

Wales Council for Voluntary Action

Supporting charities, volunteers and communities

11. Campaigning and influencing

11.9 The National Assembly for Wales – Basic facts and Glossary



Overview

This information sheet provides an overview of the key things that third sector organisations may wish to be aware of when engaging with or influencing the National Assembly for Wales. This is a summary of more detailed information provided in a variety of other sheets that look at many of the issues in much more detail. The sheet also provides a glossary of important terms and phrases.

The National Assembly for Wales – some basic facts

- The National Assembly for Wales is the Welsh legislature (comparable to the UK Parliament) it is comprised of 60 elected Assembly Members and its role is to scrutinise the work of the Welsh Government and to make legislation.
- The Welsh Government is the Welsh executive (comparable to the UK Government) and its role includes developing and implementing policies; taking decisions and exercising functions.
- Elections for Assembly Members take place every four years (usually) and each voter can cast two votes. Of the 60 elected members 40 represent constituencies and are elected using a 'first past the post' system based on each voter's first vote; the constituencies are the same as those that elect MPs to Westminster (for now). The other 20 AMs represent regions and are elected using a form of proportional representation based on each voter's second vote which is cast for a political party not an individual. The electoral regions are North Wales; Mid and West Wales; South Wales East; South Wales West and South Wales Central.
- The Government of Wales Act 2006. The latest stage in Welsh devolution of the Government of Wales Act 2006 gave the Assembly enhanced powers and allowed for the referendum which was held and won in March 2011. This gave the National Assembly for Wales full law-making powers in 20 devolved areas.
- The Presiding Officer and Deputy Presiding officer are AMs who are elected by all Assembly Members and once elected they serve the Assembly impartially. The Presiding Officer's main roles are to chair plenary; maintaining order and protecting the rights of Assembly Members; and ensuring that Assembly business is handled with equality and impartiality. The Presiding Officer is responsible for ensuring that the Assembly operates properly based on its rules which are known as 'standing orders.'

- The Presiding Officer is also the Chair of the Assembly Commission. The Assembly Commission has responsibility for the provision of property, staff and services to support the Assembly Members. Membership of the Assembly Commission is made up of the Presiding Officer and 4 other Assembly members each representing a different party.
- The First Minister is elected by the whole Assembly and is therefore usually the leader of the largest political party in the Assembly. The First Minister delegates responsibility for various policy areas to the Welsh Assembly Government Ministers and Deputy Ministers (there can be up to 12) and along with the Counsel General they form the cabinet.
- Plenary is a meeting of all Assembly members that takes place every Tuesday and Wednesday afternoon (when the Assembly is in session) in the Siambr of the Senedd building. Plenary is the decision-making and law-making forum of the Assembly.
- Assembly Committees are established to scrutinise policy or legislation or carry out other functions. Committee membership must be 'party-balanced' as much as possible reflecting the number of Assembly Members representing each party within the Assembly. Committees call Welsh Government Ministers to account and Ministers do not sit on committees.

Glossary

Acts of the Assembly	A Welsh law made by the National Assembly for Wales, enforceable in all areas of Wales where it is applicable.
Acts of Parliament	Laws made by the UK Parliament. These laws may confer powers on Welsh Ministers to make subordinate legislation for Wales. They may also give legislative powers (known as Framework Powers) to the National Assembly for Wales to enable it to make Welsh laws (Assembly Measures).
Assembly Commission	Corporate body established to support the National Assembly for Wales. Chaired by the Presiding Officer and responsible for providing property, staff and support services to Assembly Members.
Assembly Bills	A Bill is a draft law. Once a Bill has been considered and passed by the Assembly, and given Royal assent by the monarch, it becomes an "Act of the Assembly"
Committees	Cross-party groups of Assembly members who scrutinise policy or legislation.
Counsel General	The Chief Legal Adviser to the Welsh Government. The Counsel General is not a Welsh Minister but is a member of the Welsh Assembly Government. The Counsel General can be an Assembly Member or an external appointment.
Executive	The Welsh Government is the executive (comparable to the UK Government) as opposed to the National Assembly for Wales which is the legislature (comparable to the UK Parliament).

First Minister	An Assembly Member nominated by the National Assembly for Wales and appointed by the Monarch. Normally the leader of the largest party in the Assembly. Head of the Welsh Government.
Government of Wales Act 2006	The latest stage in Welsh devolution the Government of Wales Act 2006 gave the Assembly enhanced powers and allowed for the referendum which was held and won in March 2011. This gave the National Assembly for Wales full law-making powers in 20 devolved areas.
Legislature	The National Assembly for Wales is the legislature (comparable to the UK Parliament) as opposed to the Welsh Government which is the executive (comparable to the UK Government).
National Assembly for Wales (NAfW)	The Welsh legislature separated from the Welsh Government under the Government of Wales Act 2006. An unincorporated association of 60 Assembly Members with a legislative and scrutiny function.
Secretary of State for Wales	Member of the UK Government who acts to ensure that the interests of Wales are represented in UK Government decision-making. The Secretary of State may attend Assembly Proceedings and addresses the Assembly at least once a year but cannot vote and is not an Assembly Member.
Subordinate Legislation	Also known as secondary legislation or delegated legislation, examples include regulations and orders. Laws made by Welsh Ministers under powers given to them by Acts of Parliament or Acts of the Assembly. Most subordinate legislation in devolved matters is made by Welsh Ministers.
Schedule 7	Schedule 7 of the Government of Wales Act lists the areas over which the National Assembly has legislative competence i.e. the specific areas in which it is able to make laws and any exceptions to those areas.
Welsh Government (WG)	The Welsh executive separated from the National Assembly for Wales under the Government of Wales Act 2006. The Members of the Welsh Government are the First Minister, Welsh Ministers, the Counsel General and the deputy Welsh Ministers. Its role is to develop policies and take decisions. The Welsh Government was known as the Welsh Assembly Government until the name changed following the May 2011 Assembly election.

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.

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Welsh Government

www.wales.gov.uk

National Assembly for Wales

www.assemblywales.org

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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