



Backbench Committee

Representations: Backbench Debates

Tuesday 1 May 2018

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 1 May 2018.

Watch the meeting

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

Questions 1-18

Witnesses

[\[I\]](#): Stewart Malcolm McDonald

[\[II\]](#): Helen Hayes

[\[III\]](#): Matt Western

[\[IV\]](#): Peter Kyle and Angela Eagle



Body

UserTrail

Info3

Info1

Info2

DocName

Page 2 of 10

PhoneNumber

Stewart Malcolm McDonald made representations.

Q1 **Chair:** Good afternoon and welcome to the Backbench Business Committee. We have four applications this afternoon. The first is Stewart Malcolm McDonald's application for a debate on the relocation of Channel 4.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: I will keep this extremely brief. I am sure that Committee members will know that the intention is to move the headquarters of Channel 4 and disperse it around the UK.

Q2 **Chair:** Do you mean disperse it or relocate it?

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: I am coming to that, because what they want to do is relocate the headquarters and have two additional creative hubs, creating up to 300 jobs, with a plan to grow. There are a number of cities—I will not list them all—in the bidding process to try to bring Channel 4 to their home city, my own home city of Glasgow being one of them. Given that the Government also have an open 12-week consultation on the future of Channel 4 at the minute—it was announced by the Government, I think, just last month—I am sure it will be of significant interest to lots of Members.

To be clear, I am asking the Committee to consider a general motion on the relocation, not that it should come to Glasgow, although clearly it should. I will leave that to myself and others to make that pitch, up against, I am sure, many other Members who will wish to make equivalent pitches for it to go to their home cities.

I sent out the email to colleagues as is normal, at very short notice I should say, which I like to think is the reason—you will be a better judge of this than me, Mr Chairman—for the low number of responses. In total, 30 Members —15 Labour MPs, five Conservatives, two Liberal Democrats, the sole Green party Member, and seven members of the Scottish National party—came back in support of a general debate on the relocation of Channel 4.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed.

Q3 **Bob Blackman:** I understand the request, and it is one that needs to be debated, quite rightly. In terms of the ideal time, the Government have launched, as you said, a consultation for 12 weeks. Do you want this to



Body

UserTrail

Info3

Info1

Info2

DocName

Page 3 of 10

PhoneNumber

promote the consultation or formulate the consultation—that is, get a debate quite quickly—or are you content to wait until towards the end of the consultation, to promote the various different causes?

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: It is a good question. I think the debate in itself will help Parliament to make its view known in response to the consultation. The consultation is about more than just the relocation, to be entirely fair, but I think in terms of the timing of it, there is an event—I appreciate pressure on the parliamentary agenda—on the relocation of Channel 4 here in London. I would pitch, cheekily or otherwise, if it is possible to get the debate to dovetail with the event that is happening next week, but I understand that there are other pressures that you have to balance.

My preference would be the sooner the better. I do not think it has to be towards the end of the consultation, because as I say the consultation is about more than just the relocation itself. The consultation is quite broad.

Q4 **Bob Blackman:** I suspect the earliest opportunity that we will have to allocate is Westminster Hall on Tuesday 15 May, when the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport will be answering debates. You will get 90 minutes, and I would suggest that in the event that you wanted a debate later on in the process, that might be possible if you came back for reapplication.

Otherwise, I think I am right in saying—we will receive notice of this—that there are a lot of heavily subscribed and requested debates that have to be debated in the Chamber because they are on divisible motions. If we offer you the option of 15 May to get a debate quickly, would you take it?

Chair: Hold on—before you answer that, there is also a 90-minute slot in Westminster Hall on 10 May, which is the day I told you about.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: My preference would be 10 May because, as I mentioned in my previous remark, there is an event on the very issue of the relocation of Channel 4 happening that evening in London. That is my preference. The Chamber is always the preferable option, but I can see the downside, as your debate can be eaten into or may end up having to be moved if there are urgent matters to consider. I would be delighted to accept a Westminster Hall setting.

Q5 **Mr Wragg:** You mentioned, and almost apologised for, the sparse numbers for the application, but if you have a 90-minute debate with 30 people wanting to take part, accounting for the lead Member and Front-Bench contributions, that leaves barely any time at all. Notwithstanding all the guidance, is 90 minutes sufficient?



Body

UserTrail

Info3

Info1

Info2

DocName

Page 4 of 10

PhoneNumber

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: The apology was based on the cheeky assumption that you might give me three hours. If memory serves, my application was submitted a week ago Friday. I sent the email on Thursday afternoon, and the application had to be in on noon the next day, so it was rather rushed. The 30 responses were supportive of the application—they did not necessarily indicate a willingness to speak, as I often support applications for Backbench Business debates but do not necessarily speak in those debates. I imagine that there will be lots of Members representing cities that are bidding who will want to come and bang the drum for their patch.

