

# Working for wellbeing

How Cymdeithas Tai Eryri is focusing on the needs of tenants and communities.



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

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Dylan Williams - Electrician Cymdeithas Tai Eryri

## Overview

Cymdeithas Tai Eryri is a registered social landlord that has always put communities and wellbeing at the centre of its operations. It is recognised as being an innovative organisation, and constantly adapts to changing needs and demands to ensure financial security whilst providing tenants with affordable, warm homes in places they want to live. In recent years, adapting to the twin challenges of energy prices and climate change has been woven into their corporate plan, because moving these forward will inevitably affect their housing and tenants wellbeing.

## Background

Cymdeithas Tai Eryri is a social enterprise that has operated across Gwynedd and Ynys Môn for over 30 years as a social landlord, providing affordable housing in response to local needs. Cymdeithas Tai Eryri offers support to vulnerable people and seeks to reduce social disadvantage while contributing to community regeneration and sustaining the Welsh language.

### Results

Identify outcomes that increase the wellbeing of Wales

### Evidence

Make decisions using better information

### Collaboration

Work with others across boundaries

### Long term

Fix the causes rather than the symptoms

### Connect

Focus on the economic, social and environmental benefits

### Transparency

Measure and report on the difference you make

This is one of a series of SD stories that can be found on the Welsh Government website at <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/sustainabledevelopment/>

The organisation employs 100 people, has 1600 properties, and an annual turnover of £7.5m. Cymdeithas Tai Eryri collaborates closely with the local authorities, other social enterprises, community groups, the private sector, and the Welsh Government.

### Why

Like many housing associations in Wales, Cymdeithas Tai Eryri was born out of a local concern for affordable housing and also uniquely a desire to maintain the Welsh language in the area. So even though this wasn't called sustainability at the time, from the outset Cymdeithas Tai Eryri's focus was on creating sustainable communities.

Community Initiatives Manager Dewi Llwyd Evans emphasised the importance of sustainable outcomes: 'there's no point having high standard houses if they are in communities where people don't want to live, or which aren't sustainable in their own right'. As part of its work, Cymdeithas Tai Eryri tries to provide work and training opportunities for unemployed and vulnerable people. It looks closely at its contribution to the local economy in terms of spend, contracting, procurement, sustainable development, and **focuses on the triple bottom line of social benefit, economy and the environment.**

Cymdeithas Tai Eryri is also finding that statutory levers and nudges from the Welsh Government, Europe, and from the housing and construction sector, are helping them focus on the right outcomes. Dewi Llwyd Evans mentioned how important sustainable development principles are for securing funding: "if you approach the funders, you clearly need to have an understanding of those things."

### What they did

Cymdeithas Tai Eryri consider planning for sustainable outcomes from the outset. In their current 2012-2015 business plan Tai Eryri have three core priorities:

- Developing Community Assets - providing high quality, sustainable community assets for social, economic and environmental benefit.
- Supporting Local Services - encouraging community action and social entrepreneurship in order to maintain local services.
- Good Governance and Management - ensuring effective governance and financial viability of the business and projects.

Under each priority specific strategic objectives are identified, which can be found in their corporate plan. Importantly, they know it is crucial to be financially independent while delivering comfortable and warm homes for their tenants and reducing their ecological and carbon footprint.

To deliver their objectives, working across departments is just part of what they do. The work stream for reducing carbon for instance brings together people from across the organisation who agree an annual work plan, with around 10 meetings a year and quarterly reports to the boards. Within this, there is a nominated coordinator and a board member who champion the carbon reduction and ensure progress is being made.

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In terms of tracking outcomes, Cymdeithas Tai Eryri already gather feedback and monitor tenant behaviours as part of their self-assessment for the Welsh Government, where their designed SMART objectives in the corporate plan feed into the reporting cycle. Despite this, Dewi Llwyd Evans still recognises the need to improve the quality of the information they capture: “we can put all the kit in and get the performance of the house to a much higher standard, but the tenant themselves might not see the financial benefit. There needs to be a more qualitative approach, looking at whether the tenant is warmer, happier and hopefully better off.”

They are now working with Bangor University to monitor installations and tenant experiences and see if the investment is having the desired impact.

### What changed

Cymdeithas Tai Eryri are seen as a leader in the field and have been pursuing new ground in much of the work they deliver. They have an innovative procurement model that uses social inclusion clauses, they were the first social landlord in north wales to build Code level 4 Homes, incorporating higher environmental measures and are now the first to begin building passivhaus houses.

### What obstacles existed

Funding cycles are a challenge for the organisation. Projects that rely on funding are very difficult to progress in the long term and often lose momentum.

Cymdeithas Tai Eryri are now focusing more on sustainable funding mechanisms and ways they can self-fund projects through schemes such as their [retro fit programme](#) and social enterprise models.

Working across departments has at times been an obstacle to progression. In order to ensure the cross-departmental working did not get lost, meetings were held where all departments needed to be represented.

Dewi Llwyd Evans: “if you’ve got the manager who is responsible for retro fit or the maintenance programme, you want that person in that meeting. Occasionally we’ve had to nominate to ensure attendance, but generally people are there because they’re committed to making something happen.” The passion and culture engrained for making a difference has been an important part of making progress.

“We research and look at what is happening in the field we are considering. Being able to show that someone else is already doing something similar makes it easier to show your ideas can work and aren't completely bonkers.”

Dewi Llwyd Evans

### What they learned

Leading the way has been an important part of how Cymdeithas Tai Eryri work, and allows them to build relationships with other organisations in the area.

“Because we’re seen as an innovator in the local area, we often work in partnership with others because we have done things differently.”

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"We've got people who generate ideas and want to try different things. As long as we can bring a business case and rationale that makes sense, senior management and our management board are willing to consider it. It is a creative environment and they are not risk averse. We are a social economy organisation run on business lines, this allows us to consider innovation as long as the business case is sound", according to Llwyd Evans.

## Listening to communities

Building evidence based on what communities are saying and doing has been a vital part of how Cymdeithas Tai Eryri works. Dewi Llwyd Evans says: "you start off with what your user group is actually interested in, what their needs are. What really helped win the arguments in terms of retro fit was the consultations with communities and tenant participation events. Tenants living in the off-gas areas were telling us they hated storage heaters, were using coal fires, and had cold, damp houses. As the tenants said this we clearly had to do something about it. We already had some ideas of where we wanted to go and these put together built a corporate rationale for doing what we are doing".

Cymdeithas Tai Eryri provides evidence as reasons for work to be done, rather than just doing things for ideological reasons.

## Delivering on the ground

"Policy documents with good intentions are not enough. You can put all the right words into the policy documents, yet often our collective actions belittle these documents. Whatever I can do at a local level I'll just get on with. There's a danger of just going from committee to committee and national meeting to meeting without getting things done", says Dewi Llwyd Evans.

### Contact and Links

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Cymdeithas Tai Eryri  
Corporate Plan and Vision  
Best foot forward case study  
Retro fit programme

"I believe that most organisations can find something in the sustainability agenda. Yes it will probably cost more but ask what are your core objectives in the first place? Social objectives are particularly important in the third sector and public sector - sustainability clearly has to be part of what you do to deliver them."

Dewi Llwyd Evans

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