

National Assembly for Wales
Scaling the Wall

An event to mark International Day of
Disabled People 2009

Actions for change



The National Assembly for Wales is the democratically elected body that represents the interests of Wales and its people, makes laws for Wales and holds the Welsh Government to account.

Accessible Information

This information is available in accessible formats including audio, large print and Braille format on request.

Contact the Equality and Access Team

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The National Assembly for Wales celebrated the International Day of Disabled People 2009 with a positive day dedicated to the central issue of access to democracy. Collaboration between a steering group of disabled people and disability support organisations gave us all an opportunity to make recommendations for accessing democracy more easily and equally.

This was timely as we were anticipating a number of events where voter turn-out is important: the UK general election, a series of polling events for the referendum on Assembly powers, the 2011 Assembly election and the 2012 Welsh local government elections.

The conference discussed the upsurge of instances of disability hate crime, with key contributions from the South Wales Police Safety Unit and Safer Wales, dealing with the perception and reality of a hurtful subject. This report, which details the important discussion that took place, will be circulated to public bodies, groups and organisations across Wales.

In this way the Assembly Commission continues to be committed to developing our equality objectives for all citizens of Wales.

The Rt Hon the Lord Elis-Thomas PC AM
Llywydd of the National Assembly for Wales

What is the International Day of Disabled People?

International Day of Disabled People was first celebrated by the United Nations in the early 1980s and provides an opportunity to promote an understanding of disability issues and promote support for the dignity, rights and well-being of disabled people.

The day, celebrated each year on 3 December, provides the opportunity for individuals and organisations to demonstrate their commitment to disability equality by providing an opportunity for disabled people to raise awareness, promote equality and inclusion, voice their concerns and celebrate their achievements.

Who held the event and why was it held?

On 3 December 2009, the National Assembly for Wales Equality and Access team held an event focussed on the barriers that prevent disabled people from accessing democracy and participating fully in democratic society. Another theme of the day was tackling disability hate crime.

This report pulls together the issues raised by attendees concerning the three themes. It will be published on the Assembly's website and sent to politicians and organisations around Wales in order to continue to raise awareness about issues affecting disabled people and to bring about positive change.

Where did we hold the event and what happened?

The afternoon event was held in Tŷ Hywel, Cardiff Bay. Four groups of people discussed access to political information, access to democracy and tackling disability hate crime. Discussions included the disabled attendees relating their personal experiences of accessing democracy, accessing information and their perspectives of hate crime.

Throughout the event, attendees were encouraged to write down comments or suggestions related to the themes of the event and put them on a temporary wall which was placed in the Senedd. The wall provided attendees with the opportunity to highlight some of their concerns and to suggest possible ways forward. It remained visible to Assembly Members and the public in the Senedd following the event. Some of the comments that were provided can be seen in the **Wall Comments** section of this report.

In the evening, a reception was held in the Senedd which provided the opportunity to network and to be entertained and challenged by a short sketch written and performed by two delegates. Attendees also enjoyed a short reading of a published work by a disabled writer.

Who attended the event?

The event was attended by disabled people from across Wales. A steering group consisting of disabled service users helped to plan the event. In addition, representatives from South Wales Police and the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) also attended and took part in the event.

Who were the members of the steering group which helped design the event?

The steering group which helped design our event was made up of representatives from:

- Cardiff and Vale Coalition of Disabled People;
- Swansea Disabled People’s Forum;
- Wales Council for Deaf People;
- Wales Council for the Blind;
- Learning Disability Wales;
- Cardiff Access Group;
- Rosie Moriarty-Simmonds; RMS Disability Issues Consultancy.



Evening performance by Kay Jenkins and Andrew Hubbard

Accessible democracy

Workshop discussions focussed on the practicalities of voting and looked at barriers to access during the registration and voting process. The discussion built upon Scope Cymru's Polls Apart survey and campaign for accessible polling stations and the recommendations made in the Assembly's Equality of Opportunity Committee's report from 2007 on the Accessibility of Polling Stations in Wales, available at: www.assemblywales.org/cr-ld6906-e.pdf

The Committee's report highlighted the following:

- grants are available from the Welsh Government to local authorities to purchase accessible equipment for polling stations for Assembly elections;
- the Election Planning Group was set up by the Welsh Government in 2005 to provide a strategic overview of electoral issues in Wales;
- polling station inspectors can inspect polling stations for their accessibility; and
- performance standards for the accessibility of polling stations are in place and returning officers should ensure that all polling stations are equipped with the physical equipment necessary to make them as accessible as possible.

