



## FIRST MINISTER CELEBRATES PONTY SCHOOL'S SUCCESS

It was great to see the First Minister placing such an emphasis on the PONT project, with a special mention for pupils from Pontypridd High School. The Tories meanwhile would scrap support for the scheme. Find out why I think they're wrong on Page 2.



## BEDROOM TAX

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I'm continuing to back the campaign to get rid of this hated tax on some of the poorest people in our communities.



## FOOD HYGEINE SCORES

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Food hygiene scores across Pontypridd and Llantrisant have improved dramatically as a result of the introduction of the Food Hygiene Rating (Wales) Act 2013.



## APPRENTICES

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I've highlighted the outstanding success of Pontypridd apprentices at First minister's questions.



## UKRAINE

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I visited Ukraine as part of an EU Committee of the Regions Delegation. The crisis there continues to deepen.

Contact details on back page



## Successful Challenge To the Hated Bedroom Tax

The UK government has now confirmed that tenants who have lived in the same property since the beginning of 1996 and have been in continuous receipt of housing benefit are exempt from the Bedroom Tax, this also applies to those who have inherited a tenancy on the same basis.

challenge, but the Tory/Lib Dem government is intent on members of society. It is a grossly unfair tax.

I welcome this successful legal challenge continuing to attack the poorest mem-

Despite the reprieve for some the Tory / Lib Dem government is however likely to re-write the legislation. This government will not be happy until it has dismantled everything about our society which is fair and just. They shouldn't be closing loopholes in the policy, they should be tearing it up. If they don't, the next Labour Government will.

## Under-25 housing benefit

I've strongly attacked the Tory/Lib Dem government's plans to withdraw housing benefit from under 25s in a question to the First Minister.

It's clear that the Tory party is intent on a sustained attack on the most vulnerable in our society. The disabled, the poor and the low-paid have all been targeted, now it seems that a new front has been opened up and this time they have the young in their sights.

If progressed, this will impact more than four hundred young adults and young families in Pontypridd and more than twenty thousand across Wales.

It means that these families could face homelessness at a time when there are significant employment challenges and a cost-of-living crisis.

It's not acceptable for the Lib Dems to stand on the touchline and say they would do things differently. They are in government so must take responsibility.



## PONT project

Following his visit to Uganda, Carwyn Jones said, "I was privileged to see the fantastic improvements made to Bubutu High School through the efforts of staff and pupils of Pontypridd High School."

So I was appalled at Tory pledge to cut funding to Uganda and the consequences for the hugely successful PONT project.

I believe that Welsh Tory Leader, Andrew RT Davies' pledge to scrap Welsh Government funding to Uganda is not only a failure of compassion, it's a failure of logic and insight too.

The Tories completely miss the point. They don't understand that the benefits that flow from projects like PONT are two-way.

The community in Mbale benefit from the transfer of skills and the hundreds of volunteers from our constituency benefit in terms of personal and career development.

For many the experience is truly life-changing.



## Food hygiene scores

**In 2011 the food hygiene scores across catering outlets in Pontypridd were disappointing, with just 35 awarded the top score of five.**

We now have 82 outlets in the Taff-Ely area that have been awarded the top score, that's an improvement of more than 200%.

Taff-Ely also had the one of the highest number of zero scores in Wales, so the reduction from 14 to 2 is very encouraging. Our average score is now 3.6, which is a very good base from which to push on.

To have 87% of our catering businesses scoring three or more is a credit to the way owners and employees across the constituency have risen to the challenge.

We need to celebrate their success, but we also need to acknowledge that there are still improvements to be made.

I helped scrutinise the legislation and when it was introduced in Wales in 2013 some people were sceptical. But with these results there can be no doubting the significant contribution this Welsh Government initiative has made, both to public health and in helping people to make an informed choice when purchasing prepared food.

You can find out how the businesses near you are performing via:

**[www.scoresonthedoors.org.uk](http://www.scoresonthedoors.org.uk)**

## You're hired!

**I welcome the success of apprentices in the Pontypridd constituency and across Wales, who are out-performing their English counterparts.**

In 2011/12 . 85% of apprentices in Pontypridd completed their apprenticeships, which compares favorably with the English average which fell to 74%

Even better news is that 90% of our apprentices go on to secure sustained employment or further training. For level 3 apprentices the figure is one of the best in the UK at a fantastic 97%"

This means that in 2012, almost 300 people in Pontypridd and Llantrisant gained high-quality skills and employment or further training,

Only 1% of those completing their apprenticeship go on to be unemployed after three months. This is a tremendous result and testimony to the excellence of both the apprentices and the Welsh Government's Jobs Growth Wales strategy.

The Tory Government is failing young people. I'm really proud that in Wales we have a strategy that is leaving nobody behind.



