



Constituency Lobby
26–27 June 2009

Information pack



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Join the lobby – make your voice heard

Thank you for deciding to take part in the Constituency Lobby.

This pack will give you all the information you need to prepare for the lobby, and to persuade your MP that it's time to Get Fair.

About the Get Fair campaign

Government statistics reveal 12.8 million people in Britain today are living in poverty – that's 1 in 5 of us. Get Fair supporters want a fair society, free from poverty in all its forms.

Get Fair is a coalition of over 60 charities, housing groups, community organisations, churches and faith groups. For the most up to date list of coalition members, go to www.getfair.org.uk

About the Constituency Lobby

On 26 and 27 June this year, across the UK, the **Constituency Lobby** will descend on MPs in their home constituencies. This will be our key time to influence election manifestos and present specific calls for an income that meets minimum living standards, affordable housing and fair access to services.

Exactly as it says on the tin, it is only **together** that we can create the political climate for our decision-makers to act for the poorest in our society. Not only will these **12.8 million** people be worst hit by the impact of the current economic climate, we must use this opportunity to address the structural weaknesses that mean even during the previous boom years, **1 in 5 in the UK** still lived in poverty.

We are calling for all major political parties to deliver on their existing commitment to end child poverty by 2020, and extend this goal to tackle poverty across all generations in the UK. Specifically, we are calling for politicians to commit to concrete measures to ensure:

- **An income that meets minimum living standards**
- **Affordable housing and decent neighbourhoods**
- **Fair access to services, without discrimination**

Get Fair is targeting more than 50 key constituencies around the country, where MPs and Prospective Parliamentary Candidates have the power to influence party policy and propose legislation. Wherever you live, we are asking you to visit your own local Member of Parliament and ask them to do all they can to support these measures.

By taking part in the lobby, you will be joining thousands of other people throughout the UK, sending a loud message to our political parties that it's time to Get Fair.

1. Get started



Working with others

To ensure the Lobby has the maximum impact, we would like people to visit their MPs in groups. If there are other people from your constituency taking part in the Lobby, please arrange to visit your MP together.

To help this happen, we are recruiting **constituency organisers** in many places. You can find out if there is an organiser in your constituency, and see their contact details, by visiting www.getfair.org.uk/lobby.

If you do have an organiser, please contact them and let them know you want to join the Lobby. They will let you know the plans for your constituency, and may invite you to meet up with other local people to plan together for the Lobby.

If there is no organiser listed for your constituency, we ask you to **let Get Fair know** that you are planning to take part in the Lobby. There is a registration form at the very back of this pack – please complete it and return it to us. This will help Get Fair to monitor the lobby. And if other people from your constituency register too, we'll put you in touch with them so that you can plan to lobby your MP together.

If you are on your own in your constituency, don't worry! This pack provides all the information you will need to learn about the issues and present a strong case when you meet your MP.

Keeping us informed

It really helps to share ideas and inspiration at a national level by hearing updates from as many people taking local action as possible. We can also help you by suggesting people in your area to get in touch with. Please don't forget to let us know what you are doing by filling out the registration form on the back of this pack. If you get stuck at any point you can email info@getfair.org.uk or call **0161 236 9321**.

2. Get ready (doing your homework)



Bear in mind that whatever the scale of your local action, the lobby is not the end of the process, but the beginning of dialogue with your MP on your concerns about poverty in the UK. You can establish a relationship with them, and other campaigners in your area, to keep poverty high on the social, political and economic agenda both locally and nationally.

Researching your MP

It is helpful to become familiar with your MP and their office before you descend on them at a surgery! Find out what they do, what committees they are on, what their specialist areas are. It is useful to find out about any particular responsibilities they hold and whether they are interested in UK poverty. The more local information you can provide about poverty, the problems and potential solutions, the better. But remember – they may know a lot more about issues in your local area than you give them credit for!

You can find out more about your local MP and get in contact with them at:

- www.writetothem.com
- www.theyworkforyou.com

Your MP may have their own website, or you could do an internet search for them.

Contacting your MP

Once you have found out about your MP, try to get in contact with their office and find out the best way to approach them. Be polite and clear on the phone about what you are aiming to do, the office will get a lot of calls so they need to know you know what you want!

