HOUSE OF COMMONS

Backbench Business Committee

Representations: Backbench Debates

Tuesday 22 April 2025

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Watch the meeting

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

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Jim Shannon made representations.

Q1 **Chair:** Welcome to this meeting of the Backbench Business Committee. We will consider requests by colleagues for debates in the main Chamber and in Westminster Hall.

First up is our season ticket holder, Jim Shannon, who has a request for a debate in either the main Chamber or Westminster Hall, for 90 minutes, on hospices and palliative care in the UK.

Jim Shannon: Mr Chairman and Committee members, thank you for giving me the opportunity to request this debate. I have one more name to add: that of Rebecca Long Bailey, the Member for Salford. I think that that gives us the four Labour Members we need to have the debate okayed.

Why is this important? Obviously, assisted dying is under consideration, but the alternatives of palliative care and hospice care have become part of the debate. I and others—an accumulation of Labour, Conservative, independent, Liberal, SDLP and Alliance Members—all felt that we should request the same thing, because they also feel moved by the issue.

Hospices deliver essential end-of-life care—we all know that—and they support parents and children. They are for more than just those who have terminal illness and their families. They are also grappling with funding shortages, rising demand and workforce pressures. Many rely heavily on charitable donations and on families to pay the mortgage and do other things. There has been inconsistent Government support, creating a postcode lottery for care equality and access. I believe it is time to amplify the voice of healthcare professionals, patients and caregivers. By forcing cross-party discussion, which we have done, we must push for a national strategy to ensure equitable and high-quality palliative care in a system under strain as the population ages and complex care needs grow.

The Sue Ryder charity provides expertise and compassion for care for people at the end of their 65 years or thereabouts. The charity's 2021 research revealed that 245,000 people in England were expected to receive palliative care in 2022, which is three years ago now. If we looked today, it would be even more. Complex illnesses and comorbidity will increase even more as the population ages: 1.7 million people are 85 or over, making up 2.5% of the UK population. By mid-2045, that is projected to have nearly doubled to 3.1 million, representing 4.3% of the total UK population.

Those are just some of the figures. We feel that this is an issue that needs to be debated and looked at, as a way for the present Government to give an answer on palliative and hospice care, which I believe everybody wishes to see.

Q2 **Jess Brown-Fuller:** Jim, I am sure you are aware that Paul Kohler, the MP for Wimbledon, was given a Backbench Business debate on hospices and palliative care. His application at the time was very similar to yours, and we have had that debate within this Parliament. My understanding—

the Chair will correct me if I am wrong—is that we can have another debate on the subject if you talk about a particular nuance that was not covered within that debate, or if you bring a substantive motion to the Chamber. Is it your intention that this debate be slightly different from the one before, or are you planning on bringing a motion forward?

Jim Shannon: I thank the hon. Lady very much for that guidance; it helps me focus. My idea would be perhaps to change the focus of it slightly.

I give great credit to the Sue Ryder charity; it is one of the charities that I deal with regularly. Its research and its projection of figures show that by 2045, among the total UK population, the number of people with mobility and complex health needs will have increased. It is time to look at those up-to-date figures that the Sue Ryder charity has provided to me for the last period of time. I am happy to do whatever is necessary to ensure that we have a debate. If you can give me an idea of a way to do that, I will certainly ensure that.

Chair: Taking up what Jess said, the suggestion would be that if you had a substantive motion to go with this bid, obviously the Committee would look at it and allocate Chamber time appropriately.

Jim Shannon: Can I come back to you on that?

Chair: No, you will not need to come back; you will need to send the substantive motion in to us, probably when you come next week on another subject.

Jim Shannon: Okay. I will have that with you before the day is out. Thank you very much—you are very kind.

Edward Morello, **Sarah Champion**, **Monica Harding** and **Aphra Brandreth** made representations.

Q3 **Chair:** Our next application is from Edward Morello on the impact of UK ODA cuts on international development. This is a request for a debate in Westminster Hall on a Tuesday morning, or alternatively in the Chamber. I should advise you before you start that Chamber time is challenging and there is a very long wait, unless you are prepared to take 1 May. Over to you, Edward.

Edward Morello: I understand the challenge. I thank the Chair and the Committee for the opportunity to present this application. I also thank my co-sponsors on either side of me for their cross-party support for this debate.

