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Reasons I disagree with fellow Essex MP Kemi's plan to scrap stamp duty

AS I'm sure I've mentioned before in this column, there's no such thing as a typical day in the life of an MP. Our diaries are hectic, ad hoc, and frequently susceptible to being hijacked by unforeseen events beyond our control.

However, Fridays are – usually, but not always – days that we can spend in our constituencies, meeting with our constituency teams (to catch up on casework issues etc.), meeting with constituents and local organisations, and trying to fit in all the things that we struggle to do when Westminster duties mean we can't get them done at other times. To give you a flavour of what a Friday might look like, I thought I'd tell you about my Friday last week.

My day began at 7.05am with an interview with BBC Essex. Leader of the Conservative Party and neighbouring Essex MP, Kemi Badenoch, had chosen Chelmsford the previous day to launch another eye-catching, but rather nonsensical (yes, I am, of course, biased, but I'll explain why I disagree with it in a minute) policy about scrapping stamp duty.

So BBC Essex wanted to get my opinion on the idea, as a local politician from a different party. That's why my alarm went off bright and early so I could have a chat with Sonia Watson live on air.

As I said – a little tongue-in-cheek – to Sonia, it's unlikely to be a surprise that I would disagree with a Conservative party policy, but while I agree that stamp duty could certainly do with reforming, scrapping it altogether runs the risk of simply inflating house prices across the board.

There is no guarantee that existing homeowners and estate agents wouldn't simply increase the price of homes for sale to compensate. There is also no way of ensuring that any potential savings would be reinvested by house buyers, for example into renovations, and therefore creating work for plumbers, electricians and decorators etc.

On the other hand, if we were to reform stamp duty, perhaps to create some sort of rebate through the stamp duty system if buyers were to



Marie Goldman MP at The Priory in Springfield

invest in energy-saving measures such as renewable energy or insulation in their new home, that might be one way to improve the system. We could also look at increasing the stamp duty threshold for first-time buyers.

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But none of this will work if we don't increase the number of homes that are available – and that means building. Labour has a target of building 1.5 million new homes by the end of this Parliament, but they're already falling way behind that goal, especially in places like London, which puts even more pressure on nearby towns and cities, such as Chelmsford, where the laws of supply and demand mean our house prices are already completely unaffordable for many.

In short, I agree we need to see change in the system, but scrapping

stamp duty altogether, which could cost a whopping £10 billion by some estimates, just hasn't been properly thought through.

At 8.30am I went to the dentist, something even we MPs need to do.

At 9.30am, I joined an online briefing for MPs from Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust (EPUT), who deliver community health, mental health and learning disability services across Essex and beyond.

At 10.45am, I left to go and visit The Priory, a mental health and addiction treatment centre located in Springfield. I've driven past it so many times over the years but never visited either in a professional or personal capacity, although I've heard really good things about the work they do.

It was therefore very interesting to meet with some of their staff and to hear more about the services they provide. Interestingly, they aren't just a private facility – they also have a contract with the NHS and have a ward dedicated to NHS patients.

Among other things, we discussed the importance of local organisations working together to improve capacity and outcomes for patients.

One of the key points raised was that physical and mental health still aren't given equal weighting when it comes to both understanding and treatment. Early intervention is absolutely key to achieving better outcomes, and continuing treatment where it's needed, while recognising that different patients will need both different types of intervention and different lengths of treatment – there is no one-size-fits-all remedy.

I was very pleased to see the Care Quality Commission release its latest inspection report for The Priory on Saturday, rating it as 'Good' across the board. Well done to all the team.

I will admit that I spent a bit longer talking to the team at The Priory and having a look around with them than I had intended. That meant I had just about enough time to buy lunch (a takeaway sandwich from

Worlds Pantry Coffee Shop in Moulsham Mill – if you haven't been there yet, do – the coffee in particular is excellent), but not enough time to eat it before I had to head to my next appointment.

This time I had been invited by Barnes Farm Primary School to come in and listen to Year 5 (nine- and ten-year-olds) giving speeches about issues that matter to them. Most of them had chosen to research and write speeches on one of three topics: deforestation, pollution and gender equality in sports.

Over the course of about 90 minutes, I heard dozens of wonderful speeches. It is always lovely to hear children talking about the things that they care about and practising their persuasive powers, even though I know from personal experience just how daunting it can be standing up in front of your peers and making a point.

The children did an excellent job and should be very proud of themselves. I am sure there are some future leaders in amongst them, as well as some powerful advocates for global issues.

Afterwards, I returned to my constituency office to hold a virtual surgery with constituents needing my specific help or input on an issue.

MPs hold surgeries in lots of different ways, but after the tragic murders of MPs Jo Cox and David Amess, the security services advise MPs not to hold open surgeries without appointments. This isn't just about the safety of MPs, but also about the safety of our staff who work with us, as well as the safety of other members of the public attending.

Thankfully, if there is a silver lining to have come out of Covid, it's that far more people are used to attending online meetings and the technology has evolved to such an extent that it's easier and more convenient all round to hold a majority of surgery meetings in this way.

Last Friday, my team and I spoke with constituents who wanted to raise issues ranging from healthcare to pensions, and immigration to shopping accessibility needs.

Finally, I spent time going through some of the emails that had built up in my inbox over the course of the day before heading home to spend an evening with my family.

All in all, a varied day, which I very much appreciated being able to spend in my home city.

See you next week.

Marie