

ewmpas

Manifesto for the 2026 Senedd election

Empowering Welsh communities to build a resilient, sustainable and inclusive wellbeing economy





Introduction

Cwmpas works within communities across Wales to help build a fairer, greener economy and a more equal society.

We tackle poverty and inequality by promoting social enterprise and cooperative solutions and supporting communities, businesses and public services to improve and innovate through our expert advice and consultancy services.

For over 40 years, Cwmpas has been working with social entrepreneurs, co-operatives, businesses, public bodies, communities and more across Wales to make positive change happen.

Our economy and society needs to change. We know that the ideas and ability to create that change exist within Welsh communities.

We need community owned, community-led and community-anchored solutions to re-balance our economy and create a more equal society.

Our experience and specialist knowledge, gathered through years of supporting communities, businesses and public services to improve and innovate, means that we have an ambitious vision for Wales and understand the changes that need to happen to realise it.

Now, we're calling on the next Welsh Government to help us make it happen.

- ✓ **Community owned**
- ✓ **Community-led**
- ✓ **Community-anchored**



Our mission

At Cwmpas, we want to empower communities across Wales to shape a better future for all, putting people and planet first.

Our work focusses on three core goals:

1. Creating a fairer, greener economy

Through expert business advice, social and democratic business support, and the promotion of cooperative, community or employee ownership, we are working to create a future where more businesses use their profit for good and communities can thrive through increased employment opportunities and local wealth.

2. Building a more equal society

Our digital inclusion, community-led housing and preventative care services help to reduce health and financial inequality, combat loneliness and isolation, improve health and wellbeing and empower communities to shape their own future and access the services they need.

3. Driving positive change

Our learning and development programmes support the growth of the sector and its future leaders alongside our expertise and range of consultancy services that are designed to drive innovation through supporting digital transformation, social value, collaboration and co-design, research, evaluation, feasibility studies and policy development.

We can make positive change happen together.

Our manifesto outlines ten calls to action for the next Welsh Government, demonstrating how a co-operative and community led approach to economic development can build a resilient, sustainable and inclusive Wales.



1

Build a wellbeing economy in Wales by prioritising and investing in the growth of co-operatives, employee-owned and social businesses.

Invest in specialist support for social businesses

The next Welsh Government should commit to building a wellbeing economy, one that puts people and the planet first. Key to this is growing the number of social enterprises, co-operatives and employee-owned businesses, which help create fairer, more sustainable communities.

To help social businesses thrive, it is essential that the next Welsh Government invests in specialist support tailored to their unique needs. Unlike traditional enterprises, social businesses operate with a triple-bottom line - balancing social, environmental, and financial goals.

There are specific challenges to establishing and growing social businesses so they require expert guidance on legal structures, governance, and accessing funds, which standard business support services are not designed to provide. Support should be available at every stage, from start-up to growth, as this targeted assistance will enable these organisations to thrive, scale sustainably and ultimately deliver greater positive impact across Wales.

Create a new co-operative development hub

To achieve the UK Government's goal of doubling the co-operative economy in Wales, and to truly make a difference, we must focus on creating a new wave of co-operative anchor organisations. This is why we need a co-operative development hub – a pro-active body tasked with identifying opportunities for new co-operatives in supply chains and emerging sectors and supporting their formation by bringing together the right people and groups to make these ideas happen.

Whether that's working with universities to develop co-operative spin-offs, working with sole traders to build co-operatives to decarbonise our housing stock, or working in the agricultural sector to build the next generation of food co-ops, we need capacity for specialist co-operators to identify opportunities and turn them into action.

Invest in doubling the number of employee owned businesses

One example where Wales has seen considerable success is the growth of employee-owned businesses. The number has more than doubled, from 37 in 2021, to nearly 100 in 2025. This has meant that there are more successful businesses anchored in Welsh communities, with jobs safeguarded by a smooth succession plan. The evidence shows these businesses keep jobs, anchor decision-making and boost innovation.

The rapid growth we have seen so far shows that it is achievable to double the size of the employee owned sector again, but it will require more investment, active efforts to build the market, and ongoing support for businesses that have already made the shift to being employee-owned.

Overall, the evidence shows that this model creates significant economic and social value - so ongoing support by specialist, mission-driven development agencies is key to getting the most out of it.

