



e-UPDATE #90 - 7.11.20

Welcome to this latest update.

As you of course know, England has joined France, Germany, Spain and several other European nations by entering a temporary period of new restrictions - expiring on 2 December.

I deeply regret this move, but I do accept that these are extraordinarily difficult judgements. Like many, I instinctively subscribe to the "Get on with it" school of thought; I want us to be out there, living without fear, showing courage and resilience. But even if people have become cynical about graphs, it is impossible to ignore the evidence before our very eyes: the surge in hospitalisation in Gloucestershire's hospitals (up significantly in the last week) and the ballooning death rates across the Channel. In Liege in Belgium, considerably closer to Cheltenham as the crow flies than parts of Scotland, so many medics have been struck down that COVID-positive doctors are being asked to carry on treating patients.

Although death rates remain mercifully subdued in Cheltenham, we cannot have the National **Health** Service morphing over time into the National **COVID** Service, with the cancellation of non-COVID treatments like cancer operations. Cheltenham General is currently the "green", non-COVID, site doing the lion's share of the county's planned operations. It needs to carry on doing that vital work, and not go down the road of the Midlands where cancellations of elective operations are now being considered. Nor should we be casual about so-called "long COVID" which is clearly unpleasant and debilitating.

But there are limits, and I do not agree, I'm afraid, with those who have written to me calling for Cheltenham's schools to be closed. It would cause too much damage to young people's futures, particularly those from Cheltenham's deprived backgrounds.

There is so much non-COVID work continuing. In recent days I have lobbied ministers about support for the **Cheltenham Playhouse**, and written to the County Council to seek funding for a rebuild at **Warden Hill Primary**.

Millions of pounds are being invested into primary care in Cheltenham, with the construction of the **new £10m Primary Care Centre** (expected to be named the Edward Wilson Centre) along Prestbury Road to serve around 25,000 patients from Berkeley Place, Crescent Bakery and Royal Crescent surgeries. Work started on Monday 2 November. This is planned to be open before the end of 2021.

And I warmly welcome the recruitment of more police officers in Gloucestershire (up around 5%). Investment into Cheltenham's road network continues (my particular hobby horse!) and we are on the cusp of a multi-million pound injection into **gigabit broadband** for Cheltenham - see further below.

In my ministerial duties, I have written to the French Government to seek to facilitate the giving of evidence to the Grenfell Tower inquiry by French nationals involved in the manufacture of the cladding. I have also met with former British paralympian **Dame Tanni Grey-Thompson** to discuss what more can be done to address the problem of sports coaches who abuse their position of trust to pursue sexual relationships with U18s.

Please look out too below for details about **Remembrance Sunday** tomorrow, and also the excellent work of **Cheltenham Samaritans** who are having another online fundraiser following the success of their remote beer festival earlier in the year.

Thank you for reading - and for your forbearance.

Best wishes,



Alex Chalk MP

PS At the time of writing, there has been no formal declaration in the **US presidential race**. Here in Cheltenham we particularly value the strong security relationship between our two countries. That will endure whoever is the victor. It has stopped many terrorist atrocities, and continues to save lives at home and abroad.

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](#)

CHELTHENHAM COVID UPDATE

NATIONAL RESTRICTIONS

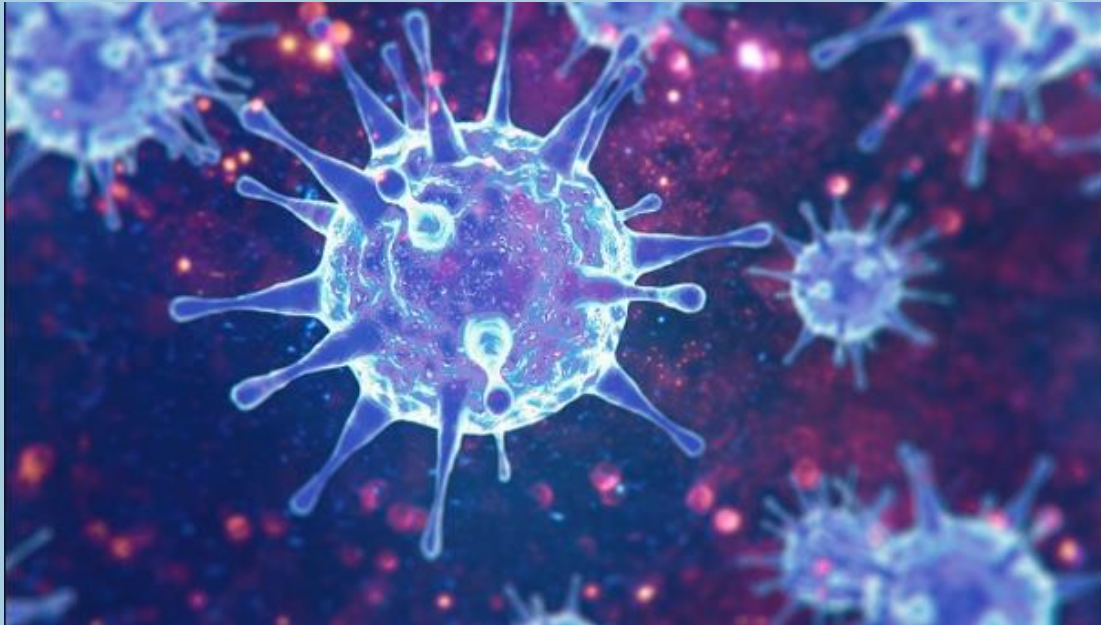
5 NOV - 2 DEC

- ▶ You must stay at home
- ▶ Only leave home for food, medical reasons, exercise, education or work
- ▶ You must work from home if you can
- ▶ Avoid travel unless essential
- ▶ Schools and essential shops will remain open
- ▶ Remember: wash hands, cover face, make space

For the latest guidance, visit [gov.uk/coronavirus](https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus)

England Enters Period of New Restrictions

See above an overview of the latest restrictions, in place for four weeks from 5 November. For more info [click here](#).



