

## Agenda – Petitions Committee

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Meeting Venue:

Committee Room 1 – Senedd

Meeting date: 14 October 2024

Meeting time: 14.00

For further information contact:

Gareth Price – Committee Clerk

0300 200 6565

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

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### 1 Introductions, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest

(Pages 1 – 28)

### 2 New Petitions

2.1 P-06-1461 Scrap the ‘Universal Actions’ and payment reductions in the proposed Sustainable Farming Scheme

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2.2 P-06-1473 Reduce Members of the Senedd’s expenses bill

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### 3 Updates to previous petitions

3.1 P-06-1291 Hold an enquiry into the corporate takeover of the veterinary profession in Wales

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3.2 P-06-1334 Make the Senedd More Representative of the Welsh Population

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

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- 3.6 P-06-1455 Protect the junior departments of the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama from closure  
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- 3.9 P-06-1342 Fund more specialist school places and staff for children with additional learning needs in Wales  
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- 3.10 P-06-1347 Review Additional Learning Needs policies & make compulsory to FULLY train all teachers and TAs in regulation techniques  
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- 3.11 P-06-1406 Financial penalties for Local Education Authorities who do not comply with timeframes for ALN  
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### **Papers to note**

- 3.12 P-06-1474 Stop Natural Resources Wales closing Bwlch Nant yr Arian, Coed y Brenin & Ynyslas visitor centres  
(Pages 78 – 79)
- 3.13 P-05-1447 Stop Natural Resources Wales closing the visitor centre at Ynyslas National Nature Reserve
- 4 Motion under Standing Order 17.42(ix) to resolve to exclude the public from the meeting for the remainder of today's business:**  
(Pages 80 – 87)

**Private**

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# P-06-1461: Scrap the 'Universal Actions' and payment reductions in the proposed Sustainable Farming Scheme

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 14 Hydref 2024  
Petitions Committee | 14 Hydref 2024

Reference: SR24/9547-5

**Petition Number:** P-06-1461

**Petition title:** Scrap the 'Universal Actions' and payment reductions in the proposed Sustainable Farming Scheme

**Text of petition:** The proposed 'compulsory' 10% planting of trees & 10% reverting productive land to habitat, will lead to an obvious 20%+ reduction in food produced in wales, jobs losses & businesses overall turnover in an already struggling industry, this will have a huge knock on effect to rural businesses & communities & families overall living standards.

Every universal action increases labour/paperwork & costs to an already strained occupation, yet this is not reflected by increased payments.

Unworkable!

More details

Calculated predictions from ADAS estimate-

A 10.8% or 122,200 reduction in livestock units.

11% or over 5,500 job losses.

125.3million pound hit to output from the sector.

A 199million pound loss in farm business incomes .

It does virtually nothing for the country's food security, or the future of the agricultural industry.

There has been a huge amount of good environmental work done by farmers through previous schemes that threatens to be lost & reversed due to the simple fact that entering this scheme will lead to a financial reductions , at a



time when input costs & expenses have all risen.

The scheme if unchanged will cause many farm closures, especially startup or tenanted farms.

Many of the universal actions point toward the 'Net Zero' targets, but at what cost?

A country that can not produce its own food, is not 'sustainable' ! This scheme is unsustainable!

<https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultations/2023-12/potential-economic-effects-of-the-scheme-phase-4-universal-actions-modelling-results.pdf>

## 1. Background

The Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS or 'the scheme') is the Welsh Government's proposed new agricultural policy - to replace the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) system of support for farmers.

The CAP system has largely been maintained in Wales since EU exit while the new scheme is developed. During this time there have been multiple consultations and a co-design exercise on the scheme.

The SFS proposals are a significant departure from the CAP's Basic Payment Scheme - BPS (direct payments), with more emphasis on reward for public goods, such as required environmental actions. As with the CAP, the scheme would be optional to join. The SFS is intended to reward farmers for delivering actions based on Sustainable Land Management objectives (listed in the Agriculture (Wales) Act 2023) to:

1. produce food and other goods in a sustainable manner;
2. mitigate and adapt to climate change;
3. maintain and enhance the resilience of ecosystems and the benefits they provide; and
4. conserve and enhance the countryside and cultural resources and promote public access to and engagement with them, and to sustain the Welsh language and promote and facilitate its use.

The most recent consultation, which closed in March 2024, included a tiered structure to the scheme. All farmers participating in the SFS would be required to carry out a suite of 17 'Universal Actions' (many of which are environmental) for which they would receive the 'Universal Baseline Payment'. Building on this, more complex non-compulsory 'Optional' and 'Collaborative' actions would then be available for additional support. The scheme rules, required for participation, included:

- at least 10% of each farm managed as habitat; and
- at least 10% under tree cover as woodland or individual trees.

The proposed payment methodology for the scheme was based on 'costs incurred and income foregone' and also an additional social payment. However the budget and payment scales for the scheme aren't known yet. The consultation stated the Welsh Government will pursue, at least, the same total level of funding from the UK Government as in 2024/25.

The proposals have been met with strong reaction from the farming industry. There is concern around the payment methodology and potential budget. Farming unions fear the 17 Universal Actions will be too onerous and bureaucratic. They question the feasibility of the proposals for different farming systems.

Environmental groups welcomed the environmental ambition of the scheme but say it needs to work for farmers to ensure uptake and have voiced concerns over the payment methodology.

The scheme rules requiring tree cover and habitat management have been a central point of the debate. Some farmers fear this could take too much land out of agricultural production and will be a barrier for scheme entry. The Welsh Government and other stakeholders (such as the Nature Friendly Farming Network and environmental groups) argue the scheme rules can be integrated into agricultural systems and benefit agricultural production e.g. through trees providing shelter belts and flood alleviation.

Some farmers are concerned there isn't enough support for food production per se, threatening food security. The Welsh Government's position has been that supporting improved environmental management will enhance food production, as they go hand in hand. The previous Rural Affairs Minister, Lesley Griffiths MS, maintained that as food has a market value it should not be classed as a public good, and so should not be directly funded by the state. Instead the scheme

design aimed to support farmers and food production through the various sustainable land management actions.

The Welsh Government published ADAS modelling results (referred to in this petition) suggesting the scheme would create around 26,000ha of new semi-natural habitat and 28,000ha of new woodland, but also reduce total farm income by £199m and farm output by £125m. The modelling also shows livestock units reducing by 122,000 and on-farm labour decreasing by 11%. NFU Cymru equates this to 5,500 jobs lost.

The modelling is “indicative of worst-case outcomes” and comes with significant caveats. The Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs, Huw Irranca-Davies MS highlights in his letter on this petition that the ADAS modelling is based on an earlier version of the scheme. Further modelling is expected.

Senedd Research has produced an article and a longer Research Briefing on the SFS proposals, and stakeholder reaction.

## 2. Welsh Government action

The most recent consultation, was described as the “final step” before scheme introduction which was planned for 2025. However following strong reaction from the industry, in May 2024 the Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs, Huw Irranca-Davies MS, announced a delay to scheme introduction - from 2025 to 2026.

There will now be an “SFS Preparatory Phase of activity” in 2025. An SFS Ministerial Roundtable made up of stakeholders has been established for further consultation. The purpose and scope of the Roundtable is to review and consider the priorities for the Universal, Optional and Collaborative layers of the SFS, along with scheme rules (including the minimum 10% requirements), eligibility criteria, and payment methodology.

Two subgroups - the Carbon Sequestration Evidence Review Panel and the SFS Officials Working Group - are also feeding into the Ministerial Roundtable.

Interim schemes are available during this phase such as the new Integrated Natural Resources Scheme, alongside the BPS.

More detail on the next phase can be found in ['Our response'](#) (the Welsh Government's July 2024 response to the SFS consultation). It terms of next steps it says:

No detailed decisions on the Sustainable Farming Scheme design have yet been made. We understand the concerns raised through the consultation process, and it is clear changes need to be made before the Scheme can be introduced.

