

Backbench Business Committee

Representations: Backbench Business

Tuesday 23 October 2018

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Watch the meeting

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

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Representations made

[I](#): Patricia Gibson.

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[III](#): Ben Bradley

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Patricia Gibson made representations.

- Q1 **Chair:** Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to the Backbench Business Committee. We have a number of applications before us. The first one is from Patricia Gibson, who is a member of this Committee. For the public record, Patricia will not be allowed to be part of the deliberations on her own application. Patricia, your application is on state pension equalisation for women born in the 1950s. Over to you, please.

Patricia Gibson: Thank you, Mr Chair. I thank the Committee. I am putting this debate forward because this is a long-standing, long-running injustice and sore affecting every single constituency across the United Kingdom. I know that there may be a feeling that we have debated this issue extensively in the past, but I checked with the House of Commons Library, and it has not been debated in over eight months—by the time the debate comes around, it might be well over nine and a half months.

There have been some developments. We have had research from the IFS talking about the level of homelessness, self-harm and suicidal thoughts suffered by some of the hardest-hit WASPI women in our constituencies. There has also been new research by an organisation called BackTo60, which has backed up some of our worst fears about the effect on WASPI women. Recently, there have been demonstrations from WASPI women, who have come to Parliament in a desperate act to have their voices heard.

As you can see, there is widespread, cross-party support. If the Committee requires it, I can get another 100 names. We know from past experience that WASPI debates have been hugely over-subscribed. There is a lot of interest in this issue. The WASPI women are asking us to be their voice in this place as they grapple with this terrible injustice. I think it is our duty to let their voices be heard.

- Q2 **Alex Sobel:** As we would expect from a member of the Committee, the application has been very well put together. I attended both debates last year. The first, in Westminster Hall, was so full that I had to sit on a table. Obviously, I couldn't speak from that position. The second, which was on a Thursday in the Chamber, was also very well attended, and there was a time limit on speeches. You have written that you want it in either Chamber. Isn't this debate too big for Westminster Hall? Should you not be looking for Chamber time?

Patricia Gibson: Absolutely. If it were my choice, I would have it in the Chamber, but being a member of the Committee, I am very mindful that business is very, very backed up. I suspect that if I insisted that this should take place in the Chamber, the Committee would probably not be able to accommodate me perhaps until after Christmas, which I think is perhaps a stretch too far. If the Committee wishes to offer me Westminster Hall, I would, of course, take it with both hands.

- Q3 **Bob Blackman:** Patricia, you are right that this has been debated long



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and loud, and that it has been going on for a long time. You are asking for another general debate without necessarily a specific ask—in other words, a motion before the House, on which the House can make a decision. As I recall, the House has considered motions and passed them. Why a general debate? Why not a specific request for action to be taken by the Government?

Patricia Gibson: The reason why I didn't ask for a divisible motion was because I was trying to be inclusive to all parties in the House and to frame the debate in a way that ensured they were comfortable supporting tabling this. The Government will set out its case as to why it will not offer further transitional support for these women, and that might make it difficult for the debate to be truly cross-party in the way that I wish. I will certainly be calling for such support, but it is incumbent on all of us, regardless of how we think this issue should be resolved, to be the voice of our constituents, who are so badly affected. The reason for not having a divisible motion was to try to be as inclusive as possible, and not to ask people to support a particular position, but to allow them to air their concerns.

Bob Blackman: Okay.

Chair: Anyone else, please? In that case, Patricia, thank you very much for your application.

Ruth Cadbury and John Lamont made representations.

Q4 **Chair:** Next up, we have Ruth Cadbury and John Lamont on road justice and the legal framework.

Ruth Cadbury: Thank you very much, Mr Mearns. It is a pleasure to be here to present the proposal that there should be a general debate on the justice framework for road safety. Many Members of this House have been contacted over the years, and particularly in recent years, by victims and families of victims, who have felt that the justice system has not dealt adequately with them and with the perpetrators of offences that have caused death and injury.

