



APRIL 2023 NEWSLETTER



April began with a **cost-of-living solidarity fundraiser** event I organised along with RCT Trades Council at Jacs Aberdare. The Trades Council elected to split the proceeds between the main Trussell Trust foodbanks covering Rhondda Cynon Taf. I was delighted that we were able to raise **more than £2300** for the foodbanks!

Local musicians Jeff Japers, Cripplecreek and DJ Gareth Hopkins play at Jacs Aberdare. The local acts all played for free and the venue Jacs also waived their fee, which meant every penny raised from ticket sales could go to the foodbanks.

Local businesses also played their part, donating raffle prizes which helped raise hundreds of pounds. Grey Trees, Penderyn Distillery, Flowers by Joy, Amore restaurant, Ty Newydd country hotel, Mirror Image Salon, Zipworld, Tesco, ASDA all contributed raffle prizes.

I was blown away by the generosity and camaraderie of local people who bought a ticket and came along on the night, but also the generous donations from unions, businesses and the brilliant artists themselves who played for free.

It was beautiful to see all different parts of our community come together to show solidarity to those most in need. **From each according to their ability, to each according to their needs.** That is an approach that is deeply ingrained here in the South Wales Valleys.

I spoke to Cleide from Merthyr Cynon

foodbank about the amount raised and she seemed genuinely overwhelmed by the donation, which she said came at a critical time and would make a massive difference.

Thank you to everybody who came along, I hope you had a good night. You can read about the event on GTFM's website [here](#). Credit to Daniel Le Brun for the photos.

That weekend was the start of a two-week recess from parliament for Easter, so I have been able to spend the majority of April at home in Cynon Valley rather than in parliament.

I hope you all enjoyed a lovely and peaceful Easter and were able to join some of the Easter events around the constituency.

Our Aberdare BID and the Aberdare market company ran events over Easter weekend with Easter egg hunts, craft workshops and more for young people. The BID has been around for a few years now and is making a real impact in the town centre in my opinion, from the planters around the town and the new 'Town of Song' signs to a calendar of events like those which took place over Easter. Thank you to BID manager Angharad and everybody connected with the BID for all your hard work.

I know RCT Council are currently working hard on their Aberdare town centre regeneration plan, which you can expect to hear more about in the weeks and months ahead.



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CYNON VALLEY ECONOMY

We have continued to make progress on the work we are doing on the local economy behind the scenes. This month we received the feasibility study on the idea of a Cynon Valley Development Trust, with that piece of work paid for by Welsh Government. I will be meeting with key stakeholders in the weeks ahead to work on next steps.

This piece of work has grown from the research I commissioned into the local economy back in 2021. You can read that research on the Bevan Foundation website [here](#).

Another piece of work coming out of the Bevan research is the idea of officially designating Cynon Valley a 'Fair Pay Valley'. I have continued to discuss this with Cynnal Cymru and will hopefully have more to report in a future newsletter.

CASEWORK

We have had an uptick in casework to do with utility companies this month. If you are having issues with your gas or electric companies, I'd like to hear about it.

I've been upset to hear from agencies about the number of disabled people who have been turning off medical equipment due to the cost of running them. This should not be happening in a rich country and I have tabled some written questions to Ministers on this issue.

Another issue which has arisen from constituents is that of armed forces accommodation. I asked written questions about this and received a shocking confirmation from the Minister, that hundreds of homes were left without heating for days at a time over the winter. You can read about this in the i newspaper and on my Facebook page. If you or anyone you know has experience of this, please get in touch.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Below is just a handful of the brilliant events coming up in Cynon Valley in the month of May:

- **Wonderful Women** at Mountain Ash Town Hall - 2nd May
- Ex-rugby player **Mike Phillips** at Mountain Ash golf club on 5th May to raise funds for Rowan Tree Cancer Care.
- **Aberdare Festival** at Aberdare park on 6th May, organised by RCT Council.
- **Charity Night at Cwmdare Club** to raise money for Signposted Cymru on 13th May.
- **Matilda** at Cwmaman Arts Centre from 18th - 20th May.
- **Gwanwyn Festival** at Hirwaun Village Hall - 20th May.
- **Cilfynydd History Event** at the Community Centre - 21st May





CYNON VALLEY

This month I caught up with Margaret and Ray Morgan from Cilfynydd. Ray was a miner and Margaret has been a ferocious campaigner on the **Mineworkers Pension Scheme** for many years. UK Government makes no contributions to the Mineworkers Pension Scheme but has received over £4 billion in surpluses. Meanwhile the current average pension for former miners in the scheme is £84 a week. I have consistently called for the ex-miners to receive a higher proportion of the surplus and will continue to campaign on this.

As well as the events in Aberdare, I was able to attend an Easter event organised by the brilliant **Cwmbach Action Group**. The event was well attended by residents of all ages, with activities including crafts, Easter bonnet competition, Easter drawing & colouring, Easter egg hunt and of course a visit from the Easter Bunny. Thank you to Wendy Gane and all the Cwmbach Action group for inviting me.

