



Nick Thomas-Symonds MP

Nick's News

December 2020 - February 2021

It has been an unprecedented last 12 months for all of us. As we continue in third lockdown, I thank all those that are following the guidelines, maintaining social distance with others, wearing masks where required and washing hands, in order to keep one and another safe. I encourage everyone to check up on those who may struggle during these difficult times. People's mental health and well-being is so important, and a phone call or message to family, friends or neighbours can make a huge difference.

Wales is continuing to administer the vaccine at a huge pace which offers a light at the end of the tunnel, and a reminder that these dark times will pass. I would like to pay a huge thank you to those working incredibly hard to help vaccinate people, and to organisations like Torfaen Council, Torfaen Leisure Trust and our Armed Forces, who have offered to step in to help with the logistics and administration of this national effort.

If we all stick together, to reduce the rates of this awful virus, and take up the vaccine when offered to us, we can make sure 2021 is a better year filled with far more happiness and joy.

Best wishes,

Nick



Small Business Saturday

The annual Small Business Saturday was marked on 5th December last year, and I marked the event by visiting local business owners in Pontypool Indoor Market. Small businesses up and down Torfaen provide jobs, skills, and vital services to the area, and I was pleased to discuss with them how we can help the small business sector here in Torfaen.



Women's Aid

When I became Shadow Home Secretary, one of my major priorities was to work to tackle domestic abuse. To mark the launch of the UN's 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence, which ran from 25th November until 10th December, I visited Cytannol Women's Aid in Pontypool to see the work they do on the frontline and to discuss the increasing incidents of domestic abuse throughout the pandemic.

I would like to thank all frontline support services who work tirelessly every day to support women and girls who suffer from domestic abuse.



Torfaen's Community Organisations

The Coronavirus pandemic has shone a light on the amazing community spirit we have in Torfaen, and just before Christmas I was delighted to visit the CoStar Partnership, and Eastern Valley Foodbank to talk about the challenges they have faced throughout the pandemic, and thank them for the work they do for our communities.



Respect for Shopworkers Week

I was delighted to show my support for USDAW's Respect for Shopworkers Week. As part of the campaign, I visited the Co-op store in Griffithstown to speak to shopworkers about their experience working on the frontline for the community, and to echo USDAW's calls for kindness and consideration when shopping.

We're in it Together Campaign

I am delighted to support the 'We're in it Together' campaign that has been launched by the South Wales Argus. The campaign is highlighting community groups, charities and other organisations that can offer help and support that are there to help people with the physical and mental health challenge that come with lockdown periods.

A full list of services that are providing support throughout Torfaen can be found here: <https://www.southwalesargus.co.uk/news/18971564-together-support-services-available-gwent/>.

Brexit Deal

Securing a deal with the European Union was always the preferred option over a No Deal outcome, which would have had devastating economic, security, and political consequences for the entire country. However, the deal that the Government secured is a thin agreement – it does not provide adequate protections for manufacturing, creative industries, and workers' rights. On security, we will no longer have real-time access to the EU database SIS II, or access to the European Arrest Warrant. The consequences of this deal are the responsibility of the Government and we will be holding them to account on their commitments. A Labour government would inherit this deal in 2024, providing a foundation in which Labour would build on to protect our economy, security, and rebuild our country.

Police National Computer Data Loss

Over the last 2 weeks I have been holding the Home Secretary to account for the massive data loss which saw 400,000 items of data deleted from the Police National Computer. This is another example of Conservative incompetence putting people's safety at risk. I have called on the Home Secretary to show personal responsibility and leadership in addressing the data loss, and it was shameful that she did not make a statement to Parliament on the issue.

Coronavirus and Border Security

I have continued to press the Government on their lack of strategy in ensuring their border policy protects Britain from the virus and any mutations. The Home Secretary admitting that she disagreed with her own Governments border policy at the beginning of the pandemic highlights the incompetency at the heart of this Governments' border policy. Following these comments, I called on the Home Secretary to urgently address Parliament to outline a proper strategy for protecting our borders against emerging strains the virus.

You can see my full speech on this [here](#).

Fabian Society Conference

I was delighted to deliver a speech at the Fabian Society's New Year Conference. In my speech, I highlighted how the Tories' lack of compassion and competence was putting people at risk and emphasised my aim to rebuild the trust in our party.

