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Lobbying MPs

General Advice

- Are MPs the right decision-makers for the change I want to see? Or is it more about their influence?
- Can I give them a good news story?
- What can they actually do for you?
    - Parliamentary Question - database of PMQs that have been asked and answers: https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-questions-answers/ When you are asking them to write PQs think about what could be a good story.
    - PMQs – if they are drawn for questions you can ask them to ask a question about something you are campaigning on – usually they want to do a something which will become a story or relates to their local constituency. You can work out who has been drawn here: https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/business-papers/commons/parliamentary-questions/
    - Westminster Hall Debates – these are debates that can raise the prominence of issues. Here are some past examples https://www.parliament.uk/about/how/business/debates/westminster-hall-debates/
    - Convene people you need to influence – they can organise a stakeholder meeting in parliament which can be useful.
- **Know your stuff:** Look at Labour/ Tory Party Policy on the area you want to influence https://labour.org.uk/issue/healthcare/
- **Be specific** about the help you can give/ the issue you are talking about – if you manage to be helpful you can then foster a relationship.
- **Always ring people up/ chase by telephone:** You can find office numbers here but if that doesn't work you can always ring the switch board on 0207219 1000 and be asked to put through to someone's office. You might want to do this to work out who to send an email to. Don't send letters, send emails but if your emails are ignored, send a letter. Always chase up by telephone.
- **Be useful:** Offer what is needed – advice on bills etc. You can find a list of upcoming bills here and where they are up to https://services.parliament.uk/bills/
- **Be nice to staff members** – they are the gatekeepers so if you can be understanding and polite and nice on the phone/ win them over they will fight harder for you. You can find out the name of staff members here: https://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/standards-and-financial-interests/parliamentary-commissioner-for-standards/registers-of-interests/register-of-members-secretaries-and-research-assistants/
- **Help them work out who they need to talk to:** Convene groups of people they may need to talk to about their policy area – if you can offer them the chance to meet with key stakeholders and tell them why they are important this will be helpful.
- **Make multiple approaches** – first stop the Secretary of State or the Shadow Secretary of State but if that doesn't work approach a junior minister.
- **Constituency angle:** If you need to lobby multiple MPs make approaches from their constituents. Ask your community to write to their MPs about the issue they care about and ask for action on it. If you want to apply real pressure try and get a story in the local paper (though this is quite aggressive)…

Approaching an MP

- Research what a Labour Government could realistically commit to doing – some changes can be done by government, others will be done by trusts
- Offer to hold a discussion group, big up your own convening power/ legitimacy: "I represent…
- Be complementary – Labour's position on X is good.
- Be clear about where you can add value… "I could facilitate a discussion between X and Y which I think would be productive for all of us involved…" it might also be "I have hosted an online discussion and we have come up with these recommendations – it would be good to sit down with you to talk about them"?
- Offer exposure – I could put you in front of X in an Q & A this would be good for your profile….

Supporter side

Tactics that have been explored

Write-to-your MP action

- This is an important and useful action - applying pressure through constituents is a good way to influence MPs.
- If you can track it, one thing you could potentially explore doing to apply additional pressure is contacting the MP saying X number of your constituents have contacted you on our behalf about this.
- You could also map this information as a campaign site to show supporters where additional pressure may be needed… i.e create a map showing X people in this constituency have written to Y MP to ask for X but they have yet to do it. **This depends on how forceful you or the campaign want to be but this could be a good way to add pressure.**
- It's also a story that could be briefed to local papers '*MP ignores pleas of X number of constituents*'…

Call-your-MP action

Tweet-your-MP

- This is effective as MPs spend far too much time on Twitter!

National lobby action days

Tactics to Explore

Local surgery lobbying

- This may be difficult to do in terms of logistics but it's a good idea as most MPs will not expect policy lobbying in their constituencies. There tends to be a demarcation of parliamentary casework which looks at policy or campaigns and constituency casework which covers local campaigns or individual requests for help.
- MPs have a great diversity in their surgery dates and times. Some do weekly surgeries, some twice monthly - at least all MPs should have surgeries within a two week period.
- Creating a resource that maps all the MPs offices and their surgery times would be amazing and useful for a lot of campaigns as well as constituents who may not be aware of this aspect of an MPs work.

