



FORTNIGHTLY UPDATE - 24.04.2020

Welcome to this latest update. I hope you are all keeping safe.

At a time when a great deal is being written in the press about the national COVID position (some accurate, some less so...) I wanted to say a little bit about the current situation in Cheltenham.

As you know, the central aim of the lockdown strategy has been to slow the spread of the disease, and thereby protect the NHS from being overwhelmed. Thanks to the magnificent efforts of so many, this goal in Gloucestershire is so far being achieved.

Here in our county, the total **number of patients in ITU** at Cheltenham General and Gloucestershire Royal is **19** (not all COVID-19). Meanwhile, **total capacity in ITU is over 90 beds**, each one equipped with a ventilator for use if needed. We now have five times as many ventilators as we did at the start of lockdown.

This means the Doomsday scenario – of clinicians being forced into heart-breaking choices about which patients should receive life-saving ventilator treatment – has so far been avoided. I want to thank those who have stayed at home and followed the advice.

Earlier today, as every Friday, I had a lengthy briefing with local health chiefs, the County Council, and the other Gloucestershire MPs, to discuss the situation.

Three key messages came to us in that meeting:

(i) **if people are unwell, they shouldn't be afraid to talk to their GP or go to hospital.** CGH and GRH have good capacity to deal with heart attacks, strokes, as well as serious injuries and illnesses [READ MORE HERE](#)

(ii) Gloucestershire has managed to secure **PPE** in a timely manner in the main and has met the demand of users - from care homes to funeral directors. In the past week deliveries of more than 446,000 items have been distributed across the county. This doesn't mean we can drop our guard of course

(iii) **281 people admitted with COVID-19 have been discharged from Gloucestershire Hospitals** having been successfully treated.

Our thoughts of course remain with the families and friends of those who have very sadly lost their lives. We must in due course come together again as a community to pay tribute and remember them.

Ministry of Justice

In my ministerial role, I have been working to deliver a range of measures to address the national impact. These have included **increasing access to legal aid for victims of domestic violence**. I have also authorised the allocation of over £600,000 to boost victims services such as Victim Support, the Survivors' Trust, and sexual violence helplines. And I have signed a Statutory Instrument to allow legal aid practitioners to receive early payment for cases, thereby boosting cash flow at this difficult time. Further details are in the update below.

Businesses

Meanwhile, £14.5m in Government grant funding has now been deposited in the accounts of almost 1,200 Cheltenham businesses, in tranches of £10,000 and £25,000.

Also, I am assured after a detailed conversation I held with a High Street bank, that the number of loans approved through the CBILS loan scheme is ramping up.

Meanwhile, the Job Retention Scheme went live earlier this week, with 140,000 business applying for the Government grant on the first day alone. Up to 20,000 workers in Cheltenham alone could be covered by the scheme.

Charities

I had a 'meeting' in the last fortnight with the Chief Executive of the **Sue Ryder Leckhampton Court Hospice**, to discuss fundraising and PPE. Many of us (myself included) have had a friend or family member looked after there. We know what skilled and compassionate care it provides.

On the former, following some intensive lobbying, the Chancellor has set up a £750m charity fund, around half of which will be allocated in direct grants, including **£200m to be administered by Hospice UK**. Second, Gloucestershire's local NHS (which provides around a third of Sue Ryder's income) has front-loaded their grant to assist with cash-flow. On PPE, local coordination of PPE supplies through the resilience forum is working well.

I've also had detailed exchanges with Leonard Cheshire, both locally and with their Head Office. PPE supply lines there are also in place.

Thank You

Finally, let me **pay tribute to those in Cheltenham** going the extra mile to support our

fantastic NHS workers. We have our own Captain Tom Moores it turns out!

Stories that caught my eye included the Cheltenham resident, Mike Skidmore, who notionally [cycled](#) to the summit of **Mount Everest** from his garage. I also want to thank the 'Food 4 Heroes' volunteers, who stood out in the rain to deliver meals to NHS staff outside Cheltenham General this week.

Thank you too to the workshops at **Balcarras** and **Dean Close** which are churning out visors to aid the national effort.

You've heard our Queen say that "light and life are stronger". We know we'll get through this. And how we do so matters - if we come through it well, this will be in large part because of our NHS and care staff's dedicated service, and the unshakeable support from so many organisations and residents across every square inch of our county. Thank you to you all.

