



Engaging with your local MPs for the first time

Our perceptions audit of politicians earlier this year told us clearly that when an MP has a good relationship with their local housing associations, they have a more positive view about the sector as a whole.

If you have never contacted your local MP before, you might be wondering where to start. This step-by-step guide will help you identify and engage with MPs who have constituencies where you have tenants and customers.

If you're looking for some inspiration, you can browse our case studies, from members who have had success engaging with MPs in their areas. Their good ideas might work for you too.

Step 1: Identify your MPs

Each MP represents a constituency and has a duty to serve everyone living in that area. The simplest way to find your local MP is by visiting the official Parliament UK website and type the postcode – of your office or an estate that you manage – into the ['Find your MP' search bar](#).

Too many MPs?

Depending on where your tenants and customers live, you may find that your organisation has a lot of MPs that you'd need to contact. To make this task more manageable, consider picking just those MPs who are particularly important to you. Perhaps they have a large number of your properties in their constituency, or maybe your specialism is supported housing and you have a service in their constituency.

Step 2: Find out more about them

On the [Parliament website](#) you'll find the MP's constituency address, contact information, their Twitter handle and website address. It will also tell you if they have another Parliamentary role – for example, they may be a Minister or Shadow Minister. Also, if you have the time, try to find out more about what interests them or if they have spoken about housing-related things in the past. This will help you make an approach which is tailored to their interests.

This is also a good time to start thinking about offices, estates or schemes that you could invite that MP to in their constituency.

Step 3: Make contact

MPs get hundreds of letters and emails every day and have a small staff who go through all correspondence. For your first contact, we suggest writing a letter, signed by your chief executive or chair, and printed on your letterhead paper. It's worth saving a scan of your letter, in case you need to email it to the MP's office later.

Most MPs will be keen to establish links with their local housing associations, and a request for a meeting to make initial contact may be well received. To get off on the right foot, your first letter should be positive and talk about all the great work you do

for the MP's constituents and the homes that you're building or managing in their area. If your research shows that the MP has expressed an interest in housing, you can reference this in the letter.

Try to keep your letter short – one side of paper is more than enough – less if you can. Around 10 days after posting the letter, follow it up with a phone call to the MP's constituency office, to check they received it and to arrange a date and time for a meeting.

Step 4: Arrange a meeting or visit

In your initial letter, it would be worth offering a meeting so you can start to get to know the MP and their priorities. You could also add to this by offering them a visit to one of your developments, or show them round a successful scheme.

Unless Parliament is in recess ([take a look a recess dates](#)), MPs will spend Monday afternoon through to Thursday afternoon every week in Westminster.

If you would like them to attend a specific meeting or event, it is advisable to offer a Friday, Saturday or Sunday. Most MPs will hold regular constituency surgeries on a Friday or Saturday, where they will hold face-to-face appointments with constituents.

Step 5: Meet your MP

In preparation for your meeting or visit by the MP, do more research on their interests and background, as they may already have a good grasp of the housing issues in your constituency, or even previous work experience in the housing sector. Other MPs might have little or no knowledge of housing policy at all. A good starting point is to check their website or to look at what they have said in Parliament about housing by searching for them on the website theyworkforyou.com

If you are inviting an MP to an event or on a site visit, make sure that you have fully briefed all those involved – on the MP and on the logistics around the visit. The fewer people involved in the visit, the easier it will be to have a conversation as you show the MP around.

If you are organising any media activity around the event, ask the MP in the first instance if they are happy for the local press to be invited. In some cases, the MP may prefer to contact the local press as they may have a pre-existing relationship and other visits on the same day as your event.

Remember to share any draft press releases with the MP in advance and ask for a quote from the MP or use any photos taken during the visit. That way their staff will be more likely to mention the meeting/visit in their communication channels (Twitter, MP's personal website, and weekly or monthly newsletters). If you are able to tweet out a picture of your MP's visit, please do using the hashtag #ukhousing.