We will continue to work with the Ministerial Roundtable and its subgroups as described above to resolve the remaining challenges before the Scheme is finalised.

We expect to provide updates from the Ministerial Roundtable periodically through the year.

Final scheme details [are expected](#) in summer 2025.

### 3. Welsh Parliament action

Both the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs (ETRA) Committee and the Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure (CCEI) Committee have [carried out inquiries](#) into the SFS.

You considered [P-06-1388 Remove the requirement for farmers to have at least 10% tree cover to access the new Sustainable Farming Scheme](#). The petition was referred to the ETRA Committee to consider as part of its work on the SFS.

There have been several debates in Plenary on the SFS (for example on [28 February 2024](#)).

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

Huw Irranca-Davies AS/MS  
Y Dirprwy Brif Weinidog ac Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros  
Newid Hinsawdd a Materion Gwledig  
Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Climate  
Change and Rural Affairs



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-06-1461  
Ein cyf/Our ref HIDCC/10175/24

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

20 September 2024

Dear Chair,

Thank you for your letter of 6 September related to petition P-06-1461 and the Sustainable Farming Scheme.

The proposed Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) is underpinned by the Sustainable Land Management (SLM) objectives established in the Agriculture (Wales) Act. These objectives are to;

- Support the Sustainable Production of Food and other Goods
- Mitigate and adapt to climate change
- Maintain and enhance the resilience of ecosystems and the benefits they provide
- Conserve and enhance the countryside and cultural resources and promote public access to and engagement with them, and to sustain the Welsh language and promote and facilitate its use

To reflect these objectives, supporting the ongoing sustainable production of food is the cornerstone of the SFS proposals. However the climate emergency is the main risk to food production over the long term, and our natural ecosystems are one of the best defences we have in responding to climate change. The proposed SFS contains a suite of Universal Actions to invest in, for example, our soils, ecosystems, animal health and our farmers' skills, which we consider as investments in protecting our future food production capacity.

It is not our view that the proposed 10% habitat and 10% tree cover Scheme Rules will lead to a 20% drop in food production in Wales. Existing semi-natural habitats, and existing trees will count towards these 10% requirements, so many farmers will already be some way towards meeting these, if they do not already.

Where new habitats are to be created to meet the Scheme Rule, we propose farmers will be able to create valuable temporary habitat features such as establishing herbal leys. These provide agricultural benefits by improving the resilience of the grassland, such as through including deeper rooted species which can access moisture at greater depths to combat dry summers, as well as providing ecological benefits to pollinating insects. Importantly the habitat creation options proposed for the Universal Layer are temporary in nature and do not in themselves lead to permanent restrictions on productive farmland.

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

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

We have adjusted the 10% tree cover requirements to accommodate various constraints such as those tenant farmers who will be unable to plant trees due to the conditions of their tenancy agreement. Where additional trees are to be planted, we continue to explore where they can be integrated in a way they become an asset to the farm such as through shelterbelts and agro-forestry. In this way the trees can provide valuable shade and shelter to livestock during our increasingly erratic weather, but does not result in the loss of large areas of pasture.

The ADAS evidence referred to in the petition reflects the impacts of an earlier version of the scheme, not the version included in the consultation which closed in March this year. This economic assessment was an important piece of work which helped inform our consultation. It helped identify the potential risks of the scheme, such as a potential drop in agricultural output which we are addressing. For example, the assessment assumed grazing restrictions on woodland and habitat, which we now propose to remove.

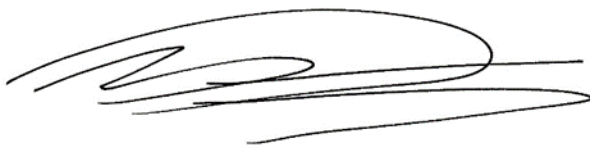
No final decisions have been made on scheme design. I [announced on 3 May](#) I was listening to the concerns of the industry and have since established a Ministerial Roundtable to work directly with key stakeholders to review the critical steps leading to the development of a revised Scheme. I further [announced on 14 May](#) I had moved the start of the SFS from 2025 to 2026 in order to work with the industry to ensure we develop a Scheme that supports a sustainable and resilient agricultural industry in Wales.

We published the [Welsh Government response](#) to the latest consultation in July, in which we reaffirmed the work with stakeholders on the Ministerial Roundtable to refine the scheme design. A good example of this productive partnership with the Ministerial Roundtable is the [announcement on 23 July](#) to update the industry on the proposal to include management of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in the Universal Baseline Payment. This will recognise farmers' efforts in managing these areas, for all our benefits and ensure these sites are integrated within wider farm management, balancing food production and actions that improve the prospects of nature and freshwater habitats.

To reiterate, Welsh Ministers will not be making any decisions on the SFS scheme design until this period of engagement with the Ministerial Roundtable is complete. I am expecting to provide an update on the progress made to Plenary this term.

I would be pleased to provide any further information required by the Petitions Committee.

Yours sincerely,



**Huw Irranca-Davies AS/MS**

Y Dirprwy Brif Weinidog ac Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Newid Hinsawdd  
a Materion Gwledig

Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs

# P-06-1473 Reduce Members of the Senedd's expenses bill

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 14 Hydref 2024  
Petitions Committee | 14 October 2024

Reference: SR24/9547-17

**Petition Number:** P-06-1473

**Petition title:** Reduce Members of the Senedd's expenses bill

**Text of petition:** With the current financial situation faced by every family in Wales, I propose that as being a Member of the Senedd is their job, expenses claimed by Members of the Senedd should exclude expenses that every other household in Wales faces, so no more paying utility bills, council tax, rent or home improvements. Travelling expenses should only be to the value of the equivalent cost on public transport and any hotel stays should be paid at Travelodge rates.



# 1. Background

## 1.1. Members expenses and allowances

The allowances Members are able to claim, including expenses for travel, accommodation and subsistence, are set out in the Determination. The Determination is set by the Independent Remuneration Board of the Senedd. The Determination sets out the details of what expenses Senedd Members can claim, the maximum levels that can be claimed for different expenses and general rules and principles Members must follow when making any expense claims. The Determination is reviewed on at least an annual basis and can be subject to further periodic reviews by the Independent Remuneration Board.

## 1.2. The Independent Remuneration Board

The Independent Remuneration Board of the Senedd is an independent body responsible for setting the salaries of Members as well as their other allowances such as staffing, travel and office costs.

The board was set up following an independent review of all aspects of financial support available to Senedd Members in 2008. It made 108 recommendations including that an independent body should be set up to make determinations about the levels of financial support to Senedd Members.

In 2010, the National Assembly for Wales (Remuneration) Measure 2010 was passed which established the Independent Remuneration Board.

The Board is made up of a Chair and four Board members who are appointed by the Senedd Commission for a term of five years.

The Board publishes its Determinations following consultation with those likely affected by it. The Board's website sets out how the views of the public are taken into account in its work. It states that all its proposals are published and the Board 'will consider all responses before agreeing the way forward'. It provides details on how members of the public can contact the Board.

The Board is required to act in an open and transparent manner and to publish annual reports on its activities which its must lay before the Senedd. The annual reports, Board meetings, agendas and further information about its operation are available on its website.

In addition to setting the Determination on Members pay and expenses it also undertakes thematic reviews of the financial support provided to Senedd Members.

## 2. Welsh Parliament action

The Senedd Commission is responsible for administering and paying to Senedd Members allowances and expenses in accordance with the Determination set by the Independent Remuneration Board. It is required by the Government of Wales Act 2006 to 'give effect' to any determination made by the Board.

Claims for allowances made by Members from 2008 onwards are published online on the Allowance Publication System.

Senedd Members are required to abide by a Code of Conduct. In relation to expenses and allowances, the Code states that:

- Rule 8: Members must comply with the rules made from time to time by the Clerk and the Chief Executive of the Senedd on the use of resources provided to Members by the Senedd Commission;
- Rule 9: Members must not misuse payments, allowances or resources made available to them under a determination of the Independent Remuneration Board of the Senedd.

