence through the medium of Welsh and will ensure that a response is provided in Welsh without incurring a delay

- The Tuag Adref (Homeward bound) service in Tywyn supports the re-ablement of patients and facilitates discharge from hospital to home earlier and support to avoid admission to hospital where possible. Since the service commenced in May 2023 there have been 95 referrals into the service. In both July 2023 and January 2024, the number of calls carried out exceeded 450 calls. Positive feedback has been received from staff and patients regarding this service.
- Since opening the treatment room in June 2023 there has been 1340 attendances recorded. The number of patients attending the treatment room remains over 120 per month. A number of different types of cases are seen in the treatment room, these include dressings, blood tests and catheter management. This service continues to expand as training and competencies are developed. The service supports existing services e.g. District Nursing, MIU and GP practice to reduce waiting times, increase capacity and improve patient experience. The treatment room enables patients to access care closer to home.
- Following a workshop with staff in Tywyn Hospital a Wellbeing Hub was developed which runs on a weekly basis on a Thursday 2-4pm. Feedback for the wellbeing hub has been positive and it has been key in supporting people who are lonely. A number of guest speakers have attended the wellbeing hub including;
  - Falls prevention team
  - Carers Outreach Service
  - Care and Repair Cymru
  - Tan y Maen (Resources for mental health and wellbeing)
  - Music therapy
  - Memory clinic sessions

We continue to be committed to working with the residents and representatives of Tywyn. Additional beds at Dolgellau Hospital have been opened in the interim period. The health board held a further workshop on 26 April 2024 with local stakeholders to look at developing a sustainable service model for Tywyn and the surrounding area. Attendees including members of the hospital action group, Tywyn town Council, Senedd member, local authority, neighboring health board, and staff from the hospital and the local care homes. It was a very productive workshop and the agreed actions are currently being collated.

### **1) Details of the reason for the Health Board's decision to withdraw the right for public questions to be asked at general meetings.**

The health board's regular board meetings are held in public, consistent with all NHS bodies in Wales and in accordance with the Public Bodies Act 1960.

The Board is committed to exploring meaningful engagement with the public where there are opportunities to raise issues and suggestions in a number of ways. In September



2023 the health board invited feedback from the public on how the Board could more effectively respond to their questions and also seek feedback on a more effective process with LLAIS and other partnership organisations. After receiving feedback, the approach now includes:

- Emphasising through Board meetings and on the BCUHB website that questions are welcome at any time. Board meetings are just once every two months and give limited time to fully consider the matters raised through questions raised to the Board. Questions can be submitted to the Chair, Chief Executive or through the contact details that are available on the website at any time and they will receive a response.
- A Citizen's Experience Report has been developed in conjunction with LLAIS. The aim of this report is to provide a regular North Wales population voice to the Board Table at meetings. It is compiled based on experiences shared by patients, carers, correspondence with their advocates and also seeks to highlight any emerging trends. This allows many voices and matters to be highlighted, rather than one issue. The first report was presented in January 2024 with the second due in May 2024.
- Community Engagement Events are now held regularly across the health board geography where the population has the opportunity to meet the Board in a community location close to them. This gives the opportunity to receive updates on matters related to their part of North Wales and raise issues which are important to them. This level of engagement contributes to understanding how to improve the services we commission and provide. Since their launch in January 2024 the health board has held four of these events. Details of further events will be available on the website.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Carol Shillabeer'.

---

**Carol Shillabeer**  
**Prif Weithredwr/Chief Executive**

2<sup>nd</sup> June 2024

Glan Eifion  
Seaview  
Borth-Y-Gest  
Porthmadog  
Gwynedd LL49 9TP

Mr Jack Sargeant MS  
Chair –Petitions Committee  
Senedd Cymru.  
Cardiff  
CF99 1SN

Tel : 01766 513 337  
Mob: 07968 437 060  
e-mail: tom@communityhospitals.net

## **P-06-1350 Re-open Dyfi Ward at Tywyn Hospital**

Dear Mr Sargeant,

The petitioners have invited me to forward further observations to your Committee from the Community Hospitals Association. This follows the petitioners' receipt of a copy of the letter of 10<sup>th</sup> May 2024, from the Chief Executive of Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB), to the Petitions Committee.

I have to say that the Community Hospitals Association was deeply saddened by Ms Shillabeer's letter and by the state of healthcare provision in South Meirionnydd that it depicts.

The essence of Ms Shillabeer's reply was that although some 15 months have passed since BCUHB started their recruitment to fill departing staff's posts, and over 12 months since the community started their petition to the Senedd, restoration of necessary healthcare services has not been achieved. There has been a year of failings by the local management recruitment staff.

Successive Health Ministers have recognised the deficiencies that have long existed in BCUHB's healthcare service delivery, which is why BCUHB has been so frequently assigned "in special measures". I am sure that you personally, from your Senedd postbag, are aware of the significant number of residents in North Wales who have suffered from, or are suffering still, because of substandard BCUHB healthcare services.

I am equally aware, from the many anecdotes that we receive from the community hospitals network, and from reading reports from LLAIS, of the deficiencies in the BCUHB service. Most regrettably, the Coroner confirms that in the BCUHB area, much too frequently an inadequate healthcare service leads to tragedy.

One has to have sympathy for Ms Shillabeer! I am sure that she wishes to improve the quality of healthcare delivered in North Wales. Her predecessors, as Chief Executives, discovered that quite a few local BCUHB management teams underperformed, and that some of them were incompetent. Her predecessors failed to make all the necessary changes and Ms Shillabeer is now tackling the task.



The failure of the local BCUHB management team to recruit the necessary staff for Tywyn hospital's Dyfi ward in over a year, is an unacceptable performance. BCUHB is receiving assistance with rectifying some of its performance problems under special measures. After the long delay in filling the vacant Tywyn posts, I would have expected the Minister's office to have offered assistance to BCUHB from a competent recruitment officer. Such an action could have resolved the recruitment failings and provided badly needed training to local BCUHB management staff.

#### COMPARISONS

A short while ago, NHS England announced a 'year on year' increase of over 6% in the number of nurses employed in the English NHS, a real increase of 21,000. There is evidence that nurses living in urban areas, especially those with families, can be attracted to move into rural areas from major urban centres. The Community Hospitals Association has seen several such recent successes, including in Bishops Castle, where the community hospital serves part of Powys. Surely, with help, BCUHB can do better.

#### IMPACT ON RESIDENTS' HEALTH.

Healthcare Inspectorate Wales did review the Tywyn Hospital Dyfi ward in November 2017 and concluded that "the services provided safe and effective care". Currently the Dyfi ward is closed and hence residents are denied that "safe and effective care". Since their November 2017 visit, HIW does not appear to have evaluated the remaining healthcare services in the Tywyn area and hence has not commented on the general deficiency of healthcare service that is now provided in the area.

I can find no evidence that Public Health Wales (nationally or the service within BCUHB) has assisted either. The health and wellbeing status of the residents of South Meirionnydd does not appear to have been assessed by PHW. Demographically, we know that there is a high elderly cohort within the South Meirionnydd population. How well, or badly, they are faring seems to have been ignored.

We trust that your committee can find some method of encouraging NHS Wales to live up to its responsibilities and to restore service to the Tywyn area. We seek your committee's continued support.

