



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

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau **The Petitions Committee**

Dydd Llun, 11 Tachwedd 2013
Monday, 11 November 2013

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

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

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

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Dr Delyth Davies	Deisebydd Petitioner
Councillor Lewis Davies	Deisebydd Petitioner
Dawn Docx	Prif Ddeisebydd Lead Petitioner
Anna Gresty	Grŵp Gweithredu St Brigid St Brigid's Action Group
Mike Parry	Prif Ddeisebydd Lead Petitioner
Brian Mintoft	Prif Ddeisebydd Lead Petitioner
Dr Karen Pollock	Deisebydd Petitioner
Mr Tom Pollock	Prif Ddeisebydd Lead Petitioner
Jennie Windsor	Deisebydd Petitioner

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

Kayleigh Driscoll	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Steve George	Clerc Clerk
Kath Thomas	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 09:53.
The meeting started at 09:53.

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions

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

[2] It is great to welcome you this morning to this meeting of the Petitions Committee. Participants are welcome to speak in Welsh or English as they wish and are able. I would particularly like to thank Prestatyn High School for its hospitality this morning; we have already had a really useful session with some year 10 and year 11 pupils who have had their say on a particular petition that we shall be returning to later. It has been a really good start to our proceedings. We have apologies this morning from Joyce Watson AM, but, otherwise, we have a full complement of Members.

09:54

Deisebau Newydd New Petitions

[3] **William Powell:** We move now to the consideration of new petitions. The first before us is P-04-510, Public inquiry into the Breckman case in Carmarthenshire. This petition was submitted by Alan Evans, and it collected 63 signatures. It states:

[4] ‘We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to establish a public inquiry into the maladministration of Carmarthenshire County Council’s planning department regarding the case of Mr. and Mrs Breckman of Maes Y Bont, Carmarthenshire.’

[5] This is the first time that we have considered the case. It is quite a complex case that would appear, on the face of it, to be a local matter, but, because of the involvement of the ombudsman, it has been judged that this is actually an admissible petition. Russell, you have indicated that you want to come in.

[6] **Russell George:** You did say that it was a local issue, so I think that it would be right for us to write to the local authority to seek its views.

[7] **William Powell:** Yes, since it is name-checked here, right at the heart of the matter—Carmarthenshire County Council.

[8] **Russell George:** Do you both feel that it would be right to write to the ombudsman as well, to seek his view on this?

[9] **William Powell:** Yes. I think that we shall write to Mark James, the chief executive of Carmarthenshire County Council, potentially also copying in Councillor Kevin Madge, the leader of the council, along with the public services ombudsman, and possibly, for completeness, the Minister for Local Government and Government Business. I would have thought that that would make sense. Are colleagues happy with that?

[10] **Bethan Jenkins:** A gaf i ofyn **Bethan Jenkins:** May I just ask a question in
cwestiwn ynglŷn â'r sefyllfa o ran yr relation to the situation with the ombudsman?
ombwdsmon? A ydym yn deall beth y mae'r Do we understand what the ombudsman has
ombwdsmon wedi ei ddweud ynghylch y said in relation to this matter, to understand
peth, er mwyn deall pam mae angen cynnal why there is the need to conduct a public
ymchwiliad cyhoeddus yn awr? Pam mae'r inquiry now? Why does the petitioner feel

deisebwr yn meddwl nad oedd y broses that that process was not sufficient? That is honno'n ddigonol? Mae hynny er mwyn i mi just to understand—or perhaps we do not ddeall—neu efallai nad ydym yn gwybod eto. know that yet.

[11] **William Powell:** My understanding is that the ombudsman has upheld a complaint brought by Mr and Mrs Breckman and that the issue is with the following through of the recommendations that the ombudsman has brought forward. Maybe Steve could clarify.

[12] **Mr George:** The ombudsman reported on the matter, which is to do with a planning dispute, I think in July of last year, and he asked the local authority to take remedial action within a period of about three months. What seems to be behind the petition is a feeling that the council has not implemented things as quickly as the petitioners would have liked. However, we do not know the full story. Certainly, it seems to be a considerable period of time after the period specified by the ombudsman, and the petitioners are arguing that things have not yet been put right to their satisfaction.

[13] **William Powell:** Therefore, they seem to want to escalate things to the next stage.

[14] **Russell George:** If we are writing to the ombudsman and to the local authority, we can seek the views of both.

[15] **William Powell:** We can get the back story, as such, and what is going on. Okay, thanks for that.

[16] Agenda item 2.2 is P-04-511, Support for children and young people participation standards. This petition was submitted by Powys youth forum with the support of 39 signatures. It states:

[17] ‘We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to provide support for the National Children and Young People’s Participation Standards for Wales self-assessment process.’

[18] I think that this is probably a clear case for us in the first instance to write to the Minister for Education and Skills. Are colleagues happy that we should do that? I see that you are.

[19] Agenda item 2.3 is P-04-512, Stop the ‘Staff reduction proposals’ at the Cardiff and Vale University Health Board. This petition was submitted to us on the steps of the Senedd just last week by Howard Barr, and he had the support of 112 signatures online, with a further 542 in a written petition. It reads:

[20] ‘We the undersigned wish to register our dismay and disapproval at the announcement of the Section 188 redundancy notice issued at the Cardiff and Vale University Health Board and the resulting staff reduction proposals. We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to: oppose and stop these draconian cuts; ensure that patient safety and quality of service is improved, not cut further; and support and campaign for proper funding of the NHS.’

[21] **Russell George:** The only avenue open to us at the moment is to write to the Minister for Health and Social Services to seek his views.

[22] **William Powell:** I am happy to do that on behalf of the committee.

[23] **Bethan Jenkins:** Credaf hefyd y **Bethan Jenkins:** I believe that we could also gallwn ysgrifennu at y bwrdd iechyd, write to the health board, because, speaking

oherwydd, wrth siarad gyda'r protestwyr ar y dydd pan roddwyd y ddeiseb i mewn, clywais eu bod yn poeni'n arw am y ffaith bod swyddi penodol yn cael eu hisraddio a byddai rhai pobl yn gorfod gweithio ar gyflogau is am wneud yr un swyddi. Dylem ofyn i'r bwrdd iechyd sut y daethpwyd i'r casgliadau hynny, oherwydd mae'n edrych yn annheg iawn bod rhai pobl sy'n gweithio ar hyn o bryd yn mynd i gael cwtogiad o hyd at £5,000 i'w cyflogau. Hefyd, rydym yn gwybod bod Unison a rhai o'r undebau llafur wedi bod yn gwneud llawer o waith ar hwn. A yw'n bosibl inni ofyn iddynt beth yn gymwys maent yn ei wneud i ddiogelu staff yn y sector hwn rhag y cwtogiadau i gyflogau penodol? Mae mwy o waith y gallwn ei wneud na dim ond ysgrifennu at y Gweinidog.

with the protesters on the day that the petition was submitted, I heard that they were extremely concerned about the fact that specific posts were being downgraded and that some people would be expected to work on lower salaries for doing the same jobs. We should ask the health board how it came to its conclusions, because it seems very unfair that some people who are working at the moment will face reductions of up to £5,000 in their salaries. Also, we know that Unison and some of the trade unions have been doing a lot of work on this. Is it possible for us to ask them what exactly they are doing to safeguard staff in this sector from the cuts to specific salaries? There is more work that we can do than just writing to the Minister.

10:00

[24] **William Powell:** I am very happy to expand that and to write also on behalf of the committee to the chief executive of the health board, because some clinical concerns were also expressed to us regarding the potential implications.

[25] **Bethan Jenkins:** A allwn hefyd ysgrifennu at yr undebau llafur? **Bethan Jenkins:** Can we also write to the trade unions?

[26] **William Powell:** Yes, I am happy to do that. Da iawn.

[27] We move on to a petition that is of particular relevance here in north Wales, namely P-04-513, Save the Wrexham/Barmouth X94 bus service. This petition was submitted by Karen Dunford and collected 465 signatures. We are looking forward to receiving it a little later in person. It reads as follows:

[28] 'Arriva Buses has announced that they will cut the X94 service which links the towns of Barmouth, Dolgellau, Bala, Corwen, Llangollen and Wrexham and 5 other bus services on December 21st this year. All of these bus services connect communities across Wales from north to south and east to west. We call on the Welsh Government to investigate how cutting these bus services might be avoided and what is the best way of securing and promoting national bus services that link the regions of Wales, especially where there is no equivalent railway service.'

[29] As I said, we will be meeting the petitioners later in the context of receiving the petition. In the meantime, what should be our next step?

[30] **Russell George:** Chair, we should write to the Minister, Edwina Hart, seeking her views. That is all that we can do at this point.

[31] **William Powell:** Indeed. Mrs Hart has made some relevant announcements about the wider issues in the Assembly since the petition was launched. It would be useful to get an update from her. I look forward also to meeting the petitioners a little later.

[32] **Bethan Jenkins:** Beth am ysgrifennu **Bethan Jenkins:** What about writing to

at Arriva, gan mai'r cwmni hwnnw sy'n gwneud y toriadau? Hefyd, a allwn ni ysgrifennu at y consortiwm yn yr ardal hon, oherwydd gall y consortiwm roi ychydig o gefndir i ni ac ychydig o gyd-destun i'r peth?

Arriva, given that it is the company that is implementing the cuts? Also, can we write to the consortium in this area, because it could give us some of the background and place this in context?

[33] **William Powell:** Yes, I am happy to do that as well.

[34] **Bethan Jenkins:** Mae'r pwyllgor Menter a Busnes yr ydych chi'n aelod ohono wedi gwneud ymchwiliad i mewn i drafnidiaeth integredig. Gan fod y toriadau i wasanaethau bysiau a threnau yn digwydd dros Gymru gyfan, a oes modd i'r pwyllgor hwnnw, neu i ni, wneud darn byr iawn o waith i ddod â'r wybodaeth am yr holl doriadau at ei gilydd er mwyn deall ble maent yn digwydd a pham maent yn digwydd? Gwn fod y ddeiseb yn cyfeirio'n benodol at ogledd Cymru, ond mae hyn yn digwydd dros Gymru gyfan, a byddai cael syniad holistig o'r hyn sy'n digwydd yn ein helpu ni fwy na chanolbwyntio ar un ardal. A ydych yn cytuno?

Bethan Jenkins: The Enterprise and Business Committee, which you sit on, has undertaken an inquiry into integrated transport. Given that the cuts to bus and train services are happening across Wales, is there a way for that committee, or for us, to undertake a very brief piece of work to bring together the information about all of the cuts that are being made in order to understand where they are happening and why? I know that the petition refers specifically to north Wales, but this is happening across Wales, and having a holistic idea of what is happening would help us more than concentrating on one area. Do you agree?

[35] **Mr George:** If it would be helpful, we can perhaps bring a research paper to the next meeting of the committee that draws together the various petitions.

[36] **William Powell:** We could try to assess the cumulative impact as well.

[37] **Mr George:** You could then decide whether there is something that you want to do a piece of work on.

[38] **Bethan Jenkins:** That would be helpful.

[39] **William Powell:** That would be a useful starting point. Russell, are you happy with that approach?

[40] **Russell George:** Yes.

10:03

Y Wybodaeth Ddiweddaraf am Ddeisebau Blaenorol Updates to Previous Petitions

[41] **William Powell:** The first update is to P-04-367, Save our Hospital Services. This petition was submitted by Rhydwyn Ifan in February 2012 and has the support of 9,000 signatures. It states the following:

[42] 'We the undersigned want to see ALL of our local health services maintained and protected at Prince Philip Hospital. We oppose the downgrading of our hospital.'

[43] We have a number of petitions here, as we will recall, that have been grouped, because they all relate to the Hywel Dda Local Health Board area.

[44] The next petition in this group is P-04-394, Save our Services—Prince Philip Hospital. This was submitted by the Prince Philip action network in May 2012, with the support of 24,000 signatures, and is again in relation to the views of the people of Llanelli, the town with the largest population within the overall Hywel Dda area. The petition demands specific retention of a range of services, and, indeed, the return of some, with a particular emphasis on the retention of accident and emergency services.

[45] The next petition in this group is P-04-430, Proposed closure of Tenby Minor Injuries Unit, which was submitted by Andrew James Davies in November 2012, with the support of 157 signatures. Associated petitions have collected an additional 581 signatures. This petition particularly relates to concerns held in Tenby and the south Pembrokeshire area regarding the future of the minor injuries unit. Colleagues will have also received correspondence that I have forwarded from a meeting that I had with Tenby Town Council with regard to that matter, and correspondence from Mr Trevor Purt from the local health board. So, we have other correspondence to consider with regard to that matter.

[46] In addition to that we have P-04-431, Against Health Cuts from the Residents of Pembrokeshire. This petition was submitted by SWAT—the Save Withybush Action Team. This came in, as colleagues will recall, in November 2012. Associated petitions had the support of 14,000-plus signatures. There is a specific emphasis in the petition on the retention of the special care baby unit at Withybush General Hospital, and concerns about the reorganisation plans of Hywel Dda and the impact of those on the future of that unit.

[47] Finally, within this group we have P-04-455, Save Prince Philip Hospital A&E. This is, again, a separate but related petition submitted by Angharad Howells in January of this year, with the support of 1,038 signatures. Again, it refers to the potential impact of the downgrading or closure of A&E services at Prince Philip Hospital.

[48] We last considered these petitions as a group back in May when we considered correspondence from the petitioners, and we agreed to write to Mr Trevor Purt at Hywel Dda LHB regarding the minor injuries unit, asking whether the health board would be able to meet the conditions laid out by the community health council when providing alternative minor injuries provision in Tenby. We also undertook to write to the Minister for Health and Social Services seeking a further update on the overall situation with regard to Prince Philip Hospital and services at Withybush. We asked to be informed when a final decision was made. As you know, we have within the papers for today's meeting the response from the Minister, Professor Mark Drakeford, dated 4 June. The petitioner also added further comments on 30 October.

[49] We have a number of potential options here. There is perhaps a case for us to wait for the Minister's decision in the light of the advice that he receives from the expert scrutiny panel.

[50] **Russell George:** I think that we have to wait for that, but in the meantime we need to send the correspondence that we have received as a committee to the Minister.

[51] **William Powell:** I would certainly like to forward the correspondence that we have received there, and also the information that has come in from Tenby with regard to the minor injuries unit.

[52] **Russell George:** All of the information that we have received.

