



A co-operative agenda for **Welsh Local Government**



the welsh co-operative party



Contents

- Foreword
- Summary
- Co-operative Councils
- Housing
- Education
- Economic Development
- Community Finance
- Environment
- Ethics & Values
- Leisure Services
- Social Care & Health
- Resources

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This is the manifesto of the Welsh Co-operative Party edited by Pete Jefferys and Karen Wilkie, with grateful thanks to Sean Rogers and all the members who contributed through the forum in Cardiff and on the website.

www.party.coop

Foreword

As Labour Co-operative candidates in the Welsh council elections, we believe in an economy that works for people, not just profit. The current economic situation facing the whole UK is a huge threat to the fabric of our communities, but it also offers an opportunity for us to put co-operation at the heart of everything we do. Local government may be facing spending constraints, but we must continue to press for fairer, more accountable and more equitable local services. Only Labour with the help of the Co-operative Party can deliver the change that Welsh people want to see.

Wales faces a unique set of circumstances that make the opportunity for a co-operative approach starker. A Labour government in the Senedd committed to co-operative approaches; a vibrant co-operative sector worth £1 billion; and of course devolved powers that protect Wales from some of the worst excesses of the Tory-led government in Westminster and allow us to develop co-operative ideas.

The co-operative movement came into existence in hard economic times because ordinary people were able to come together and share their resources for common good. Then, as now, the co-operative movement was profoundly democratic with all members able to contribute equally. We want councillors, Co-operative Party members and Labour Party members to use the ideas in this manifesto in the same spirit as the early co-operators. Not all the policies will be appropriate for all Labour groups or Labour councils, but this manifesto provides ideas and resources which can provide a starting point for developing local co-operatives and services with co-op values. We would like to see these approaches come together into a Welsh version of the 'Co-operative Council' – and some of the ideas on this are spelt out below.

Co-operative Councils, co-operative housing and co-op values across society – we believe that this manifesto offers an exciting co-operative alternative for Welsh communities.

In co-operation:

Lis Burnett, Vale of Glamorgan

Dylan Lewis, Ceredigion

Stephen Marshall, Newport

Phil Bale, Cardiff

Summary

The Labour Assembly Government in Wales has taken strong action to defend the interests of ordinary Welsh people from the massive cuts imposed on them by the Tory and Liberal Democrat Coalition government in Westminster. The Welsh Co-operative Party strongly supports that action, which is necessary as we go through the current squeeze on household budgets and public services.

In local government elections we have the opportunity to put Labour back into power in councils across Wales; fighting back against the housing and jobs crisis that are being made worse by the failed economics of George Osborne and the UK Coalition government.

This manifesto sets out our practical ideas to put co-operative values – democracy, equality and solidarity - at the heart of Welsh local government.

Co-operative Councils

We have the opportunity in Wales to put forward new ideas about how our local services can be run in the interests of Welsh people. In an age of austerity, we need bold thinking about the role of councils. The Welsh Co-operative Party supports the concept of 'Co-operative Councils' in England, and we are developing our own ideas about how Welsh councils can put co-operative values at the heart of everything they do.

People in Wales are worried about the future of the local services they rely on, and want to know that Labour councils are on their side in defending and improving schools, community centres, libraries and their local environment. Co-operative Councils in Wales will make sure that ordinary citizens and council staff have a greater say over the services in their area and the way that councils are run.

Housing

The Labour Assembly Government has pledged to tackle the housing crisis in Wales that is pricing so many young people out of home ownership or affordable rent. The Assembly Government has committed to co-operative housing, which puts tenants and residents in the driving seat, as part of that strategy. The Welsh Co-operative Party believes everybody deserves access to decent and affordable housing and that co-operatively owned and run housing is the best way to make sure that tenants' views are properly represented. Councils should do all they can to support the Assembly's vision for co-operative housing in Wales, including releasing suitable land and educating residents' groups about the benefits of housing co-operatives.

Education

Wales is proud of its devolved education system in which every child has access to a community comprehensive school. The Welsh Co-operative Party would like to see all young people in Wales educated about the role and value of co-operatives in Welsh society. We want to ensure that Welsh schools are as accountable as possible to parents, staff, pupils and the community. If we are to get past the current jobs crisis and economic stagnation, we need young people to be taught about sustainable and productive forms of business – which the co-operative movement embodies.

