

National Assembly for Wales

The year in review

Annual report and statement of accounts 2008 – 2009

Section One

Foreword from the Llywydd

This year saw the Assembly and Wales approach the milestone of the first decade of devolution, during which we continued to develop our constitution in practice. We became more effective through our committees and plenary meetings at calling Welsh Ministers to account, and began passing new Welsh laws, with the passage of the NHS Redress (Wales) Measure 2007, which allows patients an easier route to claim compensation when treatment provided by the NHS in Wales has been negligent.

This was the first piece of primary legislation made by the National Assembly, the first Welsh law to be passed since the middle ages – the code of laws associated with the name of Hywel Dda from the tenth century, and the first bilingual law ever to be passed in Britain. We have now evolved into a working legislature.

Our development has not gone unnoticed by the people of Wales, who have responded positively to the growing influence of their National Assembly. This was clearly reflected in the positive findings of the largest survey to gauge public understanding of the political landscape in Wales, published in October. Not only did this Assembly-commissioned survey indicate a generally robust understanding of the political landscape in Wales, it also noted that over 70% of people supported either partial or full devolution of power for Wales.

But there is still much to be done to encourage greater engagement in the democratic process, and to ensure that the Assembly represents the interests of *all* of the people in Wales. There are groups within society who feel disenfranchised from the political process for reasons that range from social disengagement to financial deprivation, and it is incumbent on us to address the apathy that this engenders.

That is why this year I undertook a series of consultations with groups who are often at a significant remove from the political process.

We began the process through visits across the electoral regions in Wales to representatives of the black and ethnic minority communities, as well as disabled people, faith communities and sexual orientation and young people's groups. The aim was simple – to see how we can make the democratic process more accessible to all.

Their views and voices are of crucial importance, because as we look towards the next ten years of devolution, we have to remember that the National Assembly is increasingly a focal point for a cohesive sense of a Welsh identity. But we need to ensure that *everyone* in Wales feels ownership of the Assembly and its work.

Our role is to represent the interests of Wales and its people, to make laws for Wales and hold the Welsh Government to account, and we are honour bound to ensure we do so with the full understanding and support of the people we represent.

This year saw us redouble our efforts to ensure people understand who we are and what we do, and more importantly, feel encouraged to become active and informed citizens. Democracy must be seen to belong to all. Devolution cannot work if it is a minority interest, and we are committed to continuing to make democracy accessible to everyone.

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

Introduction from the Chief Executive and Clerk of the Assembly

The past year saw the National Assembly continue to progress and develop in its role as the parliamentary body for Wales, and I am proud to lead a team whose enthusiasm and dedication has helped deliver the achievements highlighted in this report.

Good governance and accountability remain at the core of our work, and underpin the Assembly's goals and achievements. Our emphasis has also been on an open outward-facing approach, one that places the people of Wales at the heart of all that we do.

One of the National Assembly's main objectives is to help people to become informed and active citizens, who understand the democratic process, and who actively engage in shaping the future of Wales.

For people to make an informed decision at the ballot box, we know that it is important for them to understand the democratic process, how it affects them, and more importantly, how they can play an active part in it. The year therefore saw a significant effort by the Assembly to ensure that people understand the Assembly's role and how they can influence the work that Members do. Key to this has been outlining what opportunities exist for individuals and communities to ensure their interests are properly and accurately represented.

Supported by our Commissioners, we strengthened the organisation in a number of areas, including an improved approach to risk management, business continuity planning and the introduction of a comprehensive leadership development programme. Across the organisation we have teams of committed, professional people who have delivered high quality services to Assembly Members to support them in their three roles of representing the people of Wales, making laws for Wales and holding the Welsh Government to account.

We are committed to being a leading organisation in promoting equality, valuing diversity and respecting human rights in our capacity as an employer, in providing support for Assembly Members, and in interacting with the public. Over the past year we have made significant progress in meeting our equality objectives, including the publication of an equality scheme and action plan.

In January 2009, as one result of this commitment to equality, the National Assembly was named as one of the UK's top 100 gay-friendly employers, according to Stonewall's Workplace Equality Index 2009.

This made us Wales' 'most-improved employer' in terms of being a gay-friendly place to work and the second 'most-improved' employer nationally.

Looking forward, we are planning to reach out to a wider audience through greater engagement with all our communities, including using the National Assembly bus. We will also be continuing our commitment to lead by example when it comes to our corporate governance arrangements. To

maintain our commitment to being an open and transparent parliamentary institution, we will also begin to proactively publish Assembly Member expenses on a monthly basis.

Working in partnership with the Welsh Local Government Association we aim to launch an exciting new all-Wales project so that those who have not traditionally engaged politically can gain experience of working with Assembly Members and their local councillors.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who works for the Assembly, and our Assembly Commissioners for their diligence and hard work in providing support and advice to Assembly Members, and for ensuring that we make the Assembly an accessible and effective parliamentary body that inspires the confidence of the people of Wales.

