

How to lobby your MP in parliament

This briefing explains the practical steps you need to take when lobbying your MP.

WHAT IS LOBBYING?

As constituents all citizens have the right to lobby their Member of Parliament simply by turning up when Parliament is sitting and requesting a meeting. However for a personal meeting it is usually best to make an appointment to see your MP in advance.

An MP should (and generally will) see you as a constituent rather than a trade unionist. An MP is meant to represent their constituent's interest, even if he or she does not agree with them. Remember that each MP has up to 90,000 constituents to look after, of whom you are just one. If you meet your MP it is best to be brief, clear and polite.

Remember that for the purpose of lobbying, your MP can be either where you work, where you live or both.

HOW TO LOBBY YOUR MP

You should make an appointment in advance. Most MPs will be present somewhere in the House after 1100am.

The nearest tube is Westminster, next to the Houses of Parliament. They are both within walking distance from New Prospect House, across Westminster Bridge.

At the House of Commons

If your MP has agreed to meet you, but has not given any details of where or when, or if you have not already arranged a meeting, you will need to queue outside St Stephen's entrance. This is the main entrance to the Houses of Parliament opposite the Green. The area is policed and security is tight. The police will only allow 100 people, including lobbyists and other visitors, into Central Lobby at any one time. You will be directed inside, pass through the airport-style security point and can proceed to Central Lobby in due course. It is advisable not to take any big bags in with you, but if you do, they will be scanned. Please be aware that toilet facilities are quite limited.

in the lobby queue. Go straight to security. Attend the meeting as arranged but do remember to bring evidence of your appointment, such as the confirmation letter from your MP.

In Central Lobby

On the left hand side of the Lobby is a reception desk staffed by officials from the Sergeant at Arms' Office. Go to the desk and ask for a Green Card. You will need to fill in your name, address and the purpose of your visit. Make a clear statement about your reason for visiting – for example, job cuts and closures in public sector research. This is important because if you do not meet with your MP the card is sent on to their office. The MP should then write back to you and obviously will need to know the point of your visit.

The desk staff will then take the card and send officials off to look for your MP in the Chamber and other committee rooms of the House. In the meantime you are left waiting in Central Lobby. If you do not know what your MP looks like, you will need to listen out for your name to be called over a loudspeaker. Central Lobby can be quite crowded at times – so keep your wits about you.

If your MP has not appeared within half an hour or so, it is unlikely they will come at all. Sometimes they will send staff on their behalf if they are caught up in another meeting. You must decide how long you want to wait, but if it is really busy, the longer you stay the less likelihood there is of others further back in the queue getting a chance to lobby.

Meeting your MP

When your MP does meet you, he or she may talk with you in Central Lobby or an adjoining corridor, or take you to the tea-room. It is best to be clear about what you want to get out of the meeting. So be as clear, courteous and brief as possible – let your MP know exactly what it is you want them to do. Try to make sure you:

- **Introduce** yourself and say where you live and work.
- **Thank** him or her for seeing you and say why you have come.
- **Establish** how much time you have.
- Clearly and simply **explain** about the campaign. Your MP may not be aware of the issues involved.

points that impact on your area and hand over the note.

- Most important, ask the MP if they **support** the campaign and state what they are prepared to do, such as lobbying ministers on your behalf.
- Be **specific** about what you would like your MP to do (see below) – eg write to the Treasury asking for civil servants to be treated fairly on pay, or to your Secretary of State asking them to defend specialist expertise within the public sector.
- Ask the MP to keep in regular **contact** with you and to give you copies of any responses they receive from ministers.

Support your points with local examples and they will strengthen your message. Your MP is more likely to be concerned about proposals that directly affect their constituency.

ACTIONS AN MP CAN TAKE

- **Write** to the minister concerned.
- **Meet** the minister – possibly with other MPs on an all-party basis.
- Ask a **written question** in the House.
- Ask an **oral question** in the House. Remember to brief your MP with a supplementary question.
- Put down an **early day motion**. They are seldom debated and are put down merely to publicise a grievance or point of view. Both you and the MP should encourage other MPs to sign the motion.
- Move an **adjournment debate**. There is a weekly ballot for these half-hour debates held at the end of business each day. The MP and any supporters can speak for 15 minutes, the minister then replies; there is no division of the House.
- Speak on the issue in one of the **general debates** in the House such as the Queen's Speech, Consolidated Fund Bills and Appropriation Bills.
- Speak in the debate on a **motion** relating to the subject if the issue has already been timetabled.
- Get the opposition party (if the MP belongs) to provide **debating time** for a motion on the understanding that there will be a vote taken.
- Get the opposition party to ask for an **emergency debate** under Standing Order 10 if the issue is on 'a specific and important matter that should have

urgent consideration.' In practice there are 2/3 such debates each year.

- Get the issue raised with the appropriate **select committee**. There are 19 of these in addition to standing committees of the House such as the Public Accounts Committee.
- Get the issue raised with any appropriate **all-party group** in the House.

After you have seen your MP

After you have thanked your MP for taking time to see you, he or she will usually show you the easiest way to leave the Commons. It is important that Prospect knows which MPs support the campaign. Therefore, after you have seen your MP please contact your branch or a Prospect steward so that we can record your feedback. Alternatively you can write or email jonathan.green@prospect.org.uk to let us know.

IF YOUR MP IS ABSENT

This happens quite frequently. Alternative ways to seek a meeting with your MP are:

Local surgery

First, contact the MP's local constituency office. Details of these are in local papers and telephone directories. Many (but by no means all) MPs have their own websites – these are usually linked to www.epolitix.com.

Details of the time and location of the surgery will also be available from the local library or local newspaper. Surgeries are often held in town halls, libraries or church halls. Some MPs insist on appointments and others operate a first-come, first-served system. It is useful to find out in advance what you need to do to secure a meeting. It is also advisable to find out if your MP has any special interests relevant to your campaign.

House of Commons

You can also choose to meet your MP on another occasion at the Commons:

- **write** again to them at the House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. Or,
- **phone** your MP's office at the Commons by calling the switchboard (020 7219 3000) and asking to be put through. Or,
- **email** your MP – for the email address visit www.theyworkforyou.com/mp/ or www.parliament.uk or ask the Commons Information Office (020 7219 4272).