



POLICY
STATEMENT

Abolish The Welsh Assembly Party

Statement of Policy

Abolish has one policy. That is to abolish the Welsh Assembly (Senedd) to end devolved government in Wales. We should be one United Kingdom again, with one UK government.

This means:

- Removing a whole layer of politicians, 60 already in Cardiff Bay but soon to be up to 90, and saving the £65+ million annually needed to support them
- Giving tax powers back to Westminster, so we can't be made to pay more tax in a Wales made so much poorer by devolution
- Restoring one National Health Service, so patients in Wales can be treated equally to England, with shorter waiting times and better health outcomes
- Allowing academies and free schools to set up in Wales to offer a better choice of schools, including the subjects taught and language used
- Ending the one million Welsh speakers target, with the public sector to communicate in Welsh on request rather than sending out everything bilingually

Attaining Our Goal

We recognise it is likely that a referendum will be required to abolish the Welsh Assembly and end devolution. This reflects the Assembly having been set up after a pre-legislative referendum in 1997 which passed by a margin of 6,721 votes. That is now a generation ago.

The Referendum in Wales in 2011 did not let people vote against the Assembly, but only between two unsatisfactory models of devolution. Moreover, the terms of that referendum have since been negated by both the Conservatives at Westminster and Labour in Cardiff Bay.

The 2011 referendum provided for the devolution of law making powers in defined areas. It is only because of this that our number of MPs in Westminster is being cut from 40 to 32.

More powers have since been devolved without the promised further referendum.

This includes taxation, with the Assembly now able to raise income tax by as much as it likes, despite the promise printed on the 2011 ballot paper that "The Assembly cannot make laws on ... tax whatever the result of this vote".

The Assembly has also renamed itself as the Senedd or Welsh Parliament, taken powers to extend its term beyond five years, and given 16 year olds and foreign nationals the vote, with prisoners next.

All powers not expressly reserved to Westminster have been devolved. For instance, the Assembly is now criminalising parents if they smack their children. The Assembly has also sought to subject all future democratic decisions to the Well-Being of Future Generations Act, which we would repeal.

Labour and Plaid Cymru now want to increase the number of Members from sixty to up to ninety, all with staff and offices and expenses, to be paid for by Welsh taxpayers.

Until we get and win a referendum to abolish the Assembly, we shall work tirelessly to roll back devolution, for instance by restoring one National Health Service and returning tax powers to Westminster.

Returning Tax Raising Powers

The 2011 Referendum should be respected by returning all tax powers to Westminster.

Income tax rates should be set by the UK Parliament with the Welsh Rates of Income Tax abolished. It is wrong that taxpayers in Wales could be made to pay more than if they lived in England.

Even though income tax rates have yet to change, Welsh spending is at risk if income tax revenue is less than expected. We have already paid HMRC £8 million to duplicate its systems for Wales.

It is wrong that people in Wales, even first time buyers, are currently taxed when buying properties costing even a little more than £250,000, while properties up to £500,000 are exempt in England and Northern Ireland, or that firms investing in large commercial premises pay a super-tax of 6% in Wales. Land Transaction Tax in Wales should be abolished and replaced by the Stamp Duty Land Tax set by the UK Parliament.

Landfill Disposals Tax in Wales should be abolished and reintegrated into Landfill Tax set by the UK Parliament, removing any incentive for 'waste tourism'.

Until now, council tax has risen faster in Wales than in England in recent years, as the UK Government has capped rates of increase in England, often at just 2%, but Welsh government has not offered similar protection to Welsh council tax payers.

Since the 2011 Referendum promised that the Assembly would not make laws on tax, legal powers over council tax should be returned to UK Government, with councils in Wales subject to the same capping protections as in England.

Similarly, different non-domestic or business rates policies in Wales and England have caused unfairness and confusion, particularly during the COVID crisis. Legal powers over this tax should also be returned to Westminster.