Any complaints of alleged breaches to the Code are investigated by the Senedd Commissioner for Standards and subsequently the Senedd's Committee on Standards.

Responding to questions about Senedd Members allowances and expenses in Plenary on 22 May 2024, Hefin David MS, Senedd Commissioner for budget and governance stated:

The Senedd draft budget contains an amount set for issues of Members' expenses that the remuneration board has requested us to set aside. The good news for you is that most Members don't claim the maximum expenses to which they're entitled. I think it's worth us broadcasting that loudly: Members don't claim the maximum expenses to which they're entitled. And that gives us quite a lot of headroom to make up for contingencies.....

### 3. Welsh Government action

Responsibility for Senedd Members pay, allowances and expenses rests with the Senedd Commission and not the Welsh Government. However, costs incurred by Senedd Members in a role as a Welsh Government Minister for ministerial functions on behalf of the Government such as ministerial visits will be paid for by the Welsh Government.

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

# Agenda Item 3.1

## **P-06-1291 Hold an enquiry into the corporate takeover of the veterinary profession in Wales**

This petition was submitted by Dr Linda Evelyn Joyce-Jones, having collected a total of 308 signatures.

### **Text of Petition:**

In 1999 legislation was changed by the UK Government which allowed veterinary practices to be owned not just by qualified veterinary surgeons. This paved the way for private equity stakeholder corporates to buy into this market. These profit driven organisations have changed the profession so that it is barely recognisable. In many parts of Wales, it is virtually impossible to find an independently run veterinary practice. The corporate buyout now extends to out of hours provision, referral practices as well as general practice. The corporates also own laboratories, drug companies, pet crematorium as well as shares in many pets' food companies. Such a monopoly makes the few remaining independently run practices presence virtually untenable. From vet school to recruitment through to practice the corporates have the advantage. Set in this context their influence on bodies such as the RCVS and BVA is predicable.

### **Additional Information:**

For those of us with companion animals this monopoly has had devastating consequences. From lack of choice in finding an independent practice, seeing the same Veterinary Surgeon for continuity of care through to cost. But most of all clinical decisions being made with the policies of the corporate's taking centre stage.

My experience with My Cat Rosa sadly means I will always mistrust some within the profession. Companion animals are part of people's families. Covid, the isolation and mental health issues have made these relationships even more precious.

I dread to think (but have been informed) how the animal rescue sector in Wales copes. Because they must deal with some of the most abused and clinically challenged animals who have significant and often complex medical needs.

Despite numerous petitions to the UK Government, Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs etc have failed to take any action whatsoever. Cymru has led the way before on animals and their welfare, so we ask our Senedd to do so again.

**Senedd Constituency and Region**

- Ynys Môn
- North Wales

Jack Sargeant MS  
Welsh Parliament  
Cardiff Bay  
Cardiff  
CF99 1SN

From: Martin Coleman  
*CMA Panel Chair*

Telephone: 020 3738 6000

Our ref: MP001288

19 August 2024

Dear Mr Sargeant

Thank you for your letter dated 17 July. Thank you also for highlighting the work carried out by Dr Linda Evelyn Joyce-Jones and the Petitions Committee.

We have followed the work of the Petitions Committee with interest, and we will take the evidence gathered by the Committee into consideration. We will keep you and the Committee updated as we progress.

We appreciate Dr Joyce-Jones' continued engagement with our work and are pleased that she was able to join us at a roundtable event that we held recently in Swansea.

The event was also attended by a number of veterinary surgeons working in independently owned clinics in Wales, and representatives from the office of the Chief Veterinary Officer for Wales and the British Veterinary Union. We discussed a number of key issues including:

- Challenges for the sector focused on independent vets / barriers to entry
- Contextualised care
- Trends in the industry - eg humanisation of pets
- Veterinary medicines
- Regulation of the sector

and we welcomed Dr Joyce-Jones' helpful input to these discussions.

We recently published our [Issues Statement](#) which sets out the particular issues under consideration and our intended approach. We are taking into account the changing structure of the market and the impact of different business models in the sector, including those adopted by large vertically integrated groups. We are continuing our evidence gathering as we progress our wide-ranging investigation. Dr Joyce-Jones can continue to follow the progress of our investigation via our case page.

Best regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M A Coleman', is displayed on a light-colored, textured background.

**Martin Coleman**

*CMA Panel Chair*

[Martin.Coleman@cma.gov.uk](mailto:Martin.Coleman@cma.gov.uk)

# Uncovering the Impact of Corporate Takeovers on Veterinary Practices: A Closer Look at Rising Fees and Animal Welfare

In recent years, a concerning trend has emerged within the veterinary industry - the corporate takeover of veterinary practices. The gradual shift towards prioritizing wealth over health has catalysed a significant rise in vet fees not only in the UK but also around the world. Who are these corporate entities that are rapidly acquiring independent vet practices, and what implications does this hold for animal welfare? This is what an enquiry into the corporate take over of the veterinary professional in Wales would aim to discover and highlight why we need one in place.

The landscape of veterinary care is evolving, with small independent practices being gradually replaced by corporate giants seeking to monopolize the industry. The cosy, trustworthy, familiar, usually family-run vet clinics that once stood as pillars in communities are now being swallowed up by faceless entities driven by profit margins. While from a business perspective this consolidation may seem lucrative, the repercussions for animal health and welfare are dire. This is not a tech giant charging hundreds for a new brand of phone in which customers can opt out of buying and just purchase a cheaper alternative. This has become a monopoly on lives. We have known cats survive a road traffic accident and be taken to a vet by drivers, which is exactly what we ask for and expect as part of being part of a morally sound society, just to be tragically euthanised with simple cuts and bruises because owners could not afford to stump up huge amounts of money in an instant.

The consolidators, often backed by substantial financial resources, are strategically acquiring independent vet practices to expand their reach and maximize profits. These corporations operate with an efficiency-driven mindset, aiming to streamline operations and prioritize revenue generation. However, this drive for financial gain often comes at the cost of compromising the quality of care provided to our beloved animal companions.

In the veterinary industry, corporates refer to large companies or consolidators that acquire independent veterinary practices for strategic purposes. The six large corporate groups in the UK are CVS, IVC, Linnaeus, Medivet, Pets at Home and VetPartners, and we would urge the Welsh Government to open an investigation of their own into the effect this is having on sentient beings lives across the nation.

As we spend more on our cats, dogs and other precious beloved family members, the veterinary industry has become attractive targets for big corporations, and pet

owners are seeing higher bills and declining care as a result. Veterinarians and their employees tend to have comparatively low salaries compared to human doctors and nurses. In addition, pet ownership has boomed in recent years, with pet owners willing to spend whatever it takes to keep their beloved companions healthy. To put into context how much we spend on our pets each year in the UK, the Office for National Statistics revealed there has been a 270% increase from 2005 to 2021. The corporates see these rising figures, and they want in. With profit solely on the minds of these big organisations, animal welfare, as well as the welfare of the people who went into the industry wanting to help animals, has dwindled significantly over the last few years. The veterinary sector has the highest suicide rate of any other profession which we urge you to note.

Issues have now been going on so long that we have an entire generation who no longer know the traditional, animal centric, veterinary practice that the older generations remember so fondly. In many areas across the UK now, corporate owned veterinary practices dominate, yet people tend not to notice because the practices keep their original name and even veterinary staff. People are no longer aware their vets are no longer free to advise on a course of treatment, closer external service (such as pet crematorium or laboratory), or the most cost-effective avenue for the patient. They have no idea their vets are working to maximise profit at the expense of their sick, injured or, tragically, dying animal. The entire face of the veterinary industry has changed right before our eyes and we are running out of time to put the breaks on and turn it back to animal welfare.

