

Backbench Business Committee

Representations: Backbench Debates

Tuesday 18 June 2019

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 18 June 2019.

Watch the meeting

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

Questions 1-46

Representations made

I: Lucy Allan, Ben Bradley, Robert Halfon and Lucy Powell.

II: Laurence Robertson.

III: Matt Western.

IV: Robert Neill.

V: Anne-Marie Trevelyan.

VI: Anna Turley.

VII: Frank Field.

VIII: Layla Moran.

IX: Alison McGovern.

X: Tim Farron.

XI: Tom Tugendhat.

XII: Alistair Carmichael.

XIII: David Linden and Paul Masterton.

XIV: Drew Hendry.

XV: Ben Bradley and Lloyd Russell-Moyle.



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Chair: Before we begin, let me say that we have 11 applications for Estimates Day debates and four applications for Backbench Business debates in the time we are normally allocated. If anybody is waiting to make a presentation on a Backbench Business debate, I suggest you go and get a cup of tea or something, because you will be a little while, as we have 11 applications for Estimates Day debates to take first.

We will kick off and move on as swiftly as we possibly can. The only other general point I would make is that the Committee would not be averse to unsuccessful applications by Committee Chairs or other applicants for Estimates Day debates being left on the file as Backbench Business applications.

Robert Halfon, Ben Bradley, Lucy Allan and Lucy Powell made representations.

Q1 **Chair:** Good afternoon and welcome to the Backbench Business Committee. We have a very heavy agenda this afternoon, beginning with applications for Estimates Day debates. The first is from Mr Robert Halfon on the spending of the Department for Education. Robert, over to you.

Robert Halfon: Thank you, Mr Chairman. We will be very brief, because we know you are pressed. It is an honour to be in this beautiful new Committee Room.

Clearly, education funding is a huge issue. It is in the news again today, and it exercises many right hon. and hon. Members. We have a Committee inquiry, and we are likely to be calling for a 10-year plan for education similar to the 10-year plan for the national health service, and for a proper five-year funding settlement. This Estimates Day debate is incredibly important. There are likely to be significant changes in Government, so we are bidding on behalf of the Education Committee—as you can see, we are all-party; Lucy will speak in a minute, and my other colleagues may speak too—for an Estimates Day debate on this very important area.

Lucy Powell: I am delighted to be here in this fantastic new room. As a member of our Committee, Chair, you know that funding, and the lack of knowledge about future funding, is central to everything we are discussing at the moment in relation to education—schools, early years, FE and everything else. We know from previous debates that there is huge interest in this issue across the House, so we think we would be significantly over-subscribed. We are all lobbied all the time as Members of Parliament and members of the Select Committee, and we were unanimous as a Committee in wanting to bring this application forward at this important juncture.

Q2 **Chair:** As Lucy highlighted, I and William Wragg should declare a collective interest in this issue as members of the Education Committee. Ben?

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Ben Bradley: Only very briefly to add, in the light of Robert's comments, that given the changing nature of politics at the minute, it is important that we make the case for these key priorities, particularly in terms of spending. I think there is a broad cross-party consensus that spending on education in particular needs to be different. This Estimates Day debate would be a key opportunity to make that case, so I support what has been said.

Lucy Allan: In the interest of brevity, I will just say that I fully support the views my colleagues have expressed.

Chair: The voice of Telford speaks—thank you very much indeed.

Q3 **Bob Blackman:** I have one very brief question. There is another application for an Estimates Day debate on education. Would you be averse to combining your request with theirs—it appears yours is for a generalised debate, whereas theirs is for a much more focused debate—so that we had an education debate, but one covering a wide range of areas?

Robert Halfon: Obviously, you have limited time, so I would respect your Committee's view on the subject.

Q4 **Bob Blackman:** At the moment your request is for 90 minutes, but the slots are likely to be three hours.

Robert Halfon: In that case, it would be perfectly acceptable, given the constraints you have.

Chair: Thank you very much. We will be deliberating at the end of the afternoon.

Mr Laurence Robertson made representations.

Q5 **Chair:** Good afternoon, Laurence. Your application is for an Estimates Day debate on the Department for International Development budget.

Mr Robertson: Thank you for finding me a slot. I am sorry I am here on my own, but there are a lot of other Members who wanted to support this debate and would want to speak in it should we be fortunate to get it.

The international development budget is going to be around £14 billion, which is an awful lot of money. I am very supportive of international aid and development, which are hugely important. I would go so far as to say that that is one of my main motivations for wanting to come to the House. I have seen the good that our aid does and how it saves lives in Ethiopia, for example, as well as in many other countries, so I am very supportive of that aid. I think that it would be useful to have a debate on how the aid is spent, how it is targeted, the constraints on it, and whether those constraints mean that we cannot deliver it perhaps as effectively as we might want. I really think that aid should be there to help the world's poorest people and sometimes it is not actually doing that.