Yours sincerely

Tom Brooks

**Committee Member for Wales**  
**Community Hospitals Association**

## P-06-1350 Re-open Dyfi Ward at Tywyn Hospital now - Correspondence from the Petitioner to the Committee, 05 June 2024

### P-06-1350 reopen Dyfi Ward at Tywyn Hospital now

The latest reply to the petitions committee, received in May from Carol Shillabeer, the current Chief Executive for Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, is unconvincing. It does not answer many of the matters raised by the Tywyn Hospital Action Group in all four of their previous letters to the Petitions Committee. Looking at the minimal progress the Health Board have actually achieved in the past year, the outlook for health services in the Tywyn area is bleak. The Health Board have serious capability issues within their senior management teams, as their history shows. They have been shown to lack honesty and integrity and are unable to manage our public health service efficiently or openly. We know this from our experiences, from our investigations, from talking to staff and we have set out the evidence in our previous replies. The very fact that the Board closed the opportunity for the public to ask questions at their general meetings, replies to which need to be accessible and open in the public domain, proves that they fear scrutiny.

News of the recent major scandals concerning contaminated blood and post office services has shown that far too many public services are managed in a defensive and covert manner, where the interests of covering up poor management and decision making is at the expense of employees and the public. The Board has no interest in ensuring that they retain their staff and staff have left or are leaving. For example, Carol Shillabeer fails to mention that two international nurses, who currently work in Dolgellau Hospital, are terminating their contracts with BCUHB early, to go and work in Scotland. She states that the Board is holding 'workshops' where staff and the public have offered up ideas for furthering health services in Tywyn. These ideas are hardly ever realised. The board continue to promote peripheral services, such as a monthly 'wellbeing hub'. The services which were provided in 2017, such as the inpatients ward and out of hours care, remain closed. The closing the ward for patients and relatives has been a cause of severe upset and concern.

Many matters raised in the Action Group's last reply have not been answered. This includes, 'BCUHB had been considering other plans for our hospital. ulterior plans that the health board have for Tywyn Hospital need to be made public. On 28/04/23 BCUHB notes from a meeting '*Enhanced Services Action Plan*' show that '*End of life and hospice care to be considered as an option for beds at Tywyn Hospital, and 28/04/23 - to discuss Hospice Dewi Sant and Marie Curie Service in the area to follow up on previous conversations, status in progress*'. Considerable funding from donations was provided to enable the hospital to be refurbished, and the hospital is part of the public health service meeting the needs of all the people of Tywyn and surrounding areas. Additionally, the appropriate use and management of donations is a serious concern, because in March 2023, only a few weeks before its closure, over £10,000 from the Tywyn Hospital donations fund was authorised to pay for an updated patient kitchen for the inpatients ward, when in February 2023, the health board had begun planning its closure.'

There have been many opportunities for the Board to open the inpatient ward. It chooses not to open it. It chose to close it in the first place, based on a rationale which has been shown to be flawed. Please refer the previous reply about the dishonest statements it provided to the public about closing Tywyn Hospital.

The group continues to endeavour to demonstrate in our replies to the Petitions Committee how BCUHB have mismanaged our facilities and health service. There is no reinforcement of the standards and attitudes required and the continued obfuscation is a serious matter of concern. More than one year on, the Health Board do not want to reopen the inpatients ward.

As stated in previous replies 'BCUHB need to be accountable for the decisions they make on providing healthcare in the Tywyn area. We trust that the petitions committee appreciates the legitimacy of our campaign and uses its influence to ensure that our health services are reinstated to a high standard. We have a right to an efficient and effective health service, which puts patients first'.

Yours sincerely

Jane Barraclough

Tywyn Hospital Action Group

# Agenda Item 4.2

## P-06-1365 Re-open railway lines to connect the north and south of Wales

This petition was submitted by Elfed Wyn ap Elwyn, having collected a total of 12,936 signatures.

### **Text of Petition:**

Travelling between the North and the South of Wales is always a long journey, especially when using the railway. If a person is traveling between the Bangor and Cardiff, one has to go outside of Wales on rail to be able to complete the journey.

Wales needs to be connected internally by rail. The plan to do this would be to reopen the Bangor – Afon-wen and Aberystwyth to Carmarthen lines, and integrating them with the Cambrian railway, and the line from Carmarthen on to Cardiff

### **Additional Information:**

What this petition is specifically asking for is:

- A Scoping and Feasibility study for the Bangor to Afon-wen Line
- Commitment to spend any funding for the railways from Westminster on reinstating the railway lines
- Develop a blueprint of the rail route between Bangor and Cardiff on the proposed route
- Look at other routes within Wales that would be beneficial on a national and local level to reopen

If we are looking to develop the infrastructure in Wales, and to use a greener method of travel, reinstating and reopening this railway would be a step in the right direction, and would be beneficial for all the communities situated along the railway, as well as for Wales as a nation.

### **Senedd Constituency and Region**

- Dwyfor Meirionnydd
- Mid and West Wales

**Ken Skates AS/MS**  
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Drafnidiaeth a Gogledd Cymru  
Cabinet Secretary for North Wales and Transport



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-06-1365  
Ein cyf/Our ref LW/02314/23

Jack Sargeant MS  
Chair - Petitions committee

07 Mai 2024

Dear Jack,

Thank you for your letter of 22 September 2023 regarding Petition P-06-1365 – “Re-open railway lines to connect the north and south of Wales.” Please accept my apologies for the delay in replying to you.

The rail infrastructure needed to reopen these lines is not a devolved matter, and is therefore the responsibility of UK Government.

Transport for Wales are working on options to improve transport links between north and south Wales, including looking at how to protect potential travel corridors along the western coast of Wales and studying strategic bus links. As part of this work they are undertaking an initial feasibility study on the route between Bangor and Afon Wen, which will identify the best alignment for a connection and current constraints. This work is being carried out in collaboration with Siân Gwenllïan MS, the Plaid Cymru lead designated member, as part of the Co-operation Agreement between the Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru.

Yours sincerely,

**Ken Skates AS/MS**  
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Drafnidiaeth a Gogledd Cymru  
Cabinet Secretary for North Wales and Transport

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:  
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[Correspondence.Ken.Skates@gov.wales](mailto:Correspondence.Ken.Skates@gov.wales)

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

**P-06-1365 Ail-agor llinellau rheilffordd i gysylltu gogledd a de Cymru -  
Gohebiaeth gan y Deisebydd, 03.06.34**

Diolch yn fawr am rannu'r llythyr gyda mi sy'n egluro safbwynt y Llywodraeth.

Dwi'n hapus iawn i glywed bod astudaieth dichonoldeb yn cael ei wneud gan y Llywodraeth gyda cydweithrediad Sian Gwenllian. Beth yw amserlen yr astudiaeth, a phwy mae'r Llywodraeth yn ei ddefnyddio i'w gynnal?

Ond, er hyn, mae'n allweddol bod astudiaeth yn cael ei wneud o'r rheilffordd o Fangor i Afon wen a hefyd Aberystwyth i Gaerfyrddin yn ei gyfanrwydd, yn hytrach na gwneud dau astudaieth ar-wahan, er mwyn deall gwir effaith cael newid fel hyn ar Gymru. Yn ogystal a hynny mae angen i'r Llywodraeth ymrwymo i fynd ati i'w hailagor, ac i gyd-weithio gyda San Steffan i ddatganoli'r grymoedd dros seiliau'r rheilffyrdd i'r Senedd.

Atodaf wybodaeth ychwnegol gan y grwp ymgyrchu Trawslink Cymru, sy'n egluro'r pwysigrwydd i ailagor y rheilffyrdd hyn.



By virtue of paragraph(s) vi of Standing Order 17.42

Document is Restricted

# Agenda Item 4.3

## **P-06-1369 Use only Welsh names for places in Wales**

This petition was submitted by Mihangel ap Rhisiart, having collected a total of 1,397 signatures.

