

Backbench Business Committee

Representations: Backbench Debates

Tuesday 30 January 2018

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 30 January 2018.

Watch the meeting

Members present: Ian Mearns (Chair); Bob Blackman; Patricia Gibson; Alex Sobel.

Questions 1-24

Representations made

[I](#): Albert Owen, Liz Saville Roberts and David T. C. Davies.

[II](#): Douglas Ross and Martin Whitfield.

[III](#): Alex Sobel.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Albert Owen, Liz Saville Roberts and David T. C. Davies made representations.

Q1 **Chair:** Good afternoon and welcome to the Backbench Business Committee. We have three applications before us, the first of which is for a general debate on Welsh affairs on or around St David's Day, which will be on 1 March.

Albert Owen: Thank you, Chair, and I thank you and the Committee for allowing us to make this application in the first instance. I am sure that you know the history of it: basically, we have had a Welsh day debate in Parliament since 1945. We are the UK Parliament of the nations and regions, and we, as Welsh Members, want to participate fully in those debates. This gives us the opportunity to do so.

I am pleased to be surrounded by friends and colleagues from different parties—the leader of Plaid Cymru, but also the Chair of the Welsh Affairs Committee. We all come from different parties, which shows the strength of feeling that Welsh unity is utmost when it comes to the application.

In previous years, you have been generous enough to grant us a debate. This time, the calendar allows the 1st and around the 1st. The 1st is the preferable date, because it lies on St David's Day. Many colleagues will be travelling away to other things on that day, but a number of people have given me assurances that they want to participate in the debate.

I will not go over the history, but there are a lot of issues. We covered many issues last year. Brexit is obviously something that we can debate thoroughly. We do not think we have had the opportunity to do that during the passage of the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill and other matters. There are many Welsh affairs that we want to raise that are applicable to the Wales Office, and we want to give the Wales Office the opportunity to respond to us.

Liz Saville Roberts: I reiterate what Albert Owen has just said: there is a tradition of granting debates on national saints' days and we wish to see that reinstated. We are of course aware that there is the Welsh Grand Committee, but that has been very much delayed; it is correctly due next Wednesday, on 7 February. We are very much aware that we need to raise that and to present a reason as to why we should also have a St David's Day debate.

The Welsh Grand Committee is particularly to discuss the impact of the autumn Budget on Wales. A St David's Day debate would be not only an opportunity to celebrate and appreciate our national saint on a day when there will be other events to commemorate Dewi Sant—St David—but also to discuss other matters that it might not be possible to raise in the Welsh Grand Committee. I reiterate that the Welsh Grand Committee is very late this year.

David T. C. Davies: I agree with everything that Albert Owen and Liz Saville Roberts have just said. I hope that I might get the opportunity to disagree with practically everything they will say if the debate goes ahead.

Comment [BJ]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:32:16"
ServerTimeZone="14:32:16"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [BJ]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:32:34"
ServerTimeZone="14:32:34"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [BJ]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:32:40"
ServerTimeZone="14:32:40"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [BJ]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:32:58"
ServerTimeZone="14:32:58"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [BJ]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:33:17"
ServerTimeZone="14:33:17"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [BJ]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:33:46"
ServerTimeZone="14:33:46"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [BJ]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:33:50"
ServerTimeZone="14:33:50"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [BJ]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:34:09"
ServerTimeZone="14:34:09"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [BJ]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:34:17"
ServerTimeZone="14:34:17"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [OW]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:34:49"
ServerTimeZone="14:34:49"
LocalTime="GMT" />



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Albert Owen: That is why we call it a debate.

David T. C. Davies: It is important that all of us are able to hold the Wales Office to account. The fact is, the Welsh media will certainly take a great interest in what goes on on St David's Day in this House. Diolch yn fawr iawn, Mr Mearns. I hope you will look favourably upon this application.

- Q2 **Bob Blackman:** We do not know whether we will get the Chamber for 1 March or not. Is the date more important or the Chamber more important? In other words, if we did not get the debating time on 1 March but we got Westminster Hall for 1 March, would you accept that to get the date, or would you rather have the Chamber on an alternative date?

Albert Owen: That is a good question. The honest answer is that I would prefer both, but we don't always get what we want—I understand that. Seriously, the Chamber is important to us, for historic reasons. We used to debate this in Government time, and it has subsequently slipped to being not in Government time and from a full day to a half day. The Chamber has important status to us, but I do understand that there might be pressures on it.