You can read my full speech here: <https://fabians.org.uk/rebuilding-trust-3/>.

Welsh Government Restrictions Review

The Welsh Government announced its latest three-week review, the third since Alert Level 4 restrictors were introduced. The First Minister announced that Wales should remain at Alert Level 4. This means everyone must stay at home and work from home wherever possible. All non-essential retail, hospitality venues, licensed premises and leisure facilities must remain closed.

With the available headroom, the Welsh Government announced some minor relaxations:

- From 20th February, four people from two different households will be able to meet outdoors for socially distanced local exercise. This doesn't apply to private gardens.

- From March 1, the law will be changed to allow licensed wedding venues, such as visitor attractions and hotels, to re-open but only to perform wedding and civil partnership ceremonies.

- Sport Wales will make arrangements for more of our talented athletes to resume training and playing.

- With more people living and working in older people's care homes being vaccinated, the Welsh Government are looking at the guidance for care home visiting.

I know this is incredibly difficult for us all; however, if we all stick to the rules, we can keep ourselves, our families, and our communities, safe.

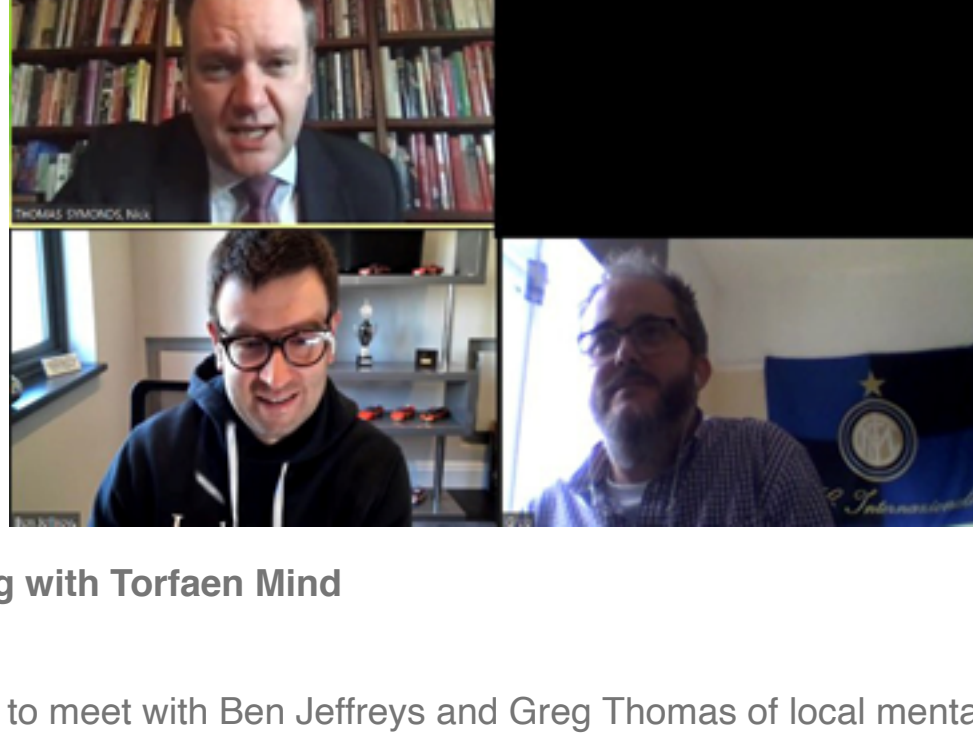
Vaccination Target Met in Wales

Wales became the first UK nation to hit the mid-February vaccine target of offering a vaccine to the top 4 priority groups. The success of the rollout – which offers so much hope to all of us – is testament to the hard work from everyone involved in the vaccination programme. I pay thanks to those working across Torfaen to administer the vaccines to those most vulnerable.

I am pleased that Wales is on track to reach the next milestone of offering vaccination to everyone in priority groups five to nine by the end of April, provided vaccine supplies remain on course too.

