



Cynulliad
Cenedlaethol
Cymru

National
Assembly for
Wales

Cofnod y Trafodion The Record of Proceedings

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[The Petitions Committee](#)

09/05/2017

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Cofnodir y trafodion yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynnddi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal, cynhwysir trawsgrifiad o'r cyfieithu ar y pryd. Lle y mae cyfranwyr wedi darparu cywiriadau i'w tystiolaeth, nodir y rheini yn y trawsgrifiad.

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. Where contributors have supplied corrections to their evidence, these are noted in the transcript.

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

Gareth Bennett Bywgraffiad Biography	UKIP Cymru UKIP Wales
Janet Finch–Saunders Bywgraffiad Biography	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Mike Hedges Bywgraffiad Biography	Llafur (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Labour (Committee Chair)
Neil McEvoy Bywgraffiad Biography	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Rhodri Griffiths	Dirprwy Gyfarwyddwr, Polisi, Cynllunio a Phartneriaethau Trafnidiaeth, Llywodraeth Cymru Deputy Director, Transport Policy, Planning and Partnerships, Welsh Government
Ken Skates	Aelod Cynulliad (Llafur), Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros yr Economi a'r Seilwaith Assembly Member (Labour), Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure

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

Kayleigh Driscoll	Dirprwy Clerc Deputy Clerk
Graeme Francis	Clerc Clerk
Lisa Salkeld	Cynghorydd Cyfreithiol Legal Adviser

Kath Thomas

Dirprwy Clerc
Deputy Clerk

*Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 09:09.
The meeting began at 09:09.*

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau, Dirprwyon a Datganiadau o Fuddiant Introduction, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

[1] **Mike Hedges:** Can I welcome everybody to the meeting? A reminder: you're welcome to speak in Welsh or English. Headsets are available with translation of Welsh to English. There's no need to turn off mobile phones or other electronic devices, but please ensure that any devices are on silent mode or you'll get broadcast. There have been no apologies received.

Deisebau Newydd New Petitions

[2] **Mike Hedges:** We move on the first of our new petitions. The first one is—'For single use items: introduce a Deposit Return System from drink containers and make fast food containers and utensils compostable'. The Cabinet Secretary responds that the issues relating to single-use and compostable food and drink packaging are many and varied. The Welsh Government intends to consider these issues as part of the evaluation and refresh of the waste strategy for Wales, 'Towards Zero Waste'. The evaluation results are due to be published this summer and a consultation on a new strategy will be launched in summer 2018. A Members' legislative proposal debate by Simon Thomas AM on a similar proposal to the petition was supported by the Assembly on 5 April. Await the views of the petitioners—but, really, I think the best thing is that the petitioners' views can be fed into the Government review. Yes? Are you happy with that?

[3] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Yes, I would imagine that one day there will be a debate in this Chamber. You know, it will go forward, this agenda, now. I think it's gathering momentum politically.

[4] **Mike Hedges:** 'Recognition of Parental Alienation': a first-consideration letter was sent to the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children on 27 March. A response: 12 April. A research briefing has been provided. The petitioners have submitted further comments. We've had

several other items of correspondence in support of the petition, which have been made available. The response from the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children states that the family justice network for Wales has recently reviewed its position and concluded that existing legislation provides the family court with a sufficient range of powers to deal with cases of parental alienation.

[5] The Cabinet Secretary also states that CAFCASS Cymru practitioners are trained to understand and recognise the potential for implacable hostility. The petitioners have questioned the existence of this training and made reference to assessment tools and frameworks on the subject available on the website of CAFCASS in England, but not in Wales. They have also requested the committee seeks to establish the number of cases identified by CAFCASS Cymru and local authorities in the last 12 months, and requested a debate in the Assembly. We could write to the Cabinet Secretary and take up those specific questions that have been raised by the petitioner, which is what I would suggest we did, but others may well have a view on it. Janet and then Neil.

[6] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** I have quite a few cases where CAFCASS, the courts, make decisions, but then, on the ground, those decisions can often be skewed and it's very difficult for parents when they're not allowed to see a child—you know, one of the parents who's not living with child. I have had numerous cases. So, again, I can see this needs to gain some political momentum.

[7] **Mike Hedges:** Neil.

[8] **Neil McEvoy:** I probably should declare an interest here, in having had personal dealings with CAFCASS and having had numerous dealings with CAFCASS in casework. I congratulate the petitioners on obtaining up until now 2,058 signatures. I imagine this will be a petition that goes past the 5,000 in the not too distant future. I'm really concerned by the—I'll choose my words carefully—ignorance, really, of the Cabinet Secretary with his letter.

[9] If you look at the response from Both Parents Matter Cymru, I think it's pretty clear that the Cabinet Secretary really does need to look at this again. I'd like to draw everyone's attention to page 59, and I'm taking the time of the committee now, really, so that people viewing this will have an insight into the lack of protection—and I'll say that again, the lack of protection that we afford children in Wales. I'll highlight just one thing here:

the six regional safeguarding children boards. I was involved with a case not too long ago where the safeguarding board upheld the complaints, and they were very serious complaints about a child possibly being in danger, and the danger being ignored, and the father in the case, who was trying to protect the child—his concerns were not only being ignored, but the father was being threatened with the loss of being able to see his children if he persisted in making complaints.

09:15

[10] Ultimately, despite what the safeguarding board said—. On paper, it looks really good because you have six regional safeguarding boards in each local area. They co-ordinate the effectiveness of the welfare of children. Let me tell everybody listening and watching this: despite the safeguarding board upholding the complaints, it didn't make a single jot of difference. They were ignored by Cardiff council. There's an issue there. Moving on, really, again touching on the ignorance of the Minister, because if Sir James Munby, the most senior judge in the family division, is saying that we have got to recognise openly and frankly the existence of parental alienation, and if the most senior judge says that, in reality, identify it for what it is, when it is and take steps to ameliorate things, and yet we have a Minister completely ignoring this—it's not acceptable, because the lack of action and the intellectually lazy attitude from this Minister is putting children in danger. There is no requirement in social work training in Wales to comprehensively recognise implacable hostility, so I'd like to know how the Minister could claim that there is.

[11] We're back to the issue of transparency on page 3 or 4—3, actually—of the letter from Both Parents Matter Cymru, because there is a crushing lack of transparency with CAFCASS in Wales. CAFCASS in England seem to be improving, they seem to get it, but in Wales we're really years and years behind because of a very ignorant and prejudiced political consensus that exists in this building, and this needs to change. And I think the petition is timely and welcome, and we should write to the Minister, and these issues will be debated.

[12] Just to add further, really, during the election campaign I sat for an evening with a girl who suffered awful abuse during her childhood, for 10 years. She's now an adult and wants to speak out about her experience. And the person who is excluded from this girl's life—the only safeguarding person who wanted to stop the abuse was dad, and dad was not allowed to

protect her. So, in the not too distant future, again, that case will be coming public unless the family change their mind, but at the minute, the individual concerned wants to speak out. She's now an adult, she's been through a terrible trauma, and the blasé attitude of Ministers like this frankly disgusts me. I'm sorry to speak in—and I'm not going to apologise, but those were very strong words and I mean them, and the Minister needs to wake up, smell the coffee and start listening to children.

[13] **Gareth Bennett:** Given the level of concern about this issue, how would we write to him so that it can't just be swept under the carpet?

[14] **Mike Hedges:** What I would suggest we do is we send the concerns we've had here on to the Minister to give the Minister an opportunity to reply. If we're not satisfied with the reply or we feel that further investigations are needed, then we invite both the petitioner and the Minister to give us evidence. If at that stage we're not satisfied, we then ask for a debate in the Chamber. Is that—? But let's see what the first set of answers are first.

[15] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** I suppose I'm a member of this committee thinking it can make a difference. I feel the response from the Minister is a bit of a pat on the head—you know, 'Now, now, things aren't—'. Well, I'm sorry, my everyday experiences as an AM and the cases that I have to deal with, and the anguish that I have to face through the courts system, CAFCASS not working and children being isolated from one of the two parents—I think it's a pretty serious issue.

[16] **Mike Hedges:** But are you happy that we send—?

[17] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** I would reject the Minister's letter, frankly, as the committee, and ask him to provide a far more—well, a response that actually addresses the points we've raised and that the petitioners raised.