- Q3 **Bob Blackman:** Obviously, we do not know yet. So if we do not get the Chamber allocated to us for 1 March, you would rather wait to, say, 8 March, or whatever it is, to have the debate—

Albert Owen: Or come forward. It is a personal thing; colleagues may have different opinions.

Bob Blackman: It is just for our sake to allocate time when we know whether we have got 1 March or not.

Albert Owen: Sure.

Chair: That clarifies that. Thank you very much indeed.

Douglas Ross and Martin Whitfield made representations

- Q4 **Chair:** Next, we have Douglas Ross on the merger of the British Transport police Scottish division with Police Scotland.

Douglas Ross: There is a Celtic theme going through the presentations you have had so far, with a Welsh-dominated presentation there and now a Scottish-dominated presentation. I thank you and the Committee for considering our application. There are many firsts as a new Member of Parliament, and this is my first time in front of your Committee, which I have been looking forward to.

The merger of the Scottish division of the long-established British Transport police with Police Scotland has attracted significant cross-party concern. Indeed, in the last few weeks peers in the other place have debated this very issue, and it was also debated in the Scottish Parliament

Comment [OW]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:34:53"
ServerTimeZone="14:34:53"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [OW]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:35:10"
ServerTimeZone="14:35:10"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [OW]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:35:44"
ServerTimeZone="14:35:44"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [OW]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:36:06"
ServerTimeZone="14:36:06"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [OW]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:36:13"
ServerTimeZone="14:36:13"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [OW]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:36:27"
ServerTimeZone="14:36:27"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [OW]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:36:31"
ServerTimeZone="14:36:31"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [OW]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:36:53"
ServerTimeZone="14:36:53"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [OW]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:36:56"
ServerTimeZone="14:36:56"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [OW]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:37:13"
ServerTimeZone="14:37:13"
LocalTime="GMT" />



HOUSE OF COMMONS

last week. Despite interventions and questions in the House of Commons, in this Session the issue has not been raised in the Chamber or Westminster Hall.

It would be the right moment for a debate on the merger in this House, as the Scottish Government finalises its plans for the merger. There are concerns from the British Transport Police Federation, the rail industry and trade unions, who have all called for the merger to be halted. I was contacted recently by the National Association of Retired British Transport Police Officers, who feel their voice has not been heard. Again, a debate would allow us to discuss that further.

Within Scotland's BTP, morale has plunged, and, according to an internal staff survey obtained by *The Scotsman*, about two thirds of officers are unsure whether they will make the move from British Transport police Scotland division to Police Scotland, which follows a number of significant, highly publicised events with Police Scotland: failures that still require answering. The fact that the merger would require the UK Government to lay orders before this Parliament demonstrates that the devolution aspect of the issue is complex, but the issues remain relevant to both the UK Parliament and UK Government.

Moreover, the effects of the merger would not be confined to Scotland. British Transport police in Scotland is currently overseen by the UK-wide British Transport Police Authority and is still considered a division of the UK-wide British Transport police. The merger would change that relationship. Likewise, there are concerns that the merger would lead to Police Scotland's problems affecting the operational effectiveness of railway policing in Scotland, which would have a knock-on effect beyond Scotland, given that policing and railway policing is a cross-border issue.

Therefore, this is a matter of great concern to stakeholders and a cross-party range of politicians. In the brief time I had to gather signatures, almost every Scottish MP with the exception of Members from the Scottish National party has supported it. Earlier today, Members from south of the border also said that they would support it if I needed further names added to the number of potential speakers. I believe it is urgent and relevant that this Parliament should discuss the matter, which is causing considerable concern in Scotland and to the wider UK public.

Martin Whitfield: I echo what has already been said, and highlight the fact that at present British Transport police in the Scotland area also cover the north-west. There is a cross-jurisdictional problem and it is right to have a debate to listen to all sides of the argument as we progress. There are clearly challenges with this move, reflected both by people serving with the British Transport police and by constituents in East Lothian who have expressed concerns to me about the move. That is why I find it very easy to support this application.

