



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

**Y Pwyllgor Deisebau
The Petitions Committee**

**Dydd Mawrth, 11 Tachwedd 2014
Tuesday, 11 November 2014**

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

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

**Aelodau’r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance**

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

**Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance**

Dr Anne Crowley	Ymddiredolwr, Y Ddraig Ffyn-ci Trustee, Funky Dragon
Jack Gillum	Cyngor Ieuenctid Powys Powys Youth Council
Catherine Jones	Llysgennad Ieuenctid y DU 2012-2014 a Chyngor Ieuenctid Penybont UK Youth Ambassador 2012 -2014 and Bridgend Youth Council
Tricia Jones	Cadeirydd, Y Ddraig Ffyn-ci Chairperson, Funky Dragon

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

Kayleigh Driscoll	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Steve George	Clerc Clerk
Helen Roberts	Cynghorydd Cyfreithiol Legal Adviser
Kath Thomas	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk

*Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 08:59.
The meeting began at 08:59.*

**Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions**

[1] **William Powell:** [*Inaudible.*]—this is a morning that the word ‘*diflas*’ was made for, I think, outside, but I hope that we have a warm welcome for you on this important matter this morning. There are no fire alarms planned this morning, so, if the alarm does go off, it is the real thing, and we will be in the hands of the ushers. Normal housekeeping arrangements apply. Members can speak in Welsh or English as they prefer and are able. We have a full complement of Members for this evidence session and for this meeting.

**Sesiwn Dystiolaeth—P-04-597 Diogelu Dyfodol Draig Ffyn-ci, Cynulliad Plant a
Phobl Ifanc Cymru
Evidence Session—P-04-597 Protect the Future of Funky Dragon, the Children
and Young People’s Assembly for Wales**

[2] **William Powell:** I think that it is important that we get straight under way. First of all, I would like you, please, to introduce yourselves briefly for the sound levels and the record.

09:00

[3] **Dr Crowley:** My name is Anne Crowley. I am a member of the board of Funky Dragon.

- [4] **Ms T. Jones:** I am Tricia Jones, and I am the chairperson of Funky Dragon.
- [5] **Mr Gillum:** I am Jack Gillum, Powys youth forum member, and I have recently been appointed to the board of Funky Dragon.
- [6] **Ms C. Jones:** I am Catherine Jones. I used to be the UK young ambassador on Funky Dragon, and I am a member of Bridgend youth council.
- [7] **William Powell:** Excellent. As I said, you are all most welcome. If you would like to make a couple of opening remarks, we have quite a number of questions that we would like to put to you and to engage with you on, so over to you for any opening remarks that you wish to make.
- [8] **Ms T. Jones:** Funky Dragon is the Children and Young People's Assembly for Wales. In October 2013, Welsh Government made a decision to cut the core funding of the charity. Our sister organisations—the UK Youth Parliament, the Scottish Youth Parliament and the Northern Ireland Youth Forum—are all directly funded by their Governments. Wales is the only nation in the UK with a youth parliament not directly funded by its Government.
- [9] Funky Dragon was told in 2013 that it would have to compete for funding in the children and families delivery grant. The criteria of the grant were not suitable for the charity, and Funky Dragon should never have been put in this process due to the fact that the grant was a competitive grant, and the criteria were for strategic development. Wales must have an independent youth-led national platform for children and young people. Funky Dragon has been fulfilling this role successfully for the last 12 years. The work of Funky Dragon is independent of Government and is truly led by young people. We were the first in British charity history to have under-18s on our board of trustees. The work of Funky Dragon is led by the young people on the management committee, the grand council and the young people of Wales.
- [10] One example would be that, in 2013, we consulted the young people of Wales to see what the priorities of the charity should be for 2013 to 2015. We had over 2,500 responses from all across Wales. This provides young people with the opportunity to have an input their youth Assembly and what we do. This is one benefit of having a youth-led body, as young people can set their own priorities and not be influenced by adults. Participation is enabling children and young people to have a voice and be heard when decisions are being made about them. Participation is a process rather than an event. Each local authority has a statutory requirement to have a local youth forum, and these local youth councils will identify national issues.
- [11] There is no longer a body for these young people to feed these issues into. These issues are the natural voice of young people, and they are the current issues that young people face day to day. Young people who are elected to Funky Dragon are those from their local communities who want to make a change. A local youth council will democratically elect three representatives to a national platform, and this process prepares young people for voting later in life.
- [12] Wales has become the only country in Europe not to have an independent youth parliament. Wales is leading the world in children's rights, yet we have lost Funky Dragon. Wales will no longer have a voice in Europe and internationally without Funky Dragon.
- [13] The 'Lost in Care' report found that young people were not listened to and the report recommended that Wales needed a body of young people to speak up on children's rights. We still believe that young people should be democratically elected from a local level to represent

young people at a national level. The platform should be called ‘Youth Assembly for Wales’. It should be able to work with all elected members, including Assembly Members and Members of Parliament, to further young people’s issues. It should support and allow young people to report directly to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. The youth Assembly should be able to hold all Ministers and Government to account.

[14] The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, in commenting on the last UK state report, stated in concluding observation 33 that Governments should

[15] ‘support forums for children’s participation, such as the UK Youth Parliament, Funky Dragon in Wales and Youth Parliament in Scotland’.

[16] This should be implemented. Funky Dragon is willing to have discussions on how we move forward from now.

[17] **William Powell:** Tricia, thank you very much for pulling the essential issues together in that opening statement. I know that other Members and I have been struck by how active members of Funky Dragon have been in the lobbying process for Members and other supporters, and also harnessing social media and all the rest of it. In that context, could you tell me please what discussions has Funky Dragon had with the previous or the current responsible Minister regarding the concerns that are set out in your petition?

