

Backbench Business Committee

Representations: Backbench Business

Tuesday 7 March 2023

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Ian Mearns (Chair); Bob Blackman; Patricia Gibson; Chris Green; Nigel Mills; Kevin Foster.

Questions 1-13

Representations made

[I](#): Damien Moore.

[II](#): Dame Andrea Leadsom, Andrew Selous, Anthony Browne, Jim Shannon and Philip Dunne.

[III](#): Jim Shannon.

Damien Moore made representations.

Q1 Chair: Good afternoon. Welcome to the Backbench Business Committee. We have three applications in front of us this afternoon. First, we welcome Mr Damien Moore to present an application entitled “Free car parking for care workers on duty”. Over to you, Damien.

Damien Moore: Thank you. It is a pleasure to be in front of your Committee with this application on free car parking for care workers. I believe this is an important application, and it comes on the back of conversations I have had with constituents and also with Engage Britain.

One of my care worker constituents buys up to 20 90p car parking tickets every day, and there are additional costs when they enter a home and find a person in difficulty, and therefore need ambulance services, or when they cannot leave for some other reason. Is it any wonder that we have over 160,000 vacancies in the social care workforce?

We propose that the Government implement free car parking passes—a green badge, similar to a blue badge—for carers on duty, so that they can park for free when making home visits. That will help to take the stress out of all the things they have to deal with during those visits, and it will obviously help with the financial costs as well.

Some councils already exempt carers. A nationwide policy was brought in over covid, but we want to extend it for the whole time. It was great, but it needs to be reintroduced and standardised, because there are places that already do this—Cornwall and Devon, for example.

The standardisation of blue badge applications was an enormous help for disabled people, who need this for care workers too. There are no unnecessary administrative burdens, and there is huge support for this—Engage Britain’s research showed that, in a 2019 vote, there was 80% support across all major political parties.

This policy would be a huge financial help, as I said, but it is also about recruitment and retention. It would show that the country respects and values care workers and would actually raise their status a bit—to a position they very much deserve, given that they are doing a very difficult job. They are in our homes and helping our families, and it is right that we give them that support to help them go about their daily work.

Q2 Bob Blackman: Which answering Department would be appropriate, given that you have asked for a Tuesday as a preference?

Damien Moore: This is the problem, really. We need to tie the Government down. We have the Department of Health and Social Care and the Department with responsibility for local government, and it falls between those two. We need to tie both Departments down in a way, but we could do with starting with one. We could do with getting a Minister there, actually showing support for this and engaging. As you will know, you often something that falls in the purview of two Departments, but one



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is a lead Department. So it would be the Department of Health and Social Care or the Department with responsibility for local government.

Bob Blackman: I think Tuesday 28th would be available. Is that correct, in terms of the selection?

Chair: Health and Social Care is on the 28th, yes.

Q3 **Bob Blackman:** Would Tuesday 28 March be convenient if we were able to offer it to you? *[Interruption.]*

Damien Moore: No, I am just being told it would not.

Q4 **Chair:** An alternative would be a Thursday afternoon. That would be Thursday 13 March—a week on Thursday.

Damien Moore: That is probably better. I can do that, yes.

Q5 **Chair:** The Government would choose which Department answered, and you would hopefully get the right one.

Damien Moore: Hopefully—or maybe there would be a fight for them to do it.

Patricia Gibson: The Thursday is the 16th of March.

Chair: Yes. I apologise. So that is obviously a possibility. Are there any further questions, colleagues? No. Damien, your attendance is much appreciated. Thank you very much for your application.

Dame Andrea Leadsom, Andrew Selous, Anthony Browne, Jim Shannon and Philip Dunne made representations.

Q6 **Chair:** Next up we have Dame Andrea Leadsom. Welcome; it is nice to see you again.

Dame Andrea Leadsom: Thank you, Mr Mearns.

Chair: Your application this afternoon is on tackling the energy trilemma.

Dame Andrea Leadsom: That's right. You will see that there is good support across the parties. Specifically, Philip Dunne, Chairman of the Environmental Audit Committee, said that he would have liked to be here, but he is at his Select Committee, so I can assure you that he would wish to speak in the debate.

Essentially, we have seen in the last year or so an appalling situation, where the energy trilemma has really come to the fore. The issue is no longer just the cost of energy; it is also energy security and decarbonisation. There has been a lot of talk in recent years—quite rightly—about the move to decarbonisation. But at what price? What we have seen is increasing energy bills and continued exposure to the hike in energy prices as a result of Putin's aggression. We need to sort out a way forward in the United Kingdom that balances those three legs of the trilemma: keeping the lights on, keeping the bills down and decarbonising. It seems that a lot of colleagues, including my colleagues here, have good



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contributions to make to such a debate. And it would be extremely helpful if we could have a Backbench Business debate, please, on Thursday 23 March.

Anthony Browne: I am a deputy chair of the all-party parliamentary group on the environment—I was the chair—and I have done a lot of work in this area. As Dame Andrea has said, it is an incredibly topical debate. The whole trilemma has shifted because of the war in Ukraine. There are trade-offs between how we get to net zero—that was there already, but then there is also the cost of living and energy security. This is unsettled for us as a country; we don't know quite where the solution is. There are debates over various things. Is nuclear power the answer? Is opening new oilfields the answer? I think it would be a really lively, topical debate and we should definitely do it.

