
November was a very busy month in politics.

Many of you will have watched the COP26 Summit in Glasgow. We made a great deal of progress that we can be very proud of. But the devil will be in the implementation.

If you'd like an independent view, I will be organising a Zoom event with Geoffrey Lean, our country's longest standing environmental journalist, where we will discuss the progress made at the Summit and what comes next. Please do send me an email at claire.coutinho.mp@parliament.uk if you'd like to sign up to attend.

I also want to thank the 350 local residents who signed up to attend the Surrey-wide Virtual COP26 Climate Summit, which I hosted in late October.

I was joined by a number of distinguished guests, such as Secretary of State Michael Gove and Sarah Jane Chimbandira of the Surrey Wildlife Trust, to talk about the importance of biodiversity, the move to sustainable travel, and our local fight against climate change in Surrey.

It was an honour to support the Chancellor and Treasury team on the Autumn Budget in my role as a Parliamentary Private Secretary (PPS).

After we do the famous walk outside No 11 Downing Street for the media photo with the Chancellor's Red Box, the PPS's scurry a bit less glamorously over the road to the House of Commons to take our seats behind the Chancellor for the Budget speech.

Some of the measures I'm most proud of include the rise of the National Living Wage to £9.50, giving a £1,000 pay rise to two million of the lowest paid, and a significant tax cut for low-income families by reducing the Universal Credit (UC) taper rate from 63 per cent to 55 per cent.

When you take the UC change together with the increase of the Work Allowance by £500, this represents a tax cut for two million low-income families, worth £1,000 a year.

In addition to freezing fuel duty, freezing alcohol duty, and cutting beer duty by three pence in a pint, the Chancellor also cut the price of English sparkling wine and prosecco by as much as 64 pence, which will benefit small businesses here in East Surrey, such as the award-winning Godstone Vineyards.

I'm also pleased to report that eligible businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors will have their business rates cut by half next year. This will benefit 90 per cent of businesses in the sector, from our high street shops to local pubs and theatres.

In the South East, we'll also be receiving £495 million of funding for local roads maintenance - enough to fill over seven million potholes over the next three years - which after recent rain is all too needed.

Whilst it wasn't as widely reported, I also want to highlight a new programme that will be a gamechanger in equipping people with the skills they need for how our economy will change in the future - a new numeracy programme called Multiply.

I am personally very supportive of the Government's agenda to improve Britain's maths, data and numeracy skills, and you can read my article on ConservativeHome in which I try and convince you that we should make Maths compulsory post-16.

Over the past few weeks, I've been checking in on our local hospitality businesses like the Bell in Outwood, the Station in Nutfield, the Star Inn in Lingfield, Café in the Park in Horley, and the Red Barn in Lingfield. I do hope you all have a chance to visit and support them too during this year's festive season.

It was also a real delight to visit Pedrick's Zero Waste in Caterham Valley again recently, which was founded to help people reduce their plastic waste. They have a tremendous wide range of local products, including weekly supply boxes, which you can order for delivery straight to your door.

Emily and team are green giants in our local community and we are so lucky to have them, so please do show them your support in the run-up to Christmas by dropping in on the shop or visiting their website at pedricks.co.uk.

It was also great to speak to residents on the doorstep in Lingfield and Caterham recently, where planning, petty crime and electric vehicle charging points came up a lot. Afterwards, I popped into the wonderful Lingfield Community Library, an ancient building which has been in place since 1424 and is quite simply a local treasure.

Finally, please do remember that if you haven't booked your Covid booster vaccine yet and it's been five months since your second dose, you are now able to book your appointment online at nhs.uk or by calling 119. Recent data shows it really does make all the difference, with a booster vaccine bringing your level of protection back up to 95.6 per cent against symptomatic infection.

With that - and I can't quite believe I'm writing this already - I would like to wish you all a very merry Christmas season and a happy new year. I'll be putting up my Annual Review on my website in early December where you can read about all of the things I've been up to in my second year as your MP.

I do hope that 2022 will draw a veil over the hugely challenging couple of years we've all experienced, and after last Christmas - where so many families were separated from each other - I hope you are all able to take time out and spend some quality time with those you love.