

e-UPDATE #98 - 06.05.21

Welcome to this update.

As well as the usual COVID/vaccine update, there is information below about the **Domestic Abuse Bill which has (finally!) become law.** This vital legislation was my joint responsibility in the Commons, so Royal Assent has been a big moment for me personally - but more importantly for victims of this horrible crime.

As well as other Ministry of Justice-related matters (I've introduced measures to save you money on your car insurance!) and a visit to YOI Feltham, there are updates on Cheltenham-related issues.

These range from a progress report on <u>police officer recruitment</u> in Gloucestershire, to the latest (rather disappointing I'm afraid) news from the French authorities regarding their investigation into the <u>Bournside coach crash</u>

It was also good to be able to welcome the <u>Polish Ambassador</u> to Cheltenham for Polish Heritage Day. He was kind enough to thank me for a speech I made in Parliament praising the **contribution of Polish service personnel who fought so skilfully and courageously** in the Second World War.

Don't forget it's election day tomorrow! Whichever way you vote, do go out and have your say on how our town and county are run. There is an election for the Police and Crime Commissioner too.

Finally, I'd like to give a plug to David Fahey of local firm **BST Electrical**, who is running as a guide runner for a blind person in the Cheltenham Half and London marathon - all in aid of **Guide Dogs UK**. Do support him if you can! You can read more and donate here.

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 <u>HERE</u>

COVID UPDATE



[Overview of the 7-day rate of cases per 100,000 in Cheltenham from February to present. Source: DHSC.]

COVID Hospital Patients:

As at 5 May, there was one COVID-positive patient in Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (GHFT), including one on a ventilator.

Cases in CHELTENHAM (as of 4 May):

- Cases in last 7 days: 8
- Rate per 100,000 in last 7 days: 6.9
- Total cases: 3,762

Cases in GLOUCESTERSHIRE (as of 4 May):

• Cases in last 7 days: 66

- Rate per 100,000 in last 7 days: 10.4
- Total cases: 22,528

Gloucestershire Death Registrations Mentioning COVID-19:

0 in last 7 days (as of 04 May).

VACCINATION UPDATE:



OVER 40s NOW OFFERED VACCINE

The vaccine is now being offered to all those over the age of 40.

As at 4 May, **34.7m people had received their first dose, with over 15.6m of those receiving their second jab**. This takes the total number of jabs administered so far to over 50m.

Here in Gloucestershire, over 500,000 jabs have been administered.

Those in the 40-49 age bracket will be contacted by their local GP services to offer the first dose of the vaccine.

Many people in the 40-49 age range will have also received a national communication – a text or letter – from the NHS giving them the option to use the national booking website:

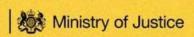
<u>www.nhs.uk/covidvaccination</u> or phone 119 to book a vaccination appointment at other available services.

Through the national booking website or phone number, residents can choose to make an appointment at one of three pharmacy locations in the county – Boots in Gloucester, Badhams Pharmacy in Bishops Cleeve and Cainscross Pharmacy in Stroud, subject to availability.

Some out of county services/centres may be available to certain residents in priority groups (based on where they live) through the national booking system.

However, people aged 40-49 years can be reassured that they will not need to travel outside of the county for their COVID-19 vaccinations if they do not wish to.

ALEX'S MINISTERIAL ROUND-UP



The Domestic Abuse Bill

has been given Royal Assent

#YouAreNotAlone

BILL PILOTED BY ALEX THROUGH PARLIAMENT BECOMES LAW

Alex was delighted that the Domestic Abuse Bill, which he helped take through the House of Commons as 'Bill minister' has received Royal Assent.

Writing afterwards, Alex said: "Finally!! The Domestic Abuse Bill is now law! Getting this over the line has taken a huge amount of hard work - but it has also been a real privilege to play a part in putting these vital protections on the statute book.

Following Royal Assent, the Domestic Abuse Bill will become law.

This Act will, amongst other things:

- 1. Create a new statutory definition of domestic abuse, emphasising that domestic abuse is not just physical violence, but can also be emotional, controlling or coercive, and economic abuse.
- 2. Establish in law the office of the **Domestic Abuse Commissioner** and set out the Commissioner's functions and powers.
- 3. Clarify by restating in statute law the general proposition that a person may not consent to the infliction of serious harm and, by extension, is unable to consent to their own death (the so called **"rough sex" defence**).
- 4. Create a new offence of **non-fatal strangulation** or suffocation of another person.
- 5. Extend the offence of disclosing private sexual photographs and films with intent to cause distress (known as the "revenge porn" offence) to cover **threats** to disclose intimate images.

