

Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations

Your local county voluntary council



11. Campaigning and influencing

11.1 Who represents me?

Overview

This information sheet outlines the different levels of democratically elected institutions in Wales which will help people to answer the question '*who represents me?*' It will also explore the main issues that are dealt with by each of the bodies, to make it easier for people to understand who they need to approach for help with specific issues.

How many representatives do I have?

At any given time, each Welsh citizen will have upwards of 11 democratically elected representatives working in different institutions, from town and community councils (at least one councillor, if there is a town or community council in your area), to local authorities (at least one councillor), the National Assembly for Wales (five Assembly Members - AMs), the UK Parliament (one Member of Parliament - MP), and the European Parliament (four Members of the European Parliament - MEPs).

One of the quickest ways to find out who represents you in your area is to use the following website: www.writetothem.com. Using your postcode, it will tell you who your elected representatives are for all institutions except town and community councils.

Town and community councillors

There are 735 town and community councils in Wales with about 8,000 elected councillors and they are considered to be the grassroots of government in Wales. You may have several town or community councillors representing your area. Conversely, there may not even be a town or community council in your area. They are concerned with very local issues, will often work in partnership with others to progress local projects and commonly provide services such as:

- community taskforces
- community centres, village halls and indoor recreation centres
- war memorials
- public information signs and noticeboards
- public seating and bus shelters

The best way to find contact details for your local town and community councillors is through your local authority, which should have the details of all the town and community councils in their area. You can also find out more about Town and Community Councils in Wales through “One Voice Wales” the organisation that represents and supports them; www.onevoicewales.org.uk

Local authority councillors

There are 22 local authority areas in Wales, all of which are Unitary Authorities. This means there is one council providing all local authority services in the area, rather than both a district or borough council and a county council.

There are over 1,200 democratically elected councillors serving on the 22 local authorities in Wales and each councillor will represent a specific area known as a ward (or electoral division). You may have more than one councillor representing your ward. Some wards that are more densely populated can be designated as multi-member wards. Your local authority will be able to tell you about your ward councillor(s) or visit www.writetothem.com. The issues that are dealt with at local authority level are:

- the council tax
- tackling disadvantage and rebuilding communities
- local transport issues
- community safety and crime reduction
- social care services
- education and lifelong learning
- housing
- arts, sports and culture
- the environment
- planning applications
- local tourism strategies

Assembly Members (AMs)

The National Assembly for Wales is made up of 60 elected Assembly Members (AMs) and every Welsh citizen will have 5 Assembly Members representing them. How does this work? There are 40 constituency areas in Wales e.g. Wrexham, Cardiff West, Blaenau Gwent and each constituency has its own elected AM. However, there are also five larger electoral regions in Wales (North Wales, Mid and West Wales, South Wales West, South Wales Central and South Wales East) and each of these regions has a further four AMs representing the people in that region.

You can find out who the AMs are for your area by visiting the National Assembly for Wales website at www.assemblywales.org or go to www.writetothem.com The Assembly has responsibility for, and the ability to make laws on, the following issues that have been devolved from the UK Parliament:

- agriculture, fisheries, forestry and rural development
- ancient monuments and historic buildings
- culture
- economic development
- education and training
- environment
- fire and rescue services and promotion of fire safety
- food
- health and health services
- highways and transport
- housing
- local government
- National Assembly for Wales
- public administration
- social welfare
- sport and recreation
- tourism
- town and country planning
- water and flood defence
- Welsh language

Members of Parliament (MPs)

Even though Wales now has its own National Assembly and can make some of its own laws, its powers are limited and it is important to note that Wales is still part of the UK. This means that Wales still has 40 democratically elected Members of Parliament (MPs) serving in the UK Parliament at Westminster. The MPs are elected in the same 40 constituency areas as the constituency AMs, so there will be one MP representing you in your area.

You can find out who your MP is by visiting the UK Parliament website at www.parliament.uk or go to www.writetothem.com

As the National Assembly only has the ability to make laws in certain areas, it follows that the UK Parliament is still the sole legislator in some areas including:

- defence
- foreign affairs
- fiscal, monetary and economic policy
- broadcasting
- social security
- immigration
- employment law
- policing and criminal law

Members of the European Parliament (MEPs)

Because Wales is part of the UK and the UK is part of the European Union, we elect people to the European Parliament to help make decisions about issues that affect people at a European level. The whole of Wales is one of 12 UK European Parliamentary regions and we have four Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) representing us in Wales.

Fundamental to the European Union (EU) is the idea that many areas of policy can be more effective if established at a European rather than a national level. Between 60 per cent and 80 per cent of new UK laws are estimated to have had their origins in the European Union. The European Parliament's main role is to analyse and amend all EU legislation, firstly through its committees and then in the full session.

The Parliament can also request the European Commission to draft legislation in any areas that it feels requires EU action. It is therefore difficult to categorise the issues covered by the European Parliament because it can cover many things, including:

- removing trade barriers to boost growth and jobs
- improving the environment
- human rights issues
- fighting international crime and illegal immigration

Given the wide-ranging brief of MEPs, it is always worth bringing burning issues to their attention.

You can find out who your MEPs are by visiting the website of the UK Office of the European Parliament at www.europarl.org.uk or go to www.writetothem.com

Further information

Voices for Change Cymru is a WCVA project supported by the Big Lottery Fund. There are now more opportunities than ever to make your voice heard and this project provides services to help third sector organisations influence policy and legislation at local and national levels.

Tel: 0800 2888 329

vfcc@wcva.org.uk

www.voicesforchangecymru.org.uk

WriteToThem.com is an independent, charitable project to help the public contact their elected representatives. www.writetothem.com

National Assembly for Wales

www.assemblywales.org

UK Parliament

www.parliament.uk

European Parliament

www.europarl.org.uk

Disclaimer

The information provided in this sheet is intended for guidance only. It is not a substitute for professional advice and we cannot accept any responsibility for loss occasioned as a result of any person acting or refraining from acting upon it.

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Produced by WCVA, County Voluntary Councils and Volunteer Centres.

Last Updated:23/06/2011