



HOUSE OF COMMONS

# Backbench Business Committee

## Representations: Backbench Debates

Tuesday 16 November 2021

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Ian Mearns (Chair); Duncan Baker; Bob Blackman; Patricia Gibson; Nigel Mills; Kate Osborne.

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### Representations

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Written evidence from witnesses:

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**Jim Shannon** made representations.

Q1 **Chair:** We have a number of applications before us this afternoon. First up we have Jim Shannon, who has renewed his season ticket with the Committee. You have applied for a debate on surgical fires in the national health service. Over to you, Jim.

**Jim Shannon:** First of all, thank you for giving me the opportunity to request this debate. I have also sent in a wee list of extra names. That is just because we did not have the chance last week to collect all the names that I wanted, because of the recess.

This is an issue that I brought to the attention of the Secretary of State for Health way back in October or November of last year. I asked a number of questions on it. Unfortunately, a year has passed and the commitment that I had hoped to have from the Secretary of State has not arrived.

Some people have asked, "What are surgical fires? What does that mean?" Surgical fires occur in an operating theatre setting during surgery, and they can cause life-changing injuries to patients and significant trauma to the clinical theatre staff involved in such events. NHS Resolution has confirmed that between 2009 and 2019, it was notified of 631 clinical negligence claims relating to operating theatre fires. It is an issue of some importance because of the danger of insurance claims. I have to say, with great respect—I always try to be respectful—that there has been no clear acknowledgment of the issue from the Secretary of State in the way I would have liked. The debate I have requested is therefore very clear, and the names of those who want to participate are there.

The expert working group for the prevention of surgical fires was established in May 2019. Its report recommended mandating "the inclusion of surgical fire prevention into surgical and perioperative education and training syllabus"; that NHS England should "explore how to evolve the procurement process of sanitising products, to reduce surgical fire risk and encourage procurement of proven surgical fire-safe technologies"; and that NHS England should "explore the development of a standardised patient safety alert system that aligns the processes and outputs of all bodies and teams, that issue alerts and makes sure there are clear and effective actions for providers to take on safety critical issues." The expert working group has stated that it is looking to make surgical fires a "never event", and to have specific mandatory training adopted for all operating theatre staff.

We feel this is vastly important. For that reason, Chair, I have come to the Backbench Business Committee, as I often do when I have to request a debate on issues that I feel are of such importance that we need to have a Minister in place to answer.

**Chair:** Thank you very much indeed, Jim. You have given us a list of about a dozen names to go with the application.



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**Jim Shannon:** There are actually 13 names. I hope it is a lucky 13.

**Chair:** It is a baker's dozen. Any questions, Bob?

Q2 **Bob Blackman:** One question, Jim: you have got an application already on our waiting list for a debate on improving asthma outcomes, which is something I have a lot of sympathy with. Would you prioritise that application over this one, or would you rather get your one on surgical fires in the NHS earlier, because it is slightly more urgent?

**Jim Shannon:** I think there are a few things that I have asked for in the pecking order. With the asthma debate that we are waiting for, we would like that first. We will keep the requests coming, Chair; you know that. Perhaps we can do them in the order that they come in.

Q3 **Bob Blackman:** It is a good job we only meet once a week.

**Chair:** Your season ticket has not run out yet, Jim, so you are okay. Thank you very much indeed.

**Alicia Kearns** made representations.

Q4 **Chair:** Next up, we have Alicia Kearns, Sarah Champion and Stuart Malcolm McDonald on the territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the need to uphold the Dayton peace accord.

**Alicia Kearns:** I am afraid you have only got me, Chair; I apologise. However, the others have not withdrawn their support. I am just sharing a revised divisible motion. I am grateful to you all for your time today. As you know, this is my first bid, so please be kind.