[18] **Mike Hedges:** Well, that's what we're going to do—I hope we'll be able to do it—we'll send the petitioner's points, we'll ask the Minister to respond to the petitioner's points, and we'll then have an opportunity to see those. If we're not satisfied that the points are being addressed, then we ask both the Minister and the petitioners in to give evidence. If we're not satisfied at that stage, then we ask for a Plenary hearing. So, that is how we make a difference—by taking it through the different stages, hopefully.

[19] **Neil McEvoy:** Thanks, Chair.

[20] **Mike Hedges:** Are you happy with that?

[21] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Yes.

[22] **Mike Hedges:** Okay. ‘Building Resilience To Cyber–Bullying In Children’: the response from the Cabinet Secretary outlines the activity the Welsh Government are taking. Statutory safeguarding guidance includes advice on e–safety and guidance materials have been produced for schools on cyber bullying. The new digital competence framework was made available in September 2016 and includes skills for learners on online behaviour and cyber–bullying. We asked for the views of petitioners following the Minister’s reply. Shall we await the petitioner’s response before we decide what to do next?

[23] **Neil McEvoy:** I think we need to. It’s a very, very serious matter, because, when I was young, whatever happened in school stopped when I got home, whereas nowadays it’s 24/7.

[24] **Mike Hedges:** Yes. You were safe when you walked through your front door; now you’re not safe at any time. There are problems with cyber–bullying, and, if I can be so bold, I don’t think that either of the two major companies—Twitter and Facebook—are doing anything near enough to try and stop that happening. And I think that that is something that does cause me some concern. Websites do, to be fair to them—if you do abuse somebody on a website, then you’ve got recourse; a lot of companies, once they have a reasonable complaint, will take it down. Twitter and Facebook refuse to accept their responsibilities in this area. Let’s see what types of replies we get from the petitioner.

[25] It might be something that we might want to take up at a later stage, or even just write to Facebook and Twitter, and ask them what they are doing to try and stop the cyber–bullying. Because those are the two major sites. And, having been cyber–bullied, as an adult and as a politician, on Twitter—which I’m sure there’s not a person in this room who hasn’t been, as a politician, and it’s sort of a ganging–up philosophy, which I think we’ve all been on the receiving end of—then I think it’s important that young people aren’t subject to what are very unpleasant, continual personal attacks, which you can be on the receiving end of. I’d be amazed if the other three members of this committee have not been on the receiving end of very unpleasant

attacks through Twitter.

[26] **Gareth Bennett:** I'm sure we all have, Chair, but, you know, I just laugh at it all. But the problem with the young people is they don't have the experience to put it any context, and they think that it's something very important, and this leads to suicide, in some cases.

[27] **Mike Hedges:** You're talking about, sometimes, children at nine, 10, 11 who are on the receiving end of this. We as adults are more resilient. It can be quite painful, some of the personal attacks, but we are much more resilient on it, whereas the nine and 10 and 11-year-olds are much less resilient. So, I think, in this matter, we'll await what they say to us, and then decide how to take it forward. But I think, at the very minimum, when we get their reply, we ought to write to Twitter and Facebook, and ask them what they're doing to try and stop it.

[28] **Neil McEvoy:** Definitely, yes.

[29] **Mike Hedges:** Okay. Happy with that? All right.

09:23

Y Wybodaeth Ddiweddaraf am Ddeisebau Blaenorol Updates to Previous Petitions

[30] **Mike Hedges:** Updates on previous petitions. 'A Welsh Government Department for Europe would ensure a clear, strategic and accountable voice for Wales in ongoing negotiations'—we've had a number of points raised by the petitioner. I suggest we forward the petitioner's views to the First Minister.

[31] **Neil McEvoy:** Yes.

[32] **Mike Hedges:** 'Medical Emergency—Preventing the introduction of a poorer Health Service for North Wales'—the petitioner has stated his view that the petition should not be considered any further. He also has expressed his disappointment at the consideration given to the petition by the previous Petitions Committee, and asked for information about how to complain. Close the petition, and provide that information to the petitioner.

[33] I think this is a classic example of something we've talked informally

about. This was 25 September 2012. It's almost five years. I think—

[34] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** We close it.

[35] **Mike Hedges:** Yes, we have to close it, but I think that one lesson for us is we need to deal with petitions with some level of expediency, not leave them just hanging there. Because it does upset petitioners, because they want to see something happening.

[36] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Well, of course, with the Betsi board being in special measures, we're all looking for some deliverable outcomes on that. And I would imagine that the petitioner on this one must be feeling quite frustrated that, all these years later, and things are not actually improving. So, yes, I think this should have perhaps ended up with perhaps a debate in the Chamber earlier.

[37] **Mike Hedges:** Or something. Either we have an investigation—we haven't asked for a debate in the Chamber—or we close it. But just hanging it there is of no good to anybody. Anyway. 'Eating Disorder Unit in Wales'—

[38] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Can I just ask, chairman, how did this happen, that it's taken five years to get nowhere?

[39] **Mike Hedges:** Well, you've got two new people on the committee in myself and the clerk, but—.

[40] **Mr Francis:** I think one of the things that happened with this petition is it was grouped with a couple of other petitions related to Betsi Cadwaladr and hospital reconfiguration in north Wales. Sometimes, when that happens, it can mean that perhaps not every angle of each of the petitions is being pursued and one angle becomes dominant. But also there was a period of time in the fourth Assembly, as you will recall, where these decisions were being taken about special measures with Betsi Cadwaladr, and other issues in relation to reconfiguration of health services, which were going to judicial review. At that point, a lot of these petitions were paused by the previous committee and I think then the issue became that they weren't restarted.

[41] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Can I just ask: so, the petitioner themselves—are we still engaged with them or have they gone away?

[42] **Mr Francis:** The petitioner has submitted comments for this meeting.

We hadn't been in touch with the petitioner for a considerable time before that.

[43] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** We have or haven't?

[44] **Mr Francis:** We hadn't. There was a gap in terms of the committee's engagement with the petitioner, but also the petitioner's engagement back. So, the latest comments, I think, express that frustration.

[45] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** I think that our new model of ways of working will seek to stop this, won't it, now?

[46] **Mike Hedges:** I would hope so. I think that a 'no' is much better than hanging about. We have to be prepared to say 'no' to some people and 'yes' to others. I'm not talking about the benefits of this petition, but something needs to happen. We either have an investigation, we note it, or we ask for it to go into the Chamber. What we can't do is just leave it hanging on, hoping it'll all turn out okay.

[47] Okay. 'Eating Disorder Unit in Wales'—the petitioner has drawn the committee's attention to the Cwtched campaign for an eating disorder treatment centre. The project has apparently secured private funding to open with the intention that placements will be accessible through local authority funding. There is currently no dedicated NHS facility for eating disorders in Wales. However, the most recent correspondence from the previous health Minister made reference to investments made in child and adolescent mental health services in north and south Wales. A review of in-patient eating disorder treatment, completed in 2015, concluded that there was no strong case for a dedicated unit in Wales, in part due to a lack of critical mass. A formal review of the eating disorders framework for Wales is due to be published in the spring, which we have just passed. Write to the Cabinet Secretary for Health, Social Care and Sport to highlight the concerns raised by the petitioner and ask for an update on the latest position in relation to eating disorder units and ask for the result of the formal review—if they've had a formal review by the spring, spring has sprung, so we're now in summer.

[48] 'Restoration of Inpatient Beds, Minor Injuries Cover and X-Ray Unit to the Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital', from June 2014: we've had information from the community health council and the local medical committee. Write to Betsi Cadwaladr university health board to ask for its reflection on the

correspondence and note the information previously received. Ask whether the health board considers that its health centre will deliver the level of local care envisaged by 'Healthcare in North Wales is Changing' in 2012, ask how the continuing perceived lack of in-patient beds and difficulties in recruiting GPs in the area are being addressed, and about its perspective on the lack of a registered nursing home in the area or care homes able to provide step-down care. We could also send it on to the health committee to ask if this will help with any of their current investigations.

[49] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Okay.

[50] **Mike Hedges:** 'Inequitable Access to Treatments That Have Not Been Nationally Appraised in NHS Wales'—no response from the petitioners. Shall we give them extra time to come back until the next meeting?

[51] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** How long did they have?

[52] **Mr Francis:** Good question. They have had previous time before the last—. The last time this petition came on the agenda, we were awaiting the Cabinet Secretary for health's announcement on this. So, I think that was earlier this year, February/March time. They had time to respond then and we didn't receive any comments. Subsequently, the Cabinet Secretary has made that statement, so they've had time to respond to that as well, though I do understand that the lead contact on this petition is on maternity leave, so we have corresponded with the people who should receive her correspondence in the meantime, but haven't had that response.

