

Backbench Business Committee

Representations: Backbench Debates

Tuesday 20 June 2023

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 20 June 2023.

Watch the meeting

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

Questions 1-28

Representations

[I](#): Andrew Selous and Mr Robin Walker.

[II](#): Yasmin Qureshi and Mr Khalid Mahmood

[III](#): Wendy Morton

[IV](#): Sir Stephen Timms

[V](#): Mr Robin Walker and Andrew Selous

[VI](#): Margaret Greenwood

[VII](#): Stephen Crabb

[VIII](#): Sir Robert Neill

[IX](#): Mr Clive Betts

Andrew Selous and **Mr Robin Walker** made representations.

Q1 **Chair:** Good afternoon everyone and welcome to the Backbench Business Committee. We have quite a lot of business to get through this afternoon, including three applications for our normal debate schedule and seven applications for estimates day debates. The first application, from Mr Andrew Selous, is on the subject of bladder and bowel continence care. Andrew, over to you.

Andrew Selous: Thank you, Mr Mearns. The week of 26 June is Continence Week, which is why I am seeking a debate in Parliament then. This is a subject that we are all a bit embarrassed about. We don't like to talk about it, which is precisely why we need to have a debate in Parliament. When you become incontinent, you often become housebound. It becomes increasingly difficult to get out and about, and it is a bit of a taboo.

We have an issue with people going into our hospitals continent, but because they are left in bed and are not able to be helped to the loo often enough they end up coming out incontinent. I look after a sort of housebound lady, to whom that happened a couple of months ago, so it is a very real issue. There is also a specific issue with men who have had catheters and other issues, but have nowhere to dispose of continence products in the way that ladies do, so I would like to air the Boys need Bins campaign.

This issue will affect a surprisingly large number of your constituents, although they are probably too embarrassed to have written to you about it. I must say, my personal inbox has not been overflowing with messages on the subject, but when I have dug a little I have found out quietly that continence has been an issue. It may not be registering as a very significant issue in your inboxes, but if you look at the stats, it is out there. It has a significant impact on people's quality of life and on what they can do.

Frankly, I think the NHS needs a bit of a push on this—as do employers, when it comes to workplace provision and so on. That is why I am keen to have this debate. I am supported by Kirsten Oswald of the SNP, and by Nick Fletcher, Robin Walker and hopefully some others. I chair the all-party parliamentary group for bladder and bowel continence care.

Chair: Robin, do you have anything to add?

Mr Walker: It is important to note the issue of loneliness and isolation that can be caused when people are stuck at home through this condition. We need to raise the case of people who have perhaps had unfortunate experiences of aftercare in hospital; that is certainly something I have



HOUSE OF COMMONS

come across in my postbag. I am keen to support the debate and it would be good to link it to the date.

- Q2 **Bob Blackman:** The application before us only has three names on it. For a normal 90-minute debate, we would expect to see eight speakers, roughly divided between the Opposition parties and the Government side.

Andrew Selous: I could probably get some more through the all-party group. I would be reasonably confident of doubling the figure.

- Q3 **Bob Blackman:** In which case we might be in a position to offer a Westminster Hall debate, possibly even next week—the week of 26 June.

Andrew Selous: To have it next week would be fantastic because that is Continnence Week, and there are clinicians who want issues raised, there are NHS policy issues and there are employers who need a bit of a nudge in this space.

Chair: Okay. That is entirely possible. It would probably be on the Thursday. The Tuesday slot we have has already been taken. Thank you very much indeed—much appreciated.

Yasmin Qureshi and Mr Khalid Mahmood made representations.

Yasmin Qureshi: Good afternoon. Alicia and Ian cannot make it today. Ian has had to go to Scotland and Alicia is chairing her Committee, but I do have Khalid Mahmood MP.

- Q4 **Chair:** I understand that the application is on the subject of Srebrenica.

Yasmin Qureshi: That is right. As the Committee is probably aware, I founded and have been the chair of the APPG on Srebrenica for a number of years. The week beginning 3 July is the commemorative week for the Srebrenica genocide, and there will be quite a lot of events happening throughout the United Kingdom to commemorate that particular appalling genocide that occurred on European soil only about 30 years ago.