I have come before you today for a reason of great significance and importance. As you can see, I think every political party bar the Alba party has signed up to support this application. Around 40 Members of Parliament have signed up, including the three Select Committee Chairs who are relevant to this area—the Chairs of the International Development Committee, the Defence Committee and the Foreign Affairs Committee. Bosnia and Herzegovina is not something we talk about that often as parliamentarians, but we have an incredibly important history, going back to 1880, of helping bring peace and stability to the region. Obviously, we sent troops during the genocide and the conflict in the 1990s, including two Members of our own Parliament, both of whom have supported this debate and would like to speak in it.

The United Kingdom is a signatory to the Dayton peace agreement, so what our Parliament says about the situation in Bosnia is of particular significance and importance. Obviously, the late Lord Ashdown was one of the most distinguished High Representatives since the Dayton peace agreement. The situation in Bosnia is deteriorating at a rate that has taken all of us by surprise. Not since the Dayton agreement have the Bosnian people felt so at risk from an outbreak of ethnic and political tensions and outright conflict on the streets of Bosnia. Dodik, the Serbian member of



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the Bosnian and Herzegovinian presidency, has called for mutiny in the armed forces by Serb members. He has created parallel Serbian institutions, and he plans to create his own independent army, backed by Republika Srpska and the Russian Government.

This is the closest we have been to war, and when I speak to people, I find that the voice of the UK Parliament is something incredibly unique. The Bosnian community here rightly believe that all Parliaments should speak up, but none carries as much influence or sway as the UK Government does. When we speak about Bosnia, it is on the front pages of the Bosnian newspapers. When we speak united, it could actually result in meaningful change. We have a duty to speak up for the importance of upholding Dayton and the legitimacy of the political institutions created from it, and I think that in the current climate, the collective voice of parliamentarians from all parties can help encourage peace and stability. The High Representative of Bosnia will be in the UK at the start of December—that was one of the requests of the APPG that I chair—and this is about creating a timely debate in which we show that the House is united on a matter of great consequence.

That does not mean that there will not be division in this debate. There are those who believe that we should perhaps allow the Republika Srpska to secede, as long as it is done in a peaceful manner. There will be those who will wish to talk about Russian interventions. There will be those who will want to talk about whether the Dayton agreements were a good or a bad thing. There will be those who will want to talk about whether the genocide denial Bill was a good thing. There will be many different reasons why people will want to speak in this debate, but my plea to you is this: Bosnia is watching, Serbia is watching, Russia is watching, and those countries around Bosnia that are being pressured by Russia are also watching. Despite the fact that we will disagree on some important matters, our Parliament coming together in this debate will send an important message. United, we can do that, and we can help to prevent a descent into conflict. Thank you for considering the application.

**Chair:** Alicia, thank you very much indeed. Any questions? Bob, please.

Q5 **Bob Blackman:** I declare an interest, in that I went on a parliamentary visit to Bosnia during the conference recess, and I agree completely with what you are saying, Alicia. Can I just ask about the urgency of this debate? Obviously, as you have said, there is a concern that Bosnia is almost at the point of war now, and we have a problem in the sense that we do not have time allocated to us until, potentially, 2 December. Would that be timely enough for you? By the way, there is no guarantee that we will even get 2 December, but would that fit with the timeframe you are looking at?

**Alicia Kearns:** A debate on 2 December would be a dream, because obviously that would be the day on which the High Representative is arriving in the UK, so that would send an even stronger message—the fact that on the day he arrived, we held this debate. I was hoping that the motion I put before you would pass through on the nod. The sooner we do



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it, the better, because Russia believe that we have taken our eye off the ball, and that is the argument they are making. The sooner the mother of Parliaments shows that it has decidedly not done so, the better, but I appreciate that you have other competing requests.

**Duncan Baker:** That is very much what I was going to ask—about the urgency.

**Chair:** Thank you. This is something that I have a lot of sympathy with, having visited Sarajevo in 2002, when Newcastle won 1-0.

