



FORTNIGHTLY UPDATE #85 - 03.07.2020

Welcome to this latest update.

In Parliament I'm delighted that we are making good progress on the **Domestic Abuse Bill**, which I am taking through the Commons and transforms protections for victims of this dreadful crime. I was also pleased to announce that we are making clear in statute that there can be no such thing as the so-called '**rough sex defence**' to escape liability when victims are killed by their partners.

I also had a robust, but largely good-natured, debate across the despatch boxes with Labour's David Lammy about the issue of progress on the **Lammy Review** - which was set up by David Cameron to address discrimination within the criminal justice system.

Last week I was delighted to mark **Armed Forces Week**, and I announced (see below) that in the Ministry of Justice we are considering plans for a specific offence of **vandalising war memorials**. It's a particularly shabby and disgraceful crime, and the courts should have the powers they need to mark society's condemnation.

Here in **Gloucestershire**, I have set out the **COVID** infection figures below, which I hope will be useful.

Staying on **health**, I'm so pleased that planning applications have (at last!) gone in for the improvement works to **Cheltenham General** arising out of the £39.5m that as a community we successfully campaigned for back in 2018. Details of what it could mean for CGH are set out below - together with my crystal clear position that improvements must sit alongside the reopening of our Type 1 A&E.

A few words if I may about **litter and anti-social behaviour**. The sheer volume of rubbish that has been dumped in our green spaces over recent days has been very concerning. Last Saturday morning I went to Montpellier Gardens to thank the Ubico staff. They had been there since 5am picking up tonnes of rubbish – including bottles, discarded food packaging, and nitrous oxide gas canisters.

This behaviour pollutes the environment, makes life a misery for local residents, and costs the taxpayer to clean up. There's no excuse for it. If people can carry full bottles to a

park, they can take empty ones away. It's plain thoughtless to leave the job to public servants.

For the avoidance of doubt, dropping litter is illegal. Councils have the power to issue on-the-spot fines of up to £150 for littering. Where the offender is prosecuted and ends up in Cheltenham Magistrates' Court, the fine could rise to £2,500. These powers should be used.

Can I close by sending my thoughts and best wishes to those in our community who mourn friends and relatives who have died. We are thinking of you. Let me thank too all those in our town - from teachers to medics, pharmacists, refuse collectors, business owners, and even frazzled home-schooling parents (!) - who have worked so hard in recent weeks. Thanks to your efforts, we can look forward in Cheltenham to brighter days ahead.

The great poet William Wordsworth put it well: Not without hope we suffer and we mourn.

Thank you for reading.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Alex Chalk".

Alex Chalk MP

PS Please can I invite you to look at (and complete if possible) **REACH's survey** below about Cheltenham General Hospital. They are doing excellent work to support the fight for the best possible services at CGH.

In line with data protection regulations, Alex Chalk's office processes constituents' data for policy and casework purposes under the lawful basis of public task. In instances where this lawful basis is not sufficient and explicit consent is required, a member of staff will get in touch with you to establish consent. You can find the full privacy notice on Alex's website [HERE](#)

ALEX'S MINISTERIAL DUTIES



[Alex at the Despatch Box opposite Shadow Justice Secretary David Lammy]

DELIVERING ON THE 'LAMMY REVIEW'

Responding to an 'Urgent Question' in Parliament, Alex set out the Government's **progress in implementing the recommendations of the Lammy Review** - an independent review into the treatment of, and outcomes for, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals in the Criminal Justice System. Condemning racial discrimination as "morally and intellectually bankrupt" Alex noted that it:

"strikes at the foundations of a fair and just society. It is particularly corrosive when found within the criminal justice system, because in that context the stakes are particularly high—guilt or innocence; freedom or incarceration. That is why the Government, back in 2017, commissioned the Lammy review..."

Of the 35 recommendations, Alex added:

*"The position now is that **16 recommendations have been completed**, two have been rejected and **17 are in progress**. Of those 17 in progress, 11 will be completed within 12 months and six thereafter."*

Watch it [here](#). Or to read the full text of the debate, click [here](#).

'Rough sex' defence will be banned, says justice minister

🕒 17 June 2020

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The so-called "rough sex gone wrong" defence will be outlawed in new domestic abuse legislation, a justice minister has told MPs.

