

Backbench Business

Representations: Backbench Business

Tuesday 17 January 2017

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 17 January 2017.

Watch the meeting

Members present: Ian Mearns (Chair); Bob Blackman; Kevin Foster; Jess Phillips; David Nuttall.

Questions 1-16

[I](#): Siobhain McDonagh

[II](#): Dr Lisa Cameron and Michelle Thomson.

[III](#): Mrs Maria Miller and Jess Phillips.

Written evidence from witnesses:

– [Add names of witnesses and hyperlink to submissions]



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Chair: Good afternoon and welcome to this second session of the Backbench Business Committee of 2017. This afternoon we have three applications before us. We have acceded to a special pleading, so first up is Siobhain McDonagh.

Siobhain McDonagh made representations.

Siobhain McDonagh: I apologise for special pleading. I am just hoping to go to a meeting with DFID, as chair of the all-party group for the Ahmadiyya Muslim community.

Q1 **Chair:** Okay, that's fine. So this afternoon, Siobhain, we have an application about access to Kadcylla and other breast cancer drugs.

Siobhain McDonagh: In the last few weeks we have heard from constituents, and in the media, the voices of women desperate for the secondary breast cancer drug Kadcylla, including two close friends of mine. No one makes the case for the drug to be available more eloquently than these women, in their own words. Bonnie, 39, and mother of Barnaby, aged 2, who I do not know, said: "Every day is precious with my little boy, so the value of a drug that could give me more quality time with him is beyond priceless". Rosalie, aged 33 and mother of two children, feels that without Kadcylla "mothers won't have years left with their families anymore. I am a single mother myself, so my kids will have no one. Please don't take this lifeline away".

Owing to changes in the Cancer Drugs Fund, the secondary breast cancer drug, Kadcylla, has recently been subject to another appraisal by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. As a result, Kadcylla has been provisionally rejected. This was announced on 29 December, and means that the drug would be withdrawn from new patients as early as June this year, depending on the final decision that will be made in early 2017. This debate, therefore, is timely, as the NICE consultation for the drug closes on 20 January, with the final committee meeting taking place on 1 February. It is vital that these discussions take place now, before a critical decision is made that could mean the drug would never be available for patients again.

It is estimated that about 1,200 women could benefit from the drug in the UK. It is a vital second-line treatment. This means that once patients no longer respond to their treatment for secondary breast cancer, they are able to take Kadcylla as their next treatment option. Kadcylla is a highly effective, life-extending drug, giving women extra precious quality time with their families, friends and loved ones. It has fewer side effects than other treatments. I know this from my own personal experience: I have a friend Samantha who believes that her last 18 months of life have been entirely dependent on this drug.

It is also important to note that Kadcylla is available in lots of other developed countries, including France, Germany, Australia and Canada. In order to improve cancer outcomes in this country, we must provide the most effective treatments. For this reason, drugs like Kadcylla must be



HOUSE OF COMMONS

available to treat breast cancer, which continues to be the most common cancer in the UK.

This debate is further timely not just because of the provisional rejection of Kadcylla but because we need to consider the broader picture of access to breast cancer drugs. Two further clinically effective drugs are to be appraised very soon: Palbociclib and Perjeta for metastatic breast cancer. There are serious concerns that these highly innovative drugs will not be approved for use in the NHS, therefore this is an opportune moment to think about how we can make progress and ensure that the most clinically effective drugs are reaching breast cancer patients.

Finally, I would also like the Committee to note that issues also apply to access to off-patent drugs for breast cancer. The availability of bisphosphonates continues to be a problem in this country. These drugs are highly effective for the prevention of secondary breast cancer and cost only 43p a day per patient. They could save up to one in 10 breast cancer deaths, yet they are not routinely available to all eligible patients due to confusion in the health system. Why is it proving so difficult to ensure extremely cheap and effective drugs are available to those who would benefit from them?