You have very kindly, in the past, granted me a debate. Last year, in fact, the Committee granted me a debate in the main Chamber. This debate is really important, because we know that this involved the murders of 10,000 young men—it was mostly young men and men—in one go by the Serbs in Bosnia. It was one of the most appalling actions throughout the whole of the war that was taking place in Yugoslavia, which saw about 100,000 Muslim men killed and about 15,000 women raped. This was just one particular incident that took place, but because of its sheer scale and nature, and the method by which it happened, we need to recognise it.

The theme for this year is “Together We Are One”. We really want to highlight the fact that it is not that difficult to have a condition that can lead to extreme hatred and extremism, which can cause the fracture of communities. That would then lead to, essentially, genocide of one group of people.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

We are asking for a 90-minute debate in Westminster Hall, which would be enough time to allow Members to come and speak. Ideally, we would like it on Monday 3 July or Tuesday 4 July.

- Q5 **Chair:** Yasmin, I will stop you there. We can only offer you debates on a Tuesday morning or on a Thursday.

Yasmin Qureshi: Tuesday morning is absolutely fine for us. You have seen the application form; it has about 15 Members who indicated that they will be speaking. These are people who have confirmed to me after I individually emailed and texted them, so I hope that those 15 Members will be there. As I say, I am asking for a 90-minute debate in Westminster Hall.

- Q6 **Chair:** There is a fly in the ointment, of course. Would this be an FCDO answering Department—the Foreign Office?

Yasmin Qureshi: I think it would be, yes.

- Q7 **Chair:** Unfortunately, the FCDO are not answering on that particular Tuesday morning. It is not their turn; they are not on the rota. To get it into that week, it would have to be on the Thursday, in that case.

Yasmin Qureshi: In that case, would it be possible for the following week?

- Q8 **Chair:** Not on the Tuesday. We already have a taker for that debate.

Yasmin Qureshi: The following week could be a Wednesday, Thursday or Monday.

Chair: Thursday in the week commencing 10 July—that would be 13 July. That would be possible.

- Q9 **Bob Blackman:** Can I just raise a point? On your application, you have a motion that cannot be taken in Westminster Hall.

Yasmin Qureshi: No, I realise that. I think initially when we applied, we were thinking of a debate in the Chamber, but in the light of that fact—and when we had a chance to think about it—we thought it would be more possible to get a successful debate in Westminster Hall. I realise that; we will take out the motion.

- Q10 **Bob Blackman:** There is a possibility of actually getting a Chamber debate.

Yasmin Qureshi: Would that be possible in the following week or that week? I do not mind if it is the following week; I would be happy to—

- Q11 **Chair:** I am afraid to say that there is a remote possibility of a Chamber debate, but there is already an offer out there, which we are waiting for a response to. The pitch has been made, Yasmin. Thank you very much indeed. Is there anything you want to add?

Mr Mahmood: This is a very important debate. For us particularly, this happening in Europe is a huge reminder for all of us, I think, that this sort



HOUSE OF COMMONS

of thing can still take place, albeit 30 years ago. I think we need to be mindful of that, and particularly mindful to pass it on to our young people through schools and education. It would be wonderful to be able to get that message across, so that we do not suffer any more of these horrific events at all.

Chair: Thank you very much.

Bob Blackman: I should declare an interest: I have been to the museum and the site of the massacres. It is really eye-opening. If you see it, how dreadful it was comes home to you.

Yasmin Qureshi: Thank you. Again, I thank the Committee for granting these debates in previous years. Thank you so much for that.

Chair: Thank you very much.

Wendy Morton made representations.

Q12 **Chair:** We now move on to one of our own Committee members, Wendy Morton, with an application on "Securing the future with the skills for today and tomorrow". Wendy, over to you.

Wendy Morton: Thank you, Mr Chair. The background of this debate really started at local constituency level, but I then did research and spoke to colleagues and ascertained that there was a much bigger demand and need to raise this topic. In fact, a recent survey by the think-tank, the Learning and Work Institute, estimates that 20% of the UK workforce, which equates to 6.5 million people, will be significantly under-skilled by 2030, with quite a significant cost to the economy.