Jim Shannon: I just add my support to Andrea and what she has put forward. The issue of energy is on everybody's mind. The first debate this morning in Westminster Hall was about decarbonisation. Again, this application is bringing all three things together. This is subject matter that my constituents ask me about all the time. So I congratulate the right hon. Lady on her request and I am very happy to support it.

Andrew Selous: I think this is the biggest issue facing our constituents at the moment, and they would be very surprised if Parliament was not fully challenging and exploring all these issues on their behalf.

Q7 **Bob Blackman:** Why 23 March? Is there a particular reason?

Dame Andrea Leadsom: Not specifically, no. It's just that we would like a debate soon. We tried earlier, before Parliament's last break, and didn't manage to get our act together early enough, but this is something that is very live and I think it's quite pressing that we discuss it. We are looking at the end of the energy price guarantee. Obviously, this is all happening around the Budget. Getting the opportunity to discuss this following the Budget, rather than just before it, would be helpful.

Q8 **Nigel Mills:** It is a general debate, Andrea. Why the Chamber and not Westminster Hall?

Dame Andrea Leadsom: I think there would be a lot of interest from colleagues. Of course the debate can always be in Westminster Hall, but it gets a lot more coverage in the Chamber. It is potentially taken more authoritatively by those who want to discuss the three different and competing priorities. So I think the Chamber is the right place for it. *[Interruption.]* Thank you very much for coming, Philip. Perhaps Mr Mearns might allow—

Q9 **Chair:** Of course. Philip, is there anything that you would like to say? Obviously, there has been some—

Philip Dunne: Chairman, I would like to support everything that Andrea has said. *[Laughter.]* I think this would be a popular topic; it's very topical.

Chair: Well, if the strength of support here today is anything to go by, I have no doubt that you will get an awful lot of speakers if and when we can organise the debate. Is there anything further, colleagues? No. Okay, thank you very much indeed.

Jim Shannon made representations.

Q10 **Chair:** Jim, you have made an application for a debate entitled, “10 years of Xi Jinping.” The fact that Xi Jinping has been the premier of China for 10 years is not the responsibility of His Majesty’s Government. Would you mind changing the debate title to something like, “United Kingdom relations with China after 10 years of Xi Jinping”?

Jim Shannon: I would be more than happy to do that. The Committee for Freedom in Hong Kong Foundation asked me if I would be prepared to ask for a debate after the 10th anniversary of the takeover of Hong Kong. Would it be more appropriate to reword it along those lines? When I told colleagues the title, they asked me, “Are you supporting China?” I said, “No, I’m not.” So you are absolutely right that the wording needs to be changed, and thank you for reminding me about that.

As to the reason why we have asked for a debate, we have some fairly prestigious supporters this time—not that our supporters are not always prestigious, by the way, but those who are keen to be involved have spoken in the Chamber on many occasions about these issues. We are hoping to use the anniversary as a basis for Westminster to highlight how China has regressed both internally and on the international stage in the 10 years that President Xi has been at the helm. The debate we are requesting from the Committee would allow us to scrutinise those 10 years, as well as calling on the British Government to develop a single, coherent China policy—with respect to the Government, that is painfully lacking. We always make those comments during such debates in Westminster Hall or in the Chamber.

We believe that the debate would provide an important opportunity to highlight the destruction of freedoms and, in particular, the Uyghur genocide in Xinjiang and the threats to Taiwan, which are on everybody’s minds—people are focused not just on Ukraine but on Taiwan as well. I understand that the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green will be bringing some amendments forward to upcoming legislation, which refer to surveillance and the fact that China seems to have had access to many places in the United Kingdom. Organ harvesting is also a subject I have brought up on many, many occasions. So there is lots of subject matter.

Mr Chairman, I don’t take this for granted. I very much appreciate being able to come to the Backbench Business Committee and ask for these debates. I think this one would create a lot of interest, and I believe that colleagues would be happy to have this opportunity in the Chamber or Westminster Hall—wherever it may be.

Q11 **Bob Blackman:** If you accepted a Westminster Hall debate, Jim, is there



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a particular rush to do it sooner rather than later? Obviously, we have potential availability in Westminster Hall that we do not have in the Chamber.

Jim Shannon: I will probably leave that to the Committee. I am not particularly fussy. I am happy to take Westminster Hall—I always am. If there is a space coming up, that might provide an opportunity for me to have the debate at a time that would be relevant. Any time would be relevant for Hong Kong and China, so I will leave the timing to you.

I have one thing to ask. I have a problem with my diabetes, and I have to go for a check-up. It has not been confirmed yet, but I think it will be on a Thursday, and I am conscious that I will have to be at home.

Q12 **Bob Blackman:** There is 16 or 23 March.

Jim Shannon: The day I have to go is 23 March.

Q13 **Bob Blackman:** Could you do 16 March?

Jim Shannon: Yes.

Chair: Okay, that's useful. Thank you, Jim. Are there any further questions, colleagues? No. In that case, thank you very much indeed, once again, Jim. Your season ticket is secure. We will now go into private session.