In addition to the names I have already given to the Clerk of the Committee, I have received support from Roberta Blackman-Woods, Jo Churchill, Jon Cruddas, Nigel Dodds, Lilian Greenwood, Chris Philp and Craig Tracey—and today, Greg Mulholland. We have 37 MPs supporting this: nine Conservatives, 20 Labour, two DUP, two Lib Dem, two SDLP, one UUP and one SNP. So we have broad support among the parties of this House for this timely and important debate and I hope the Committee might find time for it.

Chair: Thank you very much, Siobhan. Any questions?

Q2 **Kevin Foster:** Given the nature of this, is there a particular urgency, a time or date by which it would be useful to have had a debate, if we are looking at timelines?

Siobhain McDonagh: Yes; it is very timely because, strangely enough, the consultation on the drug started on 29 December and concludes next week. It is likely to go to the NICE committee by 1 February.

Q3 **Kevin Foster:** That leads to another question: we potentially have some availability next week. If that was the case, would you be prepared to accept it?

Siobhain McDonagh: Yes.

Q4 **Bob Blackman:** You said there are 37 potential speakers over 90 minutes or three hours. If we allocated you 90 minutes, each speaker would get two minutes. I suggest that, although I know the subject and I am very sympathetic, really you need three hours, especially if that number turns up. The other issue is that you applied for a general debate in either place, but also on a divisible motion. Clearly, that would only lead to having a debate in the Chamber. If we were able to offer you a slot next



HOUSE OF COMMONS

week, as Kevin has said, and we could only do so in Westminster Hall, so you would not be able to have a debate on a divisible motion, would that be preferable to having to wait for some time for a slot in the Chamber?

Siobhain McDonagh: I think the issue of time is more important than the location. Of course, we would love to have it in the Chamber: we would love to have a divisible motion and I know the Committee likes divisible motions, but given the timelines with NICE, I think that dates are more important than the location.

Chair: Thank you very much. Anyone else, please? If not, thank you very much, Siobhain.

Dr Lisa Cameron and Michelle Thomson made representations.

Q5 **Chair:** Good afternoon, Lisa. The topic of your application is publicly accessible amenities for disabled people.

Dr Cameron: Yes; thank you for hearing this application today. It is an extremely important debate for people with disability right across the United Kingdom. As chair of the all-party parliamentary group for disability I have a full postbag from people right across the United Kingdom who state that their ability to engage with society, their level of social isolation and the impact on their mental health are severely affected because today in 2017 it is still very difficult for them to access public transport and get out and about in society.

Sports facilities, sports grounds and shopping centres are things that people who do not have disability take absolutely for granted and feel we should have access to every day without thought, but they represent tremendous hurdles continually for people who have disability. It is very important and the report from Disability Matters highlights that going to school clubs, for young children, cinemas, shopping trips, sports and drama, music clubs, all these things that we need to maximise socialisation, friendships and integration in society are continually beyond the reach of people who really need to have their confidence built and to be included fully in society to maximise their full potential. This debate is extremely important because society still creates these barriers.

There was the recent case of Anne Wafula Strike, a Paralympian who was on a train and could not access a toilet facility, despite the Equalities Act stating that service providers must make reasonable adjustments. I think that emphasises the position that people with disability are continually put into in society. Right across the United Kingdom, we really have to take the lead on that and make sure we are doing everything we can, in terms of policy, to push and promote inclusion.

This is an important debate. We have cross-party support from 19 SNP, independent, SDLP, Labour and Conservative Members to date, and my office has been getting more and more support as the days have gone on. We contacted people last week, just after recess ended, and they are still going through their emails, so I expect to have even more support from right across the Chamber. I know that the all-party group garners a lot of support from Members across parties.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

I hope to raise these issues, because the public really want them to be raised, people with disability need them to be raised, and the Government has to respond. I think it is incumbent on us right across the House to make sure we advocate for the most vulnerable people in society.

Chair: Thank you very much. Any comments?

Q6 **Bob Blackman:** Which Department do you envisage answering the debate? Will it be Women and Equalities? This is cross-departmental.

Dr Cameron: Yes, I think it will probably be Women and Equalities.

Q7 **Bob Blackman:** You have obviously got a lot of speakers. There is a 90-minute slot available in Westminster Hall where Women and Equalities will answer on Tuesday 7 February. If that was offered to you, would you accept it?