Although I believe that the decision to increase defence spending enjoys broad cross-party support, I do not believe that there is consensus on the best way to fund that increase. For that reason, I would like to request an opportunity for the House to debate the decision to cut the UK's official development assistance. The reduction in our aid budget from 0.5% to 0.3% of GNI raises serious concerns not only for the world's most

vulnerable people, but for the UK's soft power, global standing and long-term security interests.

I am fortunate to sit on the Foreign Affairs Committee. One of our current inquiries is on UK soft power, of which overseas development aid is an important part. Soft power is the other side of the coin from hard power; they are intrinsically linked. Historically, the UK has led the way in tackling poverty, responding to humanitarian crises and promoting global stability. Those efforts are not acts of charity; they are essential to our national interest. When we reduce our support for conflict prevention, global health initiatives and disaster response, we increase the threat that we will ultimately be forced to confront with hard power. We also create gaps that other nations are already stepping into; China and Russia in particular are expanding their influence in key regions, often with very different aims from our own.

The decision to reduce UK aid comes at the same time as major cuts to USAID funding in the United States. This double blow has already had real-world consequences: medical facilities closing in Sudan, nutrition programmes halted in Syria, and HIV treatments scaled back. The UK stepping back now risks exacerbating those harms and undermining our ability to shape the global response.

ODA cuts also threaten the work of key British institutions such as the British Council, which is about 80% ODA-funded and plays a critical role in promoting UK values, culture and language abroad. If projections are correct and we drop to 0.3% of GNI by 2027, the UK will be spending £6.1 billion less on aid than if we had kept to the 0.5% commitment. With the spending review fast approaching, it is clear that we need a sustainable, long-term approach to funding Britain's diplomatic and development footprint.

I believe that Parliament should have an opportunity to debate potential solutions. This debate would allow Members the chance to raise these issues directly with the Minister, to consider more sustainable ways of supporting our overseas work and to reflect on how we meet our obligations, both to those in need and to our allies, without compromising our values or retreating from the world stage. I very much hope that the Committee will provide the House with the opportunity to be part of that process.

Sarah Champion: May I thank the Committee, because it recently granted an estimates day debate that happened to fall straight after the cuts were announced? More than 50 Members tried to speak in that debate, but only half were able to. If we could go for a Tuesday morning in a timely manner—in other words, before the spending review—that would be incredibly helpful, because decisions are being made right now that are going to impact all of us and all of the poorest in the world. Anything the Committee can do would be deeply appreciated.

Monica Harding: Despite the statutory commitment to 0.7%, we are now at the lowest levels of UK aid this century. If you take into account the in-

country refugee costs that ODA is spent on, the 0.3% drops to 0.1%. Not only does that have a huge impact on the world's poorest, but our influence on the world stage drops way down to the bottom of the table. There is a loss of British influence that has not been properly debated in the House.

There are also grave health and security implications. If we think about covid and how we prevented Ebola from becoming the new covid here, that was due in large part to the amount of money we put into prevention. Similarly, on security, spending ODA on deconfliction in places of war and conflict means terrorism is less likely to build. That reduces the threat to our country and keeps our borders more secure.

There has been an exponential rise in the number of Sudanese people crossing the channel in small boats as a result of the conflict in Sudan. ODA must be seen not only as helping the world's poorest, but as adding to the health and security of our nation and our influence in the world.

Aphra Brandreth: The only point I want to add is about the decision to move funding from ODA to defence. I supported that decision in the short term—it had to be made quickly—but we were not given the opportunity to debate it properly. This is our opportunity, especially as we look beyond the short term to what we can do in the medium and long term. It is vital that we get the opportunity to speak about this issue and ensure that all views and perspectives are heard.

Q4 **Chair:** There is already an application on our waiting list on the implications of the reduction in USAID. Have you had discussions with the sponsor, Brian Mathew, to see whether you could conflate the two debates?

Sarah Champion: Might I push back on that? Obviously, for the most vulnerable in the world it is a double whammy, but I think there is a specific case to debate where the UK exerts its influence through its aid budget. Were we to combine the two, we can only really speculate and not particularly have influence over the US. It is a topic that needs debating, because it is going to have global ramifications, but I think that this is quite a specific thing.

Chair: That is very helpful to our considerations. May I gently point out that your application is for a Tuesday, or a Chamber debate. You are short in the number of speakers for the Chamber, but you would be okay for the number of speakers for a Tuesday morning.

