



Cynulliad National
Cenedlaethol Assembly for
Cymru Wales

The Petitions Committee

Completion Report

**Summary of the Petitions Committee's consideration of
P-03-140 Foundation Phase**

November 2008

E-Petition Received

13 May 2008

Ruled Admissible

25 June 2008 (following collection of signatures)

Initial Consideration**23 July 2008**

The Committee gave initial consideration to the petition and agreed to:

- Invite the Enterprise and Learning Committee to consider the petition
- Invite the Finance Committee to consider the petition

(See Annex 1 for the relevant extract from the transcript of the meeting on 23 July 2008)

Further Consideration**20 November 2008**

The Committee considered the outcome of the Finance Committee's inquiry into the financial aspects of Foundation Phase funding, and agreed to close the petition as it could not progress it any further.

(See Annex 1 for the relevant extract from the transcript of the meeting on 20 November 2008)

Petitions Clerk**November 2008**

Annex 1

Extracts from transcripts of Petitions Committee meetings

23 July 2008

Alun Davies: The first new petition that we have is on the foundation phase. Members will have had an opportunity to read through this petition and to review the information that we have been provided with. Do Members have any proposals for actions that they would like us to take, as a committee, on this petition?

Michael German: Is the Enterprise and Learning Committee conducting a review of foundation phase funding? I believe that the Finance Committee, or the Enterprise and Learning Committee, is doing that.

Mr Sanchez: It has already reported.

Michael German: Fine, I just wanted some clarification on that.

Alun Davies: The Finance Committee undertook a review of the foundation phase policy in May and reported on 18 July. That report was on the funding of the foundation phase; it was not on policy relating to the foundation phase, which is beyond the remit of the Finance Committee. Are Members content that that report met some, or all, of the criteria or demands in this petition?

Michael German: The petition says:

'We ask the National Assembly for Wales to fully investigate the case for more funding.'

That surely takes an educational perspective. Should we ask the Enterprise and Learning Committee to look at the case for more funding, from an educational perspective as opposed to from a financial perspective?

Bethan Jenkins: The report notes that:

'The Committee recommends that the Welsh Assembly Government secures the finance necessary to ensure the optimum delivery of the Foundation Phase over the next 4 years.'

I would have thought that that would have been sufficient for the Minister to carry forth her investigations into the matter, as opposed to having another committee investigation on this issue.

Alun Davies: The Finance Committee has said that it will return to this issue in future years. Its report looks at the additional funding requirements. I understand what you are saying, Mike, about the educational demands driving additional funding—you are right to say that. The Finance Committee looked at the funding issues in some detail, although over a relatively short period of time. If you are saying that you want an additional inquiry that will take place before the Finance Committee's next inquiry—although we do not know when that will be—then so be it. However, we need to be careful that we do not ask committees to be in almost constant session, doing inquiries into similar issues.

Andrew R.T. Davies: I acknowledge the Finance Committee's report, but that looked specifically at the Welsh Assembly Government's funding and the interaction over funding for the foundation phase. If the report had stopped at saying that the Welsh

Assembly Government funding is insufficient, I believe that that would have been clear. However, it goes on to ask—and I am thinking specifically about this petition—the National Assembly for Wales, to consider this, which obviously means scrutiny by committees, because they are committees of the National Assembly for Wales and not of the Welsh Assembly Government.

As education falls within the Enterprise and Learning Committee's remit, it would be pertinent to refer it to that committee in the first instance. That committee could then determine whether it wishes the Finance Committee to carry on its work, or to seek a new course of action, to address what this petition is asking for: whether or not there is a fundamental need for more money. It is the petition, rather than policy objectives, and so on, that we have. I believe that that is the sensible course to take. As we have done with other petitions, we can refer it to the scrutiny committee, and that committee can then decide what it wishes to do with it. The committee might well decide to work with the Finance Committee to resolve the petition, rather than do anything on its own. I do not believe that we as a Petitions Committee can do much with this petition, other than refer it to the Enterprise and Learning Committee.

Alun Davies: I am happy to do that. However, neither of you have asked for anything substantially different to what has already been asked by the Finance Committee over the last two months. However, if you wish to refer this to the Enterprise and Learning Committee, I am happy to do so, and we can move on. Are you happy with that?

Bethan Jenkins: I am, but I do not think that it is necessary, because the Finance Committee was a National Assembly for Wales Finance Committee—there was no Welsh Assembly Government committee—and it scrutinised the foundation phase. I would see the next port of call as being the Minister, rather than another committee.

Michael German: I think that Andrew's suggestion was that we put it to the committee, and if the committee does not want to take it forward, that is its choice. Then we might come back to it, and ask the Minister directly whether the money is there.

Alun Davies: This is perhaps an example of where the Assembly has moved more quickly than the petition. Had this petition been submitted three months ago, we might have taken a different course of action. However, if Members are content, we will ask the clerk to refer this to the Enterprise and Learning Committee for consideration.

Bethan Jenkins: Would we be guaranteed a response during recess? We might get a quicker response from the Minister than we would from a committee during recess.

Alun Davies: I think that I can guarantee that you will not receive a response during recess. I do not know when the next Enterprise and Learning Committee meeting is, but I would imagine that it is in September.

Michael German: Given that funding bids are going in at the moment, it will not be clear until October whether there is sufficient funding in the budget.

Alun Davies: Shall we say that we will refer this to the Enterprise and Learning Committee for its consideration and send a copy to the Finance Committee and ask it to raise the matter during the budgetary round? I see that you agree.

20 November 2008

Val Lloyd: Petition number nine on our list of updates, P-03-140, relates to the foundation phase. This calls upon the National Assembly for Wales to provide sufficient funding for the full roll-out of the foundation phase programme. We considered it initially in July. The Finance Committee has since conducted an inquiry into the financial aspects of the foundation phase and has reported to the Assembly. We have the findings of the Finance Committee before us: item 40 on the foundation phase.

Andrew R.T. Davies: What the petitioners asked for has been achieved through pressure by the opposition.

Val Lloyd: I see that the Finance Committee welcomes the additional funding provided for the important initiative. So, in that case, shall we close the petition?

Andrew R.T. Davies: Yes.

Val Lloyd: Thank you.

Bethan Jenkins: We could have fewer party-political points then.