[53] **William Powell:** Yes, absolutely. I also wanted to check with our clerk whether there is still a response outstanding from Hywel Dda to the letter that we sent earlier in the year.

- [54] **Mr George:** I think that we are still waiting for that.
- [55] **William Powell:** I think that that needs to be chased. The concerning thing from my perspective—and from the committee’s perspective as well—is that this echoes some of the experiences that other regional Members have had in trying to take these issues forward. There has been a bit of a wall of silence from the health board. We should potentially bring this to the attention of the Minister if we continue to receive only acknowledgements, or, indeed, no substantive answers. This is not good enough.
- [56] **Russell George:** How long has it been since we sent the letter?
- [57] **William Powell:** I think that we are talking about a couple of months.
- [58] **Ms Driscoll:** It was sent back in May.
- [59] **William Powell:** Yes, a couple of months. We have chased, but we have had no—
- [60] **Mr George:** It was May or early June at the latest.
- [61] **Russell George:** Well, I think that we should write to the Minister now.
- [62] **William Powell:** This mirrors the experiences that we will hear about from colleagues in north Wales later on.
- [63] **Russell George:** We should write to the Minister with the letter attached, pointing out to the Minister that we have not had a response, and asking him to intervene.
- [64] **William Powell:** Absolutely. That is something that we must do. This is just not acceptable. Ultimately, we may be in a position to subpoena somebody to appear before us, because this cannot go on.
- [65] **Bethan Jenkins:** A yw’r panel yn mynd i fod yn trafod yr MIU a’r hyn sy’n digwydd yn hynny o beth? Mae’r llythyr o Ddinbych-y-pysgod yn dweud nad ydynt yn hapus gyda phenderfyniad y CHC. Ydy hynny yn rhywbeth y bydd y Gweinidog yn edrych arno fel rhan o’r panel? Os na fydd hynny’n digwydd, bydd raid inni edrych ar y mater ar wahân. **Bethan Jenkins:** Could I just ask, in terms of the panel, are they going to be discussing the MIU and what is happening with regard to that? The letter from Tenby says that they are not happy with the decision of the CHC. Is that something that the Minister will be looking at as part of the panel? If not, we will have to look at that separately.
- [66] **Mr George:** Mae llythyr y Gweinidog yn dweud hyn: **Mr George:** The Minister’s letter states the following:
- [67] ‘Thank you for your letter of 24 May regarding Hywel Dda Health Board’s proposals for changes to services in Mid & West Wales.’
- [68] Rwyf yn cymryd, felly, ei fod yn cynnwys popeth sy’n digwydd. I take from that that it includes everything that is going on.
- [69] **William Powell:** To answer Bethan’s specific point about Tenby, I think that the particular concern is that the CHC and the LHB seem to be putting great store by the involvement of the GP practices in the south Pembrokeshire area. In fact, at the most recent meeting that I attended, at the invitation of Tenby Town Council, about 10 days ago—

wearing my regional AM hat, rather than attending as Chair of this committee—it was evident—a senior partner from one of the practices was present—that there had been minimal engagement, just sufficient engagement maybe to tick a box. However, there had been no real engagement at all in terms of the readiness of GPs to take on this minor injuries work. So, I think that issue needs opening up.

[70] **Bethan Jenkins:** We have to understand that all of these—we do not have much detail there as to what the scrutiny panel will do, what it will look like, when we will find that out. We need to clarify some of these issues.

[71] **William Powell:** We are hearing very little from the health bodies, as we have said.

[72] **Bethan Jenkins:** We should not let it go on for months.

[73] **William Powell:** No. It is time to draw a line really, is it not? Okay. Diolch.

[74] We now move on to P-04-408, Child and Adolescent Eating Disorder Service. Colleagues will recall that, due to limited time, we deferred consideration of oral evidence that we received from Helen Missen until today's session. We have the transcript to assist us.

[75] Bethan, as chair of the cross-party group on eating disorders, I wonder whether I might defer to you to lead on your feelings regarding this. I will just remind colleagues that the petition was submitted on July 2012 by Helen Missen, and collected 246 signatures. It states as follows:

[76] 'We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to fund the Child and Adolescent Eating Disorder Service in Wales to the same degree as the Adult Eating Disorder Service in Wales.'

[77] There was particular concern expressed at that meeting about the concentration of funds going into the M4 corridor area with regard to eating disorders and concern about under-investment in mid and north Wales.

[78] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yn amlwg, mae hi'n teimlo'n gryf am y peth, achos bod ei merch wedi bod trwy'r gwasanaethau hynny. Rydym yn derbyn y ffaith bod Mark Drakeford wedi rhoi arian i mewn i dde Cymru; dadl y Gweinidog am hynny oedd bod mwy o arian ar hyn o bryd yn mynd mewn i ogledd Cymru, a dyna pam yr oedd hynny wedi digwydd. Gyda'r gwaith yr wyf yn ei wneud gyda'r grŵp trawsbleidiol, rwy'n gweld, er gwaethaf yr arian hwnnw, fod lot o gapiau yn bodoli o hyd yn y gwasanaethau, a'r broblem sydd gen i yw bod angen i ni roi amser nawr i weld effaith yr arian ychwanegol y mae Mark Drakeford wedi ei roi mewn i wasanaethau yn y de, ond hefyd, mae angen i ni edrych ar le mae'r gapiau ar hyn o bryd yn y timau CAMHS yn lleol, a sut mae hynny wedyn yn bwydo drwyddo i beth mae'r GPs yn ei wneud ac hefyd i'r haen uwch lle mae pobl yn mynd mewn i'r ysbytai. Felly, rwy'n credu y

Bethan Jenkins: Obviously, she feels strongly about this, because her daughter has been a user of those services. We accept the fact that Mark Drakeford has put money into south Wales; the Minister's argument for that was that more money is going into north Wales at the moment, and that is why this has happened. With the work that I do with the cross-party group, I see that, despite that money, there are a lot of gaps that still exist in the services, and the problem that I have is that we have to give time now to see the effect of the additional funding that Mark Drakeford has put into services in south Wales, but we also need to look at where the gaps are at the moment in the CAMHS teams locally, and how that feeds through into what GPs do and also to the higher level when people go into hospital. Therefore, I think that we as a committee could put together a short report to see what is happening now, where the gaps still exist, what the new

gallwn ni fel pwyllgor roi adroddiad byr at ei gilydd yn edrych ar beth sy'n digwydd nawr, lle mae'r gapiau o hyd, beth fydd yr arian newydd hwn yn ei wneud, ac efallai gwneud cynigion ar sut y gallwn wneud yn siŵr bod gwasanaeth Cymru gyfan yn bodoli, yn hytrach na bod un ardal yn gwneud yn well na'r llall.

funding will do, and maybe make proposals about how we can ensure that an all-Wales service exists, rather than one area doing better than another.

[79] Yr elfen arall yw'r ffaith nad yw Beat Cymru yn mynd i dderbyn mwy o arian, ac felly mae angen i ni efallai edrych ar sut y bydd hynny yn effeithio ar wasanaethau yn y dyfodol. Nid wyf yn gwybod beth yw'r ateb yn hynny o beth achos mae arian yn brin, ond gan mai Beat yw'r elusen sy'n helpu pobl, bydd hynny'n wir effeithio ar y sefyllfa. Nid oes un ateb hawdd, ond efallai y gallwn ni fel pwyllgor ddod ag adroddiad gerbron ac, wedyn, gobeithio cael dadl ar lawr y Cynulliad i hwyluso trafodaeth bellach ar y mater.

The other element was the fact that Beat Cymru is not going to receive any more funding, and therefore we may need to look at how that will affect services in the future. I do not know what the answer to that is because money is scarce, but as Beat is the charity that helps people, that is really going to affect the situation. There is not one easy answer, but maybe we as a committee could bring a report forward and, hopefully, we will then be able to have a debate on the floor of the Assembly to facilitate further discussion on this matter.

[80] **William Powell:** That would be very helpful. There was real concern expressed during that evidence session about the fact that the present funding arrangements for Beat are rounding off in the spring of next year. We heard quite clearly the important role that Beat plays in terms of raising awareness and providing some support, not just to individuals, but also to families and others affected.

10:15

[81] **Bethan Jenkins:** I think what we need to do is to try to pin the Minister down by saying, 'After a year or a year and a half, can you analyse the effect that this extra money will have?' With the adult services, we are still waiting on a review by the Welsh Health Specialised Services Committee. He did not give us the commitment of a review in the Petitions Committee, so we need to know that this money will be used effectively and that what he says will happen, in that fewer people will have to go to England for treatment and they will then be able to be treated closer to home. That is something that I would like to be able to ask of the Minister in any recommendations we make.

[82] **William Powell:** Let us write to Mark Drakeford, raising the points that you have just detailed. Hopefully, this can lead to a short report and a debate subsequently on the floor of the Senedd. I also think that we need to write to Helen Missen, as the lead petitioner, to ask for her perspective on the Minister's evidence session, which followed her own. We have not done that yet and we can share the transcript.

[83] **Russell George:** Can we also ask the Minister if we can have a debate on this in the Chamber in Government time?

[84] **William Powell:** We could try for that, but we have another route—

[85] **Bethan Jenkins:** If we produce a report, we could have a debate then. We can guarantee that, I suppose, can we not?

[86] **William Powell:** I think it would be a bit premature at the moment in relation to

seeing what the impact of the spend is.

[87] **Bethan Jenkins:** That is why I was thinking of saying that we recommend that there should be a commitment to a review of this money.

[88] **William Powell:** That would be within a sensible timescale of a year to 18 months.

[89] **Bethan Jenkins:** Perhaps there could be a short research piece so that we can pull together, in terms of what Helen said, all the gaps and have a bullet point of where provision could be made better. We could then come back to this in a year's time.

[90] **Russell George:** That is fine.

[91] **William Powell:** That is a good idea. So, we will write to Mark Drakeford detailing those points and to Helen Missen, the petitioner, for her perspective on what he had to say that morning.

[92] **Bethan Jenkins:** I do not know if there are any organisations that we could refer Beat to. I suppose it is not our problem so much, but if Beat could look for different avenues of funding and see if it could—

[93] **William Powell:** Potentially, we could do a research request on other possible funding avenues because it is so busy doing the day job that it cannot look for them; we may be in a position to offer some assistance in signposting it to other sources of funding. We need to make sure that the Minister is clear that it is not Welsh Government money, but lottery money in fact—I think it was People and Places or one of the other lottery schemes—that is supporting its work. The impact of that ceasing would be potentially devastating for people suffering from the disorder. Alright, there is a good set of actions there.

[94] We now move to petition P-04-460, Lives not Airports. This petition was submitted by Jeremy Derl-Davies in March of this year with 51 signatures. It calls upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to consider a change in its funding priorities, particularly with regard to the delivery of specialist medicines to patients throughout Wales via the Welsh Health Specialised Services Committee. The clear view expressed in the petition was that this was currently overly complex and very difficult to navigate.

[95] We last considered correspondence on the petition in June of this year. We agreed to share the Minister's written statement with the petitioner, and also to seek views on the correspondence from the Minister and from WHSSC. We wrote to WHSSC about concerns over the length of time that it had taken to respond to the committee. The petitioner has now commented on the issues, but we should note his reply that his involvement in pursuing the petition has been affected because of his need to support his wife during a particularly difficult phase of her own illness. He wished that to be shared with the committee.

[96] WHSSC also wrote to me, back on 19 July, indicating that it was reviewing why it had taken so long to reply to the committee's queries. I do not think that we have had a definitive answer from it, so it seems to have some of the same problems that we have encountered with some of our friends on the health board. I think that we need to pursue that matter, just to look into it. That was 19 July and we are now a few weeks away from Christmas, and it just is not good enough. I will write in the strongest terms, if the committee is happy for me to do so.

[97] **Russell George:** On a wider issue, we have had other petitions around this as well. It would be good if we could ask WHSSC to come in so that we could take evidence from it on

this petition. I am not sure whether it is so crucial to ask the petitioner to come in, although I am not against that.

[98] **William Powell:** I think that that would be inappropriate at this point.

[99] **Russell George:** I think that it would be good for WHSSC to come in to give evidence to us, if that is agreeable.

[100] **William Powell:** I think so. We can build that into our letter, following on from its correspondence on 19 July. We need to see it very early in the new year. Realistically, we could not have a session with WHSSC before Christmas, but I think that early in the new year is eminently achievable.

[101] **Bethan Jenkins:** We still have not had a response from the Minister on the work that he did on the rare diseases fund. He commissioned research. I know that this is not specifically about rare diseases.

[102] **William Powell:** No, but it relates to that issue, does it not?

[103] **Bethan Jenkins:** It relates in terms of the medicines that are available, and the processes. As an Assembly Member, I have been asking for the culmination of that inquiry. It would help us to have a view as to how we can then question WHSSC if processes change. I think that we could go back to the Minister and ask, ‘When are you proposing the date for this review to be announced, so that we can understand, if you are going to change the processes, how that will happen and how that will affect people’s access to medicines?’, because that is the crux of the issue here.

[104] **William Powell:** Yes, it is worth writing to Mark Drakeford on that point, because there is a relationship between the two.

[105] **Bethan Jenkins:** There is a clear relationship. I know that rare disease would be a small part of it. The fact that we have been waiting since July is just abysmal.

[106] **William Powell:** I agree. We shall pursue that.

[107] The next item is petition P-04-492, Diagnosis of autism in children. This petition was submitted by the National Autistic Society’s Pembrokeshire branch in June 2013, with the support of 902 signatures. It calls upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to ensure a timely diagnosis for children with autism spectrum disorder, regardless of where they live in Wales, and also to review the implementation of, and ensure compliance with, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines on the recognition, referral and diagnosis of children and young people on the autistic spectrum, as part of the Welsh Government’s refresh of its ASD strategic action plan.

[108] We last considered correspondence on the petition back on 24 September. We wrote to the Deputy Minister, asking her to provide an update on the position six months after the implementation of the action plan. We had a full response from Gwenda Thomas, the Deputy Minister for Social Services, and the petitioners have commented on this. The chair of the Pembrokeshire branch of the NAS has written to us, broadly welcoming the response. There is some concern, however, over slippage. Things were meant to start in September, but they have not, as yet, got under way. So, it is important that we keep that six-month window rather than talk about February, because we have lost a couple of months in terms of progress. So, if we await the Deputy Minister’s update—

[109] **Russell George:** We cannot do much at the moment, can we, Chair?

[110] **William Powell:** No. We need to await the Deputy Minister's update on monitoring the way that Hywel Dda Local Health Board is going to address this.

