

# Marie Goldman

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## POINTS OF VIEW

# Parents and their children being let down by an 'utterly broken' system

IT'S such an honour to represent the city that I call home in my role as deputy leader of Chelmsford City Council and as a local councillor. I'd like to tell you about some of the different things I've been up to recently.

But first things first. This edition comes out on the same day as the local elections that are taking place across the country. As I've mentioned before, in Chelmsford we only have elections for the Essex-wide Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC). I hope you've been out to vote.

Well done to all the candidates standing in these elections. I know from personal experience that being a candidate can be really hard work and polling day is often the culmination of months - sometimes even years - of tireless campaigning. I'm looking forward to seeing the results come in.

Over the past few months, I have been spending a lot of my time finding out more about special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), a subject I've previously written about in this column.

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that I have found parents' experiences heartbreaking. The battles they are having to have with Essex County Council to get the support their children need to get a proper education are utterly unacceptable.

One of the things that has struck me is the consistency of the stories I've heard. It might be tempting to think that tales of communication failures, statutory deadlines missed and legally agreed provision not being delivered are isolated incidents. They aren't.

That's not just coming from individual parents, but also from the charities and other organisations set up to support families or to provide a collective voice. Everyone is telling a very similar, depressing story.

The positive thing, though, is the support that parents are providing to each other.

In the absence of a reliable, compassionate service from Essex County Council, parents have realised that coming together to support each other can be very powerful and effective.



CLR Marie Goldman in Chelmsford city centre with Hannah, a Harris's hawk, and her handler Jimmy  
CLLR MARIE GOLDMAN

I was recently invited along to one such group called Bright Futures Essex, who meet monthly in Boreham.

There were some very in-depth conversations where parents shared the challenges they were having.

To be clear, this wasn't just complaints about the local authority. Far from it.

Parents were also very open about the sometimes hidden emotional difficulties of having children with SEND.

At the end of the day, we must never forget that these are people who want what we all want for our own children: we want them to be safe, to be happy, and to have the best possible chance of leading their best possible life.

And the sad truth is that they are being let down by the system.

It's utterly broken at a national level and in desperate need of

change at a local level. I'm going to keep working hard to push for that positive change.

Positive change can come in all shapes and sizes and from some inspirational and uplifting directions.

Last week, I was honoured to be invited to a presentation from a group of girls from The Boswells School.

The presentation was the culmination of months of work as part of a project called Make Space for Girls. The driving force behind it is the realisation that many public spaces don't properly cater for girls, with many parks and outdoor provisions largely targeted at activities that girls find harder to access.

The Year 9 girls had done their own research and put together their own ideas and designs for inclusive spaces that they would not only feel comfortable in, but which they would actively want to use.

There were some great ideas and I'm looking forward to seeing some of their ideas being turned into reality.

Funding for the project also included money to put some of their

ideas for Chelmsford's Central Park into practice.

I'm very pleased to have supported this project at Chelmsford City Council.

And finally, being lucky enough to live within walking distance of the city centre means I often walk through there on my way to and from meetings, and sometimes I come across things that lift my spirits.

In the past, that has included seeing parent swans nurturing their newly-born cygnets on a nest by the river.

Last week, it was when I bumped into Hannah, the Harris's hawk, and her cheerful and knowledgeable handler, Jimmy.

Hannah and Jimmy were encouraging the gulls and other birds in and around the Bond Street development not to nest there. Judging by the calls from the birds in the sky overhead, it was working.

They had already spotted two-year-old Hannah, even as she perched on Jimmy's wrist as he told me about how they work together and the bond they form as she trains to do her job.

Jimmy told me that in the wild, Harris's hawks usually live for about ten years, but in captivity it can be more than double that.

He said that was down to the regular and reliable feeding and the high quality of the food they get compared to the wild.

Hannah certainly seemed very happy to be where she was, even allowing another passerby, as curious as I was, to briefly stroke her.

Sometimes, the sheer volume of things that need fixing and the mountain that needs to be climbed to effect positive change can seem daunting.

I'm sure many of us have felt that in our lives and I don't mind admitting that I'm not immune to it.

But meeting Jimmy and Hannah really did lift my spirits. A beautiful bird of prey paired with a human who so obviously cared for her and loved her very much. It really did make my day.

A big thank you to Jimmy for taking the time to chat.

Please feel free to share with me your uplifting experiences in Chelmsford.

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