[18] **Ms T. Jones:** Personally, as the chair, I have written to the Minister on a number of occasions. I have had correspondence through e-mails; I have had correspondence from Carwyn himself and that is it—we have only had e-mail correspondence.

[19] **William Powell:** What was the outcome of the discussions that you have had—or the outcome of that engagement?

[20] **Ms T. Jones:** Just saying that they feel that the process was robust and fair, and that the bidding criteria were suitable.

[21] **William Powell:** Jack, did you want to come in?

[22] **Mr Gillum:** No.

[23] **William Powell:** I misinterpreted, then. Russell George is next.

[24] **Russell George:** I am just wondering how you elect people to Funky Dragon. What was the process for that?

[25] **Ms C. Jones:** Well, obviously, each local authority has their local youth forum, or equivalent. So, it is all different in each local authority. However, I know that, with my process—and it is done exactly the same throughout the whole of Wales—a member of staff from Funky Dragon comes in, and tells the organisation what Funky Dragon is. Then also the young people—the current members—also tell the rest of their forum, or assembly, what it does, and the process. Then it is through elections, so young people have to get up, make a speech, say why they want to be on Funky Dragon, and then there would be a vote after that.

[26] **Russell George:** Is there any way of including more young people in that vote at all, because the vote is just taking place among the people who are in the forum themselves?

[27] **Ms T. Jones:** Currently, no, but we have had a look at other models. We have looked at the UK Youth Parliament model, and the way that it works, where it is a county-wide vote. So young people—

[28] **Russell George:** For any young people who want to vote?

[29] **Ms T. Jones:** Yes. Any young person could stand, and any young person could vote. So, this is something that we are looking at maybe developing in the future, and looking at as a new option.

[30] **William Powell:** So, that would be a kind of open primary model?

[31] **Ms T. Jones:** Yes. It is the same as a county election, for a county councillor.

[32] **William Powell:** Excellent. Okay. There is one further question from me, and I know that Bethan has a number of issues that she wants to take up.

[33] What involvement is there with the youth wings of political parties, or the Young Farmers movement, or the Urdd, or other established bodies of that kind? Is there any formal relationship that Funky Dragon has had in that regard?

[34] **Mr Gillum:** Not as far as I believe. However, we have questions about whether there should be any formal involvement with political parties, because we try to stay politically neutral, so that we can represent everyone's views, and not try to go down the party line. I think that the issue with working with other organisations goes back to the comment about how we would like to be young-person-led, and there is always the potential that these bodies would have an adjustment to this, and then that changes the young-person-led section.

[35] **Ms T. Jones:** We have had representatives in the past from Young Carers, and from Voices from Care. However, they just happened to be young people who stood for election because they wanted to make a change.

[36] **William Powell:** So, that was a coincidence, rather than a designated place. Okay, thank you. Bethan Jenkins is next.

[37] **Bethan Jenkins:** Just to pick up on your point, Jack, you said about people not wanting to invite political parties. Do you not think that it would be a model to look at, to encourage people to stand, if they wanted to, as a cross-section of different political parties, so that, from a younger age then, people can understand what—. For example, we are all here on political party terms, although you could stand as an independent; I acknowledge that. However, would it not be a good model to look at, because then people from a younger age are establishing their own political ideas, which will vary across the board?

[38] **Mr Gillum:** I can see it being a beneficial model, because the UK youth select committee report, which was released last Wednesday, and of which I am a member, showed that there is a high level of political disengagement among young people. So, it could be a potential way of getting more young people involved in the process, and the practical bits of an assembly's work.

[39] **Bethan Jenkins:** Okay. I was only asking because I went to America a few years ago, and they had a very vibrant debate with young people, who were very different politically, and I think that, sometimes, we are too scared in Wales to encourage our young people to actually have real political opinions, as opposed to establishment views of processes and structures, and then that takes the passion out of the debate quite often, I feel.

[40] However, my other question was: a few years ago, there was quite a critical report of Funky Dragon by Arad Consulting, talking about the over-propensity of staffing, and saying that some of the structures were not effective. Now you are in the situation where funding has

been removed, do you think that enough was done over these years to make sure that you would not be in a position where funding would be removed, and where you would have the word 'weak' from the Government, saying, 'Well, actually, you are not good enough, effectively, to take this work on board'? You mention new models now, but should you have been thinking of new models earlier? Personally, I think that you should have been doing so.

[41] **Ms T. Jones:** I think that one restriction that we did have was the European social fund—we had ESF criteria and funding to work with. That did become an issue when our work was focused around the funding bid. Over the last two years—. I have been on Funky Dragon now for four years altogether, so I have seen the changes that we have gone through, where young people are now guiding the work and truly picking the issues and how we change. I know that one of the aims that we were going to work on—obviously, due to funding issues, that has not happened—was that we were going to write our own young people's manifesto ahead of the next Assembly elections, so that young people could put forward what they wanted to see being changed. Due to funding, that has not happened. That was work coming from the management committee, with the management committee looking at how we change our current way.

[42] **Bethan Jenkins:** The Welsh Government knew about some of these changes, did it? It was aware—. That sounds to me like a good idea and it is more of that that I think people would like to see, and also for county-wide elections. Were the Ministers aware of those changes?

[43] **Ms T. Jones:** We met with the Ministers ahead of the funding bid to bring them up to speed on the work that we were doing, but I think that it would be fair to say that there have been issues with the way we work with the Government and the way that we reported and fed back to each other.

