

# Marie Goldman

MP for Chelmsford



## Whatever Reform has got planned will be virtually impossible to stop

**T**HINK it would be strange if I wrote this week's column without at least mentioning the seismic shift in politics that we witnessed at the local elections last week. Across England, Scotland and Wales, there have been significant, once-in-a-generation changes that are very much a question of 'out with the old, in with the new'. Essex is definitely no exception.

Essex County Council had been run by the Conservatives for 25 years - but no more. Now it is run by Reform UK, who gained 53 seats in last week's elections, while the Conservatives lost 41.

With 78 seats in total on the council (following a boundary review which added three more council seats to the previous total of 75), Reform has a sizeable majority.

Only 40 seats are required to have a majority on the council, so with 53, it has plenty of spare votes to account for any absences when it comes to votes, or future defections or by-election losses.

In short, whatever it has got planned for the next couple of years will be virtually impossible to stop, as long as it's within their legal powers.

From my point of view, I find that very worrying. Of course, I'm unlikely to agree very much with an opposition party so it should hardly be surprising to read that I don't agree with much that Reform UK has to say, but it's more than that. I'm afraid I simply don't trust them.

I've seen what it promised before it took control of Kent County Council last year, such as not putting up taxes, and within its first year, increasing council tax. That's the same as what it did in Worcestershire too, where it put up council tax by a whopping nine per cent.

It's not what people voted for. It remains to be seen whether the people of Essex, myself included, will get the same treatment.

But Essex County Council doesn't have much life left in it. In two years' time, it will cease to exist.

As will all of the current district councils, such as Chelmsford, Brentwood, Maldon, Colchester and others, as well as the two current unitary authorities, Southend and Thur-



Stephen Robinson defended his Chelmsford North division seat on Essex County Council



David Loxton, left, of the Liberal Democrats, won the Chelmsford Central division



Liberal Democrat Hazel Clark is congratulated on winning the Chelmsford West division seat on Essex County Council  
PHOTOS: CHELMSFORD CITY COUNCIL

rock. Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), pushed forward by the Labour government, but embarked upon by the Conservatives when they were in government, is still set to go ahead.

Next year, we will elect so-called 'shadow councils,' who will spend the following year setting up and preparing five new unitary authorities for Essex to take over nearly all the functions of Essex County Council, plus the district councils.

It will be interesting to see how Reform UK's performance at Essex County Council over this coming year will be judged by the public when they

are asked to go to the polls again in a year's time.

In Chelmsford, I'm delighted to see the three seats that the Liberal Democrats were defending on May 7 convincingly retained.

It was disappointing to so narrowly miss out on gaining the Great Baddow & Galleywood seat, where we were defeated by Reform UK by just 34 votes.

However, I'd like to say a big thank you to everyone who voted Liberal Democrat on May 7. I had so many lovely conversations on the doorstep, and I'm grateful to have retained what I feel is a little oasis of Lib Dem yellow in the heart of Chelmsford. I know that my colleagues who were returned to Essex County Council will do their very best to hold the new Reform UK administration to account.

In other news, Wednesday, May

13, saw the State Opening of Parliament, complete with a new King's Speech, setting out the objectives of the Labour government for the new parliamentary session. As I'm writing this column a few days before the event, I'm afraid I can't say for definite what will be in the speech, but I'll be curious to see whether the Government decides that our antiquated First Past The Post (FPTP) voting system is no longer fit for purpose in the new, multi-party world that was so starkly on display last week and hints at legislation to change it to a more proportional system. As this is something that my party has been arguing for since its formation in 1988, this is clearly something I support. Indeed, it's been in every Liberal Democrat General Election Manifesto since that time - that's ten manifestos. Surely, it's about time the Govern-

ment listened, especially now that FPTP no longer appears to be benefiting the old guard of the traditional two major parties. We'll see.

Finally, there will be a special election on June 18 to elect an Essex county councillor in the Springfield division, following the sudden passing of my dear colleague, Councillor Mike Mackrory. I very much hope the people of Springfield will return a Liberal Democrat to Mike's old seat, so that we can hold the new administration at Essex County Council to account.

Thanks to everyone for coming out to vote last week. Although I'm personally disappointed by the result, it is nevertheless wonderful to see democracy in action. I'm always grateful to live in a country where elections are free, fair and peaceful. Keep well.

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Marie Goldman MP