

Backbench Business Committee

Representations: Backbench Debates

Tuesday 13 December 2016

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 13 December 2016.

Watch the meeting

Members present: Ian Mearns (Chair); Bob Blackman; Kevin Foster; Gavin Newlands; Mr David Nuttall.

Questions 1-34

Witnesses

[I](#): Sir Peter Bottomley and Jim Fitzpatrick.

[II](#): Peter Kyle, Huw Merriman and Kirsten Oswald.

[III](#): Right hon. Norman Lamb.

[IV](#): Dr Tania Mathias, Lisa Nandy and Tommy Sheppard.

[V](#): Fiona Bruce, Christian Matheson and Jim Shannon.

[VI](#): Andrew Bingham, Damian Collins and Christian Matheson.

[VII](#): Chris White.

[VIII](#): Kelvin Hopkins, Right hon. Liam Byrne and Fiona Bruce.

Written evidence from witnesses:

– [Add names of witnesses and hyperlink to submissions]



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Chair: We begin this afternoon's fairly large session of applications to the Backbench Business Committee. I will give colleagues a heads-up. First, we have Messrs Jim Fitzpatrick and Sir Peter Bottomley, followed by Peter Kyle on Holocaust Memorial Day, Norman Lamb on supporting children's wellbeing, Sir Desmond Swayne on Israeli settlements, Jim Shannon on protecting civil society, Damian Collins on governance of football, Chris White on Midlands Engine and Fiona Bruce et al on tackling alcohol harm. That is largely the order in which we have received the applications, although we have tried to accommodate those who need to get away as early as possible. Because we have a large number of applications, I urge applicants to be brief. We need to know why you want a debate about the subject, rather than rehearsing the debate itself. Everyone is welcome. Thank you very much for attending. First up is Jim Fitzpatrick and Sir Peter Bottomley on leasehold and commonhold reform.

Jim Fitzpatrick and Sir Peter Bottomley made representations.

Jim Fitzpatrick: I will be as brief as I can. Leasehold and commonhold reform is about the ownership of property. It covers a whole range of issues. The most recently publicised one is ground rent charges, which are exorbitant, but it also covers retirement homes, tenure, service charges, refurbishment charges, the north and south, older people and younger people and all classes. The Conservative Government tried to improve the legislation covering this tenure. The Labour housing Bill of 2002 also tried to cover leasehold and commonhold. Neither succeeded. We recently managed to get the Department for Communities and Local Government to accept that there are 4 million—[*Interruption.*]

Chair: Order. Could we have some order in the Gallery? I am trying to concentrate on what is being said.

Jim Fitzpatrick: We recently got DCLG to accept that whereas they were suggesting 2.5 million homes were covered by this legislation, it is more than 4 million, and we contend it is even more than that. A significant number of residents across England are affected by it. We recently set up an all-party group, even though we have been jointly campaigning with a number of colleagues on this issue for a number of years. More than 50 parliamentary colleagues from all parties in both Houses have signed up in less than two months to join the all-party group. Fifteen colleagues have signed up to say they want to participate in this debate, as well as a number of shadow ministerial spokespersons who cannot sponsor but who want to contribute to the debate.

Our bid is for a three-hour Thursday afternoon debate in the main Chamber, because we believe there is enough support among colleagues to have a proper three-hour debate. We expect that the Government are interested in listening to this, because they recognise that recent publicity demonstrates that a number of issues need to be addressed. The only way to do it is by regulation or statute. It is a debate that we think is well past its time.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Sir Peter Bottomley: I agree with Jim. Essentially, this will lead to changes in the machinery of government. You may get the law on commonhold transferring from Justice to Local Government. I think that the Competition and Markets Authority and others will potentially rule that some clauses are unfair. Over half the new homes being built in England and Wales—Scotland has a different regime—are being built as leaseholds, but they ought to be being built as commonhold. If we get that status of commonhold, we can take away the opportunities for deliberate abuse of ordinary people or for mistaken, accidental abuse. It matters to people. It matters to Parliament, and it matters to Government.

Q1 **Bob Blackman:** I understand the issues you raise. Given that this is a general debate, which Department would answer it? Sir Peter, you mentioned Justice and DCLG.

Sir Peter Bottomley: Local Government, we expect, because they have 90% responsibility for it.

Jim Fitzpatrick: The Housing Minister is leading on it. As Peter says, there is cross-reference to at least two Departments, but DCLG would be the lead.

Q2 **Bob Blackman:** You have asked for Chamber time, which, as you can probably see from behind you, will be in premium supply. If we offered you a slot in Westminster Hall, with the principle that if you wanted to come back for a Chamber time application at some stage in the new year, possibly on a divisible motion, we might be inclined to offer it, would you accept that?