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There is also the question that once we leave the European Union, some of that aid will be available—10% of the UK's aid will be up for grabs—so it would be useful if we could discuss that. I am supportive of the 0.7% target and understand why it is there, but sometimes it can lead to a determination just to spend quite a lot of money at the end of the year. It is not well spent and is done to reach that target. We perhaps need to look at that. On transparency and effectiveness, DFID is the Department bound by the obligations of the International Development Act 2002, but it is not the only Department that spends the aid money, so that is something to look at.

All of us, I hope, are very much in favour of helping people across the world when they are in desperate need—I certainly am—but we need to look at whether we can do that more effectively than we are currently.

- Q6 **Jess Phillips:** Normally—this is by no means a rule that anyone has to live by, unfortunately—we look for cross-party support, which you certainly have. I cannot help but notice that on your application there is not a single woman's name.

Mr Robertson: Oh, right. I do not know why that is the case. We emailed—

- Q7 **Jess Phillips:** Do you think that if you were to get the debate, you would reach out to try to get the support of some of the women of the House?

Mr Robertson: I would certainly hope that we would. I had not noticed that—thank you for bringing it to my attention. We emailed—

Jess Phillips: It is not a rule that that has to be the case—Bob, I should add “yet”.

Mr Robertson: We emailed every MP to ask them to support it. Unfortunately, no women have come back. I will certainly chase them up, absolutely.

Chair: If it is any help, Laurence, I notice one or two willing smiles and waving hands behind you.

Jess Phillips: Anne-Marie Trevelyan, for example.

- Q8 **Bob Blackman:** Laurence, you said in your application that you are available only on 3 July, but can you clarify the dates on which you are available? We do not yet know when the Estimates Day debates will be held.

Mr Robertson: I am afraid that I am personally available only on 3 July, but if somebody else wanted to take it up on another day, I would obviously help them.

- Q9 **Bob Blackman:** They could be held, as we are told, as late as 4 August. We are not saying that a delay to the summer recess would be extended that far, but it is just to be clear on the dates.

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Mr Robertson: It was suggested to me that it was most likely to be 2 and 3 July. I specified that I was available only on 3 July, but if it is another week, that is different.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed, Laurence. Good afternoon.

Matt Western made representations.

Q10 **Chair:** Next up—like a well-oiled machine—Matt Western on the spending on housing and planning of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. Matt, I point out that this is one of three different applications about that Ministry.

Matt Western: Thank you, Chair—I was not aware of that. As you said, I have previously been before the Committee, but not for an Estimates Day debate, so forgive me for any naivety about it. Half of the co-signatories are women, as it happens. That was not by design, but is just what happened. Sir David Amess signed it twice, so forgive me but he was so keen to support it that he put himself down twice. You will perhaps have noticed that Helen Hayes, who is also on the Select Committee, is on there. Perhaps through naivety, I did not think about the subject being approached through a Committee, but that perhaps might have been an idea. I do not know whether my colleague on the Select Committee, Bob Blackman, has a particular view on that.

The purpose behind this is that there is a significant budget going into housing planned by MHCLG. As we are well aware, there is a housing crisis and we face an extreme shortage of social housing, with 1.1 million families on the waiting list and 277,000 people homeless and sleeping rough—a 160% increase—so there is a real pressing need. The purpose of this is really to interrogate what the Government and that Ministry are looking to do, in terms of prioritising spend, given how much has been put into, say, Help to Buy and affordable housing delivery, and to get into the detail of that.

Q11 **Bob Blackman:** While you may have 50% female representation and cross-party support, you do not have the required number of speakers that we would expect for a three-hour debate. Would you be able to assemble a bigger cast of speakers if you are successful?

Matt Western: That is perhaps naivety on my part; I was not aware of the threshold.

Bob Blackman: We would normally expect to see 15 speakers for a three-hour debate.

Matt Western: Okay. I am absolutely sure that we could do that. A colleague, Frank Field, was just saying outside that he would be very pleased to support it. I am sure that, from the many more colleagues I will speak to, we will certainly get 15. It was disappointing last week; we had a debate on social housing and I am afraid that there were only five people on the Government Benches, for other reasons. However, it is such a huge issue that I am sure that we would get that support.

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Ian Mearns: Thank you very much.

Robert Neill made representations.

Q12 **Chair:** Next up, we have Bob Neill. This application is on the spending of the Ministry of Justice.

Robert Neill: Thank you very much, Chairman. This application is made on behalf of the Justice Committee. Colleagues apologise for not being here; they are all busily engaged in a number of matters. We manage to tick the boxes, in terms of the parties on the Committee, and the sexes.

We think this is an issue of great topicality. For our list of speakers, although we have nine so far, we have also had indications, to both myself and the Clerk of the Committee, that a number of the all-party parliamentary groups that take an interest in this matter, such as on legal aid, public legal education and access to justice, would be keen to support such a debate. I think we would have no trouble in making the number for a three-hour debate.

