

November 2018

I've been working to make sure we have a proper alternative to Operation Stack and that Kent's roads are prepared of there is disruption at the Channel crossings. There's also plenty going on with my with local campaigns for better healthcare in Maidstone and East Kent and investment in infrastructure. You can also read my reflections on the budget and my Brexit town hall meeting. Do please share this update with anyone you think might be interested and encourage others to sign up.

Kent Roads must be ready for Brexit

Operation Stack brought Kent to a standstill in my very first summer as an MP and ever since then I've been determined that it should never happen again.

I've been in regular contact with the Department for Transport and Highways England as they work on their solution to Stack. Roadworks have now begun to strengthen the hard shoulder of the M20, so that lorries can queue on the coast-bound carriageway while traffic can keep going in both directions on the London-bound section. The M26 is also being improved so it can be used as a lorry holding area - but I have been reassured this will only be used in a worst-case scenario. I know these roadworks have been a huge inconvenience, causing delays for drivers on the M20, and night-time noise for people living along the A20. My postbag suggests fewer lorries are now going through Bearsted at night (though please let me know if you're still having problems). The sooner this is over the better.

The Secretary of State has assured me that his priority is to keep traffic moving if there is any disruption at the border. These are contingency plans and I hope they never have to be used. I want the Government to get a deal that keeps freight moving freely across the border because that is in Europe's interest as well as ours. But it's responsible to plan ahead and make sure we're prepared.

A tax cut for millions and more money for the NHS, this was a brighter Budget

It's been tough, but we're seeing the benefits of keeping control of public finances. Debt is falling as a share of GDP the deficit is down and we have the lowest unemployment in my lifetime. With a strong economy the Government has been able to invest an extra £20.5 billion in the NHS, and I'm delighted that £2 billion is going to mental health.

There's also £30 billion for roads, and I'll be arguing that Kent should get its fair share. Extra money for schools will mean an average £10,000 for primary and £50,000 for secondary schools to buy new equipment.

The rise in the living wage will help many people - but especially women, who still tend to be on lower incomes despite progress on the gender pay gap. There's a tax cut for 32 million people and an extra £1.7 billion a year for Universal Credit.

This Budget was all about ensuring everybody benefits from a strong economy, particularly the lowest paid.



Peddling for the Poppy Appeal: I took part in a charity bike ride to help raise money for the Royal British Legion. MPs and Peers had to cycle as far as they could in 5 minutes as part of the celebrations of the First World War centenary.

Maidstone needs a health hub

Maidstone's population is growing, and people are living longer with more complicated health needs. People, particularly those in deprived parts of the constituency, need easy-to-access services close to home.

I'm campaigning for a new health hub for Maidstone, where people can get see a GP, get bloodtests, X-rays, physiotherapy, treatment for minor injuries and access council services like housing and benefits advice. The local NHS has agreed to consider a new health hub for Maidstone and I'm pushing them to look for locations to the South/South East of Maidstone for example, the Heather House site in Park Wood.

The future of farming



Agriculture policy should support farmers to grow fresh, healthy fruit and veg

As Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Fruit and Vegetable Growers, I care about the future of farming. I want Britain to seize the opportunity of leaving the EU's Common Agricultural Policy to create a farming system that supports fresh, healthy British fruit and vegetables.

I welcome the Government's plans - set out in the new Agriculture Bill - to use public money for public good, like protecting the environment and enhancing animal welfare. **Along with other members of the APPG, I want agriculture policy to promote public health too - cleaner air and more affordable healthy food.** I raised this point in the debate about this Bill, you can read what I said [here](#).

We're getting a Kent medical school, now we need a modern hospital



Simon Cook, Matt Hancock and me

Healthcare in East Kent is not good enough. Our local hospitals Trust (EKUHFT) is currently ranked 126 out of 133 trusts in England. We're getting a new medical school to attract the best and brightest young doctors. Now we need to make sure the local NHS is good enough for them to want to stay here when they graduate.

Along with Canterbury City Council leader Simon Cook, I secured a meeting with the Health Secretary to focus his attention on the situation in East Kent and particularly the future of our hospitals. One option is for emergency services to be concentrated at the William Harvey Hospital in Ashford, with a secondary A&E in Margate and planned care in Canterbury. The other is a new emergency hospital in Canterbury, co-funded by a developer as part of a housing development. This could become a centre of excellence in the South East, and together with the medical school, be a real pull for doctors and nurses. But it does have implications for the hospitals on either side. There will be no easy answers but one thing is clear – we can't continue with things as they are.

The Health Secretary said: "I've listened and heard the case for a new

hospital – I appreciate Helen and Simon’s campaigning on this and their arguments that this will be best for patients.”

The big Brexit debate



A packed hall for my public meeting

Well over a hundred people turned out on a Friday night for my Brexit public meeting. I was overwhelmed with the response – the tickets sold out in less than a day. I know that this is a difficult and sensitive subject, and I was glad that I was able to hear from so many constituents about their worries and their hopes for our exit from the EU.

We had a lively debate, and it was really valuable to hear different views. There were people who voted to remain who don’t want us to leave at all, and some people who voted to leave who wish that we were already out of the EU. I have been reflecting on what I heard, and I will use all the opinions I heard from constituents to inform how I vote on the final deal in Parliament.

Ultimately, I want us to secure a good deal to take us out of the EU. This has to respect the referendum result by taking us out of the EU’s institutions, and

also protect jobs and the economy. I think that the Government's proposal for our future relationship sets out a sensible and pragmatic plan, and I intend to vote for a deal along these lines.

How much has mental healthcare improved?



There is still a way to go to achieve parity between mental and physical healthcare

Two years of work came to fruition this month, when the APPG for Mental Health launched its report into the current state of mental health services.

We found while investment in specialist services such as perinatal and early intervention in psychosis has produced massive successes, core services still need urgent attention.

The national picture plays out locally too. I recently visited a fantastic new mother and baby unit that helps new mums in Kent get treatment for mental health problems without being separated from their baby. In Canterbury, people with their own experiences of poor mental health are getting involved in helping patients through an innovative new 'Open Dialogue' scheme. And many more people are getting access to talking therapies. But people with

serious mental health problems like psychosis have not seen the same improvements.

With the Government now working on a long-term plan for the NHS, and with an extra £2 billion being invested in mental health, it is absolutely vital that core services for adults with severe mental illnesses are made a priority.

Read the report [here](#).



Launching the All Party Parliamentary Group for Mental Health's report