



FROM THE CLOCK TOWER

October 2002



Chris Grayling MP

From the Clock Tower is a twice yearly update from your local MP Chris Grayling. The Epsom and Ewell parliamentary constituency covers the Borough of Epsom and Ewell, Ashted, Nork, Tattenhams and the Preston area of Tadworth.



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Pressure on policing

Local MP Chris Grayling has challenged Ministers over the mounting recruitment and funding crisis facing Surrey Police – and told them that ignoring the issue will simply worsen law and order problems in the area.

Surrey's Chief Constable, Denis O'Connor, has warned that the force faces severe operational difficulties, and that the service provided to the public is at risk as a result. Surrey already receives the lowest Government funding per head of population of any force in the country.

Another key reason for the problems is the difference between police pay in London and Surrey. Metropolitan Police officers receive £6,000 per year more than officers in Epsom and also get free transport.

The Met has been actively recruiting experienced officers from forces outside London, and Surrey has suffered particularly badly as a result. The force is losing up to one in six of its officers at present, either to London or to other parts of the country where house prices are lower.



In a special parliamentary debate called by Chris on *Policing in Mid-Surrey*, he warned Home Office Minister John Denham of the consequences if Surrey officers do not get the support they need.

"There simply are not enough of them to provide adequate protection for my constituents and people throughout mid-Surrey," warned Chris. ... "If the financial squeeze on Surrey Police makes it impossible for them to deal with the rising problem of antisocial behaviour, we risk the tougher battle fought in the inner cities being brought out to the suburbs." Chris has also written to Home Secretary David Blunkett asking him to end the situation where officers in London are paid so much more than Surrey officers. "It's just as expensive to live in Surrey as in parts of London – so it makes no sense to have such a big pay gap." Chris and other Surrey MPs will meet the Chief Constable shortly to discuss the problem and look for other ideas to help ease the situation.

IN BRIEF

Expanding business

Chris has been holding discussions with traders in Ewell and Stoneleigh about ways of attracting more shoppers. He's also had discussions with traders having premises near the junction of the Kingston Road and Ruxley Lane about the problems they are having with parking. "I think it's enormously important to support smaller local arcades," he says, "and I am keen to do what I can to help make it easier for traders to attract customers."

Central Railway Update

Residents in Ashted remain concerned about the proposed Central Railway freight line that is proposed to run through the area. Although he is a great supporter of the railways in principle, Chris has opposed the plan, which he says is not viable and lacks support in the industry. He has written to Ministers again asking them to rule out the project.



Finding a way forward for St Ebba's

The Government has started discussions with parents and relatives of residents of St Ebba's Hospital about their ideas for the future of the site after a special parliamentary debate organised by local MP Chris Grayling. St Ebba's is one of the five old mental hospitals in Epsom and cares for people with learning difficulties.

Most of the original residents have now been moved to new homes in the community, but a small number are still living there. The NHS would like to retain part of the site to provide ongoing accommodation for some of those who remain, but the parents and relatives want a larger area set aside to develop a village community for people with learning difficulties.

Roundabout debate

Chris has asked Ministers to reconsider plans by the Department of Health to build a new roundabout on Christchurch Road in Epsom, right next to Epsom Common. The Common is a Site of Special Scientific Interest, and is home to a number of rare species. He has also held discussions with officials at Surrey County Council and at the Government Office for the South East about the plans.

"If this proposal goes ahead, it will spoil one of the greenest approaches to Epsom, and do real damage to this part of Epsom Common. I will continue to do what I can to get the plans revised," says Chris.



What does your MP do?

It's now a little over a year since Chris became MP for Epsom and Ewell. Here he explains what a local MP actually does.



At a meeting of the Transport Committee

There are really four parts to my job – taking part in debates at Westminster, working in Committees, dealing with problems and issues for constituents, and visiting and keeping in touch with as many local people, organisations and other groups as I can.

Most of the debates that take place in the House of Commons are about new laws proposed by the Government. In the past year I have spoken in several major debates, particularly on education and transport as well as the Finance Bill which follows each year's budget. MPs also have the opportunity to call special debates on subjects of their choice – and Ministers have to attend and answer the points you make. You put your name into a weekly draw for a small number of slots. I've been lucky; my name has come out of the hat five times, and I have had debates about both policing and mental health services in Mid-Surrey, the bus pass issue for pensioners in Epsom and Ewell, and on transport and education in our part of the country.

Visiting residents at Swail House, the specialist home for blind and visually impaired people in Epsom



When people see pictures of the House of Commons chamber with relatively few people in it, they often don't realise that a large part of the work at Westminster takes place behind the scenes in committees. In the past year, I have been a member of the Transport, Local Government and the Regions Select Committee and on a series of committees investigating new laws. Select Committees are watchdogs for Government departments, and in the past year my Committee has investigated a wide range of issues, including the state of the railways, the problem of empty homes in the North of England and the future of local councils.

I think the most important part of my work, though, is dealing with issues and problems on behalf of constituents. Every day my small team and I receive a large bundle of letters, often with quite complex problems to try to deal with. I also see constituents at my regular surgeries or at other meetings around the area. Sometimes I can't do as much as I would wish as MP to help – but we do what we can.

An individual MP does not have much power to demand that something is changed on behalf of a constituent, but I do have the ability to get access to the right people and try to get the problem solved. I also get involved in broader campaigns on behalf of the constituency – for example, fighting for a better deal for our police force, or to protect Epsom Hospital.

Lastly, when the House of Commons is not sitting, I spend much of my time visiting local groups and organisations. I am working my way round the local schools and hope to have visited all of them soon. I also speak to local voluntary organisations and businesses on a regular basis. And there are regular update meetings with local public services – like the health service or the police – to keep me in touch with what's happening locally.

AROUND & ABOUT



Left:
With members of the
Epsom and Ewell
Branch of the Save
the Children Fund

Below:
With local GP Dr Terry
Mistry at Epsom
Clocktower for the start of
this year's Parliamentary
Classic Car Run



Right:
Unveiling
the Jubilee
Clock in
Ashtead



Left:
Campaigning with local parents
and children on the Wells Estate



Visits to the House of Commons

If you are part of a local school or organisation that would like to arrange a tour of the House of Commons, please contact Beth Mitchell in Chris's office at Westminster.

You can ring the office on 020 7219 8194, or write to her at the House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA.

Surgeries

Chris holds surgeries every fortnight on a Friday afternoon. The venues rotate between the Constituency Office in Ashtead, the Epsom Conservative Club, Stoneleigh Library and Tattenham Corner Library.

For details of the next surgery date, and to book an appointment, please ring the Constituency Office.

A visit from your MP

If you would like Chris to attend an event or to visit your organisation, please contact the Constituency Office at 212 Barnett Wood Lane, Ashtead, KT21 2DB, or telephone 01372 271036.