Set ambitious procurement targets

Supporting the social business sector to deliver on its triple-bottom line of people, planet and profit means creating a procurement and commissioning environment that recognises and incentivises their social value. We recommend setting ambitious procurement targets with clear and achievable goals for increasing the share of public contracts awarded to social enterprises, ensuring government spending actively strengthens the wellbeing economy.

Track the size and impact of social enterprises as a national measure

We also propose tracking the size and impact of social enterprises as a national measure under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, so success is defined by positive social and environmental outcomes, not just financial growth.



By taking these bold steps, the next Welsh Government can deliver a fairer, sustainable, and community-led economy that works for people and planet, not just profit.



2

Promote community ownership of assets as a key part of a national strategy for building collective wealth and empowering local people.

Promote community ownership of assets as an essential part of a nationwide strategy to build community wealth

The next Welsh Government should promote community ownership of assets as part of a national community wealth building strategy. There are already many successful examples in Wales of communities saving local assets, which should be supported by legislation as in Scotland and England. Community ownership promotes economic resilience, democracy, and prosperity, enabling Wales to create a fairer, sustainable economy that enhances community wealth and balances local economies.

Develop Welsh legislation for community ownership

It is essential that we create Welsh legislation to support community ownership. By learning from the experiences of Scotland and England, the next Welsh Government can introduce strong legal rights that empower communities to take ownership of local assets, with a process that is both clear and accessible.

Use community and co-operative ownership as economic development tools

Community and co-operative ownership are powerful tools for boosting local economies. By supporting co-operatives and mutual businesses across sectors, from social care to credit unions, we can create opportunities that keep wealth and decision-making in the hands of local people

Back legislative change with investment in support

To truly make a difference through legislative change, we must pair it with meaningful investment in community support. This includes establishing dedicated funding streams for community buyouts, covering everything from initial support before acquisition to providing patient capital, long-term financing, and tailored specialist assistance. This approach will ensure that every community, regardless of its current resources or capacity, has the opportunity to pursue ownership and development.



A strong commitment to community ownership can empower individuals and strengthen local economies. The next Welsh Government should seize this opportunity to create a fairer, more democratic Wales.



3

Prioritise the long-term health of our communities by investing in essential community services and supporting those who provide them.

Prioritise preventative, community-led wellbeing services

The next Welsh Government should move towards preventative, community-led wellbeing services, ensuring that people can access the support they need in ways that are rooted in their communities. To achieve this, we need to ensure there is a strong, sustainable supply of organisations providing community-based services, in which the social enterprise sector plays a vital part.

Make commissioning processes more accessible to small, community-based social enterprises.

We need to keep improving how we organise and fund local care so that smaller, community-based groups and social enterprises have a fair chance to get involved. By making the process simpler, embedding social value in decision-making, and designing services in partnership with communities, we can help these groups deliver high-quality and accessible care.

It's also important that these community providers receive stable, long-term funding as part of the Social Prescribing Framework, ensuring that preventative services are sustainable and not reliant on short-term funding cycles.

Explore multi-stakeholder community health co-operatives

A major challenge facing Welsh communities is the succession crisis causing a significant decline in GP numbers. We should explore community health co-operatives, where local people and different groups can help own and run GP services together to help ensure long-term sustainability and community involvement in decision-making, particularly in areas facing GP shortages or practice closures.



Empowering community-led approaches, will enable Wales to develop a health and social care system focussed on prevention, personalisation, and long-term resilience. The next Welsh Government must commit to embedding these principles in policy and practice to create healthier, more connected communities.



4

Reshape our social care sector by giving communities, workers and commissioners the help they need to start and grow co-operative models and systems.

Take bold action to rebalance the social care sector

The next Welsh Government must reshape social care by developing social enterprises and co-operative models and ways of working. These approaches prioritise people over profit, ensuring high-quality and sustainable care services that are rooted in local communities.

Proactively develop a strong social enterprise and co-operative supply chain for social care

The next Welsh government should foster a robust social enterprise and co-operative supply chain by investing in local capacity to bring stakeholders together and provide the specialist support needed to develop social business models. Actively supporting the growth of new and existing co-operative care providers will align with the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act and ensure a diverse and resilient care sector.

Ensure cross-governmental support for co-operatives in social care

It is essential that we ensure cross-governmental support for co-operatives in social care by embedding co-operative principles in social care policy and procurement. Recognising multi-stakeholder co-operatives and employee ownership trusts (EOTs) as sustainable and profit-distributing democratic models can enhance quality care and workforce development.

