

Backbench Business Committee

Representations: Backbench Debates

Tuesday 16 June 2026

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Watch the meeting

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

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Tonia Antoniazzi made representations.

Q1 Chair: Welcome to this meeting of the Backbench Business Committee, at which we will be considering bids, mainly from Select Committees, for estimates day debates on Monday 29 and Tuesday 30 June, and then requests for debates in normal Backbench Business time in the Chamber or Westminster Hall. As colleagues can see, we have a very long agenda, with the threat of votes on the Floor of the House, so if you keep your remarks pertinent, that will help the Committee and possibly help your case as well.

The first request, from Tonia Antoniazzi, is for an estimates day debate on the spending of the Northern Ireland Office. Tonia, please present your application.

Tonia Antoniazzi: Thank you, Chair and members of the Committee. It is very important that we have an estimates day debate to look at Northern Ireland Office spending. The financial situation in Northern Ireland is very precarious and has serious implications, not just for Northern Ireland but for the Northern Ireland Office and the Treasury, that we believe will be of concern to Members across the House.

Two and a half months into the new financial year, the Northern Ireland Executive has been unable to agree a budget, with Departments now reliant on contingency funding, leaving the nearly 2 million people of Northern Ireland uncertain about the future of their public services. The vast majority of Northern Ireland's funding envelope comes from the funding provided by the UK Government through the block grant and additional non-Barnett allocations. Concerns have been raised by Executive Ministers regarding the adequacy of the funding settlement provided by the UK Government, which could be explored during the debate, as well as the steps that the Northern Ireland Office is actually taking to support the Executive in urgently agreeing to a budget.

The UK Government recently provided the Executive with a £400 million loan to cover departmental overspends. The first repayment is covered in the main estimates. The UK Government wrote off £559 million of Executive debt in 2024, so there are now concerns that overspending is becoming normalised. A debate would allow us to examine how the Northern Ireland Office is working with the Executive to ensure that that situation is not repeated or escalated in the current financial year.

Also, and importantly, the recent riots in Northern Ireland will be of concern to Members across the House. This debate could be an opportunity for Members to ask about the funding provided by the Government to manage asylum in Northern Ireland, as well as the funding for joint work on the policing of protests and tackling serious organised crime.

The debate would be an opportunity to raise the issue of the ongoing security funding for the PSNI provided by the NIO to tackle terrorist threats and paramilitary activity. Our recent report called on the



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Government to be more transparent about how the level of funding is determined.

Members across the House will also be concerned about how funding is being used to address the legacy of the troubles. That includes funding that the NIO provides for the Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery, the body responsible for investigations into legacy cases. It has reported that some investigations are being paused because of a lack of resource for it.

The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee has not previously applied for an estimates day debate in this Parliament, although debates on matters relating to Northern Ireland are consistently well attended by Members across the House. I hope our request will be successful.

Q2 **Martin Vickers:** Tonia, you have made a comprehensive bid, but we have more requests for debates than we have time to allocate, so some people are going to be unlucky. What is the biggest point that you would want to push to convince us that your debate should be granted?

Tonia Antoniazzi: If you want one—

Martin Vickers: Yes, the one big issue.

Tonia Antoniazzi: The one big issue is that the Northern Ireland Executive has not settled its budget; it cannot agree on one. Without a budget, what position does that put us in as parliamentarians? That should be an issue for us. Recent events in Northern Ireland are also very current and very worthy of debate, along with the funding around what goes into Northern Ireland.

Q3 **Chair:** We have two potential days for debates. Will you be available on either the Monday or the Tuesday, if you are allocated a debate?

Tonia Antoniazzi: I will make myself available.

Chair: That is very helpful. The Clerks will be in touch with you shortly.

Matt Western made representations.

Q4 **Chair:** Next up is Matt Western with a request on behalf of the Joint Committee on National Security Strategy for a debate on the spending of the Cabinet Office on security and resilience.

Matt Western: Thank you very much, Chair. You may recall that I came before you several weeks ago to make the same plea. In the context of last year's strategic defence review and the national security strategy, I appreciate the importance of, and some of the fallout from, the Government's ambition to get to 5% of GDP expenditure on defence and security, with 3.5% for traditional defence and 1.5% for security. You will appreciate the wider security challenges and the threats that we face, such as those from Russia. Obviously, some of this we are seeing unfold with the announcements today and over the weekend about the interception or interdiction of Russian ships.

The UK is the most cyber-attacked nation in Europe and the third most cyber-attacked nation globally, and we face a plethora of other threats in what we refer to as the sub-threshold sphere of grey activity. What is critical now is that, through the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, we recognise the scale of these threats and how Russia, China and Iran are increasing their capacity and determination to attack the UK.

