



Cynulliad  
Cenedlaethol  
Cymru

National  
Assembly for  
Wales

# Cofnod y Trafodion

## The Record of Proceedings

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[The Petitions Committee](#)

23/05/2017

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Cofnodir y trafodion yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynndi yn y pwylgor. 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 <a href="#">Bywgraffiad</a>   <a href="#">Biography</a>	UKIP Cymru UKIP Wales
Janet Finch-Saunders <a href="#">Bywgraffiad</a>   <a href="#">Biography</a>	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Mike Hedges <a href="#">Bywgraffiad</a>   <a href="#">Biography</a>	Llafur (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Labour (Committee Chair)
Neil McEvoy <a href="#">Bywgraffiad</a>   <a href="#">Biography</a>	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales

**Eraill yn bresennol**  
**Others in attendance**

Luke Collins-Hayes	Deisebydd Petitioner
Zoe Pallenson	Deisebydd Petitioner
Cathie Robins-Talbot	Prif Ddeisebydd Lead Petitioner
Helen Robins-Talbot	Deisebydd Petitioner

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

Kayleigh Driscoll	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Graeme Francis	Clerc Clerk
Sam Mason	Cynghorydd Cyfreithiol Legal Adviser

Kath Thomas

Dirprwy Glerc  
Deputy Clerk

*Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 09:03  
The meeting began at 09:03*

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

[1] **Mike Hedges:** Introduction, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest. We have had no apologies. Neil, you wanted to say something.

[2] **Neil McEvoy:** Yes, I did want to bring something up. We discussed the very important matter last time of parental alienation, which is a form of psychological abuse. It ruins children's lives and it ruins parents' lives. I read last week about the suicide of a father kept out of his child's or children's lives. I don't know the details of the actual case, but that's the level we're talking about here; it's a really, really serious issue. There was a comment made on Twitter by both parents on a matter in response to what Janet Finch-Saunders said, and what really concerned me was that the Minister concerned—I think it's that camera I need to show this to today, or, if not, it's that one—tweeted in response, from his account, a comment that is really unbecoming of an Assembly Member, unbecoming of a Minister, where he's actually put an emoji that means 'crying with laughter' about this most serious, serious matter. And what I'd like to do is for the committee to write to the Minister—although, looking at this, he may have done it in his capacity as an AM—and just tell him that this kind of comment isn't really acceptable. It's not at all on, in my opinion.

[3] **Mike Hedges:** I've let you make those comments, Neil, because I think you have every right to make them. We'll be coming back to that issue, and I'll give you the opportunity to move something at that time.

[4] **Neil McEvoy:** Okay. Thank you, Chair.

[5] **Mike Hedges:** Can I just remind everybody, you can speak in English or Welsh? Headsets are available for translation to English. And you've no need to turn your mobile phones, or other electronic devices, off, but please, please ensure that they are in silent mode.

09:05

## **Deisebau Newydd** **New Petitions**

[6] **Mike Hedges:** On to the new petitions. The first one is ‘Reinstate Corwen’s Mobile Dental Service’, submitted by Ysgol Caer Drewyn, having collected 157 signatures—152 on paper, and five online. The Cabinet Secretary has stated that the health board is planning to reintroduce the mobile unit from 2017–18, and that, in the long term, there are plans to create two additional dental surgeries. So, it appears that the petition seems to have achieved what it was set out to achieve. So, shall we await the views of the petitioners, just to make sure they are fully satisfied, before we close it? Yes.

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

[8] **Mike Hedges:** ‘Strengthening the Legislative and Regulatory Framework Surrounding Waste Wood Processing Facilities’. The Cabinet Secretary has stated that revoking the permit for South Wales Wood Recycling is a matter for Natural Resources Wales, as the issue is of local rather than national significance. NRW is currently considering whether further action is required. The Government intends to introduce further powers for NRW, and will consult on proposals for strengthening operator requirements. The petitioner has responded to the points made by the Cabinet Secretary, and raised several related issues, including the potential for conflict between NRW’s role to protect the environment, and targets for local authorities to increase recycling rates. Shall we pass those comments on to the Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs, and see what response we get back? Yes.

[9] ‘Call on Welsh Government to make the A48 safe for all road users and pedestrians at Laleston, Broadlands and Merthyr Mawr’. We can only deal with trunk roads, because local roads are the responsibility of local authorities. So, we probably shouldn’t have received it, but it was because of a belief that the A48 is a trunk road, which is something I would have thought as well. The Cabinet Secretary has stated that Bridgend County Borough Council submitted an application to the road safety capital grant for improvements to this stretch of road, which was unsuccessful, but is the first reserve. We could await the views of the petitioners and engage in

correspondence with Bridgend council. As we've accepted it, I think that stopping it at this stage would be wrong. Yes.

[10] The next one, which is our first 5,000-signature petition, is 'Live Music Protection in Wales'. I think it shows that the 5,000 was a reasonable number, because, one, it is gettable, and, secondly, it shows that people have a very serious interest in a subject when they can get 5,000. I would suggest that we write to the Business Committee, asking for a debate on this.

[11] **Neil McEvoy:** The Minister said they're going to bring forward legislation. Have they given a timetable for that? I wonder whether it's worth giving the Minister time to maybe—

[12] **Mike Hedges:** Well, we won't have a debate very quickly; we're struggling to get one in by the end of term, as it were.

[13] **Neil McEvoy:** Right, okay.

[14] **Mike Hedges:** So, if we asked for a debate now, the Business Committee will decide. So, we're going to be talking a minimum of four weeks into—. But it does actually put the position in that we've asked for the debate; they've got the 5,000 signatures, and I think we've got a moral duty to fulfil our own rules and ask for that debate.

[15] **Gareth Bennett:** It's slightly complicated, Chair, because there's supposed to be a debate on this subject tomorrow, that—

[16] **Neil McEvoy:** Are they going to withdraw that?

[17] **Gareth Bennett:** I think, kind of, yes. Simon Thomas just said in Business Committee that they will withdraw it based on what decision the Petitions Committee gets to about the debate, because they don't want to do two.

[18] **Mike Hedges:** I think that if we decide not to ask for a debate, they'll have it tomorrow. If we decide to have a debate, they will not, and—

[19] **Neil McEvoy:** Just—. Sorry, Chair. My logic was a sort of double lock, really, to get it before the Assembly as quickly as possible, to give the committee time as well to maybe follow up at a later date. But since the Minister's made the announcement, I think it would make sense for our

group to withdraw the motion and for this committee to ask for it to be discussed before the end of term, if that's all right. I agree with the Chair.

[20] **Mike Hedges:** Is everybody else happy with that? I think we ought to see the petitioners here first, before it goes before the Assembly, so it's an opportunity for us to get their views so that we can reflect them in that debate. Is that okay?

[21] **Mr Francis:** If the petitioners are free, it's not a great deal of notice, but there's a committee slot free at the next meeting on 13 June, if you wanted to take evidence then.

[22] **Mike Hedges:** If we can get it by 13 June, then we could be looking to have a full debate, which I think we would all like. Can I say something from the Chair? I'm very pleased that somebody has reached 5,000, and I hope the Business Committee will look favourably on our request.

[23] **Gareth Bennett:** I think it's good that it's on this, which seems to be quite a substantial issue, not on some sort of marginal issue. It's a good one to have as the first one, I think.

[24] **Mike Hedges:** I don't think you'll get 5,000 on some of those marginal—. I know it's digressing, but some of the ones that you might describe as that came in with eight and 10 and 13, and we had a lot of those very small numbers. To get 5,000, you've got to put a bit of effort in, and it's really got to be an issue that touches people, so I think that we'll find that the 5,000 will be the big issues. Okay. Are we happy with that, then?

09:12

### **Y Wybodaeth Ddiweddaraf am Ddeisebau Blaenorol Updates to Previous Petitions**

[25] **Mike Hedges:** Updates on previous petitions. 'Child and Adolescent Eating Disorder Service'.