[44] **Dr Crowley:** Perhaps I will just add a little detail to what Tricia was saying. There was a subsequent evaluation of Funky Dragon, which was glowing. I think that there were problems for a couple of years before the decision to withdraw the core funding, in the sense that, for example, Welsh Government officials would come along to the board of trustees meetings as observers, but they stopped coming. They queried the model in terms of the grand council, where all of these elected young people meet together three or four times a year, as expenses. However, Funky Dragon believes that that was a really important part of the process in order to bring young people together to debate; we could not do it all online. So, there were issues. I think that our argument would be that they should have subjected the organisations to review and if there were problems, then perhaps they should have put a contract for a young people's assembly out for a tender.

[45] **William Powell:** That would have been a more transparent process, then.

[46] **Dr Crowley:** Yes, but there was no review. There was no consultation with the young people—the Funky Dragon young people or indeed any other young people out there. The decision was made and they were put into this funding bid, which was completely inappropriate—it was about poverty. The actual decision to withdraw the core funding for a process parliament was taken over a year ago and that was when the problem came.

[47] **Bethan Jenkins:** My final question was that Children in Wales said that it never intended to create a national democratic peer-led youth assembly structure. So, it seems to me that the criteria of that bid did not stipulate that. Therefore, that element then, you believe, has been abolished fundamentally, compared with the other nations.

[48] **Dr Crowley:** Yes, it has been lost.

[49] **Joyce Watson:** Moving on from that, and good morning to all of you, I will say that Tricia went with me earlier this year to Europe to represent people in Wales and did a fantastic job out there. I want to put that on the record, because it would be very unfair if I did not put that on the record. So, that is said. Moving on—it fits quite nicely—I want to know whether you have a view on the participation model for which Children in Wales has been awarded the funding. It is a follow-on question really from where Bethan left off.

[50] **Mr Gillum:** We have looked at the model. One of the things that we have identified as a cause for concern is through the Welsh Government identifying the issues for it to work on, because it is not really the young people bringing their issues to the forefront for the Welsh Government. I can see why it has done it, because it would say, ‘Okay, you can make the most benefit’, but is it not important that we also hear the young people’s issues, as article 12 says in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child? In discussions that I have had with people, we view it as that, in a lot of its participation model, it is working with disadvantaged young people, for example, young people in poverty, which is a brilliant thing to do. However, there is a lack of getting the normal voice out there, so a young person might not be involved if they had not been in care or lived in poverty.

09:15

[51] **Ms T. Jones:** Another comment that I would make is that Children in Wales is funded for its work on poverty issues and family work, while the work of Funky Dragon does not fit into those criteria. Our work is different; we look at issues such as mental health, bullying, sexual health and some of the ones that have been coming up for years and we have been reporting on them for a number of years. The model that Children in Wales will work to is different to the model that we used to work to.

[52] **Joyce Watson:** Following on from that quite nicely, again, did you, as Funky Dragon, speak to or have any conversations with Children in Wales about its bid submission for the national participation model?

[53] **Ms T. Jones:** We were invited to be in discussion with it, so we talked to the young people of our grand council about whether we wanted to be involved in discussions and we decided against it. Given the nature of our work and being truly a young people-led organisation, we felt that if we went into partnership with another organisation, there may be issues around adult and young people decision makers working together. Our board is made up of young people and the young people steer and guide all of the work of the organisation. If we went into partnership with another organisation, how would the board work? Would it be willing to have discussions? How would any organisation, not just Children in Wales, feel about young people truly leading the work?

[54] **William Powell:** Could I just clarify what the timing of that invitation was in relation to the timing of the call for bids?

[55] **Dr Crowley:** It was before the deadline for submitting the bid. So, it was an approach from Children in Wales to discuss with Funky Dragon putting in a joint bid with a number of other organisations. I was not around at the time, but I believe that the decision not to go into those formal discussions was based on the worry of losing independence and losing the young people—

[56] **William Powell:** Compromising the principle.

[57] **Joyce Watson:** I want to ask whether you accept the Minister’s view that funding awarded to Children in Wales is intended to fund a national participation model, as the Minister has expressed to us in a letter?

[58] **Ms T. Jones:** The funding is to have a model of participation, but that youth parliament is not there. That is where I personally feel that we are missing a trick, really. We need a youth body; we need young people to bring forward their own issues and we need something that young people can trust to take forward their views to the Welsh Government and the Assembly. The model of participation that Children in Wales is doing is great, but it is missing that element of an independent youth body.

[59] **Dr Crowley:** It is also a very minimal model. If it involved 100 young people in a year I would be surprised. It has not been given the money to involve the number of young people. Funky Dragon, when it has done reports to the UN and stuff, has consulted with 12,000 young people. That is just not going to be feasible for Children in Wales, because it has not been given that money. I think that the model is based on consultations with Ministers with a few young people, as Jack said, who are from particular disadvantaged groups, which is great, but it is not this representative youth parliament structure that has been revered on the international stage for the last 10 years and can really be seen as the voice of children and young people in Wales. Does that make sense? It is a much smaller, different model, which means that—

[60] **William Powell:** It is only part of the agenda that is being addressed, really, is it not?

[61] **Dr Crowley:** It is not a bad model, but it is a different model and it means that very few young people from particular special interest groups will have those opportunities to be consulted, as Jack said, on issues that the Welsh Government wants to consult on.

[62] **William Powell:** Yes. Joyce, do you have a final question?

[63] **Joyce Watson:** Yes, just finally, there was a response from the Welsh Government, obviously, as to who was successful and who was unsuccessful, and part of that response said, quite frankly, that there were stronger applications from other organisations, and that you were not successful. Would you like to make any comments?