Edward Morello: I will live with that, if that is okay.

Chair: All right. The Clerks will be in touch in due course.

Sir John Hayes, **Charlie Dewhirst**, **Rebecca Long Bailey** and **David Chadwick** made representations.

Q5 **Chair:** Next up is John Hayes, with an application for a Tuesday morning debate in Westminster Hall on the effective powers of the Groceries Code

Adjudicator.

Sir John Hayes: Thank you for inviting me. You will know that the Groceries Code Adjudicator was put in place by the coalition Government, of which I was a member, following a review by the Competition and Markets Authority about 10 years earlier, in 2001. It was put in place to enforce the groceries code, which was established after the CMA review; the Library note, which is useful on the subject, notes that it was established to "proactively enforce the Grocery Supply Code of Practice and curb abuses of power". The problem is that since then it has been pretty clear that supermarkets have continued to give primary producers a raw deal, in all kinds of ways.

The reason for the salience of the debate is that food security has never been more in the headlines. With many Members across the House who represent rural constituencies, farmers and growers, there is an appetite to look again at the powers of the Groceries Code Adjudicator. I will not go into too much detail, because I know that you will not permit me, but let me set out a few things to illustrate what we might do.

The adjudicator's powers do not currently include wholesalers. They are quite limited in the number of people they can deal with in the food chain, so there is an argument for extending their powers to a larger number of people in the food chain. They are not proactive, so they cannot launch inquiries even when they have evidence; an inquiry has to be based on a particular complaint from a farmer or grower. A lot of what they do is never made public, so the outcomes do not really have a reputational effect on retailers, even when they are found wanting.

Our argument is that the Groceries Code Adjudicator should be able to launch proactive reviews, inviting supplier and customer evidence; introduce regular supply chain audits to look at the whole food chain, rather than just at particular complaints from particular suppliers to supermarkets; mandate the publication of anonymised complaints and investigative outcomes; require supermarkets to disclose more data on payment terms, contract conditions and the various other means that they use to make life difficult for their primary producers and other suppliers; and increase maximum fines and introduce naming-and-shaming mechanisms. That would align us with EU protections in respect of mandatory payment deadlines and banned clauses in contracts.

You will see that a wide range of colleagues, representing a broad range of opinion across the House, have signed our application. I know that the Chairman of the EFRA Select Committee, Alistair Carmichael, is an enthusiast for the approach that I have just outlined; he has made that publicly known, and I think his Committee is looking at these matters now. I have discussed the matter with him, and he says that he is very happy for me to lead the process of getting a long debate—as long a debate as this Committee is prepared to give us, that is—so that these matters can be explored.

Charlie Dewhirst: It is particularly timely, because the previous

Government started a process, which is being continued under this Government, of sector-by-sector supply chain reviews in agriculture. Part of it is the implementation of the new Agricultural Supply Chain Adjudicator, who will work alongside the Groceries Code Adjudicator. Some of that remains unclear and needs to be explored. The two bodies need to work closely together, for the reasons that John has outlined: there are gaps in the system that need to be filled. This is a timely point at which to discuss the issue, particularly in relation to food security.

Rebecca Long Bailey: I completely agree with what my colleagues have said. This is a debate that crosses party divides, and it deals with issues that go right to the heart of our food security. It is not just about suppliers and growers; it goes right through the manufacturing supply chain.

Unfortunately, when we see supermarkets abusing their powers and then not being taken to task, it often leads to the driving down of terms and conditions for workers right across the supply chain. That is one of the fundamental issues that I do not think we have had time to discuss in Parliament to date.

David Chadwick: I fully support Sir John's comments. First, nearly every farmer I have spoken to has a horror story to share about supermarket buying behaviour, but not that many farmers are aware that there are regulators they can turn to, share their stories with and hopefully see some intervention from. Any debate on this issue raises the awareness of the regulator and the people at the bottom of our food chain.

Secondly, this is very topical. Just this weekend, Asda announced the start of a price war. That will create further downward pressures on the farmers, who are at the bottom of the supply chain, as we are stuck in an inflationary spiral, so the debate has much wider resonance.

Q6 **Chair:** I assume that DEFRA would be the answering Department. Is that correct?

Sir John Hayes: Yes.

Chair: That is fine. It is a Tuesday application, so we must have the correct answering Department. There are no further questions from colleagues, so the Clerks will be touch in due course.