Claire Clancy
Chief Executive and Clerk of the Assembly

The National Assembly for Wales – the year in figures

23,688	The number of children involved in the Assembly's education workshops
98	The number of petitions received during the year
2,500	The number of people questioned as part of the Assembly's survey of people's understanding of the devolution settlement
4,425	The number of written research papers and documents produced by the Assembly's Members' Research Service
71	The number of Plenary meetings held during the year
4,990	The number of oral questions tabled
2,242	The number of written questions tabled
85	The number of Legislative Committee meetings held over the year
5	The number of new Legislation Committees established to manage the Assembly's law-making process
257	The number of events held in the Senedd during the year
8	The number of ballots held by the Presiding Officer to allow Assembly Members to propose laws for Wales
2,106,100	The number of written words translated by the Assembly's translation service
146,528	The number of visitors to the Senedd during 08/09
95%	The percentage of paper purchased by the Assembly that is from recycled sources or from FSC certified suppliers
3,000	The number of votes cast in the Assembly's Welsh Idol poll, won by Ray Gravell
4,783,900	The number of words published by the Record of Proceedings during the past year

Highlights at a glance

April 2008

Siambwr Hywel, Europe's first dedicated youth debating chamber is opened by Prince Charles.

April 2008

The Assembly introduces its online e-petitioning system, resulting in a significant increase in the number of submitted petitions.

6 May 2008

The Assembly passed its first law, the NHS Redress Measure – the first Welsh law passed since the 10th century.

August 2008

The National Assembly appoints an independent panel to review Assembly Members' pay and allowances

October 2008

The results of the largest political survey in Wales, commissioned by the National Assembly, showed that 70% of people wanted either partial or full devolution for Wales.

November 2008

The National Assembly for Wales welcomed His Majesty King Letsie III of Lesotho to Cardiff Bay, as part of an initiative to develop inter-parliamentary links between Wales and Lesotho.

December 2008

The Presiding Officer welcomed his counterparts from Scotland and Northern Ireland to the National Assembly for Wales. William Hay MLA, speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly and Alex Ferguson MSP, Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament came to Cardiff Bay, for this, their first visit to the Senedd.

January 2009

Her Royal Highness, The Countess of Wessex visited the Senedd in her capacity as patron of Mencap.

January 2009

The Assembly is named 'Wales' most improved employer' in Stonewall's Workplace Equality Index, and one of the top 100 gay-friendly places to work in the UK.

The National Assembly for Wales

How the Assembly works

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.

Assembly Members

The Assembly is made up of 60 elected Assembly Members, who represent a specific area of Wales as a member of a particular party (Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat, Plaid Cymru) or as an independent member.

Assembly Members meet every week when the Assembly is in session, to discuss issues of importance to Wales and its people; they pose questions to Welsh Ministers, carry out debates on government policies and committee reports and examine Welsh laws.

The National Assembly Commission

To ensure that the Assembly carries out its role effectively and efficiently, the Assembly Commission was established in May 2007 to ensure that the Assembly is provided with the property, staff and services required for the Assembly's purposes.

The Commission sets the corporate body's strategic aims, objectives, standards and values, considers performance against their delivery, oversees change and encourages innovation and enterprise for the National Assembly.

The National Assembly Commission consists of the Llywydd, plus four other Assembly Members, one nominated by each of the four party groups. The five Commissioners are accountable to the National Assembly for the Commission's functions. To help with the delivery of these functions the Commissioners are responsible for cross cutting portfolios as detailed below:

You can find out more on the [Commissioners' pages](#) on the website.

During this year, Commissioners met formally on eight occasions, and looked at a range of issues that included the Assembly's draft budget; proposed changes to the IT system; the Assembly's Equality Scheme; our Branding Strategy; proposals for the independent panel that reviewed Members' pay and allowances and guidance for Assembly Members.

Our strategic objectives

The National Assembly's [Strategy for the Third Assembly](#) clearly sets out what its priorities are until the next Assembly term in 2011.

The first of the goals aims at **encouraging more people to become actively involved in the democratic process**. The remainder of this report outlines how we have achieved this by ensuring greater public awareness of how the

Assembly works, increasing understanding of the nature of the Assembly's relationship with the Welsh Government and the importance we place on involving the people of Wales in making laws for Wales and holding the Welsh Government to account..

The report also highlights how the Assembly is **making a bold response to its increased powers**. The establishment of new permanent legislation committees, an enhanced role for the Subordinate Legislation committee to scrutinise how powers conferred to Wales are shaping the landscape of Welsh constitution and the passing of the Assembly's first bilingual Measure all contributed towards the delivery of this goal.

Good governance and probity also form the cornerstone of the Assembly's work. This year's report details how the Commission established an [independent panel](#) to review financial support for Assembly Members, and for this annual report, the team from the Wales Audit Office has responded to a request from our Chief Executive and Accounting Officer to increase the planned audit of Members' allowances.

