

GRAYLING

**GRAYLING GUIDE TO  
WELSH POLITICS IN  
2016**



# INTRODUCTION

Since the establishment of the National Assembly for Wales in 1999, devolved politics has witnessed profound change. Yet throughout this change, Welsh Labour has remained a constant at the centre of government in Cardiff Bay and show few signs of going anywhere soon. Debate over the constitutional future of Wales remains at the top of the political agenda, with several of the suggestions made by the Silk Commission being translated into legislation by the UK Government - albeit the pace of this might slow given that the Bill has now been paused by the Secretary of State for Wales given the extensive criticism the draft received by the Welsh Affairs Select Committee and Welsh political parties.

This legislation represents a wholesale shift towards further power for the Welsh Government and National Assembly for Wales. Amongst those proposed, and integral to the devolution process in Wales, is the ability of the National Assembly for Wales to become a true parliament and decide its own electoral arrangements.

With the National Assembly for Wales' general election, EU referendum and the Local Government elections fast approaching, businesses and organisations need to position themselves at the heart of the ongoing political discussion.

As we embark on the fifth generation of devolution we hope you will find this guide beneficial in aiding you further in understanding the direction of travel in Cardiff Bay. Its comings and goings, and where Wales is heading in the years ahead.



**Cat Griffith-Williams,**  
Head of Public Affairs -  
Wales



**Alex Phillips,**



**Huw Owen,**

# OVERVIEW OF THE WELSH ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

The 2016 Welsh Assembly elections will be held on 5<sup>th</sup> May. Recent polling suggest that Welsh Labour will once again just fall short of their coveted majority, but will remain by far the largest party. The story is far bleaker for the nation's three main opposition parties. The assured arrival of UKIP to the Senedd floor means that there will simply be fewer seats to share around, with everyone set to lose out as UKIP's fifth column joins the Cardiff Bay establishment.

But, ironically for UKIP, their arrival may act only to strengthen Welsh Labour's control of government. A more divided opposition (rising from three parties to four) will leave the Welsh Labour group with more influence in relative terms, given that a coalition of parties against them that unifies Plaid Cymru and the Welsh Conservatives with UKIP is highly unlikely.

It may also force another coalition to be formed between Welsh Labour and Plaid Cymru or Welsh Labour and the Welsh Liberal Democrats. If the Welsh Liberal Democrats suffer losses comparable to their UK counterparts, which on current polling looks likely, they may only play a hand in a coalition that incorporates all three. This would form a central left alliance stronger than ever before.

Nonetheless, Welsh Labour would much rather govern alone, and recent experiences of coalition may be enough to make others think twice about supporting them. Indeed the disparity of opinion between the opposition parties may just allow Welsh Labour to govern two of three seats short of a majority. One thing we do know for sure is that any grouping will find it near impossible to grasp the reins of government without Welsh Labour's support.



# A NEW ERA FOR THE WELSH ASSEMBLY

Welsh devolution has been a slow process. Less than six months after the Wales Act 2014 received Royal Assent (an Act implementing elements of Part One of the Silk Commission), the next strand of devolution was announced in the 2015 Queen's Speech in the form of yet another Wales Bill. Negotiations for a newer, more enhanced devolution settlement have already begun and Welsh devolution remains firmly on the UK political agenda.

The new Wales Bill will provide wide-ranging further powers to the National Assembly for Wales, including control over energy generation, transport, fracking and elections. Furthermore, the National Assembly for Wales will finally get the option to call itself a Parliament.

The long overdue decision has been taken to move from the current version of devolution, which names the areas open to Welsh legislative control, to a Scottish-style reserved powers model. This new model would see powers reserved by the UK Government clearly marked as untouchable, thus leaving all other areas open for the Assembly to legislate.

The details of this Bill remain in dispute. Indeed many in Welsh Labour, Plaid Cymru and the Welsh Liberal Democrats argue that the current Bill is a retrograde step and would give Westminster greater power to veto legislation. The UK Government has signalled its willingness to listen to these concerns and has committed to bring forward significant changes over the summer. The Welsh Government has now even gone to the lengths of publishing an alternative Bill which sets out its preferred vision for the next devolution settlement.