Jen Craft made representations.

Q7 **Chair:** Next up is Jen Craft, on Down's syndrome regression disorder. This is an application for a Westminster Hall debate on either a Tuesday morning or a Thursday afternoon.

Jen Craft: Yes. Down's syndrome regression disorder is a fairly niche but horrific condition, which, as the name suggests, affects people with Down's syndrome. It is believed that between 1% and 2% of young people are affected. Put simply, they basically lose themselves almost overnight. There is very little research being done on this and it is generally

misunderstood. Parents are quite often told their child has either very early-onset dementia or very late-onset autism.

It is something which occurs almost within a matter of days. Your child will go from being a verbal young adult who has got an interest in activities and maybe a job, or who might attend a school, to almost overnight being unable to speak, becoming incontinent and being almost in a state of catatonia. Those I have spoken to whose child has experienced this have had to go through a really tortuous process, first to get it recognised as a condition and, secondly, to find someone who will take their concerns seriously.

If one morning a child who does not have Down's syndrome woke up and was no longer talking to you and you looked into their eyes and they had disappeared, you would be in A&E and they would take you pretty seriously. It would set the hares running. Unfortunately, this is not the case for Down's syndrome regression disorder. People who have done research in the United States and Canada believe that it is probably something that has existed for as long as Down's syndrome has existed, but it tended to be seen—in a fairly ignorant way—as the progression of the condition. People would just be put in a living facility, when of course that is not how we treat people with learning disabilities nowadays.

It is a fairly niche condition because of the small subset of the population it impacts. Parents who care for someone who has this disorder would like to see a much wider appreciation of its existence and an understanding among medical professionals of what to look out for. There is hope that, if it is caught early and treated, the young person can make almost an entire recovery. Where it has been treated in the US, success rates have shown between 80% and 100% recovery, but it needs to be identified quickly and acted on.

The aim of having a debate would be to raise the profile of this and to ask what kind of steps are being taken to look at creating a research and treatment pathway for this disorder. I believe there is a physician at Great Ormond Street who is studying this and is quite well versed in Down's syndrome regression disorder but, if you imagine the disorder is widespread across the country, you have to get quite lucky to find that person. This presents an opportunity to put it on the table and demonstrate that, when people are hit with this, it is fairly horrific, that there is a path back to normality, but that we need much more research and awareness of the condition for that to happen.

Q8 **Chair:** Can I clarify the answering Department, as we will need to have the correct one for a Tuesday debate? In your application, you mention both Health and Education.

Jen Craft: I think it is mainly Health. The spectrum of people that it covers will usually be from the onset of puberty to their early or late 20s. That is the age that it covers, so it will be Health. Again, people are asking for education providers to be able to notice this sudden change in a child and know how to act on it.

Q9 **Jonathan Davies:** Thank you for raising this very important issue. I know we had a debate in Westminster Hall on 19 March about Down's syndrome and the Down Syndrome Act 2022, which has not been implemented thus far. Health was answering that debate, and I see that this debate is probably sufficiently different from what came at that time, but it might be interesting to see this through an education lens to build the pressure to deliver on that Act. That is just an observation.

Jen Craft: It could be. I think they are asking for a research pathway, so it probably is a health focus. They want us to actually create guidance that says, "This is the kind of thing you need to look out for, this is what you need to identify, and it very much is a medical condition."

Q10 **Alison Hume:** Thank you for bringing this to us, Jen. I am very supportive of this application, but there are other rare chromosome disorders that have regression involved, such as Rett syndrome. Would you consider widening the parameters of the title to general regression, or do you think you should stay focused on Down's syndrome?

Jen Craft: I would be up for widening it. Down's syndrome is the most common chromosomal condition, so obviously the prevalence of regression will be higher than across the general population. It also presents an opportunity: if you understand regression and know how to treat it in Down's syndrome, you can widen that to other chromosomal conditions as well, but I am up for opening out the debate, because regression is faced by a lot of different people.

Q11 **Chris Vince:** It is irrelevant, because Jen has not actually put herself on the list, although I presume you want to speak in it, but Daniel Francis is Labour.

Jen Craft: I know. You can blame my office for that one—not that I am throwing them under the bus or anything.

Chris Vince: So I am saying that you have four and four. Actually, you have five and four, because you will speak as well.

