



# How to influence your elected representative

Living Streets has wide influence and good relationships with Westminster, Holyrood, Cardiff Bay and Whitehall and as a result we are able to influence the current agenda. Our work with politicians helps us to achieve our mission of creating a walking nation with streets fit for walking.

The work we do can be enhanced and amplified by our supporters campaigning locally on the ground to make change happen, helping to grow a national movement. Influencing your Representative is one way of trying to make an impact and create change. Elected Representatives can be influenced in many ways including phone calls, e-mails, letters, face to face meetings and e-actions. This guide will provide a brief overview of how to reach and influence your Member of Parliament (MP), Assembly Member (AM), Member of Scottish Parliament (MSP), Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) or councillor.

## Writing to your MP, AM, MSP, MLA or councillor

Representatives receive hundreds of emails and letters every day from a variety of people. A personalised letter to your local Representative will be valued by them and the staff in their office. A personalised letter demonstrates that you care enough about a particular issue to address your concerns directly to your Representative. Obviously more effort goes into writing a letter than clicking send on an e-action.

There are a few key points to remember when you write to your Representative which will make sure you maximise the effect of your letter or email.

1. **Make it clear you are a constituent by providing your address** – your letter or email will be taken more seriously if they know you can influence whether they stay elected or not.
2. **Have a clear ask** – ask for something specific that they can do to help.
3. **Be concise** and try to keep your letter to one side of A4.

If you are writing a campaign letter or email to ask your Representative to support a Living Streets campaign, we will usually provide you with a short briefing that outlines the issue and gives some key points that will help you back up your argument.

It is also good to follow up a noncommittal response from your Representative (usually they are along the lines of “I appreciate your concerns...”), but with no indication about how they feel about the subject. This is especially crucial when you are trying to get them to vote a certain way or sign an Early Day Motion (EDM).

## Telephone lobbying

There are occasions that call for contacting your Representative by phone. It can be a useful way of discussing something with your Representative (or their staff) if you are unable to make a surgery visit.

Some basic tips when calling your Representative:

1. **Plan what you're going to say** – before you pick up the phone, make a few notes of the key things you want to say. This will help you articulate clearly what you want to achieve.
2. **Be prepared to leave a message** – using the notes you made to plan the conversation is a helpful way to leave an effective message.
3. **Introduce yourself and make clear you are a constituent** –you will be given more time if you distinguish yourself from being just another campaigner.
4. **Find out who you are talking to** – elected Representatives don't often answer their own phone. It's worth finding out which member of staff you are talking to in case you need to follow the phone call up.
5. **Make your case succinctly** – elected Representatives' offices tend to be quite busy, so they or their staff will want to know quickly what it is you would like the Representative to do.
6. **Have a back-up plan** – think of it as a negotiation situation. If you can't get them to agree entirely to your ask then what's the next best thing? For example, if you would like the Representative to sign an EDM and their staff tell you that they never sign them, then ask if they would be willing to support the motion in principle, or would be willing to take up the issue with a minister on your behalf.
7. **Be polite** – always thank the Representative or researcher and leave any contact details if they have said they will follow up for you.

### Contacting your Councillor, AM, MSP, MLA or MP

You can contact your MP or Councillor through this website:

<http://www.writetothem.com/about-yourrep>

You can find out your MP's contact details (including Parliamentary and constituency offices) at <http://findyourmp.parliament.uk>.

Find your AM: <http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/mgMemberIndex.aspx?bcr=1>

Find your MSP: <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/msps.aspx>

NB. Elected Representatives are generally in their constituencies from Thursday evening, so it may be worth starting with the constituency office if calling on a Thursday or Friday, as they will be able to get hold of the Representative sooner than the parliamentary staff.

## Face-to-face campaigning

Face-to-face lobbying is one of the most nerve-wracking methods of campaigning, and it is something that quite often takes a bit of practice to get right. For this reason we only ask supporters to undertake face to face campaigning if they feel comfortable to do so. However, it's the single best way to influence most Representatives and is one of the big reasons why we need supporters like you to help.

### Meeting your Representative

The best chance for you to get a meeting with your Representative is at one of their constituency surgery meetings. Representatives can hold surgery meetings when, where and how frequently they like. The best thing to do is to visit their website and find out the dates and times of their constituency surgery. You can find out the address of your Representative's website by visiting this page: <http://findyourmp.parliament.uk> or <http://www.writetothem.com/about-yourrep>

As there are usually a lot of constituents that want to meet with the Representative, most will cap each appointment to 10 minutes, meaning you have to be prepared and succinct with your points to get your argument across successfully.

Some Representatives like constituents to make an appointment in advance, while other operate a first come first served basis, so it's always best to call your Representative's office first to check how they run theirs.

### Before the meeting

It's always a good idea to research your Representative and the subject you're approaching them about thoroughly (for example, you can find information on their voting record and key interests at [www.theyworkforyou.com](http://www.theyworkforyou.com) as well as on their website). Living Streets' website can also help you with information on the campaign, such as key facts and figures and the main concerns we have. This will help you to make a strong case for your campaign ask.

### The meeting itself

Some pointers to help your meeting go as smoothly and successfully as possible:

1. **Make an effort** – look presentable (this doesn't necessarily mean wear a suit though), be punctual and thank the Representative for making the time to meet you.
2. **Think about your body language** – remember that this will have a big impact on the message that your Representative takes away.
3. **Keep the meeting organised** – if you are in a group, nominate one person to facilitate the meeting, do the introductions and keep the meeting on track.
4. **Use the time well** – you will probably only have 10 minutes, so it's a good idea to have a list of points you would like to make beforehand to ensure that you cover everything.
5. **Listen** – remember to show that you are open to counter-arguments but beware of politicians who like the sound of their own voice – keep your agenda in mind.
6. **Take notes** – It will be useful to make notes from the meeting, including action points. You may want to reiterate these points at the end of the meeting to check understanding and agreement.

7. **Do not guess** – it is better to be honest if you are unable to answer a question. You can always come back with more information afterwards. You may wish to send the Representative a copy of one or more of our policy briefing papers or factsheets, which are available to download on our website.

8. **Tact and diplomacy** – obviously, basic rules of etiquette apply. Always thank the Representative again as you leave.

Crucially, make sure you leave having asked the Representative to *do* something, for example:

- To support Living Streets" campaign objectives.
- Ask him or her to keep in regular contact with you and to give you copies of any responses they receive from ministers about the matter.

### **Follow up**

It's usually a good idea to follow up the issue with your Representative after the meeting. This can be a simple thank you, and outlining what you felt were the outcomes of the meeting and the agreed action points. This will help to remind them of the issue and also show that it is something you take seriously.