[53] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** I'd close this now, because, to a degree, this has been addressed by policy here, hasn't it?

[54] **Mike Hedges:** Are we all happy to close it?

[55] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** He can always open it again—you know, start again, if he feels it's not working, the new policy, but—.

09:30

[56] **Mike Hedges:** Are we happy to close this?

[57] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Or else we're going to be guilty of carrying things for the sake of it, aren't we?

[58] **Mike Hedges:** Are we happy to close this then, yes? Yes. Close it.

[59] 'Give Every Child in Wales the Meningitis B Vaccine for Free'—again, we've had recent correspondence; we've had ministerial information. Do we wish to seek the views of the petitioner on the recent correspondence?

[60] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Well, it says that they're continuing to monitor the programme and its impact on the disease. I'd be inclined to close.

[61] **Mike Hedges:** Everybody else happy to close it?

[62] **Neil McEvoy:** Can I—? I think there's no harm in writing a letter to them, is there?

[63] **Mike Hedges:** I'd be keen to write to them and seek their views on how things are going. They may well say they're happy, or they may identify something that they think is still a point of serious concern. So, let's ask them their view.

[64] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Okay.

[65] **Mike Hedges:** I think there's a difference between keeping petitions open for two weeks and keeping them open for five years.

[66] 'Make the MTAN law', which runs together with 'Call in All Opencast Mining Planning Applications'. We could write to the Cabinet Secretary to request further details on the proposals to limit new coal development being considered for consultation as part of the review of 'Planning Policy Wales' later this year.

[67] Any comments?

[68] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** This has been ongoing since 2013.

[69] **Mike Hedges:** Yes, but we've got proposals being put in by the Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs on new coal developments being considered for consultation as part of the review of 'Planning Policy Wales' later this year. I think we ought to write to the Cabinet Secretary asking for information on that. If they are engaging in consultation on it, we perhaps ought to send that information on to the petitioners so they can reply to the

consultation. Happy with that?

[70] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Yes.

[71] **Mike Hedges:** ‘Encourage Planning Committees to Ensure that Planning Decisions Take Due Regard of the Impact on, or Closure of Local Community Groups and Voluntary Organisations’, last considered in November last year—await the views of the petitioner on the response from the Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs and write to the Wales Council for Voluntary Action, which we did last time. We’ve had a reply from the WCVA. The petitioner was informed that the petition would be considered by the committee but had not responded when papers for the committee were finalised. How long did the petitioner have to respond?

[72] **Mr Francis:** Since the initial submission of this petition, we haven’t heard from the petitioner again. So, I think the petition was first considered in September; last considered in November. Recently, they would have had a fortnight to provide comments to the WCVA’s letter, but a longer time previous to that.

[73] **Mike Hedges:** And the WCVA are fairly balanced in their response, aren’t they? So, shall we close the petition? Yes.

[74] ‘Natural Resources Wales (Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru) Needs Tighter Restriction’—the NRW outline the process of designating sites of special scientific interest. It also states that Natural Resources Wales are committed to working with owners and occupiers of sites of special scientific interest. Natural Resources Wales state that they and the petitioner are currently in discussion over a possible management agreement in relation to his land. The petitioner suggested that greater engagement with the landowner/occupier at the preliminary stage could reduce the number of more formal proceedings required. He’s also provided more detailed comments in relation to his specific experience.

[75] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** When did this come in? What’s the date of this petition?

[76] **Mr Francis:** Apologies. We don’t have that in the brief, but it was late last year, or early this year.

[77] **Mike Hedges:** It’s not a historical one.

[78] **Mr Francis:** No.

[79] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** How many signatures? 19?

[80] **Mr Francis:** Apologies. The committee considered it for the first time in February, so it would have closed around the turn of the year.

[81] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Close it?

[82] **Mike Hedges:** Close? Well, I think that we can send the comments on to NRW.

[83] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** I think that it's quite clear that there are other concerns about NRW that I think politicians will probably address this term.

[84] **Mike Hedges:** Yes, but I think the key thing is: let's send his comments on to NRW. NRW are not very good at talking to people, and I think that anything that we can do to get them better at that would be better for governance in Wales.

[85] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** So, what do you suggest we do?

[86] **Mike Hedges:** I think we send their comments to NRW and we close the petition. But we send the comments on.

[87] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** But they've already had it. They had it in March.

[88] **Mike Hedges:** There were further comments. We've had further comments from the petitioner regarding greater engagement. I think we should forward that on to NRW.

[89] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** We can write to them, but then close it.

[90] **Mike Hedges:** Yes, close it.

[91] 'End the Exotic Pet Trade in Wales'. The Wales animal health and welfare framework group has considered a short paper on the exotic pet trade and the group has requested a presentation from experts. Officials have also met with the RSPCA to discuss their call for a ban on exotic pets and further meetings are expected. The petitioner has provided further

comments and has asked specifically whether the Welsh Government would consider reviewing animal welfare and developing plans to regulate the sale of exotic pets. Write to the Cabinet Secretary?

[92] **Neil McEvoy:** Yes.

[93] 'Close the Gap for deaf pupils in Wales'. The committee last considered the petition on 7 March and agreed to write to the Minister for Lifelong Learning and Welsh Language. We've had a response. The petitioners have also submitted further comments, which are included in the papers. What do you want to do? The Minister has stated that plans for the next five-year investment in twenty-first century schools are being developed and will retain a commitment to good acoustic standards. The Minister has outlined the considerations being given to various elements of additional learning needs in teacher training and development. The petitioners have welcomed elements of the Minister's letter but sought detailed clarification in a number of areas. They have also made several offers to work with the Welsh Government to support developments in this field.

[94] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** I'd like us to write back to the Minister. Locally, in Conwy, they've actually cut their funding to the north Wales society for the deaf, and it's impacting from young people right through to older people. I believe another—I think Anglesey were going to do it, but they decided to reinstate the funding because the cost of getting the sign language people in, translators and things is a nightmare. So, I actually think this is something that's going to increase.

[95] **Mike Hedges:** Yes. So, if we write to—

[96] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** I think we should be supporting deaf children in school.

[97] **Mike Hedges:** If we write to the Minister—

[98] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Yes.

[99] **Mike Hedges:** And also I think we can ask the Minister whether his officials will meet with the petitioners.

[100] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** There's a lot here. There's a lot of writing back

from the Minister, but it says very little.

[101] **Mike Hedges:** Can we ask his officials to meet with the petitioners to discuss their comments?

[102] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Yes.

[103] **Neil McEvoy:** Yes.

[104] **Gareth Bennett:** That Minister's very good at that.

[105] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Yes, I know.

[106] **Mike Hedges:** 'Allow Children in Wales to Have a Family Holiday During Term Time'. We've had a response from the Cabinet Secretary. The petitioners have questioned the degree of adherence to the regulations at local level. We've had views from the petitioners.

[107] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** It's a big issue, this, isn't it?

[108] **Mike Hedges:** Yes, with very strong feelings on both sides. Some of us who have worked in education have spent time trying to get people to catch up on two weeks' worth of work because they've been away on holiday, whilst parents see the huge savings that can be made by going on holiday in term time.

[109] **Gareth Bennett:** I know this is becoming a major issue. In some cases, it appears superficially as if the authorities have been heavy-handed, but the problem is if one or two families—the parents—decide to break the rules, then everybody could do it. So, where does it end?

[110] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** I'd argue that a week away with your parents and things—and that quality family time—is important.

[111] **Gareth Bennett:** Why don't they do it in the holidays, then?

[112] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Sometime they can't afford to, because literally the prices just jump.

[113] **Gareth Bennett:** The problem is that one of the reasons why the prices are more is because it is in holiday time, so that's the reason. So, if you then

have people trying to work the system by taking their kids on holiday out of holiday time, it's going to be cheaper because it's in term time. So they're just fiddling the system, really. What happens if everybody does it?

[114] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** At least they're providing their kid—their child, I should say—with the stimulation of being with the family—

[115] **Gareth Bennett:** Of course, but what if everybody then decides to do it?

[116] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Well, I've done it previously and I'm not ashamed of it. My two used to actually take their homework and we would take a week's worth, and as long as they did their—. There are ways around it that could be catered for. They used to catch up with all their work whilst they were away. On the plane, usually.

[117] **Gareth Bennett:** There are differences of opinion.