Here are some pointers for making contact with your MP:

Nine nifty tips

- **Don't be aggressive or assume ignorance** – they will probably be on your side, and will probably have researched the issue before your arrival!
- **Book in advance** – make an appointment by phone, email or letter, letting them know exactly how many people will be coming, what you want to talk about and how long you need.
- **Make sure you are their constituent!** MPs' surgeries are for people who live in their area.
- **Give them a chance to research what you want to talk about** by sending them a clear letter or email in advance of your meeting.
- **Don't abuse the function of the surgery** – they are for local constituents, and ideally no more than 6 people at a time.
- **You may be able to ask for a 30-minute slot**, or squeeze in at the end of their surgery.
- Make sure to **follow up from the meeting** promptly with anything you have agreed to do – strike while the iron is hot and encourage your MP to do the same!



3. Get set (preparing for the meeting itself)

Getting your case together

Make sure you familiarise yourself with the main asks of the campaign and practise explaining them to other people.

What are we asking for?

There is no single issue that will bring an end to poverty in the UK. However, there is strength in our collective voice, taking a stand 'together against poverty'. With the economy in recession and rapidly rising unemployment, we are calling on MPs to press the Government to act and ensure their policy responses meet two key demands:

- **Protect the poorest in our society, who did not get a fair share during the more prosperous years and who are badly hit by the impact of the recession**

The rise in unemployment and heightened tensions at the loss of 'British jobs' may lead to increased intimidation or isolation of some vulnerable workers in lower paid jobs. We need action to ensure no one is discriminated against, marginalised or excluded from society due to unemployment or poverty.

- **Correct the weaknesses in the economy that mean even during the previous boom years 1 in 5 in the UK population still lived in poverty**

During the boom period from 1992 to 2008, over 90% of the additional wealth created in the economy went to the top 5% by income of the population. The incomes of the bottom 50% of society did not increase. Those living in poverty were hit hardest. Government defines poverty as 60% of the median average household income, which does not provide an acceptable standard of living in the UK (research: Joseph Rowntree Foundation).

At the same time, the rise in unemployment and heightened tensions at the loss of 'British jobs' may lead to increased intimidation or isolation of some vulnerable workers in lower paid jobs. We need action to ensure no one is discriminated against, marginalised or excluded from society due to unemployment or poverty. Get Fair campaigns for a just and fair society, free from poverty in all its forms.

What can you do?

Join with others to meet your Member of Parliament locally to support Get Fair and raise those issues that concern you most. These might include local issues, such as:

- Large scale job losses and the impact on neighbourhoods and town centres
- Increases in the cost of living, including fuel and energy bills
The lack of affordable housing and rising numbers of home repossessions
- Threats to local public services, reducing the quality and access to services in many areas

By getting together locally, you can put forward your own concerns and, at the same time, show your support for others. There are national and community groups campaigning on those issues, including those supported by the Get Fair coalition.

- We continue to press the government to increase levels of funding and invest £3bn to halve child poverty by 2010. Without the money 700,000 children will remain in poverty.

- Millions of pensioners do not claim the benefits to which they are entitled. Up to £5 billion remains unclaimed every year. Automatic payment of Pension Credit and Council Tax benefit for older people would take over 500,000 pensioners out of poverty.
- People seeking asylum are prevented from working and live in poverty, only getting the equivalent of 70% from income support. Those seeking asylum should be able to work after 6 months while they remain in the UK, so they can contribute to the economy.
- Around 3 million people are denied access to basic financial services, including in remote rural areas. Setting up a Post Bank would provide services from 11,500 post office branches, almost twice the number of the major high street banks combined.
- 30% of disabled adults live in poverty. Changes in welfare reform could make that worse. Disability related extra costs benefits go some way to meeting the extra costs of disability. It is important keep them as extra-income benefits.

Ask your Member of Parliament what they will do to take action now and protect the poorest in our society who are hit hardest by the recession.

WHAT WE ARE ASKING FOR?

Get Fair is calling on politicians to commit to concrete measures that will help bring about an end to poverty in all its forms. The major reduction of poverty must be a shared objective of all the UK political parties and included in their manifestos. As well as the local issues and national campaigns you want to raise as part of this lobby, supported by the Get Fair coalition, there are three policy areas we are asking for MPs' support.

