



Wales **Co-operative** Centre  
Canolfan **Cydweithredol** Cymru

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# Wales Co-operative Centre: Strategy 2017 - 2022

Creating a better, fairer, more co-operative Wales

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## Our purpose and story

**We are a not-for-profit co-operative organisation that supports people in Wales to improve their lives and livelihoods. This is our purpose.**

Since we were founded in 1982, the Wales Co-operative Centre has been right at the heart of Wales's vibrant social economy, bringing funders and partners together to make our communities more confident, more co-operative, more capable and more ambitious.

Our work is more important now than ever, as the people, communities and businesses of Wales face increasing social and economic pressures.

We are working for a fairer economy. We help to create and retain wealth within our communities through the growth of co-operatives and social businesses and by providing people with the skills to take more control of their own lives and strengthen their communities.

Everything we do is shaped by our own commitment to co-operative values and our close collaboration with funders and delivery partners to achieve both social and economic goals.

We're helping build a better future for everyone in Wales.

## Our mission and goals

We will achieve our purpose through our mission, which is to develop sustainable businesses and strong inclusive communities by working co-operatively. Between 2017 and 2022 we have set ourselves the following five goals. We will:

Be champions for an inclusive economy and co-operative working – leading the public debate, shaping policy-making, piloting innovative new projects and sharing successful ways of working;

Lead the growth of co-operatives, mutuals, social enterprises and employee-owned businesses in Wales – working across all sectors, from small local shops to large manufacturing businesses, doing what it takes to help the social business sector to thrive;

Enable people and communities to improve their lives and livelihoods, tackle poverty and help build an inclusive society;

Harness the power and potential of digital technology to achieve a social purpose and deliver social good; and

Be a strong, independent co-operative organisation, ensuring our values underpin everything we do.

# What we will do to achieve our goals

**Goal A: We will be champions for an inclusive economy and co-operative working – leading the public debate, shaping policy-making, piloting innovative new projects and sharing successful ways of working.**

## **Context**

Traditional approaches to economic development are not working for the whole of Wales. Economic growth has become unbalanced. Income inequality is increasing. Many communities across Wales are being left behind.

Overall an average of 700,000 people were in poverty in Wales in the three years to 2014-15. Jobs alone are not solving this: high levels of underemployment in Wales have contributed to the increase in people of working age finding themselves in poverty.

If this situation is to change, a new economic approach is required. The Wales Co-operative Centre believes a much greater emphasis needs to be placed on building local economies, where wealth is being created and recycled within an area where people feel they belong. We believe that economic strategy should create the conditions where strong, local, community-centric economies can flourish.

Social businesses help support local economies. They have environmental and social objectives as well as commercial ones. They reinvest the money they make back into their business or the local community. This allows them to tackle social problems, improve people's life chances, support communities and help the environment. We believe that by growing the social enterprise and co-operative sector and focusing on building local economies, we can ensure a more balanced, fairer economy.



## What we will do

We will promote proactively the case for an inclusive economy. While academics and think tanks are publishing their thoughts and ideas, there is not currently an organisation delivering in this space. The Wales Co-operative Centre will seek to play a leading role in this area by:

- Being a champion for co-operatives
- Bringing together leading co-operatives and mutuals to develop the movement as part of a Mutuals Alliance (co-operation amongst co-operatives)
- Funding research and think pieces, working with the Bevan Foundation, the Institute of Welsh Affairs and other leading think tanks
- Taking a pro-active role in the public debate
- Influencing policy and programmes, for example the Welsh Government's economic strategy
- Piloting projects on co-operative working or that help create an inclusive economy
- Collaborating with partners, such as the Co-operative College, Co-operatives UK, Social Enterprise UK and the Centre for Local Economic Studies, to develop new initiatives and promote good practice.

## How this work will be funded

We will allocate a budget from our own resources and incorporate activities within project budgets where possible.

## Measuring our success

Our success will be measured by the extent to which we are able to influence policy and programmes as well as by the growth of the co-operative sector in Wales.