[118] **Neil McEvoy:** One thing that is missed, I think, is that when children go abroad, then sometimes they're inspired to learn things when they get back because of the cultural experiences. I remember being fascinated by the Spanish language when I was 10. So, I bought a phrase book over there, spoke Spanish and then from that day on I wanted to learn Spanish. I did languages, then. I don't think we did go in term time, but my dad was a skilled worker in full-time work—an industrial worker—so he could afford to go during normal holidays, but that's not the case for everyone.

[119] **Mike Hedges:** There's a planned review, so shall we ask for an update on the planned review?

[120] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** I have every sympathy for parents in that regard.

[121] **Gareth Bennett:** Unfortunately, my mother was a school teacher so I tend to take the other view. I know Neil was a teacher as well, so—.

[122] **Neil McEvoy:** I was a language teacher.

[123] **Gareth Bennett:** This has illustrated that there are wide differences of opinion on this subject.

[124] **Neil McEvoy:** Maybe I'm biased on the impact foreign travel can have.

[125] **Mike Hedges:** ‘School Times an Hour Later’. The Cabinet Secretary has stated that school start times are the responsibility of governing bodies. As somebody who drives into Cardiff three times a week early in the morning, yes, it would benefit me greatly if they started later, but it would also create chaos for those people who take their children to school before they go to work. But, as it’s the responsibility of individual schools, can I suggest we close the petition?

[126] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** But—I am right, aren’t I? The petition was submitted by a young lady of 13. I think, to be fair to her, if we write back to her, I think she ought to be congratulated for having the initiative at that age to actually realise that there is a mechanism here where she can have her voice heard, and we’ve well and truly heard the voice of Cai Ellerton.

[127] **Mike Hedges:** And we explain why it’s a matter for individual schools, not for the Welsh Government.

[128] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Yes. And I hope—certainly, I’d offer my congratulations to her for taking the initiative.

[129] **Mike Hedges:** Yes. I’m sure the committee would like to do that.

[130] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Yes.

[131] **Gareth Bennett:** I know that the young lady who’s submitted the petition isn’t mentioning the traffic issue, but there is an issue that you’ve highlighted—that everyone realises that there’s a big difference in traffic congestion in holiday time. Isn’t there some kind of—? Schools have the ability to vary their starting time. Is there some kind of encouragement to schools to have later start times? Does that happen, to relieve the transport congestion? Because she’s coming up with a different issue, which would add to the argument for varying it. Do they get any incentives for having later—?

[132] **Mike Hedges:** No. But if you want to get a parent revolt in any school, I suggest you suggest they start at half past nine, because all the parents who drop their children off, with very little time to spare in the morning on their way to work, would be out to lynch you. I don’t mean in the physical sense, but they will be very vocal and very angry about it, because the school time at the moment suits parents dropping children off to school and the breakfast club—you can drop them off at 8 o’clock and you can get to work

by half past eight, in most cases.

[133] **Gareth Bennett:** So, as usual, we can't upset the middle-class parents. Okay.

[134] **Mike Hedges:** It's not middle-class parents. A lot of the working-class parents who are going out and going to work are having exactly the same problem.

[135] **Neil McEvoy:** The issue is catchment areas and a lack of school transport, really.

[136] **Mike Hedges:** Which I think we're talking about later.

[137] 'Teachers' Training Must Include Statutory Training in Autism'.

[138] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Yes, it should.

09:45

[139] **Mike Hedges:** Well, shall we send the National Autistic Society's comments to the Minister and see what the Minister has to say?

[140] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Yes. And endorse them as well.

[141] **Mike Hedges:** 'Make the foundation phase more effective for our children, provide more teachers and abolish yr 2 Sats'. We've had a response from the Minister for lifelong learning stating the Welsh Government's commitment to the foundation phase. The research note provides figures on staff ratios in some Scandinavian countries, but advises caution in making direct comparisons. Shall we write to the petitioners to see what their view is on what the Welsh Government has said?

[142] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Yes, okay. It's quite a detailed response.

[143] **Mike Hedges:** Yes.

[144] 'Cilmeri Community Council Appeal for The Prince Llywelyn Monument'. The good news is that Powys council have given details of improvements made to the monument site, including new signage. Due to funding restrictions, not all elements of the 2013 plan have been

undertaken. The council has indicated its willingness to

[145] 'support the free transfer of the asset to the Community Council, as this would enable the Community Council to access grants currently unavailable to PCC to improve the site.'

[146] Shall we write to the petitioners saying, 'This is what Powys County Council has offered you'?

[147] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Yes, and then close it.

[148] **Mr Francis:** Do you want to close it before receiving a reply, or wait for a reply?

[149] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Close.

[150] **Mike Hedges:** Close. Because, really, all we are doing is acting as a post box between Powys County Council and Cilmeri Community Council, and I'm sure that they can talk to each other much more closely.

[151] 'Build an International Mother languages Monument at Cardiff Bay'. We last considered this on 27 September. We had a response from the petitioner on 20 April. The Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure stated that there are currently no funding streams available to support a monument. The petitioner has expressed disappointment and stated that the leader of the house and Labour AMs have indicated elsewhere that the Welsh Government could, in fact, be willing to support it. Shall we write to the Cabinet Secretary asking for his response to the petitioner's latest comments?

[152] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Yes, you can do. And then I would probably close it.

[153] **Neil McEvoy:** Yes. I'm not sure, really, that it is an international mother languages monument. If you look at it, it seems to represent only one community in Cardiff. So, this may not be what it says on the tin.

[154] **Mike Hedges:** Yes. Well, a lot of these aren't.

[155] 'Free Train Transport for school pupils with Arriva Trains Wales'. I remember receiving this petition. I think others were there when we did. We considered it on 1 November and have written to Arriva trains. We've had a

response from Arriva trains. The petitioner has also submitted further comments. Arriva trains outline their rationale for ending free rail transport for Treorchy comprehensive pupils. Season tickets are available with a 55 per cent discount and free travel is available for pupils who receive free school meals and those who live outside the three-mile limit. The petitioner has reiterated her concerns about overcrowding behind the safety barriers on the platform, which she feels exacerbates some of the problems at station, as well as on the trains themselves. Shall we write to Arriva trains and share the petitioner's concerns?

[156] **Neil McEvoy:** Yes.

[157] **Mike Hedges:** Yes. So, shall we send the letter and ask Arriva trains to respond to the petitioner's concerns about safety?

[158] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** What's the underlying—? Is it about the safety or is it about free transport?

[159] **Mike Hedges:** Well, it was initially about free transport, but it seems to have moved on to safety.

[160] **Gareth Bennett:** Arriva have kind of brought up the safety issue.

[161] **Mike Hedges:** As has the petitioner. It's available for children on free school meals. There's a 55 per cent discount and anybody over the three-mile limit for whom it is their catchment school also gets free transport.

[162] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Yes. I've got to be honest, I can't see this going anywhere.

[163] **Mike Hedges:** But if there's a safety issue, I don't think—

[164] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Yes, I think we need to address that and we need to write to the Minister and, again, become that conduit. But again, I think that I would close this, because I think that this is not—

[165] **Mike Hedges:** Let's write to Arriva Trains and the Minister about the safety issue. Right.

[166] 'Hirwaun and Penderyn Community Council Petition for the Installation of Fibre Optic Broadband': what we can do is write to the Minister to seek an

update.

[167] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Yes. I would imagine a few of these are going to come in. I've got communities in Aberconwy where they'd like fibre optic broadband.

[168] **Mike Hedges:** So, we'll write to the Minister for an update.

[169] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Yes.

[170] **Mike Hedges:** 'Penegoes Speed Limit Petition': there's a speed limit review that is due to commence in the summer. So, I think we need to wait for that speed limit review, and when we have that we can ask the petitioners for any comments for after the review.

[171] **Neil McEvoy:** Yes.

[172] **Mike Hedges:** 'School Buses for School Children'—

[173] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Sorry—on this one:

[174] 'I'm pleased to confirm that our commitment is to include the site in the new speed limit review'.

[175] So, we close this, do we?

[176] **Mike Hedges:** No, we'll wait for the review. They've put it in the review, and I think we need to close it after we've had the review and send them the review.

[177] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Right, okay.

[178] **Mike Hedges:** We're one stage away from closing it, but I think that we ought to get the review first and then send that on to them.

[179] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Okay.

[180] **Mike Hedges:** 'School Buses for School Children': basically, they want to change the 2 and 3-mile limit.