Assembly Members remain keen to continue the devolution conversation, and to reposition power to Cardiff Bay. Those in opposition parties are also keen to ensure that any new powers aren't given away to civil servants in the Welsh Government as soon as they arrive.

# A CHANGING OF THE GUARD

A number of long-standing AMs are standing down from the National Assembly for Wales in 2016, including current Ministers Edwina Hart and Huw Lewis. With 13 AMs departing at this election (listed below), this constitutes a quarter of the entire Assembly. Change on this scale is going to be significant - and that goes without even mentioning those who will lose their seats on election night. Direct democracy in Wales is still young. Such a big turnover will reduce the knowledge capital retained in the next Assembly, and therefore could further reduce the legislative competency of an already overstretched chamber of just 60 Assembly Members.



**Edwina Hart**  
Welsh Labour,  
The Minister for Economy,  
Science and Transport  
*Gower*  
[Been in every cabinet  
since 1999]



**Dame Rosemary Butler**  
Welsh Labour,  
Presiding Officer  
*Newport West*



**Huw Lewis**  
Welsh Labour,  
The Minister for  
Education and Skills  
*Merthyr Tydfil and  
Rhymney*



**Janice Gregory**  
Welsh Labour,  
Chief Whip  
*Ogmore*



**Sandy Mewies**  
Welsh Labour,  
Assembly Commissioner  
*Delyn*



**Christine Chapman**  
Welsh Labour  
*Cynon Valley*



**Jocelyn Davies**  
Plaid Cymru  
*South Wales East*



**Rhodri Glyn Thomas**  
Plaid Cymru  
*Carmarthen East  
and Dinefwr*



**Gwenda Thomas.**  
Welsh Labour  
*Neath*



**Alun Fred Jones**  
Plaid Cymru  
Chair of the Environment  
& Sustainability  
Committee  
*Arfon*



**Jeff Cuthbert**  
Welsh Labour  
*Caerphilly*



**Keith Davies**  
Welsh Labour  
*Llanelli*



**Gwyn Price**  
Welsh Labour  
*Islwyn*

# WELSH LABOUR AND THE WELSH GOVERNMENT



There may well be a plethora of new faces and personalities to get to know after the election, but will the Welsh Labour hegemony continue?

2016 is critical for the Labour Party. Wales, London, and the North of England are the few strongholds the party has left. Losing Scotland to the SNP, combined with the so-called 'Corbyn effect' eroding the support of 'Middle England' has naturally led to serious questions over how the party can ever return to power in Westminster in its current form.

Closer to home, Wales is now the only UK nation where the party remains dominant. This election will put that to the test, but with so many Assembly Members standing down it will also be seen as a changing of the guard - or even a fresh start - that might bring new ideas capable of reinvigorating Wales' legislative agenda. Yet, regardless of being in power for each of the 17 years since devolution began, recent polls suggest Welsh Labour will remain on course to be the largest party in the Assembly by a significant margin. Indeed, the expected arrival of UKIP will likely result in a more fractured opposition that will be even more unwilling to band together to prevent Welsh Labour from holding on to the reins of government as their term in office extends well into its third decade.

But regardless of polling, securing an outright majority seems like an unlikely possibility - perhaps even more unlikely than David Cameron was of securing an outright majority last year. Welsh Labour has a long legacy to defend. A legacy which arguably makes their fight a harder one to win, given its association with declining educational and health attainment levels in comparison to other UK nations.

This record has already impacted the Welsh party. The 2015 UK General Elections saw Labour lose a number of key seats to the Conservatives (including Gower, a seat which Labour had held since 1918). Given this, it isn't surprising that there are now individuals within the party who are beginning to suggest that Welsh Labour has moved away from traditional Welsh voter values. The generational support the party has enjoyed for near a century is slowly dissipating as links to industrial heritage pass out of living memory, and new voters begin to form their own political identities.