Summary:

There are 44 COVID-19 in-patients in Gloucestershire hospital beds (as at 08.30 on 6 November).

Total number of cases in the county: 4,827 (3 November). 691 people tested positive in the 7 days up to 3 November.

Total number of cases in Cheltenham: 994 (3 November). 106 people tested positive in the 7 days up to 3 November.

Cases per 100,000 in Cheltenham: 92 (in the 7 days up to 3 November).

Death registrations mentioning COVID-19: 4 in last 7 days (w/e 3 November).

Care homes cases: in the last 7 days there have been 29 confirmed cases in 5 care homes in Glos (w/e 3 November).

South West R value: between **1.2 and 1.5**.

Testing in Gloucestershire: as of 31 October, 7 day Pillar 2 (ie available to the public, as opposed to NHS staff who use a Pillar 1 site) testing was at 10,411. This is over 2,000 more weekly tests than were conducted in the week at the end of September.

Cheltenham's mobile testing unit is at UGlos, Park Campus, Entrance 3 GL50 2RH from 7 November.

See more [here](#).



GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCES EXTENDED SUPPORT PACKAGE

Furlough Extended

The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme has been extended until the end of March 2021.

This means furloughed employees will receive 80% of their usual salary for hours not worked, for the next five months.

SEISS Funding Increased

Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) funding increased to 80% of their average trading profits for the months of November, December and January. This is an estimated £7.3 billion of extra support for the self-employed. An extra grant to cover February-April 2021 will also follow, with the amount to be confirmed.

Bounce Back Loan Top-up Available

The Bounce Back Loan scheme has been extended until 31 January 2021. If you already have a BBL but didn't take up the whole amount available, you can top that up to the £50,000 Government-backed limit.

There is also:

- Cash grants of up to £3,000 for closed businesses.
- £1.1 billion to Local Authorities for further payments to businesses.
- Mortgage payment holiday extended.

IN CHELTENHAM, ALEX HAS:



LOBBIED FOR RETHINK ON CHELTENHAM PLAYHOUSE GRANT REFUSAL

Alex was disappointed that Cheltenham Playhouse's application for grant funding from the Government's £1.57bn pot Culture Recovery Fund. He has raised this with the Secretary of State and has spoken to Arts Council England, who have the final say. Negotiations continue. **See below Alex's Facebook post for an update:**

An update on the Cheltenham Playhouse and the actions that are being taken to seek financial support for this important and valued community theatre.

"Background:

The background as you know is that the Playhouse's application for £50,000 funding from Arts Council England's COVID Culture Recovery Fund was turned down earlier this month. That came as a real blow. It also came as a bit of a surprise frankly - given that other Cheltenham institutions were (deservedly) successful to the tune of over £2.4m in total.

Although that £2.4m award was a strong result for Cheltenham overall (the neighbouring constituency of the Cotswolds for example received the national constituency average of around £500,000) the absence of support for the Playhouse was a bitter disappointment. I declare a personal interest, as someone who was lucky enough to get experience of the arts through a summer Playhouse workshop as a teenager in the 1990s. I know what a difference it has can make to the lives of young people.

Steps Taken:

Following the announcement I made contact with the Secretary of State, Rt Hon Oliver Dowden MP's Special Advisor and Parliamentary Private Secretary. The upshot was a one-on-one meeting with the Secretary of State, during which I set out my concerns. I had approached him specifically because you'll recall that the Culture Recovery Fund is part of the £1.57bn of DCMS support for the arts.

Discretion as to individual decisions rests, it seems, exclusively with Arts Council England (ACE); and so following my discussions with Oliver Dowden I was able to secure a telephone meeting with the relevant South-West representative of ACE.

In that meeting, I discussed the application in some detail and the reasons for it being turned down. At a sensitive time in our discussions with ACE, I hope you'll forgive me if I don't disclose every element of that conversation at this stage; but I can tell you that ACE was left in no doubt as to how disappointed so many people in Cheltenham were by the decision and why this funding remains vital to secure the future of the Playhouse.

Although robust, I think it's fair to describe it as a positive discussion.

Next Steps:

The next step is to arrange a meeting between ACE (South-West) and the Playhouse representatives. I have put them in touch with each other and I'm pleased to report that meeting has been organised for 5 November to discuss the way forward.

We mustn't get our hopes up, but it is positive that ACE are prepared to meet the Playhouse. We also shouldn't expect any immediate decision: I understand from ACE that it will take some weeks for our representations and any further application to work their way through the ACE bureaucracy.

Anyway, I will update you when there is more news. In the meantime, huge thanks to the Playhouse trustees for their enormously hard work behind the scenes - and for taking my calls at ungodly hours..."

The meeting between the Playhouse representatives and ACE has now taken place. Alex will provide further updates as to the outcome of those talks in due course.



REJECTED CALLS TO CLOSE SCHOOLS DURING SECOND 'LOCKDOWN'

Alex has rejected the calls from education unions to close schools and colleges in the four-week lockdown, arguing that the risk of long-term damage to children's education outweighs the risks posed by coronavirus.

