

Backbench Business Committee

Representations: Backbench Debates

Tuesday 2 December 2025

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Members present: Bob Blackman (Chair); Jonathan Davies; Mr Lee Dillon; Mary Glendon; Martin Vickers.

Questions 1-15

Representations made

I. Ben Lake and Simon Hoare

II. Cameron Thomas

III. Clive Jones

IV. Dame Siobhain McDonagh, Charlie Maynard and Mike Wood.

Simon Hoare and **Ben Lake** made representations.

Q1 **Chair:** Welcome to this meeting of the Backbench Business Committee, where we receive applications from colleagues for debates in both the Chamber and Westminster Hall on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The first application is for a debate on St David's Day and Welsh affairs. Ruth Jones is not able to be with us, so Simon Hoare and Ben Lake are presenting the application. This is for a debate in the Chamber. Over to you, Ben.

Ben Lake: I thank Committee members for allowing us to make this application. We were very grateful to the Committee for granting us a debate back in February for this year's St David's Day, and we are here to apply for next year's St David's Day. You will see that we have asked for a half-day debate this time. It was discussed when we were applying last year that perhaps an hour and a half was more appropriate given the pressures on time for Back-Bench business. We were very grateful for the hour and a half, but sadly as is often the case we ran out of time, such was the interest from Members—not just those from Wales, but also colleagues who have a great affinity with Wales and want to celebrate St David's Day, such as my good colleague here, Mr Hoare.

The date that we are applying for would coincide with not only St David's Day itself, which is a wonderful coincidence, but Wales Week London. Wales Week London has grown from strength to strength—I think it is in its eighth year now—and, broadly speaking, it is a fortnight in which various organisations with a connection to Wales or an affinity with Wales come together to celebrate all things Welsh.

From Gareth Bale and other football stars—there are also still a few rugby stars, in any case—to businesses and cultural institutions, they all gather in London for a series of civic events, talks and celebrations. It just so happens that the timings in 2026 would allow us to have the debate both near St David's Day and during that period of Wales Week London, when there is a lot more of an interest in Welsh affairs in London, not just from all Welsh people but from the media and other outside organisations.

You will see also that the application has secured cross-party support. The Welsh Affairs Committee in particular is keen to support it, as are the leading Welsh Members of all the political parties represented in the House of Commons. Is there anything you might want to add, Mr Hoare?

Simon Hoare: Obviously, there will be important elections for the Senedd in Wales next year. Matters Welsh will be, I think, pre-eminent in lots of colleagues' minds, and they will want to set out their stalls for where they see Wales's place, either within or outwith the Union, and the opportunities for growth—economic, cultural, linguistic, and so on.

I therefore certainly echo—as will all members of the Welsh Affairs Committee, on which I have the pleasure of sitting, as a Welshman—that we would appreciate that greater length of debate to better reflect what is a demonstrable demand, given previous events.



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Chair: Thank you. Lee?

- Q2 **Mr Dillon:** I was going to ask about the length of the debate, but you covered that in your introductory remarks by saying that you would like the three hours.

Ben Lake: Yes, please.

- Q3 **Martin Vickers:** Have you considered a substantive motion for the debate, perhaps calling on the Government to implement some specific recommendations that have been made by, for example, the Select Committee?

Ben Lake: It is a very good suggestion, Mr Vickers. I would be happy to discuss that with the Chair of the Welsh Affairs Committee, Ruth Jones, because, as you would expect, we have made some reports and recommendations in recent months that could very much form the basis of a more substantive motion, if that was something that this Committee—

Martin Vickers: I think that is something you can liaise with the Clerks about.

Simon Hoare: If I may, it is undoubtedly true that that is often a very good hook to hang a debate on, but if it narrows things down to a specific Committee report, it can make the debate a bit exclusive just to those who are members of the Committee, rather than those who have a wider interest—whether they are representing a Welsh constituency, are Welsh and representing a constituency outside Wales, or just have very strong affinities—but are not part of the Select Committee and therefore do not want to impinge upon a piece of detailed work that Select Committee colleagues have done. But we will take it under advisement, as they say.

Chair: Okay. Thank you for getting an early application in. As you probably know, we have a long queue for the Chamber—so much so that we have enough debates to allocate them up until the Easter recess. For example, the St Andrew's Day debate, which would have been either just before or just after St Andrew's Day, is now taking place on 11 December—a couple of weeks late, effectively. Thank you for your application; the Clerks will be in touch with you in due course about arrangements to make.

Cameron Thomas made representations.

- Q4 **Chair:** The next application, from Cameron Thomas, is for a Chamber debate on support for the Gurkha veterans.

