

# Backbench Business Committee

## Representations: Backbench Business

Tuesday 30 June 2026

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

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### Representations made

[I](#): Jim Shannon

[II](#): Luke Akehurst

[III](#): Chris Webb

**Jim Shannon** made representations.

- Q1 **Chair:** Welcome to this meeting of the Backbench Business Committee, where we will be hearing applications for debates in Westminster Hall and the Chamber. The first application is from our veteran season ticket holder, Jim Shannon, for a debate on mandatory safeguarded 24/7 helipads at major trauma centres. This is for a Westminster Hall general debate. Jim, please present your case.

**Jim Shannon:** Chairman and hon. Members, thank you very much for giving me the chance to request a debate on this issue. I understand that this particular issue has not been debated before. Every one of us knows the importance of the air ambulance; I can point to occasions in my constituency of Strangford where the air ambulance saved lives. Sometimes, unfortunately, they may be too late to save lives because the injuries were so extreme, but I can point to lives that have been saved. When people are picked up in, say, Greyabbey or Kircubbin on the Ards peninsula or Portaferry, they are taken to the Ulster hospital in my constituency or to the Royal Victoria, but not every hospital has a helipad. Some hospitals have an intention to have one.

This debate is to do with the mandatory safeguarding of helipads at major trauma centres. Let me give three quick reasons why this is important. First, there is currently no national NHS policy or directive requiring major trauma centres or NHS trusts to provide safeguarded 24/7 on-site helipad access. Some do it, and some do not. I want to make sure that they all do.

Secondly, the issue is particularly timely. Recent major incidents have once again demonstrated the vital role that air ambulances play in the UK's emergency response. Thirdly, the all-party parliamentary group report recommends strengthening hospital helipad provision as part of the UK's preparedness and resilience for major incidents.

In terms of those who have signed the application, we have four Labour Members, three Lib Dem, two Conservative, a number of independent Members, one Ulster Unionist, one Reform and myself. I believe there is a widespread request for this debate. I always request that Members participate in debates—I am on their shoulders saying, "Have you got a minute?" and then I tell them what it is about. It was absolutely no bother at all getting Members to sign this application. The cross-section of support indicates that there is awareness across all political parties in this House and a desire to ensure that this debate is held. Hopefully, it can be the motivation for Government to ensure that helipads become a "must do" and not a "maybe".

- Q2 **Will Stone:** You have applied for a debate on a substantive motion, but you have also applied for a Westminster Hall debate. Are you looking for a debate in the Chamber or in Westminster Hall?

**Jim Shannon:** I have no expectation of getting it in the Chamber. I am a realist in life; I know my limitations. Westminster Hall is my ambition. Hopefully that helps.



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**Q3 Chair:** At the moment, the application records both the Chamber and Westminster Hall, and you do not have enough speakers for the Chamber anyway.

**Jim Shannon:** No, I would be happy enough with Westminster Hall—it's my second home.

**Chair:** I thought the Chamber was your second home.

**Jim Shannon:** I divide it equally, but the seat in Westminster Hall is my seat.

**Chair:** Thanks very much, Jim. The Clerks will be in touch with you in due course next year.

**Jim Shannon:** Do you want me to leave the extra names with you?

**Chair:** If you have extra names, please give them to the Clerks.

**Luke Akehurst** made representations.

**Q4 Chair:** The next application up is from Luke Akehurst, for a debate in the Chamber on fire and rescue services suicide prevention training. Luke, please present your case.

**Luke Akehurst:** Thank you, Mr Chairman and members of the Committee. This is the first time I have been in front of you to ask for a debate. You will see from the application form that there is cross-party interest in this. There are four Conservative Members, two Liberal Democrats and the remainder Labour who have asked to speak, but I am sure that representatives of minor parties would be interested in this as well; it is not a partisan issue.

The reason why we have asked for this debate is that suicide-related call-outs to fire and rescue services have tripled in the last decade. There is not consistent, mandatory high-quality suicide prevention training across all fire and rescue services in England. Each service is responsible for its own training. The Government are running a consultation on creating a new college of fire and rescue, to ensure more standardised training. We welcome this, and a debate will help make the case for why suicide prevention should be mandatory and consistent across England for firefighters.

Surveys have shown that attending traumatic incidents like suicides has an impact on firefighters' mental health and hence retention in the service, and it puts them at risk of suicide themselves. Training has to go hand in hand with workplace wellbeing support. The Government introduced this training for new police officers in January as part of the policing reform White Paper, so it is anomalous that it does not exist for firefighters, as they are often the first attenders at these incidents. We have had people from the fire services ask for it but also people from suicide prevention charities. The Samaritans have evidence to show that training works to increase confidence in making a lifesaving intervention and recognising someone in a suicidal crisis situation.



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- Q5 **Jonathan Davies:** The Committee asks for a minimum of seven Back Benchers from Opposition parties for a Chamber debate, and you have provided six. Would you be happy or able to provide the name of a further Opposition Member?

**Luke Akehurst:** I can go away and do that, yes.

- Q6 **Martin Vickers:** I declare an interest because I have signed the application. There is a very long list, as I am sure you are aware, of requests for Chamber debates. Would you consider Westminster Hall to get the debate sooner?

**Luke Akehurst:** I would certainly consider that. I think the issue is serious enough that the debate does merit being held in the Chamber, but in order to make sure it was heard sooner and Ministers heard the case, I would be prepared to accept a Westminster Hall debate instead.

**Chair:** I declare my interest as chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on fire safety and rescue. The Clerks will be in touch with you in due course. If you could supply the extra name to the Clerks, that would be very helpful.

**Chris Webb** made representations.

- Q7 **Chair:** Finally, we have an application for a debate in the Chamber or in Westminster Hall on a Tuesday morning on VAT policy for the hospitality sector and its impact on local economies, employment and growth. Chris, please present your case.

**Chris Webb:** Thank you, Chair and members of the Committee. Before I begin, I want to declare an interest as chair of the APPG for hospitality and tourism.

This debate seeks to examine the rate of VAT applied to the UK hospitality sector and the potential impact that a policy change could have on local economies, employment, tourism and high streets across the United Kingdom. We know the significance of the hospitality sector, especially in coastal towns. The sector supports thousands of jobs, brings in millions of pounds in revenue and helps to regenerate communities across the country. We hear from businesses every day that the sector is under huge pressure, and a debate would provide Members from across the House the opportunity to consider the evidence for and against a reduced rate of VAT for hospitality. This is an important and timely discussion against the backdrop of the great British summer savings scheme that has been recently introduced by the Government.

There is support for this debate from 22 Members from five different parties, which highlights the appetite to have this discussion about an issue that we must address to protect local economies and national growth. Ministers regularly face questions about the need for support for the sector, and we are increasingly seeing MPs raise specific questions regarding VAT, so I believe this is a timely application for a debate on the issue.



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Q8 **Mary Glindon:** You have indicated that you would like either a Chamber debate, which would be on a Thursday, or a Westminster Hall debate on a Tuesday. Would you also consider a Thursday in Westminster Hall if you wanted to have the debate sooner?

**Chris Webb:** Yes, that is an option. I am cautious because a number of Members who have signed this application have raised concerns about a Westminster Hall debate at that time, due to the distance to their constituencies, but we are keen to have this debate in a timely fashion. If that was the only option, then yes, but with the backing of five different parties and so many colleagues across the House, I believe there is an appetite for a Chamber debate or a substantial, busy debate in Westminster Hall on a Tuesday.

**Chair:** Thank you very much, Chris. The Clerks will be in touch with you in due course. That concludes the public business of the Committee.