[26] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** This is a big issue for us in Wales. I know that Bethan Jenkins has worked extremely hard, and I've gone along to some of her cross-party groups, because I don't think that the issue is being dealt with in terms of the Government here. We still haven't got a centre for eating disorders, and as some of this evidence states, young children are presenting

now. It used to be more around the age of puberty, but now they're presenting a lot younger than that with eating disorders, with the pressure of modern and social society, and I do think we ought—. Again, we could be driving this through. I know, on this one, there's not as many as I've seen previously, but then, all of us AMs, I'm sure that we've all experienced—. We know how difficult it is. I had a constituent who had to access treatment over in Cambridgeshire, and with a devolved nation, it just seems odd. It's one of the biggest threats to our boys and girls—it's not just a girl-related illness—and I think we do need to be doing something. We talk about early intervention, we talk about education, but it's not happening, because of the amount of young girls now, in particular, but boys as well, who are so body conscious, and I think we do need to start recognising it. I'd like this petition to be another flag waving at us to say we ought to be putting more pressure on the Government.

[27] **Mike Hedges:** I don't disagree with anything you've said, Janet, but I think we've got a few stages to go first, and I think the first one is that we send the comments we've had in to the Cabinet Secretary for health, and we ask how that £500,000 that was made available has been spent, and then when we start getting those replies, we may well want to have our own investigation into it. If we do that, then we can decide how to take it from there.

[28] **Neil McEvoy:** I'd just like to say that the submission from the petitioner was really powerful as well.

[29] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Yes, definitely.

09:15

[30] **Mike Hedges:** So, are we okay with that method—that way forward? 'Improving specialised neuromuscular services in Wales'. Last considered on 7 March. Wrote to the Cabinet Secretary. The Cabinet Secretary has responded to the specific questions raised by the petitioners, confirmed that the chief executive group of NHS Wales is aware of concerns and has asked for a solution to be sought. The Cabinet Secretary has also confirmed that the national review of specialised neurosciences will not encompass neuromuscular services. The responses received from health boards outline a range of approaches, most of which are based on the Welsh Government's delivery plan. Wait for the petitioners to come back, following the information they've got? Yes.

[31] ‘NHS Wales Pay’. Considered on 17 January. Wrote to the petitioner on 1 February. No response has been received. So, I assume we close it. Yes.

[32] ‘To Make Mental Health Services More Accessible’—

[33] **Neil McEvoy:** I think this is another—it’s more than a flag-waving exercise. Massive concerns with what the petitioner is saying, and borne out by casework as well.

[34] **Mike Hedges:** But if we take it through the processes, we’ll write to the Cabinet Secretary for Health, Well-being and Sport to highlight the concerns and proposed improvements made by the petitioner and Hafal, and seek further information about plans to improve the responsiveness of services. If we’re not happy with that, then we’ll take it through the full process again.

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

[36] **Mike Hedges:** The next one is ‘Abuse of casual contracts in Further Education’. Last considered on 1 November. Wrote to the petitioners in November, and sent several further e-mails. We’ve had no response since. So, close it.

[37] **Neil McEvoy:** Very, very disappointing to close, because it’s a real issue, isn’t it?

[38] **Mike Hedges:** Well, speaking as somebody who worked in further education, yes, it is. But we can only engage with petitioners who engage with us.

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

[40] **Mike Hedges:** ‘Asbestos in Schools’. We’ve had several recent comments from the petitioner.

[41] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** This is another big issue.

[42] **Mike Hedges:** Again, going through the same process: send on their concerns to the Cabinet Secretary, then we come back to it. I mean, just putting it into context, in one day, we can see the petitioners and the Minister to discuss it, or we can see two petitioners one week and two

Ministers the next week. So, now we've reduced all our backlog, there's no reason why we cannot be doing at least one—a part or whole—investigation each meeting, which I'm sure people will much prefer to just churning through a process, which we're doing at the moment.

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

[44] **Mike Hedges:** 'Ensure schools exercise their statutory powers under regulation 7 of The Education (Pupil Registration) (Wales) Regulations 2010 without interference or bias'. We've dealt with it on 23 February. We've again written to the petitioners and we've had no response.

[45] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** On this one, I thought things were going ahead.

[46] **Mike Hedges:** We had another petition on this, didn't we?

[47] **Mr Francis:** Yes, there are two quite similar petitions that were dealt with by the previous committee that were passed on to this Assembly. We have been touch and had comments at a previous meeting from the other petitioner. This petition, as I say, is substantially similar, but we haven't had comments recently from this petitioner.

[48] **Mike Hedges:** Could we treat the two petitions—? Are they similar enough to deal with as one?

[49] **Mr Francis:** Yes, the previous committee had grouped them together.

[50] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** But they're different in what they're asking, if my memory serves me correctly. On this one, they're asking for a public inquiry. Surely, a local authority and the community council, and probably the town council if they've got one—a community council or whatever—. There seems to be a process that this—. In the letter we've had back from the Minister or the Cabinet Secretary—. I don't know, I think that's—. I don't see what it is—. The Welsh Ministers can

[51] 'consider calling in an application...however no requests to do so have been received by them.'

[52] **Mike Hedges:** Are you on the coal exchange?

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

[54] **Mike Hedges:** Oh, no, we're still on—. You're ahead of us, Janet.

[55] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** I'm ahead of you. Sorry.

[56] **Mike Hedges:** We're dealing with the one on the Education (Pupil Registration) (Wales) Regulations 2010.

[57] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Oh, I missed that one. Sorry. I do apologise.

[58] **Mike Hedges:** Shall we group it with the other one? Okay.

[59] Now onto the coal exchange, Janet. Please go ahead.

[60] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** On this one, I think Ken Skates's response is quite—. It does explain what he can and can't do. We've only had the one in on this, have we?

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

[62] **Mr Francis:** Yes, there's one petition about the coal exchange.

[63] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Because I know, again, Bethan, I think, has been—. She's been working on this, hasn't she?

[64] **Neil McEvoy:** I don't know.

[65] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** I know some Members have mentioned this in the Chamber before now, and it's obviously a very, very valuable building and everything. I support us keeping our heritage and historic culture. But this does appear to me that—. Obviously, it's going to perhaps go to a hotel and ancillary uses, and it goes on about—.

[66] **Neil McEvoy:** If you speak to local people—as I have done quite extensively—the developers have saved the building. Local people are actually employed there. The work was done by lots of boys from Butetown. They've given the basement to be the heritage centre. The profits from the cafe there are going to finance the heritage centre as well. There were some issues with the notice, which I think was the concern of the petitioners. But I think, in terms of the actual development, they've done really well there.

[67] **Mike Hedges:** Speaking with two listed buildings in my constituency that are very good at growing plants in, some of which are coming through the roof, I think getting a good end use for a listed building that is treating it sympathetically is the best outcome we're ever likely to get with listed buildings. So, shall we close the petition? I understand the hotel is either open or about to open.

[68] 'Resurfacing of the A40 Raglan-Abergavenny Road'. The Cabinet Secretary has confirmed that work to design noise-mitigation measures on a section of the road will commence this financial year. A new noise survey of trunk roads will also be carried out this year, but there's no mention of resurfacing the road. We've had correspondence from both the petitioner and Nick Ramsay, who referred to the 2013–18 noise action plan and previous ministerial correspondence, which contained a commitment to resurfacing the road. So, shall we write to the Minister asking why the previous commitments made to resurface are yet to be delivered, and when it's going to be resurfaced?

[69] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Yes. I mean, this isn't good to read, is it?

[70] 'The Noise Action Plan (2013–18) states'—

[71] —and we're in 2017 now—

[72] 'that this road is a priority, after the consultation responses received and the measurements taken. Yet no progress has been made despite repeated calls from residents, the local County Councillor, Assembly Member and Member of Parliament. We, the undersigned, state that this road—'

[73] I mean, yes, that's just where democracy isn't working, and maybe we could do something about it.

[74] **Mike Hedges:** I think if we write and see if we can get a date for it to be done.

