



## Backbench Business Committee

### Transcript of meeting

Tuesday 9 February 2016

Representations made before the Backbench Business Committee on Tuesday 9 February 2016

Members present; Ian Mearns (Chair), Bob Blackman, Kevin Foster, Mr Philip Hollobone, Gavin Newlands and Mr David Nuttall.

**Dr Lisa Cameron, Sir Roger Gale, Liz Saville Roberts and Richard Arkless; Mr Chuka Umunna; Mims Davies, Mrs Maria Miller and Dawn Butler; Dr Rupa Huq, Wes Streeting and Dawn Butler** made representations.

Questions 1-55

**Dr Lisa Cameron, Sir Roger Gale, Liz Saville Roberts and Richard Arkless** made representations.

**Q1 Chair:** Good afternoon and welcome. First today we have an application from Dr Lisa Cameron. Lisa, you have an application on the topic of the welfare of young dogs bred for sale. Can you tell us why you would like the debate, please?

**Dr Cameron:** It has been an issue that has been brought up in my constituency, but also across a number of constituencies. I am aware that one of my colleagues who has not been able to come today has also had an issue with puppy sales and puppies being brought across the border through the ports, and has therefore had to have some contact with the port authorities. There are issues in terms of animal welfare in relation to puppy sales. Regulations and legislation were brought in many years ago prior to internet sales, and there are issues of puppies being taken from their mothers at a very early stage. Puppies that are being bought by consumers are unfortunately dying or are in very poor health, which is causing distress for constituents too.

**Q2 Chair:** Thank you. Do you have anything to add?

**Liz Saville Roberts:** I would like to add to that on the issue of internet sales. I have a rural constituency and it is an issue with some farm dogs, and the way that they are bred. We have already mentioned the ports—I have a daughter who works with container shipping, and the issue of security in ports that this raises is one particular aspect. I support Lisa in her aims here.

**Sir Roger Gale:** Apologies—I am new here and I was not quite sure of the system. I have a front-line interest in this because Kent is, of course, a front-line county when it comes to the illegal import of puppies. I also have a son who is a veterinary surgeon, who deals with the mess—literally and metaphorically—that is created. It is a very dangerous situation that we are facing, because potentially we could be importing terrifying diseases. It is an issue that has to be addressed, and addressed very publicly. That is why I am wholeheartedly behind the pitch for a debate to air it properly.

**Q3 Mr Hollobone:** What would you like to achieve?

**Dr Cameron:** We have to bring awareness, initially, but we also have to urge the Government and Ministers to review the legislation, which is frankly outdated. It is not up to date in terms of internet sales and it does not address some of the very real issues that we are speaking about in terms of transporting puppies across borders.

**Q4 Mr Hollobone:** Why do you not have a motion saying that this House calls on Her Majesty's Government to bring forward legislation to improve the welfare of puppies?

**Dr Cameron:** I had thought that we would have the initial debate and garner support, and then having a motion would be the next stage in taking things forward. I am open to suggestions in that regard.

**Q5 Mr Hollobone:** Given the seriousness of the issue and the fact that you are from Scotland and Sir Roger is from Kent—and many constituencies in between will have Members who are interested—do you think 90 minutes will be enough to cover this topic?

**Dr Cameron:** When I contacted Members who were interested, initially we had nine from different constituencies and parties, including from Northern Ireland, Wales, Scotland and England, come forward. Because of the number of Members who came forward, I felt initially that a 90-minute debate in Westminster Hall would be a starting point. Since we applied, other Members have come forward to say that they would be willing to speak, but I took advice on the length of debate on the basis of the number of Members who had shown an interest initially when I applied.

**Q6 Kevin Foster:** My first question is what motion you are looking for, because normally we have something about that. I see that you are going for a general debate, but could you confirm roughly what wording you are thinking of?

**Dr Cameron:** It is “That this House has considered puppy farming in the UK.”

**Q7 Kevin Foster:** Puppy farming in the UK.

**Dr Cameron:** Yes, puppy farming and sales in the UK.

**Q8 Kevin Foster:** Just puppy farming and not importation, or would it be stretched to both?

**Dr Cameron:** Well, that is part of it. Puppy farming covers importation, too. Often what happens in relation to puppy farming in the UK is that puppies are imported across the border.

**Sir Roger Gale:** Could I add to that? The reason why the issue is puppy farming—maybe that is too tightly drawn—is that puppy farms and irresponsible and sometimes reprehensible dog breeders are used to launder the puppies that are imported illegally, so it is part of a bigger trade.

**Q9 Kevin Foster:** My second question is this: why did you want to start pursuing this through a Backbench Business debate, rather than, for example, a ten-minute rule Bill asking for leave to bring in some legislation? Why is a Backbench Business debate the best way of kicking this off?

**Dr Cameron:** A number of individuals had spoken with me and indicated that they wished to speak in a debate in this regard, and I thought it would be extremely helpful to have a debate to garner views from right across the House. That is why I applied for a debate in the first instance.