1. AN INCOME THAT MEETS MINIMUM LIVING STANDARDS

In the fifth largest economy in the world all people should have sufficient money to live on. No-one should live in poverty in the UK. The current level of job seekers allowance in the UK is £60.50 per week. This is not enough money to keep people who lose their jobs out of poverty. Many vulnerable groups including asylum seekers have to survive on much less. We need to increase out of work benefit levels to ensure that those losing their jobs are not plunged into poverty, and provide more support for vulnerable groups including a right of for asylum seekers to work after 6 months. Yet Government plans to reform benefits to make more conditional on people actively seeking work will result in severe financial hardship for many families who fail to meet the requirements of the system. Get Fair is calling on politicians to:

- **Put reform of welfare benefits on hold and introduce an emergency increase in out-of-work benefits and tax credits**

2. AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND DECENT NEIGHBOURHOODS

The impact of this recession has been to make even more acute the UK housing crisis. There are 1.77 million households registered with local authorities seeking to rent social housing in the UK and only 158 thousand social housing vacancies filled last year. If no one else joined the waiting list, the average wait for a tenancy would be twelve years. Repossession rates are rising as people lose their jobs and are unable to pay their mortgages, increasing the need for affordable rented accommodation in the UK. The impact of the credit crunch is making this picture worse. Building companies and housing associations are finding it far harder to access the credit they need to enable

them to produce the homes that we need in the UK. House building has almost stopped. Get Fair is calling on politicians to:

- **Invest an additional £6.35 billion over the next two years to build 100,000 new social rented homes, protecting the jobs of 150,000 construction workers**

3. FAIR ACCESS TO SERVICES, WITHOUT DISCRIMINATION

All public services should aim to narrow gaps in outcomes between the richest and poorest. Fair access to quality public services is key to ending poverty, in education, job support, health and social care. In addition, local amenities such as access to shops selling good food, reputable financial services and access to leisure activities are important if we are to enable people to live healthy lives within flourishing communities. No one should have to travel long distances or difficult and expensive journeys to the nearest NHS dentist or doctor, or pay more for essential services because they are on a low income. There should be no 'desert areas' or excluded groups. We need investment in new local services such as Post Bank, for post offices to provide banking services. Get Fair is calling on politicians to:

- **Protect local services in the recession, with additional funding to ensure quality public services reach out to those most in need**

Ask your Member of Parliament to pledge their support and undertake to use, or support the use of, all the powers available to government to meet poverty targets and include concrete measures in their party manifestos to achieve a lasting reduction in poverty in the UK.

Case studies

It may help your case, in particular anything you send to the media, to find and use case studies and stories of real people that have been impacted by UK poverty. These could be people living below the poverty line, people struggling to find affordable housing, people struggling to access the public services they need, pensioners, asylum-seekers, job-seekers and people affected by homelessness.

These may be local people you know, or case studies by various partner organisations in the Get Fair coalition. You can find these listed on the Get Fair website at www.getfair.org.uk/supporting-organisations. You must have the willing permission of anyone whose story you use, and if necessary, change names and make pictures anonymous.

Raising local issues

By getting together locally, you can put forward your own concerns and, at the same time, show your support for others. You may also want to raise local issues which are of particular concern to you – and which should also be of concern to your Member of Parliament. These might include, for example::

- Large scale job losses and the impact on neighbourhoods and town centres
- The lack of affordable housing and rising numbers of home repossessions
- Threats to local public services, reducing the quality and access to services in many areas

It may help to illustrate the issues with true-life stories or grabbing statistics about poverty. However, be careful to keep your MP focused not on answering the individual cases, but the wider picture of the need for changes in policy!

Don't let your MP off the hook

If your MP is not able to meet you on the weekend of the 26-27 June, don't let it drop – make a date when they will meet, or check when their next public surgery is when constituents are entitled to go along

and raise personal or constituency concerns (those surgery dates are usually advertised locally or can be found by ringing the MP's office listed in the local directory or with the local council).

