

Walk with kings but do not lose the common touch

MPs need to be confident communicators, willing to talk to anyone and to learn from anyone. As Kipling might have said they need to walk and talk with Prime Ministers and Secretaries of State , with Presidents and Ambassadors, with Chief Executives and executive Mayors just as they need to listen to anyone in a low paid job, the student and the unemployed to understand how it feels for them .

MPs need to be able to speak truth to power. They need to understand fair criticisms of a government they usually support and work away for its correction. They need to warn Ministers of criticisms and threats to what they are seeking to do, and to support them when they are in need of assistance for a course of action which is in the national interest. Opposition MPs need to remember that the government did get elected and is not always wrong, concentrating their fire on the areas where the government is weakest, making a mess or most out of line with public opinion. An intelligent opposition preparing itself for government also needs to present a cogent policy choice and to oppose based on a feasible alternative.

In the UK system every MP must have a good sense of place, being rooted in the community they represent. One of the important roles is to show how local circumstances will be affected by national decisions, and to bring local examples to bear on national debates. Working with people in the local community, the MP can offer access to government and advice on how to develop public services.