

Backbench Business Committee

Representations: Backbench Debates

Tuesday 30 October 2018

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Ian Mearns (Chair); Bob Blackman; Patricia Gibson; Mr William Wragg.

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Witnesses

[I](#): Kate Green.

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Kate Green made representations.

Q1 Chair: Good afternoon, and welcome to this week's Backbench Business Committee. We have five applications in front of us this afternoon. The first before us is from Kate Green on protection for homebuyers. Over to you, Kate.

Kate Green: My interest in this subject began a few months ago, when constituents who had recently moved into a new-build Persimmon Homes contacted me about a range of quite serious defects in their new houses: electrics not properly completed; skirting boards and bannisters not properly fixed; gardens left basically as seas of mud. Not only were they dissatisfied with the quality of workmanship when they moved in, they were very disturbed then they approached Persimmon to have those defects rectified and were brushed aside.

When I sought to intervene on behalf of my constituents, I was told that the company's response to the constituents involved was that it was not the company's policy to deal with Members of Parliament. When I raised that in the Chamber, I sensed that it was an experience that a number of colleagues were quite familiar with. Indeed, I was aware that other colleagues had raised similar issues at Prime Minister's questions and in other debates. I also found, after I had raised the matter in the Chamber on a couple of occasions, that the public at large had picked up on this subject.

I have been inundated in the last few months by emails, Facebook messages, tweets and letters from people sharing their experiences. Even as recently as last week, I continued to receive stories of problems people were having Nottingham, the north-east, the south-west and right across the country.

The Government have quite rightly consulted on strengthening protections for homebuyers and already announced at the beginning of the month their intention to introduce an ombudsman scheme, which is very welcome in response to one of a number of excellent recommendations from the all-party parliamentary group on the built environment. But we do not know how or when that scheme is to be implemented. We also know that there were a number of other excellent suggestions from the APPG to which the Government have not indicated their intentions—for example, a strengthened warranty scheme, a better inspection certification scheme and annual customer satisfaction reports.

I know this problem is not confined to Persimmon; some of my correspondence with fellow parliamentarians and with the wider public relate to other house builders—both national names and relatively small local builders. However, there is particular outrage and political interest at the moment in Persimmon because the chief executive has just been awarded a bonus of £75 million, which has excited very considerable press and public comment.



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There is very widespread interest in this subject from parliamentarians and the wider public. Clearly, there are policy improvements that the Government could help to facilitate or legislate for if necessary. This is the largest and most important purchase most of us ever make, and it is really distressing for people who have worked hard and saved up to be in a position where their first home turns out to be such a nightmare for them.

It would be a real opportunity for us as parliamentarians to speak up for dozens, hundreds or perhaps thousands of our constituents who have been affected by this kind of shoddy treatment in what ought to be a really important, precious and happy experience for people as they settle down and begin to establish themselves in their communities and in family life.

Q2 Mr Wragg: Thank you, Kate, for this excellent application. I just wondered, in terms of the wider debate, whether you have been in touch with the all-party parliamentary group on leasehold and commonhold reform, and whether this touched on a lot of the work they are also doing, to lend greater weight to your application.

Kate Green: It is a good question. In fact, after I first raised the issue in relation to house builders, a lot of the correspondence I received from the public was about leasehold reform, and obviously I was very aware of a parallel set of concerns that parliamentary colleagues have been raising over a substantial number of months. I was wary, if I am honest, of widening the debate out, at least when I first began to think about framing it and building up a sense of how much concern and support was out there. I have not talked to the all-party parliamentary group. I am not averse to a bigger debate that encompasses both issues if that makes more sense from the Committee's perspective for the efficient allocation of parliamentary time and so on, but I have to say it is not an area that I have really spent a lot of my time in—I am conscious that a number of other good colleagues are doing excellent work on that subject.

Q3 Bob Blackman: What do you want the Government to do as a result of having the debate?

Kate Green: When I first began to identify the level of support for such a debate, my intention primarily was to say, "Look, we need an ombudsman system." I welcome the fact that, before we got to the point of my appearing before your Committee, they had already committed to that in principle. I would like the Government to explain in detail how they intend to design that system and what they hope that system can look like. There have been suggestions, for example, that it should be funded by an industry levy. Is that the Government's intention? I would like them to indicate how they intend, in parliamentary process terms, to introduce such a system and over what period people might be expected to wait. As I say, there are a number of other recommendations—at least a dozen, I think—from the all-party group that the Government did not really address at all in their initial response following the consultation period that was completed over the summer. I would also like to press the Government on



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its response to some of those recommendations and how it feels it might or might not be able to adopt them and to strengthen the regime further.

