



Fortnightly Update #63 - 09.04.2019

Welcome to this update.

I hope you'll forgive me if I don't major on **Brexit** in this update. Many of you will (understandably) have matters you wish to raise, perhaps in relation to the recent indicative votes. Please do email me and I will respond with a detailed email setting out my thinking - all my own words, not centrally produced blurb I promise!

Closer to home, I am so, so pleased that **Glos Hospitals is being awarded an extra £10m** to support modernisation works. I have been in close contact with the Chief Executive of the Trust about this bid, and have been able to press it directly with the Secretary of State (Matt Hancock) and also the Hospitals Minister. The extra cash will go on priorities including:

- Apollo theatre refurbishment: £1,088,000
- Replacement of obsolete medical equipment: £1,490,000
- Electronic patient record: £2,500,000
- Ward improvement work: £150,000

Money will also be allocated towards OPMAS - the replacement **chemotherapy** prescribing system.

In other news, some important **tax changes** affecting thousands of people in Cheltenham come into force this month (see below). And for Cheltenham commuters who are used to tearing their hair out (!) over rail delays, the Government's Delay Repay 15 compensation scheme is now up and running, meaning passengers can claim money back on services delayed by 15 to 29 minutes. You can read more [HERE](#)

There are other updates on issues ranging from **childhood criminal convictions** to further **education** and **homelessness** prevention funding for Cheltenham.

Thank you for reading.

Best wishes,



Alex Chalk MP

P.S Please note that these fortnightly updates are intended to be no more than an overview. If you would like an in-depth update on my various campaigns (from **restoring night-time A&E services at Cheltenham General** to adolescent mental health and cracking down on the town's 'grot spots') please do get in touch.

If you would like to stop receiving these emails, please click 'UNSUBSCRIBE' below or respond to this email and simply say 'UNSUBSCRIBE'!

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New tax changes coming into force this month

There are some important changes coming into force this week. Here are a few of them:

- On 6 April the **Personal Allowance increased to £12,500** and the **Higher Rate Threshold** in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland **rose to £50,000**. The upper National Insurance contributions thresholds have also increased in line with the Higher Rate Threshold
- The **National Living Wage** has increased from £7.83 to £8.21 an hour, representing an increase to a full-time minimum wage worker's annual earnings of over £690. Young people and apprentices have also seen above inflation increases in the National Minimum Wage rates.
- From April 8, the annual work allowances in **Universal Credit will rise by over £1000**, increasing the amount that 2.4 million households can earn annually before their Universal Credit starts to be withdrawn.
- To reduce administrative burdens on charities, **the individual donation limit under the Gift Aid Small Donations Scheme is going up to £30**, which applies to small collections where it is impractical to obtain a Gift Aid declaration.
- As of 1 April, businesses are eligible for a **1/3 discount to the business rates bills** on their retail property with a rateable value below £51,000.
- **Fuel duty** has been frozen for the ninth successive year.

Since the last update, Alex has:

IN PARLIAMENT

- Spoke out in support of increased **FE (Further Education) funding**. Alex highlighted the work of Gloucestershire College (**GlosCol**) and emphasised the importance of local provision - vital to minimise drop-out rates [READ MORE HERE](#)
- Raised concerns that low-level **historic childhood convictions** (eg for a playground fracas aged 14) are damaging employment prospects, even for those individuals who commit no further offences in adulthood. Alex noted that this risked holding back **social mobility** [READ MORE HERE](#). Alex's intervention was described, by the **Chairman of the Justice Select Committee** as "characteristically significant and thoughtful."
- Met with the **Chinese Ambassador H.E. Liu Xiaoming** at a Q&A hosted by the All Party Parliamentary China Group
- Called on the **Opposition front bench** to clarify which part of the Withdrawal Agreement (which settles (a) the money (b) the implementation period (c) citizens' rights) Labour actually disagreed with [READ MORE HERE](#)
- Spoken in a **housing** debate about the importance of **young people** being able to afford housing in town centre areas to contribute to their "culture, viability, and vibrancy". Noted that the Government has provided millions of pounds to ensure the viability of the **Portland Place** development in **Cheltenham** [READ MORE HERE](#) and also an article in the Echo [HERE](#)
- Pressed the **Prime Minister** to give a timetable regarding **indicative votes** on **Brexit** [READ MORE HERE](#) and [WATCH HERE](#)
- Called on the **Foreign Secretary** to set out what steps he is taking to tackle **persecution of Christians in the Middle East** [READ MORE HERE](#)
- Spoke up for **Cheltenham** constituents affected by the so-called **Loan Charge**. Alex noted that those who had followed the (wrong, as it turned out) advice of tax professionals were often unable to pursue them in the courts as they had gone out of business [READ MORE HERE](#)
- Raised concerns for the **safety of British nationals in Brunei**, including UK security personnel, following the introduction of the death penalty in Brunei for gay sex [READ MORE HERE](#)
- Opposed lowering the **voting age to 16**. Alex made the point that it would be inconsistent with the decision of Parliament (supported by those parties advocating votes at 16) to *raise* the minimum age for, for example, purchasing fireworks and using a sun-bed [READ MORE HERE](#)
- Raised concerns about the impact of **business rates on Cheltenham's nurseries** - which play such an important role in enabling parents to get to work. Business rates have been cut by the Government by one third for shops, pubs, restaurants and cafes in England with a rateable value of £51,000 and under - but nurseries are missing out [READ MORE HERE](#)

- Received a briefing from **Air Vice-Marshal Chris Elliot**, concerning recruitment to the Royal Air Force
- Been elected as Vice-Chair for the All Party Parliamentary Group for **Ancient Woodland and Veteran Trees**
- Met with the CEO of the Association of Town & City Management to discuss Alex's new position as **Vice-Chair** of the All Party Parliamentary Group for **Town Centres**
- Met with representatives from the British Association of **Dermatologists** to discuss skin cancer warning signs, as part of a skin cancer awareness campaign exhibition
- Attended (in capacity as **PPS to the Health Secretary** - NB Alex's PPS role prohibits him from speaking in DHSC matters) debates regarding:
 - the Healthcare (International Arrangements) Bill in its final stage before Royal Assent. You can find out more about the Bill [HERE](#)
 - NHS pensions
 - Consideration of Amendments stage (so called 'ping pong' stage) for the [Mental Capacity \(Amendment\) Bill](#)
 - first aid training for infants
- Provided PPS support to the Health Secretary at **Health Oral Questions**. You can watch this month's OPQs [HERE](#)
- Joined Parkinson's UK at a reception to mark **World Parkinson's Day**. You can [READ MORE HERE](#)
- **Took part in a VR (Virtual Reality) event** with Airbus to learn more about the UK-based manufacture of world-leading satellites. The event involved using a VR headset to 'tour' Airbus' research facilities and view the latest technology
- Signed a letter to the Environment Secretary, Michael Gove, **calling for giraffes to be protected from a trophy hunting loophole** [READ MORE HERE](#)
- Welcomed several groups of **Cheltenham residents to Parliament for a tour and Q&A**. Alex has now hosted over 1,350 people in Parliament; if you're interested in joining a future tour, please respond to this email

IN CHELTENHAM

- Welcomed news that Cheltenham has been awarded **£108,000** by the Government in Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) funding, to enable the P3 Outreach team to hire two further full-time outreach staff. This funding is in addition to:
 - the Government grant of c.£600k for new Homelessness Hubs in Cheltenham and Gloucester
 - c.£1.3m Government grant for 'social impact bond' funding of P3 outreach workers to provide intensive one-on-one support for vulnerable people. This is something Alex has been particularly passionate about [READ MORE HERE](#)
- **Welcomed the Government's announcement of an additional £10million upgrade for Gloucestershire's hospitals**. The funding will support modernisation works,

theatre improvements and major equipment upgrades. The cash windfall comes on top of a £40million boost awarded to the Trust last year.