Ministry of Justice estimates actually involve things of immediate public concern and topical debate, and touch upon people in all manner of ways. There is the whole question, which I have set out as best I can, around access to justice issues and legal aid. The Government accept the importance of legal aid, both in terms of the European convention on human rights—people have the right to access justice—and also the practical need for people to be able to take disputes to court and to defend themselves properly if charged by the state with criminal offences.

All those are accepted by the Government as a priority, but we see in the estimates a reduction of some 38% of the budget for legal services in the coming year, on top of previous reductions, and a reduction of 1% on specific access to justice programmes. There are concerns as to where that then leads us on the transformation programme.

It has been hoped that that transformation of courts, which in itself is controversial because it has involved many closures of courts, impacting many individual right hon. and hon. Members in their constituencies, would open up a fund that might be recycled. However, you will have seen that the National Audit Office expressed little confidence that that programme can be delivered successfully.

This will be an opportunity for individual Members to highlight specific concerns on the impact of these matters on their voters, and also to test the resilience of the Ministry, pressing Ministers for much more specificity on how they are going to overcome those concerns.

Finally, there is also the question of prisons and probation. The Government have rightly announced major changes and have an ambitious programme of prison and probation reform. There is of course now a major reform of probation, with the move from the previous arrangements to something closer to that which applies in Wales. Although additional money is being put into the estimates in this area, there is

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obviously live and topical interest, both here and among the broader public, as to how that will be achieved in practice.

In all, we are looking at about 80,000 people in prisons and some 230,000 who are subject to probation supervision. We would argue that these are matters of significant public interest, which is why we are making a bid and would make the case that this is timely because of all the things that are coming on stream, almost immediately, around these issues.

Q13 **Chair:** Thank you very much, Bob. Any questions? No questions—I think that is perfectly straightforward. Thank you very much indeed.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan made representations.

Q14 **Chair:** Next is Anne-Marie Trevelyan, and this is about defence spending. Over to you.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: Thank you, Chair. Defence is the fourth-largest budget, and it is an area of spending that has been rarely discussed in the Chamber. We have had the opportunity in the last couple of years to raise the profile a little.

With the changing nature of warfare, instability around the globe, 10 years of contraction in the defence budget following changes in the SDSR in 2010, and transformational change happening as new technologies come forward, there are a lot of areas of defence policy where a number of us—I apologise that I am the only one here—feel that we really need to have that conversation with Ministers and raise the question of how we are spending £40 billion a year.

A third of the budget is spent on people, and we should consider how we value those who put their lives on the line to defend our nation and work globally on peacekeeping with international forces. For industry and the British workforces in the defence sector, we need to understand whether we are spending that money best, and we need an opportunity to challenge the Government and raise those really important questions on the Floor of the House, to ensure that we are spending a huge annual budget as effectively as we can.

Patricia Gibson: I don't see the number of speakers that you have in support.

Q15 **Chair:** You have not submitted a list of speakers.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: Apologies. I will do that for you. They are a familiar tribe. Interestingly, we have seen new people who are looking to be involved, particularly on the industry side, as the shipbuilding strategy and other topics like that are really coming to the fore to encourage more parliamentarians to be involved and push that area of policy forwards.

Q16 **Chair:** For information for the record, we did have an Estimates Day debate on defence in February 2018. It is one that has been aired within the last two years, but others have been aired in a similar way by Members in front of us this afternoon. Thank you very much indeed.

Anna Turley made representations.

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Chair: Your application is on the spending of the Department for Education and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

Anna Turley: Thank you very much for your time this afternoon—it is really appreciated. I am seeking a debate on the crisis in children's social care, and I am sure that that will not be a surprise to many of you.

I am sure you can all see the huge crisis that we are facing in child welfare in this country and in the family justice system. I know this sounds melodramatic, but I am afraid the reality now is that if we do not act the system will collapse. The total number of looked-after children is at a new high: over 75,000 in 2017-18. That is the largest number of children in the care system since the Children's Act 1989 was enacted. It means that 88 children come into care every day.

At the same time, the number of children protection inquiries has increased by 158%, so the issue of child protection is growing hugely. The number of children on child protection plans has increased by more than 25,000 in the last years. These numbers are huge, and I am afraid the system is just not equipped and up to date enough to be able to handle them. In terms of funding, there will be a £3.1 billion shortfall in England by 2025. I am sure we can all agree that we are talking about some of the most vulnerable people who we represent in this country, and about children who deserve every opportunity that we can give them.

The backdrop is, of course, the cuts in budgets. In my own borough of Redcar and Cleveland, the number of looked-after children is double the level it was five years ago. You can put that alongside the local authority cuts—it has pushed my local authority to a £3.5 million overspend on children's services. I know it is the same in local authorities across the country.