Expand community-led models of care across Wales through pilots and test and learning initiatives

Shifting from crisis-driven social care to preventative, community-led models will help to empower citizens and carers. Our experience supporting these networks in Wales shows the clear benefits of enabling communities to shape and deliver care.



By committing to these actions, the next Welsh Government can create a fairer, sustainable social care system that prioritises high-quality, democratic, community-driven care, ensuring that care services in Wales work for those who rely on them, as well as those who provide them.



A sustainable, net-zero economy should put people and communities first. Social businesses are uniquely placed to lead this transition, ensuring economic transformation benefits everyone. The next Welsh Government must take bold steps to support social enterprises, co-operatives, and community organisations to lead the way towards a fairer, greener economy.

Be proactive in identifying opportunities for social businesses to create good, inclusive jobs in the green economy

By working together, we can help social businesses in the green economy create quality, inclusive jobs and ensure the benefits of green growth are widely shared. Whether it's in renewable energy, the circular economy, sustainable construction, or decarbonisation, social enterprises in these areas have the power to create meaningful employment in local communities, ensuring that the economic advantages of green growth are shared fairly by all.

Support businesses that adopt the triple-bottom-line model

Social businesses promote sustainability in all sectors so supporting enterprises that balance profit with social and environmental responsibility will help create a sustainable Welsh economy. Encouraging social enterprise as the default model for new entrepreneurs can transform how we do business in Wales and build the sustainable economy we need.

Support community-owned energy projects

Supporting community-owned energy projects can help empower local communities and keep profits within them. These initiatives are also creating innovative, community-led ways of tackling fuel poverty and should be supported across Wales, with comprehensive support from planning to delivery. We should encourage community ownership of green spaces to make it easier for everyone to get involved in protecting nature and supporting community-led projects that benefit us all.



By investing in social businesses as the driving force of Wales' net-zero transition, the next Welsh Government can build a fairer, greener economy where sustainability is an opportunity for prosperity, not a burden on communities.



6

Invest in ensuring everyone in Wales is digitally-included as services, economies and communities are digitally-transformed.

Digital inclusion is about making sure everyone can use the internet and digital devices easily and safely, whenever they need or want to. These skills are essential for taking part in today's online world and economy. As more services and parts of life move online, being able to connect digitally is more important than ever. In Wales, 7% of people are digitally-excluded. While this number has dropped a lot over the past twenty years, it means those left behind are now even more isolated. We can't assume that people who are online today will always stay connected as technology changes quickly and rising living costs put more people at risk.

Implement the findings of the Minimum Digital Living Standard research pilot

The findings of the Minimum Digital Living Standard research pilot need to be implemented and expanded to include all households in Wales. Deepening our understanding of what it means to be digitally-included in Wales today is vital ensuring digital inclusion for all.

Wales has led the way on researching and developing the MDLS, and is already supporting our colleagues in Welsh Housing Associations to improve the lives of people in our communities. We should continue with this momentum by expanding the research to include more types of individuals and families, and support more organisations working directly with communities to utilise the MDLS in their work.

All public sector digital transformation programmes should allocate budget for digital inclusion

In order to create a truly digitally-inclusive Wales, we need everyone to take this on as their responsibility. As we modernise our public services with digital tools, it is essential that all public sector digital transformation programmes set aside some of their budget for digital inclusion. If we don't make digital inclusion a key part of every public service, people will fall through the gaps which will impact their wellbeing and increase pressure on public services in the long-run.



The next Welsh Government must invest in digital transformation so Wales can lead the way in creating platform cooperatives and using AI for social good.



For Welsh democracy to truly work for everyone, it must evolve to become more participatory, inclusive, and co-operative. The next Welsh Government should commit to involving people more directly in shaping the decisions, policies, and services that affect their lives. This means moving beyond traditional consultation towards genuine co-production, where citizens have real influence over policy, services, and governance.

Give ordinary people a real voice through Citizen Assemblies

The next Welsh government should establish Citizen Assemblies as a permanent feature of Welsh democracy, giving ordinary people a real voice in key decisions. Our Start Something Good community ideas events have demonstrated the power of bringing people together to identify challenges and co-produce solutions. By embedding these values within the democratic process and bringing diverse groups together to share ideas and solve problems, these assemblies can help shape policies that truly reflect everyone's needs.