- Supported the **Glos Info Auction of Promises** at the Cheltenham Jurys Inn in support of the **Superheroes Foundation**, which fundraises for UK and US children's hospitals. Alex successfully bid for a season ticket to the Cheltenham Lido! [READ MORE HERE](#)
- Joined local residents at **Christchurch** to thank Rev Tim Mayfield for his exceptional service in advance of his new posting to the North-East
- Supported the **Breeze Local Heroes Awards** at Manor by the Lake, recognising influential and inspirational people in Gloucestershire [READ MORE HERE](#)
- Gave a speech to local business people at the **Cheltenham Business Forum**, held in the Cheltenham Ladies' College Sports Centre
- Met the Chairman of the **Cheltenham Business Improvement District** to discuss the future of Cheltenham's High Street
- Visited the **former Springbank Shopping Centre site** to see the completed and much needed **housing** development, which has replaced a derelict shopping centre. Alex called for action on this 'grot spot' in Parliament back in 2015 and is delighted that the local area has now been transformed [READ MORE HERE](#)
- Visited **Bournside School** for a Q&A with Year 13 pupils
- Joined the **Cheltenham Festival of Performing Arts** team for a conference call with Children Services at the County Council to discuss safeguarding legislation affecting the festival
- Taken part in a '**Curry and Colonels**' tour around Cheltenham with Visit Cheltenham to celebrate **English Tourism Week**
- Supported the **Easter Eggstravaganza** at St Mark's and Hesters Way Community Centre
- Attended a meeting of the **REACH (Restore A&E at Cheltenham Hospital) campaign group** to discuss the next steps in the ongoing fight against local NHS bosses' plans to shift general surgery services from Cheltenham General to Gloucestershire Royal
- Supported **Plastic Free Cheltenham** for their litter-pick event in Montpellier Gardens
- Contacted the parking team at the County Council to raise local businesses' concerns that **each business is limited to just two parking permits**, regardless of their size and number of employees
- Following a Parliamentary Question regarding the steps the **Government is taking to tackle the scourge of nuisance calls (see question and answer below)**, Alex received the following email from a company, True Call, who claim to have created an ingenious solution to address the situation where companies require you to provide your phone number when buying a product or signing up to a service. You can find out more information [HERE](#)

"In 2015 my company identified this as being a big problem and came up with a simple service to solve this. We provide this free for the public – the service is called trueCall38 (www.truecall38.co.uk).

How it works - when a web site asks you for your phone number and you don't want to give it then you can just enter our memorable phone number 0333 88 88 88 88 (that's three threes, eight eights) instead of your own. If the company (or anyone they have passed your number on to) calls you they will hear a short recorded message:-

"trueCall38 is handling my calls. I prefer not to be contacted by phone, so please contact me via my email address"

You are not disturbed, and the company - if they are legitimate - can still contact you via email.

There is no registration process or cost for people using the service – they just use our number whenever they don't want to give out their own. The service has been used by tens of thousands of people and has blocked hundreds of thousands on unwanted nuisance calls."

IN THE MEDIA

- Written two articles for the **Gloucestershire Echo** about Brexit - [READ MORE HERE](#)
- Been interviewed on **BBC Points West** and **Bloomberg** about the latest Brexit developments

CONSTITUENCY SURGERIES

If you would like to book an appointment, please email reply to this email or email Alex on alex.chalk.mp@parliament.uk

CASEWORK

To raise a casework issue, please email reply to this email or email Alex.

Written Parliamentary Questions

- To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps the Government is taking to ban the marketing of single-use wipes as flushable if they do not conform to the Water UK approved fine to flush standard.