We have support from 25 colleagues from across the House, which is fantastic, including members of the Education Committee, but the reason I am here to speak to you today is because of a particular interest I have in kinship care, which is often a forgotten cohort. There is huge potential for us to support and work with family members to keep children out of the care system and to provide those parents and families with the support that they are just not getting at the moment.

Many of those families have had to give up work or have lost work and are not getting any funding support or any of the emotional or mental health support that those children need. There are 200,000 children being raised in kinship care—it is a massive issue that does not get talked about or addressed, so there is huge potential there to make savings for the state by investing early in supporting families and children before they get to crisis.

It is a cross-departmental issue, which is why I particularly wanted to bring it before yourselves, with good support across the House. We have had a couple of debates on this; we have had a couple of Westminster Hall debates and I know we have had a Backbench Business debate in this parliamentary session. However, given the urgency of the crisis, the

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fact that this is an Estimates Day debate talking about money and the fact that it is cross-departmental, I would appreciate your support for this application today.

- Q17 **Chair:** Children's services are mainly the responsibility of the DfE; although administered locally by local authorities, the funding comes directly from the DfE. Is it really a Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government **issue**?

Anna Turley: Given the responsibility they have for local authorities and the fact that local authority cuts have had a huge knock-on impact—as I say, my local authority has lost £90 million and has a huge shortfall, which has had the knock-on effect of a shortfall in children's services—we need them to really understand the scale of the crisis as well, so I would recommend both.

- Q18 **Chair:** Our difficulty is that, because you are looking at the estimates of two different Departments, you would have to have two different answering Departments on the same debate. I think your choice would be the Department for **Education**.

Anna Turley: I am happy to go with the decision of the Committee on that front; we just desperately want the time to discuss this issue.

Chair: There are no other questions. Thank you very much indeed—that is great stuff. Cheers.

Frank Field made representations.

- Q19 **Chair:** We move swiftly on, to Mr Frank Field. Frank, your application is on the spending of the Department for Work and Pensions on support for claimants in hardship, including through the flexible support **fund**.

Frank Field: It is, Chairman, and of course it will allow Members to reflect on how this fund does or does not affect their constituents. As a Committee, we have found it difficult to collect information from the Department about how the fund is working, and our conversations with claimants suggest that this is the biggest secret in Christendom.

The Secretary of State wishes this fund to be used to cover the up-front charges—largely for childcare costs of mothers going out to work—but we can find very little evidence that it is working in that way. It can also be used for bespoke schemes for disabled people moving back into work.

Many of us feel that it is not much of a fund and it is certainly not flexible. It is a fund that could draw some of the sting from those adversely affected by welfare reform, and we would like to bring it to the Floor of the House of Commons. We would obviously like to be considered for an Estimates debate; we would like, if possible, to be considered for a 90-minute debate, to share it with other people, if you wanted to divide the time up. If we are unsuccessful in that, could we remain under your consideration for a Back-Bench debate?

Chair: Any questions, please? No? That is quite straightforward. Thank you very much indeed, Frank, it is much appreciated.

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Layla Moran made representations.

Chair: Next up we have Layla Moran on the spending of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

Layla Moran: Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you everybody for your time this afternoon. This is a joint application between the Public Accounts Committee and the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee. I will admit that the homework has not been done; we can send you a list of speakers, but I know this is the kind of debate that will be completely over-subscribed. The Public Accounts Committee has done five different reports on this, and there is a current inquiry that I think the sister Committee is finishing.

The issue lies in the fact that in the past eight years, Government spending for local authorities has been cut by 50% on average in England. As a result, we have seen, as part of our work in the Committee, cost-shunting going around different parts of local government. We have seen over-spending—we have heard before about how children's services is another area that seems to be over-spending—and as a result, there is under-spending in other areas. That means that enormous pressure is being put on local government, but there is also the impact on other Departments, such as Education, Health or whatever it may be.

The reason why we think the issue is timely is that despite the cuts, the Department continues to insist that local government spending is sustainable. We have seen no evidence of that from them. In fact, most of the recommendations that we have put to the Department about that have been rejected.

This is a point where we have an opportunity, given that the spending review is coming up. It is a political decision to understand that many local authorities are about to go under, frankly, and I am sure many of us here have examples locally where that is true. We need to now bring this debate to the fore politically so that we can ensure that all the recommendations are being taken seriously by the Department.

Q20 **Chair:** Will you submit a list of names later?

Layla Moran: We can do.

Q21 **Chair:** That is very good of you. I was at business questions on Thursday morning. We had not received any applications at that stage. The application is in, so names can be added.

Layla Moran: Thank you, Chair, and thank you for your discretion.

Patricia Gibson: It is almost identical to another application we have just heard.

Q22 **Chair:** In the eventuality of only having one—we can only have one Estimates Day debate for a single Department—would you be happy to be amalgamated with another application?

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Layla Moran: I am sure that would be fine. All three of us who are here on the paper would be happy to lead it on whatever day it is, if one of us cannot make it. We have structured it for maximum flexibility.