**Sir Roger Gale:** Could I again elaborate and perhaps also come to Mr Hollobone's point on what we want to achieve? It will not surprise you to learn that I am not a natural over-regulator, but by the same token, there is regulation there that is being ignored. The facilities are there to stop puppies being imported illegally. That is not working. We do not need more legislation; we need to make what is there work. The internet control legislation is there, but again it is not being implemented in a way that serves this purpose. So the purpose of the debate would be to highlight what is there, what is not working and how we can make it work without going for more legislation.

**Q10 Chair:** Given that we have gone from puppy farming to the importation of puppies, which do you think would be the appropriate Department to answer your debate? We were considering whether it would be DEFRA, but it could be the Home Office.

**Dr Cameron:** I had thought it would be DEFRA.

**Sir Roger Gale:** DEFRA.

**Mr Nuttall:** That is what I was going to ask—which Department you were talking about.

**Mr Chuka Umunna** made representations.

**Chair:** Good afternoon, Chuka.

**Mr Umunna:** Good afternoon. I think this is the first time that, as a Member of Parliament, I have appeared before a Committee of the House, and I am very pleased to be appearing before you on this topic. Thank you, Chair, for taking me early on, in recognition of the fact that I have to go and sit

on the other side of the table in the Home Affairs Select Committee. That is where I should be now, but I think this issue is very important, so I wanted to be here.

**Q11 Chair:** You have asked for a debate on the topic of gangs and serious youth violence. Just outline the reason for your request, please.

**Mr Umunna:** Since I was elected to Parliament in 2010, I have asked just two questions at Prime Minister's questions—or I have been called to ask only two questions—and on each occasion I have done so because I have come to the House having been with a family where a young person has lost their life to serious youth violence in Lambeth. This issue has been plaguing and blighting our inner-city streets for a long time now, and not only in London, but across urban city centres in the UK.

In 2008 we had a problem of immense proportions, with 29 teenagers losing their lives to this serious youth and gang violence plaguing our streets. It is now on the rise again. Last year, 17 teenagers lost their lives. It is high time we recognised the importance of this issue by having a proper debate on the Floor of the House of Commons, looking at this problem and its solutions. There have been only two short Adjournment debates since 2010; I called one a couple of weeks ago and Karen Buck, the Labour MP for Westminster North, also had one in the last Parliament. Given what is happening, it is a disgrace that the House of Commons has not given the issue more attention. I do not mean to diminish the importance of other issues, but it sends a terrible signal to people in our diverse communities. I remember being in a Backbench Business debate in the Chamber in the previous Parliament when we debated the welfare of circus animals. If we are not able to have a Backbench Business debate on the welfare of young people on our streets in urban city centres in the UK in 2016, I think people will rightly question what on earth we are here to do.

**Chair:** I very much take the point, but the Committee does not generate applications for debates; we respond to the applications we receive.

**Q12 Mr Hollobone:** You said you are on the Home Affairs Select Committee. This is obviously a very serious issue which you are quite right to highlight. Is the Select Committee looking into this?

**Mr Umunna:** We produced a report on gang violence last year. As I said during my Adjournment debate, I do not see this as a party political issue, which is why I think it is very appropriate to have this debate in a Backbench Business Committee context. If we were seen to be playing politics with this issue—certainly if I was seen to be playing party politics with such an issue—it would be looked on very poorly indeed by my constituents. The House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee has looked at the issue, but we do not have a current inquiry into it.

**Q13 Mr Hollobone:** Does your motion reflect any of the recommendations of the report?

**Mr Umunna:** The report calls for a proper, overall evaluation of the Government's strategy in this area—I was not a member at the time. I will give an example. I have just talked about gangs. There is a question mark over whether we should be using that terminology at all. Back in 2008-09, when this was a very big issue, I was a trustee of a youth charity trying to grapple with gang violence in Lambeth. We had gangs in the sense of large groups of young people with an identifiable name. In Lambeth, we had gangs such as TM1, Gas Gang and so on. The situation now has changed somewhat; it is much more fluid and the groups of young people tend to be smaller. There is a question mark over

whether we should be using the word “gang” to address the problem, given that things have changed. That is another reason for my feeling that we need to talk about this in depth again.

**Q14 Mr Hollobone:** I am asking about the Select Committee because there is another route to discuss the issue. The Liaison Committee can also allocate time for debates, specifically on Select Committee reports. Has there been a Liaison Committee debate on the Home Affairs Committee report?

**Mr Umunna:** Not that I am aware of, but I should go back to what I said, which is the significance that the House of Commons is seen to attach to the issue. To be honest with you, I am not too bothered about how we end up having a debate on the Floor of the House, but we need to have a proper, lengthy debate on the issue—not at the fag end of a parliamentary working week on a Friday, as I had, but on a Thursday and for a decent amount of time. That would send a very powerful message about how seriously the House of Commons takes the issue.