- 6. Place a duty on local authorities in England to provide specialist support to victims of domestic abuse and their children in refuges and other safe accommodation.
- 7. Extend the controlling or coercive behaviour offence to cover **post-separation abuse**.
- 8. **Prohibit perpetrators from cross-examining their victims in person** in civil and family courts in England and Wales.
- 9. Create a statutory presumption that victims of domestic abuse are eligible for **special measures (including screens)** in the criminal, civil and family courts.
- 10. Provide new Domestic Abuse Protection Notices and Domestic Abuse Protection Orders to protect victims and stop perpetrators.
- 11. Provide for a statutory domestic abuse perpetrator strategy.
- 12. Enable domestic abuse offenders to be subject to **polygraph testing** as a condition of their licence following their release from custody.
- 13. Provide that all eligible homeless victims of domestic abuse automatically have 'priority need' for **homelessness assistance**.
- 14. Place the guidance supporting the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme ("Clare's law") on a statutory footing.



[Alex outside Newbold Revel]

ALEX MAKES MINISTERIAL VISIT TO FELTHAM YOUNG OFFENDER INSTITUTE and THE PRISON OFFICER TRAINING CENTRE

As Prisons Minister, Alex was delighted to visit YOI **Feltham** in London, and the prison officer training centre at **Newbold Revel** in Warwickshire.

In his visit to the latter he met new recruits to the prison service and witnessed the training (both practical and classroom-based) received before they enter the role.

Basic training includes a 10-week course at the Prison Service College (PSC) at Newbold Revel, or one of the local POELT training centres. Those successful in passing POELT will also be awarded a level 3 diploma in the management and care of individuals in the custodial environment.

At Feltham Young Offender Institute Alex met young people in custody to understand their experience of being in custody during the pandemic, and welcomed measures to reintroduce purposeful activity and ramp up **education**.



ALEX INTRODUCES WHIPLASH REFORMS THAT WILL SAVE MOTORISTS CASH

Alex has introduced the **Whiplash Injury Regulations 2021** and the **Civil Liability Act 2018 (Financial Conduct Authority) (Whiplash) Regulations 2021** in the Seventh Delegated Legislation Committee.

These provisions represent a key milestone in the government's reforms to rein in out-of-control motor insurance claims that have inflated insurance premiums for ordinary motorists.

The measures will not only simplify the process of setting whiplash claims but also provide certainty to claimants as to how much their claim is worth.

They will also benefit the public more generally by **enabling an average reduction in insurance premiums for ordinary motorists estimated at £35 per premium.**

Speaking to the committee, Alex commented: "the draft regulations are proportionate, calibrated and targeted measures that serve the public and consumers' interests, clamp down on fraud and act to drive down insurance premiums. They are manifestly good for the public and for road users. I commend them to the Committee."

To hear the full recording of the debate, click <u>here</u>.

ALSO SINCE THE LAST UPDATE, ALEX HAS:

- Met with Professor Dame Carol Black, a leading academic who is currently reviewing how Government can prevent the link between drugs and crime. More about that review here
- Gave the keynote speech at the Offender Management, Resettlement and Rehabilitation Conference
- Led with the opening remarks at a roundtable with tech specialists on how digital innovation can benefit prison leavers.

WRITTEN PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS:

Since the last update, Alex has answered **26** Written Parliamentary Questions. Some of the topics raised included reducing homelessness amongst people leaving prison and prison overcrowding.

See below some examples:

Q. To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps his Department is taking to reduce homelessness amongst people leaving prison.

Alex responded:

"On 29th January, we announced a £70m investment programme to provide stable accommodation for prison leavers. The investment will bring together the work of Approved Premises (AP) and the Bail Accommodation and Support Service (BASS) with a new tier of provision for prison leavers at risk of homelessness. This new accommodation service will provide up to 12 weeks of basic temporary accommodation for prison leavers who would otherwise be homeless.