The MP can table a statement in Parliament, called an Early Day Motion, to raise awareness of your local concerns – which often then attracts local media interest. MPs can also ask questions of Ministers, in writing or in the House of Commons debating chamber – to find out facts and figures, or to make a political point that the Minister has to answer. They may write to Ministers or their own party representatives – make sure they send you a copy of that letter and any reply. Be ready to issue a local press release when you get a reply to a letter, question or statements raised by the MP. If they support your concerns, ask the MP to send out their own press release too.

Questions and statements made by MPs should be topical, if they are to attract local media interest. We will be issuing additional advice nearer the time, with a draft statement (called an Early Day Motion) for all MPs to sign in June – make sure you ask your MP to sign it! We want them to give a clear pledge to use, or support the use of, all the powers available to government to meet poverty targets. We want them to make sure concrete measures are included in their party manifestos to achieve a lasting reduction in poverty in the UK.

Meanwhile, if there is a particular issue or concern arising from the national and international talks that are taking place by the end of June, we may wish MPs to write to the Prime Minister and party leaders directly. We will let you know in June.



4. Get back (following up afterwards)

To ensure your local lobby has as powerful and long-lasting an impact as possible, it is essential to follow up the meeting well. It is also good to share the success of what you have achieved with others to encourage them we can make a difference! Here are a few things you should do...

Follow up with your MP

The week after the meeting, it is good practice to send your MP a follow-up letter to thank them for meeting you, and confirm in writing what they have agreed to. There is a template letter later in this pack. You should also ask them if you can have a follow-up meeting in 3 months to see how they have got on with addressing the issues you raised in the meeting, or invite them to further events you will be holding in your area.

Let us know how you've got on

Please let us know if you have managed to organise a meeting so we can have a complete overview of which constituencies have been targeted and how MPs have responded. It also really helps both participants and organisers to share the successes of a campaign action as widely as possible – as well as giving your story the opportunity to be made famous through websites and national newsletters!

As soon as possible after the event please send us your **photos, stories, press releases and response letters** to: Get Fair, c/o CAP, Central Buildings, Oldham St, Manchester, M1 1JQ, or email info@getfair.org.uk

We have also included a feedback form later in this pack, which you should fill in and send to us the week following the lobby, so we can get a clear overview of how the campaign has gone and gather ideas for future action.



5. Templates and pro-forma letters

This section contains templates you can use for various activities related to the lobby:

- Suggested letter for contacting your MP
- Suggested letter for following up with your MP after the Lobby
- Feedback form, to let us know how it went

Feel free to use these templates and adapt them to your own needs as required.

We will also be sending **sample press releases** to all local organisers to send to the local press and media both before and after the lobby. If you would like to receive these make sure you have filled in the registration form at the end of this pack, or contact the office.

Contacting your MP

You can adapt this pro forma letter to contact your MP and ask them for a meeting:

[Your MP]
[Constituency office]
[Your region]

[Your Address Here]

[Date]

Dear [name of MP]

We are a group of your constituents from [name of local group] and we would like to request a meeting on Friday 26 or Saturday 27 June 2009, as part of the Get Fair campaign for a commitment to the eradication of poverty across all age-groups in the UK.

With the economy in recession and rapidly rising unemployment, we are calling on the government to act and ensure their policy responses meet two key demands:

- **Protect the poorest in our society**, who did not get a fair share during the more prosperous years, and who are already been badly hit by the impact of the recession.
- Use this opportunity to **address the structural weaknesses** which mean that even during the previous boom years, 1 in 5 in the UK population still lived in poverty.

At the same time the rise in unemployment and heightened tensions at the loss of 'British jobs' may lead to increased intimidation or isolation of some vulnerable workers in lower paid jobs. We need action to ensure no one is discriminated against, marginalised or excluded from society due to unemployment or poverty. Get Fair campaigns for a just and fair society, free from poverty in all its forms.

We realise that your time is limited, but we would be very grateful if you could make space for a brief meeting with [half a dozen] of your constituents from our delegation.

We look forward to hearing your response.

Yours sincerely

[Your name]

Suggested letter for following up with your MP after the Lobby

You can send this letter immediately after your meeting with your MP to thank them, remind them of what they agreed to, and send them an advance of anything you want to send to the press.

[Your MP]
[Constituency office]
[Your region]

[Your Address Here]

[Date]

Dear [name of MP]

Thank you for meeting with us on [date] as part of the Get Fair campaign.

