



Fortnightly Update #76 - 19.01.2020

Welcome to this latest update.

It has been a busy time since Parliament returned. The Foreign & Commonwealth Office, where I am based as PPS, has been closely focused on issues including **Iran** and the British response to the **Australian bushfires**. For me, that has meant spending a fair bit of time in the chamber supporting ministers making formal statements or answering UQs (urgent questions). Several All-Party Parliamentary Groups which I am a member of have also been reconstituted; and I've taken the opportunity to lobby ministers about a number of issues affecting Cheltenham - ranging from the **M5 Junction 10** bid, to the **NHS pensions** issue which has led to several senior clinicians in Gloucestershire being forced to cut back their hours. That needs fixing urgently.

One of my New Year's resolutions is to record more video content to (I hope!) give a better sense of what goes on in Parliament. Included below is a video with my thoughts on the first week back, as well as some of the issues I have raised in the chamber. I also recorded a video of the new Cheltenham office. Don't expect anything too glamorous!

I've also included a One Nation "declaration of values" document that I and others prepared in the last Parliament. Given that this is an expression which is increasingly used, I thought it would be helpful to set out what it means - to me at any rate!

Finally, spaces are almost filled for the upcoming **trips to Parliament**, but there is still some limited availability in March. Further details below.

Thank you for reading.

Best wishes,

Alex Chalk MP

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Since the last update, Alex has...

IN PARLIAMENT:



RETURNED TO PARLIAMENT

To hear Alex's thoughts on the first week back, **click on the video above**



MOVED TO NEW PARLIAMENTARY OFFICE

Alex and his staff will now be based in Portcullis House. See a clip from moving day by **clicking the video above**



IN THE CHAMBER:

Emphasised the importance of developing biodiversity in post-Brexit agricultural policy, to create a better, more diverse countryside [Watch here](#).

Called on MPs to provide reassurance to EU nationals in their constituencies regarding leave to remain under the Settled Status scheme, which has already been successfully secured by over 2 million EU nationals [Watch here](#). To read more about the Settlement Scheme [click here](#).

Took issue with the SNP's Tommy Sheppard, pointing out that 55% of Scottish people voted for Unionist parties who want Scotland to stay in the UK in the 2019 General Election.

Called on the Government to hold to account those responsible for transporting **prisoners to court**. Too many courts are routinely lying idle because prisoners have not been produced, causing distress victims, inconvenience to witnesses and cost to the taxpayer [Watch here](#).

Provided PPS to the Foreign & Commonwealth Office ministerial team during the following Parliamentary sessions:

- **The FCO Statement on the Australian bushfires**, and the measures the UK is taking to offer assistance. Watch the ministerial statement [here](#)
- **An Urgent Question on Iran:** 'To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the security situation in Iran'
- **The FCO Statement on Iran**, and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. Watch the Foreign Secretary's statement [here](#)
- **The Queen's Speech debate day** on 'Britain in the World'.

All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs)

Alex attended inaugural meetings to reconstitute the following APPGs:

1. The APPG on the Loan Charge:

In the last Parliament Alex campaigned against the Loan Charge, which has led to individuals in Cheltenham facing ruin over huge tax demands relating to liabilities said to have been incurred many years ago. You can read more about the Loan Charge issue [here](#), and Alex's previous comments [here](#).

2. The APPG on ME.

3. The APPG on Legal Aid.

4. The APPG on Youth Action and Climate Change.

(The ME APPG clashed with the Iran Statement, so Alex sent a representative on his behalf).

LOBBYING/MINISTERIAL MEETINGS

Lobbied the Housing Minister on making J10 of the M5 four-way:

Alex met with Esther McVey to lobby for investment to make J10 four-way. Alex set out the cyber vision for Cheltenham and the potential, with excellent infrastructure, for local jobs and opportunity in this sector.

Held talks with the Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury on support for low-carbon heating systems:

Alex called on the Government to extend support beyond March 2021 for low-carbon heating systems such as ground-source heat pumps. This is to ensure that providers such as 'The Renewable Design Company' on Cheltenham's Rodney Road can continue to supply environmentally-friendly heating solutions. To see some of the work they do, [click here](#).

Met the Transport Secretary to discuss the Air Balloon scheme:

Alex made the point that investment in the North must not come at the expense of Gloucestershire and the South-West. [Click here](#) to watch Alex discuss the Air Balloon plans with the Transport Secretary back in December at the site.

Alex subsequently **lobbied the Transport Minister** in the Lords, Baroness Vere, ahead of her visit on 17 January to the site.

Pressed the Chancellor to urgently address the NHS pensions issue:

A large number of senior medical staff face huge tax bills for breaching their pension savings allowance, meaning that staff are having to turn down working extra shifts out of fear of punitive bills. Alex pressed the Chancellor to roll out a solution to this as quickly as possible.

Raised with the Foreign Secretary the case of Oscar Saxelby-Lee, who needs blood donors in Singapore:

Oscar, a young boy with a rare form of blood cancer, is undergoing experimental stem cell treatment in Singapore, following his family's £500,000 fundraising drive. They have reached out to the FCO to support their efforts to encourage donors to come forward from the expat community in Singapore, as there is an acute shortage of platelets. **Read more about Oscar** [here](#).

OTHER

Held talks with the County Council and other Gloucestershire MPs to discuss plans to address several county-wide issues: potholes, roads, parking, and fire & rescue services.