It is important for us to understand where the Government is on this, because Lord Harris—Toby Harris, the chair of the National Preparedness Commission—has said that the 1.5% target could “be treated as a creative accountancy exercise”. It is like saying, “We are going to use some money from that account,” when that budget has already been accounted for. We need to get into the detail of this to give reassurance to Parliament, but also to the public, that this is real money that is being spent on security. *[Interruption.]* As the Division bell is ringing, I will end it there.

Q5 **Mary Glindon:** Have you a preference between 29 and 30 June?

Matt Western: I am very happy with either. We would be grateful for the opportunity.

Q6 **Mary Glindon:** Is there anything you can say that would give your bid an advantage over the others? We do not have enough places for everyone.

Matt Western: I recognise that you have many demands, but think back to the attack on Jaguar Land Rover and the hit we had to the UK economy. That was mentioned by the Bank of England as a significant hit, and it even had an impact on potential interest rate changes. It also had an impact on Marks & Spencer. The risk that we are facing—for example, to subsea cables—cuts across health, local government, the economy, the Treasury and so on. It is a really important area. Right now, we need to see off the threats through deterrence and security. That is the frontline.

Chair: Thank you very much. We will suspend the session now and start again as soon as the Division is over.

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

On resuming—

Dame Caroline Dinenage, Natasha Irons and Cameron Thomas made representations.

Q7 **Chair:** We now recommence our consideration of applications for estimates day debates, which are followed by applications for ordinary debates in Westminster Hall and the Chamber. The next application is from Caroline Dinenage, on behalf of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, on spending on sport and youth services. Caroline, please present your case.

Dame Caroline Dinenage: Thank you very much. I am also supported by two of my brilliant Committee members, but as you will have seen, a large number of other Members have supported our application. There were many more, but we did not have room on that bit of paper.



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The Culture, Media and Sport Committee has not had an estimates day debate since March 2021. That is how long ago it was—I was young and beautiful then; it was a really, really long time ago.

Chair: You still are!

Dame Caroline Dinenage: Thank you so much.

We believe there is a very strong case for returning these issues to the Floor of the House. I know you guys are very busy, so I just want to give you three reasons why this debate is important and timely.

First, we have recently published a report called “Game On” about community and school sports, and we are expecting the Government response within the next week or so. In the 2026-27 main estimate, Sport England’s resource funding has fallen by 6%, so this debate is timely and important. Meanwhile, it estimates the social value of sport to be more than £120 billion a year, through things such as improved wellbeing and health and reduced pressure on public services. Yet the system remains unbelievably financially fragile, with funding that is very short term, fragmented, and, as you have just heard, declining in real terms.

Secondly, the pressures are most visible at the grassroots level. As we all know, community provision is being squeezed by local authority cuts and rising costs, and there are so many ageing facilities across the country. As a result, access is becoming more and more unequal, particularly for disadvantaged groups. Our report found that that was particularly the case for girls and, of course, for disabled people.

The Government recently announced £900 million for sport, but if you look below the headline, more than half of that is directed at just two or three major events, so actually only £400 million has been allocated for grassroots provision, and that is spread over four years. There is still great uncertainty about how and to what extent this will be distributed geographically, but there are also some legitimate questions about whether this is actually new investment, or whether it is just compensating for programmes that have already been withdrawn. We want to get to the bottom of that.

Thirdly, the position of youth services and school sports raises wider cross-Government concerns, as you will all appreciate. There has been a net 14% reduction in youth and civil society spending, and, at the same time, the Government are launching a national youth strategy. We have also seen these pressures in schools; funding pressures are evident. Fewer than half of children now meet the recommended daily activity levels. Meanwhile, there are still doubts as to whether the Department of Health and Social Care contribution to school sports will be maintained in the coming months.

So while we are asking for this as a DCMS estimates debate, it goes directly to a whole range of other things: prevention, public health and opportunities for young people. A debate would allow the House to test

whether the current spending plans are adequate, sustainable and delivering value for money, particularly across things such as school sport, grassroots provision and youth services. That is why we would be very grateful if you would look kindly upon our application.

Q8 Chair: Do your colleagues have anything to add?

Natasha Irons: Just that this is a cross-party application; we have Members from the three major parties here.

The Government's plans around the national youth strategy, how that fits into the Alan Milburn review, and what we are talking about—our young people at the moment being out of work and education and training—is part of the holistic thing about what is happening in communities, right through grassroots sport, but also through things like our youth services.

The challenge, which we have noticed as a Committee, is about how joined up these programmes are. You have the youth strategy, young futures hubs and the youth guarantee, which are all trying to do very similar things. How are we ensuring good value for money and making sure they are all joined up?

Cameron Thomas: I am here to support this pitch because I think it is really important to demonstrate how cross-party this is. I agree with everything that my colleague has put forward. The implications of this drawdown in resourcing will be felt in our constituencies, as they are in mine, but they will go to the top of sport in this country.