Step 6: Stay in touch

Follow-up with the MP after the visit by email or letter, and suggest regular meetings so you can keep them updated on your work. You may also want to ensure your communications team regularly monitors the MP's website or Twitter account.

For future visits or meetings, you could consider involving your tenants and customers, if you feel comfortable to. Your MP would no doubt appreciate the opportunity to meet some of their constituents. MPs also hold regular “constituency surgeries” – usually on a Friday or Saturday, where they hold face-to-face appointments with their constituents. If you have an office in an MP’s constituency, you could consider offering to host a regular surgery for them.

Step 7: Tell us how it went...

As well as being useful for your organisation, the intelligence you learn from your meetings with MPs is vital to the Federation as we continue to develop our lobbying strategies on the issues that affect housing associations across the country.

So, please share how these meetings went with us. We would be happy to provide you with any background on our engagement, or insights into that MPs’ views, if you get in touch before your meeting. What you tell us will be confidential: we won’t share your intelligence with others outside the Federation unless you say that we can.

You can do this by [contacting the Public Affairs team](#).

We hope this step-by-step guide is helpful to you.

Checklist: identifying and contacting your MP

Step 1: Identify your MPs

Find your local MPs by visiting www.parliament.uk	
<i>Optional extra:</i> if you have too many MPs to handle, consider picking a smaller number of MPs who are particularly important to you.	
Think of offices, estates, schemes, etc that you could invite that MP to – these should be in their constituency.	

Step 2: Get to know them

Use the Parliament website to find out more about the MP: their contact information, Parliamentary role, interest in housing/ supported housing, Twitter handle and website address.	
<i>Optional extra:</i> Google them – this will often give useful information on what interests them or if they have spoken about housing-related things in the past.	

Step 3: Make contact

Find the MP's constituency office's postal address – that's where you'll need to send your letter.	
Draft your letter to the MP. Keep the tone and content positive if possible, and try to keep it to one side, with your "ask" – in this case a meeting, in the first or second paragraph.	
Get it approved and signed by your Chief Executive or Chair... and send it to the MP.	
Save a scan of the letter as a PDF, in case you need to email it.	
Around 10 days after posting the letter, follow it up with a phone call to the MP's constituency office – to arrange a date and time for a meeting. Have a copy of the letter to hand, so you can refer to it if necessary.	

Step 4: Arrange a meeting or visit

When you contact the MP, offer a meeting or visit to a scheme on a Friday or over the weekend.	
On that call, get a commitment to meet or even better, agree a date and time	

Step 5: Meet your MP

In preparation for the meeting/ visit, do more research on their interests and background. theyworkforyou.com is a good place to start	
Brief colleagues on the MP and the issues that are likely to come up during the visit.	

Liaise with the scheme manager, etc, to ensure that the visit goes smoothly and that everyone knows where to be and when.	
Carefully consider who you invite to the visit – from inside and outside the organisation – the fewer people the better.	
Media? Check with the MP first that they are happy for you to invite the local press.	
At the visit, ask the MP for a supportive quote, and to use any photos taken during the visit.	
Social media: encourage the MP and their staff to mention the meeting/visit on their website, Twitter, Facebook and their weekly or monthly newsletters. Ask them to name-check your housing association and use #housing	

Step 6: Stay in touch

Follow up with the MP after the visit by email or letter and suggest another meeting or visit.	
Follow that email/ letter up after a fortnight by phone.	
Ask your communications team to regularly monitor the MP's website, Twitter and Facebook accounts for mentions of housing or your organisation.	
<i>Optional extra:</i> Consider involving your tenants and customers too, by offering a meeting with your tenant board, or offer to host the MP constituency surgery.	

Step 7: Tell us how it went...

Complete our online form or email the Public Affairs team with info on how the meeting went and what the MP said. <i>Please be assured that what you tell us will be confidential – we won't share your intelligence with others outside the Federation unless you say we can.</i>	
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