

Cross Party Group on Co-operatives and Mutuals
1st July 2014, 18.10 – 19.20
The Media Briefing Room
The Co-operatives UK Report on Social co-operatives

Assembly Members Present

None

Secretariat

Alex Bird (Chair, Co-operatives and Mutuals Wales)

Speakers

Ed Mayo (Secretary General, Co-operatives UK) Pat Conaty (Co-operatives UK Research Associate)

Guests

Ruth Dineen (Co-production Wales), Sue Thomas (Health Librarian) Richard Vaughan (Cadwyn HA) Sarah Cole (Cadwyn HA) Glenn Bowen (Wales Co-operative Centre) Adrian Roper (Cartrefi Cymru) Mike Vigar (Cymorth Cymru) Michael Flynn (Diverse Cymru) Ceri-Ann Fiddler (WCC) Dave Palmer (WCC) Howard Lewis (ChangeAGENTS) Paul Dear (Welsh Government) Ray Joseph, Eleanor Marks (WG) Rhian Davies (Disability Wales) David Smith (Co-operative Group) Linda Ward (Co-operatives UK) Cllr. Sylvia Jones (Co-op Party) Martin Price (consultancy.coop) Karen Wilkie (Co-op Party) Lyn Richards (Wales Restorative Approaches Partnership) Julia Houlston Clark (WRAP) Michelle Andrews (WRAP) Mike Jones (WCC) Jo Mora (WG) Karyn Pittick (WG) Ron Walton and 3 others

Alex Bird (Acting Chair) opened the meeting at 18.10pm as no Assembly Members were able to attend, as the Plenary session of the Assembly was running until later that evening. Alex explained the situation and welcomed the guests and introduced the speakers.

Ed Mayo set the scene for the launch of this Report in Wales, noting that Wales is leading the agenda in the UK on social co-operative development. This is important as around 1/3 of local authority budgets are spent on social care and any change will be important to the way public services are delivered.

Pat Conaty then explained the process of the report's development and its key points.

Work started on it approximately one year ago in Birmingham with a seminar.

He noted that Care Homes in the UK have a collective debt burden of over £4bn, and many are below the accepted standard. The sector was largely made up of voluntary sector and public sector organisations 20 years ago, but now it's dominated by the private sector. In addition there are 6.3 million unpaid carers, mostly family and friends.

In Italy there are already thousands of social co-ops, and the co-operative sector in general is much larger than here. In the Emilia Romagna region there are over 8,000 co-ops which contribute 40% of the GDP.

Social Co-ops in Italy aim to have less than 100 members to keep them personalised, and they operate the "strawberry patch" principle whereby every one pledges to support the creation of another co-operative.

Pat laid out the possible progress and growth opportunities for social co-ops, particularly the opportunities in the Health and Social Care Act.

Copies of the Report were available at the event

Questions from the floor:-

Rhian Davies explained the new project to set up social co-ops being run by Disability Wales

Howard Lewis asked about the attitude of the Trades Unions.

Pat explained that in Quebec social co-ops had the full support of the Trades Union movement because it is job, not volunteer based, and co-ops generally provide higher quality jobs

Ed explained that the Wales TUC, following a research visit to Mondragon, set up the Wales Co-operative Centre. This year's UK Co-operative of the Year, SUMA Wholefoods in Yorkshire, was receiving a visit from the TUC this weekend to explain the co-operative model and demonstrate the quality of employment they have created.

Ed also pointed out the need to be analytical about organisations. Some so called mutuals that have spun out from public services in England are not best practice examples, and have only limited employee or stakeholder ownership and control. He stressed the need for the public sector to work with the co-operative sector to ensure they get the benefits of the true co-operative model in any spin-outs.

Alex Bird closed the meeting at 19.20 and thanked everyone for attending.