

Backbench Business Committee

Representations: Backbench Debates

Tuesday 9 June 2026

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

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Witnesses

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Alison Gardner made representations.

Q1 **Chair:** Welcome to the meeting of the Backbench Business Committee, where we will be considering applications from colleagues for debates in the Chamber, and in Westminster Hall on a Tuesday and a Thursday. The first application we are considering is from Alison Gardner. This is for a debate in the Chamber on medical misogyny. Alison, please present your case.

Dr Gardner: While women live longer than men, they spend more of their lives in ill health or disability, with over 1.5 million economically inactive women. I am pleased that medical misogyny has been included in the women's health strategy and acknowledge the excellent Women and Equalities Committee report. Despite that, the term medical misogyny is not well understood or defined. A debate would allow the opportunity to clarify the scope and definition of the term, and ensure that future policy does not have unintended consequences, such as reducing women to their reproductive organs or indeed creating resistance or backlash. I just discovered, while I was waiting in here, that the women's health strategy is not as well funded as the men's. I think that is a good example of the imbalance that occurs.

It will take significant focus to dismantle decades, if not hundreds of years, of bias in the system that has caused severe damage to women's lives, health and opportunities. There is, for example, the gender gap in research funding and trials, which leads to women's conditions being poorly understood and treated, with male-only trials outnumbering female-only trials by 67%. Hence, particularly with historical exclusion of women from medical trials, the low focus on women-specific health issues. For example, the biggest killer of women in the UK is coronary heart disease, yet only 5.2% of female-specific trials are focused on that. Only 3.7% of all trials are female only.

There is also bias within clinical education and training, as well as social bias. We do not have a clear understanding of what works and what does not work for women. Hence medical misogyny must continue to be discussed and seen as a systematic whole rather than through individual campaigns and issues. This debate would allow women's voice and stories to be heard, thus taking a human-centred approach and emphasising the need for co-production of policy.

I have the support of 24 Government MPs, but also the backing of the entire Labour women's PLP, who encouraged me to do this, and of 10 Opposition MPs. I stopped asking when I hit the 10, but I know there is a wide amount of interest there as well.

Q2 **Martin Vickers:** Alison, as you will be aware, there is a long waiting list for Chamber debates. In order to get it sooner, would you consider Westminster Hall?



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Dr Gardner: I have been asked by many of my colleagues to sit tight and aim for a debate in the Chamber on this. It affects 51% of the population and really is an important matter that needs constant focus.

Chair: All right. Thank you very much, Alison. The Clerks will be in touch with you in due course.

Helen Hayes made representations.

Q3 **Chair:** Next up is Helen Hayes, for a debate in the Chamber or Westminster Hall on Windrush Day 2026.

Helen Hayes: Thank you, Chair. I am applying for a debate to mark Windrush Day 2026, which takes place formally on 22 June. We have had this debate to mark previous Windrush Days, which have been incredibly important to members of the Windrush generation and their descendants. It is an opportunity for Members from across the House to celebrate the contribution of the Windrush generation to their constituencies, but also to speak about some of the injustices that many of our Windrush citizens have suffered because of the scandal at the Home Office. We would be very grateful if the Committee would consider allocating time for this debate again this year.

Q4 **Jonathan Davies:** Thank you for your presentation. We do require an even split of Government and non-Government Members for debates in the Chamber. Would you be able to find two more Opposition Members? If not, would you be content to have your debate in Westminster Hall?

Helen Hayes: I am pretty certain that I can find two more Opposition Members. We gave Members a relatively short amount of time to respond, and we got a good number within that time. I know of at least two Members who I am pretty certain would be happy to support if needed.

Q5 **Jonathan Davies:** You probably just need to let the Clerks know who that would be, as soon as possible.

Helen Hayes: Yes, we will do that.

Q6 **Chair:** Obviously Windrush Day takes place on 22 June, so the other question for you is whether you would accept a debate around that sort of time. Obviously, we cannot guarantee what date that would be.

Helen Hayes: Yes, we absolutely would accept a debate around that time. There are a whole range of different events happening to mark Windrush Day and not all of them are happening on 22 June, so I think that would be more than acceptable.

Q7 **Chair:** Okay, thank you very much. If you could kindly supply the extra couple of names, then that will make your application allowable for the Chamber, as well as for Westminster Hall.

Helen Hayes: I will certainly do that, thank you.

Florence Eshalomi made representations.

Q8 **Chair:** Next up is Florence Eshalomi. This application is for a debate on commonhold and leasehold reform and the regulation of property managing agents. This is a request for a debate in the Chamber, with a divisible motion.