Thank you for agreeing to...

We have enclosed a press release and photograph, which we hope you will be happy to endorse.

Thank you for your support, we hope you will continue to do all you can to ensure your party policy aims to **protect the poorest in our society**, who did not get a fair share during the more prosperous years, and who are already been badly hit by the impact of the recession, and **address the structural weaknesses** which mean that even during the previous boom years, 1 in 5 in the UK population still lived in poverty.

We would like to meet you again in a few months time to continue this discussion, can we make an appointment for one of your surgeries in the Autumn?

Yours sincerely

[Your name]

GET FAIR Constituency Lobby 26-27 June 2009
FEEDBACK FORM

We hope you enjoyed participating in the Get Fair Constituency Lobby. Please take a moment to complete this feedback form – it should take **no more than 5 minutes**. Your feedback will inform the independent monitoring and evaluation of the campaign. Please return this form to the event organiser.

[Event organisers: please return the feedback forms to Cambridge Policy Consultants Newton Hall, Newton, Cambridge, CB22 7ZE. Any questions, please do not hesitate to get in touch with Joke Delvaux on 01223 871551 or via joke@campolco.co.uk].

How did you first hear about Get Fair's constituency lobby? (Tick only one)

- Friends or family
- The Internet – *Please specify which site:*
- An email from the Get Fair campaign
- An email from another organisation – *Please specify:*
- I don't remember
- Other – *Please specify:*

Why did you decide to participate in the lobby? (Tick all that apply)

- To show my support for the UK poverty agenda
- To show my support for the Get Fair campaign
- I was interested in a direct dialogue with my MP
- I was interested in meeting up with like-minded people
- No particular reason
- Other – *Please specify:*

Had you already been involved in other Get Fair activities (for example Poverty and Homelessness Action Week)? (Tick only one)

- Yes – *Please specify which one(s):*
- No
- I don't remember/I don't know

Had you already been involved in other campaigns around UK poverty (for example End Child Poverty)? (Tick only one)

- Yes – *Please specify which one(s):*
- No
- I don't remember

Had you already been involved in campaigns around other issues (for example climate change or Africa)? (Tick only one)

- Yes – *Please specify which one(s):*
- No
- I don't remember

Has participating in the Get Fair constituency lobby changed how you feel about UK poverty?
(Tick all that apply)

- I feel that I now know more about UK poverty
- I feel that I now know more about local organisations and activities in this field
- I now feel more strongly about UK poverty
- I am now more likely to sign a petition on UK poverty
- I am now more likely to write or email a politician about UK poverty
- I will now pay closer attention to what politicians are saying about UK poverty
- I signed up (or will sign up) for the Get Fair campaign as a result of the Lobby
- I became a member (or will become a member) of another organisation
- I am now more likely to financially support a charity working on UK poverty
- I am now more likely to volunteer for a charity working on UK poverty
- I was already committed to fighting UK poverty and feel confirmed in my views
- The event has had no impact on me.
- Other – *Please specify:*

How likely are you to participate in future campaigns on UK poverty? **(Tick only one)**

- Very likely
- Quite likely
- Rather unlikely
- Very unlikely
- I don't know

Would you like to make any further comments about the lobby?

Cambridge Policy Consultants may like to contact you for a telephone interview or for the email survey at the end of the Get Fair campaign. Your contact details will not be shared with anyone else and will not be used for any other purpose than for the evaluation of the Get Fair campaign.

- I prefer to remain anonymous
- I am happy to be contacted

My name:

My number:

My email:



6. Registration form

If there is not a local organiser in your constituency, please use this form to let us know that you are planning to take part in the Constituency Lobby.

Name: _____

Group (if any): _____

Address: _____

_____ Postcode: _____

Telephone: _____

Email address: _____

Constituency and/or name of your MP (if known): _____

Are you planning to organise your lobby on 26/27 June Yes No. If no, what other date are you planning (if known)

Please tick if you do NOT want your contact details to be made publically available (eg on the www.getfair.org.uk website).

Please return the form to Get Fair, c/o Church Action on Poverty, Central Buildings, Oldham Street, Manchester M1 1JQ, or info@getfair.org.uk