Alex Sobel: I represent one of those cities.

Chair: Stewart, thank you very much for your application. We will make determinations later this afternoon and will let you know the outcome as soon as we possibly can.

Helen Hayes made representations.

Chair: Good afternoon, Helen. Your application is on the 70th anniversary of the arrival of HMT Empire Windrush at Tilbury docks.

Helen Hayes: Thank you for the opportunity to request this debate. This application was conceived several months ago, long before the scandal of the treatment of the Windrush generation at the hands of the Home Office came to light. On 22 June this year, we will celebrate and mark the 70th anniversary of the arrival of HMT Empire Windrush at Tilbury docks. Commemorations are going on in all sorts of arenas. There will be a service at Westminster Abbey; there will be receptions in different parts of the country; there will be a reception, which I have been working with the Speaker's Chaplain to organise, in the Speaker's apartments; and there will be events in communities up and down the country. I thought it right and proper that in Parliament the House of Commons should have the opportunity to commemorate and celebrate the contribution that began with the arrival of the Windrush, and which the generation of migrants to this country from the Caribbean and the wider Commonwealth made and continue to make to our communities.

We are also celebrating this year the 70th anniversary of the NHS, which was founded two weeks after the arrival of the Windrush. There is a strong connection between those two events and the contribution that members of the Windrush generation made to building and sustaining our NHS. This is a commemorative debate, in much the same tradition that we have debates to mark International Women's Day and other key celebrations in the calendar. It is supported by 68 Members. I should point out a small



Body

UserTrail

Info3

Info1

Info2

DocName

Page 5 of 10

PhoneNumber

error that I made on the form. I sent out invitations to sign an EDM and to support the debate at the same time. Jess Phillips said that because she was a member of the Backbench Business Committee she would not sign the application, but her name made it on to the list. Not counting Jess, the application is supported by 68 Members drawn from Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat, DUP and Plaid Benches, so there is widespread support, geographically and across the parties.

Q6 **Chair:** The anniversary is 22 June, Helen, so if allocated would you want the debate to occur as close as possible to that date?

Helen Hayes: The ideal is to have it the week before, to mark the start of the commemorations. There is an awful lot happening in the week of the 22nd, and lots of the same people are involved in lots of similar events. To have the debate just ahead of the anniversary would

Chair: The problem is that we have no idea what time we will be allocated in the Chamber so far ahead. What we can do is to say, "This is a green for go from our perspective, in principle," and send a missive to the Government asking if it would be possible to get a date around that time for a debate of this nature. Whether they accede to that is a matter for them, because I do not know what the parliamentary agenda will be like in those weeks. It may well be that the Government decide that with business coming back from the Lords, for instance, it might be quite busy. We do not know, but we will try to accommodate as best we can.

Q7 **Patricia Gibson:** Given the context in which the debate will be taking place, and the large number of speakers you have—perhaps because of the context—I wonder how you can do this subject the justice that I know you would want to do it in three hours. I think it will attract more interest now than it might otherwise have done.

Helen Hayes: Yes. I am always conscious that the Committee has limited time to allocate and that there is a great deal of pressure on time. I think the level of interest in this could easily sustain a full day of debate, but I understand that that might not be possible. The important thing from my point of view is to secure a debate in the Chamber that gives prominence to celebration as well as the current injustices we are dealing with in this place.

Q8 **Bob Blackman:** Can I clarify something? Given that the anniversary is the 22nd, I think Thursday would be the 21st, so you would be looking for the debate to be held potentially on 14 June, given that that is the timing we normally get allocated.

Helen Hayes: Yes, indeed.

Q9 **Bob Blackman:** The other issue for me is the number of speakers you



Body

UserTrail

Info3

Info1

Info2

DocName

Page 6 of 10

PhoneNumber

already have. I suspect that number may grow. With a three-hour limit to a debate, after you have spoken for, say, 15 minutes and the lead Members from all three Front Benches have spoken, the Members here will get about two minutes each. That assumes that no one else asks to speak. Obviously, there have been a lot of debates and urgent questions and so on about the treatment of people coming here to help this country, but given that, I would urge you to amend the request to a full six-hour debate. If we flag up to the Leader of the House that this is coming up and that we would like this reserved for that day, I suggest we would stand a very strong chance of getting it almost pre-allocated for that day.

Helen Hayes: Is there anything you need me to do?

