



# Public Affairs Guidance

## Influencing your elected representatives

Living Streets has wide influence and good relationships with Westminster, Holyrood, Cardiff Bay and Whitehall. We also work with Combined Authorities, Mayors, local authorities and elected councillors across the country. Our work with politicians helps us to achieve our mission of creating a walking nation with streets that are better for walking.

Our network of passionate Local Groups and campaigners form the core of our work to influence change. Working with your elected representatives is one key strategy to achieve your aims and create better streets and neighborhoods for pedestrians. 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 elected officials, whether they be a Member of Parliament (MP), Senedd Members (MS), Member of Scottish Parliament (MSP), Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) or councillor.

More on this below, but we can help you best when we know what your group is working on. We ask that you inform us ahead of any formal meetings with your MP and liaise with us before sending any correspondence to a minister or shadow minister.

### Key points to consider when working with an elected official:

1. **Make it clear that you are a constituent** – you will be taken more seriously if they know you are able to vote for them. Provide your address at the beginning of any initial letter or email.
2. **Have a clear ask** – ask for something specific that they can do to help. This may be to write to a minister on your behalf, come to a meeting held by your Local Group, or to raise an issue in the House of Commons etc.
3. **Be concise and polite.** Try to keep your initial invitation to one side of A4, present your points clearly, and take a constructive tone. The purpose of your communication is to build a relationship, not win an argument. Remember that and you can work on the persuasion later.

4. **Tailor your messaging to the audience**, your writing should be informed by a whole host of factors. Some more advice on that below.
5. **Focus on the issues of the day**. Make sure your arguments are relevant to the headline political issues of the day. For example, our recent briefing has focused on economic arguments for active travel given the ongoing cost of living crisis.

### **Writing to your MP, MS, 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.

Remember that your aim is to build a relationship with the official. Keep your tone constructive and emphasise ways that you can work together, rather than just voicing criticisms. This is important on social media, too (our full social media guidance can be found [here](#)).

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 implement/support a specific policy.

### **Writing for your audience**

Tailoring your communication to your audience is a crucial skill. This will be determined by a number of factors, it is important to ask the following questions:

#### **1. What party does the official belong to?**

Consider framing your arguments in a way that might appeal to a member of that party - whether an official is Labour, Conservative, SNP, etc. should determine how you approach your messaging.

For example, if you are speaking to a Conservative official, this might involve focusing on the opportunities for high street revitalisation or ‘levelling up’ through increased active travel. Shape your arguments to suit those who are listening.

#### **2. Do they hold any specific briefs? E.g. are they a cabinet lead for a certain policy area, or a member of any committees?**

Whether the official holds any specific brief will determine which policy areas they are most interested in. Imagine you have four meetings arranged with the following council leads: transport, public health, environment/climate change, and business.

Your meeting with the transport lead will be an opportunity to focus on issues such as pavement infrastructure and you might share the benefits of walking as a means to reduce congestion. With the public health lead, you could focus more on the benefits of

walking to our wellbeing, both physical and mental. With the environment and climate change lead, it may be better to highlight how walking can reduce emissions and frame your case in terms of transport decarbonisation. Finally, the business lead may be more interested in the type of arguments found in [our Pedestrian Pound report](#), namely that increased footfall can boost retail sales by more than 30%.

These subtle changes of focus are quite straightforward but can go a long way in your influencing work.

### **3. Have they said or published anything publicly on the specific issue of concern or on walking or active travel more broadly?**

Before you write to an official or meet with them, it is useful to know where they stand on relevant issues. Are they already an ally or will you will need to be more persuasive? This knowledge can be useful in determining both what you hope to achieve from building this relationship, and can also shape which issues you choose to lead on.

For example, let's pretend you are meeting with an official who is very concerned about road safety but has little interest in pavement parking. They will be much more receptive if you lead with campaigns relevant to their areas of interest, meaning that you might engage them first with arguments for a 20mph speed limit or school streets. You could still tackle other issues later in your meeting or letter, but this might be the most productive route to get them on side.

