



FORTNIGHTLY UPDATE #84 - 14.06.2020

Welcome to this latest update.

A great deal has happened since I last wrote, not least as a result of the shocking death in Minneapolis of **George Floyd**, which has resonated deeply here in Cheltenham and across the UK. I have reflected long and hard on this issue, and please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like to hear my thoughts on how best we can tackle inequality and prejudice.

In Parliament I have been immersed over recent weeks in the **Domestic Abuse Bill**, which I am taking through committee stage (ie the line-by-line scrutiny stage) as Bill Minister. It is a hugely significant piece of legislation which will go a long way to strengthen protections for victims of this insidious crime. I was pleased too to approve Ministry of Justice funding of **£20m for community-based support for domestic abuse survivors**, which will be rolled out via Police and Crime Commissioners.

Here at home, **non-essential businesses will be opening in Cheltenham tomorrow**. Even with the cushion of £24m in Government grant payments for local businesses and the £30m business rates waiver, this has been an incredibly tough time for local traders. Their energy, entrepreneurialism and sheer determination to make a go of their business help make Cheltenham the vibrant place that it is. I wish them every success for tomorrow.

I have written below about the temporary suspension of our **A&E**, said by managers to be necessary to help clear the backlog of essential treatments paused during the pandemic. I have made clear that after the titanic battle we fought last year, COVID-19 cannot be used as the pretext for a quiet downgrade. I am pleased to have extracted an **ironclad written commitment** from local bosses that a Type 1 A&E will be reopening in Cheltenham.

There are updates too about the roll-out of Gloucestershire's test-and-trace programme, and the road improvement works in West Cheltenham to support our town's cyber future. And who can resist a resurfacing update?! It's good news that work has started on **Rodney Road**, which took a pounding last year. The **Prom** will be resurfaced later this month –

ready to welcome locals and visitors back (albeit socially distanced) to our town centre.

Thank you for reading.

Best wishes,



Alex Chalk MP

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](#)

IMPORTANT UPDATES

GLOUCESTERSHIRE TEST AND TRACE LAUNCHED



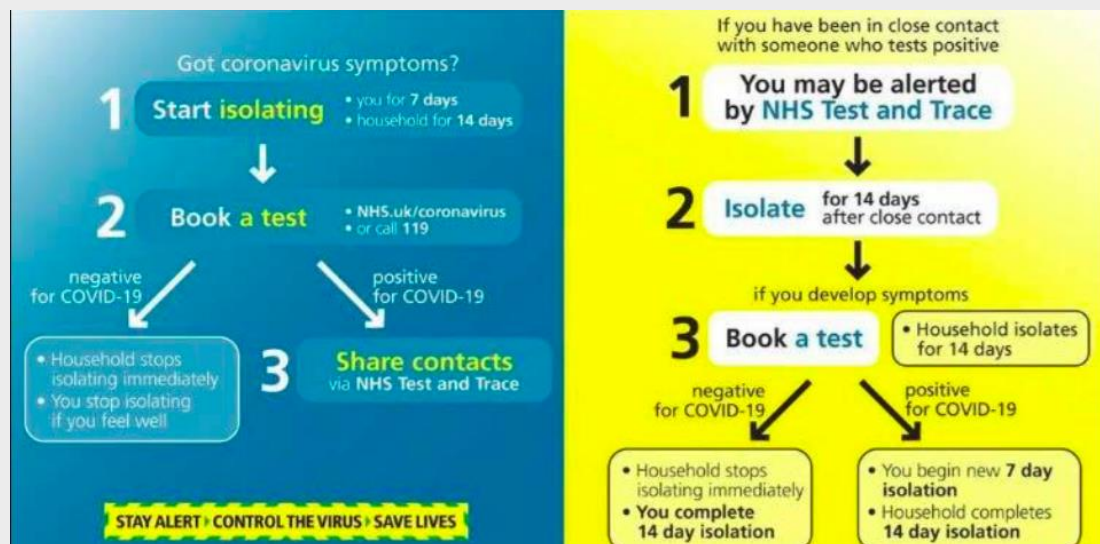
NEW PERMANENT TEST CENTRE FOR GLOUCESTERSHIRE NOW OPEN

On 5 June a new permanent COVID-19 testing centre opened at Hempsted

Meadow, Gloucester. The test centre means significantly more people each day can be tested in the county (around 700 a day at this site alone), and will help to control the spread of the virus. [Get a test here.](#)

This centre will operate alongside the mobile testing unit, previously at Oxtalls Tennis Centre, which will now be available to move around the county.

