

Backbench Business Committee

Representations: Backbench Business

Tuesday 13 March 2018

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 13 March 2018.

Watch the meeting

Members present: Ian Mearns (Chair); Bob Blackman; Patricia Gibson; Mr William Wragg.

Questions 1-25

Representations made

[I](#): Mr Ben Bradshaw, Dr Lisa Cameron, and Caroline Lucas

[II](#): Martin Whitfield

[III](#): Helen Hayes and John Penrose

[IV](#): Sarah Jones

Written evidence from witnesses:

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Mr Ben Bradshaw, Dr Lisa Cameron and Caroline Lucas made representations.

Q1 **Chair:** Good afternoon and welcome to the Backbench Business Committee. We have a number of applications in front of us this afternoon. The first is from Mr Ben Bradshaw, Dr Lisa Cameron and Caroline Lucas, on the effect on the NHS of the UK leaving the European Union. Over to you, Ben.

Mr Bradshaw: Thank you very much, Mr Chairman. I am really grateful that you have accommodated us first. Lisa and I have just slipped out of a Health Committee meeting where we are finalising our second Select Committee report into some of the impacts of Brexit on the NHS.

Although there has been plenty of debate in the House on Brexit generally and on the implications for trade, the economy and everything else, we know, as members of the Committee—anyone who follows issues around the NHS and health will also know—that there are big potential impacts depending on what kind of Brexit and what sort of relationship we have in the future with the European Union, on the NHS, social care, staffing, the supply of pharmaceuticals, medical equipment and on the overall impact of qualifications and whether people can move around Europe. We have highlighted some of those concerns in our first report. We expect to do the same in our second. With time running out for the Government to agree a transitional deal—if they still hope to do so by the end of March—we think there is a really good case for having those issues aired in a discrete debate on the issue, notwithstanding the debates that have been going on elsewhere in Parliament on the general Brexit issue.

Dr Cameron: I agree with everything that Ben said. I would just add that this is so crucial for constituents right across the United Kingdom. The potential impact on the NHS of Brexit and of the different potential scenarios is something that is very important to people, in terms of how much they care about the NHS, but also in terms of treatment availability, availability of medicines and making sure that British citizens are part of European trials going forward and have access to medications at a very early stage when they are first ratified. It is really crucial to people and I think it would be something very valuable to take forward in a debate.

Caroline Lucas: I guess I would just add that I feel that the NHS is pretty much at the top of public concern of all the different issues that face the country. If you combine the NHS and Brexit, which is probably the other big concern, you have a real issue where you can be sure that there will be lots of MPs in the Chamber. You will see that we have genuine cross-party support, including people such as Anna Soubry and Sarah Wollaston, as well as people from Labour, the SNP, myself and others. We feel very confident that we would be able to fill the Chamber and that we could certainly easily sustain a three-hour debate. We are not proposing to divide the House, but I think all MPs from whichever side of the House are under pressure about the NHS from their constituents. This would be a

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really important debate to have to demonstrate that we are taking their concerns seriously and to try to get some more light, if not heat.

- Q2 **Mr Wragg:** Thank you very much for your application. I have two questions, the first of which is quite a blunt one. Why does your application merit Backbench Business Committee time, given the amount of time given over to general debates and Opposition day debates—particularly this week, when tomorrow and Thursday are being given over to a general debate on the EU? That is quite a direct question.

Mr Bradshaw: Because, as Caroline said, the NHS is such a big issue. The explicit implications of Brexit for the NHS have not been debated and aired in a discrete way in this House. We have had plenty of debates on Brexit in general and it is huge—the economic and trade impacts and so forth. One could argue that perhaps because of the two respective Front-Bench positions, neither of the Front Benches is particularly interested in having an Opposition day debate or a debate in Government time on the impact of Brexit on the NHS, although it is a huge issue for our constituents. It is a big issue, as the Select Committee has exposed in our first report and is about to in our second, and yet there has not been Government or Opposition time given to this specific area of Brexit and its impact.

- Q3 **Mr Wragg:** You mentioned the cross-party support, which is undoubtedly on display with the list of Members who have said that they would take part in the debate. Are there any Members who want to take part who backed leave in the referendum?

Caroline Lucas: Anna Soubry. Oh no, she didn't; of course she didn't. I am sure some of these are.

- Q4 **Mr Wragg:** I have glanced at it and I don't think any of them are. I wonder whether you approached any of those MPs who backed leave at the referendum? Is that just an oversight?

Mr Bradshaw: We got these numbers together in the space of the last three or four days. I am sure we could get more together and I am sure that leave-supporting MPs who were, after all, in a significant minority in this House, would be equally interested in being able to debate this and perhaps challenge some of the views and concerns expressed by other Members. It is about having a debate. It is not about having a one-sided debate.

