

# Influencing and meeting your MP

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## Finding and contacting your MP

There's lots of ways to find out who your local MP is, a simple internet search of 'Who is my MP?' will give you lots of options. The most frequently used websites are [www.writetothem.com](http://www.writetothem.com) or [www.theyworkforyou.com](http://www.theyworkforyou.com) run by the charity mySociety and the Parliament website [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk).

Using these websites you can find out your local MP's email address, telephone numbers and twitter username. Alternatively you can ask the House of Commons directly on 020 7219 3000 or visit your local library or town hall.

## Contacting your local MP

Parliament suggests there are a number of ways of contacting your local MP. Many people prefer writing as it means you get to keep a record of what you've said. You can write to them directly at the House of Commons (London, SW1A 0AA) or via email.

All MPs have a local office in their constituency and also an office at the House of Commons. You can phone both of their offices directly. If you'd rather meet them in person then you can either arrange a meeting in your local area or attend an MP's surgery. Most MPs hold open sessions called surgeries where local people can talk to their MP about issues of concern. It's worth checking with your MP's office or on the MP's personal website when surgeries are and whether or not you need to book a slot in advance. There are two things to think about when planning a tactic; the impact on the group and the impact on the target and the other audiences.

## Arranging a meeting

The Refugee Council suggest that the best day of the week to meet an MP is Friday. Parliament rarely sits on a Friday so usually MPs head home to their constituencies. Likewise the summer period between the end of July and early September is also worth trying. When asking to meet your MP explain exactly what it is you want to talk about and offer them some dates and times.



'If you are speaking to your MP make sure you practice what you are going to say so that you're concise and don't waffle. Make sure you know what you want them to answer and respond to otherwise they'll try to take you off your point' Campaign Bootcamper Rob Punton on meeting his MP

# Getting the most out of a meeting

## Before the meeting

- Make sure you know how long you have with the politician so you can pace yourselves
- Plan the meeting so you decide who will start the meeting off and who is best placed to answer what questions
- Let the politician know in advance what it is you want to talk about, give them time to prepare. Consider sending a suggested meeting agenda so you can keep control of the discussion.
- Try to be clear about what exactly it is you are asking your politician to do (for example asking an MP to write an Early Day Motion). See 'Influencing MPs' below for some ideas). In the words of the MP Stella Creasy 'Tell me what you need me to do and why you think I would, and then I can help fight your corner'.
- Do some research on your politician beforehand. What are they interested in? Have they said anything on your issue before? Look them up on [theyworkforyou.com](http://theyworkforyou.com). The Stop Climate Chaos Coalition suggests you check in advance if they are the member of any related Committees or All Parliamentary Groups.
- The ideal sized group is roughly 5 to 6 people, any more and it becomes difficult to have a conversation.
- The campaign group Refugees Welcome suggest that your team should have a diversity of community representatives to show the strength of opinion on the issue.
- Have in mind an upcoming action or event that you can invite them to attend

## During the meeting

- One person in the group should have the task of keeping a record of what was said and who has agreed to do what. Make sure you explain what the issue is (and the social/political/environmental/economic costs), who is responsible, what your proposals are and what they can do
- End the meeting by summarising what actions you have both agreed to take

## After the meeting

- Send the politician a note summarising the meeting and what they agreed to do and by when
- Meet as a group afterwards to talk about what went well and what you might do different next time

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'I felt quite nervous as I felt he (the MP) had the position of power. As well as feeling very nervous I was also very shy. However, I did get a picture of him holding a banner which I wouldn't ordinarily have done. My tip is to have confidence as these people are there to represent you'

Campaign Bootcamper Rakesh Prashara  
on meeting his MP

# Influencing MPs

## What can you ask an MP to do?

There are lots of things you can ask your MP to do. Here are a few ideas.

### Early Day Motions

EDMs are a bit like petitions for MPs. They are described by the Parliament website as a formal request for a debate in the House of Commons, however 'very few are actually debated'. Their value lies in raising the level of interest in a particular issue. Your MP can be encouraged to add their name to another MP's EDM or to put forward their own. For example the campaign group Speak up for Libraries is asking MPs to sign an EDM on 'the urgent need to protect (library) services and staff from disproportionate cuts'. Friends of the Earth suggest EDMs are useful for the campaigner as they show what support a particular measure has and are a public commitment from an MP on a particular issue. All EDMs are listed on the Parliament website.

### Putting questions to government

MPs can ask oral questions in the House of Commons or submit written questions to the Government. For example asking what the government is doing about a particular issue, what its plans are or how many people have been affected by a particular problem.

### Pushing for a debate

The House of Commons holds lots of debates on a range of issues. The Backbench Business Committee allocates time for debates; your MP can try to persuade the Committee that having a debate on your issue is worthwhile. After successful lobbying the Committee granted a debate on the Hillsborough disaster.

### Other things you can ask your MP to do are

Speak at a public meeting or take part in a day of action

Write something for a local newspaper, newsletter or your website.

Put forward a Private Members Bill. This is essentially a proposal for a law that is put forward by an MP not by the government.

Suggest changes or amendments to a Government bill.

Vote on a particular issue.



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## Finding other interested MPs

The Parliament's Outreach service suggests you should always contact your local MP first, however, if your issue is of general or national importance its worth identifying other MPs who may be interested in supporting you.

They suggest three ways of finding out who these MPs may be.

1. You can look to see which MPs have signed any Early Day Motions (EDMs) that maybe relevant to your campaign, or
2. check who has asked any relevant questions in Parliament (you can search all EDMs and questions by topic on the Parliament website).
3. Alternatively you can check the membership of any All Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs) that maybe linked to your issue. APPGs are informal groups set up by MPs and Lords on a particular issue. There are over 630 of them on various issues from alcohol harm to zoos. If there isn't one for your issue ask your MP to set one up. There is an APPG on Jazz Appreciation so there's probably space for one on your issue too!

## Find out more

Have a look at 'Get your voice heard: a guide to campaigning at Westminster' from the Parliament's Outreach service

The campaigning group Global Justice Now has an activism briefing on Lobbying MPs and MEPs.

There is a Parliamentary Outreach Team that is able to come and visit your group and do a session to help you understand better how Parliament works. They can be reached at [outreach@parliament.uk](mailto:outreach@parliament.uk) or 020 7219 1650

To understand the process of how and when MPs vote in the House of Commons (a vote is also known as a division), have a look at the House of Commons Background Paper: 'Divisions in the House of Commons'

Finally, if you want to impress your friends with your advanced grasp of how MPs work get reading the website 'Working for an MP'

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