

Lobbying your MP

What to include in the letter

Keep it short. The basic letter should be no more than one side of A4, although you can include additional information such as photocopies or scans of documents etc.

A carefully considered letter is far more effective, and will attract greater support, than an intense, ill-thought out tirade. Don't make more than one, or perhaps at most two key points and keep your argument factual, if possible backing it up with references to research documents, newspaper reports etc.

It's always good advice to plan your letter or email carefully, to leave it for a few hours and then to read it again before posting. That way you can be sure of making the points you intended to make. Ensure you include your full name and address.

It is always important that you ask your MP something concrete; for example ask them whether they would support moves to reform the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act, or you could just ask them to clarify their position and give reasons for it.

If the issue you are raising is of particular relevance to you, then ensure you highlight your personal interest because your MP is more likely to pay greater attention to it.

If you have a question for a minister, the convention is that you write to your MP and ask him or her to pass your letter or e-mail onto the minister on your behalf. You don't need to know the minister's name, just their correct title.

The **golden rules** when writing to your MP is to include contact details, be formal but polite, keep it short, make one or at most two points and ask a direct question to discover his or her attitude to the issue at hand.

Lobbying your MP

Lobbying is the process of attempting to influence the decisions made by officials in the government. As a member of the public, the best mechanism you have to do this is through the use of your local MP. If you don't attempt to inform and influence the decision making process then your concerns won't be heard or considered. Don't leave it to someone else to speak up for you, they might not exist!

Whether or not you voted for your local MP, or even agree with their political views, you can lobby them to gain their help. They are able to submit parliamentary questions, write a letter to the relevant minister, or even arrange a meeting with the minister responsible for the issue of concern to you. Lobbying also enables you to force an MP to show where their allegiance lies on a particular subject.

Other than writing to them, you can lobby your MP in a number of ways: You can set up a meeting with them or use your local media by getting them to raise the issue or highlight a campaign, challenging your MP for a response.

You can request a meeting with your MP at anytime. The easiest way, however, is to request an appointment during their 'surgery' hours. All MPs hold local surgeries, the dates, times and

locations are advertised in advance, you can obtain this information from their own website or by contacting their offices directly.

Needless to say if you do get a meeting with your MP, make an effort to be clean and presentable – that doesn't mean wearing a suit, but do wear clean, tidy clothes. Be polite and have your case prepared in advance so you can make your argument clearly and concisely. Take copies of any supporting documents with you to give to him or her.

It is important that we establish a solid base of supportive MPs and Members of the Lords. Once we have done this we will be able to utilise them and their position on the subject to lobby other MPs and Members of the Lords.