

Comisiwn y Cynulliad Assembly Commission

AC 2008 (Paper 4 –annex)

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The First Report of the Review Panel on Financial Support For Assembly Members

Assembly Members' Salaries

Summary and Recommendations

1. From our first meeting, we were determined that our approach should be evidence based. We have based our report and recommendations upon the evidence we have received.
2. Our view was that although the new powers and duties given to Assembly Members in May 2007 have resulted in growth in their roles, these were not yet fully developed. However, Members are working increasingly within their new powers and had been doing since May 2007. Although Members' roles had not reached the level of those of Members of the Scottish Parliament, for example, pending a more fundamental review of financial support to Members, it would be appropriate to recommend an increase in salary to a point about halfway between the existing percentage of an MP's salary and the percentage of that of a Scottish Member.
 - **Recommendation 1:** We recommend that the salaries of Assembly Members should increase to a level of 82% of that of an MP, and that this percentage increase should have effect from 4 May 2007, the date of their election.
3. Some of the submissions we received suggested that it would be desirable to extend salaries to all chairs of committees. However, we did not find the evidence in support of this view to be convincing.
 - **Recommendation 2:** We therefore recommend that remuneration for committee chairs should not be extended.

4. The leaders of opposition parties that are not the official opposition do not receive a salary for this role. We received evidence that this produces anomalies that we believe should be addressed.

- **Recommendation 3:** We therefore recommend that Leaders of Opposition Parties other than the main Opposition party should be paid a salary equivalent to that received by those Committee Chairs who receive additional remuneration.

5. We were not satisfied at this stage that we had sufficient evidence to recommend an appropriate level of salary for party whips.

- **Recommendation 4:** Therefore we recommend that this is considered as part of the fundamental review that we believe is desirable.
- **Recommendation 5:** We recommend a fundamental examination of the pay and system of financial support for Members under the developing devolution settlement. This will allow for further experience of the new powers of the Assembly as they develop to inform the review, and for a new approach to be adopted, tailored for the Assembly, which had the advantages of effectiveness clarity, transparency and simplicity.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1. The National Assembly for Wales Commission (“the Commission”) decided in the autumn of 2007 to seek recommendations on the Salaries, Pensions and Allowances available to Assembly Members (AMs) from a Panel of four independent people and one Assembly Commissioner (non-voting). This report sets out the conclusions and recommendations of that Panel.

1.2. We are conscious that the Panel has not, at this stage, discharged the entire brief given to us, but we felt it was necessary to approach the matter in two phases. This report deals with issues which, on the weight of the evidence and background information presented to us, appeared to be urgent. It also makes a recommendation that the Commission puts in place a fundamental review of the pay and system of financial support for Assembly Members, which has the object of recommending something more tailored to the National Assembly for Wales, rather than the current structure, which is based upon that of Westminster.

Remit and membership

1.3. The remit of the review is set out in Appendix A and the membership and support set out in Appendix B.

Chapter 2

Methodology

Our Approach

2.1. The Panel started its work in December 2008 and met on five occasions to the beginning of March 2008 to consider written evidence, receive oral evidence and information provided by Assembly officials.

2.2. From our first meeting, we were determined that our approach should be evidence based. We have based our report and recommendations upon the evidence we have received.

2.3. We wrote to the leaders of the four parties represented on the Assembly and the independent Assembly Member asking them to submit evidence on the issues which would need to be considered in the course of the Review. We have also written to all Assembly Members individually. There was also a general call for evidence from any member of the public wishing to contribute to the discussion which was published on the Assembly's website (<http://www.assemblywales.org/memhome/mem-pay/mem-pay-independentpanel/mem-pay-independentpanel-call.htm>)

2.4. We have set up a web page so that information about the review was accessible and to provide a place where our papers, minutes and evidence could be published. (<http://www.assemblywales.org/memhome/mem-pay/mem-pay-independentpanel.htm>)

2.5. In addition to the submissions made as a result of this call for evidence, we have received background papers from the Assembly officials who supported the Panel, dealing with the following areas (these have been published on our web page):

- The working methods and approach of the Panel;
- A briefing on the background to the issues we considered;
- Information on assessing the size of the job of an Assembly Member;
- The way in which the role of an Assembly Member has changed;
- How past independent reviews have considered the issues;
- Comparative information about the practice in other places in the UK and further afield.

