



Backbench Business Committee

Transcript of meeting Tuesday 21 July 2015

Representations made before the Backbench Business Committee on Tuesday 21 July 2015

Members present; Ian Mearns (Chair), Bob Blackman, Peter Bone, Mr Philip Hollobone, Gavin Newlands, Mr David Nuttall and Jess Phillips.

Mr David Burrowes, Paul Blomfield, Richard Fuller and Kirsten Oswald; Alok Sharma, Nusrat Ghani, Greg Mulholland and Chris Skidmore; Paul Flynn; Stephen Phillips; John McDonnell made representations.

Questions 1-27

Mr David Burrowes, Paul Blomfield, Richard Fuller and Kirsten Oswald made representations.

Q1 Chair: Could you kick off and talk us through the issue and why you want some time, please?

Richard Fuller: First, congratulations, Chair, on your election, and finally getting your Committee together—and to the members of the Committee. Backbench Business Committee debates in the previous Session were a great innovation.

Our request is for a full Chamber, three-hour debate on immigration detention. It is supported by Members of Parliament from the Liberal Democrats, the Scottish National party, the Green party, and the Labour and Conservative parties, so it has widespread support across many main political parties in Parliament. The request for a main Chamber debate is specifically made because the core of the debate is a parliamentary report into immigration detention conducted on an all-party basis before the election.

One aspect we found was the lack of scrutiny of this particular area of immigration policy by Parliament. In the previous Parliament, many questions were raised and debates held on immigration and we had a flurry of immigration Bills through Parliament but there were only two debates specifically on immigration detention.

We also request that it be during the September return of Parliament, which I know is early on your schedule, Chair. There are two reasons for that. One is an increasing amount of public interest in Government policy on immigration detention and it is timely because the Government are considering introducing a Bill on immigration that will have at its core, we believe, new policies about the immigration detention estate.

If I can just talk about some of the topicality. At the end of last month, the Court of Appeal made a ruling to suspend the Government's policies on detained fast track. During May and June there were public demonstrations outside immigration detention centres. Several different organisations have approached us about this particular debate and the topic of immigration detention in general.

I will list some of those for the Committee. We have heard from Women for Refugee Women that has run a "Set Her Free" campaign. We also heard from Detention Action, a pioneering group on ending the policy of detention fast track. We also heard from Medical Justice, the Royal College of Midwives, and the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, which particularly looked at the issue of detaining pregnant women, where the Government were saying one thing but in practice it looked like something else was happening.

We have been approached about this debate by Mumsnet, Mind, Amnesty International, Liberty, Asylum Aid and the End Violence Against Women coalition, all of which wish us to have a debate on this policy at this time. Citizens UK contacted Members of Parliament in the run-up to the election. They contacted me to say that 24 Conservative Members of Parliament and 32 Labour Members of Parliament, whom they contacted before the election and have now been elected, support having a debate on immigration detention.

Finally, there are the official levels of inquiry. There is another flurry of activity in terms of official reports. Following a Channel 4 report's revelations of abuse in immigration detention at Yarl's Wood, Serco is undertaking an internal inquiry, which we expect to report shortly. The HMIP report on similar reviews has not yet been released but has been initiated. Stephen Shaw is conducting a review on behalf of the Home Office into welfare at immigration detention centres, and there is ongoing commentary from independent monitoring boards on the state of immigration detention centres.

Finally, there is a 100,000-signature petition from Meltem Avcil on the detention of women. With such widespread extra-parliamentary interest, with such a flurry of action by the Home Office and officially, and with the issues, topics and recommendations made in the all-party group's report on immigration detention, I urge the Committee to consider a debate.