Almost uniquely for a parliamentary body, the Assembly undertakes all its work on the principles of **sustainable working**. The Senedd's build was based on using sustainable materials and processes, from lighting to recycling rainwater for use in its bathrooms, and this year we were successful in achieving Level 5 Green Dragon Environmental Management System (similar to ISO 14001) for the whole estate - the highest level that can be attained in the UK. In addition, during the course of the year, the Assembly has made other improvements to our environmental footprint including strengthening the Sustainability team, improving our building management system which resulted in a decrease of 6% in the amount of energy used and introducing a system that measures our carbon footprint for business travel.

Much work has been done over the past twelve months to ensure we provide **the best service, provided in the most effective way** to our customers. Recognising the likelihood of tighter public spending, we need to work effectively and efficiently, deploying our resources and planning well to deliver our priorities while showing best value in our use of public money.

Working towards IIP accreditation and launching our Leadership development programme are among the key actions we undertook during the reporting period which will assist with the delivery of our priorities for the remainder of the third Assembly.

1. Representing the interests of Wales and its people

Representing value for money

There is no doubt that in years to come, the past year will be seen as a time when democratic institutions across the United Kingdom were challenged to be more transparent, more accountable and more responsive to the needs and expectations of the electorate.

Since its establishment as a discrete law-making body in 2007, the National Assembly for Wales has adhered to its strategic objective of being transparent and accountable and open to the most intense public scrutiny.

As part of this commitment to the principles of transparency, in August 2008 the National Assembly appointed an independent review panel, chaired by Sir Roger Jones, to review Assembly Members' financial support. The panel's remit was to review and make recommended changes to all aspects of financial support available to Assembly Members, including pay and allowances for travel, accommodation, constituency offices and support staff.

The review gathered evidence and consulted extensively, in private and in public to gather opinions from members of the public, as well as meetings with city, town and community councils, other public sector organisations, Assembly Members and also the Commissioner for Standards in Wales.

The panel's report was published on July 6 2009. A copy of the report can be [found here](#).

Representing Wales when making laws and holding the Welsh Government to account

In every aspect of its work, the National Assembly is committed to ensuring that people have an opportunity to comment on and also shape the work that we do that will ultimately have an impact on their daily lives.

During the Summer 2008 the Health Wellbeing and Local Government Committee undertook a public survey, including 500 young people aged between 14 and 16 for their views on Presumed Consent for Organ Donation. Schoolchildren visiting Siambr Hywel also debated and voted on the issue, with the motion linked to the debate using the electronic voting system, and members of the public attending the Welsh national summer shows were given the opportunity to leave their video comments on the Assembly's inflatable stand. The survey responses and the findings of the debates helped inform the Committee's final report on the subject which received considerable media coverage.

Similarly, when the Assembly was planning on introducing a law to ensure that school meals in Wales were nutritious and balanced, there was widespread consultation on the Proposed Healthy Eating in Schools (Wales) Measure 2008. Not only were the public and stakeholders encouraged to give

their views, but every school that visited the Assembly was given the opportunity to vote on whether they thought legislation was necessary to ensure they received a healthy meal.

In February 2009, the National Assembly undertook a major consultation exercise, when one of our legislation Committees asked the people of Wales whether the Assembly should have the right to legislate on the Welsh language, instead of laws on the language being passed in Westminster. This resulted in 300 responses being received which helped the Committee reach a view on the need for the legislation.

Representing the young people of Wales

As part of the Assembly's efforts to encourage young people to understand the democratic process, the Assembly's former debating chamber in Tŷ Hywel, named after the 10th century King Hywel Dda. was transformed and renamed Siambr Hywel in April 2008 – believed to be the world's first dedicated youth debating chamber. Siambr Hywel provides a forum and space to allow them to debate under the same rules that govern the Assembly, with young speakers requesting and being called to speak.

Consultation with young people is central to our activity in Siambr Hywel, but it has also acted as a venue for 19 events during the year, among them, CEWC Model Assembly, EU Mock Council of Ministers, the Assembly's Youth Participation Conference and a Government and Politics AS/A Level (WJEC) Conference. These events demonstrate our commitment to working in partnership with external stakeholders to help achieve better understanding of how individuals can play their part in Welsh democracy.

The Assembly also launched a new outreach education service for south Wales in September 08, which reached 80 schools and colleges, while 287 schools and colleges from the north Wales and mid and west Wales regions received presentations through our outreach programme. During the year the education team, collectively, delivered presentations and workshops to 683 schools and colleges, reaching an audience of 23,688 pupils.

Representing Wales' interests through technology

The National Assembly is dedicated to ensuring that we choose the most innovative and useful ways to engage with the people of Wales. As technology changes, so do people's expectations of how they can interact with us. We are committed to using the most modern and inclusive methods available to help people including those who may not normally take an interest in the Assembly and its work, to understand, engage and participate in Welsh democracy.

