



March 2022 Newsletter

There's nowhere else to start but Putin's invasion of **Ukraine**. Like colleagues from across the political spectrum, I condemn Putin's war of aggression in the strongest possible terms. I know we are all keeping the Ukrainian people in our hearts as they continue to fight for their country in the face of such senseless aggression.

This month, Volodomyr Zelenskyy became the [first foreign leader ever](#) to speak directly to MPs in the House of Commons. I found his speech very moving. Closer to home, I was one of hundreds of people who attended a rally in Pontypridd to express solidarity with Ukraine. Over £1600 was raised at the event for the Ukrainian people, to add to the millions that have been sent from Wales already. People in the Valleys have not forgotten what real solidarity looks like.

There has been a huge interest from people willing to take in a Ukrainian refugee, in Cynon Valley and across Wales. Wales has 5% of the UK population, but 10% of the people who have offered to open their homes to refugees. I was moved by Mick Antoniw MS' speech to Welsh Labour conference; 'Whoever you are or wherever you come from, refugees are welcome in Wales... we have a duty to all refugees as we do our own families'. The world has been a dangerous place for far too long for so many people – innocent men, women and children, from Yemen, to Afghanistan to Syria, and it has become even more dangerous now. I fully support the call of the UN General Secretary for peace and diplomacy to end this destructive war. You can record your interest in

sponsoring a refugee on the Homes for Ukraine website, homesforukraine.campaign.gov.uk

The Ukraine crisis has had a knock-on impact on the already out of control **cost-of-living crisis** we face. However, it's important not to let Boris Johnson hide behind the Ukraine crisis as the reason for people struggling. The Tories have created this, the worst cost of living crisis in at least 30 years. **They must own it, and they must fix it.**

Fuel prices have rocketed, food prices are going up. Energy prices are expected to go up 14 times faster than wages. At the same time, the Tories are bringing forward a National Insurance Rise, and a real terms cut in benefits.

As always, the poorest in our communities bear the brunt of it. As I said in the House this month, we need to shift the burden to those who can afford it. That means taxing wealth, and using that money to protect working class people from the cost of living crisis. Labour Outlook wrote up that speech [here](#).

This is such an important priority for me in the months ahead. If you are struggling to pay the bills, please contact me. I will do what I can to help, but I also think real stories from real people will help me get the point across to Tory Ministers in Parliament. They are so [out of touch](#), I honestly think they do not understand the difficulties people are facing.

Welsh Labour conference was this month and it was great to spend some time with comrades from across Wales for the first time since becoming an MP! I spoke at events by Welsh [Labour Grassroots](#) and [Unite Community](#).

In Cynon

I joined RCT Labour comrades speaking at the Solidarity with Ukraine rally in Pontypridd this month. The generosity of local people has been incredible, with £1600 raised to add to the millions already sent to Ukraine from Wales. [On my website](#) I have collated the various organisations you can donate to that will make the biggest difference. At this time, the advice remains to **donate cash, rather than goods** due to logistical issues in getting goods to where they are needed at the moment.

March is **Women's History Month** and March 8th was International Women's Day. To mark Women's History Month, a statue of writer and feminist **Elaine Morgan** was unveiled in Mountain Ash. This is only the second statue to a named woman in Wales and the second in a series of Welsh women to be honoured in this way as part of the Monumental Welsh women.

Cynon Valley Museum held a 'Women and the Valleys' exhibition this month and I really enjoyed the amazing opening night. There was also an event at St Elvan's to pay tribute to Ann Clwyd.

I am continuing to host street stalls for **WASPI** women in Cynon Valley. Last month I held one in Aberdare and this month I am in Mountain Ash, ahead of Abercynon in April. This is a crucial campaign that seeks to right historic wrongs about how women have been and continue to be treated.

This month, **Barclays** closed their Aberdare branch. I met with representatives from Barclays to discuss the closure and how they plan to continue serving their loyal Cynon Valley customers. I'm glad that they will now retain a presence and will set up in the CORE co-working space that is set to open on Victoria Square soon. Once the CORE opens, Barclays will be there from 9:30am until 4pm Mon - Weds. Thanks to Ann, Dawn and Jim from Our Aberdare BID for making this happen.

The BID must also be congratulated for their work on delivering **Welcome to Aberdare signs** at main routes into the town, featuring the slogan 'Town of Song'. We can be incredibly proud of our musical heritage in Cynon Valley but don't always make enough of it. It was also Fiver Fest this month, with town centre businesses offering great £5 deals to encourage people to come into the town centre. Every £1 spent in our town centres will circulate in the local economy much longer than money spent at online giants and supermarkets. **Shop local!**

Everybody in Cynon Valley should be able to access their own money without being charged to take it out. Cwmaman didn't have a **free cash machine** until Cllr Tina Williams and I requested one this month. Link got back to us straight away and a cash machine in the village was changed from charging to free to use overnight. **Please get in touch if you struggle to access cash in your community** and I will chase it up with Link.