Alison McGovern made representations.

Q23 **Chair:** Next up is Alison McGovern. This application is on the consequences of the spending of the Department for Work and Pensions on child poverty. Alison, over to you.

Alison McGovern: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Committee. We face a problem: over the next few years, we are likely to become a country that will have one of the highest legal minimum wages in the world, yet child poverty is forecast to increase by about 5%. The legal requirement to pay people more will not take our country's children out of poverty, and that is a really difficult challenge for us as policy makers to get our heads around, because most people think that it stands to reason that the best route out of poverty is work.

The problem is with our labour market. The good thing about our labour market is that we have more people in it than we ever had, including lots of people with children. The problem is the earnings power of those whose kids are most susceptible to poverty. Lone parents simply do not have the hours in the day to earn enough to keep their children properly, which is why I wanted to have an Estimates Day debate on the spending of the DWP and its impact on child poverty.

The puzzle is really not that difficult. If you have more parents working and their earning power is less—obviously, because there are only so many hours in the day that a lone parent or any parent can work—then the rest of their income needs to be made up by the welfare state. Beveridge thought that there should be family benefits for that reason.

Lots of Members—I have received quite a lot of support from Members for having this debate—often get frustrated by the amount of time we have. We often have questions and discussions about universal credit and child poverty, but we are not always able to get to the heart of the matter and the root of the problem. I am proposing that we have this Estimates Day debate so that we can discuss the role of Department for Work and Pensions spending in ensuring that, over the next five years or so, we do not end up with this situation where we have more children in poverty than any country like Britain should have.

Q24 **Chair:** Thank you. Obviously, we have heard another application from Frank Field about the spending of the Department for Work and Pensions. Would you be happy if we were, in some way, to conflate the two applications?

Alison McGovern: Of course.

Q25 **Patricia Gibson:** I was going to remark on the absence of MPs other than Labour MPs but I was distracted by the fact that you have listed Hannah Bardell as a Labour MP—is there something you want to tell us?

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Alison McGovern: Sorry—no.

Jess Phillips: There's a lot of that at the moment: who's in which party?

Alison McGovern: A mere typing error. My apologies to Hannah. Her commitment to the SNP must not be in question.

Chair: On the long list, you do have Caroline Lucas as a Green, which is quite appropriate.

Patricia Gibson: And an Independent.

Chair: Alison, thank you very much indeed.

Tim Farron made representations.

Q26 **Chair:** We will move swiftly on to Tim Farron and the spending of the Department of Health and Social Care on non-invasive precision therapies.

Tim Farron: Thank you, Chair. I am here in the place of Grahame Morris. He and I work on the all-party parliamentary group on radiotherapy; I am the chair and Grahame is the vice-chair.

On precision therapies, we are talking in particular about radiotherapy and different forms of it, proton beam and so on. Roughly 50% of us will get cancer at some point in our lives and 50% of those will need radiotherapy treatment.

Another stat for you is that 40% of cancer cures are achieved via one form of radiotherapy or another. In terms of cancer cures, it is second only to surgery, yet in the UK we spend only 5% of the cancer spend on radiotherapy.

People will have different concepts of what radiotherapy is and what it does. It can be both palliative and curative. It is often delivered in association with other forms of therapy, surgery and chemotherapy. The more precision forms of radiotherapy, which are growing almost by the year, mean that fewer numbers of fractions, or doses, of radiotherapy can be administered to gain greater impact and have greater effect.

The more precise SABR technology, for example, which the majority of cancer units in the UK have—more of that in a moment—is able to produce a much more precise beam. As a consequence, it is much more likely to kill the tumour, largely because the precision means that it is not going to damage the healthy tissue around the tumour.

Therefore, you can deliver more of it. People are more likely to be cured and more likely to be able to lead productive lives after the treatment, because they won't have had the collateral damage around it.

Among the reasons that I am very keen that this matter is debated is that there are many spending rules that have been undermining the delivery of SABR technology. Stereotactic or SABR radiotherapy is the most precise

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forms of radiotherapy. Every single cancer unit, certainly in England, and I think across the whole United Kingdom, is enabled and has the technology to deliver this more precise form of radiotherapy. Yet, around half of them do not deliver it, because of commissioning rules and the application of tariff. That basically means that people are not surviving because of current spending and commissioning rules when it comes to the use of precision and non-invasive therapies.

We think this is hugely important. The NHS forward plan talks about the importance of early diagnosis, which is wonderful. The main reason we are not curing as many people of cancer in this country is because we diagnose too late. If you diagnose early, the treatment you deliver will be more likely to be curative than palliative. It is, therefore, more likely to need to be radiotherapy. Our failure to invest properly and to ensure that the kit that we actually own and possess is being used properly is a serious threat to the lives of our constituents.

