

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Twenty Sixth Sitting

Wednesday 23 January 2019

CONTENTS

Motion to adjourn considered.

Adjourned till Wednesday 30 January at Ten o'clock.

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the final version of the report should be clearly marked in a copy of the report—not telephoned—and must be received in the Editor’s Room, House of Commons,

not later than

Sunday 27 January 2019

© Parliamentary Copyright House of Commons 2019

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

The Committee consisted of the following Members:

Chairs: † Ms NADINE DORRIES, ALBERT OWEN

| | |
|--|---|
| Allan, Lucy (<i>Telford</i>) (Con) | Mills, Nigel (<i>Amber Valley</i>) (Con) |
| Bone, Mr Peter (<i>Wellingborough</i>) (Con) | † Norris, Alex (<i>Nottingham North</i>) (Lab/Co-op) |
| Charalambous, Bambos (<i>Enfield, Southgate</i>) (Lab) | Paisley, Ian (<i>North Antrim</i>) (DUP) |
| † Fletcher, Colleen (<i>Coventry North East</i>) (Lab) | † Smith, Chloe (<i>Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office</i>) |
| † Foster, Kevin (<i>Torbay</i>) (Con) | † Stewart, Bob (<i>Beckenham</i>) (Con) |
| Harper, Mr Mark (<i>Forest of Dean</i>) (Con) | Wiggin, Bill (<i>North Herefordshire</i>) (Con) |
| † Khan, Afzal (<i>Manchester, Gorton</i>) (Lab) | |
| † Lee, Karen (<i>Lincoln</i>) (Lab) | Adam Mellows-Facer, <i>Committee Clerk</i> |
| † Linden, David (<i>Glasgow East</i>) (SNP) | |
| † Matheson, Christian (<i>City of Chester</i>) (Lab) | † attended the Committee |

Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 23 January 2019

[MS NADINE DORRIES *in the Chair*]

Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill

10 am

The Chair: I give the usual reminder about electronic devices: switch them to silent. As the Committee cannot consider the clauses of the Bill until the House has agreed a money resolution, I call Afzal Khan to move that the Committee do now adjourn.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I beg to move, That the Committee do now adjourn.

Another week and another statement by the Prime Minister on Brexit. Following the crushing defeat last week, the highly anticipated statement made by the Prime Minister on Monday revealed that plan B is just sticking to plan A. Disappointingly, the Government are now experts in delaying and running down the clock. Evidently, nothing has changed.

In contrast, we could make some meaningful change by progressing with this Bill. As my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester highlighted last week, the Minister now has an opportunity to restore some order by presenting the current boundary proposal orders for the House to decide on. I wonder whether the Minister can enlighten us any further.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship again, Ms Dorries. My hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton makes an interesting point: he says that the Government are now experts in running down the clock. We have long feared that that is the status of this Committee, as well as—obviously—wider events in relation to the Brexit deal or no-deal scenario.

However, my concern this week is about the capacity of Departments to deal with matters such as the one before the Committee. The Minister has told us that we are waiting for the orders to be drafted on the current proposals in relation to the boundary review—those that were published in, I think, September or October, which are based on 600 constituencies—and until they have gone through and been decided on by the House, it would not be appropriate further to consider my hon. Friend's Bill.

My concern is that Brexit, the preparations for Brexit and, indeed, the preparations for a no-deal Brexit are sucking the life out of Departments. Right across Government, we see Departments in this position. I believe that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has 70 statutory instruments to be considered; the Treasury has 200 to 300. The Minister's own Department, the Cabinet Office, which I shadow, is starting to see statutory instruments rack up. My concern is that much as the Minister was certain before Christmas that the drafting of the orders was on time, it is no longer on time, because resources are being diverted to other affairs to deal with the possibility of a no-deal Brexit. I press it upon the Minister that the matters before the Committee need to be considered.

We are hearing now that the February recess might be cancelled. That would have one benefit: the Committee would meet for one extra week in February, which I look forward to. I would miss the time to be with my constituents and family in Chester, but the benefit would be that I got to spend the time with hon. Members on the Committee. Can the Minister give an assurance that work is continuing to progress on the orders for the current boundary proposals, so that the House may dispose of them one way or the other, and that the life is not being sucked out of the regular work of the Department as it appears to be being sucked out of every other Department of State by Brexit?

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries. I very much echo what was said by the hon. Member for City of Chester. This is a great day to be one of those folk who get obsessed about the procedures of the House, because we have a debate this afternoon on private Members' Bills. Hon. Members will have seen, on page 6 of the Order Paper, the motion standing in the name of the Leader of the House to provide extra days for consideration of private Members' Bills. That consideration will take place on 1 February, 8 February, 1 March, 8 March and 15 March. I think that that is rather hopeful for those of us who serve on this Committee, because I was rather of the view that we were about to approach a point in the parliamentary calendar at which, even if the Government had served up a money resolution and we managed to complete consideration in Committee of the Bill, there would be no further days for us to consider it in the main Chamber.

However, the Leader of the House has helpfully tabled a motion, which I expect will pass later today, that means that, if the Government table the money resolution now, I have complete confidence that the Committee will be able to whizz through the Bill and make any necessary amendments. We could then take it back to the Floor of the House on the dates set out by the Leader of the House.

Finally, has the Minister had any conversations with the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, who is also chairman of the Conservative party, about this issue? We know, as it has been briefed to the press today, that Conservative campaign HQ has been preparing for the possibility of a snap general election, so I am interested to know whether the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has had discussions with his colleagues about expediting plans for 600 seats.

If the Conservative party is serious about going back to the country, I suspect that such considerations will have taken place in the Department, perhaps amplifying my view that this Government are more interested in their own party affairs than those of the country.

The Chair: Ms Lee, do you want to speak?

Karen Lee (Lincoln) (Lab): Yes.

The Chair: The process is that, when Mr Khan sits down after his speech, you rise at that point to indicate that you want to speak, not later.

Karen Lee: I just want some guidance, please, Ms Dorries. We are on our 26th sitting and there are 16 people in a room that costs money to heat and light. On other

weeks, we have perhaps had 10 or a dozen people. There is a cost to that. I would like to submit a freedom of information request to find out what the cost, on average, might have been of all those 26 sittings. Can you or anyone advise me to whom I might submit that freedom of information request, please?

The Chair: Obviously, you cannot do that through me. I suggest you go through the Speaker's Office to make that request. Minister do you wish to respond?

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): I have no further update to offer the Committee, other than that the order is in progress.

Question put and agreed to.

10.7 am

Adjourned till Wednesday 30 January at Ten o'clock.