Dr Cameron: It is also about making sure that there is a way forward for the NHS. That is the focal interest.

- Q5 **Mr Wragg:** I am not arguing with the substance of your debate. It was just the mention of there being cross-party support, which is undoubtedly the case. I just wondered, with it being on an issue that divides opinion in the House, whether you have sought that difference of opinion.

Mr Bradshaw: And there are leave-supporting Conservative Members on the Select Committee who have been co-authors of our reports.

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- Q6 **Bob Blackman:** You mentioned that the Health Committee is doing a report on this. There is a route for the Health Committee to ask the Liaison Committee, which just happens to have the same Chair, for time in Westminster Hall to debate the report. Is that not a route that you would choose to follow, rather than taking up other time? I think we can be quite frank with people: we do not have any Chamber time to allocate, so we are only going to be in a position to allocate Westminster Hall time anyway, and there are several competing bids.

Mr Bradshaw: I would say two things about that. First, there is a timing issue, given the urgency of the Government agreeing a transitional deal, which will be critical not only to the pharmaceutical industry, but in terms of medical equipment and staffing issues in the NHS. What the Government agree will be absolutely critical, and that is supposed to be being agreed in the next few weeks. I am not sure that the Health Committee's report, when it comes out, would be able to be debated quite as quickly as that.

The other point I would make, Mr Blackman, is that the report that we are about to publish now is a narrower report on a limited area of impact. We are doing several reports on the impact of Brexit on the NHS. The first one was a general one. This is a more narrow one. So any request that Sarah Wollaston made through the Liaison Committee for this report to be debated would be about the narrow issues that we are discussing down the corridor now, rather than the generality of this.

- Q7 **Bob Blackman:** So for you, the most important thing is getting a debate before Easter?

Mr Bradshaw: Yes. I don't think Sarah would have supported this application if she thought that that would in any way cross over—

- Q8 **Bob Blackman:** That's fine. Let's say that we offered you time in Westminster Hall, because there is no time in the Chamber. I think we have to be quite open about this.

Mr Bradshaw: Timing is of the essence here. Yes, we may pack out Westminster Hall, but timing is of the essence.

- Q9 **Patricia Gibson:** Can I ask for clarification? Does that mean that after the Easter recess but still in the month of April is too late?

Mr Bradshaw: If the Government want to agree a transitional deal at the March summit, yes. There has been speculation in the media in the last couple of days that that might be put off till June. I am not privy—well, that is because of the outstanding differences between the Government and the other EU27. But we can't bank on it being put off. The current timetable is for a transition to be agreed at the March summit, and in that case, we would like to be in a position to influence that.

- Q10 **Patricia Gibson:** I'm just curious. If you missed that deadline, would you not want still to have the debate to scrutinise whatever was agreed?

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Mr Bradshaw: There is always going to be an argument for scrutinising. We would rather scrutinise and influence in advance, rather than scrutinising after the event.

- Q11 **Patricia Gibson:** The thing I was going to ask you was this. We have heard, and it is true, that we have had a lot of debates on Brexit, but as I think Lisa said, Brexit is so huge and overarching. The reason why we are having so many debates on Brexit is that there are so many aspects to it that need to be taken into account. My real question was this. It is in light of the fact that we have no Chamber time. I am curious about the three hours, because I would think that you would fill three hours very, very easily. I know it all depends on the timing—whether it's April, Chamber time and all the rest of it—but I would have thought that in the initial instance you would have asked for six hours.

Mr Bradshaw: I did think about that, but I thought that we were unlikely to get that length of time before Easter. Just to give you one example—

- Q12 **Patricia Gibson:** It is all about the Easter deadline, isn't it?

Mr Bradshaw: It is. The Prime Minister last week—I was very pleased about this—came out and said that we wanted to have associate membership of the European Medicines Agency, for example, and full alignment, whereas only the week before, the Foreign Secretary had said something completely different, so getting some clarity from the Government about what Britain's position is, going into this transition, is going to be so important.

- Q13 **Patricia Gibson:** So if you could not get a debate before Easter, would you withdraw the application?

Mr Bradshaw: I don't think so.

Caroline Lucas: No, but we would be very disappointed, because we have been so reasonable.

- Q14 **Patricia Gibson:** But if you were offered time after Easter, you would take it?

Mr Bradshaw: I think there is always going to be a strong argument to have this debated, but we would prefer to have the debate before Easter.

Caroline Lucas: And a short time before Easter is a lot more valuable than a big time after Easter.

Dr Cameron: Yes. I think this is something the public would value having debated in depth.

Patricia Gibson: I think there would be a lot of interest in it.

