

## **Minutes of the Cross Party Group for Co-operatives and Mutuals Inaugural Meeting for the 6<sup>th</sup> Senedd term, 29/06/21**

### **Senedd Members present:**

Vikki Howells MS  
Huw Irranca-Davies MS  
Luke Fletcher MS  
Peredur Owen Griffiths MS  
Mark Isherwood MS

### **Attendees:**

Ryland Doyle (on behalf of Mike Hedges MS)  
Derek Walker – Wales Co-operative Centre (WCC)  
Daniel Roberts – WCC  
James Wright – Co-operatives UK  
Robin Lewis – Office of Vikki Howells MS

### **Minutes:**

At the start of the meeting, Huw Irranca-Davies proposed that Vikki Howells be elected as Chair of the CPG, which was seconded by Luke Fletcher. Vikki Howells was therefore elected as Chair.

Vikki Howells then proposed that Daniel Roberts be elected Secretary of the CPG, which was seconded by Luke Fletcher. Daniel Roberts as therefore elected as Secretary.

It was decided that the CPG would also have a Vice Chair. Peredur Owen Griffiths proposed that Luke Fletcher MS be elected as Vice Chair, which was seconded by Vikki Howells MS. Luke Fletcher was therefore elected as Vice Chair.

The group agreed that the purpose of the group is to remain the same as the last Senedd term, which is “To discuss co-operatives and mutuals in Wales”. The group also decided that Derek Walker, Daniel Roberts, Ceri Anne Fidler Jones and Mike Erskine will remain as members of the group.

The group then discussed the key priorities for the sector, hearing from Derek Walker of the Wales Co-operative Centre and James Wright from Co-operatives UK. James Wright discussed the recent publication of Co-operatives UK’s The Co-op Economy 2021 report, a comprehensive report on the UK’s co-operative sector. The report shows that co-operative businesses have been more resilient to the economic devastation caused by Covid, revealing that:

- Just 1.5% of co-ops were dissolved in 2020 compared to 6.5% of businesses generally
- Co-ops were four times less likely to cease trading
- The number of independent co-ops grew by 1.2% in 2020 despite the global pandemic
- Turnover for the UK’s 7,237 co-ops grows to £39.7bn (an increase of £1.1bn)
- Co-ops are more ambitious than small businesses generally, with 61% of co-ops expressing ambitions to grow or develop in the first quarter of 2021.

James said that Wales-specific data and analysis will be available soon. Following this, Derek Walker set out some of the key priority areas for the Wales Co-operative Centre and the co-operative sector in Wales, including:

- Contributing to the Welsh Government's objective to double the number of employee-owned businesses in Wales, and the potential benefits this can have for the co-operative sector.
- Growing the number of co-operative and community-led housing schemes in Wales
- Agricultural co-operatives, and how direct support can be provided for this crucial sector given economic challenges, climate change and Brexit
- Retail co-operatives, and the potential role of larger co-operatives in this industry in Wales

Huw Irranca-Davies notified the CPG of his proposal to legislate for a Welsh Marcora law to provide the legal framework, financial support and advice for worker buy-outs, and his wish for cross-party support for this proposal.

Mark Isherwood discussed his experience of working on co-operative housing models specifically, and suggested that a key priority in this context should be to assess what had already been done and what lessons can be learned for the future. He also discussed that within his casework there was a wide variety of different forms of co-operatives and mutuals, and understanding the specific needs of each of these was crucial.

Luke Fletcher suggested that there should be a specific focus on the renewable sector and community energy, and the potential for this sector to play a key role in combatting climate change and to build on successes within Wales.

Peredur Owen Griffiths noted community banking and what can be done to facilitate the growth of this sector in Wales. Derek Walker supported this idea and noted the development of Banc Cambria and that this was an area of potential in Wales.

Derek Walker and Daniel Roberts will propose a planned timetable of events for the group, with potential guest speakers highlighted. The proposed date of the first public meeting of the CPG will be in October, and Daniel Roberts will get in touch with members to find a suitable date.