I want to use the debate to highlight what I see as a potential skills gap, to make sure that we are educating our young people so that we have the skills base today, but also the skills for the future as we seek to innovate more, use artificial intelligence and so on. I also want to recognise that in certain industries we have an ageing workforce, and there is a need to fill what has sometimes been described to me as a gap in experience. I think in this place we have often highlighted the hospitality sector as one area where we have had a skills shortage or a shortage of workers. The agricultural industry is another one. I know some of those are being addressed, but of late other sectors have come to my attention—the motor mechanic industry and elements of defence, where technology is often moving at quite a rapid pace.

That is the background to my debate in a nutshell. I appreciate that mine is not time-sensitive, as some of the other bids that the Committee has heard today are. None the less, I think it is timely, to make sure that we as a Government, and across the Benches, are seeking to make sure that we have the right skills and employees for our labour market.

Chair: Thank you very much. Questions, colleagues?

Q13 **Bob Blackman:** Which would be the answering Department?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wendy Morton: I thought long and hard about this. I was thinking about apprentices and the skills agenda, which very much sit with Education. I also think that it is an opportunity for us on the Back Benches to highlight the work of some of our regional Mayors, who hold the skills agenda. That again links in with DFE. But if the Committee felt that it sat more with BEIS—well, it is not BEIS any more, is it?

Bob Blackman: I could be Work and Pensions; it could be Business and Trade.

Wendy Morton: I would be quite happy.

- Q14 **Chair:** I think the DFE would still have a big hand in it, with FE colleges, post-16 and so on, and of course training providers come under that particular aegis as well. I point out to everyone watching that although Wendy is a member of the Committee she will not take part in the deliberation on her own application—that is just for clarity and transparency. Thank you very much, Wendy. Would you like to resume your seat in the Committee? That is very kind of you. Thank you.

That concludes the normal applications. We will now move on to considering applications for estimates day debates. The Committee has been informed that we will have two days of estimates day debates in the first week of July, on the Tuesday and the Wednesday. We have seven applications in front of us this afternoon, only six of which will be dealt with by personal representation. The first is by Sir Stephen Timms.

Sir Stephen Timms made representations.

- Q15 **Chair:** Welcome, Stephen; it is nice to see you again. Your application is on the spending of the Department for Work and Pensions.

Sir Stephen Timms: I am grateful to the Committee for considering this application. It is, as you will see, a well-supported application, signed by, I think, every former Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and shadow Secretary of State for Work and Pensions who is not currently on the Front Bench.

The hope is that we can focus the debate on universal credit, because it is the 10th anniversary of the start of the roll-out of the new benefit in 2013. Universal credit accounts for a lot of spending—just over £43 billion last year, projected to go up to just over £50 billion this year, following the significant inflation increase in April this year—and 5.7 million people claim universal credit, so it is a very big issue affecting lots and lots of people. We have published several Select Committee reports on universal credit, including our recent report on universal credit and childcare costs, whose recommendations, I am pleased to say, were accepted by the Chancellor in the Budget.

There are lots of points about universal credit to debate. There are positive points to be made. It is clear that the universal credit computer system did a very good job during the pandemic in getting help very quickly and efficiently to a very large number of people, and that is an important achievement for the new benefit, but there are also some



HOUSE OF COMMONS

significant problems with it. One that we highlighted in our inquiry is the five-week wait for the first payment of universal credit after you first apply, which we think should be changed. There are some significant problems with fraud in universal credit as well.

There is quite a lot to debate within that. We on the Select Committee would very much welcome the opportunity to debate it in an estimates day debate on 4 or 5 July, and we very much hope the Committee will approve our application.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed.

Mr Robin Walker and **Andrew Selous** made representations.

Q16 **Chair:** Robin, your application is on the spending of the Department for Education on post-16 education, FE and colleges.

