

Christian Howells

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Christian Howells is a leading public and constitutional law specialist, with a strong practice advising and representing governments, individuals and public bodies in high-profile cases.

He is a member of both the Attorney General's A Panel of Regional Counsel and the Welsh Government's A Panel, regularly instructed in complex matters before the higher courts and in public inquiries.

Christian has appeared in landmark cases in the Supreme Court, Court of Appeal and Administrative Court. His work has shaped key areas of law, including human rights, immigration, devolved powers and environmental regulation. Notable cases include successful challenges that strengthened the rights of Gurkha families and children in deportation proceedings, and representing the Counsel General for Wales in a Supreme Court reference on the UNCRC Incorporation (Scotland) Bill.

He has a growing environmental law practice in Wales, including recent instructions in high-profile judicial reviews and planning matters involving coal mining, healthcare infrastructure and energy policy. He is also a recognised expert in social care law, having appeared in all reported cases under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

Christian is experienced in major public inquiries and inquests, currently acting as lead junior for the families in the Gleision mining disaster inquest. He has previously represented victims in the Infected Blood Inquiry and the Welsh Government in the COVID-19 Inquiry.

Consistently ranked in Chambers & Partners and The Legal 500, Christian combines technical expertise with strategic insight, and is trusted by clients across government and civil society.

Expertise

Court of Protection & Community Care

Christian has a recognised expertise in social care law, particularly under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. He regularly acts in complex Court of Protection and community care matters, advising public bodies and individuals on the rights of vulnerable adults and the operation of devolved legal frameworks.

Immigration & Asylum

Christian is instructed in complex immigration matters, including judicial review and appellate work. His notable cases include successful challenges advancing the rights of Gurkha families and children in deportation proceedings. He has particular expertise in the intersection of immigration, human rights and public law.

Inquests & Inquiries

Christian has extensive experience in public inquiries and inquests. He is currently lead junior for the families in the Gleision mining disaster inquest and has previously acted for the Welsh Government in the COVID-19 Inquiry and for victims in the Infected Blood Inquiry. He is trusted in highly sensitive matters.

Planning & Environment

Christian has a growing environmental law practice in Wales, including recent judicial reviews and planning cases involving coal mining, energy policy and healthcare infrastructure. He regularly advises on the legal implications of Welsh environmental and planning legislation and is instructed in cases testing the boundaries of devolved regulatory powers.

Public & Administrative Law

Christian acts in some of the most significant constitutional cases in Wales and beyond. He represents individuals, public bodies and governments, including the Counsel General for Wales in the Supreme Court reference on the UNCRC Incorporation (Scotland) Bill. His work often shapes devolved legal powers.

Appointments

- Attorney General's Regional Civil Panel of Counsel – A Panel
- Counsel General for Wales's Panel of Counsel – A Panel

Memberships

- Administrative Law Bar Association
- Public Law Wales

Notable and reported cases

Constitutional Law

- R (Greyhound Board of Great Britain) v The Welsh Ministers – Instructed by the Claimant in a challenge to the decision to legislate to ban greyhound racing in Wales without carrying out a Gunning compliant consultation. Raises an important constitutional point relating to whether primary legislation of the Senedd can be vitiated by unlawful consultation.
- R (Counsel General for Wales) v Secretary of State for Business [2022] EWCA Civ 118 – Led by Helen Mountfield KC, instructed by the Counsel General for Wales in a judicial review of the UK Internal Market Act 2020 which sought declarations that the Act cannot curtail the Senedd's legislative competence by implication or secondary legislation.
- REFERENCE by the Attorney General and the Advocate General for Scotland – United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill [2021] UKSC 42, [2021] 1 WLR 5106 – Led by Helen Mountfield KC, instructed by the Counsel General for Wales in a devolution reference concerning the way in which the legislation passed by the Scottish Parliament sought to implement the UNCRC so as to render it outside of legislative competence.