[181] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** I wish, honestly—I would support this all the

way if the financing of it—. I mean, I've got children who walk miles along very lonely country lanes and things to find a bus stop.

[182] **Mike Hedges:** The previous Minister did take action over what were considered 'available routes'. An 'available route' previously used to be any route that you could follow, and an available route we were given was a narrow path across land, then across two main roads and then through an industrial estate. I think that they have now tightened the policy on available routes. I think it's now got to be 'safe and available' rather than just 'available'.

[183] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Have you ever tried challenging that? I have and it's a nightmare.

[184] **Mike Hedges:** I've also tried challenging where the school starts as well. But that again is a—. If we write to the Cabinet Secretary to ask if they will review the distance criteria.

[185] **Neil McEvoy:** Yes.

[186] **Mike Hedges:** 'Please make Senedd TV accessible to deaf people'—

[187] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Yes.

[188] **Neil McEvoy:** A hundred per cent.

[189] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Why not?

[190] **Mike Hedges:** Let's ask what progress is being made on it.

[191] **Gareth Bennett:** Senedd.tv—I know we've talked about recently councils having more regulated tv broadcasting. Well, Senedd.tv—theoretically it's good, because you've got Plenaries and committees, but technically it's very erratic. It doesn't always work properly. You've had the same problems there. We need to do something about that because if we're telling councils—I mean, we've got Mark Drakeford saying, 'Oh, councils have got to broadcast this, that and the other', so we've got to get our own house in order and get Senedd.tv on a technically much better footing.

[192] **Mike Hedges:** I don't disagree with any of that, but I think that what we want to do is write to the Presiding Officer, or the Llywydd, to request an

update on steps being taken to make coverage of Assembly proceedings more accessible to the deaf community.

[193] **Gareth Bennett:** We do, yes, indeed. Sorry to go off on a tangent, because I agree totally with this, but we also need, before we—well, alongside this, we also need to make sure it's properly working so that everyone can access it.

[194] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** It does go off a lot. I know before my dad died he used to watch it a lot, and he'd say, 'Oh, I missed it. It went off. It went down.'

[195] **Gareth Bennett:** Every time I try and watch something—

[196] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Sometimes the speakers up there aren't too clear, either.

[197] **Mike Hedges:** And the item regarding the cross-party group for the deaf they need to address directly to the cross-party group for the deaf.

[198] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Who?

[199] **Mike Hedges:** The petitioners. We can't interfere with cross-party groups.

[200] **Gareth Bennett:** Oh, they have to contact them. Right, okay. You're probably chairman of the CPG, are you?

[201] **Mike Hedges:** No, I'm not—Ann Jones is—but I do go to it.

[202] 'Give Rate Relief to Local Authorities for Leisure—'.

[203] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** That does not preclude us from pushing it through the Senedd as a, you know—

[204] **Mike Hedges:** We'll take it up with the Llywydd as a matter of concern regarding the way it's broadcast, and I will speak regarding the cross-party group. So, I'll raise it informally, and they can raise it formally with the cross-party group.

[205] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** But I don't want that then just, sort of, lying

somewhere. I want this to be proceeded through—

[206] **Mike Hedges:** It will. It will go to the Presiding Officer/Llywydd and we are inviting their comments on what they're going to do about it all.

[207] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Right, okay—as long as it's not forgotten.

[208] **Mike Hedges:** 'Give Rate Relief to Local Authorities for Leisure and Cultural Facilities': it was last considered on 14 February. We had a response from the petitioner on 16 April. The petitioner argues that there is an inherent unfairness in providing rate relief to outsourced local authority services while charging full rates to exactly the same services that are run by the local authority, which I tend to agree with. The petitioner argues that this will result in councils losing control of services. The petitioner has also raised general concerns in relation to the level of funding for local government. Shall we send the additional points to the Cabinet Secretary, and ask for his response?

[209] **Neil McEvoy:** Yes.

[210] **Mike Hedges:** And we've got a video now—'Stop Forsythia Closing'. It's a youth provision. Whilst we wait for that to come up, a group from Forsythia youth centre are planning to view the meeting from the public gallery. They have provided a video about the centre, which will be shown to committee members. I hope they're there. We considered it on 7 March. We agreed to write to the Cabinet Secretary. We've had a response. The petitioners have submitted further comments, which are included in the papers for the meeting, and forwarded us a video. We'll have an opportunity to watch the video on the screen. They've provided an update on the latest situation at Forsythia youth centre—

[211] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Can I ask, Chair, have they gone to the local authority as well, do you know?

[212] **Mr Francis:** My understanding is that, yes, the centre management have been discussing with the local authority and the lead delivery body for Communities First in that area. But the latest update that they've provided, which is in the packs, demonstrates that staff, I think, have been issued with risk of redundancy notices. So, time is of the essence with this petition as well if the committee wanted to take any action.

[213] **Mike Hedges:** Are we in action? Yes.

Dangoswyd cyflwyniad clyweledol. Mae'r trawsgrifiad mewn llythrennau italg isod yn drawsgrifiad o'r cyfraniadau llafar yn y cyflwyniad. Mae'r cyflwyniad ar gael drwy ddilyn y linc hon: [cyflwyniad clyweledol](#).

An audio-visual presentation was shown. The transcription in italics below is a transcription of the oral contributions in the presentation. The presentation can be accessed by following this link: [audio-visual presentation](#).

[214] **Geraldine Maddison:** *The Forsythia Youth Project is a youth project that's accessible to all young people aged 11 to 25. When I set it up, I was hoping to enable all young people to attend the youth centre. I didn't want to cherry-pick young people, and I wanted to give every young person the opportunity of accessing the centre. Hence, that's why it's always been free for young people to come here. Some of the activities offered at Forsythia are generic activities that are offered throughout youth clubs, like pool, a place to meet and a safe, friendly environment. At Forsythia, though, we believe in pushing young people a lot further than that. We look at innovative ways and working with partners, and addressing issues within our own community. For example, a group of young people were involved in a project called Gurnos Zebras.*

[215] **Morgan:** *We needed a zebra crossing because what I thought of at the beginning when I joined was the old people coming out of hospital, and if they're in a wheelchair they've no health and safety, and the old people would have to rush from the hospital to get across.*

[216] **Geraldine Maddison:** *So, they worked together and campaigned to have a crossing. And they invited the crime commissioner and politicians up, and they presented a really good argument on why it should be done, and they've succeeded.*

[217] **Morgan:** *We felt more relieved that we had the zebra crossing. It made me feel extra proud of myself about what I can do.*

[218] **Geraldine Maddison:** *The progression is just absolutely fabulous to see, and to see young people coming here initially not knowing what they want to do, where they want to go, and then coming into their own, and also giving back to their community, and feeling proud to be part of the community.*

[219] **Daniel Walsh:** *So, I started coming here at the age of about 15 or 16. I kind of didn't really know my identity. I didn't know what I was about, and all through my childhood, I suffered with a speech impediment. I had a really bad stutter. I couldn't really find a way to express myself. The use of communication was no good for me. So, then, like many young people across Merthyr, and across the country, I turned to the vices of alcohol and substances, just as a way of expression. However, this was obviously sending me down on the wrong road in life. I'd get myself into a bit of trouble with the police. So, really, when I came here, I was lost.*

[220] *The journey really started with us doing small projects, like community litter picks and attending meetings. I wouldn't say anything. I would just be sitting back, observing, getting a feel for what meetings are actually like. But then, eventually, and through time, it was kind of a build-up, so I began to start speaking in these meetings, started leading on community projects, and then, later on, the opportunity came up to apply for the youth mayor of Merthyr. It was quite a tough hustings process. It was quite a difficult selection process, however I got in, and that's where I really—. That was a boost to my confidence and it excelled me as a person, really. But also, through that, I became a peer mentor to those younger members of the community. They all looked up to me and thought, 'If he can do it, so can I.' So, that's another process in which young people often develop, and that's what inspires them. If the older members of the community are doing something and doing it good, they think, 'Well, why not? I can do this, too.' And that's how the journey goes.*

10:00

[221] **Mike Hedges:** Can I start off by thanking the young people for this video, and for bringing the petition? I'm sure we've all been very impressed by what they've done. There are three things we can do that I can think of—Members might want to add. We can write to the Communities First lead body responsible for the Forsythia youth centre seeking information about the future support available for the group, given the stated success of the work done. We can write to the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children, sharing the video and information received from Forsythia youth centre, and expressing concern over the impact that the loss of successful projects like this could have in local areas. We can also write to the Cabinet Secretary responsible for youth work, sending exactly the same information, and asking if Communities First are no longer going to be providing it, how it is going to be provided in these areas.