# What we will do to achieve our goals

## **Goal B: We will lead the growth of co-operatives, mutuals, social enterprises and employee-owned businesses in Wales.**

### **Context**

Social businesses in Wales form a dynamic, growing sector, which supports growth, jobs and access to training and employment. The latest research estimates that the sector is worth £2.37 billion to the Welsh economy and supports approximately 40,800 jobs. Social businesses are often found in areas of social deprivation, supporting communities, offering jobs and training and often providing services that others can not or do not want to provide. They make an important contribution in the drive to fight poverty and to building an economy that works for everyone in Wales.

The sector is growing, as social businesses diversify and become less reliant on grants. However lack of, or poor access to, funding is the most commonly identified constraint to business growth and over half of social businesses identify additional barriers, particularly insufficient staffing, the impact of Brexit and public sector austerity measures. Many social businesses say they need support in securing investment, marketing and finance to help grow and sustain their businesses.

### **What we will do**

The Wales Co-operative Centre is the leading agency supporting the social business sector in Wales. We are proud of the contribution we have made to the strength of the sector in Wales but we know there is more that we can do to help social businesses reach their potential.

Over the next five years we will carry on helping social business to start up and to grow. We will adapt and expand our range of products and services to meet the needs of the sector. We will continue to work closely with our partners, including the WCVA, Development Trusts Association, and Social Firms Wales, to join up our services, avoid duplication and provide maximum benefit to the sector.



We will continue to offer the following services:

Expert business support, advice and guidance, covering topics including business planning, finance, HR and marketing

Training and skills development

Guidance on finance and investment, to help improve access to funding

Support with consortia development and employee buy-outs

Information for the sector through events and newsletters

Awareness raising about social businesses, for example 'Buy Social' campaigns and national conferences

We will expand the work we do, which will include looking at the following areas:

Pre and new start support, where we will plug the gap in business support to early start social businesses.

Specialist services, where we will expand our specific business support services where there are areas of particular potential. We already work in the area of social care but will seek to expand into other areas such as co-operative childcare and agriculture.

Digital skills and ICT advice to support business growth

Financial products that meet funding gaps

New services that are provided digitally.

### **How this work will be funded**

While the UK remains in the EU, we will continue look to Structural Funds to support the growth of the social business sector. After the UK leaves the EU, we will work with Welsh Government to ensure there continues to be specialist support for the social business sector.

The public and private sectors as well as social businesses themselves recognise the value of our skills and experience. We have grown our consultancy service and we will invest in expanding this part of the business over the next few years. We will also continue to seek funding from trusts and foundations.

### **Measuring our success**

We will measure our success by growth of the sector – the number of jobs created, the number of jobs safeguarded, and the number of new businesses – and by gathering feedback from our clients through biennial surveys of the sector.

# What we will do to achieve our goals

## **Goal C: We will empower people and communities to improve their lives and livelihoods, tackle poverty and help build an inclusive society.**

### **Context**

The Wales Co-operative Centre does not just support businesses, we support people and communities too. For more than a decade we have been helping people to gain fundamental digital skills so that they can access information, services and jobs. We have promoted credit unions and supported people to manage their money. And we have helped people come together to manage their homes in a co-operative structure. We hope to expand this work in the years ahead.

Poverty remains a scourge on many communities within Wales. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation's biennial monitor of poverty in Wales found in 2015 that more people of working age now find themselves in poverty than ten years previously. There are now more people who work who are living in poverty than those who are not in paid employment living in poverty. The Wales Co-operative Centre has a role to play in helping to respond to these issues.

The Welsh Government is considering what it will do to reduce poverty after the end of the Communities First programme. We believe that promoting and supporting economic activity within our poorer communities must be at the core of the Government's new approach to building resilient communities. The Wales Co-operative Centre has worked closely with Communities First and will continue to play a role in efforts to tackle poverty and build resilient communities in the future.

The Wellbeing and Future Generations Act requires public bodies to meet today's needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The work of the Wales Co-operative Centre is closely aligned to the Act. We believe the Act offers a great new platform to help us to empower people and communities to improve their lives and livelihoods and to put co-operative values into action.



