



Co-operative homes for later life in Wales

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Our Housing AGenda, the report from the expert group on housing an ageing population in Wales ¹, makes a wide range of recommendations which are being considered by Welsh Government Minister with responsibility for housing, Carl Sargeant.

In relation to the theme of widening housing choice, one of the recommendations is to:

'Test less established housing models in Wales. Practical measures that could be considered are:

- *extending the commitment to co-operative housing in Wales and investigating the feasibility of supporting a pilot co-housing initiative for older people in Wales and a home share scheme; and*
- *ensuring that there is financial and professional support and advice available to facilitate community led housing solutions.'*

The co-operative housing project, facilitated by the Wales Co-operative Centre² and funded by the Welsh Government and the Nationwide Foundation, has recently had its government funding for the coming financial year confirmed. A strategy for co-operative housing in Wales, highlighting its potential for creating communities and changing lives, as well as providing homes, was launched at the Tai conference in April 2017. It recognises older people as one of a number of groups of people for whom co-operative forms of housing might be an appropriate solution.

Some of the learning from the co-operative housing project to date is that each scheme is different and that schemes can take some time to develop from idea to the point of people moving into their homes. This experience is also clearly demonstrated by the Older Women's Co-housing (OWCH) group in north London³ who first came together in 1998 and finally moved into their homes in 2016. Such an extensive timescale is likely to be a disincentive to many older people from getting involved in co-operative or co-housing. One of the challenges for co-operative and co-housing is to share the learning from each scheme in a way that recognises that schemes are different, but also identifies commonalities and issues that other schemes are likely to face. As OWCH say on their website:

'We are carving out a path for others in our age group to follow. We hope they have an easier journey than us, now we have shown the way. The senior cohousing community could enrich the last years of many, and reduce pressures on health and care services, if local authorities, planners, policy makers and housing developers helped to remove the many obstacles society puts in its way.'

¹ <http://gov.wales/topics/housing-and-regeneration/housing-supply/expert-group-on-housing-an-ageing-population/?lang=en>

² <http://wales.coop/coop-housing/>

³ <http://www.owch.org.uk>

The very fact that there are now a number of new co-operative housing schemes in Wales, with residents seeing the benefits of their hard work and involvement⁴, means that co-operative housing is being increasingly recognised by organisations and communities as a potential way of meeting people's housing needs. And, as the OWCH example shows, it can also help to meet social and health needs.

The co-operative housing project in Wales has demonstrated the important role of housing associations as facilitators and enablers of co-operative housing, using their expertise in development, community engagement and housing management. Many housing associations in Wales also have significant experience of developing different types of housing for older people, as well as providing support and in some cases, care services.

They are therefore extremely well placed to be involved in piloting different co-operative and co-housing models specifically for older people (or indeed intergenerational schemes that seek to simultaneously meet the needs of older and younger people). I hope that a range of models emerge over the coming years and that co-operative and co-housing will become a much more common feature in the Welsh housing landscape.

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Published on Monday, 8 May 2017 by the Housing LIN

⁴ <http://www.everyonesbusiness.coop/en/2016/12/01/co-operative-housing-in-wales-building-homes-creating-communities-changing-lives/>