Chair: Thank you. The Clerks will be in touch in due course.

Dr Simon Opher made representations.

Q12 **Chair:** The next application is from Dr Simon Opher, on how to raise the healthiest generation of children ever. It is an application for the Chamber. Over to you, Simon.

Dr Opher: This Government have made a specific pledge to raise the healthiest generation of children in UK history, so I am trying to provide the first opportunity for MPs to actually debate it. I will give just a few very quick details, because I realise that time is short. In the post-natal period, there are specific problems around diet, baby food, milk and so on. Those types of issue need to be discussed fully. There is going to be a "Panorama" programme that is very critical of them.

On top of that, we have had a veritable tsunami of mental health issues in young people. Why is that? What sort of service do we need to deliver for

those people? There is also neurodiversity and all the problems associated with that. Again, we are not dealing with that in an appropriate way at the moment, and the NHS waiting lists are extremely long. Childhood vaccination rates are dropping, which is very worrying, particularly with the measles epidemic in America at the moment. We need to work out how we can change and reverse that.

Obesity is another major issue with young people. Young people are having to wait too long for treatment, and I would particularly identify oncology as having poor services. Sometimes, young people are attending for their chemotherapy and having to be turned away because there are not enough beds. There is a number of different issues, as well as standard emergency-type medical care for young people; more and more young people are having to go to A&E departments as well.

There has been a recent consensus statement by the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, NHS Providers, the NCB, Barnardo's, the Academy of Medical Sciences and the Royal College of Occupational Therapists. All those people want to bring forward and improve the quality of children's health, so that is what I would like a debate upon.

Chair: You certainly have plenty of speakers on the list, so it is obviously a very popular subject. Are there any questions from colleagues? No—okay. The Clerks will be in touch with you in due course.

Catherine Atkinson and **Steff Aquarone** made representations.

Q13 **Chair:** Next up is Catherine Atkinson, with a request for a half-day Chamber debate on regional transport inequality.

Catherine Atkinson: Thank you. Access to opportunities, whether to get jobs or training or to access culture or healthcare, is so frequently dependent upon transport—upon whether you can actually get there. When you look at the evidence setting out the spend per person by region, the significant inequality between regions and countries is stark. While I am an east midlands MP, there are other regions that, as you can see, are suffering a far greater inequality in terms of the transport that underpins so much. Even on buses, in the east midlands we have seen since 2008 a reduction of over 60% in bus routes.

In circumstances where there is such inequality, I was seeking the opportunity, which I know other hon. Members would also like to have, to talk about the impact of regional transport inequality and how that can be remedied. When you have investment in modernised transport, that also offers opportunities for decarbonisation in areas. If we want social mobility and economic growth to stretch to all corners of our countries, we need to look at how we address the inequality in transport spend. In my view, it is a fundamental inequality that hon. Members would be grateful for the opportunity to discuss.

Chair: Thank you. Steff, do you have anything to add?

Steff Aquarone: Just that 50% of the country live in a rural or coastal community. This Committee saw fit to grant a debate, which I was very

grateful for the chance to lead, on coastal communities. It was very popular. Many of our Transport Committee colleagues have supported this application because they too see the regional inequality. That is reflective of a broad level of cross-party support in the House, from the people who have spoken to me.

Chair: Thank you. Any questions from colleagues?

Chris Vince: Just a comment: as a visual learner, I welcome the inclusion of a graph, and I would like to encourage that for future applications. It is very useful—thank you.

Catherine Atkinson: I did play with a selection of graphs; I could have done it taking out HS2 spend as well, but we limited it to one.

Chair: I am glad you did not include HS2 spend, because that would have gone off the scale. Thank you very much. The Clerks will be in touch in due course.

Sadik Al-Hassan made representations.

Q14 **Chair:** Next up is Sadik Al-Hassan, on enabling hydrogen-powered aviation. This application is for a Tuesday morning debate in Westminster Hall.

Sadik Al-Hassan: Thank you, Chairman and Committee, for giving me the opportunity today to make the case for why I and my cross-party supporters believe that this debate is so important to have at this moment in our nation's history.

