

# Influence

**O**ur voting, letter-writing and lobbying – all can make a difference and influence our MPs. David Drew offers some suggestions on what to do – and what not to do.

MPs are there to be influenced. They are not immune from persuasion or indifferent to the views of their constituents. However, there is a right way and a wrong way of trying to win MPs over to your point of view.

## *The wrong way to lobby*

BEGIN BY TELLING your MP what they should do with regard to an issue, use clearly mass-produced methods of communication to demand that they speak and vote in a particular way, and intimate that you don't think your personal contact will make a blind bit of difference because you believe that they have already made up their mind, and it's the opposite of what you want. You would be surprised how many people approach their MPs in this way.

## *A more effective way*

IT IS MUCH better to think carefully about what you want to achieve and the best way to go about it. Firstly, it is best to approach your own local MP. They are very busy people and simply do not have the time to deal with issues outside their constituency. Also there is a parliamentary convention that MPs do not usually deal with other Members' constituents, which is why you may have had a letter or phone call referred on in the past.

## *Contacting your own MP*

BEFORE MAKING CONTACT find out a little about your MP. Is he or she a Christian? Have they a family? What are their interests? There are various publications in your local library that will give you this information or nowadays a quick search of the internet will give you enough to go on.

Decide how you want to communicate. Consider whether you want to write a letter or send an email. Or should you phone the MP's office? Personally, I don't mind how I receive a contact, but my phone calls are inevitably taken by someone else as I am in London during most of the week.

## *Getting your point across*

ONCE YOU HAVE decided how you wish to communicate think about what you are going to say. Again there are some basic guidelines. First, whether you are writing or phoning keep the message relatively short and to the point. If the case or issue is complicated, it is better to follow up later either through more correspondence or via a face-to-face meeting with your MP at his or her surgery. More about this later.

Second, make sure that your information is personalised. Even if you are pursuing an issue such as the cancellation of third world debt or a matter of belief such as euthanasia make sure that you use your own arguments. Don't be afraid to mention that are representing a larger group, but do talk for yourself. Clearly not all MPs are Christians, but many are, so don't be afraid to say you are.

Lastly, be positive and upbeat in your message, and certainly avoid rancour or personal attacks. MPs do get a lot of whingeing letters. Like anyone they tend to react more favourably when encouraged rather than attacked.

## *Meeting your MP*

OF COURSE, IF the matter is sufficiently serious, then ask to see your MP. You can arrange to see your MP in a number of different ways. For individual cases it is best to visit your MP at his or her surgery. This will give you the opportunity for a 10-15 minute confidential hearing from your MP who will then hopefully take up your case.

**David Drew**



David Drew was born in Gloucestershire and has lived in his constituency for the last 25 years. He was elected as a Labour and Co-operative MP in 1997 and has been a local councillor for many years. David's main interests are the eradication of poverty, the environment, health, international development and conflict

resolution, and community development.

David is a member of many local organisations including Gloucestershire Association for Disability, Age Concern (Stroud) and Care and Repair Stroud as well as a founder member of Stroud and District Small Business Club. He also belongs to various national organisations including CPRE, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace and Rural Revival.

A committed Christian, David worships in his local community and is a member of the Ministry Team at St Cyr's in Stonehouse. David was last year's Chair of the National Prayer Breakfast held annually in Westminster Hall. He is also an active member of the Parliamentary Christian Fellowship and the Christian Socialist Movement. He is also very much involved in Christians Together and preaches at different churches from time to time.

Alternatively, you can take a deputation to meet your MP. Clearly this is likely to be issue-based and will have to be carefully managed to ensure you have a focussed discussion with your MP. A deputation can be a good opportunity to get the arguments across cogently from a number of different people.

Finally, it is possible to arrange a meeting in public or private or a visit. MPs spend much of their time visiting people and places within their constituency and this can be a very effective use of everyone's time and efforts.

MPs thrive on hearing from and meeting their constituents. Christians should not be afraid to engage with politicians and make their voice heard. But be sure to do so from a position of respect for the person who is doing their best to represent you.