Q27 **Chair:** On question I would like to ask you, Tim, since you have come in towards the end of our proceedings, is that if you are unsuccessful in getting one of the four Estimates Day slots, would you like this application to be on the record, as it were, as a Backbench Business debate?

Tim Farron: Yes, it's hugely important and topical, so we would be very grateful for that, if that was the case.

Chair: Thank you.

Tom Tugendhat made representations.

Q28 **Chair:** With the last of the Estimates Day applications, we have Tom Tugendhat on the spending of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and other Departments on sanctions policy and implementation.

Tom Tugendhat: Thank you. This is a huge area of question. One of the things that we have seen over recent inquiries is the overlap of things such as the breadth of sanctions policy across the UK. It touches so many different Departments.

We have looked at it as the Foreign Affairs Committee, looking at the influence that the UK can exercise overseas and the influence other countries can exercise on us. There is a huge Foreign Office element there, of course, but there is more than that. This is also to do with the Treasury, and if you look more widely, it can even touch on areas such as education, freedom of speech in universities and different ways of running various civic institutions around the UK.

This area would allow a wider debate than we have been able to conduct in the Foreign Affairs Committee. It would open up some very important questions to debate in the House and begin to push the Government into areas that, frankly, they have been less than comfortable about going into in recent years. That is why we are pushing for it, not just as a foreign policy item, but more widely than that as a consideration for the UK in

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preparation for our departure from the European Union. It is also in preparation for a changing global environment in which globalisation of finance, travel and business has changed the influence that countries can have on each other.

- Q29 **Mr Wragg:** The application is perfectly in order and this is not a flippant point but I noticed in requesting, if possible, a debate on 2 July you say that 3 July might not be possible because the Foreign Secretary is due to give oral evidence to your Committee. Is that entirely fixed? In the event that he is preoccupied, would he still be coming to speak to your Committee on that day?

Tom Tugendhat: The arrivals of Secretaries of State before Committees is a dark art that I am completely unable to confirm or predict. At the moment, that is what is in the diary. It would be difficult for us to get another session with him before the summer recess, if we were to try to move that date. Clearly, one of the most important functions of a Select Committee—you all know this—is to hold the relevant Secretary of State to account. Given his travel plans and the amount that has happened since he was last before our Committee in December, I would be unwilling to seek to move it, if that could be avoided.

Mr Wragg: This is purely for the purposes of allocating time, that was all.

Tom Tugendhat: I appreciate that, it is just very difficult, as you know.

- Q30 **Chair:** What time would your Committee meet?

Tom Tugendhat: We meet at 2.15 and would probably start the evidence session around 2.30 to 2.40. As you can imagine, we try to keep the Secretary of State there for as long as we possibly can, so until about 5.30 or 6 o'clock.

Particularly in this inquiry session, because the Foreign Office has decided that freedom of media, which is something we all take very seriously, is a major policy area of the Foreign Office, and because he has held that close to himself, and we would not be able to get a Minister before us before September or possibly October, we are going to use some of that time to conduct the ministerial questions on that inquiry. It is always packed with the Secretary of State and I would be reticent about cutting it short given that the most important strategic threats to the United Kingdom today are all to do with our foreign policy.

- Q31 **Chair:** Part of the problem we have in accommodating that is that we think that we are going to get 2 July and 3 July, but we are not absolutely sure. If we can do anything to help that, we will, of course. We just do not know at the moment.

Tom Tugendhat: If you can make it work it would be great. If you cannot, I completely understand.

- Q32 **Chair:** The other problem with it being an Estimates Day debate is that your application talks about the spending of the FCO and other Departments. It is difficult to get many Departments to answer one

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(debate).

Tom Tugendhat: That is true. We are happy to focus on the Foreign Office, so long as—we would ask Mr Speaker's indulgence—others are allowed to contribute on policy, even though the FCO would be the lead Department.

Chair: Thanks very much. That clarifies that. Thanks very much for the application. I think that concludes the Estimates Day applications.

Mr Alistair Carmichael made representations.

Q33 **Chair:** (We) now move on to applications for Backbench Business debates in time allocated to us by the Government. First up is Mr Alistair Carmichael on human rights in Saudi Arabia and the detention of opponents of the regime (there).

Mr Carmichael: I just have a couple of housekeeping matters first. I think we had eight Members listed to speak at the point at which we submitted the application. I am told by my office that we are now up to 12. I would be fairly optimistic. I know you put some store in having 15. I work on a fairly regular basis with Amnesty International and Reprieve, which have their own usual suspects, whom they will contact when a debate of this sort comes up. None of those Members are listed in those who would participate in the debate.

(In) terms of the areas that we will be covering, there is not a shortage of material to be debated. We have seen some progress, in particular in relation to women being allowed to drive. There has been some liberalisation by the Crown Prince, but there is a substantial body of evidence that says that in the most material aspects of the situation, in relation to human rights in Saudi Arabia, it is going backwards.

