

# Backbench Business Committee

## Representations: Backbench Debates

Tuesday 1 April 2025

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Bob Blackman (Chair); Jess Brown-Fuller; Jonathan Davies; Mary Glendon; Will Stone; Martin Vickers; Chris Vince.

Questions 1-11

Witnesses

[I](#): Paulette Hamilton.

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**Paulette Hamilton** made representations.

Q1 **Chair:** Welcome to this meeting of the Backbench Business Committee, where we will be considering applications from colleagues for debates in the Chamber, mainly on Thursdays, and in Westminster Hall on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The first application is from Paulette Hamilton on the potential merits of increasing the police presence on high streets, and it is an application for a 90-minute debate in Westminster Hall on a Tuesday or Thursday. Over to you, Paulette, to present your application, please.

**Paulette Hamilton:** Let me start by thanking you for sending me the invitation. I am really keen to hold this debate because my constituency routinely has one of the highest crime rates in Birmingham, and I strongly believe that increasing police visibility on the high street is an essential part of the solution to some of the problems we have been having.

Last year, 10 people were stabbed every week in the B23 postcode area of my constituency. It has been particularly affected: in 2023, it recorded the highest number of knife-related incidents in the entire city. Seventy per cent of the youth support systems that once guided and protected young people from crime have gone. In Erdington, the closure of the Malcolm Locker youth centre in 2014 marked the end of the last council-run youth service centre in my constituency.

In addition to all that—that is the human element—crime has cost the local economy in Erdington an estimated £7 million per year. I got elected originally three years ago. The high street became a no-go area. Our older people stopped using it. Many of the shops were moving out of the high street. It was just terrible. I started to pester the chief constable and the police and crime commissioner, because we had no police presence.

People were so fed up that they were reporting incidents that were not really being acted on that they stopped reporting them, and because they stopped reporting them, we lost the police presence that we did have, because the statistics showed that the numbers were high enough. Ever since I got elected, I have been badgering the powers that be to say we need a larger presence. We need more police officers, basically.

Operation Fearless was launched last year; proceeds of crime money was used to launch the project. What was instrumental was that we were able to use all the different partners coming together to look at the issues on the high street, but, more than that, to increase the police presence. Using Operation Fearless, we were able to clean up the high street. We got rid of the drug dealers. We were able to get rid of the prostitution that was going on. We were using the partners—not just police officers, but all the others. Immigration were working with us. There were lots of drug issues. We were able to take people to court because of drugs. That meant that we were able to clean up the high street. The increased police presence and the partnership working meant that we cleaned up the high street. We then got more of our older people back on to the high street and more



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people using the shops. Shoplifting has absolutely reduced, and now we are working really closely with the police and other partners to sustain the good work that has gone on.

What I wanted to do, through the Backbench Business Committee, is use the fantastic work that I have managed to do in Birmingham, with other MPs, to show what can be done when police work with others in the local community. That is a snapshot of what I have done.

**Chair:** Because it is a Tuesday application, we need to know the answering Department. I am assuming it is the Home Office.

**Paulette Hamilton:** Yes—the policing Minister.

Q2 **Mary Glendon:** It is great to hear what has happened in your constituency. Yesterday at Home Office questions, there were about half a dozen questions on violence on high streets, particularly against shopkeepers and retailers. This would no doubt be a very popular subject. Has anyone mentioned that to you when you have spoken to?

**Paulette Hamilton:** I did not have any problems getting the number of Members I needed to present my application. If people are not enthused by it, they should be, because my persistence has meant that throughout Birmingham, other MPs are now asking for the same operation to be moved to their area, to help with what they are doing. It has been such a success that the policing Minister is coming to Birmingham Erdington to meet the police, local residents and shopkeepers and thank them for everything they have done.

**Chair:** Thank you, Paulette. The Clerks will be in touch with you in due course.

**Andrew Ranger** made representations.

Q3 **Chair:** The next application is from Andrew Ranger for a 90-minute debate on the role of careers education in improving social mobility, in Westminster Hall on either a Tuesday or Thursday.

**Andrew Ranger:** I believe the time is right for a renewed conversation about careers education and the role it can play in enhancing social mobility. Recent reports from the ONS have shown that 872,000 or 12% of young people aged between 16 and 24 are not in education, employment or training. We know that in many cases, this is not because they are not willing or wanting to work, but perhaps because they have lacked the opportunities or encouragement to pursue it.

