



**e-UPDATE #92 - 24.12.20**

Happy Christmas - and thank you to Michael (aged 9) from Charlton Kings Junior School for designing my Christmas card, above.

News of the spread of the mutant COVID strain marks a grim end to a dreadful year. SAGE experts and ministers have extended Tier 4 restrictions and from 00:01 on Boxing Day Cheltenham will be in Tier 3.

Given how close we came to Tier 3 on 15 December (see the official analysis below) I'm not entirely surprised. Since then, the incidence in the Cotswolds has risen by over 200%, Gloucester's figures remain high and our numbers in Cheltenham have risen too - albeit less explosively.

I bitterly regret these restrictions, because I instinctively believe in living without fear. But one thing is clear: as my colleague, Neil O'Brien MP has noted, Sweden's "herd immunity" strategy, which many lauded at the start of the pandemic as a better way to balance competing risks, has not worked. Although superficially attractive, it has led to a dreadful number of deaths per capita. Applied here in the UK, the results would have been even worse.

It's not difficult to see why commentators and journalists no longer trumpet Sweden as a Nordic utopia. Sweden's hospitals have been overwhelmed, with death rates around ten times higher than its immediate neighbours. Finland and Norway have had to step in to offer emergency medical assistance. Even the King of Sweden has made a near-unprecedented intervention criticising the government's bungled strategy.

A damning government report concluded that the state had failed to help the most vulnerable, and Swedish virologist Lena Einhorn has concluded that "Sweden's strategy

has proven to be a dramatic failure.” There hasn't even been an upside for the economy, which has suffered a bigger hit than their neighbours.

The strategy has fallen short despite Sweden’s natural advantages. It has just 25 people per square kilometre, compared to 273 in the UK – and a far higher proportion of people live alone. Instead, the better example seems to have come from our Australian and New Zealand cousins, as well as Singapore and South Korea: go hard, go early.

### Vaccine

Meanwhile, the vaccine roll-out in Gloucestershire is proceeding remarkably smoothly thanks to excellent planning and delivery. As at Friday 18 December, 1,850 vaccinations had been provided to higher risk NHS and social care staff, with thousands more to vulnerable groups. Nationwide, over 500,000 people in the UK have had their first vaccine dose the highest proportion on the planet.

### Other

There are updates below on my work in Cheltenham (there's good news about more funding for Cheltenham General Hospital) plus the latest on my ministerial duties at the MOJ. I haven't majored on Brexit this week, as at the time of writing we are in the final moments before an announcement on the success or otherwise of the talks. There will be time in due course to reflect on the outcome.

My sincere thanks to those on duty this Christmas, for your dedication and professionalism. We owe you a debt of gratitude - as indeed we do to the small business people who have worked so hard to keep their businesses going at a difficult time. I am thinking of you all. Please do all stay safe.

Best wishes,



**Alex Chalk MP**

PS Please note that the office will be closed until the New Year. Responses may take a little longer than normal.

*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](#)*

---

## **CHELTENHAM COVID UPDATE**

Gloucestershire <b>Tier 2 (High)</b>	Since the end of national restrictions, the situation in the majority of the area has deteriorated. Case rates are increasing in Gloucester, Stroud, Forest of Dean and Cheltenham and rates in over 60s are increasing across the area. In the most recent data, the area is on a rapidly increasing trajectory. The most concerning local authority is Forest of Dean where overall case rate (164 per 100,00), case rate in the over 60s, and positivity are high and have seen large increases in the past seven days. There have been a number of contained care home outbreaks in Forest of Dean and Stroud which account for some of this rise. The rate of increase of the epidemiology indicators is concerning but does not yet warrant escalation to Tier 3. It will be important to keep the epidemiology under review as the increased transmission of the virus may require the introduction of tighter measures. In the Gloucestershire STP the number of daily Covid hospital admissions continues to rise. The daily Covid bed occupancy is above the national acute hospital average and continues to rise. The proportion of critical care beds or beds with mechanical ventilation occupied by Covid patients remains high.
---	--

[Pictured: the official assessment on Gloucestershire's COVID situation at 15 December].

### **Summary**

As you know, Gloucestershire has been put in Tier 3 from 00:01 on Boxing Day. In Gloucestershire the overall rate per 100,000 is **162**, with the figure as high as **232** in Gloucester. In the Cotswolds the figure has risen by over 200% over the last fortnight.