It is not just the veterinary practices themselves they now pull the strings of, the corporates have now bought into out of hours services', often creating an expensive monopoly in most areas, pet crematoriums, laboratories, pet insurance...even the pet food itself! Let's start with the out of hours service, something we see our supporters often needing due to the untimely nature of road accidents and the time periods these accidents statistically fall into. Even without treatment, an out of hours consultation can cost from £200 upwards before your animal has been taken out of the carrier! Vets Now is the largest out of hours service who operate as part of the IVC (Independent Vet Care) Group, which is operated and controlled by a board led by CEO Mark Ross. While we pay excruciating amounts of money for out of hours services, usually in a bid to save the lives of animals in emergency situations, IVC reported gross profits of £953 million in the 2022 financial year, while its revenues jumped from £1.31 billion in 2020 to £2.84 billion last year. Sadly, some of the Vets Now services are so busy currently, animals are being referred miles away to other Vets Now theatres, regardless of there potentially being independent vets closer that are also operating 24 hours. As we heard at a recent Welsh Government presentation was the case for one sick little dog. A 7-month-old bulldog who was having seizures, prompting his family to phone their vets at 2am. They were advised by recorded message that only Vets Now were open, but they would not take the dog and referred him to another of their out of hours practices 2 hours away. Tragically, this young dog died in the car enroute.

The corporate's buying power is now so great that the independent veterinary services have been left on their knees, often being pressured to sell up to the corporates as they just cannot compete. With such great buying power, the external companies are also being held to ransom. The more you can purchase, the more cheaply things become in large quantities. The things the corporates are purchasing

in bulk, ultimately creating discounts for themselves, is things such as pharmaceutical products, waste disposal, cremation services, equipment, even services we wouldn't necessarily think of such as direct debit suppliers. Having such big buying power, and many external companies also working on the basis of wealth before health, the corporates are now the preferred buyers on their lists. All the costs they save are not passed down to the customer, us the pet owner, and they also cause independents to have no other option but to increase their costs too. In essence, they have created a monopoly which we, the pet owner, have no option but to use/pay and animals are suffering as a result, even more so now in the middle of this cost-of-living crisis.

The pet food industry has also not escaped the corporates grasp, with that rapidly increasing market being a key target of growth for them. Heavily backed by the corporates are big names most people will be familiar with, like Nestle and Mars. Pet health is now the candy company Mars' biggest financial part of their portfolio, and they have begun their own training academies also. Their take over has resulted in a reduction in choice for consumers.

The representative organisations of the industry are the British Veterinary Association (BVA) and the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS). The British Veterinary Nurse Association receive most of their membership fees from the corporates, and the BVA itself enjoy financial perks and sponsorship from the Mars group and the corporates themselves, leaving many to fear their influence.

As corporate entities acquire more and more vet practices, a troubling pattern emerges - a monopoly that restricts choice and hinders personalized care. Pet owners are increasingly finding themselves limited to a handful of corporate-run clinics, where the focus shifts from individualized treatment to standardized protocols aimed at increasing throughput. This shift towards standardized practices can have detrimental effects on animal health. Conditions that require careful and tailored attention may be overlooked in favour of cost-effective, one-size-fits-all solutions. Furthermore, the pressure to meet profit targets can incentivize practices to upsell unnecessary services or procedures, potentially putting the well-being of animals at risk.

The most distressing aspect of this corporate takeover is the decline in animal welfare standards. With profit margins taking centre stage, the compassionate ethos that drove many independent veterinarians is being overshadowed by financial considerations. The once warm and personalized care that pets received from their local vet is being replaced by impersonal, profit-oriented interactions. We do not intend that to sound like vet bashing either. Many vets are leaving the industry because it is "not what we thought it would be". As the corporate footprint expands, the focus shifts away from the well-being of animals towards bottom-line figures. This shift not only undermines the fundamental values of veterinary care but also jeopardizes the health and happiness of our furry companions.

The corporate takeover of vet practices represents a significant paradigm shift in the veterinary industry, where financial interests often supersede health considerations. While the rise in vet fees can be attributed in part to increasing operational costs, the

underlying issue lies in the prioritization of profit over compassionate care. The health of our furry friends should always take precedence over profit margins and this is exactly why this petition needs to see a positive outcome so the issue can be investigated further and in greater depth.

Mandy, Tiya and Carlie

CatsMatter

## Written submission to the Senedd Cymru Petitions Committee (P-06-1291: Hold an enquiry into the corporate takeover of the veterinary profession in Wales)

**Respondents:** Dr David Reader\* and Dr Scott Summers†

**Date:** 9 October 2024

We welcome the opportunity to make this submission ahead of the Petitions Committee’s next scheduled discussion of Petition P-06-1291 on 14 October 2024, and wish to convey our appreciation for the valuable work the Committee has undertaken to date on this issue. We have read, with interest, the information the Committee has received via evidence sessions and written submissions from a range of stakeholders. These contributions raise salient issues regarding the potential impact of corporate ownership of veterinary services, in addition to shining a light on broader concerns within the profession and adjacent industries/sectors. We note the petition itself pre-empts a number of preliminary concerns that have since been raised by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) as part of its investigation into the UK market for veterinary services for household pets. We consider the petition and the work of the Committee to be an important complement to the CMA’s investigation, especially given certain vulnerabilities faced by pet owners in Cymru, which may fall outside of the scope of the CMA’s current focus.

Our interest in this area originates from the operative term in the title of this petition: ‘corporate takeovers’. As has been noted in various sources, including research by the Senedd accompanying this petition,<sup>1</sup> the veterinary services market in the UK has borne witness to notable structural change over the past decade, driven by the acquisition of a significant number of independent service providers by a select few corporate entities. We note, in particular, an apparent strategy of ‘industry roll-up’—adopted by some corporate entities—whereby a corporate has succeeded in obtaining a position of potential market dominance in a particular region via the acquisition of multiple independent providers in a geographic

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\* Senior Lecturer in Competition Law, School of Law, University of Glasgow; ✉: [david.reader@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:david.reader@glasgow.ac.uk).

† Associate Professor in Business Law, Norwich Business School and Centre for Competition Policy, University of East Anglia; ✉: [s.summers@uea.ac.uk](mailto:s.summers@uea.ac.uk). Views expressed are the authors’ own and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliate organisations.

<sup>1</sup> Senedd Cymru, [Research Petition Briefing P-06-1291](#) (Ref: SR22/3596-4, 17 October 2022), 2.

radius.<sup>2</sup> Prior to launching its market investigation, the CMA deemed it necessary to reverse several of these roll-up acquisitions on the basis of competition concerns, most notably potential risks associated with the exercise of unilateral power in markets that are more concentrated than they once were.<sup>3</sup> While the CMA has indicated its intentions to subject acquisitions in the veterinary services market to closer scrutiny going forward,<sup>4</sup> the nature of roll-up acquisitions—which have a heightened tendency to fly “below the radar” of merger control thresholds—means there has likely been a degree of underenforcement of these acquisitions in jurisdictions across the world.

In this context, where localised market concentration already appears entrenched, the function of market investigations—and enquiries of the nature proposed by the petition—become even more pivotal. As with the CMA, our research is ongoing, and we are not yet in a position to comment on the precise nature of any failures within the market, nor the degree to which—if any—market concentration, (inhibited) market forces, and/or corporate ownership may be contributing to these failures.<sup>5</sup> We do, however, wish to highlight to the Committee an issue of particular concern to us, which we believe stands to be of nuanced importance to pet owners in Cymru. The early intuition to arise from our research is that certain categories of vulnerable consumers may be particularly exposed to—and/or stand to be disproportionately disadvantaged by—potential failures of the market.