The number of new cases in Gloucestershire continues to fall. But whilst the picture is improving, we must remain vigilant. **Anyone who thinks they might have COVID-19 symptoms must isolate straight away and order a test. They can do so via www.nhs.uk/coronavirus or call 119** if they do not have internet access or cannot drive to a testing site and would like one delivered to their home.



TEST AND TRACE PROGRAM LAUNCHED

The NHS test and trace service will help to control the rate of reproduction (R), reduce the spread of the infection and save lives.

The service will:

- Ensure that anyone who develops symptoms of coronavirus can quickly be tested to find out if they have the virus, and also includes targeted asymptomatic testing of NHS and social care staff and care home residents
- Help trace close recent contacts of anyone who tests positive for coronavirus and, if necessary, notifies them that they must self-isolate at home to help stop the spread of the virus.

[Find out more here.](#)

How to identify a real contact tracer from a scammer:

I have been asked about the risk of fraudsters exploiting the test and trace programme.

There is useful information on how to know if you have been contacted by a 'real' contact tracer at the above link. For ease, the most relevant part is copied below.

Contact tracers will:

- call you from 0300 013 5000
- send you text messages from 'NHS'
- ask you to sign into the [NHS test and trace contact-tracing website](#)
- ask for your full name and date of birth to confirm your identity, and postcode to offer support while self-isolating
- ask about the coronavirus symptoms you have been experiencing
- ask you to provide the name, telephone number and/or email address of anyone you have had close contact with in the 2 days prior to your symptoms starting
- ask if anyone you have been in contact with is under 18 or lives outside of England

Contact tracers will never:

- ask you to dial a premium rate number to speak to us (for example, those starting 09 or 087)
- ask you to make any form of payment or purchase a product or any kind
- ask for any details about your bank account
- ask for your social media identities or login details, or those of your contacts
- ask you for any passwords or PINs, or ask you to set up any passwords or PINs over the phone
- disclose any of your personal or medical information to your contacts
- provide medical advice on the treatment of any potential coronavirus symptoms
- ask you to download any software to your PC or ask you to hand over control of your PC, smartphone or tablet to anyone else
- ask you to access any website that does not belong to the government or NHS.



[Alex with Home Office minister Victoria Atkins]

TAKING DOMESTIC ABUSE BILL THROUGH COMMITTEE STAGE

Alex is the minister responsible for taking the Domestic Abuse Bill through committee stage of the House of Commons, with Home Office minister Victoria Atkins.

The Bill represents a major step forward in protecting victims. It helps with **housing** for victims and survivors, lessens the ordeal of court appearances, bolsters police powers and so much more.

It also creates a new independent '**Domestic Abuse Commissioner**' who will have powers to review provision of community support in this area and hold future governments to account.

It is also good news that local women's refuge organisation **Stroud Women's Refuge** has benefited from £32,500 of additional Government funding to boost the number of spaces available locally in Gloucestershire. In addition, Alex has approved funding to local Police and Crime Commissioners, including here in Gloucestershire, to boost community support services for survivors of domestic abuse.

During the Committee debates, the awful case of **Hollie Gazzard** has once again been mentioned in Parliament, and tribute has been paid to the extraordinary work that has been done in her name (including by her parents and former Mayor Cllr Klara Sudbury) to boost protection for victims. See more [here](#).



LEADING DIVORCE BILL THROUGH SECOND READING

Alex was at the Despatch Box for the Second Reading (the main debate) for the **Divorce, Dissolution, and Separation Bill**. The Bill ends the sham and heartache of the current system which requires a petitioner to allege unreasonable conduct or adultery - even where neither is true. That in turn risks unnecessary flashpoints, just as the parties make arrangements over children and finances. This Bill allows the parties to agree, without rancour, that a marriage has irretrievably broken down.

