

Backbench Business Committee

Representations: Backbench Debates

Tuesday 8 September 2026

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Watch the meeting

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

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John Glen 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 main Chamber and also in Westminster Hall. The first debate request is from John Glen for the future funding of our English cathedrals. This is a request for a half-day debate in the Chamber. Over to you, John.

John Glen: Thank you very much, Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to be here on a matter of significant interest for the country and also Members. There are 42 cathedrals in England. As the MP representing Salisbury and Salisbury cathedral, I am very keen to explore whether the Committee is willing to give us time to look at a recent report commissioned to look into the economic and wider impact of cathedrals in communities up and down the country. I have secured significant interest, with firm interest from about 15 colleagues, but there are 42 in total. We have not chased down all their offices yet, but I am pretty confident that we are going to get a much larger number. The issue of the funding of cathedrals—

Q2 Chair: Can I just stop you there? On the application in front of us we only have eight names listed.

John Glen: The list is growing all the time.

Q3 Chair: It would be very helpful if you shared the list with us, for various reasons.

John Glen: It has grown since the application went in, but we shall put the additional names to you. We will be working very hard to get, I would hope, and being realistic, 25 people there.

It will be an opportunity to explore what impact cathedrals make in their communities from a spiritual and a wider economic point of view. The report points to £235 million of additional expenditure in the economy. They also have, across a range of needs, significant capital problems and need investment. There is a real challenge, and it is unlikely that the Government are going to have a massive amount of capital to give. As a former Treasury Minister, I am very aware of those constraints. However, it is an opportunity to fully explore how we can get a wider platform for support with philanthropy and other giving.

Holding it in the Chamber would really help to raise the profile. Obviously, we could get a ministerial response elsewhere but given the numbers that we could get in the Chamber and the wider view, it might stimulate people coming from other faiths with other places of worship to talk about it. You are a great expert on that. I submit that it would reach that threshold and would be a useful debate that the country would also want to hear about.

Q4 Will Stone: Thank you for bringing this forward, John. Obviously, we have a considerably long list for the Chamber. I understand the gravitas of this, but would you consider taking a Westminster Hall debate to get it sooner?



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John Glen: Yes, I would, because I do not want to make the interval from when we had the report published in May unreasonably long, but my strong preference would be to have it in the Chamber.

Q5 **Chair:** Thank you. At the moment, this would qualify you for a Westminster Hall debate, but not a Chamber debate. Could you get those extra names to the Clerks?

John Glen: I will do that

Chair: The Clerks will be in touch shortly.

Jim Shannon made representations.

Q6 **Chair:** Next up is our season ticket holder, Jim Shannon. Jim, you have a request for a debate—in case you did not know, because you have so many applications—for a debate on pulmonary fibrosis and interstitial lung awareness. This is a request for a debate in Westminster Hall.

Jim Shannon: Thank you very much, Mr Chairman, for giving me the opportunity to ask for this debate on pulmonary fibrosis and interstitial lung awareness. My list is growing as well, but I have the list with the added names, and I will give it to the Clerk. There are not anywhere near 25, but there certainly are 11. That is four people from the Government and then the rest from the Opposition.

Why is this debate needed? September is Pulmonary Fibrosis Awareness Month, and it creates a timely opportunity for Parliament to debate a group of progressive, life-limiting lung diseases. I understand that we cannot have the debate in September because it is too short notice for that. However, if it is possible to have it as early as we can in October that would be much appreciated.

Pulmonary fibrosis describes a group of interstitial lung diseases where the scarring of the lungs makes breathing progressively more difficult. There are 150,000 people in the UK affected and it is one of the most common forms. Fewer than half of those diagnosed live more than five years.

This is a disease and a health disability that has not been fully looked at, so the debate is an opportunity for that. It is very severe, but there are serious gaps throughout the care pathway. Two in five stop treatment within six months because of intolerable side effects. The side effects are gross. Even though you know you have a life-limiting disease, some of the side effects can be unbearable as well. The 10-year health plan and new respiratory transformation partnership have so far focused principally on asthma and COPD, but pulmonary fibrosis and interstitial lung diseases have never been fully looked at.