Welsh Government should compile a public register of its huge land and property holdings. Many could be sold to fund capital spending, rather than having Welsh government mortgage Wales' future with its 'Mutual Investment Model' of shifting debt off balance sheet.

The UK Government is setting up eight tax-advantaged Freeports in England, but Welsh Government has dragged its feet on one promised for Wales. The UK Government should announce it now, perhaps a large urban area to gain from lower taxes, and not let devolution stand in the way.

UK Government has the power to tax alcohol, but the Welsh Government and the Assembly, has tried to get round this by legislating for a minimum alcohol price. This transfers money from some of the least well off to the big drinks companies. Abolish would repeal minimum alcohol pricing.

Calls from Plaid Cymru and some in Labour to devolve administration of welfare are incredibly dangerous. Wales usually runs a public sector deficit around 15% of GDP more than England.

In 2019 that Welsh deficit was £13.7 billion, amounting to 19.4% of Welsh GDP. Wales would either go bankrupt, or suffer unimaginably severe cuts to public services and welfare, if we had to pay for everything ourselves without any tax support from England.

No new tax powers should be devolved to Wales.

Restoring One Unified National Health Service

The Welsh Government has exercised incredible powers during the COVID pandemic, stretching devolution to breaking point. It has even imposed border controls with England, while removing all travel restrictions from high to low COVID prevalence areas within Wales, which previously saw our infection rate rise close to the highest in the world.

We do not believe that anyone who voted in the 1997 or 2011 referendums expected the devolution of 'health' to allow Welsh Government such power.

Hence, we propose that power over health should be returned to Westminster. We should have one National Health Service again, not a Welsh version with longer waiting lists and worse outcomes, cut off from the wider NHS Aneurin Bevan founded.

Under devolution we have had five out of seven health boards in special measures. Scandals have ranged from the awful treatment of dementia patients at the Tawel Fan unit at Glan Clywyd hospital to the Bro Morgannwg health board maternity failings. Patients from North Wales were even turned away from the Countess of Chester hospital because Welsh Government hadn't paid its bills.

Reintegration of our NHS on a UK, or at least an England and Wales basis, is supported by recent changes removing the purchaser/provider split in the NHS for England, now to be formalised with a new NHS Bill. That bill should incorporate Wales in its provisions to put our NHS back together.

There should be a common 'performers' list for doctors and other health professional overseen by the UK Department of Health and Social Care. IT systems should be integrated between Wales and England to support seamless working. Welsh GPs should be able to

refer patients to hospitals in Wales and England on an equal basis, according to clinical need and to minimise waits for treatment.

During devolution, spending on the NHS in Wales has risen more slowly than in England, partly by cutting funds for patient care to pay for 'free' prescriptions. These should remain free for children, pensioners, pregnant women and people on low income. Money raised from others should be put into patient care in Wales to help the NHS recover from COVID.

Our doctors in Wales should be restored to the same pay scales as their counterparts in England.

Boosting the Economy and Transport

Output per head in Wales is 28% less than for the UK. Average wages in Wales are 13% less than in England, and that gap has increased under devolution, as wages grew by 5% less in Wales.

Making more and more different laws for what companies have to do in Wales compared to England increases the costs of doing business in Wales, hurting our economy. Abolish will put a stop to this.

Twenty years of trying to revitalise the Valleys and economically depressed areas by handing out grants for favoured projects through Welsh government cronies and third sector bodies has failed.

Powers over economic development should be devolved from Cardiff Bay to local area across Wales. Councils should then work in partnership with business and employers, who know their areas, in Local Enterprise Partnerships. Lower council tax could help poor areas more than third sector grants.

The refusal to upgrade our roads network has held Wales back under devolution.

Instead of having the UK government build the M4 Relief Road it was planning in the 1990s, Welsh Government has dithered for twenty years, promising to build the road and spending at least £144 million on preparation, before cancelling it, despite the public inquiry decision to proceed.

