



You and Your MP



A Member of Parliament (MP) is the elected representative for an area of the United Kingdom called a constituency.

MPs split their time between working in Westminster and in their constituency. An MP has to balance the demands of representing the people of their constituency, supporting the goals of their political party and following issues that are important to them as an individual. There is no formal 'job description' and each MP finds their own balance of these roles. MPs have the privilege of sitting in the House of Commons Chamber and speaking and voting on issues raised there.

Who is my MP?

You can find out who your MP is by asking in your local public reference library or at your local town hall. You can also telephone the House of Commons Information Office (020 7219 4272). If you have access to the internet you can use the Find Your MP service at:

<http://findyourmp.parliament.uk>

The role of an MP

Your MP will generally do everything they can to help constituents but will not feel able to support every cause, nor will they be able to get the desired solution to every individual problem. MPs may not be willing to support one constituent if, in doing so, they will deprive another. At times a constituent's demands may conflict with party policy and your MP will have to decide where their first loyalty should lie. The MP may decide that

a majority of constituents would support the party policy - after all that is likely to be one of the reasons why they elected him or her.

There is no statutory job description for MPs. The Code of Conduct for Members of Parliament is the nearest approximation. The purpose of the Code is "to assist Members in the discharge of their obligations to the House, their constituents and the public at large". You can view the Code on the Parliament website

www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmcode.htm

or purchase a copy from The Stationery Office. You may also wish to look at the briefing note written by the House of Commons Library on Members and constituency etiquette

www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/SN02028



What can an MP do for me?

Many people think that their MP exists to solve all their problems for them: this is not the case. MPs are there to help only with those matters for which Parliament or central government is responsible. For many matters, the appropriate first step would be to contact your local councillor or representative in your devolved Assembly or Parliament.

Your MP is not there to help you in private disputes with neighbours, with an employer, with family matters or with companies who have sold you faulty goods; nor can they interfere with decisions made by courts.

However, constituents often take a problem to their MP because they do not know who else could help them (including on the topics mentioned above). MPs are very generous at giving help and advice and will often have a local councillor at their constituency surgeries to help those constituents whose problems are connected with the services provided by local authorities such as dustbins, housing repairs or social services.

Your MP will try to be as helpful as he or she can but, since he or she has, on average, around 90,000 constituents to look after, and many Parliamentary duties to attend to, this will place limits on the amount of time which can be spent in the constituency. It is important that they spend their time dealing with problems they can have an impact on than queries that could be more effectively dealt with elsewhere. You should therefore try to address issues directly with the organisation involved before approaching your MP.

England

If your problem is not local in nature (such as council tax, or local social services, or day to day problems in schools) but instead concerns central government policies (such as the National Health Service, HM Revenue and Customs who collect the bulk of tax and pay child benefit and tax credits, and the Department of Work and Pensions who deal with issues such as benefits, pensions and national insurance) then you should contact your Member of Parliament.

Scotland

There are a large number of policy areas which have been devolved to the Scottish Parliament by the *Scotland Act 1998*. Members of the Scottish Parliament are responsible for legislating in those areas and would be best placed to listen to problems and potentially offer solutions. Once again, local problems should be taken to local councillors but those relating to most health service and housing issues should be taken to MSPs rather than MPs. The Scottish Parliament provides a useful summary of legislative matters that the Parliament covers on its website.

www.scottish.parliament.uk/help/17020.aspx

Wales

The *Government of Wales Act 2006* empowered the National Assembly for Wales to make its own legislation on devolved matters such as the environment. The Welsh Assembly will also implement many of the regulations and orders that derive from Westminster-based Acts of Parliament. For example, the introduction of the Smoking Regulations in Wales was the responsibility of the Assembly rather than the Westminster Parliament. Much of the detailed implementation of policy, such as regulations and orders can, and should, be taken to Assembly Members rather than MPs. This means that an Act of Parliament can have a different effect in Wales from that in England. For example, the Assembly set its own rate for prescription charges in Wales, that is different from the charges applying in England.

www.assemblywales.org/abthome/making-laws-for-wales.htm

Northern Ireland

There is a similar set of issues devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly for which the Assembly will make legislation. For these issues the relevant Assembly Member would be the appropriate first step. A list of the issues addressed by the Assembly rather than the Westminster Parliament is available in Schedule 3 of the *Northern Ireland Act 1998*.



Contacting your MP

If you want to contact your MP there are a number of ways to go about it.

Writing

The best way to make contact is to write to him or her at:

[Name of Member] MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

You can check Members' titles by looking up your Member on the Parliament website. Some MPs are members of the Privy Council and have the title Right Honourable (abbreviated to Rt Hon).

The manner in which each MP wishes to be addressed in a letter is provided in the MP biography pages on the Parliament website.

Writing a letter about a problem, rather than telephoning, is a good idea as you can explain things clearly and your MP will have the written details of your case which may be useful to refer to later.

Telephone

You can telephone your MP's office at the House of Commons (020 7219 3000); ask to be connected to the appropriate MP's office. In complex cases your MP may ask you to write with further details.

The House of Commons does not have a general fax number, although some MPs will have their own fax machines. There is no central record of MPs fax numbers, so it is best to telephone your MP's office first if you wish to try to fax some information.



E-mail

Many MPs can also be contacted by e-mail. You can contact an MP's office or the House of Commons Information Office to ascertain whether they have an e-mail address, or you can check your MP's biography page on the Parliament Web site: www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/mps

Whichever method you choose, you should generally only contact your own MP as MPs will usually only deal with the problems of their own constituents and not with those of another MP's constituents. There is a long-standing convention in the House of Commons that, should a constituent contact another MP, that MP will forward the correspondence to the correct local MP. If you do contact an MP other than your local Member you should be explicit in explaining why you have chosen to do so.

Face to face

Many MPs make time in their constituencies when constituents can visit and speak directly with the MP. You should be able to find information for when your MP has a surgery either in the local phone book or at the local library.



House of Commons Information Office

020 7219 4272

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March 2013