

Meeting of the Cross Party Group on Co-operatives and Mutuals, 30th June 2020

Virtual Meeting

Attendees

Vicki	Roskams	Engagement Leader	Enbarr Foundation CIC
Dawn	Dublin	Director	Unveiled
Michelle	Reid	Chief Executive	Merthyr Valleys Homes
David	Smith	Secretary	Co-ops & Mutuals Wales
Eva	Trier	Director	Eva Trier Consulting Ltd.
Tim	Hartley	Director	Co-op News
Martin	Downes	Social Entrepreneurship Officer	Wales Co-operative Centre
Carly	mc creesh	SBW New Start Project Manager	wales cooperative centre
Claire	White	Monitoring & Evaluation Officer	Wales Co-operative Centre
Rhian	Stone	Managing Director	Pobl
Michelle	Francis	Enterprise Development Officer	Pembrokeshire County Council
Karen	Wilkie	Deputy General Secretary	The Co-operative Party
Marco	GilCervantes	Chief Executive	ProMo Cymru
David	Smith	Secretary	Co-ops & Mutuals Wales
Dan	McCallum	Director	Awel Aman Tawe/Egni Co-op
Ian	Thomas	CEO	Trivallis
sarah	owens	Business Advisor	Wales Co-operative Centre
adrian	roper	CEO	Cartrefi Cymru Co-operative
Sue	Thomas	Retired	Treasurer Socialist Health Association Cymru Wales
Jessica	Thomas	Report approver	GLI Gaming
Alan	Brunt	Chief Executive	Bron Afon Community Housing
Barbara	Lloyd	Branch Secretary	SE Wales Co-op Party
Anthony	Samuel	Senior Lecturer	Cardiff University Business School
Chris	Cowcher	Head of Community Business	Plunkett Foundation
Sara	Burch	Manager	Gateway Credit Union Ltd
Christopher	Hall	Legal Adviser	HMCTS, part of the MOJ (Civil Service)
Mike	Erskine	PR and Events Officer	Wales Co-operative Centre
Derek	Walker	Chief Executive	Wales Co-operative Centre
Dan	Roberts	Policy Officer	Wales Co-operative Centre
Glenn	Bowen	Director of Enterprise	Wales Co-operative Centre
Barbara	Lloyd	SE Wales Branch	Coop Party
Donna	Coyle	Care to Co-operate	Wales Co-operative Centre
Sarah	Evans	Independent Policy and Research Advisor	Wales Co-operative Centre
Casey	Edwards	Community-led Housing Advisor	Wales Co-operative Centre
Bebhinn	O'Loingsigh	Training Manager	Bisley
Mark	Hooper	Cooperator	Banc Cambria
Jack	Watkins	Policy officer	Institute of Welsh Affairs
Nisreen	Mansour	Policy Officer	Wales TUC
Paul	O'Hara	Secretary	drive Cardiff Taxi Co-operative Limited
Sophia	Goard	Student Medical Herbalist	Betonica

Panellist Contributions

- *Dr Anthony Samuel, Cardiff University*

Dr Samuel gave context to the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on social enterprises at the ground-level. He said that despite the challenging times, there was reason to be hopeful – in one poll, just 6% of the British public stated that they wanted the economy to return to the way it was before the beginning of the crisis. He suggested, however, that while there had been a shift in how we view the economy, there is no guarantee it will lead to permanent change. Dr Samuel drew on the work of Naomi Klein and the idea of disaster capitalism, and how the discourse around our economy will still be dominated by large corporations seeking to make profit out of the tumultuous era we live in. He said that it is up to us to ensure that the narrative of economic change can persist.

Dr Samuel made note of specific industries that could benefit hugely from social enterprise and co-operative values. One example was care homes – they have been at the epicentre of the crisis, and even before it began the sustainability of the economic model they were working in was coming into question. Now, 50% of care homes in Wales can be considered to be in a financially vulnerable state. Across the UK, there are 120 care homes run as social enterprises, and Dr Samuel suggested that these can be a blueprint and examples of best practice for models of care homes that are based on wellbeing and social value, not profit, for the residents and the workers they employ and supply chains they work with.