Best wishes,



Alex Chalk MP

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

WORKING FOR PEOPLE IN CHELTENHAM

MEETINGS

In the last fortnight, Alex has had "meetings" or other communication with:

1. Chief Executive of **Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Trust, Chair of the Clinical Commissioning Group**: to discuss hospital capacity, PPE, testing, social care
2. Director of **Sue Ryder**: regarding funding and PPE supplies
3. Representatives from **Leonard Cheshire**
4. Chief Executive of **Cheltenham Borough Homes**: regarding the impact of COVID-19

on their 5000+ tenants

5. Senior Leadership Team at **Cheltenham Borough Council**: to discuss a range of issues from Government business grants paid to the continued provision of services
6. Representatives of **HSBC**: to discuss the slow progress on CBILS loans, which is now ramping up
7. Cheltenham **Business Improvement District** (BID): regarding how businesses are being supported
8. Representatives of the Cheltenham **holiday sector**

CASEWORK

In the last fortnight Alex has received **several thousand emails** and is investigating a wide range of concerns raised by constituents.

Some of the topics he is helping with include:

1. Raising the concerns of **self-employed individuals** who have set up personal service companies and receive payments through dividends
2. Making sure **businesses** entitled to rate relief and grants get their awards
3. Supporting the **travel industry**, as well as **veterinary** and **dental practices**
4. Connecting offers of help with **medical equipment** - be it manufacturing or supplying - with local and national procurement teams directly.

IN THE MEDIA

Alex has written the following articles for the Gloucestershire Echo and appeared on BBC Radio Gloucestershire:

1. **Lockdown is Working**: thanks to the hard work of NHS staff and people's willingness to follow the rules, our health services have the capacity to cope. [Read here.](#)
2. **A 'New Deal' for Cheltenham**: looking ahead to the post-lockdown recovery, Cheltenham is in line for major Government investment in infrastructure. [Read here.](#)



[Alex with 'Food 4 Heroes' volunteers as they deliver hot meals to NHS staff at Cheltenham General]

SAYING THANK YOU TO THOSE HELPING OTHERS

Alex, together with the five other Gloucestershire MPs, has written an open letter to say thank you to everyone from our NHS heroes to local volunteer groups who are working to help others at this challenging time.

See below...



HOUSE OF COMMONS

An Open Letter to:

- The public services organisations of our county
- All Gloucestershire NHS Trusts, SW Ambulance Service, Gloucestershire County Council, all six District Councils and affiliated services, including waste contractors, Gloucestershire Constabulary, Glos Fire and Rescue Service and many others;
- To all serving the people whether through charities the private sector or community organisations in Care Homes, Hospices and at home;
- To the thousands of volunteers across our county making a difference to individual lives;
- To the businesses delivering food, mail and parcels to homes or manufacturing and producing PPE, ventilators and sanitiser gel;
- And to all our constituents in Lockdown Gloucestershire,

We, your elected representatives of the six parliamentary constituencies in our county, pay special tribute on your behalf to the work done during this pandemic to save lives, and enable our communities to keep going.

Under the pressure of the greatest peacetime health emergency in a century, our NHS in Gloucestershire has risen to the challenge - showing great adaptability, skill, courage and resourcefulness in dealing with COVID-19. We are all immensely grateful.

And there is an army of support across the county that has come together in partnership to work alongside and support the work of the NHS. From the carers continuing to look after the vulnerable in care homes and at home, schools who've stayed open, IT teams creating the Help Hub and portals for cash grants, councillors responding to needs and every single volunteer helping a neighbour, fire officers delivering national food parcels, together with faith groups and organisations like the Long Table delivering food locally; and

even our distillers producing sanitiser gel - so many are playing their part.

We want to recognise and cherish every example of love, sacrifice and community spirit because if crisis determines character it is that spirit, seen in times of floods and now in a pandemic, that makes Gloucestershire a great county.

Lastly, we recognise this has been tough for every individual and family in different ways. There are physical and mental health consequences - and we must all be sensitive to those.

Which makes the overwhelming determination of almost everyone to stick to extraordinary rules - to enable our NHS to be able to treat the sickest patients as we would all wish - all the more precious.

You've heard our Queen say that 'light and life are stronger'. We know we will get through this. And how we do so matters - if we come through it well, this will be in large part because of our NHS's dedicated service, and the unshakeable support from so many organisations and residents across every square inch of our county.