Q5 **Bob Blackman:** Three quick questions: first, while I understand that it is your first time applying, I am slightly confused by your application. You have asked for a general debate, "That this House has considered", but

Comment [OW]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:37:52"
ServerTimeZone="14:37:52"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [OW]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:38:09"
ServerTimeZone="14:38:09"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [OW]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:38:51"
ServerTimeZone="14:38:51"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [OW]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:39:24"
ServerTimeZone="14:39:24"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [KJ]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:39:54"
ServerTimeZone="14:39:54"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [KJ]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:40:33"
ServerTimeZone="14:40:33"
LocalTime="GMT" />



HOUSE OF COMMONS

you then have a substantive motion. A substantive motion can only be put if the debate is in the Chamber; it cannot be put in Westminster Hall. Do you actually want a general debate, or do you want the substantive motion to be voted on, potentially, if the House divided?

Douglas Ross: I was trying to cover all the bases, because I had watched some of your proceedings back and you had asked previous witnesses whether they would prefer a general or a substantive debate. I really just want a debate, and if the easiest way to get an early debate on this is to have a general debate where we can have a discussion, that would be perfectly acceptable to me and the other sponsors.

Following that debate, it could be that from the points raised in the discussion there is a need for a substantive debate that we could potentially come back to. That was just to show the area that we would go down. We also have until the autumn time, when UK Ministers have suggested they would have to lay the orders before Parliament, so potentially we could have a general debate to begin with but with the opportunity to have a substantive debate.

Q6 **Bob Blackman:** So this is not an urgent matter that has to be considered rapidly?

Douglas Ross: Yes it is, in that the joint programme board is meeting today; the Scottish Parliament obviously had a vote on it just last Thursday and Peers in the House of Lords debated a "regret" motion just two weeks ago. There is an opportunity at the moment for us to encourage the Scottish Government to pause this, but the longer that goes on, the more difficult it is for all parties to pause it. That is why a number of people, including the BTP Federation officers, are coming to us. In terms of a substantive debate, we would have a little more time if the discussion at the general debate elicited more interest from Members across the country.

Q7 **Bob Blackman:** The final issue, which we have been debating, is whether this is a devolved matter. What is your answer to people who say, "This is a devolved matter and it's for the Scottish Parliament to decide"?

Douglas Ross: The Scottish Parliament have decided. I was a Member of the Scottish Parliament when this came before the Justice Committee, which I sat on. The Scottish Government have agreed to go forward and it has passed stage 3, but there is still a role for the UK Parliament and UK Government, because we have to lay orders in this House to allow that full devolution to go forward. If there is to be a pause because there are concerns both in Scotland and south of the border, it is important that both our Parliaments discuss it. As a Scottish MP I am fortunate, as others are, to have two Parliaments, the Scottish and UK Parliaments, and it is right that both our Parliaments discuss this matter.

Q8 **Alex Sobel:** For clarification, is this a matter for the Scotland Office or the Ministry of Justice to respond to?

Douglas Ross: Transport, surprisingly. I am a member of the Home Affairs Committee, which I will be going to after this, and I have tried to

Comment [KJ]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:41:04"
ServerTimeZone="14:41:04"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [KJ]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:41:48"
ServerTimeZone="14:41:48"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [KJ]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:41:48"
ServerTimeZone="14:41:48"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [KJ]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:41:51"
ServerTimeZone="14:41:51"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [KJ]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:42:26"
ServerTimeZone="14:42:26"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [KJ]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:42:37"
ServerTimeZone="14:42:37"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [KJ]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:43:14"
ServerTimeZone="14:43:14"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [KJ]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:43:21"
ServerTimeZone="14:43:21"
LocalTime="GMT" />



HOUSE OF COMMONS

get it raised there, but they have rightly said that it is more of a transport issue. But it takes in the Scotland Office and, I believe, the Home Office as well. That is why I think we would have a wide range of interest; it would not just be Scottish MPs, but others would be interested.

Q9 **Alex Sobel:** But the actual Department will be Transport?

Douglas Ross: The Department for Transport.

Q10 **Patricia Gibson:** I will not start by talking about the mention you make in your motion about the Scottish police force being merged into a single police authority. I will not talk about that, because I know that both your parties supported that at the time. I am curious, though, about the direction of travel of this debate. I know that both of your parties have called the Scottish Parliament a "powerhouse Parliament", and we know all about the post-referendum vow that was made about a "powers bonanza" and so on, even after the EU referendum.

I am curious about something you said, Mr Ross, about the UK Government laying orders. I am interested in the substance of the debate, but I would like to be clear. Are you suggesting in what you have said here that, even if this has passed democratically through the elected Chamber of the Scottish Parliament, the UK Government should, if it deems or judges it appropriate, prevent the Scottish Government from carrying out the will of that elected Chamber?

