

Guide to lobbying your local MP

What is lobbying and why is it important?

MPs are powerful national figures, who have a duty to represent you and our members as their constituents. Please contact your local JBB or regional champion if you would like to receive a profile of your local MP.

Lobbying your MP is important for a number of reasons:

- To influence a decision which is about to be made by parliament;
- To gain their help with your campaign - MPs can take a number of actions: submit parliamentary questions, write a letter to the relevant minister, and/or arrange a meeting with the minister responsible.
- To force an MP to show where their allegiances lie

You can lobby your MP by:

- Setting up a meeting
- Writing a letter or email
- Using the local media.

How to find out your MP's contact details

Who is my MP?

You can find out who your local MP is by typing your postcode into this website <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/>

We are also setting up a tool on our website so that our members can easily lobby their MPs individually – check on www.polfed.org for more information.

What is my MP's address?

You can write to your MP at the House of Commons by addressing your letter:

MP's name
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Most MPs' email addresses are as follows: MP's surname, followed by MP's initial @parliament.uk.

Eg. if your MP was Tony Blair, his email address would be blairt@parliament.uk but there are some exceptions to this rule!

What is my MP's phone number?

If you want to find out any other details about your MP (eg. constituency address, surgery hours etc), you can phone them or their secretaries by calling the House of Commons Switchboard on 020 7219 3000 and asking to be put through.

Write a letter to your MP

The most usual way of contacting your MP is by letter or email. Many MPs still gauge public opinion on an issue by the quantity of letters or emails they receive, so it is always worth

writing. It is important to plan your letter or email carefully. Always ask something concrete of your MP: for example ask them to vote a certain way, or request a meeting.

If there is a particular reason as to why an issue is important to you, then say so;

MPs always take notice of letters which have an individual or personal angle.

Tips for letter writing:

- Be concise and clear;
- Focus on one issue rather than covering several;
- Give brief background information on the issue concerned;
- Where possible, try to provide evidence of local concern. Local petitions, surveys and statistics particularly add weight to your case and enable your MP to fight your cause with others more effectively;
- Be polite and fairly formal;
- It is best not to bombard your MP with many copies of the same standardised letter or email. The more effort that you put into arguing and personalising your case, the more likely you are to get a positive response.

Visit your MP

A meeting with your MP will let you discuss an issue in more detail than is possible in a letter. To arrange the meeting, write a simple letter to your MP asking for an appointment with them either at the constituency surgery or at the House of Commons. State the date and time of the requested meeting and the issue. If the meeting is at the surgery, follow the letter with a phone call a few days later. If the meeting is at the House of Commons, you should receive a letter inviting you to meet the MP.

You could also invite your MP to attend one of your local Federation meetings, award ceremonies or events. Make sure any meeting is well structured, with thoughtful contributions made by officers, local Federation reps or other invited speakers on the issue you want to highlight. Why not offer them a tour of the station or to shadow officers out on duty? Nothing focuses the mind quite like being close to the action!

Bear in mind that (contrary to popular belief) MPs are generally extremely busy, so you need to invite them at least a month in advance.

Before the meeting:

- Organise what you want to say. What are the key points you want to make?
- Prepare a short briefing, outlining the case point by point, which you can give to the MP at the end of the meeting
- Make sure you have all relevant papers and supporting evidence with you as well as photocopies for the MP

At the Meeting:

- Be clear in your argument
- Try to get firm commitments from the MP, and try to establish exactly what they will do

After the Meeting

- Write to your MP, thanking them for their time, and for any promises of support they have made. It is a good reminder!
- There are several ways in which your MP can pursue your case. Firstly, they could draft and sign an Early Day Motion (EDM). An EDM is a motion given by an MP, which, although it has very little likelihood of actually being debated in the House,

allow MPs to record their opinion on a particular issue and canvass support for it from other MPs.

- Secondly, an MP can lay down a Parliamentary Question (PQ). PQs are used by MPs to ask for information from Government ministers about Government policy. Opposition MPs are often particularly keen on PQs, as they can be used to catch the Government out, or expose weaknesses in their policies.
- If you require further information about these procedures, there are detailed factsheets available at www.parliament.uk/parliamentary_publications_and_archives/factsheets.cfm.
- **Publicise your lobbying efforts in the local media.**
If the meeting was successful and the MP gave their support, publicity keeps the issue alive and at the forefront of debate. Your MP will then be on the record as giving their support and backing the issue. The campaign will be strengthened by being seen to have a powerful ally. If your MP has refused to support the case, this could also be used to gain local publicity if you criticise them publicly.
- We'd love to know how the meeting went. Send a quick e-mail to our Parliamentary Researcher and Policy Advisor Emma Bingham – emma.bingham@polfed.org – as well as being interested in how you got on, this also helps us to be consistent in our communication with parliamentarians.

How to make an impact!

Key messages to use:

- 20% cuts will have a drastic effect on the service the public will receive;
- HMIC latest report says we will lose over 16,000 officers and similar numbers of police staff over the next three to four years;
- 84% of the public are happy with the current service provided by the Police;
- According to the public survey the public do not see the police as 'solely fighting crime' - a sharp contradiction to the Conservative policing policy;
- Uncertainty over police pay and conditions is severely affecting police morale.

Things to look out for:

- MPs with a small majority will be particularly susceptible to a well-organised campaign as they do not want to be seen to oppose a cause which is supported by public opinion (especially amongst their constituents).
- Government ministers are likely to have more influence with the Home Secretary and Prime Ministers than ordinary back-benchers and are therefore particularly worth targeting.
- MPs that have visited their local police station and have previously been keen to associate themselves with officers, possibly because crime and anti-social behaviour is a key issue with constituents.

What not to do:

- Publicly criticise your local MP or the Home Secretary in a personal attack. This will not encourage support but may discourage other supporters. Keep any objections focused on policy.
- Publicly call for the right to take strike action, this may lose public support. It is the inability of police officers to take industrial action that distinguishes our concerns from all others in the public sector.
- Send emails/letters/postcards on behalf of other constituents.

And of course be careful of tone:

- Express disappointment that the current situation has arisen.
- Adopt a moderate and constructive tone for all your correspondence. You should avoid strong or rude language and appear reasonable at all times. Any criticism should be delivered more in sorrow for the wider public than anger over vested interests.

Lobbying local authorities:

Lobbying councillors and local authority officers is very similar to lobbying MPs. The key is always to inform them to influence them. However the rules as to how you can make formal representations to a council varies from one authority to another.

Search on the authority website for the office of the chief executive who should be able to point you in the right direction. You should also be able to find details of all the elected councillors on there – if not they are listed in *the Municipal Journal*, which should be available in your local library.

Most councillors have weekly, fortnightly or monthly surgeries – usually in the town hall, library or local party HQ. If you have trouble contacting your local councillor, turning up at their surgery might be your only option.

The same principles of lobbying apply – make sure your communications are locally-focussed, evidence based, well-structured and courteous. Involve the local media as much as possible – this is the life-blood of local councillors – so try and build up and maintain a good rapport with local reporters.