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#walescoopreport Sustainable Development: A Co-operative Approach.

Matthew Close of the Wales Co-operative Centre examines the Welsh Co-operative and Mutuals Commission's recommendation that co-operative and mutual principles are enshrined in the legislative process in Wales.

The launch of the Welsh Co-operatives and Mutuals Commission's report offers many opportunities for the co-operative sector in Wales. Particularly interesting is the recommendation for co-operative and mutual business models to be considered in all new Government policies and initiatives, as part of the Welsh Government's mandatory commitment to make Sustainable Development the central organising principle of its legislative programme.

The Government of Wales Act 2006 made it mandatory for the Welsh Government to set out a scheme for promoting Sustainable Development in the exercise of its functions, which it then did in the form of *One Wales, One Planet*. This document defines Sustainable Development as:

“enhancing the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of people and communities, achieving a better quality of life for our own and future generations.” [1]

One of the key focus points in of the Scheme is to deliver a sustainable economy that is resilient to the negative impacts of global economic changes and supports sustainable business growth. Businesses that are established through co-operative and mutual models have been shown to be more resilient to adverse economic changes. There are currently 446 co-operative organisations operating at the heart of communities across Wales, owned by and run for the benefit of people within those communities, and contributing £1.54 billion worth of annual turnover to the Welsh economy [2]. From small businesses such as [That Useful Company](#) and [Barod](#), to larger companies such as [Dulas](#) and the new mutual housing associations, co-operative and mutual

businesses in Wales provide good examples of companies that can support the vision of a sustainable economy that the Welsh Government sets out in its Sustainable Development Scheme.

Another focal point of One Wales, One Planet is the drive to ensure Wales has a strong, healthy, inclusive society. Access to quality housing in a diversified housing market is identified in the Scheme as a key indicator of a sustainable society. Co-operative and mutual models are already playing a key role in this area. Community housing mutuals such as [RCT Homes](#) are structured in such a way to enable their tenants to effectively become shareholders, giving them a voice in the running and operation of the organisation.

Our [recent research](#) has also shown that there is demand for co-operative housing models in Wales, which offer people the chance to build strong, inclusive communities whilst at the same time providing a viable alternative to mainstream housing market options, which more and more people are finding difficult to access. Our Co-operative Housing Project is providing support to organisations who are exploring the potential of or in the process of developing co-operative housing projects across Wales.

Co-operative principles are evident in many other parts of Wales. Many towns and villages are benefitting from community co-operatives, which are businesses established to provide a service to their particular area. These can range from community shops and pubs, such as Siop y Bobl and [Saith Seren](#) respectively, to sporting organisations like [Wrexham Supporters Trust](#). Community share schemes are another example of co-operative values and models in action, in that they allow groups and organisations to draw capital from the very communities which their enterprises are seeking to benefit. From community regeneration to environmental power schemes such as community wind farms and hydro-electric plants, they offer a chance for these organisations to flourish whilst delivering real, sustainable development.

These examples show that co-operative and mutual business models can greatly increase the likelihood of producing a sustainable economy and society in Wales. We believe this recommendation could place co-operation at the forefront of our legislative process, and that it offers a unique opportunity for the Welsh Government to enshrine the principles and ethos of co-operation at the heart of the political landscape in Wales.

References:

[1] *One Wales One Planet: The Sustainable Development Scheme of the Welsh Government. Welsh Government, 2009, pg8*

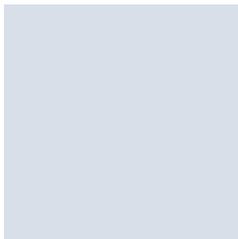
[2] Homegrown: The Co-operative Economy in Wales 2013. Published by Co-operatives UK and Wales Co-operative Centre.

Wales Co-operative Centre

The Wales Co-operative Centre is Wales' national body for co-operatives, mutuals, social enterprises and employee owned businesses. It applies its co-operative values to strengthening communities and services as well as supporting these social businesses.

www.walescooperative.org

Contacts



David Madge

Press Contact

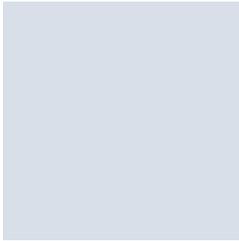
Marketing, Press & Public Affairs Officer

Press and Public Affairs. Marketing (primarily Succession and Consortia Project).

david.madge@walescooperative.org

01792484005

07900167906



Catherine Evans

Press Contact

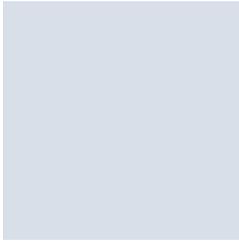
Marketing Manager

Overall responsibility for marketing and communications at the
Wales Co-operative Centre

catherine.evans@walescooperative.org

01443 743943

0300 111 5050



Mark Smith

Press Contact

Marketing Officer

Social Media, Case Studies and Communities 2.0

mark.smith@walescooperative.org

029 2055 6163

0300 111 5050