Read more of Alex's thoughts below:

"I commend the work of teachers up and down the country (including here in Cheltenham) who have responded so impressively to these unprecedented circumstances.

Closing schools disrupts children's education, and that disruption particularly damages the life chances of the least advantaged in our society. Here in Cheltenham three of the 18 wards in the parliamentary constituency fall within the bottom decile of income per capita anywhere in the UK. That weighs heavily on me, and underscores the importance of prioritising efforts to equalise life chances. Education plays a vital role in that mission.

Respected experts agree that schools are the best place for children to be. The UK Chief Medical Officers have said that keeping children out of school is far more damaging than any risk from coronavirus. The Chief Medical Officers and Deputy Chief Medical Officers of England, Scotland, Northern Ireland have all said that: 'very few, if any, children or teenagers will come to long-term harm from COVID19 due solely to attending school. This has to be set against a certainty of long-term harm to many children and young people from not attending school!'

There is also clear evidence that the number of coronavirus outbreaks in schools is extremely low. A study from Public Health England found that only 0.01 per cent of open educational settings had an outbreak. Out of more than 1 million children attending pre-school and primary school in June, just 70 children were affected.

Similarly, data collected by the Department for Education outlines that as of Thursday 22 October, only 0.1 per cent of pupils were absent from school due to having a confirmed case of coronavirus. On Thursday 22 October, 0.1 per cent of pupils were absent from school due to having a confirmed case of coronavirus, whilst 0.4 per cent pupils had a suspected case of coronavirus."

CityFibre's Cheltenham Plans

£25m investment
Cheltenham-based delivery team
New fibre exchange at Enterprise Way
Existing metro asset
~50k-60k homes
FTTH build start March 2021
Multi-year, hybrid build

CityFibre



HELD TALKS ABOUT BROADBAND INVESTMENT FOR CHELTENHAM

Alex met by Zoom with CityFibre, a company that will be rolling out **gigabit broadband** in Cheltenham from March next year. This will be a brand new network using fibre-optic cables to houses, flats and businesses and will be accessible to every property in the town. The exchange will be in Cheltenham Trade Park, just off Arle Road, and hubs will be positioned around Cheltenham.

This is so vital for Cheltenham's future prosperity. Average internet connection speed in Singapore, one of the current world leaders, is over 185Mbps (downloads an hour of Netflix in 16 seconds). Alex was assured in his meeting that average speeds on this network will be significantly higher.

WRITTEN TO GLOUCESTERSHIRE'S DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH TO RAISE CONCERNS ABOUT CARE HOME VISITS

Alex wrote to the Director of Public Health for Gloucestershire, in light of the decision to suspend care home visits, to **call for individual care homes to retain ultimate discretion in Gloucestershire as to** whether to allow a visit. A blanket ban is disproportionate in Alex's view, and each case must be considered on its merits.

The open letter from the Director and her response to Alex are set out below:

Open letter to care homes, residents, family and friends

I know that not seeing visitors or not being able to see a family member or friend who is elderly, frail and vulnerable is distressing for all concerned. Many of us working at the council are personally struggling with this too.

There is no doubt visits from friends and relatives are important to the mental health and wellbeing of residents, and during the summer months, where infection rates were much lower, I wrote to care homes to recommend that visiting should be allowed, so people could have much needed contact, although I know that some homes chose not to do this, to minimise risk to their residents.

But in the last month, cases in Gloucestershire have more than quadrupled, with a number of these linked to care home staff and residents. This is why I made the difficult decision to issue the advice to suspend visiting, before it was too late to slow the spread of the virus.

The first wave saw many people lose relatives and friends in care homes. I really want to reduce the opportunity for the virus to get into care homes again and then spread between residents and staff.

Whilst I have indicated that normal visiting should be suspended, I have no desire to keep families and friends apart any longer than is necessary. We are urgently working on finding ways that we can help strengthen infection prevention control measures that could allow visiting to recommence. We are not quite there yet but will review the situation every week.

Under certain circumstances, care homes can allow visits, for example where home managers feel a visit is critical to health and wellbeing and can be managed safely.

I understand that some people feel strongly that families and their relatives should be able to make their own judgement about the risk of C19 to their loved ones, but we must also remember that care homes have many residents, who may feel differently.

I know it is little substitution for a physical visit but wherever possible I know homes continue to support virtual visiting and I want to thank care home colleagues for all they are doing to support residents and their families during these most difficult of times.

Thank you for everything you are doing to prevent the spread of the virus and I truly believe that by working together we will overcome it, stop the misery it brings and be able to reunite with our loved ones.

Best wishes,

Sarah Scott

**Director of Public Health
Gloucestershire County Council**

[Pictured: open letter from Gloucestershire's Director of Public Health regarding suspension of care home visits]

In response to Alex's letter, the Director stated as follows:

'It is the individual care home's ultimate decision whether to allow visits or not. The care homes have their own responsibilities to protect their residents and who they provide care to. And whilst the rates in Gloucestershire are increasing, it is critical that the health and wellbeing of residents can be managed safely. Under certain circumstances care homes can and may feel they have the appropriate infection protection controls in place to allow visiting.'



[Alex with Marchants owner Roger Marchant]

HELD TALKS WITH RANGE OF LOCAL BUSINESSES OVER COVID IMPACT, AND RAISED THEIR CONCERNS WITH CHANCELLOR

In the last few weeks Alex has held talks with various local businesses, including:

- **Marchants coaches** (see pic above)
- Businesses based in the **Brewery Quarter**
- Businesses in the **events industry**.