- Q4 **Bob Blackman:** The other issue is the amount of time we have available. You have applied for a general debate in the Chamber. We know that at the moment we have no time to allocate in the Chamber at all—we are waiting to hear from the Government what will be available. Potentially, you could have a debate in Westminster Hall, but that would probably not be until December in any case. Set against that, we have a queue of already eligible debates that have to be held in the Chamber because they have substantive motions. It is your application, but could I suggest that it might be an idea to have a debate in Westminster Hall, see what the Government have to say and then, if you are not satisfied with what they have to say, come back with an application to this Committee with a divisible motion that could then be debated in the Chamber? That would potentially give you two bites of the cherry and, more importantly, get a confirmed date to have a debate rather than quite an extended wait, I suspect, before you could get a debate. But it's your application.

Kate Green: Can I just understand? You are saying that that would be a Westminster Hall debate not applied for through this Committee, but—

- Q5 **Bob Blackman:** No, you could do that by amending your application. At the moment you have applied for a general debate in the Chamber, and if we can amend that then we might be able to offer that.

Kate Green: I would be very happy to do that. The people who are taking an interest in this subject would be happy to see an initial debate in Westminster Hall, and if the Backbench Business Committee is able to look at the timetabling of when you might be able to arrange that, that would be a very welcome start. Depending on the kind of response we receive from Government and developments going forward, I welcome your suggestion that then, if necessary and appropriate, I could come back for a debate in the Chamber on a divisible motion.

- Q6 **Patricia Gibson:** Overlapping with what Bob was saying, I was just looking at your numbers: with three hours in the Chamber and 20 speakers, plus Front Bench speakers, you would be really pushed for time, but of course it is an academic question because there is no more time anyway.

Kate Green: I should also say that, of course, there are a number of Front Benchers and PPSs who have experienced similar issues, who are unable to formally support the application but are certainly willing to indicate that they would want to be present in the Chamber to indicate their support.

Chair: Thank you very much. I can add to your argument, Kate, because one of my members of staff, who is a constituent of my hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery), has a very similar problem with a Persimmon home. So I sympathise, because he moans at me an awful lot, but there you go.

Darren Jones made representations.

Q7 **Chair:** The next application is from Darren Jones, on extreme weather events related to climate change.

Darren Jones: Thank you, Chair, and good afternoon to the Committee. I am applying for a 90-minute Westminster Hall debate to talk about the weather. That might sound frightfully British, but it is because we had a number of extreme weather patterns across the world over the summer recess this year, when we were of course not here to debate them. The really important Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report that came out on 8 October suggested that we have 12 years to limit world temperature increases to 1.5°C if we do not want to see substantive changes to the way we live our lives.

We have applied through the shuffle on a couple of occasions and been unsuccessful, which is why I have brought this application to the Committee. We checked with the House of Commons Library whether I missed the opportunity to take part in one of these important debates. There has not been one on the Floor of the House or in Westminster Hall. There were several debates recently on the clean growth strategy, which were welcome and which I took part in, but those focused specifically on domestic policy and the industrial strategy, as opposed to international collaboration—this is an international issue—and also the Government's view on the IPCC report and limiting temperature growth to 1.5°C.

As you can see from the application, we have had positive support from Members from across the House, with enough to fill a 90-minute debate. I suggest that it is really important for Parliament to debate the substance of the IPCC report in parliamentary time, which we have not had the chance to do yet, to understand the Government's view and then, off the back of the debate, to suggest whether it might require further debate in the House or further action through normal parliamentary procedures.

Q8 **Chair:** Which Department do you see answering the debate?

Darren Jones: Probably the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, and Claire Perry, as the Energy Minister.

Q9 **Bob Blackman:** There is a potential opportunity for a debate on 13 November.

Darren Jones: My birthday.

Q10 **Bob Blackman:** Even better. You could celebrate by leading a debate in Westminster Hall at 9.30 am.

Darren Jones: I would be very happy with that if that is what the Committee has to offer.

Chair: The offer has not been made so don't celebrate yet, but that is a possibility. Thank you very much indeed for your application.

Carol Monaghan, Nicky Morgan, Kelvin Hopkins and Stephen Pound made representations.

Q11 **Chair:** The next application is from Carol Monaghan and Nicky Morgan.

Carol Monaghan: Alex Chalk has to remove himself.