Sir Peter Bottomley: I would normally say yes, because I understand the pressures that you have, but on this, I would prefer to say that it should be in the Chamber. The number of colleagues who write to me and whose constituents write to me and Jim trying to get help on these things is so big that I think the scale of the issue has got beyond Westminster Hall, and we have the opportunity to do good by having the debate in the prime place.

Q3 **Bob Blackman:** Alternatively, if we offered you next Tuesday in the Chamber, would you accept it?

Sir Peter Bottomley: I would.

Q4 **Kevin Foster:** You have asked for a general debate but also raised specific issues. Why are you looking for a general debate—"That this House has considered"—rather than a motion perhaps suggesting one or two ideas for how the issue might be tackled?

Jim Fitzpatrick: The motion is "That this House has considered leasehold and commonhold reform" because there are about eight different aspects of this policy that affect constituents with different tenures in different parts of the country. Saying we will discuss and consider leasehold and commonhold reform makes it open enough for colleagues to raise local matters as well as the general statutory principle and means we can



HOUSE OF COMMONS

encompass it all in one debate rather than focusing on one or a small number of subjects.

Sir Peter Bottomley: If I may add something very briefly, the other thing is that it gives MPs the opportunity, without abusing the privilege, to mention explicitly some of the people who have been behaving in a way that is clearly wrong, may be criminal and certainly should be stopped.

- Q5 **Kevin Foster:** Obviously, we normally prioritise substantive motions for the Chamber, whereas general debates normally go to Westminster Hall. Does that affect this discussion?

Sir Peter Bottomley: In my mind, were I with you rather than on this side of the table, the argument for having a motion "That this House has considered" these issues would be that the House has not considered them, so by having the debate, we shall have. It then all opens up. It is like spring: the buds will come out and the leaves will come out.

- Q6 **Kevin Foster:** But that could be in Westminster Hall. Specific motions can only be in the Chamber.

Sir Peter Bottomley: I think the numbers involved are going to be rather greater than you normally get in Westminster Hall, in my experience—which may be wrong.

Chair: I should declare an interest in this. I actually have a property on the market for sale at the moment. It is a Tyneside flat, where the upstairs flat owns the freehold for the downstairs flat, and the downstairs owns the freehold for the upstairs. There are thousands of them on Tyneside. Not to worry, but I think I should declare an interest in case that is seen to influence my judgment in this matter. Thank you very much for your application.

Peter Kyle, Kirsten Oswald and Huw Merriman made representations.

- Q7 **Chair:** We will move swiftly on to our second item, led by Peter Kyle, who have an application on Holocaust Memorial Day.

Peter Kyle: We are applying for a one and a half hour debate on Thursday 19 January in the main Chamber. The reason is that this is both a historical and a contemporary issue that needs the full attention of the Chamber. It is historical because the Holocaust is clearly very much part of our history—it is a defining episode in our history—but it also shaped the continent of Europe and further afield. It is also part of the reason why our country and many other countries started striving towards a more tolerant society.

It is contemporary because of the big changes and seismic events of this year politically, in our own country and further afield, and the earthquakes that have been happening around our country and elsewhere. Here in our own country, we have seen a rise in hate crime in general and a spike in anti-Semitism in particular. In the first six months of 2016, there were 557 anti-Semitic incidents recorded. That is a rise of 11% on 2015. We



have also seen the rise in prominence of the far right across eastern Europe.

Finally, the Holocaust occurred over 70 years ago, so each year, when we come to you for these types of debates, there are fewer and fewer survivors. That means that these sorts of debates are more important for celebrating and remembering the lives of those people who survived and are still living, but also even more important for remembering and memorialising those who are no longer with us. As each generation rediscovers the Holocaust, it is incredibly important that Parliament leads on this debate to encourage new generations to discover not only what the Holocaust means for them, but how it applies to their community.

Kirsten Oswald: I think it is very important that we take the time to have a debate about Holocaust Memorial Day. It is clear that anti-Semitism and prejudice continue to blight the society that we live in. We have heard about the very unfortunate increase in anti-Semitic attacks that has been reported. There continue to be attacks across Europe and they are increasing. It is important that we think about the issue in the context of the changed political climate in some areas of the world—particularly in some areas in Europe—and closer to home, in terms of some of the very unfortunate things that we see on social media and the impact that that has out in the real world. The Holocaust is clearly a defining episode in history and it is vital that we as MPs take account of the warnings that it gives us about allowing anti-Semitism to gain traction in society. It is vital to reflect on the fact that Holocaust survivors are fewer and fewer, and it becomes our job to try and make sure that we remember and learn the lessons of the Holocaust.