### **COVID Hospital Patients:**

As at 7am on 21 December, there were 190 COVID positive patients in Gloucestershire hospitals, with 11 awaiting results, including 10 patients in the GRH Critical Care Unit. This is over 25% higher than in the spring peak.

The Trust also has 4.4% of its total workforce absent, 1.3% of who have COVID-19 related absences.

**Total number of cases in the county:** 10,626 (20 Dec). 1100 people tested positive in the 7 days up to 20 Dec.

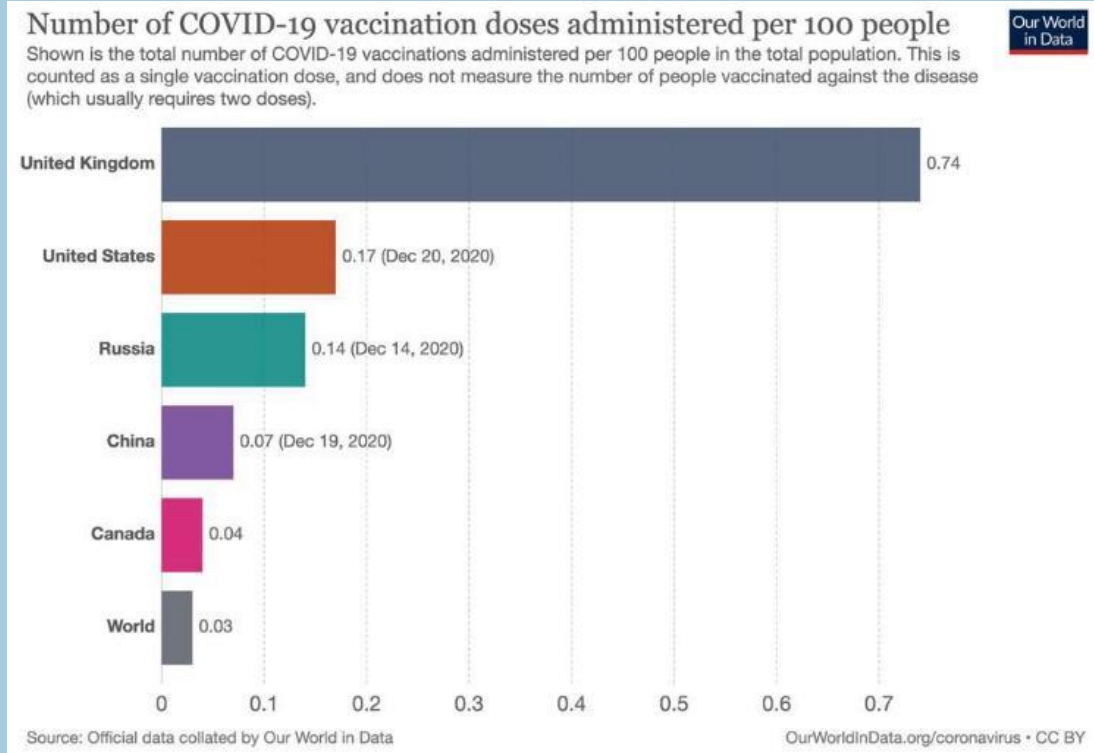
**Total number of cases in Cheltenham:** 1,936 (20 Dec). 166 people tested positive in the 7 days up to 20 Dec.

**Death registrations mentioning COVID-19:** 26 in last 7 days (w/e 20 Dec).

**Care homes cases:** There have been a number of outbreaks in care homes (staff and residents) with a number of these cases being asymptomatic and have been picked up through routine swabbing.

**Testing in Gloucestershire:** As at 18 December: 23,656 tests were undertaken via Pillar 1 (for NHS staff) and Pillar 2 (for the public) sites, this is higher than the previous week. Positivity increased to 4.1% (3% reported in the previous week).

## IN CHELTENHAM, ALEX HAS:



[Pictured: On 20 Dec the UK had administered more vaccine doses per head than any country in the world].

