

**Darganfod
Dadlu
Dewis**

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**Discover
Debate
Decide**

What is Plenary?



What is the National Assembly for Wales?

The National Assembly for Wales is made up of 60 Assembly Members from across Wales. They are elected by the people of Wales to represent them and their communities, make laws for Wales and to ensure the Welsh Government is doing its job properly.

What is Plenary?

Plenary meetings are attended by all Assembly Members (AMs) and provide one of the key mechanisms for Members to hold the Welsh Government and Assembly Commission to account, make laws for Wales and represent their constituents.

1. The Siambr

Plenary meetings take place in the Siambr, the Assembly's debating chamber, every Tuesday and Wednesday afternoon during term time. Plenary meetings usually begin at 13.30 and are always held in public.



The Siambr

A gallery is provided especially for members of the public to sit and watch proceedings. The gallery sits above the Siambir and includes 120 seats.



The public gallery

The 'electronic' Siambir

The Siambir is an electronic debating chamber. Every Member has an individual computer, to enable them to research subjects for debate and to undertake work when not being called to speak. They also have access to headphones to amplify the sound in the Siambir or to use the simultaneous interpretation service provided.

Digital clocks are located around the Siambir to time the speakers – if they turn to red it means that the speaker has overrun his or her allotted time.



The Members' computers

Seating arrangements

The chair of Plenary meetings (that is, the Presiding Officer or Deputy Presiding Officer normally) sits at the front of the Siambr, facing all Members. Government Ministers (the Cabinet) sit in the first row of seats facing the Chair. The First Minister sits in the centre of the Cabinet row. All other Members sit behind and around them, in their respective party groups.

Siambr officials

Assembly officials also sit in the Siambr. Clerks sit to the right and the left of the Presiding Officer in order to advise on procedural matters and to maintain a list of those who have requested to speak on items of business. They are also responsible for timing individual speakers, operating the electronic voting system and recording the outcome of any votes taken.

Those who produce the Record of Proceedings (the official written record of Plenary meetings) sit behind the Presiding Officer and take notes throughout the meeting. Behind the glass screens in the Siambr sit the simultaneous translators, engineers and media.

Ushers are also present to pass messages to and from Assembly Members in the Chamber.



The Presiding Officer chairing a Plenary meeting

Following Siambr proceedings

Proceedings in the Siambr are broadcast live on senedd.tv. An archive of previous Plenary meetings is also available on senedd.tv.

2. Early Plenary Business following an Assembly Election

In the early days of an Assembly, Members must meet in Plenary to agree a number of key items of business. This includes the election of the Presiding Officer and Deputy and nominations for a First Minister.

The Presiding Officer who held office immediately before the Assembly election (the former Presiding Officer) determines the date and time of the first Plenary meeting, in consultation with the political groups. If the former Presiding Officer is unwilling or unable to act (if unelected or retired), the Clerk of the Assembly will specify the date and time.

All subsequent Plenary meetings will be determined by the newly elected Presiding Officer, until the Business Committee is established and the first business statement and announcement is made in Plenary by the Minister responsible for Government business.

The Clerk of the Assembly will notify all Members of the date and time at least 24 hours before each meeting. The agenda for each Plenary meeting will also be published at least 24 hours in advance.

Election of the Presiding Officer and Deputy Presiding Officer

The first Plenary meeting must take place within seven working days of the election to elect a Presiding Officer and Deputy Presiding Officer. Proceedings will begin with the election of the Presiding Officer, followed by the election of the Deputy Presiding Officer.

Nomination of the First Minister

The Assembly is required to nominate a First Minister within 28 days of an Assembly election.

Other Early Business after an election

The Assembly must agree a number of key items of business soon after the election, including:

- the appointment of Members to the Business Committee;
- the appointment of Assembly Commissioners;
- the First Minister's recommendation to Her Majesty of a person for appointment as Counsel General;
- the titles and remits of committees; and
- the membership and chair of each committee.

The Presiding Officer

The Presiding Officer and Deputy Presiding Officer chair Plenary meetings. Their role is to ensure that proceedings progress efficiently and fairly. They do this by allocating specific time limits to Members who wish to contribute to debates and by calling different items on the Agenda at relevant points during the course of a Plenary meeting. The Presiding Officer and Deputy are elected by the whole Assembly to act as impartial officers and to ensure that all political groups are treated equally in all aspects of the Assembly's work.