## Community sport

**I Chaired a meeting on community ownership of sport earlier in January.**

I was impressed with the role the Supporters Direct has played in helping the community take ownership of clubs like Merthyr Town FC.

I've had a positive response from the Minister who is willing to help establish a Supporters Direct Cymru which I'm sure will be of great benefit to community ownership groups across Wales.

# Letter to Members from Mick

*Dear Comrade,*

*The key issue over the last month has been dealing with the human impact from the numerous Tory attacks on the poorest, such as the bedroom tax, which has affected many constituents. I've been campaigning against this at the Assembly and against the Tory proposal to withdraw housing benefit from under-25s, which would affect 400 families in Pontypridd. The Tory agenda remains clear—squeeze the poorest, whilst their 'crack-down' on tax evasion by the richest— totalling £billions - has yet to materialise.*

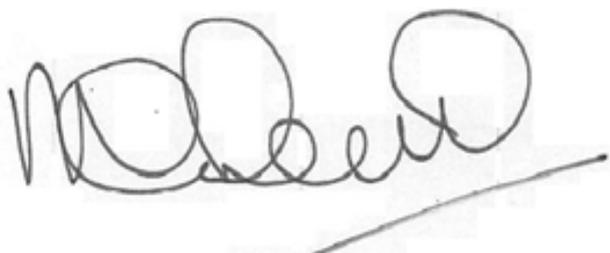
*Over the last month there's been a great deal of profile for Pontypridd internationally. This newsletter mentions both the First Minister's visit to Uganda and my own EU visit to Ukraine. Foreign politics can seem a little remote from people, especially when there's so much to do domestically, but whilst improving services and fighting the Tory cuts remain my priority, we need to remember that it's a small, inter-connected world, with which Wales must engage if it is to prosper.*

*Finally, I'd like to bring to your attention the organised street surgery schedule, which takes Owen and I to every part of the constituency.*

*There's a European election this year followed quickly by General, Assembly and RCT elections, so it's really important that as many members as possible get involved. Please come along if you can.*

*You'll find the schedule on the reverse of this letter together with my contact details if you need to get in touch.*

*Yours,*

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Mick', written in a cursive style. The signature is positioned at the bottom of the letter, below the 'Yours,' text.

## CONTACTS

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### Other contacts

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Herald story hotline: 07976 412546

### Meetings

## DIARY

The next constituency all-member meetings are **on 14 & 21 February at 7pm**. We meet every month at GMB House, Morgan Street, Pontypridd and all members are welcome.

### Street Surgery

Owen and I have a programme of street surgeries across the constituency. Please come and join us for an hour. The upcoming dates are shown below. To confirm your attendance or find out more please contact Katie Murdock on 01443 401122

Date	Time	Area	Meeting Point
Thursday 6 <sup>th</sup> Feb	11am	Hawthorn	Hawthorn Leisure Centre
Saturday 8 <sup>th</sup> Feb	10:30am	Tynant	Co op, Commercial Street
Thursday 13 <sup>th</sup> Feb	11am	Llantwit Fardre	Sports Club
Saturday 15 <sup>th</sup> Feb	10:30am	Edmondstown	Edmondstown Community Centre
Saturday 22 <sup>nd</sup> Feb	10:30am	Tonteg	Shopping Precinct, Cardigan Close



## Ukraine

I expected my visit to Ukraine as part of an EU Committee of the Regions delegation to be a good opportunity to promote Wales on the European stage. As you would have seen however, events moved quickly and dramatically over the last few weeks.

Whilst I was in Kiev four people were killed by the security forces. It meant that our delegation could not possibly meet with Government ministers. Instead I was able to do a lot of media work highlighting the way in which democracy is being systematically dismantled in that country. When I arrived home I appeared on the Sharp End and Sunday Politics where I was able to update a wider audience on events.

Later, speaking at the CoR plenary I said, "what is at stake in Ukraine is freedom, democracy and the rule of law. If we truly want to support the Ukrainian people in their fight for democracy and civil rights, which we in Europe take for granted, then we have to act in a way that will be effective, including economic sanctions targeted at the leadership of the Ukrainian Government."

The CoR adopted a resolution on 31 January calling on the government of Ukraine to *immediately revoke the repressive legislation that curtails fundamental human rights and freedoms and on the EU institutions to act decisively so as to help deescalating the tension and ensure that a peaceful solution is found.*



## Williams report

The Williams' report has significant implications for us all. I'll be pushing for a better balance of social and economic characteristics when considering which authorities to merge and for increased responsibilities for Town and Community Council.

## Contacts

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If you need Mick's help, have a question or want to sign up for this newsletter, please contact Mick on one of the above addresses .