

Disability and Equality

1 October 2013

Request for Information.

Thank you for your request received on 29 August.

We will answer each question individually.

1. How many of your present elected politician's, are Disabled People and with what disabilities do they have?

For example either: Amputee, Hearing Impaired, Language/Speech Impaired, Learning Difficult Disability, Mental Health Illness, Physically Impaired, Visually Impaired, or With a Chronic Illness, or is an Assistance animal User, or lastly has Multiple Disabilities!

Equally how many of your present elected politician's, are women or men, or from ethnic minorities, or form different age's (i.e. 25 and under, 26-to-40, 41-to-54, 55-to-68, 69 and over) groups, or from different Religious or Non-Religious Beliefs, or different Sexual Orientation too?

The National Assembly for Wales ('the Assembly') does not hold information as to the 'protected characteristics' (as defined by the Equality Act 2010) of Assembly Members ('Members'). As such, we are unable to provide information on the disability, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation of Members.

In relation to the sex of Members, there are currently 34 men and 26 women.

Whilst we do hold the dates of birth of Members, this information can be accessed here:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/democracylive/hi/representatives/search?type=representatives&institution=National Assembly for Wales>

This element of your request is subject to section 21 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 which exempts information that is already reasonably accessible by other means. So, we will not be providing this information separately.

2. Please list what reasonable adjustment's and provision's, have you made over the years since the Disabled Discrimination Act 1995 came into force in the UK, to provide for politician's who are visually or hearing impaired and/or physically disabled or have other types of disabilities. That is in your own politician chamber for Disabled Member's, or Disabled People / General Public wishing to visit and/or address politicians, in your politician chamber and/or committee rooms or building's too?

As you may be aware, the Assembly was established in 1999 several years after the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 came into force. The relevant law is now largely set out in the Equality Act 2010.

We do not maintain a record of all individual adjustments but hope the following provides a picture of our overall approach.

When the Senedd was first built, an access group was employed by the architects to ensure that accessibility was at the heart of the design of the building. Since the opening of the Senedd in 2006, we have periodically undertaken access audits to ensure that all of our buildings remain accessible. The last access audit was undertaken in March 2013.

We have facilities, procedures and equipment in place to ensure that our buildings remain accessible. Some of the facilities include:

- loop systems for the hard of hearing throughout most of our estate (Tŷ Hywel, Senedd, Pierhead and Colwyn Bay office) and a portable loop for other spaces;
- Ramp and lift access;
- Braille signage;
- Accessible toilets throughout our buildings;
- A Changing Places facility with a hoist and bed;
- Automatic doors throughout our public areas.

We would do all that could reasonably be expected to meet any specific needs any Member might have.

For members of the public visiting or acting as a witness in a Committee meeting, we always ask access requirements prior to a visit and will always make a reasonable adjustment with sufficient notice. When meetings are held off-site, we use a checklist to ensure that meetings are held in an accessible venue. It is not possible to provide a list of all of the adjustments that have been made since the Assembly was established as no such list has

been maintained. Below are examples of some of the reasonable adjustments that we have made for visitors and witnesses:

- wheelchairs available for use on site;
- reasonable adjustment for people with an ambulant disability such as rests and walking slowly during tours;
- accessible parking;
- simple, easy-read guides for people whose first language is not English;
- guides speaking in an appropriate manner in order to enable lip readers to understand;
- loop system for the hard of hearing;
- provision of information in accessible formats including Braille, Easy Read, British Sign Language, large print, languages other than English or Welsh;
- providing communication support for events and meetings including British Sign Language Interpreters, palantypists and lip-speakers.

In July 2012 the National Assembly for Wales Commission introduced an 'Access Fund' to ensure that Members have the necessary support to engage with constituents with diverse needs, and provide additional support to disabled Members and disabled support staff. Within this fund, Members may make an application for the Assembly Commission to meet the costs associated with making accessibility improvements to constituency or regional offices.

Prior to 2012 and the introduction of the Access Fund, Members could use their Office Cost Allowance to meet the cost of making any necessary accessibility improvements. These costs were met under the Office Maintenance allowance. Any adjustments or maintenance to Members' constituency offices fall within the Office Costs>>Office Maintenance category which can be searched by year and/or Assembly Member. No separate record of individual reimbursements was maintained at that time.