Standing Orders

When chairing Plenary, the Presiding Officer interprets and applies a set of rules, known as Standing Orders. Standing Orders are the rules of proceedings the Assembly must follow and they can only be changed if two-thirds of Members agree. The Standing Orders also outline the detail of how business should be organised.

The Presiding Officer is called to interpret Standing Orders in Plenary meetings when, for example, a Member wishes to seek advice on the conduct of business. This is known as raising a 'Point of Order'. They may also have to ask any Member who is not complying with the rules of debate to behave in accordance with the Assembly's rules. This is known as "calling a Member to order".

Conduct in Plenary meetings

The rules outlining how Assembly proceedings should be conducted – the "Standing Orders" – require Members to behave in an appropriate manner at all times in the Siamb. As chairs of Plenary meetings, the Presiding and Deputy Presiding Officers are responsible for maintaining order.

Members must at all times in their conduct in the Siamb promote respect for the Assembly and extend respect and courtesy to other Members. Members must comply with any directions given by the Presiding Officer about conduct in the Siamb or order in Plenary meetings.

Speaking in the Siamb

All Members are permitted to speak in Plenary meetings and are called at the discretion of the Presiding Officer. Members can either make a request to speak in advance of the Plenary meeting or they can use the Siamb instant messaging system during proceedings to indicate that they wish to contribute.

Members may speak in Welsh or English and are expected to address the Presiding Officer. Members have access to a simultaneous translation service, available via their earpieces.



The translation booth

3. Organisation of Plenary business

The topics to be discussed in Plenary meetings are agreed by the Business Committee and announced on a weekly basis in Plenary. A Plenary Agenda is published for every meeting.

An agenda is published in advance of every Plenary meeting listing all the items for discussion at a particular Plenary meeting. The agenda lists all business in the order it will be considered by Members and can be updated at any time, even during the relevant Plenary meeting if necessary.

You can read the Plenary Agenda on the Assembly's website: www.assemblywales.org under 'Assembly Business'.

Business Committee and Plenary

Business taken in Plenary meetings is scheduled by the Business Committee. The Business Committee is chaired by the Presiding Officer and its members are the Minister responsible for Government Business and the Business Manager for each political party. The Committee normally meets in private every Tuesday morning to note what Government business is scheduled for the three weeks ahead and to formally agree the organisation of all other Plenary business.

Business Statement and Announcement

The Committee's decisions relating to Siambr business are announced in Plenary on a weekly basis by the Minister responsible for Government business. This is called the Business Statement and Announcement. Any Member can request to ask a question about the Business Statement and Announcement and ask for other items of business to be added in the future.

Assembly timetable

Any decisions relating to Plenary business must be made in accordance with the Assembly timetable. This is a document, agreed by the Business Committee, which provides an outline of timetables of plenary meetings, times available for committee meetings, times available for meetings of political groups, recess dates, and dates for Ministers, the Counsel General and Assembly Commissioners to answer questions.

4. Types of Plenary business

Different categories and types of business can be taken in Plenary. These include questions, debates, statements and legislative proceedings. Items placed on the Agenda include:

- questions to Welsh Ministers and Assembly Commissioners;
- statements or debates on topics put forward by the Government, opposition parties or individual Members; and
- consideration of Welsh legislation.

Questions

Questions to Government Ministers or Assembly Commissioners may be answered orally or in writing. Ministers from each Government department attend Plenary on a rota basis to answer oral questions. The First Minister answers questions every Tuesday.

Oral questions

Assembly Members may ask Oral Assembly Questions to the First Minister, Welsh Ministers, the Counsel General and the Assembly Commission about any matter falling within their areas of responsibility. Oral questions are answered during a designated Question Time in Plenary.

The First Minister answers questions each week, whilst Welsh Ministers and the Counsel General answer questions on a four week rotation. Questions to the Assembly Commission also take place once every four weeks.

Notice of Oral Questions

The Presiding Officer conducts a ballot to determine the names of Members who may table questions. Each Member may enter their name into a ballot.