## **What we will do**

Our approach to empowering individuals and communities will be a co-operative one. We will help the sustainable development of communities. We will enable people to access training and learn new skills so that they can have more control over their lives.

This work will include:

Retaining our leadership as an organisation that champions and delivers financial inclusion initiatives

Delivering the new co-operative housing strategy to scale up and sustain the emerging co-operative housing movement in Wales

Supporting communities to develop services that they need and want, for example community energy generation

Developing resilient communities by helping big organisations to spend more of their money locally and by supporting networks of local co-operatives and other businesses

Working with the Future Generations Commissioner and public bodies to take forward the seven well-being goals

Working with Welsh Government on what follows the Communities First programme.

## **How this work will be funded**

This work will be funded by making bids to trusts and foundations with our own proposals, as well as by applying for grants and contracts from public bodies to deliver these activities.

## **Measuring our success**

We will measure our success by the number of individuals and community groups we support, by the number of new co-operative homes that are in place, as well as by the positive changes we make to policy and practice.

# What we will do to achieve our goals

## **Goal D: We will harness the power and potential of digital technology to achieve a social purpose and deliver social good.**

### **Context**

We believe digital technology has the power to tackle social and economic challenges. However its potential is not being realised, particularly in the charity and social business sectors. We want to help change that.

The Wales Co-operative Centre is in a strong position to harness the power of digital technology for social good. Our skilled team has been helping people to increase their digital skills for more than a decade. We have experience of developing digital products to help achieve our purpose, and we enjoy a partnership with the pioneers at CAST (the Centre for Acceleration of Social Technology).

### **What we will do**

We will expand our digital offering. This will mean growing our work on digital inclusion and digital skills to help organisations, especially social businesses and charities, to maximise their impact by supporting their digital evolution and by encouraging digital innovation. We will develop new partnerships with other pioneers in the field and explore the potential of digital platforms that have a co-operative ethos.

It is important we practise what we teach, by taking a digital first approach to our work. Our belief is that digital technology can make us more effective and more co-operative. We will put in place a digital strategy that sets out how the organisation can achieve its goals and ensure our people are able to work more efficiently and effectively through the use of digital technology.

### **How this work will be funded**

We will continue to seek funding from public bodies, as well as from trusts and foundations, to help people develop their digital skills and to develop digital products that assist the social business sector.

Following further market research, we intend to put in place a paid-for service that helps other organisations leverage digital technology to achieve their purpose.

### **Measuring our success**

Our success will be measured by the feedback we receive from clients and the income we generate from this new part of our business.

## **Goal E: We will be a strong, independent co-operative organisation, ensuring our values underpin everything we do.**

### **Context**

The Wales Co-operative Centre has been in business since the early 1980s. Our sustainability has been the result of strong governance and a reputation for delivery. Whilst retaining a clear sense of purpose, the Centre has also been able to adapt to a changing world. We will continue to be responsive to the changes and opportunities facing Wales in the years ahead.

The Wales Co-operative Centre is a co-operative organisation and the values of the co-operative movement will remain at the heart of our organisation.

### **What we will do**

The Wales Co-operative Centre is a values-based business. We will continue to embed co-operative values and principles in the way we work internally and with others. In particular we know there is more we can do to strengthen our offer to current and potential members and involve them more actively in setting policies and making decisions (co-operative principle 2 – see appendix). This will be a focus over the next few years.

Our reputation for delivering what we say we'll do and for delivering quality services is important to us. Our dedication to continuous improvement and customer satisfaction remains. External quality marks, such as Investors in People, PQASSO and Green Dragon, have confirmed the standard of our work and we aim to retain these accreditations.

Over recent years we have diversified our income base, which we will continue to do. Our remit is now broader than it was previously, opening up a wider range of possibilities. As a result, we will build relationships with an even greater variety of funders, winning more contracts and developing our consultancy services. Our aim is to maintain the size of the business whilst building the level of our reserves to secure our future.