Parliamentary side

Tactics that have been explored

Submitting evidence to a subcommittee/inquiry/etc.

- This is a good thing to do as you can directly influence the drafting of a bill or agenda of a select committee. Also more broadly and longer term it can build your credibility and legitimacy in parliament as a trusted source of information.

Submitting urgent questions

- This can be useful for drawing attention to things

Pledge endorsements for MPs
MP briefing live events
MP mailmerged briefings

- This is useful especially if briefings include specific information related to a constituency or constituents.

PMQ question suggestions to warm MPs
Oral question suggestions to warm MPs

Tactics to Explore

EDMs - are they worthwhile from an MP's POV?

- EDMs can be helpful for gathering media attention for an issue but you need to have a high number of MP signatures. Front benchers tend not to be able to sign them (unless they have been agreed by the shadow cabinet). If you have an MP that is happy to take ownership of the EDM and push it to get bigger numbers it could be worth doing. It has no official power or status so it isn't much different to MPs signing up to pledges but it will be an official parliamentary record. It is largely a way for MPs to express an opinion on something and they can see which of their colleagues have also signed it. You can see what EDMs have been submitted and the number of signatures they have here: https://edm.parliament.uk/

Setting up cross-party groups or APPGs - is this useful?

- I think it depends on your timeline for change. If you want to set up a stable group of people committed to exploring an area or issue in the long term, which has cross party support this is a worthwhile option. APPGs can put on events and if you have a strong parliamentarian who is committed to running it well then you can use it as a forum to bring in other MPs.
- The form for doing this is here, organisations can act as the secretariat so they organise the meetings and events and the business of the APPG. https://www.parliament.uk/about/mps-and-lords/members/apg/registration-forms-for-appgs/.

PMQs

- The deadline for tabling an oral question to the Prime Minister is usually 12.30 pm on the preceding sitting Thursday (unless recess is approaching).
- There are 15 questions on the Order Paper for Prime Minister's questions. Because more MPs submit a question than there are slots available, a ballot (known as the 'shuffle') is run, soon after the deadline for tabling questions has passed. This decides which questions are to be asked and in which order.
- The list of MPs who have been successful in the shuffle is available in the Table Office from around 2.30pm on the day the shuffle takes place (usually the Thursday before Prime Minister's questions, unless there is a recess). The results are also published and printed the following day in Future Day Orals (sometimes sooner), and

then on the Order Paper (the day or so before), in the sequence in which they will be called in the Chamber.

- MPs do not need to specify what their question is and can just write "E" on the paper. Most MPs who have a PMQ drawn will want to ask about things related to their constituency which are also linked to the news. A good clip can be useful on social media to show constituents they are asking the right questions and also to gather media attention.
- If you are lobbying MPs to ask a PMQ you will be able to find out who has a question on the Future Day Orals page. It would be worthwhile to approach them saying I'm not sure if you've decided on what you are asking yet but this is a topic which your constituent(s) have raised.

Other Oral Questions

- There are also questions for other ministers such as health or justice which MPs can ask questions at. It is worth also approaching them if you want a strong clip for a campaign or if you want to put pressure on a government minister. The deadline for oral questions is 12.30pm three sitting days before the Question Time takes place. For Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales Question Times, the deadline is 12.30pm five sitting days before the Question Time takes place. A sitting day is a day when the House is meeting. You can check the Question Time Rota PDF to see what Question Times are coming up and their deadlines.

