

Marie Goldman

MP for Chelmsford



Government must get a grip on enormous backlog of court cases

AS 2026 gets into full swing, there's a lot going on, both locally in Chelmsford and in Westminster.

It's been lovely to get out and about in Chelmsford again after the Christmas recess.

Last week, I visited Chelmsford Crown Court and met with court staff and judges to discuss some of the challenges currently facing the courts system.

I'm sure you will be aware that there is a huge backlog of cases in the criminal courts, nearly 80,000 in England and Wales. This often means long delays before cases are heard. Indeed, I learnt from my visit that some current cases are already being listed for 2030!

There are so many reasons why the Government must get a grip of this enormous backlog. There's a well-known saying that "justice delayed is justice denied". I wholeheartedly agree. I can't even begin to imagine how stressful and anxiety-inducing it must be for victims and witnesses of crime to have to wait that long. But also for those accused of crime - remembering, of course, the important principle of everyone being innocent until proven guilty.

To try to help reduce this backlog, the Labour Government has proposed scrapping the right to jury trials for a number of trials in England and Wales.

I've yet to be convinced this is a good idea, or will even speed things up very much. The right to trial by jury is a fundamental tenet of our democracy. If we're going to make such a consequential change, surely it should be for well-thought-through ideological reasons - it should be because it's something we believe in, not because it's a position we've been forced into by circumstances.

I'm also not certain that this proposed change will achieve its goal.

While it's certainly true that issues with juries and individual jurors can delay proceedings (perhaps a juror is ill in the middle of a trial, or needs time off to attend a funeral), it's also true that someone needs to consider, write up and deliver a verdict. In the absence of a jury, that

task will fall to the presiding judge. Currently, while juries are deliberating, the judge is free to conduct other trials or court business. They won't be available to do that if juries are removed. I don't yet understand how the Government thinks that will have a positive impact on reducing the backlog.



But don't just take my word that scrapping juries isn't desirable. The Secretary of State for Justice, David Lammy MP, himself has said previously that scrapping jury trials would be a mistake. The change of heart is an interesting, although unconvincing one.

The Liberal Democrats will continue to advocate for the right to jury trials and to reduce the court backlogs by investing in the system - something that successive governments have failed to do, arguably leading to the appalling state we see now.

Moving to more cheerful matters, it was lovely to visit the Christmas tree recycling scheme in aid of Farleigh Hospice last weekend. This scheme runs every year, but it's expected to be a record-breaking

Christmas trees are brought to Generals Farm where they are put through chippers to turn them into biomass



year this year, with 3,500 trees due to be collected for recycling, which is expected to result in raising some £73,000 to support Farleigh Hospice. It really was wonderful to meet with staff and volunteers supporting Farleigh Hospice and to witness the recycling system in action.

All the trees are collected by an army of volunteers from residents and organisations who usually make a donation to the charity. The trees are then brought to Generals Farm, near the Boreham Interchange, where they are put through chippers to turn them into biomass, which is then sold (for not very much money, sadly).

I know so many Chelmsford residents have a very strong, personal connection with Farleigh Hospice.

Speaking to fundraising manager Debbie De Boltz at the event, even she had a personal connection with Farleigh - with loved ones having been under its care.

When we think of hospices, we often think of the physical buildings where they are located, but actually, about 90 per cent of the people that Farleigh look after are cared for in their own homes. I know that's invaluable for many - being in familiar surroundings while getting the care they or loved ones need. I can't

praise enough the work the Farleigh Hospice team do.

Finally for this week, I want to say how frustrated I am by the Government's lack of support for the hospitality sector.

Lots of businesses have been through incredibly tough times over the past few years, but none more so than the hospitality industry who were among the very hardest hit by the pandemic. As a service-based industry meaning a very large percentage of their costs is in staffing, they are also some of the hardest hit by the recent hike in Employer's National Insurance.

I'm keen to hear directly from Chelmsford-based hospitality businesses and will shortly be holding a small business roundtable to discuss these very issues and to hear firsthand about the challenges being faced.

When speaking in Parliament, it is always much more powerful to be able to give real-world examples of what's going on, so I would very much appreciate hearing from any businesses affected by this issue.

If that's you and you'd like to get involved in my small business roundtable, please email me on: marie.goldman.mp@parliament.uk. Thanks, as always, for reading.

Marie

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