Written Evidence

2.6. Written evidence was received from six AMs and two others. A list of those who gave written evidence is at Appendix C. The evidence has been published on our web page

Oral Evidence Taken

2.7 We took oral evidence from members of each of the four main parties represented in the Assembly. The identities of those who gave evidence are contained in Appendix C. The transcript of the evidence session is published on our web page

Chapter 3

Members' Salaries

Basic Salary

Preserved link decided by Commission

3.1. During the course of our review, the UK Government published the Senior Salaries Review Body recommendations relating to the salaries of Members of Parliament and put forward proposals which were debated in the House of Commons on 24 January 2008. The Assembly Commission had decided in July 2007 that the existing relativities between AMs and MPs should be maintained pending the outcome of this review to preserve the ratio of AM salaries to that of MPs at 76.5% as recommended by the Senior Salaries Review Body in 2004. Therefore any agreed increase to MPs salaries would automatically apply to AMs salaries. The salaries of AMs were accordingly adjusted in line with the salaries set out in Appendix D.

Panel's Consideration

3.2. The Panel's brief was to consider financial support for Members in the light of further devolution to the Assembly following the May 2007 election. In summary, the Assembly gained the capacity to make primary legislation, which may have an impact upon the job weight and complexity of the role of an Assembly Member. If this were the case, there may be a need to reflect this in the salary of a Member. Also, if the workload of a Member increased, it may be necessary to change or increase the allowances Members receive for employment of staff and other support for the functions they perform.

3.3. We were also mindful that the public will view our recommendations in the light of recent events relating to the salaries and allowances of MPs and other elected representatives and that any increases must be clearly supported by the evidence we received.

3.4. All 60 AMs are entitled to the same basic salary of £47,292 (from 1 November 2007). Ministers, the Counsel General, the Leader of the Opposition, the Presiding Officer and Deputy Presiding Officer and some committee chairs all receive additions to their salaries. There are now 27 such posts each of which are awarded a salary consisting of the basic AM's pay plus a supplementary amount for the additional responsibility. Information about the current salaries of office holders is shown in Appendix D.

3.5. This leaves 33 AMs who receive the basic salary. We have not taken any external earnings into account as we believe that Members should receive adequate remuneration to be able to make the Assembly their fulltime career.

Increased Responsibility and complexity of the role

3.6. We received a range of evidence both from AMs and from Assembly officials regarding the workload of the Assembly following the commencement of the Third Assembly. During the course of the review the first of the new Legislative Competency Orders (LCOs) completed its Assembly stages.

3.7. The evidence suggested that since the passing of the Government of Wales Act 2006, further devolved powers and the elections of May 2007, there has been an increase in volume of committee work and in the level of responsibility and complexity involved in this work. This has required Assembly Members and their staff to work longer hours.

3.8. We also noted that in order to meet the challenges of the new legislative powers, the Assembly has changed its committee structure. To provide focus on legislative scrutiny, a range of small committees have been established to examine each of the proposed Legislative Competence Orders and Measures, alongside four wide-ranging scrutiny committees which will examine within their remit the expenditure, administration and policy of the government and associated public bodies.

3.9. Other committees have cross-cutting themes including equality and children. The Subordinate Legislation Committee (which has replaced the former Legislation Committee) has been given an increased remit under Assembly Standing Orders, and is no longer limited to technical scrutiny of subordinate legislation (an activity heavily dependent on specialist legal advice).