Therese Coffey MP (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at DEFRA): *"The Government set out in the Resources and Waste Strategy, the actions we will take to encourage producers to take more responsibility for the lifespan of their products and make sure these are more carefully designed with resource efficiency, and waste prevention in mind. This includes wet wipes.*

The Government is working with the water industry and wet wipe manufacturers to prevent wet wipes entering our waterways and damaging our marine environment. I hosted a cross industry wet wipes roundtable in November 2016, to tackle the issue of wipes being incorrectly flushed and causing sewer blockages. Following the meeting, revised wet wipe industry guidance requires a 'Do Not Flush' label to be displayed far more prominently on non-flushable wipes.

We support the water industry's ongoing work on their voluntary 'Fine to Flush' label, to ensure that any wipes which are marked as being 'flushable', are plastic free and are truly flushable, meaning they can enter the sewage system without causing blockages or harming the environment. We are actively encouraging the water and wet wipe industries to work together to develop an agreed 'flushability' standard for those wipes that are intended for disposal via

toilets.”

- To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of extending to all people with later stage (a) degenerative and (b) non-curable conditions the ceasing of repeat assessments for personal independence payment; and if she will make a statement.

Justin Tomlinson (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Family Support, Housing and Child Maintenance): *“Once someone has been awarded Personal Independence Payment (PIP), which can be paid at one of eight rates, that award will be reviewed. Reviews of PIP are a key part of the benefit to ensure that awards remain correct where needs may change (including where needs increase and the award may need to increase) and that we maintain contact with the claimant, both features that are missing from its predecessor Disability Living Allowance. The length of an award is based on an individual’s circumstances and can vary from nine months to an on-going award, with a light touch review after ten years.*

We introduced updated guidance for case managers and an updated PIP Assessment Guide in 2018 which will ensure that those people who receive the highest level of support under PIP, and where their needs are unlikely to change or may get worse, will now receive an ongoing award with a light touch review at the ten-year point. In line with PIP’s aim to be needs-based rather than condition-based, the change to the guidance is not condition specific. However, we believe the changes will ensure that those with severe and/or progressive conditions receive the most appropriate award duration that reflects their condition and the needs arising.

Special considerations also apply to claimants who are terminally ill, and our arrangements recognise the particular difficulties faced by people who only have a short time to live. Claims by people with a terminal illness are fast tracked, are not subject to a face-to-face assessment and they are guaranteed the enhanced rate of the Daily Living Component; nearly all also receive the enhanced rate of mobility.”

- To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what discussions he has had with social media platforms on removing scam modelling agencies from their listings.

Margot James (Minister of State at DCMS): *“Ministers and officials have regular meetings and discussions with social media companies on a range of issues. Details of ministerial meetings are published quarterly on the [Gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) website.”*

- To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether the Government has any plans to review the RCGP Advanced Knowledge Test in relation to ME and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome to ensure it (a) remains up-to-date and (b) demonstrates best practice for treatment of those conditions.

Caroline Dinenage (Minister of State for Care): *“The responsibility for reviewing and updating the Advanced Knowledge Test (AKT) lies with the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP). General practice is where most patients with chronic fatigue syndrome/myalgic encephalomyelitis are likely to be managed, and the condition is identified as a key area of clinical knowledge in the RCGP AKT content guide. The AKT is a summative assessment of the knowledge base that underpins general practice in the United Kingdom within the context of the National Health Service and is a key part of general practitioners’ qualifying exams.”*

- To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of re-classifying modelling platforms as employment agencies to ensure that they cannot charge clients upfront fees; and if he will make a statement.

Kelly Tolhurst (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at BEIS): *“Through the Good Work Plan, published in December 2018, the Government has committed to upgrading workers’ rights and protecting the most vulnerable workers. This represents the biggest upgrade to workers’ rights in over 20 years.*

Modelling platforms can already meet the definition of an employment agency as set out in the Employment Agencies Act 1973. If they meet the definition, they would already need to comply with the current legislation, which has specific regulations that cover modelling and entertainment agencies. The Employment Agency Standards Inspectorate looks at all complaints on a case by case basis, and works with other partner organisations, such as Trading Standards, to ensure organisations comply with the relevant legislation.”

