

Senedd Cymru – Welsh Parliament
Cross Party Group on Co-operatives and Mutuals
Annual Report and Accounts 2021-2022

Members

Vikki Howells MS (Chair)

Luke Fletcher MS (Vice Chair)

Huw Irranca-Davies MS

Peredur Owen Griffiths MS

Mike Hedges MS

Mark Isherwood MS

Derek Walker, Cwmpas

Secretariat

Daniel Roberts, Cwmpas

Mike Erskine, Cwmpas

Meetings, attendance and minutes:

For details of attendees, please see appendices below:

June 2021 – AGM and Key Priorities for the Group

October 2021 – Community Energy

January 2022 – Community-led Housing and Empowering Communities

April 2022 – Building Stronger Local Economies

Transparency

All meetings were open to the public. All meetings were advertised to the public.

Lobbyists

The group has not met with any lobbyists during this period, other than the secretariat.

Accounts for the period

There was no expenditure during this period, compared to previous years, as meetings were held online rather than in-person as a result of the Covid-19 restrictions and subsequent decision to keep meetings online. In addition, there was no translation costs as this was done in-house by the secretariat.

Event Summaries

June 2021 – AGM and Key Priorities for the Group

Virtual

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

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.

October 2021 – Community Energy

Virtual Meeting

Attendees

Name	Organisation
Vikki Howells (Chair)	Member of the Senedd
Luke Fletcher (Vice Chair)	Member of the Senedd
Huw Irranca-Davies	Member of the Senedd
Peredur Owen Griffiths	Member of the Senedd
Mark Isherwood	Member of the Senedd
Holly Cross	CARE
Robert Proctor	Community Energy Wales
Dan McCallum	Awel Aman Tawe/Egni Co-op
Derek Walker	Wales Co-operative Centre
Glenn Bowen	Wales Co-operative Centre
John Chown	Wales Co-operative Centre
Karen Lewis	Wales Co-operative Centre
Daniel Roberts	Wales Co-operative Centre
Mike Erskine	Wales Co-operative Centre
Ceri-Anne Fidler-Jones	Wales Co-operative Centre

Melusi Moyo	Wales Co-operative Centre
Ward Coster	Wales Co-operative Centre
Hannah Morris	Wales Co-operative Centre
Andrew Jenkins	Senedd Cymru (Member Support Staff)
Charlotte Knight	
Dyfan Lewis	Community Energy Wales
Eirwen Malin	Wenvoe Forum
Eleri Cabbage	Senedd Cymru (Member Support Staff)
Harry Thompson	Institute of Welsh Affairs
Ian MacKinlay	Thinking The Future Ltd.
James Wright	Co-operatives UK
Robin Lewis	Senedd Cymru (Member Support Staff)

Minutes of the Meeting

The Chair of the Cross Party Group, **Vikki Howells MS**, started the meeting by discussing community energy projects, their importance to Wales achieving net zero. The Welsh Government has set out its legal commitment to achieve net zero emissions by 2050 and has highlighted the importance of achieving this in an inclusive and sustainable fashion - in its Programme for Government, it refers to a 'spirit of cooperation and not competition.'. Community energy can play a key role in achieving this by working with communities and increasing citizen engagement and participation, making people active agents in how their communities change and adapt.

Vikki Howells MS gave an overview of the sector, stating that the community energy sector is already growing in Wales, and that it employed over 79 people in 2020, raised over £4.4 million in community shares, and six organisations installed new renewable electricity projects across the country.

The first speaker was then introduced. **Robert Proctor of Community Energy Wales** gave further detail on why setting up community energy projects is a worthwhile endeavour, despite the hard work, volunteering and time that it takes. He said that these groups are often formed as Community Benefit Societies, so 100% of the profits go to the local community, and are controlled by local members. It presents an opportunity to invest and make a modest but real profit for local people, but also crucially acts as an opportunity for engaging the local community. The projects have a key role in producing green energy at a local level, but also create economic benefits in the communities they are based in – by creating jobs directly and local contractors, keeping that value in the community.

Rob then gave an overview of the recent 2020 State of the Sector report, which can be accessed [here](#). It shows that the sector is growing in Wales and already creates jobs, has a considerable economic impact for local communities, and is an important source of green energy. Wales has the highest number of community energy projects per capita of any UK country. However, there is more that can be done to help the sector grow, such as facilitating the selling of the energy produced to the local community, connecting to the National Grid (which is currently prohibitively expensive), providing access to land (which is currently a major obstacle to many types of community projects, but could be helped by a widescale asset review across Wales), and engaging local communities at all stages of local and national decarbonisation plans, enabling them to take a greater control of the changes that need to be made.

