



Backbench Committee

Representations: Backbench Business

Monday 16 Apr 2018

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Watch the meeting

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

Questions 1-21

Witnesses

[I](#): Bambos Charalambous.

[II](#): Vicky Ford.

[III](#): Mr Chris Leslie and Jack Brereton.



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Bambos Charalambous made representations.

Q1 **Chair:** Good afternoon and welcome to this afternoon's meeting of the Backbench Business Committee. We have three applications in front of us this afternoon. The first is from Bambos Charalambous.

Bambos Charalambous: I am making an application for a debate about safeguarding young people participating in sport. This has arisen because one of my constituents is Ian Ackley, who was the first whistleblower on Barry Bennell. You will have heard about Barry Bennell in the papers. Despite Barry Bennell's conviction in February this year, there has not been any debate in Parliament about safeguarding. One thing I want to do is ensure that what happened to my constituent Ian Ackley when he was an 11 or 12-year-old boy does not happen to any other young people participating in sport. For that reason, I think we should have a debate about issues of safeguarding, looking at what governing bodies are doing to tighten things in terms of those coaches who have access to children and whether any issues need to be addressed around DBS checks and the definition of a position of trust. There are some areas that I think need to be looked at. We should look at them, because we have not had a debate about this issue.

Such situations have also happened more recently. In America, the national gymnast physician had access to a number of young people who he sexually abused, and he got a very long sentence for that. The area is really important and worthy of a debate.

I have managed to secure support. I think over 20 Members have signed my application, so there is scope and need for the debate. I have also spoken to the Government and Tracey Crouch. She was quite happy for the debate to take place. I have also spoken to Rosena Allin-Khan on the Opposition side. She is the shadow Minister, and she is also keen for the debate to take place. It would be worthy, appropriate and apt to have that debate soon. I am in your hands. Hopefully, you will support my application. I think it is a very important and very worthy debate.

Q2 **Bob Blackman:** Bambos, what do you hope to achieve by having the debate?

Bambos Charalambous: I want to identify any loopholes in the law. I also want to see what action any of the governing bodies of clubs have taken to ensure that this does not happen again. I have spoken with the NSPCC, and it has raised a number of areas where it thinks there might be issues. The debate would raise awareness about what governing bodies



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have been doing and would look at tightening loopholes. I mentioned positions of trust, and there is also an issue about DBS checks and what regulated activities there are around those. There is also the definition of regulated activity under the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012.

Q3 **Bob Blackman:** Which Department do you see answering this—the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport?

Bambos Charalambous: I think it would be DCMS, although obviously it could have wider significance, because there might be other activities that would also be caught by this. For instance, there were some cases a while back of music teachers who were alleged to have abused children in their trust. It may have wider implications.

Q4 **Bob Blackman:** The reason I ask is that there is the option of potentially having a 90-minute debate—not the three hours—in Westminster Hall on Tuesday 1 May, but Chamber time, as we all know, is very limited indeed. We have lost a Backbench Business debate today, so all the business is likely to get shunted. The Westminster Hall debate would allow you to have a debate and tease out the Government's position, and it would not prejudice you possibly coming back to this Committee to seek a divisible motion and a debate in the Chamber, if the Government did not give you what you wanted. Would that be something you would consider? Obviously, you would not get this number of speakers to speak in a 90-minute debate, because it would be shorter, but it would potentially give you two bites of the cherry.

Bambos Charalambous: I am in your hands. I really want to make sure that the subject is aired and I think the timing is really apt, so I think it may be best to try to get it sooner rather than later. So I will be in your hands. If that deals with the issue, that would be a good way forward, so I would not be adverse to that.

Q5 **Chair:** One aspect about this that needs further investigation is the accountability and effectiveness of sports governing bodies and the governance of individual sporting clubs as well, in terms of their responsibility for safeguarding. That has certainly been a big part of the discussions that I have been aware of, so I would hope that that would come out within that debate, Bambos. Thank you very much indeed.

Vicky Ford made representations.

Q6 **Chair:** Vicky, your application is on financial services.



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Vicky Ford: Yes. Thank you very much. I have left it quite a broad title, but I would be prepared to be more specific about that if the Committee would be interested in that.