[111] **Russell George:** Let us defer this to a meeting in the new year.

[112] **William Powell:** Yes, we need to do that and keep things up to the mark, so that, for example, by February 2014, we can take a measure of what is happening and return to the petition once we have an update. Are Members happy with that? I see that you are.

[113] We now turn to P-04-481, Close the Gap for deaf pupils in Wales. This petition was submitted by the National Deaf Children's Society in May 2013. It calls upon the National Assembly for Wales,

[114] 'to urge the Welsh Government to develop a national strategy to Close the Gap in educational attainment between deaf pupils and their peers.'

[115] NDCS Cymru presented the petition as part of Deaf Awareness Week, and it is two years since 55 Assembly Members pledged to take action to close the gap for deaf pupils. It is also worth noting the particular involvement of the local constituency Assembly Member, Ann Jones, as chair of the cross-party group. She was present on that occasion.

[116] We last considered correspondence on this from the then Minister and the petitioner on 2 July, when we agreed to write to the following stakeholders: the Welsh Local Government Association; Action on Hearing Loss; Governors Wales, which is the representative body for school governors; and the chair of the cross-party group, Ann Jones. We have received a number of responses that are in the public papers today. Colleagues, what should we do at this stage, in your view, to take this forward? There is obviously potential for a piece of work here because of the messages that are coming through from the correspondence that we have received, but I would welcome your thoughts.

[117] **Russell George:** It depends on what time constraints we have in relation to other issues.

[118] **William Powell:** Yes. We had the Minister's response on 12 June. Have we shared that response with the petitioners, and have we had a response back from them? I am not clear on that.

[119] **Mr George:** We would have asked for comments by now.

[120] **Russell George:** Why do we not wait until the petitioners have responded to us with their views?

[121] **William Powell:** Yes, and maybe we can do a chaser in case they are unaware that we are looking for that.

[122] **Russell George:** I would not want to commit to doing any more work on this without knowing that the petitioner is anxious that it progresses further.

[123] **William Powell:** Okay. We will also make sure that we keep the cross-party group in the loop, given the particular interest that Ann Jones and her colleagues take in these matters.

[124] **Russell George:** Okay.

[125] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes, that is fine.

[126] **William Powell:** We now turn to P-04-488, The right to decide: an end to the compulsory study of Welsh to GCSE. This petition was submitted by David Fitzpatrick in June this year, with the support of 51 signatures. It calls upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to change its policy with regard to the compulsory teaching of Welsh to pupils in English-medium secondary schools in Wales. This should be, according to the view of the petitioner,

[127] ‘a matter of choice for the pupils and their parents.’

[128] We considered this back on 24 September, and we agreed to await the publication of the review into the teaching of Welsh as a second language at key stages 3 and 4. That report has now been published, and we had a ministerial statement from Huw Lewis, the Minister for Education and Skills, on 27 September. In fact, the report refers to the petitioner’s views, in paragraph 4.6, as you will have noted. We had a response from the petitioner, and we have a copy of the Minister’s statement and the wider report in the public papers. Given the clarity of the statement from the Minister, and the fact that it is clear that this matter is not going to be advanced, it is probably time to close this petition. I do not know what colleagues’ views are on it.

[129] **Bethan Jenkins:** Mae gan y Llywodraeth ddogfen ynglŷn â'r hyn sy'n digwydd ar hyn o bryd. Fel Aelodau'r Cynulliad, byddem yn craffu arni ac yn asesu beth sy'n digwydd gyda hyn. Gwn nad yw'r deisebwr yn hapus â'r esboniad hwnnw, ond credaf ein bod wedi gwneud lot o waith yn edrych mewn i'r sefyllfa. Nid wyf yn cytuno â'r hyn mae'n ei gynnig fel unigolyn, ond mae dogfen sy'n ceisio ehangu ar yr hyn sy'n digwydd mewn ysgolion ac efallai gallell annog y deisebwr i edrych ar hynny a chysylltu ag Aelodau Cynulliad lleol i adolygu'r ddogfen honno ar ôl iddi gael amser i ddatblygu. Byddwn yn cynnig cau'r ddeiseb ar hyn o bryd.

Bethan Jenkins: The Government has a document about what happens at present. As Assembly Members, we will scrutinise that and assess what happens with this. I know that the petitioner is not happy with that explanation, but I believe that we have done a lot of work looking into the situation. I do not agree with what he proposes as an individual, but there is a document that tries to expand on what happens in schools and perhaps we could encourage the petitioner to look at that and contact local Assembly Members to review the document after it has had time to develop. I would propose that we close the petition at the moment.

[130] **William Powell:** Thank you for that. Does anybody have anything to add on this particular one?

[131] **Russell George:** I did have an interesting piece of casework recently, where a student wrote to me from a higher education college. This student was a fluent Welsh speaker who was objecting to what he saw as the college forcing Welsh lessons on him. He could not see that that was a good use of his time, as he was a fluent Welsh speaker. That is a slightly different issue to this. I think that we have done all we can as a committee so, reluctantly, I think we will have to close the petition.

10:30

[132] **William Powell:** Yes, absolutely. Mr Fitzpatrick, the petitioner, has had his views taken account of and at least referred to in the document, as I said, so he can feel that he is—

[133] **Bethan Jenkins:** It is like other things, is it not? Once the Government has produced a document it is then for AMs down the line to scrutinise the effectiveness of that and I suppose that that would be the avenue now. I do not know how the Petitions Committee can

progress it any further.

[134] **William Powell:** I do not think that we have a further role at this moment. The Government has a settled view, and I think that is correct.

[135] We now turn to P-04-498, To get Wales educated.

[136] **Mr George:** I just want to take you back to the previous petition, namely the one about—because, I am sorry, but we have had a response from the petitioners. It is on page 79 of your pack. It is a very short response. My apologies for that.

[137] **Russell George:** No, that is fine. What does it say?

[138] **Mr George:** It says:

[139] ‘NDCS Cymru welcomes the overwhelming support for the Close the Gap petition from the WLGA, Governors Wales, Action on Hearing Loss Cymru and the Chair of the Cross Party Group on Deaf Issues. NDCS Cymru is particularly pleased to see that the WLGA endorses the call that Additional Learning Needs are part of all teachers training. NDCS Cymru looks forward to hearing the outcome of the discussion on the 11th November.’

[140] So, I am not sure whether that counts as welcoming the responses that it is received, but it certainly is not critical of it.

[141] **William Powell:** I am very grateful to you for having pointed that out to us. It looks, therefore, as if the petitioners broadly welcome that. Are we in a position to commission a short piece of work? It depends really on workload and capacity issues, because, if this could lead to a debate on the floor of the Senedd in the new year, it would make—

[142] **Mr George:** Perhaps in the first instance we could just clarify with the petitioners: ‘So, we are doing what you are suggesting but for a different reason’. We could just clarify with the petitioner whether the responses they have received satisfy them. If they do, then there is a case for closing it, but if, obviously, they are not satisfied and they want further stuff done then we can consider a piece of work.

[143] **William Powell:** This is a very minimal sort of summary response, is it not? That is why I think that we missed it, to be fair. However, thanks for pointing it out.

[144] We now move back to P-04-498, To get Wales educated. It was submitted by Matthew Hopkins in September 2013. It has the support of 12 signatures.

[145] ‘We the undersigned call on the Welsh Government to encourage children from primary school age to stay in education to university level.’

[146] We last considered the petition—we considered the petition for the first time, rather, on 24 September and we agreed to write to the Minister for Education and Skills, Huw Lewis, seeking his views. We have got those views in our public papers today. Interestingly, despite our having shared those views, we have not heard from the petitioner.

[147] **Russell George:** How long has it been since we wrote, Chair?

[148] **William Powell:** In terms of how long we have been waiting for some other responses, it is the day before yesterday, but I think—

[149] **Mr George:** We probably wrote at the end of September.

[150] **William Powell:** Should we send a chaser? Then, if we do not hear back, we should close the petition, I think.

[151] **Russell George:** We could write to the petitioner to chase for an answer and, if we have not heard back by the end of the year, then we will close the petition.

[152] **William Powell:** We could close the petition in the first meeting of the new term.

[153] **Russell George:** I move that we close it if we do not get a response.

[154] **William Powell:** Okay. That sounds fine.

[155] The next petition is P-04-499, Kick Start The Welsh Language Curriculum. This petition was submitted by Eva Bowers and Lauren Davies in September of this year, and supported by 19 signatures. It reads:

[156] ‘We the undersigned call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to change the Welsh Language Curriculum in Secondary Schools; in order to encourage the Welsh Language to be used in a conversational manner rather than teaching Cymraeg to pass an examination.’

[157] We looked at this for the first time on 24 September. Again, we wrote to the Minister for Education and Skills seeking his views and I think that we are in exactly the same position.

[158] **Russell George:** When did we write to the petitioner?

[159] **William Powell:** It was in the same batch of letters. So, should we adopt the same approach?

[160] **Russell George:** I move again that we write to chase a response but, if we do not get a response by the end of the year, we close the petition automatically.

[161] **William Powell:** I am happy with that.

[162] **Russell George:** I do not want to be harsh, but—

[163] **William Powell:** Let us do that.

[164] The next petition is P-04-335, The Establishment of a Welsh Cricket Team. It was submitted by Matthew Richard Bumford in October 2011, so it has been around a little while. It collected 187 signatures and is what it says on the can. It reads:

[165] ‘We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to support the establishment of a Welsh international cricket team.’

[166] All credit to Mr Matthew Bumford for having raised this issue, because this culminated about 10 days ago in a very lively and wide-ranging debate on the floor of the Assembly. Bethan played a particularly feisty role in that, and it was covered fully in the *Western Mail* and other newspapers. It was also covered in the *Daily Post*. It raised the issue to new levels and I think that we were all surprised by some of the alliances that were brought forward in the Assembly that day in support of the proposition. Having said that, I am not clear as to whether we have any more capacity as a committee to take it further forward. I will open it up to colleagues.

[167] **Bethan Jenkins:** Mwynheais y drafodaeth. Rwy'n credu yr oedd yn dda i ni gael y ddadl ar lawr y Senedd. Mae'n dangos sut y mae'r Pwyllgor Deisebau wedi tyfu a bod diddordeb yn nadleuon y Pwyllgor Deisebau yn hynny o beth. Y broblem sydd gennym yn awr yw nad oedd y Llywodraeth yn edrych fel pe bai am gefnogi'r ddeiseb. Ers ers y ddadl honno, rwyf wedi cael llawer o bobl yn fy e-bostio yn gofyn sut y gallwn gymryd yr ymgyrch ymlaen, ond, heb fod y Llywodraeth yn cefnogi hyn, mae'n anodd inni fel pwyllgor i wthio'r agenda ymlaen. Rwy'n credu ein bod ni, fel pwyllgor, wedi cymryd hyn mor bell ag y gallwn, ond rwy'n gwybod bod y Cadeirydd yn cadeirio'r grŵp trawsbleidiol ar chwaraeon, felly efallai y gallai hyn gael ei drafod yno. Hefyd, mae gen i'r briff chwaraeon ar gyfer Plaid Cymru felly rwy'n hapus i gymryd yr awennau yn hynny o beth ond nid wyf yn gweld sut y gall y pwyllgor hwn ddatblygu hyn. Fodd bynnag, rwy'n credu ei bod wedi rhoi ffocws i'r drafodaeth.

Bethan Jenkins: I enjoyed the debate. I think that it was good to have the debate on the floor of the Senedd. It shows how the Petitions Committee has grown and that there is an interest in the debates of the Petitions Committee in that regard. The problem that we now have is that the Government does not appear to want to support the petition. Since that debate, I have had a lot of people emailing me asking me how we can take the campaign forward, but, without the Government's support, it is difficult for us as a committee to push the agenda forward. I think that we, as a committee, have taken it as far as we can, but I know that the Chair chairs a cross-party group on sports, so maybe it could be discussed there. I also hold the sports brief in Plaid Cymru, so I am happy to take the lead in that regard, but I do not see how this committee can develop this. However, I think that it has given a focus to the discussion.

[168] **William Powell:** Yes, very much so. I think that it would be a useful topic for the cross-party group on sport and since that involves Russell's Conservative colleague, Mohammad Asghar, who emerged as a strong supporter, it would be a natural forum to take this on. On balance, I think that we are ready to close the petition at this point. Is that your view too?

[169] **Russell George:** I think that we have taken the petition as far as we can and that we have done a good job on it.

[170] **William Powell:** Absolutely. I would like to pay tribute to the clerking team today and the previous combinations of clerks and support staff who have sustained the consideration of that petition over time. As Bethan said, it has been a success story. Therefore, we will close it at this stage but I have been very pleased to see the quality and range of the debate that was engendered.

[171] We move on now to P-04-472, Make the MTAN law. This was submitted by Dr John Cox, with the support of 680 signatures. An additional 330 signatures were collected in an associated petition. At this stage, before we move on to considering the petition and the next steps, I should note and bring to the attention of the committee that Dr John Cox lost his wife, Judy, who died suddenly on 2 November. I think that we would wish to place on record our condolences to Dr John Cox, who has been a regular engager with the Petitions Committee on this matter and other matters. I would wish to write to him on behalf of the committee expressing those condolences. Are colleagues happy with that approach? I see that you are. Moving now to—

[172] **Bethan Jenkins:** Sorry, are we discussing the petition?

[173] **William Powell:** Yes, I am going to move on to the petition now. Absolutely. I am sure that that is what he would wish. We last considered the petition on 4 June and we

discussed it in an evidence session on 14 May; however, there were issues regarding the Varteg Hill inquiry and the potential for that to make the ministerial evidence session less than useful. The Minister was scheduled to attend a meeting of the committee on 22 October, but had to withdraw and is now scheduled to attend a meeting on 18 February 2014, when Carl Sargeant will come before the committee. It is hoped that that Varteg Hill application and issues around that will be resolved by that stage. So, in my view, we need to await the Minister's attendance at that meeting in February, when Carl Sargeant will come before us. On the other hand, there may be issues that you wish to raise in the meantime.