BANNING 'ROUGH SEX' DEFENCE

Alex has confirmed that the the **so-called "rough sex" defence will be outlawed** in upcoming legislation. Concerns have increasingly emerged that defendants are seeking to avoid liability for deaths occurring during risky or violent sexual behaviour on the basis that the deceased consented.

[Read more here.](#)



[Alex was interviewed on BBC News about the family court reforms]

REFORMING FAMILY COURTS TO PROTECT VICTIMS FROM ABUSERS

Alex is the minister responsible for the Family courts, and has announced changes to **better protect victims of domestic abuse and their children**.

Victims will be provided with separate entrances to family court buildings and given their own waiting rooms, as well as protective screens to shield them from abusers.

In addition, the Ministry of Justice will pilot a **shift away from the adversarial system** towards a 'problem-solving approach' in the Family Court.

Read more [here](#), and see below Alex's comments in the Daily Express:

COMMENT

ALEX CHALK

Justice Minister



THIS newspaper deserves huge credit for the spotlight it has shone on the family courts. These are where, in thousands of cases a year, judges are asked to make the most agonising of decisions about children's welfare – where they should live and who looks after them. These decisions become even more complex in the estimated 50 to 60 per cent of cases which involve some form of domestic abuse. Regrettably, many abusers see the courts as tools to continue their abuse, leaving victims to fear the very prospect of going to court to face them. That cannot be right. Our comprehensive review of the family courts has laid bare some long-standing failings, and this Government will now look at everything from access rights of abusive parents to the way cases are heard. We want to overhaul the system to ensure the courts offer better protections for those who need them most – as campaigned for so effectively and emotively in these pages. That starts with going into court, which can make victims of abuse feel very vulnerable. We'll make it easier for them to access the measures they need to feel safe in the courtroom – such as separate entrances and waiting rooms in court buildings, as well as protective screens to shield them from their abusers. Sadly, conflict is in the very nature of these hearings with bitter exchanges where children's wishes too often get lost. We'll trial a new court process with the emphasis on finding solutions by getting to the root of disagreements. Victims reported that abusive ex-partners can drag them back to court repeatedly – a tactic used to continue their abuse – so we'll make it easier for judges to block it from happening. Another method of control is where abusers cross-examine their victims in court. As part of the Domestic Abuse Bill we will put an end to the practice once and for all. Victims tell us time again that the family courts make them feel vulnerable and put them at risk. We are going to transform them to offer more protection for victims than ever before and ensure abusers cannot manipulate the courts to continue their vile behaviour.



PROGRESSING DOMESTIC ABUSE BILL THROUGH COMMITTEE

As mentioned in previous updates, Alex is one of two ministers responsible for taking the Domestic Abuse Bill through the House of Commons. The Bill represents a major step forward in protecting victims of domestic abuse. Alex isn't in this photo as he had already left to answer questions in the main Chamber about the Divorce Bill.

The Domestic Abuse Bill builds on work that Alex focused on as a backbencher - including successfully bringing forward his own 'Private Member's Bill' to double the maximum sentence for victims of stalking, following the dreadful case of Cheltenham GP, Dr Ellie Aston, who was stalked by a former patient for seven years.

AMENDING LAWS (STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS):

A Statutory Instrument is a form of secondary legislation, which makes an amendment to an existing law, without Parliament having to pass a new Act. To find out more about SIs, [see here](#).

This fortnight, Alex led two debates on behalf of the Government on the following SIs:

1. To ensure the IMA's functions in relation to Northern Ireland will be covered by the relevant equalities legislation:

The purpose of the order is to ensure that the Independent Monitoring Authority for the Citizens' Rights Agreements (IMA), which was established under the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Act 2020, complies with key equalities legislation in Northern Ireland.

The IMA is operationally independent of Government, and was set up specifically in the Withdrawal Agreement to **monitor the rights of EU citizens living in the UK** after the transition period.

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires public authorities carrying out their functions relating to Northern Ireland to have due regard to the need to **promote equality of opportunity without discrimination**.