In April 2008, the National Assembly augmented its e-democracy services, including the launch of our e-petitioning system our improved webcasting service Senedd.tv, e-forums and a "quick vote" facility for online consultations for committee inquiries.

The Assembly's media relations team also started work on ensuring that we are providing information to journalists that reflects their needs in Wales' changing media landscape. From March 2009, nearly every media release sent out was accompanied by a bilingual audio clip, allowing local radio stations from outside the Cardiff area to carry information that they would not otherwise have access to.

In addition, the Assembly established a wide-ranging review of IT services and systems, concentrating on how the Assembly can use IT to improve the way we work and how we engage with the public. The review, called iChange, included a comprehensive internal consultation which gathered the opinions and views of over 40 Assembly Members, numerous support staff across all political parties represented in the Assembly, and Assembly staff. Everyone was encouraged to give their views on what was good and bad about the current systems and services, and what they would like to see in future.

In addition, the Assembly's Members' Research Service introduced new online tracking services have been developed to help the public to better understand the work of scrutiny and legislation committees. These can be accessed via [the progress of Scrutiny Committee inquiries](#) and [the progress of Legislative Competence Orders \(LCOs\) and Measures](#) web pages.

The [Assembly powers tracking notes](#) service also provided the Assembly and the public with the most comprehensive assessment available of the Assembly's evolving legislative competence and the legislation from which it derives.

Representing your interests through Petitions

Another particularly striking example of technology being used to help people work collaboratively with the National Assembly is the e-Petitions system, which has the potential to reach many more people than a traditional paper petition and makes the submission of petitions far simpler.

In just over two months since its launch in April 2008, the e-Petitions system had contributed a fifth of the total of petitions for the whole year, proof that user-friendly ways of engaging with the Assembly helped people to realise that their voices and opinions were not just heard, but also acted upon.

During the reporting period, the Committee received its 150th petition since the start of the Third Assembly from the Ammanford Junior Gateway Club which called for free swimming for children and young people throughout the year. The Committee received this petition from the petitioners at the National Pool in Swansea. Paralympian gold medallists David Roberts and Ellie Simmonds were on hand to support the petitioners.

The Committee also conducted, and reported on, its first inquiry during this period on a petition raised by the Welsh Canoeing Association calling for a change in the law to allow a right of access to inland water for low-impact recreational activities. As part of its inquiry, the Committee visited the River Teifi in West Wales to meet with a variety of water-users and land owners. It also held a formal meeting at the Scottish Parliament in order to gain an

understanding of the situation in Scotland, where a right of access was introduced in recent years.

The Petitions Committee has conducted a variety of visits to gather evidence on different petitions and held formal meetings in locations closer to the communities in which petitions have been raised. They have held various small discussion groups, site visits and classroom activities, received evidence via DVD and produced short video clips to communicate outcomes of petitions to petitioners which are available on the [Petitions Committee](#) webpages.

Representing the Assembly in the community

In preparation for the Assembly's tenth anniversary in 2009, the National Assembly for Wales further demonstrated its commitment to a participative democracy through the introduction of the Outreach and Liaison team. Four Assembly staff based in the four corners of Wales have responsibility for establishing partnerships with local organisations and individuals to encourage greater participation in the Assembly's work and widen understanding of devolution.

The year also saw plans for the introduction of the Assembly's Outreach bus, predominantly based in north Wales that will bring the Assembly to the doorstep of communities across north Wales, allowing people access to give their opinion on and input into the Assembly's work.

The Llywydd also led a campaign to involve more people who have traditionally experienced barriers to participation with the Assembly by undertaking a tour of Wales' five electoral regions to speak with representative groups to gauge their views on how we can right this wrong. The tour started in Swansea with a visit to the African Community Centre followed by a meeting with representatives from ethnic minority groups. The Llywydd also met with children and young people's groups, disabled people, faith groups and Stonewall Cymru to better understand how the Assembly can proactively work with these groups to ensure easier access to democracy. This was the beginning of a commitment to work even more closely with such groups to achieve a truly representative democracy.

Work on a joint mentoring scheme for under-represented groups by the Assembly and the Welsh Local Government Association was also underway during 2008-2009. The scheme will give individuals from under-represented groups the opportunity to learn more about democracy in Wales by observing the work practices of their appointed political mentors, learning about their role and responsibilities, and encouraging them to become more active in community life.

Representing Wales overseas

Over the course of the year, the National Assembly's office in Brussels has continued with its role of representing Wales' interests in Europe, and this year has been working closely with Christine Chapman AM on the Committee of the Regions' work on the future of the Lisbon Treaty.

Rosemary Butler AM, the Assembly's Deputy Llywydd attended the **CALRE** (Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies) annual meeting in Bilbao.

Assembly Members also represent Wales on the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. Janet Ryder AM and Nerys Evans AM represented the National Assembly for Wales at the Association's annual conference which was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, which was also attended by Alun Cairns AM as the UK's Regional Representative. The theme for this year's Plenary Conference was '**Expanding the Role of Parliament in Global Society: Environment, Development and Security**'. The Conference was attended by over 600 parliamentarians from all 9 regions of the Commonwealth, with 50 countries and over 160 parliaments and legislatures represented.