Indeed, Wales has arguably entered an age of greater multi-party politics. It is likely that Welsh Labour will lose seats, with UKIP and the Tories eating away at Labour votes at the margins, as well as Plaid Cymru posing a different problem through their shift further to the left under leader Leanne Wood. Such moves make a coalition more probable, but Labour would naturally prefer to govern alone - even in a minority. Anything else would likely call time on Carwyn Jones' leadership and leave the door open to new challengers in the form of Huw Irranca Davies, Ken Skates and Leighton Andrews.

# CAN THE OPPOSITION GAIN GROUND IN 2016?

## Welsh Conservatives



Ceidwadwyr  
Cymreig  
Welsh  
Conservatives

The General Election of 2015 gave the Welsh Conservatives their best result since 1983. They won several key seats from Welsh Labour and the Welsh Liberal Democrats and are keen to repeat their victories in 2016. This will be hard for them to achieve. First, they simply won't have the money to campaign to the same extent, and second, their opposition will be far less complacent in areas such as Gower and the Vale of Clwyd. A third problem is that of getting their supporters out to vote- traditionally Welsh Conservatives vote in fewer numbers in Assembly elections.

But perhaps above all else their main problem is overcoming the Assembly's regional list system. Set up to improve democratic representation, the system ensures Wales' five regions are proportionally 'topped-up' by Assembly Members who didn't do well enough to win in one of the 40 first-past-the-post constituencies. As such, as constituencies are won, regional seats are lost. While this is more democratic, it does make it hard to make large gains in overall seat numbers quickly. They also have to contend with those regional seats now being spread over more parties with the arrival of UKIP.

## Plaid Cymru



Plaid  
Cymru | Party of  
Wales

Looking back to just 12 months ago, Plaid Cymru had everything they had ever dreamed of - equal standing and media coverage at a UK election with the major UK parties and a place in the televised debates. This was surely the last piece of the puzzle that would enable them to break through and become Wales' own version of the Scottish National Party. A party with broad appeal outside its traditional rural, Welsh speaking heartlands. But it wasn't to be. Despite their day in the media sun they made no progress, even slipping behind UKIP in the popular vote.

If May brings more failure, questions will doubtlessly be asked over whether Leanne Wood is still the right person to lead. This will be made more acute by the arrival of deal maker, party faithful favourite and former MP, Adam Price, in the safe Plaid seat of Carmarthen East & Dinefwr. From an opposition and coalition perspective, a change of leader may be welcome given the general perception that Leanne Wood's focus on ideological differences over policy delivery make her trickier to do business with.

Such negative things should not dispel from the Party's ambition to form the next Welsh Government and install Leanne Wood as Wales' next First Minister. To do this they have to find some way of appealing to traditional Welsh Labour voters across the South Wales Valleys. When she became leader there was hope that Ms Wood was the person to do that. Perhaps this election is when it finally starts to work?

# CAN THE OPPOSITION GAIN GROUND IN 2016?

## UKIP



Wales | Cymru

To many observers, UKIP in Wales appears to be in a state of civil war as the election approaches. Disputes over who gets to stand on the regional lists has continued into the eleventh hour, with the party's leadership only eventually getting its way and installing former Conservative MPs Mark Reckless and Neil

Hamilton into prime positions with their Wales MEP Nathan Gill. Regardless of the confusion, support for the party continues to grow, and holding the Assembly election in the middle of the more talked-about EU referendum should only help the party.

Recent polling suggests UKIP are on course to take between six and nine regional seats, and come a distant second in many of the Labour heartlands the other parties don't bother campaigning heavily in. This will see them easily overtake the Welsh Liberal Democrats as the fourth largest force in Welsh politics. Importantly from a party perspective, such numbers will give them official Political Group designation in the National Assembly. This will give them a fund to employ staff to support their activities in the Assembly, something that will be a huge boost to any party looking to expand in the long term.

However, it remains hard to tell what kind of UKIP Group the Assembly will have. The possibility exists that they can declare mission accomplished just seven weeks into the next Assembly if the UK votes to leave the EU. If that happens then the Party is going to have to work quickly to redefine its political identity given that, presumably, so much of its platform will have been solved by Brexit.