[Read more here.](#)

2. To implement the decision made in the European Court of Human Rights in the case of *Hammerton v. United Kingdom*:

This order rectifies an incompatibility between section 9(3) of the Human Rights Act 1998, which does not allow damages to be awarded in respect of a judicial act done in good faith, and article 13 of the Convention (the right to an effective remedy, such as the award of damages), in respect of the violation of article 6 of the Convention (the right to a fair trial).

In short, it allows for **damages to be paid** when somebody has been detained longer than they otherwise would have been, as a result of **judicial error**. Alex was very mindful of the need not to encroach unduly into the important principle of judicial immunity.

[Read more here.](#)



[Alex pictured last year in Cyprus]

PAYING TRIBUTE TO THOSE SERVING IN OUR MILITARY ON ARMED FORCES WEEK 2020

Alex was proud to show his support last week for Armed Forces Week 2020. Alex is a graduate of the Armed Forces Parliamentary Scheme, a programme which aims to give MPs vital first-hand experience of the armed forces and improve their

understanding of defence issues.

Pictured above (right) is Alex during his trip to Cyprus last year to see the 2nd Battalion, the Mercian Regiment in action.

ANSWERING PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

Since the last update, Alex has responded to 18 Written Parliamentary Questions on a wide range of issues. See below some examples.

When asked about plans to increase penalties for those who vandalise war memorials, Alex said:

"Any vandalism or attack on property should be met with the full force of the law. Attacking any memorial is an insult, and this is particularly true of a war memorial commemorating those who have given their lives fighting for our freedom.

The Secretary of State has committed to reviewing the laws around criminal damage. We are also looking at penalties for this type of offending and will fully examine any proposed legislation put to us in the usual way. The Secretary of State will be setting out plans later this year."

In response to a question on the eligibility threshold for access to legal aid for victims of domestic abuse, Alex said:

"Victims of domestic abuse must have access to the help they need - including legal aid, which is subject to a means and merits test. Our comprehensive review of the legal aid means test commenced in February 2019. The review is considering how the current arrangements adequately protect access to justice, and as part of this we have explicitly committed to look at means testing for victims of domestic abuse, including the existing capital thresholds... a timetable for delivery of the review will be announced shortly."

[See all questions and answers here.](#)

ALSO THIS FORTNIGHT, ALEX HAS:

Addressed concerns about support for black women suffering domestic abuse:

In a debate on 'Black Women and Domestic Abuse', Alex responded to concerns that women from BAME backgrounds may be unable to access specialist support, and **promised that the upcoming Domestic Abuse Bill would account for cultural issues**. Alex said:

"The hon. Lady has spoken very powerfully about the stark and harrowing impacts it has on all people, but potentially in different ways, because we have to take account of the context—sometimes the cultural context—in which it takes place... we need to make

sure that there are tailored services, which take account of the cultural issues so that we can truly protect all victims, whatever their background."

You can watch the debate [here](#). Or read the full text of the debate [here](#).

Led the passage of the Divorce Bill through Parliament

As mentioned in the previous update, Alex has been responsible for the **Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Bill**, which has now completed its passage through Parliament, and is now on track to receive Royal Assent.

The Bill will **allow no-fault divorces**, meaning that instead of having to attribute blame for the breakdown of the relationship, a couple can mutually cite 'irretrievable breakdown' as the sole grounds for wanting to obtain a divorce.

Welcoming the news, Resolution (the leading group of family justice professionals) said:

"Today's vote was a victory for common sense and compassion. Resolution members abide by a [Code of Practice](#) that aims to reduce conflict and confrontation within the divorce process while considering the needs of the whole family. The current rules of fault-based divorce actively harms the ability of our members to resolve disputes constructively by cementing in conflict from the very start of the process.

"MPs should be proud of themselves for putting families first. No-fault divorce will ensure more families are able to come to long lasting, amicable and constructive agreements which benefit everyone involved, particularly children."

Held Meetings/Talks with:

- the Home Secretary, Priti Patel, regarding the Domestic Abuse Bill
- the Victims' Commissioner
- the Law Commission
- Southall Black Sisters

COVID-19 UPDATE - CHELTENHAM BY NUMBERS

SITUATION IN GLOUCESTERSHIRE

The local NHS have notified MPs today (3.7.20) that "we have no clusters in the county that would indicate an outbreak is developing". The numbers of people requesting a test at both the fixed sites and mobile units is reducing significantly with a 15% reduction last week and a further 15% reduction in swab number this week. Of the swabs being undertaken we are having about one new case identified each day. For these cases the PHE contact tracing is initiated to ensure the infection spread is controlled.

