

Backbench Business Committee

Representations: Backbench Debates

Tuesday 18 March 2025

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Bob Blackman (Chair); Jonathan Davies; Alison Hume; Will Stone; Martin Vickers; Chris Vince.

Questions 1-22

Representations made

[I](#): Laurence Turner.

[II](#): Graham Stuart.

[III](#): Sarah Dyke.

[IV](#): James Asser.

[V](#): Lee Pitcher.

Written evidence from witnesses:

– [Add names of witnesses and hyperlink to submissions]

Laurence Turner made representations.

Q1 **Chair:** Welcome to the meeting of the Backbench Business Committee, where we will be considering applications from colleagues for debates. There are five different applications all for debates in the main Chamber, but we may ask some of them to go into Westminster Hall. The first application is from Lawrence Turner, for a debate in the Chamber on compensation for criminal injuries. Lawrence, will you present your application, please?

Laurence Turner: This application has been brought forward because there has been significant interest in the subject in Parliament in the past, but it has not been debated specifically for some time. The reason for seeking parliamentary time is that the Government are due to respond to a review of a scheme that was launched in 2018, so there is a window for MPs to influence the outcome of that review in a way that better supports the victims of serious violent crime.

I have quoted in the application the words of the Victims' Commissioner, which summarise many of the problems that victims experience when they try to obtain civil compensation for acts of violence. Many applications take more than a year to resolve. The process is impersonal, and it means that victims have to relive very difficult experiences. Reform is also needed to implement recommendation 18 of the Jay inquiry into child sexual abuse.

The application is for a debate in the main Chamber, and I appreciate that all time is valuable. In respect of Westminster Hall, I would not wish to let the best become the enemy of the good, but I would like to make the case for a main Chamber debate. A number of the Members who have supported this application have their own direct experience of the scheme, in addition to constituency casework.

In my own case, six years ago I sustained life-changing injuries as a result of an attempted robbery. I won't go into the details now, but my own experience of the criminal injuries compensation scheme underlines the problems that victims report. I have not spoken in public about this issue before, and a number of Members who have supported this application are in the same position. We feel that if Members are to speak about their own experience in a way that demands speaking about something that hitherto has been private, we want it to have the greatest possible positive impact, and we feel that that would best come through a main Chamber debate. I am very glad that this application has been supported on a cross-party basis by the Chairs of the Women and Equalities and Justice Committees, as well as by a number of members of those Select Committees and a former Home Secretary.

I know there are other important applications before the Committee and I am grateful for your consideration. Thank you.

Chair: You mentioned that you would be willing to take a Westminster Hall debate if it came to it. At the moment, we have something like 30



HOUSE OF COMMONS

applications for the Chamber, so if we cannot fit you into Westminster Hall, it is likely to be the autumn before we get to your debate, but it is your application and your choice. Thank you for confirming that you would accept that if necessary.

Q2 Will Stone: Just to clarify, is there a timeframe in which you want this debate to happen so that MPs can have the chance to feed into the report? When is that?

Laurence Turner: We know that the Ministry of Justice is looking to bring forward a response to the consultation. They have not confirmed the timeframe for doing that, so it's a hard question to answer. That is why I think timeliness in this case is probably more important than the siting of the debate.

Q3 Will Stone: It might be worth going for Westminster Hall in that case, because we could guarantee you a slot and we could guarantee you a longer slot as well, because you could take two sessions. That is just something for you to consider for yourself.

Chair: There is another thing that we would be willing to do. If you take a Westminster Hall debate and you do not get, shall we say, the response from the Government you would like, that does not prevent you from coming back and asking for a Chamber debate, but you would need to have a motion attached to that to make it viable. That is another option for you.

Laurence Turner: I see. That is helpful to understand. Thank you.

Chair: Any other questions, colleagues? No. Thank you very much, Laurence. The Clerks will be in touch with you shortly.

Graham Stuart made representations.

Q4 Chair: Our next application is from Graham Stuart and for a debate on fairer distribution of SEND funding. Graham, this is once again an application for a debate in the Chamber.

Graham Stuart: Thank you, Mr Blackman; it is a pleasure to appear before this Committee. Members will be aware of just what a hot topic, understandably, SEND education—for children with special educational needs and disabilities—is. We have seen an explosion in demand and an explosion in budget, with a 60% increase from 2019 to, currently, another £1 billion being allocated by the Government towards it. It deserves great scrutiny.

As colleagues will be aware, all too often everyone talks about, and all the debate is focused on, the overall quantum rather than the distribution. It is an awful lot of money and when it comes to the distribution of SEND funding, I think the system is broken and unjustifiable. Therefore, I would be very grateful if the Committee were to support this application.

It has the support of 30 colleagues, which I think tells you something. Are there any minority party Members? Basically, we have Labour,



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Conservatives and Liberal Democrats, and there are 30 in total. I don't know how much detail you want me to go into. Obviously I could go into detail, but I won't insult the Committee. I think every colleague here will be fully familiar with the issue, so I will stop and answer any questions that colleagues have.