Chair: Out of interest, for everyone who has an application this afternoon, we already know we do not have 22 March. We do not yet know if we have 29 March, which is the last day before the Easter recess, but we know we do not have any time allocated yet. We definitely do not have 22 March, though. I am surprised you did not ask for six hours, for

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time that we do not have to give you as well, so don't worry about that.

Q15 **Patricia Gibson:** Could I just say—I was talking about this before you came into the room, and I don't think I am telling any confidences—that if you get the day on the 29th, the problem for every debate on that day is that it is filled with questions and statements, and all the time will be squeezed on that day, no matter what the debate is.

Q16 **Chair:** Yes, immediately before the recess. That has been our experience recently; just before recesses, urgent questions and statements tend to fill an awful lot of the time allocated to the Committee. Anything else, anyone, please? Thank you very much for your application.

Martin Whitfield made representations.

Q17 **Chair:** The title of this application is "Redress for victims of banking misconduct and the FCA".

Martin Whitfield: Yes, good afternoon and thank you. Last week I was mob-handed and we would have needed more chairs, but unfortunately Bill Committees, Petition Committees and a number of other things have kept the supporters of this debate away. It is yet another application for a Back-Bench debate on the situation regarding banking, following the one in January. The basis of the application is the section 166 report, which has been published and principally relates to RBS and the restructuring department of it. However, there are facts that have come out regarding the section 166 statement and the various other—I am going to use the words carefully—professional bodies involved in this, which have raised innumerable questions. I can confidently say that they have raised those questions across this House with our constituents. Our January debate attracted over 100 constituents here to Parliament and there were 38 speakers.

On this occasion, the APPG has formulated a motion we would like to put, which of course indicates that we would like the main Chamber. Obviously, having heard what has been said this morning, I can reassure the Backbench Business Committee that, in relation to time, we feel it is more important that this motion is given and the debate occurs than that it occurs before Easter. Events are moving within the finance industry across the board; however, the questions that are being raised, particularly with regard to valuers and some of the other professionals who have been involved in this, are of such importance that they need to be aired.

We have gone as far as we really feel able, working with the Treasury Committee. These questions cross a number of Departments in Government, but it is for the Treasury to answer and it is for the Treasury to address a proposal as to how we will satisfy a difficult and, unfortunately, ongoing problem.

Chair: Questions, please?

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Mr Wragg: No. It is a very worthy application.

Chair: Okay. In that case, thank you very much.

John Penrose and **Helen Hayes** made representations.

Q18 **Chair:** The application is simply "House building".

John Penrose: That's right. We sit here because I am the chair and Helen is the deputy chair of the all-party parliamentary group on housing and planning. We have been working with a number of colleagues, right the way across the Chamber, and we feel it is particularly important, given the fact that we have just had a statement about 10 days ago about a revision to the national planning policy framework. That has been launched. There is an ongoing consultation. Today, we have also had the publication of the initial findings from Oliver Letwin about the slow build-out rate for planning permissions that have already been granted.

This issue is ranked consistently in the top three or four. It is a cost of living issue that affects every single constituent in every single constituency up and down the country. It is one of the things that is consistently squeezing people's cost of living—raising the cost of living—and squeezing their family budgets on a serious basis over the course of the last 10 years. As a result, it is far more salient today than it might have been if we had been having this conversation five years ago, or even three. It is important and timely, and we have had an enormous amount of interest, because we feel that if we phrase this as a question of house building, we take into account issues about not only home ownership, but tenancies, rentals, planning permission, supply-side reforms, banking finance for housing and so on and so forth. In there will be a wide range of issues, which will span, we think, the political divide; and there are a variety of different solutions, which are being proposed and peddled, on each side of the political divide as well. So we are expecting to get a lot of people interested. We have 50-plus names here and we therefore commend the application to yourselves if possible.

Helen Hayes: I agree with everything John said. This is a broadly-framed debate to allow Members from across the country to come and speak about their perspective on the housing supply issues, which, as John has rightly said, affect every single part of the country. Whether that is an issue about new towns, land banking and delay in implementing planning applications, densification or simply the extreme shortage of supply in particular areas across the country, we know that there is extensive interest in this topic. We know that the political landscape continues to move. As John has said, the NPPF consultation, in particular, makes this a timely moment for this debate.

Q19 **Bob Blackman:** Doing the sums, allowing for Front-Bench spokespersons' speeches, with 54 people realistically wanting to speak, speakers are going to get two to three minutes each, particularly after an introduction

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and so on. If it is really that many people, three hours does not do this subject justice.

John Penrose: You are saying that we may have undercooked it. We were trying to be modest, because you normally tell us that there is a limited resource.

