



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Backbench Business Committee

Representations: Backbench Debates

Tuesday 21 May 2024

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 21 May 2024.

Watch the meeting

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

Questions 1-14

Representations made

[I](#): Sir Alec Shelbrooke.

[II](#): Caroline Lucas.

[III](#): Nick Fletcher.

Written evidence from witnesses:

– [Add names of witnesses and hyperlink to submissions]



Sir Alec Shelbrooke made representations.

Q1 **Chair:** Good afternoon and welcome to the Backbench Business Committee. We have a number of applications in front of us, the first of which is from Sir Alec Shelbrooke. It is good to see you, Alec; welcome to the Committee. Your application is on the 75th anniversary of the NATO alliance and the NATO summit in Washington 2024. Over to you.

Sir Alec Shelbrooke: I lead the UK delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly—there are 18 Members of both Houses, with 13 from the House of Commons and five from the Lords. This weekend, we are at the spring assembly in Sofia, to which practically every delegate is going, so it is a well-attended and active body.

Obviously, NATO is one of the longest-lasting military alliances ever formed, and the 75th anniversary this year means that a summit is taking place in Washington, which is a big deal. A few of us from the parliamentary side, including the Speakers of both Houses, will hopefully be attending that event.

We feel that it is right to have a debate on the 75th anniversary of the Washington treaty. We also try to have a debate once a year on the work of NATO and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, so that we as parliamentarians can highlight that to the House, get it on the record and ask Ministers to respond.

This would be a well-attended debate. I was stopped during the last Division by another Member, who said, "I was just wondering: are you thinking of doing a debate on the 75th anniversary?" I said, "Actually, in 10 minutes' time, I am going to apply for it." I do not think that we would have any trouble filling the allotted time, and the range of dates we have put forward is fine for everybody.

This is a really significant moment in the alliance's history and in the world, and there is such a need for NATO to stand strong and to stand up for democracy.

Wendy Morton: As a point of clarity, I note that my name is down as a supporting Member, and I am happy to be, because I am a member of the NATO PA. But I am also a member of the Backbench Business Committee, so I want to be clear on that.

Chair: Indeed. That is noted.

Q2 **Bob Blackman:** You have applied for a slot in Westminster Hall on either a Tuesday or a Thursday. The first available slot we have is potentially Thursday 13 June, which is one of the dates you requested. If we offered you that slot, would you be able to take it?

Sir Alec Shelbrooke: I think we would, yes. I think there is enough time to put that out to Members. It is about three weeks away, so I think there will be enough interest that we can fill the debate.

Chair: Any further questions? No? In that case, thank you very much



indeed, Alec. Much appreciated.

Caroline Lucas made representations.

Q3 **Chair:** We now have Caroline Nokes. Good afternoon, Caroline, and welcome. *[Interruption.]* Apologies—we now have Caroline Lucas. I beg your pardon: I have two Carolines, and I looked at the wrong one. I am terribly sorry. You cannot have too many Carolines.

Caroline Lucas: You cannot—you got yourself out of that hole very well.

Chair: Indeed. Caroline, your application is on climate adaptation—not Caroline adaptation—in the United Kingdom. Over to you.

Caroline Lucas: There is a lot of focus in the House on climate mitigation, net zero and so forth, but there is far less attention to climate adaptation. I would love to have a debate in Westminster Hall where MPs have the opportunity to question Ministers on the steps they are taking to adapt the UK to growing climate impacts and achieve growing resilience, especially given that this year has already seen record temperatures.

In terms of timing, I hoped that it would be possible to have the debate before the summer recess, because I think we can anticipate that we are likely to see record temperatures again. The 19th of July, for example, marks the two-year anniversary of the extreme heatwaves of 2022, when the UK reached 40° for the first time, leading the Met Office to issue its first red warning for extreme heat, and the Government to declare a national emergency. A debate ahead of the summer recess would allow Members to question the Minister on lessons learned from that last heatwave and on how they are preparing for any future potential heatwaves this year.

According to leading scientists, the high temperatures of 2022 would not have been possible without climate change. That summer also highlighted the dangers of failing to adapt and the challenges posed by higher temperatures to our emergency services, with the London Fire Brigade, for example, facing its busiest day since world war two, and ambulance services across the country placed on high alert. Official statistics from the ONS reveal that there were 4,500 deaths linked to high temperatures that year.

Having said all that, there are plenty of reports suggesting that the country is ill-prepared for future extreme heat events. The Climate Change Committee, for example, has repeatedly warned that adaptation is chronically underfunded and overlooked. This would be an important political opportunity, but also an opportunity for Members to raise issues in their constituencies and to highlight concerns about climate impacts such as water rises or wildfires, as well as issues faced by local authorities in improving resilience. That is my pitch to you.