Mr Walker: I sent the Committee a list of 15 supporters. Since then, it has gone up to 22, so I will just add the names that have come in since sending it: Lloyd Russell-Moyle, Jonathan Gullis, Barry Sheerman, Danny Kruger, Andrew Lewer, Steve McCabe and Caroline Lucas. We have all four of the English parties represented in the Commons in support of the debate.

As you all know, the Government have introduced significant post-16 education reforms, including T-levels. The Education Committee has recently published a report on the future of post-16 qualifications in which we welcome some aspects of what the Government are doing but call for more ambition, particularly in terms of getting the job opportunities that go along with T-levels, and for a pause in the defunding of advanced general qualifications such as BTECs, because we do not believe that that should go ahead until T-levels have proven themselves.

There is also the general issue of the level of spending on colleges and FE, which, of all the areas of education spend, has been the least fast growing. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has published a report showing that sixth forms are in a particularly difficult position—which is why we wanted to include colleges as well as FE, to allow for sixth-form colleges to be picked up—and that colleges and sixth forms have seen a long-term funding decline in spending per student relative to schools. The Select Committee recommended that, to prevent any further narrowing of 16-to-19 education, there should be a wholesale review of 16-to-19 funding. We want to use the debate to press the case for such a review, including more targeted support for disadvantaged students.

Broadly, that is the pitch. That is where we are coming from. The other thing that I would say is that almost all of us will have at least one, and possibly two or three, of these institutions—FE colleges and sixth-form colleges—in our constituencies, so it is a great opportunity for Back-Bench MPs from across the House to speak about the interests of those very good institutions in their patches.

Andrew Selous: I have spoken in a similar debate before, and it was extremely well supported. To me, it is really about parity of esteem across



HOUSE OF COMMONS

the education sector in terms of variants in funding, and about giving equal opportunities for life chances to everyone to pursue the educational path that is right for them—so round pegs in round holes.

- Q17 **Kevin Foster:** On the debate, I hear the points that you have made, but how do you see it relating specifically to estimates? That would be a perfectly good pitch for a normal Chamber debate that the Committee could grant around wider things. What about specifically in terms of the estimate from the Department?

Mr Walker: The opportunity of doing an estimates day debate is to drill into the numbers a bit and to look at, for instance, some of the figures that I highlighted from the IFS, and at the specific recommendation from the Education Committee about doing a wholesale review of the funding. We did an estimates day debate that was very well subscribed on childcare in the early years, shortly before the Budget. Focusing on not just why this is a good idea, or why we should be investing in this space, but the hard numbers helps to focus minds at the Department. That is something that we all know. When he was in my position as Chair of the Education Committee, Robert Halfon made a lot of speeches about the importance of FE and the ladder of opportunity, and so on. The benefit of having an estimates day debate is bringing it back to, yes, we have the rhetoric, but how do we make sure that it translates into cold hard cash?

- Q18 **Bob Blackman:** One of the other applications on our list is from Margaret Greenwood and it seems fairly similar in terms of the structure. I do not know whether you have had a chance to have any discussions to try to yoke the two bids.

Mr Walker: Literally on the way in! What I would say is that, if the Committee were so minded, I would be very happy to amend the title to explicitly include adult education. I think that there is a case for adult education to be looked at in its own right, but if that were convenient for the Committee, it could easily be grouped with some of these institutions. It would broaden the scope of the debate to some extent because of course some of the institutions that deliver adult education are beyond FE and colleges, but I do not think that that is insurmountable, and that is, in my opinion anyway, a debate worthy of consideration in its own right.

Chair: Thank you, Robin and Andrew. Much appreciated.

Margaret Greenwood made representations.

- Q19 **Chair:** Next up, believe it or not, we have Margaret Greenwood. Margaret, your application, surprisingly enough, is on the spending of the Department for Education on adult education, which I personally believe is totally different from FE and skills, but that is neither here nor there.

Margaret Greenwood: Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to you. In terms of the sector, my application is referring to adult education, such as is provided by local authorities; community-based education, which is provided by providers like the WEA; and FE and colleges. It is broad in scope. My reason for wanting this debate is that



HOUSE OF COMMONS

obviously the topic makes a huge contribution to the social, economic and cultural wellbeing of the UK. It can help people to gain skills to get into work. It can show the opportunities for getting into work—the interaction of being in a college also does that—and progress for people who are in work, who want to change direction or upskill.