In the course of the year, Assembly Members also hosted a number of Commonwealth visitors to the Assembly including :

- Hon (Richard) George Richard Torbay, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, Parliament of New South Wales together with Russell Grove, Clerk to the Parliament – April 08
- The Hon Don Harwin Member of the Legislative Council, Parliament of New South Wales – April 08
- Hon Don Wing President of the Legislative Council and Mr David Pearce Clerk of the Legislative Council Parliament of Tasmania – May 08
- Hon Hlomohang Morokole Vice-President of Lesotho Senate – November 08

Members of the European and External Affairs Committee undertook a two-day programme of private informal meetings in Brussels with representatives of a number of European institutions. This provided invaluable briefing and intelligence to inform the Committee's scrutiny of critical EU issues affecting Wales, including measures being taken at EU level to tackle the economic and financial crisis, the future of cohesion policy funding and the impact of the Common Agricultural Policy.

Looking to the future

The past year has seen the Assembly lay foundations for a number of new and innovative approaches to help people better understand the Assembly and its work, and to encourage people to participate in the process of making laws for Wales and helping to hold the Welsh Government to account.

Work has started on the refurbishment of the Pierhead building, the iconic terracotta brick building adjacent to the Senedd that is the backdrop to the daily BBC Wales and ITV Wales news bulletins. A part of the Assembly's estate, it helped Wales forge its identity "through water and fire" in the 19th century, and work is now underway to transform it into a space that will help inform, involve and inspire a new generation to shape the political landscape of the future.

2. Making laws for Wales

As the Assembly establishes itself as a mature legislature, it is interesting to glance backwards to appreciate how the Government of Wales 2006 Act has changed the legislative landscape of Wales.

From 1945 to 1999, the UK Parliament passed only 11 Acts which applied solely to Wales – an average of one every five years. Between 1999 and 2007, a further eight “Wales-only” Acts were passed which averages one “Welsh” Act each year.

History was made at the National Assembly for Wales on Tuesday, 6 May 2008, with the passing of the first ever Assembly Measure, the NHS Redress (Wales) Measure 2007. It was the first piece of primary legislation made by the National Assembly, the first Welsh law to be passed since the 10th century and the first bilingual law ever to be passed in Britain.

In addition, between May 2008 and 31 March 2009:

- Four Assembly Measures were passed,
- Three Legislative Competence Orders were made conferring legislative powers on the Assembly.
- Another seven Orders had undergone pre-legislative scrutiny by Assembly Committees, including two proposed by backbench Members
- The first committee-proposed Measure was introduced during 2008/09 - National Assembly for Wales Commissioner for Standards Measure developed by the Committee on Standards of Conduct proposing to give the Commissioner for Standards a statutory role.

In order to achieve this:

- Legislative committees held 85 meetings to consider all proposed Orders and Measures, and produced seven reports.
- The Subordinate Legislation Committee met on 32 occasions and reported on all the laid Statutory Instruments, proposed Measures and has commenced scrutiny of UK Bills.
- The Presiding Officer held eight ballots for Member-proposed legislation – four for proposals for Legislative Competence Orders and four for proposals for Assembly Measures

Full details of the progress of Orders and Measures are compiled by the Assembly’s Members’ Research Service, and can be found [here on the Assembly's website](#).

When Assembly Measures are approved by Her Majesty in Council, they become subject to Crown Copyright, and need to bear a suitable emblem when published. Discussions therefore took place between the Assembly and the College of Arms to develop a royal emblem which would be distinctively Welsh in character and which would be appropriate for marking the unique character of Assembly Measures as Welsh legislation.

The Royal Badge of Wales was unveiled and will appear on all Assembly Measures. It is based on the arms of the native princes of Wales, dating back to the 13th century, which are also used by the Prince of Wales on his banner for use in Wales.

Responding to the new legislative landscape

Such a major sea-change has resulted in significant structural and procedural changes to address the rising legislative workload on Assembly Committees, and they in turn have sought innovative ways to increase public involvement in the ways the Assembly makes laws for Wales.

The Committee scrutinising the proposed Healthy Eating in Schools Measure, for example, felt it was important to consult with children and young people who would be affected by the legislation. To this end, questionnaires based on the key provisions within the proposed Measure were sent to a ten per cent sample of schools in Wales to assess the views of pupils. Over 700 responses were received which informed the development of the Committee's report.

The Assembly's response to the change in the legislative tempo was to establish five permanent legislation Committees, each with an independent, non-voting Chair. One deals primarily with Member and Committee-proposed legislation and the other four address legislation proposed by the Welsh Government. The result has been a better management of the flow of legislation through the Assembly and also a group of Members and Chairs who have an ever-increasing expertise in the specialised task of scrutinizing legislation.

