

# CAROLINE DINENAGE MP

MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR GOSPORT

## NEWSLETTER

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February, the shortest month of the year, but certainly not the quietest - either in Parliament or the Gosport Constituency.

Regular readers will know of the tireless work of Charlotte Fairall from Stubbington, who founded [Sophie's Legacy](#) after the death of her 10-year-old daughter, Sophie, from Rhabdomyosarcoma in September 2021. Charlotte and I have been campaigning for a Childhood Cancer Mission to improve childhood cancer services, including earlier diagnosis, more research, improved patient experience, treatment, and support. At the start of February, [we met with the Secretary of State for Health](#), Steve Barclay, to make the case for our Mission. We were really encouraged by his positive reaction to our proposals. We left the meeting very hopeful that progress will be made.



Charlotte was also awarded the [Prime Minister's Points of Light Award](#) by the Secretary of State. The Points of Light Award is given to outstanding individual volunteers, who are recognised for making change in their community. I am extraordinarily proud of Charlotte for all she has achieved. Turning unimaginable tragedy into a strong and positive force for change.

I also met with the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Roads and Local Transport, Richard Holden, to discuss the progress on the new Gosport Bus Interchange. It also gave me the opportunity to push for improvements to the A32!



It was fantastic to catch up with [Hampshire & Isle of Wight Community Foundation](#). We have agreed to arrange a local event together in the near future to ensure community groups and voluntary organisations in our area are aware of their work and taking full advantage of the funding streams available, watch this space for more details!

I went for a walk around the beautiful Titchfield Haven with Debbie Tann, the CEO of the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust. I know many people were distressed about the closure of Titchfield Haven visitors centre and café in December. Thanks to Fareham Borough Council, who designated the site as a Community Interest Asset, there is a 6-month window of opportunity for a community organisation to bid for the site before it can be put up for sale. The Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust are currently crunching the numbers and trying to put together a business plan for the site before the June deadline. You can support this great work on their [website](#) or [Go Fund Me](#) page.

One of the most important roles



of an MP is to engage our youth with the democratic process, teaching them about Parliament, the role of MPs and how people of all ages can get involved in the way our country is run. [I visited Crofton Hammond Junior and Newtown Primary Schools](#) this month to meet pupils and answer their questions.

Some of you may have seen the [reconfiguration of various government departments this month](#) with the creation of the new Departments for Energy Security & Net Zero, Business & Trade, Culture, Media & Sport, and Science, Innovation & Technology. This restructuring of Whitehall highlights the Prime Minister's ambitions, particularly surrounding delivery of energy security and a focus on upskilling and modernisation of our economy.

Another big announcement at the end of February that the Prime Minister and the European Union have negotiated a new settlement for Northern Ireland, the Windsor Framework. This will remove the customs border across the Irish Sea, ensure free flowing trade between Northern Ireland and the rest of the Union. Crucially it will protect Northern Ireland's place in our Union and the power sharing agreement in Stormont.

In other news, I am pleased to say that the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities is now consulting on the application of Council Tax to Homes of Multiple Occupancy (HMO). Regular readers will know that this is a result of the [amendment that I tabled in November](#). There is increasingly a problem of individual bedrooms in shared living accommodation being classed as individual dwellings. The result is that individual tenants are hit with a full council tax bill, often without warning. Tenants in HMOs tend to be those who can least afford it, such as young people starting out in their careers. I am encouraging anyone with an interest or insight to [respond to the consultation](#) before March 31.

Other developments this month include the rise in legal age limit to get married. You now have to be 18 or over, even with parental consent. Individuals who organise arranged marriages for under 18s could face up to 7 years in prison.

In light of the recent high profile case in Scotland, the Ministry of Justice confirmed the [news](#) this month that transgender women with male genitalia will no longer be permitted to be held in mainstream women's prisons in England.

As a Minister at the Department of Health & Social Care 2018-20, I led the work on a Women's Health Strategy, to ensure the particular health needs of the female population are fully understood and properly served. I am very pleased that another part of this strategy was ticked off this month, with the introduction of [Hormone Replacement Therapy \(HRT\) Pre-Payment Certificates](#) from April 1. This will reduce the cost of HRT prescriptions to £18.70 per year, saving around 400,000 women hundreds of pounds.

On the theme of health services, it was very interesting to hear an update from the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Integrated Care Board (ICB) who are responsible for our region's health and care provision. Without a doubt, it has been a challenging period, with worries about Strep A and strike action effecting NHS services. However, the ICB offered glimmers of hope, with some promising data. On primary care, there has been a welcome 13% increase in GP appointments, on average 800,000 appointments were delivered each month in our area, with 2 out of 5 appointments seen on the day.

Local hospitals have received in excess of £6.15m thanks to the government Discharge Fund. 62% of patients were admitted or discharged within 4 hours of arriving to hospital, with ambulance waiting times better than the national average and continuing to improve. Over 75% of patients waiting for diagnostic tests are seen within 6 weeks, and local cancer referrals are better than the national average.

While access to NHS dentists remains a problem in our area, some new NHS dental contracts will be going live later this year.