To offer the opportunity of reconciliation, the **Bill introduces a minimum period of six months** (there is no minimum period between the petition and decree nisi at present). As a result, over 80% of divorces are now expected to take **longer** - providing a breathing space for those couples who may be able to iron out their differences.

[Read more here.](#)



[Alex at the Despatch Box, answering on behalf of the Government]

RESPONDING TO JUSTICE PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

At Oral Parliamentary Questions for the Ministry of Justice, Alex was on the front bench to take questions on issues ranging from:

- **supporting the justice system through COVID-19, to**
- **helping families who have been bereaved by a public disaster.**

WORKING ON THE FOLLOWING KEY POLICY AREAS:

Alex has a number of responsibilities in the MOJ. These include:

COVID-19:

Alex continues to work on mitigating the impact of Covid-19 on the justice system – working to restart the courts system in a safe manner whilst providing ongoing support to the funeral sector, the legal sector and the charitable sector.

"Rough Sex" Defence:

Responding to concerns around the so-called “rough sex” defence, Alex is working to ensure that the law is clarified. 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.

Positions of Trust:

Alex met with the **NSPCC** and other MPs regarding protecting young people from abuse by individuals in “positions of trust”. Safeguarding young people is one of Alex's top priorities whilst in Government.

ALSO IN THE LAST FORTNIGHT

As part of his other ministerial duties, Alex has:

Parliamentary Questions

- Answered 18 Written Parliamentary Questions, on issues ranging from the **ban on bailiff visits** during the coronavirus crisis, to the publication of the Hate Crime Consultation Paper [See here.](#)

International Law Committee

- Continued to chair the **International Law Committee** of experts regarding progress in the Brexit talks and the implications for the legal sector

Meetings/Talks

- Held individual meetings with MPs including: Sally Ann Hart MP, Joanna Cherry MP, Chris Green MP, Nick Fletcher MP, Sir John Hayes MP, Ruth Edwards MP,
- Also held talks with:
 - The **Law Commission**, about revenge pornography offences
 - The **Victims' Commissioner**
 - Prison Reform Trust

Signing

- Alex signed two Explanatory Memoranda to be laid in parliament on EU European Protection Order and on the EU Directive victim's rights. [Find out more here.](#)

SUPPORTING CHELTENHAM'S ECONOMY DURING COVID CRISIS

Since the start of the pandemic, £58.26m has been pumped into Cheltenham's economy to support jobs and businesses. It has included £24.5m for the small business grant fund and £30m for business rates relief. This is over and above funding for furlough and SEISS payments.

Gloucestershire overall has received almost £450 million in support from the Government for various schemes to mitigate the social and economic impact of COVID-19. This is over and above funding for the NHS.

Some of the funding measures included:

- Small Business Grant Fund and Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund: **£190.56m**
- Business Rates Relief: **£182.96m**
- Infection Control Fund for care homes: **£10.55m**
- Council Tax Hardship Fund: **£5.31m**
- Provisional rough sleeping emergency funding: **£30,000**
- Discretionary grant scheme: **£9.92m**
- COVID bus services support grant: **£15,000**
- Additional COVID funding: **£48.40m**

Total Funding: £447.87m

EXTRA SUPPORT FOR CHELTENHAM WORKERS AND BUSINESSES

In the last few weeks, Alex has welcomed a number of announcements from HM Treasury that will benefit workers and businesses in Cheltenham. The extension to the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme is just one of the measures below that **Alex specifically lobbied the Chancellor** to bring in, and will provide security for so many self-employed people in Cheltenham whose business continues to be impacted by COVID-19.

Full details below...

WE'VE SUPPORTED

3,500

SELF EMPLOYED
PEOPLE IN

CHELTENHAM

SUPPORT FOR SELF-EMPLOYED EXTENDED

The Government's Self-Employed Income Support Scheme (SEISS) has been open for applications for around two weeks, and so far 2.5 million people have submitted claims, worth a total of £7.2 billion.