Q9 Alison Hume: Thank you for bringing this application. You have not previously applied for an estimates day debate in this Parliament and, as you say, you have not had one since March 2021, which is positive. You are focusing on sport and youth services, but I am drawing from your application that you are not just looking for clarity on the spend—you have particularly mentioned the £400 million for grassroots, and how much of that is going to grassroots and how much is going to the Football Foundation—but asking about how Departments are working or not working together, which would seem very pertinent. There is a lot of money involved, and it is about getting the best value; would you say that that is correct?

Dame Caroline Dinanage: Absolutely. You have basically taken what I wanted to say and put it in a nutshell. That is exactly right. School sports funding for PE is currently funded by three different Government Departments: the Department of Health, the Department for Education and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. We have written as a Committee, and I have written as an individual, to try to get a breakdown of where that money is coming from and whether it will be sustained. I have also asked questions about it in the House, and I cannot get a straight answer. Because so many of these things cross multiple Government Departments, they tend to fall through the gaps, and it is our children who will suffer. The one thing I would say is that, after the announcement this week about the social media ban for under-16s, it is even more important because, if you are taking something away from our

children, you have to provide something else for them to do. We are taking away social media and also taking away their sports and youth facilities.

Q10 **Alison Hume:** Thank you. That is very clear. Do you have a preference for Monday 29 June or Tuesday 30 June?

Dame Caroline Dinenage: We will very happily fit in with your Committee. We would probably prefer the Tuesday, but we are relaxed about either day.

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

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown and **Vikki Slade** made representations.

Q11 **Chair:** Next up are Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown and Vikki Slade; Andy Slaughter and Dame Karen Bradley are not here. This is a request for spending on the Ministry of Justice and the Home Office on criminal justice.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: Chairman and colleagues, thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to present our case for what I colloquially call a one justice system. I am delighted to be joined by Vikki Slade, who is a member of the Justice Committee. While I am speaking on behalf of the Public Accounts Committee, which has held individual sessions across the criminal justice system since the beginning of this Parliament, including on Crown court backlogs, the Probation Service, police productivity and the prison estate capacity, this is a joint application between the Public Accounts, Justice and Home Affairs Committees.

Across all this work, a consistent picture has emerged of a criminal justice system that is increasingly reliant on reactive crisis management rather than long-term planning. That is driving up the cost to the taxpayer and, more importantly—this is the most important point of everything I have to say—increasing the risks to public safety. Multiple reports from the Public Accounts Committee, alongside those from Justice and Home Affairs, point to sustained structural weaknesses being repeated across the system. When one part fails, the consequences ripple across the rest. Those weaknesses include poor-quality data, weak co-ordination between services, under-investment in digital technology, unrealistic planning assumptions and persistent workforce shortages, particularly in the Probation Service. The Government's early release scheme is symptomatic of this short-term approach: while it might ease the immediate prison population problem, it places additional strain on probation services and undermines the ability of prisons to provide meaningful rehabilitation, including access to work and purposeful activities.

The result of that, which our report highlighted, is that a significant proportion of those released early go on to reoffend—the numbers rose by five percentage points between 2021 and 2023—and cost the country an estimated £20.9 billion a year. At the same time the number of offenders charged with a serious further offence while under probation increased by 55%.



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We are seeing a cycle of more people entering the criminal justice system, more people reoffending and a probation and police service under even greater strain. They are not isolated problems; they are interconnected failures compounded by silo working and inadequate data. Crown court backlogs remain at record levels and prisons are operating close to capacity, with worsening safety and limited opportunities for rehabilitation.

This debate will provide us with an opportunity to step back and look at the criminal justice system as a whole, and to take a genuinely cross-cutting approach that draws together the work of the Public Accounts, Home Affairs and Justice Committees. It will allow us to move beyond short-term fixes and address the root causes of failure. Without that, we will continue to see the same problems repeated. As three Select Committees are involved, we hope this application will be successful.

Vikki Slade: From the Ministry of Justice's point of view, in real terms the day-to-day spending is still well below what it was back in 2007-08. We are going backwards in terms of the real funding. The spending review set such ambitious efficiency targets on which the whole system is based, but if it cannot achieve any of those, it is like a house of cards that will come tumbling down.

There is a massive need for transformation, and the reliance on that transformation, particularly for probation, is existential. We heard today from the Minister concerned that the early release system affects the probation system; if the probation system does not get it right, it affects reoffending; we have poor levels of education in prison; we have women's units being paused because the Government have decided not to go ahead with it; and we cannot move anybody through the system.