The service will launch in five of the 12 probation regions in England and Wales, namely the East of England, Yorkshire and the Humber, Greater Manchester, Kent Surrey and Sussex, and the North West. All individuals aged 18 and over, either released from prison or moving on from APs or BASS, into those five regions who are at risk of homelessness, will be eligible. HMPPS will work in conjunction with MHCLG's announced funding to

support prison leavers at risk of homelessness into private rental tenancies as part of plans to secure settled accommodation by the end of the 12-week period.

It is anticipated that the new intervention will commence in Summer 2021 and will provide support for approximately 3,000 service users. It will be in operation during the 2021-22 financial year, with a view to scaling up and rolling out nationally, though the Spending Review 2021 will set out the approach for future years.

We are introducing and testing a new specialist housing advisor role in up to twenty prisons, including HMP Leeds. The new role will seek to strengthen links between prisons, through the gate teams and local authorities to improve accommodation outcomes for those at risk of homelessness.

The recently published Target Operating model for the unified probation service includes information regarding the future performance framework for probation, including a target on the number of individuals being housed on release from custody (90%), together with a measure relating to settled accommodation for all people under supervision (those released from prison and those on community sentences); this will assess the status three months after commencement of supervision (80%).

In preparation for the launch of the new unified probation service, MoJ have published a policy framework in support of the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) Duty to Refer process, which will mandate the roles and responsibilities of both prison and probation staff in making effective referrals."

Q. To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps his Department is taking to (a) tackle overcrowding in prisons and (b) adopt alternative methods to incarceration for low level offenders.

Alex responded:

"In November 2020, this Government announced that it would commit over £4 billion capital funding to make significant progress in delivering 18,000 additional prison places across England and Wales by the mid-2020s. This includes creating four new prisons over the next six years and expanding another four prisons over the next three years. Construction is well underway on HMP Five Wells, the new prison at Wellingborough in Northamptonshire, and works have started at Glen Parva, Leicestershire. These additional prison places will have a positive impact on lowering the proportion of crowding within the prison estate by providing accommodation that is safe, decent and uncrowded.

The total prison population has also reduced by over 6,000 since the start of the pandemic and, as a result, the total number of prisoners currently held in crowded conditions has reduced. We closely monitor prison population forecasts and the extent to which crowding has reduced in 20/21 will be reflected in the publication of the HMPPS Annual Digest.

Alternative Methods to Custody

In September 2020 this Government published the Sentencing White Paper, which set out an agenda of reform for punishing and rehabilitating low level offenders, including

where those offenders can be effectively managed in the community rather than in prison.

Where these reforms require legislation, relevant measures are contained within the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill which is currently before Parliament. Reforms include piloting a problem-solving court approach for certain community and suspended sentence orders, extending the use of electronic monitoring, and increasing the usage and availability of Community Sentence Treatment Requirements."

See them all in full HERE.

CHELTENHAM UPDATES:



ALEX CONDEMNS SUB-POSTMASTER CASE AS "ONE OF THE GRAVEST MISCARRIAGES OF JUSTICE IN LIVING MEMORY"

Alex has welcomed the decision of the Court of Appeal to quash the convictions of 39

former sub-postmasters - but he condemned the failings of the Post Office.

Following an IT system failure which misreported substantial sums of money as missing, postmasters across the UK were accused of stealing money, with some being convicted and serving time in prison.

Alex said:

"This is absolutely fantastic news. I am particularly delighted that one of those cleared is a Cheltenham sub-postmaster.

Make no mistake: this miscarriage of justice ranks alongside the Guildford Four and the Birmingham Six in terms of infamy and harm caused. Lives have been shattered, and in some cases even lost, as a result of the failures of the Horizon IT system. The Court of Appeal was scathing about the fact that the Post Office continued to support prosecutions despite the fact it "knew there were serious issues about the reliability of Horizon".

Now that the criminal court process has concluded, there must be compensation for the appalling ordeal so many innocent people have endured."



ALEX RECEIVES FIRST DOSE OF OXFORD ASTRAZENECA VACCINE

Alex received his first dose of the AZ vaccine and thanked Sarah and the team at **Cheltenham East Fire Station** for their incredible efforts.



ALEX WELCOMES POLISH AMBASSADOR TO CHELTENHAM TO MARK POLISH HERITAGE DAY

Alex was pleased to join the Mayor and others in welcoming the Polish Ambassador to Cheltenham.