Here in Cheltenham, 3,500 claims have been submitted, worth £10.6 million.

The Chancellor recently announced that the scheme will be extended, allowing self-employed workers to apply for a **second grant in August**. These grants will be paid out in a single instalment covering three months' worth of average monthly profits.

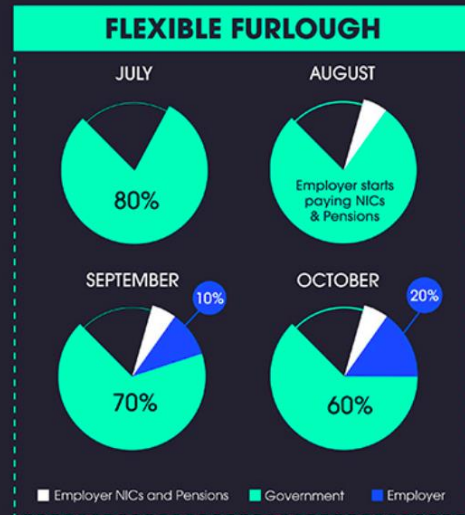
To maintain fairness alongside the job retention scheme the value of the final grant will be 70%, up to a total £6,570.

From July you can bring employees back to work for any amount of time and any shift pattern.

When **working**, employees should be paid a **normal wage**.

Employers can still claim Government grants for time spent **furloughed**.


CHANCELLOR



FURLOUGH SCHEME EXTENDED AND MADE FLEXIBLE

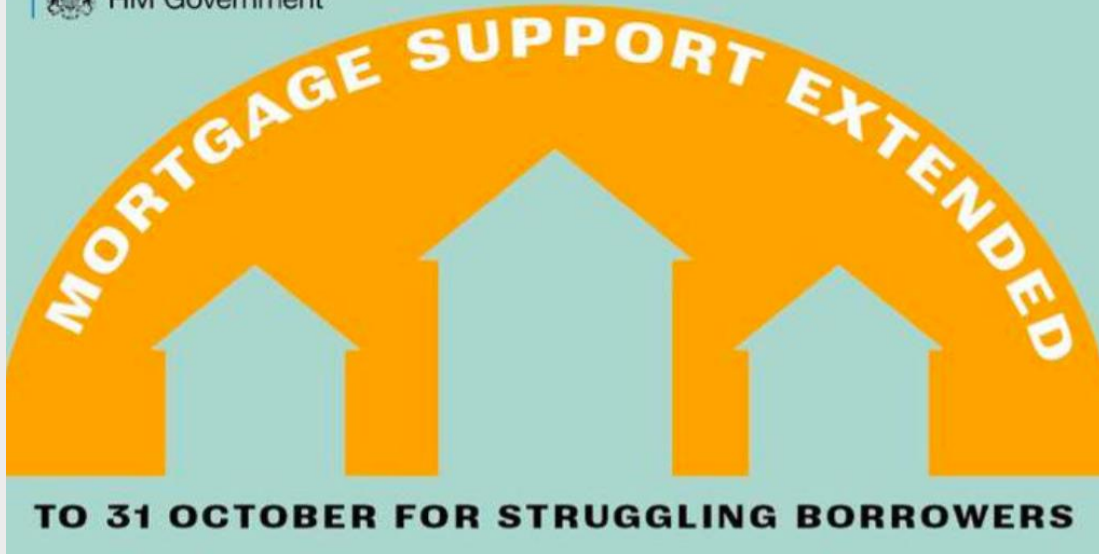
The Government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme has now been extended to October.

Around 8.7 million workers have been furloughed to date, with businesses claiming £17.5 billion to cover those wages.

Here in Cheltenham, 13,100 workers have been furloughed, with Government grants covering their wages.

From 1 July, the scheme will become more flexible, allowing a part-time return to work for furloughed employees.

Find out more here.



MORTGAGE HOLIDAYS EXTENDED

Homeowners in Cheltenham struggling to pay their mortgage due to Coronavirus will be able to extend their mortgage payment holiday for a **further three months**, or start making reduced payments.

