

Beth Winter MP



March 2021 Report

This month has seen a gradual relaxation of the [Covid restrictions](#), in line with the cautious, considered approach that Mark Drakeford and his team have taken since the beginning of the pandemic. Further easing of restrictions is expected in the weeks ahead, assuming Covid rates continue to fall. You can see FAQs covering the new restrictions [here](#). Covid rates remain low in RCT and one in two people in Cwm Taf Morgannwg have now had their first dose of one of the vaccine.

Early this month, we experienced an outpouring of grief and anger following the murders of both Sarah Everard, and much closer to home, Wenjing Lin. Male violence against women is an epidemic in our society and has been for too long. We cannot accept it any longer. Like many others I lit a candle on my [doorstep](#) and centred the families of the victims, and survivors everywhere in my thoughts. I spoke with Vaughan Roderick on [Radio Wales](#) about what we need to do now, and was pleased to sign Zarah Sultana's [letter](#) setting out some concrete actions that we could take now to fight this epidemic.

The police, crime, sentencing and courts bill passed at second reading in the Commons this month. This dreadful legislation would introduce worrying new restrictions on the ability to protest, handing new powers to the police and allowing Priti Patel to curtail protests if she judges them to be disruptive. The bill would further criminalise young black men and the way of life for many in the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community. This Bill takes completely the wrong approach to policing and justice and must be opposed. I want to give credit to Sisters Uncut who led magnificently in opposing the bill and forcing the Government to delay it.

There was good news locally this month as RCT Council Planning committee rejected the Enviroparks proposal to build a 90m stack at Hirwaun Industrial Estate. Although we must remain vigilant against future attempts to build the incinerator, this represents a massive victory for local people and local campaigners. The Valleys for Tourism not Trash Campaign group can be rightly proud of their achievements. I am proud to have played my small part.

In Cynon



Daffodils at St Johns Church in Aberdare this month

At the start of the month, Royal Mail delivered my leaflet to homes across the Cynon Valley, asking people for their priorities. The response from the community has been magnificent. I have received lots of brilliant suggestions. It's really important to me to recognise that nobody has all the answers but that the people who live in a community are best placed to resolve the problems that community faces. My team are in the

process of writing up a report on all the suggestions received and will circulate the report as soon as it is finished, read more about this in Tom's update on page 4. If you haven't received a leaflet, please let me know and tell me about your suggestions for my priorities in the years ahead.

My Economy Advisory Group also undertook a survey over the last month, this time of the business community in Cynon Valley. Responses are being collated and a handful of priorities for action have presented themselves, including analysing past attempts at regeneration, reviewing business rates and the shortage of funding and support available to small and micro businesses. If you are interested in getting involved in any of these streams of work, please get in touch. The economy group has a sub-group which is approaching how to make the Cynon Valley a better place to do business.

The Welfare Reform Advisory Group is prioritising work around the Work Capability Assessment (WCA) for ESA and PIP, the £20 uplift for Universal Credit and legacy benefits. The group will also be exploring what can be done to tackle food insecurity in Cynon Valley and support Ian Byrne MP's inspiring [Right to Food](#) campaign.

The 8th March was International Women's Day. I wanted to take the chance to celebrate the history of feminism in the Cynon Valley, which is deeply intertwined with the Labour and Trade Union movement. Read my piece celebrating two local women who have made an impact on this [here](#). I would encourage you to check out the ongoing exhibition, 'Women [and the Valleys in Lockdown](#)' at Cynon Valley Museum curated by local artist Karin Mear.

I have also attended meetings with Cllr Graham Thomas, Vikki Howells MS and representatives from Openreach to discuss the broadband situation in Penderyn. I want to pay tribute to Graham who has done much of the heavy lifting on this as we start to see improvements in the village.

I attended a meeting with Andrew Morgan, Deputy Minister Lee Waters and others about the reopening of the Abernant and Rhondda tunnels. It is my opinion that the Abernant tunnel has tremendous potential both as an active travel route for commuters between the Cynon and Merthyr Valleys and also a tourist attraction and I believe the project should be prioritised by Welsh Government. Finally, I had the privilege this month of attending a Year 12 public services lesson with Ysgol Gyfun Rhydywaun. Thank you to pupils for your brilliant questions!

