

Lobbying - Hints and Tips

Many individual people and organisations have issues they wish or need to take to their local Councillor or MP (lobbying). This information sheet gives some ideas for how you can get your point across.

There are 4 ways to lobby: by post, by phone, in person and on-line.

Lobbying by post:

This might not be effective. The person you are contacting only has to say they have received the letter and are considering the content, if they want to avoid responding.

Lobbying by phone:

- It is hard to keep a record of lobbying by phone, and the person you are speaking to can easily put you off.
- If you really want to lobby by phone, prepare notes of what you want to say beforehand, but practice them so you don't sound like you are reading from a script.
- Make sure you are able to take note of what the person you are speaking to says, but remember it is illegal to record phone calls without saying you are doing that.

Lobbying in person:

- It is harder for the person you are lobbying to be evasive or not respond. Face to face can also be more uncomfortable for the person you are lobbying.
- MPs hold Advice Surgeries in their constituencies and can take up constituents' issues and concerns with relevant minister.

- Councillor Advice Surgeries provide an opportunity for any ward resident to go and talk to their Councillor face to face. Your Councillor will discuss any concerns or problems relating to council services and listen to your views on issues that you feel are important.
- Advice surgeries: Councillors hold 1 a week; MPs hold 1 a fortnight when Parliament is sitting.
- If your Councillor refuses to meet with you, the next step is a complaint to the monitoring officer, who for most local authorities (but not all) is the Chief Executive.
- If they are a local Councillor, and do dismiss you, you could say you will have a journalist and photographer with you next time. Bear in mind, their response to this might be, unless the journalist and photographer live in the ward they cannot come into an advice surgery.
- Decide whether you want to go to an advice surgery (most are drop ins), or make an appointment. It is sometimes worth going along to a surgery, to do the same as everyone else.
- Ask for an appointment if you don't live in a Councillor's Ward.
- MPs have assistants with them. When on their own, Councillors tend not to be primed, so Councillors have less protection.

Lobbying on-line:

- Lobbying online is easily accessible. If you don't own your own computer, most libraries, resource centres and internet cafes have internet enabled computers.
- E-petitions are an easy way for you to influence government policy in the UK. You can create an e-petition about anything that the government is responsible for, and if it gets at least 100,000 signatures, it will be eligible for debate in the House of Commons. Go to: www.epetitions.direct.gov.uk

What do you want?

Be clear about what you want from the person you are lobbying. Is it: to listen; to directly intervene; or to change things? Or are you trying to educate them, challenge them or get them on board as allies?

If you want them as allies:

- There is no point being hostile and aggressive if you want them on your side.
- Provide Councillors with on-going information if you want them as allies, the more you contact them, the more they notice you.
- Invite Councillors to your events.
- If you get a good response, write a letter to the post section of the local newspaper, to thank the Councillor and say they've done this ... and are brilliant.
- Acknowledge when a Councillor or MP attends an event. It recognises the interest they have shown in your work and promotes what you do as well.
- Get the Councillor or MP to do something you can thank them for, even if it's not exactly what you want that time. It will encourage them to give you more support.

Help yourselves, and help them to help you

- Send information in advance, unless there is a good reason not to do so.
- Give Councillors and MPs no more than 2 A4 sides of bullet points, do not write dense paragraphs.
- If you are not able to send information in advance, leave something with them at the meeting.
- When contacting Councillors or MPs in any way, make sure you get a response in writing.

- If you meet with Councillors or MPs, ask for confirmation in writing afterwards.

Their knowledge and experience:

- Don't assume that Councillors and MP's will be familiar with the issues that you wish to raise. Maybe, provide them with some background information.
- Don't assume you know what they think or know – check it out.
- If they say “I have a disabled relative or friend ...” you can personalise it by saying “Well you will understand this ... and if it hasn't happened to you yet then ...”
- Don't ask people to do things that are impossible. Do you want an effective representative or do you want a martyr.
- If they say “if I do that, the consequence is ...” for example, being de-selected, listen to them.
- You may have to appreciate the fact that representatives may not want to get involved if it could affect their position (for example, being de-selected).

Know the system.

Councillors have 3 responsibilities (note, they don't do all of these at once):

1. To represent you as an individual.
2. To form policy.
3. To monitor and scrutinise the effectiveness of policies.

If you are asking them to change a policy, they will ask for evidence that it is needed. You may wish to reply that they should find the evidence, as they have the resources.

