

Backbench Business Committee

Representations: Backbench Debates

Tuesday 10 June 2025

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Watch the meeting

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

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Representations made

[I](#): Brendan O'Hara

[II](#): Antonia Bance

[III](#): Richard Quigley and Ben Goldsborough

[IV](#): Anna Dixon

Brendan O'Hara made representations.

Q1 **Chair:** Welcome to this meeting of the Backbench Business Committee. We will be considering applications from colleagues for debates in the main Chamber and in Westminster Hall on future occasions. The first application is by Brendan O'Hara, which is for a main Chamber debate for up to three hours on the risk of genocide under international law in relation to the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Brendan O'Hara: I very much appreciate you hearing this so quickly after application. As you can see from the application, 39 Members have signed and committed to take part. Those Members come from nine different parties and they represent every part of the United Kingdom.

The reason for the debate is that, arguably, along with Ukraine, over the past two years it has been the biggest issue that we have had to deal with in this Parliament. There have been a plethora of urgent questions and statements, but very few actual substantial debates in the Chamber, in which Members may debate, make speeches and have that interaction with Government.

Indeed, after looking through my records—I stand to be corrected—I think that February 2024 was the last major debate on Gaza in the main Chamber. There have been several in Westminster Hall. Now, there seems to be a change in the air, and I think that the issue is becoming more crystallised for many Members. This would be a good opportunity to discuss that.

To be absolutely clear, we do not want to have a debate on the determination of genocide. Clearly, that is not what this is about; this is about the Government's legal duty under the genocide convention in relation to the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and it is to allow Members to have a better understanding of the Government's reasoning and to examine how the Government's policy impacts the United Kingdom's legal obligation to continually assess the risk of genocide.

One of the primary motivators for me applying for this debate came from being in the High Court. The Government have said that it is not for them to determine genocide, and that has been a long-held position, but I was in the High Court for the Al-Haq hearing, and what the Government had been saying on the Floor of the House was entirely contradictory to what they had instructed their lawyers to say in the High Court, so the ambiguity there really does have to be clarified.

The primary objective of this debate would be to give the Government that opportunity to convince MPs and, more importantly perhaps, the wider public that they have fulfilled their legal responsibilities under the genocide convention. In a nutshell, that is my reasoning for making this application.

Chair: This is obviously a well subscribed application. The only thing I would say to you, very gently, is that we have a huge queue of requests for debates in the main Chamber. Obviously, the Committee will decide on appropriateness and timeliness, but as things stand at the moment, this is



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not likely to come up until late November given the queue. That is just so you are clear on the overall position. Do colleagues have any other questions?

Q2 Will Stone: This is not a question, but obviously this an important issue and we need to be discussing it. We have a lot of space in Westminster Hall. I know you do not want to have another debate in Westminster necessarily—you did allude to that—but is this time sensitive? It is obviously going on right now, so do you want to speak about it, or are you happy to wait until November?

Brendan O'Hara: Given there have been so many iterations of this debate in Westminster Hall, I question whether it would be useful to have another one. I think the optics of having this on the Floor of the House of Commons are hugely important. As much as I appreciate the offer of Westminster Hall, on this occasion I would much prefer to wait so that there is the opportunity to question and engage in debate with the Government in the Chamber. I think it would be better if we were to wait. I appreciate that, as you say, Mr Blackman, there is a lengthy queue ahead of me.

This is an issue of pressing national importance, and it will not stay where it is. We have already seen today, with the sanctioning of the two Ministers from Israel, that there is movement towards something occurring. Notwithstanding that, I think that having another debate in Westminster Hall—

Will Stone: Wouldn't do it justice.

Brendan O'Hara: Given how many people are subscribed and committed to speak, I do not think that would suffice on this occasion.

Chair: Okay. Any other points? No. Thank you. The Clerks will be in touch in due course.

Brendan O'Hara: I appreciate it. Thank you very much.

Antonia Bance made representations.

Q3 Chair: We come to Antonia Bance, who has an application for a debate on Black Country Day. This is an application for a 90-minute Westminster Hall debate on either a Tuesday or a Thursday. Over to you to present.

Antonia Bance: Thank you very much, Chair. Please accept my apologies for being late—I had the wrong room listed in my diary.

Thank you very much for the invitation to tell you why we should celebrate Black Country Day in the week of 14 July. The Black Country is the metropolitan boroughs of Sandwell, Walsall, Dudley and Wolverhampton in the west midlands. We are to the west and north of Birmingham—not that our relationship to that city should determine anything else about us.

We are a group of boroughs with a proud industrial and manufacturing heritage of our own. The name “the Black Country” comes from the smoke

and smog of our manufacturing plants, which caused Queen Victoria to close the windows on her coach as she passed through our area, and now we wear it as a badge of pride.

Black Country Day, on 14 July, is an opportunity for us to celebrate our industrial heritage. Of course, we were the home of the industrial revolution. Sometimes colleagues from Manchester or Birmingham have other thoughts about where the home of the industrial revolution actually is, but I am clear that the Coneygree colliery, where the Newcomen steam engine operated on 14 July—spot the date—1712 in Tipton in my constituency, now the home of the Angle Ring factory, was the birthplace of the industrial revolution. It was in the heart of the Black Country.