The Member selected must then table their oral question at least five days before the question is due to be answered. Questions must relate to the responsibilities of the Minister concerned (or the responsibilities of the Assembly Commission in the case of questions to the Commission). A computer randomly selects the order in which the questions are to be asked in Plenary.

Urgent questions

Members may also ask Urgent Oral Questions which are taken without notice. Urgent Questions may only be asked if the matter is judged by the Presiding Officer to be of urgent public importance.

Question time proceedings in Plenary

During Oral Questions the relevant Member is called to ask his or her tabled question. Once the Minister (or Commissioner in the case of questions to the Assembly Commission) has replied, the Member can ask one other question which is related to their tabled question. This is known as a supplementary question. Other Members may also be called to ask a related supplementary question at the Presiding Officer's discretion. The Minister (or Commissioner) replies to each supplementary question in turn.

Deputy Ministers may answer a question on behalf of a Minister when they have responsibility for that subject.

Questions for written answer

If an oral question is not reached during Plenary proceedings, the Member will receive a written answer on the same day.

Members can also table questions specifically for written answer by the Welsh Government or the Assembly Commission. There is no limit on the number of written questions a Member may table. All written answers are published in the Record of Proceedings.

Statements

Oral Statements

Oral statements are made by Government Ministers on issues of interest and importance to the Assembly. The Presiding Officer or Deputy Presiding Officer, Assembly Commissioners or other Members with particular responsibilities (eg Members proposing legislation) may also make statements.

Most statements are subject to questioning by Members and are usually allocated a maximum time on the Plenary Agenda.

Business Statement and Announcement

The Business Statement and Announcement is a particular type of statement made weekly in Plenary by the Minister responsible for Government business. The Business Statement and Announcement outlines the future business of the Assembly up to three weeks in advance.

Personal Statements

The Presiding Officer may allow a personal statement to be made by a Member. This may occur if a Member wishes to make a statement to Plenary on resigning as chair of a committee, for example, or crossing the floor (changing parties). Personal statements must be brief and factual and they are not subject to debate.

Written Statements

Written statements can also be issued by the Government or the Commission on any matter within their respective responsibilities. They usually relate to technical matters or matters which do not warrant an oral statement in Plenary. The Welsh Government and Assembly Commission usually send any written statements directly to Members by e-mail. All written statements are published in the Record of Proceedings.

Debates and motions and amendments

Any matter of interest to Wales and its people can be debated in Plenary. Debates can be proposed by Government Ministers, Assembly Commissioners, opposition parties or individual Members.

Debates

Debates are one of the most frequent items of business on the Plenary agenda. Many types of debate are brought forward in Plenary, including:

- Government debates;
- Opposition party debates;
- Committee debates relating to a report published by the committee; and
- Debates proposed by individual Members other than members of the Government.

Other than in the case of Government debates, the time allocated for all other types of debates and their frequency are determined by the Business Committee.

Motions and amendments

The basis for any debate is a motion and any associated amendments. Motions are a mechanism for obtaining a decision (or resolution) from the Assembly, and, except where 'Standing Orders' state otherwise, are subject to amendment.

The purpose of an amendment is either to modify a motion to increase its acceptability or to present to the Assembly a different proposition to the original motion. Any Member may table a motion or an amendment.

Other than Government debates, the subjects of debates are not included in the Business Statement and Announcement, but are published a week beforehand when the relevant motion is tabled.

Structure and outcome of a debate

A typical debate begins with a Member introducing the debate topic, also known as 'moving the motion'. The person introducing the topic depends on the type of debate. For example, a Welsh Minister introduces a government debate and the Chair of a committee introduces a debate on a committee report.

If a Member has tabled an amendment to the motion, they are invited to explain why they are asking the Assembly to amend the original motion. The Presiding Officer (or Deputy) will then call other Members who have requested to speak on the topic.

In the case of debates on committee reports or opposition party debates, the Minister responds to the points raised by Members. Finally, the Member who introduced the debate makes their closing remarks to the Assembly.

At the end of a debate, the Presiding Officer asks the Assembly to agree the motion. If any Member objects, the motion must be put to the vote. Members may be asked to vote immediately, or may be asked to do so at a designated 'voting time'.

