

# Marie Goldman

MP for Chelmsford

## I raised gynaecology appointment wait of 78 weeks in Parliament

**W**HERE do I even start with this week's article? There's so much to write about since last week's column – and I only have limited space (and time) to write it. So here goes.

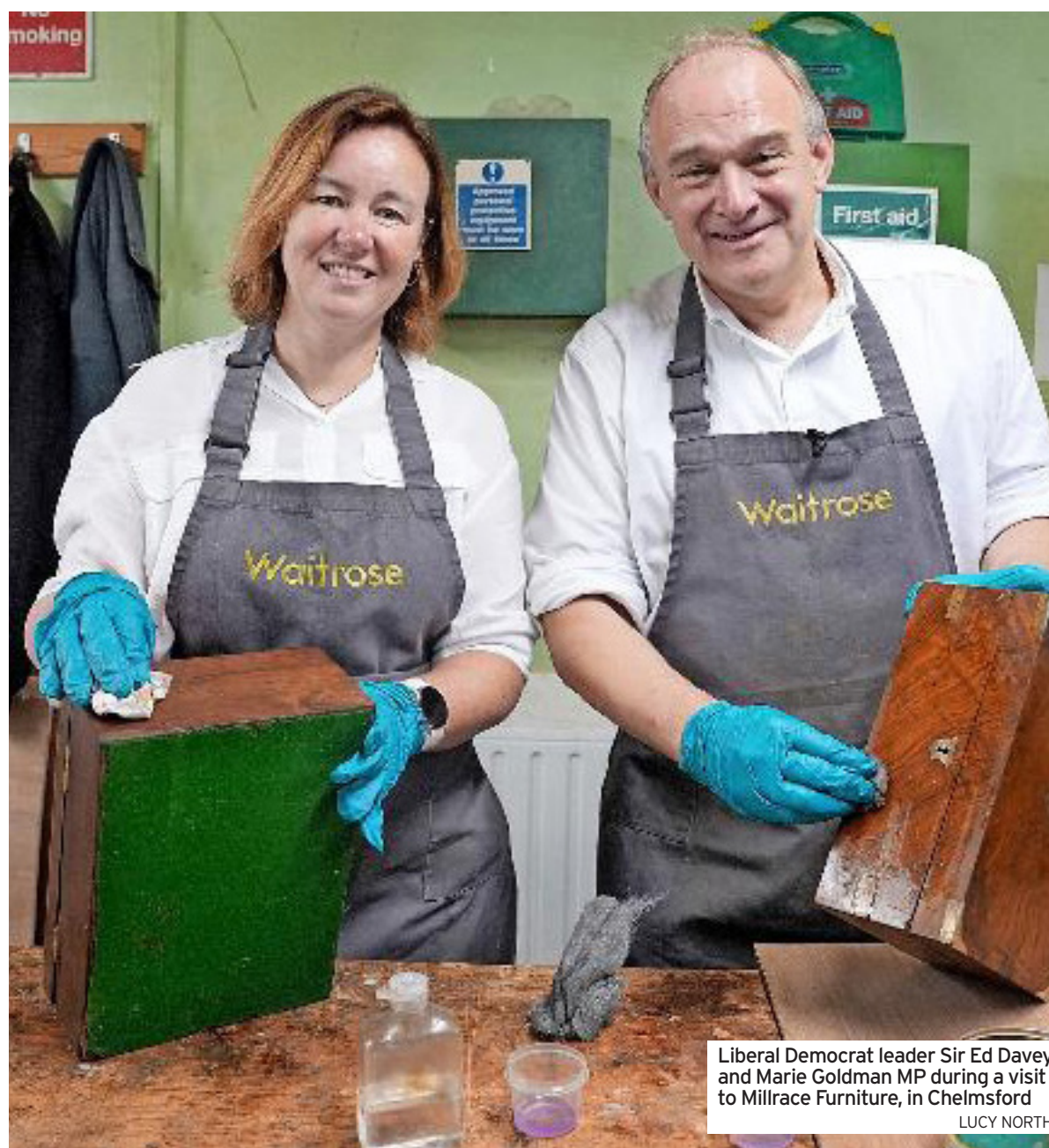
The first week back for Parliament after the summer recess turned out to be incredibly busy. I spoke in debates about dangerous and obstructive pavement parking – encouraging the Government to give local councils the powers they need to issue fines, something only the police can currently do unless specific restrictions are in place.