Meanwhile, **PPE** distribution continues across the county. Good stocks of all PPE products are being maintained.

Cheltenham Cases:

In the last fortnight (since 16 June 2020), Cheltenham has had **one new confirmed case** of COVID-19, taking the total confirmed cases from 323 to 324.

Gloucestershire Cases:

In the same period, the total number of cases for the whole of Gloucestershire has increased by **five**, from 1380 (16 June) to 1385 (30 June).

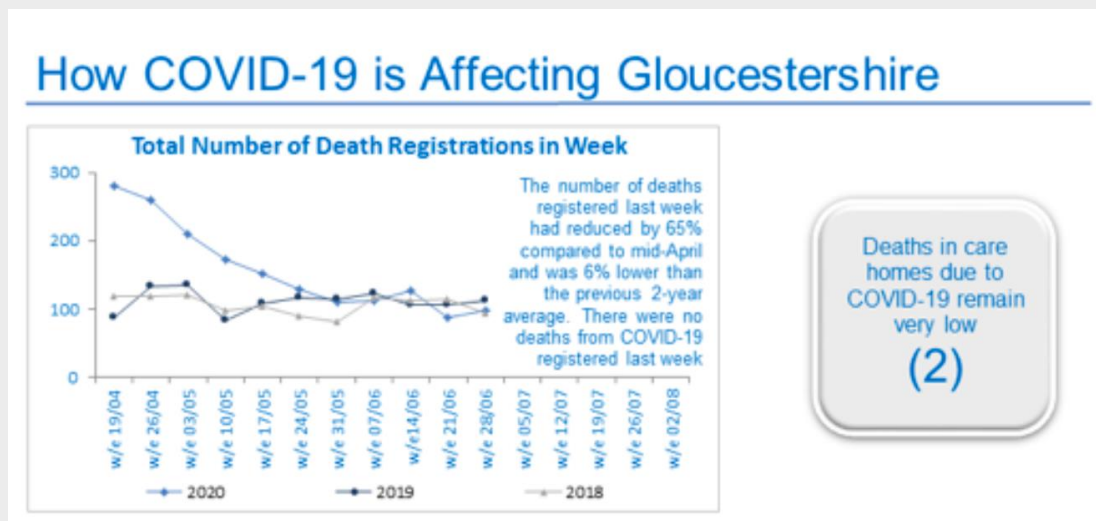
Funding for Test and Trace in Gloucestershire:

As part of £300m national funding package, Gloucestershire NHS has received **£2.2m to support the NHS Test and Trace programme** in identifying and managing the spread of the virus here in the county.

Gloucestershire Deaths:

Since 12 June, there has been one death in Gloucestershire NHS Trust hospitals due to COVID-19, taking the total from 226 (12 June) to 227 (30 June).

Below is a graph illustrating the total number of death registrations in Gloucestershire since mid-April (up to 28 June). It shows that in the week of 22-28 June, the number of deaths was 65% lower than in mid-April, and down to 6% *below* the average death rate for the same time in 2018 and 2019.