It also provides people with the opportunity to enrich their lives through personal development through more traditional forms of education, and a boost to mental health and wellbeing. We know that there is a mental health crisis at the moment, particularly post covid. It is really about a belief that people can benefit from adult education at any stage in their adult life, and that we need to provide a broad offer.

Stakeholders have spoken about there being an existential decline in the adult education sector because of reductions in funding in recent years, and because of reductions in status and public awareness of provision. Last December, in its annual report on education spending in England, the Institute for Fiscal Studies found that even though total spending on adult skills is set to increase by 22% between 2019-20 and 2024-25, that reverses only a fraction of past cuts, so total adult skills spending in 2024-25 will still be 22% below the 2009-10 level. That is a very sizeable reduction. Furthermore, spending on classroom-based adult education has fallen even more and will be 40% lower than the 2009-10 level, even with that additional funding. That classroom-based figure is particularly concerning when you think about the value of the social interaction that people have when they are in a college or a community-based education setting. In particular, we know that loneliness is a sizeable public health issue and so forth. According to the Confederation of British Industry, 90% of the UK workforce—30 million people—will need to be reskilled by 2030, so I think it is vital that we look at that area of skills.

A particular focus would be on adult literacy. According to the National Literacy Trust, 7.1 million adults in England, which is 16.4% of the adult population, are functionally illiterate. These are people who may not be able to understand short, straightforward texts on familiar topics accurately and independently and who obtain information from everyday sources, but reading information from unfamiliar sources or on unfamiliar topics could cause them problems. It is a huge disadvantage and, of course, it has an enormous impact on our economy. I think it is massively important that we make a concerted effort, as people here who can all read and write fluently, to speak up for those people who cannot and who really need to be given those opportunities.

Just to talk about the personal enrichment aspect of it, particularly with an ageing society, the problems of loneliness and addressing the mental health crisis, there are concerns that the proposals for implementing a new FE funding and accountability system will significantly reduce opportunities for adults to learn subjects such as art history, sociology, drama, music, literature, pottery—that sort of stuff—that can bring them benefits that are not necessarily employment related, although those things are also employment related if we think about them.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

I know the Government have consulted on that proposal and are talking about the provision of adult education—it is not all adult education—in areas funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency, which is about 40% of adult education provision. It should meet at least one of the following objectives: achieving employment outcomes for learning, achieving progression to further learning that moves individuals closer to the labour market, and helping those with learning difficulties or disabilities to support their personal development. All of those are hugely important, but then there is the other aspect of the broader educational offer. We are missing a trick as a society in not building up and stimulating that area of education for which I think there is a real hunger.

The Learning and Work Institute's most recent adult participation in learning survey highlighted that out of adults who have not participated in learning within the last three years, 29% of respondents cited cost as one of the barriers to doing so. It is an issue that we really need to address, and we need to ensure that we can develop an adult education service that is visible, accessible and broad and that can speak to many people at different times in their lives.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed. Any questions from colleagues?

Q20 **Bob Blackman:** I wonder if I can put the same questions I put to the Chairman of the Education Committee. We have seven applications at the moment. Realistically, we can offer only four slots for debate because each application is for three hours. Have you had, or would you be willing to have, any discussions about merging the two debates to help assist other colleagues?

Margaret Greenwood: Of course, because there is a clear overlap. As the Chair of the Select Committee said, it would perhaps expand the scope a little bit, but that would be fine because different speakers would speak on different things, so I think that would be useful.

Chair: We can bring in Wendy's application on skills as well.

Wendy Morton: I would not have an issue with that. Given that we are getting towards the end of this Session and slots will become rarer and scarcer, there may be some merit in doing that.

Chair: Thank you very much, Margaret; that is very kind of you. Good to see you and thank you for coming in.

Stephen Crabb made representations.

Q21 **Chair:** Good afternoon, Stephen, and welcome. Your application is on the spending of the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero on measures relating to energy infrastructure.