You will see from the application that we want to celebrate our industrial heritage, but also our future. Although in the past manufacturing may have given rise to smoke, smog and dirt, it is now clean and high tech. We remain the home of the modern manufacturing industry for the United Kingdom. We are also an area of culture, food, music and joy, and of the indomitable spirit of Black Country people.

You will see that I have support from across the Black Country for this application. I should also add that, since the application went in, Valerie Vaz from Walsall has added her name. I am glad to say that we have a full house, barring Ministers, as Mike Wood has today added his name to the application, and we are as cross-party as we can be for our part of the world. We would very much appreciate the opportunity to talk about our brilliant area in Westminster Hall in the week commencing 14 July.

Chair: Thank you very much for that presentation. Questions, colleagues? There is an obvious one coming.

Q4 **Will Stone:** I obviously understand the constraints that you are under with the number of MPs, but you need four Opposition Members in order to get the debate happening. Could you reach out to Jim Shannon? He will talk on pretty much anything.

Antonia Bance: I am so sorry. I hadn't realised that we needed four.

Q5 **Chris Vince:** You said that you have Mike Wood as well, so that is three.

Antonia Bance: Yes, I already have Mike, Ayoub and Wendy. I am so sorry—

Q6 **Chair:** Just to explain: for a 90-minute debate in Westminster Hall we expect to see four Government and four Opposition Members. They can be from any Opposition party: independent, Conservative, Liberal Democrat, SNP—it doesn't really matter.

Will Stone: Just one more—

Antonia Bance: Okay, finding one more name will not be a problem. In fact, I am sure plenty of west midlands colleagues from the Opposition would add their names.



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Q7 **Chair:** It would be very helpful if they actually turned up to speak as well, as opposed to just putting their name to an application.

Antonia Bance: Okay. So perhaps we will do this again on another day.

Q8 **Chair:** No. The rest of the application is in order—we are okay with that. If you could find an extra person from an Opposition party and supply that name to the Clerks, that will bring your application into order and we will consider bringing it forward. At the moment we are not allocating for the particular week that you request, but we have made a due note of the fact that you want it on either a Tuesday or a Thursday of that week. I just want to be clear on which Department would be answering the debate.

Antonia Bance: We believe it is right for the Department for Business and Trade to answer, and we think that is the right week for them.

Chair: We do not know yet, but I suspect you are right because they are answering on 1 July and normally they answer every two weeks. Okay. Thank you.

Antonia Bance: Thank you very much.

Chair: You will be in touch with the Clerks, and the Clerks will be in touch with you.

Richard Quigley and Ben Goldsborough made representations.

Q9 **Chair:** Our next application is from Richard Quigley and Ben Goldsborough on Zoe's law and mandating histological testing of all excised moles. This is for a 90-minute debate on a Tuesday in Westminster Hall.

Mr Quigley: Thanks to you, Chair, and the Committee for allowing us time to discuss this. In 2020, a 26-year-old constituent of mine, Zoe Panayi, died just 55 days after being diagnosed with melanoma. She had raised concerns about a mole on her back with a GP, which had been dismissed on two separate occasions as nothing to worry about. With her concerns dismissed, she took matters into her own hands, went private and paid £200 to have the mole removed. But as is standard practice, the mole was not sent away for testing. Hence the tragic conclusion.

Ben Goldsborough: As many colleagues around this table know, I am currently undergoing treatment for stage 2C malignant melanoma, because the NHS did catch it and sent off for a biopsy. The story that we are trying to tell is that every biopsy should be tested because of the ability to capture, mitigate and then treat—I am a perfect example.

The argument that we are putting forward and the reason we think this is a timely debate is because any moles or skin lesions could potentially be a cancer. As we have heard, Zoe's case goes against the grain of taking the issue seriously. We want to raise public awareness because one of the duties of this House is to ensure that people understand that "slip, slop, slap" is not just something that happens in Australia; it is something that we should do across the UK.



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We should also make sure that individuals get themselves checked out. As I say, the treatment that I am undergoing right now happened only because I did not go for the cosmetic route, but because I was concerned about a skin lesion from a mole. It is not right that other members of the public are missing out on treatment because of this.

Q10 **Chair:** Can I ask a question? When is it tested and when is it not? I do not want to get into the debate, but it is quite an interesting point as to what happens when.

Mr Quigley: It is a good question because it is not clearcut. It is a bit of a toss of a coin. If a doctor thinks it is worthy of testing, it goes away for testing, but not if they think there is nothing to worry about. That is why the mandatory nature is important.

Ben Goldsborough: In my specific case, I got treated by the in-house doctor in Parliament, at which point they saw a lesion and said, "That is a melanoma." They sent me off to the testing process. But if someone goes to their GP and the GP is not a dermatologist or an oncologist with any training whatever, and they just say, "This is a cosmetic mole that needs to be treated," that is when we end up with Zoe's situation. Because there are not clearcut rules in this sphere, that is when people fall through the gaps.