[64] **Ms T. Jones:** Just to highlight the fact that the criteria were not suitable for the work that we did. As a board member, I sat down and actually part-wrote the bid with our staff. There was nothing in it about having a youth assembly, which is the core work of Funky Dragon, and there was nothing in it around being a youth voice. It was all around strategic development and looking at how we get young people involved with consultations and the participation standards et cetera. I think that it would be fair to say that the criteria did not suit us, which is why the bid was not strong enough. We were trying to fit our work into something that we do not actually do.

[65] **William Powell:** I now call Russell George.

[66] **Russell George:** Joyce has just asked my question. That is fine, Chair.

[67] **Joyce Watson:** Did I? I am sorry.

[68] **Bethan Jenkins:** I wanted to ask a question. We are talking about the Government here, but I have had some individual conversations with you about looking at different models. We have talked about other countries, but I have been told that the budget for the Commission is tight in terms of setting up an assembly. Have you called for a meeting with the commissioners and the Presiding Officer to at least start the discussion? While I have said before that I have had reservations about the model that Funky Dragon used, that does not mean that I am against youth participation. In fact, I want an effective youth parliament for Wales. I am not saying that what you did was not effective; I just think that there should be a

wider base of people being elected to a national youth forum. My ambitions are also bigger—having debates here so that you feed directly into our work. I do not think that that happens enough; in fact it does not happen. We have debates about young people, but do we really know what you think? Sometimes, I think that the answer is ‘no’. I am passionate about this, but I am just curious as to whether you are seeking out those types of meetings. Funding might not be available now, but it may be in future. For example, you could at least start with a core and build that up over some years, then at least we have something. I am very worried about the fact that Wales has nothing in this regard now. The Children’s Commissioner for Wales, who we have not really referenced, is saying that too. I think that alarm bells should be ringing for the Welsh Government in this regard. So, I am just seeking your views on the Assembly side of things.

[69] **Ms T. Jones:** We are open to have these discussions. We have written to a number of—. Young people across Wales were constantly writing to their AMs over the summer. I am sure that you received a few e-mails yourself. We are willing to have these discussions, we are willing to meet with AMs and we are willing to discuss with the children’s commissioner how we move forward. I feel that it would be important for these discussions to be with adult decision-makers on an equal footing with children and young people. If we are talking about creating a youth assembly or how we move forward, children and young people need to be at the front of these conversations. You have just spoken about the UK models and different models that we have around the world. On Friday, young people from Wales will be attending the UK Youth Parliament debate in the House of Commons.

[70] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes, I watched that last year.

[71] **Ms T. Jones:** Yes. I have attended this debate in the past—I have sat on the green benches twice, which is quite a big thing to say. Being 16 and sitting in the House of Commons; how many young people get the chance to do that? An interesting comment that I would have is that, this year, funding has been found from Wales for young people to attend. So, the Welsh Government will be giving funding for young people to go to the House of Commons. For the last four years, we have relied on John Bercow to pay our expenses.

[72] **Bethan Jenkins:** I am sure that he has enough. [*Laughter.*] However, you should not have to rely on that.

[73] **Ms T. Jones:** The funding that we were given only allowed us to work within Wales. Cath will tell you about the UKYA work that she has done, and being a UK ambassador reporting in Europe, but that was because the BYC gave us funding to do that. Our funding restricted us quite a lot, which was not great for our working further afield.

[74] **Bethan Jenkins:** That will be the same, if not worse, in the future, I take it.

[75] **Ms T. Jones:** Yes. Cath can tell you about some of the international stuff that we have done.

[76] **Ms C. Jones:** Yes, we have done quite a bit of international work and we are internationally known. The main one of them is CATS, which is a conference that happens in Switzerland. It stands for ‘children as actors for transforming society’. So, young people from across the world join at this conference to talk about participation, good practice and things. Two years ago, when young people from Funky Dragon first went out, our young people were really shocked by how well known we were. So, people from Nicaragua were saying to our young people, ‘Oh my God, you’re from Funky Dragon’.

[77] **William Powell:** You have got quite a reputation then.

[78] **Ms C. Jones:** They knew who we were and they wanted to hear about all the work we did and how we did it, and they wanted to know about our good practice. Then, this year, Funky Dragon got invited back out there to be part of the planning team for the whole conference. Our young people then went to help plan it and actually facilitated workshops out at the conference. We were asked to continue doing this work, but obviously because of funding it is not possible.

[79] As Tricia has mentioned, we do a lot of work with sister and partnership organisations across the UK. Previously, I was the UK young ambassador for Wales. That was a British Youth Council role. We had representatives, one from Wales, which was obviously me, one from Northern Ireland, one from Scotland and one from England and then a whole-of-UK representative. However, this was not funded by Wales. My main role really was to consult young people from across the whole of Wales on an issue that would be taken to the EU. I had the topic of social inclusion and I worked alongside a support worker at Funky Dragon. They gave up quite a bit of their time to help me, but it was not part of their role. So, I had to travel across the whole of Wales. It was pretty hard for a girl from Bridgend to travel all the way up to Denbighshire and Anglesey to do work by myself. [*Laughter.*]

[80] However, now, with Funky Dragon gone, this EU status will be lost. In March, I went to a conference in Greece by myself with no workers—nothing—to represent the voices of young people from Wales there. Our work fed into the EU Commission and it also became part of the conclusions. Obviously, we know that EU laws do not happen in a night, so, within a few years, our work from Wales and the UK should be in that report, and hopefully it will feed into policy as well. So, now we have two UK ambassadors from Wales, because we have changed the process, but then they have no support. They have no support in Wales to get these young people's voices heard. I know that, in my term, I consulted over 2,000 young people on this one particular issue and that was by myself, so imagine what a group of young people could do.