Short Debates

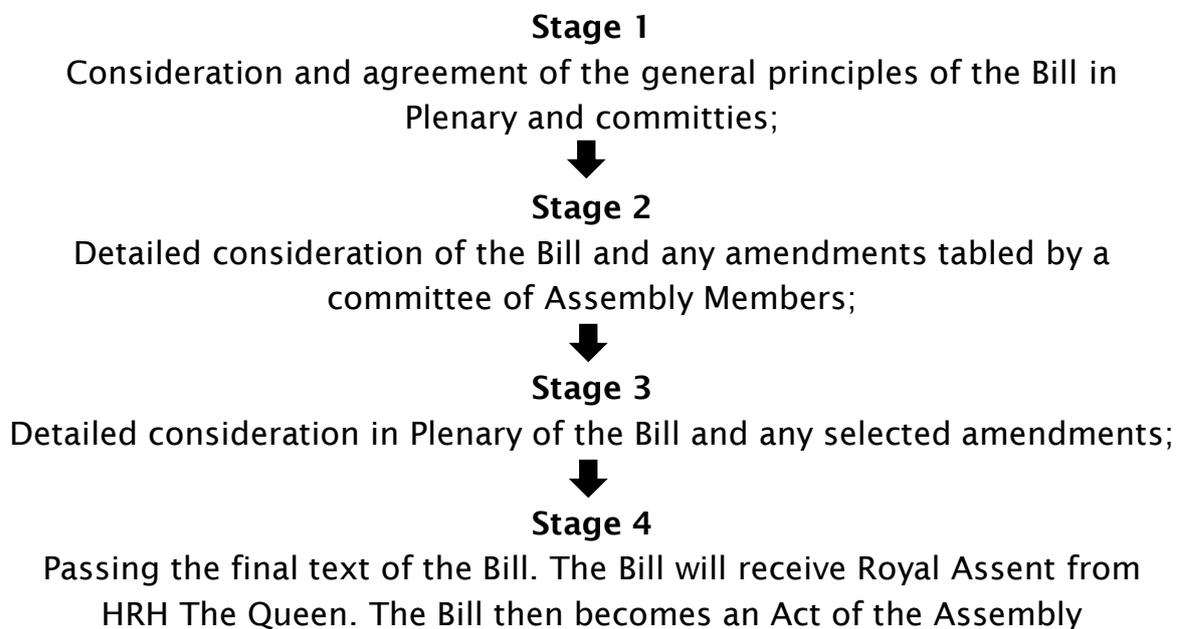
Short debates differ from other debates as they allow any Member, other than a member of the Welsh Government, to have a general debate on a topic of interest or constituency matter, without requiring the Assembly to vote at the end of the debate. Members are selected from a ballot held by the Presiding Officer and permitted to bring forward a topic of their choice. The Member will open the debate and speak for their allocated time. They may allow other Members to speak for up to one minute of their allocated time. The Minister or Assembly Commissioner responsible for the topic being discussed usually responds to the short debate.

5. Legislative proceedings in the Siambr

A Bill is usually considered at least twice in Plenary during the course of its passage through the Assembly. Some types of subordinate legislation, Assembly Bills and legislative consent motions relating to UK Parliament Bills are all considered at least once in the Siambr.

Bills

A Bill is a proposal for a new law, or a proposal to change an existing law that is presented for debate before the Assembly. Bills are normally considered in both committee and in Plenary. Most Bills will go through the following stages of consideration:



Subordinate legislation

Acts of the Assembly and Acts of the UK Parliament enable Welsh Ministers to make more detailed legislation, known as secondary or subordinate legislation.

The affirmative procedure

A small proportion of the most important subordinate legislation is subject to approval (the affirmative procedure) and has to be formally approved by the Assembly in Plenary before it takes effect.

The negative procedure

Most Subordinate Legislation is subject to annulment (the negative procedure). This means that the legislation will come into power unless a Member tables a motion against it (a “motion to annul”) within a certain deadline. If the Assembly agrees to the motion tabled against the legislation, the legislation does not progress.

Legislative Consent Motions

When the UK Parliament wishes to legislate on a subject which has already been devolved to the National Assembly, convention requires it to receive the consent of the Assembly before it may pass the legislation in question. Such consent is given by the agreement of a Legislative Consent Motion (LCM) in Plenary.