In terms of the date that the debate is requested for, it would perhaps be useful for us as parliamentarians to debate it the week before Holocaust Memorial Day, because that would give us the chance to connect with our constituents and the communities where we live on Holocaust Memorial Day itself.

Huw Merriman: Briefly, Peter and I took a plane full of pupils with the Holocaust Educational Trust over to Auschwitz just recently. We expect them to go in to their schools and spread the word about what they have seen. In that sense—I know that the debate has been held since 2008, with the exception of one year—I feel it would be incumbent on us as Parliament also to spread that word and keep to our part of the bargain. That is why I ask that we continue to debate it.

Q8 **Bob Blackman:** I have one quick comment. You suggested a one-and-a-half hour debate, and I have done some simple maths. You have 17 speakers. We give the first speaker 15 minutes and the spokesman for each of the major parties gets 10 minutes to speak. That then leaves 45 minutes for 17 people to speak, which means a time limit of less than three minutes and, of course, other people will want to speak as well. I suggest that 90 minutes is nowhere near enough for a debate of this importance and significance and, therefore, that you amend your application to be for a three-hour debate.

Peter Kyle: We are happy to take your steer on that point. I am happy, as the opening speaker, to exercise brevity, but I realise that when that is multiplied across the other people who have an allowance, it might well squeeze other speakers—so, sure. Thank you.

Chair: Thank you very much for your application. We will consider that as soon as possible. Next up, we have Norman Lamb, Luciana Berger and Liz Saville Roberts.

Norman Lamb made representations.

Norman Lamb: I am on my own, but please don't take that as any indication of a lack of interest. We want to be as succinct as possible so as not to detain you. This is a massive issue; concern cuts across all political parties. If we are thinking about issues that concern people across this country beyond Westminster, the state of children's and young people's mental health services is very high up on that agenda. Before I left the Department of Health last year, we published a report called "Future in mind", which set out a blueprint for how we modernise services. The focus was very much on the role of schools, on doing much more to prevent ill health and to prevent a deterioration of health, and on acting much sooner. There has been a process to try and get services across the country transformed since then, and I recently chaired a commission for the Education Policy Institute looking at how services have since evolved. We have made some significant recommendations to Government, but I think there is a lot of interest across Parliament in debating this issue, in confronting the challenges that we still face in this area of policy and, in particular, in shifting resources towards prevention. In a nutshell, that is the case I make to you. I am happy to answer any questions.

Q9 **Bob Blackman:** I assume that Health would answer?

Norman Lamb: It is one of those tricky debates where there is split responsibility. The Department for Education does have a role in this, and the specific emphasis of the debate is on wellbeing and mental health in schools.

Q10 **Bob Blackman:** That doesn't matter too much, but as the applicant you have to determine which Department you desire.

Norman Lamb: I would say Health.

Q11 **Bob Blackman:** We have got a slot on Tuesday 10 January in Westminster Hall. If we offered that slot to you, could you take it?

Norman Lamb: I can. Obviously, I guess like everyone else, my preference is for the debate to be in the main Chamber, but I am very keen that these issues are debated. I want the debate on it; that is the simple answer.

Tommy Sheppard, Dr Tania Mathias and Lisa Nandy made representations.

Tommy Sheppard: Standing in here for Sir Desmond is the closest that I will get to a knighthood. The three of us—Lisa Nandy, Dr Tania Mathias



HOUSE OF COMMONS

and I—are here to present this application and to indicate the strength of support that it has across the House. I should say at the outset that this is not a fresh application. This is a continuation of an application that was made in my name and that of Richard Burden and others a few months ago.

The Committee may remember that at that time Richard, as the principal sponsor of the motion, was asked to talk to other parties involved in the debate to see if it might be possible to get a single position that could be put before the House. Richard is ill, which is why he is unable to attend, but he has had discussions with a number of colleagues who take a different view from that expressed in this motion. It is fair to say that although the wording before you now has been changed, this motion does not represent agreement between the parties. I hope it will command wide support across the House, but there will be people who will wish to oppose it as well.

