

## [Minister in Merthyr to #TalkValleys](#)

The Ministerial Taskforce for the South Wales Valleys is holding a series of public meetings across the region to seek the views of communities about priorities for their local areas.

Alun Davies last night hosted the second town hall style public meeting of the taskforce at Merthyr's Red House, the arts and creative industries centre in the Old Town Hall.

Speaking following the meeting he said:

"We can feel that understanding and awareness of the work of the taskforce is growing and the engagement sessions we've held to date have been invaluable in helping to shape our priorities.

"It is vital however we continue to work with and listen to communities throughout the lifetime of the taskforce.

"From the discussions we've had with the public so far, some key themes have emerged. These include the importance of linking businesses with local schools to give young people the confidence and skills they need to enter into the world of work and the importance of linking infrastructure like industrial sites, schools, colleges and transport initiatives together, ensuring true connectivity for the valleys.

"I would urge anyone who feels passionately about where they live to engage with the work of the taskforce and have their say. We're here to listen and your views will help shape our shared vision for the valleys."

The taskforce was set up by the Welsh Government in July and aims to build on work previously undertaken across the South Wales Valleys in a more coordinated and targeted way to meet the needs of valley communities.

To learn more about the work of the taskforce or to sign up to attend one of the public meetings, please visit the [Facebook](#) page.

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## [UK inflation falls in January compared](#)

## to December. Core inflation holds steady.

The CPI index fell 0.5% in January compared to December. Food prices also fell 0.5% over the same time period, despite the bad weather effects on vegetables.

Core inflation over the last twelve months stayed at the same level as in December, at 1.6%.

Overall the CPI rose by 1.8% over the last twelve months. This was a higher annual rate than December owing to the fall out of a very good month a year ago. The main factor, accounting for half the annual increase came from higher oil prices affecting transport. The UK inflation rate is mirroring the German and US rates, affected by the same world oil price rise. The other most buoyant item was the increase over the last year in restaurant and hotel bills, reflecting higher wages.

January's figures were helped by falls in clothing and footwear prices, and by the intense supermarket competition which kept food prices down.

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## We need to renew the UK and bring Scotland together.

By Kezia Dugdale

The effects of Brexit and the drumbeat of a second independence referendum coming from Nicola Sturgeon means that questions about how we run our country are again at the centre of our politics.

But what is clear is that neither a Tory hard Brexit nor a divisive second independence referendum is what the majority of Scots want.

People want change, but they don't want the country to be divided again. Instead, we need to start thinking about how we work together. We need a new deal for how power is redistributed in this country. One that brings power closer to communities. Not just in Scotland but across the whole UK.

Nicola Sturgeon and Ruth Davidson sit in the Scottish Parliament chiefly because of the efforts of the Scottish constitutional convention in the 1980s, which led to the creation of the Scottish Parliament.

It was Labour that championed devolution for decades. And it is bitterly

disappointing to Labour politicians like me that in a decade of SNP government, they have not unlocked the potential of devolution.

That potential includes bringing power closer to the people, bridging the gap between the governed and those who govern and to give people more influence over the decisions that affect their lives.

The vote for Brexit isn't just the failure of the Remain campaign; it's a failure of our system of government.

If you think Westminster feels remote in Glasgow then imagine how it feels in Wigan or Sunderland.

I lost count of the number of colleagues from across the rest of the UK who reported back from the doorsteps during the EU referendum that people were willing to gamble on Brexit because, really, how much worse could it get?

In Scotland those feelings revealed themselves two years earlier during the independence referendum.

Then it was my turn on the doorstep to hear that, while the SNP had not made the case, people were willing to take a leap into the dark because, really, how much worse could it get?

In a generation the UK has gone from feeling that things can only get better to things can't possibly get worse.

That's why we need to change how we govern ourselves.

Our system of government was not doing the job it should have done before Brexit or the independence referendum.

That's why I want to see a People's Constitutional Convention and a new Act of Union to renew the UK for a new age.

This proposal means more powers for Scotland but strengthens the whole UK as well.

It seeks to build out from the benefits we already derive from being part of the UK, and it would bring power closer to people.

Our country feels so divided just now. Between remain and leave, yes and no, rich and poor. But together we're stronger. That's why Labour is making the case for bringing power closer to communities, redistributing power through the UK the way we redistribute wealth through the UK.

That's a better future for Scotland than a hard Tory Brexit, or a divisive second independence referendum.

That's why we need to change how we govern ourselves.

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## [China issues plan to prevent chronic diseases](#)

China's State Council has published a medium and long-term plan to prevent and treat chronic diseases in the next five to 10 years.

The plan, made public on Tuesday, aims to improve people's health, lower the onset risks of high-risk populations, and improve the patient quality of life.

The plan made lowering the premature mortality of major chronic diseases a core target, saying that by 2020 and 2025 the premature mortality rate of cardiovascular disease, as well as cancer and chronic respiratory diseases among the groups aged between 30 and 70 will drop by 10 percent and 20 percent, respectively, compared with 2015.

The plan put forward eight areas to be improved, including health education, standard diagnosis and treatment, health insurance and aid policies.

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## [China toughens restrictions on court order defaulters](#)

China has extended penalty restrictions against people who default on their court orders, keeping them from traveling by plane, applying for loans and credit cards, or getting promoted.

"There has been 6.73 million defaulters on the Supreme People's Court's (SPC) blacklist," said Meng Xiang, chief of the SPC's enforcement bureau.

So far, 6.15 million people who defaulted have been restricted from purchasing plane tickets and 2.22 million barred from travelling by high-speed train, which are usually more expensive.

The SPC has cooperated with airlines and railway companies from December last year to bar those who default from purchasing tickets, based on ID card information and their passports, according to Meng.

Previously, the ban was only based on ID card numbers, and many bought tickets with their passports to circumvent the ban.

"In addition, the SPC signed memos with 44 units including the National

Development and Reform Commission to share information of defaulters in order to extend penalty restrictions," Meng said.

Altogether 71,000 people who defaulted have been restricted from serving as corporate representatives and executives, according to SPC figures.

The Industrial and Commercial Bank of China, a major commercial bank, has rejected more than 550,000 loan and credit card applications from people who have defaulted.

"The courts include government staff, members of local legislative and political advisory bodies, and Communist Party of China congress delegates on its blacklist, with some receiving punishment including expulsion and demotion," Meng said, without disclosing exact figures.

The deterrent is effective, and nearly 1 million defaulters have voluntarily fulfilled their court orders.