Evidence shows that the earlier the intervention we make in a young person's life, the greater the chance they are given to succeed. We know that students on free school meals are less likely to be in work, education or an apprenticeship compared with their more privileged peers, and part of the reason for that is the unequal access to information and guidance that enables them to develop their ambitions and make informed choices in relation to their studies and careers. Compared with peers from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, they are less likely to feel career-ready and



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less confident in talking about their skills in job applications, and they do not always have the necessary support at home to make choices about their futures.

A report by labour market specialist Charlie Ball showed that by 2035, we will need over 11 million graduates to fill gaps in critical sectors such as STEM, education and health. Young people from all backgrounds will need the best tools to succeed in order to ensure this target is met. We also want to ensure that employers get the support they need to access the best talent in an increasingly fragmented careers landscape.

When social mobility succeeds, so does all of society. With all this in mind, I believe the debate would be a meaningful way of moving this forward. I have been delighted to be joined by colleagues from across the House, and I have had more support since I submitted the request for a debate. I would be happy for a debate in either Westminster Hall or the Chamber, should the Committee agree to move forward with this.

**Chair:** Because it is an application for a Tuesday debate, we need to know the answering Department. I am assuming it is the Department for Education.

**Andrew Ranger:** Yes, Education.

Q4 **Chris Vince:** You are slightly short on Opposition Members—you only have three on your list, and you would ideally have four. You said you have had more support. Do you have some more Opposition Members' names?

**Andrew Ranger:** Not an Opposition one, but I think I can get some. I have some interest; I just need to get them signed up.

**Chris Vince:** To make it fair, you could do with one more.

**Chair:** The Clerks will be in touch in due course. Just to warn you, Chamber time is stretching now. We are looking at appointments probably after the November recess.

**Sam Rushworth** made representations.

Q5 **Chair:** The next application is from Sam Rushworth on the attainment and engagement of boys in education. That follows on from careers advice really, doesn't it?

**Sam Rushworth:** It is good to be in front of you all again. It is an application for a Chamber debate on a significant topic that affects all our constituents, which is that boys are underachieving at every level of education. At SATs, only 57% are achieving the required standard, compared with 64% for girls. At GCSEs and achieving the five or more grades at C and above, it is 43.6% compared with 48.5% for girls. At A-levels, again, boys are getting lower grades than girls, but also 58,000 fewer boys than girls are taking A-levels every year. There are 35,000 fewer 18-year-old British males going to university every September compared with their female counterparts.



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We all know that there is a crisis of so-called NEETs. One in eight young people are not in employment, education or training, but when you break that down by sex, that is 251,000 young men who are unemployed, compared with 141,000 young women. It is crystal clear in the data that there is a gender attainment gap. We would not tolerate this type of inequality for anything else, and I do not think we should be letting down the young men we represent. It is really important that Parliament addresses this. There is no strategy for addressing the gender attainment gap. There is a strategy, obviously, for addressing underachievement as a whole, but not specifically for gender. What is the outcome? Higher prison populations and higher suicide rates for young males. We see the social problems that this leads to.

We were overwhelmed when we put out a call to see the level of interest. We have more than 35 signatures from Members of Parliament across at least six different parties, including the independents. There are a significant number of MPs from Labour, but also from the Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats, Reform and the SNP. That includes a former Education Minister. We can see that, across Parliament, there is strong support to have a debate on the subject and hopefully to urge the Government to consider what needs to be done to address it.

**Q6 Chair:** I should have said at the beginning that this is an application for a Chamber debate or a Tuesday morning debate in Westminster Hall. It is ironic that, years ago, we had to concentrate on closing the gender gap to get girls up to the right levels and now we are talking about how we can get boys back up to speed.

**Sam Rushworth:** Years ago, we did address it. There was an outcry about it that is not currently matched.

**Chair:** Indeed. That is absolutely right. Any questions?

**Q7 Will Stone:** This is really important, so thank you for bringing it forward. It is not a criticism, but I think you put forward the debate about men's mental health, for which we had a shameful turnout. What are you going to do differently to ensure all these people do show up to this debate? I know that it was not your fault.

**Sam Rushworth:** It is a fair comment. We were disappointed. It was very last thing on a Thursday afternoon, so hopefully one of the things is to put it earlier on the Thursday, but that is not that is not my gift to give. Certainly, we will follow up with everybody who has signed up for this, providing them with briefings ahead of the debate and asking them to show up and speak.

**Will Stone:** Thank you for bringing it forward. It is really important.

**Q8 Chair:** Just to warn you, we are monitoring who turns up and who does not, particularly in the Chamber, because obviously it is quite important that we use the time effectively.