The second speaker was **Dan McCallum of Awel Aman Tawe and Egni Co-op**. Dan reiterated the hard work that is necessary for some of these projects to get off the ground, but also provided examples of some projects that, with the right backing, are able to make a real impact quickly, such as

a recent project with Newport Council (<https://www.local.gov.uk/case-studies/newport-city-council-community-renewable-energy>). Dan emphasized the importance of one of the key impact that energy co-operatives can make in engaging local people in the decarbonisation and green agenda, and encouraging them to make important behaviour changes. These organisations can also engage people in co-operative and community-led movements more generally, across different sectors, and educate them on the tangible impact they can make. Dan made the point that these values of social good and co-operation should be included in the procurement work within the public sector, as local resources are being lost from communities and going to multinational corporations. He stated that his recent work in Newport is a great case study, and wants to work in a similar way with other local authorities in Wales.

The final speaker was **Holly Cross of CARE in Cwm Arian**. Holly again stated that the process they had been through was extremely difficult and challenging, but that the successful launch of their wind turbine had made a real impact, both in terms of energy production and as a symbol of what communities can do. However, it was important to note that the process must be learned from and made easier. She stated that the wind turbine had acted as a platform to do even more and create more added-value in the local community. It had created jobs and given them the opportunity to access more funding and investment, as well as giving those who had worked on it new skills and a newfound confidence, and the group have now moved onto to new areas of working on energy and resource efficiency. Some of the key learning points have been that capacity on the grid is a problem, with several bureaucratic problems that must be fixed, and that Local Authorities need to do more to support these groups – but said that there were several good examples to learn from. Holly also reiterated that access to land use for community groups was pivotal.

Following the speakers had given their contributions, **Vikki Howells MS** thanked them and invited the Members of the Senedd present at the meeting gave their thoughts. **Huw Irranca-Davies MS** discussed the positivity of there being so many organisations working in this sector in Wales. He wanted to identify the practical barriers to helping these and new organisations to grow even further, especially in deprived communities where there may be fewer people with the skills and expertise to dedicate time to these projects. He noted specifically the land issue, and said that this is one of the key issues facing Wales at present.

Luke Fletcher MS said he was happy that this was being discussed, because it is a vital aspect to getting to Net Zero emissions as has been targeted by the Welsh Government. He spoke of the need to bring communities with us on this mission, and the importance of a just transition that prioritised ending poverty. He asked the question of how we bring communities along with us on this journey, and how community energy projects can be an important answer to this. **Peredur Owen Griffiths MS** also spoke of the need to get buy-in from communities for projects of this nature, rather than imposing on them, and that projects like these can be community-led and a crucial solution.

James Wright from Co-operatives UK gave a perspective from the UK-level. He said that there was no clear strong policy objectives in BEIS for community energy (generation or other activities). At Conservative Party Conference, the BEIS Minister had agreed that communities and co-operative action in communities could be an enabler of behavioural change such as the take up of retrofit. But clearly there has been no solid policy thinking in BEIS on this. Co-operatives UK is publishing research on co-ops and climate action, and a joint declaration from large UK co-ops ahead of COP26. One demand of governments will be to utilise communities and co-operatives as an enabler in implementing net zero strategies, esp in retrofit, heat and energy use.

Harry Thompson from the IWA asked a question on the potential for legislation to give communities an opportunity to gain ownership or control of public land that was being sold. **Huw Irranca-Davies MS** believed that this is an important issue, and that what has been done in Scotland can be an example to Wales, noting that this could be an area for cross-party working on a joint-legislative process. The panellists agreed that this would be beneficial, and also noted that tendering processes' financial requirements often meant they were inaccessible to community schemes, and that first refusal should go to local communities rather than inviting multi-nationals to tender. They also noted that specialist support for community groups is essential for competing with the private sector.

Derek Walker from the Wales Co-operative Centre asked whether the current situation around energy prices in the UK could be good for community energy projects in making them more viable, despite the negative impact they have for consumers. **Dan McCallum** agreed, but that the projects should be more about getting cheaper electricity to people and should be about educating people about climate change. He noted a recent example of a project in Caerphilly, which had a viable model and project, but that it was taking too long, and public sector organisations need reform and education to ensure these projects can happen at pace and scale.