Douglas Ross: First, I congratulate Mrs Gibson on saying that she is not going to mention a number of issues and then very articulately mentioning all of those issues.

I will go back to the point on the Smith Commission, which is what I think you were trying to get at. Yes, the powers of devolving British Transport police to Scotland were agreed unanimously by a cross-party group of politicians.

What was not agreed was that the approach of devolving British Transport police to Scotland should be to merge it into Police Scotland. There were a number of other options but the SNP Scottish Government decided to consult only on one option, which was their preferred option, which is the one we are discussing today. Politicians of all parties are agreed that the devolution of BTP should go forward; we just don't agree that merging it into Police Scotland is the correct way to go about it.

To answer your second point on the orders laid before this Parliament, as we have said, we are keen to have a general debate rather than one on the substantive motion at this time. I have put it in my submission to show where we may go following that debate, but a general debate in the main Chamber or Westminster Hall would allow Members of all parties to discuss what is best for British Transport police officers and the communities we represent, who will be affected one way or another depending on how we go forward with this.

Q11 **Patricia Gibson:** I listened to you very intently and take on board everything you say, but I still don't understand the answer to my

Comment [KJ]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:43:44"
ServerTimeZone="14:43:44"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [KJ]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:43:47"
ServerTimeZone="14:43:47"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [KJ]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:43:52"
ServerTimeZone="14:43:52"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [SS]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:46:16"
ServerTimeZone="14:46:16"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [SS]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:45:47"
ServerTimeZone="14:45:47"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [SS]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:46:19"
ServerTimeZone="14:46:19"
LocalTime="GMT" />



HOUSE OF COMMONS

question. Do you think it would okay? Are you asking for a debate about this? In your or the Government's judgment, when orders are laid, if the Government deems it appropriate, you would act, despite the fact this has passed through the elected Chamber of the Scottish Parliament. Do you think it would be okay for the UK Government to prevent the will of the Scottish Parliament? That is all I want to know. It is a yes or no answer.

Douglas Ross: The answer is that at stage 1 in the Justice Committee, the Liberal Democrats and Greens voted in favour of this. By stage 3 the Liberal Democrats had changed their position on it.

Q12 **Patricia Gibson:** But you just said it passed stage 3.

Douglas Ross: Yes, it passed stage 3. Though, interestingly, it passed stage 3 with the support of the Scottish Greens. When it was voted on last week, the Scottish Greens abstained from that debate, so already support within the Scottish Parliament is waning on this issue.

Patricia Gibson: So maybe it won't pass through the Scottish Parliament and you are worried about nothing.

Q13 **Chair:** Patricia, we don't want to rehearse a potential debate now, and we are straying there. It is clear that there is role for Ministers within this Parliament to lay orders, and it has been stated that that will be done in the autumn of this year.

Given that that has yet to be done, one of the words that I heard pass Mr Ross's mouth was that he was looking for a pause, and I think that was in order to iron out wrinkles in the process. That would not at this stage be a veto on what has been done in the Scottish Parliament but a pause in order to iron out wrinkles.

Tell me if I am wrong, Mr Ross and Martin, but I think the purpose of the debate is to raise concerns that you have with the process, which would be echoed across the border in **Scotland**.

Martin Whitfield: To clarify, that is the purpose of it being a general debate, because there are views held across the board and across parties, with relation to the events that have already happened and are going to happen. The purpose of the debate would be to allow those to be aired, discussed and debated. Following on from that debate, the choice on whether to take this further would depend on the outcome of the debate, which is novel.

Q14 **Patricia Gibson:** I can see that this a matter that Mr Ross cares about very deeply, and I appreciate that; it is an important matter. I wonder this, out of idle curiosity: given that you are so concerned about it, as I see you are, what representations have you personally made to the Justice Secretary in **Scotland**?

Douglas Ross: It is interesting, because my party is doing a very good job. We held a Conservative-led debate on British Transport police and took that directly to the Justice **Secretary**.

