

## How to lobby your MP



### What is lobbying?

Lobbying is using your right to meet your MP as one of his or her constituents. You can do this either in your constituency or by visiting Parliament in person. This guide has been written for those people taking part in the Lobby for Libraries on Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> February.

Speak Up For Libraries is calling upon the Government to take action to stop the devastation of the public library service through cuts and closures. We want to see the Secretary of State uphold his duty to superintend the library service by setting out a clear vision, standards and framework to support local authorities to deliver high quality and sustainable library services.

We need as many library users, workers and campaigners as possible to attend the lobby to explain to their MP how they are personally affected by cuts and closures made to library services in their area and how vital it is that MPs support libraries as an essential public service.

An MP should regard you as a constituent, whether you voted for them or not. MPs are required to represent their constituent's interests, even if they may not agree with them. Each MP can have up to 90,000 constituents, so whilst they may not agree with each and every one, they should listen to your concerns and be prepared to pass your views on to the Government.

### You should use a meeting with your MP to seek to:

- Give them information about what is happening to library provision in your area
- Influence their views
- Persuade them that many other constituents also share your concerns
- Ask them to pass your views onto the Government
- Ask them to take appropriate action to show that they support you (see suggestions below)

### Meeting you MP

In theory you can turn up at Westminster anytime the House of Commons is sitting and request a meeting with your MP. But there is no guarantee that they will be there or will have time to meet you, and due to heightened security there is a strict limit on numbers within Parliament. Even when taking part in an organised lobby, you should make every effort to arrange to meet your MP in advance.

### Contacting your MP

The best way to contact your MP is to write to him or her at the House of Commons, Westminster, London, SW1A 0AA. Most MPs also use email and should treat emails in the same manner as a letter. You can find your MP's email address at the following website: <http://findyourmp.parliament.uk/>

Remember to include your home address in the email, as MPs have strict rules about only dealing with their own constituents.

Attached to this guide is a model letter you can use to tell your MP that you will be coming to the lobby and request a meeting with them. It is also worth giving your MP a mobile phone number (if you have one) or asking them for theirs, so it is easier to make contact with them on the day.

### Where to meet your MP

There is a limit of 100 lobbyists in Central Lobby at any one time – this is the area in the House of Commons where people traditionally wait to meet their MPs. We therefore suggest the following alternatives as possible meeting places to prevent this area getting too busy:

- MPs can come to the Aldersgate Room at Central Hall Westminster, which will be where the rally will be taking place between 10am and 1pm but which will be free during the lobby period. The Hall is on Storey's Gate, London, SW1H 9NH, which is only a few minutes walk from Parliament.
- There are a number of other parliamentary buildings where your MP may have an office, which they might suggest meeting you in.

If you need to go to Central Lobby, you need to enter through the St Stephens entrance to the House of Commons. Stewards will be available on the day to help you. Before you join the queue for the security check, inform a police officer that you have a meeting with your MP and show them any associated correspondence. This should enable you to go straight to security checking rather than queuing with the general public waiting for tours of the building. Your MP or one of their members of staff will usually come and meet you in Central Lobby – when you arrive ask the attendants desk to telephone your MP's office to let them know you have arrived.

### Using the Green Card system

If you have not arranged a meeting with your MP in advance you can still try to meet them on the day using the Green Card system.

You will need to queue for entry at the St Stephen's entrance, go through security checks and proceed to Central Lobby. Once you are there, go to the desk and ask for a Green Card. This is a request for your MP to come and meet with you and should be filled in and returned to the desk as directed. On the card you must clearly set out why you want to meet with your MP, such as 'to discuss cuts to the library service in X local authority and across local government more generally'.

This is very important because if you do not manage to meet with your MP on the day, the card will still be sent to them. Your MP should then respond directly to you, and the more they know in advance about why you were at the House of Commons, the better.

The desk staff will take your card once completed and ask officials to look for your MP to let them know you would like to meet with them. Be prepared to wait for a while, but don't forget that lobbyists who have firm appointments may also be waiting, so you should be prepared to give up after around 30 minutes.

### Disabled access

If you are planning to attend the lobby and have a disability, please telephone the Serjeant-at-Arms office at the House of Commons, who will be able to advise on procedures for entering the building (phone 020 7219 3000 and ask the switchboard to put you through to the Serjeant's office). Some disabled parking is provided but this needs to be arranged in advance with the office.