Q10 **Bob Blackman:** Just put it on the record to amend your request to be a six-hour debate, rather than a three-hour debate.

Helen Hayes: Yes. I am happy to do so.

Q11 **Alex Sobel:** My point might be slightly moot if we have a six-hour debate. These debates often get squeezed because of urgent questions and ministerial statements, so it is about trying to protect the time, which Ian can go and ask for at Business Questions. If you do not get six hours but three hours, would you like a guaranteed three hours where you do not get squeezed?

Helen Hayes: Let's go for the six and see where that gets us.

Q12 **Alex Sobel:** It is not really for this, but maybe for future reference: you have got a lot of speakers, but Backbench Business debates are for Back Benchers. Your first name on here is Diane Abbott, who I imagine will have to speak from the Dispatch Box as shadow Home Secretary, and then there are six other shadow Ministers. They should not be signing our applications.

Helen Hayes: Yes, sure. We should probably have filtered those out. Apologies for that.

Alex Sobel: If you had had 15 speakers, that would have been a big issue for you, but you have got 68 speakers, so it is not.

Chair: Alex is our political accountant, and he has dismissed six of your applicants.

Alex Sobel: You have got 68, so that is all right.

Chair: I think that is entirely in order, Helen. Thank you very much indeed. It is a very full application and we know what it is here for. We will let you know what we can do as soon as we possibly can.



Helen Hayes: That is brilliant. Thank you very much.

Matt Western made representations.

Q13 **Chair:** Matt's application is on job losses in the UK automotive industry. Over to you, Matt.

Matt Western: Thanks, Chair, and thank you to the Committee for the opportunity to speak to you this afternoon. Clearly, the car industry is a critical part of the UK economy. It is an economic bellwether, and we have just seen the first-quarter growth figures come out at 0.1%. The UK car industry is not in decline because of the weather, but it is facing strong headwinds because of consumer confidence, Brexit and the handling of diesel. The loss in UK car production in the first quarter of this year was £1 billion to UK GDP. We have seen in recent months, as you will have seen from the application, a reported decline or loss of 2,000 direct jobs in the car industry. That is 1,000 contract workers at Jaguar Land Rover, 650 at Vauxhall and about 400, they believe, at Nissan, before we get to the component suppliers and the original equipment manufacturers and the losses they will also face.

It is a huge impact on the economy that is visible and being felt, but if it continues unabated it will get a lot worse. We have seen that in the last 12 months. The indicators have been there; there has been a decline in UK car sales over the last 12 months, exports are down 12% year on year and car manufacturing is down 13%. A large element, as you will have picked up, is the issue of diesel. The demonisation of diesel—incorrectly, because Euro 6 diesel is the cleanest type of propulsion you can get—is having a massive effect on the industry, and the industry in its entirety is extremely concerned about the way it is being handled. I would suggest it is a crisis, and that is why we should be debating it, because of the profound impact on the economy.

Q14 **Alex Sobel:** The reason for the debate is very well set out, and clearly the issues of diesel, air quality and the transition away from fossil fuels anyway into electric and other forms of fuel are really important, so it is an important debate. The thing about having a debate is that we need debate from both sides, with opposing or different political views, and you only have one Conservative MP on here. I understand that that is hard in areas such as Sunderland and Merseyside, where there are not many Conservative MPs, but there are Conservative MPs in the west Midlands and in Bedfordshire, where there are car plants. There is a west Midlands Conservative MP speaking now in the Chamber. Would you be able to get more Conservative voices signed up for the debate, so we could have a debate?



Body

UserTrail

Info3

Info1

Info2

DocName

Page 8 of 10

PhoneNumber

Matt Western: I am confident that we could. There are MPs in areas of supplier constituencies, such as Jack Brereton, perhaps, in Stoke, where Michelin is based. Michelin is a massive company for that constituency. I am totally confident; it was just a matter of time in trying to get this together so quickly.

Q15 **Bob Blackman:** On the timing, there are two potential Westminster Hall debates, either Tuesday 22 May or potentially Thursday 10 May, both of which have 90-minute slots. Do you have any preference for either of those, given that you have applied for Westminster Hall as a general debate on either a Thursday or a Tuesday?

Matt Western: I guess naturally I would like to see it elevated to the main Chamber, because I think it is such an important part of the economy and needs that sort of importance attached to it, but of the two, the 22nd would be preferable.

Chair: From local knowledge—Nissan is not in my constituency but it is very close by—for every job at Nissan there are about five times as many in the supply chain. It is important. I think recent job losses announced at Nissan were roughly 400, mainly short-term contract workers, but you can certainly say that there will be an effect on the supply chain, which goes across the country. That is of importance. Thank you very much indeed, Matt.