[222] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Are we allowed to write to the local authority?

[223] **Mike Hedges:** Yes, we can write to anybody we like.

[224] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** I would write to the local authority, just saying that —

[225] **Mike Hedges:** Write to Merthyr council.

[226] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** It's not in my area, but I'd support it.

[227] **Mike Hedges:** So, we write to Merthyr council, again sharing the video.

[228] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** It's a new authority now, isn't it? So, they might sit up and listen that this is a good thing, and any budget cuts to it or anything would be false economy, perhaps.

[229] **Neil McEvoy:** I think the cost of closing places like this is enormous, but it's picked up by other agencies later on down the line.

[230] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Yes.

[231] **Mike Hedges:** To answer your question, Communities First comes under Carl Sargeant, but youth facilities, as far as I understand, come under Alun Davies. So, we would end up writing to both.

[232] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Yes, that's fine.

[233] **Mike Hedges:** Are we happy with that? Okay. And can we also write to the young people concerned and thank them for the video, their interest in coming to this committee, and say that we will continue to push this forward?

[234] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Future councillors and AMs, no doubt.

[235] **Neil McEvoy:** When is—? What's the timescale with this, then? Do we know?

[236] **Mr Francis:** The information that we've received from the centre is that the staff have been given their risk of redundancy letters, and the point of

finish in those is around the end of June or the end of July, depending on—

[237] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** So, if we can flag that up to the local authority—

[238] **Neil McEvoy:** Could you pass on the contact details of the centre, with permission, to me, because I'd like to take it up through their regional AMs?

[239] **Mr Francis:** Okay, yes.

[240] **Mike Hedges:** Okay. We move on now to two long-standing petitions, not very long-standing ones—one is 'Secondary School Awareness of Self-Harm', which was last considered in January 2015. The petitioners have been contacted in March, April this year. No response has been received. I've made alternative methods of making contact with them, which also has failed. So, can we close the petition?

[241] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Yes.

[242] **Mike Hedges:** 'Planning Control and the Welsh language'. Last considered in October 2014. The petitioners have been contacted. Again, it's a matter that has moved on from the Petitions Committee to being discussed with the planning Minister. So, shall we just close the petition? Yes.

[243] Okay. Well, that takes us to the end of the petitions that we've received. We've got an evidence session at 10:15, with the Minister and his official. Can we have a short, 10-minute break?

*Gohiriwyd y cyfarfod rhwng 10:05 a 10:15.
The meeting adjourned between 10:05 and 10:15.*

**Sesiwn Dystiolaeth: P-05-710 Sicrhau y gall Pobl Anabl Ddefnyddio
Trafnidiaeth Gyhoeddus Pryd Bynnag y Bo'i Hangen Arnynt
Evidence Session: P-05-710 Ensure Disabled People can Access Public
Transport As and When They Need it**

[244] **Mike Hedges:** Can I welcome Ken Skates, Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure, Welsh Government, and Rhodri Griffiths, deputy director of transport policy, planning and partnerships, to the meeting? If you're quite happy, Members will start off by asking questions. If I can start off first: what steps is the Welsh Government taking to address the issues

raised by Whizz-Kidz on the catalogue of problems faced by the disabled traveller, highlighted by the Assembly's Enterprise and Business Committee inquiry into integrated public transport, and concerns expressed by groups representing people with hearing and sight impairment?

[245] **The Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure (Ken Skates):** Thanks, Chair, and thanks for the opportunity that you've given me to talk about the petition today, which I very much support. Although disabled access to public transport will continue to be a responsibility for the UK Government, there is nonetheless an opportunity for us to do a lot of work in Wales, within our powers, to improve accessibility and the quality of transport that is available to disabled people, and that includes not just rail, but also buses and taxis and private-hire vehicles.

[246] You may be aware that I established an accessible transport panel and Whizz-Kidz are represented on that panel. It's already provided a huge amount of advice to me in terms of what's needed within the new rail franchise, how we can reform scheduled bus services to better meet the needs of disabled passengers, and also—as part of a forthcoming set of proposals for the reform of taxi services—how we can make sure that we drive up quality, and that we have a higher quality on a consistent basis across Wales for taxi and private-hire vehicle users.

[247] In terms of how we've addressed concerns to date in recent years, even though we're not responsible for rail infrastructure, we have nonetheless invested heavily in certain stations and, as an example, the investment in Llandaf and Radyr is consistent with our aspiration for the sort of stations that will be rolled out as part of the metro project, which has accessibility at the very heart of what we are striving to deliver.

[248] We've also introduced, albeit it remains somewhat inconsistent, the orange wallet scheme, which, I think, has been effective where it's worked well, but I'd like to see further work carried out in that regard. We've also, as I mentioned, set up the accessible transport panel, which is providing us with invaluable advice. But I think the next rail franchise will offer us a step-change opportunity in terms of the provision that's made available to all passengers, but particularly to disabled passengers and passengers with impaired sight and hearing.

[249] The accessible transport panel is currently speaking with the bidders that are taking part in the procurement exercise. It's my view that, as part of

the open dialogue that we're having with the bidders, disabled passengers' needs are fully addressed within the proposals that those four bidders come forward with. I can't talk about any details at this stage because the process is ongoing, but, essentially, we've asked them to meet the needs of disabled passengers and to provide us with the details of how they're going to do that. So, I'm also very supportive of the 'turn up and go' proposals that are at the heart of this petition.

[250] I've announced already consultations on the reform of bus services. That consultation is still open and I'd like to see considerable improvements made to local scheduled bus services, and especially the provision for disabled people. I'd like to see improvements in terms of training for drivers of buses and trains and taxis and private-hire vehicles as well. I'd like to consult on standardising regulations for taxis and private-hire vehicles. Most passengers, I think, across Wales, wouldn't necessarily recognise the difference between a taxi and a private-hire vehicle and they should expect the same, consistent treatment from all.

[251] And, of course, we've had the consultation, the further consultation that's taking place on the next franchise. So, we're in, I think, a period of unprecedented potential for change, but we need to make sure that the various groups that are represented on the panel, and who have given evidence to this committee, have their voice heard loud and clear during what is a pretty vocal period right across the transport piste.

[252] **Mike Hedges:** Thank you very much. I know that Janet's now got some specific questions on rail.

[253] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Yes, just, you know, there are examples of good practice as regards this, and I quite often seen them with the ramps and everything, and there's been a lot of talk about improving the situation for people with disabilities, but how do you ensure that that good practice is rolled out across Wales? And how do you ensure that we're not just paying lip service to it with any new contract or new franchise? I think it's fundamental. The majority of the people that travel now, in some instances, do need some kind of assistance, certainly people with disabilities, I should say, and to make sure that that good practice is there and we're not just saying it, but—. You know, it's one thing politicians up here or organisations at the top level saying it, but how is that rolled out literally on the ground so that every member, you know—?

[254] **Ken Skates:** Yes, and there are three elements to this, I feel. There is (1) training, is the training sufficient, consistent, good enough; (2) infrastructure, is the infrastructure available for provision at all stations and on all vehicles, whether it be buses or trains; and (3) onward travel, which is of critical significance for many passengers, and are arrangements sufficient for disabled passengers? If 'turn up and go' is introduced, are they sufficient to enable them to continue on to their final destination? Now, as part of the franchise process, the procurement process, we're asking the bidders to look at the stations across Wales and to examine how those stations will enable passengers to enjoy 'turn up and go', and how they will then link as well with other public transport services, primarily buses. Community transport will have a crucial role, particularly in rural Wales as well.

[255] In terms of training, we have expectations of rail operators. We've introduced voluntary standards for bus services. It's early days in terms of those voluntary standards. I'd like to ensure that we beef up the standards and make sure that higher quality service is provided through rolling out consistent and well-informed training provision. But I think what's important at this stage is that, as far as rail is concerned, we get from all four bidders their best pitches for how they're going to improve services right across Wales, for all passengers coming and leaving, at all stations as well. Is there anything you'd like to add at all, Rhodri?

[256] **Mr Griffiths:** I think that one of the things that always falls down—and the Whizz-Kidz video laid testament to that—is communication, and a lot of this is about cultural change, isn't it? So, some of the systems are pretty simplistic in terms of their design. It's about making sure that when you book a place, or when you turn up, that need is communicated right through the whole life-cycle of travel, and those things don't work. So, there's a lot that we've started to do, looking at training programmes, but also the use of technology and helping passengers access those services, and to do so in a really coherent manner across the piece.