Cameron Thomas: Thank you, Chair, and members of the Committee. For over two centuries, since 1816, the Gurkhas have served with the UK armed forces in defence of UK interests at home and across the world. Our trusted and most loyal Nepalese friends have served with distinction through two world wars and in theatres from the Falkland Islands to Korea, acquiring 13 Victoria Crosses. According to the Office for National Statistics, in 2019 there were 76,000 citizens of Nepalese descent in the United Kingdom, across every constituency. In 2008 the Gurkhas won a



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landmark case at the High Court whereby those who retired prior to 1997 who had served for four years with the British army would be allowed to settle in Britain.

Unfortunately, our Gurkha veterans face continuing injustices. Those Gurkhas who retired prior to 1997 continue to receive a small fraction of the pensions received by the British personnel who they served alongside. The 2007 Labour Government reviewed Gurkha terms of service, enabling those serving after 1997 to move on to the armed forces pension scheme, with some caveats. But those who retired before 1997, including many of those who fought so bravely in the Falklands conflict, continue to endure injustice.

The application is supported by 20 Liberal Democrat, six Labour, five Reform and four Conservative MPs, and by one independent and one TUV MP. I hope to acquire support from around the House. It aims to bring this issue before the Government, enabling the House to highlight the injustices faced by the Gurkha veterans and to recognise their service in line with that of their British brothers in arms.

Q5 Mary Glendon: I just wonder when you would like the debate to take place. The Committee currently has 15 debates waiting for time in the main Chamber. For you, the wait might be until shortly before the Easter recess. Are you willing to wait?

Cameron Thomas: I certainly am, and I should have mentioned—I apologise—that we are hoping for a time no sooner than February.

Q6 Jonathan Davies: Have you considered a substantive motion for this debate, which might set out your concerns and call on the Government to take action?

Cameron Thomas: I have, but I specifically opted for this, purely because I would like to give Members from around the House, many of whom have spoken of their Gurkha veterans, an opportunity to join a debate.

Chair: You have a lot of speakers here. The experience in the Chamber is that we never get a three-hour debate; it is squeezed to two and a half or maybe even two hours, with statements and urgent questions. Obviously, one of the concerns is that people will get, maybe, one or two minutes to speak if they all turn up. We encourage people to apply for these debates, but you need to alert people to potential time limits for it. Thank you for your application. The Clerks will be in touch with you in due course, when your time comes up in the queue, and we will try to get you in for late February or early March, if it is possible to do so.

Cameron Thomas: Thank you for your consideration.

Clive Jones made representations.

Q7 Chair: The next application is from Clive Jones and Mary Kelly Foy for a debate on secondary breast cancer. It is an application for a 90-minute

debate on a Tuesday morning.

Clive Jones: Thank you, Chair, and Committee members for letting me speak to my application this afternoon. I am afraid that Mary is unable to join us, so it is just me.

Secondary breast cancer occurs when the disease spreads to other parts of the body. For those affected, every extra month matters, yet far too often their voices are not heard. It is estimated that around 61,000 people are living with secondary breast cancer in the UK, but the truth is that we do not know the exact number. Despite the introduction of mandatory data collection by the NHS trusts in England in 2013, that collection just does not happen; it is not routinely captured.

Without accurate data, the NHS cannot properly plan services to provide the support that these patients need. If we do not start to count people properly, we risk overlooking them. Collecting and publishing this data is vital to ensuring that the services that we provide are properly designed around the real needs of patients. Accurate data is a vital foundation to ensure that we are providing everyone with secondary breast cancer with access to the right treatments at the time.

Over the last 10 years, many new drugs for secondary breast cancer have been approved for use across the UK. They have transformed people's lives, allowing them to live longer in better health and giving them more important moments with their friends and family doing what really matters to them. Charities such as Breast Cancer Now and METUPUK and many in the wider breast cancer community are deeply concerned that changes that have been made to the way that drugs are now assessed by NICE—especially the introduction of a severity modifier in 2022—will impact any progress in the next few years.

We would like to have a debate to shine a light on this and some other issues, to ensure that the NHS routinely collects and publishes accurate data on secondary breast cancer, as it is meant to do, and to fix the system so that people with advanced cancers can access new and effective treatments, which could give them, in many cases, quite a bit of time. We therefore ask the Committee if they will allocate time during the week of World Cancer Day, which is 4 February.

Q8 **Chair:** The 4th of February?

Clive Jones: Yes. That is a Wednesday, so it might be good if we could have the debate on Tuesday 3 February, because it would give a lot of visibility to these important issues. The national cancer plan has every chance of being published on 4 February, so it would be very good to have the debate around then.

Q9 **Chair:** This is a Tuesday application, so we obviously have to allocate it when the rota says that the Department is answering. I assume that Health and Social Care will be the answering Department.

Clive Jones: Yes.



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Chair: Okay. It depends on what the rota looks like around that time as to how we allocate the debate.

- Q10 **Mr Dillon:** Thanks for that presentation, Clive. I know you have been campaigning on all types of cancer for many years, so I am not surprised to see your name on this application. It has a lot of support—37 Members have indicated that they want to participate in the debate. Do you think a 90-minute Westminster Hall debate will be sufficient?