Abolish believes the M4 Relief Road should be built as quickly as possible, as supported by the UK government, under its oversight and with Newport City Council, to boost the Welsh economy.

The current situation regarding rail in Wales is a mess. Valleys lines are nationalised by Welsh Government, as now are most services in Wales except those run by GWR on the South Wales mainline. Transport for Wales also runs Chester, Shrewsbury and Hereford stations, paid for by the Welsh taxpayer, yet track outside the Valleys is owned by UK Network Rail.

To maximise investment and improve performance, we need a more integrated UK-led rail system.

Welsh Government wasted £52 million buying Cardiff Airport. £43 million of this sum has now been written off. Another £43 million of airport debt to Welsh Government has also just been written off, and a further £43 million of new public money is being ploughed into the airport. Welsh government may look to confuse by referring to a cost of £43 million, but it is actually 3 x £43 million = c. £129 million. That huge sum could instead have been better spent on Welsh priorities, like the NHS.

This waste must end. Many more Welsh people use, Manchester, Birmingham and Bristol airports than Cardiff airport. Cardiff airport should be sold. If local councils near the airport wish to own and support the airport, they should bear the costs and risks, not taxpayers from across Wales.

Helping Welsh Farmers

We must support Welsh farming, not strangle it by regulation e.g. the all Wales Nitrate Vulnerable Zone. Abolish will treat farmers fairly, by ensuring a level playing field between Wales and England.

Wales must not be singled out as a laboratory for 'rewilding'. We would instead prioritise support for traditional Welsh hill farming.

Where appropriate, Abolish would support the transition to new technologies in agriculture which could also reduce any adverse environmental impacts.

Rural policy would pay proper regard to scientific advice under our 'Science with Nature' approach.

The failing Natural Resources Wales (NRW) should be abolished.

Education and Welsh Language

Under devolution, Wales has lost its once proud educational tradition. Attainment at both GCSE and Key Stage 2 levels compared to England has deteriorated to such an extent that Welsh government has stopped providing comparable data. Instead, it focuses on a 'Welsh baccalaureate' which is not widely valued or recognised elsewhere, and which we believe should be abolished.

The two sets of PISA tests done in the past five years, which are published on an internationally comparable basis, show Wales doing poorly internationally and significantly worse than the other home nations. This contrasts with significant improvements in England.

Abolish would like to see pupils in Wales given the same opportunities as those in England. We would retain the UK Curriculum, including rights to opt out of religious and sex education. We would restore consistency of exams and grading with England to help Welsh people get good jobs.

Abolish supports the 1993 Welsh Language Act as passed by the UK government, including the right to communicate with the public sector in Welsh, for those who ask to do so. However, that should not mean cutting down forests to print every leaflet and letter in Welsh as well as English, which shows the hypocrisy of Welsh politicians, as they go on about supporting climate change action and the environment.

Abolish would stop this, and reserve communication in Welsh for those who request it from a public body, so requiring fewer public sector jobs to be reserved for Welsh speakers. It is wrong that the Assembly won't employ anyone now unless they speak some Welsh. We would cut the number of public sector 'Welsh essential' jobs. Abolish also opposes forcing bilingualism on the private sector.

In our schools, we would like to see more emphasis on choice than compulsion on Welsh language. We will end the discrimination, where Welsh government pays 100% of capital costs to build new schools if they will teach in Welsh, but generally only 50% if they will teach in English.

We would devolve to local authorities the right to decide if, and to what degree, Welsh should be compulsory outside of Welsh-medium schools. Councils should have regard to parents' wishes and the greatly varying extent to which Welsh is spoken in different council areas.

Abolish would support academies and free schools in Wales as well as England. These schools, which enjoy greater freedom and autonomy, would determine their own language policies. Parents and pupils would have greater choice of schooling, including on the extent of Welsh language teaching.

Conclusion

This Statement of Policy is our road-map to save Wales and save the Union by ending devolution.