Health

- R (Evans) v Aneurin Bevan University Local Health Board [2025] EWHC 1518 (Admin) – Led by Joanne Clement KC, represented the claimant in a challenge to the NHS Joint Commissioning Committee's decision to approve the reorganisation of the Welsh Air Ambulance service. The case concerned allegations of rationality, breach of Gunning consultation principles in a voluntary consultation, and PSED.
- R (Hari Jones) v Betsi Cadwaladr University Local Health Board and Gwynedd County Borough Council – Represented an 8-year-old child in receipt of continuing healthcare in a claim against the health board and council alleging a failure to provide the necessary care and support to allow him to attend school. The case concerned the new duty of quality on health boards, the duty on the health board to provide necessary health services, the duty on local authorities to meet needs for care and support, and the duties on both to establish partnership arrangements and to provide additional learning provision.
- R (CN) v Secretary of State for Health and Social Care [2022] EWCA Civ 86, [2022] 4 WLR 73 – represented the claimant, a person infected by the NHS with Hepatitis B in the 1980s, who sought to challenge the discriminatory (art. 14 ECHR) exclusion of Hepatitis B sufferers from infected blood support schemes.
- R (HE) v Lord Chancellor [2020] EWHC 1411 (Admin) – Successfully represented the claimant in a claim concerning the failure to exempt payments made by the infected blood support schemes when applying the financial eligibility criteria to a legal aid application.

Social Care

- R (TJ) v Monmouthshire County Borough Council [2024] EWHC 2594 (Admin) – Successfully represented an 18-year-old care leaver in a case concerning the local authority's failure to provide suitable accommodation as part of a transition plan with housing services, and failure to take into account the claimant's wishes, feelings and views in relation to accommodation.
- R (Pollock) v CYSUR: Mid and West Wales Safeguarding Children Board [2023] EWHC 299 (Admin) – Successfully represented the local authority in a challenge to its refusal to disclose a serious case review following the death of a child.
- R (JS) v Cardiff County Council [2022] EWHC 707 (Admin) – Successfully represented the Claimant in a challenge to the local authority's failure to meet the educational needs of a young adult with autism. The local authority breached a mandatory order and was found in contempt of court.
- R (Patton) v HM Assistant Coroner for Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire [2022] EWHC 1377 (Admin), [2022] Inquest LR 215 –

Successfully represented the Claimant in a challenge to the Coroner's decision at a pre-inquest review that article 2 ECHR was not engaged. The Court held that the Coroner erred in his approach when considering whether the local authority was under a duty to provide suitable accommodation to a 16-year-old child pursuant to section 76 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

Environmental

- *R (Coal Action Network) v Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council and the Welsh Ministers* – Successfully represented the Welsh Ministers in a claim concerning the ongoing extraction of coal at the Ffos-y-Fran opencast mine in breach of planning conditions. The case concerned the Welsh Ministers' reserve powers to take enforcement action.
- *R (Atlantic Recycling Ltd) v Welsh Ministers* – Successfully represented the Welsh Ministers in a claim relating to a statutory appeal against enforcement action under the environmental permitting regime.
- *R (Lewis) v Welsh Ministers* [2022] EWHC 450 (Admin) – Instructed by the Claimant in a claim against the Welsh Ministers' decision to fund the redevelopment of the Velindre Cancer Centre on the site known as the Northern Meadows. Successfully applied for an Aarhus cost capping order on behalf of an individual claimant who was part of a campaign group in circumstances where the claim was crowd-funded.

Immigration

- *Butt v Secretary of State for the Home Department* [2025] EWCA Civ 189 – Successfully represented the Secretary of State in an appeal concerning the application of Chikwamba and EB (Kosovo) to article 8 ECHR appeals under the Immigration Rules and section 117B of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.
- *R (Branco-Bonfim) v Secretary of State for the Home Department* [2024] EWCA Civ 1421, [2025] 1 WLR 1049 – Represented the Secretary of State in an appeal concerning the appeal rights of persons subject to deportation orders under the European Economic Area (Immigration) Regulations 2016, where that deportation order was certified and the person subsequently re-entered the UK unlawfully and made a human rights claim.
- *IT (Jamaica) v Secretary of State for the Home Department* [2018] UKSC 53, [2018] 1 WLR 5273 – Led by Richard Drabble KC, represented the Appellant in an appeal concerning the codification of article 8 ECHR considerations in deportation cases in section 117C of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002. This appeal also concerned article 3 UNCRC.
- *R (Gurung) v SSHD* [2013] 1 WLR 2546 – Successfully argued that the historic injustice caused to Gurkha veterans was an important factor in the article 8 ECHR proportionality balancing exercise.