*From the six of us and from the bottom of our hearts to you all - thank you.
Yours sincerely,*

Siobhan
Bailie MP

Rt. Hon. Mark
Harper MP

Sir Geoffrey
Clifton-Brown MP

Richard
Graham MP

Alex
Chalk MP

Laurence
Robertson MP



Ministry of JUSTICE

ALEX'S MINISTERIAL DUTIES

PROTECTING VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

Alex's responsibilities include helping to protect victims of crime, and during the COVID-19 crisis, Alex has been working to ensure that victims of domestic abuse can get the legal remedies and protections they need (including injunctions, non-molestation orders and Domestic Violence Protection Orders).

To that end, on 21 April, Alex signed off measures which will provide **greater access to legal aid** for domestic abuse survivors. The evidence requirements needed to qualify for legal aid have now been expanded, making access easier.

Alongside this, the government has published guidance on applying for domestic abuse **injunctions** remotely. [See here](#)

And Alex has worked with colleagues in the Home Office to secure **£2 million** in funding to go towards domestic abuse helplines and online support. [Read more here.](#)

The landmark **Domestic Abuse Bill**, which Alex is piloting through Parliament together with Home Office ministers, is also set for its second reading on 28 April. For more detail on what this Bill does, [read here.](#)

HELPING THE MOST VULNERABLE GET ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Alongside measures to protect victims of domestic violence, Alex has also signed off several other key measures that will help those who need it most.

This includes reinstating immediate **access to individual help** for debt, discrimination and special educational needs (SEN) cases – initially via video link, then face to face when social distancing measures are no longer in place.

The Legal Aid Agency (LAA) will also be given the power to **backdate payments** for applications of legal help for inquests to the time at which the application was made, rather than when the application was granted.

[Read more here.](#)

ALSO IN THE LAST FORTNIGHT

As part of his other ministerial duties, Alex has:

- Chaired a meeting of the **International Law Committee** (consisting of Court of Appeal judges, a Law Lord, senior lawyers and others) to discuss progress and strategy regarding the **negotiations with the EU** and member states

- Held talks with Domestic Abuse Commissioner and Victims' Commissioner to brief them on **prisoner release**;
- Introduced measures to support the Legal Aid sector, including **expanding the scope for hardship payments** in Crown Court cases to reduce the threshold for work done from £5,000 to £1,000, and **pausing debt repayments** to the Legal Aid Agency for legal firms. Alex is now going further and reducing the threshold to below £500
- Made courtesy calls to the newly-appointed shadow Labour justice ministers

Alex is also responsible for key aspects of 'death management'. He is the Government lead for coordinating funeral industry engagement, industry processes and bereavement support.

SUPPORTING CHELTENHAM BUSINESSES AND WORKERS



HM Government

Coronavirus

Emergency support for businesses

Is your business eligible for government grants, tax cuts and loans?

Find out more:
[gov.uk/business-support](https://www.gov.uk/business-support)

£14.5M GRANTS PAID OUT TO 1165 CHELTENHAM BUSINESSES SO FAR

Under the Government's £12 billion grant scheme for small businesses, over £6.1 billion has already been paid to 500,000 businesses across England. Here in **Cheltenham**, **£14.5 million** has been paid out to **1165 local businesses**.

But £10 million is still available. If you think you might be eligible, please click on the link below. It will give you a provisional answer quickly.

[Click here for business support finder.](#)

Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme

Online service now live

UP TO 20,000 CHELTENHAM WORKERS EXPECTED TO BE PAID THROUGH FURLOUGH SCHEME

The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) went live on Monday 20 April. The CJRS will provide grants to directly pay 80% of employees' wages up to £2,500 per month. Around 20,000 workers in Cheltenham will be covered by the CJRS.

As of 23 April, 387,000 have applied nationally, encompassing almost 3 million workers. The scheme has been extended for a month, allowing employers to furlough staff until the end of June. If you're an employer, you can [apply here](#).

The scheme has also been **expanded to include new starters**. Employers can now claim for furloughed employees that were employed and on their PAYE payroll on or before 19 March 2020.

This change will make an **extra several hundred Cheltenham workers** eligible, and around 200,000 nationally. [Read more here](#).

Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme

Over 12,000 CBILS loans now approved
More than £2bn in government-backed lending

NUMBER OF CORONAVIRUS BUSINESS INTERRUPTION LOANS RAMPING UP

12,000 Coronavirus Business Interruption Loans have now been approved, with firms benefitting from **£2 billion** of government-backed lending.

Locally, **Alex had a meeting with HSBC** to discuss his concerns that loans under CBILS were not being made quickly enough to Cheltenham businesses.

HSBC informed him that CBILS was originally rolled out along the lines of the Export Finance Guarantee, meaning that business could only use CBILS if they were 'viable'. Around two weeks ago, **the criteria were relaxed, which has dramatically expanded the availability of CBILS.** Companies no longer have to exhaust all existing company assets before they can make use of it. The definition of 'undertaking in difficulty' (a bar to a loan being made) has been clarified.

OTHER IMPORTANT LOCAL UPDATES

**£750M EXTRA
FUNDING FOR
UK CHARITIES**

£750M CHARITY AID TO HELP HOSPICES AND OTHER CHELTENHAM CHARITIES

The Chancellor has announced **£750 million in funding** to prop up charities during this crisis. This is a huge step in ensuring the survival of charities who do vital work. The fund will go to charities including hospices, addressing the recent fundraising shortfall, and many others in Cheltenham and beyond.

[Read more here.](#)

An additional
£1.6bn
confirmed for councils

CHELTENHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL TO BENEFIT FROM ADDITIONAL FUNDING PACKAGE

Last weekend the Government announced a further £1.6 billion of funding for local authorities to use to meet additional pressures arising from the pandemic and **help continue to deliver vital services**. This is on top of £1.6 billion in March, taking the total package to £3.2 billion.

This funding will be un-ringfenced, meaning councils can decide how best to allocate the money. It will support Cheltenham Borough Council and Gloucestershire County Council in delivering vital local services, such as getting rough sleepers off the streets, getting survivors of domestic abuse into safe accommodation, and supporting the shielding programme for clinically vulnerable people. It will also support the continued provision of adult social care and children's services.

[Read more here.](#)

Covid-19: Gloucestershire Community Help Hub #GlosCommunity

OVER 3000 VULNERABLE PEOPLE HAVE BEEN HELPED BY LOCAL HUB

As of 22 April, **over 3,000 people have been helped**. Of that number, 2,200 registered for help and a further 800 recorded that their neighbour or friend required support. The service continues to effectively connect these people to its small army of volunteer helpers.

Find it online [HERE](#) or call 01452 583519.



[This banner was spotted on College Road, outside the CGH Clap for Our Carers]

OUR LOCAL HEROES THIS FORTNIGHT:

'Food 4 Heroes' Volunteers Provide Meals to NHS Staff:

Locally, a great volunteer group called [food4heroes.co.uk](https://www.food4heroes.co.uk) is coordinating efforts to ensure Glos NHS staff are able to easily obtain **healthy, delicious and nutritious food**. Local firms Hey Pesto and Foxy Ladies are preparing meals, and **300 meals per day** are being delivered for staff at Cheltenham General by volunteers. To donate you can go to the link and click on the South-West.

Other Heroes:

A Cheltenham resident ran a marathon in his back garden to raise money for the NHS. [Read more here.](#)

Another has cycled the equivalent of the height of Everest whilst in his garage, raising money for Sue Ryder. [Read more here.](#)

More than 100 University of Gloucestershire nursing students have signed up to help on the frontline. [Read more here.](#)

A Cheltenham headteacher delivering packed lunches to pupils who would normally receive a free school lunch. [Read more here.](#)

A local Cheltenham musician has recorded a song called 'Lockdown (But Not Lonely)' which is being played on BBC Radio Gloucestershire. You can listen to the song for free, but donations to the NHS are encouraged. [Listen here.](#)

COMMUNITY RESILIENCE FUND TO SUPPORT LOCAL GROUPS

A new 'Cheltenham community resilience fund' has been set up this year to **support local voluntary sector agencies and community groups** that are helping vulnerable people during the COVID-19 crisis.

The scheme, which brings together **£50k from Gloucestershire County Council and £30k funding from Cheltenham Borough Council**, and, is to help cover additional costs these groups may incur because of increased activity or functions they have insufficient resources to meet.

[Read more here](#)

EMERGENCY DENTAL CLINIC NOW OPEN IN CHELTENHAM

The first emergency dental practice in the county, being run by the Gloucestershire Health & Care Trust, is now up and running, and is in Cheltenham. You can apply for an emergency appointment via 111 or direct on 0300 421 6440, but please contact your own dentist in the first instance.

