



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Backbench Committee

Representations: Backbench Debates

Tuesday 13 November 2018

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

Watch the meeting

Members present: Bob Blackman (Chair); Nigel Mills; Jess Phillips; Alex Sobel;
Mr William Wragg.

Questions 1-14

Witnesses

[I](#): Chris Bryant.

[II](#): Ms Karen Buck.

[III](#): Rosie Duffield.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Chris Bryant made representations.

- Q1 **Chair:** For all our viewers at home, I welcome you to the Backbench Business Committee. Our viewers will certainly remember that I am not Ian Mearns, the elected Chair of the Committee. He is on other business today and has asked me to chair the Committee, and the Committee has kindly consented to my doing so. First up, Chris: your bid for a debate.

Chris Bryant: I am not really here in my own capacity but as Chair of the Finance Committee. I am not trying to pull rank; I am just saying that I am not speaking on my own behalf but on behalf of others. As you know, the Finance Committee is there to ensure that the House goes through a proper process of examining our own estimates, the finances of the building and the way we administer ourselves.

There are some significant challenges in the next few years. First, in particular, following on from Dame Laura Cox's report and the other report that we may have later on in the year, there are some challenges of fairly significant amounts of additional expenditure that there might be on HR functions to support MPs and training. Secondly, there are challenges in relation to the restoration and renewal project, which will end up being one of the largest financial projects that the House has ever undertaken. Even before that comes into play, we have the Northern Estate programme, which is working on everything from Norman Shaw North and Norman Shaw South, No. 1 Parliament Street and that run of offices there, to Portcullis House and Richmond House, which is now ours but has substantial work to be done on it.

We have in the past had a debate on a motion. We are asking for a general debate this time, because the number of issues that people may want to raise is so wide ranging. We would prefer it to be in the Chamber because that is where that debate has traditionally been, but we have not had one for several years. We will produce a report of our own on the finances in time for the estimate, which goes to the Commission in late December, so we would need, or hope, or ask for it to be in the week commencing 3 December or 10 December.

- Q2 **Chair:** Thank you for the presentation. I have two points. First, we on this Committee would expect to see about 15 speakers for a three-hour debate. If there are other people who are likely to contribute, it would be very helpful to have a list forwarded to the Clerks. There is no need to come back at a future time; you can just provide a list. Secondly, we have been allocated no Chamber time as yet, for reasons that may become obvious tomorrow. We do have time in Westminster Hall. If that is all that is available, would you accept it?

Chris Bryant: Yes. The difficulty with finding 15 names is that I don't know where I would start with Members of the House of Commons and their interests in the finances of the building. I am reluctant to get all my friends to sign a piece of paper just for the sake of doing that. It is a constitutional principle that we used to do this properly and we have not done it for the last few years. Of course we would be happy to be in

Comment [KJ]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="13 November 2018"
ServerTime="14:30:31"
ServerTimeZone="14:30:31"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [KJ]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="13 November 2018"
ServerTime="14:33:02"
ServerTimeZone="14:33:02"
LocalTime="GMT" />



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Westminster Hall. We do not want to make life difficult for you. There is no particular reason why we would have to have all three hours; you might want to give us a little less if you felt that was appropriate.

- Q3 **Chair:** Would you be able to take up a slot on 29 November, rather than the December slots you have chosen?

Chris Bryant: I might have to be advised on that, I think.

- Q4 **Chair:** You don't have to make a decision.

Chris Bryant: Okay, fine.

- Q5 **Nigel Mills:** There is a process for Select Committees bidding for time on the estimates days debates. From what you have said and what you have applied for, I think this is effectively a Select Committee bidding for a debate on the estimates, isn't it? Is that not a route to get half a day's Chamber time whenever we get the next estimates process, which is presumably coming up?

Chris Bryant: There is an argument for that. We decided on the Committee that we would not go through the Liaison Committee process because they are very fully congested with people with major reports on policy areas that are very well supported. The point we would make is that we are not a Select Committee in the way that others are; we are a House Committee, really. We are a bit of the estimate that is governed not by the Government, but by the House. We feel it is really for the whole House, and therefore that sits better with the Backbench Business Committee.

- Q6 **Nigel Mills:** But don't we award the estimates time now?

Chair: We do.

Chris Bryant: But we would prefer the debate to be before the decision is made as to the next four-year estimates, rather than after, because one of the criticisms that I would have in general is that we in the Commons are really bad at looking at financial expenditure until after we have spent it and then we say that we have spent it very badly. Maybe if we did it a bit beforehand, we would do it a bit better—for instance, the issues around the Elizabeth Tower and the cast-iron roofs.

Chair: Thank you.

Ms Karen Buck made representations.

- Q7 **Chair:** The next application is from Ms Karen Buck.