[174] **Bethan Jenkins:** The only problem that I have is—and I declare an interest, as I have been working on this petition with the petitioners—if Ministers keep saying these things, then we delay and delay the petitions. To be honest, Varteg Hill is just one element of a wider agenda. This petition does not look at a specific issue. So, I think it has been a bit disrespectful of the Minister to delay and delay, because it has meant that the petitioners have felt very frustrated and that we have not been able to discuss it. The trouble is, it is difficult for us to come to a view until we speak to the Minister, but we do not want to reach a point in February whereby, if a decision on Varteg Hill has not happened, he says again, 'I am not coming to the Petitions Committee'. We cannot simply delay it again. So, we need to seek clarification from the Minister and say, 'We expect you to come to that February meeting and we want clear guidelines as to what you will and will not be able to discuss', so that we can be sure as a committee that nothing will be legally challenged, but also that we can actually talk about the concept of the petition, which is to make the MTAN law, and which is perfectly legitimate.

[175] **William Powell:** Yes, and which is a different issue removed from the specific case. I think it would be useful if we could seek our own legal advice on that, just to clarify the position and then, as you say, engage the Minister as you suggest.

[176] **Bethan Jenkins:** It is about what we can do between now and then, because it is a long time. Can we look to take evidence from interested parties on this particular issue, or even from groups that are already doing a lot of work on this, such as Friends of the Earth? Can we look to get somebody else in before the February date, so that at least we are doing something and not sitting on this petition?

[177] **Russell George:** We probably do not have much time. February will probably come quite quickly in terms of the committee's timetable.

[178] **William Powell:** The meeting on 14 February will be the third meeting of the new term. However, we can see whether there is scope for a short focus session maybe to update us on some of the wider issues. Perhaps Gareth Clubb would be happy to contribute.

[179] **Bethan Jenkins:** I do not want to just have one perspective; we could always get somebody with an independent view in alongside someone from an organisation like Friends of the Earth. I have spoken to mining companies in my area who would say the opposite, and would say, 'We believe that the MTAN is just there as guidance and we do not need to, or cannot, sometimes, adhere to it, because the coal comes in closer to the homes than we can predict'. So, I am happy to have the two views, but I think that we should try to progress it in the absence of the Minister at this committee.

[180] **Russell George:** When we write to the Minister, we can separate the issue from the concept, so there is no wriggle-out room for him to postpone the meeting again.

[181] **Bethan Jenkins:** He knows that already.

[182] **Russell George:** Writing it down would be helpful.

[183] **William Powell:** We have engaged with Carl Sargeant privately on these matters, and he is aware that the petitioners, particularly, would be looking with a fairly sceptical gaze on the postponement and the postponement after that. I think that getting legal clarification is going to be quite important.

[184] **Bethan Jenkins:** If we could have a session, perhaps in the new year—

[185] **William Powell:** Yes, let us look at that and see how things are scheduled. Excellent.

[186] That concludes the updates on previous petitions, and I think that we got clarity there. Just to mention to committee and all others present that it is coming up to 10.45 a.m. now, and because of our slightly delayed start, we are in a situation where we have a quarter of an hour to start to take evidence from the two groups of petitioners who are going to be with us today, but we will, in the course of that, need to take a break for the two-minute silence to show our respect at 11 a.m. In the run up to that, Steve will indicate that 11 a.m. is upon us, and then, whatever point we have reached at that stage, we will take that time out and then we shall recommence the work.

10:45

P-04-466 Argyfwng Meddygol—Atal Cyflwyno Gwasanaeth Iechyd o Safon Is yng Ngogledd Cymru, a P-04-479 Deiseb Adran Pelydr-X ac Uned Mân Anafiadau Ysbyty Tywyn
P-04-466 Medical Emergency—Preventing the Introduction of a Poorer Health Service for North Wales, and P-04-479 Tywyn Memorial Hospital X-ray and Minor Injuries Unit Petition

[187] **William Powell:** I ask the petitioners to take their seats, please. I extend a warm welcome to Jennie Windsor, Brian Mintoft, Mike Parry and Dr Delyth Davies. We are very grateful to you for joining us this morning. I ask you to introduce yourself briefly and the organisation that you represent for the sound levels and for our record, and then to make a brief introductory statement about your position on your respective petitions. We will then get the session under way. As I said, I have an eye on the clock, but we will take those couple of minutes out in the course of proceedings. Over to you, Jennie.

[188] **Ms Windsor:** I am Jennie Windsor, minute secretary for Tywyn and district healthcare action group. This is following a petition that we sent in to protect the minor injuries unit at Tywyn hospital and to keep the x-ray unit open.

[189] **Mr Mintoft:** Excuse me if I cough; I am Brian Mintoft and I am chair-come-secretary of the aforementioned group, because nobody else wanted to do it.

[190] **William Powell:** A volunteer is better than several pressed people.

[191] **Mr Mintoft:** I am retired. I have nothing to do with the medical profession, but I am very appreciative of the medical profession, because I have had umpteen operations, and I had a transient ischaemic attack—a mini-stroke—about two years ago. So, I really appreciate what it does, and that is why I am very interested that other people should get the service that they deserve.

[192] **Mr Parry:** Good morning, Chair. My name is Councillor Mike Parry. I am the immediate past mayor of Pwllheli. I am chairman of the Pwllheli partnership and a former chair of the district council. I think that the wording in our petition sums up what I am doing

here today in relation to health services.

[193] **Dr Davies:** I am Delyth Davies, a retired GP, and I am here to support my friend Mike. I have over 25 years' experience of general practice in Pwllheli, so I remember the good days in the past, and now is definitely not good.

[194] **William Powell:** Okay. You will have heard in our consideration of some of the earlier petitions some of the difficulties that we as a committee and our colleagues have had in engaging with another health board, which is not your own, and you may have had cause to reflect that there are some wider issues here in play. I will kick off with a question around transport. Do you feel that the Welsh Government's commitment to examining the local transport access issues that have been a considerable concern to many campaigners here in north Wales and elsewhere in any way alleviates the concerns that have been expressed with regard to having access to services? If not, what would you like to see coming from the Government to address those concerns? I do not know who is the most appropriate person to lead off on that.

[195] **Mr Mintoft:** In our area, there are certainly some short-term attempts. For example, there is a bus route being preserved between where we live and Dolgellau, which is along the coast road. However, that is a short-term thing—it is less than six months. You mentioned, actually, in relation to another petition, the X94 bus service, which is relevant to us. For example, my wife had treatment in Wrexham and she used that bus service on occasions. Most of the time, I used to drive her to Wrexham for attention. There were attempts to preserve that, or to keep it going, but I do not know how long it will last. Some attempts are being made but, overall, I cannot see how any long-term measures can retain that, because it is so rural. Whatever bus service is there is not ever going to be busy. So, I do not know what the solution is, but it needs a different solution and a new way of thinking to enable transport in the area.

[196] **Mr Parry:** Similarly, Chair, on the Llŷn peninsula, we are literally out on a limb, so physically, for instance, for appointments in the acute hospital, it is impossible for people down the Llŷn to access services at the acute hospital and be back on the same day. Public services do not exist to that extent.

[197] **William Powell:** So, there need to be customised modes of transport.

[198] **Mr Parry:** Yes, there are small transport initiatives that have sprouted up that are helping, but they are not always available.

[199] **William Powell:** No, indeed.

[200] **Mr Mintoft:** On transport, if I could wave this map—you can have copies of it if you wish—it is actually a health service-produced map. You can see that the red areas mark where the general hospitals are and the accident and emergency units. That is the area that we live in, and that is the area where you live. The red actually represents public transport that will get you there in 30 minutes. That happens to be between 10 a.m. and 12 p.m. on a Tuesday; do not ask me why, but that is what the survey was. You can see that the colours thin out to different ones. The white, in effect, means it is more than 90 minutes.

[201] **William Powell:** That covers the whole of Gwynedd, and the whole of Powys.

[202] **Mr Mintoft:** Yes.

[203] **William Powell:** Large chunks of Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire are in the same position.

[204] **Mr Mintoft:** Our concern is around this area. It is separate from our main petition. You can see that our main general hospital here is Aberystwyth.

[205] **William Powell:** Yes, Bronglais.

[206] **Mr Mintoft:** It still takes an hour to drive to there. We currently have a concern, which we did not have before, about the facilities there being moved to Carmarthen, and you can see where Carmarthen is by comparison.

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

[208] **Mr Mintoft:** Yet, the distances to the north Wales hospitals are equally large. I have some quotes on the times.

[209] **William Powell:** I was impressed by the turnout of people from your community and the Tywyn area, and Russell George and I were present at a meeting in Machynlleth in, I think, the spring of last year, when there was a really strong turnout from your community, from concerned patients, user groups and local councillors.

[210] **Mr Mintoft:** There is a lot of strong feeling in the area.

[211] **Mr Parry:** In relation to that, Chair, looking at the map—and I will not go into it in any depth today—I have an example of a 999 call down in Aberdaron on the Llŷn, where the ambulance came from Glan Clwyd. Now, you are talking two hours, and that is one way. You then have to get back to Bangor, which is the nearest acute hospital. That is not an isolated incident. I have made a request under the Freedom of Information Act—quite an extensive one—and that is due to be delivered to me today or tomorrow, so I will forward that to the committee.

[212] **William Powell:** That would be really helpful, to have clarity on that.

[213] **Mr Parry:** With the various tranches, you know—eight minutes, up to an hour and a half, or two hours. Another example is an ambulance that came from Dolgellau to the Llŷn, picked the guy up who, you know, had some kind of heart complaint—it is 999 again—and it got lost. So, he had to get up and show them the way. Now, I do not blame the ambulance service, because that is another issue. It is composite within the whole scenario. They are under tremendous pressure, as, indeed—*[Interruption.]*

[214] **William Powell:** Yes, indeed, and with the best will in the world, the more remote the source of the ambulance is—and sat-navs are notorious, particularly in the kind of parts of Wales that some of us live in, for taking you up one-way tracks and leading you into a bad place as well.

[215] **Mr Parry:** Yes, we are on very good terms with a lot of Polish lorry drivers. *[Laughter.]*

[216] **William Powell:** I can imagine that you probably are.

[217] **Bethan Jenkins:** Did the health board undertake a transport impact assessment when it was proposing the changes? In my area, Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Local Health Board did not talk to First Cymru, which is the biggest transport provider, when it was making the changes to the south Wales programme. So, if it did, were you satisfied, and if it did not, why not?

[218] **Mr Parry:** Certainly, in our area, there was a public relations exercise, for want of a better word, and I was involved on what they call a locality basis—I was invited to these rather intense meetings, and I refer to this in my submission. The questions there were fairly loaded and, while we had questions, there was no actual evaluation of what the results would be, if they should go a certain way. Unfortunately, we are now finding out what is happening with transport, closing minor injuries units and what have you. The golden hour is ticking, and we are not able to access it, and the results of that are horrendous for the patient and in terms of cost.

[219] **Mr Mintoft:** In our area, it is impossible to make the golden hour. It takes an hour by road, and pretty much an hour for an ambulance with flashing lights. The only way it can be made is by this red vehicle that comes down out of the sky—locally, it is called the Tywyn taxi, and that is not even run by the NHS.

[220] **William Powell:** Yes, the air ambulance, which is obviously subject to significant restrictions on its hours of operation and as a result of weather-related issues. Dr Davies, it is clear that you have some specific things to contribute here from your own background as well.

[221] **Dr Davies:** Well, times have changed. As regards the golden hour, it is much more important now for the golden hour to be accessed by an ambulance with paramedics than a doctor, actually. If you have an ambulance with paramedics able to get to you in less than an hour, then you are actually safer than being treated by a doctor, really, and I think that the ambulance service is becoming very thinly spread and being criticised unfairly for not being able to reach places in a reasonable time.

[222] **Mr Mintoft:** I would agree with that; it is spread very thinly. The other day, within the last two weeks, there was a lady who needed to be moved. It was only about half a mile within Tywyn, and she needed a wheelchair for that to be done. They had to call an ambulance from Bala. There are supposed to be ambulances in Tywyn, but there were none to cover that area, so it took four hours to actually get that ambulance. It was not an emergency, but, it took four hours to get that in. Again, when the ambulance people got there, they did not know the place, as they had not been before.

[223] I am not blaming the ambulance service, as I think that it tries to do a very good job. However, about two months ago, within a one-week period, I saw three incidents where there were two ambulances together. The reason was that they had staffed an ambulance with one person. If somebody needs to be lifted and moved, they have to get another ambulance, so you end up with two ambulances in the same place doing just one job. I think that that is not good.

[224] **William Powell:** It is certainly not the best use of resources in any way.

[225] **Mr Mintoft:** Having one person can be useful if they can get there quickly and can deal with it, but in these specific incidences, which involve moving people, one person cannot do it.

[226] **Russell George:** Why were there two ambulances there?

[227] **Mr Mintoft:** Sorry?

[228] **Russell George:** Why were there two ambulances there?

[229] **Mr Mintoft:** The staff in the original ambulance could not move the person; they were not allowed to move the person. They had to get somebody else to help—

[230] **William Powell:** There was a manual handling restriction.

[231] **Mr Mintoft:** Yes, that is right; manual handling.

[232] **Russell George:** Did they need more than two people in that situation? Is that why there were two ambulances?

[233] **Mr Parry:** It depends. If they have to transport somebody who is having a heart attack to hospital, say—

[234] **Dr Davies:** There was only one person in the ambulance.

[235] **Mr Mintoft:** There was only one person in the first ambulance. That is the problem. They cannot move the person.

[236] **Russell George:** So, the second person who came in the second ambulance was not coming because the ambulance was needed, but because the second person was needed.

[237] **Mr Mintoft:** Yes, that is correct. They were needed to lift the person.

[238] **Russell George:** The issue is not really the ambulance, then; the issue is about the two members of staff required.

[239] **Mr Parry:** If they need to be given treatment on the way to hospital, they have to have the second person. They cannot go until they have the second person.

[240] **Russell George:** Clearly, while someone is driving, there needs to be someone in the ambulance to provide treatment. The ambulance is acting like a second vehicle to get the second person there; is that right?

[241] **Mr Mintoft:** Yes, although they are qualified staff. If there had been two of them in that ambulance, they could have dealt with it on their own, but they had to be called in because the first one could not deal with it. With the distances involved, it is silly, because the ambulance can sometimes take hours to get there. It is a waste of time.

[242] **William Powell:** In the brief moment that we have before 11 a.m., I ask you to give us your current view on the opening hours for MIU, which I know was a particular concern in the context of Tywyn. What are your views on that?

[243] **Mr Mintoft:** Our concern is enhanced because of the environment in which we live. The accident and emergency unit is a long way away, and the minor injuries units—I have changed the name slightly; they are local unscheduled care services—are very important to us. That is the first line, as it were, for patients. The fact that the hours have now been reduced—they were reduced from 1 October—is already starting to have an impact, and I have some examples of that.

