

# Marie Goldman

MP for Chelmsford



## Raising questions in the Commons on issues that people care about

**M**Y role as Liberal Democrat Shadow Leader of the House of Commons means that I get to raise important topics on the floor of the House of Commons every single week that Parliament is sitting.

I do this in something called 'Business Questions'. I thought I'd use this week's article to tell you about the questions I've been raising so far this year.

Whether it's the future of our NHS, the climate emergency or the basic need to keep children well-fed, these are the issues that people in Chelmsford, and right across the country, care about.

You can watch me ask each of the questions on the Business Questions playlist on my YouTube channel here: <https://bit.ly/MGBQs>

### ■ A crisis in community pharmacies:

Community pharmacies are the unsung heroes of our healthcare system, playing a vital role in taking pressure off the NHS. We're all encouraged to think "Pharmacy First" these days, but that's simply not sustainable if pharmacies are losing money on the drugs they dispense.

I've spoken in the Chamber twice now about this issue, highlighting how nearly 500 pharmacies have closed in the past year alone.

With projections of nearly 1,000 more closures by 2027 and at the time I asked the question, no guarantee of ongoing funding for Pharmacy First, I called for urgent Government action. Pharmacies cannot wait.

### ■ Cuts to carers and Integrated Care Boards:

The Government's Spring Statement delivered a blow to 150,000 carers who are now set to lose half a billion pounds in support by 2030.

Carers already operate with very little support, and these cuts risk forcing many into even more difficult circumstances, while piling further pressure on social care and the NHS.

And it doesn't stop there. Integrated Care Boards, the bodies responsible for running our local NHS services, have been told to cut their running costs by a staggering 50 per cent. That's not fat-trimming; that's amputation. I called

Marie Goldman MP in her role as Liberal Democrat Shadow Leader of the House of Commons speaks during Business Questions

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for parliamentary time to examine the impact of these sweeping cuts on our already fragile health and care system. The public deserves to know what the Government knows.

### ■ Championing Lib Dem ideas:

It's been heartening to see a groundswell of support in Parliament for a range of Liberal Democrat policies - from our proposal of a Youth Mobility scheme to a fairer voting system. I urged the Government to seize this moment and give time to allow these popular bills to become law.

### ■ Concerns over maternity services and the CQC:

In Chelmsford, the downgrade of

Broomfield Hospital's maternity services to 'Inadequate' caused real concern. Two more local hospitals, Basildon and Southend, also received poor ratings.

While I saw encouraging signs during a recent visit to Broomfield, these reports were based on inspections from March 2024. Why has it taken nearly a year to publish findings? The CQC does vital work, but it must be better resourced to do it swiftly.

■ **The role of PCSOs in Safer Streets:** Chelmsford isn't a crime hotspot, but residents often talk to me about nuisance crime and the importance of visible policing.

PCSOs play a crucial part in community safety, but Essex Police was set to axe all 99 of them due to a £12.5 million shortfall. I called on the Home Secretary to explain how communities would be kept safe without them. I was genuinely

relieved when the Government subsequently announced additional funding allowing Essex's PCSOs to be saved.

### ■ Delaying democracy?:

The Government has announced delays to local elections in some areas, including Essex, to "support transition" to the as-yet-unknown new structure for local government.

But briefing papers from Essex County Council suggest a delay of up to three years, not the one year the Secretary of State mentioned.

This would extend county councillors' terms by 75 per cent. This isn't just a delay, it's a democratic deficit.

### ■ Who pays for council failures?

Sticking with the important issue of local government, we can't ignore the shocking levels of debt left behind by previous administrations.

Woking is £2 billion in the red. Thurrock racked up £1.5 billion of

debt, largely from investments in a non-existent solar farm. Yet ministers have confirmed there's no plan to write off that debt. That means residents in places like Essex may be forced to pay the price through higher taxes or reduced services. I asked for clarity on how this is fair.

### ■ A cold winter and a hot planet:

We cannot separate the climate crisis from the cost-of-living crisis. Millions of households remain in fuel poverty, yet the Government continues to delay action on insulation and clean heating. Meanwhile, Ofgem has announced yet another energy price rise. I called for a debate on the Liberal Democrats' bold proposal for a ten-year home upgrade programme, one that makes homes warmer, cheaper to heat and better for the planet.

### ■ The power of books - and the need for action:

It was a joy to open the new library at Barnes Farm Primary School on World Book Day. But the national picture is bleak: one in seven state primaries has no library, and nearly a million children have no book of their own. I made it clear that reading should be a right, not a privilege.

### ■ No child should go hungry:

The Liberal Democrats introduced universal Free School Meals for infants when in government because hunger holds children back. Today, many are still going without. That's why I championed our proposal to raise the income threshold for eligibility and to automatically enrol families on benefits for free school meals. It's time for cross-party support to ensure no child goes hungry in 2025.

### ■ Backing brilliant apprenticeships:

When the Prime Minister said it was a "moral issue" that one in eight young people is not in education or training, I agreed. But it's hard to square that with the Government's decision to scrap Level 7 apprenticeships, like the one run by Anglia Ruskin University in Chelmsford.

This innovative scheme is helping students from disadvantaged backgrounds train as doctors in their home communities.

I urged the Government to reconsider and protect such life-changing programmes.

Week after week, I've been raising these issues because they matter. They're about fairness, opportunity and making sure Government delivers for the people it serves. I'll keep pushing for answers - and action.

Marie

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