The ambassador was here to mark **Polish Heritage Day** and lay a wreath at the war memorial.

This was the fifth consecutive Polish Heritage Day in Gloucestershire, with celebrations taking place in Gloucester, Cheltenham and Cirencester.

From 30 April, fifty white and red flags were flown on the four Gate streets in Gloucester and remained there throughout the Bank Holiday weekend. Polish flags also appeared in Cirencester, Stroud, Coleford and Cheltenham.

Alex discussed informally with the ambassador his forthcoming talks with his Polish ministerial counterpart concerning a new bilateral prisoner return scheme.

The ambassador expressed his thanks for Alex's speech in Parliament in which he paid tribute to the courage, skill and contribution of Polish pilots in the Second World War.



ALEX HOLDS TALKS WITH CHIEF CONSTABLE TO DISCUSS RECRUITMENT DRIVE AND TAGGING OF BURGLARS

Alex recently met with Gloucestershire's Chief Constable and the other Gloucestershire MPs to discuss policing in the county.

Alex was delighted to learn that Gloucestershire are ahead of schedule for this year's target for officer recruitment. In total, the headcount will be rising by around 10%.

This is part of the commitment made by Government to put more officers back on our streets, with the recruitment of **20,000 more officers nationwide**. To date 8,771 police officers have been recruited.

Alex also received an update on the scheme that Alex has been involved in rolling out, which tags burglars and other acquisitive offenders for twelve months after release.

This scheme is now being piloted in Gloucestershire.





Wendy Morton MP Minister for the European Neighbourhood and the Americas

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Email: fcdo.correspondence@fcdo.gov.uk

www.gov.uk/fcdo

Our ref: MC2021/07678

26 April 2021

Alex Chalk MP House of Commons London SW1A 0AA

Door Alex

Thank you for your correspondence of 25 March to the Foreign Secretary, on behalf of your constituents affected by the coach crash involving Bournside School in July 2016. I am replying as the Minister for the European Neighbourhood and the Americas.

I was sorry to hear that your constituents are facing continued distress due to the ongoing investigation into the crash.

On 1 April, we were informed that the French Examining Magistrate has recommended to the Public Prosecutor that the case be closed due to the failure of a key witness to attend a court hearing. The final decision will rest with the Public Prosecutor.

The Examining Magistrate noted that only one of the 13 victims of the crash is a civil party in the case, and that only civil parties will be formally notified of the Examining Magistrate's recommendation to end further investigations. French authorities are under no obligation to share updates about the investigation with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office as a third party. Therefore, a local lawyer is best placed to advise your constituents on how to become a civil party in order to be notified formally of changes in the status of the case. Should your constituents wish to become civil parties, we maintain a list of English-speaking lawyers on gov.uk for their information: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/france-list-of-lawyers/list-of-lawyers-infrance.

I recognise news of the proposed closure of the investigation after so much time will be unwelcome and may add further to their distress. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office is unable to influence any decision to close the investigation as we are unable to interfere in the judicial processes of other countries, just as we would not expect similar interference here in the UK. However, consular officials at the British Consulate in Marseille will continue to seek updates on the investigation and my officials will share any new information with you.

Should you or your constituent have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Consular Desk Officer for France, Ann-Marie Odusoga on 020 7008 0205 or at Annmarie odusoga@fcdo.gov.uk.

Your ever,

Wendy Morton MP
Minister for the European Neighbourhood and the Americas

ALEX "DISAPPOINTED" AT FRENCH DECISION TO RECOMMEND BOURNSIDE COACH INQUIRY BE SHELVED

After nearly five years, and repeated letters from Alex, the French authorities have recommended that the investigation into the Bournside coach crash be closed.

In July 2016, a coach containing nearly 50 students and staff from Bournside was involved in a road accident in France's eastern Jura region. They were on their way to a week's camping trip in Italy. The coach left the road, and ended up in a ditch. Ten students and two staff members were injured, two seriously.

Initial police investigations suggested that driver fatigue may have played a part, and in 2017 the driver of the bus was handed a six-week ban by a UK tribunal from carrying passengers, for failing to take a sufficient break before setting off for Italy last July.

Since that time, Alex has been urging the French authorities to progress their investigation and provide some clarity for the victims.

