

# PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT  
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

## HOMELESSNESS REDUCTION BILL

*First Sitting*

*Wednesday 23 November 2016*

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### CONTENTS

Sittings motion agreed to.

Order of consideration agreed to.

Adjourned till Wednesday 30 November at half-past Nine o'clock.

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**not later than**

**Sunday 27 November 2016**

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**The Committee consisted of the following Members:**

*Chair:* MR CHRISTOPHER CHOPE

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| † Betts, Mr Clive ( <i>Sheffield South East</i> ) (Lab)   | † Monaghan, Dr Paul ( <i>Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross</i> ) (SNP) |
| † Blackman, Bob ( <i>Harrow East</i> ) (Con)  | † Pow, Rebecca ( <i>Taunton Deane</i> ) (Con)                              |
| † Buck, Ms Karen ( <i>Westminster North</i> ) (Lab)   | † Quince, Will ( <i>Colchester</i> ) (Con)                                 |
| † Burrowes, Mr David ( <i>Enfield, Southgate</i> ) (Con)  | † Slaughter, Andy ( <i>Hammersmith</i> ) (Lab)                             |
| Donelan, Michelle ( <i>Chippenham</i> ) (Con)   | † Thewliss, Alison ( <i>Glasgow Central</i> ) (SNP)                        |
| † Drummond, Mrs Flick ( <i>Portsmouth South</i> ) (Con)   | † Tomlinson, Michael ( <i>Mid Dorset and North Poole</i> ) (Con)           |
| † Hayes, Helen ( <i>Dulwich and West Norwood</i> ) (Lab)  | Glenn McKee, <i>Committee Clerk</i>  |
| † Jones, Mr Marcus ( <i>Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government</i> ) | † <b>attended the Committee</b>  |
| † Mackintosh, David ( <i>Northampton South</i> ) (Con)  |  |
| † Matheson, Christian ( <i>City of Chester</i> ) (Lab)  |  |

## Public Bill Committee

*Wednesday 23 November 2016*

[MR CHRISTOPHER CHOPE *in the Chair*]

### Homelessness Reduction Bill

9.30 am

**The Chair:** Good morning. Before we consider the Bill in detail, I remind hon. Members that there will be the severest of sanctions against those who use mobile devices and, likewise, against those who try to drink tea or coffee during the sitting.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): I beg to move,

That, if proceedings on the Homelessness Reduction Bill are not completed at this day's sitting, the Committee meets on Wednesdays while the House is sitting at 9.30 am.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship for the second week in a row, Mr Chope; I suspect that it will not be the last time. The motion will ensure that we have time for a full and constructive debate on the details of the Bill. I hope that everyone agrees that getting the Bill right in Committee is important, so that we can return it to the House in as complete a fashion as possible and it can complete its passage, particularly given that it has all-party support. I hope that the motion will have the full support of the Committee and that we can progress with a like mind.

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your fair and clear chairmanship, Mr Chope. We always know where we stand when you are in the Chair, for good or ill. I have no reason to oppose the motion; the Opposition welcome the opportunity for open-ended debate on this important Bill.

My only observation is that the order of consideration is somewhat unorthodox. We are to start with clause 2, so the substantive clause 1 will come later, and probably not in the first sitting. I make no formal objection to that, but—I hope that the Government and the Bill's promoter hear this—if there are to be substantive amendments, it would be as well for those of us who may also table amendments if they could be made available sooner rather than later; otherwise we are going to get ourselves into a bit of mess, which will not help proceedings to be as clear and efficient as possible.

Not having seen any Government amendments yet, I make no criticism of them; I will wait until I see them. It would be helpful if the Minister or the promoter could indicate when they are likely to be tabled, because we will clearly either be wasting our time or getting our wires crossed if we try to amend something that is no longer going to be in the Bill.

**The Chair:** There are two separate motions. It will be more convenient to decide upon the first motion first, although the hon. Gentleman has just referred to some of the contents of the second motion.

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Bob Blackman:** I beg to move,

That the Bill be considered in the following order, namely, Clause 2, Clause 3, Clause 8, Clause 9, Clauses 4 to 7, Clauses 10 to 13, Clause 1, new Clauses, new Schedules, remaining proceedings on the Bill.

Over the past few weeks, I and others have met stakeholders, in particular the Minister and his officials, to consider the Bill as presented on Second Reading. We will discuss potential amendments to some of the clauses, to make sure that their meaning is clarified, any errors are corrected and their effect is improved. One of the problems associated with this type of Bill is the consequences of changing the system. We do not want it to impact on that. My proposed order of consideration will allow sufficient time to complete the process. We are clear that we want to proceed on an all-party basis, working closely together in a collegiate fashion, so that amendments, especially Government amendments, are tabled in plenty of time and everyone has a chance to read and understand them, and, if Members want to propose further changes, we can do so.