Since Labour came to power last July, one word has been repeated time and again: growth. To that end, following heavy encouragement from the Government in recent weeks, we have seen a spate of announcements from airports across the country detailing ambitious expansion plans. In my North Somerset constituency lies Bristol airport. It is the eighth busiest airport in the UK, already serving more than 10 million passengers a year and with plans to expand to 15 million by 2036. Although many of my constituents are thankful for the 5,000 jobs the airport provides and the billions it brings to the local economy, many are also concerned about the environmental impact that such a dramatic expansion in passenger numbers might entail.

While every Member of this House would agree that growth is important, I believe achieving our net zero goals to be of equal importance. That is why the growth of hydrogen in aviation is vital. This fuel of the future will enable us to grow our economy while simultaneously reducing the carbon emissions from this important sector. Like many of my colleagues with airports in their constituencies, I know this to be an issue of real importance to many of our constituents. Some 60% of constituencies have 500 or more people employed in aviation. It is important that, while hydrogen in aviation is still in its infancy, Parliament be given an opportunity to debate this topic, thus influencing the course it takes as it matures in the years to come.

Q15 **Chair:** Thank you very much. As it is a Tuesday debate, would it be Transport answering?

Sadik Al-Hassan: Yes.

Chair: Thank you. Any questions from colleagues?

Q16 **Will Stone:** Just the one. You are slightly short on Opposition Members.

Sadik Al-Hassan: I have two Lib Dems, a Conservative and an SNP.

Will Stone: You only have one Lib Dem. Who is your second?

Sadik Al-Hassan: Wera Hobhouse.

Chair: Thank you. Any other questions?

Q17 **Jess Brown-Fuller:** Less of a question, more of a statement: I had a group from a local school in my constituency come out to do a presentation in Parliament about hydrogen-powered aviation. I am pleased to tell you I understood not a single word of it, but it was certainly something they were fascinated by. They had done an extracurricular project that they then got to bring to Parliament. So this is also something that the next generation is really interested in, and thank you for raising it here.

Sadik Al-Hassan: I encourage you to pass me your notes so that I might understand a little better in future.

Jess Brown-Fuller: Happily.

Chair: Okay. The Clerks will be in touch with you in due course.

Sadik Al-Hassan: Thank you, Committee and Chair.

James Naish made representations.

Q18 **Chair:** Next up is James Naish on the UK hydrogen supply chain opportunity. We have a suggested redraft of the title to "The hydrogen supply chain".

James Naish: That is absolutely fine, Chair.

Q19 **Chair:** This is, once again, a request for a Tuesday morning debate.

James Naish: That is correct, yes. Thank you, Chair and Members of the Committee, for hearing me out on why I think this would be a good 90-minute Westminster Hall debate. The supply chain is obviously critical to our economy, no matter the industry, and we know that hydrogen has huge opportunity. I am grateful for the support from Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat Members. As has just been seen from the previous submission, there is a broader interest as well from people who are not particularly associated with this Backbench Business Committee application.

I worked in the energy industry, and I have been contacted by a range of businesses, industry stakeholders and colleagues from across the House, all of whom recognise the immense economic and environmental potential

of domestic hydrogen. From the development of green hydrogen production to the deployment of innovative technologies such as hydrogen fuel cells and gas turbines, this sector offers a major opportunity for regional investment, job creation and, of course, decarbonisation.

Indeed, the global hydrogen economy is forecast to be worth around $8 trillion by 2050, with an estimated $1 trillion in annual demand for hydrogen technologies. It is essential that we, as the UK, really think hard about our role within that. Despite our strong R&D base and industrial capabilities, my current view is that the UK is in danger of falling behind. Countries with more strategic and better resourced policy frameworks are starting to attract that investment ahead of the UK.

The Hydrogen UK assessment last year made it clear that, without more targeted support, we risk public funds being spent on imported technologies, diluting the potential benefits to UK regions and, of course, to UK employment. That is why the timing of the parliamentary debate on this topic is particularly important. We are expecting major policy announcements in the coming weeks, including the results of the hydrogen allocation round 2, the launch of consultations on allocation round 3 and updates to the hydrogen transport and storage business models, all of which could no doubt play into the broader debate about the supply chain.

I believe the debate will give Members the chance to showcase success stories that already exist in our country, scrutinise the Government's approach, where there is flex for moving further, and explore what a strategic, joined-up policy framework would actually look like for the UK—one that enables the UK not only to participate in the hydrogen economy, but ultimately to lead it. That remains an opportunity. As someone with a strong interest in renewables and the future of British industry, I would be very pleased to sponsor this debate. I hope the Committee will consider it.