### **Text of Petition:**

In a spirit of respect for Wales as its own nation with its own history and culture; and as a mark of acknowledgement concerning some of the cultural oppression that has historically been inflicted on Wales and her language and culture.

English names might initially continue to be used by some out of habit but in all official avenues and in both spoken and written media, the original Welsh names for places in Wales should be used.

### **Additional Information:**

Following moves concerning the names of Eryri and Bannau Brycheiniog, we consider it an opportune moment to move to using only the Welsh names for places in Wales.

### **Senedd Constituency and Region**

- Neath
- South Wales West

**Jeremy Miles AS/MS**

**Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros yr Economi, Ynni a'r Gymraeg  
Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Welsh Language**



Eich cyf/Your ref P-06-1369  
Ein cyf/Our ref JMEEW/05188/24

**Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government**

Jack Sargeant MS  
Chair - Petitions committee  
Senedd Cymru  
Cardiff Bay  
CF99 1SN

21 May 2024

Dear Jack,

Thank you for your further letter of 11 April, concerning the petition which calls for only Welsh names to be used for places in Wales.

Your letter request details regarding the work of the linguistic infrastructure unit in relation to safeguarding Welsh place names, and about the research commissioned to understand more about how Welsh place names are changing in Wales.

We set out our initial steps in relation to Welsh place names in our [Welsh Language Communities Housing Plan](#), and last year I launched our [Welsh Linguistic Infrastructure Policy](#), which outlined the role of a new linguistic infrastructure unit in the Welsh Government which, as well as coordinating work on dictionaries, terminologies, corpora etc, is responsible for developing steps to safeguard Welsh place names.

Both documents above set out initial steps in relation to Welsh place names, in line with our commitments in the Programme for Government and the Cooperation Agreement with Plaid Cymru. The priority was to obtain data to drive policy developments. That's why, in both the *Welsh Language Communities Housing Plan* and *Welsh Linguistic Infrastructure Policy*, we refer to the importance of commissioning research to learn more about how and why place names are changing.

### **Place names research**

In early 2023 a research project was commissioned by Cadw, in conjunction with officials from the Cymraeg 2050 Division, with the aim of identifying where, how and why changes to names are taking place, how many names are changing or have recently changed, and the nature of these changes. The purpose is to make informed recommendations on possible options to safeguard those Welsh language place names that may be under particular threat.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

The following types of place names are being considered:

- Property names — including houses, farms and other buildings
- Business names
- Development and associated street names

Topographical names — for natural features in the landscape – were also a part of the initial research project. However, since a suitable methodology could not be identified within the time and resource available, only limited attention has been given to topographical names to allow the focus to be given to areas where policy could be more effectively deployed. The research has followed a three phase approach. Phases one and two have been completed, namely:

Phase One – *Understanding the current landscape.*

- a literature review to help understand the associated factors with name changes.
- understanding the threshold for Ordnance Survey and digital maps to change names appearing on official maps, and how the data is gathered to achieve this.
- contacting other key stakeholders working in the field to establish their understanding of the current issues and any operations.

Phase two – *Data gathering:*

- Obtaining quantitative data for name change applications from all local authorities.
- Interviews with all local authorities to understand:
  - Their policies or approach for responding to name change applications and how their policies are operated in practise.
  - Their policies or approach for naming new developments/streets.
  - Whether the current policies are effective in safeguarding Welsh-language place names.
  - Their perception of their role and its effectiveness in safeguarding Welsh place names, including any differences that may exist between the discharging of the role between individuals and developers.
  - Other evidence around place name changes.

Phase three (currently in its final stages) – *Further investigation of unofficial naming practices within 7 selected communities*

- Further investigations including surveys in 7 locations, a pan-Wales digital dwelling name survey and data science analysis to compare official addresses with displayed names and to establish changes over time.

Officials received a copy of the interim report, which described initial findings from phases one and two, in early February 2024. The interim report has not been published as it is anticipated that data collected during the third and final phase will have a bearing on conclusions across the entirety of the report. The research findings will inform our direction of travel in terms of next steps in this area, including those set out in the Welsh Language Housing Plan and Welsh Linguistic Infrastructure Policy. We anticipate that the results will be presented in a final report for publication by the end of June.

### **Other steps led by the Linguistic Infrastructure Unit**

As we await the research results, we're exploring what we can do in the short term to better safeguard Welsh names. This includes:

- Considering the use of covenants to safeguard house names.
- Considering the use of conveyancing packs as a way to raise awareness of the worth of certain names.
- We have developed guidelines concerning how to use Welsh names on social media and websites – through [Pack Page 64](#) Welsh or English; we're also considering

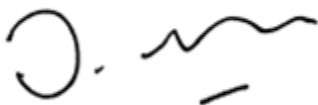
developing guidelines to help people collect Welsh names that do not already appear on a map, and to record them. The aim will be to share these guidelines widely with other organisations and bodies, so that they can adapt them for their own purposes.

- We've established a Local Authority Place Names Forum with Gwynedd, Môn / Anglesey, Ceredigion and Sir Gâr / Carmarthenshire local authorities, with the aim of:
  - sharing information
  - pinpointing gaps in how we all deal with place names, and opportunities to work together
  - supporting each other to find practical solutions to prevent Welsh names from being displaced
  - sharing good practice, so that examples of what works in one organisation can be adopted, where appropriate, in another.

Education and awareness raising is also a part of the picture. Engendering pride, so that people want to keep or bestow Welsh names on their houses, farms or any other property. In this context, another intervention is the Cultural Ambassadors Scheme. The *Welsh Language Communities Housing Plan* contains a number of interventions to support Welsh language communities which have been affected by second homes, such as communities taking ownership of schemes according to their needs. During the public consultation on these interventions, it became clear that voluntary cultural ambassadors were called for, and that specialist training was needed on how to represent cultural and social history.

On St David's Day I launched the Cultural Ambassadors Scheme, which is a part of the Wales Ambassador platform. Its aim is to encourage individuals, businesses and third sector organisations across Wales to undertake the modules and to become a part of our network, which shares the information they've learned with visitors, neighbours and the wider community. Under this scheme, we're developing a module about place names. At present, we're writing silver and gold level content, meaning that information about how to collect place names will be available shortly.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'J' followed by a wavy line and a short horizontal stroke.

**Jeremy Miles AS/MS**

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros yr Economi, Ynni a'r Gymraeg  
Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Welsh Language

# Agenda Item 4.4

## **P-06-1380 Make Blue badge Applications Lifelong for individuals who have a lifelong diagnosis**

This petition was submitted by STAND NW CIC, having collected a total of 1,618 signatures.

### **Text of Petition:**

Not all disabilities are the same, some are life long, meaning they do not change over time.

Unfortunately, current guidelines require individuals with lifelong diagnoses, which include learning disabilities or profound and complex needs, to reapply for a blue badge every three years. This process can be very frustrating and time consuming for both individuals and their caregivers and focus heavily on the negative aspects of an individual's abilities.

### **Additional Information:**

The Equality Act 2010, states, a disability is a physical or mental condition that has a substantial and long-term impact on a person's ability to do normal day-to-day activities, it states it allows for the better or more favourable treatment of people with impairments based on the evidence given, to provide equality of opportunity.

We believe that the process should be updated to better support those with disabilities by making life easier for those with lifelong conditions.

We are therefore proposing a change, we are calling for the Welsh Government to change their current process when applying for blue badges, to give what's right and to support disabled people.

The change would be, that if a person applies for a blue badge due to a lifelong medical condition that is not expected to change, and their supporting health notes confirm this, then a blue badge should be granted for their lifetime.