**Alicia Kearns:** An unknown key part of history.

**Chair:** It was an interesting experience, because we, as the Newcastle fans, were protected by UN peacekeepers who were keeping the Bosnian police away from us. We had the Bosnian police, the Željezničar football team and their fans, and then the UN peacekeepers, with us protected by those peacekeepers—who were Irish, by the way.

Outside of the football, which was a bloody awful match, the fact that so many Newcastle fans had travelled there in the aftermath of conflict—that we were daft enough to go there in the first place—meant that it was like a return to some sort of normality. There's a little historical anecdote. Thank you very much indeed, Alicia; that is much appreciated.

**Alicia Kearns:** Thank you, all.

**Dawn Butler** made representations.

Q6 **Chair:** Next up, we have Dawn Butler. Your application is on responsibility for the ministerial code. Over to you, please.

**Dawn Butler:** This is a simple application that every single Member of Parliament should have a vested interest in: responsibility for the ministerial code. People outside of Parliament do not really understand how we work and operate—and a lot of us inside do not really understand how we work and operate. If we can clarify who is responsible for the ministerial code and how it should work and operate—no matter who is the governing party—I think that will help to build trust in the system and in Parliament. At the moment, we in Parliament are losing the public's trust, and we have to build that up as strongly as we can.

A number of MPs who I have not put on the list are very interested in being part of and supporting the debate. There are lots of different ideas about whether responsibility for the code should be quasi-judicial or rest with the Standards Committee or the whole House. All of that could come out in the debate.

Q7 **Nigel Mills:** I probably broadly support the idea, but you have precisely zero Conservative MPs on the list that you sent in.

**Chair:** Sir Peter Bottomley has been added.



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**Nigel Mills:** Okay, you have one, but for a three-hour debate we would normally expect—

**Dawn Butler:** One is more than zero.

**Nigel Mills:** The name was not on the list that I looked at. We would normally expect seven or eight, give or take, for a three-hour debate. Do you think that you could get seven or eight Government MPs for some balance on the motion?

**Dawn Butler:** A number of Conservative MPs have expressed an interest in participating in the debate. They have some ideas on what they think should happen with regard to the ministerial code. There is a Conservative MP on the application. It is balanced. If you look at the EDM that I put down, more than 100 MPs have signed that. I know that your Committee has sometimes agreed to have debates with just one Member of Parliament.

I think this is a very important debate. There need to be considerations around the sensitivity of some MPs who are interested in the debate but do not want to put their head above the parapet for exactly the reasons why we need to have the debate.

Q8 **Nigel Mills:** Okay, but we will not progress your application unless you can get at least half a dozen, I guess, to give it some balance.

**Dawn Butler:** So the rules are that you need to have half Government Members.

**Nigel Mills:** Roughly.

**Dawn Butler:** Is this for all applications?

**Nigel Mills:** Certainly for those in the Chamber.

Q9 **Chair:** What we have to do is to get Members from all parties. If it is over-dominated by one side, we would look to get some balance. It works both ways: we have had applications with nothing but Conservative names where we asked them to get Labour Members. If you have got MPs who have expressed an interest, you should ask if they would be willing to add their names to the application. Your application is in and live, and it can be added to.

**Dawn Butler:** Can I just be clear? There are a number of parties. There are Members from Plaid Cymru, the Green party, the Scottish National party, the Alba party and the Lib Dems. We have got a Conservative Member on there and five from Labour. There is a mix of parties, and a Conservative MP. Can I be clear how many more names I need to get?

Q10 **Chair:** I would suggest that if you can get three or four, that would be ample.

**Dawn Butler:** So I need to get another two.

**Chair:** I would say three or four.



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**Bob Blackman:** Three or four more.

**Chair:** Yes, three or four more.

**Dawn Butler:** Just to be clear, you want three or four more Conservative MPs.

Q11 **Bob Blackman:** To be clear, in our private session we were discussing an application on our list that has been outstanding for a year and requires extra Government names, but the applicant has not provided those extra names. As the Chair says, your application will go on the list, but it will not go forward for debate until those names are provided, because we have other pressing matters and very little time allocated to us.