Paul Blomfield: Richard has made a comprehensive and convincing case, for which I provide cross-party ballast. The inquiry to which he refers had real strength in breadth and depth. It included a former Law Lord, a former Conservative Cabinet member and a former chief inspector of prisons. With the issues that we raised in the inquiry report, we sought to demonstrate that a different approach to immigration detention could be both more effective in achieving compliance with returns and more cost-effective in terms of the disproportionate amount that we spend as a country on our immigration estate, as well as being a more benign approach. Richard has underlined the topicality of a debate and, from previous experience, the Committee is always concerned to ensure that there is sufficient interest to sustain a three-hour debate in the Chamber, and I think that is clearly there from the breadth of interest across the parties and from the depth of interest within parties, as Richard has indicated. I know that a number of my colleagues and a number of Conservative colleagues—I am sure both Richard and David will underline that—would be actively keen to participate in such a debate.

Mr Burrowes: I agree with everything that has been said in my absence. In the past, debates have been triggered by community concern, not least through formal petitions. There has been a

widespread campaign by Citizens UK, which you probably saw before and during the election. That campaign is reflected across communities throughout the country. A debate would have great topicality and national interest, and it would also be timely and relevant because of the present Home Office review of conditions at Yarl's Wood and the wider issues of immigration detention, which will be published in the autumn. That will be an important time for a wider debate about the principle and extent of immigration detention.

Mr Hollobone: I understand the importance of the issue, and it is clear that you have cross-party backing for a debate, which would no doubt be well attended should we grant time. The one big flaw in your application, as far as I am concerned, is that you are jumping up and down and getting very cross about this very important issue. Here is your golden opportunity to put a motion before the House to ask the Government to do something, and all you are doing is asking for a general debate. You would strengthen your case immeasurably if you could agree on a motion that you would like the House to decide upon because, ultimately, you are asking for Chamber time, and only in the Chamber can motions be passed. If the debate was in Westminster Hall, you wouldn't have that opportunity, but you are asking for time on the Floor of the House of Commons. You would strengthen your case were you to agree on a motion asking the Government to do something.

Q2 Mr Bone: The Backbench Business Committee's time is limited, and we have a list of criteria to go through. As Mr Hollobone said, you have ticked most of the boxes. Listening to your description, I would say that this is a Westminster Hall debate unless there is a substantive motion. I am sure that we will hear lots of other pitches today, and I am sure the lack of a substantive motion will be taken into account in our considerations. I have one specific question. I think Mr Fuller said that Government legislation is pending. We would not normally grant a Back-Bench debate if a Government Bill was about to go through Parliament, because you could raise the points during that process. Is it likely that there is going to be a Bill in September?

Mr Burrowes: The prospect is that the Government will be responding to Mr Shaw's review of the conditions at immigration detention centres, not least Yarl's Wood. There is no suggestion at this stage that the time limits on and extent of immigration detention is going to feature in the immigration Bill—that is the early indication from the Home Office. We want to time the debate with the response to that review and extend the remit wider to look at the extent of the immigration estate, so I do not think there is a chance of us commenting on an existing Bill. We may be able to talk to it—at a later stage, it may become relevant—but not at this stage.

Q3 Chair: Kirsten, is there anything you want to add?

Kirsten Oswald: I would only emphasise that there is support from across the House for this issue to be debated. It is important to bring it to the Chamber.

Q4 Mr Nuttall: To follow on from what has been said already regarding the nature of the application, on the application form, the box has been ticked for a general debate in the Chamber, but, although the relevant box has not been ticked, you have also supplied the draft text of a substantive motion. Which is it?

Chair: We have an updated form, Richard. On the original form it said a debate on a substantive motion, but the updated one just said a debate in the Chamber.

Richard Fuller: I think that question relates to Mr Hollobone's very good question. The intention of this Committee may change from that in the previous Parliament. This is the first meeting of this Committee, and its interest in substantive motions or general topics will be clarified as you move forward with your deliberations.

On the specific issue of having a substantive, votable motion, it is feasible to do that. There are a number of specific recommendations in the report that could be made into a votable motion. As a group, we are open to both aspects of that. We do not, however, want to pick off one particular part of the report and say, for example, we are going to debate term limits for detention, because that would miss out other very important issues, such as the detention of pregnant women or ending the detention of victims of rape, torture or conflict overseas. We have flexibility on bringing forward the main recommendations in a votable motion if that is the emerging intent of this Committee.

