

# What does an MP do?

There are 650 different ways of being an MP. It requires your presence in Parliament on many specified times including late nights, following the rules of conduct and Parliamentary process. It also affords each MP considerable scope to decide how to spend the many days and hours when the Parliamentary timetable does not dictate what is being done.

The main task of an MP is to scrutinise government actions, question Ministers, debate proposed new legislation and revisit old legislation that may be failing. This can be done in Parliament by a number of means, and outside through speeches, . blogs, media interviews and the rest. MPs lead a national debate to improve matters, and to expose things that need improving.

Some MPs follow the news and social media, intervening on whatever is topical. Some MPs specialise in particular subjects so their interventions come with more expertise and knowledge behind them. Some MPs allow the agenda to be driven by their party, others try to get changes to their party's stance on things. Some MPs campaign to get a change to a law or government policy. Many do this based on professional campaign lobby groups and organisations who supply them with research and back up. Some of us run campaigns for ourselves based on what our constituents are telling us and on our perceptions of what changes would improve public services or the economy.

The MP needs to get the right balance between listening and leading, between taking the views of the constituents to government to get explanation or change, and explaining the views of government or Opposition to constituents. The MP also needs to find a good work balance between time spent in the constituency meeting people, attending events and dealing with problems, and time spent in Westminster putting the case of constituents to government and participating in the debates and law making for the UK as a whole.

Some MPs try to become a sort of super Councillor locally. This is difficult to make work, as the proper Councillors have the powers to settle local budgets, make planning decisions and guide local services. The MP has no powers in any of these areas and may be resented by those who do have the powers if he or she grandstands too much on what they should be doing. The MP is ,however, often seen by many constituents as the Complaints department about any public service or planning failing they perceive, so each MP has to work out how to handle that perceived role and whether it is possible in particular cases to be a force for the good or for change in local matters. There is opportunity for joint working with local Councils as they often need government funding and approvals.

It does help to live in the local area so then your time spent shopping or being out and about is more time when you are available to constituents if they have something pressing they want to tell you. It also means they can see you are experiencing the same local problems they are if there are road works or flash floods or whatever nuisance comes to plague us.