

Minutes

Welsh Assembly Cross Party Group on Co-operatives and Mutuels

15th January 2014

Media Briefing Room, 12.30 – 1.30pm

Assembly Members Present

Mick Antoniw AM (Chair), Mike Hedges AM, Leighton Andrews AM, Julie Morgan AM, Bethan Jenkins AM, Julie James AM

Secretariat

Alex Bird (Executive Chair, Co-operatives & Mutuels Wales)

Speakers

Daniel Rose (Head of Supporters Direct, England & Wales) Kevin Rye (Head of Communications, Supporters Direct, England and Wales) Meurig Evans (Chair, Merthyr Town FC)

Guests

Tim Hartley (Chair, Cardiff City Supporters Trust), John Strand (Merthyr Town FC), Mark Evans (Merthyr town FC), Brent Carter (Business Development, Merthyr Town FC), Alan Lewis (Chair, Swansea City supporters Trust), Ian Courtney (Regional Director, Charity Bank), Karen Wilkie (Deputy Gen. Sec. Co-op party), Dr Martin Price (consultancy.coop), Alan Jones (Communities Investment Fund), Angela Farr (Sport Wales), Alan Burge, Richard Vaughan (Cadwyn Housing Assoc.), Ashley Drake (Membership Manager, Wales, Co-operative Group), Ryan Jones (Wales Co-operative Centre), Sionedd Hughes (Director of Policy & Regeneration, Community Housing Cymru), Geoff Jones (Enterprising Communities, WCVA), Jeremy Bowen-Rees (Landsker), Mike Clarke (Chair, Cartrefi Cymru) and 11 others

Mick Antoniw AM (Chair) opened the meeting at 12.30pm, welcomed the guests and introduced the speakers.

The Chair outlined his commitment to the development of the Supporters Trust movement in Wales and the potential importance of the Localism Act in securing community assets.

Daniel Rose (Head of Supporters Direct, England & Wales) spoke about the work of Supporters Direct and its origins. It is funded principally by a levy on the English FA, but campaigns across all forms of spectator sport. It's values are to restore the power and influence of the principal stakeholders, the spectators. In clubs that have become fan owned there has been a distinct change of atmosphere and purpose, putting more emphasis on community, volunteering and player engagement with its values. This has made the clubs more sustainable.

Kevin Rye (Head of Communications, Supporters Direct, England and Wales) spoke about the work of Supporters Direct in England and across Europe. There are now similar organisations in many European countries that come under a common Supporters Direct Europe banner. These include Ireland, where football has declined over decades and is now starting to be revived by a supporter led movement.

He also pointed to the work done by Merthyr Town FC in community engagement, as well as the good work done by Wrexham and Swansea. He cited Merthyr Town as an exemplar of the possibilities for community ownership.

Meurig Evans (Chair, Merthyr Town FC) gave a précised account of the recent history of Merthyr Town FC moving from private ownership via administration and bankruptcy to community ownership. He particularly emphasised the role of the ground's owners, Merthyr Tydfil Council, without whose help and co-operation it would not have been possible. They have moved from 1½ staff at launch to a total of 6 today with the financial support of the Council and others, including a 3 fold increase in local business sponsorship. They are now able to engage in a variety of activities involving local youngsters, and with the support of a substantial grant have just opened a brand new all weather pitch, which will enable even more activity to take place

Discussion followed in which Mike Hedges AM cited the importance of implementing the Localism Act in Wales. This was endorsed by Leighton Andrews AM (a founding member of Cardiff Supporters Trust) and by the Chair. It was also pointed out by Ian Courtney, Alan Burge and others that this would impact on other community assets such as local pubs and village shops. Kevin Rye added that in England, football grounds such as Anfield had been officially listed as Community Assets, which would prevent the being sold without the community having a chance to bid for them.

Leighton Andrews AM suggested that a Supporters Direct Cymru was essential to take the movement forward in Wales. Karen Wilkie stated that she and many others have argued for a Supporters Trust movement in Wales for many years, and the time was right now for such a development.

Alex Bird (Secretariat) added that the importance of the one member one vote nature of Supporters Trusts meant that following a change of legal structure, any take over by single individuals would become effectively impossible, and this was a great strength of the movement.

The general consensus of the meeting was in agreement with the need to develop the Supporters Trust movement in Wales, and it was suggested interested parties should form a small steering group to take this forward. This suggestion was endorsed by the Chair.

The meeting was closed at 1.25pm by the Chair, who thanked all present for attending.