**Q15 Bob Blackman:** May I explore the motion? It “calls for an independent or party commission”. Can you talk us through what you have in mind? I have at the back of my mind something that happened in the last parliamentary Session, when we had some problems about having a Backbench Business debate that was effectively setting up a commission. I just want to be clear what you have in mind so that we are not going to be offending any rules that may have been set up.

**Mr Umunna:** I thought you were actually going to ask me—this would have been very reasonable, as you were referring to rules and things that have happened in the past—how the commission would be different from the inquiry that the Government set up in the wake of the 2011 riots and unrest. I think this is a particular issue on which the Government have made a number of good interventions, during both this Parliament and the last Parliament. I think there is good practice that can be gleaned from what local authorities are doing across the country. But what we have not had is any concerted effort to bring that all together publicly and assess our progress.

I will be honest with you, Mr Blackman: during the last Parliament, when I asked my question of the Prime Minister about this, I did get some flak from my own side for stating that there was a belief on the streets that no political party and no Government of any persuasion had actually got to grips with this. I said that in spite of the huge and wonderful work that Vernon Coaker did as a Home Office Minister in the Parliament before 2010.

What a commission would do is enable us, for the first time in a long time, to take a step back and consider Government policy over a period of time. You will recall that at the beginning of my comments today I was referring back to the terrible figures for the number of teenage fatalities in 2008. Obviously we are talking about things over the course of three different Parliaments, which is why I think it would be appropriate to have the commission, to look into what policies have or have not been effective and how we address the issue overall.

Part of my motivation—I am trying to avoid using a phrase involving magic and weaponry, because it would not be appropriate in this context—is that there is not one magic solution to this issue. A suite of responses is required, but at a very basic level, in both a national and a local context, there has to be join-up. What we often find, both nationally and in different local authorities, is that all the different players who are addressing this issue do not often know what the others are doing and are not looking at it in a holistic way. That is the kind of stuff I would like the commission to do.

**Q16 Bob Blackman:** I understand completely what you are driving at, and it is laudable. My concern is the mechanics of the membership of this commission, how it is staffed, who it reports to and what happens as a result of doing this. Is this a Select Committee of the House, or—

**Mr Umunna:** Oh, I see what you mean. It would be a cross-party commission. I would like it to be set up as an independent commission, but at the instigation of the Government. I actually think that the Home Office have got the resource to do that, and they know many of the different agencies and third sector organisations that are operating in this area. So in the speech that I give, if you decide to grant the request that I am making today—

**Bob Blackman:** I don't want you to rehearse the speech.

**Mr Umunna:** I know; you have given me more ideas of things I need to cover. I will spell out exactly what the commission would look like and who would oversee it.

**Q17 Kevin Foster:** It would be an interesting debate on that point. Would it just be yourself leading it, or would there be anyone else joining you as a lead Member?

**Mr Umunna:** There are a number of other Members who have put in to support this application—you are going to ask me to reel them off, off the top of my head.

**Kevin Foster:** No, I'm not expecting you to.

**Mr Umunna:** One of them is actually in the room, Dawn Butler. I don't profess to be the authority on this issue, and I actually think that the more lead Members the better—I have in my head about four to five, maybe, but I have to confess that I have not done this process before. Four to five lead Members would probably be appropriate, because I think everybody brings a different perspective from a different part of the country to this issue.

**Q18 Kevin Foster:** It is usually just a couple. I take it that the view would be to have a debate that, I accept, would predominantly focus on London, but the effect spills out. When the Member for Ilford North asked a question at Prime Minister's Question Time about this, he wouldn't have realised that that day, someone who had grown up in my own constituency was murdered with a knife in London.

**Mr Umunna:** In your constituency, Mr Foster?

**Kevin Foster:** Someone who'd grown up in my constituency in Torbay, who'd just started a job in London and was killed on the streets in what seems to have been a random knife attack. That shows the impact across the country. I take it that the view would be also to allow discussion from Members from Greater Manchester, for example, and other parts of the country, to explore issues in their own area.

**Mr Umunna:** I was about to say that Greater Manchester has done a lot of good work in this area, as has Scotland, and Glasgow in particular. Although the stories you tend to read, because of the numbers, tend to be London-based, this is something that has been impacting many urban city centres across the UK. It would be a shame if we did not reflect that.

**Kevin Foster:** It is a great subject for debate.

**Q19 Mr Nuttall:** Yes, it is a strong application. There are good grounds to debate this matter. Can I explore further the date and timing of such a debate? Clearly, although it is important and urgent to the extent that, sadly, as you have just said, young people are losing their lives fairly regularly, the reality is that the debate is not going to be scheduled in the next couple of weeks. You stated that you are not available between 9 and 11 March. You specifically mentioned a Thursday earlier.

**Mr Umunna:** It doesn't have to be.

**Mr Nuttall:** Because we sometimes allocate on other days. I was just clarifying that point.

**Mr Umunna:** Thank you for your question, because that may help my application. Yes, I am not hung up on any particular day of the week. If this Committee wants to tell me now that you wish to give me the whole of a Monday to do it, I am not going to say no.