6. Voting

When the Assembly is required to make a decision on any item of business Members are invited to agree that business. If any Member objects, it must be put to the vote. Members may be asked to vote immediately, or may be asked to do so at a designated 'voting time'.

Voting time

Voting time is a point on the Plenary Agenda, decided by the Business Committee, when all votes which have been deferred are taken. The number of votes to be taken can vary, but the Presiding Officer will call each vote in turn and a message will appear on every Member's screen asking them to vote at the necessary time.

Electronic voting

The Siambr is an electronic debating chamber. At the base of every Member's computer there is a slot for a card which identifies them. There are also three buttons:

- Green: to vote in favour
- White: to decline to vote (referred to as 'abstaining')
- Red: to vote against



Electronic voting in the Siambr

Members press the button of their choice and the results are shown on the Siambr plasma screens at the end of each vote. Once the vote is closed it is not possible to change the vote cast.

Other forms of voting

Certain votes have to be taken in certain ways. For example, if there is more than one candidate for the role of Presiding Officer, the election must take place by means of a secret ballot. If there is more than one candidate for the role of First Minister, a roll call must take place.

If the electronic voting system fails, the Presiding Officer can choose to take the vote by show of hands or by roll call.

Voting results

All voting results are published after the meeting in a document called the Votes and Proceedings and the Record of Proceedings. A Vote Summary is also published containing the full details of how each Member voted on each item of business.

Terms

Act of the Assembly: A law for Wales

Assembly Members: The Assembly is made up of 60 elected Assembly Members – 40 are chosen to represent individual constituencies and 20 are chosen to represent the five regions of Wales. The regional Assembly Members are elected by a system of Proportional Representation, called the Additional Member System.

Bill: A proposed law.

Cabinet: the Cabinet of the Welsh Government is made up of the First Minister, Welsh Ministers and the Counsel General to the Welsh Government. Deputy Ministers are members of the Welsh Government but not of the Cabinet. There cannot be more than 12 Ministers and Deputy Ministers (not including the First Minister and the Counsel General)

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 Government.

Debate: A discussion between Assembly Members. Debates take place in the Siambr and can be followed by a vote.

First Minister: The First Minister, appointed by the Monarch upon the Assembly's nomination, is the Assembly Member who is the leader of the Welsh Government. The First Minister appoints other Welsh Ministers with the approval of the Monarch.

Laws: these are rules which are agreed by a legislature, they tell us what can and cannot be done in a country. The laws made by the National Assembly are called Acts of the Assembly.

Legislation: another word for laws.

Legislative Process: the process of making laws.

National Assembly for Wales: The National Assembly for Wales is made up of 60 Assembly Members from across Wales. They are elected by the people

of Wales to represent them and their communities, make laws for Wales and to ensure the Welsh Government is doing its job properly.

Plenary: This is the full meeting of all 60 Assembly Members and takes place in the Siambr.

Presiding Officer/Llywydd: The Llywydd is elected by all Assembly Members and serves the Assembly impartially. The Llywydd's main role is to chair Plenary, maintain order and ensure that Standing Orders are followed.

Record of Proceedings: This is a complete record of Assembly proceedings. It is published bilingually on the Assembly's website (www.assemblywales.org).

Scrutinise: When the National Assembly for Wales examines the work of the Welsh Government, this process is called 'scrutiny'. This means holding the Welsh Government to account for its decisions and its actions. This job is done by the Committees of the National Assembly and by Members in Plenary. The role of the Opposition parties is to question and scrutinise the Government. Government backbenchers can also carry out this role.

Senedd: the Senedd is the building in Cardiff Bay where the business of the National Assembly for Wales is conducted. The Senedd is where laws for Wales are made. In the Senedd in 2008, a Welsh law was passed for the first time since the 10th century.

The building and the Siambr are public spaces so the people of Wales can watch Assembly Members in action.

Siambr: This is the debating chamber where Plenary Meetings of the National Assembly for Wales are held. There is a public gallery above the Siambr, where members of the public can arrange to watch the meetings as they happen.

Standing Orders: These are the rules which govern Assembly proceedings.

Welsh Government: The Welsh Government consists of the First Minister; the Welsh Ministers; the Counsel General to the Welsh Government and the Deputy Ministers.