



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Backbench Committee

Representations: Backbench Debates

Tuesday 20 November 2018

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 20 November 2018.

Watch the meeting

Members present: Ian Mearns (Chair); Bob Blackman; Nigel Mills; Alex Sobel; William Wragg.

Questions 1-11

Witnesses

[I](#): Liz Twist and Stephen Timms.

[II](#): Diana Johnson, Frank Field and Emma Hardy.

Written evidence from witnesses:

– [Add names of witnesses and hyperlink to submissions]

Liz Twist and **Stephen Timms** made representations.

Q1 **Chair:** Good afternoon, and welcome. This is the Backbench Business Committee. We have in front of us three applications, the first of which is on Traidcraft and the future of fair trade. We have here Liz Twist and Stephen Timms. I should declare an interest, as Traidcraft is in my constituency.

Alex Sobel: I declare an interest, because I am a shareholder in Traidcraft.

Liz Twist: You may have heard that a few weeks ago Traidcraft announced that it was having difficulties and had to look at how it could carry on. It was one of the founders of the fair trade movement, going back many years to the '70s. Stephen will know much more about that than I do. We want to support Traidcraft, which has a long history, and to highlight the importance of fair trade more generally. As Traidcraft played such an important part in setting up fair trade, which has gone on to develop in many different ways, we thought it would be appropriate to have this debate.

You will know that there is an APPG for Fairtrade; it is aware of this application. Will Quince, of course, is its chair. Since we put in our application, we have got additional supporters: Stuart McDonald from the SNP is supportive, and Fiona Bruce from the Conservative party has agreed to support the debate, as have many other Members. We would really like the opportunity to raise the issue of fair trade.

Stephen Timms: I also need to declare an interest, because I am the chair of the foundation trustees of Traidcraft, and have been for the past three years or so. Liz described Traidcraft as one of the pioneers; it is the pioneer of the whole fair trade movement in the UK. It wouldn't have happened at all without Traidcraft, from the 1970s onwards. It has been remarkably effective, and there are fair trade products all over the place now, including supermarket own-brand products.

The problem for Traidcraft has always been working out what its niche is, having been supremely successful in changing significantly the nature of the retail marketplace. As Liz says, it is struggling; it has struggled for a number of years. It has a plan for the future after Christmas. I encourage everyone to buy its products between now and Christmas, to give it the best chance.

Liz Twist: Yes. We hope you all got the catalogue.

Stephen Timms: Liz and I sent the catalogue round, as you did, Chair. There are some interesting policy questions about what happens in the new retail environment, and in particular, for those many MPs of all parties who are concerned about the principles of fair trade, about how those principles are taken forward.



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Q2 **Bob Blackman:** Which Department do you think would answer this debate?

Liz Twist: I think it would be BEIS. We had a think about this, because the obvious one you might think of is the Department for International Trade, or even DFID, but it's a trading organisation, so it needs to be BEIS, really.

Q3 **Bob Blackman:** In which case, would Tuesday 18 December at 9.30 in the morning fit with your diaries?

Liz Twist: Yes, I am sure it will.

Stephen Timms: It will fit with mine.

Q4 **Alex Sobel:** It is unusual for us to have a debate about an individual business, even a not-for-profit business such as Traidcraft. I don't recall us having had a debate about a single business. Would it be possible to amend the title slightly? Maybe it could refer to fair trade businesses. Obviously, the debate could focus on Traidcraft. Then we are not setting a precedent for debates around individual businesses.

Stephen Timms: There quite often are debates, particularly when businesses are in trouble, about named businesses. I would not have thought that in itself was a problem, but if the Committee wanted to change the name, no doubt it would be—

Liz Twist: Yes.

Q5 **Chair:** We want to facilitate a debate if we possibly can. You're right, Stephen: other businesses in trouble have had debates; but I am not sure if they have been mentioned in the title of the debate. I am not certain; I would have to check that.

Thank you very much for the application. On the question that Bob put to you about the timing, that is of course dependent on competing priorities, but if we can facilitate that, we certainly will.

It was very remiss of me not to mention that we have some guests from Ghana, who have come to see the proceedings of the Backbench Business Committee. For those of you who do not know what we do here, the Committee takes applications from Back-Bench Members of the UK Parliament for debates in parliamentary time in the main Chamber and Westminster Hall, our second debating Chamber, in order to air subjects and topics that would possibly otherwise not be debated in Government time, or on the main Opposition parties' Opposition days. Back Benchers have the opportunity to bring applications to our Committee, and to get matters that are dear to their hearts, and the hearts of their constituents, aired in parliamentary time. That is what we are here for. Thank you for coming along; you are most welcome.

Liz and Stephen, thank you very much indeed.

Diana Johnson, Frank Field and Emma Hardy made representations.



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Q6 **Chair:** Diana, your application is on antisocial behaviour, which is never exhibited in this Committee; we are all very well behaved. I see you are joined by Frank Field and Emma Hardy; you are most welcome. Diana, over to you.