Alex also participated in a Zoom call with 'Talk Business Local' to hear from local businesses and answer questions.

In light of these discussions, Alex has escalated their concerns to the Treasury.

Hibernation Grants:

Alex has written to the Chancellor to suggest that businesses in three particular sectors which are being particularly hard-hit receive a 'hibernation grant'. Alex wrote:

*"I am very concerned about three sectors where Cheltenham has particular strength: the **outbound travel sector, events sector** (eg suppliers of equipment to concerts and festivals), and the **weddings sector**. All are buoyant and viable in normal times - and stand ready to thrive again. But I am worried that what awaits for these companies is not hibernation, but disintegration. Many are on the cusp of collapse, and will be forced to sell off the very assets that they need to keep in place to allow them to emerge into the sunlight in due course."*

Supporting the Coach Industry:

Following his meeting with Marchants owner Roger Marchant, Alex is calling for bespoke support to the coach industry during this difficult period. Whilst they have been able to take advantage of the furlough scheme and Government-backed loans, coach companies have not received further **sector-specific support**, unlike bus, rail and light rail operators. Alex has called for the Treasury to look at what further support could be made available for this sector.



VISITED CHELTENHAM TREE GROUP'S NURSERY TO SEE TREE-PLANTING OPERATION IN ACTION

Alex visited the Midwinter Allotments with Michael Bacon OBE, Chair of the Cheltenham Tree

Group, to see how the charity runs its tree-planting operation.

The Cheltenham Tree Group encourages the **planting and protection of trees throughout the town**. Using the subscriptions from members, they rent two plots on Midwinter Allotments which they use as a tree nursery to plant several hundred trees every year. After several months, once the trees have become established, they then sell them to the council and other groups such as the scouts, guides and schools, as well as members of the public.

They then **donate profits from sales to environmental charities** who run tree-planting operations in Africa where new tree-planting is vital.



WELCOMED MAJOR INVESTMENT IN PRIMARY CARE FOR CHELTENHAM

Construction of the new £10m Primary Care Centre (expected to be named the **Edward Wilson Centre**) along Prestbury Road to serve around 25,000 patients from Berkeley Place, Crescent Bakery and Royal Crescent surgeries, started on Monday 2 November 2020. This is planned to be open before the end of 2021.



[Pictured pre-COVID: Alex regularly takes part in the YMCA 'Sleepesy' to support their important work]

WELCOMED £2.7 MILLION GOVT FUNDING PACKAGE TO TACKLE HOMELESSNESS IN GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Alex was pleased that the Government agreed to his call to award additional funding to Gloucestershire County Council to help tackle homelessness.

The Government has awarded £2,663,492 to the County Council as part of a **£433 million investment to deliver 6,000 new homes for rough sleepers** by the end of this Parliament. The Government plans to deliver 3,300 of these by March 2021.

This plan builds on the 'Everyone In' campaign launched at the start of the pandemic, which has helped to support over 29,000 vulnerable people, enabling councils to keep rough sleepers safe this winter.

This latest funding sits alongside the £91.5million in grant funding given to local authorities in September to support vulnerable people and provide short-term accommodation over the coming months, including £300,000 for a joint Gloucestershire bid.

Alex has long been a campaigner on tackling rough sleeping, and was delighted with the Government's latest commitment. **In 2018 Alex helped £950,000 of funding from the Government to set up Cheltenham's homeless hub in the Cheltenham YMCA building.**

The hub is staffed with a 24/7 service to rapidly assess individual needs, including specialist support for mental health problems and substance misuse, as well as personal housing plans to prevent rough sleeping.

[Read more here.](#)

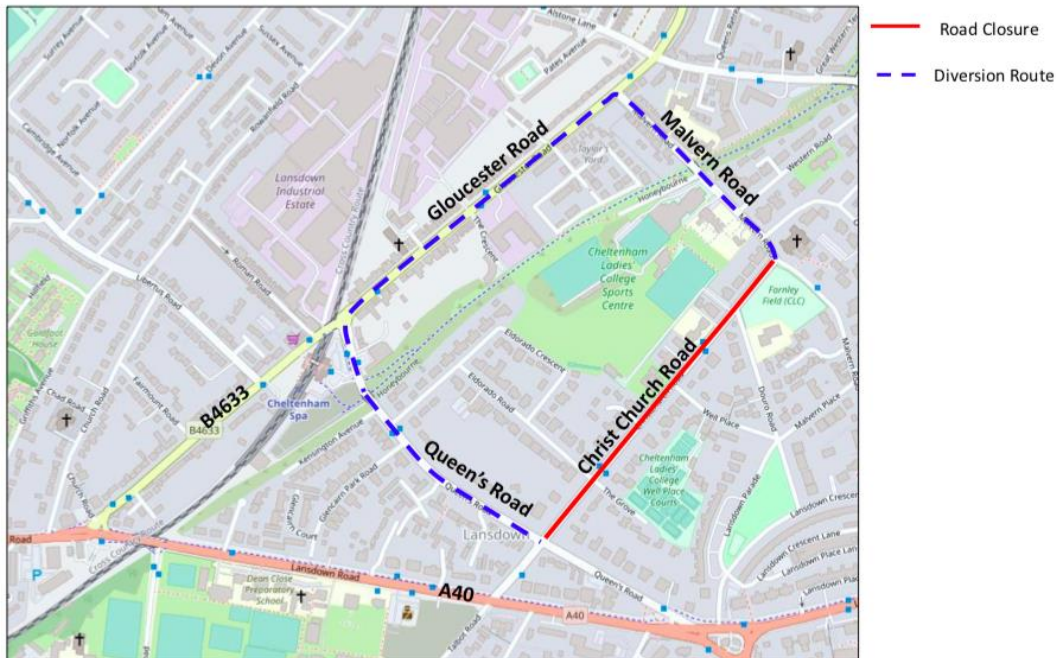


WELCOMED 5.6% BOOST IN NUMBER OF POLICE OFFICERS IN GLOUCESTERSHIRE

As part of the Government's drive to recruit 20,000 new police officers by 2023, Alex was pleased that in the first year of the scheme, Gloucestershire has seen a 5.6% boost in police numbers.