[244] **William Powell:** We will return to that in a moment. As the library clock is telling us that it is 10.59 a.m., I think that we should prepare to stand and show our respects.

11:00

*Safodd y pwyllgor am funud o dawelwch.
The committee stood for a minute's silence.*

[245] **William Powell:** Thank you very much.

[246] **Mr Mintoft:** As I said, I have some examples where delay has been caused because the minor injuries unit has not been open, since 1 October. It is open between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m.; obviously, accidents and other incidents do not stop at 6 p.m. It is not open at weekends. There was a man with a dog bite, which could potentially be extremely serious, who decided that he did not want to go a long way; the place was closed, but he did not know that it was closed and had to check. He waited 15 hours for treatment. That could have been a major problem as he needed to be seen, checked over and stabilised. Before that, with the minor injuries unit—in fact, I put this example in my last correspondence to you—a friend of mine put his head through a glass door at 9 p.m. He tried to get minor injuries treatment, but could not, either in Tywyn or Dolgellau. He rang the out-of-hours service, which referred him to Bangor accident and emergency unit. That is a 140-mile round trip. He had no car—his wife did not drive anyway—and he had a 12-hour overnight wait for treatment, so I guess that he had a sleepless night. I have plenty of examples here, all since the MIU has gone to shorter hours. A lady with asthma who had difficulty breathing over the weekend was told by the out-of-hours service to ring Dolgellau, which referred her to Ysbyty Alltwen, which is nearer to Porthmadog. That is 43 miles away, therefore an 86-mile round trip. She decided to wait for Tywyn on Monday, and was treated for a chest infection. A 12-year-old boy with asthma had pneumonia some months ago, therefore his mother was very concerned. He recently had breathing difficulties on a Saturday. Tywyn was closed. The doctor was not available in Dolgellau, although he was supposed to be. He went to Alltwen in Tremadog—an 86-mile round trip—to be treated for a chest infection.

[247] Those are the ones that we know about. Most of the time, as I said in my previous correspondence to you, we have no way of telling how many people are missing treatment and not being treated, or are travelling a long distance elsewhere to be treated. We are trying to put something in place, such as a Facebook page, for people to report those experiences. There will be some inertia in that, and we will not necessarily know, but the NHS will not measure those things—it measures the people treated once they come within its remit.

[248] **William Powell:** What is your perspective on the community health council and any engagement that you have had with it as far as this is concerned?

[249] **Mr Mintoft:** The CHC in north Wales was very helpful to us. I have something here to read out. As you know, the x-ray unit is still working.

[250] **William Powell:** Absolutely, and that is something that we are pleased about, in that it was relieved.

[251] **Mr Mintoft:** It has two sessions. The morning session is fully utilised. The afternoon session is very well utilised—it is not totally full, but it is well used. That is great. In the case of the minor injuries unit, I am not sure whether the CHC agrees with the shortened hours, but it had to in the end, I think; I have talked to some of the people there. However, the CHC has been very helpful in trying to fight our case, and it took it a long time to get the solution that we have, which is that the x-ray unit is still open and the minor injuries unit is still working on shorter hours.

[252] **William Powell:** I believe that my colleague Russell wanted to raise issue around the out-of-hours service.

[253] **Russell George:** You mentioned the out-of-hours service. What improvements could be made to the out-of-hours service?

[254] **Mr Parry:** Abolish it.

[255] **Mr Mintoft:** I have forgotten his name, but we talked to the man who organises it for north Wales—I think that he sits in Caernarfon; it might be Bangor; sorry, it is Bangor. He said that less than 20% of doctors in north Wales are willing to participate in the out-of-hours service. I have talked to other people, and although I cannot say how often, it happens often that there is one doctor to cover from Bangor right down to our area for the out-of-hours service. That is not good enough. What happens—I have already referred to it—when someone rings up is that they are probably referred to A&E. Laughingly, I say ‘local’ A&E, because they are all a long, long way—

[256] **William Powell:** An hour and a half or two hours away in some cases.

[257] **Mr Mintoft:** Exactly. In a sense, I cannot blame the doctors. If they are sitting there, they know that they have to spend x amount of hours to get out to us and back.

[258] **William Powell:** That is dead time in the car with their driver, presumably.

[259] **Mr Mintoft:** That is right. They have a driver.

[260] **Russell George:** I was going to ask Dr Davies if the out-of-hours service in the past was a much better service. Is that your view?

[261] **Dr Davies:** It was certainly very different, and it was better.

[262] **Russell George:** How was it different in the past?

[263] **Dr Davies:** Each practice looked after its own patients, 24 hours a day. In the practice where I worked, there were six doctors, so there was a rota where you did one night in six. We had some difficulty in recruiting replacements. We had a husband and wife who left, and we wanted to recruit, but people were not applying for the job because they were going to have to work one night in six. They were not willing to come to Pwllheli, which is a very nice place to live, because they could get a job in Bangor or Wrexham where they did not have to do any nights.

[264] The other helpful thing, especially with evenings and nights on-call, was that if, for example, you were called to see an elderly patient whose spouse was frail and unwell, you also saw the spouse. Let us take the example of an elderly lady with pneumonia or bronchitis, who did not really need to go to Ysbyty Gwynedd, she could go into a GP bed in the community hospital, and if the husband was too frail to look after himself, but they managed together, you could ring social services and they would put the husband in a respite bed in Plas y Don. They would both come home from the respective places—where they had been looked after—in better shape than before the wife became ill.

[265] **Russell George:** Is it your view that the out-of-hours service should be improved or abolished? Mr Parry was saying that it should be abolished.

[266] **Dr Davies:** It is almost abolished already, is it not? I do not know. I think that the British Medical Association made a bad decision, really. I will add that I left before the big money came in.

[267] **Russell George:** Okay.

[268] **Dr Davies:** So now, it is big money and no nights.

[269] **Russell George:** Yes, I see.

[270] **William Powell:** Bethan has the final group of questions. I am conscious that time is pressing us a little.

[271] **Bethan Jenkins:** I just wanted to ask where you wanted to go from here. Obviously, we are concerned about the out-of-hours service, about the downgrading of the MIU and about transport. You have said that the CHC has been satisfactory, in terms of your negotiations with it, but where do you see movement now, in terms of holding the health board and the Minister to account on the changes and how they will affect people's daily lives? I appreciate the work that you are doing with regard to Facebook and people putting their stories there, but that will not be conclusive for the health board—it could just dismiss that and say, 'We dispute that that has happened; we think that our service is acceptable'. We need a qualitative analysis of what is happening. How do you see the whole process moving on, so that we can be secure in the knowledge that people are getting the treatment that they deserve, that the ambulance service is effective and that people are not suffering unnecessarily because of these changes?

[272] **Mr Parry:** I think that our submissions, Chair, will expand on and set the scene properly as to the problems; certainly, my submission does so.

[273] **William Powell:** Yes. The broader picture, and also issues around the consultation—

[274] **Bethan Jenkins:** Is there one thing, or a few things, that you would specifically home in on today?

[275] **Mr Mintoft:** At the top of my list—I thought that I was going to give a presentation today—there are two words: availability and accessibility. Those are the two problems. If you shorten the hours of whatever is available, there will be people who are ill or who have a problem outside of those hours. It is wonderful to have very skilled people in great places, who can offer wonderful treatment—I do not decry that at all—but it is no good if it is not available for people. That is what we are talking about: availability and accessibility.

[276] **William Powell:** That is fair enough.

[277] **Mr Parry:** Could I launch into this, Chair? At the outset, I need you to consider that in no way am I an expert witness, but I represent—

[278] **William Powell:** You speak from experience and on behalf of the people that you represent.

[279] **Mr Parry:** Yes, precisely. In the 30 years that I have been involved with local social matters, this matter has caused me the most concern, in terms of potential harm to our communities and to individuals.

[280] I worded the petition in a generic way because I was very aware that what Betsi was proposing was harmful to the majority of rural communities. I avoided being parochial. The main thrust of our petition fits comfortably with Tywyn's expressions of concern, articulated in that petition. If we look at the status quo, all of the symptoms of collapse are there: extremely low morale among staff; huge ambulance queues outside A&E; patients inappropriately placed in wards and homes because of bedblocking and non-availability of ambulances; a crisis in GP recruitment; the out-of-hours service not being user friendly or even responsive within acceptable parameters; and stories of near misses—which I can provide, of course. All in all, it is a complete lottery, which will, sooner or later, arrive at what will be, or have been, plainly avoidable tragedies.

[281] Where we live, the theory of the benefits and outcomes of the golden hour—which we referred to earlier—is a complete joke. It is a given today, sadly, that the Betsi board has been in a shambolic state. It has admitted to being dysfunctional, and is presently in a state of reconstruction. It is a scandal that the Auditor General for Wales had to get involved to highlight the problems with the board. The recent timely resignations and retirements within the board and the CHC locally and nationally tell their own story, in my view. Betsi now has a new chair, Dr Peter Higson, and I look forward to our meeting with him next week and wish him well. I shall not be taking any baggage with me to that meeting; I am quite open-minded about it. There is also, in our area certainly, in contrast to Brian's, no public confidence in the function of the CHC, considered widely to be the lapdog of the Betsi board, as evidenced by mass resignations of CHC members—Councillor Peter Read from the executive board, Councillor Selwyn Griffiths, and Councillor Huw Edwards, the chairman of Gwynedd Council. Some of these members have 20 years plus standing on the CHC, which must, I suggest, signal something of significance. Gwynedd Council also passed a motion of no confidence in the Betsi board and in the CHC, to reflect what its communities were telling it. The effectiveness of CHCs depends, in part, on the public's perception of their reputation and standing. As far as I am concerned, they have no standing and their reputation is not to be envied. In my view, and that of many others, they need root and branch reform or even abolishing.

[282] With regard to the consultation process that Betsi Cadwaladr undertook, I attended a series of what were called locality meetings, which were designed, in my personal view, to give some kind of endorsement and validity to the supposed research that they conducted within those meetings, under the guise of public consultation. It included a lot of leading questions and scenarios. On reflection, I was probably mugged. The limited public meetings also convened were also stage-managed and demand was not satisfied; Dr Delyth Davies would attest to that. Whilst I appreciate that the Betsi Cadwaladr board has a serious fiscal situation to deal with, the reconfiguration of services that has led to a poorer service and a threat to patient safety is totally unacceptable. Ironically, the whole new package that it put together was sold as offering a better and a safer service.

11:15

[283] At this juncture, it would be remiss of me if I did not pay tribute to the trust staff who are doing their best and operating under very frustrating and difficult circumstances. I am as frustrated as they are. If I achieve nothing else here today, I will be happy to have made you aware of some of the real problems troubling our health service in the rural regions. I can provide you with real life scenarios and examples that have been subjected to this systemic casino that we now have. I do not want the Assembly to be like the German nation after the war, being in denial of the atrocities that were taking place within their boundaries; I am telling you candidly today that people are, and will, suffer and die as a result of these changes. The priority has to be not particularly apportioning blame, but finding solutions. However, I find the complacency and denial by some politicians—not all, I must say—asserting that our health service is not in crisis, to be offensive and beyond belief. The individuals, including the First Minister, need a reality check.

[284] I have nearly finished now, Mr Chair. Any change, even a change for the better, is always accompanied by drawbacks and discomforts, and while one is not resistant to change, one is resistant to the outright dereliction of duty, or what is plainly a series of historical poor decisions, some of which clearly need to be reconsidered. Our healthcare system is in meltdown and on the pathway to becoming neither healthy, caring nor a system. The onset of winter is likely to exacerbate problems and move our systemic difficulties from the general ward into intensive care, with the end result of unnecessary suffering. Let us face it: we do not have a healthcare system; we have a system of care that is ill. Seriously, our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter. To conclude, Chair, do not take life too

seriously; you will never get out of it alive.

[285] **William Powell:** Councillor Parry, thank you very much for that concluding statement, which addressed the couple of remaining questions that I had. One request that I would make to you on behalf of the committee is that you please send us an update when you have the meeting with the new chief executive, to which you have just referred. You said that you would leave your guns at the door and that you were hoping for a fresh start. It would be really helpful to us to have your perspective on that forthcoming meeting. Also, because of time constraints, we are not going to consider your evidence today, but we will do so at a future meeting and, hopefully, we will have that update from you by then as well. So, I would like to thank you very much for taking the time out to join us here at Prestatyn High School, and we shall come back to consider this evidence session at an early future meeting and we will hopefully hear more from yourself. If you have any other additional submissions in the meantime, please send them to us as a committee and we will take them forward.

[286] **Mr Mintoft:** I have four points that I would like to mention, which are single sentences. At the last meeting, you talked about the Tywyn hospital development. Sure enough, there is a development, but it is nothing to do with the MIU or the x-ray services that you were talking about. It is simply moving the health centre into a different building and providing some beds for dying people and people who are recovering. It does not affect what we have said. I agree about staff morale. On the reduction of the hours of staff, with fewer people using the facility we can eventually see it dying. We have seen it elsewhere. They will say, 'There are not many people using this, so we don't need it'. That is the staff. There are also some skills there. Some of the nurses have been able to diagnose for years; they have done it well for people. They have the skills and the training, but they are now not allowed to do it. The new nurses being recruited are being recruited on only six-month contracts and they do not have any training to do that sort of thing, so the thing is deliberately being run down. Thank you very much.

[287] **Bethan Jenkins:** We do not have time now, but would you write to us saying what you think that we, as a committee, could suggest? You could include some ideas—perhaps you will know more once you have met with the new members of the community health council—so that we will have an idea of how we could satisfy the demands in your petition when we discuss it at the next meeting.

[288] **William Powell:** Diolch yn fawr am **William Powell:** Thank you very much for ddod heddiw, ac am y sesiwn y bore yma. coming today, and for the session this morning.

11:20

P-04-343: Atal Dinistrio Amwynderau ar Dir Comin—Ynys Môn
P-04-343: Prevent the Destruction of Amenities on Common Land—Anglesey

[289] **William Powell:** I ask Mr Tom Pollock, lead petitioner on petition P-04-343, to step up in a moment, together with Lewis Davies and Dr Karen Pollock.

[290] Croeso cynnes iawn i bawb. A warm welcome to everyone.

[291] I ask you, when you have drawn breath, just to introduce yourselves for the record and to ensure that the levels are right. I ask Dr Karen Pollock to kick off.