I will explain the principal reason why that is the case. The motion that we wish to see debated puts forward the argument that a two-state solution in this part of the middle east is the way forward: a viable, independent state of Israel and a viable, independent state of Palestine. That position has been widely adopted by the international community for the last 23 years and is, indeed, the position of the British Government. However, the movers of the motion believe that a major road block to achieving that solution is the policy of the Government of Israel to continue building residential settlements in the Palestinian areas that they occupy militarily. Therefore, the motion seeks to raise that issue, be critical of that policy and ask the Israeli Government to reconsider, in order that we might be able to move forward with negotiations for a lasting settlement. It is fair to say that there will be others in the House who will not accept that criticism of the Israeli Government and will therefore wish to see the matter debated and to oppose the sentiments contained in this motion. That is, in a nutshell, why there is not a single position.

There is widespread interest in this matter; there have been several associated debates in Westminster Hall. I think that this would be the first time in three years that the House has had the opportunity to discuss, in the main Chamber, the question of what is happening in Israel-Palestine. I know that it is a matter of deep concern to Members across the House from all parties. We ask that we get the time to have a full Chamber debate. I suggest that we will be looking at some time in the second half of January. We might then be informed by outcomes that are taking place with the French Government, in terms of new political initiatives in the region.

Dr Mathias: As lots of Members know, when similar debates have been in Westminster Hall many colleagues have felt some frustration about the timing. That is why I support a Chamber debate.

Lisa Nandy: Having visited the Occupied Palestinian Territories, like many colleagues from across the House, I know that when we debate these issues in Parliament it has huge consequences, and makes a great



HOUSE OF COMMONS

impression on the people living there. This is very timely in that, as Tommy said, we believe the progress that is not being made towards peace in the region is directly related to the issue of settlements. And it is a contested issue, as he made clear, which warrants a debate if this House is to come to a view.

- Q12 **Mr Nuttall:** Can I first thank the applicant for his patience in that this has been around for a while now? I also thank the Committee for its patience, because we have been expecting this—I think it is right to say the application goes back to 19 July, when it was first brought before us. Shortly after that, there was another application, on 6 September, where the lead Member was Sir Eric Pickles. The intention was, as I understand it, for there to be a joint bid. I appreciate that Mr Sheppard touched on this briefly in his opening remarks, but could you expand on the extent to which this is now an agreed bid? Is it not an agreed bid, or is it partially agreed?

Tommy Sheppard: It is not a consensus position. There will be other points of view.

- Q13 **Mr Nuttall:** Would it be right to say we are no further on than in July or September?

Tommy Sheppard: We are no further on in the objective of securing a consensus. The wording of the draft motion has been amended—some might say it has been put in rather softer terms—to try to command wider support across the House. There will be some colleagues who will not feel able to support the motion and presumably they will want to put a contrary point of view in a debate.

- Q14 **Mr Nuttall:** What steps have been taken to try to reach agreement with the Eric Pickles bid?

Tommy Sheppard: That was done by Richard Burden. I know he tried to approach Sir Eric and he also spoke to Joan Ryan from Labour Friends of Israel. I think they had productive discussions but were unable to come to an agreed position because it does hinge on whether the House wants to criticise the policy of the Israeli Government in this regard.

- Q15 **Mr Nuttall:** I assume, in view of the fact that this has been going on since July, there is some urgency in this.

Tommy Sheppard: I had not realised that it was quite so long—nearly six months. I think that is because it has proven difficult to have discussions, with sickness and with recesses. It took quite a while to do it.

- Q16 **Mr Nuttall:** You have heard us ask the other applicants, so I will ask you similarly: if we were able to offer you a three-hour slot in the main Chamber on Tuesday, would that be something that you would be happy to accept?

Tommy Sheppard: It would be preferable, I think, to delay it until the second half of January because we know that meetings relevant to this

debate are taking place in the international sphere at the beginning of January.

Chair: Thank you very much for the application. We will make a determination as soon as we possibly can.

Jim Shannon, Fiona Bruce and Christian Matheson made representations.

Q17 **Chair:** Next up—with season ticket in pocket—Mr Jim Shannon, and Fiona Bruce and Christian Matheson. This application is referred to as “Protecting civil society space across the world.”

Jim Shannon: Mr Chairman, we are joined by Chris Matheson, who is very keen and interested in this issue. You have got all the details before you. The topic is specific: it is protecting civil society space across the world. We have been energetic in speaking to MPs across the House, and 10 political parties are represented in the names we have. We have a number of supporters from the two largest parties—Labour and Conservative—and that is why both parties are represented here in the presentation to the Committee.

I understand that the issue of civil society has never been debated in this House. In the past, there would have been an issue with shrinking space for civil society, but the issues have become greater today than ever in the past. We are keen to coincide with the launch of an inquiry on this specific matter with which my colleague and friend Fiona Bruce was involved. As you know, I am chair of the all-party parliamentary group on international freedom of religion or belief, but the remit of this specific debate we are requesting goes beyond that. It relates to women’s rights; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex rights; migrants’ rights; and the environment. All those issues are connected to the shrinking space for civil society.