Expenses incurred and claimed by Members, are published on the Allowance Publication System and available here:

<http://www.assemblywales.org/memhome/pay-expenses-financial-interests-standards/mem-expenses-2.htm>).

This element of your request is subject to section 21 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 which exempts information that is already reasonably accessible by other means.

We have a dedicated Health and Safety Officer who is available to assess the needs of Members and staff. Some of the reasonable adjustments we have made include making adjustments to the layout of a Member’s office; providing specialist equipment such as a loop system, or specific equipment.

In 2013, our commitment to accessibility was recognised by the charity Action on Hearing Loss. As part of their Louder Than Words Charter we have been recognised as being an organisation committed to supporting staff and visitors who are deaf or have a hearing loss. More information on the Charter is available at:

<http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/supporting-you/accreditations-assessments-and-training-for-businesses/accreditations/louder-than-words.aspx>

Our internal disability staff network assists with the impact assessing of policies and building renovations, ensuring that accessibility remains an important consideration.

We also have Cross Party Groups that covers a range of disabilities. These groups ensure that Members remain aware of issues affecting disabled people. A list of our current groups is available at:

<http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/mgListOutsideBodies.aspx>

3. What annual funding or public tax payer’s money, for the last five years. Have you allocated to meet your own political chamber and it’s member politicians, own Legal Duties under Disability and Equality Laws, to make reasonable adjustments and provision’s for Disabled Politician’s and Disable People in General?

The only fund specifically in place to meet disability or other access needs is the Commission’s Access Fund. This is budgeted at £10,000 per annum but actual spend is as follows:

Date	Cost
2012	£2,053.56
2013 (to date)	£2,619.36
Total	£4,672.92

As mentioned in our response to question 2, Members may make an application for the costs associated with making accessibility improvements to constituency or regional offices. In making an application, Members are required to provide details of the adjustments proposed, the access issues that the proposed adjustments will address, and any financial assistance available from other parties to meet the cost of the adjustment proposed (for example from co-tenants, landlords and the Access to Work Scheme etc.). The Access Fund will also cover the cost of a professional audit which may be undertaken to provide advice on improving the accessibility of an office.

Where expenditure may need to be incurred outside of the scope of the Access Fund, for example, purchasing a wheelchair for use in the Senedd, it would be charged to the most appropriate budget – for furniture or estates, for example. Compliance with the Equality Act does not have its own budget heading.

4. Please give details of what Diversity, Equality, Disability, Discrimination and Legal Duty Awareness Training. That you give to all your own Politicians, or Candidates for Political office and/or Political Party, let alone to Government Minister's and/or Cabinet Members?

Following the introduction of the Equality Act 2010, we produced a range of factsheets advising Members of their roles and responsibilities under the legislation. The factsheets cover:

- Overview of the legislation;
- Staff behaviour;
- Building and office premises;
- Surgeries and home visits;
- Accessible information and communication support;
- Reasonable adjustments for disabled people;
- Recruiting staff;
- Employing staff; and
- Equality and the Government of Wales Act 2006

In addition we have:

- developed and rolled out an in-depth online equality module which has been completed by all Assembly Commission staff and will shortly be made available to all Members and their staff;
- developed and rolled out Disability Confidence Training;
- delivered deaf awareness and British Sign Language Training;

- published and continue to publish a monthly Equality Bulletin to provide Members with equality-related news, publications and events;
- produced a short session on “Supporting Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual staff” which will be available to Members shortly.

The Assembly is not responsible for training potential candidates to the Assembly nor is it responsible for training Members of the Welsh Government.

Your request has been considered according to the principles set out in the Code of Practice on Public Access to Information. The code is published on our website at http://www.assemblywales.org/abthome/about_us-commission_assembly_administration/abt-foi/abt-foi-cop-pub.htm

If you have any questions regarding this response please contact me. If you feel you have cause for complaint, please follow the guidance at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely

Buddug Saer
Programme Officer
National Assembly for Wales

Cause for concern or complaint with your FOI response?

If you believe that I have not applied the Code correctly or have not followed the relevant laws, you may make a formal complaint to the Chief Executive and Clerk at the National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff Bay. Details of the Assembly's complaints principles are set out in the Code of Practice on Complaints available on the Internet at <http://www.assemblywales.org/conhome/con-complaint.htm>. Please advise me if you wish to receive a printed copy.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

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