(At) this point, because of what is going on in Yemen and the role of Saudi Arabia there, and also what you see in the Gulf of Oman at the moment and the concern about the oil tankers—of course, where you have concerns about Iran, concerns about Saudi Arabia are never far behind—this question about the balance between trade and human rights is going to come into sharper relief than ever.

For that reason, we would like to see a proper and substantial discussion of the human rights record and practices in Saudi Arabia. The particular issues that we have highlighted in the campaign are not exhaustive. (That) is why we have drawn the application fairly widely. I would want a general debate, so that those who have concerns in other areas would be able to bring them forwards. We would be seeking a debate on general terms in either the main Chamber or Westminster (Hall).

Q34 **Patricia Gibson:** You said that you are up to 12 speakers. Can I request that you move that to 13? I have spoken on this issue quite a number of times and I would be delighted to participate in this (debate).

Mr Carmichael: You could maybe even bring some of your colleagues with you as well, Patricia, and then we can get over the (line).

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Patricia Gibson: I am sure there will be great interest.

Q35 **Chair:** You have said that you would like the Chamber or Westminster Hall. We have a slot that would be only 90 minutes, but the answering Department would be the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, on Tuesday 2 July. Would you be willing to take that?

Mr Carmichael: If we will be limited to 90 minutes, I think we would want to stop recruiting fairly soon, but something on 2 July is an attractive prospect. Did you say that was in Westminster Hall?

Q36 **Chair:** Yes. Additionally, there is a three-hour slot on Thursday 4 July that would potentially be available.

Mr Carmichael: Could I take that away and consult those who are participating? To be honest, the three-hour slot looks more attractive, but, frankly, I have always been of the view that half a loaf is better than no bread.

Chair: Indeed. Thank you very much. That is very good of you.

David Linden and Paul Masterton made representations.

Q37 **Chair:** Next up is Mr David Linden and Mr Paul Masterton. Their application is on changes to tier 5 religious worker visas.

David Linden: Thank you, Chair. We will not seek to detain the Committee.

I was first sent a letter on this issue by Father Liam McMahon, who is the parish priest at St Michael's in Parkhead. Essentially, the issue is that previously priests, who of course require holidays and time away for retreats, could get cover under tier 5 visas for religious workers. Changes made by the Home Office in December mean that religious organisations are required to come under tier 2, which increases the cost and makes it a lot more difficult to get religious workers in.

I think we would all agree that, to put the Catholic side of things, in order to allow people to continue to receive sacraments and to be able to attend mass, we need to allow people to come here to provide that cover for priests. The whole idea behind a debate is to air the issue in the Chamber, to ensure we are raising it with the Immigration Minister, and ultimately to ask the Home Office to look again at this decision, which is putting a lot of religious organisations and particularly Catholic churches under great stress.

My colleague, the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire, raised this at PMQs and wants to add something.

Paul Masterton: The only thing I would add is that while the issue has predominantly been raised by MPs of the Catholic faith, it is not unique to that faith; it faces the Jewish community in my constituency, for example, and others. These placements are extremely important for the reasons

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that David outlined and, more broadly, in terms of the sheer experience of individuals coming over to lead worship here in the United Kingdom. That speaks more broadly, particularly to post-Brexit immigration policy, and it is an aspect of that debate that has not been aired at all. As you can see from the work that David has done in drawing together the application, there is a clear appetite to raise this issue on behalf of local faith communities.

Q38 **Patricia Gibson:** I do not know whether I am allowed to say anything, Chair, because my name is on the application as a supporter. I was going to say that given the great interest in this issue, 90 minutes might be frustratingly short on the day.

David Linden: This is a discussion that you and I have had before, Patricia—about people who secure debates in Westminster Hall and seek to speak for 30 minutes—but as the person to open the debate, I would certainly not intend to do that. The reason I have asked for 90 minutes is that, given the possibility that it might be on a Thursday, I am very conscious that the people who have said they will speak might not all come. I have always been a believer that, in Westminster Hall, the more brief you are as the mover, you should be able to get other colleagues in. But you are right, it is an issue that has exercised a lot of people—

Q39 **Patricia Gibson:** It is just that you have such a lot of people, and I think that a lot of them will come and will want to talk about how this has affected their constituency.

David Linden: Yes.

Q40 **Chair:** I must admit, I am not aware when on the updated list the Home Office is next due to be the answering Department in Westminster Hall, but there is a 90-minute slot on Thursday 4 July, because the Liaison Committee has a 90-minute slot, which leaves a 90-minute slot for us. If that was available, would you take it?

David Linden: I am more than happy to check with colleagues whether they would be available on the 4th. If that is the opportunity, I am sure we would be willing to look at it.

Chair: Thank you very much.

Drew Hendry made representations.

Q41 **Chair:** We are getting on to the downward slope now. Mr Drew Hendry, please. This application is that the House should consider the specific and urgent matter of the publication of details of the future of the UK shared prosperity fund.