The Committee recently received an update on progress in implementing the recommendations of its report. The transcript of its meeting on 2 March can be seen at www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-committees/bus-committees-other-committees.htm

Accessing political information

Workshop discussions identified the following issues:

- advice is needed on where to find information on political parties and election candidates;
- disabled people need to be more proactive in helping political bodies present accessible information;
- election information is usually only provided in printed format and the language used is not easy to understand;
- lack of awareness of candidates.

Disability hate crime

Two groups discussed this issue. Group one was facilitated by two police officers from South Wales Police and the discussion was centred on how the police perceive and investigate an allegation of disability hate crime.

Group two was facilitated by Mark Williams, Combating Hate/Celebrating Diversity Co-ordinator for Safer Wales. This group looked at delegates' experiences of hate crime and the potential solutions for reducing and removing hate crime. The two groups came together at the end of the session to compare notes and provide feedback.

The discussion around disability hate crime was timely as the Equality and Human Rights Commission announced on 3 December that it would run a formal inquiry into the actions of public authorities to eliminate disability related harassment and its causes. Information on the inquiry can be accessed at www.equalityhumanrights.com

We hope that the issues raised in this report will be noted by the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

Mencap are running a campaign to raise awareness about tackling disability hate crime, particularly in relation to people with learning disabilities who might be experiencing hate crime. Further information on this can be found in the [Useful information](#) section of this report.



Delegates gather to share information

Access to democracy

Views raised during discussion:

- as someone with a visual impairment, how do I know when I'm voting that the third party is selecting my preferred choice?
- why can't we have the option to vote online?
- staff in polling stations should be more disability aware;
- electoral registration forms can be overly complicated and difficult to access online. They can be difficult to access particularly for people who rely on screen readers. The hard copy forms can also be difficult to read and fill out. Easyread versions could be made available, particularly for people with learning disabilities;
- many polling stations are still not accessible to people who have physical and/or sensory impairments. Signage is often poor and can be difficult to access for people who are visually impaired;
- disabled people should be able to vote in a manner that respects their dignity and human rights;
- election information on leaflets is only available in printed format, usually in small print.

Suggestions for action:

Action 1

The UK Electoral Commission should investigate the use of technology and alternative formats to make the electoral registration and voting processes more accessible for disabled people. Templates for people who are visually impaired could be utilised more with Braille overlay. Text phones and text messages could be utilised in order to register voters. Electronic voting machines could be used in polling stations that have audio visual messages and information.

Action 2

The Welsh Local Government Association and Returning Officers should ensure that polling stations across Wales have improved physical access and accessible signage, especially in rural areas; polling stations across Wales will be accessible to people who have sensory or physical impairments. Staff should receive disability equality training and information on communication support to enable them to provide an accessible customer service.

Action 3

The Electoral Commission might wish to consider working with disability groups to investigate ways to increase voter participation in elections.

This could include:

- using technologies available to enable visually-impaired people to cast their vote without the aid of third party intervention;
- creating an accessible electoral registration voting form which is accessible on and off line;
- provision of election information in accessible formats;
- removing barriers to voting identified by disabled people.

Access to political information

Views raised during discussion:

- there can be a lack of awareness of the requirements of disabled people by political parties when producing information and also a lack of face-to-face contact with candidates; some politicians fail to share knowledge and information with the public in an accessible format;
- disabled people should proactively challenge the lack of available information in accessible formats;
- use of complex language and terminology can be alienating;
- many websites are still inaccessible to disabled people mainly because service providers can be unaware or unsure of what is required. The involvement of disabled people in web design and information could overcome many of the problems encountered by people with sensory disabilities.

Suggestions for action:

Action 4

Political parties, the Electoral Commission and the WLGA should ensure that they make information available in other formats including Braille, type-talk, email, Easyread, face-to-face communication and British Sign Language. Websites should be accessible to all users and include access for deaf users and people who have visual impairments.

Action 5

Political parties might wish to consider providing training to their members on disability equality, accessible communications skills, and providing information in accessible formats. Politicians should use clear, plain Welsh/English and avoid jargon.