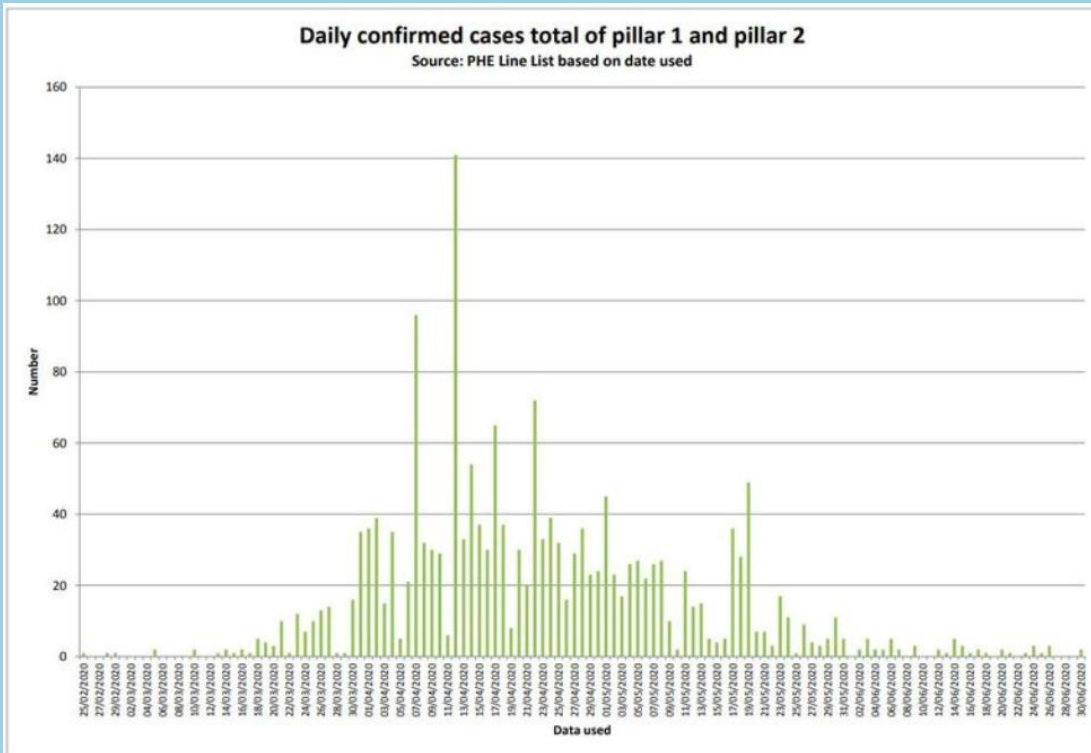
DAILY CONFIRMED CASES

Whilst we must remain vigilant, Gloucestershire has so far not seen a spike in new cases.

The reported 'spike' was due to the County Council releasing Pillar 2 testing data (home tests, the mobile testing units and more recently the fixed site at Hempsted Meadows), which shows an additional 360 cases identified since March 16 – but which

are not newly detected cases.

Even with the Pillar 2 cases added to the Pillar 1 data, the overall picture for the county has not changed with the peak of cases occurring in the middle of April, see below (click image to enlarge):



IN CHELTENHAM, ALEX HAS:



[Above: litter left behind after a Friday night in Montpellier Gardens]



[Last Saturday morning local recycling staff put in a huge shift to clear litter from the night before]

ESCALATED CONCERNS TO POLICE AND COUNCIL ABOUT LITTERING AND ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR IN CHELTENHAM'S PARKS

After concerns were raised by many constituents about the state of littering and ongoing

anti-social behaviour in Montpellier Gardens and other parks in town, Alex has taken the matter up with the council and local police. Littering is a criminal offence, and councils have powers to fine those who behave in such an inconsiderate way. Alex is in favour, as he indicated in his Echo column, of robust law enforcement.



[Alex previously pictured at Sandford Parks Lido]

URGED CULTURE SECRETARY TO REOPEN OUTDOOR POOLS SUCH AS CHELTENHAM'S LIDO

Alex met with the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to make the case for reopening Sandford Park Lido. As a season ticket-holder last year, Alex **echoed the case made by many constituents about how important it is to get this local asset reopened as soon as possible**. He emphasised the physical and mental benefits it provides for local people, and the financial implications for the Lido itself.

Pictured above is Alex at the Lido in August 2019.

[Read more here.](#)



[Artist's impression of the proposed new facilities at CGH]

BACKED PLANS FOR £39.5M GLOS HOSPITALS UPGRADES

A planning application has been submitted for development of new facilities at Cheltenham General and Gloucester Royal hospitals, after **£39.5 million** in funding was awarded for the projects in 2018 following a campaign.

The plans for CGH include **two new theatres and Day Surgery Unit**. It is expected that these new facilities will reduce waiting lists and result in fewer operations being cancelled. An application for planning permission by the developer has now been submitted to Cheltenham Borough Council, with work expected to begin next year.

Alex was delighted that the plans are now moving forward, but has reiterated that these improvements **must be delivered alongside a continued A&E department at CGH**.

