

# Marie Goldman

MP for Chelmsford

## Frustrating that I can't spend more time on my favourite bit of the job

**S**O much of my time as an MP is taken up with activities in Westminster. From the outside looking in, it's tempting to think that if an MP isn't sitting somewhere on the green benches, they aren't in Parliament that day, but that couldn't be further from the truth.

Indeed, proportionately, very little of my time is spent in the House of Commons chamber, unless there's a big debate happening that I'm taking part in. Most of my time is instead spent in committee meetings, briefings with clerks and officials, drop-in sessions with external organisations, all-party parliamentary group (APPG) meetings, receptions and discussions with my team. On top of that, I also have papers to read, emails to respond to and online meetings to attend.

Some MPs are often only in Westminster Monday evenings, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, but my role as Liberal Democrat Shadow Leader of the House of Commons (yeah - that's pretty long as job titles go!) means that I often also have to be in all day on Mondays, and every Thursday morning for Business Questions (which work like a mini PMQs, only with the Leader of the House answering the questions instead of the Prime Minister).

Unfortunately, that doesn't leave with me a huge amount of time to have meetings in my constituency. And that's personally frustrating for me because it's easily my favourite bit of the job. Let me tell you about my constituency day last week to illustrate why.

Fridays are usually the day that I get to spend in Chelmsford doing things around the constituency. It's often a very busy day and it can be quite varied - and last Friday was definitely no exception.

After calling into my constituency office first thing, my day then started off with a visit to Woodcroft Nursery in Great Baddow. As one of the few remaining grant-maintained nurseries, they've been doing some excellent work with their special educational needs provision and they were keen to tell me more about it. It was lovely to have a look round their wonderful space



Marie Goldman MP with students at Chelmsford County High School for Girls  
PHOTOS: MARIE GOLDMAN MP

and see what they've been doing. I hope their meeting this week with Essex County Council will result in the funding they need to keep this great work on a sustainable footing.

Afterwards, I headed back to the office to catch up with my team both in Chelmsford and - via online link - in Westminster. We have this meeting every week where we go round the room telling each other what we've been working on, what work is coming up and discuss issues that sometimes need a bit more attention.

Every week, I also encourage my caseworkers (the members of my team who specifically work on helping constituents with the problems they write in about) to nominate an issue they've been working on as 'casework of the week'. While we deal with some very serious and difficult issues, this is also an opportunity to highlight something perhaps a bit more light-hearted and amusing.

This week's clear winner was an email that had been received from a Chelmsford constituent asking for help with an organisation called the CRA. My caseworkers weren't familiar with that acronym, nor with the postcode that the constituent had submitted as part of their address.



Marie Goldman MP at Woodcroft Nursery in Great Baddow

Further correspondence discovered that the lady in question had Googled 'Chelmsford MP' to find out the contact details for her local MP. Unfortunately, she had forgotten to tell Google that she lives in Canada and wanted the details of the MP for Chelmsford, Ontario! (The CRA is the Canada Revenue Agency.)

It turns out there are four places called Chelmsford in the world; one in England (of course), one in Canada, one in the USA, and one in Australia. This very quickly prompted a discussion between me and my husband about the logistics of visiting the other three...

At lunchtime, I had a meeting with someone from the Essex Chambers of Commerce about improving local skills as part of the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP). LSIPs are about having joined-up plans influ-

enced by both business and education to drive forward the local skills that will benefit local communities, businesses and - hopefully - the country's economy as a whole.

There is already good work being done in Chelmsford, but some of it could be a bit more joined up and I'm keen to support that.

At 2pm, I visited Chelmsford's County High School for Girls (CCHS) and spent the better part of an hour being grilled by Year 13 politics students on everything from international relations to proportional representation, and from why and how I got involved in politics, to what sort of vegetable I think best describes me (as a fan of Donkey in Shrek, it was an onion, obviously - layers!).

But seriously, I was incredibly impressed by the depth of questions and the research that they had clearly done before I came in. I thoroughly enjoyed myself - I hope the students did too.

I was equally impressed by the few minutes of the mock UN Assembly debate that the Year 12 students were conducting at the same time in the school hall that I briefly got to observe. It's always such a joy to know that young people are taking a keen interest in politics. It gives me genuine hope for the future.

I then went to a meeting with a local business in the city centre who is having problems with inconsiderate parking outside their property.

The issue has been ongoing for some time so it was time to bring together representatives from vari-

ous organisations including the police, Chelmsford City Council and the South Essex Parking Partnership, as well as the local county councillor, to see if we could come up with a solution that would work for the long-term. We had some good ideas, which my team and I will be helping to follow up.

My final meeting of the day was a roundtable discussion with several local businesses about general issues affecting businesses in Chelmsford, Essex and beyond.

This was a great opportunity for me, as a local MP, to hear directly from business leaders about what's concerning them and how I might be able to raise their concerns in Parliament. But it was also a useful networking discussion for the businesses who were able to give advice to each other as the discussion evolved.

That was the official end to my day, at about 6pm. Over the weekend I was also out knocking on doors talking to constituents, and on Saturday evening I went to Boswells School to see the fabulous 20th anniversary celebration performance from the brilliant Bam Bam Boogies - a Chelmsford-based dance school focusing on street dance. But perhaps more about them in a future article.

My time in the constituency is often extremely varied and very enjoyable. Thank you to everyone who invited me along to chat.

Keep well.

Marie

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