

CAROLINE DINENAGE MP

MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR GOSPORT



NEWSLETTER

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Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all my newsletter readers!

It's fair to say that 2022 has been a rollercoaster of events and emotions. It's sometimes easy to forget that the year started with the world still in the grips of the Covid pandemic. We then saw the horrors of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the huge efforts to support those fleeing Putin's wickedness. All of this has had a global impact on economies, energy prices and food supplies, causing cost of living challenges for everyone.

Domestically, a year of three Prime Ministers and a rolling cast list of Ministers that even those working in Parliament have sometimes struggled to keep up with, has caused no end of frustration for those of us who just want to serve our constituents and get on with the job.

Locally, the completion of the, long awaited, Stubbington Bypass and the £11.5M extension to the Eclipse Bus Route have been welcome infrastructure investments.

We have also seen unparalleled recognition of our local cultural heritage with the reopening of the refurbished [Gosport Gallery](#) as part of the [High Street Heritage Action Zone](#). Gosport was also named one of the Arts Council's Priority Places.

For me, 2022 also brought some surprises right from the get-go, discovering an unexpected DBE in the New Year's Honours list in the early hours of January 1st! While one of our sons headed off to University, we also welcomed two Ukrainian guests in May, who have become much loved members of the family.

I must admit that this year I tried to remain slightly detached from the political dramas of Westminster and concentrate on my constituency work, alongside some key policy campaigns, such as the Childhood Cancer Mission, in memory of Stubbington's Sophie Fairall and pushing for greater support for unpaid carers.

Here's a quick round-up of what I've been up to in December.



I was delighted to attend the twinning ceremony of Alverstoke Junior School and Kitoo Primary School in Kenya.

Alverstoke Juniors have been working with the charity [Chase Africa](#) to raise money for the Kenyan school, while the children have been getting to know one another via letter and video.

The twinning ceremony was marked with the simultaneous planting of a tree in both Alverstoke & Kitoo to symbolise their partnership.

It's that time of the year again! My Christmas card competition! It's always a highlight to look through all the designs from primary school children across the area. This year's beautiful winning card design was by Sara Salam from Gomer Junior School - well done Sara!

I also ran my 3rd annual [Best Independent Shop Competition](#) to mark [Small Business Saturday](#). This year saw a tough contest with over 100 businesses nominated and 2,500 constituents voting. The winner was [Indelible Ink Tattoo Studio](#) on Forton Road. I caught up with Gez and team to hand them their award and learn more about their business. It's always heart warming to see so much engagement with this competition- it shows how much local people value the service offered by our independent shops and traders.

I thoroughly enjoyed the Stoke Road Christmas event. It was lovely to see so many people taking part in the late shopping and joining the festivities - including the Santa Stormtrooper! Thanks to the local

traders for organising the event.



I met with GFMAT in Brune Park School to discuss support for autistic children and their families. They hold regular SEND Parent/Carer drop-in sessions at the new [Gosport Community Hub](#), offering advice and information, as well as building a community of SEND carers. They are open to anyone in the Gosport and Fareham area - do keep an eye on my Facebook and the Gosport Community Hub's page. They are also running Teen Life sessions in partnership with the National Autistic Society in the new year with a six-session programme. Please email gosportcommunityhub@gfm.org for more info.

I also popped along to the [Goshawks](#) Christmas display to see the fantastic young gymnasts in action and hand out some certificates and awards.

I caught up with the team from [Portsmouth Harbour Marine](#), to hear their plans for next summer's Gosport Marine Festival.

I paid a visit to the lovely people at [NXT Skills](#) who offer a specialist day service with bespoke support for teens who aren't in education, employment or training, helping them build confidence, skills and prepare for their next steps in life.



Regular readers will know of Hampshire County Council's plans to close the Visitors Centre and Café at Titchfield Haven.

I strongly opposed these plans, alongside residents and volunteers, I even made a deputation at the Councilor's decision meeting. However, despite our best efforts, the Council decided this month to close the Centre and go ahead with the sale of the buildings.

Thanks to Fareham Borough Council, who made this site an Asset of Community Value last month, it cannot be sold for at least six months, other than to a community group. This means there may yet be hope of finding a positive outcome, especially with Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust confirming their interest in developing a proposal. I will be meeting them shortly to discuss this further.



At the start of December, it was the [UNiTE campaign](#), led by the United Nations to End Violence against Women & Girls. The Spinnaker Tower shone orange to create awareness for the campaign.

In other local news, [Solent Freeport](#) is now up and running. Freeports create tax incentives, improve trade

and investment in port areas, and this is a great way to boost our economy.

The Solent Freeport is among the first in the country and I was very pleased to see the Minister, Dehenna Davison, in the region to mark its launch.

I am delighted and relieved that the Ministry of Defence has changed its mind on the [closure of HMS Sultan](#) - this was confirmed to me in an update from the Minister of State for Defence Procurement, Alex Chalk KC MP. The news comes after a long and hard-fought campaign, with numerous meetings with Defence Ministers past and present, including inviting former Minister Tobias Ellwood to see the site in 2017. This is great news for the constituency and the Royal Navy.

