

Debate Pack

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The legacy of Jo Cox

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1 Background - “More in common than that which divides us”

On 9 September 2021, in the House of Commons Chamber, there will be a general debate on the legacy of Jo Cox. The debate was proposed by Neil Coyle. The debate will take place in time allotted by the Backbench Business Committee.

Jo Cox was MP for Batley and Spen from the June 2015 General Election until she was murdered during the European Union Referendum campaign, on 16 June 2016.

Both Houses of Parliament were recalled on 20 June 2016 to pay tribute to her.¹ Members of both Houses highlighted one phrase from her maiden speech time and again as they remembered her. She had said:

we are far more united and have far more in common than that which divides us.²

MPs highlighted her compassion, spirit and energy; and the causes that she championed.

Jeremy Corbyn, then Leader of the Labour Party, concluded his tribute by looking to the future and saying: “Today, we remember Jo’s compassion and her passion to create a better world. In her honour, we recommit ourselves to that task.”³

Jo Cox continues to be remembered in Parliament, with many parliamentarians drawing inspiration from her words and actions. Since the beginning of the current Parliament until the summer recess, Jo Cox was mentioned on 129 occasions in contributions from members of both Houses.⁴

The current Speaker made a statement on the fourth and fifth anniversaries of Jo Cox’s death.⁵ Also on the fifth anniversary, Keir Starmer, the current Labour Leader, said:

today is the fifth anniversary of the death of our dear friend and colleague Jo Cox. Jo had already changed so many lives for the better. She was passionate about creating a fairer, more just world. I know she would have gone on to achieve so much more, and that she would have been so proud of the work of her foundation and what it is doing in her name. Jo and I were in the same intake into this House; we were friends

¹ [HC Deb 20 June 2016 cc1883-1900](#); [HL Deb 20 June 2016 cc1333-1348](#)

² [HC Deb 3 June 2015 c675](#)

³ [HC Deb 20 June 2016 c1885](#)

⁴ Parliamentary Search, [Members’ contributions referring to Jo Cox](#), 2019 Parliament

⁵ [HC Deb 16 June 2020 c623](#); [HC Deb 16 June 2021 c261](#)

and our children are around the same age. There is not a day that goes by when we do not miss Jo. I know that I speak not just for those on the Opposition Benches, but for many across the House, when I say that today we remember Jo. [Hon. Members: “Hear, hear.”]⁶

2 The Jo Cox Foundation

The [Jo Cox Foundation](#) was established in 2016 by her friends and family. It exists “to build a positive legacy for Jo and to create something positive from the tragedy that was her murder”.

Its vision is “for a kinder, more compassionate society where every individual has a sense of belonging and where we recognise that we have more in common than that which divides us.”⁷

The Foundation’s website explains how it seeks to put its vision into practice:

- The **Great Get Together**: an initiative to bring communities together every year on the weekend of Jo Cox’s birthday in June. It links to the Foundation’s vision for a “nation of strong compassionate communities”.
- The **More in Common Network**: groups across the UK working to promote Jo Cox’s powerful “more in common” message in their communities.
- The **Connection Coalition**: a network formed in April 2020 by the Foundation and others in response to the pandemic. It aims to “build a better future for everyone by building strong relationships and connected communities.”⁸
- **Yorkshire Projects**: Yorkshire-based programmes, currently focused on mental health and digital inclusion.
- **Civility in Politics**: work to promote respect and civility, inspire women and young people, and work across political divides.
- **Building a fairer world**: working with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to deliver Jo Cox Memorial Grants to projects focusing on women’s empowerment and addressing identity-based violence.⁹

⁶ [HC Deb 16 June 2021 c271](#)

⁷ The Jo Cox Foundation, [Our Vision, Mission and Values](#). The website also sets out the Foundation’s Mission: “The Jo Cox Foundation inspires and galvanises positive change at local, national and international levels. We do this by partnering with visionary individuals and organisations who share our commitment to the fairer, kinder world that Jo dedicated her life to building.”

⁸ The Connection Coalition, [Home Page](#). The Jo Cox Foundation founded the Connection Coalition alongside Mind, The British Red Cross, Facebook, Age UK, Nesta, Nationbuilder and The Cares Family

⁹ The Jo Cox Foundation, via the “Our Work” tab on the [website](#)

2.1 Loneliness Commission

The Foundation also describes the work of the cross-party Loneliness Commission, established by Jo Cox and Seema Kennedy:

Jo's vision was that the Commission would run for one year and work with charities, businesses and the Government to turbo-charge the public understanding and policy response to the loneliness crisis.¹⁰

The work was taken forward by Rachel Reeves and Seema Kennedy and at the end of 2017, the Commission's report, [Combatting loneliness one conversation at a time](#), was published.