We will reinvest the surpluses we make into our business, with priority given to investing in the skills of our staff, developing new products and services, and further growing our reserves.

### **How this work will be funded**

This area of work underpins all that we do, and funding will be made available from the contracts and funding that we secure as well as the surpluses we make.

### **Measuring our success**

We will use the following measures: external evaluations, an annual staff survey, the size of our turnover, surpluses and reserves, feedback from clients and funders, PQASSO and Investors in People accreditation.

# Our co-operative values

Underpinning our work is a commitment to delivering support to people, communities and businesses in ways that reflect and reinforce our own co-operative values. We believe that how we do things is just as important as what we do.

Our values are inspired by the international co-operative values (see appendix) but written in our own words. They signal what we are, how we do things and where we increasingly want to be. All staff, board members and volunteers commit to operating within our values.

Our values guide us to:

**Be co-operative**...we work collaboratively for mutual benefit

**Be supportive**...we give our time, expertise and encouragement

**Be fair**...we value diversity and democracy

**Have integrity**...we strive to be open and honest in everything that we do

**Be positive**...we invest our energy in achieving outcomes

**Be inspirational**...we stimulate people, communities and businesses to take control and reach their potential.

## Next steps

Each year we will develop an annual plan that will translate this strategy into the operational detail that is required to implement the five goals we've set.

The annual plan will contain a number of SMART objectives against which we will measure our progress.

Our objectives for 2017-18 are as follows:

1. We will meet or exceed all our project delivery targets by the end of March 2018 and retain existing grants and contracts.
2. We will win new business during 2017-18. Our turnover will be sustained at between £4 and £4.5 million in our budget for 2018-19 and we will have diversified our income so that Welsh Government funding is less than 80%.
3. We will maintain and improve the quality of what we do. This year we will retain our Investors in People status and our PQASSO accreditation at level 2. Our average customer satisfaction score will be above 4 out of 5 in 2017-18. Staff will state that they are satisfied with WCC as a place to work in the annual staff survey with a rating of 4 or more out of 5.
4. We will seek to continually improve our governance. This year we will grow our membership to 85 (an increase of 20%) with at least 5 new social business members. Board attendance at meetings will be 80% or higher during 2017-18.
5. We will increase the impact of our policy and public affairs by successfully influencing economic and social policy and practice. We will evidence this through examples of policy changes and new initiatives that arise as a result of our work.

# Appendix: International co-operative values and principles

As a co-operative organisation, the Wales Co-operative Centre adheres to the International Co-operative Values and Principles. The International Co-operative Alliance has summarised these values and principles as follows:

## **Values:**

Co-operatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. In the tradition of their founders, co-operative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.

## **Principles:**

The co-operative principles are guidelines by which co-operatives put their values into practice.

### **1st Principle: Voluntary and Open Membership**

Co-operatives are voluntary organisations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political, or religious discrimination.

### **2nd Principle: Democratic Member Control**

Co-operatives are democratic organisations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. Men and women serving as elected representatives are accountable to the membership. In primary co-operatives members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote) and co-operatives at other levels are organised in a democratic manner.

### **3rd Principle: Member Economic Participation**

Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their co-operative. At least part of that capital is usually the common property of the co-operative. They usually receive limited compensation, if any, on capital subscribed as a condition of membership. Members allocate surpluses for any or all of the following purposes: developing the co-operative, possibly by setting up reserves, part of which at least would be indivisible; benefiting members in proportion to their transactions with the co-operative; and supporting other activities approved by the membership.

### **4th Principle: Autonomy and Independence**

Co-operatives are autonomous, self-help organisations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organisations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their co-operative autonomy.

### **5th Principle: Education, Training and Information**

Co-operatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers and employees, so they can contribute effectively to the development of their co-operatives. They inform the general public – particularly young people and opinion leaders – about the nature and benefits of co-operation.

### **6th Principle: Co-operation among Co-operatives**

Co-operatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the co-operative movement by working together through local, national, regional and international structures.

### **7th Principle: Concern for Community**

While focusing on member needs, co-operatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies accepted by their members.

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