Whilst Co-operative Councils, housing and education are priorities for the Welsh Co-operative Party, we believe that there are many more areas in which Welsh councils can make a difference to people's lives by pursuing co-operative initiatives. From local economic development and mutual finance to the environment, social care and fair-trade we believe that co-operative values and policies are right for the future of Welsh local government.

How to use this manifesto

Alongside the Co-operative Party's 2010 'Co-operative Agenda for Local Government', this manifesto is a tool-kit for Welsh Labour councils and opposition groups to develop and implement policies.

In Wales, councils vary widely in their circumstances and so some of the ideas will be better suited to your councils and others less so. However, the values that underpin 'Co-operative Councils' – democracy, equality and accountability – are relevant to all Welsh local authorities and the Welsh Co-operative Party encourages Welsh councils to work collectively to develop our vision for co-operative local government in Wales.

Co-operative Councils

A Co-operative Council is a Labour-led local authority determined to change the way both the council and local services are run, giving greater democratic control to ordinary people, drawing on the rich heritage of the co-operative movement.

Co-operative Councils are already being developed in England and Scotland, but the Welsh Co-operative Party believes that there is also a great opportunity for Welsh Labour local authorities to join this exciting new initiative.

At the heart of the Co-operative Councils movement is the idea that local people should have a greater say over the services they receive from their councils and how the council is run. The Welsh Co-operative Party believes we can transform the relationship between the leadership of our councils and the public as well as with those who work for the council. Reflecting the values and principles of the co-operative movement, Co-operative Councils would be as transparent as possible and would seek to generate new policy ideas co-operatively with council staff and local people.

The Welsh Co-operative Party will work with Labour councils and opposition groups to develop a model for Co-operative Councils in Wales, building on the work of the Co-operative Council Network in England but adapting the concept for the Welsh context.

Co-operative approaches can be applied to almost all aspects of local government, from economic development and community regeneration to social care, environmental services, housing and education.

The new approach is not about turning all services into co-operatives, nor about replacing skilled professionals with volunteers. Nor is it about enabling services to be transferred out of public control to the private sector. It's simply that where services are under threat and resources tight it sometimes makes sense to preserve quality by exploring the benefit of public service mutuals as the alternative to privatisation or administrative bureaucracy.

The Co-operative Council concept provides an opportunity for local authorities to educate council staff and the public about the co-operative movement and co-operative business models. It is crucial for the success of the Co-operative Council project that capacity is built in all sections of the community to participate in new co-operative services and in the formation of co-operative policies. Labour Co-operative councillors especially have an important role in educating and informing those who live in their area about the Co-operative Council approach.

Welsh Co-operative Party branches will work with Welsh Labour councils and opposition groups to develop and adopt the Welsh Co-operative Council model. The Welsh Co-operative Councils project is supported by the Wales Co-operative Centre and by the Co-operative Group in Wales as well as Welsh Labour.

What Welsh councils can do:

- Work with local Labour and Co-operative Parties to develop a vision for their co-operative council.
- Set up a 'co-operative commission' or equivalent (as was the case in Lambeth Council) to give a range of ideas for co-operative services from the council.
- Work collaboratively with other Welsh Labour councils interested in becoming Co-operative Councils and with the 'Co-operative Council Network' in England.
- When developing policies make sure that the views of staff and the public lead decisions and that there is greater transparency about available resources.
- Work with staff and the public to increase awareness and education about available co-operative models through council literature, staff seminars and public meetings.

Housing

The Labour Assembly Government in Wales has a robust vision for co-operative housing. Given the scale of the housing crisis, with thousands of young people in Wales unable to afford either a mortgage or rent, it is vital that a solution is found. Labour and Co-operative AM and Minister for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage, Huw Lewis is building on the Co-operative Party's model for sustainable, co-operative housing in order to achieve this change.

