

National Assembly for Wales

e-democracy strategy

Digital engagement with the people of Wales

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1. Preface

The National Assembly for Wales wishes to make greater use of a range of digital channels to increase the breadth and depth of its engagement and understanding by the people of Wales and other stakeholders.

This strategy sets out what the National Assembly wishes to achieve through digital engagement or e-democracy initiatives, and how it will bring that into effect.

The strategy will outline the following:

- a summary of the current situation;
- a clear statement of our vision, aims and objectives;
- a high-level overview of roles and responsibilities for staff;
- governance;
- a summary of next steps including timeframe; and
- an analysis of evaluation mechanisms.

It must be noted that this document sets the strategic direction for the National Assembly for Wales. It is not an operational document. However, the strategy aims to drive cost savings through an efficient use of Assembly resources and accessing free-to-use and easily available technologies.

Following the strategy's approval by the Assembly Commission, a detailed operational delivery plan will be produced.

Iwan Williams

Media, Brand and e-democracy Manager

August 2010

2. The operating environment and the status quo

E-democracy is the effective use of digital communications channels and traditional communication techniques to ensure the National Assembly communicates effectively and allows the people of Wales to converse quickly and easily with the Assembly.

2.1 Our drivers

One of the National Assembly's key strategic goals is to engage the public in the democratic process; ensuring that there is increased understanding of its role in Wales and informing people how they can become involved in its legislative and scrutiny functions.

As we approach the Fourth Assembly and undertake the role of informing the people of Wales of their opportunities to vote in 2011, we need to ensure that we maximise every opportunity to converse with the people of Wales. We have a robust matrix of communication channels, but we must ensure that these are complemented and augmented by new and emerging methods.

The strategy therefore takes into account the overall 5 per cent budget reduction for 2011-12 and the planned cumulative reduction of between 20 and 25 per cent by the end of 2014-15. It is envisaged that this strategy can be achieved within these constraints.

Technology has changed communication. It has changed the way that people communicate with each other, and is changing the way people communicate with organisations, large and small. People now expect to be able to contact public and private bodies immediately, and more importantly, they expect those bodies to listen and respond in a timely fashion.

If the Assembly is not in a position to engage in a conversation, then other conversations will be held discussing the fact that the Welsh legislature is unable to interact with people on their terms, and will immediately point to a failure of its objective of effective engagement.

In addition, the Assembly must consolidate its position of being an authoritative and trusted source of information on issues that, while they may appear abstract, nonetheless have a direct impact on people's lives – such as the referendum.

This e-democracy strategy therefore sets out a clear intention that the Assembly will actively embrace new technologies to ensure that we are in a position to interact with the people of Wales – on their terms, in their chosen environment and in the language of their choice, but in a way that allows us effectively to manage and lead conversations.

The intention is to democratise communications with the Assembly, while also making Wales' democratic process more accessible and easier to

understand.

2.2 Our performance

In many ways, the Assembly is ahead of its peers in its use of technology. Assembly Members are serviced by intelligent information systems in the Senedd and their regional and constituency offices, offering the potential for them to work paper-free. We are one of the only parliaments in the world where Members can present information electronically, as well as voting and communicating digitally within the Siambr.

The Assembly's live webcasting service, Senedd.tv, provides comprehensive coverage of all Assembly business and Siambr Hywel – the former Assembly debating chamber – is home to the world's only dedicated youth debating chamber. In addition, transcripts of Plenary meetings are published online within 24 hours of the end of the meeting, and a summary of business conducted at each meeting is also published online within 30 minutes of the end of each meeting.

The Assembly Commission this year also committed to making the record of proceedings more widely accessible to a broader audience.

The Assembly has greatly increased its strategic use of multi-media techniques to raise the profile of our scrutiny and legislative roles; the External Communications team have been working closely with committees to develop multi-media information packages that span consultation, inquiry, evidence gathering and report launches.

The reach of such work has been increased through the use of the Assembly bus in North Wales, and the launch of the Pierhead also offers a light-touch entry into the Assembly's operational activities.

We have also successfully introduced an Assembly presence on a number of social networking sites. Twitter is used as a bilingual newsfeed that carries all our press releases; Facebook carries information on all Assembly events; the Assembly's Flickr pages carry a number of publicly accessible copyright-free images of the Assembly and its estate. The Assembly has a dedicated YouTube channel which carries every video that is produced either as part of the Assembly's multi-media news packages or its promotional and "explainer" videos.

However, the Assembly's e-democracy initiatives have been tactical when they should be strategic, and intermittent when they should be consistent.

In addition, our digital profile - and indeed our accessibility - is not always proportionate to our role as Wales's legislature.

2.3 The challenges

While the past three years have seen the Assembly significantly improve its communications efforts, the strategy seeks to ensure we keep pace with the

communications marketplace and the people of Wales, with Assembly Members' aspirations and with the expectations of staff.