### **Senedd Constituency and Region**

- Vale of Clwyd
- North Wales



Eich cyf/Your ref P-06-1380  
Ein cyf/Our ref KSNWT/05298/24

Jack Sargeant MS  
Chair - Petitions committee

09 May 2024

Dear Jack,

Thank you for your letter of 8 April regarding the petition to make blue badges lifelong for individuals who have a lifelong diagnosis.

As my predecessor said in previous correspondence, blue badges are valid for three years. This length of award is set out in legislation and is common across the UK. However, applicants who will permanently meet the eligibility criteria can be awarded a badge on a 'not for reassessment' basis, which means that when re-applying in three years' time they will not need to provide any additional medical evidence to support their application, only proof of identity and residency. These are reasonable and proportionate requirements on applicants and necessary to prevent fraud and misuse.

Regarding the training of desk-based assessors, this is a matter for local authorities which have the statutory duty to administer the Blue Badge scheme in Wales. The Welsh Government does not ordinarily keep records on the training and qualifications of local authority staff.

There is no statutory appeals process against a decision made by a local authority on a blue badge application. The Welsh Government does not have the legal power to intervene in the assessment of individual cases. Our guidance to local authorities recommends they have a clear policy on how they will review blue badge decisions should they be challenged by an applicant. Applicants who are unhappy about the way the process was conducted should be made aware of the local authority's standard complaints procedure, in the same way that any other user of the local authority's services would be informed of their right to complain.

As noted in previous correspondence, over the last 20 years the Blue Badge scheme has been subject to several reviews and as a result we have made changes in conjunction with stakeholders. We are committed to ensuring that the Blue Badge scheme remains robust and fair, and that the process of obtaining a badge is as efficient as possible.

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[Correspondence.Ken.Skates@gov.wales](mailto:Correspondence.Ken.Skates@gov.wales)

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

I hope this information is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ken', with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke above the letters.

**Ken Skates AS/MS**

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Drafnidiaeth a Gogledd Cymru  
Cabinet Secretary for North Wales and Transport



**P-06-1380 Make Blue badge Applications Lifelong for individuals who have a lifelong diagnosis - Correspondence from the petitioner to the Committee, 3 June 2024**

Good morning

Thank you for your email

Feedback from our members is that Ken is repeating the same information as his predecessor, and not listening to the reasons why the petitions was drawn

Please see response below to Ken Skates

*As my predecessor said in previous correspondence, blue badges are valid for three years. This length of award is set out in legislation and is common across the UK. However, applicants who will permanently meet the eligibility criteria can be awarded a badge on a 'not for reassessment' basis, which means that when re-applying in three years' time they will not need to provide any additional medical evidence to support their application, only proof of identity and residency. These are reasonable and proportionate requirements on applicants and necessary to prevent fraud and misuse.*

As stated previously, we agree that implementing robust procedures to prevent misuse and fraud is essential for the integrity of any system. However, it's important that these measures are designed with sensitivity and precision to ensure that they do not unfairly impact individuals with lifelong conditions. Such individuals require support and understanding, not scrutiny that may add to their challenges. A balanced approach that protects resources while respecting the rights and needs of all individuals is crucial for a fair and just system.

Clarity in language is also crucial, especially in the application processes. If a term such as 'not for reassessment' effectively means a 'life award', it should be stated explicitly to avoid confusion. For individuals with lifelong conditions, it's important that the application process is streamlined to reflect the permanency of their situation. It should be clearly communicated that individuals with lifelong conditions are not required to complete a full application form, a separate, simplified application form for identification purposes could significantly ease the burden on applicants, ensuring that they provide only the necessary information. This would also improve the efficiency of the application process.

*Regarding the training of desk-based assessors, this is a matter for local authorities*

*which have the statutory duty to administer the Blue Badge scheme in Wales. The Welsh Government does not ordinarily keep records on the training and qualifications of local authority staff.*

Previously Lee waters stated that officials held a training workshop in 2020. If you do not keep records where has this data come from?

The administration of Blue Badges is a responsibility that requires a comprehensive understanding of various disabilities which includes severe cognitive impairments. It is concerning to hear that desk-based assessors, many lack training in this area. Disability and Equality **Awareness** training is not enough. Appropriate training is crucial to ensure that assessors can make informed decisions when issuing Blue Badges. Previously we have raised a suggestion of centralising the system which could lead to consistency across Wales. The Welsh Government needs to ensure that **every** local authority provides equitable and suitable services to individuals with disabilities, regardless of their location.

*There is no statutory appeals process against a decision made by a local authority on a blue badge application. The Welsh Government does not have the legal power to intervene in the assessment of individual cases. Our guidance to local authorities recommends they have a clear policy on how they will review blue badge decisions should they be challenged by an applicant. Applicants who are unhappy about the way the process was conducted should be made aware of the local authority's standard complaints procedure, in the same way that any other user of the local authority's services would be informed of their right to complain.*

The Blue Badge scheme provides a vital service for those with mobility issues and severe cognitive impairments, ensuring easier access to parking spaces. However, concerns have been raised about the need for an appeal process, given the lengthy application procedure and decisions made by assessors who may not have expertise in disabilities. It's important that the criteria for eligibility, which includes the consideration of severe cognitive impairments, are applied consistently and fairly.

There is an assumption that if you don't need a wheelchair, you haven't got a disability.

Is there sufficient awareness of severe cognitive impairment?

What is being done to raise the profile of this?

Lee Waters stated previously, 'eligibility for the Blue Badge Scheme is based on mobility and not on specific medical conditions', this shows the need for the current process to be reviewed considering conditions that come under Severe Cognitive Impairment.

*As noted in previous correspondence, over the last 20 years the Blue Badge scheme has been subject to several reviews and as a result we have made changes in conjunction with stakeholders. We are committed to ensuring that the Blue Badge scheme remains robust and fair, and that the process of obtaining a badge is as efficient as possible.*

As noted in previous correspondence

*"Lee Waters says 'We remain committed to ensuring that disabled people who experience the greatest barriers to mobility can use the Blue Badge scheme for on-street parking concessions and that the process of obtaining a badge is as efficient, effective and stress-free as possible'.*

"There are so many holes in the current process and too many inconsistencies for it to be efficient or effective and it is this that is costing the taxpayer, and the current process is certainly not stress free.

Also please look at the benefits a blue badge brings to an individual or family and not look at it as it's a privilege to have one

Please see the information previously submitted supporting this petition

Many thanks

# Agenda Item 4.5

## **P-06-1396 Introduce a vape licence for dedicated vape shops**

This petition was submitted by Claire ford, having collected 541 signatures online and 8,494 signatures on paper. Making for a total of 9,035 signatures collected.

### **Text of Petition:**

Lack of training and a licence can cause unsuitable products and illegal devices to be sold, which can be dangerous and hinder the chances of becoming a non-smoker. There are also fake and illegal vape products that are not compliant with UK regulations in circulation, which is a danger to the public. Licenced premises authorised to sell vape products should lower this as they buy directly from licensed suppliers, so they won't be fakes, bought cheaply on the black market to make a quick buck.

### **Additional Information:**

We want Vape products to be sold by licensed vape dedicated shops with trained staff who specialise in vape products, all aspects of vaping, NRT (Nicotine Replacement Therapy), including product knowledge to enable them to work with the public to ensure a more successful quit smoking rate.

Currently Vape shops are compliant and meet Trading Standards requirements to trade. Many staff are qualified NCSCT Non Smoking Practitioners to ensure a working knowledge of all NRT and advise accordingly

Parents are unhappy as some retailers are selling vape products to under 18s. This hinders the vape industry as they work towards a smokefree Wales. Vaping is a stepping stone from smoking, it's not something they should be introduced to at such a young age.