Q5 Chair: The other thing, Richard, is that it is a substantial application, and you have done an awful lot of work, but you are lacking a list of names. You have nine names and you're looking for a three-hour debate. Could you add to that list? You have already indicated that many MPs are backing this, so can we have their names please?

Richard Fuller: Indeed, Chair; I asked Citizens UK for their list of names myself. It may be that members of your Committee are on their list. If that is an important and critical consideration for the Committee, I am sure that if the Committee contacts Citizens UK formally, they would enable those 56 additional names to come forward to you.

Chair: Gavin, did you want to say something?

Gavin Newlands: No, we were just saying that we would like to speak, but were joking because we could not vote on it.

Chair: Anything else to add, colleagues? No. Thank you very much. We will consider the application later today and let you know as soon as possible.

Alok Sharma, Nusrat Ghani, Greg Mulholland and Chris Skidmore made representations.

Q6 Chair: Welcome.

Alok Sharma: Thank you for seeing us today. I am speaking on behalf of my colleagues and the 50 other Members of Parliament who have expressed an interest in this debate. We are asking for a debate on penalties for causing death by dangerous driving. I understand the discussion that has just taken place, and we are asking for a general debate rather than one on a substantive motion, but if you feel that it would be helpful, we would be happy to come forward with a substantive motion for you.

My interest in this started with a constituency issue, when two of my constituents who were cyclists, John Moorland and Kris Jarvis, were knocked off their bikes and killed by a reckless driver who was already disqualified from driving. He did not have any insurance and he had taken the vehicle without consent. He was more than two and a half times over the alcohol limit and he had taken cocaine in the 24 hours before driving at 70 mph in a 30 mph zone. On top of that, he had 67 previous convictions, one of which included phoning a bomb hoax at Heathrow on 9/11.

This man was convicted of killing two people. He got 10 years and three months in prison, and the reality is that he will be out in five years on licence. I do not believe that that is fair or justice, and neither do the more than 100,000 people who have signed the e-petition relating to this matter that was brought forward by the fiancées of John and Kris.

Together with some of my colleagues who are here, I held a half-hour debate in Westminster Hall, and 10 colleagues contributed to it. There is clearly cross-party support for this. More than 50 colleagues have expressed an interest in the debate. We have Members from Labour, the Democratic Unionist party, the Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats and the Green party. It is very much cross-party.

We are asking for this debate to take place in September because the Ministry of Justice is holding a review on all penalties relating to driving offences. Our understanding is that that is due to be published some time in the autumn, but not before September when we come back after the recess. We would like to have this debate to allow those views expressed by Members in the Chamber and those of many of our constituents to be debated, so that that can be fed into the review. Through that, when the consultation comes out, it will reflect the will of the House, the many MPs who will debate the matter and many of our constituents. So far as I am concerned, this is a cross-party issue that has huge support in the country. That is why it is timely to have this debate in the main Chamber.

Nusrat Ghani: I support Mr Sharma's application. I am the MP for Wealden, which is in East Sussex. Wealden has the highest amount of road traffic accidents in East Sussex. Some 35% of people involved in car accidents in East Sussex are in Wealden. In just one of my villages, Heron's Ghyll, there have been 44 incidents over the past 10 years, of which three were fatal. The issue is important for my constituents. As an MP and as a candidate, I have held many meetings across my constituency, and the issue came up time and again.

Greg Mulholland: Like Alok and all the other Members, I have had tragic constituent cases where there is a deficit of justice, not only in the sentencing, but in the actual crime. A lot of people end up being charged with death by careless driving, simply because it is easier for the CPS to get a conviction, when the case was clearly one of dangerous driving. Outside Parliament, there is huge support for the debate from the likes of Brake and all the other road safety charities.

As Alok has said, because of the review there is a need for the debate. We had a debate about two years ago in the main Chamber at the start of the process, and there has not been a chance to debate it since. On behalf of all those victims and their families, it would be appropriate to have a chance to debate this issue in the Chamber. Equally, we could come back with a substantive motion, if that would be helpful.