Ms Karen Buck: The proposal is for a debate on the issue of section 21 of the Housing Act 1988. It is very specific, but it sits in a much broader context, which is that, as the Committee will undoubtedly know, there has been a sharp increase—of around half—in the number of households living in private rented accommodation in the last decade or so. The existing structure for determining tenancies and the end of tenancies has not been

Comment [KJ]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="13 November 2018"
ServerTime="14:33:45"
ServerTimeZone="14:33:45"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [KJ]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="13 November 2018"
ServerTime="14:33:49"
ServerTimeZone="14:33:49"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [KJ]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="13 November 2018"
ServerTime="14:33:52"
ServerTimeZone="14:33:52"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [KJ]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="13 November 2018"
ServerTime="14:34:03"
ServerTimeZone="14:34:03"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [KJ]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="13 November 2018"
ServerTime="14:34:19"
ServerTimeZone="14:34:19"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [KJ]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="13 November 2018"
ServerTime="14:34:51"
ServerTimeZone="14:34:51"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [CE]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="13 November 2018"
ServerTime="14:34:49"
ServerTimeZone="14:34:49"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [CE]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="13 November 2018"
ServerTime="14:34:49"
ServerTimeZone="14:34:49"
LocalTime="GMT" />



HOUSE OF COMMONS

revised in 30 years. Around the 30th anniversary of the 1988 Act there has been wide-ranging pressure from within a number of the interested charities and campaigning organisation to discuss ways in which we could ensure greater security for tenants. It is something that the Government have said they are interested in addressing. There is an interesting debate to be had about the best way of taking this forward with the main charities gathering a petition of 50,000 signatures to ask us to discuss what the implications may be of moving away from a no-fault system, and allowing landlords, of course, to be able to take possession of their properties, but to do so where they have established fault or they have a genuine reason to recover their property.

Q8 Chair: Thank you. I note from your application that you desire a general debate in Westminster Hall. We have pre-allocated everything up until the beginning of December. There is a potential slot on 6, 13 or 20 December. Are any of those dates that you would not want to do?

Ms Buck: I think that 20 December will be a bit of a challenge, in terms of getting a reasonable attendance, but otherwise no.

Q9 Mr Wragg: Just noting your list of proposed speakers, I think Mr Quince is a Parliamentary Private Secretary so, in terms of what we request here, he is not eligible to be a part of that. You would probably need one or two more Government Members to be added, if possible.

Ms Buck: Absolutely. It is always a challenge to get the names, but I think there will be a genuine interest in taking part on both sides of the debate.

Chair: Thank you for your application.

Rosie Duffield made representations.

Q10 Chair: The next application—last but by no means least—is from Rosie Duffield.

Rosie Duffield: The debate I would like to bring to the Chamber is on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls. It marks the UN day where we discuss that and try to do something about it.

Q11 Chair: Thank you for the application. Is there any time sensitivity involved for the debate?

Rosie Duffield: The day itself is on 25 November, so ideally, in order to get Maria Miller on board, I would like to apply for 21 November, if at all possible.

Q12 Chair: That is a Wednesday, I think. I am sagely advised that we have not been given any time in the Chamber to allocate, so we are not in a position to be able to allocate that. We can allocate time in Westminster Hall for a general debate, if you would so wish, but that would either have to be a 90-minute slot on 29 November, or on 6 or 13 December,

Comment [CE]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="13 November 2018"
ServerTime="14:34:49"
ServerTimeZone="14:34:49"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [CE]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="13 November 2018"
ServerTime="14:34:49"
ServerTimeZone="14:34:49"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [CE]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="13 November 2018"
ServerTime="14:38:41"
ServerTimeZone="14:38:41"
LocalTime="GMT" />

Comment [CE]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="13 November 2018"
ServerTime="14:34:49"
ServerTimeZone="14:34:49"
LocalTime="GMT" />



HOUSE OF COMMONS

this side of Christmas.

Rosie Duffield: Okay. I am not wedded to any particular date, so if you are okay with me seeing who could make those dates, I am happy to be flexible on that.

Q13 **Alex Sobel:** There are four names on here. For a three-hour Chamber debate you will need about 20.

Rosie Duffield: I know. Sorry about that. The reason is that I put this together during the recess. I am so confident that lots of Members, not just women, on both sides would want to speak on this, especially following on from Sarah Champion's debate on ratifying the Istanbul convention. It is the same sort of subject, but brought up to date with the EU legislation.

Q14 **Chair:** If you could supply a list of names through the Clerks, you will not have to reapply or come back. Just make it clear that you have the list of speakers, because, as you can tell, time is precious and if you cannot muster the speakers—I am sure you will—we could put on another debate to fill the time.

Rosie Duffield: I am kind of new at doing this, I'm so sorry.

Chair: People who apply to us the first time around get special treatment, but just be warned for the second time you come.

Rosie Duffield: I feel a bit more organised. Thank you.

Chair: Thank you. That concludes the public session of the Backbench Business Committee. We will now go into private session to determine the applications.

Comment [CE]: <TimeTag
ServerDate="13 November 2018"
ServerTime="14:34:49"
ServerTimeZone="14:34:49"
LocalTime="GMT" />