

YOUR TOOLKIT FOR LOBBYING MP'S

First things first, what's an MP?

MP stands for Member of Parliament. Parliament is made up of the current Government (Labour) and members of other political parties, who are still your representative in Parliament, but belong to a different party so do not form part of the serving Government. (The main opposition to the Labour Government being The Conservative party and The Liberal Democrats, but there are also MP's from parties such as the BNP, UKIP, Green Party etc) Every MP is given an area of the country to represent, called their constituency, to find out who your MP is go to www.theyworkforyou.com

Boring bit over!

SOME BASICS

- An MP splits their time between their constituency office and the parliament office where they have to attend a certain number of debates in The House of Commons each week.
- If it is a local issue write to the constituency office, if it's a national issue, write to the Parliamentary address.
- Be aware that the MP's office will store all correspondence, and once you've written to them a few times they will create a file for all your correspondence!
- Your MP is obliged to chase matters on your behalf; if it is something they can help you with, whether that's locally or in Government.
- You are entitled to a free tour of the Houses of Parliament by your MP, having forewarned them of course! And also you are allowed into the House of Commons at any time to watch a debate. Every week every MP has 2 tickets to PMQ's (Prime Ministers Question time) if you contact the Parliamentary office of your MP they can book you in for free.
- You can request information on the number of debates they've sat in on, how many Q's asked in The House of Commons, and now also for details of their expenses.
- If you ask your MP to pass on your concerns/letter to any minister, including the PM, they will.
- Depending on how senior and busy your MP is, they are more 'the face' of the office of people who work for them. Although letters and emails will be signed off by the MP, and they conduct face to face surgeries, they do not have a catalogue knowledge of all their casework because they have researchers, staff and interns to deal with the nitty gritty of the case work. So don't get peeved if they don't recognise you in the street, or you draw a blank look when you catch them in the street and ask how their progressing with your case! These staff are experienced and hard working, so don't complain if you're not getting direct correspondence from your MP in person, you're normally in good hands!
- MP's can table Early Day Motions (EDM) which are good for "publicising the views of individual MPs, drawing attention to specific events or

campaigns, and demonstrating the extent of parliamentary support for a particular cause or point of view." Just write to your MP and say "I would like you to table an EDM on this subject because...."and convince them! Or you can ask them to sign an EDM that's already been tabled. Look up all EDM's [here](#).

- Use an MP as extra weight to your campaign/cause/struggle locally. I even dealt with a woman asking her MP for help with dentist fees, often as soon as an MP steps in, matters get resolved a lot faster. They can also affect council members who belong to the same party as them, as they have likely worked together before, and belong to the local branch of the same political party.

5 ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS IN LETTER WRITING TO MP'S

1. Every minister in the Government, even the Prime Minister (PM) is an MP, so this means some are busy representing their own constituents as well as running a Government department, this means there is NO POINT writing to an MP that isn't yours, directly. It is seen as more correct (and I believe more effective) if you write to your MP asking them to pass on your concerns/suggestions/enquiry to the relevant minister and department. This way the tradition and correct form is maintained AND your MP knows about your issue too. You are more likely to get somewhere this way because you aren't just a random member of the public, you have your MP as your face in Parliament, and you never know they might get a chance to converse face to face and drop it into the conversation! It is essential that they stay in touch with what most bugs their constituents, help them out by keeping them in the loop!

SO, if you want to reach a particular minister/department, with more authority, just say in your letter to your MP, "Please pass on my letter with its concerns/suggestions etc to the Minister for _____" and then they are obliged to do it!

2. Don't ramble, on paper you will look like a mad man! Being concise is highly appreciated in a busy office. A quiet and considered letter is far more effective-and refreshing-than an intense and ill-thought out tirade that looks like your heart's just hit the paper. Remember they are in a formal position (where they are actively encouraged not to take a hugely emotional stance but instead plug rational arguments), so if they can see a formal argument in your issue it is far easier for them to take it on.
3. Handwrite it. They **rarely** receive handwritten letters and cards, and when they do they really sit up and take notice-they stand out a mile. It's far more personal, it says a lot about you and how strongly you feel, and it's much harder to ignore.
4. Even if you want to, don't mouth off about MP's expenses unless it's directly relevant to that person or your issue. It gets their back up and they've heard it all before.
5. Young people and children go down a treat in an MP's office. They are rarely contacted by a young person-i.e. anyone under 30, so it's a novelty and a rare treat. It also looks great for their election campaign literature to have young faces who the MP has helped on it! Cynical but true, if you can somehow make it clear your age in your correspondence, you'll get a reply much faster!

DONT BE PUT OFF IF....

- You don't get a reply immediately; the average turnaround for a written reply is within 3 weeks: it depends on each MP though. If it's urgent give the constituency office a ring.
- You get a generic reply; Chances are if you sent a generic email so did lots of other people. Therefore at some point, to save valuable time, the office will generate an official party line and generic response which can be personalised as is necessary. Even though this acknowledgment may seem offhand and tokenistic, they file every correspondence and if they receive lots of a particular email or postcard they will act on it, so it is worth doing. Even though it's more like a head count, it will reach the MP's attention. (Remember that a hand written letter is still far more effective.)

And finally, there is no substitute for face to face contact, you're much more memorable in person than just a name on paper, if you can get to an advice surgery then do, if not, try and visit them in their office.

Now let's get out there and change things!