My colleague has just talked about public safety, but my biggest concern is about public trust. We have recently seen some very high-profile cases, which are obviously sub judice at the moment, where lenient sentencing is being challenged. At the same time, early release systems and a presumption against custodial sentences are being challenged, and releases in error are damaging public trust. It is important that the House seeks assurance about the adequacy of the funding to keep our population safe, and ensures that the funds are distributed so that justice can function properly and is served.

Q12 **Will Stone:** Thank you for bringing forward this important debate. I will keep the question simple: do you have a preference for Monday or Tuesday?

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: We would be very happy to be selected for either.

Chair: The Clerks will be in touch in due course. Obviously, we have to consider which debates are chosen and on which day. We will let you know as soon as we can.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: May I make one further point? I thought one of you might ask me what the one single point of this debate is.

Chair: Go on, then.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: It is a combination of both of us. In a nutshell, it is the risks to public safety and trust.

Will Stone: You are so articulate I did not feel the need to ask.

Helen Hayes made representations.

Chair: Next up is Helen Hayes on behalf of the Education Committee. This is a request for a debate on the Department for Education's spending on early years.

Helen Hayes: I am grateful for the opportunity to present my case for this debate. The early years are a vital stage in a child's life; it is the stage when their brains are built, and when we have the opportunity to mitigate the effects of disadvantage that can become embedded for a child's lifetime.

It is also a stage of life that the Department for Education is focused on; it has some pretty big policy changes happening at the moment, particularly regarding the expansion of Best Start family hubs and funded childcare hours.

My case for the debate in large part rests on the fact that there are some issues in the estimates. This is an application not for a general debate related to early years, hung on the hook of an estimates day, but for a debate on the fact that the estimates currently show a £400 million shortfall in the budget for funded childcare. The House should have the opportunity to discuss that issue. We always say how important the early years are, but we do not do them the justice that they deserve in the time that we spend in the Chamber talking about them—about this crucial stage of life and opportunity to make a difference for our youngest children.

This debate is compatible with the application made by the Chair of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee for a debate on physical activity, which I am pleased to support. If this Committee was so minded, we could have a whole day all about the future of our children and young people, which our constituents would like very much.

Chair: Very good!

Q13 **Jonathan Davies:** If we were to allocate time for your debate, do you have a preference on whether it be held on the Monday or the Tuesday?

Helen Hayes: We could make either day work.

Q14 **Jonathan Davies:** When was the last time you had an estimates day debate?

Helen Hayes: I do not have the date in my head, but it has been a while. Our last application, which I think was for a debate on SEND, was not successful because it was considered to be oversubscribed. We have maybe had one such debate in this Parliament.

Q15 **Jonathan Davies:** I do not know whether this would be permissible, Chair, but might you consider combining your debate with the CMS Committee's debate?

Helen Hayes: I would not like to speak for the Chair of the CMS Committee, but we would be as flexible as we could with the time that this Committee is happy to offer.

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

Florence Eshalomi made representations.

Q16 **Chair:** Next up is Florence Eshalomi, on behalf of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee. This application is for a debate on the spending of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. Over to you, Florence.

Florence Eshalomi: Thank you for listening to this application. I seek an estimates day debate on MHCLG's main estimate for 2026-27. My understanding is that there will be two debates per day, so I seek a three-hour debate—

Chair: Just to correct you, we are likely to allocate three debates for each day, so they are more likely to be two hours than three hours.

Florence Eshalomi: Okay. I seek a broad general debate on the spending of MHCLG to allow Members from right across the House to scrutinise and look at its departmental spending.

One area that I think will draw a lot of interest will be around the integrated settlement. That is formed on the back of devolution, which has been a big and sometimes contentious issue for many Members. We can look at the Government's intention to have strategic authorities, and the devolution through established mayoral strategic authorities. It is also quite important to look at how money flows from different Departments into mayoral authorities. We are talking about really large sums of money: in some strategic authorities, they will be looking at public money in excess of £3.3 billion. We need to make sure there is effective scrutiny of this.

Obviously, another key area across MHCLG is housing supply, which a lot of Members would want to discuss. The debate would look at the Government's estimate in the context of the 1.5 million new homes, and the introduction of the national housing bank and the housing delivery fund. Parliamentarians will want to scrutinise that to see how the Government will reach that objective. Another key area is the fair funding review. Some parliamentarians and councils do not see that as "fair": they were quite concerned by the way that funding was allocated. It is a case of looking at how some of those other grants have, in some areas, decreased.

Finally, there is the MHCLG strategic plan. The Department has not actually published that plan to spell out how it is delivering on its



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priorities, which is concerning. Despite the expectations, that will be a key area to scrutinise and on which to hold the Government to account on their planning and performance framework. The delay highlights the issues around transparency across MHCLG and the quality of some of its scrutiny, which would benefit from more parliamentarians probing it.

Q17 Martin Vickers: As you heard in our questioning of others, we are asking for the killer point that might convince us that your request should take preference over others. You have housing, finance—a very wide range of issues. Which one do you want to emphasise?

