

Backbench Business Committee

Representations: Backbench Debates

Tuesday 27 June 2023

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 27 June 2023.

Watch the meeting

Members present: Ian Mearns (Chair); Bob Blackman; Chris Green; Nigel Mills; Wendy Morton.

Questions 1-13

Representations

[I](#): Marion Fellows.

[II](#): Selaine Saxby.

[III](#): Wendy Chamberlain.

[IV](#): Chris Law.

Written evidence from witnesses:

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Marion Fellows made representations.

Q1 **Chair:** Welcome to the Backbench Business Committee. We have four applications in front of us this afternoon. We are starting a little early, as the Commons is due to have a round of Divisions and we do not want to clash with that. The first application this afternoon is from an old friend and colleague, Marion Fellows. Marion, your application is on the culture in the management of the Post Office Horizon scandal. Over to you, please.

Marion Fellows: It is not just the Horizon scandal that we want to talk about; it is actually about the culture of Post Office Ltd across the piece. I have very carefully made it wide ranging, and I have very carefully made it non-contentious, because very few folk would agree that there is nothing to talk about in terms of the culture of Post Office Ltd. As you will see from my application, I have covered most major parties, because it is a subject that many Members are really interested in. We have no intention of stepping on Sir Wyn Williams's shoes, and it is not my intention that anyone discusses individual cases. If I am being brutally honest, which I always prefer, we want to keep the pot boiling on this within the House of Commons. If we could have a debate before recess, it would keep the momentum going. As you will see from my application, I am chair of the Post Offices APPG and many colleagues on the APPG have supported this.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed. I apologise to those who have just entered; we started a little early because we are expecting Divisions and we wanted to ensure that everybody got their representations in without too much trouble. I do apologise for that. Any questions for Marion, please?

Q2 **Bob Blackman:** As you rightly say, it is quite a broad-ranging debate. I assume that you are happy for a Westminster Hall debate?

Marion Fellows: I am very happy to have any type of debate that the Committee chooses.

Q3 **Bob Blackman:** If we offered you Thursday 13 July, would that be okay?

Marion Fellows: That would be lucky for some.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed Marion; that is much appreciated. Super.

Selaine Saxby made representations.

Q4 **Chair:** Next up, we have Selaine Saxby. Good afternoon Selaine, and welcome. The application in front of us is on accessibility of radiotherapy. Over to you, please.

Selaine Saxby: Good afternoon. I come at this from a constituency angle, but also as one of the vice-chairs on the all-party parliamentary group for radiotherapy, which is chaired by Tim Farron. At this point, less than half



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of the patients who should be receiving radiotherapy, compared with any international standard, are doing so. There have been great technological advances but we have not really kept up here.

There has been a big piece in the *Daily Express* this week, and my constituency is fourth in the country for having the worst accessibility to radiotherapy, with only 4.7% of my constituents able to get to treatment within the recommended 45 minutes. We have three Conservative colleagues, and none of theirs can get there in that time either. In terms of how that impacts on patients, we are seeing patients taking decisions about their treatment based on the distance to the treatment, as opposed to whether it is the right treatment.

Radiotherapy is a daily treatment for a number of weeks, and that obviously does not just impact the patient. For my constituents, it is a 65-mile drive down to Exeter to receive the treatment, and, as you can imagine, if you are not well yourself, you will need a driver, so many of our health services in North Devon are reliant on volunteer drivers. That then ties up your volunteer driver every day of the week for one patient—to deliver one service—which then impacts on many other services because your volunteer drivers are not available.

The frustration is that a radiotherapy unit is now, in price, only £2 million, and, in my area, I have disused community hospitals where you could potentially put something in. At a time when we are looking to tackle the backlog in the NHS, radiotherapy is a non-invasive treatment. When you have an older population, as we do in North Devon, you cannot get those people in to have the treatment that they need. Case after case comes into my constituency surgery—I expect the same is true for other rural MPs in the same position—in which people take decisions to have other treatment that may not be as appropriate for them simply because they cannot face the journey for that many weeks, which I feel is entirely understandable.

This is something that has been discussed already—ever since I got here, I have been part of the APPG for radiotherapy—but new machines are now available. Even the machines that we have in this country are quite out of date. I know that £2 million is a lot of money, but, relative to the cost of building a new hospital, and some of the other budgets that we talk about for Health, it does seem to be something that should be brought up the agenda, and I very much hope that that will be a possibility.

Chair: Okay, thank you very much. Questions, colleagues?

Q5 **Bob Blackman:** You have a very large number of speakers who are keen to address this, so clearly it is a popular debate. You have ticked the potential of having a Westminster Hall debate on a Tuesday or Thursday; if we offered you Tuesday 18 July, would that be acceptable? That is the last week before recess.

Selaine Saxby: That sounds fabulous.

Bob Blackman: That is a 9.30 am slot.

Selaine Saxby: Perfect.

Chair: I think that I should also add that we do not have any Chamber slots between now and the summer recess, so—

Selaine Saxby: No, I think that, actually, time is probably more pressing on this subject than the need for a Chamber slot. Thank you.

Chair: Okay, well, thank you very much indeed. That is very much appreciated.

Wendy Chamberlain made representations.

Q6 **Chair:** Next up, we have Wendy Chamberlain. Wendy, your application is on paediatric autoimmune neuropsychiatric disorders associated with streptococcal infections, known as PANDAS for short.

Wendy Chamberlain: Thank you very much, Chair. Yes, PANS/PANDAS is how the conditions are commonly known, and no, they have nothing to do with the fluffy animals. However, they are conditions that change family life irrevocably.