If I am allowed, I will say one further thing, just about the technicalities of the system. This is about 50% of the allocation for the high needs national funding formula. The introduction of that was a positive step in establishing a structured methodology, but it relied on 50% of the allocation being based on 2017-18, historical spending, and local authorities were free to put the money in different pots, and they had the allowance to do that. Because of the way in which they had chosen to place their finances across their spending pots, it has a tremendous impact on how much money they then get year after year, and here we are eight years later.

In fact, my local authority happens to be the lowest funded of all, but the dysfunction goes across the board, and it received the lowest per-pupil funding in the country at £1,049 per child, with the next lowest council being £100 more. We have quite a broken system and I would be really grateful for the opportunity to let all colleagues come in, talk about their specific areas, and appeal to the Minister to come up with a better system and replace the broken Tory one they inherited—*[Laughter.]*

Q5 Chair: Thank you for that. Is there any requirement to do this quickly? I am not sure whether you were here when we mentioned this on the last application, but we have a queue of over 30 applications for the Chamber already, and we only get two debates on a Thursday—that is it. You will be waiting rather a long time for a Chamber debate. Alternatively, of course, it can be a Westminster Hall debate initially to try to get the answers that you might wish to see on a change of system.

Graham Stuart: I guess it might be best to be flexible, if that is the way you are steering me.

Chair: It is your application.

Graham Stuart: It is my application, but I am also happy to be steered, rather than waiting forever.

Q6 Chair: Let us put it this way: you are likely to be waiting until the autumn, because of the number of applications.

Graham Stuart: Wow. I think it sounds like a Westminster Hall debate. I hope, especially with my closing remark, that colleagues may wish rapidly to ensure that we jump the Chamber queue and reach the front. I will repeat that remark in the Chamber, if that secures me the Chamber commitment.

Chair: Nothing precludes you, if you have a Westminster Hall debate, from coming back with a new application, provided you have a motion to go with it.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q7 **Alison Hume:** Just to double check, the Government have not made a commitment to reviewing the formula then, as we stand?

Graham Stuart: That is a good question—I should be better briefed to know. I do not think they have, unless the hon. Lady thinks they have.

Alison Hume: I don't know; that is why I was asking the hon. Gentleman.

Graham Stuart: I am pretty sure that they have not.

Q8 **Chair:** I asked an urgent question about this and the answer was, "We will review it in due course."

Graham Stuart: Exactly. Anything to do with money, Ministers talk about a spending review and put it off. This is really good opportunity to land it and raise the salience.

Chair: Any other questions? No. Graham, the Clerks will be in touch with you in due course.

Sarah Dyke made representations.

Q9 **Chair:** The next application is from Sarah Dyke on the potential merits of Government support for small abattoirs. This is an application for a Chamber or Westminster Hall debate, either on a Tuesday morning or a Thursday afternoon.

Sarah Dyke: Thank you, Chair, and thank you very much for inviting me to present this to the Committee. Small abattoirs are really important for our farmers. We know that farmers are having a particularly difficult time at the moment. In 2007, the UK had nearly 100 small abattoirs, but by 2023, this number had fallen to just over 60. Many of those that are still operating are suggesting that may close over the next couple of years.

They are particularly important to farmers because they allow them to privately kill some of their animals, rather than contracting to some of the larger abattoirs. They are also really important because it reduces the food miles for animals to slaughter, which obviously reduces the stress on those animals and helps to secure that local meat supply and local provenance. I believe that this issue has possibly gone under the radar in the House, with much more attention being paid to other issues affecting the agriculture sector at the moment.

I would be delighted if we were able to debate the subject because small abattoirs are such a crucial element of local food supply to ensure that we have good-quality, traceable meat on our tables that has good local provenance and high welfare standards. That is important to the local economy as well. Obviously, those local abattoirs are able to offer jobs and keep people in jobs. They are essential to the local economy.

I am very pleased that I have support from across the House. More signatures came through this morning. I hope those have been recorded in the latest application that you have, but I am sure that I will be able to get more and more signatures.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

I am a member of the EFRA Committee and I have heard the concern expressed there. Also as a farmer's daughter and somebody from the farming industry, I hear it loud and clear across my constituency that there is a real risk if we lose our small abattoirs.

Q10 **Chair:** I presume that the answering Department will be DEFRA.

Sarah Dyke: Yes.

Chair: Okay. On a Tuesday morning, we have to ensure that it is the right Department answering.

Any questions from colleagues? No. The Clerks will be in touch in due course.

Sarah Dyke: Thank you, Chair.

James Asser made representations.

Q11 **Chair:** The next application is from James Asser on the five-year anniversary of the covid pandemic. Again, this is a Chamber application.

