

# 4 | Taking an issue forward: getting in contact

Once you have found out who the best person to contact is, the next step is to get in touch. Writing to the parliamentarian is the best first step, and can be used to ask for a meeting. **This sheet provides information and tips on how to write to a parliamentarian and what a meeting might involve.**

## Write a letter to a parliamentarian

Sending a letter is the best way to convey detailed information and is most effective for drawing a parliamentarian's attention and support on a specific issue. It is also useful for the parliamentarian to have a written record of your concerns which their office will keep on record and reference. This is particularly important with MPs, as they deal with large constituency case-loads and receive many letters, phone calls, and emails daily. You can also email the parliamentarian, but it is advisable to write first and follow up with an email.

### Do your research

It is vital that you carry out research on the issue that you want to raise and also on the person you are contacting. It is good practice to show how your issue relates to current government policy and ensure that the issue raised is of relevance to the MP's or Peer's Party's policies.

- If the parliamentarian has a special interest in the area or has spoken on the issue then it is useful to refer to that in the correspondence.
- If a parliamentarian is going to take an issue forward locally or nationally, it is vital that the information that you give them is up-to-date and the facts are correct.

See Labour Party health policies here:

<http://www.labour.org.uk/health>  
<http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/index.htm>

See Conservative Party health policies here:

[http://www.conservatives.com/Policy/Where\\_we\\_stand/Health.aspx](http://www.conservatives.com/Policy/Where_we_stand/Health.aspx)

See Liberal Democrat health policies here:

<http://www.libdems.org.uk/policies/health>

### ► Tips for the letter

- Make sure the tone is polite, formal and the issues are described clearly and objectively. parliamentarians may not respond positively to angry or aggressive letters.
- State at the beginning why you are writing and what action you are hoping for (see Information Sheet 5: Taking an issue forward: What you might ask a parliamentarian to do).
- Try to keep the letter concise, and try to keep the length down to no more than 1 or 2 sides of A4. Add enclosures for more detail if necessary, but these should not be too long.
- Avoid any jargon and acronyms. If they must be used, explain them clearly.
- Keep it as straightforward as possible – do not assume that they have a detailed understanding of the key issues.
- Make it relevant by telling the parliamentarian how it affects them or their constituents. If it is your elected representative you may want to say: 'Your constituents will be affected by...' Where possible, it is also useful to provide evidence of local concern about the issue (for example, press coverage or letters you have received).
- Try to give personal case studies if possible.

**NB:** You should receive a reply within a few weeks, but if you haven't heard then you might want to follow up with their office.

# 4 | Taking an issue forward: getting in contact

A face-to-face meeting with a parliamentarian is one of the best ways to engage further with them on an issue. When parliament is sitting, MPs will usually spend most of their week in Westminster, often from late on Monday until Thursday evening. It is possible to meet with MPs both in parliament and in their constituency.

## Ask for a meeting

### ► Meeting in the Constituency

It may be easiest in terms of travel and time to meet your MP in their constituency. Appointments can be made for private individual meetings, or for meetings at a local 'surgery'.

The MP's surgery is an opportunity for a 'face to face' discussion and works in a similar way to a GP's surgery. You can make an appointment or just turn up on the day. This is a quick and guaranteed opportunity to meet your MP. However, if you do not have an appointment, you may have to wait for a while. The meeting will be shorter than a separately arranged private meeting and, as you are one of many meetings for the MP that day, it will be harder to engage them in a detailed discussion.

If you want to engage with an MP and outline an issue in detail, a one-to-one meeting outside of surgery hours is likely to be the most effective. You can arrange this through the MP's constituency office.

#### Where do I find out about surgeries?

MP's usually advertise their surgeries on their websites and they will also often be carried in local papers and advertised in local libraries.

### ► Meeting in Westminster

A parliamentarian may have more time to spend in a meeting in Westminster. The type of meetings can range from formal discussions in a meeting room to a meeting over coffee. If you arrange a meeting, you may want to confirm the arrangements with the MP's office before you attend the meeting.

**'Green Card'** - It is technically possible to meet with an MP in Westminster without arranging an appointment. You can 'Green Card' your MP. This means that you can turn up to parliament without an appointment, queue up until you get to Central Lobby, and then fill in a green meeting request form. The MP's office is then contacted and the MP may, if free, come and see you. This is not the best way to meet with your local MP though as it is not a guaranteed meeting, and any discussion is likely to be rushed.

## What happens at a meeting?

The style of the meeting can differ dramatically depending on the parliamentarian that you are meeting. Generally, they are an opportunity for you to outline the issue in more detail and say how you hope the parliamentarian might be able to help. It is best to be clear about the key points that you need to get across concisely. You can go in to more detail if the parliamentarian wants to discuss a particular issue further.

After the meeting it is a good idea to:

- Note the key points that were discussed
- Draft a thank you note to the parliamentarian mentioning any agreed action points

**NB:** It is important to note that all meetings with parliamentarians are 'Subject to parliamentary business'. This means that they can be cancelled or changed at short notice, even up until minutes before the meeting. Often a member of staff from the MP's office will take the meeting if they are called away.