3.10. The new legislative processes mean that Members now spend more time and research in developing LCOs and Measures, both individually as Assembly Members and also as Committee members. Both individual Assembly Members and Committees now have the ability to submit LCOs and Measures, as well as the Welsh Assembly Government.

3.11. Witnesses differed in their views as to how the increased quantity and changed nature of the workload should be reflected in the salaries of AMs. The opinions ranged from the view that it was too early to make a full assessment and there should be no significant change at this time to a (majority) view that an adjustment should be made to bring AMs' salaries more in line with those paid to members of the Scottish Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly.

3.12. We took evidence and collected information about the role of an Assembly Member and how this has changed since May 2007. Appendix E contains a summary of the evidence provided by officials of the Assembly Commission. We were satisfied that the new powers to make primary legislation and the potential for growth in the areas in which the Assembly was empowered to legislate had already, to a degree, and would over time be likely to increase the responsibility and complexity of a Member's role.

3.13. However, we were faced with two difficulties. The first is that the Assembly's new powers are not yet a year old. Although new legislation was making its way through the Assembly and growing all the time, none had completed its passage by the time of this report. The second difficulty is that for this reason and because of time constraints, it was not possible for us to undertake a comprehensive role evaluation of an Assembly Member's new duties.

3.14. We therefore placed some emphasis upon the findings of the previous independent review of Members' salaries, in the sense that it established a link between the level of job weight between that of an AM and of an MP, established at 76.5% as at 2004. We were also able to consider the levels at which the salaries of Members of the Scottish Parliament and of the Northern Ireland Assembly had been set, in relation to those of MPs, and looked for background purposes at the maximum allowances set for local government Members in Wales.

3.15. Our view is that although the new powers and duties given to Assembly Members have resulted in growth in their roles, this was not yet fully developed. Members are working increasingly within their new powers and have been doing since May 2007. Although their roles have not reached the level of those of Members of the Scottish Parliament, pending a more fundamental review of financial support to Members, it would be appropriate to increase their salary to a point about halfway between the existing percentage and that of a Scottish Member.

- **Recommendation 1:** We therefore believe that it would be appropriate to recommend that the salaries of Assembly Members should increase to a level of 82% of that of an MP, and that this percentage increase should have effect from 4 May 2007, the date of their election.

Office Holders' Salaries

3.16. We received evidence about the salaries of three types of office holder in particular, Committee Chairs, the Leader of the second opposition party and the party whips.

Committee Chairs

3.17. Some Committee Chairs receive an additional salary and others do not. The four Scrutiny Committees are:

- Communities and Culture Committee;
- Enterprise and Learning Committee;
- Health, Wellbeing and Local Government Committee;
- Sustainability Committee.

3.18. The Chairs of all these Committees currently receive an additional salary element. The other Committees (apart from Legislation Committees) are:

- Audit Committee;
- Business Committee;
- Children and Young People Committee;
- Equality of Opportunity Committee;
- European and External Affairs Committee;
- Finance Committee;
- Petitions Committee;
- Standards of Conduct Committee;
- Subordinate Legislation Committee.

3.19. Of these, only the Chairs of the Finance and Audit Committees currently receive an additional salary element. The view that differentiation between Committee Chairs in terms of payment is not logical was persuasive. However, additional payments to all Committee Chairs (except those who chair Legislation Committees which, by their nature, are time-limited) would mean that a majority of Assembly Members will receive additional responsibility payments. This may, of course, be a feature of the comparatively small size of the Assembly combined with its wide and growing range of responsibilities.

3.20. We received very limited evidence on the differences in roles of the Committee Chairs, and that which we did see was insufficient for us to make a decision about whether their roles are the same or should attract different levels of salary, or no salary at all.

- **Recommendation 2:** We therefore recommend that remuneration for committee chairs should not be extended.

