

Marie Goldman

MP for Chelmsford



Implications of changes particularly significant for future of Chelmsford

LAST week's announcement about Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Essex marks one of the most significant shifts in how our county is governed in a generation. Under the proposals, five new unitary authorities will replace the current two-tier system of county and district councils.

It is a structural change that will reshape how services are delivered, how decisions are made and how residents interact with the institutions that serve them.

For many, this will feel like a long time coming. The existing system – split between Essex County Council and 12 district, borough and city councils – has often struggled with the familiar tensions of overlapping responsibilities, inconsistent service delivery and the inefficiencies that inevitably arise when accountability is shared across multiple layers.

The move to unitary authorities is intended to simplify this landscape: one council responsible for all local services in each area, from social care to waste collection, from highways to housing.

The scale of the change shouldn't be underestimated. Reorganisations of this kind are complex, disruptive, and often politically charged.

They require careful planning, clear communication, and a willingness to put residents' needs above institutional loyalties.

But they also offer opportunities: opportunities to modernise, to streamline and to design services around the realities of how people live today rather than the administrative boundaries of the past.

For Chelmsford, the implications will be particularly significant. Our city has grown rapidly, with a population that increasingly expects responsive, joined-up public services.

A unitary model could, if implemented well, bring decision-making closer to the communities it affects.

It could reduce duplication, improve transparency, and create a more coherent approach to long-term planning.

But it will also require vigilance to ensure that local identity and local



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priorities aren't lost in the process. Residents will rightly want reassurance that the new structures will be accessible, accountable and genuinely reflective of the places they serve.

As this process unfolds, I'll be engaging closely with ministers, local leaders and community organisations to ensure Chelmsford's voice is heard.

Structural reform mustn't become an end in itself; it has to be a means to better outcomes for the people who rely on these services every day.

Alongside the LGR announcement came another development of real consequence for our area: the decision to place the Mid & South Essex NHS Trust into a new national recovery programme.

This follows the trust being identified as one of the worst performing in the country on several key measures, including waiting times and patient flow.

It's never comfortable to see your local NHS trust described in such stark terms. The NHS is woven into the fabric of our national life, and the staff who keep it running, often under extraordinary pressure, deserve our respect and gratitude.

But honesty matters. The chal-

lenges facing Mid & South Essex have been deepening for some time, and the consequences are felt directly by patients, families and the workforce.

That is why I welcome the decision to bring the trust into the recovery programme. It's not a badge of shame; it's a recognition that the current trajectory is unsustainable and that additional support, scrutiny, and resources are needed to turn things around.

The programme is designed to provide exactly that: targeted intervention, expert guidance, and a clear framework for improvement.

For Chelmsford residents, this matters enormously. Our constituents rely on the trust for emergency care, planned operations, maternity services and so much more.

When waiting lists grow, when communication falters, when staff are stretched to breaking point, it's our communities who feel the impact.

A recovery programme offers the chance to reset – to rebuild confidence, to stabilise services and to create the conditions in which staff can thrive rather than simply cope.

I've been meeting regularly with the trust's leadership, frontline staff and representatives from across the system. Those conversations have been frank, constructive and often sobering.

Staff speak with pride about their work but also with exhaustion about

the pressures they face.

Patients write to me – far more often than I'd wish – with concerns about delays, cancellations or the difficulty of navigating a system that feels overwhelmed.

These voices matter. They're the lived reality behind the statistics, and they reinforce the urgency of the task ahead.

My role isn't to stand on the sidelines but to support the trust on its road to recovery, to challenge where necessary, and to ensure the needs of Chelmsford residents are front and centre in every discussion.

Both the LGR proposals and the trust's inclusion in the recovery programme speak to a broader truth: public services across Essex are under strain, and structural change alone won't fix everything.

Reform has to be accompanied by investment, leadership and a commitment to listening to the people who use and deliver these services every day.

For local government, the coming months will be dominated by consultation, planning and negotiation.

Residents will want clarity about what the new unitary authorities

will look like, how they will be funded and how local identity will be protected.

For the NHS, the focus will be on stabilising performance, supporting staff, and rebuilding trust with patients.

In both cases, transparency will be essential. Change of this scale can only succeed if people understand why it's happening and how it will improve their lives.

My priority is to ensure Chelmsford's interests aren't lost in the noise – that our city's needs, aspirations and challenges are reflected in every decision.

These aren't easy times for public services, but they're also moments of possibility.

With the right support, the right leadership and the right focus, we can build systems that are more resilient, more responsive and more aligned with the communities they serve.

I'll continue working with local partners, national bodies and, most importantly, the people of Chelmsford to make sure that happens.

Keep well.

Marie

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■ Marie's column returns on April 16.

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