



Getting Involved with Parliament



The UK Parliament works to make the Government accountable to the people it governs.

Members of the House of Commons (MPs) are elected by local areas all over the UK meaning that everyone has a local representative in Parliament. When government plans impact on their local area MPs can make direct representations to government ministers on behalf of their constituents.

Working in committees, Members of both Houses invite the public to contact them with their views and experiences. This helps in their task of scrutinising new government proposals and keeping the actions of government departments under review. Parliament's committees will often make recommendations for a change of policy or procedure based on the real experiences of people who have submitted evidence.

Your Member of Parliament

Your Member of Parliament (MP) is the person elected by your local area to represent you in Parliament. If you are aged 18 or over, and are a British (or qualifying Commonwealth) citizen, you should make sure that you are on the electoral register for your electoral area. This entitles you to have a say in choosing your local MP by voting for one of the candidates at the next general election or local by-election. For more information about who is eligible to vote in UK Parliament elections, and getting on the electoral register, contact your local electoral registration office. The Electoral Commission also has information about this on its website at: www.aboutmyvote.co.uk

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 know your full postcode, you can find out who your MP is via the Find Your MP service at:

<http://findyourmp.parliament.uk>

Help with resolving problems

MPs will often be available to help constituents resolve problems on matters concerning the UK Parliament or central government. For more information about when and how you can contact your MP see the Brief Guide *You and Your MP*.





Lobbying your MP

MPs need to know the views of their constituents if they are to represent them, even if they conflict with the policy of their own political party or they do not agree with them personally.

If you feel strongly about an issue you can try to persuade your MP to use his or her position to raise it in Parliament. You might also want your MP to vote in a certain way on an issue in the House of Commons. MPs are not bound to vote according to their constituents' wishes but they will often take their views into account when they vote. You can try to influence the opinion of your MP in a number of ways, from sending letters to organising meetings and rallies that they are invited to attend.

Petitions

A 'Petition' is a formal request to the House of Commons to take action on a specific issue, which an MP can present on behalf of their constituents. To find out how to go about this contact the House of Commons Information Office or look on our website at:

www.parliament.uk/get-involved/have-your-say/petitioning

Following your MP's parliamentary activity

Much of your MP's parliamentary activity is recorded and is publicly available. If you do not have access to the internet, the House of Commons Information Office (020 7219 4272) provides a

comprehensive enquiry service to callers. The Official Report of proceedings in Parliament, Hansard, is also available in most central reference libraries as are reports from parliamentary committees. The House of Commons Information Office can tell you how your MP has voted on a particular issue, whether he or she has been serving on a parliamentary committee and the details of any Early Day Motions your Member has tabled or signed. Early Day Motions, (EDMs) are often used by MPs to draw attention to specific events or campaigns and to demonstrate the extent of parliamentary support for a particular cause or point of view.

If you do have access to the internet, you can read the text of your MP's parliamentary speeches and any questions they have raised in the Commons since the last election using the Hansard by Member facility on the UK Parliament's website:

www.parliament.uk/business/publications/hansard/commons



Having your say

There are other ways to make your views known to Parliament:

- ***Public Bill Committees***

When a bill begins its Parliamentary scrutiny in the House of Commons a Public Bill Committee is appointed to examine it in detail after the bill is passed at second reading stage. The committee may decide to take written and/or oral evidence from the public as part of its consideration. Details of all current bills before Parliament are available on our website or can be obtained by contacting the Information Offices of either House.

- ***Select Committees***

Select Committees work in both Houses. They check and report on areas ranging from the work of government departments to broader topics such as economic affairs and public administration. When a Select

Committee in either House conducts an inquiry they often invite written evidence from interested parties. They may also ask certain people to attend the committee to give oral evidence. For more information, see the Brief Guide *Select Committees*

The Scrutiny Unit produces guidance to anyone wishing to submit evidence to a parliamentary committee and this is available on Parliament's website. The Scrutiny Unit can be contacted at: Scrutiny Unit, House of Commons, London, SW1P 3JA
Email: scrutiny@parliament.uk
Telephone: **020 7219 8387**

Following Parliament's Work

There is a wealth of up to date information available on the UK Parliament website, including the daily agendas for both the Commons and the Lords and details of the bills they are considering in the current session. You can also find details of the work of committees and up-to-date reports of what has been said in both Chambers.

Parliamentary debates can also be watched live or downloaded from the video archive on the website at: **www.parliamentlive.tv/Main/Home.aspx**

If you do not have access to the internet, the House of Commons Information Office and House of Lords Information Office can usually answer questions about Parliament's business and procedure and can supply explanatory material. The House of Commons also produces a Weekly Information Bulletin that is available online at: **www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmwib.htm**

Visit Parliament...

Anyone can visit Parliament while it is in session to watch a debate from the public gallery or to attend a committee hearing. UK residents can also book

a tour of the Palace of Westminster by contacting their MP. To check the forthcoming business of either House, you can look at the Parliamentary Calendar on our website at:

<http://services.parliament.uk/calendar> or contact the Information Offices of either House.

Visitors can also buy tickets for tours during Parliament's summer recess and on Saturdays throughout the year. For further information contact Ticketmaster on **0844 847 1672** (or online at: **www.ticketmaster.co.uk**)

...or let Parliament come to you

Parliamentary Outreach has regional officers based around the UK and in most instances can provide training and advice on the work of Parliament at a location convenient for you. Parliamentary Outreach also hosts Public Bill workshops that provide accessible information on how to engage with Parliament's scrutiny of legislation and free regular drop-in sessions for anyone who wants to find out more about the workings of the UK Parliament.

Contact details for regional outreach officers and details of upcoming events, including Public Bill workshops and drop-in sessions, can be found at: **www.parliament.uk/outreach**

→ Glossary

Parliament: The British Parliament is made up of three parts: the Crown, the House of Lords and the House of Commons. Parliament is where new laws are debated and agreed.

Constituency: The UK is divided into 650 areas, of broadly similar population size, called parliamentary constituencies. Each constituency elects one MP to represent the area in Parliament.

Constituents: A constituent is anyone who lives in a particular constituency.

Government: The Government is the institution that runs the country. It is also known as the Executive. The Government formulates policy and presents its proposals to Parliament for approval.

Government departments:

The Government is organized into departments, each responsible for administering a different service in the UK, such as transport or education. Each department is headed by a cabinet minister who oversees other ministers and a large team of officials.

Bill: A Bill is a proposal for a new law, or a proposal to change an existing law, that is presented for debate before Parliament.

Second reading stage: Bills must pass a number of stages in both Houses of Parliament if they are to succeed. The second reading is the most important stage for a bill. It is when the main purpose of a bill is discussed and voted on. If the bill passes it moves on to the committee stage.

House of Commons Information Office

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