The UK is, of course, a world leader in the financial services sector. The sector is a very significant employer in the UK, with over 1 million people employed in it. The sector is also the largest contributor to British tax revenues—£70 billion to over 10% of total tax. It's not just in London, which is why 16 MPs so far have agreed with the application; in my own constituency of Chelmsford, there are over 3,000 jobs that are in financial services.

It is also a sector that is crucial for the wider economy as a whole, for businesses and for consumers. The biggest financial decisions that consumers ever make in their lives are the type of mortgage that they sign up to and the car finance lease that they sign up to, and it is crucial to have a dynamic but also well-regulated financial services sector.

It is a time when we really need to discuss the future of our financial services sector. The relationship with Europe is key. This is a sector where many of the jobs based in London rely on access to the European markets, but also many businesses and consumers in Europe rely on access to the markets in the UK. However, it is the one sector that would not be covered by a traditional free trade agreement, and therefore it is worth examining the nature of the agreement that the Government intend to agree. And within the financial services sectors, there are many different sub-sectors that have different interests.

So it is important we discuss it, partly because of the negotiations with Europe and the free trade agreement, but also because this is a very important time for deciding what sort of regulation we in the UK want to have going forward.

I spent nearly a decade in the European Parliament, as you know. A lot of that was working on financial services regulation, where for many years we have worked hand in hand with European regulators. What do we want going forward? What is the support of this House? Leaders in the sector are extremely keen to hear voices from across Parliament debating this and suggesting the approach, especially to ongoing regulatory strategy. That means issues like financial fraud, which would have had a little tiny debate on a little tiny sub-sector of it, but also financial crime and anti-money laundering. We have heard that come up in a debate today as well. There is also the issue that the industrial strategy, which we will have a broad debate on tomorrow, does not cover financial services. It covers all the sectors and contributors to our economy but not this, which is so key to everything else's success.



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Why not a Westminster Hall debate? Quite simply because I have been in a lovely Westminster Hall debate today but only two Members were present. This is much more important, and it is incredibly important that we show to the 1 million people involved in that sector that this House treats that services sector as seriously as we treat other parts of the industrial strategy. That is why I have asked for quite a broad debate.

There are lots of other issues on which Members may wish to become involved. For example, the gender pay gap has been a really big issue in the financial services sector. There will be little issues that this sector exemplifies, and therefore that need to be considered.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed.

Q7 **Bob Blackman:** Thank you for your presentation. You haven't indicated, although it is a general debate, whether you would accept a Westminster Hall debate on a Thursday. We have a potential vacancy on 26 April in Westminster Hall; you could get three hours. If you do not accept a Westminster Hall debate on a Thursday, you go to the back of the queue of a long waiting list for the Chamber.

We can only allocate the Chamber when we get it. We have already lost one debate today, which then has to be reallocated. Given those circumstances, is it important for you to get the debate as early as possible, or can you wait until, I suspect, the middle to end of June before we can even consider allocating it?

Vicky Ford: That is a good question and I have thought about it. I believe that this is too important to be dealt with in just a Westminster Hall debate. The call for this debate came after an approach to me from very high up in the Corporation of London, which, as you know, looks at the financial services sector across the UK, and a real concern that parliamentarians—

Q8 **Bob Blackman:** Can I say that Westminster Hall is our second debating Chamber? So far as we are concerned—in this Committee particularly—we defend the use of Westminster Hall for those debates. It is recorded by *Hansard*, as you know, and is available on TV. It has every single aspect of presence, other than the fact that you cannot have a vote at the end. It is your application, and we will obviously consider it, but if you decline the potential offer of a Westminster Hall debate, you will go to the back of the queue.

Vicky Ford: If it is okay, I would like to think about that and get back to you through the Clerk. I want to make sure that we give a proper hearing to all these different issues, because they keep coming up in the main Chamber.



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Q9 **Bob Blackman:** The other consideration that you should bear in mind is that the three hours is protected in Westminster Hall. We know, to our bitter cost, that in the Chamber the time is squeezed considerably; it can be down to one and a half hours.

Vicky Ford: I am a new Member, so I will take that back. I hear the offer. Maybe the 26th—next Thursday?

Q10 **Nigel Mills:** I looked at this and my heart sank. I thought, "Not another Brexit debate, surely?" Are you assuring us that this is not a re-run of debates we have already had in recent months?