Comment [SS]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:46:57"
ServerTimeZone="14:46:57"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [SS]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:47:06"
ServerTimeZone="14:47:06"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [SS]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:47:06"
ServerTimeZone="14:47:06"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [SS]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:47:20"
ServerTimeZone="14:47:20"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [SS]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:48:22"
ServerTimeZone="14:48:22"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [SS]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:48:22"
ServerTimeZone="14:48:22"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [SS]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:48:26"
ServerTimeZone="14:48:26"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [SS]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:49:27"
ServerTimeZone="14:49:27"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [SS]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:49:27"
ServerTimeZone="14:49:27"
LocalTime="GMT" />



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q15 **Patricia Gibson:** But you are not content to leave it to them.

Douglas Ross: In the devolved Administrations our MSPs are standing up for Scotland on this issue. I think it is right that our Scottish Conservative MPs, Scottish Liberal Democrats, Scottish Labour MPs and Scottish National party MPs can have this debate in this place as well. The one important thing about the Smith Commission was that we will not devolve and forget. It would be wrong for us to assume that because we have given these powers away we should just ignore them going forward. As you said, Chair, when you picked up on my point, there is still a role here for Parliament and UK Government Ministers.

Patricia Gibson: Clearly the powers have not been given away by asking the UK Government to intervene and prevent the Scottish Government from carrying out their elected will, but there you do.

Q16 **Bob Blackman:** If you were offered Tuesday 6 March in Westminster Hall for a 90-minute debate, with the offer that if you do not get the answers or a conclusion, you can come back for a more substantive debate and a vote in the Chamber, would that be an acceptable way forward, given you will have to wait five or six weeks to get the debate?

Douglas Ross: Absolutely. Prior to coming here I had also put my name into the shuffle for Westminster Hall on this very debate, so I am trying to cover all my bases. Not that you were second choice.

Q17 **Bob Blackman:** We could tell you that you could get a guarantee.

Douglas Ross: So yes is the answer to your question.

Alex Sobel made representations.

Q18 **Chair:** Last but not least is a member of our own Committee: Mr Alex Sobel. The application is on the future of basketball in the United Kingdom.

Alex Sobel: It is a pleasure to appear before the Committee for the first time, although I am experienced in the ways of the Committee. First, I will explain a little bit about basketball in the UK and then go on to the technicalities. Basketball has three arms in the UK: the professional game, which is represented by the British Basketball League and the Women's British Basketball League. That is a professional league like the NBA, although not quite as big.

Chair: Not quite.

Alex Sobel: Then there is the grassroots sport played by adults and young people in courts around the country. It is the second most popular sport for 11 to 15-year-olds in the UK. It is particularly popular in urban centres, particularly in London. Then there is the elite game. Team GB plays in international tournaments, including the 2012 London Olympics, EuroBasket and others. It also has age group teams: under-18, under-16, boys and girls and so on. It is that part of the game that the debate will

Comment [SS]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:49:31"
ServerTimeZone="14:49:31"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [BD]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:50:00"
ServerTimeZone="14:50:00"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [BD]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:50:10"
ServerTimeZone="14:50:10"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [BD]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:50:22"
ServerTimeZone="14:50:22"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [BD]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:50:40"
ServerTimeZone="14:50:40"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [BD]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:50:47"
ServerTimeZone="14:50:47"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [BD]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:50:47"
ServerTimeZone="14:50:47"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [BD]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:51:03"
ServerTimeZone="14:51:03"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [BD]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:51:48"
ServerTimeZone="14:51:48"
LocalTime="GMT" />



HOUSE OF COMMONS

address, because that part of the game is entering a deep and severe crisis, which it might not recover from without the intervention of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

After the 2012 Olympics UK Sport revised its criteria and only wanted to fund elite sport that had medal potential. Basketball did not medal in 2012. Unfortunately it did not get past the men's or women's first stage. The British Basketball Federation, the umbrella body set up last year over Basketball England, Basketball Scotland and Basketball Wales, has had decreasing funding and is now facing a cliff edge of no more funding. They have looked for other funding sources, including commercial sponsorship. They have not been able to secure that as yet. They have only enough money to last until March. If no funding comes forward, they will have to withdraw from competition. They have already entered the under-16 and under-18 teams for international competition. FIBA, the world governing body like FIFA, would fine them potentially up to €300,000 per team. They would be suspended from international competition for two years. It would be difficult to envisage a scenario, without a huge amount of investment and support, that would mean they would re-enter international competition. GB would no longer be represented at any level in any international competition.