Jonathan Davies: I should say that I have signed this application. I think it is an important debate, particularly given your current experience, Ben.

Q11 **Chair:** We all wish you well in your treatment.

Ben Goldsborough: It is going well. Thank you.

Chair: That is good news. The lesson is that the earlier it is caught, the better.

Okay, thank you. The Clerks will be in touch with you in due course and we will see when we can allocate this debate.

Could I just clarify that because it is an application for a Tuesday, it is Health and Social Care that would be the answering Department?

Mr Quigley: Yes.

Chair: Thank you.

Anna Dixon made representations.

Q12 **Chair:** The final application is from Dr Anna Dixon—she has got her breath back—on addressing the inequalities faced by unpaid carers. This is for a general debate in either Westminster Hall or the Chamber. Over to you, Anna.

Anna Dixon: Good afternoon, and thank you very much for inviting me to speak to this Backbench Business debate application on the theme of the inequalities faced by unpaid carers. I am the chair of the APPG on carers.



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Through that APPG, we have support from more than 60 Members across the parties.

There are 5.8 million people in the UK who provide unpaid care for family members or friends and, sadly, despite the amazing care that they give, they experience quite a wide range of negative impacts. It is Carers Week this week. The theme of Carers Week this year is inequalities experienced by carers. That is why I would like to put forward that theme for a Backbench Business debate.

Briefly, those inequalities include financial insecurity. Many carers are either unable to continue to work at all or may have to reduce their hours to fulfil their unpaid caring duties. Many young carers forgo educational opportunities, missing out on those life chances—Chris is very aware of the issues facing young carers.

We know there are big inequalities in their mental and physical health. They experience inequalities in access to healthcare from the NHS, and many of them get very socially isolated. Many of you will have constituents, if not already family and friends, who are affected. It can become quite socially isolating for people if they are unable to leave home, and often they do not get respite.

While the Government have made progress in a number of areas around carer's allowance, the Employment Rights Bill and saying they will have a review of unpaid carers, we believe there are many more issues that need debating, such as the financial assistance that is needed, and the access to breaks, affordable social care and proper NHS care. There is also further work to do on their rights, in particular stronger protections for carers from discrimination. That is why the APPG on carers would also hope as part of this debate to seek some assurances from the Government on things that might be included in the carers strategy.

As you can see, there are many issues that could be debated. We previously had an Adjournment debate led by the hon. Member for North East Fife. That was really well attended with many Members. I know Adjournment debates do not always get good attendance, but it got very high attendance.

Many Members have expressed an interest through their membership of the APPG, and many more who are not directly involved have constituents who face some of these inequalities as carers. We think it would be a very good opportunity for Back Benchers to speak to the many and wide-ranging issues that affect carers in their constituencies.

Q13 Chris Vince: I have a question and a solution for you. You only have three Government Members. You need to have four.

Anna Dixon: Oh dear. Right.

Chris Vince: You can put me down as your fourth. Obviously, as you alluded to, this is an interesting topic for me.

Anna Dixon: Thank you very much, Chris. That is my error; it is the first time I have applied.

Chris Vince: You can put me down—with your permission, Chair.

Q14 **Chair:** You have asked for a general debate in Westminster Hall or the Chamber. Just so that you are clear, the queue for the Chamber is enormous, so you are likely to be allocated a Westminster Hall debate. If it is a Tuesday, I am assuming that Health and Social Care would be the answering Department. Is that right?

Anna Dixon: Yes. It is interesting, because this touches on a number of issues, which is one of the challenges. Where we have specifically had a debate on carer's allowance, that was with somebody from the DWP. Where we have been looking at carer's leave, the Minister, Justin Madders, is from DBT. But in general, this often does sit under DHSC. So yes, that is where we are sitting it, but I think we would expect Members to wish to talk about a wider range of issues.

Q15 **Chair:** It is just that for a Tuesday, we have to allocate when the relevant Department is due to answer. For a Thursday, it does not matter, but for a Tuesday it does. If this gets an allocation for a Tuesday debate, we would have to be clear who the answering Department were, to alert the relevant Minister to come along; otherwise, the Government will decide who comes along to answer.

Anna Dixon: I understand. I think the overall ministerial lead is seen to be DHSC, even though aspects touch on other Departments

Q16 **Chair:** I understand. Any other questions or comments? No.

Thank you very much, Anna. The Clerks will be in touch with you in due course. You have said that this week is Carers Week; clearly, we are not able to allocate this week. Is there any timeframe? Are there any other occasions?

Anna Dixon: In coming to this, the observation was that there are few opportunities to put in for timely debates because everything is so booked up. I did not want to miss the opportunity—obviously I am bidding for this in Carers Week—but that is an annual event. So it would be as soon as is possible for your schedule.

Q17 **Chair:** We will not make you wait until Carers Week next year.

Anna Dixon: That would be great. Thanks for your flexibility on timing.

Chair: You arrived just at the right moment.

Anna Dixon: The Whip will be happy if I get back to the Bill Committee in time.

Chair: That concludes the Committee's formal business. The Committee will now retire to consider the applications in private.