The marketplace

Over the past five years, our operating environment has changed considerably. The communications landscape has become increasingly fragmented and dominated by digital media, which has altered the composition of audiences, their patterns of consumption and the scope of the Assembly's interactions with them.

Assembly Members

Many Assembly Members are technologically literate, and use a broad range of communication techniques and channels to communicate with constituents and stakeholders and peers. The Assembly should therefore, as an innovative practitioner of digital engagement, offer guidance on emerging trends to Members who are already technologically literate. It should also encourage and mentor Members who are less confident to ensure that constituents across Wales have equal opportunities to interact digitally with their regional or local Assembly Member.

National Assembly staff

Many National Assembly staff have active social networking profiles or participate in the political and social blogosphere in a personal capacity. Many of our staff have an interest not only in communicating politics but in the politics of communications; better deployment of staff's skills would see us improve as an organisation. In addition, the use of digital channels for engagement is seen by staff as being absolutely central to this effort.

The e-democracy team will produce and manage the policies, guidance and training created to support staff undertaking e-democracy work.

It is worth noting that there are a number of ways in which National Assembly staff might engage digitally and that they may represent the National Assembly in a number of settings. Sometimes this 'representation' may be beyond the direct influence of this corporate strategy.

It is suggested that the National Assembly therefore develops policy guidance for its staff, Assembly Members and Commissioners which recognises three levels of participation in digital engagement. This policy is in accordance with broader engagement policies developed by the Cabinet Office:

- **Personal:** a private digital profile owned and determined uniquely by the individual, in which he or she may occasionally talk about being employed by the National Assembly but should not use this profile to discuss or represent the organisation and their professional activities;
- **Sponsored:** a professional profile owned and uniquely determined by the individual but used exclusively in relation to their professional activity as

a National Assembly employee and, therefore, registered with External Communications and framed by the Assembly's corporate strategy – for example, an Outreach worker in one of the Assembly regions;

- **Corporate:** a professional profile fronted by the individual but coordinated by the National Assembly, used exclusively as a corporate communications channel and framed by the organisation's strategy – examples include profiles for specific National Assembly Committees, News functions etc.

3. Vision, aims and objectives

3.1 Vision

The strategic vision for the National Assembly's e-democracy strategy is:

The National Assembly's commitment to e-democracy is a commitment to ensuring the people of Wales can easily understand and participate in our legislative and scrutiny roles.

All of the National Assembly's e-democracy activity will be focused on delivering our business objectives, and all staff are encouraged to participate as a demonstration of their talent and commitment to our objectives.

3.2 Aims

The following aims are framed by the vision:

1. **A commitment to conversations**

The National Assembly is committed to using all available communication channels – both traditional and innovative – to ensure the people of Wales understand and want to participate in the Assembly's work.

2. **Communication will be relevant, useful and effective**

Each communication initiative and strategy will be evaluated to ensure that it is not only cost-effective, but uses the most appropriate communication channel. These channels can be traditional, innovative or a combination of the two.

3. **A commitment to blended communications**

Every communication initiative will be assessed to ensure it has the correct weighting in terms of digital communication and traditional communications, such as outreach and events.

4. **Technology is the medium and not the message**

Using digital media will not become a lazy shorthand for being innovative, nor will the Assembly become distracted by innovative communication tools. The Assembly will be committed to issues rather than the medium used to communicate those issues.

5. **Encourage communications pioneers**

The Assembly will recognise that across the organisation, some people and teams have a genuine passion for digital engagement and innovative approaches to communications. The Assembly will therefore encourage those individuals to be e-democracy champions for their service area (and work with their managers to facilitate this) to ensure the principle becomes embedded across the organisation.

6. **Aim for creative engagement**

We will strive to make our communications creative to underscore the Assembly's commitment to making a bold response to constitutional change.

7. Accept that some risks are necessary

The National Assembly will manage the risks associated with e-democracy – including reputational risk, personal safety and data protection – through establishing robust digital engagement policies and guidance.

8. Know our limitations

Some communications activities are not appropriate for digital communications exclusively – it would be unlikely in the near future, for example, to undertake a legislative or scrutiny inquiry that happened *only* online. We will always be clear about what is outside the remit of digital communications and why.

9. Gauge the appetite of stakeholders

Before the Assembly embarks on a commitment to communicate digitally with defined stakeholder groups (for example, the media), we will assess their appetite for such communications, and will modify our approach according to their needs.

10. Evaluate

The National Assembly will regularly monitor and evaluate the impact and quality of its engagement, and we will adjust our communications as a result of insights gained from that evaluation. We also make a commitment to sharing those insights with other stakeholders when appropriate.

3.3 Objectives

The following objectives are designed to crystallise the National Assembly's strategic e-democracy vision and its supporting aims.