In a letter to Alex, Foreign Office Minister Wendy Morton MP advised that "the French Examining Magistrate has recommended to the French Public Prosecutor that the case be closed due to the failure of a key witness to attend a court hearing. The final decision will rest with the Public Prosecutor."

Responding, Alex said: "I entirely respect of course the independence and integrity of the French judicial process. Equally, however, it's only fair to point out that this delay has caused significant distress and frustration, particularly for young people who have been kept waiting for the outcome of this investigation.

I continue to liaise with the FCDO, which of course is unable to interfere in the internal proceedings of another country. I have asked for consular officials at the British Consulate in Marseille to continue to keep me updated.

In the meantime, my thoughts are with those who continue to be affected."



ALEX URGES ANYONE REGISTERED TO VOTE TO MAKE THEIR VOICES HEARD ON 6 MAY

Here in Cheltenham, we are facing one of the largest set of elections we have seen with the half the Borough Council, the County Council, and the Police and Crime Commissioner all being decided on 6 May.

At the last election, the Lib Dems won 32 seats, the Conservatives 6, with the remainder held by Independents.

Polls open at 7am and close at 10pm. If you are unsure of where your local polling station is, you can check out the Cheltenham Borough Council website here.

If you are someone with a postal vote and has not already used it, you can take it along to any polling station in Cheltenham by 10pm on 6 May.



[Alex on the campaign trail in Cheltenham recently]

ALSO SINCE THE LAST UPDATE, ALEX HAS:

• Held a virtual constituency **surgery** with local constituents

Attended the Following Events:

• A Cyber Webinar hosted by law firm Charles Russell Speechlys to discuss "Cyber Central: transforming the regional economy"

Received Briefings from:

- NHS Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group about the **vaccine rollout** in Cheltenham
- Vaccines Minister Nadhim Zahawi.
- Secretary of State for Health and Social Care Matt Hancock

Held Talks with:

- Local residents who have been affected by the cladding scandal to discuss the situation in their building and others
- Representatives from the wedding industry to discuss how the pandemic has affected the sector

IN THE MEDIA

SINCE THE LAST UPDATE:

Alex has written two articles for the Gloucestershire Echo, in which he:

- 1. Welcomed the end of the plans for the European Super League. <u>READ HERE.</u>
- 2. Welcomed the Court of Appeal decision to clear 39 former sub-postmasters. READ HERE.

CHELTENHAM BOUNCEBACK:



Alex is featuring Cheltenham businesses who are bouncing back from the pandemic. It is Alex's goal to showcase local shops, hospitality businesses, and events in Cheltenham, when restrictions allow. Each update will highlight a different featured business.

Would you like your business featured? Email Alex on alex.chalk.mp@parliament.uk.



Re-opening - Monday 12th April, 2021

For COVID-19 secure:

- singing lessons
- · voice and performance coaching
- guitar, bass and ukulele lessons for beginners

Sing Better Today Vocal Studio is planning on re-opening its doors again for face-to-face lessons as of *Monday* 12th April, 2021 in accordance with the latest Government guidelines.

Buidelines subject to change (conditions apply)

New slots available book now to avoid disappointment

VOCAL COACH ROB PERRY:

"It's been a difficult year for many and I would like to take this opportunity to thank all my students who have continued to put their faith in me throughout the pandemic. It is an honour and a privilege to be an ongoing part of your musical journey. I look forward to welcoming you back through our doors very soon."