Glenn Bowen from the Wales Co-operative Centre asked about the job creation and innovation in the sector. **Rob Proctor** said that it was a small but growing sector, directly employing 79 people in Wales but creating more jobs indirectly. He also noted that these jobs needed to be innovative, and that this innovation can come from small organisations and not just R&D departments in MNCs – it was this type of innovation that is needed to reach net zero. **Holly Cross** also discussed how these groups were embedded in communities, their local knowledge of contractors and suppliers meant that the sector was definitely creating much more jobs locally, indirectly. **Dan McCallum** also noted the ethics of the organisations – for example, they had recently learned of human rights abuses in the production of solar panels, and had switched suppliers as a result. He spoke of the need to do this work as ethically and sustainably as possible, and ideally these resources would be from Wales itself, rather than the other side of the world, because of the environmental and economic benefits that would come from this.

Vikki Howells MS then closed the meeting, thanking the participants, organisers and audience.

January 2022 – Community-led Housing and Empowering Communities

Virtual Meeting

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 Cooperative Centre

David Myles Wales Co-operative Centre

Derek Walker Wales Co-operative Centre

Elin Hywel Senedd Support Staff

Hugh Russell Communities Creating Homes, Wales Cooperative 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.

April 2022 – Building Stronger Local Economies

Virtual Meeting

Attendees

Name	Organisation
Vikki Howells (Chair)	Member of the Senedd
Daniel Roberts (Secretary)	Cwmpas

Derek Walker	Cwmpas
Mike Erskine	Cwmpas
Donna Coyle	Cwmpas
Sarah Evans	Cwmpas
Alex Still	Senedd Support Staff
Alun Jones	Social Investment Cymru WCVA
Andy Green	Grow Social Capital
Eleri Williams	Building Communities Trust
Elin Hywel	Senedd Support Staff
Gareth Andrews	Vale Cricket Club
Gareth Jones	TownSq
Brian Colley	Glyn Wylfa
Glenn Bowen	Cwmpas
Harry Thompson	Institute of Welsh Affairs
Keith Henson	Barcud Cyf
Leonie Ramondt	Swansea CoHousing
Maggie Joan Haggas	3rd Age Hostelling and Housing/Holistic Hostels Limited
Mark Gahan	Severn Wye
Mark White	Smart Money Cymru Credit Union
Martin Little	TPAS Cymru
Matthew Reardon	Welcome to our Woods
May Baxter-Thornton	Cymoedd Creadigol
Michelle Rowson-Woods	The Coalfields Regeneration Trust
Paula Lunnon	Cwmpas
Robin Lewis	Senedd Support Staff
Ross Edwards	Garrison Farm
Sibani Roy	NWAMI
Josh Chown	Cwmpas

Minutes of the Meeting

The meeting was started by the Chair, Vikki Howells MS. She began the meeting by congratulating the secretariat of the group, the Wales Co-operative Centre, for their recent rebrand and new name, Cwmpas. Then, she made members and attendees of the group aware of an online event on September the 14th of May, to celebrate Robert Owen and building on his legacy.

The first presentation of the meeting was by Dr Daniel Roberts, Policy and Research Officer at Cwmpas. He gave an overview of a new report, 'Building Stronger Local Economies', that has been published by Cwmpas to bridge the gap between communities or those delivering services, and policy and legislation. It introduced the idea of building community wealth and gave examples of how this can be done with specific approaches including the foundational economy, social value and social enterprise.

Next, Dr Sarah Evans gave a presentation on the work Cwmpas is doing across different sectors and with different partners to embed social value and develop new approaches to economic development. Derek Walker also gave an overview of the work on employee ownership in Wales, which following a Welsh Government commitment to double the number of employee-owned businesses in Wales, has seen several new conversions in recent months.

Finally, Donna Coyle, Co-operative Care and Support Manager, discussed how these principles and approaches worked in the social care sector specifically. She explained three projects they were working on; a Welsh Government funded project to increase social value delivery models in care and support, along with guidance for commissioners and procurers to invest in social value models; Drive Wales - a collaborative project focused on 'person-centred' service delivery informing the Foundational Economy strategy to increase and create opportunities for the third sector to supply more social care services; and a National Lottery Community Fund project, Community-led care: Solutions to social care issues, which is due to start in the summer.

The meeting ended with a discussion among the attendees on the ideas discussed in the presentations and how they related to their work, with issues such as volunteering, local government and the potential of social enterprise discussed. The date of the next meeting will be set and distributed to members and attendees shortly.