

Beth Winter MP



June 2021 Report

In the last fortnight, Mark Drakeford has [made clear](#) that Wales is at the start of a **third wave of Covid**. There has now been a sustained week-on-week increase in the number of cases in Wales and the Delta variant has taken hold. Although cases remain relatively low in RCT compared to North Wales and other parts of the UK, we must remain vigilant and I fully support Mark Drakeford's decision to pause the relaxation of restrictions for now.

In the news again this month was the case of **Christopher Kapessa**. As you will remember, Christopher died after reportedly being pushed into the river Cynon in July 2019. It is now almost 2 years since Christopher's death and his mother Alina has not stopped campaigning for truth and justice. This month, I welcomed the [High Court ruling](#) that there could be Judicial Review into the CPS decision not to prosecute following Christopher's death on 5 grounds, including that the CPS decision "*failed to properly value human life*". A BBC documentary on the case was also aired this month, watch the documentary [here](#).

This month I held the first of three '[Cynon Climate Assemblies](#)', which was focused on **Green Jobs**. It was inspiring to hear Welsh Government Deputy Climate Change Minister Lee Waters MS, Professor Calvin Jones from Cardiff Uni and Jo Rees, Green Policy Officer at the Wales TUC. I thought the event was brilliant and demonstrated the appetite of local people to get involved and speak about green issues. The expertise and knowledge that we have in the Cynon Valley is immense and should not be underestimated. I am writing up all the brilliant ideas that arose from the session and will send these around in due course. The second instalment in the series will be held in July and will be focused on **Green Transport**. More detail will follow soon. I hope to see you all there! After the third event in September, I will compile the ideas into a '[Cynon Climate Manifesto](#)' to be submitted to COP26 and Boris Johnson in November.

This month, I was delighted that the rest of the Welsh Affairs Committee unanimously agreed my proposal to launch **an inquiry into the benefits system in Wales**. The inquiry is now taking evidence on the key challenges facing the benefits system in Wales, how they differ from the rest of the UK and how they have changed due to Covid. We will also be discussing the implications of the promised UBI pilot in Wales. Read the full terms of reference [here](#).

In Cynon

Despite the pause in relaxations to Covid restrictions, I have jumped at the chance to get **out and about** much more over the last couple of months.

There really is so much amazing work happening in the Valley and I see it as a pivotal part of my role to celebrate and promote that work. It was a pleasure to visit Cynon Valley Organic Adventures in Abercynon and Daerwynno outdoors centre near Ynysybwll. Most recently, I visited Bryn Gobaith Farm in Mountain Ash, where local people are working in partnership with Cardiff based refugee charity Oasis.

To mark **Volunteers Week**, I met with Cllrs Adam Fox and Ross Williams at Lee Gardens Pool in Penrhiwceiber, where I was also lucky enough to bump into Alfie Ford and Amy MacIntosh of Mountain Ash comprehensive school, whose incredible fundraising efforts saw them win £1000 each for charity from First Give UK.

Since my last update I have had a catch up in Aberdare with Cllr Steve Bradwick and one with Cllr Tina Williams in Godreaman. I did also walk through Aberdare with the local PCSO, speaking to local traders about some of the issues in Aberdare town centre and what people like me could be doing to help. I'm hoping to organise similar



With the brilliant volunteers at Lee Gardens Pool!

'walkthroughs' with other local PCSOs in the weeks and months ahead. I was shocked and horrified by the news of a stabbing this month in Aberdare town centre and my heart goes out to the victims, their families, the emergency services and all those impacted.

This month, **GTFM** launched their two new transmitters in Cynon Valley, I was delighted to be able to attend the launch event at the Sobell centre in Aberdare. A massive thank you to Terry, Gareth and all at GTFM for having me. Community radio is an absolutely vital resource for local people and since the launch I've enjoyed tuning to keep up with the news and views. You can listen to GTFM on 100.7 and 107.1FM. I also met this month with representatives from Hargreaves who are working on the regeneration of the Tower Colliery site.

My team have continued **building links** across the Cynon Valley. This month, we wrote to housing providers, to all groups who work with older people in Cynon and organised a meeting bringing together organisations who work in the Arts, Culture and Music sector. It has been an incredibly challenging time for the sector but it was great to hear from so many groups who are all looking forward and planning for the future. I have also begun visiting the various food banks and food pantries across the Cynon Valley who do such important work. I will be visiting more in the first two weeks of July so will update you on this next month.

