

Writing to MPs and local councillors – guidance notes and template

One of the ways we ask members to support our campaigns is to contact their local MPs and councils. Here, we want to set out why this can help to progress campaigns and to help you feel confident writing to your local representatives. At the end, there is a skeleton template designed to show you the best way to structure your letter to get the results you want.

How can my local MP help?

Your local MP is the person who represents your area in Parliament. This means they are able to raise matters of national importance in the House of Commons and call on Government to take action. A local MP may also, at their discretion, offer to support your campaign in other ways such as attending a local event or writing to the media.

When considering if your MP is the right person to write to, think about whether the issue you are concerned about is something that is within Government's power to resolve. If that is not the case, consider writing to your local councillor instead.

Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales

For those living in the above three countries, there is an extra aspect to consider when deciding who to write to. If the issue you are concerned about is one which your devolved government is able to progress without reliance on the national, you may consider writing to your local MSP/MLA/MS instead of (or in addition to) your MP.

How can my local councillor help?

Matters that are left to the discretion of local councils should be raised with your local councillor. Some examples of topics which fall under a local council's remit include education, social care, housing, and planning; if you are not sure if something falls under local council responsibility then it is worth looking at your local council's website to see if there is information available. If you cannot access your council's website, you can also call their office to find out – your local library or town hall can help you find the information you need.

If there is more than one local councillor for your ward, you may either choose to write to all of them (being sure to note in the letter that you are doing so), or if you are aware that one is particularly concerned with the topic you wish to write about, you can write to them and note that you feel they may find it of particular interest.

How do I find mine?

To find your local MP: <https://members.parliament.uk/members/commons>

To find your local MSP (Scotland): <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/msps/>

To find your local MLA (Northern Ireland): <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/mlas/>

To find your local MS (Wales): <https://senedd.wales/find-a-member-of-the-senedd/>

To find your local councillor/s: <https://www.gov.uk/find-your-local-councillors>

If you cannot access the internet, your local library or town hall will be able to help you find the details you need.



Using the TG name

Being a TG member empowers you to campaign with the weight of a national organisation behind you. We are happy that members use their membership of TG as a boost to their campaigns, but please bear the following in mind:

If you are writing about a campaign that TG has a mandate about, please make sure that your letter is in support of the viewpoint presented by that mandate. If you disagree with the stance that TG has taken on an issue, you are still free to use the guidance in this document to help you, but letters should be sent without invoking TG's name. This ensures that the national message stays consistent, which is important if we are to be taken seriously.

If you are writing about a national issue that is not covered by a TG mandate, you can still say that you are a TG member – but make sure you are clear that you are speaking as an individual and not supporting a national stance.

If you are writing about a local issue which your Guild is involved with, you can emphasise your Guild over the national movement – but do still mention that your Guild is part of a wider movement, and that HQ encourages members to get involved with local issues as part of TG's objectives.

Letter or email?

These days, it can be hard to know whether a physical letter or an email would be the best option. There are benefits and drawbacks to both: an email is faster, but there is the risk of it being sent into junk; physical letters demonstrate a little more effort but take longer to arrive and still do not guarantee a response.

If you are aware that the person you are writing to has a preference, and you are able to match that preference, that may be the best place to start. Otherwise, it comes down to what you are most comfortable with – there's also nothing stopping you from sending an email as well as a posted letter, though if you are going to do this then it bears mentioning in each correspondence that you will be doing/have done so (see the template for more on this).

Whichever method you choose, you should aim for your letter to be no longer than a single side of A4. Posted letters should be typed, if at all possible, as this makes sure the recipient is able to read and understand what you have sent them.

Finally: it might be tempting to write one letter on behalf of the whole Guild, but we would recommend instead encouraging members to send separate letters, even if that means separate copies of a letter that the Guild composes together.

When will I get a response?

When writing to MPs or councillors, you will need to be a little patient when waiting for a response. We would suggest allowing at least two weeks for email and four weeks for post – it may be that the person you have written to is waiting on a meeting or discussion with others to make their reply more meaningful. Even if that isn't the case, there will be other demands on their time that may mean they cannot reply immediately – and sometimes correspondence can be set aside for later only to slip from their mind.

If you do have reason to chase a response, please be respectful and polite when doing so. You may wish to use a different means of communication, especially if your letter was originally sent in the post. If you are able, a phone call may help to prompt the person you wrote to and nudge your correspondence further up the list of priorities.

Template letter

Note: unless otherwise noted, the below applies for both posted letters and emails

Make sure you include your address, including your post code, at the top of the letter – this makes it clear that you are a constituent.

Dear Mr/Mrs/Miss <last name>,

I am writing to you about my concerns regarding <topic>. This should be as brief and specific as possible – save the details for later paragraphs I do so as a local constituent, and as a member of Townswomen's Guilds (TG). Only include the latter when writing on behalf of a TG campaign.

Your first main paragraph should summarise what you think the problem is, and some brief reasoning why. This can echo what has been published by HQ but should also touch on any local examples of the problem – and especially any personal experience of the problem.

Your next paragraph should focus on the desired outcome – referencing the wording of the relevant mandate where it applies. If it does relate to a TG campaign, you can then mention that you are supporting a national mandate – if the mandate brought the issue to your attention, you could say as much. If the mandate is one you or your Guild proposed, this is definitely something worth mentioning – that you sought support from the national organisation.

You can then talk about TG itself, briefly – focus on its mission statement of making women's lives better and on its suffragist roots. In this instance, it is the campaigning and determination to see change happen that you want to emphasise. You can talk about any action that HQ has taken or asked of members, as well as any other action that you have taken personally (or as a local Guild).

Next, you should summarise what it is you want from the person you are writing to. Are you asking an MP to raise the issue in Parliament? Are you seeking information from the local council about why the proposed solution isn't in place? Be specific, and make sure that you aren't asking for something that is not within their means to do or respond to.

To close, thank them for their time in reading your letter and that you are looking forward to their reply – don't be pushy, but it does help to make clear that you do expect a response. If you are sending through the post, remind them that your address is at the top of the letter. If you are sending an email, you can state that they can respond to the address you are emailing from. You might also consider including your phone number, as this could help the person you are contacting to get back to you more quickly. If you are sending both letter and email, then this is where you reference that – in the email, say "I will also be sending a copy of this in the post" and in the letter, say "You may have already read this, as I sent it to you by email on <date>, but I wanted to make sure that at least one copy reached your attention".

Yours sincerely,

<sign>

<print>

In most cases, "yours sincerely" is the most appropriate line to close the letter with; softer examples such as "kind regards" or "in TG friendship" should be reserved for when you are writing to someone who is already familiar with who you are.