- Be aware of what committees each Councillor sits on: scrutiny or other committees. Research what these committees do.
- Most Councillors will have fairly specific not generic (that is general) responsibilities, so don't assume that they are responsible for all aspects of the issue in hand.

- Lobby political parties as well as Councillors as this is where some policies will come from.

If asking Councillors to change policy, remember they will take it into their political group/party for discussion first. Formation of policy is usually discussed within political groups before going to a council meeting.

You could write to the area political party; ask if your issue is something that needs to be discussed through their group. If the answer is yes, ask how you can engage with the group.

Remember Councillors operate in a political system. If there is a 'whip' in operation, they have to vote or decide based on what their party tells them.

Note: scrutiny of a policy is not whipped, that means there is no pressure from the party to vote or decide a particular way.

How to find your Councillor or MP

You can find your local MP or MEP by visiting the government's own website at: www.findyourmp.parliament.uk

You can find your local Councillors by visiting www.direct.gov.uk and typing in your post code.

Bolton:

Democratic Team, Room 207/209 Second Floor, Town Hall, Victoria Square, Bolton, BL1 1RU

Telephone: 01204 331 039

Email: councillors@bolton.gov.uk

Web: www.bolton.gov.uk and click on "Council and Democracy"

Bury:

Democratic Services, Bury MBC, Town Hall, Knowsley Street, Bury. BL9 0SW;

Telephone: 0161 253 5000

Web: www.bury.gov.uk and go through the A-Z of Services

Or [www.twitter.com/burycouncil](https://twitter.com/burycouncil)

Manchester:

Members Services, Town Hall, Albert Square, Manchester.

Telephone: 0161 234 3235

Email: members.services.office@manchester.gov.uk

Web: www.manchester.gov.uk/councillors

Or www.twitter.com/mancitycouncil

Oldham:

Members Secretariat, Civic Centre, West Street, Oldham. OL1 1UG

Telephone: 0161 770 3000

Web: www.oldham.gov.uk/your_community/getting_involved

Or www.twitter.com/oldhamcouncil

Rochdale:

Committee services, Rochdale Town Hall, The Esplanade, Rochdale. OL16 1AB

Telephone: 01706 924 704

Email: council@rochdale.gov.uk

Web: http://www.rochdale.gov.uk/council_and_democracy.aspx

Or www.twitter.com/rochdalecouncil

Salford:

Democratic Services Manager, Customer and Support Services directorate, Civic Centre, Chorley Road, Swinton M27 5DA

Telephone: 0161 793 3009

Email: committee.services@salford.gov.uk

Web: www.salfordcouncillors.info

Or www.twitter.com/salfordcouncil

Stockport:

Stockport Council, Town Hall, Edward Street, Stockport, SK1 3XE

Telephone: 0161 217 6024

Minicom: 0845 644 4306;

Email: stockportdirect@stockport.gov.uk;

Web: www.stockport.gov.uk

Or www.twitter.com/stockportmbc

Tameside:

Council Offices, Wellington Road, Ashton-under-Lyne OL6 6DL

Telephone: 0161 342 8355

Web: http://public.tameside.gov.uk/forms/know_your_councillor.asp

Or www.twitter.com/tamsidecouncil

Trafford:

Trafford Council, Talbot Road, Stretford, Manchester. M32 0YT

Telephone: 0161 912 4250;

Minicom: 0161 912 2102;

Email: democratic.services@trafford.gov.uk

Web: www.trafford.gov.uk/councillorsandcommittees/councillors

Wigan:

Wigan Council Town Hall, Library Street, Wigan, WN1 1YN

Telephone: 01942 244991

Web: www.wigan.gov.uk and follow "Council and Democracy" or 'petitions'

This information sheet has been produced by Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People.

This is also available in your preferred font size, Braille, audio and electronically from:

Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People

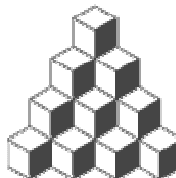
B.E.V.C, Aked Close, Ardwick, Manchester. M12 4AN

Tel: 0161 273 5154

Email: info@gmcdp.com

Web: www.gmcdp.com

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