**Mr Nuttall:** We occasionally have other days. We had time yesterday.

**Mr Umunna:** My only restriction is that I am not available between 9 and 11 March. Otherwise, I am open.

**Q20 Chair:** If you have other names, could you please send them in to the Clerks so that they are there for the record?

**Mr Umunna:** Yes, and the Clerks have those names.

**Q21 Chair:** We have two separate applications on the subject of International Women's Day. Am I right in saying that both applicants are happy to have this taken as a joint application?

**Mims Davies:** I have a motion in my application.

**Chair:** That's a point of negotiation or discussion, but if you are happy to take the applications together, it would help us to facilitate them. Would that be all right?

**Mims Davies, Mrs Maria Miller and Dawn Butler** made representations.

**Mims Davies:** Thank you everyone for your time and attention this afternoon. I am the chair of the all-party parliamentary group for women in Parliament, and we have been through a long process to bring the application before the Committee. I am delighted to be supported by the Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee, Maria Miller. The all-party group came together, and the Select Committee was born from that group, in the previous Parliament, so it feels very appropriate for me to have the Chairman's support—or Chairperson, I should say.

I will bring the Committee up to speed with the process I have gone through to make this application. There was a meeting of the all-party women in Parliament group to discuss this application and to develop ideas for the day, because there is a programme in which students are invited to Parliament to be part of this day. We obviously have the substantive motion before you, and I have six parties in support of the application. I have several supportive Members who are keen to be

proactive, but many of them are currently speaking or involved either in the Chamber or on Committees, hopefully not all at the same time.

On the International Women's Day programme for 8 March, we have agreed sponsorship with Lloyds. We have organised tours of Downing Street, and there will be a cross-party panel event in the afternoon, supported by Universities UK, which will be sending us a leading academic. I have been exhaustive in trying to get cross-party support and in bringing you a substantive motion. I have also been instructed—you might find this confusing, because there are various names on both forms—by the Women and Equalities Committee to be the lead Member on this application. That is why I am before you today, and obviously I am keen to take any questions that you have.

**Dawn Butler:** It is a pleasure to be here. I am pleased we have both put in the same motion; that shows how important the issue is. I am happy for it to be taken as a joint motion. The important thing is that we have a debate on the Floor of the House on International Women's Day.

I want to read my motion: "That this House expresses its solidarity with International Women's Day, notes with concern that, despite women making up 51% of society as a whole, more progress needs to be made in electing women to Parliament, as well as establishing equal pay, gender balance on corporate boards and parity between men and women in positions of leadership, and calls for greater action against FGM and other practices harmful for women."

We have done an awful lot of work around all of those issues and I think the whole House will have various contributions to make on all that and much more. For me, the most important thing is to have a debate on the Floor of the House where all parties can contribute.

**Q22 Mr Hollobone:** The Committee quite likes to schedule debates that have two sides to the argument. Who will object to either of these motions?

**Dawn Butler:** It might come as a surprise to you but there may be a few men who might not want equality, parity of rights of women and more women in this House. That could possibly happen.

**Mrs Miller:** I think you have raised an important point, Mr Hollobone, that there is actually a lot of consensus on the issue of equality in Parliament today, which is to be applauded. You and I joined the House on the same day in 2005 and I think things have moved forward immeasurably since then, to the credit of all parties. But I don't think we should underestimate the power of a debate on the Floor of the House of Commons in setting the agenda for the nation on International Women's Day. The absence of a debate on a day that has become increasingly important would be more noticeable than ever before. I urge the Committee to think about that, that it is important that we have a prime time debate on an issue that, as Dawn says, is important to 51% of the population.

**Q23 Mr Hollobone:** It is interesting that you talk about the day because, as of this moment, this Committee has not been informed that it has that day to give. It is the Government's decision whether to give this Committee that day or any other. There is another route for you with your Select Committee Chair hat on, through the Liaison Committee. That would have access to time in Westminster Hall, potentially on the very day that you are seeking to highlight as part of your campaign.

When an application came before this Committee in the previous Parliament for International Women's Day, we did not have the Select Committee on Women and Equalities, but we now do. There is another lever that you could pull to get a debate, if you are specifically after that day.

**Mims Davies:** I am happy to have the debate in advance of International Women's Day, because on the day there is a large programme of events inside and outside Parliament. It is preferable for us to have that debated in advance of International Women's Day.

I am also clear that this Parliament should be setting the standard around the world on parity and equality. That is a time to make those arguments in the Chamber to remind people.

On the point of equality, there is no equality if men are not involved and there is no conversation between the two. It is acceptable to be a man on the school run or doing flexi time, however they want to live and work. For me, there is no equality without men being part of the argument and conversation. I have been delighted with the response I have had to what you have before you from men in this Chamber.

The Select Committee regularly hosts people from different Parliaments around the world about women's equality rights in areas that we take for granted. It is great to showcase how far we have come in the past 15 years, for example.

**Q24 Kevin Foster:** It is ironic that today, because Jess is not here, it is an all-male Committee discussing a motion for International Women's Day.

