

Marie Goldman



MP for Chelmsford

POINTS OF VIEW

Is it really best use of an MP's time to jump through pointless hoops?

As a newbie in Parliament, I'm frequently coming across things that I find myself feeling very frustrated about. These are usually examples of practices and procedures that seem, well, slightly bonkers. Here's an example.

I wrote last week about how Private Members' Bills work and I explained how you apply to bring one forward in a special ballot. I don't think a ballot is ideal, but it's hard to think of a much better way of fairly giving all Members of Parliament an equal opportunity. However, last week, I was introduced to another type of Private Members' Bill: a Ten-Minute Rule Bill (10MRB for short).

This also gives MPs the opportunity to propose a Bill on a subject of their choosing, but there's quite a big difference in how you apply for them.

There are only four slots available for 10MRBs, so competition is fierce. I understand it used to be the case that MPs had to queue up outside a specific office in the Palace of Westminster on a specific day at a specific time, and the first four members through the door were allocated one of the four slots. I'm pleased to say that Parliament has moved on from those days.

After all, is it really right that the fate of a potential piece of important legislation can be thwarted by traffic, a delayed train or urgent constituency business? Do we really want our MPs to be spending their (rather expensive) time standing in queues? Surely there's a better way to run a country.

So, the system was changed. But I'm not entirely convinced it's been changed for the better. As a former management consultant specialising in IT systems, I have a reasonable amount of experience of analysing existing systems and devising new ones to replace them. So I know that replicating in the digital world precisely what was happening in the real world is rarely the right answer. It's often a lost opportunity to adapt and improve upon a previous process – to streamline and improve efficiency. Sadly, that principle wasn't



Marie Goldman MP joining Essex Police on patrol in Great Baddow
MARIE GOLDMAN MP

applied to the 10MRB process.

Now, in order to apply for one of the four coveted 10MRB slots, instead of physically queuing up, MPs have to compose an email containing the long and short title of their proposed Bill, which must be agreed in advance, and send it to the House of Commons Public Bill Office.

Instead of the first four MPs that walk through the door being allocated a slot, it's the first four emails that arrive in the inbox of the Public Bill Office after 10am.

So, there I was, the evening before, using all the tricks in the book to try to make my email one of the winning four. I formatted it in plain text. I kept the word count as short as possible. I removed attachments and images. And I scheduled it to be sent at precisely 10am using the web ver-

sion of Outlook from my parliamentary email address. And still I wasn't successful. I mean, this wasn't a shock to me. With probably 500 MPs all vying for the same four places, the odds were somewhat stacked against me, but what an utter waste of all of our time.

There's often a lot of talk about how much MPs get paid – it's far higher than the average salary and I'm not going to get into a debate about that right now, but is it really the best use of an MP's time to be jumping through these pointless hoops?

And in case you're wondering, the title of my proposed Bill was: 'Schools (Mental Health Professionals) Bill'. It was described in my email as: 'Bill to make provision to require primary and secondary schools to employ mental health professionals and to provide access to mental health services on school premises during school hours; and for connected purposes.'

Poor mental health among our children and young people is a

growing crisis. I really do want something to be done to help with that. I guess it won't be via a Ten-Minute Rule Bill – at least not this time around, anyway.

I mention all of this to give a specific example of a parliamentary process that, in my humble opinion, is crying out for reform. And to tell you how you can give your opinion and suggestions about things that should be changed in Parliament.

The House of Commons Modernisation Committee, of which I am now a member, is officially up and running and has launched a call for views on its future work programme. Stakeholders, organisations and members of the public are all invited to contribute to this via the Modernisation Committee's website here: bit.ly/ModComCall.

You have until 3pm on December 16 to submit your comments on how the Modernisation Committee should consider reforms to House of Commons procedures, standards and working practices. Ready, steady, go!

And finally, I was deeply saddened and concerned to hear about the death of a Chelmsford man last week after an assault in Great Baddow. Thank you to all the members of public who contacted Essex Police to provide information to help them with their enquiries.

The reassuring news came swiftly that three suspects were apprehended within just a few days and have now been charged with murder. The police believe that this incident does not pose a threat to the wider community.

I know it's always very worrying to hear about these issues, especially when they happen so close to home, but I want to thank the police and the first responders who have to deal with such awful scenes and work so hard to keep us safe.

As I said in Parliament last Thursday, the Liberal Democrats have their backs – we will never stop campaigning for the resources they need to support them in their vital work.

Keep safe and thanks for reading.
Marie

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