

## Engaging with your elected representatives: ideas for Catholic advocacy

*'This is the true face of politics and its raison d'être: an invaluable service to the good of the entire community. This is why the social doctrine of the Church considers it a noble form of charity. I therefore invite young people and the not-so-young to prepare themselves adequately and to make a personal commitment in this area...a healthy realism knows that even the best ruling class cannot solve all the questions in a flash. In order to realize this, it suffices to try to act in person instead of limiting oneself to observing and criticizing from the balcony what others are doing.'* **Pope Francis**



### Choose your issues...

There are whole a range of issues which, as Catholics concerned with the Common Good of our communities, our country and our planet, you may wish to engage with your elected representatives about:

**Local issues** such as homelessness, social care or schools

**National issues** such as welfare reform, mental health, prisons or support for refugees

**International issues** such as peacebuilding, human rights or climate change

If you're in need of some inspiration have a look at the advocacy being undertaken by CSAN ([csan.org.uk](http://csan.org.uk)), CAFOD ([cafod.org.uk/campaign](http://cafod.org.uk/campaign)), and the Catholic Bishops' Conference ([cbcew.org.uk/advocacy](http://cbcew.org.uk/advocacy))

### Identify who to approach...

Once you've chosen the issues that are important to you, it is worth spending some time identifying which of your elected representatives it is best to engage with and what they can do for you:

**Your local MP** is responsible for representing you in the House of Commons – particularly on issues handled by government departments.

These include things like immigration and asylum (handled by Home Office); benefits (handled by the Department for Work and Pensions); and foreign policy (handled by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office).

At the request of a constituent MPs can write to government ministers, ask them questions in parliament, or raise issues in debates.

If your MP is in the government or shadow cabinet there will be restrictions on what they can raise in parliament, but they are still able to contact ministers on your behalf.

You can find your MP at [parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/mps/](https://parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/mps/)



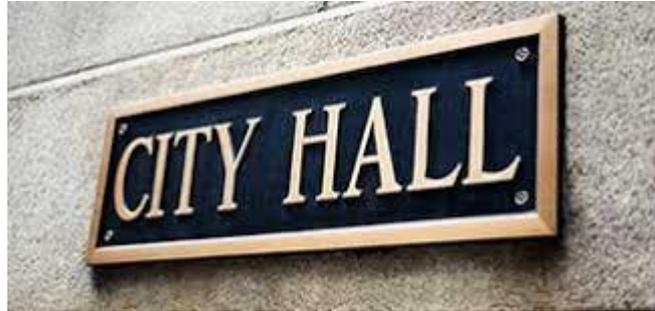
**Your local councillors** are responsible for representing you on issues handled by the council. Before beginning your advocacy have a look at exactly what these issues are.

Many places have two tiers of local government: **county councils** (responsible for things like schools or transport) and **district, borough or city councils** (responsible for things like housing and recycling). In others places there is just one **unitary** tier of local government providing all the local services.

You can find your councils and councillors at [gov.uk/find-your-local-councillors](https://gov.uk/find-your-local-councillors)

Some areas also have an **elected mayor** – you can find a list of them at [local.gov.uk/topics/devolution/directly-elected-mayors](https://www.local.gov.uk/topics/devolution/directly-elected-mayors)

*If you don't know who is responsible for a particular issue speak to your MP's office who will normally be happy to point you in the right direction.*



### **Get in touch...**

The best way to get in touch with your MP, councillors, or elected mayor is to e-mail them. All their addresses can be found using the links above. You can also send your MP a physical letter at

**House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA**

If you want a longer face-to-face discussion MPs and councillors run **local surgeries** where you can book an appointment to meet with them. This can be helpful for particularly complex issues or if there is a group of you would like to meet your representative at the same time.

Most MPs and many councillors also have a presence on **social media** particularly twitter and facebook. This can be helpful for engaging quickly or publicly questioning your representatives, but they will normally ask you to get in touch via e-mail to discuss issues in more detail.



### **Be effective...**

Whenever you are engaging with any elected representative by writing or in person it is important to:

**Keep it polite** – treat your representatives with respect and remember to thank them for any help

**Inform, persuade and ask** – succinctly explain what the issue is, why it is important, and what you exactly would like them to do

**Make it personal** – always make it clear that you are their constituent and explain why this issue matters to you

**Follow up** –ask for a reply, share the outcomes of your advocacy with others in your parish, or with our national agencies

## **Develop a strategy for engaging with local councillors/MPs**

- **The three issues I/we will raise in order of importance are:** Aim to adopt the: SMART approach i.e. SPECIFIC, MEASURABLE, ACHIEVABLE, REALISTIC, TIMELY

1.

2.

3.

- **My/our aims from raising each of these issues are:**

1.

2.

3.

- **I/we offer this individual the following reward(s)** e.g. briefing on key issues, public platform, photo opportunity or positive comments on their social media

1.

2.

3.

- **The following issues are likely to derail the conversation and should be avoided:**

a)

b)

c)

- **I/we are ready to back up my/our request with the following briefings/pieces of research:**
- **I/we will invite the following interested local people/groups to the meeting** (need to inform the office about exactly who will be attending the meeting)
- **The person in the group responsible for raising each issue:**

### **5 Tips for Building a Constructive Conversation**

1. Treat your MP/ Councillor as an ally
2. Demonstrate your preparation
3. Drop in some carefully selected facts
4. Be open to learn
5. Thank them

**Further help:** Hope for the Future: [www.hfff.org.uk](http://www.hfff.org.uk) or email: [info@hfff.org.uk](mailto:info@hfff.org.uk),

Commission Apostolic Trust [www.commission-together.org](http://www.commission-together.org)

| <b>Constituency</b>                | <b>MP</b>       | <b>Party</b> |
|------------------------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Batley & Spennings                 | Tracy Brabin    | Labour       |
| Bradford East                      | Imran Hussain   | Labour       |
| Bradford South                     | Judith Cummins  | Labour       |
| Bradford West                      | Naz Shah        | Labour       |
| Calder Valley                      | Craig Whittaker | Conservative |
| Colne Valley                       | Thelma Walker   | Labour       |
| Dewsbury                           | Paula Sherriff  | Labour       |
| Elmet & Rothwell                   | Alec Shelbrooke | Conservative |
| Halifax                            | Holly Lynch     | Labour       |
| Harrogate & Knaresborough          | Andrew Jones    | Conservative |
| Hemsworth                          | Jon Trickett    | Labour       |
| Huddersfield                       | Barry Sheerman  | Labour       |
| Keighley                           | John Grogan     | Labour       |
| Leeds Central                      | Hilary Benn     | Labour       |
| Leeds East                         | Richard Burgon  | Labour       |
| Leeds North East                   | Fabian Hamilton | Labour       |
| Leeds North West                   | Alex Sobel      | Labour       |
| Leeds West                         | Rachel Reeves   | Labour       |
| Morley & Outwood                   | Andrea Jenkyns  | Conservative |
| Normanton, Pontefract & Castleford | Yvette Cooper   | Labour       |
| Pudsey                             | Stuart Andrew   | Conservative |
| Selby & Ainsty                     | Nigel Adams     | Conservative |
| Shipley                            | Philip Davies   | Conservative |
| Skipton & Ripon                    | Julian Smith    | Conservative |
| Wakefield                          | Mary Creagh     | Labour       |