Florence Eshalomi: Good afternoon, Chair and colleagues. I am seeking a three-hour debate in the Chamber based on the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee's pre-legislative scrutiny on the draft Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill. This is a really important debate that will see the House coming forward to express their views on our findings and recommendations ahead of the Government formally introducing the Bill.

One of our clear recommendations in the report is that the Government introduce regulation of property managing agents in the final Bill. That is an issue that has been raised by many Members across the House, so I think there would be a lot of support. This debate is also crucial and timely, because we expect the Government to introduce this Bill before the end of the summer recess; in my application this afternoon, I am requesting that the Committee consider time for this debate in June or July, to enable the House to express its views on the findings of our report and on the need for managing agents to be in the final Bill. There is cross-party support for the need to look at the regulation of managing agents.

More generally, this debate will allow Members from across the House to debate our broader findings, which include the proposal to cap ground rent at £250 a year for all existing leaseholders. Our report is pushing the Government to make sure that cap is brought into force no later than 2027. We also have evidence in our report looking at the 40-year transition period to zero ground rent and asking why a 20-year period was not considered. Again, that would allow Members to advocate for many leaseholders in their constituencies.

Q9 **Will Stone:** Thank you for bringing this forward; this is a massive issue with leasehold in my constituency. You highlighted that you want the debate to happen before summer recess. Do you have a specific date in mind? You said June or July, but it would help us to allocate it if you had a set date.

Florence Eshalomi: We do not have a date yet, but we are pushing the Government to bring in that Bill as soon as possible. We are hoping for the last week of June, and we are happy to be flexible based on the dates that the Committee has.

Q10 **Chair:** Thank you very much, Florence. The Clerks will be in touch with you in due course. We recognise that you are not able to have a debate on—

Florence Eshalomi: On the week commencing the 22nd. That is correct.

Chair: We will try to see what we can do in terms of timing. Thank you.

Alison Bennett made representations.

Q11 Chair: Next up is Alison Bennett. This is a request for a debate on the challenges and inequalities faced by unpaid carers and how care-friendly communities can alleviate them. The request is for a debate in the Chamber.

Alison Bennett: Good afternoon. Thank you, Mr Blackman. This week is Carers Week, and the theme this year is building carer-friendly communities. I am applying for a 90-minute general debate because the role of unpaid carers goes unnoticed far too often and is not discussed enough. There are 5.8 million unpaid carers in the UK, and they contribute a value of £184 billion, but the role of carers is not understood by their communities. I think that is because it is too often hidden—care happens in private—and the experience of carers is so varied. It ranges from the primary school child who is making sure a parent takes their medication to the sandwich carer who is looking after elderly parents and raising a family—maybe having to give up work—and the octogenarian who has been caring for 60 years.

In policy terms, there is so much for hon. Members to discuss. Alan Milburn's recent interim report talks about the plight of people not in education, employment or training, and unpaid carers are over-represented in that group. The DWP carers' allowance overpayment scandal continues to rumble on, and whether it is cuts to respite care made by local authorities or changes to indefinite leave to remain that will impact the paid social care workforce, those have a knock-on impact on unpaid carers. This House has a vital obligation to keep talking about carers, recognising what they do and fighting to get them a better deal.

Q12 Martin Vickers: Alison, you appear to have used an old version of our application form, because we now cannot allocate 90-minute debates in the Chamber, only half-day debates. For that, you would need another four signatures. Bearing in mind the time constraints and that we are in Carers Week already, would you be content with a Westminster Hall debate?

Alison Bennett: Yes, I would. I think that, although it is Carers Week this week, unpaid carers have to do what they do 365 days a year. This debate, whenever we can schedule it, will always be gratefully received.

Q13 Jonathan Davies: Debates need to have a more neutral title. Would you be happy with "Support for Unpaid Carers" as an alternative?

Alison Bennett: Yes, I would.

Q14 Chair: The choice is yours: you can either submit extra names to make this eligible for the Chamber or, alternatively, accept a Westminster Hall debate. I have to say that the queue for the Chamber is huge, whereas if you want a Westminster Hall debate, then we can look at that straight away—but it is your choice.

Alison Bennett: I think my preference would be for the Westminster Hall debate.

Q15 **Chair:** Thank you very much. The Clerks will be in touch with you shortly.

Jim Shannon made representations.

Q16 **Chair:** Next up is our season ticket holder, Jim Shannon, with a request for a debate on making the case for reform in the vascular sector. This is a request for a debate in Westminster Hall debate on a Tuesday, I believe.