We observe and foresee circumstances where vulnerable consumers—namely, those who are chronically sick, disabled, of pensionable age, on low incomes, and/or residing in rural areas—will struggle to engage with the market effectively and, in some cases, may be unable to access veterinary services at all. For example, vulnerable consumers stand to be disproportionately impacted by the closure of local veterinary practices (which we have observed to arise in the aftermath of several corporate roll-up strategies), particularly those pet owners who live in remote or isolated regions of the UK. While it is likely that the majority of pet owners are in a position to manage the *inconvenience* of local closures, vulnerable pet owners may not have the practical means or capabilities to travel further afield to access veterinary services.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> David Reader and Scott Summers, ‘[Paws for Thought: Putting UK vet acquisitions on a tightened leash](#)’ (2024) Jun-II, CPI Antitrust Chronicle.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid* 5-8.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid* 6, and Sarah Cardell (Chief Executive, CMA), [Remarks at the 2023 Annual Antitrust Enforcers Summit: Challenges in Merger Review Panel](#) (27 March 2023), from 1:05:04.

<sup>5</sup> Here, we refer to market failures in the broad sense, as market characteristics, external events, regulatory issues and/or conduct by market participants that result in sub-optimal outcomes for consumers.

<sup>6</sup> While anecdotal, one of the authors has learned of concerns for elderly pet owners, stemming from the recent closure of his local first opinion practice. As a result of the closure, a round trip of 2.4mi to the nearest vet has been extended to 10.2mi. A combination of issues—including limited options for public transport, and no public footpath permitting access between neighbouring towns—means private travel (e.g. by car or taxi) remains the only viable option in many cases.

Moreover, we have preliminary anecdotal evidence indicating that certain categories of vulnerable consumers are less likely to have access to private transport (or are less inclined/able to drive longer distances), meaning longer journeys—arising from the closure of local practices—may need to be made using public transport. This is impractical or unfeasible for many pet owners, especially where veterinary services are sought in emergency situations. The timing, reliability, and calling points of public transport in remote areas may render it unviable for owners seeking to take their pet to their nearest practice. The cost of public transport may also be prohibitive, as may the prospect of taking distressed or severely ill pets on to buses/trains/etc. Private taxi services may be considered as an alternative but, again, costs and other factors may limit this option for some vulnerable groups, especially if taxis can only be booked in advance (a trait of rural taxi operators), and a pet owner is faced with an emergency situation.

We anticipate that pet owners residing in rural areas of Cymru are particularly exposed to: (i) the consequences arising from the closure of local veterinary practices, and (ii) as a matter of associated concern, a ‘security of supply’ risk, where the insolvency of a single corporate entity calls into question the economic viability of most—if not all—veterinary practices in an entire geographic region. We invite the Committee to consider the pertinence of these risks to the devolved competences the Senedd possesses in relation to animal welfare, which may be compromised by highly-concentrated ownership in local markets.

We have made submissions to the CMA Inquiry Group, recommending the explicit consideration of regional variances in access to veterinary services across the UK, as well as probing the specific experience of vulnerable consumers when engaging with the market.<sup>7</sup> While we have confidence that the remit of the CMA’s investigation is capable of extending to the consideration of these issues,<sup>8</sup> the current Issues Statement is silent on the scope that will be afforded to particular categories of vulnerable consumers and to regional nuances. This, we feel, accentuates the importance of the petition before the Committee, which lays the foundations for a deeper-dive into the granular effects of market concentration and corporate ownership in this context, and its potential implications for the welfare of animals (including services provided by charitable bodies) and—to the extent it is possible under the Senedd’s devolved powers—vulnerable citizens.

We thank the Committee for its consideration of this submission, and welcome any requests for clarification or elaboration on the points we have raised.

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<sup>7</sup> David Reader and Scott Summers, ‘[Response to CMA market investigation into veterinary services for household pets: Issues Statement](#)’ (*Consultation response*, 30 July 2024), paras 1.1–1.6.

<sup>8</sup> In particular, we are hopeful that the CMA’s forthcoming consumer survey will gather valuable data to analyse these variations.

# Agenda Item 3.2

## **P-06-1334 Make the Senedd More Representative of the Welsh Population**

This petition was submitted by Seren Cole, having collected a total of 258 signatures.

### **Text of Petition:**

This petition is calling upon the Welsh Parliament to investigate the introduction of Gender and Ethnicity Quotas within its electoral systems and calls for more representation of those from a disabled background.

Furthermore, it requests what action has this Senedd and the previous five incarnations done to make the Senedd more reflective of Wales as a whole.

### **Additional Information:**

According to the Welsh Government's own statistics, 5.2% of Wales is of ethnic minority background, however, this number is not reflected in the current composition of the Senedd, a further 48.9% are women according to the ONS and over a 1 / 5 of the population self-identify as disabled.

However, this diverse makeup is not reflected in the Welsh Parliament.

Only 43% of those elected to the Senedd are women and only 3 members are from an ethnic minority background with little to no representation of those with a disability. Whilst there have been improvements in recent years, these numbers are still shockingly low and have led to vast parts of the Welsh population not having their voices heard.

We need representation in the Senedd, so all people's needs are met and understood by their government.

### **Senedd Constituency and Region**

- Bridgend
- South Wales West

# Agenda Item 3.3

## **P-06-1374 Bring Wales in line with England by allowing landowners 60 days tent and campervan camping a year**

This petition was submitted by Andrew Richard Walton, having collected a total of 430 signatures.

### **Text of Petition:**

During Covid Wales extended landowners' rights to allow tent and campervan/motor home camping from 28 days pa to 56. In 2022 it reverted to 28 days but a consultation was held around making 56 days law. A recent announcement by the Senedd put any permanent change on hold. As of July 2023 England has 60 days of permitted camping, putting Welsh landowners at a disadvantage. I urge the Senedd to look at the Town and Country Planning Order 2023 amendments and consider bringing them into Welsh law.

### **Additional Information:**

The new amendment passed in England in July 2023 allowing landowners 60 days of up to 50 tents and campervan/motor home camping per year, subject to some new regulations:

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2023/747/article/3/made>

The Senedd response that the consultation in Wales had concluded and that changes to the pop-up campsite rules would be looked at in a future update of the planning permitted rights rules:

<https://record.senedd.wales/WrittenQuestion/87749>

I urge that this review is held now, and tries to be as consistent as possible with the English amendments so as not to disadvantage Welsh landowners like myself who want to diversify the use of their land in order to maintain an income in these difficult times for everyone.

### **Senedd Constituency and Region**

- Ceredigion
- Mid and West Wales

**Rebecca Evans AS/MS**  
Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning  
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros yr Economi, Ynni a Chynllunio



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-06-1374  
Ein cyf/Our ref RE/10064/24

Chair - Petitions committee  
Senedd Cymru  
Cardiff Bay  
Cardiff  
CF99 1SN

23 September 2024

Dear Chair,

Thank you for your letter of 17 July regarding petition P-06-1374.

The Welsh Government is mindful of the desire of the camping sector to see the introduction of these permitted development rights. Officials are progressing work in this area, and we anticipate issuing the consultation paper on this and other changes to permitted development rights this autumn.

The proposed subordinate legislation will be subject to scrutiny by the Senedd, so taking account of these consultation processes, the start of the summer camping season 2025 will be the earliest any possible changes can be put in place.

Yours sincerely,

**Rebecca Evans AS/MS**  
Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning  
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros yr Economi, Ynni a Chynllunio

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

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay  
Caerdydd • Cardiff  
CF99 1SN

[Correspondence.Rebecca.Evans@gov.wales](mailto:Correspondence.Rebecca.Evans@gov.wales)  
[Gohebiaeth.Rebecca.Evans@llyw.cymru](mailto:Gohebiaeth.Rebecca.Evans@llyw.cymru)

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

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

**P-06-1374 Bring Wales in line with England by allowing landowners 60 days tent and campervan camping a year – Correspondence from the Petitioner to the Committee, 08 October 2024**

Good morning

Thank you for the extension to comment.