[81] Another international thing is that Funky Dragon got asked to set up a national forum in Florida. We had work going on with Saint Helena. So, we are internationally known, and Tricia has already mentioned the House of Commons event, which I have personally been to as well, as has Jack.

[82] **Mr Gillum:** I am going on Friday as well.

[83] **William Powell:** Excellent. Catherine, thanks particularly for putting on the record all of the international dimension, which is obviously so crucial to your work. I have a further question, if I may. What is the capacity of the Funky Dragon trust in terms of the membership and resources to protect some of the legacy of what Funky Dragon has achieved? To what extent is funding being sought from organisations like the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the Hansard Society or other relevant bodies, which could potentially at least build up incrementally, as Bethan was suggesting, some of the valuable work that Funky Dragon has done over time?

[84] **Dr Crowley:** Sure. We have a board of trustees that is made up of professionals and young people—professional young people. There are about 10 of us; perhaps nine of us. Basically, the funding came to an end at the end of September. We had a number of staff still employed until the end of October winding things up, closing offices et cetera. Where are we now? It is now 10 days later, so in the last couple of weeks we have been concentrating on redundancies, closing offices and getting stuff into storage. We have a Big Lottery project, which is working with children doing research, which we still have funding for, and that has been transferred over to Swansea University for management.

09:30

[85] We plan to keep the organisation going. The young people are all committed to staying on the committee, and the adults too, and we are going to try to have discussions now that the staff have gone—. Obviously, it is quite difficult when people are being made redundant to start talking to people about who will take the work forward. So, now that that phase is over, I think that we can start having conversations with the children's commissioner, Children in Wales and the Assembly to find a way forward and, yes, to apply for money. The point is that this should be core funded and, hopefully, we can come back to that at some point, but I accept what Bethan is saying that in this age of austerity, et cetera, there is not a lot of state money around, and we are going to have to start—. However, we are definitely, positively looking to protect the legacy and carry it on.

[86] **William Powell:** Thank you. I think that the clock has almost beaten us, but this is such an important issue that the last word should go to the young people, particularly, who have brought this forward, and if there is a final statement or something that you would like to share with us that you have not covered until this point, we would very much like to hear it.

[87] **Ms T. Jones:** It is just that we still believe that young people in Wales should have a youth body that is democratically elected and, possibly, there should be a partnership between the Welsh Government and the National Assembly. We think that that new model or any new processes should be a partnership where young people can hold Ministers to account with the help and support of the Assembly. Again, maybe there should be democratic, county-wide elections, and maybe it should mimic the National Assembly in a way. I think that that is our main one.

[88] Possibly, there should be a review into the decision and the process as to how the decision was made to cut the core funding without consultation with any young people, and the way that it was done. I am just looking at Jack's notes. [*Laughter.*] I think that that is everything, unless Jack has something to say.

[89] **Mr Gillum:** No, she covered it all.

[90] **William Powell:** That is a strong note on which to finish.

[91] Diolch yn fawr iawn am ddod y bore Thank you very much for coming this
yma. morning.

[92] Thank you very much indeed for your contributions this morning. It has been a really interesting session, and we will be considering the evidence that we have taken.

09:33

Y Wybodaeth Ddiweddaraf am Ddeisebau Blaenorol Updates to Previous Petitions

[93] **William Powell:** I think that we should move directly to agenda item 3. The first petition is, in fact, very long-standing, as colleagues will be aware. P-03-150, National Cancer Standards, was submitted by Rhondda Breast Friends and was first considered on 9 July 2008, having collected 43 signatures. In addition, Rhondda Breast Friends has developed a charter regarding improvements required to cancer care services, and that has had the support of 1,475 signatories. The background to this is that we last considered the petition on 11 March 2014, and considered correspondence from Public Health Wales, along with further comments from the petitioner, and we agreed a series of actions: to write to Public Health Wales, copying that to the Minister for Health and Social Services, seeking further details on the timescale for the provision of the tailor-made information, and also, given the significant

time period since the submission of the petition, we requested a short, focused research brief, drawing together all of the various strands.

[94] We have the response from Public Health Wales, dated 22 July, in the public papers, because its original response was not received by the clerking team. In addition, the clerking team has received, very recently, a very positive letter indeed from Diane Raybould, the founder of Rhondda Breast Friends, in which she gives a very upbeat assessment of recent developments in this field and that is very much to be welcomed. Of course, what we are awaiting is the Government's response to the health committee's recommendations with regard to its recent inquiry, and I think then that it is reasonable to expect a Plenary debate to follow. So, I would be grateful for any suggestions that Members have as to how we should proceed in this regard.

[95] **Bethan Jenkins:** Do we know when the debate will happen? All I was thinking was, once we do have the debate, whether we could talk to the petitioners about—. Quite often, professional lobbyists will contact Assembly Members as to how to potentially frame a speech or which points to use within a speech. I wonder whether we could encourage the petitioners to contact Assembly Members or the spokespeople to say, 'Look, this petition has been going through for some time now; the petitioners have worked really hard to make sure that it is still on the agenda; can you take note of the points—.

[96] **William Powell:** I think if we could have a facilitating role like that, it would make a lot of sense.

[97] **Bethan Jenkins:** We cannot make decisions here on what cancer policies are put in place, for example, but we can facilitate that, in that debate, the petition has a strong voice. That was what I was going to suggest.