Written Questions

- This is a much quicker way to find out information from a government department if you are interested in gathering campaign stats or highlighting whether information is actually recorded or not. There is some skill in drafting these but you can get government figures or information very quickly through this process. You can find examples of questions and answers that have been asked here. There are two main types of written parliamentary questions; 'Ordinary' questions and 'Named Day' questions. Most MPs staff will be happy to submit these questions for you if you have developed a relationship with them.
- 'Ordinary' questions do not have to be answered on a specific date. An MP will date a written question for two days after they have tabled it.The convention is that the MP can expect it to be answered within seven days of the question being tabled. However, there is no parliamentary rule that states ordinary written questions have to be answered by a certain date.
- 'Named day' questions is where the MP tabling the question specifies the date on which they should receive an answer. The MP must give a minimum of two days' notice for these types of question. MPs may not table more than five named day questions on a single day.

Private members bill - merits and when is this the right avenue?

- This is a very long term option and needs to be focused on a very specific law change. MPs do get some help with drafting the bills from the clerks so you don't need to be an expert in law to propose one.
- It can take a full session to pass. Private Member's bills are given very limited time to pass through parliament and you need a committed MP who is able to prepare and lobby for support for it from across the house as it will need to pass each stage. They are likely to need to ring many MP's offices and put pressure on their colleagues to support their bill. Sometimes the government can adopt a Private members bill or parts of it if it gathers lots of attention.
- They also need to put into a ballot (which is drawn each parliamentary session). People who have already been drawn in the ballot usually have a bill they are already committed to.

- As an initial strategy you should aim to build a base of MPs you would ask to put their names into the ballot next time for your bill. Some more info on who has been drawn this session and successful bills that have passed is here.

Triggering debates - is this a good use of time eg backbench business committee - and if so, how can we do this?

- This is a good way to raise awareness of an issue if you manage to get a motion passed with good attendance from MPs (this can be tricky as often backbench business debates are held in the evenings at the same time as other business).
- You need an MP who is willing to go through the process of applying for one which they may do for media attention or if they are passionate about the subject. This page explains how you can apply for one.
- The big thing will be getting other MPs to the debate and to speak in it, again applying pressure from constituents will be helpful with this. The motion passed is a kind of endorsement but does very little to concretely change things. It can raise the profile of an issue within parliament if it is well attended.

Informal side

Identifying MP allies

Q: How we best identify anchor points in each party for campaigns - friendliness vs power; interest vs portfolio? E.g. Do we pursue people based on portfolio or if you know someone has a passion on the issue, is it still worthwhile enlisting them as your advocate to do the work for you?

- I think it is always good to get a supportive MP on board who is interested in the issue. Backbenchers will have more time to do some of the above parliamentary tactics and complete tasks such as chairing an APPG, applying for backbench business debates, building support for a bill, booking a room in parliament, submitting a written question etc. It is worth you building a network of these strong supporters of your campaign and developing strong relationships with their staff so you can just ring them and ask for basic favours. To identify people who may be interested, look who asks questions related to your area in the questions database, who signs related EDMs and who contributes in relevant debates.
- Front benchers will not have time to do any of the day to day lobbying so your relationships with them need to be focused and useful and probably inevitably more limited. Once you have your backbench allies you should use them to push for a meeting with the front bench. This meeting should be focused and useful. You should try to get to a point with them where they can call you if they have a debate coming up and need stats or a press quote etc but to reach this level will take time and trust. It is best to win the trust of their political advisor rather than the MP first as they do the bulk of the work day to day and your relationship with them will be more useful - you want them to be ringing you up for help with a speech they are writing for their MP. The register of MPs staff can be found here
- You also might want to ask to meet with the Party policy lead on the issue you are seeking to influence. They are in charge of compiling the research for press stories and developing policy proposals alongside the Political advisors so having a good relationship with them is important. This information is not public so you will need to ask for an introduction through the political advisor or the MP.

121 meetings & Following Up

What is the best way to get a 121 meeting with an MP - when to contact staffers, when to contact MPs directly? What is the best way to follow up with MPs, putting an issue on their desks without annoying them? If we haven't had a reply from particular MPs consistently do you keep pushing?

