

# Blog

## The Housing Quality Network Cymru

19 November 2018

### HQN Cymru members' update – 19 November 2018

#### Our mutual friends

*The housing green paper in England has renewed interest in mutual and co-operative housing. **Keith Edwards**, Lead Associate for HQN Cymru, and **Dave Palmer**, who manages the Wales Housing Co-op Project, consider the lessons Wales has to offer.*

Wikipedia says that co-operation is the process of groups of organisms working or acting together for common, mutual, or some underlying benefit, as opposed to working in competition for selfish benefit. Mutuality is defined as the sharing of a feeling, action, or relationship between two or more parties.

Co-operation is therefore based on the principles of mutuality. But you don't necessarily need to form a co-operative in order to co-operate. Wales has been exploring these themes for a number of years: first through the emergence of community mutual stock transfers in South Wales, and more recently via the Wales Co-operative Centre [Co-op Housing Project](#), working to support new grass roots housing based on mutual principles.

There are a number of examples worth looking at including the [Ty Cyfle](#) youth project, which demonstrates how co-operative principles can transform the way housing is delivered and perceived.

A series of high-level events organised jointly by HQN, Trowers and Hamlin and co-op think tank Mutuo came to the conclusion that mutuals should be higher up the agenda of options for housing in the future. The events focused on innovative models including the [Merthyr Valleys Homes](#) tenant/staff mutual.

As MVH's Mike Owen says: 'Most people have no real say in their homes, their schools, their health service; many of the big decisions in their lives are decided by other people. The mutual was for us the start in giving power back to the community.'

The opportunities this new approach opens up are worth exploring. In the words of TPAS England's Jennie Osbourne: 'Given the scale of the housing crisis we face and the need for landlords and communities to reconnect together in shared ambitions, it's got to be worth exploring what it is at least.'

We couldn't agree more. Co-operation and mutuality should be part of the future for tenants' voice and power. The precise form this takes is not important – a co-operative mindset, *not co-operatives themselves* are the key to sustainable community-led housing.

## About the author

Keith Edwards is a former Director of CIH Cymru and TPAS Cymru. He came to the housing sector via the trade union, co-operative and community development movements. As a consultant, he has worked for Welsh Government Ministers, the Housing Regulator and a number of local authorities, housing associations and private companies.

He has wide experience of stakeholder involvement, developing strategy, option appraisals, designing new service models and supporting co-operative and mutual housing. He has particular expertise in helping organisation get the maximum social, economic and environmental benefits from their investment and service delivery, having set up and run the innovative i2i project for Welsh Government.

Keith is Lead Associate for HQN Cymru.