Housing co-operatives should be at the heart of the Welsh strategy to tackle the housing crisis because they work for tenants and residents, not for private profit. Through housing co-operatives and other mutual organisations, tenants and residents can take real control over decisions that affect their lives and create stronger communities. Recent evidence from the Commission on Co-operative Housing has shown that tenant satisfaction is highest in housing co-operatives on all of the scales measured, and they are more likely to say their landlord does a good job. Housing co-operatives also have significantly lower arrears and vacancies than other landlords. Housing co-operatives have also been found to encourage wider participation in the community by co-operative members.

In Wales, one model for housing co-operatives being pursued by the Assembly Government is the Co-operative Party's 'New Foundations' model. This radical model separates the cost of the land from the purchase price by taking it out of the market through a community land trust. New Foundations ensures affordability as it is based on monthly payments for tenants that are a percentage of income. Tenants are also able to build up an equity stake which they can take with them once they leave the co-operative, but public subsidy is locked into the co-operative for future generations.

The Welsh Co-operative Party fully supports the Assembly Government's visionary approach to the housing crisis.

We also welcomed the Assembly Government's support for the Community Mutual Model for stock transfer and the decisions already taken by many residents, such as those in Rhondda Cynon Taf, to choose this model.

Local authorities should be supported to build and maintain affordable social rented housing, but if they are unable to meet the housing quality standard by retaining their housing stock, we believe that transfer to a Community Mutual is the best option.

Welsh councils should facilitate such stock transfers to community housing mutuals where appropriate and ensure that the transfers are a catalyst for local economic, environmental and social regeneration.

Welsh local authorities should also look to ensure that housing stock that remains under council control is as democratic as possible – giving full representation to the views of tenants.

Welsh councils should declare a 'right to manage' in Housing Strategies. This can take the form of Tenant Management Co-operatives that take over the day to day running of the housing stock.

Case Study – RCT Homes

RCT Homes was the first Community Housing Mutual in Wales. In December 2007, RCT Homes became Wales' largest social landlord when it took over the ownership and management of the entire housing stock of nearly 11,000 homes from Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council. RCT Homes is responsible for the homes on more than 60 housing estates and in 27 sheltered housing schemes.

Five tenants sit on the RCT Homes Board and tenants play a key role in scrutinising new policies and procedures and in overseeing RCT Homes' major decisions.

RCT Homes is not just a landlord; it is a major local social enterprise. As well as raising the standard of homes, they are working with tenants and their local communities to create a sustainable legacy of increased employment and higher skill levels.

RCT Homes' Rules commit the organisation to supporting 'social inclusion' – driving the economic regeneration and development of the communities it serves by working with other organisations to develop local skills training and to generate jobs through the procurement of local labour. The Welsh Assembly Government has held up RCT Homes' procurement process as a 'model approach' that other social landlords can follow to help regenerate some of Wales's most disadvantaged communities.

Source: RCT Homes

What Welsh councils can do:

- Support the Assembly government's vision for co-operative housing in Wales by releasing land, educating residents groups about co-operative options and providing funding where necessary.
- Put co-operative housing at the heart of their local housing strategy.
- When councils hold ballots on stock transfer, residents should have the option to vote for a community mutual.

Education

Wales is proud of our devolved education system, in which every child has access to a community comprehensive. Welsh local authorities retain powers over planning, funding and school management, making councils an important player in educational services.

The Welsh Co-operative Party believes that it is crucial that our young people are given a well-rounded, world-class education that includes teaching co-operative values. Learning about the co-operative movement and co-operative forms of business will encourage values of reciprocity and social responsibility.

Young people in Wales should also be given the opportunity to learn more about the Welsh co-operative sector. Currently, very few school leavers are equipped with knowledge of co-operatives and mutuals, compared to other economic models.

Through its involvement in education in England, the co-operative movement has demonstrated that it can provide a values-led, inclusive environment and curriculum. Whilst the co-operative 'trust' model is not appropriate for Welsh secondary schools, we believe that we can work with the Co-operative College and others to develop greater inclusion of co-operative values in the governance and curriculum of Welsh schools.

More can be done in Welsh schools to ensure that they are directly accountable to parents, staff, teachers, pupils and their local communities.