One rationale for the order of consideration is that there has been substantial lobbying on clause 1 in particular. I propose that we debate that clause at the end, because that will allow us to ensure that any proposed amendments to it are drawn up in a suitable fashion, through parliamentary counsel, and circulated to Members. By the time we come to debate the clause, everyone on the Committee will have had a chance to see and understand the provisions and obtain any background information that they need.

That is the reason for a slightly strange order of consideration. One reason that clauses 4 to 7 are included later is that it was envisaged—although this may turn out not to be the case—that there might be consequential amendments to clause 4 in particular, as a result of amending clause 1. I understand from our discussions last night that that may not necessarily be the case.

The order of consideration gives us a sensible route for discussing the clauses. My understanding is that some of the earlier clauses are less likely to be controversial or require amendments, but we want to go through them in detail as well. I hope that, in that spirit, we can discuss the Bill in the order suggested. If colleagues are concerned and want to change it, I will understand, but I believe that it is a logical way of dealing with the Bill, because it is complicated and any changes will have consequences.

**Andy Slaughter:** I have nothing to add other than this: I understand that there is no formal programme motion for a private Member's Bill, but given the tactics that the hon. Gentleman has set out, I wonder when he envisages the first sitting taking place. It looks like there will be an interesting debate on clause 1 or what replaces it, but when will we get to that point? This is a bit like "Hamlet" without the prince: we are talking around the subject before we actually get to it. When will the new position on clause 1 be set out and when are we likely to debate it? Clearly, that is a matter for the Committee, but it would be useful to know what is in the minds of the Government and the promoter.

**Mr Clive Betts** (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I want to re-emphasise the point that my hon. Friend has made. It would be useful to have some idea of timing so that we

can plan ahead and prepare. I also welcome what the hon. Member for Harrow East, who is in charge of the Bill, has said about the intention to proceed on an all-party basis and to try to secure agreement, because that is how we have worked on the issue. Even before the Bill was a gleam in the hon. Gentleman's eye, the Communities and Local Government Committee discussed the issue and its members worked together on trying to improve the service that homeless people receive.

I welcome the fact that we will take another look at clause 1. On Second Reading, I raised concerns about the loopholes that it might provide for those authorities that are perhaps less enthusiastic than us about trying to improve the service. Some of the caveats may give them wiggle room not to deliver the sort of service intended. It is important that we get the clause right, that we make it watertight and that we do not allow wiggle room for authorities that do not want to comply, so it is very important that we have time to consider it.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Marcus Jones):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Chope. I reiterate the Government's support for the Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East. As he has said, since Second Reading we have been working closely with him and a number of other stakeholders to get to this point.

I hear what has been said about clause 1. As I said on Second Reading, we were aware that several stakeholder groups had concerns about clause 1. At that point, we said that we would listen carefully to those concerns. We have continued to do that and to engage in dialogue.

As my hon. Friend has said, we cannot yet say for definite when the amendment to the clause will be tabled, but I assure Opposition Front Benchers that, in the spirit of how the Bill has been handled so far—a spirit of co-operation across the House to enact important

legislation that will benefit homeless people and people at risk of becoming homeless across the country—we fully intend to ensure that the hon. Member for Hammersmith has sight of the proposal for clause 1 as soon as is practicable. We are willing to work with him.

**Bob Blackman:** I trust that that reassurance from my hon. Friend the Minister and me is sufficient to ensure that colleagues are content. The hon. Member for Hammersmith asked when we are likely to get to clause 1. Provided that my proposed order of consideration is agreed to, I propose that we adjourn now, and that we meet next Wednesday to start the process.

I envisage that we will not debate clause 1 until, possibly, 14 December, depending on the progress we make, but I am clear that when the amendment to the clause is ready, we will circulate it to all members of the Committee. If there are any other amendments, we will circulate them as soon as they are available. I hope that colleagues on the other side of the argument will also take that in the spirit in which it is intended. The earlier we can have sight of proposed amendments, the better, so that we can carefully consider their impact not only on the clause, but, consequentially, on the Bill. I trust that we have satisfied everyone and that we can proceed accordingly.

**The Chair:** May I remind Members that amendments for next week would need to be tabled before close of play on Friday? As nobody knows exactly what progress there will be, the sooner amendments are tabled, the better.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Ordered,* That further consideration be now adjourned.—(Bob Blackman.)

9.43 am

*Adjourned till Wednesday 30 November at half-past Nine o'clock.*