I am conscious of time and that you would like me to be concise. I have taken the opportunity to meet some of the people from Pakistan who originally brought this to my attention, little knowing that Fiona was chairing an inquiry into this very issue. We are coming from different angles, but we have the same focus.

We are asking for a debate in the main Chamber. We want to coincide with the publication of the inquiry, which Fiona will launch at the end of January 2017. We are coming here well in advance to request this debate, because we feel it is of such necessity.

Q18 **Chair:** Did you say the end of January?

Jim Shannon: Yes. We have gauged support from all the parties. I have also taken the chance to meet the ambassador for Bahrain, and I have had the chance to meet the deputy ambassador for the United Arab Emirates. We are very keen to get all this energy and interest from all these groups into this debate. Our request is to have the debate in the Chamber to coincide with the launch of the inquiry.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Fiona Bruce: I come with two hats on. First, I am chair of the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission, which has undertaken a six-month inquiry into this issue, looking at countries all over the world where the Department for International Development is providing UK aid. The phenomenon of civil society, the press and NGOs being restricted is now happening worldwide. There are a number of reasons for that. One is that it is a reaction against terrorism. Another is Governments being frightened about the use of technology and so wanting to control populations. Our report, which will be wide ranging, will be produced by the end of January.

Secondly, I come with my hat on as a member of the International Development Committee, which is also very worried about this matter. I will give you one example of the many countries we are concerned about. Just this morning, we had a session in our inquiry into South Sudan which was attended by a Foreign Office Minister and a DFID Minister. They concurred that the country is restricting civil society. It is one of a number of countries where there has been an NGO Act passed this year that restricts the activity of NGOs, voluntary groups and so on. This requires much broader airing, and hence we are making this request.

Christian Matheson: When we are looking at the quality and spread of democracy and freedom across the world—we all, I hope, feel a sense of responsibility to achieve that—too often we look at Government structures and Government institutions, but civil society and a strong civil society sector underpins the involvement of ordinary people outside of those Government structures and institutions. We feel this would be a very good way of providing support and scrutiny of what is going on in other parts of the world.

Q19 **Bob Blackman:** You have 37 potential speakers. A three-hour debate means they will get two minutes each. Is this a realistic list of people who would be determined to turn up on, say, a Thursday afternoon in January to speak on this issue?

Jim Shannon: I believe that the interest in this issue is quite phenomenal. I realise—as you do, Bob—that we have people on that list who will probably come along and seek to intervene, people who will come with a speech to make, and people who will come along with perhaps two or three comments. I think we need a three-hour debate, such is the magnitude of the issue, and I am happy to settle for that if we can.

Q20 **Bob Blackman:** We have missed you at the Committee, Jim, but I am tempted to say that if there are realistically 37 people wanting to speak, three hours is not long enough, because people will not be able to make speeches in two or three minutes. It is just not fair on them if they have prepared something. So how realistic is this list? In our consideration, we may have to say that this could end up being a six-hour debate.

Jim Shannon: If we could get a six-hour debate, we would be more than happy, but to be quite honest with you, I would be happy to settle for three hours. Bob, you are absolutely right: we have a number of people on



HOUSE OF COMMONS

that list who have expressed an interest—and by the way, there are others, whose names aren't on that list, who have also said they might like to come along—but not every person will participate in the debate with a speech, but many will come to intervene. I am quite confident that three hours to coincide with the launch of the inquiry at the end of January would come at a good time, and I believe that the interest is of such significance that three hours is what we will need. If you give us six hours, we will be more than happy to take it.

Chair: That concludes your application. Thank you very much indeed.

Damian Collins, Andrew Bingham and Christian Matheson made representations.

Q21 **Chair:** Welcome. I also have to declare an interest in this application, as I chair the all-party parliamentary group for football supporters and am, I am sad to say, a season ticket holder at Newcastle United.

Damian Collins: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I am supported by Andrew Bingham and Chris Matheson, and I am here to speak on behalf of all the members of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee. We have also had support for this motion from some other Members: Clive Betts, who is chair of the all-party football group, John Spellar, Gavin Newlands, Simon Danczuk and Rosie Cooper.

The House has considered the matter of football governance and Football Association reform a number of times over the last six or seven years. There have been two Select Committee reports urging substantial change to the structure and constitution of the FA, and legislation if that was not delivered. The Government have said that legislation would be their ultimate sanction, but have never brought it forward. At the moment, the Government are leading a review on the consultation on the sports governance code, with which the FA is nowhere near compliant, and now would be a good time to demonstrate that there is cross-party political support in the House of Commons for legislation to reform the FA if it will not reform itself. This cannot be left indefinitely.