- Councils should encourage parent teacher associations and support parent governors. Schools should be supported in setting up an elected student body, structured as a co-operative with open and democratic membership, which has real input into setting the ethos and direction of the school.
- Community forums should encourage schools to be open to the views of local people and build links between those who rely on and live close to community schools.
- Welsh councils should work with partners such as the Co-operative Schools Network, Young Co-operatives, the Co-operative Party and others to implement our vision for co-operative education in Wales.

In addition to introducing co-operative values into Welsh secondary education, the Welsh Co-operative Party supports greater inclusion of our values into the running of primary education, child care and youth services.

There is also scope for co-operative clusters of schools, sharing resources as a viable alternative to closures in areas of falling rolls.

Case Study – Sir Thomas Boughey High School & Co-operative Business & Enterprise College

Sir Thomas Boughey High School is one of the first Co-operative Business Colleges in the UK.

As part of this initiative they have been successful in gaining major sponsorship from the UK's largest co-operative society, the Co-operative Group based in Manchester.

As a Co-operative Business College Sir Thomas Boughey aims to give a balanced view of business activity by including Co-operative & Mutual ways of running a business within the curriculum as well as the PLC model.

Many schools only concentrate on the PLC model and fail to show young people the vital contribution that mutuals and co-operatives play in our modern society.

Source: Sir Thomas Boughey school

What Welsh councils can do:

- Work with schools, experts such as Dynamix, the Co-operative College, Young Co-operatives and the Welsh co-operative sector to develop resources for schools to teach Welsh young people about the co-operative movement and co-operative businesses.
- Work with the Co-operative Council Network and others such as ProMo Cymru to develop co-operative youth services. It is crucial that young people have a voice in the provision of youth services in their area and that they feel a sense of ownership.
- Councils can build on the success of the 'Co-operative Trust' school model in England, but adapt it within the LEA context. This could include strengthening governance to make schools more accountable to their communities or setting up elected student bodies.

Local Economic Development

The financial crisis in the UK and in Wales has shown that business is not often accountable to customers or to staff. Banks that lent unsustainably in order to satisfy shareholders collapsed, leading to ordinary people bailing them out and facing cuts in their public services to pay for it. These cuts are hitting harder in Wales than other parts of the UK due to the large public sector workforce. The public are demanding greater transparency and stronger values from our media and politics. Business development should also be reformed in favour of accountability and social ethos. We need a new model for a sustainable economy that puts people before short-term profit.

Co-operative and mutually owned businesses are an ideal, sustainable model for Welsh economic development. They generate wealth and employment and retain profits locally for the community for their benefit. In Wales, co-operatives generate more than £1 billion in income a year, employ about 7,000 people, and are found in almost all sectors of the economy and in all parts of Wales. The co-operative sector as a whole is outperforming other types of business.

Eight of Wales' co-operatives are in the top 100 by turnover of UK co-operatives. Dulas Ltd is the UK's second largest worker co-operative and Cardiff-based Shaw Healthcare, 70% owned by its staff, is one of the leading social care providers across the whole of the UK. A recent report by the Wales Co-operative Centre has shown how co-operatives have played a key role in the transformation of several regions of the world, such as Emilia Romagna region in Italy, which has gone from one of the poorest to one of the wealthiest regions in less than 30 years.

Mutual organisations are often catalysts for local economic regeneration. For example, football supporters' trusts develop community programmes that go beyond the club and its fans. Community housing mutuals not only develop skills to support tenants into work, but can generate local training and employment opportunities.

Not only should Welsh local authorities look to grow the number of co-operative and mutual enterprises, but focus should also be given to supporting existing ones.

Mutual business forms still often suffer from a lack of access to finance or signposting to appropriate support, despite being robust and proven business models.

The Co-operative Group is helping to fund mutual and co-operative business support in Wales delivered through the Wales Co-operative Centre and a consortium. This invaluable resource provides a package of support and advice to help aspiring and established co-operatives.

Welsh local authorities should continue to support the Wales Co-operative Centre as the UK's leading co-operative development agency and ensure that local businesses are aware of the services they provide.

Alongside support for co-operative and mutual businesses in Wales, the Welsh Co-operative Party advocates the development of community work spaces in small towns and villages that could provide spaces in the community for communal work resources. Such workspaces could include desk spaces, superfast broadband, video and phone

conferencing facilities and childcare. They could be used by local government and public sector workers who currently work from home or would if circumstances permitted. Equally, small and micro businesses and social enterprises could benefit from the facilities as well as secondary co-operatives, credit unions, and home care co-operatives. Community workspaces could be located in public buildings with surplus space, community centres or post offices.