The Jo Cox Foundation notes that the then Prime Minister, Theresa May responded "overwhelmingly positively" to the Commission's recommendations. She appointed Tracey Crouch as the new Minister for Loneliness and committed to creating a loneliness fund and commissioning an England-wide strategy for loneliness.¹¹

[Baroness Barran](#) is the current Minister for Loneliness.

2.2 Tackling intimidation

The Jo Cox Foundation has worked with the Committee on Standards in Public Life to produce a [Joint statement on conduct of political party members](#).

The [Elections Bill 2021-22](#) includes a new electoral sanction for those guilty of intimidating a candidate or campaigner. This follows concerns about increasing levels of abuse, threats or intimidation. The sanction will apply if someone is convicted of one of the offences of an intimidatory nature that are listed in the Bill. This is only if the offence is committed because the victim was a candidate or campaigner. Someone convicted may be served a disqualification order that prevents them from standing for, being elected to, or holding certain elective offices for five years.¹²

¹⁰ The Jo Cox Foundation, [The Jo Cox Loneliness Commission](#)

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Library Briefing, [Elections Bill 2021-22](#), CBP 9304, 1 September 2021

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Press articles etc

The following is a selection of news and media articles relevant to this debate.

Please note: The Library is not responsible for either the views or the accuracy of external content.

[Cyclists' gruelling 280-mile bike ride raises funds for Jo Cox Foundation](#)

Evening Standard

Isobel Frodsham

1 August 2021

[Covid-19 has left young people battling loneliness and many without friends](#)

Mirror

Aletha Adu

9 July 2021

[Leadbeater says politics must change after 'abuse and intimidation' in campaign](#)

Evening Standard

Dave Higgins

2 July 2021

[Hundreds turn out at Halifax Piece Hall for Great Get Together event inspired by the late Jo Cox](#)

Yorkshire Post

Susie Beever

21 June 2021

[Loneliness minister: "It's more important than ever to take action"](#)

Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport | Office for Civil Society
[press release]

17 June 2021

[Jo Cox: Manchester exhibition 'does her proud' says father](#)

BBC News

18 May 2021

['More in Common: in memory of Jo Cox' exhibition set to open](#)

Batley & Birstall News

Dominic Brown

16 May 2021

See also, People's History Museum, [Exhibition | More in Common: in memory of Jo Cox](#)

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Parliamentary Questions

Social Capital

25 January 2021 | HL Deb 25 January 2021 cc1385-1386

Asked by: Lord Stevenson of Balmacara

My Lords, the noble Baroness, Lady Barran, is also Minister for Loneliness. Does this ONS report [Social capital in the UK: 2020] signal any adjustment to the Government's current loneliness strategy, which was set up in memory of Jo Cox MP? If so, can she point to any policy areas that might be adjusted?

Answering member: Baroness Barran | Department: Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

I start by saying that it is an enormous honour to be the Minister for Loneliness. My inbox on loneliness is fuller than on any other subject that I am responsible for, and it is something that absolutely touches every one of us. Our strategy will continue predominantly along the same lines; namely, talking about loneliness and the stigma, and making sure that funding goes to organisations that connect people. During the pandemic we have brought together a group of around 70 organisations in our tackling loneliness network that are advising us on particular themes in relation to young people, digital, place and older people.

Veterans: Covid 19 Support

7 December 2020 | HC Deb 7 December 2020 c548

Asked by: Sharon Hodgson

I thank the Minister for his remarks. As he knows, many of our veterans up and down the country have faced loneliness and isolation as they shield during the pandemic, and that feeling will only get worse as we approach Christmas, with the reality of not being able to see family as usual. Will the Minister support and promote the Jo Cox Foundation's "Great Winter Get Together" to help our veterans who may be experiencing loneliness this winter?

Answering Member: Johnny Mercer | Department: Ministry of Defence

I would be delighted to support the initiative in the name of my friend, Jo, who was in the same parliamentary intake as me. Loneliness is an acute problem, particularly at this time of year, and I am especially aware that our veterans, who often depend on the sort of face-to-face contact of such things as cognitive behavioural therapy, will have been challenged by the specific

circumstances we find ourselves in. I would be delighted to support that effort.

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