The total number of police officers for the county stands at 1,231, up by 70 this year.

The new officers will also benefit from the recently-increased police pay. This year, police officers' pay will rise by 2.5%, the second consecutive year that it has risen by that amount. This is equivalent to a constable receiving an extra £1,100, and is the largest pay increase for forces since 2010.



[Pictured: planned diversion whilst work is carried out on Christ Church Road]

PRESSED FOR FURTHER RESURFACING WORKS ON CHELTENHAM'S POTHOLED ROADS

Alex welcomed the news that **Christ Church Road in Cheltenham will be the latest road to be resurfaced** as part of the County Council's ongoing plan to invest £150 million into the county's roads.

Christ Church Road will be closed for approximately 8 days (excluding weekends), from Thursday 5 November to Monday 16 November, with work carried out between the hours of 9.30am-3.30pm. You can view the diversion map [here](#).

This is just the latest in a long list of roads in Cheltenham that have been resurfaced recently, following Alex's long-standing campaign to improve the town's roads.

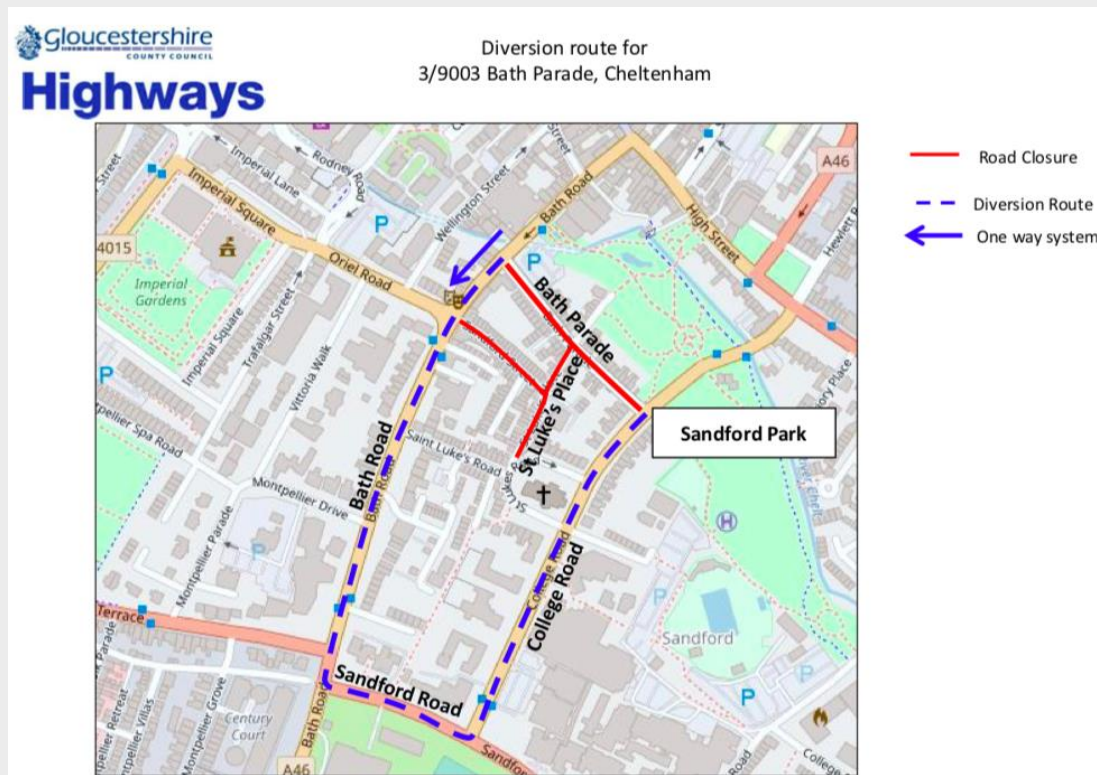
Others that have already been resurfaced since the highways plan was announced include:

1. London Road approach to Bath Road junction
2. Berkeley Road
3. Suffolk Parade
4. St James' Terrace
5. St James' Square
6. St George's Place
7. The Prom

8. Rodney Road
9. Montpellier Drive and Montpellier Parade (by Eagle Tower)
10. A40 by Granley Road
11. Portland Street

Before that, Vittoria Walk and Tommy Taylors Lane were also resurfaced.

Also coming up later this month is the **resurfacing of Bath Parade**. The road will be closed for approximately 3 Days (excl. weekends) between the hours of 7.00am to 7.00pm, from Thursday 12 November to Monday 16 November. See below details of the planned diversion route.



[Pictured: planned diversion whilst work is carried out on Bath Parade.]

Alex continues to report potholes which need repair. If you have any pet hates of your own please do let him know!