**Mims Davies:** That had not gone unnoticed.

**Chair:** I am afraid that Jess Phillips is otherwise engaged.

**Q25 Kevin Foster:** Are there any relevant all-party groups that would be involved?

**Mims Davies:** Yes. I am the Chair of the all-party parliamentary group for women in Parliament. I think Ruth Cadbury might be on the other motion. I think there has been a little confusion about the process by which this was coming before you. She is not here to defend herself, but I have occasionally had to remind her that she is the deputy chair! But she is new and busy, so there you go.

**Kevin Foster:** That is something we can leave you to sort out. A bit like Mr Hollobone, I cannot see anyone coming into the Chamber to take on Ms Butler on this point; one or two individuals might decide to do so, but not too many.

**Mims Davies:** We can manage that.

**Q26 Kevin Foster:** I am sure you can. I do not have any doubt that you would deal with them quite robustly if they did, but I am trying to get a flavour of the debate. Is the idea to have a general discussion and bring up a range of issues—for example, the recent issue of EU exemptions around VAT reflecting, shall we say, the priorities of the 1960s and 1970 rather than those of today—rather than focusing on the one or two issues that were listed in the alternative version? Is it to be a general debate or one focusing on a couple of specific issues? Is there a theme? For example, when we had the men's day one, it was themed on particular types of cancer that affect men. Is it general or will there you focus on a couple of issues that will be the theme of this year's Women's Day?

**Mims Davies:** I agree with Ms Butler; there are some broad themes and areas we can pick up on. Yes, we would like to hear from people across the Chamber about the value and importance of

women in all sectors. Personally, I would like to celebrate women every day—what we do, the unnoticed work that women do as carers, as mothers, as contributors to society. We want to make sure that the House recognises that and is taking those issues forward.

**Q27 Bob Blackman:** You talked about celebrating International Women's Day, though maybe not having the debate that day. At the moment the Government have not allocated us any time, so we do not know which days we are going to get. Would you prefer to have this in advance of International Women's Day, so you can showcase what is going to happen, or the week after, when you can say, this is what happened and this is how we can take things forward? There is a balance for you—we may get one or both of those days, or we may get neither.

**Mims Davies:** I would prefer three hours in the Chamber in advance of International Women's Day, so that Members who have invited people to be part of the programme of events can showcase that and what has gone on in the House ahead of that time. I certainly feel it would be more suitable to do it in advance, if that were possible to timetable.

**Q28 Bob Blackman:** Would it be preferable to have it on a fixed day? Sometimes we get offered time at the end of the day—say, on a Monday, like last night—but we may not know that that will be three hours; it can be flexed, depending on Government time. Would that be acceptable to you?

**Mims Davies:** As we have two motions here, and such interest, with people from across six parties, I would like a fixed time so that we can do justice to the broad issues that we would like to bring forward.

**Dawn Butler:** I agree: a fixed day would be preferable. It would also set the scene of what is going to happen on International Women's Day.

**Mrs Miller:** It gives us the opportunity to set out the key issues. We know that the media listen hard to our Backbench Business debates and they will be able to pick up some of the themes that we put forward in the work that they are doing around International Women's Day.

**Q29 Gavin Newlands:** You say you would prefer to have it the week before. If we were not allocated that time, would you take the week after?

**Mims Davies:** We don't want to be picky, but we hope to get the week before.

**Q30 Gavin Newlands:** If the Committee is not allocated the time, though, would you accept time the following week?

**Mims Davies:** We don't want the dregs, but we will soak up what we can. Let us just hope the Committee is able to accommodate us.

**Gavin Newlands:** I am just predicting, just in case.

**Mims Davies:** I understand.

**Dawn Butler:** It is time-sensitive, which you might take into account when you are deliberating and considering other motions.

**Gavin Newlands:** I appreciate that.

**Mrs Miller:** Would this not strengthen your hand in terms of asking for an allocation that week?

**Gavin Newlands:** That is a question for the Chairman.

**Mims Davies:** Good luck.

**Q31 Gavin Newlands:** My main question is this. You may see this as counterproductive; I just want to get your opinion. The motion talks about progress needing to be made in terms of gender parity in Parliament. Would your motion have more teeth if it called for parity by a certain time—by 2025, or whatever it may be? Would you call for a date to be set by which Parliament has to achieve parity? It would give the motion a bit more teeth.

**Mrs Miller:** I think the motion is a bit broader than that. It is about parity—

**Q32 Gavin Newlands:** No, it would be one aspect of it.

**Mims Davies:** There is a meeting in New York coming up that the Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee is attending in late March to try to get a sense of where we are at around the world and to set an agenda for going forward. I like that idea, but there is a huge multinational conference coming up that hopefully we can tap into. That debate will be really important. It will be the first time that we have a cross-party group of members of the Women and Equalities Committee attending.

**Q33 Mr Hollobone:** The International Men's debate was allocated by this Committee to Westminster Hall and was extremely successful. In the interests of equality, would you accept Westminster Hall as well?

