

Marie Goldman

MP for Chelmsford

Much-needed healthcare centre will have an impact across the city

WITH the days so noticeably shorter at this time of year, summer flowers a distant memory and leaves littering the paths, it's tempting to hunker down, withdraw from the world and maybe just feel a little sad. But then the Christmas lights get switched on and our streets are transformed with the promise of festivities just on the horizon.

It was lovely to open the activities on the main stage outside Shire Hall on Sunday as the countdown to the Chelmsford Christmas lights switch-on began.

It was a cheerful, uplifting atmosphere in the city centre as crowds thronged through the High Street, thankfully able to keep dry as they wandered in and out of the shops and tasted the festive wares from the pop-up traders outside.

Well done to the teams at Chelmsford For You, BBC Essex and everyone else who helped make sure the event went smoothly.

For me, that engagement was the final one in a week that had already been pretty busy. Here's a flavour of what I got up to last week.

On Monday, I visited Farleigh Hospice and met the new chief executive, Michelle Kabia. I've visited Farleigh Hospice before, but not on Michelle's watch, so it was a good opportunity to chat about the challenges facing the sector, as well as have a tour around and meet some of the wonderful team.

I then headed over to cut the ribbon at the official opening ceremony of Beaulieu Healthcare Centre. This has been a long time coming and I'm delighted to have played a role in the past few months to help get it over the line. Well done to everyone involved in this project, including the Elizabeth Courtauld Partnership which is now running this brand new facility, as well as Chelmsford City Council, the NHS and developer Vistry, who all worked together in partnership to create much-needed additional healthcare provision in this area. I'm sure it will have an impact across Chelmsford.

On Tuesday morning, I joined a



Marie Goldman MP at the official opening of the Beaulieu Healthcare Centre in Chelmsford, with local councillors plus representatives from the NHS and the Elizabeth Courtauld Partnership
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community event for parents of children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND), organised by a group run by parents called Bright Futures.

Along with many parents, in attendance were also two representatives from SEND Operations at Essex County Council. I think it's fair to say that parents gave them quite a grilling over many SEND issues, but one issue that kept coming up time and time again was poor communication.

Parents often felt ignored and frustrated, which exacerbated the stress of having to fight for the support their children need.

I am sure the Essex County Council officers who were there were listening – the real question is whether

the politicians running Essex County Council are likely to do anything about it.

We all hope they will because at the heart of this are children, many of whom are not getting the education, the support or the best chance in life that they should.

The Government was supposed to be releasing a White Paper soon telling us how they are going to reform the SEND system. Tragically, that has now been delayed to the spring at the earliest and, if rumours are to be believed, the Government doesn't yet appear to have any good ideas about how to fix things.

On Tuesday afternoon, I had a meeting with the Care Quality Commission to discuss their latest inspection report into the Mid & South Essex NHS Foundation Trust (the NHS trust that runs our local hospitals, including Broomfield). This latest report was specifically looking at how well led the trust is. Badly seems to be the answer.

That's worrying, but sadly not surprising. Of biggest concern to anyone reading the report is surely the low morale of staff. The report made it clear that staff felt that repeatedly, they weren't listened to, that their concerns about issues in the trust weren't taken seriously and weren't acted upon. That cannot be allowed to continue.

The NHS only exists because of the fabulous, dedicated people who work there. We must do more to support them.

I'm keen to help with that and am organising roundtable discussions with staff so they can tell me, frankly and candidly, what's going on so that I can hopefully work with the trust to help fix things.

On Wednesday, I joined the team from Anglia Ruskin University and a few others on the Science Festival Steering Group to start evaluating how this year's science festival went and to start planning for next year's event. I had a lovely time having a

look around this year's festival a few weekends ago, especially as it was family day so there were lots of children out with their parents (I'm not entirely sure who was enjoying it most – lots of the adults seemed to be having as much fun as the kids!).

But it's important to understand what we want to achieve with this event and to ensure it grows and thrives in the future.

On Thursday, I was invited to visit Shield House in London, which is where CST (the Community Safety Trust) is located. CST provides security for synagogues and Jewish schools across the country. It also does counter-terrorism work, focusing on anti-semitism. It was fascinating and eye-opening to hear about the important work it does, but incredibly sad that it has to do it at all.

We then visited a nearby Jewish primary school and heard firsthand from the Year 6 pupils their own experiences of anti-semitism – being singled out in hatred, even as young children, simply for being Jewish. Totally unacceptable. Nobody should ever have to live in fear like this.

On Thursday evening, I hosted a dinner in Parliament, kindly organised by the Essex Chambers of Commerce, for local Chelmsford and Essex businesses. It was a great opportunity to hear directly from businesses about the issues they're facing. I heard loud and clear the challenges that the new Employment Rights Bill will bring, although this is currently held up in Parliament in a kind of stalemate between the House of Commons and the House of Lords. It is possible it won't become law after all, but at the moment we really don't know.

It did give me the chance to tell businesses about the Liberal Democrats' policy to put a temporary windfall tax on the big banks who profited greatly from previous quantitative easing, without having to lift a finger for it.

We believe this could raise up to £30 billion over five years – much-needed funds that we would use to lower the VAT rate for hospitality businesses to 15 per cent, providing some vital relief for businesses that have been hit from many angles recently.

All in all, it was another packed but interesting week.

Thanks for reading.

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