Leaders of Opposition Parties other than the main Opposition party

3.21. We received a strong representation that the leader of each of the parties acts as the representative of that party and the group. This requires attendance at events and meetings at which all party leaders are present. And we noted that the Assembly is not constructed on a two party model.

3.22. It is now established protocol in the National Assembly of equality of treatment for all political groups. Whilst size defines speaking order, all leaders are called to speak.

3.23. The leader of each party also has responsibility for the leader's allowance, which has some equivalence with the House of Commons Short money. This allowance is expressed in terms of numbers of support staff, and a relatively small cash sum for expenditure related to the work of these staff.

3.24. However, we also noted that in the House of Commons only the leader of the main opposition party receives a salary. And in the Scottish Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly no opposition party leader receives a salary.

3.25. But we are persuaded that the current system produces anomalies that we believe should be addressed.

- **Recommendation 3:** We therefore recommend that Leaders of Opposition Parties other than the main Opposition party should be paid a salary equivalent to that received by Committee Chairs who receive remuneration.

Party Whips

3.26. We received evidence from the Labour Group that in the House of Commons, Government Whips are salaried, which was said to reflect the substantial responsibility that the posts attract. In summary, the evidence was that the Chief Whip does a great deal of work in liaising with members and co-ordinating the work of political groups. It was said that the Government Chief Whip in the Assembly attends Cabinet and provides significant support to the Leader of the House in arranging committee membership, liaising with Members and ensuring the smooth passage of Government business. The Labour Group accordingly proposed that each party chief whip receives a salary uplift to reflect their extra responsibilities.

3.27. The House of Commons published list of Ministerial and office-holders' salaries shows that only the Government and Opposition Chief Whips and Deputies receive a salary. No additional salary is paid to the whips in the Scottish Parliament and Northern Ireland Assembly, although in Northern Ireland an additional allowance is paid for staff to support the whips in their roles.

3.28. To recommend an additional salary for any of the party whips would be out of line with the other UK devolved institutions, but there is no reason that the Assembly should not follow its own path if this is suggested by the evidence. However, we were not satisfied at this stage that we had sufficient evidence to recommend an appropriate level of salary for party whips.

- **Recommendation 4:** Therefore we recommend that this is considered as part of the fundamental review that we believe is desirable.

Chapter 4

Future Work

4.1. While we have considered all issues within our terms of reference, the limited resources and evidence available to us within the time we had to report, lead us to the conclusion that further work was needed to do justice to the range of issues which were raised.

4.2. We therefore recommend a fundamental examination of the pay and system of financial support for Members under the developing devolution settlement. This will allow for further experience of the new powers of the Assembly to inform the review, and for a new approach to be adopted, tailored for the Assembly, which had the advantages of effectiveness, clarity, transparency and simplicity.

4.3. We believe that there is an opportunity for the Assembly to develop a model of corporate governance based on principles of openness, transparency and accountability (i.e. no payments without validation), which meets the needs of Wales better than the current system which is based upon the Westminster Parliament.

4.4. During the course of our work, we were mindful that there were a number of issues which needed to be pursued further. While it will be for the Assembly Commission to consider its approach, if it agrees to a root-and-branch review of financial support that we consider is necessary, we would recommend that:

- It may be useful to seek expert external job evaluation of the roles of Assembly Members, such as that undertaken as part of the SSRB 2004 Report.
- When considering the total remuneration package – further comparative research should be undertaken to consider models of expenses and allowances within both the public and private sector with evidence also being taken from other parliamentary bodies both in the UK and abroad.
- Consideration should be given to what are the most appropriate comparators for AMs' salaries and allowances. In our view comparisons with MPs may be less useful than reference to pay structures relating to those working in other parts of the public services (e.g. the judiciary or the civil service). It may also be desirable to develop a system which sets AMs' pay without the intervention of the Assembly or the Commission (so that politicians would no longer have a direct say on their pay increases).