WRITTEN TO THE COUNTY COUNCIL, TO CALL FOR FUNDING FOR NEW WARDEN HILL PRIMARY SCHOOL BUILDING

Warden Hill Primary is rated as an ‘outstanding’ school by Ofsted. However, the school buildings are in need of extensive refurbishment.

On 11 November the Council will consider a bid to approve a total funding package of **£6.5m to expand the school by one form of entry and embark upon a major refurbishment of the school.**

Writing in support, Alex raised his concerns about the current state of the school buildings and backed this opportunity to create a new, state-of-the-art teaching facility, which will be cheaper to maintain and more environmentally friendly.

If approved, work will commence in 2021. Coming on top of the c.£30m funding for the new school in Leckhampton, this will represent further significant investment into education in Cheltenham.



BACKED CHELTENHAM ROTARY CLUBS' CAMPAIGN TO 'END POLIO NOW'

Alex joined with representatives of the four Rotary Clubs of Cheltenham as they planted the first 'Rotary Tree' in Imperial Square. November 2021 marks the centenary of the first Rotary Club in Cheltenham, and so in celebration the clubs have launched a campaign to **plant 100**

trees around town for the 100th anniversary.

Half of the trees are being planted this November, with the remaining half in November 2021 in the Centenary Month.

At the planting on 24 October, 1000 purple crocus corms were also planted around the base of the tree in support of '**Purple4Polio**' day, and a street collection at the site of the tree raised £130 for the 'End Polio Now' campaign.



[Alex visited 'The Ultimate Party Shop' on Regent Street]

ALSO SINCE THE LAST UPDATE:

- Held constituency **surgeries** via Zoom
- Visited local store 'The Ultimate Party Shop' on Regent Street ahead of Halloween (above)
- Met the other **Glos MPs** to discuss lockdown measures
- Met with a representative of **local WIs**, to discuss what support he could offer to members
- Made visit (virtually) to **Sandfields Care Home**.

- Hosted a Q&A (via Zoom) with **Cheltenham Balagokulam** for their UK Parliament Week Event.

ALEX'S MINISTERIAL ROUND-UP

Since the last update, Alex has:



[Click the image to watch Alex answer questions at the despatch box]

ANSWERED PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS ON LEGAL AID AND THE RECOVERY OF COURTS FROM COVID-19 IMPACT

Earlier this week Alex was at the despatch box to answer questions on behalf of the Ministry of Justice. Alex responded to questions on a range of issues, including steps taken to **clear the backlog of court cases**, and the **support for the legal aid sector**.

See below one of Alex's responses:

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab)

If he will bring forward a strategy to support victims affected by court delays as a result of the covid-19 outbreak.

[908315]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Alex Chalk)

We continue to make significant progress on criminal courts' recovery. Since August, magistrates courts have consistently completed more cases than they are receiving. In the Crown court, millions of pounds have been invested in perspex screens, technology and Nightingale courts to enable thousands of hearings to be listed each week. Significant progress, too, has been made to accelerate the roll-out of the section 28 pre-recorded cross-examination service to support alleged victims to give their best evidence.

To read Alex's responses in full click [here](#). Or watch it [here](#) (from 12.00.35).



[Click image above to watch]

HIGHLIGHTED MOJ SUPPORT FOR LEGAL AID SECTOR DURING PANDEMIC IN LEGAL AID SPENDING DEBATE

In a debate about Ministry of Justice spending on legal aid, Alex emphasised the **recent funding that the MOJ have invested** in order to ensure that the vital legal aid sector continues to function during a difficult time as a result of COVID-19.

Alex said:

*"Legal aid stands as a **pillar of our constitution and a bulwark of our freedoms**. For a great many people, it operates out of sight; they may go through their entire lives without encountering it, and in that way it is not like the NHS or schools or policing.*

However, for those who do encounter it, its importance is immediately understood. Legal aid ensures that the guilty are convicted and the innocent walk free; that those facing conviction, punishment and disgrace on the accusation of the state will have those allegations properly tested. It is there to ensure that the rights and liberties of ordinary citizens, often created by this Parliament, are upheld.

Over the past few months, the importance of the advice and legal sectors has been brought into sharp focus. My officials and I have been engaging extensively with various organisations across the advice sector throughout this period, and I know how challenging it has been for providers and their service users alike. I also know how many providers and practitioners across England and Wales have gone above and beyond to ensure that vulnerable people across society can continue to get the help they need.

*As a Government, we have tried to support that work as best we can over this difficult period. I am delighted that... we were able to **secure £5.4 million of emergency funding for the not-for-profit advice sector**, to ensure that providers across England and Wales were able to adapt their operations and continue to provide their important services.*

*In the early days of the pandemic, we understood that **almost half the law centres in England and Wales were facing potential collapse, and I am extremely pleased that our funding helped to prevent that outcome**. I do not suggest for a second that it solved all problems, but I hope it is fair to say that it was of some significant assistance."*

Read Alex's comments in full [here](#). Or watch the debate [here](#) (it starts at 15.10.00; Alex begins his remarks at 16.21.05).



[Baroness Grey-Thompson]

HELD TALKS WITH BARONESS TANNI GREY-THOMPSON TO DISCUSS TIGHTENING THE LAW ON THOSE IN 'POSITIONS OF TRUST'

Alex recently met with Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson to discuss the ongoing work of the Ministry of Justice to review the law regarding those in positions of trust.

An ongoing campaign led by the NSPCC is seeking an expansion of what constitutes

someone in a 'position of trust'. They are hoping to make it illegal for anyone in a position of authority over someone under 18 to have a sexual relationship with them.

