

# Lobbying MPs and MEPs



Sam Crawley, Brighton and Hove WDM

**Lobbying decision makers is one of the most effective ways to influence government policy. As a constituent, your elected representatives are duty bound to listen to your concerns.**

Constituency lobbying can:

- Keep the profile of development issues high amongst MPs, Members of Scottish Parliaments (MEPS), Welsh Assembly Members and MEPs
- Raise issues with ministers via MPs thus building political pressure to change policy
- Make MPs aware of WDM and our key campaigns
- Make local people aware of WDM and empower them to get involved
- Be used tactically to influence MPs working on particular issues or with a particular interest
- Bolster and lend credibility to lobbying done by WDM's staff

## **Find out who your local MP is**

The first step to lobbying your MP is to find out who they are. You can do this by searching by postcode with this website: <http://findyourmp.parliament.uk>

You can also ring the House of Commons information office on 020 7219 4272.

Welsh constituents can find out who their Assembly Members are at [www.assemblywales.org/memhome.htm](http://www.assemblywales.org/memhome.htm)

Scottish constituents can find out who their MSPs are at [www.scottish.parliament.uk/msps.aspx](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/msps.aspx)

Many groups find that they have members in more than one constituency and can therefore lobby more than one MP. This is good news as you can have more of an impact in your area if you are lobbying two or more politicians.

## **Find out about your MP**

The more you know about your local representative the better able you will be to lobby them effectively. You can find out which committees they're on, and what their areas and countries of interest are by using the House of Commons website:



## **BRIGHT IDEA**

Follow your MP and MEPs on Twitter – you can follow what issues they're interested in and tweet them directly.

findyourmp.parliament.uk

All MPs have their own website where you can find out about their latest news and the issues they care about and are working on.

You can also give their assistant researcher or secretary a ring. Explain that you are a group working on world poverty issues in the constituency and that you wondered if your MP has any related interests, background or sits on any relevant select committees. The more you find out about your MP the more you will be able to make your case in an appropriate and effective way.

### **There are three main ways of lobbying your MP:**

- i. Meetings
- ii. Letter writing
- iii. Events

### **Lobby meetings**

Meeting your MP is the most effective way to lobby them. MPs are very busy people so it is advisable to set up a meeting well in advance. Meeting your MP can be an exciting and for some a slightly nerve wracking experience, but don't be intimidated as MPs are human too. There's a good chance you will know more about the issue than your MP.

#### **Before the meeting**

- Think about why you are meeting your MP.
- Find out more about your MP – what are their interests? What is their party's policy on this issue? Do they sit on any relevant committees or parliamentary groups? Are they interested in development or environmental issues?  
www.theyworkforyou.com is a really useful website for this as it has links to MP's voting histories and the EDM's they have tabled and signed, as well as their interests. It's an easy way to build up a picture about your MP.
- Prepare three bullet points for each of the following questions. This will help you stay focused and clear about what you're doing:
  - i. What are you going to say?
  - ii. What are you going to ask them to do?
  - iii. How are you going to convince them to take action?

#### **At the meeting**

- Arrive early and make contact with the MP's staff (they can be useful if you are hoping to have future meetings with your MP)



- Explain the issue and ask them for their opinion about it
- Get them to agree to take action – make sure you note down a definite follow up action or they will try to wriggle out of it!
- Ask them what you can do to help them with the issue e.g. would they like a briefing on the issue? Do they have follow up questions WDM can answer and provide more information on?
- Get a photo with your MP – ask a staff member to take a photo of you and your MP. You can hold up an action card or placard to make it more eye catching.

#### **After the meeting**

It's always good to send your MP an email or letter thanking them for meeting you and reminding them of what they've agreed to do. You can also include any further information they requested.

#### **Write to your local paper**

Send a report and photo about your meeting to your local paper. Joint press releases are good if possible, with a quote from both your WDM group and the MP.



### **GROUP EXPERIENCES**

We try to pair people up when lobbying politicians, which gives us more confidence, and particularly for those new to the idea. By arranging to visit one of their regular advice surgeries we can always get to see them, though it may have to be kept brief.

Manchester WDM



Writing letters and getting stories published in your local newspaper is a good way of influencing your MP, even if you haven't met with them. MPs like to be updated on the concerns of their constituents and so pay attention to local news.

### Let us know how it went

It's really useful for campaign planning and communicating with WDM groups and supporters to know how your meeting went. Email [activism@wdm.org.uk](mailto:activism@wdm.org.uk) or the relevant campaigner with any feedback.

## Letters

You can send a letter to any MPs that you do not get to meet.