Scrutinising legislation made for Wales

A number of other Committees play a key role in examining Assembly Measures, LCOs and UK Bills and their implications for Wales.

The Assembly's [Finance Committee](#) considered and reported on the financial implications of four proposed Measures for Wales, on the assumption that if they become laws in Wales, it may be necessary for the Welsh Government to account for the consequences of the new legislation when setting its budget. The Finance Committee examines the financial implications of any proposed Measure to ensure that it is properly costed before it is made law.

During the autumn and winter, the [Enterprise and Learning Committee](#) undertook pre-legislative scrutiny of a petition submitted by Sustrans to the Assembly which called on the National Assembly for Wales to seek powers to place a duty on the Welsh Government to develop and maintain a network of traffic-free shared use paths for walkers, cyclists and disabled people across Wales.

The committee consulted widely, and the overwhelming consensus among respondents was that legislative competence for this matter should be conferred on the National Assembly.

It was felt that a network of traffic-free routes would encourage more people to adopt healthier lifestyles, and would help reduce the use of private cars and therefore help address the challenges of climate change while also benefiting tourism and the local economy.

The result? The Committee was convinced of the long-term sustainability of the considerable economic, social and environmental benefits of the scheme, and is looking to propose legislation to make it happen.

Scrutinising other legislation which impacts on Wales

Committees also have a role to play in scrutinising other types of legislation that will impact on Wales.

The [Sustainability Committee](#) undertook scrutiny on the UK Planning Bill in order to seek clarification on the implications for Wales, in particular around the establishment of the Infrastructure Planning Committee and who would be responsible for planning decisions. The Committee scrutinised the Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing on the Bill and made a number of recommendations to the Welsh Government, aimed at protecting Welsh interests within the context of the Bill, in particular about the need for the necessary powers to be transferred to Wales.

At the request of the House of Commons Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills Select Committee, the [Enterprise and Learning Committee](#) responded to the UK Government's consultation on the Draft Apprenticeships Bill. The Draft Bill was drafted to apply to England only. The Committee sought clarification from the Welsh Government regarding the mechanism by which Welsh clauses would be incorporated into the Bill. The Committee scrutinised John Griffiths AM, the Deputy Minister for Skills, at a meeting in March. The Committee felt that the legislative process by which Welsh clauses were incorporated in a large UK Bill was unsatisfactory and left little room for thorough scrutiny either at Westminster or in the National Assembly for Wales. The House of Commons Committee noted that 'the consultation on the operation of apprenticeships in Wales and on the application of the draft legislation to Wales has clearly been inadequate'. It therefore recommended, 'that the Government rectify this deficiency before the provisions in the draft Bill are finalised'

The UK Climate Change Bill was scrutinised by the [Sustainability Committee](#) as it contained a number of provisions which would have a significant effect on Wales. The Committee made a number of recommendations to ensure that the Bill fully reflected Welsh priorities and interests, in particular these focused on the need to ensure a greater emphasis and clarity was given to the targets and aims contained within the Bill to tackle Climate Change.

To adopt a proactive approach to the examination of powers being conferred on Welsh Ministers and the Assembly by UK Bills, the [Subordinate Legislation Committee](#) the Committee is now seeking to:

- identify powers in UK Bills which relate to Wales and consider whether any powers conferred on the Secretary of State should be conferred on Welsh Ministers;

- consider, where powers have been conferred on Welsh Ministers within a UK Bill, whether procedures for making subordinate legislation are appropriate; and
- consider whether the Welsh Government should seek Measure-making powers, as opposed to delegated powers for Ministers, when Bills relate to fields within Schedule 5 to the 2006 Act.

The Committee began this work by reporting on the Business Rates Supplements Bill which would confer powers on Welsh Ministers. The report highlights the Committee's view that the Welsh Government ought to be taking advantage of the opportunities these Bills offer, in order to seek Measure-making powers for the Assembly.

The year ahead

As the Assembly's law-making powers gather momentum, the focus for the legislation committees will be to ensure thorough and transparent scrutiny of legislation which not only involves input from civil society organisations but also from the people of Wales that it will affect.

During the coming year, we aim to increase awareness of the Assembly's law-making role and to help external organisations and interested individuals understand how to engage with the Assembly's role as a legislator – and crucially, to identify at which stage in the legislative process their input can influence the laws that are made.

In the coming year the Subordinate Legislation Committee will be looking in more detail at the powers that are passed to the Assembly and Welsh Ministers from UK Acts of Parliament, to ensure that we take a broad view of the development of the Welsh constitution.

We also aim to increase our interaction with young people and schools through the Assembly's education team, to gather views on the proposals for Welsh laws which might have a direct impact on them or their education. We will also use new and emerging technology as well as traditional outreach activities to ensure the people of Wales can become increasingly involved in the process.