I am ever mindful of your kindness and generosity when it comes to debates, Mr Chairman. Here is a topic that I think needs to be discussed and I hope that that can happen. There are 11 names. As I said, there are four from the Government side and the rest are from the Opposition side.

Q7 **Alison Hume:** Thank you for bringing this application, Jim. I agree with you that interstitial lung diseases should be included in the 10-year plan.



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It is a very good application, but you will know that we require an even split between Government and non-Government Members to support the debate. You say you have signatures coming, but at the moment you have only two Labour Members. Can you provide the Clerk with additional names?

Jim Shannon: I have two more names. I nabbed them this morning—Mark Sewards and Steve Yemm. I will give them to the Clerk.

Alison Hume: Thank you.

Q8 **Chair:** Jim, Pulmonary Fibrosis Awareness Month is this month, but clearly we are not in a position to allocate a debate now. Is this an early application for next year or are you thinking of a particular timeframe?

Jim Shannon: I was hoping this might be a belated application for October. If you don't ask, you don't get—that's how it works. It is my fault as the proposer. It should have been in long before now. The APPG discussed it only over the summer and we realised that September was the month. We knew we were never going to get it in September; we understand that.

Chair: Thank you very much. If you could give the names to the Clerks, they will be in touch with you in due course.

Daniel Francis made representations.

Q9 **Chair:** The next application is from Daniel Francis on inequalities in access to therapy for disabled children. It is a request for a Westminster Hall debate on either a Tuesday or a Thursday.

Daniel Francis: Thank you for having me again, Chair. I am hoping to bring forward a debate on inequalities in access to therapy for disabled children, so that colleagues and I can raise concerns regarding children with neurodisabilities and their families who are facing inequalities in accessing rehabilitation and therapy services in the UK. As I have touched on when I have been here previously, I have some first-hand experience as a parent of a child with quadriplegic cerebral palsy.

I got involved in this prior to the summer. The Member for Harlow was quite involved, but he is now a PPS. NAPA, which is the neurological and physical abilitation centre, is based in his constituency, and he has been working closely with them. They have designed individualised intensive therapy programmes with unique combinations, with a wide range of speech, physical, occupational and other innovative therapies. Their groundbreaking research dives into the imbalance caused by different access levels to advanced paediatric therapeutic care.

I am aware that Members from across the House attended the event that NAPA held here back in June—it was a very hot day—and have an interest in the matter, given the wide range of differences in those therapies across the country. Again, I know that at first hand. For four years, either my father or I did a 118-mile round trip every week to ensure that my

daughter could have that kind of service. We went from south-east London to Ingfield in West Sussex, but NAPA offers some of those services.

Families are reporting disparities in accessing services, with provision being determined through a postcode lottery, and hugely through the charitable sector or private therapy. Again, I know from my role as chair of the all-party parliamentary groups for access to disability equipment and for wheelchair users that early intervention could improve long-term outcomes for children with complex disabilities, preventing hospital admissions and pressures on social care systems. Investing in rehabilitation would mean not only investment in the quality of life of disabled children and their families but long-term savings for public finances. Again, I spoke on that in the Health Bill last night, and there is very clear evidence on that matter. I would therefore be grateful if a Westminster Hall debate could be considered and, hopefully, granted.

Q10 Mary Glendon: You have applied for a Westminster Hall debate, but your application includes the text of a very clear substantive motion. Debates in Westminster Hall can take place only on neutral motions. Would you therefore be happy for us to change your motion to a neutral motion that says, "That this House has considered inequalities in access to therapy for disabled children"?

Daniel Francis: I would be delighted to accept that request, Mary, and have that rounded debate.

I also forgot to say that, in the last Parliament, there was an all-party parliamentary group on cerebral palsy—there isn't now—in which Mary Kelly Foy and a former Conservative Member for Blackpool, whose name I forget, were very involved; I think the gentleman has cerebral palsy. There are recommendations from that APPG's reports on these matters, and it would be good to be able to talk about them as well.

Alison Hume: Thank you, Daniel, for bringing this application; I think it is really important. I just want to add that I think the economic consequences of not providing timely rehabilitation and therapy services for children are huge. Only the other day, I was speaking to the parent of a primary-aged child who has broken his ankle twice and is waiting for proper orthopaedic interventions. That must be replicated across the country, so thank you for bringing this application.