[75] 'Save Our Bus'. The Gilfach Goch to Pontypridd bus was being closed in January 2016. Information provided by Bus Users Cymru is that, following discussions between RCT council and Stagecoach, a survey of passengers on the service has recently been conducted. The changes made by Stagecoach mean that passengers are now required to change buses if travelling between Gilfach Goch and Pontypridd. Write to the petitioners and ask for any

comments they've got? I think this is an example of dealing with something quickly, because we're now going back to January 2016. We're sort of 14 months on. I think we really do need, as a committee, to make sure that these things are dealt with expeditiously, because things have moved on.

[76] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** We're on about bus use now?

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

[78] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Well, can I just say, we've just had that inquiry when we went to, you know—all about people's use of—. You know, the disabled people in particular; a lot of elderly people fall into that bracket. So, we've gone and done all that, and then here we are—still, we've got this situation. So, I think we need to send—. You know, we need to do something about it.

[79] **Mike Hedges:** Let's go back to the petitioners with the comments we've received and let them come back to us, and then we can see how we want to take it forward.

[80] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Well, I don't know whether that's good enough, Chairman, to be honest. What's the point of us, here, learning that people with disabilities really struggle to access buses, and then here we have evidence that one's been taken away, and that's going to significantly affect residents? I think that we ought to be a little bit more—. Go back to the Minister in particular, and say—. We're saying one thing. We're spending money—taxpayers' money—on staff time, gaining evidence that things aren't working right, and then saying, 'Oh, well, okay, we've done that inquiry.' But then, this one jumps up and says, 'Well, actually, this is happening now.'

[81] **Gareth Bennett:** It's slightly complicated, Chair, in that the petitioner is on about a direct service from Gilfach to Ponty, and you can actually get buses from Gilfach to Ponty that change at Porth, so it's not totally losing all of its services. It's the difficulty in changing at Porth and wanting to retain the direct service.

[82] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** If you've got disabilities or if you're elderly—. When I go on the train, you sort of go, 'Ugh, do I have to change?' You know, because it's all the inconvenience, but it's also if you're not well, or if you've got disabilities, it can actually be quite hard, changing. So, could we not just write back and say we've discussed it here, and some of the Members feel

that maybe they could come forward with some other kind of—?

[83] **Mike Hedges:** What I was going to suggest is that we could reference it in our report that we're writing regarding the bus users et cetera. We could reference the fact that one of the problems that exists is when through buses are changed into buses where you have to change, and that can have an effect on disabled people.

[84] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Right. Can we not even write to the local authority and see if they'll help in some way?

[85] **Mike Hedges:** Yes, we can, but I was just trying to see how we could fit it in to—

[86] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** But writing it in a report doesn't solve the issue, does it?

[87] **Mike Hedges:** Right, shall we write to—

[88] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Sorry.

[89] **Mr Francis:** One other option: the information we've had from Bus Users Cymru suggests that Stagecoach have been—. Stagecoach is the operator in this place, who have made the decision to stop the through bus. They've done a survey of passengers recently, and one option for the committee could be to write to Stagecoach and ask for the outcome of that consultation and what they're doing.

[90] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Yes, let's do it.

[91] **Mike Hedges:** Yes, okay.

[92] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** I think we do need to scrutinise things a little bit more. Thanks.

[93] **Mike Hedges:** 'Trees in Towns'. NRW have previously confirmed details of the support and guidance available to local authorities regarding tree planting in towns. We've written to the petitioners, but they haven't come back to us.

[94] **Neil McEvoy:** That's a shame, isn't it, with 2,000 signatures?

[95] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** I was going to say, yes.

[96] **Mike Hedges:** I think that, sometimes—and I may be wrong with this petition—sometimes people use this as a means of highlighting something, and they've been successful in highlighting the need for more trees in towns, I think. It's very much an opportunity to highlight the need. But as they haven't come back to us, shall we close the petition? Or do you want to go back to them again?

[97] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** So, did they have a response from a Minister or—?

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

[99] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** I've not got it, sorry.

[100] **Mr Francis:** In previous meetings, the committee has considered responses from the Minister and from Natural Resources Wales about this, and, previously, the petitioner.

[101] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** And what are they doing about it?

[102] **Mr Francis:** I think, from memory, there are guidelines available to support local authorities in the value of trees. I think we previously asked questioned about funding as well.

[103] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Well, I mean we talk about air pollution. Simon Thomas works hard here on it. Trees are a natural—. They help to clean the air and everything. So actually, if you think, again, we say things; we must do something about it. This is one solution to the problem, so maybe we should be a little bit more proactive on this one alone, because—.

[104] **Neil McEvoy:** Shall we write to them again?

[105] **Mike Hedges:** Write to the Minister again, asking—

[106] **Neil McEvoy:** Write to Coed Cadw Woodland Trust, yes.

[107] **Mike Hedges:** Write and ask what increase in tree coverage has taken place in the last five years.

[108] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** You see them take them down; it's very rare you see trees planted.

09:30

[109] **Neil McEvoy:** I'm interested in what other plants can be used as well, because in our manifesto for the council elections we were talking about green infrastructure, which is basically planting plants on concrete structures, such as the flyover at Gabalfa, and it takes out 80 per cent of air pollution. It's really low-maintenance as well.

[110] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Aloe vera's a really good one.

[111] **Neil McEvoy:** I wonder if we could maybe push that a little bit.

[112] **Mike Hedges:** The other thing is that—if I can highlight Swansea council, who have spent a lot of time planting wild flowers on roundabouts et cetera, for exactly the same reason, and it looks better and we've got lots of wild flowers and daffodils planted across Swansea, which has made a huge improvement.

[113] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Pardon the pun, but it only takes the seed of an idea to actually come forward and actually deal with some of the problems that we spend hours talking about.

[114] **Mike Hedges:** Yes. 'Review of Scallop fishing in Cardigan Bay.'

[115] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Isn't there going to be one? Isn't there going to be a review of this? I thought—. Isn't the Minister going to make a statement?

[116] **Mike Hedges:** Well, if we write to the Minister we'll get a full response.

[117] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Yes, I'm sure I've seen it somewhere where he's coming forward with a statement on it, anyway. But, yes, do it.

[118] **Mike Hedges:** Scallop fishing in Cardigan bay—the petitioner's satisfied with what's happening now, so shall we close the petition and be pleased that the petitioner's requests have been met?

[119] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Well, if he's asking for a review and they haven't

had the review yet, how have we met it?

[120] **Mr Francis:** I think a consultation was carried out over last summer and the plan is that the fishery is going to be opened from this summer. The petitioner had environmental concerns related to that, but we've previously considered a statement made by the Cabinet Secretary, and the petitioner in his latest comments has indicated he was broadly satisfied with the outcome of that.

[121] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Okay, fine. Close it.

[122] **Mike Hedges:** 'No Further Actions on Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (NVZ) In Wales At All'—the Cabinet Secretary provided a detailed outline of the issues being considered by the Welsh Government in determining the future course of action on nitrate vulnerable zones and we're awaiting a Government announcement. This is one where we've had both sides petitioning us, haven't we? Some people saying that it should be allowed and other people saying it shouldn't.

[123] **Mr Francis:** We did have, though the petition in favour of nitrate zones didn't receive the required number of signatures.

[124] **Mike Hedges:** Okay. So, shall we await the Government's announcement? We'll hold the petition, because if we're not happy with the announcement we can come back to it, then. Yes.

[125] **Communities and children:** 'Ensure Disabled People's Housing Adaptation Needs Are Adequately Met'—we considered it on 11 October. We've had a Welsh Local Government Association response. We haven't had the response of Disability Wales. The petitioner was told that it would be considered by the committee. We haven't had a response from the petitioner either. The WLGA has welcomed the new framework for delivering adaptations and additional funding provided by the Welsh Government. They've also highlighted the need for training for front-line staff. Shall we write to the petitioners again with the WLGA's comments and ask them for their comments on it? Yes?

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

[127] **Mike Hedges:** Okay.

[128] **Mr Francis:** The petitioners are running late in traffic, so we may want to pause shortly.