[98] **William Powell:** Yes, I think if we can ask the clerking team to keep a watching brief on that and to make sure that we do not lose that opportunity, I think that would be a very sensible thing to do. It is clear from the e-mail received very recently from the lead petitioner, Diane Raybould, that she is already quite strongly engaged with her own Assembly Member, Leighton Andrews, but I think, across the Assembly, it would make sense to do that. In fact, she is in the public gallery. You are most welcome; it is good to see you.

[99] **Bethan Jenkins:** The other point was in the letter from Public Health Wales. In the last paragraph, it says that the issue of non-urgent suspected cancer is not a question for it and that we should re-approach the Welsh Government. So, on that, I think that we need to write back to the Welsh Government.

[100] **William Powell:** Indeed. We need to get back to the Minister. I would be happy to write in that regard. Are there any other comments that colleagues have at this time? I see that there are not. Excellent. We will do that and actively await the Plenary debate, but also build in the actions that Bethan Jenkins has suggested, if colleagues are content.

[101] We move on now to P-04-494, Robotic assisted laparoscopic prostatectomy must be made available to men in Wales now. This petition was submitted by Professor Kevin Davies MBE, and was first considered on 16 July 2013 and has the support of 2,090 signatures. An associated petition collected in excess of 1,000 signatures. We last considered the petition on 21 October and agreed to seek comments from the petitioner. We now have a full response from the petitioner in our public papers. Also, there has been in the news recently, to which Joyce Watson referred, a positive announcement with regard to the funding of a facility within Cardiff and Vale University Local Health Board area, and that is clearly to be welcomed. I would appreciate any steer from Members as to how we should proceed on this one.

[102] **Joyce Watson:** Thank you, Chair. I think what would be good now is to go back to the petitioners and ask them about this announcement and see if that answers their call—a call that we all around this table supported, and, clearly, the Government and Cardiff and the Vale have also. I think that that is the course of action for us at the moment.

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

[104] **Russell George:** Should we not write to the Minister and the health board as well, seeking the assurances that the petitioner would like?

[105] **Joyce Watson:** Yes, that is right.

[106] **William Powell:** Yes. I think that we should share the petitioner's comments, most definitely, yes. So, I will happy to take forward those two actions. Thank you.

[107] P-04-540 is Stop Sexism In Domestic Abuse. This petition was submitted by the organisation Healing Men and was first considered on 11 March 2014, having collected 238 signatures. We last considered this on 15 July this year. We considered correspondence on the petition and there was some concern around some of the statements within the petitioner's letter. We agreed a number of actions: first, to await the petitioner's full response and also to consider those at a future meeting; in addition, to seek the views of Welsh Women's Aid on the correspondence and, in the light of those, potentially move to close the petition. The response from Welsh Women's Aid is available in the public papers. We also have a response from the petitioner. He specifically makes a request for further time—and I quote—

[108] 'to properly prepare a considered and appropriate response and avoid the difficulties experienced with my earlier response that had to be prepared under very considerable pressure from deadlines'.

[109] There is acceptance that there was inappropriate content in some regard to some of those previous remarks. The petitioner anticipates being able to complete that in time for it to be considered in full at a future meeting. Joyce, I know that you have been particularly engaged on this one, and you have indicated.

[110] **Joyce Watson:** I have indicated, and yes, I am. It is international day to end violence against women on 25 November, it is called white ribbon day, and it actually calls on men to support ending violence against women and children. I have to say that I do not accept this apology that has been written to us, any more than I accepted the first comments that were made by this individual about Welsh Women's Aid in the first place. I cannot accept that, because you are rushed, you make spurious claims that are unfounded and uncalled for. I have to put that on the record, because I cannot accept it, and I do not accept it.

[111] Moving on, to claim that there is sexism in the way that men, women and children suffer domestic abuse is unfounded. I can point you to several projects that are funded by the Welsh Government in the same way as Welsh Women's Aid and other projects are funded for women and children. So, I would move to close the petition. That is what I would do, simply because I do not accept that not having enough time gives you an entitlement to make unfounded allegations about an organisation that has done really good work. I find it very difficult, consequently, to really accept that it was a time issue.

[112] **William Powell:** Joyce, I am grateful for that clear and straightforward contribution. Russell George, you indicated.

[113] **Russell George:** I made no statement on the allegations that were made or any of the

background, but if somebody wants to make an apology to our committee for something that they have written, then I fully accept it. That is my strong view, regardless of what the issue is. So, I fully accept the apology. The petitioner has asked for more time to come back with a response. If any petitioner asks us to do that, we would usually agree to it. So, I would move that we do that.

[114] **William Powell:** I think it is fair to say that we endeavour to deliver consistency in our approach, and, indeed, Joyce is frequently an advocate for that—and rightly so. So, in that context, I would also wish to afford the gentleman the additional time that he is seeking, as we have done frequently in the past. Potentially, in doing so, he may actually address some of the points that Joyce has quite legitimately made. I would favour that. Bethan, I do not know whether you have a view on the issue.

[115] **Bethan Jenkins:** People say and do things in this world, and if we do not accept people's apologies, we start to get into a tricky place. So, I accept the apology. If we give the petitioner time, I would respectfully ask back that they be reasonable and that they are reasoned in how they correspond with us.

[116] **William Powell:** I think that there is merit in that.

[117] **Bethan Jenkins:** That led to a fractious discussion, so I would ask, when they read or look at this, and when they are analysing the Welsh Women's Aid's comments, that they do so in a sensitive way.

09:45

[118] So, for the same reasons as Russell, I cannot begin to start treating petitioners differently because I took issue—and I did take issue, as did Joyce—with what they said. However, just to be consistent, we should let them come back.

[119] **William Powell:** I would agree with that approach. I hope that we can agree to do so, having noted and taken account of Joyce's comment. Thank you.