What Welsh councils can do:

- Welsh local authorities should put co-operative and mutual business models at the heart of local economic regeneration plans.
- Welsh councils should have a cabinet member with responsibility for developing the co-operative economy.
- Develop proposals, along with local co-operative and mutual businesses, for growth of the sector.
- Include co-operative models in advice to new businesses provided by the council and other partners.
- Review procurement procedures to ensure that co-operatives are not excluded by expensive and time consuming procedures.
- Increase the awareness and skills of council officers with regard to co-operative initiatives.
- Councils should set up community work spaces in rural areas to benefit co-operatives, credit unions and micro enterprises as well as public sector workers.

Community Finance

Financial mutuals, such as building societies and credit unions, are run in the interests of their members, not external shareholders. Credit unions have seen increasing success in Wales over the last decade, following support from the Assembly government, and the Welsh Co-operative Party welcomes this progress.

For many, the financial crisis did not start with the collapse of the banks in 2008, but has been growing out of changes in our financial system for decades. Banks are seen by many as rewarding only a minority of highly paid staff and executives, rather than their hard pressed customers, home buyers or small businesses in need of a loan.

Mutual and co-operative financial organisations, such as the Co-operative Bank, building societies and credit unions have bucked this trend and are seen by the public, rightly, as an ethical alternative to other forms of financial institutions.

The credit union movement in Wales has grown significantly over the past decade, now serving every local authority area across Wales. Membership of Welsh credit unions has grown on average by 16% per year. New law changes from January 2012 have increased the potential for credit unions to expand their membership and their services.

The Welsh Co-operative Party is actively supporting the Co-operative Party's national campaign 'The Feeling's Mutual' for fairer financial services. We believe that community finance organisations need to have maximum support from local government in order to ensure that there is an ethical and sustainable alternative to the excesses of some banks.

Welsh councils can help support community finance in their area and contribute to the change we need towards fairer financial services.

Case Study: Cardiff and Vale Credit Union

The credit union is a non-profit, ethical organisation that is supported by the Welsh Assembly Government and Cardiff County Council. It was established in 1994 for the benefit of employees of South Glamorgan County Council, and now covers anyone living or working in Cardiff or the Vale of Glamorgan.

It has a central aim of being a social enterprise where members are encouraged to approach financial matters responsibly. It works by allowing members savings to provide the funds for the union to offer loans to other members. Crucial to its success is the fact that it has had high level political support and is very firmly rooted in the community that it serves, it offers a wide range of benefits to its members and is clearly focused on delivering a high quality service.

All members are asked to save at least £10 a month but ultimately members can save what they can afford. All loan applications are assessed on the member's ability to repay the loans. The union is regulated by the Financial Services Authority and savings are protected by the financial services compensation scheme.

Source: Cardiff & Vale Credit Union

What Welsh councils can do:

- Support the Assembly government's commitment to community finance by highlighting the work of local credit unions and providing support where appropriate.
- Develop a formal written policy to promote credit unions in Local Authority area, including savings schemes in schools.
- Educate local people and council staff about alternative forms of financial services, especially community finance.
- Work with local banks and building societies to set up targeted business support for community finance, including exchange schemes and training opportunities for credit union staff.
- Provide payroll deduction facilities to local credit unions for council staff.
- Ensure that local charities and social enterprises are aware of credit unions that provide financial services for SMEs.

The Environment

Wales is a beautiful environment in which to live and the Welsh Co-operative Party believes that local authorities should work to protect and preserve that environment for future generations. Protecting the environment can only be achieved through a sustainable energy policy, a planning policy that considers the real value of the natural environment and through including the communities who benefit in countless ways from these natural resources.

Climate change is likely to have many impacts in Wales such as increased flood risk, increased risk of heatwaves and drought and increased chance of other weather extremes. Welsh councils should work to increase their resilience to these risks as they develop, but also combat future risk through renewable energy and energy efficiency. Given the scale of the threat from climate change, Welsh councils should look to harness the power of the communities they serve – both in terms of adapting to climate change and cutting carbon emissions.