Stephen Crabb: Thank you very much, Chairman, and I appreciate the time you have extended to me to make this pitch. The idea for the debate came from members of the Welsh Affairs Committee, but, as you can see from the application, it is also supported by Members from other parts of the UK. I would imagine there would be wide interest in the debate. We're

focused on the estimate relating to the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, especially the increase of £790 million in the budget for net zero.

The Government's target for net zero implies profound changes to the UK economy and society and to our energy systems. Notwithstanding the strategies that the Government have already brought forth, there remain big gaps in how the Government intend to reach their 2050 target, and profound difficulties along the way. One of the most serious of those difficulties, which we highlighted in our recent Welsh Affairs Committee report, relates to grid capacity. That's something that affects every single one of our constituencies. We've identified grid capacity as probably one of the most significant potential roadblocks on the way to reaching net zero.

The Government targets also imply big opportunities. One of those is in the field of floating offshore wind, which is already creating economic opportunities in the north of Scotland, the west of England, and Wales as well. We see that as a major growth opportunity for the UK if the right strategies are put in place. And again, that was highlighted in a report that we on the Welsh Affairs Committee recently published.

The third strand of work that has fed into this application relates to our work looking at nuclear policy as it applies to Wales. Again, what we found in our inquiry would resonate with Members right across the UK, and what makes this debate particularly timely, coming as it would in the first week of July, is that the Government intend a large formal launch of Great British Nuclear in the following week.

It would be a fairly wide-ranging debate, Mr Mearns, which I would imagine would have resonance with Members from across different parts of the UK and would make for an interesting scrutiny opportunity to press Ministers on the detailed plan for reaching net zero.

Chair: Thank you. Questions, colleagues, please.

- Q22 **Wendy Morton:** Just one quick one, if I may, Chair. I think there's a lot of merit in the application. These debates tend to be for three hours. I believe we normally look for 12 names. Are you confident that you could fill the three hours?

Stephen Crabb: Confident and hopeful.

Wendy Morton: Marvellous.

- Q23 **Chair:** Before considering a debate to go forward, we would normally be asking for 12 to 15 names for a three-hour debate slot. I am hoping that, given the fact that these debates are going to be held on a Tuesday or Wednesday, we will get about three hours for each debate. If you could add some names, that would be really useful.

Stephen Crabb: Okay.

Chair: Thank you very much.

Sir Robert Neill made representations



Q24 **Chair:** Next up is Sir Bob Neill. Sir Bob, your application is on Ministry of Justice spending on His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service.

Sir Robert Neill: Thanks very much, Chair, for the opportunity to present this application to you. It relates to a topic that is of growing and considerable concern and that has received quite a bit of publicity as well, and that is the pressures on the prison system and then on the probation system.

We think it's appropriate for an estimates day because part of it relates to the adequacy of resourcing for an unprotected Department, which is downstream in terms of a lot of the workload that it picks up. Therefore, there is increasing concern. I think we set that out as succinctly as we can in our application. There is concern, in addition, around areas like prison officer recruitment and retention.

As a Select Committee, we have been doing an inquiry specifically into prison workforce and the need for a proper strategy. In the course of that, we agreed to publish yesterday a survey that heard from about 6,500 prison officers, which made for striking reading. Two thirds of prison officers in the operational band say that they do not feel valued, 70% say that morale in their prison establishment is low, and some 50% say they do not feel safe at work. There are concerns about the quality and amount of training that is made available to prison officers, and also concerns about the connection between discharge from prison and then support for people who have been discharged in the community. There are still ongoing concerns that this is not properly joined up.

That leads us to two concerns in particular. One is whether the resource—the DEL—that the Department has is sufficient to meet the projected extra 20,000 prisoners and the projected extra pressures that will come through that. The fact that there is a difficulty there is evidenced by the need to have used the emergency Operation Safeguard on a number of occasions, using prison cells, which is not satisfactory.