DELIVERY OF FREE SCHOOL MEALS CONTINUES OVER EASTER HOLIDAYS

Nearly **4,000 families in Gloucestershire** have benefited from **Free School Meals** over the Easter holidays. From 23 March children receiving Free School Meals have been getting packed lunches to make sure they do not go without. Families who are self-isolating have been receiving a hamper with ten days of food inside. The hamper comes with recipe cards so parents can cook with their children.

[Read more here](#)



0800 073 2200
www.letstalkglos.nhs.uk

**Let's Talk can offer you support and
guidance on how to manage your wellbeing.**

PUBLIC ENCOURAGED TO SEEK MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Gloucestershire County Council has launched a campaign aimed at encouraging local communities to look after their mental health and wellbeing during the current situation, and are signposting to areas of support, including to their 'Let's Talk' service.

[Click here to watch their video and find out more.](#)

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THE UK'S FIRST EVER VIRTUAL WELLBEING FESTIVAL

LIVE LIFE WELL

Virtual Weekender

8-10 MAY 2020

A THREE-DAY FESTIVAL PROVIDING TALKS, WORKSHOPS, EVENTS AND RESOURCES, TO HELP YOU AND YOUR FAMILY BETTER ADAPT AND COPE IN THESE EXTRAORDINARY TIMES

SUPPORTING THE NHS CHARITIES



COVID-19 URGENT APPEAL

NHS CHARITIES TOGETHER

ACCESSIBLE TO ALL

General Admission £10 per household for access to the whole three-days of content. **FREE tickets** for all frontline and key workers, school, university and college students, and for those in need. **APPLY TODAY**

REGISTER FOR TICKETS TODAY VIA OUR WEBSITE
lifelifewell.uk

UK'S FIRST VIRTUAL WELLBEING FESTIVAL RUNNING 8-10 MAY

The wellbeing community has come together to launch the **'Live Life Well Weekender'** - **the UK's first ever virtual wellbeing festival online**, to help people cope in these difficult times. The three-day festival will bring together experts and industry leaders, to provide a variety of **talks, workshops and resources**, that will offer support, spark discussions and provide the practical tools to help people look after their wellbeing.

Register for your tickets today via the website www.lifelifewell.uk.



National Cyber
Security Centre

Cyber Aware 

NATIONAL CYBER SECURITY CENTRE LAUNCH CYBER AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

The NCSC, part of GCHQ, has launched a campaign to help individuals and organisations to protect themselves online, as the country is relying more on technology while staying at home. **The 'Cyber Aware' campaign has these top tips for staying safe online:**

1. Turn on two factor authentication for important accounts
2. Protect important accounts using a password of three random words
3. Create a separate password that you only use for your main email account
4. Update the software and apps on your devices regularly (ideally set to 'automatically update')
5. Save your passwords in your browser
6. To protect yourself from being held to ransom, back up important data

[Find out more here.](#)

USEFUL LINKS:

[National Guidance](#)

[General NHS advice](#)

[Latest advice and developments from Gloucestershire NHS](#)

[Gloucestershire's Community Help Hub](#)

[Council service updates](#)

[Make an adult social care referral](#)

[Business advice and support](#)

[Looking after your wellbeing](#)

[Support for children and families during Covid-19](#)

USEFUL NUMBERS

Crime Stoppers	0800 555 111
UK Visas & Immigration.....	0300 123 2253
Citizens Advice Bureau.....	0300 330 1175
Shelter.....	0808 800 4444
Fire, Police, Ambulance service, Coastguard & Mountain Rescue.....	999
Police Non-Emergency	101
Debt Advice (Stepchange)	0800 138 1111
Law Society (Find a solicitor service	020 7320 5650
If you require legal advice, please call the CLA to establish if you are entitled to Legal Aid.....	0345 345 4345
HMRC	0800 015 9559
School Closures	0800 046 8687
Universal Credit.....	0800 3285644
Business hotline	0300 4563565
National Domestic Violence line.....	0808 2000247

GET IN TOUCH

As always, feel free to **email Alex on** alex.chalk.mp@parliament.uk if we can be of assistance at this difficult time. Please note we are receiving an increased volume of correspondence, and have limited resources in a small office, but we will do our best to help you.



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