## Welsh Liberal Democrats

Welsh Liberal  
Democrats  
Democratiaid  
Rhyddfrydol Cymru



After the devastation of the 2015 General Election the last real hope for the Welsh Liberal Democrats is that voters return to them for the Assembly elections. Sadly for them this is looking increasingly unlikely with polling placing their support well into single figures. What this will mean in practice is that they will be

lucky to get more than one Assembly seat - with that last seat being Brecon & Radnorshire, held by Leader Kirsty Williams AM.

While Kirsty Williams' constituency is far from safe (the Conservatives having just won the Westminster seat in 2015), it remains their best hope for survival. Losses this May could be significant in the longer term. Much as UKIP may gain Political Group status in the National Assembly, one seat would see the Liberal Democrats lose it. Cue loss of their Group Office and the personnel that come with it, significantly handicapping the party in their ability to be a successful policy and scrutiny force - something which could prevent them from rebuilding their national presence in the future.

Leaving Kirsty Williams as their only member will also surely bring an end to any ambitions she may have to one day go to Westminster and lead the Federal Party. Having taken on the Welsh leadership with a group of six Assembly Members riding high in the polls, her failure to differentiate the Welsh party from the unpopular 2010-2015 Coalition Government could be responsible for her being left as their single member. This will surely lead to questions over her effectiveness. That said, she will have no one to pass the crown of leadership on to. Maybe a turn as the Assembly's new Presiding Officer will be the best option.

# ELECTION BATTLEGROUND

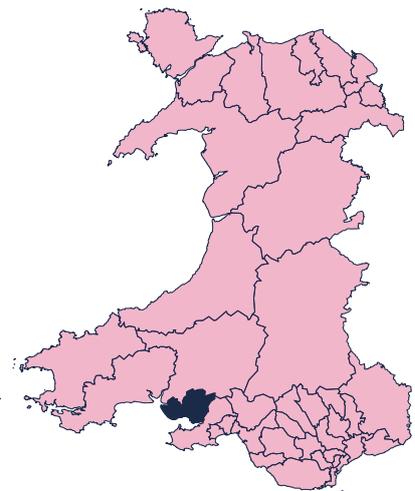
Unlike elections in Scotland, National Assembly for Wales elections have in the past struggled to step out of Westminster's shadow. Instead of being about important devolved issues such as health and education, they have all too often been a mid-term popularity contest for the parties in London.

While the focus on Welsh public services has increased in recent years (in no small part thanks to the Prime Minister's use of the Welsh NHS as stick with which to beat the Labour Party), the decision to hold the EU referendum just seven weeks afterwards is liable to result in the Assembly election being drowned out by pro/anti EU rhetoric.

Nonetheless, there remain a few key battlegrounds to keep an eye on which will likely decide the fate of the Fifth Assembly.

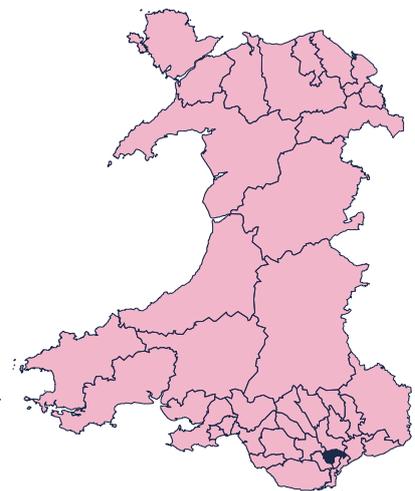
## Llanelli

A straight fight between Welsh Labour and Plaid Cymru, the large Carmarthenshire town has changed hands at each of the Assembly's past elections. The current holders (Welsh Labour) are keen to break that cycle. In response they have brought in Lee Waters - a Cardiff based public affairs professional - to fight against former Assembly Member Helen Mary Jones. In 2011 there were just 80 votes in it, but it was an easy win for Labour in the 2015 Westminster election. As such it is Mr Waters' to lose. The result will have far wider ramifications for the Mid & West Wales regional list, and as such is a key win for both parties if they want to build their respective cases to form the next Government.