Contact Rob Perry on 07487 271719

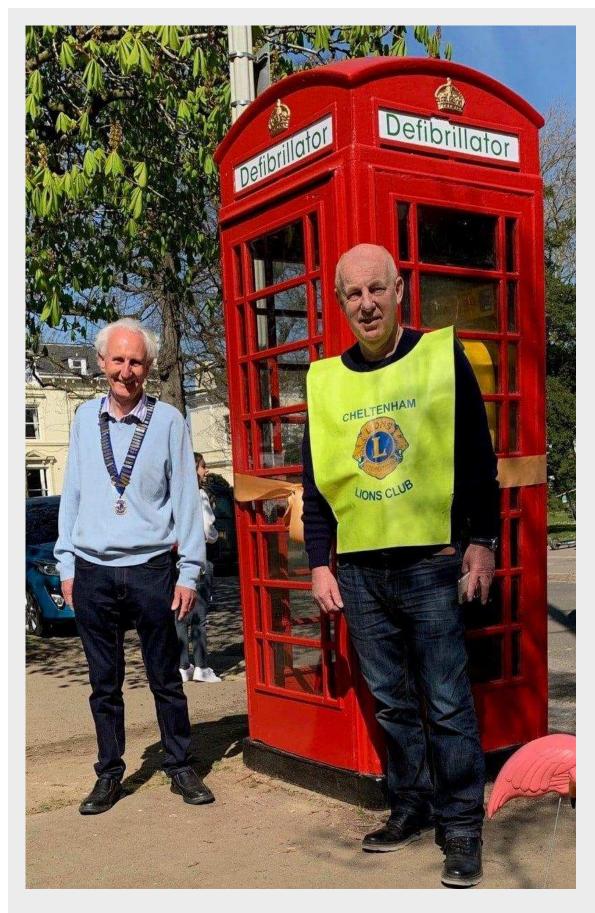
FEATURED BUSINESS: SING BETTER TODAY

Voice and performance coach Rob Perry started his business 'Sing Better Today' in 2018 teaching singing to all levels at his studio in Cheltenham, along with guitar and ukulele lessons for beginners.

During lockdown he revamped his studio to improve the client experience further, and can now also offer recording sessions for solo artists and small ensembles. Committed to vocal health and blending traditional with up-to-date training techniques, he aims to get the very best out of his students' voices and his easy-going nature puts even the most nervous of clients at ease, which he says is fundamental to their development.

Rob has recently been taken on as Singing Teacher for the Friday afternoon Showtime classes at the Patricia Newman School of Dance and Theatre.

If you want to learn more about Rob's business take a look at his latest video here.



LIONS CLUB HELPING TO SAVE LIVES IN PITTVILLE PARK

The Lions Club Cheltenham president Mike Clark, wearing chain of office in picture, and

project leader Martin Shorland, celebrate the completion of the President's Project for 2020/21, the renovation of a red telephone box in Pittville Park and the installation of a life-saving defibrillator.

Working with Community Heartbeat Trust, one of the leading providers of 'defibs' in the country, the Lions Club members gained support from the public and commercial sponsors Newland Homes, Bovis Homes, Linden Homes, Robert Hitchins and In The Park, the operator of neighbouring Central Cross Café.

The 'defib' can be operated by medical staff, or through instructions held in the machine by members of the public to provide urgent assistance to anyone suffering a cardiac arrest. Time is the key factor in such a scenario in that the sooner help is provided the greater the chance of a favourable outcome.

"We have welcomed and been encouraged by the enthusiastic support of local businesses who have sponsored the installation and to members of the public" said Martin Shorland.

THE BATHERS BEATS CANCER RAFFLE HAS BEEN LAUNCHED TO RAISE VITAL FUNDS FOR STUART BATHERS' TREATMENT

Cheltenham resident, Stuart Bathers is currently fighting an inoperable brain tumour, and friends and family have rallied to raise funds for life-saving treatment not available on the NHS.

The Bathers Beats Cancer raffle has been launched as a way to contribute to the fundraising efforts to reach £70,000 for the lifesaving treatment.

The prize draw closes on Monday 17 May 2021.

If you would like to buy a Bathers Beats Cancer raffle ticket, visit <u>galabid.com/bathersbeatscancer</u>



LILIAN FAITHFULL CARE CHARITY CELEBRATE 75 YEARS

Lilian Faithfull Care Charity are celebrating 75 years of caring for Gloucestershire's older people. The Lilian Faithfull Care Group has been providing exceptional care to remarkable people in Gloucestershire since 1946. Their care ranges from adult day care, respite, independent and assisted living, residential and nursing care. With specialist knowledge of living with dementia, palliative and end of life care. As a Charity they are in care for the right reasons - not for profit, and through their 'Home for Life' pledge, they will never ask a resident to leave their homes for financial reasons.

Throughout the month of May, Lilian Faithfull Care teams will be will be safely celebrating the 75th anniversary with the remarkable people they care for, and virtually with families and supporters. Plus, sharing more stories which you can look out for on their social media pages.

As a fun and active way to mark their 75-year milestone they have a virtual 75 'Miles in May' Charity Challenge and are inviting people to take part or simply donate to their charity. To find out more about their May's Charity Challenge visit:

www.lilianfaithfull.co.uk/about-us/support-us



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