The Co-operative Party has developed a model for 'collective power' in communities. This radical approach, based on examples from Scandinavia, would see local businesses and other organisations come together to collectively purchase power as a co-operative from the wholesale energy markets. Banding together in this way, consumer energy co-operatives can cut the energy bills of their members, reducing fuel poverty. Such co-operatives can also drive down carbon emissions by installing insulation and smart meters for their members.

Community energy production has taken a hit from the short sighted policies of the national Coalition government, who have cut solar energy subsidies. The Welsh Co-operative Party believes that community renewable energy is an integral part of a renewable energy strategy for Wales. We would like to see local authorities ensuring that planning decisions reflect the need for community energy and eventually joining up community renewable energy with consumer energy co-operatives to lower carbon emission and fight high energy bills.

What Welsh councils can do:

- Councils in Wales should ensure where possible that community renewable energy projects have financial and planning support, given the withdrawal of such support from the Tory-led UK government.
- Welsh local authorities should encourage community co-operative ownership of renewable energy projects in order to spread the benefits of renewable energy generation through communities and lock in support for the projects for the future.
- Welsh local authorities should investigate barriers within their communities to setting up consumer energy co-operatives. Councils can work with the Co-operative Party and other partners to help set up consumer energy co-operatives and tackle fuel poverty.
- Councils should support the development of a Welsh national community energy and climate change unit, based on the successful Supporters' Direct model. This agency would be mutual in structure, owned and controlled by the consumer energy co-operatives, with stakeholders from local government and local groups and enterprises.

Ethics and Values

Co-operatives are run according to internationally agreed values and principles. The principles are guidelines by which members put their beliefs into practice – principles of open and democratic membership, member economic participation, autonomy, education, co-operation among co-operatives and community concern. The Welsh co-operative movement is shaped by these core values and the Welsh Co-operative Party believes that they should be at the heart of all we do.

The financial crisis, phone-hacking and the expenses scandal have shown that we need stronger values shaping our core institutions. This is true in local government, just as it is in national and international organisations. Councils must be transparent and open, reaching out to residents to help shape and improve services.

The Co-operative Party's 'Co-operative Council Network' is working with councils across the UK to build a vision for the ethics and values of Labour run co-operative councils, based upon the longstanding values of the co-operative movement.

The co-operative movement and the Co-operative Party have always shared a concern for international development. The movement has been an active supporter of the Fairtrade initiative since its inception, whilst the Party has made the case for supporting the development of workers' co-operatives when Labour was in government in the UK.

Fairtrade ensures better prices and decent working conditions for farmers and workers in the developing world. It rebalances conventional trade, with fairly traded products benefitting their producers.

In Wales, the Fairtrade movement is well developed. The Welsh Co-operative Party congratulates the Assembly Government's leadership to enable Wales to become the first Fairtrade country in 2008. Welsh local authorities should continue to support the initiative's growth and ensure that people in Wales are educated about the value of co-operatives internationally in improving peoples' lives.

What Welsh councils can do:

- Welsh local authorities should work with and take a leading role in the development of Co-operative Councils and use this opportunity to articulate co-operative values at the heart of local government.
- Welsh local authorities should ensure that towns and cities achieve Fairtrade status and maintain it.
- Councillors should be Fairtrade champions within their wards, encouraging businesses, schools and other organisations to buy Fairtrade.
- Councils procurement strategies should include commitments to buy Fairtrade where possible.

Leisure Services

Budgets for cultural and leisure services such as libraries, leisure centres and swimming pools are likely to come under significant pressure.

Through converting important centres of local culture and recreation into 'community benefit' co-operatives, run by their members and staff, there is a real opportunity to anchor them firmly in the communities they serve. A strong membership base can make the difference between community assets being kept alive or being left out to die. A community co-operative can act as a vehicle to unite the aspirations of a large and active membership.

Co-operatives and mutuals are ideally placed to provide best value. They provide local jobs and retain profits locally – thus encouraging economic development – and give workers and users a real interest in how the service is run. Councils that have transferred their leisure services to co-operatives, for example, have found that services that were liabilities threatened with cuts to provision have become much greater revenue earners, even expanding provision.

