

A GUIDE TO LOBBYING YOUR MP



WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO LOBBY?

Everybody has the right to contact their Member of Parliament (MP) to raise their concerns. MPs can then raise these issues on behalf of their constituents.

MPs hold a great deal of power and influence. They make decisions on every part of our lives both outside and inside the workplace. Their support can assist in getting local campaigns media coverage and helping to exert pressure on the relevant bodies.

With further cuts coming, pay restraint and attacks on our trade union rights, we need now more than ever to make sure our voice is heard in parliament.

The new bulletin 'Fire & Rescue Service Matters' aims to do that. We encourage all members to use the bulletin to meet their MP and discuss the issues it raises. You can find electronic copies of 'Fire & Rescue Service Matters' via <http://bit.ly/FRSmatters>.

Making regular contact with your MP will help to build a rapport, continuously highlighting the work firefighters do and the scale of the continuous cuts. We need them to put the fire and rescue service at the top of the agenda.

Sustained lobbying does work. Sustained pressure from firefighters in 2014 forced a parliamentary debate on the Firefighters Pension Scheme. We made MPs sit up and take notice of our dispute.

HOW TO LOBBY YOUR MP?

Once you have the contact details for your MP, you then need to decide how you want to lobby them. There are several options:

- A face to face meeting with them
- An email or letter
- A phone call
- Increasingly campaigners are now using social media to contact their MPs

You can arrange a meeting by contacting your MP and requesting one. Your MP will offer to meet you in their constituency office, where they hold advice surgeries or in Westminster. Advice surgeries usually take place on Fridays and sometimes at the weekends. Details of your MP's constituency surgery can be found on their website.

Letters can be sent to their constituency address or to parliament (Houses of Parliament, House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA).

Phoning your MP's office can also be beneficial. You are more likely to speak to a researcher or a member of their team but this is still a good chance to pitch your case and answer any questions they may have. This allows you to put the MP's office on the spot by asking them what they are going to do about the issue. Always follow the phone call up with an email outlining your key points. Engaging in this way helps to make your case stand out from others.

Over 580 MPs have twitter and nearly 500 are on Facebook. Some MPs will ignore these messages seeing them as 'spam' but many will engage with you or note what you are saying. Lobbying MPs on social media can help to create a buzz around the issue by getting colleagues to retweet and share the posts. This shows MPs the strength of feeling that an issue has.

WHO IS IN PARLIAMENT?

There are 650 MPs. Each one represents a constituency in the UK. Each MP has around 90,000 constituents.

After the May 2015 general election, The Conservative Party have a slender majority, holding 330 of the 650 seats.

The other parties have the following number of seats:
Labour 232; Scottish National Party 56; Liberal Democrats 8; Democratic Unionist Party 8; Sinn Féin 4; Plaid Cymru 3; Social Democratic and Labour Party 3; Ulster Unionist Party 2; UKIP 1; Green Party 1; Independents 1.

The final seat is held by the Speaker of the House.

LOBBYING YOUR MP IN PARLIAMENT

You must enter through Cromwell Green visitor's entrance on St. Margaret's Street, a two minute walk from Westminster tube station. You will then have to queue to go through security scanners. This can take up to 30 minutes so make sure you leave enough time. You won't be able to take banners and other campaign materials into parliament.

If you are going to parliament then you should contact your MP in advance requesting a meeting. All you need to do is outline your concerns, the date and time you would like to meet and leave your contact details so they can get in touch. If you are attending parliament for an organised rally, make sure you tell them that and tell them why the lobby has been called.

If you have arranged a meeting, when you arrive, go to the information desk in Central Lobby and say you have arrived to meet your MP, take any written confirmation of the meeting you have.

If you have not arranged a meeting with your MP you can still 'green card' them when you get there. This can be done at the information desk in central lobby. Officials there then inform the MP that their constituents are in central lobby. If your MP is not in parliament a message will be left for them and the desk will inform you. If your MP does not meet you they must respond at a later date in writing. Don't be disheartened if your MP does not show, they still know you are there and will be told about the issue.

WHEN IS IT BEST TO LOBBY IN PARLIAMENT?

The best day to go to parliament is Wednesday as it coincides with Prime Ministers Questions.

Most MPs tend to be in Westminster as a result. TV cameras are also more likely to be there.

You will be unable to meet your MP in Westminster when parliament is in recess. These dates are available here:

<http://bit.ly/1KiSiYE>

Find out how your MP has voted in the past and what they have said in parliamentary debates:

www.theyworkforyou.com

WHAT TO SAY TO YOUR MP?

Your MP may not have a wealth of knowledge on the subject. They are unlikely to understand all of the technical fire service jargon so make sure your correspondence is accessible to them. Avoid using acronyms. Write clearly and concisely. They receive thousands of letters. They are more likely to take notice of a short letter that makes the argument in a few succinct points.

Research your MP, make sure you know what they think about the issue generally and use this to your advantage. Plan out your strategy before you meet them. There is little point wading in with an argument that the MP will completely disregard. Think about what you are going to say and how you are going to use statistics and facts at your disposal. Make some brief notes and use the resources on the FBU website to help.

MPs will only meet and discuss with their own constituents, there is little point contacting other MPs. They will meet you as a constituent, however you should make it clear in your meeting and correspondence that you are a firefighter and a member of the FBU.

MPs and the public have a lot of respect for firefighters. Most will value your comments about the service. However your MP will expect you to put forward a rational neutral position. Try not to let your own emotions cloud the debate. Make sure you explain the detrimental impact that the issue is having on their constituents.

Make sure your communication is clear, ordered and to the point. MPs get thousands of letters and will be more likely to focus on one that is well written and explains clearly what the issues are.

HOW TO CONTACT YOUR MP?

Find your MP here:

<https://www.writetothem.com/>

Find your MP's contact details:

<http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/mps/>