Mr Bone: My name is on the list of Members supporting this debate, so I will not be taking part in this discussion or our private deliberation of it.

Q7 Bob Blackman: Just taking up the points that you have made—you clearly meet all the criteria for an appropriate debate—is there a conclusion that you want to get to, to give the Government guidance? If so, may I suggest that that should form the substantive motion?

Alok Sharma: Yes. There are two aspects to this. The petition that was started by Kris and John's fiancées, Tracey and Hayley, called for consecutive sentencing; so if you kill two people you do not have the whole thing put together. It is consecutive sentences. You spend more time.

We also took, together with Chris Skidmore, who has also got constituency issues, our constituents to meet the Prime Minister earlier this year. I think he understood, very much, the point of view that was being expressed.

Q8 Chair: Before the 1 o'clock session began, we had private deliberations and in those, we agreed to adopt what the Committee had done in the last Parliament: we would not normally accept applications from Government PPSs, unless it was on a constituency matter. I think having one PPS present to us is fine; I think adding more to that is a problem.

Alok Sharma: Mr Chairman, this is absolutely a constituency matter, but it is also a national matter, and in terms of what we are looking to achieve I think it is strengthening sentencing for people who kill by dangerous driving. That would be what we are looking for; clearly the review is taking place and then there will be an opportunity to input into the consultation, but ultimately that is what we want to achieve.

Chris Skidmore: Leaving aside the PPS issue, we have a strong constituency case. A 20,000-signature petition went to Downing Street. On this particular issue, the Prime Minister wrote to the then Justice Secretary Chris Grayling, who announced in the *Daily Express* that there would be changes; but those changes have not now happened. So I think there is a genuine case here that we need answers from the Government on about where this is going, given the change in personnel at the top of the Ministry of Justice, because at the moment we are unclear.

Chair: An observation from my perspective is that you have a broad swathe of support; I think you have a great deal of sympathy, but a votable motion would be most useful.

Q9 Gavin Newlands: There are a lot of names, from most of the UK. I am just curious about it being a reserved matter; I am just wondering, did you approach any Scottish Members, or any SNP Members?

Alok Sharma: Actually, when my office emailed, they emailed all Members of Parliament, so this was the response we got back.

Greg Mulholland: But it is a reserved matter; the law is slightly different in Scotland.

Q10 Mr Hollobone: Can I just confirm, Mr Sharma: are you a current signatory of the ministerial code?

Alok Sharma: No. I am a PPS, not a Minister.

Q11 Mr Hollobone: Have you signed the ministerial code?

Alok Sharma: No.

Chair: Thank you very much. We have noted the application. It is a very strong application and we will be making our deliberations later this afternoon.

Paul Flynn made representations.

Paul Flynn: Thank you very much for seeing me. I was asked to take two to three minutes. I hope I will take less than that. I would like to have a debate on foxhunting because I believe the public were greatly exercised by the prospect of a debate last week and feel cheated by the fact that it did not happen. We know there are passions on both sides and the matter has been discussed regularly, about every 10 years. I think it is important now to record the mood of the House, which I believe has changed considerably since the McNamara Bill in 1992 and other Bills since then. All I am seeking is a small debate for a small amount of time—I do not know how your time is allocated—so that we can ventilate the powerful feelings of the public on both sides and the feelings of Members as well.

Q12 Chair: The thing is, Paul, it is a one-person application, and the normal ground rules are that we look for cross-party support so that we could ensure that the number of people who applied would then take part in the debate. You are asking for three hours in the Chamber. It is undoubtedly a topical issue, but we want a cast-iron guarantee that Members are up for this, not just yourself.

Paul Flynn: I am sorry I have not done that, but I thought—three minutes; it would be unreasonable to ask people to come along and have a minute each, or half a minute each, whatever it might have been. There is no question about the strong feelings of hundreds of Members on this subject. It might well be fairly obvious from our past debates, which have all been oversubscribed, when we have had day-long debates.