This is a topic of major interest to lots of Members across the House, for different reasons. The consequences of the FA being a weak organisation with poor governance get us into areas around supporters' representation, investment in grassroots football, the way football deals with the serious matter of abuse and safeguarding young players, and all the issues that the Select Committee discussed with the Sport Minister this morning around the accessibility of sports stadiums and how you deal with homophobia in sport, particularly in football. The inability of the FA to really take charge of these issues is a consequence of its weak governance structure, and we feel that the time has come for a substantive motion to be put to the House supporting the principle of legislation. We as a Committee are going to prepare a draft Bill, which will probably be published in February, but we want the Government to understand that there is strong cross-party support for this, so we have put in an application for a debate in January in the main Chamber on a substantive motion.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

It is important to have a debate on a substantive motion because there will be some Members who feel that Parliament should not be legislating to change the rules of a private organisation, which is an unusual piece of legislation to pursue. It has been done before and it can legally be done, but it is nevertheless important to ask the House whether it supports the principle of taking such a step.

Christian Matheson: I very much support the Chairman. As he says, this application has the unanimous backing of our Select Committee. Some of the evidence that we have heard from sportspeople from across the sports about areas such as disabled access and homophobia indicates very much that where football leads, other sports follow, because of football's dominant position in sport. So actually there may be wider implications across the sporting world for the proposals that Mr Collins is making. We think the implications of the debate will be very beneficial to sports, sportspeople and sports fans.

Andrew Bingham: I will just add that football is the biggest spectator sport in the country, so I think there will be a huge amount of interest in this outside this place. Given the Sport Minister's revelation this morning that if the FA does not reform, the Government will not back any bid for a future World Cup, I think it is time we debated it in the House and tried to get some movement on it.

I take the point that people may make—that we should not be legislating on a private organisation—but this is a unique situation with the Football Association. They have had their chance and they have not done it, so I think it is time that we debated it at length.

Chair: This is obviously very topical, with five past chairs of the FA showing the metaphorical red card to their own organisation, as it were.

Q22 **Bob Blackman:** I, too, declare an interest as a platinum season ticket holder at Tottenham—that means home and away, by the way. I do think this is an important issue. We have got Culture, Media and Sport questions on Thursday and you are publishing information on Monday. Is that Monday of next week?

Damian Collins: That was Monday this week.

Bob Blackman: So you have published your information.

Damian Collins: That was the letter from the former FA chairmen calling on Parliament to legislate for reform of the FA.

Q23 **Bob Blackman:** I just wanted to be clear what that was. We have a slot next Tuesday for a Chamber debate. Given that this is such a topical subject right now, would you accept that if it was made available to you?

Damian Collins: I appreciate what you are saying, and I think this subject is always very topical. My preference would be for a debate in January. The Committee is doing work preparing a draft Bill with the support of the House authorities. What we might try to do as a Committee



HOUSE OF COMMONS

is publish that around the time of the debate to inform the debate. We could not do that for next Tuesday. I think we would be in a better position to provide more information to help the House in the new year.

Chair: Kevin, from the Torquay United perspective.

- Q24 **Kevin Foster:** Yes, probably non-league at the moment, but we will skip over that quite quickly. I am conscious that the debate is about having the Government introduce legislation. Looking at the debate, are there people who are likely to come along and argue, "No, it should carry on with the self-regulatory system as it is at the moment," as it is for all the home nations? Because it is about governance of football, some could legitimately talk about the SFA or the Northern Ireland Association.

Damian Collins: Indeed. Because football is a devolved matter and there are different associations who are all independent members of FIFA, people in different parts of the United Kingdom will have different views on this and will want to talk about that. As I mentioned earlier, people want to debate various important individual issues that are a function of having poor and weak governance, but there are some Members who have told me that they feel that, even though the FA might be in a poor state, they do not think that Parliament should legislate.

There may be some people who express a contrary view. That is why I think it is important to have a substantive motion, because we really are asking Parliament to give guidance now and say very clearly, "We think this is a private matter," or, "Actually, it is a public matter"—because of the huge interest in the game and the huge amount of amount of public money that goes into football—"and therefore we should take a view and be prepared to legislate." We would have a clear answer from the Commons.

- Q25 **Chair:** Can I make a suggestion? Obviously I am involved at a level and normally debates about governance in football are about the governance of clubs. I wonder whether the title should be more about the governance of national football in England.