Chair: Either Kelvin Hopkins or Stephen Pound is doing a very good Alex Chalk impersonation.

Carol Monaghan: Alex is here in mind but is not quite at the table. Thanks for the opportunity to speak to the Committee. I have raised the treatment of people with ME before. I first became aware of it during my election campaign in 2015, but I knew absolutely nothing about it and did not really know how I, as a Member of Parliament, could effect any change.

However, I met a constituent in January this year who told me about something called the PACE trial. It is a piece of fairly controversial research that recommended that the best treatment for people with ME is something called graded exercise therapy. From the start, the ME community has argued that this treatment is not only ineffective but is extremely damaging, with people who have undertaken it ending up far worse than they started.

It is important that we get this debate. We have already had two debates this year. We started with a 30-minute Westminster Hall debate, which many Members attended, but they could obviously make only short interventions. We then had a longer Westminster Hall debate in June, at which 30 Members spoke during the three hours. There is great cross-party interest.

The timing is important. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence is currently updating its guidelines for the treatment of ME, as a result of the pressure that the ME community put on it because of its current recommendation for graded exercise therapy. There is concern that graded exercise therapy will remain because over 60% of the panel—it is called the guideline development group—are supporters of PACE. It calls into question the independence of this particular review of current treatments.

We also have situations where, if people are treated well by a GP, with a GP who has knowledge and understanding of the condition, they are able to manage their condition and in some cases, make a decent recovery. They are able to function to a certain extent, and some people can function to a fairly good extent. If the treatment is wrong, however, they can be bed-bound for many, many years. This has an impact not just on the person themselves but on their family and the economy. We need to get this right. It is important that GPs have an understanding.

There is one other sinister aspect of this that I want to highlight, and it is important that we highlight this in the Chamber. That is the issue of children with ME. ME itself is a horrendous condition, but some of the



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families have then been subjected to child protection prosecutions because it is considered that the parents are causing harm to the children. They have been threatened with being removed from their parents or getting a social worker involved. What is a terrible condition, affecting them physically in every aspect of their lives, becomes a mentally traumatic condition.

The time is right. We need to get this debated. We need to really start putting pressure on both NICE and the medical community to get the treatment right for this condition.

Nicky Morgan: I just want to say a couple of things. Carol has set this out very well. With the support of the Backbench Business Committee, we came before you previously to ask for the longer debate in Westminster Hall, which you have heard was very well supported. At the time, we had a debate about whether there could be a substantive motion. At that point, it was felt that just to get the issues out to be explored and for Members to be able to speak up on behalf of constituents was the right thing to do. I think there is now a proposal for us to have a substantive motion.

Carol has talked about the NICE guideline development committee. When I came before, I talked about the fact that this is the House of Commons at its best in terms of working cross-party to highlight an issue that has been much under sung and not necessarily debated publicly for many years. What was fascinating from the last debate was how widely reported and tweeted and everything else it was. I, and I am sure other Members, had emails from around the world just for the fact that we have been here presenting to the Committee. This is something, particularly in relation to the NICE guidelines, where we as Members and this House can give people who often don't get heard a voice against what can be a very powerful medical community. I hope that the Committee will therefore want to give us this time and the substantive motion to enable Members to do that on behalf of constituents.

Kelvin Hopkins: I want to add my support to everything that has been said. I have a particular interest because I had family members—not immediate family members—who are long-term sufferers from ME and the failure of the medical profession to diagnose and treat it properly. Over many, many years, that was the case. I have had constituents with similar problems. One in particular has suffered very badly indeed. Probably more relevant to us is that Dr Ian Gibson, a former Member of Parliament for one of the Norwich seats, has been advising me. He is absolutely incandescent about PACE and the terrible damage that it has done. He is an expert witness and has advised me. I have put down a number of written questions about PACE in the past. So I have a specific interest.

Stephen Pound: Thank you for hearing us again. I think the disability of ME doubly disadvantages people. On the one hand, it is an invisible disability. On the other hand, it is a denied disability. If there is one thing that I drew enormous pleasure from following the last couple of debates, it was, as Nicky Morgan has said, the number of people from around the world who got in touch with us and said, "At last, somebody is listening to



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us.” We are in a position where we need to do more than just ventilate and more than just adumbrate on the particular circumstances—we need to intervene in what appears to be a remorseless, rolling rockfall that is liable to crush many of our constituents.