[See more information about the plans here.](#)

HAILED 6% RISE IN NUMBER OF DOCTORS AND NURSES IN THE REGION

Alex is delighted that, following news that the **NHS now has 6,000 more doctors and 12,000 more nurses** than last year, hospitals in the South West were among the biggest beneficiaries. In the region, there are now:

- **623 more doctors**, taking the total to 10,956 (6% rise)
- **1,455 more nurses**, taking the total to 27,111 (5.7% rise).

These figures do not include any former healthcare professionals who have volunteered to return to the NHS during the coronavirus pandemic.



WELCOMED LOCAL PRESSURE ON TRUST OVER TEMPORARY A&E CLOSURE

Alex has welcomed the efforts of REACH (Restore Emergency at Cheltenham General Hospital), who are seeking local patients' views on planned surgery during the COVID-19 crisis.

As mentioned in previous updates, **Cheltenham General Hospital A&E has temporarily become a minor injuries unit** with all other emergencies directed towards Gloucestershire Royal Hospital. REACH is concerned that vulnerable patients needing emergency treatment must go to GRH, where COVID-19 cases are also being dealt with on the same site.

Alex has expressed his own concerns that **the Trust must not use this temporary closure as a pretext to close Cheltenham's Emergency Department permanently**, and has won reassurances from Trust bosses that this is not the case.

[Take part in the REACH survey here.](#)



[Alex on a previous school visit speaking to local students]

HELD MEETING WITH LOCAL HEADTEACHERS

Alex held a Zoom meeting with **headteachers of local primary schools** including St James', St Greg's, Naunton Park Primary School, and others, to discuss issues including plans for **reopening of schools** in September.

SOUTH WEST OFFICERS' RAID BY NUMBERS:

31

Arrests

£790k

Criminal cash

17kg

Cocaine

2

Firearms

10

EncroChat phones

43

Rounds of ammunition

PRAISED NCA AND SOUTH WEST POLICE OFFICERS FOR ROLE IN MAJOR ENFORCEMENT OPERATION

Alex has paid tribute to the work of staff at the National Crime Agency and police officers in the South West for their role in a major law enforcement operation, which has taken **criminals, drugs and weapons off the streets**.

Operation Venetic, which involved the infiltration of an encrypted global communications system used by criminals to distribute their goods, has seen entire alleged organised crime groups dismantled. Almost 750 arrests have been made, and with £54million of criminal cash, 77 firearms and more than two tonnes of drugs seized.

The South West Regional Organised Crime Unit **arrested 31 people** and seized **£790,000 in cash, 10 EncroChat phones and 23kg of cocaine** and other drugs.

Alex said:

"I'm sure people across Cheltenham will join me in thanking our police force for their part in this operation. This will send the message we will continue to hunt down criminals and their gangs who are intent on making money and bringing fear to communities through their illegal activities."



[Alex pictured taking part in Cheltenham YMCA's 'Sleep Easy' back in 2016]

WELCOMED FUNDING TO HELP ROUGH SLEEPERS STAY OFF THE STREETS

Alex was delighted last week that the Government announced plans to provide local authorities with an **extra £105 million to ensure people currently in emergency accommodation do not return to the streets**. During the pandemic, the Government asked councils to ensure all rough sleepers were brought into emergency accommodation. This additional funding can be used for a range of support interventions, and will ensure those brought in do not have to return to the streets (read more [here](#)).

During his time as MP, Alex has worked hard to end rough sleeping in Cheltenham, and this announcement is welcome news. It comes on top of the **£500,000 that has previously gone into Cheltenham's homelessness hub located in the YMCA**. The hub provides vulnerable people with accommodation and a range of debt, substance abuse and mental health support.

Read more about the great work of Cheltenham's YMCA [here](#).



VISITED NEW LOCAL TESTING SITE

Alex paid a visit to the **new COVID-19 testing site in Hempsted Meadow, Gloucester**, to see the testing system in action.

Do you have symptoms? Find out how to get a test [here](#).



[Before and after: pictures from 2019 and then last Sunday]

WELCOMED PLANS FOR LONDON ROAD CROSSING

Alex was delighted that plans are now moving forward on the installation of a **pedestrian crossing at a busy stretch of London Road**. Local residents, campaigners and councillors have lobbied for years for a crossing. Alex previously joined their campaign (pictured left) in the driving rain last year.