[257] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** And with your permission, Chair, if I can just—

[258] **Mike Hedges:** Please.

[259] **Janet Finch-Saunders:**—whilst I've got the opportunity: public conveniences at railway stations for the disabled.

[260] **Ken Skates:** Oh, yes.

[261] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** In Llandudno, I'm told that they can close any time between 3 and 4 o'clock. You know, if people are expecting to be able to go to a public convenience, they've got the key and it's locked. And I've raised it, you know. We do need to think of those kinds of things. And my final plea would be: late night. I know when I've travelled home from here late at night—I would say 'late night': 9 or 10 o'clock on a train—and its youngsters who are consuming alcohol, and they can make disabled people feel very, very uneasy if they are loud and they're rowdy. And I've seen that on numerous occasions when, you know, the consumption of alcohol can actually impact on people like me, let alone—. But if you've got a disability and there's larking around going on in a carriage, it can be really undermining of those people. I've seen people struggle to get off, and I've had to, on occasion, say, 'Excuse me, you know, you let these people through.' So, I think we do need to look at those kinds of social elements as well.

[262] **Ken Skates:** I think you're right, and I think there is a culture change that's required to take away some of that rowdiness that we experience, because, actually, about 78 per cent of stations are unstaffed, so passengers need to feel comfortable, if they are alighting late at night, that they are going to be in a safe and secure environment. That presents challenges for the operator as well in terms of being able to roll out disabled persons' assistance, but it's not an insurmountable challenge. I do believe that the four bidders are in a position to come forward with innovative solutions to present to us.

[263] In terms of toilets, this was one of the primary concerns that came through the public consultation that took place ahead of the competitive dialogue process for the franchise, primarily with regard to toilet facilities on trains, but also at stations. It's something that we are acutely aware of and recognise that needs to be improved.

[264] In terms of the actual station infrastructure, again, that's something the UK Government, through Network Rail, often remains responsible for. We've invested in part, but also, in terms of management through Transport for Wales, we'll be able to look at improving those services as well. So, we do have long-term—well, short-term, actually—aspirations to improve quite considerably the experience that people will have on trains and at their stations as well, once we get that new franchise up and running and Transport for Wales managing the network.

[265] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** The points I made about the alcohol, though—some will be subsidising their revenue stream by the sale of alcohol. I think it just needs to be better—

[266] **Ken Skates:** Managed and regulated.

[267] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Yes.

[268] **Mr Griffiths:** If I may, that's a really good point. I think we've got to make sure that all those partners involved in this—ourselves, the bidders, the operators—everybody is involved in being an advocate for disabled passengers. I mean, the Paulley case perhaps may not have happened if people were far more aware of people's needs.

[269] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Yes.

[270] **Mike Hedges:** We move on to buses then, Neil.

[271] **Neil McEvoy:** Yes, there's a recommendation from the bus policy advisory group about drivers studying a professional competence module to get some kind of consistency across the piece. I just wondered what you thought about that.

[272] **Ken Skates:** I think that makes perfect sense. I think we should expect that. We should expect consistency in terms of customer delivery and in terms of assistance that's given to disabled passengers.

[273] **Neil McEvoy:** You mentioned the orange wallet scheme. Are there any plans to roll that out across Wales?

[274] **Ken Skates:** I'd like to examine the feasibility of rolling that out across Wales. I think there have been notable successes. I think it's valued by people who carry it. I wouldn't wish to make it obligatory for people to have to use an orange wallet in order to notify staff that they need assistance, but, as a discreet method of doing so, I think it's very useful and I'd like to see it rolled out.

[275] **Neil McEvoy:** I'd like to see drivers with it because I think it makes perfect sense for a wallet to be available for passengers if they need it.

[276] **Ken Skates:** Yes.

[277] **Neil McEvoy:** The other question is: should disability awareness and equality training be a core element of a grant qualification?

[278] **Ken Skates:** I think it should. In terms of buses, we've got the consultation taking place at the moment on reform and improvements to bus services, but I think making it a condition is certainly something that we would wish to explore and to implement. I think it's an expectation that people have and I think it would make sense to do that.

[279] **Neil McEvoy:** The other one is whether or not you think it's a good idea to ensure that visuals and sounds are available for buses stopping.

[280] **Ken Skates:** Yes, there was a bit of a pushback on our proposals for this at the time when we said we wanted to see it introduced for companies of a certain size. There was some pushback. Some companies argued that it wasn't necessary because most people use apps now, but, actually, for a huge number of passengers, it really is still relevant and it is a valued service.

[281] So, I wish to see—and it was quite groundbreaking for us to take the step to say, 'It must be provided'. I think we need to go further with it and I think utilising the support, the financial resource that we have, as a lever to make sure that more bus operators introduce that sort of provision is essential.

[282] I think it also says something about the country—if you have a standard approach, a consistent approach, to your provision for all people, no matter how able bodied or disabled, if you have a consistent, high-quality approach, it says something about the country you live in. and I don't think that we can roll back on measures that are designed to provide an equal playing field for all.

10:30

[283] **Neil McEvoy:** Thanks.

[284] **Mike Hedges:** Okay. On to taxis, Gareth.

[285] **Gareth Bennett:** Could I just ask a quick question about trains, as well?

We've had a lot of stories in the press in recent months concerning Arriva Trains, who've possibly been slightly heavy-handed in fining people who've been travelling without tickets, but this has brought up the issue of the availability of ticket machines on stations, and accessibility. And this is affecting even able-bodied people, who are saying, 'Well, there's only ticket machines on that side of the station. I'd have to go over the bridge et cetera, et cetera'. So I can see that, for disabled people, those problems are going to be magnified. So, I wondered what you thought about that.

[286] **Ken Skates:** Well, with new technology, this issue should largely be resolved—with integrated ticketing, with the use of smart phones and apps. We'd expect to have a transition towards greater use of digital ticketing. For the time being, I think it is right that we pursue ticket dodgers, and there are people who purposely dodge tickets. It's quite incredible, actually—the stats relating to this, and some of the data, which shows, actually, it's very much a white-collar crime if you like. It's not something that students, young people, unemployed people do. I think we had a judge at one point, or somebody from the legal profession, who was dodging a fare.

[287] **Gareth Bennett:** There was a case in London—it was a big City broker, or something, and he got fined £6,000 because they worked out that was how much he owed because he'd been doing it for so long.

[288] **Ken Skates:** There we are.

[289] **Gareth Bennett:** The problem is that—yes, I know there are fare dodgers—some of the people who are getting caught and fined excessively aren't fare dodgers; they're people who genuinely wanted to buy a ticket. So, we can't just assume that everyone that's getting caught by Arriva is a fare dodger— that's the problem.

[290] **Ken Skates:** So, as part of the next franchise and the procurement exercise, we've asked the bidders to look at the ticketing system and make sure that we don't just offer more opportunities for people to buy tickets easily; we also make sure that there is a greater integration of the tickets, so that you don't have to buy separate tickets for bus or for rail travel, and that's part of the vision for the metro. But this is rolled up in the procurement exercise and the roll-out of the metro system.

[291] **Gareth Bennett:** What about the people that won't have access to digital technology? How is it going to be made easier for them? In simple

terms, what if somebody couldn't buy a ticket because the ticket machine was only on the other side of the station and they couldn't physically get over the bridge in time to get to the ticket machine on the other platform and get back to catch their train?

[292] **Ken Skates:** Yes, absolutely.

[293] **Gareth Bennett:** Would there be like standard set requirements to have ticket machines on both sides?

[294] **Ken Skates:** This is something that Transport for Wales will be examining right across the network, ensuring that, where there are unstaffed stations, there are machines that are working that people can purchase tickets from, and that we remove the excuse that can sometimes be offered up that tickets were simply unavailable by any means. We wish people to travel as easily and swiftly as they possibly can do, but we also wish, where people need to pay, to pay for those journeys as well.

[295] **Gareth Bennett:** Yes, thanks.

[296] **Mr Griffiths:** It's a really good point. Our position is that we are not relying on the individual's technology to access the service. So, it's about a range of different options for people with different needs, which is really important as part of the franchise requirements.

[297] **Gareth Bennett:** That's good. Going on to taxis, I guess a problem is you want to make sure there is a standardised level of service. I suppose, with the taxis, that's the hardest area to achieve it. So, how would you go about doing that?