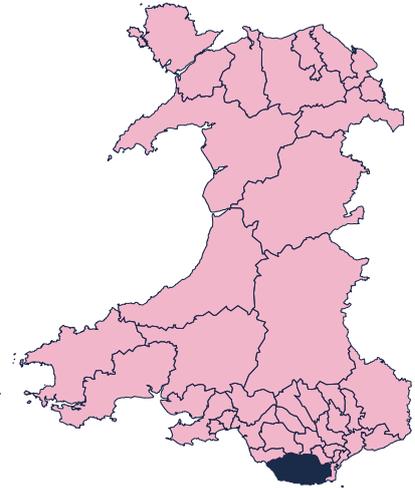
## Cardiff North

Another seat with a mixed history, Cardiff North is a close fight between Welsh Labour and the Welsh Conservatives. Currently under Labour control, the seat has been edging towards the Tories in recent years, with many surprised that they retained it comfortably at the 2015 Westminster election. This is a must win for the Welsh Conservatives if they want to show progress in the Assembly. If they do, it will be more evidence that Labour support in South Wales (which has been uncontested for nearly a century) is starting to fade.



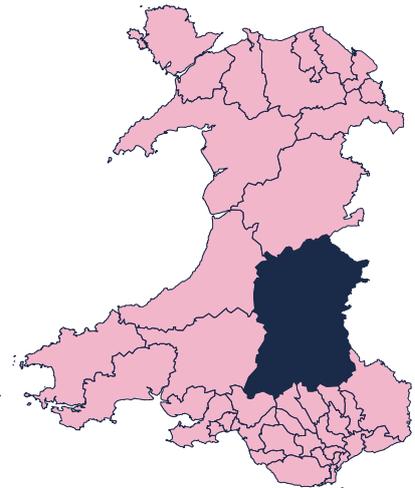
### Vale of Glamorgan

The Vale (as it is known) is one of the few constituencies with a different party representing it in the Assembly and in Westminster. The Welsh Conservatives would love to change that and dislodge long time Welsh Labour Minister Jane Hutt from the seat she has held since 1999. Their chances were reduced, however, by the decision of Welsh Conservative leader Andrew RT Davies to not contest the seat, and instead stick to the South Wales Central regional list. Up against a relative unknown Labour's chances of retaining the seat are far stronger. As such, were they to lose it on election night it will be a sign of much larger problems across the rest of Wales.



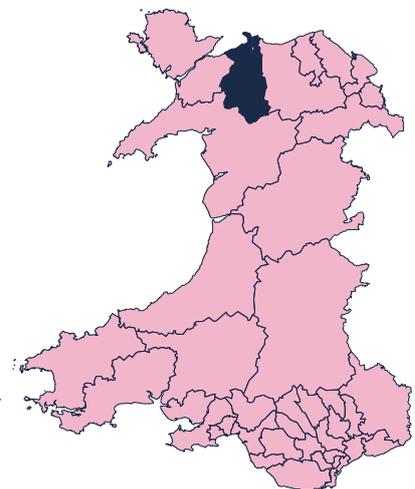
### Brecon & Radnorshire

The closest thing the Welsh Liberal Democrats have to a safe seat in Wales, the southern two thirds of Powys has been held by leader Kirsty Williams since 1999. Retaining it has appeared to be the prime focus of the party for many years. Its loss to the Conservatives at the Westminster level in 2015 shocked the party to its core. Losing it again will likely be the end of Liberal representation in the Assembly and allow the Tories to claim victory in their decades long campaign to annex Powys.



### Aberconwy

A rare three-way marginal in Wales between the Welsh Conservatives, Welsh Labour and Plaid Cymru. Currently held by the Conservatives, Plaid Cymru are doubtless keen to overcome their 1,600 vote deficit and recover the seat. Welsh Labour (just 115 votes behind Plaid in 2011) have popular local Councillor Mike Priestley - who recently defected from the Welsh Liberal Democrats. How this seat falls on election night will likely give an early indication of which way Wales is heading.