We have had ongoing negotiations. I am the chair of the all-party group on basketball. My co-chair is Lord Wasserman, who has already raised this matter in the other Chamber. Without intervention from DCMS and the Government, or another method of direct funding or some other method we have not arrived at yet, elite basketball will effectively cease in the UK.

We need this debate at this time to highlight not only all the great things basketball does as a sport—it is a diversionary activity from gang crime and knife crime, many young people play it and a great professional basketball league is developing in the UK—but mainly the cliff edge that our elite game faces. Having a debate in Westminster Hall with the Minister for Sport responding would hugely amplify our calls for intervention. We have already had the BBC ask us when the debate is going to be, because they want us to come on the "Breakfast" show. I would have to travel to Manchester at 5 o'clock in the morning, but we all have to make sacrifices. That is why I need this debate.

In terms of technicalities, I imagine that one or more members of the Committee might ask me about the number of names and the political balance of the speakers. We are a little short on Back Benchers from the governing party. I have had some others indicate they would be willing to speak if they were in Westminster at the time, including Nicky Morgan, and potentially some others around professional clubs in Surrey, but I have not managed to firm their names up. I could try to do that if we could get a date.

Q19 **Bob Blackman:** What do you want to achieve as a result of having the debate? You have mentioned all the problems, but what is the positive thing that comes out of having the debate?

Comment [BD]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:52:46"
ServerTimeZone="14:52:46"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [BD]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:54:18"
ServerTimeZone="14:54:18"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [HG]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:55:42"
ServerTimeZone="14:55:42"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [HG]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:56:19"
ServerTimeZone="14:56:19"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [HG]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:56:28"
ServerTimeZone="14:56:28"
LocalTime="GMT" />



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Alex Sobel: The simplest solution to this would be for DCMS to ask UK Sport to change the criteria. I forgot to mention that there is actually a new Olympic sport—three on three—which is going to be introduced at the next Olympics. That is basketball but with three people on each side, which is completely untested.

Q20 **Chair:** Like five-a-side.

Alex Sobel: Like five-a-side or rugby sevens, but for basketball, yes. It is completely untested internationally.

Q21 **Bob Blackman:** Is it the same sized court, but with three players on each side?

Alex Sobel: I think the court is smaller. I will be honest: I do not know all the technicalities of three on three. The medal potential is unknown, but UK Sport is not looking at it because it is not currently an Olympic sport. DCMS could change the criteria to ask them to fund future Olympic sports. We just need a slight variation in the criteria to allow funding for basketball. We are talking about quite a small amount of money—between £500,000 and £700,000 a year. That is all the federation needs. In the scheme of elite sport funding, it is a couple of rowing teams. It is not a huge amount.

Q22 **Chair:** I am not putting words in your mouth, but I guess that one of the things that underpins such an application for funding is, "Okay, we may not have a successful international team in this sport, but it is a very significant mass participation sport."

Alex Sobel: Yes, it is, and there is also potential. If you take away the potential for people to go and play basketball and then perform in the Olympics and internationally, it may put people off entering the sport at the grassroots. If you look at who plays basketball, it is generally young, black, disadvantaged men and women. They do not have access to some of the sports in which we perform very highly, such as cycling and rowing. Those are not an option for them.

Q23 **Bob Blackman:** The other issue I want to touch on is timing. There is the potential for Tuesday 20 February, but you were saying that if they run out of money by the end of March, that could be it.

Alex Sobel: Yes, so 20 February would be towards the end of the timeline. I have come a bit late to this, but given the crisis—

Q24 **Bob Blackman:** But that still would allow sufficient time for—

Alex Sobel: I hope so, yes.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed. I should declare a small interest, inasmuch as a local team near where I live—a small village called Newcastle upon Tyne—has been probably the most successful British basketball team for the past decade, but that is neither here nor there.

Comment [HG]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:56:56"
ServerTimeZone="14:56:56"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [HG]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:56:58"
ServerTimeZone="14:56:58"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [HG]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:56:58"
ServerTimeZone="14:56:58"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [HG]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:58:02"
ServerTimeZone="14:58:02"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [HG]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:58:37"
ServerTimeZone="14:58:37"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [HG]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:58:47"
ServerTimeZone="14:58:47"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [HG]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:58:54"
ServerTimeZone="14:58:54"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [HG]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="14:58:55"
ServerTimeZone="14:58:55"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [OI]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="30 January 2018"
ServerTime="16:33:15"
ServerTimeZone="16:33:15"
LocalTime="GMT" />