[129] **Mike Hedges:** Okay. The petitioners, I'm told, are running late. They've been hit by the traffic, which I could've told them about—that's why I come here quite early in the morning, to avoid it.

*Gohiriwyd y cyfarfod rhwng 09:34 a 09:44.  
The meeting adjourned between 09:34 and 09:44.*

**Sesiwn Dystiolaeth: P-04-628  
Mynediad at laith Arwyddion Prydain i Bawb  
Evidence Session: P-04-628**

**To Improve Access to Education and Services in British Sign Language**

[130] **Mike Hedges:** Good morning. Can I welcome members of Deffo!, who've come to talk to us about British Sign Language? Can I also, for the record, say my sister is profoundly deaf and she does use sign language so I have some knowledge of it and I also know Cathie reasonably well because I see her quite often in Swansea? So, if I make those two declarations, and I think somebody wants to make an opening statement.

09:45

[131] **Ms C. Robins-Talbot:** I'm going to sign, so I don't need the microphone. We would just like to say, first of all, thank you for inviting us here today. It's a great opportunity for us to give you more information, to talk about our experiences. So, thank you for that. I apologise that, because of work commitments, not everybody could make it. But the aim of our petition we feel is very important, about the barriers that deaf people are still facing, deaf people who use sign language—not just young people but primarily we're focusing on young people—and we want to focus on education as well as other services.

[132] One of the areas we feel strongly about is education for young people because of the barriers that still persist. There's no education that is completely through medium of sign language. We think everybody—not just deaf people, but everybody—should have the opportunity to learn BSL on the curriculum. Also, families should have that opportunity as well. So, we're pleased to be able to give our experiences and our views today. We've a small handout of a letter, if you would like to have a look at a copy of that.

That is a supporting letter that we've got. It's information that would be regarded as evidence, I believe. Helen will hand those out.

[133] **Mike Hedges:** Thank you. Okay. Can I again thank you? I'm going to ask some questions around British sign Language and its availability and its need for families. You say you'd like to make some comments on how important it is the wider family, especially parents and siblings, learn British Sign Language, and how that would benefit deaf children and what demand you see for it.

[134] **Ms H. Robins-Talbot:** One of the things that we've found, working with families, is that there is nothing out there for parents to access unless they pay for sign language classes, which can be quite expensive. They start off at an average of £300 for level 1, going up to anything from £1,200 to £1,600 for level 3, which we think is the appropriate level—level 3—to be able to communicate effectively with your children if you're going to develop them educationally.

[135] When we first put this petition in, we were told that it's the job of the local authority to provide these accesses. So, I went home and I rang the local authorities, a number of them, and they said that there is no facility whereby parents—this is what we're aiming for—of deaf children can actually access free sign language courses, or there's nothing for children either. To us, this is a bit naughty because you wouldn't expect your children to go to school if they didn't understand what they were being taught. We don't expect deaf children to go to school and not understand what they're taught either. Then we were told that there was finance available, which would be through the local authorities. So, again, I went home and I rang around, and, yes, lifelong learning does have a budget for adult education. However, it was perceived, at that time, for there to be no need for BSL classes.

[136] With one of my other hats on, I manage the Swansea Centre for Deaf People, and for the last three years, I think, now, we've run at least—because of the limitations of our centre at the moment—we've run at least three courses a year, with high demand. It's got to the point where Talking Hands, which supports Deffo! and the parents and families are actually applying their funding to support parents to learn to sign by paying the deposit on the classes. To date, we've had, I think, 11 parents take us up on that offer to pay the deposit for them. We're also piloting a course at the moment, which Cathie's delivering on our behalf, with young people. The youngest in the class is seven and the oldest in the class is 16. It's been quite effective. Just

to show, for our own peace of mind, that if you did put sign language in front of children, they would learn it. As I say, I think in two weeks, there are seven or eight on a 15-week course at the moment.

[137] So, our evidence—or rather, what we have collected or tried to collect; we don't have a lot of resources to carry out huge research—what we have found is that, quite simply, there is nothing there. And whilst we understand that the education of these children is the responsibility of the local authorities, the provision of sign language, we feel, should be the responsibility of Government, because there's a different—. We're not querying children's education at the moment, maybe that's a battle for another day, but right now, we're concerned about their access to their own language, that when they leave school, or even when they're in school, they can't communicate with these people who are their peers, and they can't communicate or understand interpreters, which is their right, as they grow, for access to work and everything else. So, unless they learn sign language from a young age and start using it as an everyday language—. We tie it very closely to the Welsh language; the struggle is the same, the battle is the same, and they're a minority group. And the other problem we find is that by classing them as disabled or with special educational needs, they come under a provision that doesn't actually look at the fact that they're actually deaf young adults. We appreciate, of course, that there are deaf people who have additional needs, but they're not all deaf with additional needs. They're a minority language group, and that's how we'd like to have them looked at, really.

[138] **Mike Hedges:** Okay, thank you. The last question from me is—and I'm almost asking this on behalf of my sister—the importance of siblings learning sign language to aid communication within the family. Is there anything you'd like to say on that?

[139] **Ms H. Robins-Talbot:** Yes. Those who've got it—I'm sorry, we didn't bring enough—but there's a part in here where we've had some information from parents, which we've provided. One of things that they've said is having a deaf child in the family often leads to one of two things: either the deaf child becomes special, because they're deaf and because they need a little bit more attention paid to them to make sure they understand everything that's going, which leaves the other siblings out of it, but also, if the other siblings don't learn to communicate with them, they find that there are family breakdowns as well. So, as I say, this pilot we've got, with Cathie running it at the moment, we're actually taking sibling groups as well now to try it. It

seems to be working quite effectively, and, like I say, the parents are taking it on as well. So, yes, we think it's really important that families of deaf children should be given access to the BSL courses.

[140] **Mike Hedges:** Thank you very much. Gareth.

[141] **Gareth Bennett:** Yes, thanks—

[142] **Mr Collins-Hayes:** Could I add something?

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

[144] **Mr Collins-Hayes:** It's really important that families learn to sign. Obviously, that's connected to early diagnosis as well, and early development of language, and that's so crucial, because if you don't have any communication at a young age, you're going to face bigger barriers as you grow up. You're going to be constantly behind in the education system, and you're always going to feel 'less than'.

[145] **Ms Pallenson:** I grew up in a family that didn't sign—what I would class as a 'hearing family', and I always feel like my education has been a bit behind everybody else. I feel, in family situations, I'm left out. I was sent to boarding school to try and catch up in terms of education. So, that meant moving to England, not being able to stay in Wales with my family, and fighting with the council constantly, asking for me to go to a school that would allow my education to be good. I would have preferred to have stayed in Wales to be educated, rather than sent to England.

[146] **Mike Hedges:** There used to be a school in Wales, Ashgrove, but it ended up closing down, unfortunately. But that did provide residential opportunities within Wales.

[147] **Ms C. Robins-Talbot:** That's correct, yes. It was a school for the deaf. It was originally in Llandrindod Wells. I think that closed probably 30 or 40 years ago, and they relocated to Penarth. And I think it was about two years ago when, finally, the building was closed and it was demolished. So, now we have no school for deaf children in Wales at all. We have all deaf children in mainstream. In my time, we're talking 30 years ago now—when I went to school, I was in a mainstream school and we had what were called 'partial hearing units'. We had a teacher of the deaf who would teach a large number of us deaf children together. It was West Glamorgan in those days; you know,

it wasn't 22 local authorities. But when the authorities changed, that's when we became affected. So, it might be that, then, one or two deaf children would be in one school, and they were much more scattered. Communications support workers weren't available in many of these schools to support the deaf children through their education and that's when the deficit got even worse. So, having sign language, having extra support, would mean that children would be better educated in Wales.

[148] **Mike Hedges:** Okay. Thank you. Gareth.

[149] **Gareth Bennett:** So, just to be clear on what you're aiming for, it sounds as if you would like there to be a deaf school in Wales.