With such a high success rate in the vaping industry helping people quit smoking, the industry needs to be recognized and a licence needs to be introduced to ensure safety is met and vapes are sold responsibly.

### **Senedd Constituency and Region**

- Blaenau Gwent
- South Wales East



Eich cyf/Your ref P-06-1396  
Ein cyf/Our ref EM/05219/24

Jack Sargeant MS  
Chair  
Petitions Committee  
Senedd Cymru

[petitions@senedd.wales](mailto:petitions@senedd.wales)

09 May 2024

Dear Jack

Thank you for your further letter of 2 April addressed to Jane Bryant MS, Minister for Mental Health and Early Years regarding Petition P-06-1396 - Introduce a vape licence for dedicated vape shops. I will reply as this matter falls to my portfolio.

Like cigarettes, shisha can contain nicotine, tar, carbon monoxide and heavy metals such as arsenic and lead. These toxins place shisha smokers at risk of developing heart and circulatory disease, cancers, respiratory disease and respiratory infections, and nicotine addiction. Smoking shisha is not less harmful than smoking cigarettes.

In the previous response to the Petitions Committee about licensing it was stated we are committed to taking all measures necessary to address the devastating health impacts of tobacco in Wales and to do all we can to prevent young people from using vapes, this includes looking further at the evidence of other tobacco and nicotine products.

The Tobacco and Vapes Bill was laid before Parliament on 20 March 2024. The Bill will create the first smokefree generation by introducing measures to stop people from ever starting smoking and becoming addicted to tobacco products, as well as stopping vaping products from being deliberately targeted at children.

The core measures in the Bill will:

- a. Make it an offence to sell tobacco products to anyone born on or after 1 Jan 2009;
- b. Make it an offence to sell all vaping products (nicotine and non-nicotine) to anyone under 18;
- c. Provide powers to reduce the appeal and availability of vapes (nicotine and non-nicotine) to children;
- d. Strengthen enforcement activity to support implementation of the above measures and broadening the offences for which fixed penalty notices can be used.

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[Correspondence.Eluned.Morgan@gov.wales](mailto:Correspondence.Eluned.Morgan@gov.wales)

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

All tobacco products, like heated tobacco, cigars, and shisha are included in this legislation because all tobacco products are harmful and there is no safe level of tobacco consumption. Drawing the line at tobacco verses non-tobacco offers a clear distinction that regulators, businesses and the public will understand.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. E. Morgan'.

**Eluned Morgan AS/MS**

Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Iechyd a Gofal Cymdeithasol

**P-06-1396 Introduce a vape licence for dedicated vape shops –  
Correspondence from the Petitioner to the Committee, 20 May 2024**

Thank you for info

That response is honestly nothing to do with licensing for vapes. Vapes are not even subject to the age going up to be able to buy them like normal tobacco cigarettes are going up a year each year. That's not happening with vapes so even more reason to make sure vapes can only be sold by dedicated vape shops that won't serve underage

Regards

---

Hi

Just to add a bit more information after the last correspondence. I understand the Welsh government's response is more created to smoking and upping the age each year so eventually no one will be of age to buy cigarettes.

This isn't the case for vapes you have to be 18 to buy them and that's ongoing. More ppl will turn to vaping as the age rises for tobacco cigarettes. This being the case it's imperative that they source them from dedicated vape shops to ensure they are getting their products that are UK compliant and not being sold to the underage.

With disposables being banned this will increase the black market into stepping into kits and liquids. The black market was full of fake disposables so it's natural it will continue but with other products. This was already the case before disposables came on the market.

It's very important that we separate the 2 things. Vaping is the number one product that is helping people quit smoking and is being recommended by health professionals. I'm aware it's not classed as a medical nrt but this doesn't alter the fact of the high success rate.

Vape shops have in-house training and for the most have passed NCSC training as non-smoking practitioners and it's important underage ppl are not served these products.

The only way for proper accountability is to have dedicated shops licensed to sell these products and not every shop. This will help trading standards know exactly who is selling products and easier to shut down other shops that are profiting and putting people's health at risk by selling unregulated products and also serving underage people.

Regards

## Response to Competition Marketing Authority's market investigation - veterinary services

### **My background.**

My professional life has been spent working in social services, local government, and the NHS. As well as various roles for the Anglican Communion in Cheshire, Barking and Dagenham and Liverpool. I have had a lifelong love of Cats which has led to over forty years of sharing my home and heart with various domestic felines all of whom were rescues.

I greatly welcome your report Veterinary Services for Household Pets in the UK. I thought I was well versed in the veterinary corporate stakeholder company's shenanigans but even I admit to being shocked seeing it all together in your 60 page document. Two thoughts come first:

1: How did the CMA let this happen? Yes, it happened on your watch.

2: What on earth has the "regulator" of the profession been doing during this time? Apart from rocking up at Westminster at regular intervals asking for a new Veterinary Surgeons Act?

One very important fact your report omitted was that here in Cymru and in England under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 an owner of an animal can be prosecuted if they fail to get their animal veterinary treatment. A piece of legislation I, like many others campaigned long and hard for.

### **My experience.**

When I came back home to Cymru in 2005 I had one Cat, Benny followed by a succession of foster cats and kittens from various rescues. When you have an animal, a good honest qualified vet is essential. I chose the only veterinary practice in Caernarfon. Cibyn is still the only VP there. Caernarfon is a close-knit community and those who worked within that practice were part of that community too. It was a small animal practice which was one of the reasons I chose it, I made the right choice. Due to an experience I had with a veterinary practice in Merseyside I knew I was fortunate. The staff there were dedicated, passionate and were led by an amazing couple who were both veterinary surgeons. Caernarfon is a holiday hot spot, but our local politicians will tell you it also has some of the most deprived wards in Cymru.

In 2010 after I lost Benny who received exceptional care, as I did too, I adopted Rosa, a cat who had been abandoned, abused and clearly by her behaviour and physical clues regularly beaten. In 2013 Gracie joined our family, a failed foster. I, of course in a heartbeat chose Cibyn Veterinary Clinic for them too.

A few years later I learnt the practice was up for sale and I understood the reasons why. The corporate stakeholder companies are like the grim reaper, they wait in the shadows, their timing is perfect. So, in 2014 Independent Vetcare Evidensia stepped in. I was assured by one of the veterinary surgeons, a brilliant one, that nothing would change for Rosa, Grace, and I.

As your report mentions the practice name never changed and to add to the confusion one of the former owners who was an eye specialist stayed practising at the clinic. My Rosa was euthanised at my request on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2018 at a practice here on Ynys Môn that I had gone to for a second opinion. This practice is owned by CVS.

I later discovered from reading her clinical notes (the unaltered version) test results and diagnostics



show that she may not have been FIV+. This analysis was also confirmed by one registered veterinary nurse and three separate veterinary surgeons whom I trusted with Rosa's full clinical notes and diagnostics. This condition was the reason Independent Vetcare Evidensia refused Rosa the medication she badly needed. Rosa's clinical notes also state "asks a lot of questions"!

I attach a page of Rosa's clinical notes (Appendix 1) which show the last consultation I had at Cibyn Veterinary Clinic on 10/11/2018, I have removed two veterinary surgeon's names and a receptionist too. Here you see upselling at its finest on that Saturday morning - I saw a vet who had never seen Rosa or I, but I had met her before.

- 1: Rosa was never a member of IVC's "health plan"
- 2: Rosa was prescribed a year's course of flea and worm treatment.
- 3: Rosa was also injected with a drug branded as Convenia.
- 4: Rosa was prescribed a bottle of Metacam. Which I took home.

