



Members and Constituency Etiquette

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This note discusses the conventions that have developed as a result of the relationship between individual Members and their constituencies. It covers the issues of constituency casework, raising matters relating to another Member's constituency in the House, and visits and speaking engagements in other constituencies.

The Note deals also with the related matter of local precedence.

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A. Introduction

Members of Parliament are bound by the *Code of Conduct for Members of Parliament* which is set out, together with the accompanying *Guide to the rules relating to the conduct of Members*, on the parliamentary website.¹ The detailed provisions of the code are primarily concerned with Members' pecuniary interests and with ensuring that such interests are properly registered and declared. Beyond this, Members enjoy a good deal of latitude in deciding how they will carry out their various duties although there are conventions surrounding Members' dealings with their constituents.

In the British parliamentary system one Member represents a single constituency, and conventions have developed so that one Member's relations with his or her constituents are very much a preserve other Members should not interfere with. In *How Parliament Works*, Robert Rogers and Rhodri Walters comment:

MPs are extremely careful to check that the person raising a problem is indeed their constituent and not that of a neighbouring member.²

The conventions dealing with these matters are not the subject of formal parliamentary rules, and Erskine May and the Standing Orders are silent on the point, save for the non-application of absolute privilege to constituency correspondence.³

B. Casework

1. Parliamentary conventions

"The simple, general principle is that any citizen in the United Kingdom should first get in touch with his own constituency representative".⁴ Edmund Marshall, formerly MP for Goole, so wrote in the fullest account, yet to appear about the practicalities of a Member's dealings with his constituents. He continued:

There is a convention, almost universally observed on all sides of the House of Commons, that Members deal with personal inquiries only from their own constituents.⁵

The corollary of this is that when a Member is contacted by someone who is not her or his own constituent, that person should be referred without delay to the constituency Member.⁶

¹ House of Commons, *Code of Conduct for Members of Parliament*, and House of Commons, *Guide to the rules relating to the conduct of Members*, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmcode.htm>

² Robert Rogers and Rhodri Walters, *How Parliament Works*, 6th edition, 2006, p116

³ Erskine May, *Parliamentary Practice*, 23rd edition, 2003, pp152-153. On this point, see also PCC Standard Note SN/PC/2024 on qualified privilege

⁴ Edmund Marshall, *Parliament and the Public*, 1982, p21

⁵ *Ibid*, pp21-22

⁶ The House of Commons provide a constituency locator in order to deduce in which constituency a particular address falls, <http://www.upmystreet.com/commons/>

In response to a point of order, on 4 March 2004, the Speaker set out the convention. He stressed the importance of individual Members in ensuring that the convention was adhered to:

Mr. Ivan Henderson (Harwich) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, of which I have given you notice. I ask for your guidance and advice to Members of this House regarding parliamentary protocol in the case of Members asking questions in this House on behalf of constituents of other Members when contacted by them. The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) recently visited my constituency, met a group of my constituents and returned to the House and asked several questions about my primary care trust, right down to localised issues regarding individual GP surgeries. I understood that if constituents contacted a Member representing another constituency, the issues would be referred back to the relevant Member of Parliament to raise them on behalf of his constituents. Can you, Mr. Speaker, make a ruling or give us guidance for the future on how to deal with issues regarding other Members' constituents?

[...]

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will answer the point of order. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of his point of order. There is a well understood convention in the House that unless otherwise agreed between the Members concerned the interests of electors should be represented only by the constituency Member. It is not possible, however, for me as Speaker to ensure that this convention is enforced at all times. It is best to leave it to the good sense of Members to work out any problems between them. I hope that this is of help to the hon. Gentleman.⁷

This is echoed on the *Working for an MP* website, which states:

There is an oft-quoted 'strict parliamentary protocol' that MPs do not pursue issues raised by or about constituents of other MPs. Until last week (3 March 2004) our view on this was as follows '*In the absence of any very clear definition of this protocol, you should use common sense and refer any matter concerning someone who is not your constituent to his or her own MP*'.⁸

There are numerous difficulties with this convention, and Edmund Marshall detailed some of them:

The practice of contacting one's own MP should be observed regardless of the problem to which the contact relates. I have known persons affected by problems at their place of work write about those problems to the MP whose constituency contains that workplace whereas they themselves lived in another constituency. Since MPs represent people rather than places, their inquiry should have been directed first to their own constituency Member. Similarly, inquiries about public services in some other constituency should be first directed by any complainant to his own MP, provided of course those services relate to some parliamentary responsibility. The MP may then wish to consult his colleague who represents the other constituency concerned, but it is entirely for him to decide whether to do so. On

⁷ HC Deb 4 March 2004 c1069

⁸ Working for an MP, *Protocol clarified on representing constituents*, 10 March 2004, http://www.w4mp.org/html/library/guides/0403_protocol.asp

other occasions, a person may contact an MP, not for his current constituency, but for an area where he has lived for much of his life and still regards himself as part of the local community; in spite of these considerations, the MP will be correct to redirect the inquiry to the MP for the person's new constituency. When a particular MP is engaged in a campaign on an issue of general importance, an individual citizen living in another constituency may wish to write a letter of support to that MP; but it is always courteous to contact the local MP at the same time, soliciting his own support for the same cause.⁹