Florence Eshalomi: My killer point is that, since the local elections, there have been so many changes across many areas, so it is important that we as parliamentarians are holding the Ministry to account to ensure that our councillors, including the many new councillors, are actually doing the job locally.

Q18 Martin Vickers: Would either Monday or Tuesday suit you?

Florence Eshalomi: Yes.

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

Layla Moran made representations.

Q19 Chair: Next up is Layla Moran on behalf of the Health and Social Care Committee with a request for a debate on the spending of the Department of Health and Social Care on pharmaceutical procurement.

Layla Moran: Thank you, Chair and Committee, for allowing me to resubmit this application. I should start by saying that last time it was a joint thing with the SIT Committee—we just did not have the time to sort ourselves out—but Chi's name is on this application, so she still supports it.

I will start with the killer point. What if I told you that this Government have committed this country to spending £9 billion extra on the NHS and pharmaceuticals, but have not received parliamentary scrutiny or released any impact assessment? That is fundamentally what this debate is about. The UK-US pharma deal was struck after Trump had threatened tariffs across the world. It was hailed as a big win for the pharmaceutical industry in the UK. I declare my interest as an Oxford MP. That is my local patch, and much is to be said for supporting that industry, but the money has to come from somewhere.

As you all well know—we are currently going through the Health Bill—the NHS is undergoing a lot of reorganisation. It is under a lot of pressure in and of itself to meet its productivity aims. The three shifts are key and we support them. We think they are the right thing to do. However, there is much about the UK-US pharma deal that runs counter to the Government narrative on what it is trying to achieve itself. First, the deal commits the UK to increasing spending on novel pharmaceuticals—that is the branded stuff, not the generic stuff that is much, much cheaper—from 0.3% of GDP, as it is currently, to 0.6% of GDP by 2036. The amount of money

allocated in the current spending review is covered, although the IFS suggests that there might be a £0.5 billion deficit just in this spending review. The IFS suggests that by 2036—the mark for 0.6% of GDP—we are talking about £9 billion.

I heard my colleagues' applications. These are eye-watering amounts of money that the taxpayer is spending on pharmaceuticals. Whistleblowers from some NHS organisations say that this not only will not deliver value for money for the NHS but could even cost lives. If you are going to spend money on some of these pharmaceuticals and not on generics or on prevention, when you run that through the health economics cycle, you end up with the numbers of people who will not receive lifesaving treatment on the NHS.

None of that has come out properly in debate. We think there is huge public interest in this. As I say, the main thing we want to achieve is the release of that impact assessment. That was the key thing I asked for when I made the application last time. It is still a live issue, and we have still not seen it. That is the one thing I aim to achieve as an answer from the Government by having this debate. We deserve to know where that £9 billion is going to be found.

Q20 Mary Glindon: Thank you for highlighting your killer point. You say that the Science, Innovation and Technology Committee would also be involved, but would your Committee take the lead?

Layla Moran: Yes, we will be leading, but as you will see, Chi Onwurah, the Chair of the SIT Committee, is a signatory to our application. Last time, she was a co-presenter. This time, it is us leading it, but very much with their support. They are happy to keep supporting us in that.

Q21 Mary Glindon: With the main emphasis that you have outlined to us?

Layla Moran: Exactly. Actually, it is pretty much the exact same application as last time. The thing that has materially changed is that the American Supreme Court has since ruled that the tariffs that Trump had threatened to impose on everyone were not lawful. The reason why we are doing this is because one of the reasons that had been given no longer exists, so I would argue that there is an even bigger reason now to scrutinise this. Do we really have to do it? If we do, where is the money going to come from? That is the key question.

Q22 Mary Glindon: Would you like 29 June or 30 June, or is either okay?

Layla Moran: I would be deeply grateful for either.

Chair: Thanks very much. The Clerks will be in touch in due course.

Debbie Abrahams made representations.

Q23 Chair: The final application for an estimates day debate is from Debbie Abrahams on behalf of the Work and Pensions Committee. This is about the spending priorities and performance of the Department for Work and Pensions. Debbie, over to you.



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Debbie Abrahams: Thank you so much for letting me speak to you and put this application before the Committee. You will be aware that the Department for Work and Pensions is the largest-spending Department in the Government, at nearly £300 billion a year. We have not had a debate in the Chamber since 2023. The Department provides financial support to some of the most vulnerable people in the country. In addition, half of the budget consists of the state pension. In so many words, this is a really important Department.

My Committee has the opportunity to scrutinise in our annual report, but because it is so important, and because there has been so much change in recent months, we believe that all parliamentarians should have the opportunity to scrutinise and debate this. For example, there have been recent devolution and machinery of government changes, such as moving skills from the Department for Education to DWP, and the transfer of the crisis and resilience fund from the DWP to MHCLG. This would be an opportunity for us to ask questions about, for example, how the crisis and resilience fund will be managed, given that the policy framework is still owned by DWP but the money has gone to MHCLG.