Diana Johnson: Thank you very much, Chair. I think most Members of Parliament would recognise that antisocial behaviour is often raised with them by constituents, through letters or emails. Over the summer, I became aware of the increasing number of constituents coming to me on the subject. I wanted to test out whether the same thing was happening across the House. When I suggested to other Members that it would be sensible to have a debate on antisocial behaviour, I got lots of responses from Members of Parliament from London, the east midlands, the north, and the north-west. It seems that this is a problem that many MPs face.

As I hope you will see, five Conservative MPs are backing this, as well as 26 Labour Members. An SNP MP has also put their name to this. There have been short, half-hour debates on this in Westminster Hall—in fact, Emma had one fairly recently—but given the common themes from what we are all experiencing in our constituencies, it would be helpful to have a longer, fuller debate, to look at what lessons we need to learn, and what action we need to take.

There are a couple of points I would want to raise. One is the changes to antisocial behaviour legislation that came in after 2010. It is an appropriate time to look at whether they are working, or whether we need to revisit that legislation. There are also new problems developing. The use of Spice seems to be an issue in many constituencies, and is causing problems to communities and on high streets. That is certainly something that we should discuss.

It seems a good time to discuss this; the local government settlement and the police grant settlement are next month, and antisocial behaviour has a bearing on both those budgets, so this would be an ideal opportunity for the House of Commons to debate this very real issue, which affects many of our constituents. I don't know whether Emma or Frank want to say anything.

Frank Field: I very much support this application, and would wish to speak in the debate. As well as endorsing what has been said, I would add that in Merseyside, given the cuts, despite the police's heroic attempts, they have, in effect, a broken bat. They have merged in their minds criminal activities and antisocial behaviour, thinking that if they can define an act as an antisocial, rather than a criminal, activity, it is someone else's job to look after it. I would like to tease out that aspect in the debate.

Emma Hardy: I add my support. As Diana mentioned, I had a half-hour Westminster Hall debate on this, but in half an hour, as you will appreciate, you only scratch the surface of some of the issues, and there were many more things that we needed to cover and look at. We have neighbouring constituencies, and this is a huge problem across Hull—and across the whole country—so I'd like to throw my weight in behind this.



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Q7 **Chair:** You've got the M62 corridor covered.

Diana Johnson: And the north and south of it.

Frank Field: We're waiting for the train connections—High Speed 3.

Chair: If you're waiting for a train connection, Frank, don't hold your breath.

Frank Field: We'll have a debate about that another day.

Chair: We'll not go into the vagaries of Northern rail or the TransPennine Express. Bob, over to you.

Q8 **Bob Blackman:** Unfortunately and very sadly, notwithstanding the importance of the application and the number of speakers you have, we have no Chamber time whatever to allocate. However, we potentially can guarantee you a three-hour debate in Westminster Hall. It depends on your requirements, in terms of time-sensitivity. Diana, you mentioned the police funding settlement; you might want the debate before that. We don't know exactly what date would be provided, but we have a few shrewd ideas.

We could provide you with the certainty of a three-hour debate in Westminster Hall. Debates in the Chamber that are set for three hours very rarely get three hours; they get two and half hours, if we are lucky, because we get squeezed by statements and UQs. The reality is that given the queue of debates in the offing on time-sensitive issues, and the lack of Chamber time, you wouldn't get a debate on this until probably the end of January, if you waited for the Chamber. Under those circumstances, would you accept a Westminster Hall opportunity, if one were forthcoming?

Diana Johnson: I think we probably would, because I think we would like to get this debate up and running as soon as possible.

Emma Hardy: Yes.

Frank Field: Absolutely.

Chair: We haven't had any Chamber time for about five weeks. As I speak, we haven't yet been informed that we have any time in the weeks to come; there is certainly none this week, and we haven't been given any indication of having time next week. We have 10 unheard debates looking for Chamber time on the stocks, so I think Bob's counsel is very wise.

Q9 **Alex Sobel:** As Ian says, it is very competitive, because we haven't been given Chamber time, and because of the number of applications we have. We would expect that in three hours, you would maybe get in 17 to 20 Back-Bench speakers. Obviously, we want a good, balanced debate. You have five Conservatives; this is the sort of subject that I imagine a lot of Government Back-Bench MPs would be interested in. Do you think you could go back and find two or three more names to make it more balanced?



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Diana Johnson: Yes, we can certainly have a go at that, because I do not think that this is in any way party political; all constituency MPs have problems with antisocial behaviour. We might differ on the remedies, but we probably all want to contribute on this, so yes, we are happy to do that.

Chair: I don't think we have many MPs who are in favour of antisocial behaviour.

Alex Sobel: The question is whose fault it is.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed. We had another application, but the Members decided not to pursue it this afternoon.

For the information of our colleagues from Ghana, the debates as yet unheard are on quite a range of subjects—on a cumulative impact assessment of changes to disability support; on children's social care in England; on settling the debt owed to victims of the Equitable Life scandal; on the sustainability of maintained nursery schools; on beer taxation and pubs; on the protection of home buyers; on appropriate ME treatment; on the UN report on the Rohingya refugee crisis; and on International Men's Day. We have a fairly broad span of subjects waiting to be debated.

I'm afraid that is the end of our formal proceedings. We will go into private session. Thank you very much indeed.