

National Assembly for Wales

Standards of Conduct Committee

Lobbying and Cross-Party Groups

Assembly Rules and Guidance

The Assembly's Standards of Conduct Committee has undertaken an inquiry into the Assembly's arrangements in relation to lobbying activity, and has made recommendations about some strengthening of those arrangements. The Committee's report was published on 2nd May and is available on the Assembly website:

www.senedd.assemblywales.org/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=231

What has the Committee recommended and why?

Lobbying activity and Cross-Party Groups are widely recognised as a valuable part of the democratic process. Openness and accountability are also needed to ensure public confidence. The Committee does not want to introduce measures that will place an unnecessary burden on Members or those who want to engage with them as it is important to maintain the open culture of the Assembly and the availability of its Members.

The Committee has proposed that the Assembly adopts:

- a. A new code of practice for Assembly Members in relation to lobbying activity – The National Assembly for Wales' Guidance on Lobbying and Access to Members;
- b. New Assembly Rules for the Operation of Cross-Party Groups that will replace existing guidance.

The Committee will review arrangements again before the end of the Fourth Assembly to ensure that they remain fit for purpose.

a) National Assembly for Wales' Guidance on Lobbying and Access to Members

The Committee recommends that Members of the National Assembly for Wales are provided with guidance on lobbying (a code of practice for Assembly Members on contact with lobbyists) encouraging the recording of meetings. It is proposed that the guidance proposed in the Committee's report is adopted by resolution of the Assembly in plenary.

Subject to agreement, the guidance could be issued alongside proposed new rules for Cross-Party Groups to form a package of advice for Assembly Members. It is the Committee's view that the actions it proposes could help to provide reassurance to the Welsh public about levels of openness and transparency, and the Standards Commissioner's ability to investigate any concerns that might be raised with him in the future with regard to lobbying.



b) Cross-Party Group Rules – what changes are proposed?

Cross-Party Groups provide a forum for Assembly Members from different parties to consider shared interests in particular subjects relevant to the Assembly. The new rules provide more robust guidelines on how Cross-Party Groups should operate, but certain things would not change:

- **Status** - Cross-Party Groups are not formal Assembly groupings and are not bound by any of the Assembly’s Standing Orders; they have no formal role in policy development; do not have any of the powers of Assembly Committees and cannot use the Assembly’s logo or branding.
- **Use of Resources** - Cross-Party Groups do not take precedence over formal Assembly business and must respect the limitations on the use of Assembly facilities and resources, as set out in Sections 8-10 of the rules.
- **Accountability and Compliance** - The new rules emphasise the responsibility of Chairs for ensuring that Cross-Party Groups comply with the rules on use of Assembly facilities and resources; that all notices, correspondence, documentation and other arrangements relating to Group activities must be issued in the name of the Chair of the Group; and in the case of the group appointing a Secretary who is not an Assembly Member, that person must not act without the prior approval of the Chair. Outside organisations and individuals associated with Cross-Party Groups are not entitled to use the Assembly’s resources. Failure to comply could result in a group being de-registered on the authority of the Presiding Officer, and any complaint concerning a Members’ personal standards of conduct, the proper use of Assembly resources and/or the proper registration of interests in accordance with Standing Order 2, would be handled by the Standards Commissioner and Standards of Conduct Committee according to Assembly procedure.
- **Openness and Transparency** – the rules include certain new requirements for information to be made public on the Cross-Party Group section of the Assembly’s website. The new requirements are summarised below:

Registration

Chairs should re-register existing Cross-Party Groups, or register any new Cross-Party Group using a registration form provided by the Assembly Commission.

By when?

A new registration form will be sent to Chairs before the rules come into effect. Groups would need to re-register at the start of each new Assembly following elections.



Elected officers

Before registering a Cross-Party Group, office-holders should be elected (a minimum of a Chair and a Secretary) and their names and contact details published. Office-holders may be elected at an inaugural Annual General Meeting or an ordinary group meeting.

Recording changes

Changes to office holders should be notified.

Holding Meetings

Groups would be required to hold an Annual General Meeting (AGM).

Publishing information

Meeting dates, times and venues would be published.

Minutes of all Cross-Party Group meetings to be published.

An **Annual Report and Financial Statement** to be published. The information required would be as set out in sections 12-13 of the rules.

By when?

Details of elected officers should be provided within four weeks of election, using the registration form.

Within four weeks of the change, by an amended registration form.

Within 12 months of registration of the group, and then annually.

Chairs should provide as much notice of meetings as possible.

Within four weeks of the meeting taking place (section 14 of the rules).

Within six weeks of the AGM being held.

What happens next?

The full guidance and rules are included in the Committee's report, and the Assembly will be invited to endorse them when the report is debated in plenary towards the end of June 2013. If endorsed, the lobbying code of practice will come into effect immediately, but the Cross-Party Group Rules would not come into effect until 23 September 2013. Assembly Commission staff will contact Cross-Party Group Chairs after June to provide further information and guidance about the practical implications of the rules, and to ensure that groups have the tools, guidance and support needed in advance of the rules coming into effect.

How do I find out more?

If anyone involved in Cross-Party Group activity has a query about the proposals in the Committee report, they may contact:

Standards of Conduct Committee Clerk, telephone 029 2089 8429, email

StandardsofConductCommittee@wales.gov.uk

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