

Marie Goldman

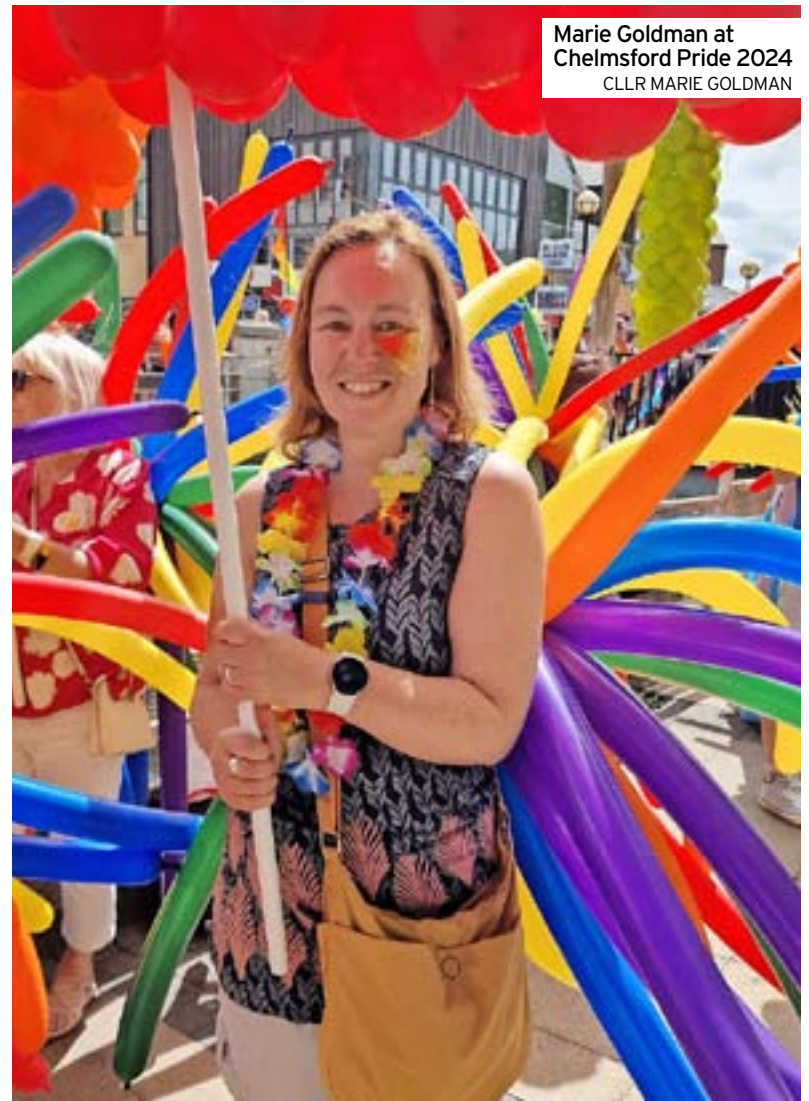
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Chelmsford



POINTS OF VIEW



Linda Mascot, third from right front row, at the Pride celebrations in Chelmsford
CLLR MARIE GOLDMAN



Marie Goldman at Chelmsford Pride 2024
CLLR MARIE GOLDMAN

Festival was a joyful, colourful celebration of human diversity

JUST one more week to go until we go to the polls. Depending on your perspective, the last five weeks since the General Election was called may have whizzed by in a blur of frenzied activity, or dawdled along with interminable predictions from political pundits about the potential outcome.

One thing is for sure: the appetite for change across the electorate, including right here in Chelmsford, is huge. People who have voted for the same party their entire life are saying they want something different this time around and, in a week's time, they're prepared to vote for it.

I'm grateful to the many, many voters who say they will be lending me and the Liberal Democrats their vote on July 4, but it's important to remember that change doesn't happen by accident. We all need to make sure we go out and vote if we want to make it happen.

With all the wall-to-wall coverage of the election, it can be tempting to think that (apart from the football, of course), there's little else going on. That couldn't be further from the truth.

The past few weeks have seen some lovely, cheerful events happening in Chelmsford. One of them was a showcase of Chelmsford's voluntary sector: Volfest.

Volfest is the annual opportunity for representatives from the third



Pride is easily one of my favourite festivals held in Chelmsford
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sector to come together and tell us what they do. It comes in the form of a day-long festival of stalls in our high street. I was lucky enough to be able to take some time out from campaigning to meet and have a chat with some of the volunteers on the stalls and find out more about what they do.

I've met many of these fabulous organisations before and been humbled by what they are able to achieve for our city and its residents. I've mentioned a few in this column in the past, but what I have probably missed out is the incredibly important role played by Chelmsford CVS.

Headed up by the truly amazing and indefatigable Lorraine Jarvis, the small but perfectly formed CVS team supports Chelmsford's volun-

tary sector by championing their work and helping to strengthen local community groups.

I've spoken to many local charitable organisations in Chelmsford who simply couldn't do what they do without the support of the CVS, whether that's help to write grant applications to get much-needed funding, or searching for vital volunteers.

There's also the key role of networking and having the strategic overview of what's going on within the sector locally to be able to join the dots and connect opportunities.

The truth is that we rely on our voluntary sector to fill many gaps in the provision of things we might expect the Government and the state to sort out. We could spend a

long time discussing whether that's right, and I would argue that many things should at least have a lot more support from the Government even if they are not fully provided by the state.

But the bottom line is that charities and voluntary organisations provide vital support and services to our community and we'd be a lot worse off without them.

Organised by the CVS, Volfest is a chance to find out more about what they all do - and what they need. But there are no prizes for guessing the key ask from most of the organisations I chatted to as I wandered along the stalls: they need more volunteers.

Covid hit the third sector hard, but not necessarily for obvious reasons. One thing that several of those running charities tell me is that since the pandemic and the subsequent cost-of-living crisis, many previous volunteers have decided not to come back to voluntary roles, or no longer have the time to volunteer because they have had to find paid employment.

At a time when demand for their services is probably at its highest and government funding is, very sadly and frustratingly, at its lowest, that leaves these organisations on unsafe ground.

So, if you can help, please do get in touch with the Chelmsford CVS via their website: chelmsfordcvs.org.uk.

Finally for this week, last Saturday welcomed Essex Pride back to Chelmsford city centre and Central Park. Pride is easily one of my favourite festivals held in Chelmsford. It's such a joyful, colourful celebration of human diversity and I was - there's no other word for it - proud to join the parade through the city centre and on into the park, waving (and wearing!) beautiful balloon creations that spelled out Essex Pride in the official Pride colours.

The party that I represent has always been a champion of diversity. Our former MP and now peer, Baroness Lynne Featherstone, is the reason that same sex marriage was made legal in this country just a short decade ago.

As I walked at the front of the march to the beat of the uplifting music blaring out from the amplifier being wheeled along just in front of me and behind the Liberal Democrat banner being carried by my party colleagues, it reminded me of the many reasons why I believe in the Liberal Democrats, and am proud to be standing for them.

I hope that on July 4, you will lend me your vote so that I can help represent those important values in Parliament.

You can read the Liberal Democrat manifesto on our website here: libdems.org.uk/manifesto.

Thanks, as always, for reading.

Marie