In the Bubble

It has been a very busy, and very short sitting in parliament as we enter the Easter Recess. I was lucky enough to be called to ask the **Prime Minister** a question for the first time. I was keen to follow local people's lead in what I asked the Prime Minister and sourced a question from a resident called Lyndon who wanted to ask about the long-term neglect of the South Wales Valleys by consecutive Governments. [The reply](#) was, as usual was not satisfactory.



The Prime Minister answering Lyndon's PMQ

On the same day, the Chancellor delivered his Spring **budget**. Whilst I welcome the commitment to increase Corporation Tax and the extension of the Universal Credit uplift, the budget was noteworthy for what was missing from it. After a decade of Tory cuts, Cynon Valley and the UK needed a budget that outlined a vision of prosperity and green jobs fit for the

21st century. This wasn't it. Read my [statement](#) here. You can also watch my speech [here](#).

There were two things that stood out as local matters that were missing from the Budget. One was a support package for the aviation sector and another was anything on coal tip safety in Wales. **GE Aviation** in Nantgarw employs over 200 Cynon Valley residents and provides good apprenticeships to our young people. Downstream, the jobs that it provides are incredibly important to the South Wales Valleys. Uncertainty reigns in the sector and the Chancellor must come up with a sector specific deal to protect these highly skilled jobs. If the plant doesn't survive, we will have lost not only jobs and livelihoods, but also skills that could be vital for the green manufacturing jobs of the future.

I took the chance to ask Mark Drakeford about **coal tips** at Welsh Affairs Committee this month. He told me that the upkeep of the coal tips was a UK Govt responsibility, but that Treasury Ministers do not accept that. This impasse must be broken, and those coal tips must be made safe against future extreme weather events. I will continue to push the case on this. Watch the session [here](#).

Another issue I raised with Mark Drakeford was the way that UK Government have behaved towards devolved administrations over the course of the pandemic. It was startling to hear him describe the Internal Market Act and Shared Prosperity Fund as "**Poisoning the well** of intergovernmental relations". Watch the whole session [here](#).

I also spoke this month in a debate on **pneumoconiosis**. In preparing for this debate, I found shocking evidence that the death rate in post-industrial towns and the former coalfields is 30% above the UK average. This could have played a real part in the RCT having one of the highest Covid death tolls in the UK. Watch my contribution [here](#).

Very briefly I want to extend my solidarity to striking PCS members at **DVLA** in Swansea and to striking GMB members in relation to the **British Gas** attempts to Fire and Rehire. Finally, I want to celebrate that the asylum camp in Penally is now closed. The disused barracks were not fit for human habitation and the other barracks used by the Home Office in Napier must also now close.

Tom's Comms



Tom Bateman
Communications
Officer

Something that always frustrates on the doorstep is hearing about how “we only ever see you at election time”. We think it is incredibly important to be constantly campaigning across our communities, letting people know that Beth is here to help, and is listening to them.

Getting out and campaigning has been made a lot more complicated by Covid, it has resulted in a strong emphasis on social media. We are very conscious that not everyone is on social media and therefore need to do more to reach people who are not online.

Over the first part of this year, we put together a leaflet which was delivered across the Cynon Valley (Diolch Royal Mail!). It was important for us to give people the opportunity to let Beth know about their priorities. The response from our communities has been

outstanding. We have been inundated with responses, people returning their slips to the office, emailing, messaging through Facebook and ringing up to speak about their priorities.

There are a few common themes, people want to talk about Jobs, about our town centres, about the local environment and about public transport. The response to this leaflet serves as a reminder that the people who live in a community are best placed to understand and resolve the problems that community faces.

As well as problems, we have a huge amount to shout about here, and we often do ourselves a disservice. It is a key priority for Beth to make sure that we properly celebrate the positives here in Cynon Valley. This leaflet gave people the opportunity to nominate something they felt we should celebrate more. People wanted to celebrate the natural beauty and tourism potential of our area, as well as the tightknit and welcoming nature of the people, and the community spirit that has been on show since the start of the pandemic.

As an office, we are now writing up the responses into a report which we will share as soon as we can. This will inform Beth's campaigning priorities in the months and years ahead.

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What are **Your Priorities** for Cynon Valley?

One of my key election pledges was **“to be a visible and available local MP, working in the interests of the communities of the Cynon Valley.”**

That means listening to the people of the Cynon Valley. Please let me know below what you think my priorities should be in the months and years ahead!

Priority 1:

Priority 2:

Priority 3:

Something in Cynon that we should celebrate more:



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