3. Holding the Welsh Government to account

Effective scrutiny of a government's work is at the heart of any democratic process, and this work is undertaken by the National Assembly in a number of ways, with various parts of the Assembly's staff all playing an important part in allowing Assembly Members to hold the Welsh Government to account. While much of this process is done through scrutiny committees (see section below), the Assembly holds the Welsh Government to account in a number of other ways.

Holding the Welsh Government to account in the Siambr

Plenary meetings take place in the Siambr, the Senedd's debating chamber, on Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons between 13.30 and 18.00, and are chaired by the Llywydd or Deputy Llywydd.

Between April 2008 and March 2009, 71 Plenary meetings were held.

Assembly Questions

Assembly Questions are one of the key ways that Assembly Members are able to hold the Welsh Government to account, and can be used to obtain information or to press for action. There are two types of Assembly Questions: oral and written.

Members can ask **Oral Questions** directly to the First Minister and other Welsh Ministers. First Minister's Question Time takes place each Tuesday, with other Ministerial and Commission questions taken on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

For each Question Time, 15 questions are randomly selected in an automated 'shuffle' conducted on behalf of the Llywydd. Members then have an opportunity to ask supplementary questions for which no notice is given.

During the period of this report, a total of **4,990** Oral Questions were tabled – a breakdown of where those questions were directed is below:

	Number of Oral Questions Tabled
First Minister	1,046
Minister for Health and Social Services	585
Minister for the Economy and Transport	557
Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills	538
Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing	503
Minister for Social Justice and Local Government	465
Minister for Heritage	438
Minister for Finance and Public Service Delivery	416
Minister for Rural Affairs	398
Counsel General	26
Assembly Commission	18

After Oral Questions, the Presiding Officer may allow any **Urgent Assembly Questions**, which are without notice and are of urgent public importance. During the period of this report **six** Urgent Questions were asked on subjects ranging from job losses in Wales to the development of wind farms.

Written questions may be tabled at any time, and receive a written answer. Any Oral Question that is not reached by the end of the allocated time also receives a written answer, which appears in the Record. **2,242** Written Assembly Questions were tabled during this period.

Committees that hold the Welsh Government to account

As part of their role in holding the Welsh Government to account, Assembly Committees examine issues such as how Ministers are spending public money and how effective policy is at achieving what it set out to do. In short, the National Assembly's scrutiny Committees, makes sure that the Welsh Government is accountable for its actions, on behalf of the people of Wales.

Committees recommend ways in which Government policies could be more robust and its expenditure more effective, efficient and economical. Committees engage proactively and innovatively with individuals and organisations which can articulate the voice and experience of the people of Wales.

Over the course of the year, the Assembly held 257 non-legislative scrutiny committee meetings.

Helping Assembly Members to hold the Welsh Government to account

The **Members' Research Service** provides impartial, independent and expert research and information services to support Assembly Members in all they do as elected representatives and to secure scrutiny and legislation of the highest quality.

During 2008/09, the service provided research and information advice and support to Assembly Members in a number of areas: through an individual enquiry service; by producing proactive research to inform debate; and by providing research support and advice for Members in undertaking scrutiny and in making laws.

During the year, 3,593 pieces of written work were produced by the Members' Research Service, including 3,428 replies to individual enquiries, and 579 pieces of research work informed Assembly Members' work as they either held Welsh Ministers to account in scrutiny Committees or made laws for Wales in legislation Committees.

Involving the people of Wales in holding the Welsh Government to account

As part of the Assembly's commitment to ensuring the opinions of the people of Wales underpin all our work, including that of holding the government to account, the [Health, Wellbeing and Local Government](#)

[Committee](#) undertook innovative ways of engaging the public in their inquiry on presumed consent for organ donation in Wales.

In addition to online discussion forums on the Assembly website, two short questionnaires were produced which could be used in schools and in the National Assembly's buildings and people were also allowed to vote on the issue online. The Members' Research Service designed the questionnaire, and worked closely with the Assembly's External Communications team and the Education team on implementing the project. Around 900 questionnaires were returned and analysed, and qualitative comments made on the questionnaires were used to inform the body of the report and the analyses were included in an Annex to the report.

The National Assembly's Petitions scheme triggered another high-profile consultation to challenge the Welsh Government's policies. A BBC initiative, "If I ruled the world" highlighted concerns about the use of plastic bags in Wales. A participant had highlighted the issue, and decided to submit an online petition to the Assembly, suggesting that a levy was introduced on all plastic bags in Wales.

The Assembly's [Sustainability Committee](#) subsequently met with a range of interested parties, from plastic bag producers to major supermarkets, and also visited Ireland where a levy has been placed on all plastic bags. The Committee produced a report which recommended a charge be placed on all plastic bags in Wales, which has since been agreed by the Welsh Government.

At the start of an inquiry into the Production and Promotion of Welsh Food in January, the [Rural Development Sub-Committee](#) held a round-table discussion with key stakeholders. The Chair was keen to move away from a more formal meeting format to try and gain a better understanding of the real issues facing the food industry in Wales, and it was therefore the people taking part in the meeting who set the agenda in terms of the issues they wanted to raise.