Local Government

- *R (AY) v Vale of Glamorgan CBC* [2025] EWCA Civ 671 – Successfully represented the Respondent in an appeal concerning whether the parents of children with additional learning needs had a right to be represented by a lawyer at a review meeting.
- *R (Williams) v Caerphilly County Council* [2020] EWCA Civ 296, [2020] PTSR 1130 – Led by Philip Havers KC, represented the Appellant in an appeal regarding; (i) whether the local authority had to comply with the Welsh improvement duty contained in the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009; and (ii) whether the cabinet could adopt a leisure strategy that had not been foreshadowed in a budget.
- *R (DJ) v Welsh Ministers* [2019] EWCA Civ 1349, [2020] PTSR 466 – Led by Ruth Henke KC, represented the Appellant in a challenge to the Welsh Ministers' policy for funding education for young adults with learning difficulties at specialist residential colleges. It was argued that the policy unlawfully fettered the discretion to fund such provision under s32 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000.
- *R (WX) v Northamptonshire County Council* [2018] EWHC 2178 (Admin) – Successfully represented the Claimant in a challenge to the closure of 21 libraries arguing a failure to consider results of consultation, irrationality, breach of library duty, and non-compliance with the PSED.

- R (Tilley) v Vale of Glamorgan Council [2016] EWHC 2272 (Admin) – Represented the Claimant in a challenge to the decision to implement community-led libraries, arguing irrationality, non-compliance with the PSED, breach of library service duty, and failure to consider the best interests of child.
- R (Tilley) v Vale of Glamorgan Council [2015] EWHC 3194 (Admin) – Represented the Claimant in a challenge to a decision to implement community-led libraries arguing unfair consultation, and breach of PSED and library duty.

Inquests & Inquiries

- Gleision Mining Disaster Inquests – Represents three families in the inquest into the deaths of four miners who drowned following an inrush of groundwater at the Gleision Colliery in 2013. Successfully submitted that the inquests should be re-opened over a decade later, following acquittals of the mine owner and manager for gross negligent manslaughter, as article 2 ECHR was engaged based on arguable failures of the HSE and Coal Authority to regulate mining activity.
- Sky Lewis Inquest – Represented the family of a teenage child who took her own life following an out-of-area placement for mental health therapy when, as a result of the failure of multi-agency co-operation, she did not receive any therapy from CAMHS following her placement and before her death. Article 2 ECHR was engaged. The Coroner suspended the inquest and notified the Director of Public Prosecutions of a likely homicide offence.
- Kianna Patton Inquest – Represents the family of a teenager who took her own life in circumstances where the local authority arguably failed to identify her as a looked-after child and provide her with accommodation. There was also an arguable failure of multi-agency co-operation between CAMHS and the local authority. Article 2 ECHR was engaged.
- Andrew Gwynne Inquest – Article 2 ECHR inquest into the death of a man following an accident on the M4 after a prolonged police chase. The jury found failures by the police to properly plan the pursuit.
- Covid-19 Public Inquiry – Represented the Welsh Ministers in modules 2 and 2B of the Inquiry concerning the decisions by the UK and Welsh Governments regarding non-pharmaceutical interventions, and in particular the decision to lockdown during the pandemic.
- Infected Blood Inquiry – Represented hundreds of victims in the Inquiry into the infection of NHS patients with HIV, Hepatitis C and other infections through blood and blood products supplied by the NHS through the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s.
- Inquest into the death of Emiliano Sala – Led by Cathryn McGahey KC, instructed by Cardiff City Football Club in the inquest into the death of footballer Emiliano Sala who died when the plane in which he was travelling crashed into the English Channel.