I have read the ministers letter and I am content that this is more progress than we have seen over the last 3 years if indeed the draft does go out to consultation in the autumn. I would welcome being notified when the draft proposals are available for comment please so that I can let those who supported my petition know as well and we can respond to the proposals.

I also note that any changes may not become law until the summer of 2025 which is far from ideal being half way through the camping season but I suggest that if businesses know the change is coming into law halfway through the season they can plan for this by using their regular 28 day permitted rights in the first half of the year and then the changes will come into force which will hopefully allow them further days within the year. But of course that will depend on what is in the draft and what comes out of the proposals.

But this is a very welcome step forward and I look forward to seeing the proposals.

Best wishes

Andrew

# Agenda Item 3.4

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

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

### **Text of Petition:**

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

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

### **Senedd Constituency and Region**

- Cardiff West
- South Wales Central



**Y Gwir Anrhydeddus Elin Jones AS**

Llywydd, Senedd Cymru

**Right Honourable Elin Jones MS**

Llywydd, Welsh Parliament

**Senedd Cymru**

Bae Caerdydd, Caerdydd, CF99 1SN

Llywydd@senedd.cymru

0300 200 6565

**Welsh Parliament**

Cardiff Bay, Cardiff, CF99 1SN

Llywydd@senedd.wales

0300 200 6565

Carolyn Thomas MS

Chair of the Petitions Committee

Welsh Parliament

Cardiff Bay

CF99 1SN

27 September 2024

Dear Carolyn,

**Ref: Letter from the Committee about Petition P-06-1433**

Thank you for your letter of 17 July. I am writing to provide clarity on the current position, as requested.

At the Commission meeting on 15 July, Commissioners considered the report of a review which had been undertaken at the Commission's request by one of the Commission's Independent Advisors. The purpose of this piece of work was to aid the Senedd Commission to develop a broadcasting protocol/policy which would provide clarity on the channels to be available on the Senedd's internal television system into the future.

The report set out that the policy should be:

- Transparent: the policy should be published on the intranet alongside a list of the available channels.
- Closely linked to the Commission's view of what best serves the professional needs of Members, their staff and Senedd staff. Channels and radio stations which offer news and current affairs are most likely to fall into this category. It is hard to see a case for the Senedd to offer a range of entertainment channels and music radio stations on its internal network.
- Politically impartial: it is essential that the Senedd Commission is, and is seen as, politically impartial and that decisions on which channels to include on the network are not thought to be taken on the basis of Members' political views. Adherence to an external regulatory standard of impartiality would provide assurance in this regard.

- Simple: a simple rule is easy to explain and easy to follow. A more complex rule risks tying the Commission up in lengthy consideration of which TV channels to include or remove, benefitting no-one.
- Cost effective: the Senedd Commission should minimise public expenditure on the inclusion of channels on its internal network and the operation of its policy in this regard.

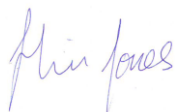
Commissioners received the information reported and accepted the policy approach recommended by the Independent Advisor.

The policy position adopted is that the primary purpose of the internal TV system in the Senedd is to provide broadcast feeds for the Siambr and Committee rooms. In addition, a number of television channels and radio stations are available. The television channels are those considered by the Commission to meet the professional needs of Members, their staff and Senedd staff and which are required by statute to provide comprehensive and authoritative coverage of news and current affairs in, and in the different parts of, the United Kingdom and from around the world. In addition, a number of radio stations which principally provide authoritative news coverage are also included on the internal network.

This will mean that the Senedd Commission's Triple Play system will include only those channels which have public service obligations: BBC, ITV, Channel 4, Channel 5 and S4C. Commissioners agreed one addition to this provision, which was to include Sky News as an additional channel to ensure a plurality of news programmes.

A wide range of other television channels and radio systems can be accessed online using the Senedd IT network.

Yours sincerely,



The Rt. Hon. Elin Jones MS

Llywydd

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg / We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English

# Agenda Item 3.5

## **P-06-1442 Extend Universal Free School Meals to secondary schools**

This petition was submitted by Unite Community Cardiff and Area Branch, having collected a total of 254 signatures.

### **Text of Petition:**

We call for:

Implementing Universal Free School Meals in secondary schools, for all pupils regardless of dietary requirements for allergic, religious, or personal reasons.

Ensuring as far as possible that these Free School Meals are ethically and sustainably sourced, including protecting workers' rights in the supply chain.

Encouraging in all schools, high-quality in-house kitchens making fresh food whenever possible, and when not possible that providers use fresh and local produce.

### **Additional Information:**

As part of the Co-operation Agreement between the Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru in 2021, Universal Free School Meals were rolled out in primary schools. This has fed tens of thousands of young children many of whom are in poverty, and massively reduced the stigma behind taking these meals. Feeding children must always be a political priority.

It's time for this to go ahead. According to Child Poverty Action Group, 19% of children in poverty still don't have access to Free School Meals due to the means testing in secondary schools, that's approximately 25,000. Not only are they at risk of going hungry, but the Trussell Trust estimate 20% of adults in Wales experience food insecurity.

Additionally we believe that Universal Free School Meals can and must be used to educate, including teaching home economics in Wales especially

promoting value for money, healthy diets, with local, ethical, and sustainable sourcing as part of the Curriculum for Wales.

### **Senedd Constituency and Region**

- Cardiff West
- South Wales Central

**P-06-1442 Extend Universal Free School Meals to secondary schools -  
Correspondence from St Joseph's Catholic & Anglican School and TCC  
Youth in Action Group, 03 October 2024**

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Senedd Committee  
Welsh Parliament  
Cardiff Bay  
Cardiff  
CF99 1SN

Dear Members of the Senedd Committee,

**Re: Support for the No Hungry Learners Campaign**

We, the students of St Joseph's Catholic & Anglican School, are writing to you as part of the TCC (Trefnu Cymunedol Cymru / Together Creating Communities) Youth in Action group to express our deep concern about the issue of school meal debt and its impact on young learners in Wales. Our campaign, #NoHungryLearners, aims to alleviate the burden of school meal debt and ensure that all children have access to adequate food, which is essential for their physical, mental, and academic development.

Article 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) states that children and young people should be able to live in a way that helps them reach their full potential. This includes having access to adequate food and housing. Unfortunately, many students in our community are struggling with school meal debt, which not only affects their nutrition but also their ability to focus and succeed in their studies.

Our campaign has been primarily focused in Wrexham, but we believe this issue needs to be addressed across the whole of Wales. Throughout 2023, we have been actively working on this campaign. We have met with our Headteacher, Mr. Wilkinson, as well as local representatives including Ken Skates MS, Lesley Griffiths MS, and Education Lead for Wrexham, Cllr Phil Wynne, to discuss the issues and potential solutions. Our efforts were also highlighted at the National Child Poverty Summit in Swansea, where we presented our campaign and its goals to a wide audience, including the Children's Commissioner for Wales, Rocio Cifuentes.

We believe that by addressing school meal debt, we can remove a significant barrier to education and help all children thrive academically. We urge the Senedd Committee to support our campaign and take action to ensure that no child in Wales goes hungry at school.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to your support in making a positive change for the children of Wales.

Yours sincerely,

[Your Name]

On behalf of the students of St Joseph's Catholic & Anglican School and TCC Youth in Action Group

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## Statement of Evidence: No Hungry Learners Campaign

**Campaign Overview:** The TCC (Trefnu Cymunedol Cymru / Together Creating Communities) Youth in Action group, comprising students from St Joseph's Catholic & Anglican School in Wrexham, launched the #NoHungryLearners campaign to address the issue of school meal debt and its impact on students' well-being and academic performance.

### Key Findings:

- **Survey Results:** A survey conducted within the school revealed alarming statistics:
  - 30% of students reported being refused a meal due to debt on their account.
  - 30% of students had to skip a meal at school due to lack of money.
  - 73% of students who were refused a meal were informed about their debt in front of their peers, causing unnecessary shame and stress<sup>1</sup>.