### **THANKED LOCAL NHS STAFF FOR ROLLOUT OF COVID VACCINATION PROGRAMME IN CHELTENHAM**

Alex has welcomed the rollout of the first COVID-19 vaccine, produced by Pfizer-BioNTech. On the first day the vaccine was rolled out in the county, Alex said:

*"This is a day of hope for Cheltenham, for Gloucestershire and our country. Thank you to local clinical staff who will be rolling out the vaccine over the coming weeks, at the same time as they are caring for sick patients.*

*Every vaccination makes this virus less lethal overall, as more vulnerable people are protected. But January could still be a very difficult time for Cheltenham General and Gloucestershire Royal if we let down our guard too early."*

The vaccine is now being administered to priority groups at the **Cheltenham East Community Fire Station**, as well as the Devereux Centre (Tewkesbury), North Cotswold Hospital (Moreton-in-Marsh), Rosebank Surgery (Gloucester) and Vale Community Hospital (Dursley). Five more sites across the county are due to be opened in the coming days.

Watch the video of Cheltenham East Community Fire Station in action on the first days of the vaccine programme [here](#).



**SUPPORTED 'CAROLS BY CARLIGHT' ORGANISED BY 'LOVE CHELTENHAM'**

Alex joined local people at a **Christmas drive-in carol service** at Cheltenham Racecourse. Attendees parked up in front of a giant screen and tuned in on their car radios to sing along to Christmas carols and readings in the safety of their own car.

All costs of hosting the event were covered by local Christian churches who support the 'Love Cheltenham' initiative. See more at [lovecheltenham.org](http://lovecheltenham.org).



**HELPED SECURE £2.8M FUNDING FOR VITAL MAINTENANCE WORK IN GLOUCESTERSHIRE HOSPITALS**

As part of the £600m Government investment to tackle crucial maintenance work in hospitals, Gloucestershire will benefit from **£2,777,000** in funding.

The projects include replacing hospital lifts, upgrading electrical infrastructure, work to improve fire safety and enhancing ventilation systems. The projects are underway and will be completed by March 2021.

Meanwhile, **South Western Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust**, which provides services in Gloucestershire and across the region, has been awarded **£925,000** for eight maintenance projects.

**We're providing**

**£1,507,675**

**to**

**Gloucestershire County Council**

**to support children, families and the most vulnerable over winter**

**WELCOMED GOVERNMENT FUNDING TO SUPPORT VULNERABLE FAMILIES IN GLOUCESTERSHIRE**

Alex welcomed the announcement of a £170m package of winter support for children, families and the most vulnerable over winter. As part of the Covid Winter Grant Scheme, over **£1,500,000** will be provided to Gloucestershire County Council.

The funding will be ring-fenced to help the hardest hit families and individuals, with at least 80% earmarked to **support with food, heating and bills**. The grant will cover the period to the end of March 2021.

This builds upon the £63 million of additional funding to councils (**over £550,000 for Gloucestershire County Council**) to support households struggling to afford food and other essentials as a result of the financial difficulties due to the pandemic. Gloucestershire County Council as a result, was able to run a COVID-19 Emergency Assistance Grant Fund over the summer and the October half-term.



**Supporting Guide Dogs' work to make childhood equal**

**Alex Chalk MP**

Guide Dogs MPs virtual roundtable  
#MakingChildhoodEqual

**ALSO SINCE THE LAST UPDATE, ALEX HAS:**

- Held constituency **surgeries** via Zoom;

**Attended the following events:**

- **Guide Dogs UK** Parliamentary Zoom event (see above);
- A (Covid-safe) **carol service** at St Mary's Church, in Charlton Kings.

**Held talks/meetings with:**

- Baroness Berridge, Education Minister, alongside the Head Teacher of **Pittville School**, regarding the school's application to build a **new sports hall**
- Baroness Stedman-Scott, **Minister for DWP**, on behalf of a recently-bereaved constituent seeking benefits advice

- **GFirst LEP** and other Gloucestershire MPs;
- A local events business, to discuss their plan to **help freelance musicians** in Cheltenham;
- Local constituent regarding links between **ME and Covid-19**
- **National Farming Union** Cheltenham Members

---

## ALEX'S MINISTERIAL ROUND-UP

---

**Since the last update, Alex has:**

### **SIGNED STATUTORY INSTRUMENT EXPANDING LEGAL AID ENTITLEMENT**

Alex has signed into law measures broadening entitlement to legal aid, by ensuring that certain payments (for example payments from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board) are no longer taken into consideration as a person's assets when making a decision on legal aid eligibility.