Dr Cameron: Well, I want to have the debate. I would preferably have it in the main Chamber, on a substantive motion. Other than promoting and supporting access for people with disability, I would also like there to be some focus on the provision of Changing Places toilets and amenities in towns and sports centres.

Q8 **Bob Blackman:** I think that there is an adjournment debate this evening about that specific subject. If we made an arrangement with you so that you can have your 90-minute debate in Westminster Hall, and if you do not get the Government to answer the way you would like, a beefed-up motion calling on the Government to do things could possibly come back to the Chamber at a future time. Would that fit with your application?

Dr Cameron: Yes, I would be extremely positive about that. As chair of the all-party parliamentary group for disability, I will continue to come back and harangue the Government until we achieve our aims.

Q9 **Chair:** Apologies, Michelle. I forgot to ask whether there is anything you wanted to add.

Michelle Thomson: I think my colleague covered the main points very comprehensively. The only other comment I would add is that we understand that this is about building awareness, but it is certainly not about building sympathy. As part of the awareness piece we articulate what people need to go through, but it is a very valuable opportunity for us to celebrate what they overcome in fighting to be treated with the respect that they deserve. There are simple examples. We in Edinburgh look to derive more of a café culture, but equally, for people who are blind, that causes a whole range of problems.

The other thing I would add is that I don't think people appreciate the extent to which it impacts on people's lives, in terms of health visits. It is so much harder to plan things, because people always need to have their diary available. I think that was an excellent pitch by my colleague, and I have got nothing else to add.

Q10 **Chair:** From my perspective, Lisa, are we actually saying that public



HOUSE OF COMMONS

organisations and/or businesses that are providing services are not DDA compliant?

Dr Cameron: I think there is an aspect of that, because we are talking about a reasonable adjustment. I firmly believe that in 2017 it is reasonable to expect to be able to access public amenities and toilet facilities if you are disabled. It is a very basic need, and it prohibits people going across their door if it is not available.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed. No one else? In that case, thank you very much for your application.

Jess Phillips and Mrs Maria Miller made representations.

Q11 **Chair:** We now have an application from a member of our own Committee. Over to you, please, Jess Phillips. This is an application on International Women's Day 2017. For the record and those watching, Jess will make the application but will not take part in the consideration of the application when it comes to the closed session immediately following our public meeting. Over to you, Jess.

Jess Phillips: I return. Last year, a number of different people came to ask for the debate on International Women's Day and to push for that debate to be in the Chamber. If memory serves correctly, last year a series of all-party parliamentary groups with actions on women applied. There was one Conservative application and then a Labour application and at the meeting they combined their applications.

In applying for the debate today, I have gone to the Chairs of all of the all-party parliamentary groups that are cross-party and have an interest in women. That is the Select Committee on Women and Equalities and the groups on sex equality, women and work, women and enterprise, childcare and women's health. I have left out women in Parliament because that is chaired by Mims Davies who is a PPS—and I know how well that goes down with this Committee.

Those are cross-party groups and include all of the different interest groups in Parliament that focus on women's issues, both inside and outside the Houses of Parliament. We have come together to put in for this debate. I think the case is made by the different international and national day debates we have in the Commons and how important it will be for us in this House to recognise the struggle of gender equality but also to celebrate the actions of women both here and across the world. I imagine that exactly the same subjects will be raised that were classically raised in last year's debate: women's access to work, to economic empowerment *[Interruption.]* That is just the shifting in of Maria Miller. Women's ability to be on time. *[Laughter.]*

Chair: That's below the belt.

Jess Phillips: Women's power at working across different interests together. In last year's debate there was a strong emphasis on domestic violence, international crises involving women, with lots of attention being given to the young girls who had been kidnapped by Boko Haram, right



HOUSE OF COMMONS

down to celebrating how many women we have here in the Commons, and improving the presence of women in workforces that have classically consisted of men. There is an awful lot to talk about.