All of the above is false. But as I later discovered pie charts, performance related pay including how quickly surgical procedures are done. Non-Disclosure Agreements (for Clinical Directors) are all part and parcel of working for a private equity shareholder veterinary company.

It warms my heart to be able to tell you the veterinary surgeon who saw my Rosa and I that day in 2018 found a way out of the corporate machine and now leads the clinical team in the only Independently owned and run veterinary practice in Gwynedd and Ynys Môn. A close family member of theirs and long-time friend of mine told me they had left "because IVC was asking them to do awful things they didn't agree to. But they are so much happier now where they work".

When I made that appointment the same day Rosa and I were seen. The receptionist failed to tell me that because it was a Saturday morning the consult fee would be twice the normal charge. But if I had worked for IVC maybe I would have been overworked enough to forget to pass that information on.

While I accept it was my decision to request euthanasia for Rosa, I will never be convinced I had all the correct information to make an informed decision. The loss of a family member is devastating for anyone. To have to accept you sent them to their death in error is simply indescribable. I tried to take my own life shortly after I discovered that. I could no longer live in Dyffryn Nantlle in the shadow of Yr Wyddfa because at every turn I saw my beautiful Rosa. I have been left with PTSD, recurring nightmares, the list is endless. After a surgical procedure under GA at Ysbyty Gwynedd in Bangor in April 2020 a nurse asked me about my daughter Rosa. In their recovery room as I came round, I screamed her name apparently asking her if she knew where she was.

#### **After Rosa.**

A very dear friend of mine known as Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Arch to me, once told me "Linda if you see someone trying to jump in a river it may be a good idea to look up stream to see the reason why".

Since I lost my Rosa that is what I have tried to do. I learnt all I could about the big six corporate shareholder veterinary companies. Spent hours on the phone talking to veterinary professionals at their wits end. When SARS Covid allowed, I travelled UK wide including Scotland, Northern Ireland, and the Republic of Ireland meeting with vets from veterinary schools, referral practices in my attempt to understand. Then other families started to contact me too. In the words of Beverley Cuddy, Editor of

Dogs Today magazine “We are all members of a club we didn't want to join”. Slowly I have gained the trust of many veterinary professionals still left at the coal face. Many have become valued friends.

Just a fortnight ago a highly educated, informed politician the leader of Plaid Cymru in Westminster accused me of “vet bashing”. That hurt because of the regard I have for Liz Saville Roberts AS/MP. I can understand but I find it hard to condone those that have chosen not to somehow recognise what is going on. Even though the veterinary corporate's work is on a need-to-know basis. I know from experience, a clinical director, a registered veterinary nurse, even a practice manager working in the same veterinary practice are never given all the information. The veterinary corporates are about as transparent as a block of concrete.

### **RCVS - Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966.**

As your report mentions the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons – RCVS claim to be the statutory regulator. They are by their own admission a self-regulating body. Run by legal experts who have little experience of animal welfare. Many including the eifa committee of the UK Government have repeatedly stated they are not fit for purpose. The college's relationship with the veterinary corporate's is almost incestuous. The attached screenshot (Appendix 2) from the biggest corporate stakeholder company Independent Vetcare Evidensia demonstrates this perfectly too.

In a freedom of information request the RCVS informed me that last year they received £2,389,169 from the corporate stakeholder companies (Appendix 3).

I also firmly believe that the RCVS are more likely to take disciplinary action against professionals that practice independently rather than working for a corporate. The RCVS have informed me they keep no such data in regards ratios. With £1 billion pounds of profit in 2023 (IVC) am sure the corporates can afford top notch legal teams in stark contrast to your average Independent practice here in rural north Wales or the south Wales valleys. The British Veterinary Union - part of Unite has gone on public record in regard to the RCVS stating that they “function as an old boys club”. Followed by “there is a strong distrust in the ability of the RCVS to perform its duty as a regulator”.

In paragraph 26 your report correctly states that the RCVS's remit is in relation to individual practitioners not in relation to practice owners e.g. the corporate's. However, in the RCVS legislation reform consultation of 2020/21 the plans to give the RCVS this power was dropped by them.

As a gauge of how those on the front line in the profession feel may I suggest you look at the RCVS's own data in regard to voting for elections and responses to consultations etc. Your report is correct when it states this is a profession in crisis. Which clearly is multi factorial and hasn't happened overnight.

I have deep reservations that a new Veterinary Surgeons Act, will help matters at all. It's my strong belief that if this legislation is revised. It will only add to the pressure of an already overstretched, demoralised, depleted workforce. Plus, do very little to help us or our family members.

I was horrified but not surprised when Dr Malcolm Morley on behalf of the British Veterinary Association - BVA stated that on the back of your previous findings they hope a new VSA would now become a reality. Rather simplifying and in my view conveniently ignoring the vast majority of the issues you raised. Could this have anything to do with the fact Dr Morley works for a corporate stakeholder veterinary company?

## **Animal Welfare**

I have always been deeply concerned in regard to the impact the policies of the corporates are having on animal welfare. The cost-of-living crisis together with the fall out after SARS Covid have just compounded matters. This varies because of demographics but here on Ynys Môn and in north Wales it is a dire situation. The phone calls I take for Rosa's mobile vets only serve to confirm this.

The effect the present situation has on the rescue sector is immeasurable, every indicator backs this up. From abandonment, animals being signed over, to rescues having to close. Even the larger corporate style charities are pooling their resources or in the case of Cats Protection temporarily withdrawing their neutering voucher scheme. Citing raising veterinary fees and demand as the problem.

Mrs Eileen Jones CEO of Friends of Animals Wales, stated in a recent submission to our Senedd Cymru:

"The condition of the animals coming direct from homes is mainly dire. Many owners are handing in because they are unable to fund ongoing health conditions or animals have become unwell or injured and owners cannot pay for treatment".

Paragraph 18 of your report states that the corporates have strategies to keep everything in house including within their own referral practice's. I have spoken to clinical staff who have told me that the corporate's keep a record of how many times as VS in a first opinion practice fails to refer to a second opinion practice within their company. They live in fear of being disciplined and in fact often are.

Many professionals from Independent referral practices have also stated that they are having to perform complex operations in order to reverse these procedures. I would argue that the guidelines from the RCVS are being breached by the profit driven corporate's desire to keep everything in house. I also know that referrals to Independent second opinion practices come too late for many.

## **The Competition Marketing Authority's Remit.**

I note your timescale of further investigation is possibly two years. I find this deeply concerning especially as I have already stated this all was allowed to happen during your watch.

I would argue that this report and consultation is different to all your others. This one doesn't concern a tin of beans or a packet of frozen peas but sentient beings who are protected by law. I am appalled that in your previous consultation you chose not to use all your powers. Including choosing not to engage with us families or carers to the same degree as some veterinary professionals who gave evidence orally.

I would equate this to trying to do a jigsaw only using half the pieces of the puzzle. It simply isn't possible.

I would of course be willing to assist you further.