Q13 Bob Blackman: The only point that I was going to add is that so strong are the feelings that no one else has signed this—

Paul Flynn: I haven't asked anyone—

Q14 Bob Blackman: And you will appreciate the fact—as you have been to this Committee before, I think, and you have sat watching some other requests, and we have got further requests—that our time is limited. So, as the Chair quite rightly points out, without the cross-party demand it's unlikely to gain favour.

Paul Flynn: Okay. Thank you very much.

Chair: Thank you very much, Paul.

Stephen Phillips made representations.

Stephen Phillips: Thank you very much, Mr Chairman. Congratulations on your election and welcome to the Committee. I feel rather like I am in the “Dragons’ Den”, pitching to you.

This is a joint application from myself and Stephen Twigg, who can't be here today; I gather that he has an ill relative. It is for a debate on the sustainable development goals. It has cross-party

support. In the last four days, it has gained the support of more than 20 Members, obviously including Mr Twigg himself, who is the Chair of the International Development Committee, several other members of that Committee and several members of the Foreign Affairs Committee.

For those who don't know, the sustainable development goals are the replacement for the millennium development goals. This is a critical issue that will drive £10 billion of spending annually by the Department for International Development across the next 15 years. It is also something about which there are strong feelings in all parties in the House, either in favour or against international development, and as we all know from the recent general election our constituents are concerned about the amount that is spent on international development.

I am asking for time in September in the Chamber and there is a very good reason for that. It is that the significant negotiations are taking place at the moment, but there are meetings in New York at the United Nations in September. The Government's position is not entirely clear, and if the House is going to have any input into what these goals should contain for the next 15 years, and therefore into how this DFID money should be spent, that debate must take place in September. There is no other time at which it can usefully occur, and for that reason I have asked for it to take place in the Chamber in a three-hour debate in September.

The debate has sufficient support, purely from those who have added their names as potential speakers over the last four days, to occupy at least three hours, and I realise that, in fact, that is the only time you have available to give. I am happy to answer any questions.

Q15 Mr Hollobone: Given the importance of the timing and of the topic, why don't you seize the opportunity to ask the Government to do something specific, on which you could test the opinion of the House?

Stephen Phillips: I understand, Mr Hollobone, your point on substantive motions, and there is a good argument in relation to many debates—two of which you have heard about today—for a substantive motion to go before the House. The difficulty here is that the zero draft contains a series of general propositions on which there will be differing views across the House and indeed differing views within the international community.

What is important is that the Secretary of State and the Minister of State, who I suspect will be on the Front Bench for the Government during the debate, hear the views of the House as to how the zero draft should change during the negotiating sessions leading up to December, so that when the world comes to sign it in December it contains provisions that are acceptable to Parliament and indeed that have been discussed in the House of Commons.

I will just add that if Parliament is not for this, then I don't know what it is for.

Q16 Mr Hollobone: That is a good answer—a perfectly acceptable answer. I understand your point of view. However, I suggest that you would concentrate Government minds more if there was a specific motion before the House, and I think you would also find that there would be a greater attendance in the Chamber.

Stephen Phillips: I have no doubt about that, because it might well be whipped. The difficulty, I think, will be, first, that the motion might be very long, given that one would end up with a series of views about a series of propositions that the world community is putting forward as to where development should go over the next 15 years. There will also be a series of views in the House, and if

one is going to put a substantive motion before the House it will be a motion that one would want as many names on as possible.

In reality, the way in which this time is probably best used is to have a general debate, so that the Government can hear from individual Members of Parliament, particularly those on the Back Benches, about how they think international development should go during the next 15 years. And this issue is absolutely critical for some of the poorest and the most vulnerable people in the world, as well as for spending the DFID budget.

Q17 Bob Blackman: Given the pressure on time, Stephen, if Westminster Hall was offered and there was no Chamber time available, would you accept that as a means of getting a general debate?