Embed co-design in public service reform

We must ensure that the people who use, provide, and are affected by public services are involved in helping to design how those services work. This will lead to more effective, responsive public services that reflect the real needs of the people they serve.

Invest in media literacy and democratic education

During these changing and volatile political times, it's important for everyone to learn how to avoid misinformation and understand how our democracy works. By being proactive and investing in media literacy and democratic education, we can help people make better choices, avoid falling for false information, and get more involved in our communities. This is essential in building trust in institutions and creating a more informed, active electorate.



By taking a co-operative approach to democracy, the next Welsh Government can empower people across Wales to play an active role in shaping their future, ensuring Welsh democracy works for everyone, not just those in power.



8

Develop community-led and co-operative housing models as a key part of the solution to the housing crisis.

We are proud to serve as the Enabling Hub for community-led housing (CLH) in Wales, championing the voices of communities and supporting the growth of this vital sector. For over a decade, we have worked alongside communities, funders and policymakers to raise awareness, break down barriers, provide expert guidance, and share valuable learning across Wales, the UK and beyond.

Community-led and co-operative housing models have a key role to play in building an inclusive and sustainable housing market in Wales. There are inspiring examples across Wales of local people taking the lead to help solve specific local problems, create affordable homes and build stronger communities.

Set ambitious targets for affordable community-led homes

We are calling on the Welsh Government to set ambitious growth targets for the number of affordable homes developed through CLH initiatives, and to work in partnership with us, communities, local government and RSLs, and provide leadership, guidance and resources through legislation, policy frameworks and dedicated revenue and capital grant funding.

Establish a revolving loan fund for Community-Led Housing

We want to stimulate growth and address market failure by establishing a revolving loan fund for CLH. This fund would have a mix of investment sources including government grants and social investment so it stays flexible and steady. It would give out loans for early planning, getting started, and building projects, making it easier for new housing ideas to get off the ground.

Create a national housing strategy that includes Community-Led Housing

We're calling for a national housing plan that makes Community-Led Housing (CLH) a central part of the solution. We want to see bold action, with a target for building affordable homes and for at least 10% of these to be created through CLH models. Both national and local planning support is needed to help these community projects succeed, including updated guidance and more flexible development options. This means providing training for local councils and encouraging them to work closely with the CLH Hub to create positive policies that support local communities.

Encourage community ownership of land and assets

The next Welsh Government should help communities take ownership of local land and assets by introducing a law that gives them the first chance to buy these assets when they become available for community benefit including the development of affordable community-led homes. A national third sector, intermediary body should be established to temporarily hold land and buildings on behalf of communities, making sure these important spaces are kept for local benefit, such as developing affordable housing for those who need it.

It is important that the next Welsh Government continues its funding partnership with foundations and trust funds to provide support and advice to communities across Wales that want to deliver affordable CLH and works collaboratively with key partners and stakeholders to remove the known barriers and speed/scale up the delivery of affordable CLH.

We want to see funding for a national CLH support programme for six years

This programme should keep working with foundations and trusts to support and advise communities in Wales that want to build affordable CLH. It should also work closely with partners to remove the known barriers and make it easier and faster to create affordable CLH homes



The next Welsh Government needs to to set ambitious growth targets for building more affordable homes through Community-Led Housing (CLH). By collaborating with communities and partners, and providing strong leadership, clear guidelines, and steady funding, the next Welsh Government can empower local communities to lead on housing solutions.

9

Protect the Welsh language for future generations by re-balancing economies and supporting community-led businesses, assets and services.

The next Welsh government should commit to supporting the social enterprise sector as a cornerstone of their efforts to promote and sustain the Welsh language. Building on the success of the Perthyn project, there is a clear case for supporting new and growing Welsh-owned co-operatives and social enterprises to create strong, resilient local economies where the Welsh language can thrive.

Develop community-owned co-operatives and social enterprises

Developing community-owned co-operatives and social enterprises is important for building strong local economies, especially in places where the Welsh language is a living, vibrant force. These enterprises provide meaningful work opportunities for Welsh speakers, enabling them to remain in or return to majority Welsh-speaking areas. By being based in local communities, co-operatives and social enterprises use both business ideas and community values to bring lasting benefits for both the Welsh language and the economy.

The growing number of community-owned and social businesses in Gwynedd shows how valuable the Welsh language can be for the economy. The Perthyn project has demonstrated how giving early support to new, community-led ideas can have a transformative impact and empower Welsh-speaking communities.