The [Rural Development Sub-Committee](#) had earlier held an inquiry into the reorganisation of schools in rural Wales, which originated from a petition by a group of parents in Powys. That inquiry focused on issues relating to the provision of education in rural primary schools such as the social and educational issues associated with primary school reorganisation, and the impact on communities. It also looked at the adequacy of existing policies and guidance in addressing the wider issues associated with the reorganisation of rural primary schools, and Estyn's role in this context.

The [Enterprise and Learning Committee](#) decided to work informally to undertake an inquiry into the support for people with dyslexia in Wales. The Committee wanted to place the citizens of Wales at the heart of its scrutiny and so met children with dyslexia and their families in an informal coffee morning, to give them the opportunity to air their views openly to Committee members. This also gave members the opportunity to hear first hand evidence from those with dyslexia about the barriers that they and their families face daily.

Approximately 25 people attended each coffee morning, and it was noted that this set-up was a benefit to the parents of the children as they had the opportunity to raise their concerns with Assembly Members and seek advice from a wide range of professionals in the field.

The Members fed their findings back to the Committee and young people who took part were invited to the launch of the Committee report so that they could see what difference their views had made to the Assembly's work.

After concerns had been raised with Assembly Members by constituents, the [Finance Committee](#) carried out a short inquiry in May 2008 to examine the financial implications of the Foundation Phase, which would provide for a new and innovative way of delivering education for three to seven year-olds. Following the Committee's inquiry, the introduction of the Foundation Phase was changed to a staggered approach that would allow the policy to be delivered in line with the level of resources allocated to it.

As part of its inquiry into Issues affecting migrant workers in Wales, their families, and the communities in which they live and work, the [Equality of Opportunity Committee](#) visited an Advocacy and Advice centre for migrant workers in Wrexham. They met with older people in North and West Wales to get first-hand accounts of people's experiences as part of their inquiry into Home Maintenance and Adaptations Services in Wales.

During their inquiry into Parenting in Wales, the [Children and Young People Committee](#) discussed the emerging ideas from their inquiry with about 30 parents who met with them in the Senedd and in Flintshire. Before the meeting, the parents were given information about the Committee and the work it had done on this inquiry. The parents met in small groups with a member of the committee who then reported back to the Committee as a whole about the ideas they'd heard. Members said that the evidence provided by parents at these events "hugely strengthened" their final report.

The [Communities & Culture Committee](#) inquiry into domestic abuse and the support services available in Wales consulted widely and received evidence from survivors of domestic abuse. Those consulted included residents of refuges, who allowed Committee Members access for visits and gave their views. The wide scope of the Committee's inquiry allowed them to explore the strengths and weaknesses of the existing domestic violence strategy and to make some robust recommendations about what more needs to be done.

The future of public service broadcasting in Wales in English and Welsh was the focus of the [Broadcasting Committee](#), as well as reviewing what impact the digital switchover would have on life in Wales. Set up during the summer term, the Committee ceased to exist on 18 July 2008 after delivering its report. The input of both Welsh and UK broadcasters to the Committees deliberations resulted in a well informed report which received significant publicity both in and outside Wales. This work was continued by the Communities and Culture Committee and its findings reported in May 2009.

The [Audit Committee](#) promotes the effective and efficient governance of Wales, and considers the delivery of the Welsh Government's policies to

ensure that value for money is achieved. This year, the Committee focused on health-related issues that had a direct impact on people across Wales. In May it published a report on minimising infections contracted through contact with the healthcare system in Wales, and in October 2008 the Committee reported on the Welsh Ambulance Service Trust. The Welsh Government's response to the report prompted the Committee to recall the Accounting Officer to give further evidence and launch a further inquiry into these issues as it was felt that insufficient progress had been made to date.

Looking ahead

The past year has shown the benefits associated with increasing engagement with Assembly's work, and we will continue to place a strong emphasis on the Assembly's strategic objective of increasing participation in the democratic process.

In the next year we will continue to look for increasingly flexible and innovative ways to do this. For example, the Assembly's outreach bus offers opportunities for people to comment on Committees' work via video vox-pops, and also offer opportunities to hold meetings in different parts of Wales to collect evidence for inquiries from people affected by specific issues. Notes from the meetings as well as video evidence can therefore be collated and shown to the committee in a formal meeting and can be used as formal evidence.

We will also look to use people's video contributions, for example, mobile phone footage and photographs to highlight their experience of any issues that Committees may be discussing, which again can be displayed on the Assembly website as well as being used as evidence and illustrations for the final report of an inquiry.

Assembly Committees will also look to develop further the idea of virtual and actual reference groups, where virtual reference groups of key stakeholders could enable the fast identification of issues. The information gathered from this type of group could be used to scrutinise Ministers across portfolios on the issues under question, possibly through short, sharp and focused mini inquiries into the issues.