Clive Jones: I guess that is what we have asked for, but if you can find a way to give us more time, that would be great.

- Q11 **Chair:** The only way we could give you more time would be to allocate it for a Thursday, but you have applied for a Tuesday.

Clive Jones: Even having the debate on Thursday 5 February would be good.

Chair: You are amending your application accordingly to add Thursday on.

Clive Jones: Yes—to add the option.

Chair: Alright, thank you.

Clive Jones: Sorry, we did not get that right.

Chair: That is fine. The Clerks will be in touch with you in due course when we know the answering Department's rota, when we have the time to allocate, and so on. Thank you very much.

Dame Siobhain McDonagh, Charlie Maynard and Mike Wood made representations.

- Q12 **Chair:** The final application before us is from Siobhain McDonagh and others on increasing survival rates for brain tumours. This is an application for a debate in the Chamber.

Dame Siobhain McDonagh: Thank you. Our application is for a debate on survival rates relating to brain cancer. Brain cancer is the largest killer of children and people under 40 in the UK, and has seen some of the worst improvement rates over the last 30 years. The specific brain tumour type that I am particularly interested in, glioblastoma, has seen no improvement in outcomes in over 30 years. The amount of money that comes from cancer charities or from the National Institute for Health and Care Research for work on brain tumours is very low. Unless we campaign hard and raise the profile, that is unlikely to change. The system will not change itself unless we try to change it.

We have extensive cross-party support for this debate. If we were able to secure it before the publication of the national cancer plan, it would raise the profile not only of brain tumours but of all rare cancers. As a country, our outcomes for rare cancers are so poor. I am not sure if my colleagues have anything to add.



Mike Wood: You will see that this application is based on a substantive motion. It aims to build on what I think was a successful debate on a private Member's Bill earlier this year—the Rare Cancers Bill, introduced by Dr Scott Arthur—on which 29 Members of Parliament spoke on Second Reading, and the debate lasted just over three hours. We are therefore confident that there would be interest in this particular debate on increasing survival rates for brain tumours. Being a private Member's Bill, it could not really deal with things that would we were going to require, such as spending commitments. This debate is about trying to shape the Government's cancer strategy, first, to make sure that the £40 million committed in 2018 is delivered in the research that will make a difference, and to ensure that the clinical trials that can help save lives happen. We know that only 3% of brain tumour patients are currently enrolled in clinical trials.

While we are building on Dr Arthur's private Member's Bill, this is a distinct area—one that could not be covered within that Bill—but which has the potential to save many lives. Some 16,000 people are diagnosed with a brain tumour every year, of whom 3,200 are diagnosed with glioblastoma, as Siobhain says. Many of those deaths will be preventable if the research is done and if we can build up those survival rates that, as has been said, have been static for so long.

Charlie Maynard: I would just say one thing: the national cancer plan is out in early February. My beg is that, if you are able to squeeze us in before that, it would make more of a difference than after that. If that is at all possible, that is my request.

Q13 **Chair:** Dam Siobhain, you had a debate on this, I think, on 8 May, with a very similar motion. What is going to be different about this debate compared with the previous one? The reason I ask is that, as you will have heard, we now have a queue of debates taking us up to the Easter recess. To be absolutely fair to colleagues, having two debates in the same Session is, in some people's eyes, unfair, because they do not get their chance in the Chamber. How would you answer that?

Dame Siobhain McDonagh: I think the debate in May helped us considerably raise the profile of the issue. Other things we have managed to do in the Chamber since then have also kept the pressure on the Government. There is also the proximity of the cancer plan, which, as Charlie says, is going to be out in early February. About 45% of people diagnosed with cancer are diagnosed with a rare cancer.

This is specifically about brain tumours, but we also want to bring in other rare cancers. We know that there are large forces that prevent this work from being done, and we know that this could be a very purposeful thing that Members could do to change the profile of this disease. Without us, it will continue to be the Cinderella of cancers.

We are currently running a stage 1 trial at University College London on glioblastoma. It is due to last for 18 months, and there are 16 patients. We have five patients in the trial at the moment, so we are ahead of



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schedule, and we are preparing for our second trial. We just think it should not be down just to philanthropy; there needs to be wider responsibility.

Charlie Maynard: This is about pressure. If we know that we have secured this debate, and they know we have secured this debate ahead of 4 February, we are more likely to get a better result out of them. That is the key message.

Q14 **Chair:** So effectively you want this debate in January—is that what you are saying?

Dame Siobhain McDonagh: If possible.

Chair: Fine. The Committee will decide on that when we come to the January allocations, but at the moment we are allocated fully up to the Christmas recess. We will consider it as we go through the allocations for January. Thank you for your application. The Clerks will be in touch when we can find time for your debate on our long list.

Dame Siobhain McDonagh: Thank you for your time.

Chair: That concludes the applications put to the Committee. The Committee will now go into private session to consider the applications and the allocation of time.