Q20 **Chair:** Thank you for your presentation. Just to clarify, because it is a Tuesday debate request, what would the answering Department be? Is it DESNZ?

James Naish: It would be DESNZ, which is how it is differentiated from the previous application. This is about the broader approach to the industry and our strategic thinking when it comes to the role of hydrogen.

Chair: Okay. Questions, colleagues?

Q21 **Alison Hume:** Do you have any more Opposition speakers? You might need one more.

James Naish: I think there are two Liberal Democrats and one Conservative on here at the moment. There is general interest, I think, in the growth of hydrogen, as has been seen from the previous application. Indeed, hydrogen is present in a lot of constituencies across the country on a small scale, so I am confident that there would be a broader appetite to debate it.

Martin Vickers: Just to say, in answer to that, that it is important to my constituency, so I am very happy to add my name.

Alison Hume: Well, there you go!

Chair: Any other questions? Are there no questions on the different types of hydrogen? Fine—fair enough. The Clerks will be touch with you in due course.

Dr Beccy Cooper made representations.

Q22 **Chair:** Last, but by no means least, we have Dr Beccy Cooper. This is a request for a debate on obesity and fatty liver disease—saving that one until last—and it is for a Westminster Hall debate on a Tuesday morning. Over to you, Beccy.

Dr Cooper: Thank you so much. Briefly, colleagues, as you probably already know, obesity and fatty liver disease are increasing across our population. Almost two thirds of adults in the UK are overweight or obese, placing millions at a higher risk of premature death, chronic disease and a multitude of cancers—all happy stuff, I know, but very important. And up to four in 10 children with obesity—that is 38%—are now estimated to have fatty liver disease, which is absolutely shocking.

Also of note is that this is unfortunately most prevalent in our most disadvantaged and marginalised communities, as so much in health is. The Office for Health Improvement and Disparities recently published data highlighting that premature mortality rates for non-alcohol-related fatty liver disease are now 6.4 times higher in the most deprived areas of England than in the most affluent—but it is not only in those deprived areas.

As co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on liver disease and liver cancer, I was delighted that 90 MPs and peers—perhaps including some of you—were represented at the British Liver Trust's recent parliamentary liver health awareness day in January; some of you may have had the fibrinogen scan. It is encouraging to see cross-party support for action to tackle rising cases of liver disease, but more can and must be done to help save lives and reduce this huge, avoidable pressure on our NHS. This debate will help to highlight that.

Particularly as we move forward to the 10-year health plan, improving prevention and early detection of fatty liver disease is essential for the UK Government to achieve their proposed shift from sickness to prevention. Speaking as a public health doctor, we have been talking about it for years. I am in politics to try to make this happen. I do not want to keep banging my head against a brick wall; I really want to see this shift, so this is a crucial thing.

The debate, crucially, is going to look upstream at prevention measures to reduce obesity, which is a key risk factor for liver disease. I recently visited Worthing hospital's liver unit, and I met with some of my colleagues there: senior leadership and frontline clinicians delivering vital liver services in the region. Their commitment to prevention in the clinical setting—secondary prevention as well as primary prevention, so early diagnosis and outreach to underserved groups—is exactly the kind of

innovation that I want to be able to highlight in this debate and allow colleagues to discuss.

A final point, very quickly, before I stop: Thursday 12 June is the Global Fatty Liver Day. I have committed to being away on a trip with the Health Committee that week, so, if it is possible to hold this debate—if you are amenable to it—on Tuesday 17 June, that would allow us to recognise that very important day. Thank you so much for your time.

Q23 **Chair:** Okay. Thank you very much for that application. I assume that Health would be the answering Department.

Dr Cooper: Yes.

Chair: Thank you. Any questions from colleagues?

Q24 **Alison Hume:** Yes. This is fascinating. Is the rise due to junk food, or is it something else?

Dr Cooper: It is complicated, but essentially there is a direct correlation between the amount of processed food—high fat, high salt, high sugar—that we are now consuming in our society and the increase of non-alcoholic fatty liver disease. There is a direct correlation, so you would be hard pressed to say it is due to anything else, really. It is causality, not just correlation.

Chair: Thank you. The Clerks will be in touch in due course.

Dr Cooper: Lovely. Thanks so much for your time.

Chair: That concludes the public business of the Committee. The Committee will now retire to consider the applications in private.