

Carmarthenshire County Council Case Study

The story of the local authority's approach to community-led housing

Basic summary

- **Local housing market characteristics**
 - Urban and rural combination
 - High housing demand
- **Country:** Wales
- **New build homes. Example given:** housing co-operative
- **Partners:** Welsh Government, Welsh Co-operative Centre, Gwalia Housing Association (now part of the Pobl Group), Confederation of Co-operative Housing
- **Main outcome:** 27 intermediate rented homes for housing register applicants

Key message: Welsh Government capital funding and advice from the Welsh Co-operative Centre has enabled Carmarthenshire Council to test how a co-operative scheme could provide homes for housing register applicants, using a developer housing association to build the homes and develop the co-operative

1. *The story: what was the problem that needed addressing?*

Carmarthenshire is a primarily rural county, the third largest in Wales, with urban centres. It is an area of high housing demand. Carmarthenshire County Council (CCC) retains its housing stock and is actively building new social housing. The top three local housing market challenges are:

- Mismatch between the profile of social housing stock and housing need – with a massive under-supply of smaller homes (1 and 2 bedroom) and an adequate supply of 3 bedroom houses in most areas
- The ability of single people under 35 to afford 1 bedroom homes due to welfare benefit changes that cap the local housing allowance at the shared accommodation rate
- Affordability challenges and lack of supply for would-be first-time buyers, especially in more rural parts of the County.

2. *Why is Carmarthenshire County Council supporting community-led housing (CLH)?*

The Council sees co-operative housing schemes as making an important contribution towards its strategic aim of providing a range of affordable housing options for local people. CLH supports three of CCC's strategic priorities:

- People who live, work and visit Carmarthenshire are safe and feel safer
- Carmarthenshire's communities and environment are sustainable
- Carmarthenshire has a stronger and more prosperous economy.

CLH also provides more options for housing applicants.

3. *Who is benefitting or will benefit from CLH schemes in Carmarthenshire?*

Founder members of the Old Oak Housing Co-operative pilot scheme were families on the local authority housing register. Future schemes may be for single people as well as families.

4. How does Carmarthenshire County Council enable CLH schemes to develop?

The Council's five year [delivery plan for affordable homes](#) gives it the opportunity to consider whether a cooperative model would be most appropriate to meet a particular need in a particular area.

CCC supports CLH by providing land at below market value and promoting concept of cooperative housing locally, sending a mailshot to housing register applicants in the three urban areas under consideration.

5. Co-operative homes created in Carmarthenshire:

The Council decided to take part in the Welsh Government initiative in order to explore how a co-operative housing scheme could provide homes in the area. [Old Oak Housing Co-operative](#) was initiated by CCC as a pilot scheme: it therefore came about through a 'top-down' rather than 'bottom-up' process. The co-op was set up to manage 27 intermediate rent family homes.

The authority received advice from the Wales Cooperative Centre and capital subsidy from Welsh Government. CCC looked at three potential sites, choosing the one in Carmarthen because it had the highest housing need.

CCC asked Gwalia housing association (now part of Pobl Group) to build the homes and develop the co-op. The land was sold to Gwalia on favourable terms, which allowed the scheme to go ahead. The Council and sought potential co-operators from its Housing Choice Register. Gwalia then worked with the Confederation of Co-operative Housing through the Wales Co-operative Centre's support programme to train co-op members to manage the homes. In addition to a management committee, there are rents, repairs and allocations groups. The co-op controls most of the housing services, such as managing rents, with some services bought back from the housing association as needed.

6. Lessons learnt and what Carmarthenshire County Council will do next:

Local barriers to enabling CLH are:

- The lack of understanding of what co-operative housing is – by both the public and housing providers. CCC sent a mailshot to all housing applicants for Carmarthen Town, and the Pobl Group, the partner housing association (originally Gwalia), worked with those who responded. There was plenty of interest because of the level of housing need, rather than specifically because it was a co-op.
- Lack of clarity over different models – this is inevitable, because some Welsh schemes are co-ownership whilst others are for rent.

To make co-operative housing mainstream, authorities will need to learn from the pilot schemes and focus on at most two or three alternatives which work. This will make future schemes easier to fund. In addition to the reduced land cost, CCC's scheme had generous funding from Welsh Government, without which the scheme would not have been viable.

Contact:

Matt Miller

Housing Needs Lead

Carmarthenshire County Council

mmiller@sirgar.gov.uk

01554 899320