[292] **Dr Pollock:** I am Karen Pollock. I am here because my father and I were two of the petitioners. My father, sadly, died last year. My father's house abutted Marian common. I am

also here because I work in the heritage industry and I have an interest in how the beauty and archaeology of Wales are promoted, thus preserving the natural environment.

[293] **William Powell:** We are grateful to you. Mr Pollock?

[294] **Mr Pollock:** I am Tom Pollock. I am here to support the petition, and to lead the petition on behalf of everyone who has signed and supported it in the past. Of course, I am also here to support my wife, Karen.

[295] **William Powell:** Mr Davies?

[296] **Mr Davies:** Rwy'n gynghorydd sir dros ward Seiriol lle mae tir comin y Marian. Hefyd, rwyf wedi bod yn athro daearyddiaeth, ac wedi byw yn yr ardal ers blynyddoedd. Rwy'n nabod yr ardal fel cefn fy llaw, a fi yw'r person sydd wedi cael y mwyaf o broblemau gyda difrodi'r tir comin hwn.

Mr Davies: I am a county councillor for the Seiriol ward where the Marian common land is located. I have also been a geography teacher, and have lived in the area for years. I know the area like the back of my hand, and I feel that I am the person who has had the most problems with the damage to this common land.

[297] **William Powell:** I will kick off just by asking you, as a group of petitioners, to give a little bit more clarity to the committee and colleagues about the level of legal protection that is currently afforded under the Commons Act 2006, and in what respects you would like to see that protection enhanced through the action of the Assembly.

[298] **Mr Pollock:** I have a prepared statement, if you would like me to read it.

[299] **William Powell:** I would be very happy for you to kick off in that way.

[300] **Mr Pollock:** Just bear with me a moment: I just need to put my other eyes on. [*Laughter.*]

[301] First, we would like to thank the Petitions Committee for this opportunity to put forward oral evidence in support of this petition. The online petition contained 156 signatures, and followed a paper petition with 320 signatures, which sought to prevent the destruction of a specific common, Marian common in Llangoed, Anglesey. This common land is under the stewardship of Llangoed and Penmon Community Council and is registered common land, with registered rights of common for grazing, estovers and the collection of stone. There is registered public right of way for open recreation under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. A length of the Anglesey coastal footpath crosses the common. To recap, in June 2011, during the nesting season, large swathes of vegetation were destroyed, and earthmovers changed the topography of the land to create two 7m-wide dirt roads. Photographic evidence has been submitted to the committee.

[302] This is an area with a wealth of flora and fauna. Detailed lists compiled by environmental experts have been submitted to the committee. The local community, which enjoys this beautiful area for recreation, was shocked and saddened by this act, but felt powerless to protect the common against further destruction in the light of inadequate laws. While section 38 of the Commons Act 2006 should, in theory, prevent the resurfacing of the land, it does not prevent the destruction of vegetation and the modification of the landscape for vehicular use. Basically, anyone can cut and drive large dirt tracks across any common land with impunity. In the worst-case scenarios, little of the natural heritage would be left for the enjoyment of local communities.

[303] In the case of Marian common, under the Prescription Act 1832, if no greater

protection is provided for common land, it is likely that rights of access will be applied for after 20 years, and then, of course, vehicular trespass will be legitimised. We feel that the law—section 38 of the Commons Act—is inadequate. It makes no provision for the protection of the natural environment or protected species. Any individual can plough up or denude the plant life and wildlife on common land without fear of prosecution. The example above, of Marian common in Llangoed, specifically shows that one way to alter the use of common land from common to private is to carry out an unannounced, pre-emptive, legally unrestricted change to the land, and then to sit back and wait for any civil legal action to restore the land to common determination. All agencies in our case have refused to help the Marian community as, being subject to civil law, no-one, including the local county council, has the funds to run a civil case against an experienced perpetrator.

[304] We would like to make the following points in support of this petition. Using the example of Marian common as a precedent, the petitioners feel that the committee has an opportunity to provide all common land in Wales with greater protected legal status. In terms of securing and protecting a better environment for the people of Wales, any change in legislation would be strongly supported by many. Greater legal protection for common land would strengthen the intention behind many areas of natural beauty. Greater legal power would devolve power to local communities. Local councils are currently helpless to enforce the overwhelming local consensus for the preservation of common land. The economy of north Wales is supported by tourism. The beauty of the local heritage draws visitors from across the globe. As well as local signatures, the paper petition to protect Marian common also contains signatures from visitors enjoying the coastal path. The relaxation of planning laws, which comes into effect this autumn in Wales and will allow local people to improve their homes, should run hand in hand with new laws that protect common land, and thus the local environment, for local communities.

[305] Finally, recently, local people have been extremely frightened by official letters sent by the Land Registry on behalf of a certain Lord Treffos in Cheshire, who is reinstating claims to exercise archaic, manorial rights to collect tithes and dues from local people. Tightening up the laws related to common land would give greater security to those who feel under threat from external forces hoping to acquire land for individual gain.

[306] **William Powell:** I believe that that point was raised by Rhun ap Iorweth with the First Minister last Tuesday in Plenary session.

[307] **Mr Pollock:** Indeed, yes.

[308] **William Powell:** It would be useful, possibly, for us to engage with him, as the new Member for Ynys Môn, on these matters.

[309] **Mr Davies:** Fel cynghorydd sir, rwyf wedi cael trafferthion mawr ynghylch hawliau tir—hawliau maenrol Treffos ar dir. Mae dros 4,500 o hawliau ac maent yn dal i ddod i mewn. Mae rhai o hen bobl fregus yn dychryn pan maent yn derbyn y llythyron, heb wybod yr hanes na dim byd arall am yr hawliau. Rwyf wedi bod yn helpu llawer ohonynt, a dweud y gwir.

Mr Davies: As a county councillor, I have had great difficulty around the land rights—Treffos manorial rights on land. There are over 4,500 rights, and they are still coming in. Some older, vulnerable people are scared when they receive these letters, without knowing the history or anything else about these rights. I have been helping a lot of these people, to be honest.

[310] **William Powell:** Potentially, this is coming at a favourable time, with the imminent emergence of the environment Bill. This is exactly the background to that, and two of the three Members that you have here today are actually involved directly with the Environment and Sustainability Committee. Russell George and I serve on that committee, and this is

something that we could take some of the lead on within the committee, now that we have heard testimony at first hand. Russell, do you wish to add anything?

[311] **Russell George:** No, I am okay for the moment.

11:30

[312] **William Powell:** To be honest, your statement has been pretty comprehensive in addressing a number of the questions that I wanted to bring forward. Dr Pollock, do you have anything to add at this stage?

[313] **Dr Pollock:** I would like to see stronger regulations, but I would also like to see an independent arbitrator in places like Marian common, which would be somewhere for people to go and put forward their case. There would then be a balanced response, so that commons are not just taken out of the community's usage, really.

[314] **William Powell:** Could I ask you briefly what engagement there has been with the North Wales Police on any issues around criminal activity? I know that in the part of Wales that I come from, issues around off-road use have not seen a very active response from Dyfed-Powys Police, but that is often because of resource issues and other complexities. I do not know whether the council would like to add something in this regard.

[315] **Mr Davies:** Cefais fy ngalw i'r safle hon pan oedd y dinistrio yn digwydd, yng nghanol mis Mehefin, yn ystod amser nythu bywyd gwyllt. Gofynnais i fab y datblygwr a oedd wedi cael caniatâd, ac nid oedd wedi cael caniatâd. Bûm mewn cysylltiad â swyddog yr heddlu a oedd yn cydweithio gyda Chyngor Cefn Gwlad Cymru o ran byd natur, a dywedodd yntau fod y dystiolaeth i gyd wedi mynd, wedi'i dinistrio, ac oherwydd hynny, ni allai wneud dim byd. Ni allwn ddeall hynny. Roedd cynefin arbennig yno, gydag adar yn nythu a phopeth, ac yng nghanol mis Mehefin, canol y mis nythu, daeth y peiriannau mawr i mewn. Roedd ef yn dweud na allai wneud dim byd, am nad oedd unrhyw dystiolaeth. Nid oeddwn yn hoff iawn o'r ateb hwnnw, a dweud y gwir.

Mr Davies: I was called to this site when the destruction was taking place, during the middle of June, during the nesting time for wildlife. I asked the son of the developer whether he had had permission, and he had not. I was in contact with the police officer who was collaborating with the Countryside Council for Wales in relation to wildlife, and he said that the evidence had all been destroyed, and because of that, he could not do anything about it. I did not understand that. You had a special habitat there, with birds nesting and everything, and in the middle of June, in the middle of the nesting period, these big machines arrived, and he said that he could not do anything about it, because there was no evidence. I was not very happy with that response, if truth be told.

[316] **William Powell:** It sounds to me clearly like an environmental crime that should have been taken more seriously.

[317] **Mr Pollock:** I also wrote, along with several other people, to North Wales Police complaining that nothing had been done, especially at the time a four-wheel drive was driven up Snowdon, and the gentleman was prosecuted. I thought that would have been a fair case to answer on the Marian, because of the lorries and tractors being driven across it. However, a so-called investigation was carried out and it was said that there were no grounds for any prosecution at all.

[318] **Dr Pollock:** I do not think that any of us want to stop farmers from carrying out the things that they have to do. If you have an off-road vehicle it can go on common land, but I think our point was that the whole habitat was destroyed. The whole topography was

changed. The earth was moved to make these tracks.

[319] **Mr Pollock:** Yes, they actually constructed a road where there had not been a road.

[320] **William Powell:** Have you yet engaged with the police and crime commissioner, Mr Winston Roddick, on this matter, or is that something that you would welcome us taking forward as a committee, potentially?

[321] **Dr Pollock:** I do not know what Lewis would think as a county councillor. Would that be—

[322] **Mr Davies:** Rwy'n meddwl ei fod yn syniad da. Mae'n debygol, fel mae pethau'n mynd, y bydd hyn yn digwydd ar dir comin mewn lleoedd eraill yng ngogledd Cymru neu drwy Gymru hefyd. Dyna beth roeddem ni yn dymuno heddiw yn y fan hon oedd sicrhau deddfwriaeth gryfach i wneud yn siŵr bod tir comin yn cael ei edrych ar ei ôl i'r dyfodol. Mae hynny'n bwysig iawn.

Mr Davies I think that that is a good idea. It is likely, the way that things are going, that this is going to happen on common land in other places in north Wales or throughout Wales as well. What we wanted to do here today was to ensure stronger legislation to make sure that common land is looked after for the future. That is very important.

[323] **William Powell:** I call on Russell George and then the last word will go to Bethan.

[324] **Russell George:** What conversations have you had with the farming unions, the National Farmers Union or the Farmers Union of Wales?

[325] **Mr Pollock:** We did not have any conversations at all with farming unions, or I did not, anyway, because it was deemed that common land was what we were looking at and the protection of it. We contacted all the bodies such as, at the time, the Countryside Council for Wales, which is now Natural Resources Wales, and the community council that, supposedly, was the custodian of the land. Wherever we turned, it was all directed back at us with nobody being willing to take a lead on it. In terms of the farming unions, I must admit that it had not occurred to me—

[326] **Russell George:** Perhaps we can write as a committee to seek the views of the farming unions on this matter.

[327] **William Powell:** Yes, we can write to the farming unions on the island, initially.

[328] **Russell George:** Yes, if they have not yet been engaged with on this, they will have views on this.

[329] **William Powell:** We will write to both of them and to Winston Roddick, as that was previously welcomed by Councillor Davies.

[330] **Mr Pollock:** I think that the Winston Roddick idea is quite good; it is just that no-one seemed to have any teeth. There are laws in place, but it is like saying that burglary is against the law, but if nobody is prosecuted for burglary—

[331] **William Powell:** Absolutely. There is no credibility, is there?

[332] **Mr Pollock:** Yes. The law is in disrepute.

[333] **Dr Pollock:** I think that it is a case of looking forward, rather than looking back at what happened, because we cannot really change that now. The shrubs are growing back—

[334] **William Powell:** It is about trying to learn from the episode.

[335] **Dr Pollock:** Yes, that is right. We do not want this to happen to us or to other people in the future. I think that that is the point. We are not trying to persecute anyone; we would just like the law to be that this cannot happen to the natural habitat.

[336] **William Powell:** Daw'r cwestiwn olaf wrth Bethan Jenkins.

William Powell: The final question comes from Bethan Jenkins.

[337] **Bethan Jenkins:** Roeddwn yn trio deall peth o'r cefndir, ac rydych chi wedi dweud, Lewis, eich bod wedi cwyno wrth y bobl oedd yn gwneud hyn, ac iddynt hwy ddweud nad oeddent wedi cael caniatâd. O dan adran 41 o'r Ddeddf, mae'n dweud os nad yw'r Gweinidogion wedi rhoi hawl iddynt fynd ar y tir neu i wneud y gwaith penodedig hwnnw, mae'r Gweinidogion yn gallu gweithredu yn eu herbyn. A oedd yr adran honno wedi cael ei defnyddio mewn unrhyw ffordd? Rwy'n trio deall beth sydd yn anghywir neu ddim yn digwydd nawr i ni fel pwyllgor allu cynnig sut mae gwella'r ddeddfwriaeth. A ydym ni'n gallu edrych ar dargedu elfennau eraill? I mi, sut mae gwneud i hyn weithio yw'r peth pwysicaf. Os nad yw'r ddeddfwriaeth yn gweithio, sut ydym ni'n gallu sicrhau ei fod yn gweithio?

Bethan Jenkins: I was trying to understand some of the background, and you have said, Lewis, that you had complained to the people who did this, and that they had said that they had not received permission. Under section 41 of the Act, it says that if the Ministers have not given them the right to go on the land or to do that appointed work, the Ministers can take action against them. Was that section used in any way? I am trying to understand what is wrong or what is not happening now so that we as a committee can put forward ways of improving the legislation. Can we look at targeting other elements? To me, making this work is the most important thing. If the legislation does not work, how can we ensure that it does?