See below the signed Statutory Instrument:



2020 No.

**LEGAL AID AND ADVICE, ENGLAND AND WALES**

**The Civil Legal Aid (Financial Resources and Payment for Services) (Amendment) Regulations 2020**

*Made* - - - - - \*\*\*

*Laid before Parliament* - - - - - \*\*\*

*Coming into force in accordance with regulation 1*

The Lord Chancellor, in exercise of the powers conferred by sections 21(2)(a) and 41(1)(a) and (b) and (3)(a) of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012<sup>(a)</sup>, makes the following Regulations:

**Citation and commencement**

1.—(1) These Regulations may be cited as the Civil Legal Aid (Financial Resources and Payment for Services) (Amendment) Regulations 2020.

(2) Subject to paragraph (3), these Regulations come into force on 8th January 2021.

(3) Regulation 2(4) and regulation 2(5) come into force on 28th January 2021.

**Amendments to the Civil Legal Aid (Financial Resources and Payment for Services) Regulations 2013**

2.—(1) The Civil Legal Aid (Financial Resources and Payment for Services) Regulations 2013<sup>(b)</sup> are amended as follows.

(2) In regulation 2(1) (interpretation) insert at the appropriate places—

““the Caxton Foundation” means the charitable trust of that name (number 1142529) established on 28th March 2011 out of funds provided by the Secretary of State for the benefit of certain persons suffering from hepatitis C and other persons eligible for payment in accordance with its provisions;”;

““Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme” means—

(a) the schemes established under the Criminal Injuries Compensation Act 1995<sup>(c)</sup> or any arrangements for compensation by the Secretary of State for criminal injuries in operation before the commencement of those schemes;

---

(a) Section 42(1) of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (c. 10) provides that in Part 1 of that Act “regulations” means regulations made by the Lord Chancellor

(b) S.I. 2013/480; relevant amending instruments are S.I. 2013/591, 2015/643, 2015/838, 2016/211, 2016/708, 2017/745, 2019/894

(c) 1995 c. 53

(c) after paragraph (1)(s) insert—

- (t) any payment made by or under the Macfarlane Trust, the Macfarlane (Special Payments) Trust, the Macfarlane (Special Payments) (No.2) Trust, the Eileen Trust, MFET Limited, the Skipton Fund, the Caxton Foundation or a Relevant Infected Blood Support Scheme;
- (u) any payment made under the Vaccine Damage Payments Act 1979(a); and
- (v) any payment made by or under a trust established out of funds provided by the Secretary of State in respect of persons who suffered, or who are suffering, from variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease for the benefit of persons eligible for payments in accordance with its provisions.”, and

(d) After paragraph (3) insert—

“(3A) In calculating the disposable income or the gross income of the individual, the Director may disregard the following payments—

- (a) any payment made by or under the National Emergencies Trust, the We Love Manchester Emergency Fund, or the London Emergencies Trust; and
- (b) any award of compensation paid under a Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme.”

(4) In regulation 37 (interest in land)—

- (a) in paragraph (1) omit “, subject to paragraphs (2) and (3),”, and
- (b) omit paragraphs (2) to (4) and renumber regulation 37 accordingly.

(5) In regulation 38 (subject matter of the dispute disregard) after paragraph (3) insert—

“(4) Where the individual resides in more than one dwelling, the Director must decide which is the main dwelling for the purposes of this regulation and regulation 39.”.

(6) In regulation 40 (certain payments to be disregarded)—

- (a) at the end of paragraph (1)(d) omit “and”;
- (b) after paragraph (1)(e) insert—
  - (f) any payment made by or under the Macfarlane Trust, the Macfarlane (Special Payments) Trust, the Macfarlane (Special Payments) (No.2) Trust, the Eileen Trust, MFET Limited, the Skipton Fund, the Caxton Foundation or a Relevant Infected Blood Support Scheme;
  - (g) any payment made under the Vaccine Damage Payments Act 1979; and
  - (h) any payment by or under a trust established out of funds provided by the Secretary of State in respect of persons who suffered, or who are suffering, from variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease for the benefit of persons eligible for payments in accordance with its provisions.”, and

(c) after paragraph (2) insert—

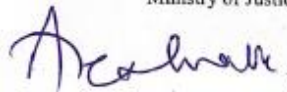
“(2A) In calculating the disposable capital of the individual, the Director may disregard the following payments—

- (a) any payment made by or under the National Emergencies Trust, the We Love Manchester Emergency Fund, or the London Emergencies Trust; and
- (b) any award of compensation under a Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme.”.