It is usual for one of your MPs' members of staff to accompany you once you are inside the building, but you will need to arrange this in advance.

### Meeting with your MP

When meeting with your MP it is best to be as brief, clear and courteous as possible. If they send a member of their staff, treat them in the same way. Keep in mind the main points you want to make, and what you would like them to do. Try to ensure you:

- Thank them for taking the time to meet with you
- Establish how much time they have
- Make the key points but try to allow most of the time for questions and discussion
- Most importantly, ask them what they are prepared to do to support your views and put them to the Government.

### Ask your MP to:

- Put pressure on the Secretary of State to enforce the law that local authorities must provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' public library service and to issue statutory guidance on this duty as set out in the Public Libraries & Museums Act (1964)
- Ask the Secretary of State to draw up a clear vision for the future of the library service, including standards and a development programme to support local delivery
- Sign the Early Day Motion on libraries and library workers, recognising the social value of libraries and the urgent need to protect services and staff from disproportionate cuts
- Talk to local authorities in their constituency about library services to ensure they are not facing disproportionate reductions as a result of cuts to local government funding
- Pledge support for libraries, listen to the views of library users and staff about the impact of cuts on services, and seek to influence their party's policy on the issue

## **Speak Up For Libraries - January 2016**

**Speak Up For Libraries is a coalition of organisations and campaigners working to protect libraries and library staff, now and in the future.**

Website: [www.speakupforlibraries.org](http://www.speakupforlibraries.org)

Twitter: [@SpeakUp4Libs](https://twitter.com/SpeakUp4Libs) Event hashtag [#SUFLobby16](https://twitter.com/SUFLobby16)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/SpeakUpForLibraries](https://www.facebook.com/SpeakUpForLibraries)

Eventbrite: <http://sufl.eventbrite.com>

Your MP  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

Your name, address and contact details

Dear MP

(If you don't know who your MP is, check <http://findyourmp.parliament.uk/> to find out)

### **Lobby of Parliament – Tuesday 9 February 2016 – Speak Up For Libraries**

I will be attending the lobby of Parliament on Tuesday 9 February 2016. I would very much like to meet with you on that day to discuss the concerns of both library users and staff who live and work in your constituency about closures and cuts to library services.

Library services have borne the considerable brunt of public spending cuts. Over 100 UK libraries were lost last year, and at least 441 have closed in the past five years. Another 149 are currently under threat.

Since 2010 there has been a 22% drop in the number of all staff (full time equivalent) employed in UK's public libraries (figures are from 2010/11 to 2014/15), which at March 2015 stood at 18,028. This included a 32% reduction in professional staff.

Over the same period there has been a 93% increase in the number of volunteers, which in March 2015 stood at 41,402 volunteers, although each volunteer worked an average of 38 hours a year. The skills and knowledge base of the library workforce is being seriously eroded and the quality of library service provided threatened.

The future looks just as bad. Following the Spending Review 2015 last year the Local Government Association commented: "Even if councils stopped filling in potholes, maintaining parks, closed all children's centres, libraries, museums, leisure centres and turned off every street light they will not have saved enough money to plug the financial black hole they face by 2020." (press release 25/11/15). As local authorities approach setting their budgets for 2016/17 the stories of further deep cuts to library services proliferate.

Local campaigns are happening all over the UK to counter threats to library services, but at the lobby we will join together to send a clear message to MPs. Public libraries and staff have a long and proud tradition of providing open access to information and promoting literacy, and during times of recession they are more vital than ever. We are calling on MPs to take action to ensure library services are sustained and developed into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

I do understand that it can be hard to make firm appointments on days when large numbers of people are seeking to lobby their MP. The lobby is using the Aldersgate Room at Central Hall Westminster as its base for the day and this will be free for meetings during the lobby period from 1pm to 3pm, or perhaps you may

wish to make alternative arrangements to meet me in one of the Parliamentary outbuildings.

I would be grateful if you can let me know in advance if you are available on 9 February and suggest a good way of making sure we can meet.

I look forward to your reply and meeting with you on the day.

Yours faithfully,