Vicky Ford: No, it is not. On the Brexit example, this is about what we want the financial services chapter to look like. This is the largest contributor to our tax revenues, Nigel, and we need to get it right. We are at a turning point in how we decide how we regulate it and what sort of access we need. Given that the Chamber is going to give the industrial sector a full Chamber debate, I think it is fair that we also give a full Chamber debate to the financial services sector.

Q11 **Nigel Mills:** So the debate is not intended to be another round of the Brexit debate and it is wider?

Vicky Ford: No, it is going forward.

Q12 **Mr Wragg:** Thank you for your application. Given its importance, have you considered the wording of the motion? Clearly, with wording for the motion, it stands a greater chance of being heard in the Chamber. All we have in this application is "[topic]". I might have an out-of-date version. Is there wording for the motion?

Vicky Ford: I wanted to discuss with you what your view was on the wording of the motion, but I think that the motion we are discussing tomorrow is "this House has considered the industrial strategy" and I would like to have a motion that says, "this House has discussed the financial services sector". I possibly would have said "and its impact on the British economy", but perhaps that is also too narrow if we want to bring in the other issues that keep coming up in the House.

Q13 **Chair:** That would still be a general debate topic, rather than a motion that would require some action from the Government in a specific way. I would say to you to certainly consider that. The potential offer of time in Westminster Hall is on the table, but if your debate in Westminster Hall had legs and brought out a number of unanswered questions, particularly in terms of ministerial response, that would then form nicely the basis of a later application for Chamber time.

Vicky Ford: So that would be next Thursday, and it would be Westminster Hall, three hours. The other point I really want to make,



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going back to Nigel's point, is that this is being sponsored by people who are on both sides of the Brexit debate and that is really, really important.

It is a really good idea. Should the strategy then be just, "this House has considered financial services and its impact on the British economy"? Do you want something about regulation as well?

Q14 **Chair:** This is not our debate. It is your application and it is up to you how you frame it, but if you want Chamber time at a later stage I suggest that a votable motion would be the way forward.

Vicky Ford: A votable motion, in Westminster Hall—

Bob Blackman: No.

Q15 **Chair:** A general debate in Westminster Hall, but that would probably tease out unanswered questions from the Government and that could then form the basis of a votable motion that you could bring back for a later application. That would be my suggestion.

Vicky Ford: Okay. Thank you very much. What do you need me to do?

Chair: Keep in touch with our esteemed Clerk, Mr Davies.

Vicky Ford: But potentially next Thursday. That would be great. Thank you very much indeed.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed.

Mr Chris Leslie and Jack Brereton made representations.

Q16 **Chair:** Last but certainly not least, Mr Chris Leslie and Jack Brereton. The application is on the subject of Kashmir.

Mr Leslie: Thank you, Chair. It is hopefully a fairly straightforward description on the application form. I think we probably have about 750,000 Pakistani Kashmiri residents within the UK, so there is a great community interest in issues and events that are taking place in the area that is quite disputed between India and Pakistan. I know that Members will have lots of different views and be well aware of the issues that are involved.

On the application I think we have 29 colleagues across the parties who are supporting the call for a debate in the main Chamber: a three-hour allocation, probably with a Foreign Office Minister to reply. We have not had a debate in the main Chamber for more than a year, and Jack might say a little more about the topical reasons why this is coming up—there is a lot in the news about it.



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There is a long history, and the UK was involved in the original partition of that part of the world, so the Pakistani Kashmiri population feel very strongly that the British Parliament has an ongoing responsibility and duty of care on this issue. Governments of all parties have sometimes not wanted to get involved, but there is a need to probe Government policy in the light of recent events. Human rights concerns come up. Lots of questions are also swirling currently because of the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting. As we know, President Modi of India is visiting the UK, and that, I think, is going to bring this issue very much to the fore, and Pakistan is in the Commonwealth as well. With both India and Pakistan as nuclear powers, there are geopolitical defence issues that come into this question as well.

I don't think there will be any particular intention to come at this from one particular side or the other, because it is a hotly contested issue and we want to make sure that lots of the questions are properly investigated, but given the widespread interest across the different parties, we felt that this was the time to visit this particular issue.