### **4. Does the official have the power to enact the change you are asking for?**

As we noted above, it is important to have clear asks when you write your letter or enter your meeting. Before you can form your asks, you need to know what the official is responsible for. If they do not have responsibility for the policy area of concern, you may be better placed contacting someone else or using this contact as an ally to reach out to the relevant decision-maker. This could be a particularly useful avenue if your local official is a member of the same party as the relevant portfolio holder as the two will often be familiar with one another.

## **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 you to undertake face to face campaigning if you 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 people like you to help.

## **Meeting your Representative**

There are a number of ways to meet with officials you hope to influence. We encourage you to invite officials to any key events you may be holding in their constituency, such as inviting your local councillor for a led walk to highlight concerns around pavement infrastructure or inviting the LA transport lead to the launch of a campaign for a 20mph speed limit on a street within their ward. Invitations to these events will often be well-received if your event is presented to be a good press opportunity for the official or an opportunity for them to meet with local voters. Always

remember to make it clear what they will get out of the event in your invitation.

The best chance for you to get a meeting with your MP is at one of their constituency surgery meetings. If you live in England or are looking for your MP, you can find out ways to contact your MP by visiting [this page](#). If you are looking for a member of the Scottish Parliament you can find a list of your local representatives [here](#). If you are looking for a member of the Welsh Parliament or Senedd Cymru, you can find a list of your local representatives [here](#).

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.

### **The meeting itself**

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

1. **Make an effort** – 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. If you are inviting an official to an event, make sure they have a briefing with key timings and any relevant background information on your Local Group or the policy area.
4. **Use the time well** – you will have limited time, 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 or event, including key actions. Be sure to go over actions 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 official to *do* something, for example:

- To support Living Streets' campaign objectives.

- Attend an upcoming walk or event within their ward or constituency.
  - Ask them to keep in regular contact with you and to give you copies of any responses they receive from ministers or policy leads about the matter.
9. **Follow up** – it's usually a good idea to follow up the issue with the official after the meeting. This can be a simple thank you, outlining what you felt were the outcomes of the meeting and the agreed action points.

### **How can we help you?**

Please do keep us up to date on your public affairs work. We know that many of our Local Groups have regular contact with their councillors, so we do not expect to be kept in the loop every time you meet, but updates on your progress will help us to support you better. We do ask that you inform us ahead of any formal meetings with an MP or mayor when these are held by the Local Group.

If your Local Group covers a constituent with a minister or shadow minister, we ask that you run any correspondence with this MP by us before sending. This will be reviewed quickly and helps ensure that our efforts to influence high-profile national figures are aligned as an organisation.

We also encourage you to share your activity across our Local Group network. Many of our Local Groups cover small areas that may be found within the same local authority or combined authority as another Local Group. It is important that our Local Groups consult with one another when they are working to influence the same decision makers. Firstly, joining together will make your call to action more powerful as you can demonstrate a wider base of support. Second, this helps to ensure that our messaging as an organisation is clear and makes our asks easier to understand for the official.

We want Living Streets to approach influencing from a united platform with clear, powerful campaigns. Only by working together between Local Groups and head office, and between Local Groups themselves, can we achieve that. This also helps us to manage our relationships, we receive funding from many Local Authorities so need to ensure that our campaigning is approached from the perspective of a 'critical friend'.

Starting January 2023, we are holding a monthly public affairs drop-in session open to all Local Groups. This will be held 13.30 – 14.30 on the last Tuesday of every month and will be attended by a member of the Living Streets public affairs team. Please do join us to raise any questions or concerns, but also to share your successes with other Local Groups.

Living Streets' [website](#) also has a number of useful resources, such as key facts and figures to help you to build a strong case for your relevant campaign. If you have any other specific questions on influencing or working with elected officials more broadly, please contact our Public Affairs Coordinator, Callum Coleman ([callum.coleman@livingstreets.org.uk](mailto:callum.coleman@livingstreets.org.uk)).