Stephen Phillips: The difficulty with a Westminster Hall debate, Mr Blackman, is that it is not going to achieve the traction, either in Parliament or in the media, that this issue needs to generate. Part of the problem is that the general election campaign simply eclipsed the major negotiations that took place at the beginning of this year and the issue has been completely off the radar. It is very important not just for the world, but for this country and our spending going forward. I think, therefore, that it merits, particularly with the support that it has had in the House over the last five days, a debate in the Chamber.

Q18 Bob Blackman: Has the International Development Committee produced a report on this topic?

Stephen Phillips: No. The Committee is, as I understand it, considering doing that, but Mr Twigg is very happy to be the joint lead Member on this. I know he's extremely supportive of this issue being debated properly in the House; and in my respectful submission, that is exactly what needs to happen, and it needs to happen in September and preferably in the first week.

Q19 Mr Nuttall: I want to follow up on Mr Blackman's point, because in your answer to the question posed by my colleague Mr Hollobone about what you hope to achieve by holding this debate, it seemed to me—please correct me if I formed the wrong impression—that your intention was to ensure that the Government were fully apprised of the various views across the House on this topic. If that is the case, in what way would that not be achieved if the debate was held in Westminster Hall?

Stephen Phillips: That is a fair point, Mr Nuttall. The problem with it is that you could then say that there should be no general debates in Backbench Business time on a Thursday. The Government are going to listen more if you have the media sitting in the Gallery listening to a three-hour debate in which many Members of Parliament express views about what is a very important issue to at least some people, because those views are going to get some traction in the media. This Committee exists in part to give general debates on a Thursday, and this is likely to be more efficacious as a general debate than as a debate on a substantive motion.

Q20 Mr Bone: I just want to correct something, Mr Phillips. We are not in existence to provide general debates on a Thursday; that is not in our Standing Orders. That doesn't mean we can't do it, but it is not something we are required to do.

Stephen Phillips: No, I'm not suggesting that, but there can be, Mr Bone, general debates, given by this Committee, on a Thursday in the Chamber. There have been a number in the past; indeed, if anything, it has been the practice.

Q21 Mr Bone: I was just correcting a matter of fact, m'lud. I think you have made a very strong case for why it has to be a general debate and why it has to be in September. The problem the Committee will have to discuss and decide on is whether we have time for a general debate on a Thursday; and the Westminster Hall option has been hugely successful in the past. The debate on prisoner votes started in Westminster Hall. If there was a general debate going on a Thursday in the Chamber, you have made a very good case. I guess we have only one—

Chair: We have only one.

Q22 Mr Bone: That is the thing we will have to think about.

Stephen Phillips: Well, I'm bidding for that slot. If you don't give it to me, then after September, I regret to tell you, is too late. You will know from reading the papers that there has already been one brief debate, led by the Scottish nationalists, in Westminster Hall. It was fairly well attended; it had no real coverage in the media at all. This debate, I suspect, will get a lot more coverage in the media and it will influence the Secretary of State in her negotiating position.

Q23 Chair: Can I ask one simple question? We have today six applications and we have one day in the Chamber in September to allocate, so if you were offered debating time in Westminster Hall, would you refuse it?

Stephen Phillips: I am not going to refuse it, Mr Mearns, but—I don't say this with any disrespect at all—I think that it would be a shame if the Committee did not accede to this application, given the time-critical nature of the issue and its importance, because it is going to affect things for the next 15 to 20 years.

Chair: I wasn't trying to imply anything at all, Stephen; I just wanted to get things clear for my own benefit.

Stephen Phillips: I am grateful.

Chair: Thank you very much, Stephen.

John McDonnell made representations.

John McDonnell: I have applied for a debate on the dog meat trade and the cruelty associated with it. Some of the names are Yasmin Qureshi, Henry Smith, Peter Bottomley, Gordon Marsden and Nigel Dodds, none of whom are able to be here today. Some are in the Chamber.

This is a carry-over from the last Session, when there was a huge campaign about this issue, with emails and correspondence with MPs. We held a lobby, which was successful, and attended a

briefing meeting with a number of celebrities like Judi Dench, Peter Egan and others. Tobias Ellwood, the Minister, also came along and spoke. There was a large social media campaign focused on the dog meat trade in general and the Yulin festival in China, with regard to the cruelty that went on there.