I pushed the Government to step in and make sure that residents across Essex, but especially in Chelmsford, are not forced to pay for the huge, £800 million of unsecured debt racked up by previously-Conservative-run Thurrock council in dodgy investments. I am worried that the Government's plans for devolution and local government reorganisation in Essex could lead to a redistribution of Thurrock's debt, but as I pointed out to the minister, the maths simply doesn't work and there is no model of local government in Essex that would be financially sustainable without central government stepping in to alleviate the debt.

In July, the Prime Minister announced a deadline for the UK to recognise the State of Palestine. He said: "The UK will recognise the state of Palestine by the United Nations General Assembly in September unless the Israeli government takes substantive steps to end the appalling situation in Gaza, agree to a ceasefire and commit to a long-term, sustainable peace."

But Parliament has not yet formally debated or voted on this issue, so I called for the Government to make time for that to happen before Parliament breaks for conference recess next week. It is surely right that MPs should get to express their opinion on such an important step.

I also raised in Parliament the very long waiting times for gynaecology appointments in local hospitals, with one Chelmsford constitu-



Liberal Democrat leader Sir Ed Davey and Marie Goldman MP during a visit to Millrace Furniture, in Chelmsford

LUCY NORTH

ent telling me they faced a 78-week wait, rather than the Government's target of 18 weeks.

We also voted on Lords' amendments to the Hereditary Peers Bill – a Bill designed to get rid of hereditary peers from the House of Lords, something I and my Lib Dem colleagues are absolutely in favour of – in fact, we'd like to go much further and abolish the House of Lords altogether, replacing it with an elected second chamber, but that's a battle for another day.

Listening to some of the rather obscure and quite poor arguments from the Conservative benches about why the hereditary peers should stay was really quite something. If you've got a few spare moments, you might consider looking the debate up in Hansard or watching it back on Parliament TV.

That was Thursday, and then came Friday. What a day!

My day was always going to be busy as I was welcoming the leader of the Liberal Democrats, Sir Ed Davey, to Chelmsford. We visited the Millrace Foundation, behind the Millrace Project uses furniture restoration as a therapy tool to help people who are struggling with their mental health.

It's a lovely initiative and has genuinely helped Chelmsford residents, especially men, step back from thoughts of suicide.

Such important, life-saving work at a time when the NHS simply doesn't have the capacity that I'm sure we all wish it did have to help people with their mental health.

I was struck by a newspaper article by a Reform MP on the same day implying that mental health issues are nothing more than a fashionable way to get attention.

That's hugely disrespectful and ignorant in the context of the more than 2,000 mental health in-patient deaths being investigated by the Lampard Inquiry at the moment – hearings resume in October with

further, heartbreaking testimony from bereaved families.

In the middle of Ed's visit to Chelmsford, it was announced that the Deputy Prime Minister, Angela Rayner MP, had resigned, the Prime Minister was kicking off a very significant reshuffle and to top it off, the Duchess of Kent died at the age of 92.

All round, it was a very busy day for news. But I was lucky, in between interviews, to have some time with Ed to talk about the issues affecting Chelmsford.

To anyone who has run their own organisation – whether that's a business, a charity or a group of volunteers – I suspect you may join me in thinking that the concept of reshuffling MPs in government is rather strange.

In what other walk of life would you conclude that someone isn't doing a good enough job in their current role, but they might do better if you throw them into an entirely different department, with a completely different set of employees, and expect them to hit the ground running with no warning?

Yet that's exactly what a reshuffle does, especially one that doesn't see many people being removed from government (one notable example being my opposite number, Lucy Powell MP, who lost her role as Leader of the House of Commons, but wasn't offered an alternative), just moved around. Not for the first time since being elected, I find myself saying it's a strange way to run a country. I guess time will tell whether this particular reshuffle was a good idea or not.

But to end on a high note, I was thrilled to go to the fabulous BBC Radio 2 in the Park at Hylands Park last weekend. The music was brilliant, the sun shone and there were tens of thousands of smiling faces enjoying their time in our city.

I hope it contributed a significant amount to our local economy and that those who had come from further afield left with a lovely impression of Chelmsford and want to come back to shop in our shops and eat and drink in our bars and restaurants in the future.

The whole event was really well organised – a great example of excellent collaborative teamwork between the BBC and the fantastic team at Liberal Democrat-run Chelmsford City Council. Well done to everyone involved!

I am worried that the Government's plans... could lead to a redistribution of Thurrock's debt.

Marie Goldman MP