### Tips for writing to your MP:

Letters must contain your address so the MP can check you are in their constituency. Otherwise, your letter will be discarded.

Begin your letter by saying who you are and what your concerns are. Explain why you are writing and give examples and facts.

As with meeting your MP in person, tailor the letter to their interests. For example, if they are sitting on a committee which addresses your issue, explain why your request relates to their committee's responsibilities. Always ask for a response.

Try to limit yourself to one, or at most two sides of A4 paper.

### What next?

If you met your MP, or they came to an event, send a follow-up letter thanking them, summarising what you discussed and asking them to keep you informed of what actions they're taking.

## Events

If you are looking for a more creative way to engage with your MP then why not get your MP involved in an event? You should follow the same process of



## TOP TIPS

- Do your homework: Find out all you can about the MP and plan what you want to say.
- Keep it focused: Make sure you stick to the campaign rather than go off topic! Don't be afraid to make the MP stick to the topic too if they're waffling.
- Be polite: It may be very frustrating if they don't give you a straight answer, but just be confident and politely say you don't think they have answered your question.
- Keep calm but if they do ask you a tricky question which you cannot answer, let them know that you can find out the answer for them. This will also be a good reason to continue your dialogue.

**Remember: The MP's job is to listen to you, but not necessarily agree with you, so don't take it personally if you walk away without their support.**

writing a personalised invitation letter to the MP as if you were organising a meeting. It may be a good idea to flesh out some of the ideas you have, such as checking if certain venues are available, or other speakers before inviting the MP.

Once you have the agreement of your MP then you can work to publicise the event. It is a good idea to think about getting in contact with other local groups, as well as calling local journalists.

## Lobbying MEPs

The European Parliament is a key decision-making body for the European Union. MEPs are influenced by a wide range of factors, including their political party, their EU party bloc, lobbying by different



## FURTHER READING

'They Work for You' is a really useful website which is updated with the latest information about elected representatives. You can read debates, see what's coming up in parliament and sign up for email alerts when there's past or future activity on someone or something you're interested in.

[www.theyworkforyou.com](http://www.theyworkforyou.com)



## GROUP EXPERIENCES

Glasgow WDM have used a café conversation style of meeting for organising hustings with MEPs:

Each of the candidates is given a very brief slot to introduce themselves to the whole audience (sometimes we've included a particular question - e.g. introduce yourself and tell the audience what you would do about international development/climate change). Then each candidate sits at a different table for the rest of the evening, with the audience moving around to talk to them. You can let people move fairly freely, but it works quite well to have defined time slots and remind people to change tables. That way nobody monopolises a particular candidate, and all the candidates get equal attention which keeps them happy.

We've sometimes allowed the candidates a very brief final word to the whole audience at the end as well depending on time. We provide refreshments to make it a nicer, more informal atmosphere (e.g. we tried to provide cakes from different EU countries for the last EU election).

### Glasgow WDM

industries, as well as lobbying by individuals and businesses within their own constituency.

You can lobby any of the MEPs in your constituency regional area, and you can link up with other WDM groups in the area to do some joint lobbying.

As with lobbying MPs, before you approach any MEP it is important to do your homework. What is their political party? What are their interests? Have they been involved in any other campaigns recently? What committees do they sit on? All this information can heavily impact on how you may approach them.

MEPs are very busy people so it is advisable to set up a meeting well in advance. MEPs' time is split between three main locations; out of four weeks, two are spent in Brussels, one in Strasbourg and one back in their constituencies.



Manchester WDM

### Find out who your MEPs are

You can find out who your MEPs are by using the European Parliament website: [www.europarl.org.uk](http://www.europarl.org.uk)

To organise a meeting, start with a letter or an email explaining what you are concerned about and requesting a meeting at their UK constituency office. Allow a week or two for them to respond, but if they don't, follow up with a telephone call.

### The surgery

The other way to meet your MEP is at their surgery. Most MEPs will hold surgeries across their region to meet with local residents. There is always strength in numbers, so the more members of your WDM group that go, the better. It is best however to try to meet your MEP outside of surgeries, as these could be busy and crowded occasions.

The World Development Movement campaigns against the root causes of poverty. Our network of local groups and activists keeps global justice on the agenda in towns and cities around the UK.

WDM's activism team supports local campaigning. Contact us:  
World Development Movement, 66 Offley Road, London SW9 0LS  
020 7820 4900 • [activism@wdm.org.uk](mailto:activism@wdm.org.uk) • [www.wdm.org.uk/activism](http://www.wdm.org.uk/activism)