So, while there is still much progress to be made, the government investment and the hard work of health and care professionals across our region is starting to deliver improvements.

I continue to engage with the ICB regarding the upcoming merger of Gosport Medical Centre with the Willow Group and the potential closure of Bury Road Surgery, we should know more on the latter very soon.

Further policy announcements this month included the launch of the [Family Hubs and Start for Life programme](#), which meets commitments on the government's Vision for the First 1,001 Critical Days.

The government also announced £200m of funding to improve cycle and walking infrastructure across the country, reducing journey times, making active travel safer and more accessible.

I hosted some fantastic Gosport ladies in Parliament this month at an event encouraging female participation in elected politics. I thoroughly enjoyed showing them around. With International Women's Day around the corner, it's important to work towards a Parliament which better reflects the population it represents.



OFGEM has announced that its cap on the amount suppliers can charge for energy for average dual fuel, direct debit customers would fall by 23% for the three months from 1 April to £3,280, from £4,279 for the January to March quarter. Good news that the government's policies are working in driving down inflation, particularly in the energy sector.

Of course, February 24 marked the poignant reminder of the 1-year anniversary of the war in Ukraine. A minute silence took place across the country, allowing reflection on the devastation and suffering that this horrific war has inflicted on the Ukrainian people. It is absolutely vital for our own national security, as well as the moral good, that Putin is not allowed to succeed. The friendship between our two nations a year later remains as strong as ever.

Local people have offered incredible support and compassion to those who have sought refuge here. My own Ukrainian guests have been with my family since May and have become much loved members of our household.



This special relationship was highlighted by the surprise visit from President Zelenskyy earlier in the month, where he gave an extraordinarily speech to both Houses of Parliament.

The next few months will be crucial in defining the ultimate outcome of this conflict, its impact on the rest of the world and how it has changed the face of the geopolitical landscape cannot be understated. This month I joined NATO Parliamentary Assembly delegation meetings at NATO HQ in Brussels for important updates on these themes.



Many of you will know that I have been concerned with the state of living accommodation in HMS Sultan & HMS Collingwood for some time. This month I met with Second Sea Lord, Martin Connell, who visited HMS Collingwood to see the

standards for himself and took the decision to close Vivian Block. This is an issue I have regularly [raised with Ministerial colleagues](#) both inside and outside of the Common's Chamber. I will be meeting the First Sea Lord, Admiral Ben Key, shortly and I've invited the responsible Minister, Dr Andrew Murrison, to come and see the accommodation at Sultan and Collingwood first hand. Our service personnel persistently show up, step up & fill in for other public services in our times of need. They deserve our best respect & care.



I [hosted an event in partnership with Google UK](#) for local businesses to learn how to best utilise digital tools to improve business outreach. The Google Digital Garage, held at the Fareham Innovation Centre, was well attended. Around 50 local business had the opportunity to pick up advice from Google Digital Coaches on developing social media strategies, using Google Analytics and expanding their customer base.



I enjoyed meeting [Bridge to Unity](#), a local organisation who run a range of projects to bring communities together in support of groups from veterans, to Afghan and Ukrainian refugees. They are holding an event offering CV advice, networking and 1 to 1 support for Ukrainian refugees on March 4 from 11am-2pm at the Freedom Centre in Gosport. For more info, email [info@bridgetounity.co.uk](mailto:info@bridgetounity.co.uk).

I attended the Friends of Crescent Garden Annual General Meeting at St Mary's Parish Centre.

Towards the end of February, I took the opportunity to accompany Fareham and Gosport 999 Police Response Team on the night shift alongside Hampshire's Police & Crime Commissioner, Donna Jones. The police officers I met were admirable in their quiet professionalism and competence. It was frustrating to see how much police time is wasted with unnecessary callouts and alcohol related incidents.

Earlier this month was HIV Testing Week. I met with the Terrance Higgins Trust to learn more about the HIV self-testing process and took the painless test myself in just 15 minutes. Testing is an important part of the ambition to eradicate new cases of HIV. You can get a test online and find out more from the [Terrance Higgins Trust](#).

I attended an Early Years Roundtable at the end of the month. This was an opportunity to hear from childcare professionals on the challenges they are facing.

I met with the National Literacy Trust Local Leaders Network at Gosport Discovery Centre. They do great work to promote improved reading and literacy in Gosport, working with local people to make the Discovery Centre and Bridgemary Library a welcome space for all.

World Book Day is also coming up on March 2. I met with the Publisher's Association to hear about events being held across the country.



**Finally, in other news:**

-Shaw Trust are looking for nominations for individuals, campaigns or organisations who are challenging perceptions of disabilities. [Nominations are open](#) until March 31.

-National Apprenticeship Week took place at the start of February. In Gosport, we have a fantastic array of apprenticeship providers like Fareham College and CETC. I was thrilled to learn that there have been nearly 30,000 apprenticeship starters since my election in 2010.

Best wishes  
Caroline Dinenage

Caroline Dinenage MP  
167 Stoke Road  
Gosport  
PO12 1SE  
[caroline.dinenage.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:caroline.dinenage.mp@parliament.uk)



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