

Contacting an MP

a political guide for meetings and individuals



This briefing gives advice on how to engage with politics, and in particular contacting your elected representatives. It provides some suggestions for raising an issue with your local Member of Parliament.



Your Member of Parliament (MP) may be able to help you raise awareness of a political issue or to change legislation.

A total of 650 MPs are elected to the House of Commons. Each MP represents an area of the UK containing an average of around 75,000 voters. Some MPs represent parts of densely populated urban areas, while others represent geographically large rural constituencies.

In Scotland and Wales some powers are devolved to the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly.



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For more information or additional copies, contact Jessica Metherringham using the contact details on page 4.

A large print edition is also available; please contact publications@quaker.org.uk or call 020 7663 1162.

Britain Yearly Meeting is a registered charity, number 1127633.

Interested in writing to your Member of Parliament?

Here are some of the points you may wish to include.

Including your address ensures that they know you are a constituent. There is a strict parliamentary convention that MPs should only correspond with their own constituents.

[Your home address]

[Date]



[Name of MP]
[Member of Parliament for XXXX]
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Every area of the UK is represented by a Member of Parliament. Find out who your MP is and what the constituency is called by going to www.writetothem.com and entering your postcode.

Dear [name of MP]

You may wish to write as a meeting, or as an individual. If you're writing as a group, test this within your meeting and consider the Speaking Out policy agreed by Meeting for Sufferings.

I am writing to you about the issue of xxxxx.

I am a member of XXX Quaker Meeting, and I am aware that others in the meeting have similar concerns.

Why do you believe what you do? Is there any key fact or crucial information, or is it a matter of conscience? Consider looking at www.quaker.org.uk for up-to-date information or Quaker faith & practice for key quotes from Friends.

On this issue, I believe that...

I would like to ask you to raise this issue in Parliament/ vote against [a particular] Bill/ensure that it becomes a manifesto commitment.

Please pass my letter on to the Secretary of State or the Minister responsible for these issues.

What can they do? Is there a particular piece of legislation?

Please let me know your own views.

Can they raise your concerns with someone else?

In Friendship

[Your name]

You may wish to handwrite "Dear..." and "In Friendship".

Suggestions for writing your letter

Whether you have regular correspondence with your MP or have never contacted an elected representative, these hints and tips may be useful.

Before you write

Who are you contacting?

Consider whether your MP is the best person to approach. If this is a purely local issue then your local councillor may have more influence. If it's about EU legislation then your MEP might be able to help. You could also contact your Member of the Scottish Parliament if you live in Scotland or Assembly Member if you live in Wales. You might also consider writing to a member of the House of Lords.

Looking at voting records

Looking at an individual's voting record (www.theyworkforyou.com) can give you a good idea of their view. However, voting records can be deceptive – sometimes an MP votes against a Bill because they disagree with the detail of the particular legislation rather than the broad idea.

When you write your letter

Making your request clear

Are you asking for a specific action? While some MPs are happy to reply with their opinions on an issue, others prefer to be asked to do something specific, such as table a Parliamentary Question.

Speaking to the office

Remember that most elected representatives employ staff, and your letter is likely to be read by them first. Persuade them that this is an important issue worth an MP's attention.

Ask for a PQ or EDM

MPs can ask a Minister a Parliamentary Question (PQ) about any subject. MPs can also lay Early Day Motions (EDMs), which normally recognise an achievement or call for a debate. You could suggest that your MP use these to raise awareness.

Making assumptions or appearing argumentative

It's easy to appear to accidentally make assumptions about an elected representative's view, or to appear to be asserting your own view without considering their experience. A deliberately careful and measured tone can often work better.

Detail or big picture?

Consider whether the recipient of your letter is more likely to be persuaded by detailed facts or by overarching arguments. Looking at a recent speech or article by them could provide you with a good sense of whether detail or big picture is best.

Ask for your letter to be passed on

Your MP may not have expertise in the subject you're writing on. If you ask your MP to pass your letter to the Minister then you may receive a more detailed reply.

Personal touches

Tell your MP why you care about the issue. A personal story can be much more powerful and persuasive than generic examples or hypothetical scenarios.

On specific issues: what are you asking for and when?

Is this the right time?

Before you write, consider the timing. Has this issue been in the media recently? Is there a Bill seeking to change legislation around the issue? Other churches, charities or campaigning groups may have prepared template letters you could use.

Providing information

If there's an upcoming debate about an issue you have direct experience of then speak with your MP. Before debates MPs ask their staff for key facts, so a letter highlighting some important points may be welcomed – particularly if there's also a local connection. (If the MP doesn't agree with you, this might be an opportunity to change their mind.) You should send this about a week before a debate.

Party conferences

You could also send information to MPs just before the political party conferences each autumn – especially if you happen to know that they'll be speaking at a conference event.

Local events and press

Many MPs write a regular column for their local paper, or have their own newsletter. Tell your MP about something good a local community group is doing and they might include it in their column or on their website.

Other activities: meeting your MP

A face-to-face meeting with your MP can be an excellent way to understand their approach to politics and what matters most to them.

Surgeries

Most MPs hold weekend surgeries in their constituency. These are for constituents to ask an MP for help with a problem or to discuss a particular topic of concern.

Meeting in Parliament

If you're in London during the week, try asking to meet your MP in Parliament.

Ask as part of a group

Are there others in your community who have similar concerns? Asking as a group can be a useful way of demonstrating that the issue has wide support.

Extending an invitation

If you're writing as a local meeting, why not invite your elected representative to meeting for worship?

And finally...

Try not to write too often...

Writing to your MP is a good way to build a relationship, but it would not be sensible to write more than once a month. MPs receive a lot of correspondence and can start to look unfavourably on too many letters from one person.

...but do keep writing

A slow and steady correspondence can sometimes change opinions. Think long term and recognise that sometimes political change takes a long time.

Don't be disheartened

It might be that your MP doesn't agree with you and isn't open to your arguments. Try to find shared values and acknowledge that many people do have different views – your MP could be representing the views of others in the constituency very well. If you don't feel that you share any common ground with your MP, you could try writing to other elected representatives, such as your councillors or your MEPs.

Got a question?

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Visit www.quaker.org.uk/public-issues



Where to find more information

Find out about what happens in Westminster, Edinburgh and Cardiff at www.parliament.uk, www.scottish.parliament.uk and www.assemblywales.org.

Go to www.theyworkforyou.com to see what MPs have spoken about, and www.number10.gov.uk to see recent Government press releases. Use www.aboutmyvote.co.uk to find out more about how your representatives are elected and www.writetothem.com to contact them.



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