

Backbench Business Committee

Representations: Backbench Debates

Tuesday 25 November 2025

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 25 November 2025.

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

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Representations made

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Mrs Sharon Hodgson made representations.

Q1 Chair: Welcome to this meeting of the Backbench Business Committee. We will be considering applications from colleagues for debates in the Chamber and in Westminster Hall on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

First up today is Sharon Hodgson with a request for a debate on the need for prison officers in all types of prison to be provided with mandatory protective body armour. This is an application for a Westminster Hall debate on either a Tuesday or a Thursday. Over to you, Sharon.

Mrs Hodgson: Thank you so much, Chair and Committee, for agreeing to hear my application today.

My constituent Claire Lewis was a prison officer at HMP Frankland, working on the ordinary wing. In 2010, Claire was stabbed in the back with a broken bottle, leaving her with life-changing physical and psychological scars. Recently, there was a very high-profile case, as there often is, of prison officers being attacked. That led to her wanting to do something about it, so she set up a petition on change.org, which has reached over 30,000 signatures: it calls for mandatory anti-stab and anti-slash protective gear for all prison officers.

I was also able to get a constituency petition, which I presented to Parliament and to which I had a response from the Government. I wrote to Ministers and had a response, which basically said that there would be extra protective gear for up to 10,000 more officers, but it will be those working in high-security facilities.

Claire has retired now, but generally the issue is getting worse, because lessons have failed to be learned. According to HM Prison and Probation Service, there has been a 20% increase in attacks across England and Wales over the last five years. It is very welcome that 10,000 more prison officers are to be given stab-proof vests and hundreds of tasers, but it still does not address the issue that all prisoners can be dangerous in one form or another or can have mental health concerns. They might not have started off wanting to stab a prison officer, but I can imagine—I don't ever want to be there—that prison is not a nice place. Lots of them, even in the non-high-security establishments, can end up being very dangerous people.

It is not just the frontline officers who need protective gear; it is all officers. They are just trying to do their job and trying to protect the country from dangerous individuals. They all deserve the same level of protection. Ministerial correspondence that I have received has focused on the action taken to increase the number of stab-proof vests and tasers in the high-security prisons, but that really needs to be extended.

I have had lots of support from colleagues across the House when I have asked about this subject, so I think it would be worthy of a debate that brings a Minister to the House to give a response.

Q2 Chair: As this is a Tuesday application, can I check which Ministry would be answering? We have to allocate it for the rota.

Mrs Hodgson: The Home Office or Justice.

Chair: Which? They answer on different days.

Mrs Hodgson: The Home Office.

- Q3 **Martin Vickers:** Debate titles should be expressed in neutral terms, so would you be happy to amend the title slightly to “Potential merits of mandatory body armour for prison officers”?

Mrs Hodgson: Yes.

Martin Vickers: That would still allow you to contribute in the same way.

Mrs Hodgson: I am happy with that, yes.

- Q4 **Mary Glendon:** I have visited Frankland and Durham jail. The police officers there showed us hundreds of examples of the kind of weaponry that is put together by the very clever inmates, which looked lethal.

You said that it was 2010 when sadly your constituent suffered that horrendous injury. You will be aware of the House’s sub judice resolution, which prevents the discussion of ongoing legal cases. Could you just confirm that there are no ongoing legal proceedings in that case?

Mrs Hodgson: Yes, I can confirm that—absolutely.

- Q5 **Jonathan Davies:** Prisons are the responsibility of the Ministry of Justice, so why do you want the Home Office to answer?

Mrs Hodgson: I think that is who I have written to. I had correspondence with Home Office Ministers. Was it Yvette? *[Interruption.]* Ah, yes. You are right: I wrote to Lord Timpson and he is in Justice, so that is a very good question.

Chair: We will mark this down as Justice.

Mrs Hodgson: Do you think this would be more Justice than Home Office? I would be happy with either, but yes, it was Lord Timpson.

Chair: All right. The Clerks will be in touch when we have time to allocate such a debate.

Jim Shannon made representations.

- Q6 **Chair:** Next up is our season ticket holder, Jim Shannon—a late arrival, but he is welcome none the less. This is a request for a Tuesday debate in Westminster Hall on freedom of religion or belief in Sudan.

Jim Shannon: First of all, I apologise: I did not know you had started. We were sitting outside having a wee chat, and then I said, “We’d better knock on the door—it’s 17 minutes past.” Thank you, Chairman and Committee, for giving me the opportunity to request a debate.