The Committee was keen on supporting a debate, but we fell out of time at the end of the last Session. That is why we are bringing it back here. We applied for a Chamber debate, rather than a Westminster Hall debate, because of the popular pressure in the campaign and because we wanted to give some status to the issue. At that stage—it appertains now—a number of countries were looking at developing their own policies on tackling the dog meat trade, Thailand in particular.

We have been working with a whole range of animal cruelty charities in this country that operate abroad, and with charities in those countries as well—in Thailand, China and elsewhere. We had a good response from the Foreign Office. We felt that the Government could be quite a world leader in bringing other countries together to address the issue, develop an international strategy to tackle the dog meat trade and support countries that were developing their own anti-cruelty policies. That is why we wanted the debate. The argument for the Chamber was purely for status and publicity. The Yulin festival has now happened, but it will be repeated next year, so our strategy now is to focus on the development policies in the countries we have been working with and to focus on the influence we can exert on China itself.

I understand that you have problems with regard to there being only one slot in September. Ideally, we would like at least a date we can aim for, so that we can mobilise people. There was such intense interest last time—we had people queuing up to get in to the briefing meeting and lobby. If we could secure a date and give people advance notice, it would give them some confidence that we are dealing with the issue, which is clearly important to a large number of our constituents, to give it the seriousness that they think it deserves.

Q24 Chair: You say that this is an issue from the last Parliament, and obviously you have recycled the application from the last Parliament as well, because a number of the Members you have listed are no longer with us, sadly.

John McDonnell: I have listed Yasmin Qureshi, Peter Bottomley, Gordon Marsden, Nigel Dodds and myself. There is a new early-day motion as well, which I think has more than 100 signatures.

Q25 Chair: At the moment, we have only been allocated time for the two weeks in September. If this is not time critical, we will probably have an indication in September of the time that will be allocated in October. Would you be happy for this to be held in abeyance until then?

John McDonnell: I am trying to be as amenable as I possibly can. The decision is yours, and I am happy to do that, as long as you take into account that it needs to be given some priority at this stage, because we are frustrating literally thousands of people who have lobbied us, emailed us and so on. I do not want the social media campaign to say that we have let them down yet again. I understand your decision-making process and your priorities for September, but if I come back in September, I urge you to treat this with some priority, given that we have put this off so often.

Q26 Chair: I have a suggestion. To give us some assistance, if you could get some more names added to the list, that would help.

John McDonnell: That is no problem. Obviously, we have only been back a short while and I was not sure of the timetable of the Committee meeting. But if you look at the early-day motion on a cross-party basis, we are talking about more than 100 Members of Parliament who have expressed a concern, similar to the figure in the previous Parliament of more than 150.

Q27 Mr Hollobone: I support the Chairman in what he is saying: to update the application form, take off the names of MPs who are no longer Members, and get some more names on a cross-party basis. If you have an EDM that is presumably asking the Government to do something, why not reflect that in a motion?

John McDonnell: That is a worthwhile suggestion. We prepared that last time and that was the case. This EDM has actually been drafted by another Member spontaneously, which demonstrates the nature of the campaign itself. The Government response that we had in the briefing session was extremely constructive, but time has moved on. We can update the EDM into a proper resolution that will take into account the updating activities of Government.

Again, I don't want to wander away as though I am a soft touch on this. It is a priority for a large number of people. I have been here twice before and members of the Committee have expressed support for the general principle of it, but there is always another priority that has bumped us off. I don't want to be here in September without your realising that for many people this is a critical issue. There is such a significant lobby out there about animal cruelty and this issue is abhorrent to a large number of people. They want to see seriousness given to it by Parliament.

Chair: John, you have made your appearance today. If you can update the application with a votable motion and with a list of names, I would not see the necessity for you to come back physically but to do that in writing to the Committee Clerk.

John McDonnell: Thanks a lot.

Chair: Thank you. We don't have Jim Shannon, so that ends the public session of the meeting. Thank you everyone for attending.