Finally, my team are finalising a rolling programme of **street surgeries** which we will be undertaking in the months ahead, trying to get out across all the communities in the Cynon Valley. There is nothing worse than hearing 'We only see you at election time' so we will be out speaking with people about their concerns at every opportunity.

In the Bubble

This month I met with senior figures at RCT Council to discuss the Council's Cynon Valley application for '**Levelling Up**' from Westminster and I was able to submit a letter setting out my support for the application. I really appreciate that RCT Council actively consulted with me and involved me in the process, but I have real concerns about the design of the Levelling Up scheme and feel very strongly that Welsh Government should be heavily involved. The way Westminster has cut out our Welsh Government has been disgraceful. I set out my concerns both in a recent [Westminster Hall debate](#), and when questioning UK Ministers at a recent [Welsh Affairs sitting](#).

While he didn't turn up to that session, I did have the opportunity to ask questions of **Welsh Secretary** Simon Hart at a more recent sitting of the Committee, and pushed him again for assurances that there would be a three-way conversation between UK Govt, Welsh Govt and Local Authority leaders on the Levelling Up and Community Renewal Funds. In addition to that, I did take the chance to ask the Secretary of State for his views about Universal Basic Income. You can watch the whole of that session back [here](#).

From statutory sick pay to Universal Credit, our welfare system in the UK is completely inadequate, not least in a time of economic recovery. As I mentioned earlier, I was delighted that the Welsh Affairs Committee unanimously agreed to my proposal for an **inquiry into the benefits system in Wales**. The inquiry will look at whether welfare reform, including the devolution of social security responsibilities, are needed to the benefits system in Wales, and will explore the implications of the Welsh Govt UBI pilot.

This month marked my return to **Westminster**, where I asked COP26 President Alok Sharma about supporting developing countries with green transitions. I asked the Department of International Trade about arms exports to Israel and I asked Defra Minister George Eustice whether he would follow the lead of Welsh Government in committing to implement a Clean Air Act.

I've also asked several [written questions](#), including on child tax credits, Section 21 evictions, the Mineworkers Pension Scheme and the contaminated blood scandal. I'm really keen to follow constituents lead on questions so please send me your questions and I will raise them at Westminster.



Questioning COP26
President Alok Sharma

I met this month with Food Sense Wales to discuss **Free School Meals and the Right to Food** in Wales. You can read an article by Food Sense Wales about child food poverty [here](#). Since my last update I have written to new Education Minister Jeremy Miles about Free School Meals in Wales, expressing my passionately held belief that Free School Meal eligibility must be expanded to all those who receive Universal Credit. Jeremy responded that the eligibility threshold is currently under review. A change to the threshold would be a positive step however I believe that the criteria should be changed to include all of those on Universal Credit, rather than an arbitrary cut-off point. I will continue to push for this, and am delighted to have the support of CLP members in doing so, after the motion on the subject was passed unanimously at the last CLP meeting.

Rob's Review



Rob Hope
Senior Caseworker

Since my last update Sue Pickering has joined the team as a caseworker and Sue is taking on much of the new casework that comes into the office. Sue has vast experience in this line of work and is already proving to be a great addition to the team. I'm still doing casework but mostly cases that I have already been dealing with and have knowledge of.

The volunteer strategy that I spoke of last time is coming together. We are looking to have volunteers joining us in September (Covid permitting!) so it's important to ensure that we all know what role volunteers can play in the office and that a plan is in place to ensure that volunteers have full support and can make the most of their time with us. We are looking forward to welcoming some new faces soon! If you are interested in being one of them please let me or another member of the team know.

A major change in my role is a focus on

campaigning work. There are currently a number of specific campaigns that Beth and the team are keen to advance. We have been working closely with the Justice for Christopher Kapessa Campaign and as you may know there have been some significant developments with the campaign recently.

Tackling food poverty & food insecurity is a major priority for the team. A recent [report](#) on child poverty showed that **a third of all children in the Cynon Valley are growing up in poverty** and this is something that everyone in the team wants to challenge. There is though some fantastic work being done in the Cynon Valley and over the next month Beth & I will be visiting some of the food initiatives to learn about their work.

Finally, we are joining forces with Citizens Advice Rhondda Cynon Taf & Age Connect Morgannwg to raise awareness of the Department for Work and Pensions' decision to close Post Office card accounts for benefit and state pension payments in December. We also are seeking some discussions with the banking sector regarding banking provision in the Cynon Valley.

I'll let you know how we're getting on next time.

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