[120] The next update is to P-04-570, a petition on inequitable access to treatments that have not been nationally appraised in NHS Wales. It was submitted by Genetic Alliance UK, the Tuberous Sclerosis Association, and the Association of Glycogen Storage Disorders, and it was first considered on 15 July 2014. It has the support of 1,089 signatories. We last considered this, as I said, on 15 July, and agreed to write to the Minister for Health and Social Services seeking his views. The Minister has replied and, indeed, we have a response from the petitioners themselves.

[121] The petitioners' letter clarifies that they are seeking a review by the Health and Social Care Committee of the current individual patient funding requests criteria, and the use of the exceptionality criterion in applications from patients with specific rare conditions. Both of those letters are in our pack of public papers today.

[122] Would colleagues be supportive if we were to refer this matter to the Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee, David Rees, to ask whether the committee would be prepared to give consideration to carrying out an inquiry on these matters, if the work programme allows?

[123] **Russell George:** Agreed.

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

[125] **William Powell:** I think that that is the best way forward. Thank you.

[126] The next update is to P-04-586, 'All NHS Wales staff to be Paid at Least the Hourly Living Wage Rate of £7.65'. The petition was submitted by Unison Cymru Wales and was first considered on 23 September 2014. It has the support of 174 signatories. As I said, we first considered this on 23 September and wrote to the Minister seeking his views. We have got a response from the Minister. At this time, we are still awaiting a response to that ministerial correspondence from the petitioners.

[127] **Joyce Watson:** Shall we wait for that response?

[128] **William Powell:** I think that that is the sensible way forward, allowing Unison to answer in the round.

[129] If Members are content, there are a number of other updates on our agenda today for which we could adopt a similar approach. I will just take you through those briefly so that they are included in the Record: P-04-598, Disability awareness training; P-04-516, Make political science compulsory in education; P-04-562, Caernarfon Heritage Centre; P-04-585, changes to A494/A470 junction Dolgellau; P-04-594, Cilmeri Community Council appeal for the Prince Llywelyn monument; P-04-579, reinstate funding for Skomer island's guillemot monitoring; P-04-595, Foresight Pathway; P-04-592, democratically binding plebiscites at local government level; and finally in this section P-04-596, 'Save Porth Fire Station'. In all of those cases, we are seeking updates from the petitioners to correspondence received. If colleagues are happy that we adopt that approach, that will expedite things considerably. Is everyone happy? I see that you are. Good.

[130] The next update is to P-04-487, on a Welsh Government deposit loan scheme for first-time Welsh buyers. This petition was submitted by Sovereign Wales and was first considered on 18 June 2013. It has the support of 17 signatories. There has been quite a substantial exchange of opinions between the petitioner and the Minister in this regard. We have a further body of feedback from Sovereign Wales. I would propose that, at some point, we will probably need to draw this exchange of comments to a close, but the Minister, in his letter, shows some appetite for still engaging, and the petitioner has some interesting comments to make. So, I would propose that we share his comments back with the Minister, for his consideration, if colleagues are happy. Yes? I see that you are. Good, thank you very much.

[131] We move now to P-04-559, 'Secondary School Awareness of Self-Harm'. This petition was submitted by Eleanor Price and was first considered on 17 June of this year. It has the support of 12 signatories. We considered it, as I said, on 17 June and we agreed to write, to seek views on the petition, to the Minister for Education and Skills and to the Minister for Health and Social Services, all local health boards and, indeed, the Welsh Local Government Association. To be fair, we have had a range of responses. We have had a response from the Minister for Education and Skills, who I think is probably leading on this one from the Government's perspective. We have also heard from Hywel Dda, Cardiff and the Vale, Aneurin Bevan and, indeed, Powys teaching local health board. The petitioner has also submitted some comments on the responses received, and they are all actually in the public papers. One thing that I would like to propose is that we chase the remaining health boards, because this is an important issue, and I think that we need to have a full suite of responses. Are there any other proposals that Members would bring forward at this stage for taking this petition forward?

[132] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes, just because we on the Children, Young People and Education Committee have just carried out an initial look at child and adolescent mental health services, but I know for a fact that the committee will look at other issues in the future, notwithstanding

how we can potentially stop people from getting into CAMHS in the first place. So, that will obviously be looking at school services, counselling services and so forth. So, I see a benefit in sending all of these pieces of evidence to the Chair of that committee for our future deliberation, because of course, in many of the answers that we have had, especially from Cardiff and the Vale, they reference specialist CAMHS in relation to self-harm. So, I think that it would be useful for us to take on board for the future.

[133] **William Powell:** I am very happy to share those. I think that that would be really useful, potentially. We could also draw the responses to the attention of Professor Graham Donaldson, who is undertaking the review, as well. I am sure that that would also inform his work. As I said, I am committed to chasing up the remaining health boards, to get an all-Wales response.

[134] **Russell George:** I agree with those points, Chair.

[135] **William Powell:** Excellent, thank you.

[136] Moving out to P-04-599, on the impact of domestic rating on self-catering accommodation. This petition was submitted by Mr Chris Harris and was first considered by our committee on 23 September. It has the support of 27 signatories. We last considered it, as I said, back in September, and we agreed to write to the Minister for Economy, Science and Transport. We have got quite a full response, and indeed, we have also got feedback from the petitioner with regard to the ministerial correspondence. It is clear that the petitioner is expressing a view that he and maybe other people in his position find it difficult, or they have not had the opportunity—as he feels it, anyway—to engage with this process and was not aware that some of the work had been undertaken, which the Minister clearly says has actually been put in train. So, I wonder whether it would be useful to write to the Wales Tourism Alliance, which styles itself as the voice of the tourism industry, and possibly also the Machynlleth-based Mid Wales Tourism, which I think would be the relevant trade body, to seek their perspective on what this petition is all about. Are colleagues happy with that? I see that you are. Russell, you indicated. Are you happy with that?

