



CAMPAIGNER NETWORK TOOLKIT

7) How to influence the political process

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The Vegan Society's campaigns target the people who decide on the policies that affect animals, the environment, and human health & nutrition. Typically these will be governments, international institutions or multinational companies. Local campaigners rarely have direct access to these decision-makers, but you do have ways to influence them. You can be that change!

Local campaigners often have access to influential people, such as MPs, as well as local members of political parties, local councillors, trades unionists and local managers of national or multinational companies. Depending on the particular issue, any of these could help to influence the way policies are shaped at national or even international level.

Do you realise how powerful you are as an active campaigner?

Elected politicians in the UK can have a massive influence on raising awareness of the issues The Vegan Society campaigns for, and the best way you can influence them is by talking to your own MP or elected representative.

Working with MPs (and AMs, MLAs, MSPs)

You can find out who your MP is by visiting

www.theyworkforyou.com or **www.writetothem.com**

The latter allows you to contact your MP, local Councillors and MEPs (Members of the European Parliament) through the website. Be aware, however, that a personal letter will have more impact. The most obvious way to persuade an MP to support a campaign is to meet or write to them, explaining calmly and rationally why you believe a particular policy is necessary. Local media coverage will always be useful in persuading an MP that an issue is worth bothering about. Ideally, you are trying to build a partnership with MPs and other influential people. Do not alienate them by being confrontational or over-demanding. You don't have to be a political expert – all you need is passion. Your passion is your biggest asset because what you tell them, or write to them about, acts as an indicator for what 'the people' think. Your efforts

help build a picture of a constituency that is bothered and concerned about animals, the environment, and people. This makes your MP sit up and listen!

Make it their priority!

Writing letters to your MP can be immensely influential. Anecdotal evidence suggests that just 20 individual letters from constituents makes an issue a priority for an MP. To help you get the most out of your efforts, we'll alert you to the best times to contact your MP on a particular issue through our Campaign Actions and Campaigner Network emails and webpage.

Be creative – get them involved

Why not really capture your MP's imagination by engaging them in some of the events you organise. Show them what it's all about with an invite to a screening of a film or get them along to your next meeting - find ways of involving them however you choose to campaign. Remember, the aim is to show that ordinary people like you – their potential voters – care about these issues.

Visiting your MP

Your MP may run surgeries on an informal drop-in basis (first-come-first-served), or may expect you to make an appointment. For the informal surgeries, we advise you to turn up as early as possible. Details of surgeries are often advertised in the local press. You can also contact your MP's office directly. The office will advise you on how and when you can meet your MP. If you haven't met your MP before, introduce yourself as a constituent who has a deep concern about the issue – a concern shown by your support of organisations such as The Vegan Society.

Your MP will not expect you to have the same level of understanding and knowledge as a policy specialist. You simply need to convey your concern about the issue, and the need for the MP to take action. It is a good idea to write a follow-up letter to thank your MP for his or her time, state what you understood to be

the outcomes of the meeting, and remind the MP of the actions which he or she agreed to take on your behalf.

Whatever activity you are planning, it helps to have the local media on your side. They can help you spread your message and engage support. The greater the publicity, the greater the chance there is of more people becoming involved. There are many potential opportunities: news stories, features and in-depth interviews, letters to the editor, phone-ins, photo stories and filming opportunities (See our Campaigner Network Toolkit leaflet on Speaking to the Local Press).

Influencing your MP: top tips

- ▶ Be yourself. It's you they want to listen to.
- ▶ Always ask them for something that demonstrates their support. Ask them for a signature, to take a stand, be photographed etc.
- ▶ Keep communication simple: keep letters/emails to one page maximum.
- ▶ Do some homework. At www.theyworkforyou.com you can enter your postcode and get all the information you need about your MP, their areas of interest and their contact details.
- ▶ Be aware of any role, or office, your MP may hold e.g. a position in the Cabinet or Shadow Cabinet, and what their brief/area of responsibility is.
- ▶ Your MP may be involved with an All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) connected with issues relevant to The Vegan Society's campaigns. An APPG is a cross-party group of MPs and Peers that aims to increase awareness and understanding amongst parliamentarians of particular issues. There is an APPG on Vegetarianism and Veganism which is funded by The Vegan Society, the Vegetarian Society and V for Life. This APPG welcomes attendees with an interest in vegetarianism, veganism, or special diets; public health; the environment; and animal welfare. If your MP is not a member, why not encourage them to join? <http://vegappg.org.uk/>

Local Councillors

Councillors are elected to represent their communities and make decisions about how local money is spent on services. There are a number of different types of councils, depending on what type of area you live in and how it has been decided to organise local services.

Councillors are responsible for all local services. Unitary or 'single tier' councils cover other medium to large towns and cities (e.g. Reading, Nottingham) as well as some rural counties (e.g. Cornwall, Durham). These councils are also responsible for all local services. County councils often cover areas with a mix of rural villages and towns and cities. They can be quite large, and are split up into smaller district and borough councils. County councils are responsible for roughly 80% of services for the whole area. Some examples of county councils include Kent, Northumberland and Lancashire. District councils which are sometimes called borough or city councils depending on the type of area, cover the smaller areas that make up counties. They are responsible for fewer services than county councils and focus on local services. Some examples include Thanet District Council in Kent, King's Lynn & West Norfolk Borough Council in Norfolk and Preston City Council in Lancashire.

Northern Ireland has 11 local councils, Wales has 22 unitary councils and Scottish local government consists of 32 local authorities. To find your local council visit: www.gov.uk/find-your-local-council.

Information on Scottish local authorities can be found here:

<http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Government/local-government/localg/usefullinks>

Finding your local councillors:

There are a number of tools you can use to find your local elected councillor(s). You may also want to find out which councillors are responsible for specific services: you can find out who your ward/division councillor(s) is/are by typing your postcode into the website: www.writetothem.com