[338] **Mr Davies:** Diolch am yr wybodaeth honno. Rwyf wedi bod yn aelod o Gyngor Cymuned Llangoed a Phenmon ac mae tir comin y Marian yn yr ardal hon; rwyf hefyd yn gynghorydd sir ers ychydig o flynyddoedd. Ar ôl i mi gael fy ngalw yno yn ystod y difrodi, cysylltais â phob adran yn y cyngor sir roeddwn i'n teimlo y byddai'n medru bod o gymorth. Nid oedd un ohonynt yn medru rhoi cymorth i mi. Nid oedd y cyngor cymuned oedd â hawliau'r tir comin yn medru gwneud dim byd yn erbyn hyn. Byddai wedi bod yn braf pe byddwn wedi medru codi'r ffôn, ffonio'r cyngor sir a gofyn i'r adran orfodaeth yn yr adran gynllunio i fynd yno'n syth i hel tystiolaeth ac i wneud rhywbeth yn ei gylch. Roeddwn yn bwrw wal bob tro roeddwn yn trio gofyn am gymorth gan y cyngor sir—dim ond esgusodion a gefais, neu roeddent yn dweud wrthyf nad oedd ganddynt hawl i wneud hynny. Felly, byddwn yn hoffi cryfhau'r rheolau rhwng y Cynulliad, y cyngor sir a hefyd y cymunedau—bydd rhywbeth fel hyn yn digwydd eto i gyngor cymunedau, ac nid oes

Mr Davies: Thank you for that information. I have been a member of Llangoed and Penmon Community Council, and Marian common is in this area; I have also been a county councillor for a few years. After I was called there when the destruction happened, I got into contact with every single department in the county council that I thought could be of assistance. Not one of them could give me any assistance. The community council, which had the rights for the common land, could not do anything against this. It would have been good if I could have picked up the phone, phoned the county council and asked the enforcement department in the planning department to go there straight away to collect evidence and to do something about it. I was hitting a brick wall every time that I asked for assistance from the county council—there were just excuses or they would say that they did not have the right to do that. So, I would like to strengthen the regulations between the Assembly, the county council and community councils—something like this will happen again to

ganddynt y pwerau. Yn y cynghorau sir, mae adrannau cyfreithiol a ddylai fedru bod yn gymorth i gyngor cymunedol pan fydd pethau fel hyn yn digwydd, ond ni ddigwyddodd hynny yn yr achos hwn.

community councils, and they do not have the powers. In county councils, there are legal departments that should be able to provide assistance to community councils when things like this happen, but it did not happen in this instance.

[339] **Bethan Jenkins:** Felly, fe fyddech yn anghytuno â'r hyn y mae'r Gweinidog yn ei ddweud yn ei lythyr bod y pwerau yn ddigon cryf fel y maent?

Bethan Jenkins: So, you would disagree with what the Minister says in his letter that the powers are sufficiently strong at present?

[340] **Mr Davies:** Nid ydynt yn hanner digon cryf

Mr Davies: They are not half as strong as they should be.

[341] **William Powell:** Diolch o galon am ddod y bore yma.

William Powell: Thank you very much for coming along today.

[342] It has been really helpful for us to gain an understanding at first hand from your testimony of what the specific concerns are, and how, in a number of different ways, we can take this forward. Given the time constraints this morning and the programme that we need to fit into, we need to defer consideration of your evidence, but we have a number of actions coming out of this morning anyway. We will be considering the evidence in the round at our meeting on 26 November. Thank you very much indeed for what you have contributed today to our consideration of this petition.

11:40

P-04-496 Ysgolion Pob Oed P-04-496 Through Schools

[343] **William Powell:** I ask Dawn Docx and Anna Gresty of the St Brigid's Action Group to stand-by: we will just organise the nameplates and then we will get under way.

[344] Croeso cynnes. It is great to see you again, Dawn, and to meet you, Anna. I wonder whether you would introduce yourselves briefly just to check the sound levels and also give us a brief update on developments, which I know have been broadly positive and widely covered in the last couple of weeks with regard to the specific issues in your campaign.

[345] **Ms Docx:** Thank you very much. Diolch yn fawr for the opportunity to be able to give some background to our concerns, as well as an update. My name is Dawn Docx, I am the lead petitioner. I am also the parent of a pupil at St Brigid's School.

[346] **Ms Gresty:** I am Anna Gresty, and I am the parent of a pupil at St Brigid's and a member of the action group.

[347] **William Powell:** Thank you.

[348] **Ms Docx:** Since the consultation closed on the proposed merger of the two schools—obviously, we will talk about that in more detail later—the results of that consultation have been considered by Denbighshire County Council, and it has decided not to go ahead with phase 1, which was the closure of two schools, which are over 10 miles apart, and combining them to be, in effect, one school, but on two sites. Its intention is to go forward with the phase 2 of the consultation, which is to close both schools once they have built the new school on a different site. Thank you very much.

[349] **William Powell:** Excellent. Please refresh your glasses with the water. So, clearly, in that case, there has been significant progress in terms of the local issue at this stage, in terms of getting that further involvement.

[350] **Ms Docx:** Yes, I think that what we are asking for is Welsh Government guidance around school mergers and closures—not just for St Brigid’s, but for other schools as well.

[351] **William Powell:** Absolutely. I was just going to ask you to clarify the points that you think are of wider application across Wales, particularly, for example, in situations where there is not such a concerted, articulate group as has assembled around the St Brigid’s case to protect school communities and wider communities against something inappropriate happening as the result of a particular bureaucratic decision.

[352] **Ms Docx:** Thank you. We particularly wanted to focus on through schools, which, as you are aware, are primary, secondary and sixth form, because, obviously, having pupils aged from three to 19 brings additional complexities to any of these changes.

[353] **William Powell:** Like pastoral things and all sorts of other matters.

[354] **Ms Docx:** We believe that this guidance could be necessary for other schools, and not just through schools, but schools throughout Wales that may be facing closures and mergers. We do understand that there has to be development and improvement in the infrastructure of our education establishments, and we do know about the guidance that surrounds the twenty-first century schools funding, but we believe that it is not strong enough, because—dare I say it—in their dash for cash, local authorities may well be tempted to produce a plan with an eye to the future, or the vision of the new school that they wish to build, with very little consideration of the impact that it has on the current pupils or, indeed, on pupils moving into the schools. The whole process takes years, and these are years that we do not get back for our children’s education.

[355] We are using St Brigid’s as a case study, as you know, and it is a very popular and oversubscribed school, very much like Prestatyn High. Unlike Prestatyn High School, however, we have not been able to have the capital to expand and to meet that demand. As parents, we found ourselves with this plan that Denbighshire County Council had created, where the idea was that it would close both schools and then reopen on the same two sites, over 10 miles apart, and with very little consideration of the practicalities of this arrangement. So, when we ask how it would work, whether the children would be bussed from one site to another, and whether the teachers would be driving up and down in their cars, the answer that we received was that it would be up to the new headteacher and the governors to work out how that would work in practice. We do not think that that was good enough, really.

11:45

[356] We also believe that there was very little consideration of children with special educational needs or medical needs. Although an equality impact assessment needs to be undertaken, it certainly was not developed to the extent that it should be—and this is why Anna is with me. Anna has a son, Jake, who is seven—

[357] **Ms Gresty:** Do you want me to—

[358] **Ms Docx:** Yes; thanks.

[359] **Ms Gresty:** Go on, then; I will.

[360] Jake is seven and has a life-limiting illness. So, obviously, his medical needs are quite great, and the equality impact statement had no provision for how things would change or how his needs would be met. When I asked the question at the consultation meeting of how they would meet his additional needs, they just said, 'Well, this is why we're here'. So, I said, 'Well, I'm asking this question now', and there was no attempt to engage with children with medical needs or special educational needs, and there was no consideration given to those children. I think that they needed to look at how they were going to meet those needs, because I know that St Brigid's meets the needs of children quite well in a through-school setup. It needs to be considered.

[361] **William Powell:** In any management of change of that sort, children with specific conditions are the most vulnerable to suffer, are they not?

[362] **Ms Gresty:** Yes, and they will suffer. They just did not seem to understand that.

[363] **Bethan Jenkins:** Did they say that they did not have guidance from Government? What was the reason given for why they did not come up with that initially, so that you had to prompt them for an answer?

[364] **Ms Gresty:** They did not give any sort of reason. I asked quite a long, convoluted question about how they were going to meet all these different needs, and when it was minuted, it was, 'A parent asked how they were going to interact with parents'. I did not ask that; I asked how they were going to meet specific needs, and there was no understanding of the requirement by the Welsh Government to meet the needs of children with additional needs.

[365] **Bethan Jenkins:** Where has that gone now? Where does that sit now in the scheme of things for the development and progression of the discussions?

[366] **Ms Docx:** The intention now is to move to phase 2 of the consultation, in which they will consult on the idea of building a new, combined school on a different site. What we would want to see is much more careful consideration of some of these issues that we have raised and have put in writing during the first phase of the consultation, so that we can see that the issue is being addressed, rather than it being left to petitioners to try to prompt the local council regarding the need to think about these things.

[367] We note the response from the Minister, and he obviously thinks that the code is sufficient. However, our experience is that it is not really sufficient and that more needs to be available for local authorities, which have the ultimate responsibility. However, it needs to be able to show that they have considered these things, not simply at the end of a consultation process when we have explained it all to it.

[368] We also are very pleased to see that the Minister recognises that through-school education is very valuable. Although, maybe, it is not the place of the Welsh Government to actively promote it, given that a number of through schools are being built or exist in west Wales, we think that it is right that we promote the benefits of through schools and the fact that it makes a real difference to pupils moving into year 7. They do not have a dip in educational attainment.

[369] **William Powell:** The issues of transition do not exist in the same way, do they?

[370] We have the opportunity to represent the views that you have expressed today and, when we have a transcript of today's session, we will feed that back to the Minister. It would also be helpful for us if you could, together with colleagues, reflect on your response to the Minister. You have given an oral response today, but if you could give a considered view,

taking into account the views of other campaigners and others involved in the petition, it would help things considerably.

[371] **Bethan Jenkins:** What has the Welsh Local Government Association said on this? Have you talked to the WLGA? Obviously, to play devil's advocate for a minute, the Welsh Government would say that, if it was to micromanage and be so prescriptive, where would it start and end on these things, because education budgets are given to local government to administer. So, have you spoken to the WLGA to see what is done in other parts of Wales, so that best practice can be shared?

[372] **Ms Docx:** No, we have not, but that is a useful suggestion; thank you.

[373] **William Powell:** That is something that we as a committee can also consider doing in the next phase, after 26 November. Russell, you have been very patient.

[374] **Russell George:** My question was very similar to the one that Bethan asked. Ultimately, these are decisions for the local authority and, once again, playing devil's advocate, what can happen or what some people argue is that too much guidance from Welsh Government can be restrictive for the local authority, particularly because the geography in different areas across Wales is so different. What are your views on that?

[375] **Ms Docx:** The difficulty is that there are certain directions, such as the need to remove surplus school places, and the letter states that the focus has to be on educational achievement. We would say that we have a school here that is achieving really excellent results and yet, because of the surplus school places issue at the other school involved in the merger, they are being overridden by the need to get the money and therefore address surplus places, and it has not been thought out with regard to the way in which this will work out here and now for the pupils involved at both schools. When we took the wider petition out, we got 3,300 signatures.

[376] **William Powell:** Clearly, this is an issue of concern, not just in your own community, but potentially, as you said, across Wales.

[377] **Ms Docx:** Yes, it could be.

[378] **William Powell:** If there is a final message that you would like to leave us with today for us to take away and to inform our consideration of the evidence on 26 November, which is when we shall do that, we would be very grateful for you to share it with us now.

[379] **Ms Docx:** It is really about having a broader consideration than is in the guidance now. There is also the matter of the complexities of through schools, and the fact that we do not want to do away with through schools, because we see the advantages of them. It is a question of whether that is taken into account when closures and mergers are considered.

[380] **William Powell:** Do you have any view on the weight given to the views of diocesan authorities in the case of faith schools, and whether any additional guidance or support might be helpful there, because I realise that that is factor in your particular case?

[381] **Ms Docx:** We would not know the answer to that. With our case, we get the impression that the opinion of the two dioceses is very important, and they are pushing for the concept of the faith school, which does not seem to have the same general enthusiasm from parents.

[382] **William Powell:** That is useful.

[383] Diolch yn fawr am ddod heddiw ac Thank you for coming today and for the am y sesiwn y bore yma. session this morning.

[384] We are extremely grateful to you for having come here to Prestatyn High School to speak to us in person. We will take that forward, because of time constraints, at our next meeting on 26 November. We look forward very much to receiving your correspondence in the meantime, in terms of a fuller response to the letter that we received from Huw Lewis. Diolch yn fawr iawn.

11:54

Trafod y Broses o Gasglu Tystiolaeth Discussion of Evidence Gathering

[385] **William Powell:** The petition under discussion is P-04-432, Stop the Army Recruiting in Schools. We have the opportunity to discuss evidence that was previously gathered from Cymdeithas y Cymod and its colleagues. We also had a really useful informal session this morning with a group of year 10 and year 11 pupils here at Prestatyn High School. It would be useful if any of those of you who were present or, indeed, those of you who were not present but would like to contribute, feel able to do so. Do we have a roving microphone? I see not. However, there is an opportunity for folk to step up if they would like to make a contribution. I will ask Bethan to kick off on this issue. There was a particularly strong response this morning to the issue, and it was really useful to hear from pupils in years 10 and 11 about their experience of the public service qualification that you are pursuing. It would also be useful to hear about the Kinmel camp and some of the experiences that you have had there, and some of the benefits that we heard about this morning.

[386] **Bethan Jenkins:** There are a few people here from this morning. It was good to have the debate, and it would be really good if we could talk to lots of different schools, but we do not have the time. I thank the pupils. It was interesting that some people thought that they had been influenced by the army coming in to schools, but others thought differently, and just said 'As long as I'm aware of what the army is saying, I'm able to make my own decision'. Some people thought that they were too young to make a career choice at 16, but others thought that they were able to, so we had varying opinion. It was interesting that, when the army comes into the school, it was more glossy, telling people how great it is, but when questioning the soldiers who were talking to them, they were able to ask more probing questions about conflict and how it would affect morale. What students would potentially benefit from is more of a balanced approach at the start, from when the army comes in, so that they know exactly what they are doing. We also found that pupils might want to talk to other professions within the public sector, such as firemen, policemen or other professions, so that they could understand what other job prospects they had, instead of just the army. I am not sure that they all enjoyed the gruelling sporting exercises.

[387] **William Powell:** No, I think that there was a touch of the boot camp about some of the things that they had to do.