Last year, the Committee moved quite a lot around to enable the debate to take place on the actual International Women's Day, which we were incredibly grateful for. It worked really well as part of a big day of activities. This year, I imagine that will simply not be able to happen because it is the day of the Budget, or the spring statement. Therefore, some of the activities that will be taking place in Parliament to celebrate women that week will need to be moved around. We were exceptionally grateful last year and the debate was so well received; some of the women's issues raised in the debate were written about by the press internationally.

Mrs Miller: I endorse everything that Jess has said. Perhaps the Committee should be aware that this has become part of a package of things that this place does to shine a spotlight on women's achievements in politics and outside. I think that that is important. I pay tribute to the all-party parliamentary group on women in Parliament, which also ensures that large numbers of young women from around the country come into Parliament on that day, so that hopefully they can be inspired to become Members of Parliament in future, so it is part of that outreach, too. I apologise for my lateness.

Q12 **Bob Blackman:** Can I just look at the timing of this? As you quite rightly say, International Women's Day falls on the day of the Budget. Customarily in Parliament, we would have a series of days for a debate on the Budget, which would mean that you could not have your debate even on the Thursday. It would be either brought forward a week or be in the week after. Do you have preference one way or the other?

Jess Phillips: I think the week before that would be the more preferable. Because it falls on a Wednesday, it makes it very difficult. Last year, we had it on a Tuesday.

Q13 **Bob Blackman:** Because we had protected time.

Jess Phillips: With the collapse of business and stuff, I am happy for it to be on a Monday. I would prefer it to be held the week before, but I recognise we are in interesting times in respect of parliamentary time and what it might need to be allocated for. We would take it the week before.

Q14 **Bob Blackman:** You have asked for a six-hour debate and I do not have a problem with that, given the number of speakers who would clearly want to take part. Obviously it is your application not mine, but I would be very twitchy about saying we want to allocate this on a day when business might collapse or might elongate, because then you would get squeezed. I personally would rather see this debate scheduled for a day when you know you are going to get a clear day, even if you get statements or urgent questions.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Jess Phillips: Absolutely. I think last year's application was for three hours, but actually the debate ran on for six easily, because of some brilliant scheduling last year, obviously, by this Committee in all your wisdom. I think you are right. I think it would be difficult for it to be crowbarred into anything less really.

Q15 **Kevin Foster:** Just to be clear, because on the form it was not ticked, it is a Chamber application?

Jess Phillips: Oh yes; sorry.

Q16 **Kevin Foster:** Having been to the debate last year, I saw how many took part. Are we conscious that, first, we are satisfied that the number who have signed up are going to turn up and speak? Clearly, the last thing we would want is to schedule a long debate and end up with a short debate—you will know why. Or one or two people will end up giving extremely long speeches to pad it out. Secondly, are we expecting any particular theme? For example, will we see all members of the Women and Equalities Committee talk on a particular theme? Or are we just expecting a general debate with a chance to bring up any issue that each Member feels is relevant?

Jess Phillips: Last year, some of the Conservative Members who spoke talked about really specific abuses against women. The breast ironing thing came out of that debate—I had never heard of that. I think that no matter what we say the theme will be, people will speak—women are—we are—a varied bunch of people and there is a lot to talk about, so people will talk about what they are going to talk about.

I imagine that there will be general themes of women's economic empowerment and violence against women. I think they are the things that constituency MPs will raise. The application earlier about breast cancer medication is no doubt another thing that somebody could raise at a debate like that.

We would absolutely want the debate in the Chamber. On the number of people who are going to speak, while I am not going to say that every single one of these people is going to turn up, these are largely Labour Members, because I was largely, quickly, filling in the form. There will be many, many more Conservative Members from the Government Benches who will want to speak. We had to have time limits last year.

Chair: Thank you very much. I think this is a classic example in terms of what I have been saying at business questions about giving us ample notice of date-specific applications. As has been pointed out, 8 March, Budget day, is also International Women's Day. By bringing that to the notice of the Leader of the House, which I intend to do if the Committee agrees that this is an appropriate debate to go forward, we can see if there could be something that we could do in conjunction with business managers to schedule a debate as close to the date as possible.

Colleagues, that concludes the formal business of the Committee this afternoon. I thank everyone for their attendance.