- To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the effect of the roll-out of 5G technology on people's health.

Jackie Doyle-Price (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Mental Health, Inequalities and Suicide Prevention): *“Electromagnetic fields (EMFs) and health evidence reviews have been prepared by scientific expert groups in the United Kingdom and around the world. The independent Advisory Group on Non-Ionising Radiation (AGNIR) published their report in the UK in 2012 and the European Commission’s Scientific Committee on Emerging and Newly Identified Health Risks (SCENIHR) published their report in 2015. The World Health Organization is presently preparing a review. The AGNIR report is available at the following link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/radiofrequency-electromagnetic-fields-health-effects>*

The SCENIHR report is available at the following link:

https://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/health/files/scientific_committees/docs/citizens_emf_en.pdf

Based on the accumulated evidence and reviews, Public Health England (PHE) advises that the guidelines of the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP) should be adopted and there is no convincing evidence that EMF exposures below the ICNIRP guideline levels cause adverse health effects.

PHE has committed to keeping the emerging evidence under review and to preparing another comprehensive review when sufficient new evidence has accumulated.”

- To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, whether the Government has made an assessment of the effect on levels of nuisance calls of companies requiring consumers to provide their phone numbers when purchasing products or signing up for services.

Margot James (Minister of State at DCMS): *“Companies who process personal data and use it to make marketing communications are regulated by the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA) and the Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations 2003 (PECR). Both of these are administered and enforced by the Information Commissioner (ICO). If a company collects phone numbers from customers, it must be clear and transparent about how personal data will be handled, and ensure that the data is processed in a way which individuals would expect. Personal data must not be shared with third parties without an appropriate legal basis. Organisations that fail to comply may be subject to enforcement action by the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO). The ICO has the power to impose a monetary penalty on those*

who break the law.

The Government has not made an official assessment of the effect on levels of nuisance calls of companies requiring consumers to provide their phone numbers when purchasing products or signing up for services.”

POTHOLE, GROT SPOT & HIGH STREET UPDATE

- A number of potholes on **Hewlett Road** have been filled by the County Council, following a report by Alex on behalf of a local constituent
- **Tennyson Road** has been included in the 2019/2020 resurfacing programme, following concerns raised about the state of the road by a local resident.
- **Libertus Road** is on the list of potential resurfacing schemes, although there is no timetable for the scheme at present, and raised residents' concerns about a potential drainage failure in the area.
- Requested that bird excrement be cleaned off the area of the **Promenade outside the War Memorial**
- **Coffee 1** will be opening on the former Montpellier Lodge site in Montpellier Gardens on 18 April. [READ MORE HERE](#)
- Two new eateries are opening in Montpellier, **Clementine cafe and August Moon Tea**. [READ MORE HERE](#)
- Contacted the County Council to seek an assurance that the pictured tarmac infills outside Primark on the High Street are **only temporary** and will be replaced with like for like replacement slabs in due course



- Reported the following pothole on the junction of the **High Street/Bath Road** to the County Council for repair



PHOTO GALLERY



Alex has been elected as the Vice Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Ancient Woodland and Veteran Trees



Supporting the Auction of Promises in aid of the Superheroes Foundation



At the Breeze Local Hero Awards



Meeting pupils at Bournside School



Taking part in a 'Curry and Colonels' tour around Cheltenham as part of English Tourism Week



Celebrating the completion of the new housing development on the former Springbank Shopping Centre site



Speaking to Bloomberg News outside Parliament about Brexit



A Hogarth-esque montage! Alex is on the left of the image



Supporting the Breeze Local Heroes Awards at Manor by the Lake



Supporting those people affected by Parkinson's



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Our mailing address is:

Alex Chalk MP

2 Henrietta Street

Cheltenham, GL50 4AA

United Kingdom

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