**Mrs Miller:** No. I expected more from Mr Davies. I thought he should have pushed you harder for it to be in the main Chamber.

**Mims Davies:** I do not want to be flippant about this. I would also have liked to see that debate in the Chamber. There are issues that this Parliament has not tackled in terms of male suicide and mental health issues, for example. A broad range of issues for men still need to be brought to the Chamber. I am happy to do that, as well as tackling female issues, so next time I would like to see that debate in the Chamber tackling those issues that perhaps have been sidelined.

**Q34 Mr Hollobone:** I understand but my question is this. The men's debate was in Westminster Hall. Would you also take Westminster Hall?

**Mims Davies:** Previously, when it has been granted, it has been in the Chamber.

**Q35 Mr Hollobone:** Not always.

**Mims Davies:** Okay. I would be hopeful that, now that we have so many more women parliamentarians, this is a really good opportunity to showcase our Parliament as it is now.

**Q36 Mr Hollobone:** Would you take Westminster Hall?

**Dawn Butler:** Could I be clear that the answer from me would be no? I would like to see the debate on the Floor of the House for the full three hours. I would always strive, when fighting for equality, especially for women who are fighting for equality and have not got equality in this place, for the biggest and the best. Unfortunately you had your debate in Westminster Hall. Next time, hopefully, you will have some strong men fighting to have it on the Floor of the House. But we are fighting to have it on the Floor of the House.

**Q37 Mr Hollobone:** Sorry, but it was not my debate. This Committee allocated the debate to Mr Davies and other applicants. My question is, would you take Westminster Hall? One of you has said no.

**Mrs Miller:** Mr Hollobone, I understand the point you are making. I feel really strongly that when it comes to showing Parliament's support for issues that affect women we should do so in the most assertive way that we can. I would reflect very badly on Parliament if we had this debate in Westminster Hall.

**Q38 Mr Hollobone:** Would you take it?

**Mrs Miller:** It would be for Ms Davies to decide that. Personally, I think it would be better to have it on the Floor of the House.

**Q39 Chair:** May I outline the scenario? At the moment, we are totally unaware of any allocation of time in the Chamber after the recess, apart from possibly two to three hours on Tuesday 23 February. After that, we have not yet been allocated any time. If no time were to be made available to this Committee in the Chamber during those weeks, but some time were made available in Westminster Hall, under those circumstances, we would have no time to allocate in the Chamber. So what would your answer then be?

**Mrs Miller:** My answer would be that this Government should be making time available for the Backbench Business Committee to allocate such a debate.

**Chair:** I could not agree more.

**Mrs Miller:** In all seriousness, Ms Butler's response would be my response. I simply do not think it is acceptable to have a debate of this stature in Westminster Hall, with the greatest respect to Westminster Hall. It would be appalling not to have it in the Chamber.

**Dawn Butler:** It would do a disservice to this place not to have the debate on the Floor of the House. I would be willing to take it further. So if we need to make further representations or write a letter to the Leader of the House, I would be willing to put forward further representations.

**Mims Davies:** I have directly spoken to the Leader of the House and have raised this in Business Questions. He has responded positively, so if we are in that situation I would happily take this forward, as colleagues have said.

**Q40 Mr Hollobone:** I am still not clear. The arguments, you have just said, are a gripe against the Government. I understand that and I sympathise, but we can be in a position where we have to allocate time for the week you are after but do not have time in the Chamber and do have time to grant in Westminster Hall. If we were to offer you, in those circumstances, a three-hour debate in Westminster Hall to celebrate International Women's Day, would you take it or not?

**Mims Davies:** If it is all or nothing, there is only one answer, isn't there?

**Q41 Mr Hollobone:** What is that answer?

**Mims Davies:** We would have to accept it, but I would not like to be in that position. I would be very disappointed to be in that position.

**Chair:** I entirely accept that, but we don't yet know, because the allocation of time is entirely within the gift of the Government.

**Mr Hollobone:** We should also make it clear that if the Government wants to allocate a three-hour debate For International Women's Day in its own time on the Floor of the House, it can do that.

**Mrs Miller:** That is a point that I know that Ms Davies has brought to the attention of the Leader of the House already.

**Mims Davies:** I have done that, in the exhaustive way that if you don't succeed with one rabbit hole in this place, you must try another way in.

**Q42 Chair:** You will accept that asking for guarantees of allocated time from the Government is something that we are not shy of doing.

**Dawn Butler:** There is time in the House to debate a Bill, although we do not know what that Bill is. When will we know whether you will have time allocated, and when will we know whether there are other avenues that we will need to push it down?

**Chair:** You will know instantly, as soon as we get any time allocated and as soon as the Committee has the opportunity to allocate that time. We will do it as soon as we possibly can.