These objectives all conform to SMART principles, and they will be regularly reviewed, especially in the initial phases of their implementation.

The objectives below are for the initial 12-month period.

1. Establish an Assembly-wide e-democracy team

An e-democracy group will be established with representatives from each service area, comprised of people who have either self-identified as having a genuine interest in e-democracy, or have previously demonstrated an aptitude for its guiding principles.

2. Develop a 12-month plan

The e-democracy team will develop and implement a 12-month e-democracy plan based on this strategy, with activities seeking to achieve the strategy's vision and aims.

3. Create a hub for all e-democracy activity

The National Assembly website will provide a single point of access to all e-democracy activity.

4. Familiarise all staff with current activity

A number of corporate social networking sites have already been established for the Assembly in anticipation of the e-democracy strategy going live.

It will be the responsibility of individual members of the e-democracy team to ensure their relevant service areas are aware of these and how they are being used.

It will also be their responsibility to identify how the day to day activity of their service areas could be augmented and made more accessible through the use of digital engagement.

5. Policies and guidance

Draft policies and guidance for the use of the sites currently being used have been developed. The e-democracy team will review these regularly.

6. Management Board champion

The National Assembly should have a dedicated e-democracy champion on its Management Board (and Change Board) who can demonstrate strong understanding of the principles of e-democracy and awareness of trends in digital engagement and the impacts they can have on the work of the National Assembly.

7. Review web access policies

The UNO project has enabled a review of web access across the organisation. All e-democracy champions should have access to the relevant social networking sites being used by the Assembly.

Every service area should also have at least one 'open access' PC situated on their floor, in addition to those located in the library.

8. Monitoring e-democracy activity

The monitoring of all National Assembly-related e-democracy activity will be carried out daily, and reported regularly, but no less than once a quarter. It will be made available to Commissioners, management and staff.

9. A commitment from every service area

Every service area head should review their service plans to assess how the principles of e-democracy can be entrenched into their day to day

business. This commitment should be presented to the e-democracy team by individual service area representatives.

10. Sharing our vision and aims

To consolidate the Assembly's commitment to effective engagement with the public and stakeholders, the agreed version of this strategy should be shared with selected stakeholders. Their feedback and views will be collected, and used to inform the next iteration of the strategy's objectives.

4. Governance of the e-democracy strategy

The National Assembly's e-democracy initiatives will initially focus primarily on the public and clearly identified stakeholder groups such as the media and public affairs practitioners.

Co-ordination of the activity will be handled by the e-democracy team under the steer of the Media, Brand and e-democracy Manager.

The e-democracy team will develop a 12-month activity plan based on this strategy; the costs have been earmarked from in-year funds from the 2010-11 and the 2011-12 budget.

The e-democracy team will deliver engagement activity, but may draw on other staff or (on occasion) external resources where required. The team will issue regular progress reports to the Management Board.

The e-democracy team will produce and manage the policies and guidance to support the e-democracy strategy. The team will also identify training needs for staff to help them undertake the work of effective digital engagement.

The Assembly's Management Board and the Assembly Commission will have ultimate responsibility for approval of corporate digital engagement policies. Priority areas should be to:

- promote the vision, aims and objectives of Assembly's e-democracy strategy;
- establish participation policies and accompanying guidance for staff engagement;
- educate service heads and line managers in managing staff participating in digital engagement;
- support appropriate web access and mobilise facilitating technology; and
- champion examples of good practice from other legislatures and contexts.

Although digital engagement will be delivered by Assembly staff, to be successful it will require visible backing and leadership from the National Assembly's directors and heads of service. Commissioners and senior managers should encourage staff through their own direct participation in the National Assembly's corporate digital engagement activity.

5. Risks

New technology can be open to abuse and misuse. For example, the newness of even the most established sites means that learning how to use them to best effect is still being carried out 'on the hoof', and not precedents have been set by other legislatures or government bodies.

We have sought to mitigate against risks (although we cannot eliminate them) by developing policies on the use of new technologies and websites.

However, the greatest risk associated with this strategy is not carrying out the recommendations it contains, not least of which is alienating an emerging generation from the democratic process. Unless the Assembly moves to engage with those demographics that have typically remained distant from the Assembly and its work, that distance will only be maintained and increased.

The Assembly needs to move quickly to engage with digital 'natives' when they are young, to become part of their cultural consciousness as Welsh citizens. Without moving more content online – so it can be accessed by anyone with an internet connection – it will be increasingly difficult to counter charges of the Assembly being Cardiff-centric and unrepresentative.

In addition, there is a reputational risk for the Assembly, where it is seen as being irrelevant to modern society as a result of a perceived refusal to adopt what have now become mainstream communications techniques.

6. Staffing and Costs

6.1 Staffing

The day to day operations of the e-democracy team will be led by the National Assembly Web Editor, with strategic guidance from the Media, Brand and e-democracy Manager. This team will continue to lead on identifying effective and cost-efficient digital communications channels and techniques.