Drew Hendry: I am delighted to be part of your downward slope, Chair.

This is a very important issue. A Government manifesto promise was to replace the EU structural funds, which amount to about £1.3 billion per year, or over £9 billion during the seven-year period that they cover. The

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existing one is running from 2014 to 2020. Nothing has been declared for post-2020, and we are now some six months away from the period when we need to know about that.

It is important that this comes to the Floor of the House of Commons because, according to Commons Library figures, approaching 300 parliamentary questions remain unanswered on the issue. Despite repeated promises, we have seen no details. We were promised a full consultation before the end of 2018, but that did not happen.

There are major issues about respect for the devolution settlement—for both the Scottish and Welsh Governments, and of course the Administration in Northern Ireland—and serious issues for the communities involved. Those are largely rural communities. For example, in the highlands and islands, the issues have been about population density and EU funding support for that, and in west Wales and the valleys about less developed areas.

The application has support from MPs from four different parties, and I have also taken support from the all-party parliamentary group for post-Brexit funding for nations, regions and local areas through its chair, Stephen Kinnock, this morning. I can also guarantee, from conversations, that many more MPs would be very interested in speaking in this debate. I can confidently predict the number would be much higher than 15.

Q42 **Patricia Gibson:** In view of that fact—I think you are right that it will be much higher than 15—is it a three-hour debate you are looking for?

Drew Hendry: It would be appropriate, given the level of interest.

Q43 **Ian Mearns:** You have a substantive motion, so you are looking for time in the Chamber and a three-hour debate. Can you provide us with the additional names?

Drew Hendry: I will, yes.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle and Ben Bradley made representations.

Q44 **Chair:** Last but certainly not least, Lloyd Russell-Moyle and Ben Bradley. This is the application on the role and sufficiency of youth work.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: We are applying for this debate and we have got 15 speakers from across different parties. You can see that the lead Members are from four different parties as well.

It is four years since a Select Committee has done an inquiry into youth work. Part of the problem is that, since then, youth work has been moved into three different subsequent Departments. It now sits in the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. Philosophically, it does not, but departmentally it does. The all-party parliamentary group has conducted an inquiry into the state of youth work. Ben and I have gone round visiting youth clubs around the country and we produced this cross-

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party. We think there is a time, need and desire to talk about what has happened to youth services, particularly in England. The difference with how they have not quite been destroyed in Wales and Scotland is also an interesting comparator.

We have seen in other debates—some of the knife crime debates and so on—that a lot of the time people end up talking about youth work. We think it is important to have a dedicated period of time to talk substantively about youth work and, particularly, the recommendations of the inquiry, which the Government have been very willing to respond to, but they need a space in the Chamber to respond.

Ben Bradley: The key point is that it is so dispersed across different Departments, so it is incredibly difficult to get a straight answer from Government, when it is always palmed off to other areas, without having the specific topic on the Order Paper.

The issue cuts across so many very current issues, from knife crime as was mentioned by Lloyd, to so many other things that come across our desk on the Education Committee, such as exclusions and all of the challenges with adult learning skills, and a lot of other elements that have such an impact in constituencies such as mine, particularly where social mobility, social justice and deprivation are key. Through our visits to a lot of these services, we saw the disparity and the postcode lottery in these services, with some people having incredible support and amazing centres and some having none at all.

The key reason for having the debate is where we started: without having it specifically on the Order Paper, it is something that just does not get discussed, because it is split in so many different ways.

Q45 **Chair:** I have a historical interest in as much as, back in my local government days, I chaired two national negotiating committees.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: On the pink book committee at the JNC.

Q46 **Chair:** I chaired the Soulbury committee, which, among other things, did community service managers. I also chaired the JNC for youth and community, in which I remember being told repeatedly by the negotiators on the staff side that the youth service was the fourth emergency service—well, it was until the RAC used the same epithet, but there we go. Thank you very much indeed; that's great.

I take it we have lots of speakers on the list. Are you looking for a general debate either in Westminster Hall or in the Chamber?

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: We were hoping to have it in the Chamber because we wanted it to be about considering the role and sufficiency of youth work and accepting the report recommendations, so it would be a substantive motion. We were hoping for three hours in the Chamber, understanding that that might mean it does not come immediately, but we think that waiting a bit longer would be worth it. It is not an issue that is time sensitive, although it is important, if that makes sense. We can be more flexible on that element of it.

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Chair: I will be encouraging the new Leader of the House to think about allocating additional time for the Backbench Business Committee, because I am cognisant of the fact that the House moved on to the Adjournment debate last night at 7.8 pm and that would have accommodated quite easily just under three hours for something or other. I am going to ask the Leader of the House on Thursday to try and avoid that sort of situation happening again. If we can come up with Backbench Business, which we have on the stocks aplenty, I am sure we can fill that time for the Government.

Thank you. **That** concludes our public session. We have heard all the applications. We now go into private session to make our deliberations.

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