Supported the Open Doors 2020 World Watch List Launch, which provided in-depth research and analysis into the 50 countries where **Christians** face the worst **persecution**. Alex has long campaigned on this issue.

Attended Holocaust Memorial Day Trust Parliamentary Reception. Ahead of the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz on 27 January, Alex attended the reception to commemorate the end of the Holocaust.

Welcomed new MPs into the Conservative Environment Network, of which Alex is a founding member (pic below).



Met with fellow One Nation Conservative MPs, to discuss how to progress the One Nation agenda. Alex previously called for such an approach in his first speech back in Parliament since being re-elected ([watch here](#)). See below the One Nation 'Declaration of Values':

One Nation Conservatives Declaration of Values

As One Nation Conservatives, we are united by our belief in the following values:

The United Kingdom: we believe in the United Kingdom as the embodiment of our shared values and as a force for good in defending our values in the world: we are patriotic Conservatives who reject narrow nationalism.

Active global leadership: we believe the UK must be a leader on the world stage through our aid, trade and security commitments to tackle global challenges as a global citizen, through a strong defence and “soft power” commitment.

Life Chances: we believe that everyone in our country – whoever and wherever they are from – has an equal right to a fair chance in life, and that bold reforms to welfare & vocational skills are central to tackling social injustice and creating an opportunity society.

Social Responsibility: we believe in a strong society, and a social contract between all of us as fellow citizens, supported in our tax and welfare system.

Public Services: we believe in our public services, properly funded by a growing economy, as fundamental to the wellbeing of our nation, in a mixed economy of public, private and third sector providers.

Localism: we believe in the importance of place and Conservatives supporting the local, civic and voluntary over the bureaucratic, statist and compulsory.

Environmental Stewardship: we believe that we all have a responsibility to act as stewards of our local and global environment, for the next generation, and a duty to show global leadership on climate change and biodiversity.

Markets and values: we believe in free enterprise, business and the market economy with a framework of good regulation to enhance competition, support innovation, break monopolies, empower citizens and reflect our shared values.

Law and Human rights: we believe in universal human rights and the rule of law and are of our country and Party’s record in promoting them through an independent judiciary, effective enforcement, community policing & policies to prevent crime & social breakdown.

Democratic renewal: we believe that civilised, open respectful political debate in our Party, Parliament & free press, and a vibrant arts & cultural sector is fundamental to strengthening the health of our society and democracy.

IN THE MEDIA

Highlighted the progress the UK is making on reaching net zero carbon emissions by 2050, in an interview on Radio 5 Live with Emma Barnett, alongside senior MPs from opposition parties.

Outlined his vision for Cheltenham's Cyber Park in an interview with BBC Radio Gloucestershire.

Welcomed plans for Cheltenham Spa Station's new car park in an interview with BBC Radio Gloucestershire.

Discussed infrastructure investment in the South-West, among other topics, on BBC Politics West (pic below).



In two articles for Gloucestershire Live:

1. **Called for the UK to do all it can to assist in tackling the Australian bushfires.**
2. **Welcomed the return of the Northern Irish Assembly, and its wider implications for a less divisive approach to political debate.**

IN CHELTENHAM:



JOINED CHARITY SPINATHON

Alex took part in a charity Spinathon for Maggie's Cheltenham at CLC sports centre. I believe that Maggie's raised over £12,000, a fantastic achievement!



CHALLENGED GWR ON JOURNEY TIMES

Alex wrote to GWR to call for more journeys on the route to be **sub-two hours**.

MORE SUPPORT FOR TROUBLED FAMILIES TO SUCCEED



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

WELCOMED SUPPORT FOR VULNERABLE CHELTENHAM FAMILIES

The Government recently announced £165 million in funding to help families with deep-rooted problems, in order to help them get their lives back on track. Almost **one million pounds** of this budget will be spent in Gloucestershire.

[Read here](#) how the support package will help.

ALSO THIS FORTNIGHT:

Held drop-in sessions at The Hatherley and Umbrella pubs, for constituents to raise any concerns.

Met with Maggie Stewart, the Director of the Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre.

Held a constituency surgery.

Met with REACH - Restore Emergency At Cheltenham Hospital - to discuss forthcoming Fit For the Future Citizens' Jury process.

Attended the Cheltenham Civic Society Winter Party.

IN OTHER NEWS:

Applications are now open to Cheltenham students for the Sutton Trust Summer School scheme.

Schools in Cheltenham will shortly receive information about the Sutton Trust's

programme, which champions social mobility from birth to workplace. The summer schools are designed to help young people make informed choices about their futures. **For more information about the programme, [click here](#).**

VISIT PARLIAMENT!

Alex organises regular trips to Parliament. The day includes return transport from Cheltenham, a full tour of the Houses of Parliament, and a Q&A with Alex - all done at cost (just £16).

Places are going fast, but there is still limited availability on the following tour dates:

- **Friday 13 March** (est. departure time from Cheltenham: 10.30am)
- **Monday 30 March** (est. departure time from Cheltenham: 7.00am).

There are also further tour dates planned for **April**.

If you're interested in joining us on one of them, please email Chris at chris.shevlin@parliament.uk.

GET IN TOUCH

As always, if you would like to get in touch to raise any issues, big or small, feel free to contact the office by emailing alex.chalk.mp@parliament.uk or by calling **01242 210473**.



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