[150] **Ms H. Robins-Talbot:** Ultimately, we would. What we're actually asking for, through the petition, is for BSL to be put on the national curriculum to give everyone the opportunity to learn it, because the way we're looking at it is that the more people in society who can sign, even if it's just your local shopkeeper who can ask you what you want, or you go to a local pub and want a pint—and, instead of having to point at everything, someone can then say, 'Oh, you want a pint', you know. So, we think that if it's in education then people will take it on.

[151] I used to work in a school before and one of the things that we used to do, when the new year 7 started, we would teach them the basics, like 'Good morning', 'How are you?' and then, as it went on, it was, 'What did you do at the weekend?' and 'Do you like football?' We found that, after that initial start-up, they would befriend the deaf and some of them, even today—we bump into them in town and things like that—and they come straight on and they talk to Cathie, because they never forget it. They remember it, and even if it's just that basic conversation—without the fact that it leads to future employment for deaf and hearing people, because interpreters are always going to be needed, hopefully, it'll lead to better employment opportunities for deaf people as well, because at the moment we tell them that they have to go to work and all the rest of it, but where? The jobs just aren't there.

[152] **Gareth Bennett:** How far is—? Oh, sorry, you wanted to—.

[153] **Mr Collins-Hayes:** I'm from England, and grew up in a deaf family. We moved to Wales three years ago, because I was studying at university. So, growing up in a deaf boarding school, I felt that I was equal with everybody

else. I didn't see any barriers in life at the time—everybody could communicate through sign language, the teaching was in BSL, and I felt the same as everybody else, but I came to Wales and realised that there were huge barriers, because children who go into mainstream school sometimes can be isolated—they can be the only deaf child, and that can be very scary. They can feel very lonely. It's important to have a number of deaf units, where there's good support so that they can mix together as a small group and get the support they need.

[154] **Ms C. Robins-Talbot:** I think also, on the back of what both of the others have said, the dream of having a deaf school in Wales is still a dream, I think. In reality, I don't think that's going to happen, but I think that education for deaf children is very important. I don't think it should matter what your hearing loss is. What we're trying to say, really, is that we believe that language is important. It doesn't mean—if you're in a deaf school or whether you're in a mainstream, it's language that should be available wherever you are within education, and it should start before you're in education, not just at school, so that you've got those building blocks ready for education.

[155] If you think about the Welsh language and Welsh people going to Welsh schools, how do they get the language to begin with? It starts in the home and it's not seen as a disability if you speak Welsh. The same if you use BSL—it shouldn't be seen as a disability; it's just giving access to language to improve their experiences and to make those people have what they need.

[156] One area of research that we have worked on—there was a group called Deaf Ex-Mainstreamers, DEX, the organisation, and they did some work where they were showing that if you give deaf children access to sign language really early then education is better. It's not going to affect speech and language as previous spurious research had suggested. You can be an expert in lip-reading but still only get 30 per cent of what is said, and our children, if they're being taught only to speak and to lip-read, are suffering because they're always going to be behind because of the deficit in the ability to lip-read proficiently. So, what we want is the language recognised as an official language and then we want the provision that goes with that. We want the facilities to have early access to BSL. The group showed that providing this—. And there's evidence that language is a barrier for deaf children when they're deprived of it. So, we're hoping that you will see from the opportunity, the evidence we've given today, and maybe if you need to

do some more research—it mightn't be needed—but if you could also listen to personal experience as well, because we would like you very much to support that. The experts have shown that it is beneficial.

10:00

[157] **Gareth Bennett:** Have there been examples so far of mainstream schools teaching BSL, and how has it worked?

[158] **Ms H. Robins-Talbot:** We haven't found any. You see there's a conception that if a child goes to school and they have a unit where they have access to a teacher of the deaf or a support worker they're actually being taught BSL. But they're not being taught BSL, because the education authority says that they have to follow the English, so the BSL follows the English word pattern. Whereas these don't use any of that—they don't use 'is', 'on'; their language is very different. And what we feel is is what Cathie said: if our children are immersed, like you are when you do Welsh—when you learn Welsh, you are immersed in Welsh, you don't learn English, you don't learn anything until you've learned Welsh. Once you've got Welsh, and you understand the concepts of Welsh, then we can teach you maths, then we can teach you English, then we can go through science.

[159] It's exactly the same with BSL. It's all right to say, 'They've got it', but, very often, when we work with our children, if you say something—I don't know, just say to them, 'Why do you think the sky is blue?', they learn the concept, 'That's a colour; it's a colour.' We don't know why, what's behind it, the science; no-one's able to sit down and explain to them, 'The sky is blue because of this, that, or the other', or 'We have to do this, because this is the way society works'. They haven't got the concept. Maths is a huge problem, because there are a lot of concepts in maths, and, if they don't understand the concept, they're not going to learn. All of us are the same—we all have to understand before we're being taught. And one of the problems with our children is we assume that, because they have a support worker, because they're having access to a teacher of the deaf, they're actually being taught BSL. Well, they're not. It isn't happening, in schools or anywhere else. They're having access maybe to sign language, but they're not being taught in BSL.

[160] **Gareth Bennett:** Thank you.

[161] **Mike Hedges:** As you know, I've been raising the need for British Sign Language to be dealt with as equivalent of English or Welsh, and treat GCSE

first language British Sign Language to be exactly the same as a GCSE in English or Welsh first language. Curriculum Wales are fighting very strongly back against that, but I intend to keep on putting pressure on, because I think it's the right thing to do.

[162] **Ms H. Robins-Talbot:** Can I just reply to that? Because we asked the parents this, because, when Alun Davies came out to visit the group, one of the things the parents said was that anything that improves access to BSL and raises awareness is brilliant, and the GCSE is great. But we don't understand if our children are going to be taught like we learn English from small, and we grow up and we develop our language and we go to school and they teach us where to put the full-stops, the commas, and the question marks, and all the rest of it. A GCSE is fabulous, but is it for deaf children? So, when will we start teaching our children to prepare them for a GCSE? When they're 11? That's far too late.

[163] **Mike Hedges:** But we start preparing for GCSE when we start school at three, don't we, in terms of English or Welsh as a first language, or even prior to that, when children go to Mudiad Meithrin, or Ti a Fi, they start off the language at that stage, and everything is geared towards the final examinations. So, I would hope that, at some stage, we do exactly the same with sign language, so that the whole thing is geared towards eventually taking examinations. Sorry, Gareth.

[164] **Gareth Bennett:** If you were successful in getting BSL on the curriculum, would there be any problems with getting enough staff to teach it?

[165] **Ms H. Robins-Talbot:** Cathie and I have lived in fear of this question for a long time. Because we think—. We sit here, and we encourage young people to bring things to Parliament, power, speak to the people who know, and we know in our hearts there are no people out there qualified at the moment. So, we need to start off by encouraging deaf people to become tutors, to become teachers, so that they can teach somebody. Because, ideally, that's what you would want—a deaf role model for a deaf child. So, we need that, and one of the things that we already know is, if we're successful with putting BSL on the national curriculum, it's not going to happen tomorrow, it probably won't happen next year, and it probably won't happen for another two years. Because the people out there who we need to train—these people—just don't have the skills to do it yet. So, that's our honest answer, and a fair one, I think.

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

[167] **Neil McEvoy:** I just wanted to pick on the tutor aspect of things.

[168] **Ms C. Robins-Talbot:** Can I also say—? Sorry, to add to what Helen said, having BSL on the national curriculum would affect everybody, obviously, and deaf people go to airports, they go shops, they go to jobs, and so every day there's the potential to meet deaf people. And so having it on the curriculum for everybody means that you're allowing better access. It's not only about providing access for deaf people, but it's also giving other people skills to interact. And, in Wales, we've got 3,000 deaf children living in Wales, and 90 per cent of those are from hearing families. So, they have no contact with deaf people and they have no role models in life growing up. There's been a youth club for the deaf for the last 20 years, and some of our children come for the very first time and they go, 'Oh, so there's deaf adults', because some of them really think that when they grow up they're not going to be deaf, that they're going to be able to hear, and they're like, 'Oh, so you're deaf but you're grown up, and you've got a degree and you've been to university, and you've got a job.' They really, genuinely, have no idea what's ahead for them.