Welsh local authorities should consider, where appropriate, transferring leisure and cultural services to community benefit societies or co-operatives with open and democratic membership. These can be asset locked, which can ensure that any assets transferred cannot be disposed of unless they were to fulfil the same aim for community benefit as originally intended.

Parks and open spaces are a focal point for communities, yet we rarely have a say in how they are run. Research indicates that this is a source of dissatisfaction for many, with more than half the population wanting a say in the way that parks and open spaces are run in their communities.

What Welsh councils can do:

- Consider co-operative and mutual models for cultural and leisure service that may otherwise face closure due to budget cuts. It is crucial that any new co-operative or mutual services have adequate business planning and continued support from the local authority.

Social Care and Health

The Co-operative Party in Wales supports the principle that users and carers should be given as much control as possible over the services they require. We welcome the movement towards direct payments and individual budgets, which have been extremely successful in changing the quality of care and quality of life of the people receiving them.

Through coming together collectively, direct payment and individual budget recipients can improve the quantity and quality of the services that they receive and ensure a decent working environment for the carers that they rely upon. The Co-operative Party welcomed the previous UK government's pilot of direct payments mutuals. These have brought together service users, informal carers and personal care assistants to ensure that both users and employees can benefit from a more formalised system of care and economies of scale. This means that recipients are able to remain in control of the day to day provision of how their care is provided, while personal care assistants of the co-operative are able to ensure that they receive appropriate employment conditions. Service users in receipt of individual budgets and their employees could receive similar benefits from joining a similar or existing mutual organisation.

In addition to social care, the Welsh Co-operative Party supports the Assembly's ambitions to build a healthier Wales and to solve long term health issues with initiatives such as anti-smoking legislation. The National Co-operative Chemists started in Wales, whilst assistance from the co-operative movement, such as the Co-operative Group's grants to breakfast clubs and walking buses, has helped educate children and young people to lead healthier lives.

What Welsh councils can do:

- Councils should ensure that all service users and carers have access to a direct-payments mutual within their local community, through using their organisation capacity to help develop direct payments mutuals. It is also important that the move to direct payments and individual budgets is not used as a means of reducing overall budgets; and to ensure that pay rates reflect the cost of being a responsible employer to high quality staff.
- Welsh councils should work to develop models for direct-payments social care mutuals through the Co-operative Council network, which is looking in more detail at how co-operative values and models can be applied to social care provision. In so doing, Welsh councils should ensure that direct payments and individual budgets are not used as a means of reducing overall budgets and pay a rate that reflects the cost of being a responsible employer to high quality staff.
- Welsh local authorities should support the Assembly's work to improve public health in Wales and promote and develop the work of co-operative societies in building public health facilities such as breakfast clubs and walking buses.

Resources

Cardiff & Vale Credit Union

www.cardiffcu.com
029 2087 2373
info@cardiffcu.com

Co-operative Councils Network

www.councils.coop

Co-operatives & Mutuals Wales

www.cooperatives-wales.coop

Dynamix

www.dynamix.ltd.uk

Mutuo

www.mutuo.co.uk
020 8387 1256
p.hunt@mutuo.co.uk

ProMo Cymru

www.promo-cymru.org

Public Service Mutuals

www.co-operative.coop/corporate/Public-Service-Mutuals

RCT Homes

08453 014141
www.rcthomes.co.uk

Sir Thomas Boughey

www.sirthomasboughey.staffs.sch.uk
01782 729400
01782 729421

The Co-operative College

www.co-op.ac.uk
0161 246 292
enquiries@co-op.ac.uk

Wales Co-operative Centre

www.walescooperative.org
0300 111 5050
info@walescooperative.org

Young Co-operatives

www.youngco-operatives.coop

The Co-operative Party

The Co-operative Party is part of the global co-operative movement. Over 800 million people are members of co-operatives worldwide, and the UN estimates that the livelihood of three billion people is made more secure by co-operatives.

We work with Labour Party in the UK to influence its policies towards more co-operative solutions. There are 29 Labour and Co-operative members in the House of Commons, 15 in the House of Lords, five MSPs, nine Welsh AMs and hundreds of local councillors.

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