In addition to my regular meetings, this month I visited RCT Domestic Abuse Services, St Fagans Trecynon and joined YEPS on an outreach session at Aberdare skate park.



Speaking at the Solidarity with Ukraine rally in Pontypridd



The unveiling of the Elaine Morgan statue in Mountain Ash



At the newly 'Free to Use' cash machine in Cwmaman with Cllr Tina Williams

In The Bubble

Ukraine has rightly dominated up in parliament this month.

As with any war, there is a clear moral duty on all nations to take our share of **refugees**. I understand that the Foreign Office was preparing for a potential Russian invasion of Ukraine as early as November last year. Considering that, the lack of preparedness from the Home Office to help people enter the UK has been unacceptable. We saw the outrageous scenes of people [queuing in the snow](#) outside UK visa centres in Poland, only to be told there were no appointments, with only a handful of visas issued. When the schemes were finally launched, [according to Andrew Morgan](#), they were 'a mess, unclear and changing almost daily'.

Once again, **Wales has shown the way**. I [asked First Minister Mark Drakeford](#) during a Welsh Affairs Committee session, about the UK Government's response to the refugee crisis. His response was clear and strong; UK Govt are doing huge damage to the UK's reputation and more importantly, are causing huge distress to people who need our help.

During the same session, I also asked the First Minister about **coal tips**. [He was clear](#) that if absolutely necessary, Welsh Government would find the money to make the coal tips safe but that he felt it was clear that UK Government should foot the bill.

This month, the Welsh Affairs Committee published [our report](#) into the **Welfare Benefits system in Wales**. We made a series of strong recommendations, including bringing back the £20 Universal Credit uplift, extending it to legacy benefits, increasing statutory sick pay and expanding eligibility, increasing benefits in line with inflation and exploring devolving the administration of some benefits. The UK Government must respond to the report and I will be pushing hard for these recommendations.

I must mention the disgusting **mass firing of P&O workers** by [video link](#). P&Os entire British crew, over 800 people, were fired on the spot by zoom and met with security guards at the docks to escort workers off the boat. This must be a line in the sand. We must not accept this, we must not allow ourselves to become a country where employers feel they can treat their staff in this way with impunity. Workers must fight back. [Join a Trade Union](#).

Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe and **Anoosheh Ashoori** were finally released this month after years of imprisonment in Iran. As Nazanin said in her first public statement, it should never have taken five foreign Secretaries or six years to get her home.

In a speech this month, I called on UK Government to **cancel the planned National Insurance hike** and shift the burden for fixing our social care system onto the wealthy. Watch that speech [here](#).

As I write this, the Chancellor has just announced his **spring statement**. He has tinkered at the edges and missed a vital opportunity to help the poorest and most vulnerable in our society. He has done nothing to address the imbalance between the wealthy and the poorest in the UK. No wealth tax, no windfall tax, no uplift to Universal Credit, benefit rises capped at way below inflation. What a mess of an uncaring Government!

Finally, on St Davids Day, I was delighted to [recite some poetry](#) from Jacob Davies in an **International Mother Language debate**. A rare opportunity to speak Welsh in the chamber!



Signing the book of Solidarity with Ukraine



but that is not sufficient

Mark Drakeford responding to my question on Coal Tips



Speaking some Welsh in the Mother tongue debate on Saint David's Day.

Davies' Diary



Yvette Davies
Office Manager

Since my last column, we have made a lot of progress as a team and we've also grown as a team. Julia Silezin will be joining permanently as a Support Officer from 18 April having previously been helping out one day a week.

Beth's parliamentary assistant Ben will be working full time with us from later in April having previously been part-time.

Our capacity as a team will therefore be growing, which is lucky because we are noticing a definite uptick in correspondence at the moment. The phones are busier than they've ever been. This reflects Beth's growing profile, but unfortunately also the huge impact of the rising cost-of-living on our communities.

We do what we can to help, but Beth is also keen to use her position to make clear to Ministers the scale of the problem. To that end, we are

running a Cost of Living survey, which you can fill in on Beth's website [here](#). Physical copies can also be collected from the constituency office.

In February, we had two team away days to work on where we want to go and what we want to achieve for Cynon Valley. Rachel Rowlands acted as a facilitator for us for two days of forward planning, with Ben travelling up from London for the first time.

Unfortunately, we were cut short as we were interrupted by Storm Eunice and the red warnings meant we could not travel safely to the venue.

Rachel is now working with us going forward to build and develop the strengths of the Team.

The end of the financial year has been an especially very busy time for me, with accounts to settle and budgets to finalise for the year ahead.

In addition to this, and to managing the team, a strong focus for me recently has been the Cynon Valley economy research by the Bevan Foundation.

There are now nine task and finish groups beginning streams of work to turn recommendations into action. I have been co-ordinating this effort and leading on four of the task and finish groups. Tom has even used photos I took to promote the research on social media, see below!

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The team with facilitator Rachel Rowlands on our away day at Daerwynno

The Cynon Valley economy research which I am leading on

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