Daniel Francis: If you will allow, Chair, anecdotally—as I say, we have heard this evidence in the APPG for wheelchair users—we know that there is clear evidence about that, particularly for children with cerebral palsy who do not weight-bear. My own daughter had half the ball taken out of the socket of her hip three years ago and is about to have to have part of her femur taken out on one side, because her leg has almost come out of its hip on that side. Those are quite common issues if you talk to the specialists over the road at Evelina. I am sure that we will be discussing that in the debate—if it is granted.

Q11 Chair: You have asked for a Tuesday debate; if it is in Westminster Hall



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on a Tuesday, we need to allocate it to the right answering Department, but you have not indicated the answering Department. It could be Health and Social Care or it could be the Women and Equalities Minister— I just want to clarify.

Daniel Francis: I think Health and Social Care is probably the most appropriate place for it to be.

Chair: That's fine. The Clerks will be in touch in due course. Thank you.

David Mundell made representations.

Q12 **Chair:** Next up is David Mundell, who has two applications. We will deal first with the application on the global fight against HIV, which is a request for a half-day debate in the Chamber. Over to you, David.

David Mundell: Thank you very much, Bob. I am really here in my capacity as a co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on HIV, AIDS and sexual health, which is one of the largest all-party groups in Parliament and will, next year, celebrate its 40th year as a group.

As you will be aware, there has generally been a debate in Parliament either around World AIDS Day, which is 1 December, or National HIV Testing Week, which is in the spring. All those debates have previously been very well attended, with a large number of Members from all sides participating.

Within the UK Government's remit, we have had an HIV action plan in relation to England and quite a significant amount of positive activity. That is why the feeling of the APPG—and my own feeling—is that this year it would be appropriate to debate the global situation. That has been very much impacted by changes in funding, not just to ODA here in the UK but very significant changes in the United States, which has previously been an important funder of HIV treatments, particularly in the global south.

It will be an important opportunity to make clear that many of those who are facing infection now are in fact women and girls; it is not the stereotypical gay male community that some people believe is the case. There have been rising rates, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and the middle east, and therefore our view is that the focus of any debate this year would rightly be on the global situation. I believe that there would be sufficient interest in this debate to ensure that there was wide attendance in the Commons Chamber and that therefore it would merit that.

Q13 **Jonathan Davies:** Thank you, David, for your application. You mentioned some awareness days. Is there a particular date that you would like us to consider?

David Mundell: I tried to get the application in early, and I know you have a very long waiting list, but I had anticipated that the debate would be held in December, because World AIDS Day is 1 December. There will be some other activity in Parliament around that, as always, but proximity to World AIDS Day would be very much welcomed, if the Committee was minded to grant the application.

Q14 Jonathan Davies: You are probably aware that there is a long waiting list for debates. Would you consider having this debate in Westminster Hall, to increase the likelihood of it happening around the date you mentioned?

David Mundell: I would not rule it out, but I think it is a debate that would command wide interest across the House and would merit being held in the Chamber. I and members of the APPG obviously wish the debate to take place, so if those two things were not reconcilable, obviously I would not rule out a Westminster Hall debate, but the preference would be for a Chamber debate, and I think it would both merit that and command the level of support that merits that.

Q15 Chair: There is a queue, as Jonathan said. I think 1 December is a Tuesday—is that World AIDS Day?

David Mundell: World AIDS Day is on 1 December, yes.

Chair: That might fit with a Westminster Hall debate on that same morning, but we will bear that in mind.

David Mundell: I take your guidance. As I say, I do think it is a debate that is suited to the Chamber, but I take on board what you are saying.

David Mundell made representations

Q16 Chair: David, you have a second application.

David Mundell: The second application is by me, with the support principally of Irene Campbell, who is the Labour MP for North Ayrshire and Arran. We would like to have a debate in Westminster Hall on nuclear power in Scotland.