- Write an email to the MP directly being very specific about the meeting purpose, why it relates to them and where possible referencing their constituents. It is likely that the MP is not actually reading this email but is it being processed by the staff member who will screen it for the MP.
- If there is no response after a week, ring up the office (you can also ring the parliamentary switchboard on 0207 219 3000 and ask to be put through to X MP's office). Try to build up a rapport with the person answering the phone and ask if the email has been received and whether the MP would like to meet.
- Continue to chase until a date is set or the staff member says it isn't possible.
- A shortcut is also to ask an MP you are on friendly terms with to introduce you to another MP via email and make the request that way. MPs are unlikely to say no to their colleagues.

Desk drops to MPs
would receiving something in the mail have an impact, give ROI?

- Some creative mail campaigns can be effective - a lot of parliament is run on letters, but given the big budgets of many lobbying firms it will be hard to outdo them.
- Personal letters from constituents are likely to guarantee a response.

Other Questions

- *Q: Number of pledges that feel significant to an MP on an issue - is there a general tipping point when perception on salience of the issue shifts or is it about who the signatories are?*
- I think numbers can be important, it depends on the percentage of the party who signs it. For Labour getting 122 is over half of the parliamentary party.
- Also if you can get people who carry weight within a party to sign it - others are likely to follow. In Labour you would try and get a prominent left winger (member of the socialist campaign group) and then you could write to the rest saying X has signed it. But you'd also want a respected figure from the Labour centre to sign it to bring in people from that wing too. Similarly you might approach the Tribune group of soft left MPs, or the Cooperative party MPs. This can also work from a regional perspective. You can say X is a big issue in Birmingham and the other Birmingham MPs have signed it….
- *Q: What does a front bench vs a back bench day look like?*
- A Frontbench day is likely to be very hectic, with staff who are overburdened. Constant policy casework coming in with MPs requesting lines on specific issues, organising for weekly questions (making sure they have enough MPs signed up and in the chamber and working out what to ask), working towards creating and landing media stories related to their briefings, meeting with endless stakeholders and lobbying groups, potentially doing political visits to relevant workplaces. They will also more longer term be looking at policy development, reading key reports and suggestions and working with the party to develop policy announcements (later in the electoral cycle). Their office will also be processing all diary requests including issuing apologies, passing invites on to other MPs etc. If there are elections frontbenchers will be expected to do campaign sessions.They'll have front bench rota duties to make sure they are covering the front bench at different times- also they will be expected to put an appearance in at debates related to their briefs. In the evenings they are likely to be attending events related to their brief with important stakeholders or being invited to speak at local parties. All these speeches will need to be written. They will also have to organise their shadow team meetings and may be expected to do media on behalf of the leadership around specific announcements. They will also need to spend at least 1-2 days in their constituency.

- A Backbench day is likely to be slower and more constituency focused. They will have more control over their diary and time to pursue their own interests. They might be on bill committees or run appgs. They will put in for questions on areas they are interested in and will likely be motivated by gaining local media and traction. They also may be interested in trying to make a name for themselves with a successful campaign or by gaining profile or traction around an issue with a hope of being promoted to the front bench. They will be freer to have meetings.

Useful Resources

- *How do we find specific clippings from parliament if it's not appearing in Hansard or Parliament live?* Any official business or debate moments should be in parliament live. https://www.parliament.uk/site-information/using-this-website/help/parliamentlivetv-help
- *MP email addresses and telephone numbers* are here: https://members.parliament.uk/members/Commons, or you can ring the switchboard on 0207219 3000 and ask to be put through to a members office.
- *MP staff members - you can find this information here* https://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/standards-and-financial-interests/parliamentary-commissioner-for-standards/registers-of-interests/register-of-members-secretaries-and-research-assistants/
- SPAD list https://order-order.com/spads/

Reaching MPs through Political Parties

- If you are trying to reach Labour MPs it is also worth using Party architecture. You can create a template motion asking the local MPs to sign the pledge to be passed at CLPs which can be distributed through your supporter networks where they are also a member of their local party; this is likely to get an MP's attention.
- You could also write a blog or encourage a party member or a supportive MP to write a blog on the campaign for LabourList, Conservative Home or Liberal Democrat Voice with the title "*Why every Labour MP should be supporting X".*