[137] **Russell George:** I was just going to suggest the same, Chair.

[138] **William Powell:** Okay. Thank you very much.

[139] The next petition is P-04-572 Grants for Flood Resilience. Now, this petition was submitted by Charles Edward Moore, and was first considered, again, at that busy meeting on 15 July. It has the support of 88 signatures. We have a response from the Minister on this point. We also have a response from the petitioner, which is in our public papers. What would colleagues like to do to take this forward? Joyce, I think that you have a question on flood-related matters in Plenary today. I do not know whether you would take a lead on this particular matter.

[140] **Russell George:** Chair, I am happy that we write to Natural Resources Wales. I think that that would perhaps be a wise move.

[141] **William Powell:** Yes, no problem at all—I am very happy to, because it is clearly a key body in taking all this forward.

[142] **Joyce Watson:** I do have a question later on about flood resilience. There have been properties in our area flooded this weekend.

[143] **William Powell:** Indeed, yes, absolutely—in Pembrokeshire.

- [144] **Joyce Watson:** Again.
- [145] **William Powell:** Yes.
- [146] **Joyce Watson:** I have been down there and have spoken—
- [147] **William Powell:** St Dogmaels and other areas have been affected.
- [148] **Joyce Watson:** —to some people in Cardigan on Sunday. It is a big issue. It is an issue that affects many people and is probably going to affect many more. However, we have had a response, and we have had a statement. I would agree with what Russell said.
- [149] **Russell George:** Chair, can we write to the Association of British Insurers, asking for its views as well?
- [150] **William Powell:** Absolutely. I think that there are lots of people who suffer crippling excesses on their insurance policies, which actually makes things very difficult, so I think that that would be useful, to get its perspective.
- [151] **Joyce Watson:** There was a report done by a previous committee that I sat on—I think that it was the communities committee—about two years ago. I know that there has been work ongoing with the Minister, trying to come up with a solution to insurance for flood victims, to see whether they could, somehow, group together and see whether there was a way forward. So, those pieces of information are available; it might be worth us finding them.
- [152] **Bethan Jenkins:** I thought that it was the Public Accounts Committee, because I sat on that committee when there was a review into flooding.
- [153] **Joyce Watson:** I cannot remember which committee it was.
- [154] **William Powell:** Maybe it was a cross-cutting issue, I do not know.
- [155] **Joyce Watson:** It was a committee that I sat on before, and I sat on many. However, there is a review that was done, and it might be worth at least letting the petitioners see that and the responses that were given to that.
- [156] **William Powell:** Back in their terms of office, John Griffiths and Alun Davies, as the responsible Ministers, had liaison meetings with representatives of the insurance sector.
- [157] **Joyce Watson:** Yes, they did.
- [158] **William Powell:** So, maybe we could drill down to get some more recent updates.
- [159] **Joyce Watson:** And to feed it back.
- [160] **William Powell:** Indeed, and feed back to the petitioners, as this is very much a live issue, as we all agree.
- [161] **Joyce Watson:** Absolutely.
- [162] **William Powell:** Okay. Thanks for your wide range of responses on that one.
- [163] We now move to P-04-583 Ban all Growing and Selling of all GM Seeds/Foods and Animal/Fish Feed in Wales. This petition was submitted by Gruffydd Meredith, and was first considered by us on 23 September. It has the support of 13 signatures. Now, we considered it,

as I said, on 23 September, and agreed to write to the Minister for Natural Resources, seeking his views on the petition. The matter has actually been taken up by the Deputy Minister for Farming and Food—our colleague, Rebecca Evans—and she has now responded. We also have further comments back from the petitioner. Both of those are in our public papers. Clearly, we have some significant issues here with regard to competence. I would very much appreciate a steer from colleagues as to the best way forward, if, indeed, there is a way forward.

[164] **Bethan Jenkins:** I think that, regardless of competence, the point in the letter from the commissioner that I would like to hear an answer to is that it does seem that they say that they want to take a precautionary approach, but then they adhere to the Food Standards Agency's view that GM feed does not represent any more risk to farm livestock than conventional feed. So, I would like to understand that dichotomy, really, first, before we close the petition, just so that we are clear as well about where the Government actually stands on the issue.

10:00

[165] **William Powell:** Indeed. In preparing for this meeting, I also reflected that Russell George and, latterly, Joyce, who has joined the committee as well, and I sit on the Environment and Sustainability Committee. We did have quite a lengthy session on GM, taking stock of the current position. I think we also had a video-conference link with European Commission officials. I am not quite sure as to the status of that in terms of the information, but if we can contact the clerk of the Environment and Sustainability Committee, we may have got some material there that is possible for us to get up to speed with and also potentially to share back with the petitioner as well, because it is clearly an important issue. We need to, if we can, take forward some further work on it. So, if colleagues are happy with that approach, I will be in touch with our colleague Alun Ffred Jones. Okay.

[166] I think that concludes, given the decision we made earlier with regard to updates, today's agenda, and in good time. I remind Members of the two-minute silence to commemorate Armistice Day that takes place at 11 a.m. this morning. There are no petition presentations planned for this week. I am very grateful for your attendance and contributions this morning. It has been a really useful, focused session. Diolch yn fawr. Thank you very much indeed.

*Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 10:01.
The meeting ended at 10:01.*