Baroness Grey-Thompson raised her concerns regarding sports coaches abusing their positions. The Government is engaging with stakeholders to see how the law can be tightened in this regard.



MADE MINISTERIAL VISIT TO 'NIGHTINGALE COURT'

Alex paid a visit to a 'Nightingale Court' in the Ministry of Justice buildings at Petty France in London (pictured). The site is one of 10 new courts that were set up in July to alleviate the pressure on courts and tribunals resulting from the pandemic.

The courts hear civil, family and tribunals work as well as non-custodial crime cases. The move enabled capacity to be freed up in existing courts to hear other cases, including custodial jury trials, which require cells and secure dock facilities to keep the public, victims and witnesses safe.

A key part of **Alex's ministerial portfolio has been to ensure that courts recover from the pandemic** as soon as possible, and the Nightingale Courts have played an important role in that.

Read more [here](#).



APPROVED FOUR PRACTICE DIRECTIONS

Since the last update, Alex has approved four 'practice directions'.

What is a practice direction?

In English law, a practice direction is a supplemental protocol to rules of civil and criminal procedure in the courts, and is a device to regulate minor procedural matters.

What has Alex approved?

1. One of the practice directions being extended is 36Q, which has allowed for **better triaging of child arrangement cases**, and would allow for the piloting of settling cases on the papers.
2. Another of the practice directions, 36R, is also about giving the **family courts more flexibility** to deal with the challenges of coronavirus.
3. The practice direction 36H relates to a pilot scheme for police to be notified of **forced marriage and female genital mutilation protection orders** by receiving an email in a centralised mailbox, rather than the applicant having to deliver them by hand.
4. The final practice direction lists out the standard forms for parties to use in **family proceedings**.

ANSWERED 30 WRITTEN PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

Alex has responded to questions from MPs on a wide range of issues, from improving the waiting time for Court of Protection decisions to protecting the right to peacefully protest.

See below some examples of Alex's responses. To see the full list of answered questions, [click here](#).

Q. To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps his Department is taking to reduce the waiting time for Court of Protection decisions.

Alex responded:

"HMCTS and the MOJ have been working together to pilot new, digital ways of working in the Court of Protection that could streamline processes and remove both administrative and procedural delay. Emphasis has also been placed on increased digital working, to increase efficiency and facilitate remote working for both Court users and Court staff. These pilots are still in their early stages.

A digital upload pilot that commenced in April enables professional users to submit their Property and Affairs deputyship applications online. Over 200 applications have now been issued through this pilot, which has enabled orders, in non-contentious cases, to be made within weeks of the application being received.

A second pilot is being developed to encourage applicants to notify parties upfront. This will remove delays in waiting for responses and enable non-contentious cases to be dealt with in a more timely and efficient manner.

In addition, this month a new centralised team will be created at the Court of Protection, called the 'Orders Hub', to focus specifically on orders and process them more efficiently. Staff will be provided with targeted training to increase their expertise, tasks will be completed in tandem to reduce the time taken and areas of improvement will be identified to allow changes to be implemented. This will enable court orders to be issued quicker, and some within days of receipt."

Q. To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what discussion he has had with Cabinet colleagues about creating additional legal protections for the right to protest.

Alex responded:

"Peaceful protest is a vital part of a democratic society. It is a long-standing tradition in this country that people are free to gather together and to demonstrate their views, however uncomfortable these may be to the majority of us, provided that they do so within the law.

There is, of course, a balance to be struck. Protestors' rights need to be balanced with the rights of others to go about their business without fear of intimidation or serious disruption to the community. Rights to peaceful protest do not extend to violent or threatening behaviour and the police have powers to deal with any such acts."

ALSO SINCE THE LAST UPDATE:

- Attended Parliamentary Week Domestic Abuse panel with Victoria Atkins MP
- Made Ministerial visit to Shelter (virtual)
Made Ministerial visit to Law Centre (virtual).

Held Meetings/Talks with:

- Pauline Latham MP, regarding her Private Member's Bill to outlaw marriages for those aged under 18
- Jess Phillips MP, regarding the Domestic Abuse Bill.

IN THE MEDIA

IN THE MEDIA SINCE THE LAST UPDATE, ALEX HAS:

Been interviewed on BBC Points West regarding his **efforts to secure funding for Cheltenham Playhouse**, in which he was able to secure a meeting between the Playhouse Trustees and Arts Council England, who make the decision on funding applications.

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

1. Urged people in Cheltenham to have their say on the **future of healthcare in Gloucestershire**, and welcomed that A&E would not be one of the services up for debate in the new consultation launched by the Trust. [Read here.](#)
2. Updated readers on his **efforts to secure funding for Cheltenham Playhouse** from the Government's Culture Recovery Fund. [Read here.](#)
3. Reluctantly accepted that, given the rising number of COVID-19 cases across England, a **second lockdown** is necessary. [Read here.](#)

'Cast-iron commitment'

"We are saving lives through this approach. I am absolutely certain of that," added Ms Lee.

Cheltenham MP Alex Chalk, who has previously **campaigning to secure the future of the town's A&E**, said the trust had given him a "cast-iron" commitment that the closure was temporary.

"I take them at their word" he said.

"We don't want Covid to be the pretext for a quiet downgrade, as there simply isn't capacity at Gloucestershire Royal Hospital for the whole county.

"I and the people of Cheltenham look forward to A&E reopening at the earliest opportunity."