**Bob Blackman:** You might want to bring it up at Business Questions on Thursday and put some pressure on.

**Mims Davies:** Thank you.

**Dr Rupa Huq, Wes Streeting and Dawn Butler** made representations.

**Q43 Chair:** Welcome, and sorry for keeping you so long.

**Dr Huq:** Last but not least.

We have 21 Members from three different parties and are putting in for a debate on a very consensual motion, “That this House has considered the NHS in London.” We have done that deliberately because we do not want to make this a partisan debate but want it to be one on which we all agree moving forward. I think the paperwork before you says that we want 90 minutes in the Chamber, but given the interest we have had we think we can fill three hours in the Chamber.

It is a vitally important subject and was the No. 1 issue for us all in the general election. Everyone here who is an MP will have a bulging postbag or inbox full of people who write about the NHS, and in London in particular there are many configurations. We represent different compass points today—east, west and north-west—and there are big issues going on with hospital reconfiguration, care services for the elderly and the demographic ticking time bomb that is coming down the track. We think we have a good case and that we will get a lot of interest. A lot of people will speak who are not in the list of 21 names.

**Wes Streeting:** I wholly agree. Across the health economy in London there are different issues in different places. There are some familiarities, and it is not all negative, either. There are obvious pressures in terms of primary care and urgent care across the capital, but in my neck of the woods, for example, we are one of the areas taking part in a Government pilot on the integration of health and social care, which has potential benefits not just in London but across the rest of the country. Those are all points we would like to be able to get across. It is quite striking how many Members from different parts of London have signed up.

Some of us will also have individual issues that we want to raise. In my case, my local accident and emergency department is likely to experience overnight closures of its services in the foreseeable future. There are similar issues and have been similar issues across London and, of course, major reconfigurations have already happened and MPs from all parties want to talk about the pressures going forward and their experience so far. As Rupa said, we have tried to produce a consensual motion, so that all Members from all parties feel able to participate without feeling they are being drawn into a party political knockabout over the NHS.

**Dawn Butler:** I concur.

**Q44 Mr Hollobone:** Would you take Westminster Hall if we didn’t have the main Chamber to offer you?

**Dr Huq:** We think this lends itself to the main Chamber. We have even had media interest and something on a Thursday—London Members are around on a Thursday—would get a good attendance. I think it lends itself more to the actual Floor of the House than Westminster Hall, which can attract fewer people.

Recently, in some of the Westminster Hall debates that I was in, such as the Donald Trump one, there were loads of people there. There was another one on the Women Against State Pension Inequality, or WASPI, campaign. There weren’t enough seats. I came in there; I couldn’t get to speak at all. So, this kind of thing, to air 21 good-length-of-speech contributions from Back Benchers, and more—

**Q45 Mr Hollobone:** Those two debates you refer to weren't debates from this Committee; they were debates from the Petitions Committee. I understand what you are saying about the Chamber. Would you take Westminster Hall if that is all we could offer you?

**Wes Streeting:** We would probably have to try to squeeze in; beggars can't be choosers.

**Dr Huq:** We don't want to look ungrateful, but we would prefer the main House.

**Q46 Mr Hollobone:** Looking at your cross-party list, I can see one Conservative.

**Dr Huq:** This was given the time pressures. It was actually after Bob Blackman's call the other day in Business Questions, when he said there is time available. So we could have worked harder on some of those names, but I'm convinced there will be Conservatives who will speak on the day. Also, the political nature of London is that it is weighted towards our side, and some of the people are Front-Bench people, but I'm confident that there will be other people who are not on that list who would speak.

**Q47 Gavin Newlands:** Forgive the ignorance of this Scottish Member, but just so I'm clear about the application, what differs between London's NHS and the NHS in Kent and elsewhere? Is there anything particular that's happening in London that you need to debate? Are there any particular issues? I suppose that's the main question.

**Wes Streeting:** Even within London, there are different pressures in different parts of the city, but in London we have an enormously growing population. We have got high levels of childbirth and an ageing population, both of which place significant pressures on the stretched resources of the NHS. There have been major reconfigurations that have already taken place, and further reconfigurations are planned. London is also home to some of our largest and most successful medical schools. So I think there are myriad issues in London.

On top of that, you have also got the social care agenda, where in London at the moment we are through the pilots. We are possibly able to go further in terms of integration of health and social care than other parts of the country. So I think there is a particular need for a debate, but obviously whenever we've had broader debates about the NHS in the Chamber, it is an issue that has national interest and we get good turnouts. Because of the particular pressures in London, we would like to have a debate focused specifically on the city, so that we can have a more focused conversation.

**Q48 Kevin Foster:** I speak as a Member who started a debate on the regional railway, and we only had one Opposition Member for most of the entire area. Have you looked at, for example, slightly broadening some of the themes? I am conscious that London's NHS, if we are talking about the hospitals here, includes services that are actually national services. For example, on Sunday I was at a fundraising event in Torquay to help to pay the travel costs for a family in which the husband is coming for very, very specialist treatment that is only offered in London. It is a national treatment service that is provided here in the capital, and we know all that proton therapy happens here. Have you thought perhaps that the debate could encompass some of those specialist services, which might allow an opportunity for MPs in the not-too-distant, not-too-far-away areas to speak? They might help to balance the debate slightly in terms of the political parties.