I am not going to criticise the medical profession. It is not my place to do so and I can’t do so, but it seems to me that what we have here is an unequal contest. There is a very high number of people who suffer from myalgic encephalomyelitis who are deeply concerned about this current form of treatment. We all know that medics have got it wrong in the past. What have we got to lose by ventilating this one more time as widely as possible? If we don’t get this right, the consequences, particularly for paediatric ME sufferers, could be absolutely disastrous.

You see three and a half parties represented here, and we have attracted an enormous number of people. But, really and truly, the people I would like to be addressing today are those around the world who have suffered from their disability being denied for years. They look to us, as Nicky Morgan said so brilliantly and eloquently, to speak for them. I know all of us would be extremely grateful for the opportunity to do so.

Q12 Bob Blackman: Briefly, you mentioned that NICE is updating the guidelines. Have you got any deadline or timeframe for when it will report, therefore potentially leading to the timeliness of the debate?

Carol Monaghan: It is certainly looking at it just now. The panel is being put together at the moment, so it is happening as we speak, but in terms of a deadline, I am not sure.

Q13 Chair: I note that the application is supported by 30 or so Members of Parliament, which is very heartening. It is timely; I have been aware of the problem for over 30 years. It is the sort of issue that the Backbench Business Committee was created to air, so thank you very much for the application. If anyone has influence with the Leader of the House’s office, we need some time to allocate, so any help we can get in that department would be very welcome.

Stephen Pound: Thank you for your courtesy and kindness.

Rushanara Ali and Mrs Anne Main made representations.

Q14 Chair: The next application is from Rushanara Ali and Anne Main on the UN report on the Rohingya refugee crisis.

Mrs Main: Thank you, Mr Mearns, for giving us this opportunity. You see before you co-chairs of the all-party parliamentary group on the rights of the Rohingya, which was set up to give those Rohingya—many colleagues in this House have been over to see them in Bangladesh—a voice in this place. There has been an escalation, which is why we are desperate to have a debate on this now. The subject was last discussed in October 2017 following the United Nations Commission on Human Rights’ statement then that what happened to the Rohingya amounted to ethnic



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cleansing. The House was incredibly well attended for that debate. A lot of people went a lot further at that time, saying that it was more than ethnic cleansing—that it was indeed genocide. One year on and the UN fact-finding mission has stated that this is ongoing genocide.

I will hand over in a minute to Rushanara, who has been there recently and wishes to highlight to the Committee some recent reports in the media. The chair of the fact-finding mission to Myanmar, Marzuki Darusman, said that the Rohingya remaining in Rakhine are “at grave risk”, and repatriating those who have fled would amount “to condemning them to life as sub-humans and further mass killing.” Some of the Committee will be aware that a memorandum of understanding was signed between Bangladesh and Burma. That was hastily shelved, to the great outrage of the APPGs on Bangladesh and on the rights of the Rohingya, and to pressure from outside, because it did seem to be of concern that, in an effort to try to deal with the problem, Bangladesh may well end up trying to repatriate the Rohingya to a very hostile environment. There is concern that the Rohingya may well be hived off into an area called Bhashan Char island, which is basically a floating mudflat, because there is enormous pressure with the upcoming elections to get this problem solved.

I accept that 1 million people turning up on your doorstep in an impoverished country is more than a big ask of anyone, but an electorate that is becoming incredibly disheartened about the amount of resources and land going to this large number of people is causing political pressures—there is an upcoming election. On top of that, there is now this new—only last week—fact-finding report that recognises the genocide. At this point, I would like to hand over to my colleague.

Rushanara Ali: Last year, when the debate was allowed by the Committee, it was soon after 700,000 people were forced out of Burma. The fact-finding report, which is the subject of the debate we would like to have, has made it very clear that the military, and it refers to the civilian Government as well, has been responsible for prosecuting genocide.

In the meantime, we are concerned, as Anne has said, that if the repatriation happens, that will force people back into the hands of the very perpetrators of the genocide. Although the international community should be pushing for an International Criminal Court referral, which our Government are in the lead for, in fact what is happening is that the victims and survivors of genocide are being threatened with the prospect of being returned to the perpetrators. That cannot be acceptable given all that we say about never letting genocide happen again. It has happened on our watch, and we need to make sure that our Government do everything necessary to ensure that the Burmese military in particular is held to account. That is not what is happening.

Last year, we were very grateful to have the debate to highlight the humanitarian crisis facing Bangladesh because of the refugee flows, and the access issues for those who are effectively in prison camps in Rakhine State, which I have visited twice. I visited Bangladesh recently in July.



