

A Fair Pint Campaign

How to lobby your local MP

1. Introduction

Often the best way to lobby Parliamentarians is from the grass-roots up, as they are much more likely to respond to issues affecting their constituents. A united response from publicans at a local level, and meeting with your MP should help to raise the profile of the 'Fair Pint' campaign in Westminster, particularly if done in large enough numbers.

Through local lobbying, you can highlight and raise awareness of the key issues of the campaign. Local lobbying activity can help you to build relationships and influence with your local MP, and spur them into action on behalf of the campaign.

This toolkit is a resource to promote and support this "lobbying" activity by publicans. In the toolkit you will find:

- Information on contacting your MP
- A sample letter to your MP
- Objectives for a meeting with your MP
- Information on using the local media
- A checklist of activity to undertake

2. Contacting your MP

MPs represent an average of 60,000 people and receive hundreds of letters, telephone calls, e-mails and invitations every week. Most MPs have offices both in their constituency and in Westminster. They are usually required to be in Parliament from Monday to Thursday each week, when Parliament is sitting (which roughly coincides with school terms). Friday is spent in the constituency, giving MPs a chance to have meetings with their staff, attend local events and hold surgeries for constituents. Many MPs also make themselves available over the weekend for events, meetings and surgeries.

You may already know your local MP and may have made contact previously. If you do not know who your local MP is, the easiest way to find out is to use the MP "locator" service on the Parliament web-site at: <http://findyourmp.parliament.uk/commons/>. This service also links to contact details and biographical information about MPs. Contact with your MP can be through correspondence or in person. Correspondence is the best method of contact if you wish to maintain a process that can be traced and kept current during holidays etc. when an MP's office may be closed.

Making contact with the MP in person is an effective way of building a good relationship and encouraging them to take up the issues you want to raise. However, it is important to make contact in a way that is timely and organised.

The sample letter provides a template with which to write to your MP, asking them to support the campaign, and requesting a short meeting.

3. Sample MP letter

Name MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

May 2008

Dear Name

A Fair Pint? Campaign

I am writing to you as a local constituent and publican to ask you to support the campaign to ensure fairness for UK landlords and consumers who suffer as a result of 'tied lease agreements'.

I am the tenant of the [ADD NAME] pub in your constituency. The pub is tied in a lease agreement with the [ADD NAME] 'PubCo'. My situation is common to many pub tenants in the UK: approximately, 24,000 British pubs (37%) are owned by PubCos.

"Tied" landlords have no choice but to buy their beer from the PubCo even though they can buy the same beer cheaper elsewhere. Tied pub landlords also have to rent their pub and home from their PubCo with rents which are profit related. Unfortunately, upward only rent reviews and beer that has to be bought at inflated prices from the PubCo places enormous pressure on many tied landlords who struggle to make a living. Huge numbers of landlords are simply being forced out of the market and few consumers understand why they are paying more for their pint.

The dominance of the large PubCos over the pub market has resulted in an unfair and uncompetitive arrangement for tied pub landlords and consumers alike. Pubs are currently closing at a rate of 27 pubs per week, and in 2006-07 bankruptcies amongst pub landlords increased seven-fold.

The Fair Pint campaign, a coalition of pub tenants and other organisations and individuals affected by the tied lease agreement, is calling for an end to this unfair situation. I hope that you will want to support this campaign, and ensure the survival of Britain's pubs.

I would be delighted to meet with you in the constituency to discuss these issues further. I would also urge you to highlight these concerns in Parliament, and to support Early Day Motion 1328 on PubCos and the supply tie.

Yours sincerely

Name

4. The meeting and its objectives

Local lobbying activity is an important opportunity to secure action and continuing support from your MP. You should prepare, in advance, a list of ways in which you want him/her to help you and then try to get their commitment.

Meetings with MPs will tend to be quite business-like and they will expect a case to be put to them, outlining the issue, the effect it will have upon the publicans and the public and why they should become involved.

When raising issues with your MP, you should aim to win his/her commitment to one or more of the following actions:

- To write to the Secretary of State for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform to highlight the issues you have raised.
- You can ask your MP if they are able to table a Parliamentary Question, either an Oral Parliamentary Question, at question time to the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform, which takes place every four weeks when Parliament is sitting, or a 'Written Parliamentary Question' which can be tabled at any time.
- If they haven't already, ask your MP to sign Early Day Motion 1328 on PubCos and the supply tie.
- You can inform your MP that you are planning to send a press release on the meeting to the local paper, and ask whether they would be prepared to be quoted in this press release.
- If you are based in Scotland or Wales, you can let your MP know whether you have had any previous contact, or whether you are intending to contact your MSP (Member of the Scottish Parliament) or AM (Assembly Member).
- It is obviously very important to thank your MP for their time in meeting with you and to recognise their efforts on your behalf.

5. The local media

The local media can be a key part of your local lobbying activity. For example, if you are meeting with your local MP in your pub, you may want to invite local press to send journalists and photographers.

A media dimension can also be a helpful way to encourage the MP to engage in the issues. If, for example, the MP is participating in a media interview, he/she will want to sound knowledgeable and interested in the issues and will need to say how he/she intends to take up the issues.

In planning media contact, you need to identify all possible outlets for your story from mainstream local papers to the trade and free press, and radio and TV stations. Remember, no outlet is too

small: often the free newspapers circulated in residential areas are more widely read than national dailies.

Do you have any media contacts already? Personal contacts with journalists, whether from previous coverage, family and friends or just a friendly phone call, can be the quickest way to a story. If not, identify the contact name of the right person for your type of story. This is not difficult: just looking through your local paper you will see the “by-line” of journalists next to the stories they write, and this should help you to identify who is writing on similar themes to yours.

If you are “cold-calling” a newspaper, or local radio, just ask for the name of the most relevant person to your story – such as the news editor/desk for tomorrow’s or future news stories; the features editor for longer, more discursive articles, or the picture editor for photocalls.

It is important to involve, and where appropriate, give prior notice to people you are involving in media activity. For example, your MP may be able to supply contact information for the local media outlets, or will be prepared to issue a press release to support your cause.

If you are involving the media, you should consider what photo opportunities there will be (ie who will be available for photographing where, and what they will be doing) and how this relates to the issues you are raising with the participants. You would need to explain what makes for a good photo opportunity. You could also make your own arrangements for a photograph, such as by taking your own digital camera. These pictures can then be emailed to local media.

6. Checklist of activity

Before the MP visit

Use sample letter to write to your local MP.

Follow-up the letter with a phone call to MP’s office, after 2 weeks, to arrange appropriate time/ date for visit.

Identify the appropriate local media and inform them of intended visit.

Work out the key points and actions that you would like the MP to take away from the event.

After the MP visit

Agree a press release for issuing to the local media.

Write to the MP to thank him for the meeting, setting out the key messages and actions discussed.