



## Get to grips with the different ways you can use to make government listen to your ideas.

### How to Start

Casual and formal approaches each have different strengths, depending on whether it's just you, a group, or if contacts have already been made.

Either way, you'll need to know how the system works and then use it to your advantage.

Remember, don't underestimate just how difficult it might be to get in contact with a local politician.

Even though they'll be much more accessible than an MP working from Westminster – it's possible their own workload could take priority over your concerns.

You'll need to be convincing during your approach and make sure never to take "no" for an answer.

That said, getting to know your Councillors and politicians makes a great first point of contact when you want someone to listen to your ideas.

Don't forget that first impressions count so know the facts and use them to your advantage. Direct the conversation to the point you want to make and then stick to your guns.

It shouldn't be too hard to find the right MLA, Councillor or government Minister for you to talk with.

Look up contact details on their own websites or get the number from the phonebook and don't be afraid to go right to the top of the department and get the person in charge to give you answers.

Politicians should be only too eager to talk to you, after all they need your votes.

Remember that an email, just like a letter, is a document and once sent it's no longer your property.

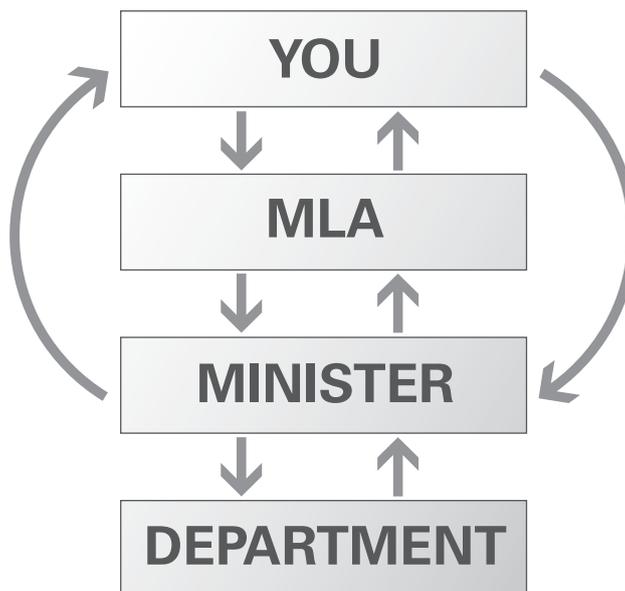
This also means that any email or letter in your possession can be used as evidence or reprinted in any format, including in the media, as seen fit.

It can work the other way too, so make sure anything you send to a government official is truthful, factual, and what you really wanted to say.

## HOW TO CONTACT THE GOVERNMENT

CASUAL FACE TO FACE or TELEPHONE		FORMAL LETTER or EMAIL	
Make some notes beforehand		Formal letters will always get replies	
You'll still need to put it in writing to get a solid response	Don't let them avoid you but remember, sometimes people are busy	Be careful with the tone and content, because you're dealing with elected officials	There's less pressure than a conversation and you can make your points clearer and easier
Know who you want to talk to	Take a note of everything said	Try to use headed notepaper – it looks more professional	Letters can be used as evidence or even published in the media

## PROGRESS OF YOUR LETTER



## WHAT TO EXPECT

**Don't expect Ministers to immediately take your side because their job is to defend the government and its policy decisions.**

So, make a compelling argument, based on facts not opinions.

Be simple, concise and say what you really want to see happen to make the situation better.

Expect them to offer you the bare minimum time-wise unless you convince them otherwise.

Remember, politicians (MLAs, MPs and MEPs) want to win over public opinion as well as elections.

So by giving them a solvable problem that could make them look better will almost certainly help your cause.

Show them what the real problems are – in many cases they could easily have been unaware the problem actually existed – then give them a workable solution.

You'll also get a much better response if the politician involved has taken a personal interest in you and your policy issue; so, be convincing.



## SETTING AN AGENDA

**Many of the issues people really want to see change are never high on the agenda when it comes to making government policy decisions**

For example, rural policy never usually leads the 6 o'clock news but for anyone whose lives are touched by countryside planning laws, these are still very important issues.

As such, these campaigns will take much longer to get the right people to listen – hence the “drip-drip” effect.

This doesn't mean it will never happen, it just means that more time will be taken up trying to convince the government that a new policy is needed.

Getting the public on your side is a great way to make sure that the right people listen.

## PUBLIC OPINION

Public opinion is a powerful weapon to have for any campaign group or person wishing to influence the government.

It stands to reason that the more people you have on your side, the bigger chance you have to turn your ideas into a real policy.

Sometimes changes can happen dramatically but this is not often the case.

You'll probably find that the "drip-drip" effect is most often the case –

so be prepared for the long haul and always remember to take pride in even the smallest wins.

When you lobby Council, even a vote of confidence at a single Council meeting can be enough to rally group support.

Use every victory to convince more people to take up your cause.



## WINNING ALLIES

Politicians are elected on the back of public support, so when enough people make noise about an issue, you'll be sure that they'll soon follow.

If you're looking answers from the government then also make sure you offer them a good solution to the problems your campaign group is looking to change.

It's no good just pointing out what is wrong – you need to give consideration to the reasons why the situation has happened and how it can be fixed.

To do this convincingly, you'll need to have some form of evidence

(whether it's hard evidence, commissioned research, or first hand accounts from the people really affected by the problem) which supports your claims.

Then you can begin winning important allies by using your evidence and possible solutions to convince them that change is very much in their interest.



## USING CIVIL SERVANTS

At the end of the day, your campaign is more than likely all about changing people's opinions of a certain issue.

This can be complicated and time consuming because when someone has made up their mind, it can be difficult to make headway.

But it's not impossible, especially if you have good research, public support, government allies, or politicians on your side.

Another great way to find a solution to the problem you're campaigning about is to ask Civil Servants.

These people are directly connected with policy creation and they often

have expert knowledge of the situation you're trying to change.

Make sure to ask Civil Servants in the specific department your issue relates to to find out what policy direction they are taking.

Quite often they'll even point you in the right direction to find government statistics and further information on the history of the policy you're concerned about.

## COUNCIL LEVEL

Try talking to your Councillors casually about your campaign issues, especially if you intend to ask specific questions at, for example, a town meeting.

It's all about sensitising them to the issue you'll be raising.

Nobody likes being surprised or put on the spot, so try to let the people who really can make decisions know what you intend to talk about.

This way, when the issue is raised you'll probably get a real, thought-out response.

People don't often have the answers to every possible question, so give them time to research your issue so they can discover what help might be available to you.

You'll find you get a much more favourable response than simply causing an argument.

A Councillor who is put in a position to publicly help a worthy cause will jump at the chance quicker than one you try and shame into action – either through a public meeting or the media.

Remember, most Councillors are members of all the major political parties.

If you get Councillors on your side then you'll find it much easier to convince the main political parties.

Getting them on your side is also a very useful way of bringing your campaign to a national level.