- *Nisreen Mansour, Wales Trades Union Congress (TUC)*

Nisreen discussed how the Covid-19 crisis has highlighted existing inequalities – with old problems around regional inequalities and the gender and BAME pay-gaps being seen again in the impact of the Covid-19 crisis and the response to it. She said that trade unions have long considered that we must address the root cause of unfair labour markets, which come from the naturally unequal relationship between worker and employer. She stressed that we can not rely on individual action to solve these problems, and that unionization and collective bargaining is the solution – but she suggested that we won't see growth in these important areas without policy intervention.

Nisreen pointed to two industries in which greater levels of collective voice and unionization could make a big difference - Hospitality and Tourism. She said that these are two crucial components of the Welsh economy, but that the 100,000 workers in these industries in Wales currently have low unionization and weak collective voice, with precarious work such as zero-hours contracts and low wages common.

Nisreen noted that firms in these industries had said that the businesses models currently dominating these industries simply do not allow for better conditions for workers. Therefore, the TUC believes that the Government should not continue to fund business models that don't allow for fair work, and instead look towards alternative models such as unionized co-ops.

- *Sara Birch, Gateway Credit Union*
Sara discussed the experiences of credit unions across Wales and their response to the crisis, and in particular her own Gateway Credit Union. She said everything changed when lockdown was initiated, and they had to suddenly transition to an online service. Sara discussed the “credit union difference”, as they looked to serve their members; releasing savings where necessary, checking in on elderly members, and increasing levels of savings. She discussed how they had opened accounts for community groups, and worked with key members of the foundational economy. She said the future will hold new and old challenges, but credit unions across Wales want to work together, exchange best practice and pool resources, to step up and continue to support communities across Wales during this period.
- *Paul O’Hara, Drive – Cardiff Taxis*
Paul spoke of the experience of his social enterprise stepping up and meeting the needs of their workers and the community during the Covid-19 crisis. He said they lost 95% of pre-booked work when the crisis began, but decided as a collective to provide free shopping trips for the elderly, paying the drivers with the group’s savings, and giving a 25% discount to key workers, including those outside the health and care sectors working in factories and industries that kept us going through the lockdown.

They found that they had attracted new customers during this period, and now, with society and the economy beginning to re-open, old customers had started coming back. Paul spoke of his hope that the rise in community spirit we have seen during this period isn’t forgotten and can be harnessed for social and economic good.

Questions and Discussion Summary

- Derek Walker, CEO of the Wales Co-operative Centre, discussed the opportunities that can come from the Covid-19 crisis, but the dangers of us slipping back to the status quo. He discussed the opportunities for the growing movement to influence what comes next to build a better country. He drew on the growing mutual aid groups across Wales, and asked how we can support them and build on this development. He referenced the Co-operative Party’s “Owning the Future” report and the Vision and Action Plan for the Social Enterprise Sector produced by the Social Enterprise Task Force. He stressed that we need systemic change, rather than new projects, with a new way of seeing the economy and making economic decisions.
- Attendees discussed how best to promote existing social enterprises and co-operatives. Key to this was the role of educational institutions in engaging young people. The group discussed how business/economics/entrepreneurship education must include social enterprise, and celebrate local social entrepreneurs not just distant billionaire celebrities. The group discussed the positive signs, with the importance to young people of ethical, values-based considerations. The group discussed the positive signs of the Wrexham Hack of Kindness and the Hackathons across Wales.
- The group discussed the importance of joining up the co-operative movement with other relevant campaigns on environmentalism, poverty and localism. It was agreed that there is

significant overlap already, and developing and nurturing positive relationships is very important. The engagement of the general public with the foundational economy was paramount, with support for Buy Local schemes. The group stressed that we can't assume this will stay forever, and we must work to make ethical consumption easier.

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