Jim Shannon: A Tuesday or a Thursday. Mr Chairman, Committee members, thank you for giving me the opportunity to request another debate. I am chair of the APPG on vascular and venous disease, and it is a topic I have a particular interest in. That does not make me better or more knowledgeable than anybody else, but it does give me an interest in this subject matter. The title of the debate is "Making the case for reform in the vascular sector". We believe that reform is necessary for vascular health. We are very fortunate to have gained the names of Members across the political spectrum, including four from the Labour party.

Despite the dedication of professionals across the sector, the service provision of vascular care continues to suffer from a range of challenges, including inequitable service provision, treatment delays for patients and fragmented referral pathways, avoidable harm, prolonged hospital stays and unnecessary lower limb amputations. That is one of the things that has always concerned me greatly; many people have lost part of their limbs due to a disease that could have perhaps been managed better. For the NHS to deliver better care for the patients within the vascular sector, it is necessary that guidelines are created and the NHS is held accountable to them. That would help to reduce disparities in local outcomes and support a more consistent, high-quality standard of care across the country.

My job is to represent the people who have come to me with their problems. This is a serious problem, and we think that some changes are necessary, to help Government. We are not here to catch anybody out; we are just here to help them to do it better.

Q17 **Will Stone:** You have already answered this, but just to confirm, are you happy with a Thursday? Tuesdays are quite rammed at the moment.

Jim Shannon: I do what the Chairman tells me.

Will Stone: You heard it from the horse's mouth.

Chair: Thank you, Jim. As usual, the Clerks will be in touch with you in due course. The next application is in my name and that of Mary Kelly Foy, so I will vacate the Chair, and Martin will take over for the duration of this particular application.

[Martin Vickers took the Chair]

Bob Blackman and **Mary Kelly Foy** made representations.

Q18 **Chair:** We now have an application in the name of Bob Blackman and Mary Kelly Foy.



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Mary Kelly Foy: This application by Bob and myself, as co-chairs of the APPG on smoking and health, is for a debate focused on why the UK urgently needs a road map to a smoke-free country. While the Tobacco and Vapes Act 2026 is now law and will protect today's children from the harms of tobacco, smoking is still the leading cause of preventable death across the UK. The Act does very little to support the 5.3 million current smokers to quit, and we risk leaving some communities behind without a clear plan on how to achieve a smoke-free country.

This is perfect timing for the debate, as we have a new Public Health Minister who has always been very supportive of this agenda. We would be grateful for the opportunity to bring her to the Dispatch Box to hear the debate and respond. While there have already been debates on the Tobacco and Vapes Act since the Government have been in power, there has not yet been a debate that focuses on support for current smokers. These people must be an important priority as we consider the impact that the legislation and further regulations will have.

We know that the smoke-free 2030 target set by the previous Government will not be met, so we believe it is important to discuss what a new national target could look like. There are many communities with higher smoking prevalence than the national average. These include people with mental health conditions, those experiencing homelessness and poverty, and those doing routine and manual jobs. In these populations, smoking rates can still be as high as 40%. Any plan should have specific targets to reduce smoking in these groups, as we have done in pregnancy with huge success.

It is not currently clear how Labour's manifesto commitment of opt-out cessation services for those in hospital is going to be achieved, so this debate would provide the Minister with a chance to update the House on progress in that area. I hope the Committee agrees that this is a topic of huge importance, and I am happy to answer any questions.

Chair: Bob, do you have anything to add?

Bob Blackman: Last week, we jointly hosted the 50th anniversary of the APPG's formation and celebrated some of the successes. The reality is that we have come an awfully long way over the last 50 years in terms of smoking cessation. As Mary rightly points out, achieving a smoke-free England by 2030 means halving the current rate of people who still smoke.

Remarkable progress has been made on smoking in pregnancy, which is good news, and the Tobacco and Vapes Act is excellent news as well. However, much more needs to be done. These debates have always been led from the Back Benches, and eventually the Government have caught up with the requirements. We want a debate with the new Public Health Minister, to get her to lay out what the Government are going to do in order to achieve this. There is also the aspect of the regulations underpinning the Tobacco and Vapes Act that are needed.



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Q19 **Will Stone:** Debate titles need to be neutrally phrased. Would you consider calling it "Progress towards a smoke-free UK?"

Bob Blackman: Yes.

Mary Kelly Foy: Yes.

Q20 **Chair:** World No Tobacco Day has already passed. Do you have any preference on the timing?

Bob Blackman: My personal view is it should be as soon as possible, so that we can get Government action before the summer recess.

Chair: The Clerks will be in touch to advise.