As Members may be aware, under the devolution settlement energy policy is reserved to Westminster, but planning policy is within the remit of the Scottish Government. Over a period of time, the Scottish Government have used that planning policy to ensure that there is no nuclear development in Scotland, which is contrary to the view of, for example, myself, Irene and various other Members. Other people have different views, but it is a very topical issue, particularly as the Government are pressing ahead with nuclear development in England. It is a topic of interest that would spark a very lively and, I am sure, well-attended debate, not least by Scottish Members of all persuasions.

Q17 Jonathan Davies: David, as we discussed in respect of your previous application, there are a great many debates in the pipeline. If we had to prioritise one of your debates, which would it be?

David Mundell: I sort of have two hats on, because I am speaking on behalf of the APPG in relation to the HIV debate. I think that is a very important debate and I would wish that to take place. This second debate is on a very topical, political issue that could be debated at any time. In a timing cycle I think the HIV debate, as we just discussed, is better suited for around 1 December. This other debate could, within reason, take place at any time because I do not anticipate that the Scottish Government will

change their position within the short term but—who knows—once we have had the debate they might do so.

Chair: Thank you very much, David. The Clerks will be in touch about both of your applications in due course.

John Slinger made representations.

Q18 **Chair:** Next up is John Slinger, applying for a debate on a subject in which we all have a vested interest: the role of an MP. It is a request for a Westminster Hall debate on either a Tuesday or a Thursday.

John Slinger: It is good to be back before this Committee. I seek this debate because I regard the role of an MP as absolutely critical to our democracy. I will talk you through the reasoning. The role has evolved organically over time. It has never been truly gripped, defined or properly assessed in this place, though it has been outside, and as far as I can tell there have been no debates on the role of an MP. There are strengths to that organic growth and some deficiencies, including there being no job description—*[Laughter.]* I note the laughter of hon. Members.

Each MP determines the role as best they can. The public often do not understand our role—how could they—nor do organisations. Nor, quite often, do we. Certainly I do not understand it on occasion. As hon. Members will know, we are under no obligation to ever visit our constituency—although I live in mine so I visit it every week—nor to come to this House, save to swear the oath of allegiance. That is frankly preposterous, I think we can all agree.

There is a grey area both nationally and locally: there are very few formal powers and they apply pretty much only nationally. They are the legislative powers to vote on and to amend legislation, and the powers to question Ministers, to initiate debates or to scrutinise. Of course, we have immense power at certain moments. We may have noticed that when we—those of us in the PLP, at least—determined who the Prime Minister is. That is an enormous power and privilege but the other powers are heavily constrained by whipping.

Locally, no public or private organisation that provides services to our constituents is under any statutory obligation ever to meet us, consult us or respond to us. Of course, they do because they know our status but they are not under any obligation—not even councils are; it is incredible. We have no formal executive power locally to direct policy; we have no resources. Local councillors, for example, do have resources to deploy on issues that they care about. In my area, Rugby borough council is just about to bring in a £3,000 fund for each councillor and councillors on Warwickshire county council each have £8,000 per year to distribute to good causes and to make things happen in their constituency. We have the power of influence, convening, writing, talking and cajoling and that is not insignificant, but it is not enough. That is within the context that we face, which is vital.



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If we look at local Government reorganisation and devolution, we are seen as the most senior politician in our areas and yet we hear little else of metro mayors in the current debate. People assume that we have the power and the budget to deploy locally when we know that we do not. People assume that we can improve their area and local services. Of course we can, but the route to doing so is of course highly complex.

As Members of Parliament we end up being held accountable for almost everything that happens in our area. We pick up the pieces of often broken or failing local and national public services, and much more besides. Of course, if I could be so bold, due to our nature as democratically elected politicians, we are incentivised to maximise the appearance of power and minimise the absence of it, which is slightly ironic.

I am seeking a debate to discuss this perhaps most vital role in our democracy, and most importantly to give hon. Members across the House the opportunity to make their suggestions and discuss these issues. They can take it wherever they want: they can talk about the logistics of being an MP, our formal powers, our informal powers and the support we receive; maybe even pay and our package, security and the wider context, as I have mentioned. I want the debate to be about not complaints or moaning but improving the situation, focused on solutions and constructive ideas.