Action 6

Political parties, the Electoral Commission, Local Authorities and other public sector organisations should consider making it easier for disabled people to provide feedback/suggestions for service improvements and ensure suggestions are acted upon as appropriate.

Disability hate crime

Views raised in discussion:

- some individuals reported that they had been frightened to speak up when they had experienced harassment because of their disabilities and were afraid of potential repercussions by perpetrators;
- there was a perceived lack of training of police officers to deal with reports of hate crime and a lack of understanding of people's disabilities;
- the time taken by police to respond to an incident of hate crime.
- Some people felt that they had not been kept up-to-date with work being done by police authorities;
- victims often did not recognise that what they had experienced was disability hate crime;
- the need for more education and awareness among young people, disabled people and wider society as to what constitutes disability hate crime and the support that is available to people from various sources;
- Social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter could be used, in a positive manner, to raise awareness of disability hate crime.

Matters relating to equality would generally come under Personal and Social Education (PSE) which forms part of the basic curriculum for all registered pupils who are of compulsory school age and at maintained schools. One of the aims of PSE is to promote self-respect, respect for others and celebrate diversity. The PSE framework does not specifically mention hate crime. However, it is for individual schools to determine exactly how the curriculum is delivered. The framework can be viewed at <http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/curriculumassessment/arevisedcurriculumforwales/pse/?lang=en>

Suggestions for action:

Action 7

Police authorities in Wales may wish to consider the concerns raised and provide further Disability Equality training to officers. Forces should provide information in accessible formats to victims of hate crime. Follow-up information and support should be offered to individuals reporting a hate crime and they should be kept informed on how investigations are progressing.

Action 8

Police authorities in Wales should ensure that communication support should be available to individuals who have a sensory, hearing, mental health or learning disability to reassure them that the case is being treated seriously. Police authorities in Wales should communicate that help is available, by whom and where it can be accessed.

Action 9

The Welsh Government, local authorities, police authorities and disability groups and support networks in Wales could work in partnership to develop an awareness-raising campaign aimed at helping people identify and tackle disability hate crime. This may include how to identify when a disability hate crime occurs, how to combat disability hate crime, where to get help and the responsibility of the wider society in challenging and removing hate crime in all its forms.

Action 10

The police and support agencies such as social services, social workers and voluntary organisations could make it easier for people to make a complaint by giving them the opportunity to report the incident to somebody other than the police, ie a youth worker, social worker, teacher or anonymous reporting mechanism through organisations such as Safer Wales or disability organisations. Support could be improved by creating better links between organisations to ensure a more joined-up approach to tackling hate crime. There needs to be a greater understanding of the process of reporting and recording hate crime across the different organisations. Safer Wales provides information and advice on anonymous reporting and support for victims of Hate Crime.

Action 11

The Welsh Government should incorporate/place more emphasis on recognising and tackling hate crime as part of the curriculum for school pupils throughout their school career. This would need to be combined with enhanced training for teachers in teaching around the issue and in dealing with hate crime incidents. Young people need education on hate crimes, both those who are potential victims and those who may well be perpetrators.

Wall comments

Visitors were asked to give their comments at the event. A selection of these comments are shown below:

“Voting is not accessible for people with sight impairments; from the registration form to political leaflets and the polling station. Please help us to vote!”

“There are not enough disabled politicians. Political parties should actively seek out disability groups and encourage their involvement.”

“All levels of elected representatives should try to do a surgery in local supermarkets so that they can meet their constituents.”

“The Electoral Commission, the WLGA and the National Assembly should have more involvement in schools, more public involvement, and be creative in raising awareness in order to raise awareness and involvement in the democratic process. They should always use clear, plain and understandable language and make information available in accessible formats”.

“There is a lack of knowledge from politicians about the real problems facing disability groups.”

“I am too afraid of repercussions to make a complaint.”

“More money should be allocated to the police to raise awareness of disability hate crime.”

“In my experience, the police do not understand that what may be a small incident to them can have a huge impact on somebody’s life.”

After the report – what happens next?

Where can I find a copy of this report?

The report will be available online at www.assemblywales.org/equalities

Who will get a copy of the report?