We have had a statement and UQs on Sudan, but we have yet to have an in-depth debate about how things are going there. We know all the tragedies; we know about the probably 2 million people who have been



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displaced, and about the murders and the killings. We know that Christians specifically have been targeted because of what is happening. The Rapid Support Forces have been very clinical in killing people. One of the leaders of the RSF was on Facebook or something, saying that he killed over 2,000 people, as if that were a badge of courage. The things that are happening really worry me. The Pentecostal church in El Haj Yousif, El Shegla in Khartoum was burned by extremists on 8 July. The Sudanese episcopal church, the Africa Inland church and the Roman Catholic church in El Fasher were bombed by the RSF in June. There have been reports of arrests and detention by the SAF.

Given the scale of the atrocities and the heightened risk to religious groups, we think it is time that this matter was debated in some depth. A lot of Members are interested in what is happening in Sudan; we had 16 Members apply and there were others I did not get a chance to ask. I am quite confident that we will get the turnout we need for this one. The Minister would be Hamish Falconer, I think.

Chair: For the FCDO.

Jim Shannon: Yes. This is a copy of the request with all 16 names.

Alison Hume: Thank you, Jim. I note that you have just three Labour names on your list at the moment. We would probably look for a fourth for an even split.

Q7 **Chair:** There are only eight names on the application, but you said that you had got 16.

Jim Shannon: This is the up-to-date one. There are 15 names on it, and four are Labour. I was surprised by what you said there—I think the girl from the APPG went around and asked a few people, but I wanted to ask people personally. This is probably the one that you want.

Q8 **Alison Hume:** We appreciate you coming and pitching, as a season ticket holder and frequent flyer, but how confident are you that the supporters of your application will actually participate in your debate? The reason I am asking, Jim, is that we recently allocated you a debate on end-of-life care, but when we checked, none of the people on the application had participated, and the debate finished in less than an hour.

Jim Shannon: Was that on a Thursday? It probably was. Sometimes people have other things to do on a Thursday, and I understand that. It also means that they have to stay behind for an extra day. We supplemented that debate with other people, if I recall rightly, who perhaps were not on the list.

Besides the 16 names on the list I gave you, I am quite confident that there will be many others who will wish to participate. If I had had time, I would have run round them all. Quite a number of Members have wanted to ask a question on Sudan in the Chamber, and I have only asked three of them. I am confident that we will be able to do that, and if we get a debate on a Tuesday, that is even better.



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Q9 Chris Vince: This is going to sound like a bit of a leading question, because I think I know what you are going to say. The Committee recently allocated a debate on freedom of religion or belief in foreign policy, which was David Smith. I think I know what your answer will be, but are there specific issues with freedom of religion that particularly apply to the terrible things going on in Sudan? We recognise that the freedom of religion part is very important, but do you think that there is scope for a wider debate on Sudan as well?

Jim Shannon: I think the wider debate on Sudan specifically targets and focuses on what is happening in Sudan. Something like 6 million people have been displaced. The latest atrocities in El Fasher indicate the specific violence and bestiality that has taken place there. They went to a hospital, and they killed every person inside. I cannot get my head around how anybody would ever want to do that.

Given the levels of violence and atrocity, I think it is time that Members of this House had a chance to focus attention on Sudan to such an extent that hopefully the Minister can give some reassurance on what we are doing. I do not doubt for one second that the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and its Government are working on it, but we really need to do something. There is a genocide going on that the world has ignored, and I think it is time that the world focused on Sudan.

Q10 Chair: Jim, you have submitted a large number of the applications on our waiting list. Where would you place this in terms of priority?

Jim Shannon: I applied a few months ago for one on the Chinook tragedy. I understand that that has been allocated a debate tomorrow.

Chair: We have agreed that that will be taken off our list, because it has already got a debate.

Jim Shannon: That is one I can remove, because I am quite happy for it to go forward. I will go and support Alex Easton, who is the proposer.

I cannot remember all the debates that I have requested, to be honest. I know that there are quite a few. There is one on Myanmar.

Chair: Yes, that is the first one on the list.

Jim Shannon: You mentioned in the Chamber last Thursday, Mr Chairman, that you had enough Westminster Hall debates to take us through to Easter. Is that right?

Chair: Yes.

Jim Shannon: If I have one every month for the next five months, would that be okay? I would just suggest that that is the best way forward.
[Laughter.]

Chair: All right. Well, the Clerks will be in touch with you when we have time to allocate.



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Jim Shannon: I will mark a day every month in the diary! Thank you very much.

Martin Vickers: We should give the first Thursday of every month to Jim.

Alison Hume: Make it Jim Shannon day.

Chair: Well, only if it is the second debate.

Vikki Slade made representations.

Q11 **Chair:** Welcome, Vikki. You have an application for a debate in the Chamber on modernising the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency.