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Anne Main and others have visited as well. Across different parties people have seen what is happening.

We need the opportunity to highlight the importance of our Government taking action. As you heard earlier from Nicky Morgan, this is another subject where the role of the UK Parliament goes beyond our borders. It has an influence on how other Governments think in terms of their responsibility to contribute to the humanitarian effort, which is only a third fulfilled. The UN appeal has met only a third of the funding required for the 1 million people who are refugees now.

Secondly, the accountability and justice dimension to the conflict has to be addressed. When we have debates like the one that was granted last year we are able to build a coalition from around the world. Our Foreign Secretary, who recently visited Rakhine, has come back and one of the things he has reported to more than 160 MPs—those of us who wrote to him calling for a referral—is the importance and need for getting a coalition in the UN Security Council to make a referral successful.

We are in a better position than we were, both with the Government as well as on the Back Benches, but we are still a long way from protecting people who have suffered so much. We think it is really important to have the opportunity to get a debate in the House now, given what has happened. I cannot think of a more important subject than the fact that genocide has happened on our watch, and seeking accountability for our Parliament.

Q15 Bob Blackman: The case you present is very powerful, but I want to look at the application that you have made. You have asked for a general debate, and then you have a draft text of a substantive motion. In your presentation, you quite rightly talk about the terrible tragedy that is going on in Bangladesh, but the text of the motion appears to be about the perpetrators of the genocide in Burma.

I just want to clear up what you are asking for. Do you want the substantive motion in that case—a divisible motion—for debating time in the Chamber, or do you want a general debate on the plight of those people who are victims of the genocide?

Rushanara Ali: They are victims of the genocide because of the actions of the military, so the two are intertwined in terms of context.

Q16 Bob Blackman: They are and they aren't. The problem is, as Anne Main has referred to, we have the situation of the plight of the Rohingya in Bangladesh, who may be pushed on to—

Mrs Main: Bhasan Char island.

Bob Blackman: A totally unacceptable position. That would be very different from dealing with the causes behind the genocide. The problem that I think we have potentially is that building the coalition may take time—I think everyone would accept that—but the crisis is what may happen to the Rohingya in the meantime. I just want to be clear what we are doing here. Our time, in terms of Chamber time, is very limited. At



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the moment, we do not have any allocations to make, but I do think that the crisis that we are talking about needs to be aired somehow. My suggestion is that, although we do not know what the business of the House will be when we return in November, in the event that there was a potential end-of-day debate, which might be available at short notice, would you accept that, because of the impending crisis, rather than waiting potentially until December to get a debate?

Mrs Main: The difficulty we have is that there is real urgency to this—

Bob Blackman: I understand that.

Mrs Main: Yes. I can see we are rushed, but it is difficult for us. We want to highlight the fact that this is now not ethnic cleansing, but genocide. If there is some understanding between Burma and Bangladesh—for all the reasons that I can understand—and we turn a blind eye to people being sent back to a situation in which they will be brutally murdered, then we have been complicit. We cannot say that having a three-hour debate or something like that is not of any value. Whether or not we call for the motion to be divided on, I don't know, but the trouble we shall have is that so many people want to participate—40 people are named here—and I honestly believe that we shall be struggling for time.

Q17 **Bob Blackman:** May I also suggest that you reword the proposed motion? I have every sympathy with the motion—don't get me wrong—but it is to take into account the plight of the Rohingya who might be forced into that terrible position of either being returned or, alternatively, being put into an unacceptable place, which is totally unsuitable for the people whom we are trying to help. But it is your application.

Mrs Main: I completely see the wisdom of your words. My only concern is about securing enough time. Suddenly to go from last year's debate in the main part of the House on ethnic cleansing to—no disrespect to the House—being shuffled off to one and a half hours in Westminster Hall on genocide seems a little—

Q18 **Bob Blackman:** No, excuse me, that is not what I am suggesting. I am not suggesting that a Westminster Hall debate is appropriate. I am suggesting possibly rewording the motion to take into account the current plight and, potentially—we have no knowledge of this—if the Government are in a position by then to allocate some time out of the normal Backbench Business time, that would give you an opportunity for an urgent debate on the subject.

Mrs Main: I shall leave it up to my colleagues.

Bob Blackman: You don't have to make a decision now, because we cannot allocate the time anyway.

Q19 **Chair:** The application is submitted. In terms of managing it—although the urgency of it is entirely understood—a divisible motion, which actually calls on the Government to do something, would be really useful from that perspective. It is a question of you having a negotiation between yourselves and the people who signed the application and coming to an



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agreement.