This month, **Hirwaun & Penderyn Community Council** organised an event to share information with residents about the cost-of-living crisis. It was a well-attended event, with stalls from lots of local advice agencies. I know most properties in the ward were leafleted so residents had the opportunity to come along and hear about the support that is out there at this difficult time.

There is always so much good stuff going on in Cynon Valley. As I am in London Monday—Thursday, I am limited in how much I can attend, but I want to support all the amazing local groups and the work they are doing. You can find my weekly **post promoting upcoming events** pinned to the top of my Facebook page.

We have been holding '**Cuppa and a cake**' events in my office on a fortnightly basis. These will now move to monthly, and will always feature a guest agency to discuss the work that they do. This week, we are playing host to Fleur from Age Connects Morgannwg to speak about all the work they do in the community. Keep an eye on my Facebook page to keep up to date with upcoming events in the office.

We also welcomed PCSOs this month for the regular '**Cuppa with a Copper**' events in the office. These are a really useful opportunity for local people who have issues they would like to raise with the police. In my experience these tend to be to do with anti-social behaviour, or with traffic and parking. If you have something you would like to raise with the police, or would like me to raise on your behalf, please get in touch. The next cuppa with a copper in my office is scheduled for **xyz**.

At the start of the month I popped to **Aberdare TESCO** to spend an hour chatting and listening to local people as part of my regular schedule of pop-up stalls. Next month I will be in Aberdare market.

I also had the privilege of dropping into **Mountain Ash YMCA** and caught up with Tony from MAS training who was delivering first aid training as part of their security training.

Back in March, I took part in a sponsored walk in memory of Chloe Christopher, organised by her mam Michelle. We found out this month that as well as raising lots of awareness about the dangers of sepsis, the walk **raised over £4,700 for the UK Sepsis Trust!** All credit to the inspirational Michelle Christopher on an incredible achievement!



Cost-of-living event at Hirwaun Village Hall



'Cuppa with a copper' in my office with Cllr Dunn



With Derek the Weather & Cllr Williams after UK Sepsis walk



IN PARLIAMENT

Jeremy Miles this month announced that the **Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) in Wales** would be rising from £30 a week to £40 a week. Wales has become the first Govt in the UK to increase the payment, which was scrapped in England in 2010. **This is the difference a Labour Government can make.**

I have since moved a motion in the Commons celebrating the decision, calling for it to be regularly increased from now on, and calling on the UK Government to follow Wales' lead and re-instate the payment. The [Early Day Motion](#) has now been signed by several Labour and independent MPs and was covered by Nation.Cymru [here](#).

I will continue to use my platform at Westminster to celebrate the progressive policies here in Wales. The Tories meanwhile are determined to attack the record of our Welsh Labour Government, and are quite happy to completely distort the truth to do so.

Around 290 care leavers in Wales receive £1600 a month as part of a **basic income pilot**. Disgustingly, Tories are trying to attack Welsh Govt because a very small proportion of these are unaccompanied asylum seekers leaving local authority care. I am so proud of Wales's ambition to be a **Nation of Sanctuary** with a caring and compassionate approach to asylum seekers. The UK Govt's response is shameful and I urge them to reflect and show some humanity.

The Tories know that as it stands, they will lose the next general election. They are playing fast and loose with the truth, and the law, to try and find some sort of electoral advantage. We must confront their lies and stand up for the positive record of our Welsh Labour Govt.

The General Election cannot come soon enough. This Tory Govt is doing nothing to tackle the cost of living crisis, or the growing gap between rich and poor in the UK. Ministers are hiding (and being sacked for bullying) and they continue to refuse to negotiate with trade unions to bring to an end the industrial unrest in the country.

We need now a Labour Government with policies that can transform this country – from a redistribution of the wealth that exists in very few hands, to protecting the hard-won terms and conditions of our workers, as well as their right to strike. I am so proud to have stood alongside so many workers on the picket lines, here in Cynon Valley, outside Prince Charles Hospital, in Cardiff, Swansea and in London.

With parliament not sitting for most of April, there is not much parliamentary activity to report. I have continued to ask **written questions** of Ministers as usual. This month I asked questions on the use of cages in animal agriculture and received answers to previous questions about Child Benefit and Lasting Power of Attorney. You can read all these questions and answers on the parliament website [here](#).

The [Welsh Affairs Committee](#) reports into Nuclear in Wales, Water Quality in Wales and Broadcasting in Wales continue, and a new inquiry into the defence industry in Wales is also now beginning. The [PACAC committee](#) which I am also a member of is continuing with several inquiries, including into lobbying, civil service staff and scrutiny of international treaties. The Committee is also now accepting evidence on the status of the UK's 'Overseas Territories'.

I have also signed **Early Day Motions** from my colleagues, including on knife crime and housing conditions in the private rented sector.