A copy of the report will be sent to:

- every Assembly Member of the National Assembly for Wales;
- Welsh MPs
- the National Assembly for Wales Equality of Opportunity Committee
- the Equality and Human Rights Commission in Wales
- the Welsh Local Government Association
- the Welsh Government Elections Planning Group
- the Electoral Commission Wales
- the Association of Electoral Officers Wales
- all political parties within Wales
- all police forces in Wales
- disability organisations/access groups

Disabled people bringing about change – active citizenship, spreading the word of this report

Disabled people and disability organisations are invited to share this report and use it to influence positive change, improvements or overcome barriers to the electoral process.

National Assembly for Wales

The National Assembly for Wales is the democratically elected body that represents the interests of Wales and its people, makes laws for Wales and holds the Welsh Government to account. You can find out more about the work of the Assembly's Equality of Opportunity Committee, and in particular, its current work on accessibility of railway stations and its ongoing work on accessible polling stations at www.assemblywales.org

Welsh Government

The Welsh Government is the devolved government for Wales. This means that Wales has its own government to make policy and laws for the people of Wales within the 20 devolved fields. The Welsh Government is separate from the UK Government, which is based in London and headed by the Prime Minister. Visit the website at: www.wales.gov.uk

Welsh Local Government Association

The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) represents the interests of local government and promotes local democracy in Wales. It represents the 22 local authorities in Wales. The four police authorities, three fire and rescue authorities and three national park authorities are associate members. Visit the website at www.wlga.gov.uk

Police Authorities of Wales

The Police Authorities of Wales consist of four member Authorities. They are: Dyfed Powys Police Authority, Gwent Police Authority, North Wales Police Authority and South Wales Police Authority. Police Authorities of Wales (PAW) is a representative body of the four Police Authorities in Wales.

The main aims of PAW are to:

- consider and act upon issues affecting policing in Wales, particularly those under the control of the National Assembly for Wales;
- seek to influence the policing agenda at a national level on behalf of Police Authorities and local communities in Wales;
- support Police Authorities in securing efficient and effective policing services across Wales;
- promote awareness of policing needs and the role and achievements of Police Authorities;
- uphold and champion the principles of local accountability and policing by consent.

Visit the website at <http://paw.swpdevelopment.co.uk>

The Equality and Human Rights Commission Wales

The Commission has a helpline to give information and guidance on discrimination and human rights issues.

Wales main number: 0845 604 8810

Wales textphone: 0845 604 8820

Wales fax: 0845 604 8830

Monday – Friday, 08.00–18.00

Equality and Human Rights Commission Helpline Wales

Freepost RRLR-UEYB-UYZL

3rd Floor

3 Callaghan Square

Cardiff

CF10 5BT

email: waleshelpline@equalityhumanrights.com

website: www.equalityhumanrights.com

Crown Prosecution Service

The Crown Prosecution Service has a policy statement (also available in Easy read) which explains the way that it deals with cases of disability:

www.cps.gov.uk/publications/prosecution/disability.html

Elections and voting

Find out more about registering to vote and voting at:

www.aboutmyvote.co.uk

Scope Polls Apart Campaign for Accessible Democracy

www.pollsapart.org.uk/index.php

Mencap 'Get My Vote' Campaign

www.mencap.org.uk/case.asp?id=12840&menuId=&pageno=

Mencap's easyread guide to voting:

www.mencap.org.uk/document.asp?id=12634

Speaking Up – 'Promote the Vote Campaign' – website for people with learning disabilities where they can find out about voting:

www.promotethevote.co.uk

The Electoral Commission Wales – an independent body set up by the UK Parliament to ensure integrity and public confidence in the democratic process. Visit the website at:

www.electoralcommission.org.uk/wales

Reporting disability hate crime

To report hate crime of any form, you can use the Safer Wales website or report directly to your local police force. Mencap is also running a campaign against disability hate crime.

Safer Wales

www.saferwales.com/form.asp?i=1

South Wales Police

www.south-wales.police.uk/en/content/cms/help-and-advice/victims/hate-crime/

Dyfed-Powys Police

www.dyfed-powys.police.uk/en/advice/hatecrime/

North Wales Police

www.north-wales.police.uk/nwpv2/en/diversity/raceHate.asp

Gwent Police

www.gwent.police.uk/info_point/hatecrimereporting.htm

Mencap

www.mencap.org.uk