We had a debate in Westminster Hall last week that was only 90 minutes long. The debate was severely curtailed and there was a lot of demand for it, so we know that there is a lot of interest in the House on the topic. It is very relevant now because the Department for Transport is reviewing cycling offences. We feel very strongly that a review of offences around cycling should be part of a much wider review of road traffic offences, given that the vast majority of victims are injured or killed as a result of collisions with vehicles rather than cyclists. The issue is also important because road casualty statistics are flatlining.

John Lamont: I just wanted to highlight the importance of the subject. An effective road traffic offences framework is important, first, to ensure that victims of road crime and their families feel that the legal system is delivering outcomes that satisfy their needs. It is also important to ensure that the legal system is an effective enforcement mechanism and



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deterrent to reduce dangerous driving on our roads. In terms of justice, a recent report by RoadPeace titled “Causing death by careless driving—10 years on” highlighted numerous cases where families of victims of road crime felt that they had been let down by the legal system.

I would say that there are three critical flaws in the current framework limiting the effectiveness of our road traffic laws: first, the definition of careless and dangerous driving in securing outcomes; secondly, the exceptional hardship loophole, which keeps dangerous drivers and repeat offenders on our roads; and, thirdly, the maximum sentence for so-called hit-and-run offences, which is currently only six months.

Q5 **Bob Blackman:** Very briefly, I notice you have had a Westminster Hall debate on the subject already. Which Department do you wish to answer it? There is potential for Transport, Justice, Home Affairs—a range of different Departments. Given that you are bidding for a Westminster Hall Tuesday debate, we obviously have to validate that the relevant answering Department will be available that day.

Ruth Cadbury: That is a very good question because, like a lot of issues, it crosses the two silos. We think probably Justice. The problem is that the concerns that Members and the campaign groups, which I can say are RoadPeace, Cycling UK and Brake, have raised carry across the stages. It is investigation—which is often the Home Office—as well as inquests, prosecution, sentencing, civil compensation and victims’ rights. I suspect that Justice probably has more involvement in those than others, but there are other Departments that also have a view. We are definitely saying that, given the timing and the level of concern, we need a decent chunk of debating time.

Bob Blackman: We think 13 November may be available.

Chair: I don’t think that would be the right answering Department.

Bob Blackman: In that case, we don’t know, do we?

Chair: I think possibly the 19th.

Ruth Cadbury: Transport is running the current flawed consultation—well, we think it is flawed; we are both officers of the APPG on cycling. It is the Department for Transport that is currently consulting on the cycling offences. It was Transport that responded to the Westminster Hall debate last week.

Q6 **Bob Blackman:** So 13 November is a possibility.

Ruth Cadbury: That sounds appropriate.

Q7 **Chair:** I understand Justice are likely to be answering on 20 November.

Ruth Cadbury: I am relatively new to this process; I am sorry.

Q8 **Chair:** Anyone else? No? Thank you very much indeed.

Ben Bradley made representations.



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Q9 **Chair:** Good afternoon, Ben. Having spent the morning together, it is nice to see you again.

Ben Bradley: Thank you for considering my application. Ruth Smeeth sends her apologies; she is in a Select Committee at the moment.

The issue I want to raise is about Mamba and Spice and psychoactive substances that are increasingly impacting on towns across the country that are similar to mine. I imagine from the demographics represented around the panel that there would be some on the panel who are particularly affected by this issue.

Increasingly, there is a pressing need to change something at national level. We reached a peak in terms of the visible societal effects of the issue earlier this year, certainly in my constituency. On a local level, the police and council have tried to manage that, and they now feel that, without legislative change, there is little more they can do.

I raised this recently in an Adjournment debate where, rather than talking about reclassification, I talked about the societal impact of the drugs. The response was that this is consistently under review by the Home Office. I am very keen to inform that review process as much as possible. Twenty police and crime commissioners nationally have also written supporting reclassification. I am keen to push that forward, as well as to hear from Members from across the House what alternatives might be available to achieve the same outcomes. I am very keen to keep this discussion as visible as possible in Parliament.

