

Backbench Business Committee

15th anniversary of the Backbench Business Committee: Government Response

Second Special Report of Session 2024–26

HC 1740

Backbench Business Committee

The Backbench Business Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to determine the backbench business to be taken in the House and Westminster Hall on days, or parts of days, allotted for backbench business.

Current membership

[Bob Blackman](#) (Conservative; Harrow East) (Chair)

[Jonathan Davies](#) (Labour; Mid Derbyshire)

[Mr Lee Dillon](#) (Liberal Democrat; Newbury)

[Mary Glendon](#) (Labour; Newcastle upon Tyne East and Wallsend)

[Alison Hume](#) (Labour; Scarborough and Whitby)

[Will Stone](#) (Labour; Swindon North)

[Martin Vickers](#) (Conservative; Brigg and Immingham)

[Chris Vince](#) (Labour; Harlow)

Powers

The Committee is established under Standing Order No 152J to determine the backbench business to be taken in the House and in Westminster Hall on days, or parts of days, allotted for backbench business. The powers of select committees are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, which are available on the internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publication

This Report, together with formal minutes relating to the Report, was Ordered by the House of Commons, on 3 March 2026, to be printed. It was published on 5 March 2026 by authority of the House of Commons.
© Parliamentary Copyright House of Commons 2026.

This publication may be reproduced under the terms of the Open Parliament Licence, which is published at www.parliament.uk/copyright.

Committee Reports are published on the Committee's website at www.parliament.uk/bbcom and in print by Order of the House.

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Backbench Business Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 3302; the Committee's email address is bbcom@parliament.uk. You can follow the Committee on X (formerly Twitter) using [@CommonsBBCom](https://twitter.com/CommonsBBCom).

Second Special Report

The Backbench Business Committee published its First Special Report, [15th anniversary of the Backbench Business Committee](#) (HC 1548), on 16 December 2025. The Government Response was received on 13 February 2026 and is appended below.

Government Response

Substantive motions

One of the barriers to tabling substantive motions is that Members assume they will be ignored by the Government. With that in mind, we call on the Government to establish a framework for responding to substantive motions agreed in backbench time. When the House agrees a substantive motion, the Government should publish a written response within two months, setting out how it plans to proceed on that matter. (Paragraph 36)

The Government considers all debates scheduled by the Backbench Business Committee - general debates and those on a substantive motion - a valuable opportunity for the House to inform and scrutinise Government policy. It is the Government's view that the best way in which Ministers can set out their position towards a subject or motion is during the debate itself, in the Minister's closing remarks that respond to the points that have been raised. The Government will always listen carefully to the views of the House and will endeavour to ensure that any actions or decisions that follow a debate are announced to the House in the usual way. This is in addition to the various ways in which members can seek information from the Government in the form of written and oral parliamentary questions and through other types of parliamentary business.

Timing of debates

If backbench business is to be relevant and effective, the Government must provide more time for that business on days that Members are most likely to be able to participate in debates. We recommend that Standing Order No. 14(4) be amended to require the Government to allocate a proportion of the mandated backbench time on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Some of this time might be allocated in the form of quarter days, or 90-minute debates, to take place before the Government's business. (Paragraph 47)

Standing Order No. 14 gives government business precedence, an important principle in ensuring the Government can effectively deliver its legislative programme. Such a change to Standing Orders would be too prescriptive and impact the ability of the

Government to effectively schedule its business. Thursday is a sitting day like any other in the week, and therefore Members should expect to be in Parliament to participate in any business set down for this day, including Backbench Business debates they have supported. During this Session the Committee has been able to allocate business on a number of days, not just Thursdays - most recently Monday 9th February 2026.

The Modernisation Committee may decide to consider this as part of any work looking at use of time in the Chamber and Westminster Hall.