This month also saw new funding and a support scheme to end armed forces veterans homelessness called [Op Fortitude](#).



A sad farewell to two well known and much loved local veterans, Adm. Tony Whetstone and former Mayor of Gosport, Geoff Rushton who both passed away this month.



For many years Admiral Tony and I walked beside each other at the

Gosport Remembrance Service, we became firm friends. Geoff will be remembered as a star of last year's VE Day commemorations in Lee on the Solent, one of the WW2 veterans joining the parade in the back of a vintage jeep. Geoff was a Lancaster Bomber navigator during WW2, I recently took the Defence Secretary, Ben Wallace, to meet him and hear his regret that Bomber Command veterans did not receive greater recognition for their immense bravery. Both Tony and Geoff were fine gentlemen and will be greatly missed.



I met with First Bus this month. We discussed their new flexible Ticket and Multi-Day bundles. They have also frozen their single fares and reduced some return fares. They are currently advertising some job vacancies. You can find out more [here](#).

I also met with 'Lift the Ban' organisation who are campaigning for asylum seekers to be able to work in the UK whilst awaiting the decision of their application.



Back in Westminster, I was delighted to open the [We Are Tech Women, Level Up summit](#). An opportunity to discuss the barriers to the Tech industry for women - and how we remove them. Currently, only 17% of tech workers are female. It's vital for our economy that we harness everyone's talents.



I also visited the English National Opera to see a ['relaxed' performance](#) of *It's a Wonderful Life*.

A great way to introduce theatre and opera to children as well as neuro-diverse and disabled people.

[English National Opera](#) work hard to make opera more accessible.



The Christmas season in Parliament kicked off at the start of December with some festive snowy weather. The lighting of the Christmas tree and carol service were joined by the Rock Choir.

And I discussed what I would do if I had a day off on [Times Radio](#).

This month saw the long-awaited return of the Online Safety Bill. Although I'm disappointed that the 'legal but harmful' clause has been removed, it is imperative that this Bill hits the statute books urgently and brings forward long awaited protections for children. I attended the Report Stage debate and look forward to supporting its progression through the next Parliamentary stages.



[In Health Questions](#), I took the opportunity to press the new Secretary of State, Steve Barclay, to recommit to a Childhood Cancer Mission. This builds on my work with Charlotte Fairall and [Sophie's Legacy](#) to improve child cancer care and services following Sophie's death in 2021. The Minister promised to report back to the House shortly on this crucial issue.

There was progress this month on the government's efforts to stop the perilous journeys of small boats across the English Channel. The Prime Minister announced several measures to combat illegal immigration and create a fairer asylum system. A new deal has been agreed with Albania, where many of the current migrants originate. A new dedicated Small Boats Command Centre will be introduced to police the channel in a more unified and strategic way. Funding for the National Crime Agency has been doubled. 10,000 migrants are being moved out of hotel accommodation and into low-cost alternatives, such as disused holiday parks or former student halls, while their applications are processed. Police patrols on French beaches will be increased.

Another positive announcement this month was the news that Baycroft School will benefit from the [School Rebuilding Programme](#). They are one of the latest schools to be awarded the funding which will help to deliver state of the art learning environments for pupils.

This month we saw industrial disputes across the country, although we were very lucky that none of the hospitals in Hampshire, or

indeed South Central Ambulances, took part in the strikes, our rail journeys and postal services have been affected. I met with representatives from Royal Mail to discuss the issues at the heart of this dispute and how they could be addressed.

There is no doubt that local health services are under enormous pressure at the moment. It was a pleasure to meet the (relatively) new Chair of NHS England, Richard Meddings, to discuss the way forward. I invited him to visit Gosport next year and he agreed. I also met this month with leaders of our local Health & Care services via the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Integrated Care System and caught up with Sara Tiller who leads the Primary Care Trust to hear more about how services are operating on the ground.



I also spent part of one freezing Sunday morning with volunteers from [Hampshire Search & Rescue](#) at their training session in Fort Brockhurst. It was fascinating to learn more about their role, helping to find missing and vulnerable people from across Hampshire. This life-saving work is largely funded by grants, donations and support in kind from organisations like Hampshire Constabulary.

It's just one example of the incredible dedication of volunteers, community organisations and charities across our region, many of whom I've had the honour of meeting over the last twelve months. They make our area such a special place to live.



Finally this month, I joined the brave souls from [Gosport Vitamin Seaunity](#), who meet nearly every day of the year, for a Christmas Day dip in Stokes Bay!



On behalf of myself, my family and my lovely Parliamentary team I'd like to take this opportunity to wish you all a happy, healthy, safe and prosperous new year!



Best wishes
Caroline Dinenage

Caroline Dinenage MP
167 Stoke Road
Gosport
PO12 1SE
caroline.dinenage.mp@parliament.uk



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