- If an independent panel is appointed to undertake this work, it would in our view benefit from having an independent secretariat to support it although it should be able to draw upon the knowledge and experience of relevant Assembly officials.
 - Such a review should also be provided with a suitable budget to support its work.
- **Recommendation 5:** We recommend a fundamental examination of the pay and system of financial support for Members under the developing devolution settlement. This will allow for further experience of the new powers of the Assembly as they develop to inform the review, and for a new approach to be adopted, tailored for the Assembly, which had the advantages of effectiveness clarity, transparency and simplicity.

Appendix A

Terms of Reference

To carry out a review of the Salaries, Pensions and Allowances available to Assembly Members.

The Review Panel will consider the following as part of this review:

- What are the tasks expected of Assembly Members?
- How is the role of an Assembly Member likely to change as a result of the implementation of the Government of Wales Act 2006?
- How does the role of an Assembly Member compare with that of a Member of Parliament, a Member of the Scottish Parliament or Northern Ireland Assembly or other relevant public sector roles?
- What are the appropriate levels of office-holders' salaries that should be paid to:
 - The First Minister;
 - Welsh Ministers;
 - The Counsel General;
 - Deputy Ministers;
 - Presiding Officer;
 - Deputy Presiding Officer;
 - Leaders of Opposition Parties/Groups;
 - Committee Chairs (and which Chairs should receive an additional salary);
 - Members of the Assembly Commission;
 - Chief Whips/Business Managers of Parties/Groups;
 - Any other office-holders identified by the panel.
- What are the tasks expected of party leaders and should there be a numerical qualification in terms of numbers of Members to qualify for payment, and if so, what should this be?
- What resources are required to enable Assembly Members' tasks to be undertaken effectively and efficiently on behalf of constituents and the Assembly?
- What resources could be best provided centrally, or through other financial support mechanisms and what resources could be provided through Allowances?

- How should the remuneration of Assembly Member Support Staff be organised?
- What support should be provided to former Members on leaving?

The Review Panel shall invite evidence submissions from AMs and such persons, parties and other organisations as it deems appropriate, and shall otherwise conduct the review as it sees fit.

The Review Panel may consider comparators with other support mechanisms both within the United Kingdom and beyond.

The Review Panel shall prepare a report setting out its findings and recommendations with respect to salaries, with reasons, for submission to the Assembly Commission by around the end of January 2008. It is anticipated that the review of allowances will be completed by the end of April 2008.

Appendix B

Panel Membership and Support

The Panel was comprised of the following members:

- Sir Michael Wheeler-Booth (Chair), a member of the Richard Commission and former Clerk to the Parliaments, he currently lectures in politics at Magdalen College, Oxford;
- Mair Barnes, recently appointed as a non executive adviser to the Commission, a long track record in leadership of major companies;
- Eileen Heasman, Director of Human Resources at the Office for National Statistics;
- Professor Steve Martin of Cardiff Business School, an expert in the public sector who was the academic adviser to the Beecham Review of Local Service Delivery in Wales;
- William Graham AM, Commissioner with responsibility for Assembly Resources, will sit on the Panel as the Commission's representative. Mr Graham is a Welsh Conservatives Member elected from the South Wales East regional list As an Assembly Member. Mr. Graham declared an interest in the Panel's recommendations and has indicated that he would not feel it appropriate to vote on matters in which he had an interest.

The Panel was supported by staff of the National Assembly for Wales, in particular the following:-

- Dianne Bevan, Chief Operating Officer of the Assembly who has responsibility for finance, human resources, ICT, external communications and facilities management;
- Wayne Cowley, Head of Members' Business Services in the Assembly: responsible for management and administration of the current system of Members' financial support in the Assembly and has assisted in previous reviews; staff from his team also assisted;
- Anna Daniel and Virginia Hawkins, respectively legislation committee and scrutiny committee clerks;
- Advice was given by Ian Summers, former Partner in the Wales Audit Office with particular responsibility for Assembly matters, currently working with the Assembly Parliamentary Service on corporate governance and specialist financial advice;

- The Panel had access to the resources of the Assembly's research service, legal team and other specialist staff as the need arose.