Backbench business allocated on days other than Thursdays is often curtailed by multiple Government statements and Urgent Questions. There have been occasions where the Government has provided protected time for backbench debates on days where a large number of statements or Urgent Questions are anticipated, such as the time-sensitive debate on baby loss awareness on 13 October 2025. We welcome this and call on the Government to more consistently provide protected time to backbench debates, to provide certainty for both Members and the public, especially for debates that have previously needed to be cancelled. (Paragraph 48)

The Government understands the frustration of Members when debates are postponed. When arranging oral statements the Government always tries to ensure this is balanced with the main business of the day. However, there are occasions where statements are unavoidable and it is important that the Government makes such announcements to the House. The granting of Urgent Questions is a matter for the Speaker.

It is important to ensure there is as much certainty as possible of sitting times for Members as they seek to balance the different parts of their role. Across the last few Parliaments, Members have valued the certainty of

sitting hours and the current sitting times have evolved through a series of reforms. The Procedure Committee has played a key role in reviewing sitting hours and the Government would not wish to unintentionally undermine this certainty by overusing ad hoc business motions that provide for business to run later into the day.

There can also be unintended consequences of protecting time for debates, as illustrated by the debate on 13th October 2025, which resulted in a sensitive subject with many Members sharing personal testimony, in addition to affected family members in the gallery to watch the debate, taking place late in the evening.

The Modernisation Committee may wish to consider this as part of any work looking at use of time in the Chamber, and whether and in what circumstances such a provision should be used, and how to manage the impact of urgent questions and oral statements on backbench business debates.

Sitting times in Westminster Hall on Thursdays

The trial period of an earlier start time in Westminster Hall on Thursday afternoons, which took place in the previous Parliament, had a positive impact on the number of Members participating. The change allowed a larger number of Members to participate in Thursday afternoon debates in Westminster Hall and did so without adversely affecting the wider business or administration of the House. We urge the Government to implement the change on a permanent basis. (Paragraph 52)

While the Government appreciates that the trial allowed some Members to more easily participate in Westminster Hall debates on Thursday afternoons, there were concerns that this change resulted in some unintended consequences in the last Parliament. Specifically, the altered timings provided a greater risk of clashes with Urgent Questions, Oral Statements and Business Questions, creating potential difficulties regarding the availability of MPs and Government Ministers for business in the Chamber.

Select committee statements

We call on the Government to amend Standing Order No. 22D to revise the requirement that select committee statements be made within five sitting days of report publication to within ten sitting days. This would provide much needed flexibility to the Backbench Business Committee to facilitate the increased demand for these statements. (Paragraph 77)

The Government agrees with the Committee about the value and increasing popularity of select committee statements and will bring forward the relevant Standing Order change.

Changes to Commons Procedures

We will always consider the potential merits of providing time for debates on substantive motions that would implement the recommendations of the Procedure Committee in circumstances where the Government does not propose to put forward those motions itself. (Recommendation, Paragraph 84)

It is a long standing practice that the Government brings forward such motions. It is important that, before any such changes are put to the House for consideration, the Government is able to carefully consider reforms and any potential consequences, as well as ensuring there is clear consensus on such matters.

Topical debates under Standing Order No. 24(A)

We invite the Government to work with us to consider how we can make greater use of the existing power under Standing Order No.24 (A) to facilitate topical debates on matters of urgent regional, national or international importance. (Recommendation, Paragraph 92)

The Committee already has the power to do this and when the Backbench Business Committee was set up, the Committee acknowledged that the 35 days allocated to backbench business include a number of days which had previously been provided each year in Government time.¹ These were as follows:

- Defence - 5 days
- Pre-recess adjournment debates - 4 days
- Welsh affairs - 1 day close to 1st March
- International Women's Day - 1 day close to 8th March
- Public Accounts Committee reports - 1 day (usually taken as two half days)
- European affairs - 2 days before EU Council meetings
- Fisheries - 1 day
- Intelligence and Security Committee reports - 1 day

¹ Backbench Business Committee, First Special Report of Session 2010–12, Provisional Approach: Session 2010–11, available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmselect/cmbbackben/334/334.pdf>

The Committee may wish to consider whether the scheduling of some of these topical debates should be re-introduced. It is welcome that the Committee has, for example, scheduled debates for topics such as Holocaust Memorial Day and the anniversary of the Grenfell Tower fire.