Appointment to the Privy Council

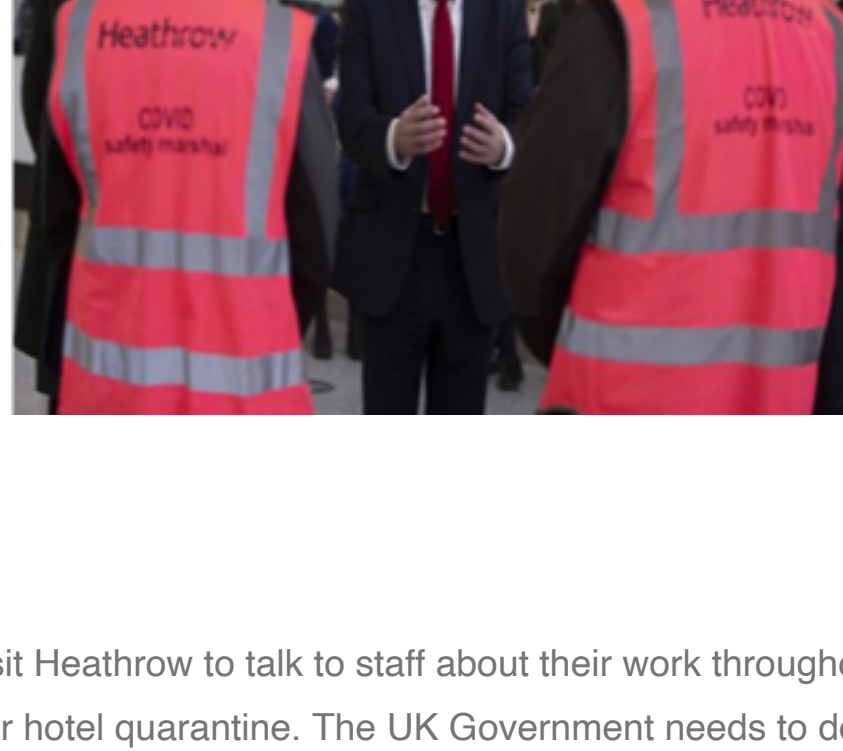
I was greatly privileged to be appointed to the Privy Council. It is the honour of my life to represent the constituency where I was born, was brought up, and have always lived. I am grateful, as always, to the people of Torfaen for their support over three General Elections. Having access to important confidential information is vitally important at any time to provide scrutiny, but it is particularly important at a time of national crisis, during the Covid pandemic.



Virtual Meeting with Torfaen Mind

I was delighted to meet with Ben Jeffreys and Greg Thomas of local mental health charity Torfaen Mind. I thanked them for the vital work they do, discussed how the pandemic has impacted the people of Torfaen, and how the charity has had to adapt to provide their services throughout the past year.

It has never been more important to ensure people can get the right support to their mental health and wellbeing – and I also want to pay tribute to our local MS Lynne Neagle on her tireless campaigning on mental health issues.



Visit to Heathrow

I was pleased to visit Heathrow to talk to staff about their work throughout this pandemic and preparations for hotel quarantine. The UK Government needs to do far more but it's clear how hard-working and dedicated our frontline workers are in these tough times.

At Heathrow I also met with Unite members to hear of their fight against the fire and rehire tactics used by the Airport. This has had a devastating impact on the workers and their families. Labour are determined to outlaw this shameful practice.

Fire and Rehire

I have met Unite the Union members to discuss this awful practice where workers are laid off and then rehired on worse terms and conditions. I know the issue this is causing to families up and down the country. Labour would outlaw this dreadful practice.

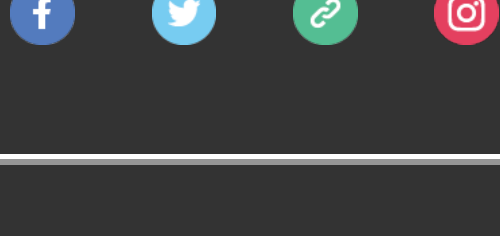
Hotel Quarantine Policy

Throughout the last few weeks, I have pressed the Government on their delayed and flawed policy on hotel quarantine. I have called on the Government to introduce a comprehensive hotel quarantine system, rather than the current half-baked policy.

You can see my full comments addressing the issue of hotel quarantining [here](#).

South Wales Argus Column

My latest South Wales Argus column can be read here: <https://www.southwalesargus.co.uk/news/19106589-this-winter-hasnt-easy-encouraged-positive-progress-made--nick-thomas-symonds-mp-torfaen/>.



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