[Find out more here.](#)



LATEST GRANT SCHEME FOR SMALL BUSINESSES NOW LIVE

Having recognised that there are some businesses who missed out on previous grant schemes, **the Government has allocated additional funding to local authorities** to use to devise a scheme to award businesses small grants at their discretion.

That means an extra £1.2m for Cheltenham Borough Council to use.

The application window is now open for businesses to apply. The scheme's full criteria, and details for how to apply, are available [here](#).

ALSO IN CHELTENHAM:



CHELTENHAM A&E UPDATE

Read Alex's thoughts on the temporary, emergency suspension of Cheltenham's A&E below:

"The **three-month suspension of A&E at Cheltenham**, announced on Wednesday, has been imposed by the Trust as an **emergency measure**. By declaring an emergency bosses are not required to carry out the usual detailed consultation with members of the public.

We all recognise the need to show pragmatism at this extraordinary time, and also to unwind the backlog of essential treatments for cancer etc - which we are told is part of the reason for this move.

But we fought as a town so, so hard for our A&E. This cannot and must not be the pretext for a quiet downgrade - and it would be a grave abuse of the emergency procedure if that were the aim. I have been given personal assurances that it is not.

I am reassured to note that in response to a letter from me, the Trust (known as 'One Gloucestershire') have made an ironclad commitment to the future of A&E in Cheltenham as follows:

"One Gloucestershire has publicly committed to the continuation of a Type 1 Emergency Department at Cheltenham General Hospital as part of the commitments made under our Fit for the Future (FFTf) programme and this proposal for temporary change does not detract from that commitment."

Grateful as we are in Cheltenham for the brilliant efforts locally to successfully treat COVID sufferers in the county, we owe it to future generations living in Cheltenham and beyond to hold Trust bosses to their promise. I intend to do so."



THANKED STAFF AT GLOS TESTING SITE

Alex visited the 1st Battalion, The Royal Welsh at the Pillar 2 testing site in Gloucester. With the support of the police and the fire brigade they were until recently processing hundreds of tests a day.

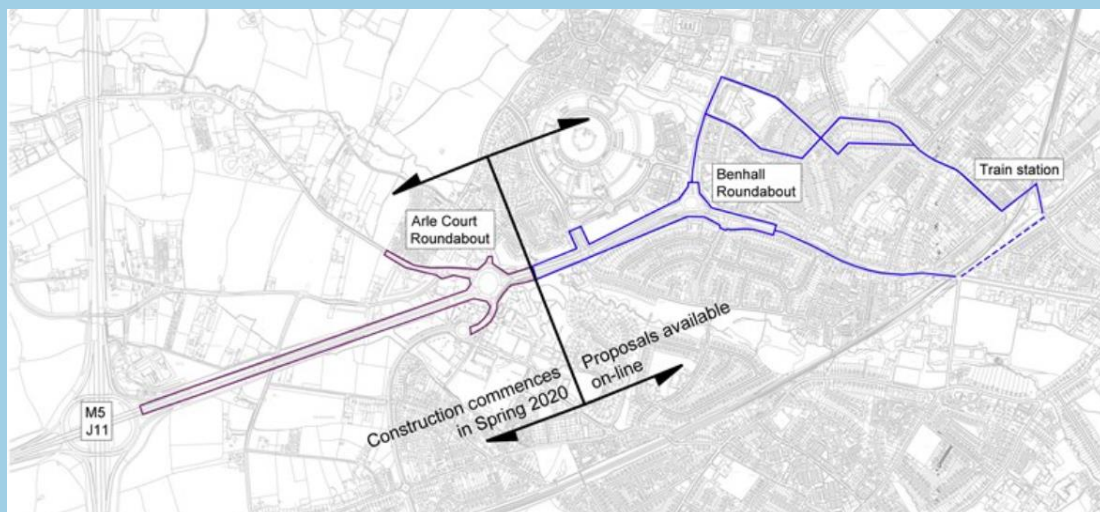
This has been a hugely professional operation with great teamwork between the services. Alex expressed his sincere thanks on behalf of the people of Cheltenham for their work.