[169] And it's not just about learning sign language—it's about giving them aspirations, and that's why we're asking for the three points that we've asked for: for it to be on the curriculum, for the opportunity for deaf children to have support through BSL in school, and for families to learn sign language at an early age. And I know the Welsh Government has funded interpreter training through BSL Futures, and that was great. I really congratulate the Welsh Assembly on taking that step, and that will obviously help the deaf community, and that's fantastic, but it's not enough, it's not a complete measure. We need more of that. We need the cost of deaf children learning to sign. We need the schools to take on BSL as well so that they're thinking ahead to the longevity of the school.

[170] **Mike Hedges:** Thank you. Neil.

[171] **Neil McEvoy:** Just about tutors, really. I went to Cardiff Deaf Creative Hands and met a lot of people a few months ago. And I met some people who said they're not allowed to be tutors of profoundly deaf children, because the emphasis is on lip-reading and language acquisition.

[172] Ms H. Robins-Talbot: There is a lot of emphasis in schools on children following the English model, which means they have to learn to lip-read. Like I say, just because they go to a school regularly doesn't mean to say they automatically get access to anyone that actually signs. And I think this is the thing—it's got to be a matter of choice. We're not in this place to turn around and say that all deaf must sign and all hearing must sign. It has to be a choice where—. I think one of the problems that we have is of family. When Cathie was in school, units were massive. All the parents met, all the parents chatted, 'Oh, where is she going to college, university?' whatever, and, 'Oh, how did you manage to do that?', and they find things out. Today, that's not happening because a lot of schools don't have units and the children are mainstreamed. So, unless they find things like Creative Hands, like Talking Hands, and organisations that are there, many of them are left out there isolated. The children go through huge frustrations, and then that's when they go and try to find help, which is usually in their teens and then they find people like us, I hope, like Creative Hands, like—. There's quite a few set up now—Family Sign Language, things like this—where people can actually go and say, 'Where do we go? Where can we take them? What can they do?', because I've got a little two-year old in my group. Her sister is deaf, and this two-year old is able to spell her name, she uses my signing, she can tell me when she leaves she's going to see me next week or tomorrow, because they live with me half the time. So, it's not impossible to learn, and it should be there, but, unfortunately, if people don't know that their children—.

[173] I'll give you an example that some of the parents have told us. When you're diagnosed with a baby who's deaf, I can understand it's terrifying. I've got deaf people in my family, but I can understand it's terrifying. And then you think—. The first thing a lot of parents have said to us is, 'Well, what are they going to be able to do?' They're babies. 'What are they going to be able to do?' They're already thinking of them being 25 and looking for work: 'What are they going to be able to do?' No, let's go back. Let's start off with the simple things. Let's join a club. Let's meet other parents who are the same as you. Let's give them access to sign language. Because a lot of them they feel the pressure and think, 'They've got to come into my family. My family is hearing. Cochlear implants—', you know, that's the main thing.

[174] Not all children can be cochlear implanted. Not all children can be. So there has to be a service there somewhere, not a one-size-fits-all, but fits the individual people. There has to be more information out there about where you can go to get services. A lot of our parents have told us in this little survey that, when the baby's in hospital, when you have this baby, and

you're told the baby's deaf, it's sort of, 'That's it.' You don't see nobody for weeks. It takes ages before a teacher of the deaf or someone who's a specialist can come and see you. It takes weeks. So they've got this baby that they know is deaf. Do they talk to it? I don't know. Do you know what I mean? Those are the frustrations they have. They're not told where to go, and when they get in touch then with someone, perhaps a teacher of the deaf who may say, 'Oh, but I've heard there's a group down the road', and they come, and then when they come in, because there are deaf people in there, they feel a bit 'Oh—they can't sign themselves—'and this is the world my child's going to be in.' But, as you can see, Cathie, Luke, they've all been to university. Cathie's got an MA. You can get there. He's doing a degree. She's been to university. They can achieve, and these are the people we want as role models for our parents, to show that they get married, they have children, the same as us. They go to work, they're unemployed—whatever the normal thing is out in society. They're the same. They're all the same. They're working, they're not working, they're in education, they're not in education. This is what the parents need to see.

[175] This is one of the things they all told us: it's that early bit, when you have this baby, and they always say, 'I'm sorry, the baby's deaf. I'm sorry.' That's a big apology, isn't it? So, straight away there's something wrong with the child. It's the same with all disabilities. You know it's not just deaf children where the parents get that sort of news. There should be a system within that first point of contact, which of course is medical, to be able to say, 'Breathe. Take your time. There are places you can go. There are systems out there to help you. It's not that you're left alone with this child', which many of them did feel, and still do feel, because they feel it's a constant battle to get—. You know, 'Is my child entitled to have a support worker?' 'Oh, they wear hearing aids, they're okay, they speak well, that's fine', so they don't get them. But it's a choice. The parents want them to have that. The parents want them to learn sign language.

[176] One parent here, her boy is eight, and he's just had an operation for a cochlear implant. But she said she waited until he was eight because she wanted him to be part of the decision-making process. But all the family are learning to sign, because they know that if it doesn't work, this boy is going to be profoundly deaf. So, they're all learning to sign now to prepare themselves for it. I think these are the things you have to look at. What she said was that her boy woke up deaf, and one of her arguments was, 'We go to school and we teach the children to speak Spanish, Italian, French, whatever, for the odd school trip they might go on. But, you don't wake up

speaking Spanish, but you can wake up being deaf.' She said that was really important to her, to realise that her boy just woke up deaf. We know another person that did the same at 11—just woke up one morning deaf.

[177] So, it affects us all. It affects all our families. I don't know if you've ever met deaf people. I know Mike has, because we're boring Mike constantly. But it's that feeling of having to do that; that unless you knock on their doors and force them—. I'm not saying you've been forced into the situation, but this is where we are now, trying to raise awareness of something that's been out there for years.

[178] **Mike Hedges:** I know Janet wants to come in and I know Neil wants to come back.

[179] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Have we moved on to No. 3 yet, or—?

[180] **Mike Hedges:** Well, I think if we ignore the numbers, then we just go on as we are.

[181] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Okay, that's fine. Before I come to our research paper and the question I was going to ask, I was going to say that, clearly, population size where Wales is concerned as against England, do you feel that there are better provisions over the border?

[182] **Mr Collins-Hayes:** Yes, absolutely. I'm from England. I've grown up and, moving into Wales, can see the disparity. I had options. The options here are limited. For example, I see with Zoe and my partner, who's from Wales, that they've had to go to England to be educated, and they've told me their stories. They just felt that the education was better in England, so they didn't really want to stay in Wales. They've come back more confident. They've been able to go to university. This wouldn't have happened if they'd stayed in Wales and been educated. So, they've had to go out to be educated.

[183] **Ms Pallenson:** If I hadn't gone to England, I would have just been isolated at home. I wouldn't have had friends, I wouldn't have been able to talk to people, I wouldn't have any confidence. I wouldn't even be here now, sitting in front of you.

10:15

[184] **Ms C. Robins-Talbot:** Just to add to that, I grew up in a mainstream

school. I was born into a hearing family—one of the 90 per cent—and my family tried very hard, they fought for me every step of the way, to have access to sign language—to BSL—and to English, because they felt that both were important. And I left school, and I wanted to go to Derby College, which was in England, unfortunately. So, the local authority were a bit like, ‘Well, it’s cheaper for you to go to a local college.’ But my family fought for it, and I was one of the lucky people that they agreed to fund, and I did go to a deaf college, up in Derby. You know, we’re talking 30 years ago, but it was very difficult then, but I’m sure it’s still as difficult today.