Rather unusually, there has also been a reversal of a change in sentencing policy. As a matter of policy, the Government previously brought into force an increase in the sentencing powers of magistrates to up to 12 months, which was generally thought to make the system more effective, but they had to reverse that. It is a pretty unusual and bizarre state of affairs when it is luck of the draw as to which court you end up in front of. In reality, the reason for that is to smooth the flow of prisoners through the system. If they go to the Crown court for their sentence, it'll be some months further down the track before they enter the prison system, and there is the hope that they will have got rid of some people at the other end. We do not think that is a satisfactory state of affairs.

The other thing worth highlighting is that there have now been a number of very adverse HMI reports about prisons and youth offender institutions. In fact, I have noticed that the Committee has seen more of those over the last two or three years than it has in recent times. That includes urgent notification procedures where the Secretary of State is asked to step in and, very often, replace the management or the leadership.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Finally, there is also an area related to estimates about the ability of the Department to actually use its capital, or DEL. It has had an increase in capital allocations, specifically with a view to deliver those 20,000 prison places, but so far we have seen a failure to deliver them on time. Only £1.1 billion of the £4 billion allocated has been spent so far, partly because there have been a number of difficulties with planning. Some of us who are London MPs will remember the attempt to get rid of Holloway some years back. It had run into huge planning difficulties and restricted covenants, which should have been foreseen. This gives us a chance to drill down into whether we are spending in the right place, whether there is enough and whether the Department has the capacity to deliver on its capital budgets. It would be ridiculous if we got an underspend, but we were crowding people in and using the resource DEL to hire out prison cells and so on.

Those are the grounds for the application. We think it is a matter of real public interest. We have seen a great deal of media interest and coverage of the situation in prisons. It would be likely to attract a good amount of support. All the Committee members have said they would support it. Since then, John McDonnell, Ian Lavery and Rob Butler—all of whom have a long-standing interest in prisons, as you know—have given me permission to say that they would be willing to support it. I think many others would be interested in it as well.

Chair: Thank you. Are there any questions from colleagues?

Q25 **Wendy Morton:** My question was partly answered in the rounding-up remarks. It was about the number of signatories. I had counted seven plus three, which gets to 10.

Chair: Plus Bob, don't forget.

Wendy Morton: Of course. How could I forget? I presume that you would be able to get the numbers and fill the time.

Sir Robert Neill: Indeed. I am sure we would be happy to get together and get more. Whenever we have had debates on this subject before, we have always been able to fill the time. There are a number of quite significant issues. A number of people have prisons in their constituencies and are affected by that, so that always attracts attention too.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed, Bob; we greatly appreciate it.

Mr Clive Betts made representations.

Q26 **Chair:** The last person to present to the Committee is Mr Clive Betts. Welcome, Clive. Your application is on the spending of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on adult social care.

Mr Betts: There are a lot of issues around the Department's spending, but adult social care is one that we have come back to on a number of occasions. We have just done another report on the issue; I think it is our third in the last few years. I can't say that we were completely satisfied with the Government's response. There are issues of real concern around



HOUSE OF COMMONS

the stability of long-term funding and the continued reliance on one-off fixes at every Budget time. They stop long-term planning and the development of a constructive and proper approach to workforce planning, which is key to getting social care right.

There is another issue as well: while it is just an element of council spending and the Department's spending, it is related to the Department of Health's spending, and that is complicated local government financing arrangements. Also, when we talk to local council leaders in our inquiries, the message comes back very clearly: unless you sort out social care funding and get that resolved for the long term, you simply will not sort out local government finance. It causes pressures on all other local government services, which have borne the brunt of cuts as priority is given to social care, for very understandable reasons.

Q27 Chair: Do you have names?

Mr Betts: No, we have not submitted names, Chair. That is probably a fault on our part. We could have got names, but we just did not submit them.

Q28 Chair: The application is in—it is a live application—but we would like to have the names of those who support it, please. Can you do that and provide them to the Clerk?

Mr Betts: Of course.

Chair: That is kind of you. Thank you very much, Clive; that is much appreciated.

We are considering another application this afternoon from Steve Brine, who is the Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee. It is on the spending of the Department of Health and Social Care on primary care. His Committee is sitting at the moment and I believe it is grilling the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, so that is a reasonable excuse for him not being present.