James Asser: I thank the Committee for seeing me this afternoon. As everyone is aware, we are on the fifth anniversary of the pandemic. Hopefully this is uncontroversial. I am not looking for a change in policy. Nor am I looking for any funding from Government, which hopefully makes life easier. I am also not looking for any inquiry, or to go into policy at the time or Government decisions. What strikes me is that the pandemic affected every community and every constituency, and one of the things we need to remember is the people involved: both those who lost their lives, and those who took part and did heroic things to keep our communities going.

The borough in which my constituency sits was the hardest hit at the beginning. In the end, we lost over 1,000 people to covid. One of the ways we responded to that—it is one of the things I am proudest of about my time as a councillor—was to set up a covid memorial garden in one of our parks. When we launched that two years ago, we had lots of members of the community, community groups, but also people who had lost family members. We saw the impact on them of having somewhere they could go and tell their stories. As we know, many people were not able to mourn or grieve properly or have proper funerals during that period, so that is something that is certainly well worth having.

There are probably lots of similar stories from across different constituencies, and stories of people who kept things going. We have talked a lot, for absolutely the right reasons, about the NHS and the medical service, but there are all those other frontline workers who often go about their business unsung. I certainly remember the posters on bins thanking binmen for going out. We lost staff in my council who were prepared to go out and continue working when everyone else was having to be locked down. It strikes me that, five years later, this is a good opportunity to remember all those stories and all that community work.

To pre-empt questions on timing, because I have been listening to the other points made today, I have applied for the Chamber rather than



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Westminster Hall. Given the scale and the effect on every part of the country, it struck me that, potentially, a lot of people would want to take part in the debate. I am obviously flexible; I recognise that the Committee's hands are tied.

In terms of timing, in an ideal world, the debate would relate to the start of the first lockdown, which is now, but I appreciate you have a lot of pressure. Equally, given that the pandemic went throughout the year and there will be anniversaries and significant moments all the way through, including in the run-up to Christmas—I am thinking of that first Christmas lockdown—I do not think it will be a huge problem if there is a delay in debating the matter, because there are always opportunities. We could talk about it throughout the year.

I have signatures from the three main parties—Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat—and the Green party. I have almost 20 and I have had a number come in since the deadline. People have obviously spotted it. Like you, my inbox fills up and you frequently see these requests after the deadline has gone, so I am certain that other people out there would support the application. Hopefully that is helpful.

Chair: Any questions from colleagues? No. Thank you, James. The Clerks will be in touch in due course.

James Asser: Lovely. Thank you.

Lee Pitcher made representations.

Q12 **Chair:** Our final application today is from Lee Pitcher, on suicide prevention. This is once again for a Chamber debate.

Lee Pitcher: Thank you, Chair. I massively appreciate you inviting me along to speak today to request a debate in the Chamber.

10 September is World Suicide Prevention Day, and the theme is how to change the narrative. Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem, and changing the narrative—moving from stigmatising talking about mental health and suicide prevention to taking preventive measures and preventing suicide—is one thing we can do. Hon. Members right across Parliament are in a unique position to start that discussion and change the narrative.

Statistics from the Office for National Statistics in England, the National Records of Scotland and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency show that in 2023 there were 6,000-plus suicides in England and Wales, 700 in Scotland and more than 200 in Northern Ireland. That is an 8% increase. If you look at the proportionality, three quarters of people who die through suicide are men. The other quarter are women, but in recent years we have seen a doubling of the number of teenage girls and young adult girls dying through suicide.

Of course, this is an extremely diverse subject, in terms of all the things it can cover—education, health, defence, home affairs, culture, media and sport and justice—so there is a huge demographic of Members who want



HOUSE OF COMMONS

to input. We all have family friends, colleagues and other people close to us who have lived through seeing somebody lose their life early.

It is the same with me. The reason I am so passionate about this issue and have campaigned on it for some time is that I lost my cousin John a few years ago—he died from suicide—so I know for a fact that changing the narrative is so massively important. What I mean by that is that we have an opportunity to have a debate on all the things we can do to support and prevent—things that have not happened yet that we might want to do—and raise awareness of the things that are out there. Just through talking about it—just through debating—we have the chance to save the Johns that are thinking right now about their tomorrow. We can do that immediately, so our debate will save lives.

Chair: Any questions from colleagues?

Q13 **Martin Vickers:** I just want to declare an interest. I supported the application, and I did so because I have dealt with a number of cases in my constituency. I run a campaign with colleagues to try to prevent suicides from the Humber Bridge, so I am fully supportive.

Lee Pitcher: Thank you for doing that.

Q14 **Chair:** Just to clarify, you would ideally like the debate on 11 September.

Lee Pitcher: It would be great to do it on the 10th or as near to it as possible.

Chair: You may think this is advance notice, but with the queue of debates that we have, it is not really.

Lee Pitcher: I understand. I have heard that you have quite a backlog.

Chair: Thank you for getting it in early.

Lee Pitcher: I appreciate it. Thank you for listening.

Chair: Any other questions? No. Okay, the Clerks will be in touch in due course.

Lee Pitcher: Thank you so much.