[185] So, I went to the college, and, for the first year of my college life, I learned what it was like to be deaf—yes, a grown-up deaf; yes, I’d learned sign language; yes, I was using sign language, but I hadn’t really taken on board all that it meant to be deaf. I felt that my learning just increased exponentially by being in that environment. From that, I came back to Wales, got involved with youth work, and it’s all thanks to the college in Derby. If I hadn’t gone—you know, my family were very supportive, and encouraged me, and believed in me—but I believe that I would just be outside washing the car, or maybe having mental health problems, emotional issues, because I wouldn’t have been allowed to achieve my potential. And I see the children who are going through this now, and I think, it shouldn’t be, in this day and age—you know, it’s happening again. We need to protect the future of our deaf children in Wales.

[186] **Mr Collins-Hayes:** I think it’s important that deaf children have confidence. The boys from England—you know, the school I went to, it was great. We would visit people, and not mind where we went, who we talked to, and it might be just five, six or seven, but if you’ve got language in common, you’ll talk to anybody. If you meet somebody in the street who’s deaf, they tend to withdraw from society; it’s very different. But I met another boy who was deaf, and I said to him, ‘Come and get involved in football’, and, suddenly, when he had that contact and that language, he got involved, and he became suddenly much more confident. He suddenly had a world that he could engage with. And I just want what is happening already in England to happen in Wales.

[187] **Mike Hedges:** Okay, thank you. Neil, did you want to come back?

[188] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** I want to ask mine.

[189] **Mike Hedges:** Go on, Janet.

[190] **Neil McEvoy:** Go on. That's okay.

[191] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** For me, just going on the curriculum aspects alone, this says it all to me. The Assembly doesn't have powers to legislate on any languages other than Welsh, although it can legislate in relation to languages within the curriculum. There will be engagement with stakeholders on the new curriculum. So, how will you feed into the new curriculum? That's one question. And then, of course, the First Minister agreed in Plenary, on 17 January this year, to raise the issue of BSL with Qualifications Wales. So, I think, as a committee, I would like to ask how he's gone on with that—ask him.

[192] But also, I and my staff had our first BSL lesson—we're learning BSL now—because I think it's a huge issue facing us in Wales. Whilst I appreciate that people are born deaf, or can wake up deaf, the ageing society, the demographics of Wales—my own constituency is the second highest over 65—mean that a lot of people actually go through the majority of their life with full hearing, but then they lose their hearing. My father, at 91, was profoundly deaf, but it was a gradual process. It went on for years. Probably for about 15 years, he was very profoundly deaf, and, even until the very end, people were confusing his deafness with confusion. I can't tell you how many arguments—even to the very few hours before his death—that I've had: 'He isn't confused, he can't hear you.' You know, 'This is how you speak to my dad.'

[193] So, for me, I've become extremely passionate, because you have to learn to live with that experience sometimes to realise. He wasn't the only one, but we have a profoundly ageing nation, and we haven't got the tools there, we haven't got the mechanisms in place, to ensure that people can actually continue to live a life of any quality. So, seriously, I am going to keep pressing now. I'll work with the Chairman. I think it's about BSL, I think it's about having the facilities there for the children who are born deaf, it's about having a culture, and—I don't like the word 'holistic'. We should have a culture that supports people and recognises the fact that, as people age, they get sight impairment and they can become very profoundly deaf. We should be putting those mechanisms in now, intervening and laying the foundations now for support. I'm sorry, I've had a little rant now, but I feel really passionately, because my local authority recently have just cut North Wales Association of the Deaf. They've just said, 'We're cutting your funding.' So, we've had meetings and we've had to then get people in to do BSL, and

probably, by the time we've finished with our meetings, we'll be costing more than if they'd allowed that funding, and we're not going to let it go.

[194] **Ms H. Robins-Talbot:** One of our young people, I have to mention—Hannah. She's passed away now, she had cystic fibrosis, but when we first set up this group she met with Keith Towler. Keith is a lovely man, and he was a bit of a devil's advocate in our first meeting and he was winding them up and joking around with them and everything, and he said to Hannah, 'What are you making all this fuss about? You've got equal opportunities.' And she said, 'Yes, we do. But we never have the opportunity to be equal.'

[195] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Absolutely right.

[196] **Ms H. Robins-Talbot:** And that's one of the things that he's held onto for a long time. And if it wasn't—. To be fair, it was the previous Petitions Committee where it came up with the language, and Bethan Jenkins was sitting on that one, and she said, 'It's no problem, it's a language. Let's go for it,' sort of thing. And they sent off for, I don't know, for the committee to go and research things, and it came back and she was stunned to realise that you can't legislate for any other language. And it was through that Petitions Committee that that moved on to the education and welfare Bill, because it affects both. It affects the well-being as well.

[197] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** I just have a final question, then: how do you think the additional learning Bill—you know, this new Bill that they're bringing forward—will help you? And also, do you feel now that you're going to have any input into the new curriculum?

[198] **Ms H. Robins-Talbot:** No. There are two issues here: when we first started this conversation a long time ago, we were promised that we would be involved in the Donaldson report, and the next thing we knew it had been published. Endless attempts afterwards—we understand that there are pilot schools—to get involved in something with that to see where they're being piloted, if they're being piloted in schools with deaf children and what effect that's having, and the ALN Bill at the moment doesn't hold a lot of water with our parents because it specifically targets SEN. There is no provision within the ALN Bill that actually says, 'This is how we're going to look after your deaf children.'

[199] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Okay. That was my last question, but then, Chairman, can I make a plea—I hope my two colleagues will support me—

that we do call the education Cabinet Secretary in—

[200] **Mike Hedges:** We intend to.

[201] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** —and that this is one of the issues on our agenda?

[202] **Mike Hedges:** We're calling the Cabinet Secretary for Education in, or whoever the appropriate Minister is, to discuss the evidence we've received today as part of our inquiry.

[203] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** I'm talking now with particular regard to the curriculum.

[204] **Mike Hedges:** Yes. Everything we're discussing today, we'll have an opportunity to talk about to either the Cabinet Secretary or the Minister or whoever has responsibility for it.

[205] **Ms C. Robins-Talbot:** Could I just add to Janet's question about how we could work with the curriculum? We've got the opportunity from Deaf Ex-Mainstreamers' research to show how we can use that and adapt it to be a Welsh model. We have a structure and a system, there's research there, and there's nothing in Wales, so we can't create everything tomorrow. So, I say, rather than start from scratch, why not use the model that they've used and trialled in England, and adapt it to suit Wales. And then that would help everybody to understand why the language is important. So, I would recommend that would be a good starting point.

[206] **Ms H. Robins-Talbot:** This model was originally designed by Meirion Prys Jones—used to be the CEO for the Welsh Language Board. He's now working with DEX to develop this, because they reckon without it, if someone doesn't start taking action with it, that the language will become, well, it is classed as endangered, but it may well become extinct. That report is in there, actually.

[207] **Mike Hedges:** We'll have an opportunity to raise these with Alun Davies on 27 June. He's the Minister responsible. But everything we've discussed today—

[208] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Sorry, with all due respect, Chairman, I'm asking can we have the education Cabinet Secretary in as well.

[209] **Mike Hedges:** Well, I think that it's the Minister responsible who tends to come, and it falls under Alun Davies's responsibilities.

[210] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** It's going to be dealing with the curriculum.

[211] **Neil McEvoy:** Curriculum.

[212] **Mr Francis:** Curriculum reform is under Kirsty Williams, the Cabinet Secretary for Education, as you say.

[213] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Yes, I'd like to invite her.

[214] **Mr Francis:** We could talk to the Government about that to see what the options are. They may suggest that those questions could be asked of Alun Davies.

[215] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Too late afterwards. Let's do it.

[216] **Mike Hedges:** We'll ask if she can come along to talk about the curriculum, then. Okay. On to you, then, Neil.

[217] **Neil McEvoy:** Yes, thanks. So, the Equality Act isn't very effective, do you think?

[218] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** I think that says it all.

[219] **Ms H. Robins-Talbot:** Well, all I can say is that—

[220] **Ms C. Robins-Talbot:** Can I give you an example of the Act? In school, if you have to make reasonable adjustments for all of the people in your class, including deaf children, they think, 'Well, we've put a loop in and that covers our provision for deaf children'. Again, it doesn't look at language. There's no power in the Act. They think that one token gesture will suit everybody. They're not looking at individual needs. Loops are not the solution for everybody, unfortunately.