Vikki Slade: Yes, and this is my first time in front of the Backbench Business Committee, rather than being a frequent flyer. I am seeking a debate after raising this issue during business questions on a Thursday last month. The Government have moved on some changes to driving testing, which is welcome, with young people having long waits and the bots intervening, but I am sure I am not alone in being inundated with problems that residents are having—not just new learner drivers, where I am particularly worried about the length of time when they have a pre-existing medical condition, but people who are seeking to renew their driving licence or have had their driving licence taken from them.

From the many, many bits of correspondence that I have had with the DVLA, it seems to be quite clear that it is a reactive service and that there is no system of automation for chasing doctors. If a doctor does not reply, it just sits there for months until someone approaches their MP. It is really inefficient. I have heard stories of DVLA staff actively being told not to try to help people, which I hope is not true. There is no system to bring things into the modern age; there is very little use of email and of proactive work.

I had 31 people signed up at the time of submission. That is now up to 33—and I did not put myself on, so we can make that 34. Of the 31, there were 11 Labour MPs and others across the political spectrum. I know that when I have spoken about DVLA issues, a lot of people in the Chamber have commented that they have had similar issues.

If we are talking about modernising the driving system, there may well be opportunities for people to raise their issues about graduated driving licences, about driving at the other end of the spectrum when people are older, about people being able to use their driving licence for minibuses for volunteer driving, now that younger people do not get those additions automatically, or about international driving licences and Ukrainians being able to drive. There is a good opportunity for all those things. I cannot see that this has been debated in recent times in any substantive way, and I am very confident that people will bring all their constituency issues.

Q12 **Will Stone:** The title should be expressed in neutral terms. I am not sure how “modernising” is not neutral, but would you be happy to change your title by replacing “modernising” with “reform”? You would still be able to



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discuss exactly the same thing, but it would make it a lot easier for us.

Vikki Slade: Apart from my slight aversion to the word “reform”—I am trying to reduce my use of that word in my common parlance—I will do it, if that helps.

Jonathan Davies: Another thing to mention is the big black market around driving tests.

Vikki Slade: Yes, the bots.

Q13 **Jonathan Davies:** The Committee has 16 debates asking for Chamber time on its waiting list, which is likely to take until March to allocate. Are you happy to wait?

Vikki Slade: It won't be as long as some of my residents have to wait for their driving licences, will it?

This is really important, and I do not think that it is going to change in the next few months, so if we need to wait for it, let's get it on the list.

Chair: Are there any other questions? No.

Thank you for your presentation. The Clerks will be in touch when we have a slot for you.

Andrew George made representations.

Q14 **Chair:** Next, we have Andrew George with an application for a debate in Westminster Hall on a Tuesday or Thursday, on Government policy on accessibility of banking services—a much-debated issue in this House.

Andrew George: Yes, that may be the case. It is precipitated, as all these things are, by experience in our own patch. In my patch, there is a proposal from Lloyds for the closure of banks in the area. When it completes that range of closures, it will be going from having 39 banks throughout Cornwall 10 years ago to having just one, in Truro.

I need to declare an interest, because I have been a member of Lloyds for many, many years, since I was yay high, and still am, although I will probably take my business elsewhere if it closes the bank in Penzance. But it is not about that particular branch. I am talking to other MPs who are affected; there are 38 around the country on this occasion.

This debate raises a number of other issues regarding digital exclusion, the position of vulnerable customers and so on. If you take my constituency as a whole, Lloyds has informed us that it has 33,000 customers there, which would make it substantially the largest bank of the high street banks, because obviously we all have standard populations. More than 1,000 people are using the branch on a regular basis, and it is still closing it. Although it says that customers have chosen to use apps or online and telephone banking, it is very clear that across all banks, when you are met, it is by a member of the bank's staff who tries to chaperone you into using electronic or other means of banking and deflect you away from face-to-face banking services.



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The issue for us to consider as legislators is the impact on the resilience of our financial services and our business and economic security. I notice that the Business and Trade Committee has published a report today called "Toward a new doctrine for economic security." It does not have a section on the banking industry, but I have dropped Liam Byrne a line to ask whether his Committee would or should look at the security of financial services in this country as well.

I know that you will say, "We have banking hubs—surely that is sufficient." You can, of course, bank through the Post Office, but it is a very ephemeral service in comparison with that of high street banks. We are rushing at this at high speed, so, as you will have noticed, I have not had the opportunity to gather as many MPs to support this application as I would have liked, but I can go out and gather many more. I know that many people I have spoken to are enormously worried about the impact, particularly on the digitally excluded.

Q15 Mary Glindon: On the point about gathering more supporters for the debate, the Committee asks for four Back Benchers from the Government side to support Westminster Hall debates. You have only three on the application. Do you think you could find another one to support this debate?

Andrew George: I do not think I will have any difficulty. If I have failed in that regard—well, it is a pathetic excuse for an MP to say, "I delegated it to staff," isn't it? But—

Chair: You are the one in front of the Committee!