Appendix C

List of those who gave oral and written evidence

Written Evidence was received from:

David Melding AM
Carwyn Jones AM
Michael German AM
Jenny Randerson AM
Nick Bourne AM
Chris Franks AM

Representative of the Labour Group Support Staff

One member of the public

The Panel also interviewed the following people:

David Melding AM
Michael German AM
Alun Ffred Jones AM
Carwyn Jones AM

Appendix D

AM Salaries

	Salary w.e.f 1/4/2007		Salary w.e.f 4/5/2007		Salary w.e.f 1/11/2007	
	£	£	£	£	£	£
Member of Parliament	61,181		61,181		61,820	
Assembly Member	46,804		46,804 (50,169)		47,292 (50,692)	
Members who are also Members of Parliament or Members of the European Parliament	15,601		15,601 (16,723)		15,764 (16,897)	
	Office-Holders salary	Total Salary¹	Office-Holders salary	Total Salary¹	Office-Holders salary	Total Salary¹
	£	£	£	£	£	£
First Minister	77,546	124,350	77,546	124,350 (127,715)	78,355	125,647 (129,047)
Presiding Officer/Welsh Ministers	40,225	87,029	40,225	87,029 (90,394)	40,645	87,937 (91,337)
Leader of the largest party without an Executive role	40,225	87,029	40,225	87,029 (90,394)	40,645	87,937 (91,337)
Deputy Presiding Officer/Deputy Ministers	25,301	72,105	25,301	72,105 (75,470)	25,566	72,858 (76,258)
Chairs of Scrutiny Committees/Chair of Audit Committee/Chair of Finance Committee	5,873	52,677	5,873	52,677 (56,042)	5,934	53,226 (56,626)
Leader of opposition parties other than the largest	N/A	46,804	N/A (5,873)	46,804 (56,042)	N/A (5,934)	47,292 (56,626)
Counsel General (if AM)	40,225	87,029	40,225	87,029 (90,394)	40,645	87,937 (91,337)
Counsel General (if not AM)	87,029	87,029	87,029 (90,394)	87,029 (90,394)	87,937 (91,337)	87,937 (91,337)

¹ Including both Assembly member and Office-Holder salaries (amounts in parentheses represent salary if recommended increase is applied)

APPENDIX E

The Changing role of an Assembly Member

New Powers and Duties – Effect On The Role of an Assembly Member

Legislative Committees

In the Third Assembly, as a result of the Government of Wales Act 2006, the Assembly can make a new category of Welsh laws called 'Assembly Measures'. Prior to the 2006 Act, the Assembly only had secondary legislative powers. Before making Measures in relation to a particular devolved area, the Assembly needs to obtain 'legislative competence' on a case by case basis from the UK Parliament. Legislative competence can be granted either in Acts of Parliament or by using the new route of "Legislative Competence Orders" (LCOs).

To date a new Committee has been set up to scrutinise each proposed LCO. Proposed Measures are subject to a four stage procedure – including line by line scrutiny and consideration of amendments by a proposed Measure Committee - comparable to the parliamentary process at Westminster and in the Scottish Parliament. In February 2008, over half of the non-government Assembly Members were members of legislative committees.

The new legislative Ballots through which Members may be given leave to propose LCOs or Measures have been well subscribed and have resulted in proposed Measures and LCOs being brought forward (see below). Two more ballots are expected in the summer term.

The legislative workload is steadily increasing, as is to be expected as the Assembly makes use of its new powers. By the end of April 2008 – one year into the new mandate:

- Five LCO Committees will have reported. One of these undertook joint scrutiny of the proposed LCO with the House of Commons Welsh Affairs Committee (January 2008);
- Two new Committees set up to consider Member led proposed LCOs will start taking evidence;
- The first Measure Committee will have completed Stage 2 consideration of amendments;
- Two new Measure Committees will be established - one to consider a government Measure and one a Member led Measure.

