

Voluntary Sector Submission to the Committee on Standing Orders

There is real scope for the National Assembly to work with civil society, and the voluntary sector in particular, as a fundamental way of strengthening the connection between government, and people and communities in Wales.

The National Assembly's Voluntary Sector Scheme has already provided a strong foundation for the relationship between the Assembly and the voluntary sector, and has put Wales in the forefront of government-voluntary sector partnerships. This scheme is set to become the sole responsibility of the Welsh Assembly Government following separation of powers in 2007.

The challenge for the National Assembly following the separation of powers is to move its partnership with the sector to a new level, by using the expertise of the sector to help drive improvements in the quality of life for people and communities in Wales.

The Voluntary Sector Partnership Council

The Voluntary Sector Partnership Council has been a positive example of partnership working and co-operation between the Welsh Assembly Government, Assembly members and the voluntary sector. We are keen for the benefits of this tripartite working to continue following the separation of powers.

Assembly Committees

The voluntary sector operates across all areas of government activities and is an important part of the social, economic, cultural and environmental life of Wales. With 30,000 organisations, and established networks providing representation across key areas of activity, the sector is active every minute of every day in every community in Wales. This makes it well placed to support the scrutiny work of all the Assembly's committees.

The sector believes that each subject committee of the Assembly should have responsibility through its standing orders to scrutinise the delivery of government policy as it affects the voluntary sector. Each committee should also be able to appoint advisors from the voluntary sector to assist in its scrutiny work

Voluntary Sector Scheme scrutiny committee

The Welsh Assembly Government will retain the existing statutory duty to make a scheme which sets out how it will promote the interests of the voluntary sector in the exercise of its functions. The scheme has to specify how the Assembly Government funds, monitors and consults the sector.

At present, a Funding and compliance sub-committee exists as a sub-group of the Voluntary Sector Partnership Council to fulfil a monitoring role, and scrutinise implementation and compliance with the Voluntary Sector Scheme. These are functions that the sector believes should be taken forward by a standing Committee of the National Assembly.

The National Assembly's standing orders should establish a committee to scrutinise how the Assembly government is delivering on the principles of its Voluntary Sector Scheme and if its compliance with its obligations

This committee should:

- Have representation from each of the subject committees, in a way that reflects, as far as practicable, party balance;
- Appoint expert advisors from the voluntary sector as appropriate;
- Report annually to the Assembly on the effectiveness of the Assembly government's implementation of the scheme, and in addition, make ad hoc reports, as necessary.

The Committee on Standing Orders is invited to consider the recommendations that:

All subject committees should have responsibilities for scrutinising government policy in relation to the voluntary sector, for their subject areas; and that subject committees have the power to appoint expert advisors from the sector.

A voluntary sector scrutiny committee is established by standing orders as outlined above.