

This week's big event in Westminster was of course the Chancellor's Autumn Statement. Among the big picture analysis of the wider economy, the Statement saw some announcements that are really beneficial for our area but are sadly lost in the wider debate on deficit reduction, tax cuts and so on.

For example, one of the announcements made in the Statement will directly benefit the Heart of Kent Hospice in Aylesford. Unlike the NHS, hospice charities have in the past incurred VAT. The Chancellor told the Commons that he will refund the VAT that the Heart of Kent and other hospices pay, which ultimately means that more of the money fund-raised for the cause will be spent on the excellent care they administer rather than side-lined and sent to the Treasury.

Another announcement that will directly benefit us locally is the diversion of bank fines (LIBOR money) to fund a new helicopter for the Kent, Surrey & Sussex Air Ambulance. This is fabulous news and comes on the back of previous announcements on refunding VAT on fuel. I think Malling has a special affinity with the Air Ambulance, not least because of the tragic loss of a helicopter and its crew on the North Downs, but also because of the major motorway and road network that runs through our borough. Many fundraise for the KSSAA and now even more money can go towards saving lives.

Nearly £2m of LIBOR money is also being used to build apartments for single veterans on the RBLI site which strengthens Aylesford's commitment to our returning and injured military personnel.

So while grateful for the announcements the Chancellor made on stamp duty, savings, cutting income tax, business rates and scrapping air passenger duty for children, some or all of which may apply to you personally, it was the measures that will help our local community that this week got my heartfelt thanks.