The Government is always happy to work with the Committee to discuss scheduling of debates in advance where there are topical issues that need to be aired.

The Modernisation Committee may also wish to consider this recommendation in any work it does looking at use of time in the Chamber and Westminster Hall.

Sir David Amess Summer Adjournment Debate

We will continue to remember Sir David Amess's contribution to the House through our annual Sir David Amess Summer Adjournment Debate. We urge the Government to ensure that the final day before a summer recess is always made available for this purpose. (Paragraph 96)

The Government remains committed to ensuring the annual Sir David Amess Summer Adjournment Debate can go ahead. 2024 was an exception due to the timing of the general election and the King's Speech. On that occasion, a day was provided ahead of the Conference recess to ensure this important debate could still take place.

Election of the Backbench Business Committee

We call on the Government to re-introduce a secret ballot of the whole House for the election of members of the Backbench Business Committee. (Paragraph 101)

We do not feel it would be appropriate for the Backbench Business Committee to be constituted in this way. All members of the Backbench Business Committee have to be agreed by the House itself. Whilst there are some differences between the Backbench Business Committee and other Select Committees, particularly its ability to schedule business in the Chamber, the Government does not believe that its membership should be selected in such a vastly different way.

We urge the Government to amend Standing Order No. 152J so that, unless the House otherwise orders, the Members and Chair continue in their roles for the duration of the entire Parliament. (Paragraph 105)

The Government recognises that the operation of the Committee is well established, and that the re-appointment of the Committee at the beginning of each session can cause delays to the scheduling of backbench business.

We will therefore bring forward the relevant Standing Order change ahead of the next session. However, we note that this would still require the Committee be re-elected at the beginning of the next session to allow the Chair and Members to be appointed for the Parliament.

Sessional allocations of time

We continue to welcome the informal arrangements we have with the Government for approving a pro-rata allocation of backbench days during extended sessions of Parliament. It would be helpful to codify the principle that additional backbench days should be provided in extended parliamentary sessions. We recommend that Standing Order No. 14 be amended so that backbench days are allocated in proportion to the length of a parliamentary session. (Paragraph 108)

We believe that the current certainty in Standing Orders, coupled with the informal arrangements that have existed in longer sessions, is the best way to ensure that the Committee gets the appropriate amount of time across a session.

The Modernisation Committee may wish to consider the broader allocation of backbench business as part of any work it does looking at use of time in the Chamber and Westminster Hall.

Private Members' Bills

We support the Procedure Committee's 2016 recommendation that the Backbench Business Committee should have responsibility to consider bids from backbenchers for bills to have their second readings debated in the first four backbench legislative opportunities in each session. We call on the Government to implement these proposals in time for the 2027–28 session of Parliament. (Paragraph 121)

Implementing such changes would have a significant impact on the Private Members' Bill process as a whole, and it is important these matters are considered in the round so that unintended consequences can be thought through. On that basis, the Government does not support this recommendation.

The Modernisation Committee may wish to consider this as part of any upcoming work on the legislative process.

Allocation of Westminster Hall debates through the Speaker's Ballot

Given the success of the trial to allocate the first debate on Tuesdays in Westminster Hall, and the large number of applications the Committee receives for debates on Tuesdays compared to Thursdays, we invite the Modernisation Committee to consider whether there could be

merit in the Backbench Business Committee supporting the further allocation of Westminster Hall debates on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. (Recommendation, Paragraph 133)

The Leader of the House of Commons will raise this with the Modernisation Committee in his capacity as Chair. Alongside consideration of this recommendation we encourage the Committee to engage with the Chairman of Ways and Means.