**Dr Huq:** It does not preclude other Members from elsewhere coming and speaking. I led a Westminster Hall debate in the summer on London's housing situation, and there was an SNP person

summing up, so we wouldn't necessarily say no to other people. But we are envisaging that it would be predominantly London Members.

**Q49 Kevin Foster:** I accept the predominant London focus, but I am conscious that there are NHS services that London fundamentally provides that are actually national services, in the same way as the Liverpool hospitals with tropical medicine, which has an impact nationally. Would that be included in the theme, or would it purely be about, let's say, primary care access and other things that would be obviously directly about London?

**Wes Streeting:** The motion is broad enough to allow that, and it was quite striking that Wendy Morton's private Member's Bill was centred around Great Ormond Street hospital, which is in London, but she had a particular interest in the issue. So I don't think there is anything to stop other Members from participating. I think it would actually strengthen the case for a three-hour debate in the Chamber, rather than a debate in Westminster Hall. We may even get people from outside London wanting to participate.

**Q50 Bob Blackman:** What exactly do you want to achieve from the debate? A general debate, which is what you have applied for, gives everyone an opportunity. You have outlined a broad range of issues, but what is going to happen as a result?

**Dr Huq:** As a fellow London MP, you know that mayoral elections are coming up. I think it is good to air these issues now. We are all under similar pressures. We don't want to make this a ding-dong, which is why we haven't hung ourselves with a motion that people from the Government Benches would not want to support or sign up to. I think we should air these issues and look at consensual ways forward.

**Q51 Bob Blackman:** I come back to the question: what do you want to see happen as a result of the debate? London MPs and others from outside will come and give their views, but what happens?

**Dr Huq:** A Minister will be listening, and I hope the debate will influence something. There will be media interest. Our constituents will feel that they have been listened to.

**Wes Streeting:** I am not sure that this argument will appeal to other members of the Committee. As a London MP in the last nine months, I have felt that, ironically, our issues in the capital sometimes get overlooked. There is a presumption that because we are based in Westminster and the media can often be dominated by London voices and issues to the detriment of other parts of the country, London is at risk of losing out on the devolution agenda and seems to be far behind some of the deals that other parts of the country have got. Health and social care are areas where I would like to see a greater pull of devolution. There are massive issues around the relationships between the Mayor, the Assembly, London's local authorities and NHS England that it would be good to explore.

This is an opportunity to make a pretty united London-wide case on a cross-party basis as to how we can improve the health and social care of people living in London. The work of the APPG under the leadership of Bob Neill and Steve Reed has highlighted the extent to which London has begun to slip behind on the devolution agenda compared with where we were when we had the creation of the Mayor and Assembly some decades ago.

**Q52 Bob Blackman:** I completely agree, but the issue is that you have a general debate and nothing is going to happen on the back of that other than airing the issue in Parliament.

**Dr Huq:** There is a precedent for that. There was the tax credits debate, which, I think, had no strict motion. It was just to consider the issue of tax credits in a three-hour Backbench debate.

**Bob Blackman:** No, it had a motion, and it did have an effect.

**Dawn Butler:** It would highlight the issues specific to London and the pressures that London faces in people using the NHS. It may highlight the issues that are not highlighted elsewhere. As has been said, the issues of the NHS do not just apply to people in London, they apply to people who live elsewhere. It is a case of highlighting those issues, bring them to the fore, and having the Minister understand that these are real issues and a real stretch of services that is not repeated anywhere else.

**Q53 Bob Blackman:** On the timeliness of the debate, are there any particular time pressures? Do you feel that the debate must be held at a particular time? You have sat through the other applications. Everything has to go into a queue until we get some debating time. If there is a particular time aspect to this or urgency, now is the time to tell us.

**Wes Streeting:** I don't think we have the same sort of time constraints as some of the other applications have had, if that makes the Committee's job easier. From our point of view, we have made the case about the pressures, particularly around the number of people who would want to participate, and also the potential advantages of having a debate on a Monday or Thursday, when there is a one-line Whip. Understandably, colleagues who have to travel across the country to come here may wish to spend time in their constituencies instead, whereas it is just a tube ride away for the rest of us.

**Dr Huq:** I would say before the mayoral election would be better.

**Wes Streeting:** I agree.

**Q54 Chair:** We outlined the situation earlier. We don't have time allocated, but if you are to be added to a list we would not be able to timetable you until mid or late March. Would that be a particular problem?

**Wes Streeting:** That's fine.

**Q55 Chair:** The only thing I would add is that the application is heavily weighted towards one party. There would therefore be a question about the Clerk receiving additional names from other parties in furtherance of the application.

**Dr Huq:** So we still have time to do that?

**Chair:** Absolutely.

**Wes Streeting:** There is certainly interest. Even this morning at health Questions, Dame Angela Watkinson was raising issues about my local trust. I am sure that there will be a good deal of cross-party interest. We will drum up those names. Obviously, the lead Members will be from different political parties.

**Chair:** Okay. Thank you very much indeed.