Jack Brereton: As Chris has mentioned, this is coming at it from all angles. Certainly, there is a role here for both Pakistan and India. Just to reflect on why we think it is important that we have this debate, we have seen quite an escalation in some of the violence in recent times and also the humanitarian situation within the region. For example, at least 30 people were killed and many more injured in the last few months alone, so it is particularly important we have this debate and raise awareness about the situation in that part of the world. Ultimately, we want to see that peaceful resolution. Wherever humanitarian abuses are taking place throughout the world, it is right that they are brought to the fore and brought to our attention. I think it is important that people are aware of them and that human rights abuses cannot take place in this part of the world.

Q17 **Bob Blackman:** I have one or two questions. I won't go into the subject area, but the process of the debate, because I think I will completely disagree with everything you are likely to advise. Of course, Pakistan illegally occupies part of sovereign India, but let's not go into that. Let's look at the fact that you potentially have 28 speakers for a three-hour debate. Allowing for Front Benchers, if all 28 speakers, and more, apply, it will be about three minutes each, after someone has introduced the debate. I can understand the interest, but given the level of interest, to my mind, a three-hour debate to allow people to advance arguments in the way you have advanced will not do justice to the subject. Is it really that number of people who really want to speak in such a debate and will participate?



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Jack Brereton: I think that some will want to speak at greater length than others.

- Q18 **Bob Blackman:** But the problem is that the Speaker will almost certainly impose a restrictive time limit on speakers, because we will only have three hours for the debate.

Jack Brereton: These are MPs who take an interest in this area and want to see this issue put before the main Chamber. Whether all of those MPs will turn up on the day—it is very hypothetical to ask that question. I can't possibly say whether they will or not.

Chair: It is timely for me as Chair to remind that when an application comes in with names on, these are people who are interested in speaking in a debate.

- Q19 **Patricia Gibson:** As I look at the list names, I am astonished I couldn't find a member of the Scottish National party interested in speaking on self-determination.

Mr Leslie: I am sure there are. Maybe we should have applied for more time.

Jack Brereton: If you would like to grant us more time, we are always happy to have it.

- Q20 **Chair:** You have mentioned the CHOGM meeting. Is there a particular time sensitivity, or do you just want to try to get a debate?

Mr Leslie: Generally, with all those Heads of Government coming, there will be meetings and bilateral meetings, and there will be more interest in the role of the UK in policy issues affecting that part of the world. We don't know how it is going to pan out over the next week or so, but it felt to me as if this was quite an important inflection point.

Chair: Sadly, we haven't got any time to allocate in the next—

Mr Leslie: I understand that, but I think that over the course of the next few weeks this will be in the news much more, particularly—as I hope—if we can start to debate some of the confidence-building measures that are required on both sides of what is currently quite a stand-off situation. This thing has been going on for 70 odd years now. Frankly, everybody is turning up at meetings every year expressing one side or the other and it is all very stale. It has got into tramlines and we need to crack through that. Personally, I think that Parliament and the UK have the potential, as I think we did so successfully in places such as Northern Ireland, to apply some of that lateral thinking to how you can help to broker some sort of peaceful dialogue. I think it is quite timely in that respect.



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Jack Brereton: That is key thing. We want to see that peaceful dialogue—a political solution that can end the current violent situation that is emerging in that region.

Q21 **Nigel Mills:** Chris, you said that the last debate was just over a year ago. How do you justify coming back for parliamentary time quite so quickly. There are many issues that should be debated in Parliament. Can we debate, a year—

Jack Brereton: I think it is because the situation is not getting better; it is getting worse. I think there is a need to recognise that, particularly, as Chris mentioned, with the wider security situation, because these are two nuclear powers. It is important that this is something that we as MPs get a chance to debate.

Chair: To be fair, Nigel, that was another Parliament with a different set of Members.

Mr Leslie: I hadn't thought about that.

Jack Brereton: I wouldn't have been able to—

Nigel Mills: It was a question to the witness. It wasn't an opinion.

Mr Leslie: Jack needs the chance to speak on this issue.

Jess Phillips: Maybe you will sort it out, Jack, after 70 years.

Jack Brereton: I'm not sure about that.

Jess Phillips: Aim high.

Chair: "Catalyst" will be Jack's middle name from here on. Thank you for the application. I think there is little likelihood that we will get any allocation of time from now until the middle of May, so I hope that will not dampen your appetite for it. That concludes our public deliberations this afternoon. Thank you very much indeed.