

How 2 Lobby the National Assembly for Wales

Introduction

Created by the Government of Wales Act 1998, the National Assembly for Wales is the devolved law making body in Wales.

Although not as powerful as the Scottish Parliament, the Assembly has the authority to legislate in a large number of areas.

Its creation gives Assembly Members (AMs) the chance to make new laws, examine and debate the work of the Welsh Assembly Government and to debate issues of importance to Wales.

Powers

When the National Assembly for Wales was set up, it inherited the budget and most of the functions belonging to the Welsh Office, which used to be a UK Government department.

In 2006(Government of Wales Act), the Assembly gained primary legislative powers known as Assembly Measures and these can be enacted in a vast number of areas including education, the environment, health, social services and many more.

The UK Parliament at Westminster retains overall authority for taxing, non-devolved domestic issues and foreign policy.

Composition

The Welsh Assembly is made up of 60 Assembly Members (AMs), with 40 representing constituencies and 20 representing one of five regions (four AMs for each region).

Every person in Wales is represented by one constituency AM and four regional AMs. Voters can cast two votes; one for their constituency and one for their region. Regional AMs are elected by the Additional Member System (AMS) which is a form of proportional representation.

Constituency AMs win their seats on a first past the post basis, with the Assembly being 'topped up' by regional AMs who are elected from closed party lists using the alternative party method of voting.

Relationship with the UK Parliament

Wales remains part of the UK and MPs from Welsh constituencies continue to have seats in the House of Commons. The country is still bound by laws passed in Westminster.

The Secretary of State for Wales represents Wales in the UK Government's cabinet as well as in the UK Parliament. Their job is to make sure that the interests of Wales are fully considered when policy is developed.

The Welsh Government

The party with the largest number of AMs will usually form the Welsh Government, which acts as the executive arm of the Welsh Assembly. Since December 2009, a coalition government has been in power, made up of Labour and Plaid Cymru AMs.

The Welsh Government makes policy on devolved matters and introduces new Measures to the Welsh Assembly. It is led by the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister with assistance from Ministers and their deputies.

How does it represent me?

- AMs are elected for a fixed term of four years. They are allowed to re-stand as many times as they wish.
- Your AM is there to represent your views and concerns, regardless of whether or not you actually voted for them.
- AMs come from all walks of life. Many come from a business or legal background, but many others are trade unionists, farmers, journalists, youth workers, teachers or even actors.

How can I influence my AM?

Although the Assembly has limited powers, it still has considerable influence when it comes to Welsh policy matters.

- AMs pay a great deal of attention to their postbag, so just writing to them expressing your concerns and encouraging others to do the same can have a massive effect, especially if it is regarding a local issue.
- If you want to do more than write a letter, try to set up a meeting with your local AM or an AM on a committee that may be working on the Measure you are interested in. This face-to-face contact may help you to put your point across, and help the AM to better understand your views.
- AMs will usually run weekly or monthly 'surgeries' where you can

visit them to discuss any issues and concerns that you have. They tend to be advertised in local newspapers and usually happen on a Saturday or weekday evening, taking place in a public building such as a library or a more relaxed place like a supermarket or pub.

- You can invite your AM to discuss the issues with your group. If funds allow, you could arrange to visit them at the National Assembly for Wales.
- Nearly all AMs are members of political parties and tend to stick to their party's policy. It is worth finding out what the overall party position is on an issue before talking to your AM. Remember that they may not necessarily support the party view, unless they are a Minister and then must follow the party's policy.
- AMs are sometimes more open to influence by their constituents when a free vote takes place. This is used when particularly personal or moral issues are being debated (such as abortion or the death penalty) and AMs are not pressurised to vote one way or the other by their party. If the law that concerns you relates to this kind of issue and your AM doesn't have strong personal view about it, your arguments could have a significant effect on how they vote.

How can I influence other AMs?

The Welsh Assembly has a number of committees that can be helpful when you

have a specific concern as well as considering and investigating the work of the executive.

If you are interested in a certain issue, in addition to finding out who your local AM is, you should find out the names of the AMs that make up a committee relevant to your issue.

All committees are potentially useful and all are approachable. Committees of particular interest may include the Children and Young People's Committee and the Petitions Committee.

How do I contact my AM?

Go directly to <http://www.assemblywales.org/memhome/member-search.htm> to search for the details of your local AM.

If you wish to speak to an Assembly office directly, you can call the main switchboard on 0845 010 5500 and ask for the office you require.

You can write to your AM at the following address:

Their Name AM
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff CF99 1NA

Where can I get further information?

For further information you can visit the National Assembly for Wales official website, www.assemblywales.gov.uk or www.exploretheassembly.org or call the Assembly Information Line on 0845 010 5500.

For more information

about BYC training:

www.byc.org.uk/training

or to download further resources:

www.byc.org.uk/resources

British Youth Council

We empower young people across the UK to have a say and be heard.

www.byc.org.uk

0845 458 1489

mail@byc.org.uk