Dr Linda Joyce-Jones

Ynys Môn, Cymru  
11/4/2024

Appendix 1:

### Medical History

Medical History for: Miss Linda Joyce-Jones  
 Tegan S. [redacted]  
 Patient Name: Rosa Posa  
 Species: Feline  
 Breed: Domestic Short Haired

Sex: Neut Female  
 Age: 9 Years 6 Months 16 Days  
 DOB: 12/05/2009  
 Microchip No: 958000001741393

Date	Description	Site	Vet	Qty
	Plan to GA, examine larynx visually while placing tube and assess laryngeal mass. Then proceed to thoracic Xrays to include neck on same plate if poss. Must keep within estimates. History - Sent to Operation list.			
31/10/2018 12:05	Anaesthetic - Cat (induction and first 40 mins)			1.00
	Anaesthetic - Cat (induction and first 40 mins) (Health Plan Discount)			1.00
	Hospitalisation - Day Patient			1.00
	Hospitalisation - Day Patient (Health Plan Discount)			1.00
	IV - Catheter Placement			1.00
	Surflo IV Cannula No Port Wings G22x25mm (50) (ea) (IMS)			1.00
	Sedator Inj 10ml (per ml)			0.03
31/10/2018 12:06	Propofol Plus 20ml Vials (5) (per ml)			1.50
	Torbugesic Inj 10ml (per ml)			0.10
31/10/2018 12:07	X-ray - SA opinion (up to 3 images)			1.00
	X-ray - SA opinion (up to 3 images) (Health Plan Discount)			1.00
31/10/2018 12:16	GA and chest rads (CT/SLJ). Pre-med with medetomidine/butorphanol IM to good effect. 22G IV catheter placed in left cephalic vein, induced with 1.5mls propofol IV. Laryngoscope exam of larynx performed - no obvious masses or inflammation, but did feel subjectively thickened and a little difficult to pass 4mm ETT.  Right and left lateral and DV inflated chest rads taken. Mild bronchial pattern and possibly a little right sided heart enlargement (cor pulmonali due to increased resistance from bronchial inflammation??) But only very mild changes... No evidence alveolar disease or masses.  Possibly could suggest mild inflammatory disease ddx asthma. No dramatic findings. Called owner with results, no answer so left message and will call her again later.			
31/10/2018 12:18	Document Created - Discharge Simple.doc			
31/10/2018 14:20	pm check - a little sleepy still, MM pink and moist, CRT <2s, cardiac and thoracic auscultation NAD, HR 120bpm, RR 24bpm, abdo palpation NAD, comfortable. T 36.4, a small amount faeces in rectum.  Comfortable, stable, would like to keep her here to recover for an hour or two but then fine to go home.			
31/10/2018 16:43	Discharged to owner, taken through post-GA instructions and findings today. Recheck in a week. Book Consult Vet around 07/Nov/2018 to see [redacted] for 10 minutes			
10/11/2018 11:40	Weight updated from 2.97(Kg) to 3.15(Kg).			
10/11/2018 11:53	Consultation Consultation (Health Plan Discount) Vet Authorises Anti-parasitics for 12 months			1.00 1.00 1.00
10/11/2018 11:54	Metacam Inj Cat 2mg/ml 10ml (per ml) Metacam Inj Cat 2mg/ml 10ml (per ml) (Health Plan Discount) Convenia Inj 10ml (per ml) Convenia Inj 10ml (per ml) (Health Plan Discount) Metacam Cat 3ml (Give 3 kg dose once daily for 6 consecutives days Stop if your pet vomits or passes dark stools and contact your vet) Metacam Cat 3ml (Health Plan Discount)			0.31 0.31 0.31 0.31 1.00 1.00
10/11/2018 11:55	Book <No Reason> around 10/Nov/2018 to see [redacted] for 10 minutes			1.00
10/11/2018 11:57	Discount £10			1.00
28/11/2018 11:04				

Appendix 2:



John Dinsdale | Chief Veterinary Advisor  
ivcevidensia.co.uk



## About John

Chief Veterinary Advisor responsible for the Group Veterinary Advisors, Regional Clinical Director Support Group and Group Veterinary Nurse Advisor teams. Having had over 30 years experience owning a first opinion practice and out of hour's service provider, he brought his practice into IVC Evidensia. Main areas of work include, clinical standards, complaints, business support and development, RCVS Practice Standards, IVC Evidensia relationship with the RCVS, Major Employers Group and Vet School Council. As part of the Operations team he is also involved in the wider group strategy bringing a Veterinary surgeons perspective to the direction of the group.

## Get in touch

[john.dinsdale@ivcevidensia.com](mailto:john.dinsdale@ivcevidensia.com)



Appendix 3:

**3: I would like to know the exact figure (for the fourth time of asking) in regards to the amount of money the six major private equity shareholder companys fund the RCVS by each year. This includes all fees they automatically pay your organisation when they register their veterinary**

Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons The Cursitor, 38 Chancery Lane, London WC2A 1EN  
T 020 7222 2001 F 020 7222 2004 E [info@rcvs.org.uk](mailto:info@rcvs.org.uk) [www.rcvs.org.uk](http://www.rcvs.org.uk)



**surgeons or registered veterinary nurses with you. If you cannot provide this particular information, then I would like to know why not.**

The RCVS receives payments from corporate organisations in relation to specific costs, rather than any general funding. The costs include fees for the initial registration of practice premises and for the initial, or renewal of, individual practitioners' practising certificates. Branches of the six main corporate organisations also belong to the Practice Standards Scheme, and fees are paid to cover the assessments carried out for those premises. Because there is no standard approach to the payment of these fees (in that some are paid centrally and some by individual branches) it is not possible to provide an accurate figure.

To assist you, the total sum received collectively from the six major corporate practice owners for Registrants' renewal fees in the financial year 2022-23 was £2,389,169. We are unable to provide specific figures in relation to the individual organisations, as the number of Registrant employees is a matter of commercial sensitivity. As above, however, please also note that the nature of payment arrangements for registration varies, and not all of the corporate bodies pay the renewal fees for all of their Registered employees.

If you are dissatisfied with the handling of your request, you may:

- a. Write to Eleanor Ferguson, Registrar of the RCVS, at the RCVS offices (or email: [e.ferguson@rcvs.org.uk](mailto:e.ferguson@rcvs.org.uk))
- b. If you are not satisfied with the response that you receive, you may write to the Information Commissioner, who is appointed to consider such complaints at the address shown below:

Information Commissioner's Office  
Wycliffe House  
Water Lane  
Wilmslow  
Cheshire,  
SK9 5AF

Further information on how to complain is available on the Information Commissioner's Office website: <https://ico.org.uk/>

Yours sincerely,

**Gemma Crossley**  
Solicitor  
Head of Professional Conduct

Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons The Cursitor, 38 Chancery Lane, London WC2A 1EN  
T 020 7222 2001 F 020 7222 2004 E [info@rcvs.org.uk](mailto:info@rcvs.org.uk) [www.rcvs.org.uk](http://www.rcvs.org.uk)

## Dogs Trust response to the Petitions Committee inquiry into veterinary services in Wales.



These comments refer to the challenges of veterinary provision across the UK. It is important to distinguish the profession from the industry, and the professionals that we work with are highly dedicated individuals. To focus on the veterinary services in Wales, Dogs Trust recommends the following:

- To increase the number of veterinary professionals in Wales, Welsh Government should explore introducing additional bursaries and scholarships for students who wish to study and work in Wales after graduating. This would ensure that the course is accessible for all students, regardless of socio-economic background and may encourage graduates to remain in Wales.
- A differentiation should be made between the veterinary industry and the profession. Most vets working in practice will not be responsible for setting prices for veterinary services, nor will they benefit directly from increased costs.
- There is a need to highlight pathways for contextualised care. Within general practice, different approaches may be taken based on the balance of feasible treatment options, including consideration of the cost. Contextualised care refers to an approach to cases within the context of their surroundings, which includes input by the owner. The partnership between the client and the vet is focused on maximising the welfare of the patient and we would like to see more emphasis on this approach. A contextualised care approach lends itself to offering a client an appropriate range of treatment options where applicable. There is a fear amongst some professionals of being sued if they do not offer so-called 'gold standard'. Welfare should be the primary goal; 'just because we can does not mean to say that we should'.
- The Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 is in urgent need of review and Welsh Government should urge the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to conduct a review as soon as possible. This would enable Registered Veterinary Nurses, an under-utilised skill, to take on a broader scope of procedures, to take account of paraprofessionals, and to give clear definitions for terms such as 'referral' and 'specialist'.