**Sam Rushworth:** We let people know that as well. When we were asking for signatures, we did explicitly say, "Please do not just put your name to it if you are not willing to come."

**Sam Rushworth** made representations.

Q9 **Chair:** We now move to another application from Sam Rushworth—don't go away—on defibrillator access. This is an application for a 90-minute debate in Westminster Hall on a Tuesday.

**Sam Rushworth:** This is another issue that gained quite significant support: 30 MPs signed the application, including MPs from the Conservatives, Lib Dems, Reform, three different Irish parties and quite a lot of Labour MPs. Why does this matter? It is important to our constituents and it is also very personal to me.

In the UK, on average, only 8% of people survive cardiac arrests that occur outside hospital settings. That is low compared with international data. We know that the chance of survival increases to 70% when there is defibrillation. Many people in the UK live in postcodes that are considered defibrillator deserts, where people live beyond the three-to-five-minute window considered key to survival. Defibrillators are used in only one in 10 hospital cardiac arrests in the UK. There is a significant challenge here.

This is personal for me. When I was 11, my mother's life was saved by a defibrillator—this is before we had mass access to them. Her heart had stopped and she was not breathing, and it was only because she collapsed at church where a member of the congregation happened to be a paramedic with one in his car that I grew up with a mother.

Sadly, children growing up today having lost parents because we know that cardiac arrests can affect people who are young. It is something we can do something about, so it is a really important topic to put before Parliament.

**Chair:** Any questions from colleagues? No. I assume that Health would answer this debate.

**Sam Rushworth:** Yes.

**Chair:** Thank you—we need that for a Tuesday morning debate. The Clerks will be in touch in due course.

**Peter Prinsley** made representations.

Q10 **Chair:** The last application is from Dr Peter Prinsley, on long-term conditions. This is an application for either a Chamber debate or a Westminster Hall debate, for 90 minutes on either a Tuesday or a Thursday.

**Peter Prinsley:** I am asking for a debate on the growing national challenge of long-term conditions. I have spent my career managing incurable problems, learning the limits of medicine as optimism gives way to realism. More than 15 million people in England live with a long-term



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condition. They are not cured; they are just managed, often for decades. They represent 70% of all spending on the NHS, most GP appointments and most hospital bed days. There are many incurable chronic conditions—diabetes, asthma, arthritis, dementia—across all of medicine.

Many colleagues across the House will be having issues raised by their constituents about many of these diseases, about their previous work and even about their own experience. I think that having a debate about this problem would now be highly relevant.

We often talk about reforming the systems that support people into work. We know that that has been particularly topical lately, and tackling the management of long-term conditions that prevent people from working is particularly relevant. If we want the reforms to succeed, we have to ensure that the health services are fit to support people with these conditions—properly funded and fit for purpose. We know that 2.8 million people are now out of work or off work because of long-term sickness. That is a rise of 700,000 people or more in the past three years.

We know that 100 million working days are lost every year and I think that a debate right now would allow MPs the opportunity to talk about the solutions to the problems with treatment. Primary care is stretched to breaking point. GP numbers have not kept pace with rising demand and patients with long-term conditions often wait weeks for appointments. As we know, the Government are coming up with a 10-year NHS plan, and I think a refocus on the everyday needs of these millions of people with long-term conditions is timely.

From the introduction of community health hubs, enhanced mental health services and rehabilitation, to a return to continuity of care and to the generalist in medicine, the debate will be an opportunity for many MPs to put across their proposals to improve things.

**Chair:** Once again, if it is a Tuesday, I assume the answering Department would be Health.

**Peter Prinsley:** Yes.

**Chair:** I should point out that you are a bit light on Opposition speakers for a Chamber request. For Westminster Hall, it is fine, but for the Chamber you would need more Opposition speakers to swell your numbers. I am sure that you would manage to do that, because you will be joining a very long queue for the Chamber.

Q11 **Chris Vince:** Would you be happy with a Westminster Hall debate?

**Peter Prinsley:** I understand from what I heard earlier that a Chamber debate would be long delayed, so I wonder whether a Westminster Hall debate might get the thing over the line more quickly.

**Chair:** Yes, it would. That is a strong hint.



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**Peter Prinsley:** It is obviously up to the distinguished members of this Committee.

**Chair:** That is a good start. Thank you, Peter. The Clerks will be in touch in due course. That concludes the public business of the Committee.