

How to lobby government effectively

- Lobbying is letting those who make decisions know what you think (MPs, a minister or a civil servant).
- It is giving a clear message on what you are trying to achieve
- It is getting people to take the decision you want and about talking to the establishment
- And, it is about establishing links and making your self known

During our campaign for Fair Pay last year the lobbying done locally and nationally was invaluable in securing a successful outcome on police pay. This year the same approach needs to be taken and the following guide is a few suggested ways to keep the pressure and momentum high. The most important thing to remember at all stages with lobbying MPs and talking to local press is to ensure the message, and what we are seeking to achieve, is clear.

A useful tip for highlighting the pay issue and keeping it newsworthy is to use topical issues especially local ones and tie in what you are trying to say around this. This is also important when trying to win hearts and minds, to highlight the great work police do using these examples and tie in police pay and its importance.

On our website you can find your local MP by typing in your postcode - this will bring up a draft letter you can use and there is also a background briefing document we have put together that you can use for yourselves, press or your local MP: www.polfed.org. This year we have also set up an email address for questions relating to pay: pay2007@jcc.polfed.org and from this we will be compiling a Q&A on those that are frequently asked.

First step

You need to decide exactly what you hope to achieve by lobbying, you need to be clear about your facts. Lobbying isn't about persuading people to do something by the force of your personality. It's about giving the right people the right information, at the right time, in the right way.

How to approach an MP

- Write to your MP at the House Of Commons, but be aware that most MPs simply pass on all constituents' correspondence to the appropriate minister for their comments. It's possible that your MP just becomes a bureaucratic post office between you and the government.
- Go and see your MP at the House of Commons. If you can, fix an appointment before you go. If you can't, you can go to Central Lobby and fill in a card for the attendants to find your MP and bring him or her to you. This often doesn't work.
- Go to your MP's constituency surgery. Some MPs meet their constituents on a first-come first-served basis. Others insist on appointments being made. Check with the constituency office or the MP's House of Commons office whether an appointment is necessary before you go.

NB It is worth remembering that parliament is currently in recess and MPs are most likely to be available at their constituency address.

What's the best approach?

It depends on your MP. Some are very active on constituency matters, and respond very positively to any approach from constituents. Others will do little more than act as a post-box unless the issue particularly interests them. So when you approach your MP:

- Try to work out what will interest him or her, and make sure this is highlighted in your first approach.
- If possible, make it clear that you represent a group of his or her constituents that you're not just acting on your own.

- Make sure you understand what position he or she has been taking on the issue before you make your approach. Read your local newspapers. Check whether your MP has a web site. Check Hansard to see if the issue has been raised in the House Of Commons and whether your MP has made any comments.
- Know what you want him or her to do. MPs will often ask you what you want to do to help. If you know, and you have a plan by which you can involve them, you can respond positively. If you don't know, you don't have a plan, you'll be losing a golden opportunity.

Going directly to the minister

You can try going straight to the top, but:

- Ministers do not reply to letters from members of the public. If you write simply as a citizen to a minister, you're likely to receive a reply from a low-ranking civil servant.
- Government departments are organised so that ordinary citizens find it difficult to speak directly to ministers.
- Ministers are unlikely to see letters from "ordinary people". These are filtered to a civil servant for reply.

To make sure that the minister sees your letter, you need to do one of the following:

- Write it as a constituent. Ministers' offices ensure that ministers see all of their constituents' letters immediately. The minister will give a personal reply - though the letter will still be drafted by civil servants.
- Write as a representative of a nationally recognised body or a local body with plenty of clout. If the minister's office believes that you represent a significant organisation, it's possible that the civil servants handling the letter will ask the minister to sign a personal reply will ask the minister to sign a reply himself or herself.

How to motivate a minister

- Get press interest. Contact the minister's local newspaper or try to contact the Lobby (political) correspondents of one of the serious newspapers.
- Personal interest. If the issue is something the minister has campaigned about in the past, your campaign may spark an interest.
- Political risk. The minister will act if there's a risk of being criticised for neglecting your issue. You need to make it seem likely that the risk exists.
- Political advantage. The minister will take a personal interest if there's a chance that taking your side will result in a popular decision.

How to generate political interest

Approach people who matter to the minister:

- Special advisers. All Cabinet ministers have one or two special advisers in their departments. Special advisers are political appointments (technically appointed as temporary civil servants). Their job is to give their ministers political advice alongside the official advice offered by the civil service. Some concentrate more on policy development (the so-called policy wonks) while others concentrate on their ministers' public image (the so-called spin doctors).
- Parliamentary private secretary. All senior ministers have a PPS, an MP who acts as the minister's eyes and ears in parliament and among the minister's political colleagues.
- Policy advisers and researchers at party headquarters.
- Their constituency agent and chairman of the local constituency party.
- Some local councillors within their constituency. Relationships between councillors and MPs vary dramatically according to personalities.