However, as the principles of this strategy become more enshrined in the Assembly's normal ways of working, all service areas will have a degree of responsibility for its implementation. To this end, there should be e-democracy champions from across service areas, who should ensure that opportunities for innovative engagement are identified and drawn to the attention of the Media, Brand and e-democracy Manager.

Many service areas already do so, and the strategy seeks to recognise these pioneers, while also encouraging other service areas to take a similar approach to communications.

In accordance with the Assembly's Welsh language policy, all communication, including online digital communication, will be fully bilingual. However, it is not envisaged that this will add significantly to any translation requirements.

6.2 Cost

The strategy has taken into account the overall 5 per cent budget reduction for 2011-12 and the planned cumulative reduction of between 20 and 25 per cent by the end of 2014-15.

The costs of routine digital engagement are very low – most channels and software services are free to register with, access and use. Consequently, it is envisaged that the implementing this strategy can be achieved within these budget constraints.

Any cost-benefit analysis would indicate that the reputational risk to the Assembly of not taking advantage of these communications techniques would outweigh the minimal cost savings associated with not undertaking this work.

Currently, it is estimated that the implementation costs of the Assembly's e-democracy budget is approximately £5k to £10k for the first 12 months; this funding has been earmarked from in-year spend.

7. Timeframe for delivery

The delivery of the National Assembly's e-democracy strategy will be as follows:

Start-up – within three months

- identify a dedicated and objective-driven e-democracy team
- develop a 12-month activity plan
- identify appropriate channels and tools
- develop guidance and policies for their use
- start a programme of regular e-democracy engagement

Consolidation – within six months

- embed e-democracy principles and activity into the Assembly's routine business
- increase the frequency and depth of e-democracy activity
- establish benchmarks for evaluation of usage and quality

Innovation – within 12 months

- begin to 'franchise' best practice e-democracy activity across the Assembly's service areas
- share insights and best practice with Assembly Members
- share insights and learnings with external stakeholders, as appropriate
- review the e-democracy strategy in light of developments and redevelop list of objectives for the next period

8. Outputs

It is envisaged that the following outputs will come from this strategy:

- a strategy and implementation plan;
- a core delivery team and broader network of divisional representatives;
- a set of policies and targets;
- training programmes and guidance;
- corporate accounts and profiles on social media sites;
- digital content to be used on the corporate sites and around the web;
- monitoring and evaluation reports; and
- case study materials.

9. Evaluation and monitoring

Effective digital engagement through the National Assembly's e-democracy should be evaluated against certain benchmarks to gauge its effectiveness.

9.1 Key Performance Indicators

Implementation of the National Assembly's e-democracy strategy could result in a number of positive outcomes. Below are some suggested performance indicators, both qualitative and quantitative. A definitive list – and guidance on how they can be measured – should be developed by the e-democracy team, and be aligned to specific activities:

- greater understanding of the role of the National Assembly;
- clarity about the difference between the National Assembly and the Welsh Government;
- increased traffic to key pages of the National Assembly website;
- increase in the number of responses to consultations;
- greater preponderance to participate in inquiries;
- enhanced reputation of Assembly Members;
- increased voter turnout; and
- etc.

9.2 Online metrics

There are also a number of metrics at our disposal which can be used to evaluate the efficacy of the e-democracy strategy.

These can, for example, measure page impressions, unique visitors, the amount of time spent on each page, the number of returning visitors, the location of our visitors, which pages are the most popular, and so on. The Assembly would need to benchmark these figures to see what effect the reinvigorated communications efforts are having on the data.

It will also be possible to measure the number of interactions the National Assembly is having through social networking sites, including the number of people who have chosen to follow the Assembly's various social networking profiles.

9.3 Qualitative as well as quantitative

The e-democracy team will also develop qualitative metrics to assess the implementation of the e-democracy strategy. These could include the number of positive versus negative feedback comments; consideration could also be given to having user surveys on the Assembly website – pre and post the development of the new site.

9.4 Monitoring

The e-democracy team will develop an evaluation report covering all of the activities undertaken in the first 12 months of the strategy. This should be made publicly available, perhaps as part of the National Assembly annual report.

10. Acknowledgements

In order to formulate a wide reaching and comprehensive strategy, this paper has been put together and informed by meetings and discussion with a number of leading thinkers and innovators in social media and online technologies.

These parties include: the Cabinet Office, the National Assembly's Cross Party Digital Group, Ofcom, Consumer Focus Wales, The Foreign & Commonwealth Office, COI, UK Parliament, the Parliamentary Education Service, Hansard Society, Cardiff School of Creative and Cultural Industries, the Government Communications Network, Race Online 2012, Wisekids, Crocstar Media, NativeHQ and Marc Webber.