He returned this year to celebrate the victory in better weather, albeit whilst following social distancing rules (pictured right).



[Alex on a Zoom call with Macmillan Cancer Support]

MEETINGS/TALKS

Hosted a Zoom meeting with representatives of Macmillan Cancer Support, to discuss how the coronavirus is impacting people living with cancer, and discuss their calls for a National Cancer Recovery Plan.

Held a Zoom meeting with local constituents about the potential for a post-COVID 'Green Recovery'.

Held talks with Executive Leadership Team at Cheltenham Borough Council, to discuss:

- Retail, hospitality, and leisure grants
- Anti-social behaviour in Montpellier Gardens and other Cheltenham parks
- Cyber development

Attended teleconference with county MPs, CCG, Hospital Trust, and local Public Health representatives, to discuss:

- Adjustments for more vulnerable members of staff
- Local Outbreak Management Plan to respond to any future outbreaks
- Mental health services recovery
- Recovery of cancer services.

IN THE MEDIA:

In addition to appearing on BBC News 24 and in the national media, Alex has written three articles for the Gloucestershire Echo:

1. Urged Cheltenham Borough Council to reconsider its plans to slash the amount of parking available in the town centre, to **encourage more shoppers to return** and aid Cheltenham's economic recovery. [Read here.](#)
2. Welcomed the **reopening of businesses** in Cheltenham, as the COVID Alert Level is downgraded. [Read here.](#)
3. Called for a more robust approach in **tackling littering** in Cheltenham's parks. [Read here.](#)

OTHER LOCAL NEWS



GLOS COUNTY COUNCIL PROVIDES 1500+ LAPTOPS FOR VULNERABLE CHILDREN

Following funding made available by the Department for Education, **1558 laptops and tablets** are now on they way to local vulnerable children, to support them in remote studying.

For some children and families who do not have internet at home, they will receive, in addition to their laptop, a **4G hotspot device** to help get them online.

[Read more here.](#)

GCC ALSO PROVIDES £3M FOR EXTRA SPECIAL SCHOOL PLACES

Gloucestershire County Council have approved plans to spend an additional £3 million to create more special school places and better facilities for children with additional needs.

By the end of the two-year programme, there will be an extra 77 pupil places for children with special educational needs, spread across **Belmont and Battledown in Cheltenham**, and two more schools elsewhere in the County.

[Read more here.](#)



CAFE NOW OPEN AS PART OF PITTVILLE PUMP ROOM REVIVAL

As of Monday 22 June, the Cheltenham Trust has opened a 'Heritage Café' on the Pump Room portico. For now, this **service is takeaway only**, with the suggestion that customers bring a picnic blanket or folding chairs. From 4 July, it is planned to have **socially distanced tables available**.

This is part of the 'Pump Room Revival' campaign, to revive use of the Pump Room for local residents and visitors.

NEW 'RESERVE AND COLLECT' LIBRARY SERVICE LAUNCHED

Libraries are allowed to partially reopen from 4 July under new Government guidance. Here in Gloucestershire, libraries will be **reopened on 13 July, with a new 'reserve and collect' system in place.** To reserve and collect, you simply browse through the online catalogue, find the items you wish to borrow and reserve them. You will then be sent an email with a link to select a slot to collect the items. All collections will be managed with social distancing.

For those who do not have internet access, staff will arrange for a 'ring and read', where a customer can call and request the type of stock or title required. This can then be collected, or delivered as part of a home delivery service.

[Read more here](#)



GWR ANNOUNCE PLANS FOR TRACK RENEWALS

GWR have announced that work will shortly be taking place on track renewals, starting on Sunday 28 June and continuing on some weekends during the summer. The work being completed will help to ensure GWR trains can run reliably and reduce the need for temporary speed restrictions.

Sunday 19, 26 July and 2 August:

- Track renewals will take place through Worcester Shrub Hill station.
- Buses will replace trains between Worcester Foregate Street and Cheltenham Spa/Worcestershire Parkway.
- Long-distance services from London Paddington will terminate at Worcestershire Parkway. Local services from Bristol will terminate at Cheltenham Spa.



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