# ONES TO WATCH



**Jayne Bryant**

Welsh Labour, Newport West

Jayne was educated at St Julian's and Keele University, and worked in Newport, Cardiff, the Rhondda, London, and Australia. For nine years, Jayne has headed a team of six solving family, social, and political problems. She was also one of four Welsh Labour candidates in this year's European elections in May and was the second candidate on the Welsh list.

[@JBryantWales](#) – 2,177 followers



**Jayne Cowan**

Welsh Conservative, Cardiff North

Jayne Cowan was first elected to serve the residents of Rhiwbina as a councillor in 1999, and was re-elected in 2004, 2008 and 2012. She also served as the Deputy Lord Mayor of Cardiff for 2011/12. With her husband, Adrian Robson, she switched from the Conservatives to becoming an Independent before switching back in June 2015.

[@JayneCowan](#) – 3,946 followers  
[@Jayne4CardiffN](#) – 109 followers



**Sian Gwenllian**

Plaid Cymru, Arfon

Sian Gwenllian is Y Felinheli's Councillor on Gwynedd Council. She was elected in May 2008 and has been a member of the Council ever since.

[@siangwenfelin](#) – 1,815 followers



**Huw Irranca-Davies**

Welsh Labour, Ogmore

Has been the Labour Member of Parliament since 2002. He currently has a majority of 13,043, although he is standing down to contest the Labour safe seat of Ogmore. He is the incumbent Shadow Minister for Food and Farming, and has been a Parliamentary Private Secretary in in three different Ministries. He has also been a Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales.

[@IrrancaDaviesMP](#) – 10,600 followers



**Adam Price**

Plaid Cymru, Carmarthen East and Dinefwr

Adam is a former MP and has been a leading Plaid Cymru activist for many years. After departing Parliament he has been involved in a number of academic and business ventures in Wales and the United States with varying degrees of success. A strong supporter of Leanne Wood's leadership bid, Adam is a keen deal maker who is happy to work across political divides behind the scenes.

[@\\_Adam\\_Price](#) – 5,408 followers



**Lee Waters**

Welsh Labour, Llanelli

Lee is a former Chief Political Correspondent for ITV Wales and BBC Wales producer. He was a leading figure in the 2011 referendum 'Yes for Wales' campaign and has been a director of Sustrans. He is currently the director of the IWA.

[@Amanwy](#) – 3,698 followers

# 2016 NEW ASSEMBLY CANDIDATES

## Who's who on Twitter



**@Aled\_Glanogeu**

Aled Davies  
695

**@AliceGreenParty**

Alice Hooker-Stroud  
454

**@Eluned\_Morgan**

Eluned Morgan  
1,400

**@HelenMaryCymru**

Helen Mary Jones  
4,000

**@LeggeBourke**  
Harry Legge-Bourke  
300

**@GrenvilleHam**  
Grenville Ham  
173

**@ToniaAntoniazzi**  
Antonia Antonazzi  
449

**@vickymoller**  
Vicky Moller  
81

**@fab63franbryant**  
Frances Bryant -  
619

**@JohnCBayliss**  
John Bayliss  
469

**@pippa\_pemberton**  
Pippa Pemberton  
67



# ABOUT GRAYLING

Grayling was the first public affairs consultancy in Wales, offering our client's unrivalled experience in Government Relations, Planning Communications, PR and Media support. Our policy and political specialists based here in Cardiff Bay and across Westminster, Scotland and Brussels, understand the shifting priorities of key decision makers and are ideally placed to analyse the Welsh political landscape and changing stakeholders to help prepare businesses and organisations.

We benefit from being part of a global communications company yet retain the local knowledge which comes with having a dedicated team on the ground in Cardiff Bay. We're proud to be a big company with a small company ethos.

We'd love to talk further about how we can help you. Why not send us an email or drop in for a chat and coffee next time you're in the Bay.

# GRAYLING

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