Expand the Perthyn model to unlock further potential across Wales

By expanding the Perthyn model, we can unlock further potential by helping more communities across Wales, in areas where Welsh is widely spoken and where it is not. Supporting new social enterprises in these communities will create new opportunities for people to learn, use, and share the Welsh language, fostering its growth and normalising its everyday use.



The next Welsh Government should recognise the social enterprise sector as a vital tool in their Welsh language strategies. By committing to seed funding, training, and infrastructure support for co-operatives and social enterprises, they can ensure that the Welsh language is not only preserved but thrives as a living language across all parts of Wales.

A photograph of two middle-aged men standing outdoors in a rural setting. The man on the left is wearing a bright green high-visibility shirt and has his glasses perched on his head. The man on the right is wearing a grey t-shirt. They are both holding cardboard boxes filled with fresh produce, including green beans. In the background, there is a green field, a wooden fence, and some trees under a blue sky with scattered clouds.

10

Champion the role of co-operatives in strengthening the food sector and sustaining rural communities in Wales.

Co-operatives and community-owned businesses are important for keeping rural Welsh communities sustainable and resilient.

In areas where traditional private sector investment is limited, these models provide vital services, create local employment, and help keep money in the community rather than being extracted by distant shareholders. To tackle rural poverty and help people to thrive, the next Welsh Government must actively build on the proud history of co-operative and community-led models in these areas and support the expansion of co-operative and community-led enterprises.

Identify opportunities for community ownership and social businesses at the heart of rural economic development strategy

The next Welsh government should identify opportunities for for community ownership and social businesses in rural communities, enabling local people to manage services such as shops, post offices, transport, and childcare. This will help to ensure that communities have continued access to the high-quality, locally-led services they need. Models such as community-run pubs, village shops, and transport groups in Wales have been successful in sustaining rural life.

Investment and support for food sector co-operatives

Supporting co-operatives in the food sector, building on the success of existing agri co-ops such as Calon Wen and Clynderwen & Cardiganshire Farmers, will enable farmers to work together to process, market, and sell their produce. This collective approach will strengthen local supply chains and help establish a fairer, more sustainable food system. Learning from these successes will help to build strong local food systems and enable Wales to develop a thriving community-led food growing sector.



The next Welsh Government needs to embed co-operative principles at the heart of rural economic development and the development of a resilient food system. Doing this will build stronger, fairer communities where people have real control over their local economies and futures.

Our calls to action

We want the next Welsh Government to help us to shape a brighter future for everyone. By building a strong economy, looking after our environment, and making sure fairness is at the heart of every decision, together we can build a resilient, sustainable and inclusive Wales.

We want to see the next Welsh Government:

1

Invest in specialist support and create a cooperative development hub

to proactively identify, support, and scale new co-operative, employee-owned, and social businesses across key sectors and double the size of the employee owned business sector in Wales.

2

Promote community ownership of assets as a key part of a national strategy

by introducing new laws, providing funding for communities to buy these assets, and offering expert advice.

3

Empower social enterprises to deliver community-led health services

by simplifying how contracts are awarded and putting more value on social impact.

4

Develop and implement a programme to support and expand social enterprise and cooperative social care models

including investing in local training and support, encouraging collaboration, and making sure that co-operative values are built into our social care policies and how contracts are awarded.

5

Invest in social businesses as a driving force of Wales' net-zero transition

to enable the creation of inclusive, high-quality jobs and driving local prosperity.

6

Commit to ensuring a truly digitally-inclusive Wales

by expanding the MDLS pilots to all household types across Wales, facilitating its implementation by organisations in our communities, and putting inclusion at the heart of digital transformation.

7

Strengthen Welsh democracy

through citizen assemblies, co-designing services and investing in media literacy to give people a direct and meaningful role in shaping key government policies and legislation.

8

Invest in the expansion of affordable community-led housing models

by offering flexible, easy-access loans to get projects started and creating supportive policy frameworks that empower local communities to lead on housing solutions.

9

Provide targeted support for new and existing Welsh language community-led co-operatives and social businesses

through funding, training, and support for projects that strengthen the Welsh language in local communities.

10

Embed co-operative principles at the heart of rural economic development and to help build a resilient food system

by identifying opportunities for community ownership and social businesses in rural communities and supporting more co-operatives in the food sector.



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