Damian Collins: Yes, or the governance of the Football Association.

- Q26 **Mr Nuttall:** There seem to be all sorts of issues here. There are certainly two separate issues, in the sense that this is about the structures and the way that the FA operates rather than the clubs—is that right? In this motion you are talking purely about the governance of the Football Association, and that is of England.

Damian Collins: Yes.

- Q27 **Mr Nuttall:** Are all the others operating all right? Are there no problems in Wales?

Damian Collins: Chris Matheson was whispering in my ear, "What about the other nations?" too. We could broaden it. Because sports governance is a devolved matter, the focus of our motion was on England.

Q28 **Mr Nuttall:** So it is devolved.

Damian Collins: Yes.

Gavin Newlands: That is correct. Obviously football and sport in general is a devolved function. We are talking about narrowing the debate to the Football Association of England. I cannot speak for all the Football Associations, but I expect they are set up in a similar fashion and may have similar issues. If you narrow it to the Football Association of England, you might be doing the other Football Associations a disservice, with Members from other parts of the UK not being allowed to air their views on those associations. Perhaps it needs a slight tweaking. I suggest that it does not specifically mention the FA of England. It could say "Football Associations".

Chair: I am reminded of the time that the Starship Enterprise flew over Hampden Park just as the Scottish cup final was taking place, and Captain Kirk said to Mr Spock, "What's going on down there, Spock?" and he says, "Football, Jim, but not as you and I would recognise it." Thank you very much, Damian. Next up we have Chris White. Nicky Morgan has had to leave.

Chris White made representations.

Chris White: My right hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough had to leave for another engagement at 3 o'clock. Thank you for inviting me. I want to apply for a debate on the midlands engine.

Two weeks ago, I asked the Leader of the House in business questions whether we could have a debate on this. To my surprise, he did not answer my request directly, so I thought it would be useful to come here. We put a note out to colleagues. Within 24 to 48 hours, we had more than 21 responses. The midlands covers a huge number of constituencies. This is a very important area and region for our national economy. The Government will be launching their Midlands Engine strategy shortly, and I thought it would be helpful if Members from all parties had the opportunity to contribute to the development of that strategy.

Q29 **Bob Blackman:** The only slight problem is that in your application you have a long list of names, which is great, but no details as to what you are trying to achieve with the debate. First, which Department do you think should answer this debate?

Chris White: The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

Q30 **Bob Blackman:** Right. What are you seeking to gain from having the debate?

Chris White: I am seeking to gain a greater understanding of the Government's intention, in terms of their strategy, and how the House can contribute to that strategy. Whether it is Birmingham, Dudley or Warwick and Leamington, and whether it is about infrastructure, skills, universities, research and development or our manufacturing industries, there is a

huge role for the midlands to play. This covers a huge multitude of different topics.

Q31 Bob Blackman: Is there something specific you want the Government to do?

Chris White: To have a Midlands Engine strategy that works for everyone.

Q32 Kevin Foster: Would you be prepared to accept a slot in Westminster Hall if it was offered?

Chris White: Yes. I am not going to be difficult about this. It is more important to get the issue aired than to be precious about where we hold the debate.

Q33 Chair: Is there time sensitivity?

Chris White: The beginning of the new year would be great. The earlier the better.

Chair: Thank you for your application. Last but not least in this marathon session is Fiona Bruce, Liam Byrne and Kelvin Hopkins on tackling alcohol harm.

Fiona Bruce, Liam Byrne and Kelvin Hopkins made representations.

Fiona Bruce: We are here representing three chairmen of three all-party groups concerned about alcohol. Kelvin, who is vice-chair of the all-party group on alcohol harm, is standing in for Bill Esterson, who gives his apologies as he cannot be here.

We now have 11 Members who would like to speak in this debate. I have just given you the list. The reason I did not have it when I put in the application on Friday is that I only decided to put the application in two days before, after the all-party group on alcohol harm launched this report on the impact of alcohol on the emergency services—that is police, fire, ambulances and A&E.

The report's statistics are shocking. I do not want to rehearse it, but I will give you two or three. Over 80% of police have been attacked by someone who was drunk. Over 70% of A&E attendances at weekends are people who are under the influence of alcohol, causing massive disorder problems and frightening other patients, meaning they cannot get seen. We hear of TVs being thrown at staff and consultants being kicked. The fire officers are saying that many accidents now are so much more serious because of alcohol. It is a massive national issue.

We are seeking—I will let my colleagues speak—an update of the out-of-date national alcohol strategy. We believe that Government should actually address this issue. One of the witnesses to our inquiry—a senior police officer—said that we are not just dealing with alcohol, "it is a culture we are battling."