### Campaign Activities:

- **Meetings and Advocacy:** The youth group met with key stakeholders, including:
  - Mr. Wilkinson, Headteacher of St Joseph's.
  - Ken Skates MS and Lesley Griffiths MS.
  - Cllr Phil Wynne, Education Lead for Wrexham.
  - Rocio Cifuentes, Children's Commissioner for Wales<sup>21</sup>.
- **National Child Poverty Summit:** The campaign was presented at the National Child Poverty Summit in Swansea, highlighting the issue to a broad audience of community and charity groups, as well as policymakers<sup>2</sup>.

### Impact and Progress:

- **Policy Changes:** Following discussions with the Headteacher, measures were implemented to ensure that students are discreetly offered a meal even if their account is in debt, in line with council policy<sup>1</sup>.

- **Community Engagement:** [The campaign has garnered support from local politicians and community organizations, enhancing its reach and impact<sup>1</sup>.](#)

#### **Supporting Materials:**

- **Campaign Video:** [A video summarizing the campaign's goals and activities was created and presented at various events<sup>2</sup>.](#)
- **Attachments:** This statement includes a detailed letter and the campaign video for further reference.

#### **Future Steps:**

- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Continued efforts to monitor the implementation of policies and support students facing meal debt.
- **Expansion:** Plans to extend the campaign's reach across Wales, advocating for systemic changes to eliminate school meal debt and ensure no child goes hungry at school.

**Request for Support:** We urge the Senedd Committee to support the #NoHungryLearners campaign and take necessary actions to address school meal debt across Wales. Ensuring that all children have access to adequate food is crucial for their academic success and overall well-being.

# Agenda Item 3.6

## **P-06-1455 Protect the junior departments of the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama from closure**

This petition was submitted by Rebecca Totterdell, having collected a total of 10,560 signatures.

### **Text of Petition:**

The Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama has provided a junior music and acting programme to students aged from 4 to 18 for the past 25 years. The school currently sees around 300 talented young people through its doors each weekend, and many of those are on bursaries. It is the only such provision in Wales.

Due to financial difficulties the RWCMD is being forced to consult on closing the Young Acting and Young Music programmes at the end of this term..

### **Additional details:**

If the closure goes ahead, the RWCMD will be the only Royal School of Music without a junior department.

### **Senedd Constituency and Region**

- Cardiff North
- South Wales Central

**P-06-1455 Protect the junior departments of the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama from closure - Correspondence from the Petitioner, 08 October 2024**

Dear Petitions Committee

Apologies for my slow response to your email regarding the debate on my petition to protect the junior departments of the RWCMD. The reason I missed your previous email is that I have been working flat out on the creation of a replacement school for the junior department. Some of the now redundant teachers and banded together with me to start a cooperative during the summer break, and we were soon approached by Emma Archer of Cardiff music service and Mari Pritchard of the National Music Service to see if they could work in partnership with us. We agreed, and together we have set up the Young Musicians Academi, which has now been running at Stanwell School in Penarth each Saturday for the past three weeks. The effort it has taken to put this together in the incredibly short time the RWCMD allowed us has been enormous. But I hope this proves to them that there is a need to provide this service for the children of Wales and that they see the huge mistake they have made in rejecting the future of our country's arts talent.

Indeed, the response to this from RWCMD has been true to form. I contacted them to ask for a meeting to enable me to request basic assistance such as to see if they would inform ex students about the new provision, or perhaps offer us use of their hall for a fundraising concert for the Academi as a courtesy. The response I received said they would be in touch with me when the necessary staff returned from their summer breaks. They still have not been in touch, despite staff having returned to work.

The funding is still a huge issue for us at the Academi. Studying music at a high level requires a lot of contact time between teachers and students, and the experienced staff teaching these students do deserve to be paid a fair wage. We have set up a fundraising campaign and are applying for external support for the Academi, but I maintain that the talented young musicians of Wales deserve the same funding opportunities as their English and Scottish counterparts. We have already lost numerous children from the arts to this catastrophe, and will continue to do so if we cannot assist those who are on lower incomes with bursaries.

I would ask the Welsh government to consider matching the National Music and Dance Scheme which offers financial support to talented young musicians attending specialist music schools in England, if they want to protect the future talent of their nation.

Yours sincerely

Rebecca Totterdell

# Agenda Item 3.7

## P-06-1392 Reform of the additional learning needs Code of Wales 2021

This petition was submitted by Victoria Anne Lightbown, having collected a total of 15,160 signatures.

### **Text of Petition:**

Despite only a couple of years into the changes and promises of earlier and better support for children and young people with ALN, more and more ALN pupils are being missed in Wales. There are also issues with consistency and accountability.

There is still a large focus on Universal Provisions as opposed to the holistic approach of Person Centred IDPs for ALN pupils. Pupils with mental health / physical disabilities should have equal access to support and a quality education.

### **Additional Information:**

Children under the age of 5 years are being denied support based on an 'assumption' that they will simply 'catch up' by the time they reach statutory school age. When IDPs are produced schools are able to "interpret" what is required without adequate accountability and contact of specialist health therapists for guidance. We call for the rights of all children under the UN Convention of Disabled People to be respected by ensuring:

- A universal code of practice to provide an inclusive quality education for all ALN pupils.
- Educational settings providing properly resourced provisions and trained staff that reach a quality assured standard of education to make the system fair, reliable and able to meet ever increasing demand.
- Education and health need to work more closely together.
- Compulsory specialist training and support for teachers and their staff.

### **Senedd Constituency and Region**

- Clwyd West
- North Wales



Eich cyf/Your ref P-06-1392  
Ein cyf/Our ref LN/05579/24

Chair - Petitions committee  
Senedd Cymru  
Cardiff Bay  
Cardiff  
CF99 1SN

19 August 2024

Dear Chair

### **Reform of the additional learning needs Code of Wales 2021.**

Thank you for your letter dated 26 June 2024 regarding the petition: Reform of the additional learning needs code of Wales 2021.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the ALN Reform Wales group and Senedd members for their support and commitment to collaborate with Welsh Government officials to ensure the ambitions of ALN reform are realised.

I want to reiterate I am fully committed to improving the ALN system and creating an inclusive education where all learners' needs are listened to, responded to and learners are supported to participate fully in education.

Evidence is telling us that the ALN system is not operating effectively in some areas. We are also hearing about the growing challenges facing the system. It is clear concerted action is needed, including a period of review, designing and testing proposals to ensure we deliver for children, young people, and their families.

The two Children and Young People Education (CYPE) committee reports (*'The Implementation of education reforms'* and *'Do disabled children and young people have equal access to education'*) published in July set out recommendations that Welsh Government are aware of and are in the process of setting out action to remedy. The recommendations are for the Welsh Government to consider as part of a wider review, and I will share our response to the report with the Petitions Committee.

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

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

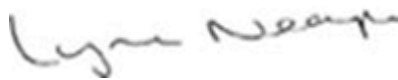
I have listened to parental groups and acknowledge their concerns and absolutely recognise that being heard is part of the solution. This is a complex, and highly charged area of government policy, and an important aspect of this work will be to ensure parents and learners are at the heart of the ALN process. We will continue to listen and collaborate with parents to ensure they have the support, guidance and information they need. My officials have already reached out to the ALN reform group Wales, and other parental and third sector groups.

As you are aware I have set out my commitment to improve implementation and ensure the legal framework is clearly understood, and what steps we can take in the short term to support the sector to identify and meet the needs of learners. I am pleased to say that work has already begun.

This includes strengthening monitoring of key delivery partners, which is developing mutual understanding of clarity of expectations as set out in the act and code. We continue an active dialogue with Estyn, and I met with them this month to understand findings from inspection activities and progress and insights so far as part of the second ALN thematic review.