Date

17 December 2020.

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State  
Ministry of Justice





[Pictured: Lancaster Town Hall, the latest building to be temporarily repurposed as a 'Nightingale Court']

### **CONTINUED TO ROLL OUT MORE 'NIGHTINGALE' COURTS**

This week public buildings in Lancaster & Birmingham will open their doors as 'Nightingale' Courts to help increase capacity in the justice system whilst following social distancing rules.

These, plus 3 temporary courts due to open in the New Year, provide 9 more court rooms in total.

A new Crown Court in Cirencester will also open in the New Year.

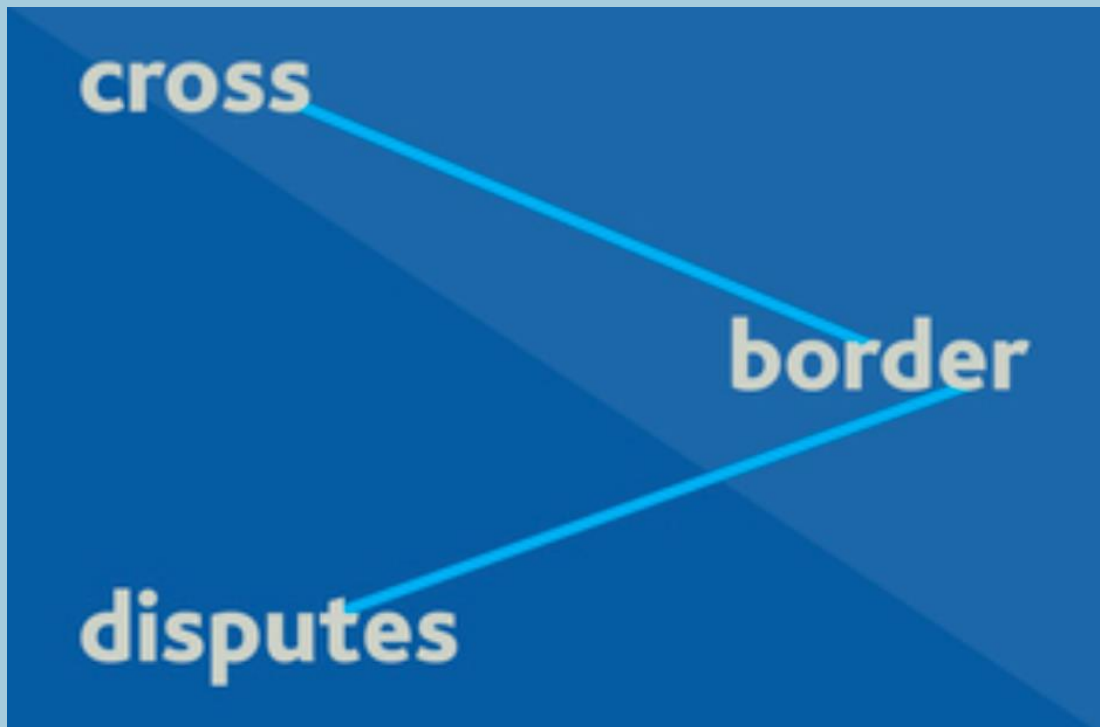
[Read more here.](#)



### **ANSWERED PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS ON ISSUES INCLUDING CHILD TRUST FUNDS AND THE DESECRATION OF CORPSES**

Alex was at the Despatch Box to answer Oral Parliamentary Questions on behalf of the Ministry of Justice. Alex answered a range of questions, including on what steps the MOJ is taking to improve **access to child trust funds** for parents of young adults with learning disabilities (see Alex's response [here](#)), as well as whether the MOJ have considered **criminalising the desecration of corpses** (see Alex's response [here](#)).

[Watch Alex answering questions here.](#)



**WELCOMED ROYAL ASSENT FOR PRIVATE INTERNATIONAL LAW BILL AFTER LEADING IT THROUGH PARLIAMENT**

As Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice, Alex has been responsible for piloting the **Private International Law Bill** through Parliament. The Bill has now received Royal Assent and becomes law.

