

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 Assembly Government.
- The Welsh Assembly 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 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. 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 National Assembly for Wales was created by the Government of Wales Act 1998. This Act has now been superseded by the Government of Wales Act 2006 (GoWA 06) which made many important changes to the way in which Wales is governed.
- The GoWA 06 gives a greater amount of power to the National Assembly for Wales and allows it to make its own legislation in certain devolved areas.
- From May 2007 the National Assembly for Wales had the power to make Assembly Measures (laws) in areas where it has legislative competence (powers to make laws). The Assembly is also able to request legislative competence in new areas but this is still limited to a list of policy areas that are devolved to Wales. These areas are set out in Schedule 5 of the Government of Wales Act 2006.

- Proposals for new laws can be made by the Welsh Assembly Government, Assembly Committees, the Assembly Commission or individual Assembly Members if they are selected in a ballot.
- 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 Assembly Members delegate most of their executive powers to the First Minister who in turn delegates responsibility for various policy areas to the Welsh Assembly Government Ministers, who together 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 Assembly Government Ministers to account and Ministers do not sit on committees. There are three kinds of committee in the Assembly: Legislation Committees that scrutinise Assembly Measures and Legislative Competence Orders; Scrutiny Committees (e.g. the Communities and Culture Committee) and Standing Committees (e.g. the Audit Committee).

Glossary

Acts of Parliament	Laws made by the UK Parliament. These laws may confer powers on Welsh Ministers to make subordinate legislation for Wales.
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 Measures	Welsh laws that can be used to make new legislation or amend existing Acts of Parliament. Measures can only be made in areas in which the National Assembly has legislative competence.
Committees	Cross-party groups of Assembly members who scrutinise policy or legislation.
Counsel General	The Chief Legal Adviser to the Welsh Assembly Government. The Counsel General is not a Welsh Minister but is a member of the Welsh Assembly Government.
Executive	The Welsh Assembly 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).
Fields	Areas of Government policy devolved to Wales as listed in Schedule 5 of the Government of Wales Act 2006 e.g. Field 1: agriculture, fisheries, forestry and rural development
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 Assembly Government.
Government of Wales Act 2006	The latest stage in Welsh devolution the Government of Wales Act 2006 gives the National Assembly enhanced powers, changes the electoral system for Assembly elections, allows for a referendum on full law making powers if certain criteria are met and separates the executive and legislative branches of the Assembly .
Legislative Competence Order (LCO)	LCOs give the National Assembly permission to create legislation in a certain policy area. Legislative Competence must be sought by the Assembly and agreed by Parliament before new laws (measures) can be made. LCOs are orders in council which transfer specific powers from Parliament to the National Assembly.

Legislature	The National Assembly for Wales is the legislature (comparable to the UK Parliament) as opposed to the Welsh Assembly Government which is the executive (comparable to the UK Government).
Matters	Matters need to be inserted into fields (areas of Government policy devolved to Wales) in order for the National Assembly to be able to make laws (measures) in any particular area. e.g. Under Field 5: education and training various matters have been inserted such as Matter 5.1: Provision about the categories of school that may be maintained by local education authorities. This gives the National Assembly for Wales power to make its own laws in this policy area.
National Assembly for Wales (NAfW)	The Welsh legislature separated from the Welsh Assembly 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 to the UK Government when they make decisions that affect Wales. Usually a Welsh MP the Secretary of State may attend Assembly Proceedings but cannot vote and is not an Assembly Member.
Subordinate Legislation	Also known as secondary legislation or delegated legislation. Laws made by Welsh Ministers under powers given to them by Acts of Parliament. Most subordinate legislation in devolved matters is made by Welsh Ministers.
Schedule 5	Schedule 5 of the Government of Wales Act lists the fields (areas) of Government Policy devolved to Wales. The Assembly can request for matters to be inserted into these fields. Once a matter has been inserted into a field (either by an Act of Parliament or a Legislative Competence Order) the Assembly can then make its own laws (measures) in that policy area.
Welsh Assembly Government (WAG)	The Welsh executive separated from the National Assembly for Wales under the Government of Wales Act 2006. The Members of the WAG are the First Minister, Welsh Ministers, the Counsel General and the deputy Welsh Ministers. Its role is to develop policies and take decisions.

Much of this information has been reproduced from Members Research Service Quick Guide 28 available at www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-guide-docs-pub/bus-assembly-publications-research.htm

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

Welsh Assembly 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.

For further information contact

Wales Council for Voluntary Action

Baltic House, Mount Stuart Square, Cardiff Bay, Cardiff, CF10 5FH
Registered Charity 218093

Tel: 0800 2888 329 help@wcva.org.uk
Fax: 029 2043 1701 www.wcva.org.uk

Produced by WCVA, County Voluntary Councils and Volunteer Centres.
Last Updated:30/03/2009



Tel: 0800 2888 329
www.wcva.org.uk