HOUSE OF COMMONS

To conclude, just a week ago the Government's own requested report on the impact of alcohol from Public Health England, which is 400 pages long, produced some damning statistics. There are 1 million hospital attendances due to excess alcohol consumption a year. Public Health England reckons that 10 million people are drinking in a way that is harming their health. It is now the biggest cause of death for men between the ages of 16 and 49.

We are requesting a three-hour debate. We are happy for it to be in Westminster Hall. We would like it to be in what has come to be known as dry January, because we think that the minds of Members and the public will be a little bit more focused. Having said that, one of the reasons why I decided to request the debate was that I was amazed at the national media interest about the release of what is—I do not want to demean an all-party group, but we had daytime television, several national radio stations and the front page on more than one national newspaper. Clearly there is concern about this issue across the country.

Liam Byrne: I support the application. As you know, I helped to set up the APPG on children of alcoholics after I lost my dad to alcohol just before the general election. As Fiona says, it is strange that the Government have not updated what was a pretty weak alcohol strategy, which was last published in 2012. This is now the third biggest health risk in Britain. It costs our country about £21 billion a year. The problem is growing; it is not diminishing. My particular interest is the 2.5 million children—one in five kids—who live with a mum or dad who drinks too much.

Over the last year I have found consensus across quite a wide group of children's charities and alcohol charities that policy change is possible, but we have not yet found ways of bringing the agenda together, crystallising it and lobbying the Government effectively. We are going to publish the first ever manifesto for children of alcoholics in the new year. That will have an impact, and obviously this would be an opportunity to talk about that a bit more widely.

Kelvin Hopkins: I have to say that I would have come along to support the application even if Bill had been able to be here. I am speaking on behalf of the all-party parliamentary group for foetal alcohol spectrum disorder, which is something that I have been pursuing personally in Parliament for the past 10 years or more. It is a terrible, terrible affliction, with thousands of babies being born permanently damaged for life every year. We have met a number of the parents, and some of the youngsters themselves who have been damaged, we have published a report that is online and Bill Esterson has spoken about this in the Chamber.

Some 70% of adopted children are affected by foetal alcohol damage, as are a high proportion of children in care and prisoners. There has been a spike in autism, which is really disguised foetal alcohol spectrum disorder. Yet sadly our Government does not take it as seriously as they should. It is totally avoidable; if we can prevent people drinking in pregnancy, then we would see tens of thousands, and over the years hundreds of



HOUSE OF COMMONS

thousands, of people who are not damaged by alcohol who otherwise would have been so.

In Canada, they take this issue seriously; in Denmark, they take it seriously; and in many other countries. They really start in childhood. "What do you not do when you've got a baby in your tummy?" "You don't drink alcohol." Children in Canada are taught that.

It creates misery for the children themselves and their families, but also enormous social costs to society. In Canada, these babies are known as "million dollar babies", because of the cost to society of supporting them. It is a scourge, which is a major part of the alcohol problem. I want to speak up for this debate and have proper time to discuss this issue.

Q34 Gavin Newlands: You have made an excellent argument as to why we should have a debate, but in the application itself you have asked for a three-hour debate and this is an additional list, so we have 11 names. That is absolutely welcome—some different names—but by and large we generally look for around 15 names as a minimum for a three-hour debate. Is that something you can furnish the Committee with?

Fiona Bruce: I am absolutely confident I could get a lot more names. As I said, the reason I decided to ask for this debate was because of the interest in this report last week, but I also realise that the best month to have this debate is January, so we have got together very quickly and come to ask if you would be willing to allow us to have this debate. I am confident that we can get more people who would be interested.

Liam Byrne: It is probably worth adding, given the debate about minimum alcohol pricing as well, that I suspect there will be a number of colleagues who might wish to come in on that particular angle who are not yet on that list.

Fiona Bruce: That's right. One of the recommendations in this report, which has been taken through as a private Member's Bill in the Lords, was about the drink-driving limit. We now have the highest limit in Europe, apart from Malta and I think possibly Northern Ireland. In Scotland, where they reduced the limit recently, they are now showing that lives can be saved. Our police estimate that about 800 serious accidents could be prevented—serious injuries, not fatalities—if we did that here, so there is a lot of momentum in the House, I feel.

Gavin Newlands: I was just going to clarify about the Scottish limit as well, but obviously that has been done already.

Chair: Thank you very much for your attendance. That concludes the business, except for one thing I need to say. I would like to place on the record my personal thanks to our Clerk, Mike Hennessy, who will be leaving his duties with this Committee after the new year.