Mrs Main: The general feeling behind it is that everyone who has signed this is concerned about the Rohingyas' plight, full stop. My concern is that we cannot send them back. I don't want to send them to Bhasan Char island, but actually I don't want to send them back. No one wants to see them go back, because there has to be a recognition that they would be going back to a genocidal situation.

Q20 **Chair:** Therefore, how do we get the Government on board to make a submission to the UN? That is what we are trying to achieve?

Mrs Main: Yes, that is the pressure that we want.

Q21 **Bob Blackman:** Thinking off the top of my head—doing my Philip Hollobone impersonation—something like, "This House calls on the Government to put pressure on the United Nations to prevent the repatriation of the Rohingya from Bangladesh to Burma and, furthermore, to provide assistance to ensure that within Bangladesh they are assisted to appropriate arrangements pending the final outcome of where they will settle", then going on with your motion here. It is up to you.

Mrs Main: We can go away and have a discussion.

Rushanara Ali: We will speak to your Clerks and come up with some wording.

Mrs Main: But I think you can see where we are coming from—the two things are intertwined.

Chair: And I think you can see where we're coming from as well.

Rushanara Ali: Absolutely.

Mrs Main: Thank you very much.

Chair: Thank you very much.

Philip Davies and **Mrs Anne Main** made representations.

Q22 **Chair:** Last, but not least, the next application is from Mr Philip Davies. The title of the application is "International Men's Day".

Philip Davies: Thank you very much for saving the best until last, Mr Chairman. I should also pass on the apologies of Jeremy Lefroy, who would have been here, but as he is hoping to catch the Speaker's eye in the Budget debate, he cannot.

This will hopefully be quite straightforward as it is an annual application that we make for a debate to coincide with International Men's Day, which I think we have done for the last four or five years. You will see that there are people from four different parties on the application. Almost half of the people who have signed it are women MPs, so this is not just something for men. Obviously the issues that we raise in these debates are still very prevalent, still very important and often do not get an outing in the House



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of Commons. Issues such as the high rate of male suicide, the poor educational outcomes for working-class boys in particular, and parental alienation, are all very important but never really get debated in Parliament to be perfectly honest. This gives us an opportunity to do so all in one debate rather than having separate debates for each, even though they are important issues in their own right.

I ticked the “Chamber” option because we have had the debate in the Chamber and in Westminster Hall. Every time we have had it in Westminster Hall, everybody always says during the debate, “We should be having this debate in the Chamber”. I know that Maria Miller in particular—Chair of the Women and Equalities Select Committee—is very keen and always makes that point. I heard what Mr Blackman said during one of the earlier sessions about the fact that you have not been allocated any time in the Chamber, so I appreciate that that is a difficulty for you. Obviously it is not for me to tell you when or how to schedule debates. I merely ticked “Chamber” alone so I could make the point that it is always felt that it should be held in the main Chamber as it has been in the past. That is a matter for you.

Mrs Main: As a mum, with two girls and two boys, I wanted to support Philip because I think we have had a big revolution in our perception of traditional women’s roles and what girls should be doing, but I do not think there has been any re-evaluation of the role of young men and men in society, and the additional pressures that they are under in terms of their emotional state and so on. I think it is incredibly valuable to have that debate to air those particular perspectives, because for every wife who is a mum, there is a son and a dad. I think the role of fathers in the break-up of a family system is incredibly important to look at; as is the number of young men who are killed as a result of knife crime and so on. Men have quite a difficult role in society now, and whereas my dad always used to know what his and my mother’s roles were, I am not sure that we are so sure of what our roles are any more and I think it is valuable to explore all those things in the debate.

Q23 **Bob Blackman:** Remind me Philip; when is International Men’s Day?

Philip Davies: It is 19 November, which I believe is a Monday, so the idea would be—as with International Women’s Day—to hold it as close to that date as possible. Given that it is a Monday, it seems to me that it would be appropriate to hold it either that week or the week before, in anticipation.

Bob Blackman: So either the week before or the week itself.

Chair: I would point out, Philip, that we have already pre-allocated an awful lot of time in Westminster Hall, because we knew what the dates were going to be and had a backlog of applications. We might struggle to get any time in Westminster Hall anywhere near 19 November, but we do not yet know what Chamber time we will be allocated, so we will try our best.

Philip Davies: I appreciate that.



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Chair: That concludes our public consideration for the Committee this afternoon. We will now go into private session.