

Meeting of the Cross Party Group on Co-operatives and Mutuals, 12/01/22

Attendees

Name	Organisation
Vikki Howells (Chair)	Member of the Senedd
Luke Fletcher (Vice Chair)	Member of the Senedd
Mabon ap Gwynfor	Member of the Senedd
Mike Hedges	Member of the Senedd
Casey Edwards (speaker)	Communities Creating Homes, Wales Co-operative Centre
Harry Thompson (speaker)	Institute of Welsh Affairs
Chris Blake (speaker)	Skyline Rhondda
Daniel Roberts (Secretary)	Wales Co-operative Centre
Belisario Iurcovich	Wales Co-operative Centre
Dan Rose	Senedd Support Staff
Dave Palmer	Communities Creating Homes, Wales Co-operative Centre
David Myles	Wales Co-operative Centre
Derek Walker	Wales Co-operative Centre
Elin Hywel	Senedd Support Staff
Hugh Russell	Communities Creating Homes, Wales Co-operative Centre
Huw Lewis	Wales Co-op Party
Lucie Taylor	Community Land Advisory Service
Mike Erskine	Wales Co-operative Centre
Nicola Perkins	DTA Wales
Robin Lewis	Senedd Support Staff
Sophie Buckley	Pembrokeshire Association of Voluntary Services

Minutes of the Meeting

Vikki Howells MS, the Chair of the Cross Party Group for Co-operatives and Mutuals, started the meeting by outlining the purpose to explore community-led housing in Wales, and in particular what must be done to further expand its role in Wales. Vikki stated that co-operative and community-led housing is about local people taking a leading and lasting role in creating secure, affordable homes and strengthening communities. In this meeting, one of the key barriers to the development of community-led housing that we have identified was to be discussed; access to suitable land.

Vikki then introduced the first speaker of the session, **Casey Edwards of Communities Creating Homes, delivered by the Wales Co-operative Centre**. The [Communities Creating Homes](#) programme is Wales' only community-led housing hub. Communities Creating Homes' mission is to help people and communities create the homes they want by sharing knowledge, building skills and bringing people together. Casey gave an overview of the project and the work that it has done in Wales, as well as outlining the key principles and benefits of community-led housing including well-being, community integration, democratic values and affordability. Casey also gave examples of positive case studies across Wales and the UK, including Bridport, Tir Cyffredin, Granby4Streets and LILAC. Communities Creating Homes are currently working with 60 community-led housing projects in Wales at various stages of development. Casey also outlined the policy commitments that have been

made in this area, including in the Welsh Government's Programme for Government published in 2021. Casey then discussed the next steps for policy on community-led housing, suggesting that Scotland could offer a blueprint for Wales through its Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 and consistent Land Reform policy since devolution.

The next speaker was **Harry Thompson from the Institute of Welsh Affairs**. Harry is currently managing a project on the future of land and ownership in Wales, and will soon be publishing a report outlining the Welsh context and next steps for development. He has been meeting and discussing this issue with community groups, landowners and policymakers to see where there is agreement and shared priorities. Harry noted that throughout this project he has been convinced of the importance of this subject area, and believes it is essential that policymakers and wider stakeholders are aware of the importance of this policy and the significant impact it could have on Welsh communities. He noted that 70% of the price of a house is the land it is on, and that this means it is a crucial debate in the context of the housing crisis in Wales. Harry then gave the wider context of the legislative changes that have happened in England and Scotland over the past couple of decades, and challenged the Welsh Government to prioritise this policy area to a greater extent to ensure that Wales is not left behind.

The final speaker on the panel was **Chris Blake from Rhondda Skyline**. The Rhondda Skyline Project is a collaboration between the community and a number of organisations including, Welcome to Our Woods, RHA Wales, The Green Valleys CIC, Wood Knowledge Wales, The National Lottery and the Welsh Government. It aims to give local residents control over the mountains and woodlands surrounding the Upper Rhondda Fawr through the founding of a Community Land Trust. This Trust will secure the rights to the land from National Resource Wales, the body that currently manages it, and allow local people to decide how it is used and what projects can be funded to benefit the community it surrounds. Chris discussed the work the project has been undertaking, and the importance of communities coming together to tackle the challenges Wales and the wider world is facing. He made note of the quote "...if humankind is to have any hope of finding a sustainable way of life, we must rebuild community. That means giving responsibility for their own place, planning and enterprise back to the people who actually live in the area". He stressed that land reform and community-led housing schemes are a crucial element of this and that policy work in this area is essential.

Following the speaker's presentations, the Chair thanked them for their contributions and invited all of the MSs to the virtual stage to take part in a discussion. **Mike Hedges MS** discussed the importance of prioritising social value to the same extent as economic value when public bodies were selling land or other assets, and the work that the Welsh Government is doing in this area, as well as the next steps, were discussed. One of the key questions raised by **Derek Walker** and **Huw Lewis** was the room for legislative proposals and political support for these ideas, and MSs from both of the political parties represented said that they would support these areas and act as flagbearers on this issue. **Lucie Taylor** noted that in her work there has been high demand for land and spaces from community groups, but that there was increased risk-aversion in Local Authorities who were concerned about losing ownership of land or assets of high economic value during difficult economic conditions. **Luke Fletcher** noted that he believes a culture shift is needed and that the government needs to step in to initiate this. The importance of legislation in ensuring that these steps are taken as soon as possible and to give communities genuine rights in this area was made clear, and **Vikki Howells** said she would write to the Welsh Government as Chair of this Cross-Party Group. Finally, **Vikki** thanked the panellists, MSs and attendees for the fruitful discussion and closed the meeting.