[388] **Bethan Jenkins:** That is what they have to do. I have my own views on this, but what is most important is that the young people feel that they are not being told something that is not a reflection of reality. We need to look at that within the whole educational structure, so that if one profession is given precedent over another, how the school and the school management team would cope with that and how they would make sure that all students are given a balanced approach, because when we go in as politicians we cannot be party political in schools. So, you would expect the army to take a more pragmatic approach in saying, 'Yes, conflict happens and mental health problems happen when people go into the army.' Children do not want to be patronised and be told that it is all perfect when it is not. I think it was a

really useful session to have.

[389] **William Powell:** It was very useful indeed. I think the message we heard was that there was a clear sort of aura of glamour around some of the people going in, dressed in their fatigues, talking about some of the travel opportunities that they had and the world that it had opened up. However, there was a sense that if there had been input from either the British Legion or Combat Stress or a more rounded picture given, it would have been more valid. Having said that, when there was a vote taken—I think there were about eight or nine people in the room this morning—we had just one expressing concern about the army coming in. Otherwise, it was pretty much unanimous that that focus group of young people that we were speaking to this morning was strongly in favour of the army having the opportunity to come to set out its stall. However, as Bethan said, there was a feeling that it would be great to have a wider slice of people across public services and, indeed, as you pointed out or maybe you want to open up now, Russell, opportunities to meet people with an entrepreneurial background to look at other career paths and opportunities.

12:00

[390] **Russell George:** I want to thank the students who were in the meeting this morning. I was very grateful for your time as well. However, from my perspective, what I picked up is that all the students we met this morning wanted to take part in the exercise. They wanted to take part, but, for me, it was a bit of an eye-opener, in terms of where the other professions are. Why are they not coming into schools? To my mind, perhaps, I would be more persuaded to say that rather than it being a negative campaign highlighting that the army should not go to schools, there should be more of a positive look at this and at where the other professions are. Perhaps there is a role for us as a committee to contact the Minister on those grounds and ask him to state that there should be a balanced approach in getting all professions in to give their views, really.

[391] **Bethan Jenkins:** I think that is where the word ‘recruit’ comes in. I know that there has been a dispute around it, but if one profession gets more access to children it surely then will lead to them considering that prospect, because we were talking to the children about careers options and some people had not accessed the careers service in the school. So, if they are not, perhaps, yet thinking about alternatives, such as looking into the science professions or other things that might interest them, then there may be a skew in the statistics showing that more young people join the army, if that is the main option for them in the school structure. That would be the concern, because it is not something to take lightly. At the end of the day, it is a very serious profession in terms of the fact that you go into combat. It is not to be shunned. I think, as a committee, we need to look at all the implications of when these professions come into school and how that impacts on different children, because some young people have formulated opinions and they know what they want to do when they are older, while others do not have a clue and want to be guided and to have that advice. It is a really important time for them. It is something that we have to take really seriously, I think.

[392] **Russell George:** What came out of it was that nobody felt that they were being recruited, which is very much the wording of the petition, although I take the points that Bethan has raised now about what recruiting means if no other professions are coming in. I think it would be good, Chair, if we offered that invitation again to any students, young people or teachers here who want to give their views on this. We would very much welcome, would we not, Chair, their views?

[393] **William Powell:** Absolutely, I wonder whether you could help us at this point, as you facilitated the session this morning.

[394] **Mr Barons:** I am Alex Barons, an associate senior leader in the school. I completely

agree with a lot of the points that you have raised about getting other groups in to promote their professions. The school has a lot of freedom in terms of how much it gets people in to do things. The army is very willing and keen to come in; therefore, there is a lot of opportunity to come in because it is willing to do so.

[395] **William Powell:** It also has a budget appropriate for that.

[396] **Mr Barons:** Absolutely, whereas getting other services in—especially other public services—can be trickier. If businesspeople have to give up their time, it costs them money and that can be difficult. In this school, particularly, we have good relationships with a lot of local entrepreneurs who come in and provide entrepreneurial workshops for the pupils before they go out to work experience and things like that. Those are often very successful. So, they have some opportunities. However, it would be very helpful for people who work as careers advisers and those who co-ordinate ‘Careers and the world of work’ in schools to have guidance or framework from the Government to say which people should be coming into schools.

[397] **Russell George:** What other professions did you have in—for example, the police and so on?

[398] **Mr Barons:** All pupils have regular contact with our police liaison officer. She comes into the school regularly. It is the difference between someone coming in to recruit or coming in to give information. Even when the army is in doing its army day, it is not so much, ‘Here we are, come and join us’, but it is more that it provides information.

[399] **William Powell:** It is an informational, promotional role.

[400] **Mr Barons:** Mainly, we have local entrepreneurs and businesspeople coming in as part of the Dynamo project. Have you come across that?

[401] **Russell George:** I was a Dynamo role model in my previous life.

[402] **Mr Barons:** So, we have the Dynamo project, which brings people into our school to talk to pupils about life in business and how they have got to where they are. They are usually successful people talking about how they have achieved that success. It tries to build that entrepreneurial spirit among pupils. It can, otherwise, be tricky to get people to come in to promote their professions.

[403] **William Powell:** Do you sometimes have a careers-focused day, every year or second year, where you try to get a wide range of people from different walks of life in, or is there no space for that within the curriculum?

[404] **Mr Barons:** It is certainly not something that we do in this school at this time. Maybe it is something that we could look into. It can be difficult in terms of fitting everything in—in terms of time in the curriculum—to get a specific careers day in, but it is certainly something that we can look into.

[405] **William Powell:** It is certainly something that I saw working well in other schools when I was in the profession, so it is worth taking that on board.

[406] Excellent, we have another contributor. Could you introduce yourself?

[407] **Ms Major:** I am Daisy and I am a year 11 pupil. I have not taken the public services diploma so I have not done the army day, but before we went on work experience last year, we had a day when we had people from different career backgrounds coming in. As part of

that, we had somebody from the ambulance service coming in. I think that it was in year 7 or 8 when we had a day with the Crucial Crew, when police officers and firemen came in and we spoke to them. So, we have had access to other communities, apart from the army.

[408] **William Powell:** That is good, because in the group that we met this morning, there were potentially two or three recruits to the police service, or people who would be keen to go that way.

[409] I ask those of you who have just joined us to take a seat and to introduce yourselves so that we can hear your views.

[410] **Mr Collings:** I am Sebastian Collings. I am a pupil at this school and I am on the school council.

[411] **Ms Hinson:** I am Holly Hinson and I am one of the head girls at the school. I am in the sixth form and I am on the school council.

[412] **Mr Collings:** While we are on the issue of stopping army recruitment in school—

[413] **William Powell:** That was the wording drawn from the petition.

[414] **Mr Collings:** Personally, I think that it is a good thing, because it would not be as strong as it is today if it did not recruit. It has to go somewhere to find people to go into the army. I agree with what you are saying in that it should not be forced upon students, but it should be providing a realistic view of what the army will be like. I have done it myself as I used to take part in the combined cadet force in Ruthin and we went to train with the territorial army and things like that. I think that they should do more realistic forms of army recruitment, giving people the choices in schools to go to experience it themselves, as I did. We camped with the proper TA, which opened my eyes to see that it was not for me, but if other people had the opportunity to do that, they could decide for themselves whether it would be for them, instead of just doing a day on the field that does not really show you what the army is really about.

[415] **William Powell:** I believe that the CCF can lead to away days and opportunities of field trips over two or three days, and can involve a meaningful range of activities.

[416] **Mr Collings:** Yes, there are promotions and real-life sorts of scenarios and so on, which are really helpful.

[417] **Ms Hinson:** I think that it is really good because not everyone learns in a classroom. I do not know what it is, but I now see people getting on the bus wearing army clothes.

[418] **Mr Barons:** It is the Kinmel camp.

[419] **William Powell:** Perhaps they are the Kinmel camp cadet contingent.

[420] **Ms Hinson:** Yes, they do that. They get GCSEs and qualifications out of it, which they would not normally get in school, so it is really quite helpful. Also, in our sixth form, we are taken on days. For example, I did a Pure Potential course. You had to sign up for if you thought that you could meet the target grade. That had different workplaces. People can go to the sixth form to get A-levels, but they still do not have to go to university. We realise that you can use them to start school-leaver programmes and so on. I want to study accounting at university, but people on the course told me that if I met their grade, I could leave school straight away and go with them and get the qualifications and stuff. So, it does help. School does take us on a lot of things. I do not think that the army should stop recruiting because it is

really handy.

[421] **Mr Barons:** It is important to actually have a range. I think that having the army in can be quite helpful, but I think that the main point that seems to come out a lot in this discussion is that there has to be a realistic view; it cannot be glamorised. It has to be a kind of open and honest thing. I think that that is very true, but I think that that is also very true of all professions. Anyone who comes into a school tries to promote their profession. I tell them all how wonderful teaching is, and how it is the best career in the world and that they should do it. I love my job, but it is not going to be for everyone. We all have a tendency to glamorise what we do, and that will be difficult to rule out completely. However, there has to be guidance on who should come in to promote their career choices in school.

[422] **Russell George:** To what extent are teachers present on the course, because they should do the check and balance? Were you a part of the careers lesson when the army came in, or were you on the course? There is no doubt that you must have a responsibility and feel that the young people must also have a balanced view.

[423] **Mr Barons:** Absolutely. I do not teach the public services course and I have not been on the army day to see this, but obviously I think that there is a responsibility on us as teachers to provide a balanced view. I agree with that.

[424] **Russell George:** So, you have to tease that out. So, if you feel that they are not being balanced, it is your duty to tease that out. Is that how you would feel that the teaching profession should police it?

[425] **Mr Barons:** When you are dealing with teenagers, you will know that they are quite savvy at teasing it out for themselves. That has to be said. They are quite good at it. Given that we are in an era of such mass media, people and teenagers can either see the glamorous side of the army or they can make a judgment for themselves from things that they can see on the internet or television about the not-so-glamorous side of the army.

[426] **William Powell:** On the news also.

[427] **Mr Barons:** Therefore, the pupils are very aware of the non-glamorous side of it. If they want to ask about it, if they have a concern over it, and if they are seriously considering a career in the army and are thinking, 'This is a concern', teenagers are savvy enough to ask.

[428] **Russell George:** The reason I ask is because I was a Dynamo role model, and I noticed that there would be differences between schools and teachers. If they felt that the young people were not taking a balanced view, or if they felt that I was not giving a balanced view, some teachers would help to tease that out of me. However, in some schools a teacher would sit at the back and not seek to be involved. I felt that that was wrong on their part, because they did not know who I was. They could have been there to do the checks and balances—

[429] **William Powell:** To kind of moderate the session, really, in a sense.

[430] **Mr Barons:** If it was me, as a teacher, I would be interrogating, trying to push you to kind of tease these things out. That is what we would call an effective model of how to do it in terms of careers. It would be effective of the teacher to push these points.

[431] **Russell George:** That is good to hear.

[432] **Bethan Jenkins:** I suppose that the issue on guidance is what I agree with because we know from research that we have done before that the army will go into certain areas of

Wales, or certain schools. We know from freedom of information requests that we have done before that it would go into more deprived areas. Whether you think that is a political decision or not is something for another day, I suppose, but it is about cautious approaches. We want to make sure that people from all schools and children from all backgrounds get the same treatment and the same access to information as everyone else, and that the army is not ringing you up, saying, ‘We want to come to your school’, because it knows that there is a facility nearby that will make it easier to recruit people afterwards, potentially. That is my concern as a politician.

[433] **Mr Barons:** That is, I think, why it is really good that this petition has come before this committee, because, hopefully, as a result of that, there may be some guidelines as to what schools should do in terms of the army, but maybe also other public services in terms of them coming in. That would be something that, as schools, we would appreciate.

[434] **Bethan Jenkins:** Did you want to say something on that?

[435] **Mr Collings:** I was just going to say that the army, as far as careers go, is the only one actually pushing it, actually going for it—the police, the ambulance and fire services do not seem to be pushing it to try to recruit people into their professions. However, the army seems to be doing it a lot more than—

[436] **William Powell:** That is going to be guided partly by its need for new recruits.

[437] **Mr Collings:** It is clearly doing it a lot more than any other profession out there, which is good in some respects, but I think that the other professions should be enlightening students like us as to what the roles are, because I do not know of half of them, and we should really know of them, should we not?

[438] **William Powell:** Daisy, do you have any reflections? You were kind enough to open the battle from the student point of view.

[439] **Ms Major:** I just think that we do have access to other things, like I said, with the ambulance service coming in for work experience day and crucial careers and stuff. However, I think that there is an aspect where the army is glorifying it and making it look like it is better than it is. If it brought along people who could explain the risks of entering the army and the things that could happen, that would make it more balanced.

[440] **William Powell:** It would be a truer picture, effectively. Maybe we should leave the last word to Holly, as one of the head girls here and part of the leadership team.

[441] **Ms Hinson:** I just do not think that they should stop, really, because the more that I go on trips and stuff and find out what more is going on, the more that I want to do stuff, so I think that it is a good thing that it is coming to school. It is good for most children. It is true that it does not show the bad side, because I remember doing Army Day on our back field and it was loads of fun—

12:15

[442] **Mr Collings:** There was a bouncy castle.

[443] **Ms Hinson:** There was a bouncy castle, was there not? It was like an assault course. We were all in teams, and we all won prizes and stuff. It was not like a real army.

[444] **William Powell:** Diolch yn fawr **William Powell:** Thank you very much. iawn. Diolch yn fawr iawn i Ysgol Uwchradd Thank you very much to Prestatyn High

Prestatyn.

School.

[445] Thank you to Prestatyn High School for all its hospitality this morning and for allowing us to come to invade the library. I saw a notice on the door saying that one or two activities had been postponed or relocated—

[446] **Russell George:** There were seagulls.

[447] **William Powell:** The seagulls have been taking an interest in our proceedings as well, which is refreshing.

[448] **Mr Barons:** The seagulls are a constant pleasure.

[449] **William Powell:** Anyway, it has been a really rewarding morning in a whole range of different ways, and I think that, from our perspective, the engagement with you as a student body and all the perspectives that you have brought have been really helpful.

[450] Diolch yn fawr iawn.

Thank you very much indeed.

[451] We look forward to continuing our consideration of this petition and having a chat informally with you afterwards.

[452] I remind Members that we have the petition presentation coming up for Save the Wrexham/Barmouth X94 bus service, with the lead petitioner and our colleague Aled Roberts AM, who is active on the petition. We will receive that now and, hopefully, we will have an opportunity to have a further chat, if people wish to take up one or two of the issues in a more informal setting.

*Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 12:16.
The meeting ended at 12:16.*