**Dawn Butler:** I understand that. I am just being clear, so that I can get the names and then come forward. Then there will be no delays. So, you want another three or four names.

**Chair:** It is just a paper exercise. Just email in the names—that is all that is required. You will not need to come back to the Committee.

Q12 **Nigel Mills:** I have a separate question. The motion that you have suggested, Dawn, is a bit of an amalgam of “this House has considered” and a specific motion. Would you be willing to reword it to say that the Committee on Standards should take over responsibility for the ministerial code, and to take out the “this House has considered”? I was not quite clear whether it was a neutral motion for the House to consider, or whether you actually wanted a positive recommendation on a particular change.

**Dawn Butler:** Yes, absolutely. I would not have a problem with that. Some other MPs have suggested that, too. I would be happy with that.

**Chair:** Thank you very much indeed. You could resubmit the wording in a format that you would prefer, but it is a live application. You do not need to come back to us. Just get us some names, then word the motion as you want.

**Dawn Butler:** Okay. Thanks, Chair.

**Chair:** That is much appreciated.

**Dame Margaret Hodge** and **Kevin Hollinrake** made representations.

Q13 **Chair:** Next up, we have Dame Margaret Hodge and Kevin Hollinrake, who are applying for a debate on economic crime. Welcome, good afternoon and over to you.

**Kevin Hollinrake:** Thank you, Chair. We believe the debate that we are applying for is very important. It is also very urgent, and it has strong support across the House from 40 parliamentarians. I don't know whether you have ever read a book called “Moneyland” by Oliver Bullough, but it is well worth a read. He sets out that just about every evil, nationally or



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internationally, is facilitated by the UK's lax regime in terms of the facilitation of economic crime. Things such as corruption, organised crime, tax evasion, terrorism and the impoverishment of nations are all facilitated by the country's lax rules surrounding the ability to effectively hide money and the proceeds—the ill-gotten gains—of all those different activities. The National Crime Agency estimates that it costs the UK alone £100 billion a year.

The Government have promised to act on this, so the debate is about holding their feet to the fire. We are pushing at an open door, but there is no guarantee that the forthcoming economic crime Bill will contain some of these provisions. It may come next week, the week after or in some months, but it may not include the very important provisions that we have set out. The key elements of this are a register of overseas entities that own properties in the UK, which is a very common way for criminals and other parties who are laundering money to hide money within the UK, and reforms of Companies House to make it a regulator rather than simply a register. Company formations in the UK are very simple and are another classic way to hide money.

The final issue that we hope to address in the debate is the most important thing: a requirement for companies to prevent economic crime. There should be a "failure to prevent" offence for senior executives in our largest organisations—be they banks, insurance companies or whatever—who often turn a blind eye to economic crime that is facilitated by their organisations. They should have to put checks and balances in place to prevent this from happening. If they did that, it would be a very significant measure in reducing economic crime.

Some of the key people among the 40 who are supporting this application are John Penrose, who is the Prime Minister's corruption tsar, and Baroness Manzoor, who is the chair of the Financial Ombudsman Service.

**Dame Margaret Hodge:** Thanks very much, Chair. I think the issue is really urgent. In an odd way, it links to all the concerns around standards as well—the two are sort of linked. We have become very much the jurisdiction of choice for a lot of dirty money—that is the honest truth. That is because we have allowed a lax regulatory regime, where even what is there is not well resourced, and people are not doing anything about it.

Anybody who saw the Pandora papers—they did not get a lot of coverage; people are almost becoming immune to these leaks now—saw, for example, that £4 billion of property bought in the UK is bought through foreign companies, often British Virgin Islands-registered companies, where the owner is anonymous. What you do is you set up this shell company in the BVI, you take your money that you might have got as a kleptocrat from a developing country or from Russia or from drugs smuggling—as Kevin said, all these crimes lead to that—and then you bring it in and put it through various accounts, and we allow that money, because our Companies House register is so poor, to come into the legitimate system. Just in that one leak, there was £4 billion-worth of



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property, and people such as the Crown estate is involved in transactions that probably—probably—involve money laundering. That is really important.

