



HOUSE OF COMMONS



Get your voice heard:
a guide to campaigning at Westminster

Get your voice heard: a guide to campaigning at Westminster

A Member of Parliament (MP) is the elected representative for an area of the United Kingdom called a constituency. MPs split their time between working in Westminster and their constituency. An MP has to balance the demands of representing the people of their constituency, supporting the goals of their political party and following issues that are important to them as an individual. There is no formal 'job description' and each MP finds their own balance of these roles.

This booklet provides advice and information about how to work with MPs to raise awareness of your campaign at Parliament.

Foreward from Mr. Speaker

I want to pay tribute to the campaigners and campaign groups that do so much to help inform and stimulate debate in the House of Commons.

On a daily basis, I listen to contributions from Members of Parliament that reflect the ideas, concerns and aspirations of a staggering range of campaigning individuals and organisations. They each provide invaluable knowledge and practical experience of the multitude of issues that Parliament considers as it holds the Government to account and makes new laws.

I wish to strongly encourage campaigners and campaign groups to continue to get involved with the work of Parliament and I very much hope this guide will help you to do so effectively.

Rt Hon John Bercow, MP
Mr Speaker
House of Commons



1. First steps

1.1 Building a relationship with your local MP

If you are thinking about campaigning at Parliament on a specific issue, your local MP should be your first point of contact. Once elected, an MP's job is to represent the people of his or her constituency (constituents) in Parliament, whether or not they voted for him or her. You only have one MP so even if you disagree with their party's views and voted for another candidate, or didn't vote, your MP is still there to help you with any issue for which Parliament or central government is responsible.

FAQ: 'WHAT'S THE BEST WAY TO CONTACT MY MP?'

You can find your MP's contact details:

- on the Parliament website, www.parliament.uk;
- by calling the House of Commons Information Office on 020 7219 4272;
- at your local library;
- at your local town hall.



You could then make an appointment to see them, send them an email or write them a letter. You could also call the MP's office to ask for advice on how they prefer to be approached.

Your MP will try to be as helpful as he or she can but, since they represent on average 90,000 constituents, and has many Parliamentary duties to attend to, this will limit time which can be spent on constituency matters.

FAQ: 'WHAT SHOULD I DO IF MY MP HASN'T ANSWERED MY EMAIL / LETTER?'

MPs receive a large amount of correspondence, so cannot always reply immediately. If you haven't heard back from them after about 2 weeks, you should follow up your email or letter with a phone call, or make an appointment to go and see them at their local surgery.

1.2 Ensuring your campaign is appropriate for your MP

MPs are all different and they all work differently. That is why it is important to get to know your own MP and find out how they prefer to work.

FAQ: 'WHAT HAPPENS IF MY MP IS THE PRIME MINISTER / THE SPEAKER / A MINISTER?'

Your MP can still represent you on specific constituency issues. Although they may not be able to speak out as freely about their views on your campaign, they may have significant influence on policy development. If it is not a constituency issue, you could also try talking to another MP who has an interest in the subject (see sections below).

MPs are there to help only with issues for which Parliament or central government is responsible. Often a better first step would be to contact your local councillor or representative in your devolved Assembly or Parliament (see section 4).

2. Events

2.1 Inviting MPs to events

Holding an event can be a good way to launch or raise awareness of your campaign and the work you are doing. If you would like to invite an MP to your event, think carefully about your aims.

- What value will they add to your event, and what would you like to gain from their attendance?
- What will their role be?
- What will they get out of the event?
- How does this fit with their specialist interests?
- Is this the best event to invite them to, or are you planning another which would be more appropriate?



FAQ: 'WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO INVITE AN MP TO ATTEND OUR EVENT?'

Give them as much notice as you can. Their diaries are usually very full, so the earlier you invite them, the better. Explain exactly why you would like them to attend, and what their role will be. Make it clear whether you are expecting any media coverage. Parliamentary business may take precedence, so they might have to send apologies at short notice. Have a back-up plan, in case they are unable to attend.