There have been other concerns that the Committee has raised. For example, in the February estimates we became aware that the amount of employment support made available had reduced. That money was lost to the Department. If we are trying to get people back into work, that needs to be avoided. There are many aspects—I could go on, but they are included in the application. We hope that you will give the opportunity for this debate. I think that everybody, in all parties, recognises the importance of making sure that our Department is working efficiently in all aspects, including how it manages the money that the taxpayer provides.

Q24 **Alison Hume:** Thank you, Debbie, for bringing this application. Can I ask for a bit of clarification? What is RDEL funding? What does RDEL stand for?

Debbie Abrahams: It is departmental expenditure limits. I have forgotten what the “R” stands for, but it is an accounting acronym.

Q25 **Alison Hume:** You said that the crisis and resilience fund—the money—has been moved to MHCLG, while the policy responsibility remains with the DWP. Has that happened with anything else, or is it just that particular thing?

Debbie Abrahams: It is just that particular thing, but there have been other things. For example, the child poverty unit has been transferred from the Cabinet Office to DWP. There are lots of little changes that people might not have picked up, and a debate would enable parliamentarians to scrutinise that.

Q26 **Alison Hume:** What would be your main pitch for why we should pick this debate over others?

Debbie Abrahams: As I said, this is the biggest-spending Department in Government. We have had various debates and points made in the Chamber about the importance of our social security system and making it

as efficient as possible, which I agree with. It is an opportunity for the people who have raised these concerns to make those points.

Q27 **Alison Hume:** Do you have a preference for 29 June or 30 June?

Debbie Abrahams: No. It would be lovely if you could grant either one.

Q28 **Chair:** At the moment, your application does not have exactly the number of speakers we would expect.

Debbie Abrahams: We have some more, including some Conservatives.

Q29 **Chair:** Do you have those to hand?

Debbie Abrahams: We have Joy Morrissey and Liz Twist.

Chair: If you give them to the Clerks, we will add them to the list. The Clerks will be in touch in due course.

That concludes the estimates day applications. We will consider those in private after we have finished with the applications for debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall.

Katrina Murray made representations.

Q30 **Chair:** The next application is from Katrina Murray, for a Chamber debate on economic abuse and coerced debt. Katrina, please present your case.

Katrina Murray: The main reason I am specifically asking for a debate on economic abuse and coerced debt is that I am aware we have had many debates, whether in Government time or Backbench Business debates, on violence against women and girls, but this is a request to have a debate on the very specific topic of economic abuse and coerced debt.

Part of the history is that I held a constituency women's summit with local and Scottish VAWG organisations and statutory services back in January. We focused on the issue of coercive control, and this is one of the outcomes of that event. The particular focus is work by Dr Jenn Glinski from Scottish Women's Aid, work being carried out by StepChange on coerced debt, Aberlour Children's Charity, who focus on public sector debt, and the organisation Surviving Economic Abuse. It is about trying to pull together various strands of work.

If there is a killer fact, it is that one in six women in the UK has experienced economic abuse by a current or former partner. That figure is backed up by more than one source. They are very clear that it is not about debt being written off or being able to get out of paying; it is about how women are being penalised and how that control continues through life.

We know about the burdens of dealing with debt and living a life in a society like ours, which is heavily dominated by having a good credit score. How do you then move through housing or employment within that? It is also about how it maintains a level of control. Within that, there is the work of Gingerbread, which has been looking at reforms to the Child



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Maintenance Service and how control can be stopped through that. This differs from many other parts of the violence against women and girls response because this sits with the Treasury. There has been some work identified in the financial inclusion strategy, but there is still a way to go.

I was originally looking to get signatures for a Westminster Hall debate, but I was turning people away when they said, "Yes, we want to contribute," which is why it is a Chamber application.

- Q31 **Will Stone:** Would you be willing to go back to Westminster Hall, based on the fact that we have a long, long list for the Chamber and this is a very important debate?

Katrina Murray: I would like everybody to get a chance to be heard. I would not like people to have only 90 seconds to talk about what is happening in their constituencies, because this issue is coming through the postbag a lot. Of course, I am in the hands of the Committee, but when we have talked to the organisations involved, I said that I was applying for the debate now, so there is a chance that if we were on a waiting list, the debate might be scheduled towards the end of the year or even the beginning of 2027. I am aware of the preciousness of Chamber time, but I would not want people to feel that they have to try to curtail their speech, even if it is only a four-minute speech, to 90 seconds just to be able to be heard.

Chair: Thank you very much, Katrina. The Clerks will be in touch in due course.