[221] **Ms H. Robins-Talbot:** One of the things our parents have said is, 'It' all paper'. It's another piece of paper. It's another piece of paper that's come over. We've got the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child that says they should have all these things.

[222] **Neil McEvoy:** Oh, it's just—

[223] **Ms H. Robins-Talbot:** But it's very specific and says about the right to use your language, and that's another piece of paper. So, if you go in and you think, 'I've togged up for this. Now, I've made myself aware of what's going on, and this is what I need to say', and we say 'Article 12, article 30'. And we teach the children all of this, and then it becomes another piece of paper because there's no finance behind it. It has no teeth. It has no teeth.

[224] **Neil McEvoy:** Just personally, really, for you guys, how do you feel not being able to access services?

[225] **Mr Collins-Hayes:** I just feel demoralised. I'm lucky enough to have some confidence and some ability to fight for what I want, but I don't think others have that. There are a few people like me, but most aren't, and so you end up fighting on behalf of others too.

[226] **Ms Pallenson:** And I'm not like him. I've not always been full of confidence. I'm quite nervous and I'm not used to doing things like this. So, I need to have my confidence built up, and I need people around me that can help. It's all ages, not just young people. It's about having older people around me as I grow up, to learn from, to have access to sign language, to feel that I can have a job in the future, that I can do things like everybody else.

[227] **Neil McEvoy:** Yes. I think it's outrageous that this institution doesn't have the power to legislate. Absolutely outrageous. So, I thank you for bringing that to our attention, really.

[228] **Ms H. Robins-Talbot:** For Cathie and I—something that keeps coming back to our minds—we went to Hungary in 2006. When we went to Hungary in 2006, when we were telling them about things that we had that we thought were amazing at the time—like we had text phones so we could make phone calls, we had the disability living allowance to help us to do other things, there had just been the first BSL march to get BSL recognised—and we were talking to these well-educated students who somehow had got themselves through education with no interpreters—nothing, but by pure hard slog—they said to us, 'Oh, you're so lucky to have all that'. And when they came here to visit and they saw what we thought—you know what they say: that the grass is always greener; you never think about what you've got.

When these young people came here on a visit with us, they were just astounded by all these facilities that we had, and yet we were shocked when, in 2010 I think it was, the first deaf MEP to be elected to the European Parliament was a deaf Hungarian. They were so far behind us, and yet we seem, all the time, to be playing catch-up with everything. A load of countries that you would consider to be third-world countries have recognised BSL in its totality—you know, everything about it, they've taken on board. Scotland—they're doing it. We've got lots of friends in Scotland. We're involved at the moment in the new dialogue as to how they're going to enforce it.

[229] **Neil McEvoy:** What's your view on Scotland and their legislation?

[230] **Ms H. Robins-Talbot:** Well, we were working in Scotland at the time, when it started, with the deaf youth there who were on the youth parliament. I just think it's a huge step forward. We know it can't happen tomorrow. It's impossible for it all to happen tomorrow, but I think if there are strides towards it, people's confidence will start to build. They'll want to learn, they'll want to go to work, and they'll want to be able to be involved in other things. It would improve that. At the moment, they sit there and think, 'What's the point? I know he's been to university and hasn't got a job. I know he's been to university and hasn't got a job, and that one's a youth worker, but they haven't got jobs.' We've trained 47 deaf youth workers. The British Deaf Association started it, but Cathie and I continued it and we trained 47 deaf, part-time youth workers. And the only who's employed is in Cardiff and he's part-time.

10:30

[231] **Neil McEvoy:** Stuart.

[232] **Ms H. Robins-Talbot:** Stuart, and he's part-time, and he's employed by Cardiff. But that's the only one who's employed throughout the whole of Wales. Forty seven young people have been trained up to be youth workers, and they're all stacking shelves or not working, or just completely apathetic. If you say to them, 'Come on, get involved in something like this' they sit back and say, 'What's the point?'

[233] **Neil McEvoy:** So, there's only one person employed part-time.

[234] **Ms H. Robins-Talbot:** Cathie's employed privately. Cathie's a youth

worker in—

[235] **Neil McEvoy:** I mean through local authorities.

[236] **Ms H. Robins-Talbot:** But only Stuart, as far as we're aware, in Wales, is employed as a youth worker. And he works, I think, three hours, down in Cardiff.

[237] **Ms C. Robins-Talbot:** Yes, it's a deaf youth club that he's working in. And when we were talking about the Scottish Parliament, I think it shows us that it's not impossible to do this in Wales. We can do this. I know the power they have in Scotland is more than we have in Wales currently, but I also feel that, as a citizen of Wales, we have a responsibility to everybody in Wales, and I think that allows us to give hope and to live for the future of the deaf children, when we see what's happening in Scotland. And I know Ireland at the moment are going through the process, and I know it's one foot in front of the other and they're not near the end at all yet, but I really feel that—. I don't want to see Wales become the last one to do this. I really want Wales to be looking at a BSL Act, and, if individual Assembly Members support that, then it will take on a life and it can be voted through the Assembly and it can make progress.

[238] And that, then, would cover education, it would cover health and employment, and that's what we would be doing, but, obviously, now we can only focus on education presently because of the powers that the Assembly has. So, we just need to continue supporting this, and we need you to help us, if you believe in it, to see that, in Wales, we can be the first to have a BSL GCSE.

[239] **Neil McEvoy:** It makes perfect sense, really. I just want to make the point about youth work. So, 0.5 per cent of the school population gets a part-time youth worker in the whole of the country. It's quite incredible, quite incredible.

[240] **Ms H. Robins-Talbot:** Cathie and I started up Talking Hands in 2009, and we recently moved—well, not recently; we moved in 2007—into the Swansea Deaf Centre. In terms of numbers that you get outside, our numbers are quite low, because, obviously, of the incidence of deafness. But we continued, and our young people come back, and we've got 24-year-olds who are coming back, because they don't know where else to go, so they come back. They're still in a youth club at 24, and we can't turn them away

because there is nowhere else for them to go. And we now have a full range, from pre-school group, a junior youth club, a senior youth club, and we support Deffo!, because the BDA have finished with the youth service in Wales, and we've taken them under our wing because they've got no group, they've got no finances, so we look after them.

[241] But every single person that works with us is a volunteer. They are all parents. Cathie and I have given our lives to it. The people here are working with it because there's just nothing else out there. Same as Cardiff, same as a few other small groups. We've just recently opened another club in Llanelli—very close, but the distance is hard to travel. In north Wales, you will know that that distance is twice as hard to travel. We used to run a youth club up there, and one of the problems we found was transport, in that it finished at 7 o'clock. A youth club is usually 6 till 9, so kids couldn't get home, hence they didn't come. So, there are lots of issues to overcome to bring kids into our communities as well.

[242] **Mike Hedges:** Does anybody else have any further questions? No. Well, can I thank you for coming along, and what you said to us we will be raising with whoever the appropriate Ministers, Cabinet Secretaries are when we get an opportunity to speak to them, which will be in a couple of weeks' time.

[243] On a personal note, I will just say that we talk about legislation; comprehensive education was not brought into this country with legislation. It was brought in by a Department of Education and Science circular, and an awful lot of things can be done without legislation, but by ministerial circulars to local authorities, and I think that may be a direction we may well wish to try and push Ministers in. If you send this circulars out, it can have a profound effect. Thank you very much.

[244] **Ms H. Robins-Talbot:** Thank you very much for your support.

[245] **Mr Collins-Hayes:** Thank you.

[246] **Mike Hedges:** Thank you.

10:35

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

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

*Cynnig:*

*Motion:*

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

*Cynigiwyd y cynnig.*

*Motion moved.*

[247] **Mike Hedges:** And we need, now, to move into private session again. I should say under whatever it is, shouldn't I? Whatever it is, yes.

*Derbyniwyd y cynnig.*

*Motion agreed.*

*Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 10:35.*

*The public part of the meeting ended at 10:35.*