I used to be a huge supporter of what David Cameron was doing in this field because he had an anti-corruption debate and he set out a national economic crime, but we have got worse and worse over time, and we now are the jurisdiction of choice for too much dirty money. The reason this links into everything else is that money corrupts, doesn't it? You are now getting a lot of linkage between the money coming in and the influence it is having on our politics—that is particularly about Russian money. There is a lot of Russian money coming in—God knows how—that ends up in the coffers of political parties, and that is really dangerous.

There is a relevance today around all these issues, and it is linking the economic crime to the unrest around Committee standards, so we really want this. What is frustrating for those of us who have been campaigning for a long time is that the legislation is there. For example, the legislation to have a public register of properties so that we know what foreigners own here is there. I know it has been written—I know the civil servants have written it—but they just have not brought it forward. The legislation on Companies House, which is where you have to put in all the details of who owns a company—the beneficial ownership of the company—is also there. They have been consulting on it for two, three years. It is there; it is ready to go, and it is very frustrating that they do not do it.

The final thing is the corporate liability reform. That is absolutely essential if you are going to stop the enablers—the accountants, the banks, which Kevin has done a lot of work with, and all the others—actually facilitating economic crime. Behind economic crime is all crime. You think about it as just money, but where does the money come from? Too often it is terrorism, drugs and bad things. We therefore think this is a really urgent debate. We have massive cross-party support. It is just to push the Government into acting with the legislation we know they have on the books.

**Q14 Chair:** Thank you very much indeed. In terms of timing, you will have heard the exchanges earlier on. We have not been awarded any time that is not already allocated. We are running up to 25 November, as we speak. We hope to get some time in December. It may well be that after Christmas we get some more time, but how soon would you like this, if at all possible?

**Kevin Hollinrake:** Our worry is that the Government bring forward a Bill that is not sufficiently broad and all-encompassing. That could happen at any time; we just do not know when that will be. You have heard this a lot, Chair, but the sooner, the better. It is critically urgent.

**Q15 Chair:** We are in the gift of the Government because of them awarding us time to allocate. Sadly, we do not have this Thursday. We have 25 November, which is already pre-allocated. If we can get some time in early December, that would be as soon as we possibly could do.



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**Dame Margaret Hodge:** The other thing I would say is that if we go through another Parliament without putting this legislation on the statute book, that is really terrible for all of us in terms of Britain's reputation and standing in the world. So if you want to get it in in this Parliament—it should have been in this year—

Q16 **Chair:** It could have been in the Finance Bill, couldn't it?

**Kevin Hollinrake:** I would have been happy to see it there.

**Dame Margaret Hodge:** Do you know, we keep trying to amend the Finance Bill, but they are getting so clever at limiting the scope of a Bill that you cannot even ruddy amend it? I have been trying that for yonks now and we have had some success, but not enough. They have got too clever at it.

Q17 **Bob Blackman:** Do you have any intelligence about when the Government may come forward with their Bill? As the Chair said, the earliest we are going to get any time in the Chamber will be 2 December, and there is no guarantee we will even get that, given what is going on. We haven't got this Thursday, for example, because the Government have taken over the time. If you have intelligence about when they may come forward, could you pass it to us? You don't have to come back to the Committee, but could you let us know?

**Kevin Hollinrake:** We can ask the question again. We have asked that several times and not been given anything approaching a straight answer, so we just don't know. We will keep asking the question and if we hear anything, we will certainly let you know.