2.2 When and where to hold your event

As a general rule, MPs will spend Monday to Thursday in Westminster and Friday to Sunday in their constituencies, although this will vary between MPs and depends on where their constituency is. During recess, they may be in the constituency during the week. You can check recess dates and sitting hours for Parliament at www.parliament.uk, or by calling the House of Commons Information Office on **020 7219 4272**.

Convention requires MPs to inform the local MP if they are planning to visit their constituency. If you are inviting more than one MP to a constituency event, bear this in mind and alert the local MP if other MPs accept the invitation.

3. Finding interested MPs

You should always contact your local MP first to raise an issue at Parliament. However if your campaign is of general or national importance, you could also contact other MPs who may be interested in supporting you. Don't contact all MPs in the country; they receive a lot of correspondence from their own constituents and mass mailings will not get their attention.

You can find out which MPs are interested in the issues raised in your campaign in the following ways.

3.1 Select Committees

Select Committees concentrate on specific Government departments or specialist subjects. The committees run inquiries and report on issues within their particular area. You can respond to any call for evidence from a Select Committee. If there are no current inquiries which are related to your campaign, you could look up the members of a relevant Select Committee and ask whether they could draw your campaign to the Committee's attention. You can find a complete list of Committees along with details of current and past inquiries, and contact details for committee members and staff at www.parliament.uk



3.2 All Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs)

APPGs are informal groups set up by MPs and Members of the House of Lords, each focused on a particular subject or country. They can form and join APPGs to develop their knowledge on a topic and meet others interested in that subject. You can find a complete list of APPGs and their contact details at www.parliament.uk. If there is a group related to the theme of your campaign, you can ask for a full list of members from the Chair or Secretary. These MPs and Peers have expressed an interest in the subject, and might therefore be interested in your campaign.

CASE STUDY: Rachel Sears, Campaign! Using All Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs)

Campaign! is a project working with young disabled people across the South East of England. In February 2011, we brought two Campaign! groups to Westminster to meet Parliamentarians. We wanted to invite

MPs and Peers who were interested in disability to meet the young people and listen to their views. We looked up the members of the APPGs on Disability and Learning Disabilities and invited all the Qualifying Members to the event, explaining that they had chosen to



invite them due to their membership of the APPG, rather than targeting them randomly. We also invited the local MPs. The response was very positive, and we were able to put together 2 panels of 8 Parliamentarians including MPs from all parties and Members of the House of Lords.

Campaign! is an Accentuate project funded by Legacy Trust UK. It is a part of the Create Compete Collaborate ambition, delivered by Creative Junction.

3.3 Early Day Motion (EDM) signatories

EDMs are formal motions submitted for debate in the House of Commons. However, very few EDMs are actually debated. They are used by MPs to place on record his or her opinion on a subject, and to gauge the extent of parliamentary support for a particular cause or point of view. MPs can table an EDM, and other MPs can add their name to that motion to show their support. You can see all EDMs from the current and previous sessions at www.parliament.uk, and search them by MP or by key word. Look for an EDM relevant to your campaign and contact MPs who have added their names to it, as they have displayed an interest in the issue.

3.4 Questions and debates

Parliamentary Questions and debates are used by MPs to ask for information from Government departments, press for action on certain issues and hold the Government to account. As with EDMs, you can see what questions have been asked at www.parliament.uk. If MPs have asked questions relevant to your campaign, you could contact them asking if they would be interested in supporting you. Equally, if MPs have spoken in a debate relevant to your campaign, that may suggest that they are interested in the subject and you could try getting in touch with them.

FAQ: 'WHAT ARE E-PETITIONS?'

E-petitions allow an opportunity for your campaign to be discussed in the House of Commons. Since 2011 e-petitions have led to debates on the use of wild animals in circuses, prisoners' voting rights and the European Union referendum.

If an e-petition receives at least 100,000 signatures it can be considered as a subject for debate but this is not guaranteed. The Backbench Business Committee decides which e-petitions are debated but a Member of Parliament must make the case for their consideration. Availability of time and cross-party support for the issue are also taken into consideration.

