

Christina Rees MP

Monthly Report - October 2017



Rhianna's Swing Visits Parliament

Local charity raises awareness of important project

Rhianna Chellew was just 8 years old when she was diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumour which quickly resulted in her being wheelchair bound. Rhianna's parents took her to Ynysanghared Park in Pontypridd, which has a disabled access swing. It meant the world to her to be able to join her able-bodied friends on some of the equipment. She enjoyed so much that her parents looked for other playgrounds with similar equipment but there were not any in Wales.

Heartbreakingly, Rhianna passed away surrounded by her family on the 23rd June 2016. As a legacy, family and friends have set up "Rhianna's Swing" a charity aiming to source funding to establish a fully accessible play area in Gnoll Park. Keen to support the project, Christina has been working to raise awareness (and help raise funds), including hosting an MP's drop-in in Parliament, which was attended by members from across both Houses.



It was wonderful to see the return of Neath Food and Drink Festival this year, where local producers and the town were showcased.



I was delighted to support the "Wear It Pink" campaign to raise awareness of breast cancer



I was very happy to pledge my support for British and Welsh farming and recognise their economic contribution

THE GREAT SEPTEMBER FAIR IN NEATH

The 737th Great September Fair arrived in Neath to yet another warm welcome and massive crowds. Apart from a torrential downpour on the Saturday, the week was blessed with fine weather, drawing in people from afar and raising Neath's profile. A particular mention for Mrs. Margaret Coleman and the Showman's Guild for the work they do in providing rides for children with special needs from schools across Neath.



BEVAN SOCIETY ANNUAL LECTURE

This year's Bevan Society Annual Lecture was yet another brilliant event. Held in Parliament's Portcullis House, the lecture has become a much-anticipated date in the calendar and this year's was no exception. Professor John Bew gave a scintillating talk on the politics of Clement Atlee, the longest serving Labour Leader and widely regarded as one of the greatest Prime Ministers in history. As a biographer of Atlee, Professor Bew gave an overview of his early life, role as leader of the opposition, and ascent to Prime Minister of a post war Government that delivered the welfare state, National Health Service, a programme of house building never before seen, and a series of social reforms.



Christina Rees MP calls on the Government to back Tidal Lagoon

Shadow Secretary of State for Wales continues to apply pressure

The Tory Government's reluctance to back the Swansea Bay Tidal Lagoon is no secret. Despite many months (even years) of halfhearted support as well as their own independent review making a compelling case to back the scheme, they continue to refuse to make the commitment needed to drive forward a project that will have a huge impact on the local economy and region.

Following the launch by local stakeholders of the #lovethelagoon campaign, Shadow

Secretary of State for Wales Christina Rees wrote to Welsh Secretary Alun Cairns, calling on him to not let the tidal lagoon follow rail electrification to Swansea as another broken promise. Christina Rees said, "I offer Mr. Cairns every support in achieving this end [tidal lagoon] and ask again that we meet at the earliest opportunity to discuss the matter further".

Having been passed to a Minister in the Department for Business Energy and Industry Strategy, it is an all too familiar response dismissing my calls for the Government to step up and deliver this much needed project that has been backed by their own independent review. It is yet another example of the Secretary of State failing to stand up for Wales.

WELSH LABOUR HEARTLANDS PROJECT

Following last year's Assembly election, Welsh Labour established a Heartlands Project to support campaigning in the more traditionally safer seats across south Wales. The latest event took place this past month in Merthyr's Redhouse, and involved a political overview from Alun Davies AM, Minister for Lifelong Learning and Welsh Language, who is leading the Welsh Government's Valleys Taskforce, as well as excellent training on working with new members, being a treasurer and getting the most out of CLP meetings. The project seeks to strengthen Labour's heartland constituencies and ensure we continue to win elections.





VALLEYS TASKFORCE

Following on from a summer of consultation, engagement and research, the Valleys Taskforce has published a high-level plan titled *Our Valleys, Our Future*. Building on the event held in April, as well as the Pathfinder project based in Banwen and Glynneath, the taskforce held a discussion on its plan in Dove Workshop. The event, attended by the Minister for Lifelong Learning and Welsh Language Alun Davies AM, involved key stakeholders from the Neath and Dulais Valleys in an effort to seek their views on the plan. This process will help inform the Delivery Plan which will include specific, practical actions on the three key themes of good quality jobs and the skills to do them, better public services, and my local community.

UNIVERSAL CREDIT ROLL OUT

Labour wins Commons vote on pausing the roll-out of Universal Credit

This past month saw Theresa May suffer fresh embarrassment over the Government's flagship benefit reform after Labour secured a symbolic victory in Parliament which has exposed the deep discomfort over the policy from even the Tories' own backbenchers.

Following a mass abstention on the vote from Tory MPs, the Labour motion demanding the Government delay the roll-out of Universal Credit passed with no opposition.

The vote came on the same day as the Government were forced to lower the fees charged for the Universal Credit helpline after it was revealed some people paid 55p a minute to get advice and support.

Christina said: "I'm delighted we've won the symbolic vote on pausing Universal Credit. It is by no means the end of the campaign, and we will continue to ensure the Government gets the details of the roll-out correct. I'm proud of the work carried out by the Shadow Welsh Team in fighting the pernicious elements of the flawed policy."



WELSH GOVERNMENT BUDGET

On 3rd October, Welsh Labour Government Finance Secretary Mark Drakeford AM laid the draft budget for the year ahead, which has been developed against a backdrop of unprecedented and ongoing austerity, and 7% lower in real terms by the end of the decade than it was in 2010/11 - £1.2bn less to spend on public services. Despite this, Welsh Labour is pursuing a proudly progressive agenda, including £70m over 2 years for a flagship childcare offer; an extra £10m to tackle homelessness each year; an extra £40m to accelerate the 21st Century Schools programme. The Finance Secretary also announced new progressive rates for a Land Transaction Tax, which will replace stamp duty in Wales from 2018.

- An additional £450m over two years for NHS Wales
- An extra £16m in each of the next two years for the new treatment fund
- An additional £90m for the NHS Wales capital programme over three years

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