MPs are vital to our democracy, and I believe that our status, power and authority need to be enhanced—not for our benefit, but for the benefit of our constituents and the democracy of this country. MPs must have more opportunities to speak out, and I want this debate to be part of a much wider discussion here in this place, among the various Committees, with academia and others, about revitalising our democracy. Rewiring the state must include improving and revising the role, status and powers of MPs. When I mentioned my application to colleagues, they were very interested. I think the debate would be well supported from across the House, and it is an important and timely one.

Chair: Thank you. I would add to your observations that, for those of us who have served in executive roles in local authorities, becoming an MP changes your position from one of making decisions that affect people in the places they live to one of, “Can I bring influence to bear to make a decision?”. It is very frustrating, I agree.

Q19 **Will Stone:** Thank you for bringing this debate forward, John. Would you want it to coincide with any particular time, or to happen as soon as possible?

John Slinger: As soon as possible, Will—I am not supposed to call you Will, am I?

Will Stone: I called you John, so I started it.

John Slinger: Thank you, Will.



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Chair: Any other questions? I think we all have an interest in this.

Q20 **Alison Hume:** I do. Thank you for bringing this application, John. I describe myself as a combination of the Terminator and a fairy godmother. That is how I think my constituents see me, but of course, as you say, the reality is completely different. I cannot believe that we have never debated this—is that right, Chair, to your knowledge?

John Slinger: We did check, and I did not find anything, although there may have been some debates that I have not found.

Alison Hume: I am sure that if it is accepted, it will be oversubscribed, because you know we MPs love talking about ourselves!

Chair: There probably were discussions about this during the expenses scandals, when IPSA was set up, because there is obviously a rationale for that. The Standards Commissioner clearly has an interest in this—as we know, he tried to inflict certain things on MPs—and I think IPSA would have a say on what happens. But you are absolutely right: we have no contract of employment; we have no job description; we set up a small business; we employ our staff, albeit to contracts and within a budget; and there are examples of people who arrived in this place and sworn their oath of allegiance, but who have never been to their constituency or done anything for their constituents, and somehow they managed to get re-elected.

John Slinger: It is extraordinary.

Chair: It is. Anyway, the Clerks will be in touch with you in due course about a potential date. Thank you, John.

Liz Jarvis made representations.

Q21 **Chair:** Our final application is from Liz Jarvis. It is an application for a Tuesday morning Westminster Hall debate on improving post-diagnostic support for people living with dementia. Liz, please present your case.

Liz Jarvis: Or a Tuesday afternoon.

Chair: We get to allocate only Tuesday mornings and Thursday afternoons in Westminster Hall.

Liz Jarvis: Okay. I am sure that many of us have been impacted by dementia or will know constituents who have been impacted by dementia.

Without wishing to bring everybody down, one in three of us will develop dementia. It is obviously the defining health and social care challenge of our time. Later this year the Government's modern service framework for frailty and dementia and the first publication of the Casey commission is expected. This would be a timely debate looking at what happens after diagnosis. At the moment, in far too many cases, people are told that they have dementia, and then they get sent home and are left to get on with it. They have to do their own research and find out about everything themselves. However, research shows that if properly supported, they can



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live a reasonably productive and active life for as long as possible. That is really important.

This debate has cross-party support and would give Members the chance to talk about experiences in their constituencies and to put the case forward for ensuring that everybody in the UK has access to the post-diagnostic support that they need.

Chair: Thank you.

Q22 **Alison Hume:** Thank you for bringing this application, Liz. Would you consider a debate on a Thursday in Westminster Hall in order for it to happen in October or November as requested?

Liz Jarvis: Yes, we would consider it, but the ideal would obviously not be either of those.

Q23 **Alison Hume:** But you would consider it?

Liz Jarvis: We would.

Q24 **Chair:** What would be the answering Department? Is it Health and Social Care or is there a different Department?

Liz Jarvis: It is Health and Social Care. I am trying to think who the Minister is now because the last time I spoke about dementia it was Stephen Kinnock, but it is not him anymore.

Chair: They have all changed.

Liz Jarvis: Yes.

Chair: The only reason I ask is that because if it is a Tuesday morning it has to fit within when Health and Social Care are answering. Thursday afternoon is different and anyone can answer; it is basically a free for all.

Thank you very much. The Clerks will be in touch with you shortly.