For more information on e-petitions: <http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/>

FAQ: 'HOW CAN MPS RAISE AN ISSUE AT PARLIAMENT?'

MPs will have personal preferences on what methods they use to raise a matter in the House. You can find more information about each of the methods listed below at www.parliament.uk or by requesting the relevant factsheet from the House of Commons Information Office. MPs can:

- Ask a Parliamentary Question of a particular Minister, either written or oral;
- Apply for an Adjournment Debate, during which a Minister must give a response
- Introduce a Private Members' Bill;
- Present a petition;
- Table or sign an Early Day Motion (EDM).



4. Who else could I contact?

4.1 Local elected representatives

Councillors are elected by the local community and are there to represent its views. Each represents an area called a ward. Their work includes holding surgeries to help local people, supporting local organisations, campaigning on local issues, and developing links with all parts of the community. You could speak to your local councillor about your campaign. Call or check the website of your local council for a list of names and contact details.

4.2 European elected representatives

Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are your representatives in the European Parliament. Their job is to represent your interests and those of your city or region in Europe. They do this by listening to people with local and national concerns, to interest groups and businesses. Where necessary, they question and lobby the Commission and the Council of Ministers. If you feel that your campaign resonates across Europe, you may wish to speak to your MEP and ask for their support. You can find the contact details for MEPs on the website of the European Parliament Information Office in the United Kingdom, www.europarl.org.uk, or by calling them on **020 7227 4300**.

4.3 Representatives in the devolved administrations

If you live in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland or London, you also have at least one elected representative working on devolved issues. In Scotland, Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) represent local or regional constituencies, as do Welsh Assembly Members in Wales and London Assembly Members in London. In Northern Ireland, you have one Northern Ireland Assembly Member to represent you. If your campaign is related to a devolved power, you could contact your MSP or Assembly Member about it. You can find out more about devolved powers and representatives at www.scottish.parliament.uk, www.assemblywales.org, www.niassembly.gov.uk or www.london.gov.uk

CASE STUDY: Ian Standing, Hands off our Forest (HOOF). Using the media as part of a campaign

We launched the HOOF campaign in 2010 in response to Government suggestions to dispose of the English Public Forest Estate. The Forest of Dean, where we are based, had fought this battle twice before, in 1981 and in 1993–94. Then there was no email or e-media; we relied on Royal Mail, the telephone and some press and TV coverage. This time we had fantastic local press coverage, national press and TV, our own website, Facebook and Twitter, plus an online petition which attracted over half a million signatures. E-media also gave us easy access to fellow campaign groups, allowing us to spark and teach new groups and to swap ideas with more established groups such as Lakeland and Cannock. This media campaign took place at the same time as campaigning and lobbying inside Parliament, and the combination of both prompted re-consideration from the Government regarding this issue.



5. Working with the media

As well as raising awareness of an issue in Parliament, use the media to get your message across to a wider audience. Traditional forms such as newspapers, radio and TV, and online forms such as dedicated campaign websites and social media campaigns, can all be useful in spreading the word and gaining support.

A question, debate or EDM in Parliament can be a useful foundation for a press release, news story or newsletter. A wide public response to a campaign, demonstrated through online followers on a social networking site, can also show Parliamentarians the scale of support for a particular issue.

To find out more about the work, history and membership of Parliament contact one of our Information Offices by telephone, by email or in writing or visit our website www.parliament.uk. We can:

- Answer your questions on how Parliament works.
- Provide detailed publications on Parliament's work and history.
- Give you help following debates and legislation in Parliament.

This guide has been produced by Parliament's Outreach Service

If you or your organisation are interested in free Parliamentary training, please contact Parliament's Outreach Service on **020 7219 1650** or email parliamentaryoutreach@parliament.uk

House of Commons Information Office

House of Commons

London SW1A 0AA

T 020 7219 4272

E hcinfo@parliament.uk

House of Lords Information Office

House of Lords

London SW1A 0PW

T 020 7219 3107

E hlinfo@parliament.uk

www.parliament.uk