I'd like to thank Senedd Members for surfacing and contributing important evidence, for allowing officials the space to focus on the work that is needed to move at pace, and to reassure families that concerns are being heard and progress is being made. I will be keeping the Senedd fully updated on progress and will seek to respond to concerns raised by the ALN Reform Group Wales.

Yours sincerely



**Lynne Neagle AS/MS**  
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg  
Cabinet Secretary for Education

# Agenda Item 3.8

## **P-06-1341 Accessible guidance for parents and schools to help develop plans to support children with additional learning needs**

This petition was submitted by Zoe Beasley, having collected a total of 347 signatures.

### **Text of Petition:**

There are around 1,400 children and young people with type 1 diabetes in Wales. Children living with such disabilities need support in school to manage their condition and ensure they reach their full potential. As a mother, I'm one of many parents whose type 1 diabetic children don't receive the support they need because of a lack of understanding of funding to support the care required in school. I and others have experienced a deficiency of care support, and I am seeking to change this.

### **Additional Information:**

I'm frustrated with the lack of access for dedicated support; without it, type 1 diabetes can have life-threatening complications. The Equality Act 2010 legally defines children with diabetes as people living with a disability. Education Institutions such as schools must ensure that students living with diabetes are not disadvantaged.

No matter how confident the child is, children are not able to be trained on insulin pumps until the age of eleven, and with children being diagnosed from birth onwards, support between Nursery to Primary School is even more essential to help manage their diabetes.

Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) 2018 Act is a welcomed step; however, it is only now being implemented. The new legislation has brought in a statutory measure called Individual Development Plans to support students by developing a supportive framework to ensure that their academic, physical, and support needs are met.

I'm asking our Government to review current guidance for the new ALN legislation to increase school/Local Authority participation by creating accessible format guides and support that reduces the barrier to access.

### **Senedd Constituency and Region**

- Cardiff South and Penarth
- South Wales Central

# Agenda Item 3.9

## **P-06-1342 Fund more specialist school places and staff for children with additional learning needs in Wales**

This petition was submitted by Stevie Pyne, having collected a total of 1,429 signatures.

### **Text of Petition:**

To look at funding provided for specialist provisions in Wales for children with additional needs it's far from acceptable children with a high level of need being forced to stay in a mainstream environment due to spaces in schools and schools being underfunded and understaffed!

### **Additional Information:**

Specialist schools and unit base provisions throughout Wales are already full to capacity and the ones who aren't yet will not be far behind. Schools are understaffed, staff are overworked already, ALN children are unable to receive the education and support they so rightfully deserve from the start, in many cases early intervention is extremely important and these chances are being taken away from children due to the crisis we are facing within our education system.

### **Senedd Constituency and Region**

- Cynon Valley
- South Wales Central

# Agenda Item 3.10

## **P-06-1347 Review Additional Learning Needs policies & make compulsory to FULLY train all teachers and TAs in regulation techniques**

This petition was submitted by Clare Anna Mitchell, having collected a total of 6,353 signatures.

### **Text of Petition:**

A review of the ALN policies in schools and a huge increase in support for the 40% of children who are struggling daily is needed. They need to be taught regulation techniques from early years, creating happier, less disruptive classrooms & providing a tool box to take through life. Long term, decreasing mental health issues, drug and alcohol abuse and lowering crime rates.

There are very few Welsh language Specialist Training Facilities discriminating against a right to Welsh medium education.

### **Additional Information:**

1. Teacher training in university should have a significant focus on ALN to ensure the ALNET act can be effectively rolled out. 40% of learners have some form of ALN. This should be compulsory and not optional! ALN strategies help all learners.

2. Neurodiversity Awareness campaign – ND affects at least 1 in 5 people in Wales. Awareness of ND and how it presents and affects people should be commonly understood to ensure an inclusive Wales.

3. Teaching Assistants support – TA's need to be valued, trained and paid properly

4. Funding for a ND specialist teacher and TA in each LA to support, guide and train staff in school.

5. Welsh medium provision for ALN is not as well supported as in English medium schools and this is not giving equality or inclusivity for welsh learners.

6. 40–60% of pupils with General Learning Difficulties can now not be coded with the new ALNET code of Universal Provision.

7. Parent Support from trained staff who can sign post them to support for their child's needs.

### **Senedd Constituency and Region**

- Gower
- South Wales West

# Agenda Item 3.11

## **P-06-1406 Financial penalties for Local Education Authorities who do not comply with timeframes for ALN**

This petition was submitted by Victoria Anne Lightbown, having collected a total of 327 signatures.

### **Text of Petition:**

Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Reform Wales has identified significant failures by local education authorities when complying with the timeframes for

- 1) ALN determination
- 2) Finalising Individual Development Plans
- 3) Complying with tribunal orders

We believe local education authorities should be held accountable for these failings. We believe there should be financial penalties to the local education authority for these failings.

### **Senedd Constituency and Region**

- Clwyd West
- North Wales

Your ref: P-06-1474  
Our ref: CX24-154

Gareth Price  
Petitions Committee Clerk  
Senedd Cymru  
Cardiff Bay  
CF99 1SN

By email only: [petitions@senedd.wales](mailto:petitions@senedd.wales)

30 September 2024

Dear Gareth

## **Petition P-06-1474 Stop Natural Resources Wales closing Bwlch Nant yr Arian, Coed y Brenin and Ynyslas Visitor Centres**

Thank you for your letter of 16 September.

As the Petitions Committee will be aware, public funding is very tight, not only for NRW but also for other public sector bodies. NRW needs to make a minimum saving of £13 million over the next two years. As such, we are having to look across all of our remit and critically review what we can and must continue to do, what we stop, and what we slow or do differently to fulfil our Corporate Plan ambitions. We are having to make difficult decisions in order to achieve these savings.

While we fully recognise how well loved and regarded our visitor centres are, the truth is that NRW is not best placed to operate catering and retail facilities. We have acknowledged that if we are to support visitor access and maintain the sites for future use, the centres themselves need to be run by organisations that have the skills, knowledge and financial capacity to operate in the retail and catering sector.

In the Case for Change, we proposed that visitor centre sites remain open for recreation access, such as walking and biking, as they are currently. Services such as play areas, car parking and toilet provision will also remain available. The proposal is that we no longer operate catering and retail provision at visitor centres but that we will seek to identify and work with partners to run these services. Our visitor centre staff are not responsible for managing the land in and around the centres, so are not responsible for trail and access management.

We are currently reviewing the services we provide as part of our Case for Change process. This impacts all our services, not just visitor centres. Our consultation with Trade

Unions on the proposals has now closed, and we will review the information received during the consultation to determine if any adjustments are needed. The final proposals will be presented to the NRW Board for consideration in the autumn.

The outcome of the Case for Change will then be communicated to staff, and further information on impacted services will be shared with the public and stakeholders in due course. At that point, we will re-engage with local groups and potential partners about the next steps at each visitor centre site. These may be slightly different, as each site has bespoke needs that will need to be considered.

We have already been approached by multiple community groups and private enterprises that are interested in operating the visitor centres, and we are planning further public meetings in mid-November. Information about those meetings will be shared in due course.

It is very important to NRW that we do this responsibly and in the right way, and that we secure the future of the sites for maximum benefit in the long-term. It is a great opportunity to secure future investment in the sites, provide refreshed interest in the areas and promote the ongoing attractiveness of mid-Wales as a destination for visitors to Wales.

Yours sincerely



*pp. Sarah Jennings, Executive Director for Customer, Communications & Commercial*

**Clare Pillman**

**Prif Weithredwr, Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru  
Chief Executive, Natural Resources Wales**

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg a byddwn yn ymateb yn Gymraeg, heb i hynny arwain at oedi.  
Correspondence in Welsh is welcomed, and we will respond in Welsh without it leading to a delay.

# Agenda Item 4

By virtue of  
Regulation 21(1)(A) of the Local Authorities (Executive  
Arrangements) (Access to Information) (England)  
Regulations 2000.

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