**Chair:** Nigel?

**Nigel Mills:** I am co-chair with Margaret of one of the APPGs on this application, so I will not take any role.

**Maria Miller** made representations.

Q18 **Chair:** Next up, we have Maria Miller with an application for International Women's Day. I am very glad to see that this has been submitted well in advance, Maria.

**Mrs Miller:** Mr Mearns, I know the pressure on your time and the Committee's time, so I thought a timely application for International Women's Day would be called for.

As you can see, the application has wide cross-party support and I am speaking on behalf of the all-party parliamentary group on women in Parliament, which has taken on the mantle of choreographing events around International Women's Day. As Members will know, that is 8 March, which is a Tuesday next year. Ideally, a debate on the Tuesday would be wonderful but Thursday would be just fine.



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As I did in previous years, I have also written to the Leader of the House to remind him of the commitments the Government has given in the past to a debate in Government time. To reflect the significance of International Women's Day, and given my past experience of the Leader of the House not quite finding time for the debate, I thought I would put in a parallel application to this Committee to ensure we were not caught out.

It is particularly important that we have a debate on International Women's Day next year because of the amount of emphasis there has been, particularly in the G7, through COP and through coronavirus, on the differential impacts these events have had on women and, as colleagues will know, the differential impact that being a Member of Parliament can have on female colleagues. If you remember the debate last year, it was particularly moving and difficult because of the personal testimony of some Members around the harassment and experiences they face as female Members of Parliament.

But this is not a debate only for women. Indeed, I will be going to the International Men's Day debate, which I believe is next week, and I hope many male colleagues will be able to take part in the International Women's Day debate too.

I think the debate and events around it have become a part of the parliamentary calendar. I hope that colleagues on this Committee will be able to support some of the events as well. If there any questions, I would be very happy to answer them.

**Q19 Chair:** Thank you very much indeed. Given that the Government normally allocate us Thursdays, which Thursday would you prefer on either side of the 8th? Would it be the one before or the one immediately after?

**Mrs Miller:** I consulted some of the groups who are involved, and it is generally felt that the week of the 7th will be the week when most people are doing their events, so Thursday 10 March would be entirely brilliant.

**Q20 Nigel Mills:** Maria, you have ticked the box to ask for a general debate, but you have given us text for a motion. Which would you rather have?

**Mrs Miller:** I am in the hands of the Committee. I think a more substantive motion is always nicer, although I am never quite sure whether that puts me at odds with the Committee or not. I think the motion I have put down is quite focused on some of the particularly pithy issues we face, so maybe a substantive motion would be more reflective of the need for a really thorough debate on these issues.

**Chair:** Okay, we will put it down as a substantive motion.

**Q21 Bob Blackman:** You have ticked the boxes for 90 minutes and three hours, which is very helpful for the Committee. However, given the number of people who will wish to participate, I gently suggest that a three-hour debate will be required.

**Mrs Miller:** Mr Blackman, I will be guided by you. I think you are entirely right; I think there would be a lot of disappointed colleagues if it was only



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a 90-minute debate. Given the nature of the debate, I think it should be held on the Floor of the House and that it would be seen as a retrograde step if it was held in Westminster Hall.

**Chair:** If you actually get three hours on a Thursday, you will have done extremely well, because that never happens, but there we go. Thank you very much indeed, Maria.

**Mrs Miller:** Thank you very much.

**Nadia Whittome** made representations.

Q22 **Chair:** Lastly, but certainly not leastly, we have Nadia Whittome on corruption in the UK. Nice to see you.

**Nadia Whittome:** Thank you, Chair. I see that we have votes shortly, so I will try to be as quick as possible.

First, thank you all for considering this application. You will see that the application has the support of Labour colleagues, the SNP, the Green party, the SDLP, Plaid Cymru and Alliance, and since the application was submitted Jim Shannon from the DUP has also added his name. I am afraid that I have not yet been able to get signatures from Conservative colleagues, but I am confident that that will be possible, given the urgency of the debate and the attention there has been on the issue.