[Alex

was quoted by BBC News reiterating the guarantee he had been given by Trust bosses that Cheltenham's A&E will reopen]

WELCOMED COMMENTS FROM HEALTH TRUST THAT IT 'REMAINS COMMITTED' TO REOPENING CHELTENHAM'S A&E

In a recent BBC News article, Trust Chief Executive Deborah Lee has said that the closure of Cheltenham's A&E was "wholly and only in response to the pandemic".

Alex welcomed this latest confirmation that the suspension of **A&E services in Cheltenham is temporary**.

You can read the article in full [here](#).

OTHER LOCAL NEWS



ROYAL BRITISH LEGION POPPY APPEAL GOES VIRTUAL

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, this year's Poppy Appeal is a bit different. The Royal British Legion (RBL) have had to adapt and create new ways for people to commemorate our Armed Forces through poppies.

Each year 40,000 volunteers make the Poppy Appeal happen. However, many of their collectors now fall into vulnerable categories, so it is not safe for them to do face to face collections. The same risk exists for many supporters, who can't leave their homes as they would normally to buy a poppy.

Virtual Poppy – Facebook and Instagram:

Facebook have donated a poppy filter for the Poppy Appeal this year to be used on Facebook and Instagram. This filter simply places a poppy on the lapel of the user so that anyone on social media can show their support for the Appeal in their Facebook or Instagram stories. To find the filter, [click this link for Instagram](#) and [this link for Facebook](#).

Find out more about the appeal [here](#).

Remembrance Service in Cheltenham

Following the latest lockdown restrictions, Cheltenham Borough Council has announced that a number of changes will be made to the town's Remembrance Sunday service on Sunday 8 November 2020.

Local people are encouraged to **watch from home** as a short, closed service takes place at the War Memorial, with the ceremony streamed live via Cheltenham Borough Council's [YouTube channel](#).

Alex will be in attendance, alongside the Mayor of Cheltenham and a standard bearer from the Royal British Legion, to lay wreaths in two-minute intervals to maintain social distancing measures. They will also observe the two-minute silence at 11am.



FRIENDS OF CHELTENHAM SAMARITANS HOST VIRTUAL MUSICAL THEATRE FUNDRAISING EVENT - 28 NOVEMBER

As a result of COVID-19, Friends of Cheltenham Samaritans have been forced to look for alternative fundraising opportunities. Following their very successful Virtual Beer Festival in June, and 'Cheltenham World Relay' at the end of the summer, they are now organising another virtual event that people will be able to enjoy from their own homes.

On Saturday 28 November, '**A Musical Theatre Night In**' will be broadcast on their YouTube channel, with excellent musical theatre singers providing entertainment, with songs from the world of musical theatre and a handful of festive songs to start the countdown to Christmas. The entertainment will be provided by mostly **Cheltenham-based artists** who

have performed in theatres all over the world, the West End, and in Film.

Tickets for the event (just £5) are now on sale on Eventbrite. [Buy tickets here.](#)



'INDIE BUSINESS LIVE' LOOKING FOR SMALL INDEPENDENT BUSINESSES TO JOIN NETWORKING EVENT

'Indie Business Live' is an online event taking place on 26 November. It is a 9- hour celebration of over 1,000 small business, showcasing the very best that small independent retailers and businesses have to offer.

The celebration aims to:

1. Connect small businesses across regions, sectors and demographics;
2. Create a panel of representative voices who recognise the needs of small businesses, and can facilitate proper consultation and engagement with the Government;

3. Engage and encourage small businesses to embrace transformation and change for good.

[See more here.](#)



[Pictured: Nicky in action. Image courtesy of Matt Brodie]

CHELTENHAM CYCLING COACH AMONG FINALISTS FOR PRESTIGIOUS UK COACHING AWARD

Cheltenham Town Wheelers club chair and British Cycling Coach, Nicky Harverson, has been named as a finalist for the UK Coaching Awards 2020 in the **Children and Young People's Coach of the Year**.

The Award for Children and Young People's Coach of the Year is given to an individual coach who has **excelled and shown outstanding commitment to children and young people** in helping meet their sport and physical activity needs and aspirations.

Hosted by UK Coaching, the showpiece annual event is seen as one of the most prestigious by the coaching community. A virtual awards ceremony for all finalists will take place on Thursday, 3 December 2020, during which the winners will be announced.

[Read more here.](#)

NEW CHELTENHAM YOUTH HUBS LAUNCHED

New youth hubs are being set up by Cheltenham Job Centre Plus, in conjunction with partners, to **support young people aged 18-24**. The type of support the hubs will provide includes help on computers, careers guidance, housing advice, benefits advice, access to training, apprenticeships, mentoring, mental health and wellbeing support as well as job opportunities.

The opening of these hubs has been curtailed due to the new national restrictions, but they are expected to be able to reopen in some capacity post-lockdown.

The planned new hubs are:

1. Digi Dens (in Oakley and Hesters Way), which are ready to go as soon as restrictions are lifted;
2. Whaddon Youth Hub, which has continued with a limited service by appointment only;
3. Cheltenham Community Projects (High Street), which is closed due to COVID-19, but Cheltenham Job Centre Plus are working with them to secure an arrangement as a youth hub post-lockdown;
4. Salvation Army, which is also closed due to COVID-19, but were able to offer the potential for a youth hub moving forward.

Can you help?

The Job Centre Plus are keen to see different agencies, charities and businesses collaborate on the youth hubs project.

If you can offer support or know somebody who may be able to contribute, whether it be IT services, mentoring or even can offer premises, **please get in touch with Alex at alex.chalk.mp@parliament.uk**.



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