As mentioned in previous updates, the Bill's overarching framework allows the UK to implement agreements that will give British businesses and citizens vital protections across borders. The Bill gives a framework to bring into UK law 3 existing cross-border agreements, as well as any future jurisdiction and reciprocal enforcement agreements.

[Read more here.](#)



### **MADE MINISTERIAL VISIT TO INNER LONDON CROWN COURT**

In his ministerial capacity, Alex visited Inner London Crown Court to meet judges and HM Courts and Tribunal Services Staff to discuss the future of courts recovery from the pandemic. Despite much of the South-East of England being in Tier 4, jury trials will continue as normal.

Since the end of July, the Magistrates' Court has been disposing of more cases than it has received, eroding the COVID backlog.

### **ANSWERED 20 WRITTEN PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS**

Alex responds to questions from MPs on a wide range of issues. 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 assessment he has made of the potential merits of rolling out the Sexual Violence Complainants' Advocate Scheme, piloted in Northumbria under the Home Office Violence Against Women & Girls Service Transformation Fund.”***

**Alex responded:**

*"The Government wants to ensure that victims of sexual offences are treated with dignity and respect throughout the criminal justice process.*

*We are aware of the Sexual Violence Complainants' Advocate Scheme in Northumbria and are considering the evaluation of this pilot as part of the Criminal Justice Board's end-to-end review of the criminal justice response to rape and serious sexual offences.*

*The Government will publish its initial findings and recommendations for action in due course. We are committed to continuing work with partners from across the criminal justice system after that to improve the system in the longer term.*

*The recently revised Victims' Code, which comes into force on 1 April 2021, will also ensure that victims benefit from a clearer set of rights and that these rights are recognised at every stage of the justice system. The revised Victims' Code provides a solid foundation on which we can progress the Victims' Law. We aim to consult on the detail of the Victims' Law next year."*

**Q. "To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what plans he has to amend the Human Rights Act 1998."**

**Alex responded:**

*"Yesterday the Government announced the launch of the Independent Human Rights Act Review, which is a key manifesto commitment of Government.*

*The Review will be a technical examination of the operation of the Human Rights Act, chaired by Sir Peter Gross. It will focus on the relationship between domestic courts and the European Court of Human Rights, as well as the relationship between the judiciary, the executive and the legislature.*

*The Panel have been requested to provide a detailed, independent piece of advice outlining options for reform by Summer 2021. A government response will subsequently be published."*

**ALSO SINCE THE LAST UPDATE, ALEX HAS:**

- Signed a Statutory Instrument to **prevent people being evicted** from homes before 11 January;
- Authorised the release of remains of two deceased **US Air Force personnel** who died in the UK to the US Air Force;
- Written to the devolved administrations regarding UK's annual report on **Human Rights**;
- Attended the Law Centre Network Annual Event (virtual).

**Held Meetings/Talks with:**

- The Director of Service Prosecutions - responsible for bringing prosecution against Armed Forces personnel
- The Law Society
- Rushanara Ali MP (Lab)
- Baroness Meacher and Crispin Blunt MP, regarding Humanist marriages
- Finding Legal Options for Women Survivors (FLOWS).

---

## IN THE MEDIA

---

### **ALSO IN THE MEDIA SINCE THE LAST UPDATE:**

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

1. Highlighted the fate of Sweden's 'herd immunity' strategy, whilst welcoming the progress made in Gloucestershire in rolling out the COVID-19 vaccine. [Read here.](#)
2. Urged people in Cheltenham to **take care over Christmas**, amid rising number of Covid patients in local hospitals. [Read here.](#)
3. Welcomed the rollout of the first Covid-19 vaccine. [Read here.](#)

---

## OTHER LOCAL NEWS

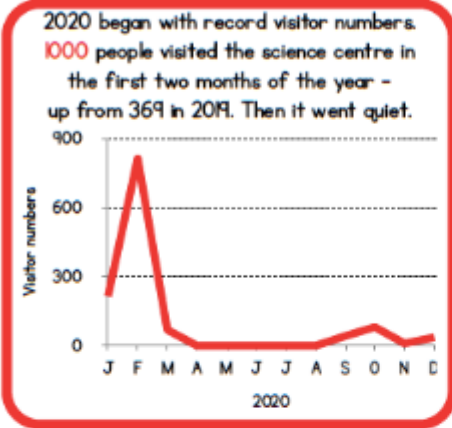
---





2020 may have been a quiet year for Cheltenham Science Group but we are still determined to inspire a new generation to **love Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths**.

visitor numbers



lockdown

We created four STEM projects, each containing six activities, for families to download for free and try at home. The page was visited by 949 unique visitors.