Q10 **Bob Blackman:** Which is the answering Department that you envisage for this debate?

Ben Bradley: Home Office.

Q11 **Bob Blackman:** So potentially 6 November would be available.

Ben Bradley: That would be ideal.

Q12 **Bob Blackman:** Bear in mind that that is the short recess week.

Ben Bradley: That's the final day before the House rises?

Q13 **Chair:** Yes. The Tuesday.

Ben Bradley: That would be fine by me.

Chair: Thank you very much, Ben. We will let you know as soon as we possibly can.

Daniel Zeichner made representations.

Q14 **Chair:** Next up is Daniel Zeichner on Anti-bullying Week.

Daniel Zeichner: Thank you for the opportunity. I chair the anti-bullying all-party parliamentary group. This really applies to young people and to schools, but it is obviously an issue that is, sadly, rather all-consuming at the moment.



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Each year, there is a national week that is organised by some of the anti-bullying charities. It is very effective. It has huge reach in schools. I was quite surprised to find that it reaches over 6 million children and young people and that 75% of schools engage in it. I think it is one of those occasions when there is an opportunity to link what we do here with what is going on outside. Last year during the same week, there was a debate organised, which I think you gave time for. It was organised by Gavin Newlands. A number of Back Benchers spoke in that debate.

I probably don't really need to make the argument why this is an important subject. It clearly affects some specific groups, including, sadly, young people with disabilities, as well as those who are the victims of race and faith-targeted bullying, looked-after children and young carers. Basically, the point is that this is an opportunity for those of us in this place to link into the work that is being done outside. That is why it is relevant that it is done, if not in the actual week, then fairly close to it.

Q15 **Chair:** Right. There is an opportunity on Thursday the 15th, which I think is within the week.

Daniel Zeichner: That would obviously be ideal.

Q16 **Bob Blackman:** Which Department would answer the debate?

Daniel Zeichner: Education, I think.

Q17 **Bob Blackman:** So the other possibility is 20 November.

Daniel Zeichner: If the first wasn't possible, I am sure we would take that.

Q18 **Chair:** Any more comments or questions? No? Daniel, thank you very much indeed. The ordeal is over.

Ged Killen made representations.

Q19 **Chair:** Last but not least, we have Ged Killen on the impact of ATM closures in the UK's towns, high streets and rural communities. Over to you, Ged.

Ged Killen: I am asking for this debate because we have had quite a bit of debate in the House about bank closures, but we have not had anything that has focused specifically on ATMs, and the issue is a lot wider than just banks. Banks have left towns and have left ATMs, which are now at risk. I have spoken to a lot of independent ATM operators who think that their business models are becoming unsustainable because of changes to the funding formula by LINK. They have introduced four cuts to the funding formula: the first one has already happened; since then, on average, there have been 300 ATM closures every month. That was faster than expected. They did expect ATMs to close down, and they were trying to reduce the numbers where ATMs were condensed in city centres, but the impact was not expected. Now, they have instigated an Access to Cash review, which will report in the middle of next year.



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The PSR has come under some pressure to exercise its powers—this is the first real test of the PSR. It has been asked to have a look at this issue, which impacts Members right across the House. There is a lot of support for it. I had an EDM that was signed by 42 MPs from all different parties. Fifty MPs attended an event jointly hosted by the FSB and the Which? “Save our cashpoints” campaign. People representing lots of different constituents across all different parties can identify with this issue, and we would benefit from a debate in the House.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed.

Q20 **Bob Blackman:** Answering Department?

Ged Killen: The Treasury.

Bob Blackman: That has thrown me. Potentially, you could have 20 November or 4 December.

Jess Phillips: November hasn’t even happened, and we are already looking at December. Time is racing away.

Chair: Any questions? No? In that case, thank you very much. That concludes our public session of the Committee. We will now go into private session to allocate what little time we do have.