There has been a lot of press coverage on corruption in politics in recent weeks, and it is important for us, as a Parliament, to have a sensible, cross-party debate about the issue so that we take some of the tension out of it, and to speak in more practical terms about the concerns the public rightly have and about how we can react constructively to those concerns and work together to ensure public confidence. That will require a discussion beyond individual cases or allegations, particularly in the light of the recent report from the Committee on Standards in Public Life. There is an opportunity to have that discussion and examine the institutional architecture we have to detect, prevent and act on corruption at not only a national level but a local level. There have been reports in many areas of inadequate scrutiny in local government, so that should be part of this debate as well.

There is also a lot of excellent academic work in this area and some interesting international examples I think the whole House could benefit from discussing together in a more collegiate manner than the usual debates in the House allow.

Given that I am confident we will be able to get some Conservative colleagues to support this, I think this debate would be in all of our interests. I hope you will be able to consider granting us the opportunity to discuss this issue.

**Chair:** You will have listened to the exchanges earlier. It is a live



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application. It has been submitted and it is in order, except for the fact that it has no Conservative names on it. If you can add a handful of Conservative names, that would make it a full-blown application.

- Q23 **Nigel Mills:** As the co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on anti-corruption and responsible tax, I clearly support the topic that you want to raise. You are raising a very broad debate that, as you say, could range over all manner of things, so I suppose my only question is, do you want to focus on standards in public life, donations and politicians, or do you want it to be a broad-ranging debate on the robustness of procurement and all those other issues that are entirely relevant here? That would be quite a lot to cover in one session.

**Nadia Whittome:** In some senses, you are right. It is broad, because it would be not just national but local as well. But it is also quite specific, in that it would look at the institutional architecture that exists and the fact that a lot of our current anti-corruption legislation focuses on foreign power, which misses a lot of the problems that we have. It would be an opportunity for us to talk about how we proactively root out corruption in institutions rather than just react to it, which inevitably means that it becomes a conversation around individuals, which has to be done, of course, but that does not get to the issue and stop it from happening again.

- Q24 **Nigel Mills:** I suppose one reason why I was asking was to find out which Government Department you would want to respond. If you want it to be about standards in public life, you might want the Cabinet Office or the Leader of the House. If you want it to be about law enforcement, that would be the Home Office. If it is financial issues, that would be the Treasury. If it was local government standards, you could end up with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. You might want to think—you have plenty of time—about focusing your debate.

**Nadia Whittome:** Maybe not plenty of time. Maybe everyone will rush to add their signatures.

- Q25 **Nigel Mills:** Perhaps just think about whether you want to refine the title of the debate to get the response that you want. Otherwise, the Government might just pick any one of those to respond and you might not get the outcome you are looking for.

**Nadia Whittome:** Thank you for that advice. I will be led by the Committee's guidance on that, but my thought would probably be the Cabinet Office or the Leader of the House.

- Q26 **Chair:** In terms of timing, you are obviously aware that we are not awash with time. Would some time before Christmas suffice?

**Nadia Whittome:** That would be excellent and very much appreciated.

**Chair:** That is of course dependent on a handful of names coming forward to the Clerk.

**Nadia Whittome:** Of course.



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Q27 **Duncan Baker:** Can I suggest, as a newbie here, that there are some similarities between this and Dawn Butler's application? They are different, but there are obvious similarities. With time being so pressed in terms of getting so many debates through, would it help, not necessarily if debates were merged, but if there was an agreement between the two parties to say, "We will have a debate on corruption and breaches of the ministerial code"? Clearly, there are synergies, and it might help you get in quicker.

**Nadia Whittome:** If that would help the Committee and help us, I would be happy to have those conversations with Dawn.

**Chair:** It is your application, so you might want to have that discussion with Dawn, but the problem still exists that, between the pair of you, you need Conservative names.

**Nadia Whittome:** She has one more than I have.

**Chair:** Thank you very much. That concludes our public session. We will now go into private session.