Q4 **Chair:** One technicality is that you have 28 signatories, which would tend to lend itself to something more than a 90-minute debate in Westminster Hall. Of the 28 signatories, however, only three are Members from the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Government party. Would it be possible to get a couple of additional Members from the Government party to sign your application, Caroline?

Caroline Lucas: We did try quite hard. Sorry, you are saying that 28 Members would be enough for—

Q5 **Chair:** Well, 28 Members signing an application would normally be enough for a longer debate. It just so happens that a debate we had previously allocated has been withdrawn by the lead Member, so there is a main Chamber debate slot available in the first week back after the Whitsun recess.

Caroline Lucas: That is very generous. We have tried hard, and I do not know why we are struggling with supporters from the Government party, because it is not intrinsically a party political thing. Everybody wants to see adaptation, although we can argue about how we do it. Failing that, would I be able to make a pitch for Westminster Hall?

Q6 **Chair:** Normally, if we had a dozen names on an application for Westminster Hall, three of which were from the Government, that would be regarded as acceptable. There is a possibility in the main Chamber if you are able to get another couple of names.

Caroline Lucas: I just know that we have tried really hard and that we have not got much time to organise ahead of that date, which is so soon after we come back. Although I do recognise the generosity of your offer, I think it would be more realistic to go for Westminster Hall, if that is okay.

Chair: Okay. Any further comments or questions?

Q7 **Bob Blackman:** In terms of Westminster Hall, you have raised the options of a Tuesday or a Thursday. Our Tuesday slots in Westminster Hall are full for quite some time, but there is potentially a Thursday slot on 21 June. Would that be possible?

Caroline Lucas: The 21st of June is a Friday, no?

Q8 **Bob Blackman:** Sorry, 20 June then.

Caroline Lucas: I am sorry to be awkward, but I cannot actually do that one. What is the first Tuesday you would have, as long as it is before the summer recess?

Q9 **Bob Blackman:** It depends on the answering Department. It has to be the answering Department on a Tuesday, but on a Thursday, it could be any Government Department. If it is climate change, presumably you would be looking at the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero.

Caroline Lucas: Well, actually, it is weird. Adaptation tends to be DEFRA. That is one of the problems—you have two Departments looking at different bits of it.

Q10 **Chair:** The point is, Caroline, you have a live application. We can add it to the list, and then we can talk to you about available dates subsequent to this. Is that okay?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Caroline Lucas: But you think that there are Thursdays available other than 21 June, which came to your mind just then?

Bob Blackman: Yes—that is the first available slot we have at the moment.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed.

Nick Fletcher made representations.

Q11 **Chair:** We do actually have an application from Caroline Nokes, but she has asked that we consider it on paper—apologies for the confusion. Our next applicant is Mr Nick Fletcher. Nick, welcome; please take a seat. Your application is for a debate on men’s health charities.

Nick Fletcher: I thank the Committee for letting me appear before you today. We have had some real success with the all-party parliamentary group on issues affecting men and boys. With the support of this Conservative Government, we have managed to get a health ambassador, which is great, and we are in the middle of doing task and finish groups on men’s health.

That has come about because of the huge support from the different clubs out there, which help men, including with their health. It would be good for us to do a debate on that to thank them for their work and, more importantly, to make sure that all Members and members of the public know about the charities that are out there. If we could have a debate, we can raise awareness of the clubs and help to signpost men across the country to them.

There are some fantastic clubs out there, such as Andy’s Man Club, Talk Club, Men’s Pie Club and Grumpy Old Men’s Clubs—there are all kinds of different clubs—but one of the biggest problems is that, unfortunately, a lot of people still do not know about them. It would be an important and worthy debate to have on the Floor of the House if we could let Members know about this issue and let them speak up for people in their constituency.

Q12 **Bob Blackman:** You have ticked Westminster Hall for a Tuesday. Would you accept a Thursday?

Nick Fletcher: We would prefer to have Tuesday, if we can, because the attendance tends to be a little low on Thursdays.

Q13 **Bob Blackman:** We have a slot available on 13 June, which is a Thursday. If not—presumably it is Health and Social Care to answer, is it—

Nick Fletcher: Yes, I would have thought so.

Bob Blackman: In that case, the next available slot will be 2 July.

Nick Fletcher: Men’s Health Week is 10 to 16 June, so that will probably be the Thursday, by the sounds of it. You said you have Thursday the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

13th. Do you have nothing on the Tuesday of that week, either in the main Chamber or in Westminster Hall?

Bob Blackman: No, that is already allocated.

Nick Fletcher: I think we will go for the Thursday, if that is okay with everyone.

Q14 **Chair:** Of course, Nick, you know that we now have the earlier starting and finishing times for Westminster Hall debates on Thursdays.

Bob Blackman: Your slot would be 2 o'clock—2 pm to 3.30 pm.

Nick Fletcher: That would be great. Thank you, I appreciate that.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed. We will now go into private session.