

# Writing to MPs

This note gives a few pointers on writing to MPs. It covers:

- Why write to them;
- What to expect;
- How to do it.

## Why write to your MP

Your MP is your elected representative. It is his or her job to represent your interests – though not necessarily your views – in Parliament. If you do not write to them, they do not know what your views are and cannot consider whether or not your views correctly represent your interests. In that case, they will almost certainly follow the party line.

If you do write to them, they are expected to respond and to take your views seriously. If your letter is the only one they receive on a particular topic, they can be excused for claiming that it is a minority view; if they receive a large number of letters expressing concern about a particular issue, they cannot do that.

In the latter part of 2021, we saw two events which prompted a large number of letters to MPs:

- **the sewage scandal** – where the government wanted MPs to reject a Lords amendment which would have prevented water companies from continuing to pump sewage into rivers and coastal waters – enough MPs became concerned about the safety of their seats, because of the number of letters they received, that there was a significant rebellion on the Tory backbenches;
- **the corruption scandal** – where, after Owen Paterson had been found guilty of egregious breaches of anti-lobbying rules (i.e. corruption: he represented the interests of Randox rather than those of his constituents), instead of rubber-stamping his punishment, Johnson attempted to rip up the entire standards system. This prompted a further wave of letters and forced a government U-turn. And, of course, the by-election that followed Paterson's resignation demonstrated that those MPs who had become concerned about their own seats were right to be worried.

## What to expect

Writing to your MP can be dispiriting. Assuming that you are writing to complain about a government policy or action, as in the two examples above, you are likely to receive a standard reply that has been drafted by the party Central Office. This reply will probably not address your points in detail, but will contain bland reassurances that the proposed policy or government action is entirely beneficial and you should not have any concerns about it. It is tempting, when you receive such a response, to feel that this means that your letter was a waste of effort. The two examples above, demonstrate that this is not the case if your letter was one of many.

If the standard response has already been analysed and deconstructed, or if you are inclined to do so yourself, you can follow up with a rebuttal letter – and this is more likely to force your MP to think and respond. But even if you do not do this, your MP will have registered the strength of feeling on the issue.

You may never know the precise impact of your letter – indeed on its own it would probably have little impact – but we do know that a barrage of letters on an issue of widespread concern can be very effective.

## How to write to your MP

A few general considerations may be useful, especially if you have never written to your MP before:

- **Introduce yourself** as a constituent – and if you have never written before, say so: the fact that people other than ‘the usual suspects’ are writing to them concentrates an MP’s mind
- **be polite** – indeed it may be more effective if you can find a way to suggest (for example based on their past speeches) that you expect them to agree with you. Many MPs had made speeches about the local environment, so on the sewage issue, their constituents were able to say things like, *“In July, you commented on how important it was that the River Wye was free from pollution, so I am sure that you will share my concern that the Lords’ amendment to protect our rivers is in danger of being voted down.”*
- **Focus** on a single issue – e.g. corruption – and just two or three key points about your concerns
- **Make it personal** – e.g. “I have spent 20 years teaching children to kayak on the Wye, but now, it is so polluted that it has become a health hazard” or “The NHS saved my life, so I feel strongly about this Bill” etc
- **Be specific** about the action you expect the MP to take – e.g. “Can I ask you to support the Lords’ amendment when the Bill returns to the Commons.”
- **Keep your letter short** – less than a page is ideal.

Actually writing to them is easy. This website will find all the details you need and even send your email for you: <https://www.writetothem.com/> All you need to do is to prepare the text of your letter and paste it in.

And if you want any guidance, Doug and the 99% Campaign Team will be happy to help you. In any case, they would love to know about your letter, so please send a copy. You can contact Doug on [doug.crawford@99-percent.org](mailto:doug.crawford@99-percent.org).