Fabian Hamilton made representations.

- Q32 **Chair:** Next up is Fabian Hamilton—plus others, but only Fabian is here today. This is for a debate in the Chamber on Equitable Life compensation. I declare my interest as a former chairman of the all-party group, together with Fabian, in the last Parliament.

Fabian Hamilton: Thank you for hearing me today. I apologise that Jim Shannon is not with me—he did tell me he would be here. We have 24 names altogether on our list of people, which the Clerk should have.

I first secured a debate on compensation for Equitable Life policyholders in Westminster Hall in June 2009. I think we would all agree that a lot has changed since then, including the passing of the Equitable Life (Payments) Act 2010, which allocated compensation of 22% of losses to all Equitable Life policyholders who had suffered from the collapse of the world's oldest life assurance company in 1999.

The one group of policyholders who lost out, however, were the pre-1992 with-profits annuitants—the WPAs. I tabled an amendment—with yourself, Chair, if I remember rightly—to the Equitable Life (Payments) Bill on Report in 2010, but the vote was lost on the Floor of the House. We did our very best. The Act provided taxpayers' money for compensation up to a total of £1.5 billion out of the total losses of £4.1 billion, calculated by the then Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman at the time of the company's collapse. It is estimated that, of the original allocation, £171



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million remains unspent. In 2014, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer made an ex gratia payment of £5,000 to the approximately 9,000 pre-1992 with-profits annuitants.

I know that there have been many debates over the 17 years that I have been involved in this campaign, but there has not yet been a debate specifically on the remaining pre-1992 WPAs, the remainder of whom are now aged between 84 and 99 years old. The purpose of this application is to hold a debate on this group, who many of us believe have been badly treated over many years by the seemingly arbitrary cut-off date of 1992. This application is supported by more than 20 MPs from across the House. At the time of the collapse, it was estimated that there were 2,000 constituents in every parliamentary constituency in the United Kingdom who had suffered losses under the collapse of Equitable Life. I rest my case.

- Q33 **Jonathan Davies:** Thank you very much for your presentation. I think you may have heard from the previous questioning that there is a long wait to get into the Chamber. Obviously, this is very pressing and many of the people you are advocating for are in their later years, so you may wish to expedite this. Would you be willing to have the debate in Westminster Hall, because you are likely to get that sooner?

Fabian Hamilton: Yes, I think we would. Obviously, we wanted the Chamber, because it carries more weight, but as you rightly say, Jonathan, this is a very important debate because of the age of the people who have been suffering. The money is no good to them after they die. They need it right now, and that is what we want.

- Q34 **Jonathan Davies:** You may also find that in Westminster Hall your time is less likely to be curtailed by Government statements and urgent questions, so perhaps it is a good space to have it.

Fabian Hamilton: We would certainly be willing to compromise in order to secure the debate.

- Q35 **Mary Glendon:** I declare an interest as I was involved in the group, but I fear my constituent is no longer with us.

Chair: Unfortunately, that is what is happening.

Fabian Hamilton: We all have an interest.

- Q36 **Chair:** We do. The Clerks will be in touch in due course, Fabian. Thank you.

Fabian Hamilton: Nothing else you need from me, Chair?

Chair: No.

Fabian Hamilton: Thank you very much for your attention.

Vikki Slade made representations.

- Q37 **Chair:** Next up is Vikki Slade on the role and effectiveness of Ofcom. This

should be an interesting debate. The request is for the Chamber or Westminster Hall on a Tuesday or Thursday. Over to you, Vikki.

Vikki Slade: Thank you, Chair. I know you have heard me make this pitch because you were in the Chamber when I put it at business questions. I am taking the bull by the horns. When I heard that the deadline was the following day, I said to my team, "We need to get this done, because it is becoming more urgent." By Monday, Ofcom had been given the job of managing the social media ban, which makes this even more timely.

For those who have not heard what I am about to say, the areas that Ofcom is responsible for as a regulator are expanding as we change how we communicate. Trust in what we see, hear and experience is so important. If that trust declines, or if the regulation around it fails, social cohesion is badly impacted.

We are seeing disenfranchisement as we are moving to digital. Digital inclusion is impacting the elderly, the poor and the rural. People who remain on traditional telephone lines cannot access the same level of security, for example. Those on old-fashioned lines cannot get the screening that those of us on modern ones can. People who rely on the post are getting a second-class service, compared with those of us who can communicate by email.

Time and again, the regulator is failing—from Royal Mail through to mobile connectivity. The proposed social media ban for children will be added to Ofcom's workload, and the response from colleagues since I raised this issue has been quite impressive. We had 21 signatures within 24 hours. Since then, people have been saying, "Oh, I wish I had seen it earlier." I know a lot of people see their postbags full of problems that are laid at Ofcom's door.