My interest in the condition came about as a result of a constituent who contacted me. In October of last year, her nine-year-old daughter started to display very worrying OCD-type symptoms: she wouldn't wash, she wouldn't dress, she wouldn't eat, she was not attending school and she was developing tics. It was a really concerning presentation of symptoms. After engagement with doctors, the family went into the mental health system.

PANS/PANDAS is largely unrecognised. As you will see from my application, according to one 2020 survey, 95% of caring parents did not suggest PANS/PANDAS as a potential diagnosis. What is most frustrating about the condition is that it can often be readily treated with very common antibiotics.

In the case of my constituent, her daughter was admitted and prescribed antipsychotic medication, which was obviously hugely distressing for the family of a nine-year-old child. They have since undergone private diagnosis, and their daughter is now receiving antibiotics and they have seen some improvement in her condition. The reality is that for some conditions that can come about as a result of PANS/PANDAS, such as tics and Tourette's, the behaviour then becomes learned and, as a result, much more difficult to unravel.

From a UK perspective, where we are at the moment is that we have a PANS/PANDAS working group within the NHS that includes representatives from numerous leading health organisations and advocates. It has recently issued a statement on diagnosis and treatment. There are a number of international peer-reviewed studies, and the US is further ahead than the UK on this. At the moment, because there is no NICE guidance in the UK, GPs do not know what to do or where to turn, and often do not think of PANS.

There is an opportunity through this debate to get a response from the Government about that working group on paper, and therefore think about what we could be doing to ensure that this condition becomes better recognised and treated.

It is not lost on me today that Lewis Capaldi has said he is unable to come back to touring for the near future as a result of his Tourette's. I know of an advocate in this space, Evie Meg, who is an influencer who has Tourette's that has come about as a result of her PANDAS. An unknown number of children potentially have this condition and have experienced mental health challenges as a result, although it is actually a physical root cause that we should help to address.

- Q7 **Bob Blackman:** Once again, you have ticked the box for either Westminster Hall or the Chamber. As the Chair has rightly pointed out, there is no Chamber time. If we offered you Thursday 13 July in Westminster Hall, would that be acceptable?

Wendy Chamberlain: Yes, it would, thank you very much.

- Q8 **Chair:** The alternative would be to wait until the autumn but, if you are happy to take that, that is excellent.

Wendy Chamberlain: Yes. Robin Millar is the Chair of the APPG but, as a PPS, he is unable to submit the application. I will take that in the first instance, thank you very much.

Chris Law made representations.

- Q9 **Chair:** Last but certainly not least, we have a representative from just above the River Tay, Chris Law, on climate finance for addressing loss and damage.

Chris Law: To explain a little, in the past six years I have been to every COP and listened carefully to the debates and discussions around the UN. In our own House, it has taken some time to get the debate around climate change accelerated. That is pretty clearly understood and agreed by scientists. The funding that the UK has agreed to—£11.6 billion between now and 2025—it is largely around mitigation and adaptation.

What changed in the past 18 months was the outcome of COP27 in Glasgow, which was the first policy set out by the Scottish Government on loss and damage. That was then widely acknowledged to be the main debate at last year's COP in Egypt, where we had nearly all countries worldwide agreeing to it.

It wasn't easy; it started out with the small island Pacific states and then New Zealand, Canada and Europe got on board. The UK was at the forefront of that, as well. Given that the UK is a seatholder at the important Transitional Committee, we need to engage directly leading up to the next climate change talks towards the end of this year. The UK plays a key and pivotal role in that.



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At the moment, a fund has not been agreed for how much will go to it, but it has been set up in principle. This is an opportunity for the UK Parliament to have a broad-ranging debate on why this is so important. To be clear, loss and damage is for situations where neither mitigation nor adaptation is suitable. It is where there is irrevocable damage and irrevocable loss, and where we play a key part in that.

- Q10 **Bob Blackman:** Chris, you have asked for the Chamber, but we have no Chamber time between now and the summer recess. We can offer you the first debate on Thursday 20 July in Westminster Hall. Would that be acceptable to you?

Chris Law: I guess it depends on the length of time. I have already started to get additional signatures, and I think we are going to have a very busy debate, so if the time available is short, that would be helpful.

Chair: It would be 90 minutes.

Bob Blackman: The guarantee, of course, is that you do get 90 minutes, whereas, as you probably appreciate, debates in the Chamber very rarely get the full period of time at all.

- Q11 **Chair:** The only caveat I would add is that the 20th is obviously the last day before the summer recess, and it is also the day of a train strike.

Chris Law: Can I perhaps look at early autumn if that is the case, given the pressing time between now and then? Would that be possible?

- Q12 **Bob Blackman:** If you press the case for a Chamber debate and you want to go into the autumn, I would also say that we would expect to see at least five Government names on the application—at the moment, there are only two—to get the balance right.

Chris Law: I can work on that. I actually have some additional names since I put the submission in. For example, David Mundell, who is a former of Secretary of State for Scotland, has added his name, and I have some more Members of my own party, so I will definitely pursue that.

- Q13 **Chair:** Alternatively, there would be the possibility of having a three-hour debate in Westminster Hall on that Thursday. That would be a possibility as well, but if you want to hold out for the Chamber, that is entirely within your gift.

Chris Law: I am really grateful to be offered the last day. I am just concerned that people might not be there, and I think it is a really important debate. The next climate change talks are in November, so September might be appropriate. I could get some names added for then, if that is possible.

Chair: In that case, your application is in order, except with the caveat that Bob added: if you want the Chamber time, a couple of more Government names would be useful. With that, I thank you for the application.