[298] **Ken Skates:** Well, we can look at doing that, and it's my intention to consult on a number of proposals regarding taxis and private hire vehicles in order to implement national standards that will not distinguish between taxis and private hire companies. There's evidence out there that suggests that disabled people are being disadvantaged in terms of private hire vehicles, and we wish to see this end. Introducing national standards that are implemented consistently across Wales will help achieve this, and it will relate not just to the quality and the safety of the passenger experience, but also to the training that's provided to drivers, the availability of vehicles that can carry wheelchairs and also the expectation on carriers to ensure that passengers feel safe and comfortable and pay a fare that is reasonable and

standard. I think if we can introduce, alongside the reforms that are taking place on buses and on rail, reform for taxi and private hire vehicles, then I think we can introduce, then, the fully integrated, consistent transport vision that we've outlined on a number of occasions.

[299] **Gareth Bennett:** You mentioned the fact that taxis need to have certain fittings for wheelchair users and there is a problem of not enough taxis having those fittings. So, this is kind of a difficult one to resolve, and I don't know what measures you can take to get more taxis to be available with those fittings, because that has been a problem.

[300] **Ken Skates:** This relates largely to the Equalities Act 2010, but, over time, we would expect more vehicles, due in no small part to the turnover and churn of taxis and private hire vehicles, to come to market that have provision not just for wheelchairs, but also for prams and for other tools that can be used to help mobility, particularly for people of restricted mobility, such as the elderly. So, we would expect more of those vehicles to come on stream anyway.

[301] **Gareth Bennett:** Will there be enough, do you think?

[302] **Ken Skates:** I'm not sure we've made an assessment of whether there are sufficient vehicles available at this moment in time. I think the key piece of work for us is with training. That's where we can, with our responsibilities and our existing powers, have the greatest influence in terms of making sure that drivers are fully trained in terms of passenger needs and expectations.

[303] **Gareth Bennett:** Training was certainly an issue that, when we had the Whizz-Kidz, was one of the main points with all forms of transport. They were saying that they were dealing with drivers who often were unaware of their needs, but then we had the companies in and there were standard practices for training of drivers, so there seemed to be a big gap between what the two groups were saying. I don't know what the solution, there, is with oversight of training.

[304] **Ken Skates:** Yes, the question is: are we seeing that training carried out consistently across all vehicles and with all drivers, or is it being carried out inconsistently and in some parts it's not actually being carried out?

[305] **Gareth Bennett:** How will that improve?

[306] **Ken Skates:** Through the introduction of national standards. So, through the introduction of national standards, which can be enhanced by local authorities where it's considered something that is desirable, I think we can, then, ensure that we have a standard degree of consistency in terms of quality.

[307] **Gareth Bennett:** There was one specific thing, going back to the issue of the taxis and not enough taxis with the fittings. Another issue that was mentioned was a lot of the taxi drivers that do have the fittings, they tend to have contracts to take people to school in the mornings, like disabled kids and stuff like that. So, one of the problems arising from that was often that the vehicles with the fittings weren't available later in the day because the taxi drivers tend to do all their stuff in the morning and then they're not available—they're not on shift later. So, that is one of the problems affecting availability.

[308] **Ken Skates:** Yes, local authorities will be able to address this through licencing regimes, and this is something that we're proposing as part of the consultation. So, we would hope that, in the future, through local authority licencing, sufficient vehicles to carry out the sort of service provision that you've outlined will be available.

[309] **Gareth Bennett:** Okay, thanks.

[310] **Mike Hedges:** Can I just raise a few questions relating to the answers we've had from you, the Minister, the answers we've had from the bus and rail companies, and the views that we had from Whizz-Kidz at the very beginning? Anybody who's been watching this fully would think the Whizz-Kidz were living in a different country to the rest. What can the Welsh Government or Transport for Wales do in raising awareness of the full scope of assistance available for disabled passengers and existing passenger assist schemes at railway stations? Because what we were told by the rail company, and what Whizz-Kidz told us, was very, very different.

[311] **Ken Skates:** Okay. So, all stations—all stations—should now carry, published—they should carry, it should be on the walls there—expectations for disabled passengers. That should be expected. In terms of raising awareness with passengers away from stations, I think there is work that Transport for Wales will be able to do as part of the next franchise, as the manager of the franchise, to raise awareness of what the rights are for passengers—for all passengers, but this would be particularly relevant to

disabled passengers in regard to the Whizz-Kidz petition. So, already, the expectations are published, but I think it's fair to say that Transport for Wales does have a piece of work to do to ensure that awareness is spread sufficiently across passengers. Not just those who it directly relates to, but across all passengers, indeed. Because, in order to get that cultural change, we need everybody to appreciate we all have a part to play.

[312] **Mike Hedges:** I actually talked to a charity that deals with people with disabilities and the people working for the charity were surprised at some of the answers that were received as opposed to the 'ordinary' person, and so I think there is a need for this information to be got out. The other question is: there are problems with some stations; I think that that's accepted by everyone. What is going to be done to ensure that all stations are disabled-friendly?

[313] **Ken Skates:** Okay. Well, it's not just about making them disabled-friendly, I should say; it's also about maintaining them so that they remain disabled-friendly. Quite considerable investment has been made in a number of stations. What we wouldn't wish to see is for some of the facilities, such as lifts or ramps, to then fall—because of development of maintenance—into disrepair, and to not be available. So, it's essential that we have sufficient resources being channelled through to Welsh stations through Network Rail, through the Department for Transport, to ensure that provision is adequate, meets expectations, and is fully maintained. We've stepped in and we've invested where we can, but it is something that I think I'm pretty repetitive in calling for: additional resource for the network, for our infrastructure. I think this petition actually highlights again why we need to see an improvement on current levels of investment in the infrastructure.

[314] **Mike Hedges:** I would agree with you entirely. My final question is: if we were to invite Whizz-Kidz back in 12 months' time, would they be telling us how much things have improved following this, or would they say it's the same as usual? I think that really is the key. We've talked to lots of people, including you, Minister, including the bus companies, representatives of the taxi industry, and representatives of the two main rail companies, and Network Rail, who all said lots of very nice things about what is being done and what is available. But—and I'm going to suggest to colleagues that we do invite Whizz-Kidz back in 12 months' time to say if they think they have found things have improved—would you expect them to be saying 'yes'?

[315] **Ken Skates:** In terms of the cultural change that needs to happen right

across society, it's going to take longer than 12 months. I think we need to recognise that cultural change does take time. There have been improvements, but, in order to see the level playing field that I've talked of, we need to make sure that everybody plays their part, and that will take time because it requires so many different players. In terms of the actual infrastructure and the service provision, it depends in no small part on how quickly the bus industry respond to the calls, it depends on how quickly we can see taxi and private hire vehicles adapt and modernise and adopt higher quality standards. I think 12 months' time may be too soon to give you a definitive answer as to whether there has been huge, discernible change, but, through the new franchise, through the roll-out of the metro, through the proposed reforms for buses and for taxis and private hire vehicles, which will come down the line in the course of the next four years, I think, by the end of this Assembly term—and I realise that I'm as impatient as anyone else to see change, but I think, by the end of this Assembly term, if you ask Whizz-Kidz again then, 'Has there been an improvement?', I think there will be a resounding 'yes.'

10:45

[316] **Mike Hedges:** So, you suggest we wait another four years before we call them back—or three years.

[317] **Ken Skates:** Not necessarily four years, but inviting Whizz-Kidz back before the new franchise has bedded in, and before we've had an opportunity to introduce what, at the moment, are only proposals for legislation and for reform of services, I think might be a bit premature, and I wouldn't wish to raise expectations unreasonably.

[318] **Mike Hedges:** Okay. So, would you say May 2020 would be acceptable?

[319] **Ken Skates:** May 2020 would be a good time to invite Whizz-Kidz back and to take a good, close look at the improvements, and perhaps to—right now—create the baseline so that we can then check, in 2020, how far we've gone in three years.

[320] **Mike Hedges:** That's a decision that the committee will make later on, but I thank the Minister for his advice on that.

[321] **Ken Skates:** Thank you.

[322] **Mike Hedges:** I thank the Minister for coming along. I thank his officials for coming along, and I close the formal part of this meeting. Thank you very much.

[323] **Ken Skates:** Thank you. It's a good petition this.

Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 10:45.

The meeting ended at 10:45.