Peter Kyle and **Angela Eagle** made representations.

Q16 **Chair:** Last but not least, Peter Kyle on the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia 2018. He is joined by Angela Eagle.

Peter Kyle: Thank you, Chair. A couple of other colleagues were going to join us, but business in the House and elsewhere has detained them. Mhairi Black from the SNP and Nick Herbert from the Conservative party were due to join us but are detained elsewhere.

As you can see, we have had 19 people sign up for this now—a few more than when the application was submitted—across all parties and all geographical areas. Back in October, there was a debate on LGBT issues internationally in the Chamber, but there has been a lot of progress and a lot of issues raised since that debate. This debate wants to cover domestic LGBT issues as well as the international situation. Both of those will be covered.

Since October, when the debate was last held in the Commons, there has been a lot of activity internationally. Bermuda has repealed its same-sex



Body

UserTrail

Info3

Info1

Info2

DocName

Page 9 of 10

PhoneNumber

marriage rights. Uganda is pressing on with homophobic legislation. At the time of that debate, it was believed that Uganda was pulling back from doing so. At the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in recent weeks, there was no official debate on LGBT issues. Even though there was some discussion in the margins, it was not mainstreamed at all, and there was no debate in the main conference. These are all reasons why we in this Parliament need to address some of these issues and debate them.

Domestically, there are a lot of issues that affect all MPs in all constituencies. For example, recent research from Stonewall shows that there are still a third of people at work who are uncomfortable about coming out and talking about their sexuality or allowing their sexuality to be known. At universities, there is growing transphobia, and there are increased rates of homophobia, perhaps because of their diverse nature and people coming from around the world from different cultures, different traditions and different political backgrounds. Those are issues that need to be aired again. There are growing issues relating to the trans community, transphobia and grappling with those issues as they grow and play a more prominent role in society. This is the right period to really go into detail. This also plays into a global week of tackling these issues. I think it is really important that the British Parliament has its voice and plays into this global week of standing against transphobia, homophobia and biphobia.

As you know, Thursday Backbench Business debates are a great opportunity for people to make personal statements as well. I know there are a lot of MPs who have signed up for this already who will certainly be in that category. There is a degree of that in the group. As I said, 19 people have signed up already, but that was only from within the LGBT networks of the parties. There are a lot of people beyond that who will want to come and represent their constituents and have their voices and their communities heard in the debate.

Those are the issues that I want to get on to the table. Angela is free to say something if she feels that she wants to at this point, but she may want to save it for the Q&A.

Ms Eagle: I would just add that the IDAHO day grows in strength each year and that because of the very good progress that we have made in this country in pioneering equal rights for LGBTQI—and the rest of it—people, the world does look to us for a lead. If we were to have no debate about that progress and some of the problems that face LGBT people not only in the UK but internationally, I think that would be seen as rather odd. I think that the rise in hate crimes and intolerance that we have seen in the past few years needs to be constantly addressed so we can maintain



Body

UserTrail

Info3

Info1

Info2

DocName

Page 10 of 10

PhoneNumber

our global leadership on these very important issues of individual rights and self-determination.

Chair: Thank you very much.

Q17 **Alex Sobel:** Obviously, I am very supportive of this, and we do need to have the debate. You said you have 19 names; there are 17 names on here. Of those, only four are Conservatives. Do you have additional Conservative names?

Peter Kyle: Yes, we have. Maria Miller is down. Justine Greening is also down. As I say, Nick Herbert could not be here today, but he chairs the LGBT all-party parliamentary group. He came to see me this morning and said that the APPG is fully behind this, and the Committee can rest assured that the APPG will be doing a lot of work to ensure very high attendance. He has personally said that he will be doing a lot of work to make sure that Conservative Members have a presence in the Chamber and that the Conservative voice is heard loud and clear. He wanted to be here to say so directly, but is needed in the Chamber at the moment.

Q18 **Bob Blackman:** In terms of the timing, do you want this debate to be held, ideally, on 17 May, or do you want it on a different day, because, obviously, other events will be going on on that day?

Peter Kyle: Ideally I would like it to be on that day. I have spoken to the LGBT community in my constituency, in the city of Brighton and Hove, which celebrates this in a very loud and proud way every year. I have asked whether they would rather, if the debate ran over, I were down there or up here, because I have never missed one of those events down there. They said, absolutely, they want the voice heard in Parliament, if at all possible, on that day.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed. That concludes the formal, public business of the Backbench Business Committee, so we will close proceedings.