- Chemistry
- Biology
- Physics
- Technology
- Engineering
- Maths

reopening

- Having made some changes, we reopened (for the first time!) in September.
- sessions must be prebooked at [buytickets.at/cheltenhamsciencegroup.co.uk](http://buytickets.at/cheltenhamsciencegroup.co.uk)
  - opening hours changed to Thursday and Sunday to allow 72 hours in between
  - each bubble allocated their own area (maximum of 3 bubbles per session)
  - masks worn by volunteers and visitors over the age of 11
  - hand sanitiser available and extra cleaning between sessions

the future

Professor Adam Hart from the University of Gloucestershire says,

"If 2020 has taught us anything it is the importance of science: we are going to need science even more as we head into the future. After all, it isn't just pandemics we need to fix. The Cheltenham Science Centre is such an important part of the process of inspiring and teaching the next generation of scientists."

We are excited about the future and the prospect of a brand new visitor attraction at the heart of the **Golden Valley Development**, the home of **Cyber Central UK**.

Nick Sturge MBE says, "The supply of diverse talent - people of all ages, skills and backgrounds - are crucial to a vibrant economy in cyber-tech. We are delighted to be working with CSG to help citizens of Cheltenham and Gloucestershire unlock their potential and be part of Cyber Central"

The science centre will continue to open as often as it is safe to do so to enable the public to experience, investigate and enjoy hands-on science. We also look forward to resuming our outreach to schools and community groups in the new year. Please consider how you can **support us** whilst our income from visitors and outreach events is reduced due to COVID-19 restrictions.



**CHELTENHAM SCIENCE GROUP PUBLISH THEIR REVIEW OF 2020**

Alex has long been a supporter of Cheltenham Science Group. The community interest company was set up to **forge links between local STEM-based businesses and the community**. After receiving record visitor numbers at the start of 2020, their activities have been curtailed by COVID-19. However, the Science Centre will continue to open whenever it is able to do so, and will continue to provide the public with hands-on

experience of science in Cheltenham.

[Find out more here.](#)



[One of Tamsin Stuart's paintings of hero police dog Stark]

### **CHELTENHAM ARTIST IS RAISING MONEY TO SUPPORT RETIRED SERVICE DOGS**

Local Cheltenham artist Tamsin Stuart is raising money for the Retired West Midlands Police Dog Benevolent Fund. She is selling paintings of police dog Stark, who was brutally attacked with a machete, and was very lucky to survive. Money raised from the sales will be donated to the support fund.

[See more details here.](#)

A registered charity

Here if you need us this Christmas  
Talk to us, we'll listen

Call free day or night on  
**116 123**

Email  
[jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

**SAMARITANS**

[samaritans.org](http://samaritans.org)

**SAMARITANS ARE THERE FOR THOSE WHO NEED THEM THIS CHRISTMAS**

The Samaritans will be there **24 hours a day** throughout the holiday season, including Christmas day, to listen to anyone who is struggling. For many, this year will be particularly difficult, either because it gives them a chance to reflect on struggles they have faced over the year or because they will not be seeing people they love.

You can call them on **116 123** or email [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org).

**Merry Christmas from Alex!**



Highly commended: Alexandra, aged 9,  
from St James' C of E Primary School.



Highly commended: Daisy, year 6, Warden Hill Primary School.



Highly commended: Lauren, aged 5, Greatfield Park Primary School.



Copyright © 2020 Alex Chalk MP, All rights reserved.

You have received this email as someone who has written to me in the past and agreed to sign up to these updates. I like to keep constituents updated on my work for Cheltenham with email fortnightly updates. If you would like to stop receiving these emails, please click 'UNSUBSCRIBE' at the top or bottom of this email or reply and ask to be removed

from the list. In line with GDPR guidelines regarding data protection, I will continue to send you these updates unless you request to be removed.

**Our mailing address is:**

Alex Chalk MP

2 Henrietta Street

Cheltenham, GL50 4AA

United Kingdom

[Add us to your address book](#)

Want to change how you receive these emails?

You can [update your preferences](#) or [unsubscribe from this list](#)