Q20 **Bob Blackman:** I understand that, but one of the frustrations—I raised this at business questions last week, as you are probably aware—with the estimates debate was that we had people at the end getting squeezed to three minutes and they just did not have the time to talk about things. Given the wide range you are talking about here, people will want to develop their arguments in a slightly longer period. I believe that a full days' debate is needed on this. You only get six hours anyway, because of UQs and statements.

John Penrose: We would love it. We were trying to aim off, because we know you guys are always short.

Helen Hayes: Absolutely.

Mr Wragg: I was just going to make the point that there was the recent all-day debate, so-called, in the Chamber, which Laurence Robertson led and that was extremely well-subscribed. So realistically, 54 speakers will be far too many for that three hour application at the moment.

Q21 **Chair:** Is there any time sensitivity from your perspective? You have heard how rationed for time we are at the moment.

Helen Hayes: The consultation on the NPPF closes on 10 May. It would be desirable to have the debate before that deadline, but there is no time pressure beyond that.

John Penrose: I think having it in the Chamber in April, rather than in Westminster Hall in March, would probably be better.

Chair: Okay. Thank you very much.

Sarah Jones made representations.

Chair: Last up this afternoon, Sarah Jones and cancer treatment. Good afternoon and welcome, Sarah.

Sarah Jones: Thank you very much for hearing this. I am here not because I am an expert in brain tumours, but because I am a friend of Tessa Jowell and I used to work for her, so I have a particular interest in supporting her at the moment. You will all know that she was diagnosed with a brain tumour last May. It is an incurable brain tumour. She has accessed trials and treatments, but she is very poorly.

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In January, she led a debate in the House of Lords, where she talked about the treatment she has received, the access that she has had to doctors in America, and the fact that she got access by knowing people who knew people and by having a very supportive family who went out and found the best they could across the world for her. She made the point that not everybody has access to that kind of treatment and that, because of problems with data sharing, there is an issue around the speed with which clinical trials can be effective. That means that we have had many years of no improvement in outcomes for people with brain tumours and many years of no improved treatments.

Tessa met the Prime Minister and had a roundtable with the Secretary of State for Health and with James O'Shaughnessy, who has gone away to look at some of the issues that were raised. The Government committed £20 million of funding, and Cancer Research UK provided another £25 million of funding. The issues that came out of the roundtable were the need for data sharing around the world among clinicians, the need for more clinical trials, and the need for more access to clinical trials, should patients want them.

We are asking for a debate in the House of Commons that mirrors the debate that happened in the House of Lords. The Government have said that they will come back with some thoughts on the roundtable around 15 or 16 April. We wondered whether it would be possible to have a debate after that point, perhaps in the last week of April. We have spoken to the Speaker and he is keen to be there to chair if possible. I have spoken to MPs who I know have an interest and a connection to Tessa—you have the list of people supporting it. There is a lot of cross-party support from people such as Nick Boles, who has had cancer himself, and from lots of Tessa's colleagues and chairs of all-party parliamentary groups on relevant topics.

I hope you will think that is a good enough reason for a debate. Unfortunately, we are quite time-limited in terms of wanting to do it while Tessa is still with us, which is another issue.

Q22 **Chair:** So you are suggesting April, rather than trying to fit it in before the recess?

Sarah Jones: We thought it made sense to let the Government have their debates about what they will do with some of the issues that were raised in the roundtable. So doing it in the last week of April would mean the Government can respond properly—hopefully we are still in time.

Q23 **Bob Blackman:** I am very sympathetic to the cause. If anything good can come out of this, it will create awareness of the problems. Thinking about the logic of it, there is the potential to have a 90-minute debate in Westminster Hall on a Tuesday morning before Easter, which might enable people to put on record their ideas. That would not prejudice having a debate in April. I think the subject warrants a debate in the Chamber, but just to get the details on the record, that might be something for you to consider. It would not prejudice the application for

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Chamber time in April. Would that appeal?

Sarah Jones: I guess, for the people who have said that they want to speak, I do not know whether it would be slightly peculiar for them to speak twice in a couple of weeks.

Q24 **Bob Blackman:** They would not all be able to, because in a 90-minute debate you will get fewer people speaking. In a three-hour debate, you obviously get a larger group. I am just thinking about the implications of it in terms of time, because we have a time slot available before Easter in Westminster Hall for 90 minutes. We effectively have no other time available.

Sarah Jones: I think after Easter would be preferable, and to do it once, when everybody can come, would probably be preferable as well.

Q25 **Chair:** Bob, could you take your foot off the microphone? The Clerk of the Education Committee nearly killed one sound engineer by kicking a microphone, but that is neither here nor there—it happens in this place. Thank you, Sarah. It is obviously a very timely application, and we are very sympathetic to the subject.

Sarah Jones: Thank you.

Chair: That brings to an end our public deliberations for the day. We will now go into closed session.

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Comment [HJ]: <TimeTag
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