I would like to see a debate in the coming weeks or months, before the social media changes come into play, because I think it will demonstrate whether or not Ofcom is capable and has the capacity to take that on, and before the Budget, so that if the Treasury needs to make changes to how Ofcom is funded, we give them the chance to hear what the concerns are.

As I said, we have 21 signatures on the form. There are now probably closer to 30 people who have contacted me since the closing date. I hope that the Committee will look favourably on that.

Q38 Martin Vickers: You mentioned getting this in before the Budget. As you know, there is a very long waiting list for the Chamber. If the only way to accommodate the debate within those dates is Westminster Hall, would you accept that?

Vikki Slade: I am very happy with that. To be fair, I did not expect to get so many signatures so quickly, so I thought we would only be pitching for Westminster Hall. I was pleasantly surprised to have so many people interested. I am in your hands.

I waited a long time for my DVLA debate, for which I was immensely grateful. I will take whatever you can give.

Chair: Thank you very much, Vikki. The Clerks will be in touch in due course.

Daniel Francis made representations.

Q39 **Chair:** Last but by no means least—thank you for your patience—we have an application from Daniel Francis on capital funding for Changing Places toilets. This is for a debate in Westminster Hall on a Tuesday or Thursday.

Daniel Francis: Thank you, Chair, and thanks for having me. For those of you who don't know, Changing Places toilets are specialist toilets, predominantly but not solely for people with cerebral palsy or MND. They have a specialist changing bed and adaptable sinks and so on, which raise to accommodate the needs of that person. They sometimes have showers to the national specification, and it is a larger toilet, equipped to meet the needs of carers and so on.

I don't say this very often, but the last Government can take some credit for two great initiatives that they undertook in this area. First, they changed the planning regulations so that larger buildings—sports stadia, shopping centres, leisure centres—now mandatorily have to provide Changing Places toilets. Equally, they supplied a capital grant for a time to provide additional Changing Places toilets. That ended 15 months ago.

As many of you know, I am the parent of a child with cerebral palsy. Quite frankly, we cannot live our lives without a Changing Places toilet, and we have to plan our day trips, holidays and all our travel around knowing there is one. As a London MP, in my borough we have gone from zero to three Changing Places toilets in the last 10 years, and in this part of London—in central London—there has been a very large increase. It has been hugely helpful to see that.

Changing Places Awareness Day—this is the cheeky part, which I will come on to later—is on 19 July. We had an Adjournment debate on this subject last year, but I know that a number of my colleagues who are campaigning for additional Changing Places toilets are struggling with the end of the capital fund 15 months ago.

Looking at existing areas, the Changing Places toilet in my constituency is in our shopping centre. However, I have two town centres, so I have been trying to lobby Sainsbury's, for instance, to provide one—my Crayford constituency has the second largest Sainsbury's in the country. There are actually some really good examples, including Marks & Spencer—my former employer, so I declare an interest—IKEA and so on. In fact, IKEA on Oxford Street has one, which means that you can now shop in the west end, so there are some really good examples of big traders that are supplying them off their own bat.

However, from talking to a number of colleagues, there is this issue that the capital fund has expired, so you now have to try to have conversations



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with your local authority, or heritage organisations and sport organisations, about how you fund them, which is not always straightforward. Building on last year's Adjournment debate, the purpose is to press the Government again to look at MHCLG's decision about bringing another fund forward, so that local authorities can start to look at where Changing Places toilets can be provided.

It is in your hands, Chair, but I have one cheeky request. I am more than happy with Westminster Hall, but it is only five weeks until the end of term, and Changing Places Awareness Day is on 19 July. I am sure that the graveyard slot on 16 July will not have a great waiting list, and if we were able to get it near to recess, that would help with the general campaign. PAMIS is the main campaigning organisation that has provided the huge increase in Changing Places toilets—the country has gone from 500 to 2,000 in the last 10 years. It is based in Scotland, and it does a great deal of campaigning work. If we get the debate near to Changing Places Awareness Day, it would be appreciated.

Chair: Funnily enough, you have almost answered the questions that we were just going to ask.

Q40 **Mary Glendon:** You mentioned that the awareness day is on 19 July, and the House rises on 16 July. Would that be your preferred date for the debate?

Daniel Francis: I would be delighted. I really had the graveyard slot last year; I had the Adjournment on that last day in July last year on this subject. We would be delighted, and that would build in with the awareness day. I am a London MP—I do not have a long way to travel home at the end of it, have I?

Chair: Thank you very much, Daniel. The Clerks will be in touch with you in due course, but I would pencil in your diary the last day of term.

Daniel Francis: Thank you very much; I am hugely grateful.

Chair: That concludes the public business of the Committee. We will now go into private session to consider the bids for both the estimates day debates and the debates in Westminster Hall and the Chamber.