As described in the recommendations above, the Petitions Committee and Welsh Government should review the veterinary industry as a whole to improve the services offered to dog and pet owners in Wales.

Dogs Trust is a dog welfare charity, caring for around 13,000 dogs per year, we work closely with the veterinary services market to help manage the welfare of dogs in our care, as well as owned dogs who we support through our outreach schemes, post-adoption support funds and emergency fund. Our Emergency Fund can provide a financial contribution towards urgent unexpected treatment for dogs in the UK where their owners are unable to cover the whole cost. Owners are usually in receipt of means tested benefits but might also be on a low income or experiencing financial difficulty for another reason. Our Together Through Homelessness veterinary scheme funds the veterinary care for dogs whose owners are experiencing or at risk of any form of homelessness anywhere in the UK. We work in conjunction with over 150 vet practices across the country where the owners we support can access free vet care for their dogs.



We highly value the support and dedication of all veterinary professionals we engage with, without whose support, we would not be able to help the number of dogs we do. However, the profession has been under a huge amount of pressure over the past few years. The difficulties experienced during the pandemic led to many veterinary professionals moving to non-clinical roles or leaving the profession entirely. Dogs Trust has experienced significant challenges in recruitment for our clinical roles. This is also evidenced by many of our associated vet practices offering a reduced level of service; specifically, there has been a reduction in the number of visits to our centres, and on occasion there is a difficulty (or long waiting lists) to accommodate appointments and surgeries at practices. Some practices have had to withdraw their services completely due to a lack of capacity to support our needs. This can negatively impact welfare if this reduced capacity leads to a delay in instigating appropriate treatment. A significant rise in pet ownership during the pandemic alongside those leaving clinical roles has increased pressure on the profession.

According to the most recent Consumer Prices Inflation data from February 2024, vet bill inflation is over 3 times higher than headline inflation (13.25% vs. 3.4%)<sup>1</sup>.

Increasing costs of caring for a dog contribute to the high numbers of enquiries to Dogs Trust from dog owners needing to give up their dog. As a part of this process our Customer Support Centre records the reason given. Concerningly, the proportion of those that spoke to our Customer Support Centre explicitly referring to financial issues as the reason that they are looking to relinquish their dog increased by 266% between 2021 and 2022. It further rose by 235% between 2022 and 2023, more than a tenfold increase on 2021. Additionally, between 2022 and 2023, we also saw a 512% increase in those mentioning being unable to afford veterinary expenses in their handover enquiry. To help keep dogs with their owners, between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024, Dogs Trust funded 1,880 veterinary treatments for 996 dogs across the UK, whose owners were experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

We have also seen an increase in telephone requests for financial help, either via our emergency fund, or requesting assistance in paying veterinary bills, with a 55.9% increase between 2022 and 2023. This also increased by 41% by email in the same period and as of Q1 2024 remains roughly double the numbers in 2022. This again reflects the ongoing financial challenges pet owners are facing.

The situation with veterinary services costs has had, and continues to have, a huge impact upon our ability to care for and rehome dogs, especially when combined with the increased overhead cost pressures as a result of the pandemic and the spike in energy prices. Costs have increased in all aspects of our lives, which continue to have a knock-on effect on our service delivery. As dog owners have experienced rapidly rising costs in dog food and veterinary bills, this has resulted in a rise in relinquishment enquiries, causing our rehoming centres to rapidly fill up. The cost of looking after increasing numbers of dogs, often with complex behavioural challenges or in need of costly veterinary treatment, is having a serious impact upon our ability to accept further dogs.

In summary, we do have concerns the about affordability and coverage of veterinary care, with more and more pet owners unable to access affordable or sufficient care for their pet. This is leading to welfare issues from delayed treatment, and greater pressure on an already stretched charitable sector.

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<sup>1</sup> Dogs Trust internal research, based on CPI data and a method developed by Oxford Economics





**Senedd Petitions Committee**

**Welsh Parliament**

**Cardiff Bay**

**Cardiff**

**CF99 1SN**

**20/05/2024**

### **FUW Written Evidence on The Veterinary Profession in Wales**

Thank you for your correspondence enquiring the views of the Farmers' Union of Wales (FUW) on the veterinary profession in Wales.

Over the past twenty years there has been a number of changes in the demands on the veterinary profession sector in Wales. More specifically, with respect to veterinary services for farmed animals, there has been a sizable increase in the regulative demands of animal health and welfare in the guise of disease testing and surveillance.

For instance in 1999 the number of TB tests (both antibody and blood tests) conducted on cattle in Wales totaled 306,382 tests. In comparison, the number of TB tests conducted on cattle in 2023 stood at more than 2 million. This step change in testing, as a result of government policy for TB eradication equates to an increase of 550% in testing requirements alone.

There are many examples in which animal health and welfare incentives have influenced a change in the work demands of farmed animal veterinary services, which include, but are not exhaustive, BVD testing, veterinary attestation requirements for export, sheep scab surveillance testing, pre and post anthelmintic use testing, flock and herd health planning etc.

Many of these initiatives are rightfully designed to improve the health and welfare of farmed animals in which positive outcomes would include a reduced dependence on veterinarians, however, such health planning demands the time of veterinary professionals in an advisory capacity to achieve the best outcomes.

Concern has been raised by members on the reduction of independent veterinary practices in Wales; this observational shift is also supported by the Competition and Markets Authority review which reported that independent veterinary practices have declined from 10% in 2013 to almost 60% of practices now being owned by large companies.

There are both positive and negative reports of this change in structural ownership of veterinary services. Positively, there are opportunities for practices to obtain larger quantities of medicines at cost price allowing for more affordable supply to clients and greater access to new treatments and technology.

However, reports from members imply that treatment costs have increased substantially within practices owned by larger firms. One member shared that in their experience the more expensive and only treatment route is often advised which includes referrals to other specialist practices within a company, yet when a second opinion is sought by independent practices their treatment options are often more affordable with comparable outcomes for the animal(s) being treated.

In addition, members also felt that it has become more difficult to forge a working relationship with their vet as it is often not possible to be assigned the same vet from larger practices. The consequence of this lack of consistency means that long term or ongoing issues are more difficult and time consuming to overcome as the case has to be explained repeatedly. Farmers value the consistency of the services they receive from the same veterinarian as they would have extensive knowledge of the farm history and livestock system which can often prove beneficial in dealing with longer term animal health issues.

The 2019 survey of the Veterinary Profession reported that most frequently-cited reasons for planning to leave the profession, other than retirement, are poor work-life balance, not feeling rewarded/valued (non-financial), long/unsocial hours and chronic stress. Sadly it has been reported by Platt et al., 2010 that veterinary surgeons in the United Kingdom are three to four times more likely than the general population to die by suicide.

Some initiatives being explored and brought forward to alleviate the work pressure on veterinarians include training paraprofessionals or lay testers to complete routine testing and advisory work. Again, there are advantages and disadvantages associated with the use of these personnel, however, their contribution in alleviating pressure on veterinary professionals are recognised.

It must be noted that on the whole, veterinarians offer a commendable service to farmed animals despite the rising costs of such services.

Yours sincerely,

Elin Jenkins

FUW Policy Officer