# A National Care Service must change who owns and controls care

Tom Lloyd Goodwin's article, "A National Care Service" https://cles.org.uk/a-national-care-service-must-start-with-reforming-the-care-market/ makes an essential contribution to care reform. His argument that market reform must accompany investment deserves attention across the UK. Co-operatives Wales agrees additional funding must improve people's lives, strengthen the workforce and sustain services, rather than reinforce arrangements that allow excessive extraction.

Andy Burnham's National Care Service ambitions provide an opportunity to put co-operative principles into practice. For Co-operatives Wales, putting those principles at the heart of social care means democratic ownership, fair employment, meaningful co-production and public resources delivering better care and lasting community benefit. Democratic control, equality, equity, solidarity and concern for community must shape ownership, commissioning and everyday support. These principles must be expressed through rights, resources and accountable decisions, giving practical substance to the ambition.

Quality must drive change, whether provision is co-operative, public, charitable or privately owned. Quality means safe, reliable support, skilled and fairly treated workers, continuity of relationships, dignity, choice and independent living. It must also be informed by fairness, democracy, co-production and co-operation, with people receiving support helping define and assess what good care looks like.

Tom connects ownership and financial practices with conditions experienced by workers and people receiving care. Commissioners must examine where money goes, who makes decisions and whose interests prevail. Transparency should cover debt, rents, management charges and related-party transactions. Reasonable operating costs and prudent reserves sustain care; excessive extraction diverts resources from it.

Co-operatives are particularly well placed to align ownership, accountability and community purpose. Worker co-operatives give staff democratic influence; user-led co-operatives strengthen people's control over support. Multi-stakeholder models bring workers, supported people and communities together. However, a co-operative identity cannot substitute for evidence: quality must be demonstrated through everyday practice, independent scrutiny and action when services fall short.

Cartrefi Cymru Co-operative illustrates this wider potential. Its membership includes people receiving support, employees and community supporters, recognising members' time, talents and community connections. Its stated approach combines democratic participation, learning, independence and collaboration. We see this as an additional community dividend: stronger relationships, shared knowledge, collective confidence and local capacity alongside care delivery.

Reciprocity is central to this approach. People receiving support are citizens with experience, skills and contributions to make. Co-operation creates opportunities to give and receive support, shape decisions and build community life together. Participation must remain voluntary: nobody's entitlement to care should depend on their ability to contribute, work or volunteer. Contributions should be valued across generations and supported through accessible participation.

Wales already has a foundation. Section 16 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 requires councils to promote social enterprises, co-operative arrangements, user involvement and third-sector provision. These duties should produce measurable changes in commissioning and delivery.

The Welsh National Care Service programme's commitment to alternative provision therefore needs funding, specialist development advice and support for ownership transfers. Procurement should recognise democratic governance, fair work, quality and community benefit through lawful, transparent criteria and proportionate requirements. People whose voices have been marginalised must influence decisions and see how their contributions change services.

Across the UK, governments should share learning while respecting devolved responsibilities. England's ambitions and Wales's programme should be judged by better care, fairer employment and greater control for people and communities. Co-operatives offer a strong means of achieving these outcomes, including benefits beyond individual contracts. Reform must make those benefits visible, accountable and available to everyone who needs support.