A further government proposed LCO and Measure are expected in the summer term. In February, two Members were given leave to introduce the proposed LCO and Measure, while a further LCO and a Measure were selected in the Ballot on 20 February. The Assembly will decide whether to give the latter two Members leave to introduce before the end of April 2008.

Scrutiny Committees

In the Third Assembly, the Government of Wales Act 2006 separated the executive and legislative functions and allowed for a number of Scrutiny Committees to be

established. The Committees' function is different from that in the First and Second Assemblies, which was mainly policy development.

Their remit is to hold the Welsh Assembly Government to account, substantially by scrutinising Ministers whose portfolio impacts on the scrutiny inquiry they are conducting and, for the most part, they follow the Westminster model of Select Committees, carrying out a series of scrutiny inquiries. The Scrutiny Committees are also able to carry out scrutiny of proposed Assembly Measures (usually at the consultation stage) as well as to introduce their own LCOs and Measures and take them through the appropriate Assembly procedures and legislation committees.

In the Third Assembly there are 9 Committees and one sub-committee which meet regularly (either weekly or fortnightly) to carry out the scrutiny function. As these Committees have a membership of eight or nine to reflect the political balance with the Assembly, the majority of members' time in committee will be spent in scrutiny committees. This has resulted in the majority of backbench members attending at least four scrutiny committee meetings per month and six members attending over ten scrutiny committee meeting per month.

At the end of the Second Assembly, the requirement for Committees to reflect the political balance of the Assembly has the following implications for Members:

Number of Members	Number of Committees a member of
9	3
26	2
10	1

Number of Members	Number of Committee meetings in a 4 week period
16	4
27	3
1	2
1	1

Third Assembly

In the Third Assembly, the requirement for Committees to reflect the political balance of the Assembly has the following implications for Members:

Number of Members	Number of Committees a members of
4	4
14	3
16	2
8	1

In terms of workload, this equates to:

Number of Members	Number of Committee meetings in a 4 week period
1	12
5	10
4	9
5	8
3	7
8	6
5	5
11	4 or less (i.e. 1 per week or less)

Plenary

In the Second Assembly the majority of plenary time was spent considering Government business – Ministerial statements and questions to Ministers. In the Third Assembly, around 40% of plenary time is allocated for Assembly and Non-Government business, and at present the majority of this time has been dedicated to Minority Party Debates.

To date, there has only been one Plenary debate on a government led LCO and only one Stage 1 Measure debate. There have been two debates seeking the Assembly's leave to introduce Member proposed Measures and two debates on Member proposed LCOs, following their selection in a ballot. The amount of time devoted to legislation will increase once Legislative Committees have reported.

Three Plenary debates have been held on Committee Reports. The number of debates on Committee Reports will increase in due course as reports from the Committees in the Third Assembly are published.

There are approximately 33 sitting weeks in a Plenary year. The Third Assembly meets in Plenary every Tuesday and Wednesday during a sitting week (66 Plenary meetings a year). It formally sits for an extra 1.5 hours each week in comparison with the Second Assembly, 49.5 hours more than in the Second Assembly. However, business can run beyond 5.30pm, and as more legislative debates puts pressure on the agenda, it may become a more regular occurrence. In practice, this will increase the amount of time that the Assembly sits

	Second Assembly	Third Assembly
Tuesday's Plenary	2.00-5.30pm (3.5 hrs)	2.00-5.30pm (3.5 hrs)
Wednesday's Plenary	2.00-5.30pm (3.5 hrs)	12.30-5.30 pm (5 hrs)
Total no. of hrs a week	7 hrs	8.5 hrs
Total no. of hrs a year	231	280.5

In addition, there are also regular meetings of party groups etc. which add to the amount of time which Assembly Members spend in formal meetings.