HELD Q&A WITH LOCAL BUSINESSES

In a Q&A session with local businesses held on Zoom, organised by [Punchline-Gloucester.com](https://www.punchline-gloucester.com), Alex answered a range of questions on Cheltenham's economic recovery from COVID-19.

[Read more here.](#)



WELCOMED WORK STARTING ON A40 SCHEME, TWO YEARS AFTER LOBBYING FOR FUNDING

Work will shortly begin on the first phase of the “West Cheltenham Transport Improvement Scheme”, which is expected to take around 18 months to complete. The

project will ease congestion on and around the A40, and Alex is delighted that work is now set to begin.

Alex said:

"Some two years or so after we secured the £22m investment from Sajid Javid (I remember it well!) work is now beginning on the West Cheltenham Transport Improvement Scheme on the A40 between M5 Junction 11 and the Benhall area.

The improvements will reduce the existing congestion issues along the route, ease traffic flows on one of Gloucestershire's busiest routes, maintain and improve routes for sustainable travel and support the release of employment land, which includes our Cyber Central development.

This works marks one of the largest investments in highway and sustainable infrastructure to date and will support the future prosperity of Cheltenham and the whole county of Gloucestershire."



Alex welcoming resurfacing work in Rodney Road!

IN THE MEDIA:

Welcomed the opening of a **new testing facility** for Gloucestershire, in an interview with Heart Radio.

In three articles for the Gloucestershire Echo:

1. Welcomed increased testing capacity in Gloucestershire, and emphasised the role that **Test and Trace** will play in reducing the infection rate of COVID-19. [Read here.](#)
2. Urged Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Trust not to use the **temporary closure of CGH's A&E** department as a pretext for permanent closure. [Read here.](#)
3. Highlighted the importance of the new **Domestic Abuse Bill** in tackling violence against women. [Read here.](#)

ALSO THIS FORTNIGHT:

As well as responding to thousands of constituents' emails, Alex has:

- Attended telephone conferences with county MPs, CCG, Hospital Trust, local **Public Health** representatives and the County Council
- Held a constituency **surgery** (via Zoom)
- Held talks with leaders in **Cheltenham's travel industry** to hear their concerns regarding the impact of COVID-19
- Met (remotely) with the **Vice-Chancellor of the University of Gloucestershire**
- Held remote meeting with **Highways England** and Baroness Vere regarding progress on the A417 'Missing Link' project.

OTHER LOCAL NEWS



81% OF LOCAL SCHOOLS REOPEN

81% of schools in the county are now open. This is the highest proportion in the South West. On Monday 1 June, 10,469 pupils attended, 12.8% of the school population, and up from 3,105 the previous week.



GLOS TO GET £1.5 MILLION FOR CYCLING AND WALKING SCHEMES

As part of the Government's recently announced funding package to improve cycling and walking infrastructure to encourage active travel during COVID-19, Gloucestershire County Council have received £1.44 million to design schemes to deliver this. GCC is working with district councillors on priority schemes.

Types of measures that could be taken forward include:

- Installing pop-up cycle facilities
- Using cones and barriers to widen footways, crossings, refuges and bus stops
- Reducing speed limits
- Additional cycle parking at key locations.



[Above: extent of Rodney Road closure]

RODNEY ROAD AND PROMENADE TO BE RESURFACED

Both the Prom and Rodney Road are being resurfaced. Rodney Road will be done between 12 and 17 June; the Prom will follow between 18 and 22 June.

Both are being carried out overnight between 7pm and 7am.



Trustee Opportunity

HESTERS WAY NEIGHBOURHOOD PROJECT SEEKS TRUSTEE

The Hesters Way Neighbourhood Project seeks a trustee to join its board. Applicants must live in the West Cheltenham area, and be willing to join for a temporary supporting role. Experience in charities/HR/finances/community would be welcome.

To apply, you must send a short paragraph outlining your skills/experience to Board@hwnp.org.



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