Andrew George: I will deal with it. If need be, I will nobble them in the Chamber or the Lobbies this evening. Is that the language I am supposed to use?

Mary Glindon: You have used it.

Andrew George: It is on the record.

Q16 Chair: This is an application for a Tuesday as well as a Thursday. What would the answering Department be: the Treasury?

Andrew George: My understanding is that it would be Business and Trade, because it is about the resilience of financial services rather than the economy as a whole.

Chair: Are there any other questions? No. Thank you very much; the Clerks will be in touch when we have a slot to offer.

Andrew George: Thank you very much indeed for listening.

Wera Hobhouse made representations.

Q17 Chair: Next up is Wera Hobhouse, with an application for a Westminster Hall debate on a Tuesday morning, on Eating Disorders Awareness Week 2026. Wera, please present your application.



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Wera Hobhouse: Thank you, Chair and members of the Committee, for letting me speak to my application this afternoon. For many years now, this Committee has kindly allocated a debate for Eating Disorders Awareness Week. It is something that the eating disorder charity Beat asks Parliament to do as part of Eating Disorders Awareness Week, which in 2026 will be from 23 February to 1 March. A day that falls around that week—either a Tuesday or a Thursday—would be most welcome. The week before would also be fine.

This is about the importance of keeping eating disorders on the agenda in Parliament. Eating disorders are on the rise, particularly since covid. You will know, Chair, that I chair the eating disorders all-party parliamentary group, and I have raised eating disorders many times in Parliament. This is an opportunity for many other Members, who either have constituents who have been, or have actually personally been, in touch with the tragedy of eating disorders, to raise the issue in Parliament and look at improving our eating disorder services. Granting a debate would be very welcome.

Q18 **Chair:** You have mentioned a Thursday. At the moment, the application is only for a Tuesday. It is your application, but we are quite happy to add Thursdays.

Wera Hobhouse: That is interesting: on my draft, it says Tuesday for 90 minutes or Thursday for 90 minutes, but I don't know whether that reached you.

Chair: I have a copy of the application here.

Wera Hobhouse: I would be happy with either.

Q19 **Chair:** Thank you; we will add that. Which would the answering Department be?

Wera Hobhouse: Health.

Chair: Are there any other questions from colleagues? No.

Thank you for putting an application in so early. It is very helpful to us in staging the potential debate. The Clerks will be in touch with you in due course.

Martin Wrigley made representations.

Q20 **Chair:** Our final application, from Martin Wrigley, is for a debate in Westminster Hall on either a Tuesday or a Thursday, on the NHS federated data platform.

Martin Wrigley: The NHS federated data platform sounds like a very technical thing, but it impacts everything in the NHS. The recent NHS medium-term planning framework, which came out in October this year, has mandated that its platform be now rolled out to every acute provider, every community provider and every mental health provider in the NHS.

You may have seen a recent article in *Prospect* magazine talking about this very system.

Last month, the NHS England report encouraged all trusts to throw out their existing solutions and use the Palantir-provided Foundry platform, the NHS federated data platform. This move, and the wider reliance on US-based AI analytics companies, is a worry to the Science, Innovation and Technology Committee and to Members across the House.

Palantir has contracts for significant systems in the Cabinet Office, the NHS, defence, police and more. The federated data platform was supposed to be a framework open to third-party solutions, but that has not happened. The reliance on US companies inhibits the development of and opportunity for UK sovereign AI solutions, which is a target that the Government have soundly set.

This debate will throw light on the issues around this NHS core platform and will allow Members from all sides of the House to air their concerns and get some answers from a Government Minister. Those concerns are shared by many outside agencies, including the BMA. It may sound technical, but it impacts all our futures and all the NHS services that we receive.

Q21 Martin Vickers: We ask for four Government Back Benchers to support each of our applications. Hopefully you could add another one.

Martin Wrigley: I picked that up from the previous application. Given that Clive Lewis has also commented on it, I am sure that he would be happy to sign, so yes, I can certainly add a fourth.

Q22 Chair: I take it, because it is a Tuesday application, that Health and Social Care would be the answering Department.

Martin Wrigley: The answering Department, I think, is DSIT, because it is looking after the digital implementation of all these things. On the application form, I put down for the Chamber on Tuesday or Thursday.

Chair: Not on our form it isn't! So you want to add the Chamber to it?

Martin Wrigley: Yes, please. Thursday is fine as well—thank you.

Chair: Ah, I see what you have done.

Martin Wrigley: I apologise if we have filled in the form wrong.

Chair: That is fine. Thank you very much; the Clerks will be in touch when we have a slot to allocate.

Martin Wrigley: Thank you very much indeed.

Chair: That concludes the public business of the Committee. The Committee will now go into private session to review the applications and allocate time.