Edmund Marshall provided the following advice for dealing with those whose names do not appear on the electoral register:

... Prisoners and British citizens abroad whose names do not appear on any electoral register, but who wish to contact an MP, should in general approach the Member for the constituency where their names last appeared on an electoral register.¹⁰

a. Prisoners

There are no clear rules on which Members should represent prisoners. There are arguments for cases being accepted by either the Member representing the prisoner's last home address or the Member in whose constituency the prison is located. Clearly, prisoners will often be moved around a great deal from prison to prison, and if they are taking up their cases with a number of Members, or moving on before an issue is resolved, this could cause confusion. Referring cases back to the home address could be a way of simplifying the process. However, it is obviously perfectly proper for the Member in whose constituency the prison is situated to take an interest in the operation of that prison. Some Members take a very strong interest in their local prisons and regularly take up the cases of inmates. Much will depend on the circumstances of the case (for example, what it is that the prisoner is asking or complaining about and how long he or she likely to be at that particular prison), and, of course, on the wishes of the Members concerned.

The Prison Service has confirmed that it regularly deals both with the MP for the prisoner's home address and the MP for the constituency in which the prison is situated, and are perfectly content to do so.¹¹ Moreover, there is a Prison Service Instruction on Legal and Confidential Access Correspondence which states that correspondence between prisoners and various organisations and individuals, including MPs, should be subject to confidential handling arrangements. This states that this should only be the case where the MP is acting in a "constituency capacity", which the Prison Service confirms, covers both the home address MP and the MP for the constituency in which the prison is situated:

It is a fundamental principle that prisoners continue to have access to Members of Parliament while serving their sentences. Correspondence should be allowed freely, but letters between prisoners and MPs should be treated as privileged only where the MP is acting in a constituency capacity. This privilege is not extended to Members of

⁹ Edmund Marshall, *Parliament and the Public*, 1982, p22

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p21

¹¹ Personal communication, 15 December 2005

the House of Lords, who have no constituency responsibilities, nor to local Councillors.¹²

The *Prison Handbook 2006*, which is not an official document but is provided in all prison libraries,¹³ states the position as follows:

Members of Parliament and local Councillors, as elected representatives, are able to advise on a wide range of issues. Usually your home address determines your MP and councillors, but whilst in prison you may contact the constituency into which the prison falls.¹⁴

b. Boundary changes

Boundary changes can also give rise to conflict of interests, even between Members of the same party, on who should represent particular constituents, as the political parties begin to make preparations for new boundaries when they are announced, although the changes are not formally implemented until the subsequent General Election. In the meantime the Member for the existing constituency should continue to deal with constituents' inquiries, as the following Speaker's ruling makes clear:

Mr. Bryan Davies (Oldham, Central and Royton): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I want to raise a gross breach of the conventions of the House and of the way in which we seek to represent our constituents. I have told the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Davies) that I would raise the matter. I am sorry that he is not in his place.

I have received several complaints from my constituents that personalised letters have been sent to many of them above the signature of the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth. In addition to containing tendentious Liberal Democrat propaganda, they include a leaflet entitled, "For Help and Advice". Underneath is a photograph and the words, "Chris Davies MP". There was also a questionnaire on local and national matters. A freepost envelope is enclosed with the address "Chris Davies MP", in which the questionnaire can be returned. If the questionnaire is returned, the hon. Gentleman writes to the individual, my constituent, who has corresponded with him. I consider that to be the grossest interference with the rights of my constituents and with my rights as their elected representative.

My constituents are clearly being misled, because the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth is not their representative and cannot carry out actions in the House on their behalf, as suggested by the material. I ask for your guidance, Madam Speaker, on how I may make progress in ensuring that that activity ceases and that the conventions of the House are upheld.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. Several hon. Members will be suffering from that problem because of the redistribution of constituency boundaries. I am in a similar position, because my hon.

¹² Prison Service Instruction 02/2005, *Legal and Confidential Access Correspondence*, 21 February 2005, para 11, http://psi.hmprisonservice.gov.uk/PSI_2005_002_legal_and_confidential_access_correspondence.doc

¹³ HM Prison Service, *Prison Libraries*, Prison Service Order 6710, http://pso.hmprisonservice.gov.uk/PSO_6710_prison_libraries.doc

¹⁴ *Prison Handbook*, 2006, para 2.8.8

Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) represents an area that is due to become part of the constituency for which I expect to stand. I have been scrupulous in not contacting his constituents and have referred letters to him because he is the Member of Parliament. I am surprised that the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Davies) did not pursue the same course.

[...]

Madam Speaker: The House will know that I have often given guidance on these matters. Of course, I deprecate the activities of any Member who interferes in such a way in another's constituency. The hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Davies) is a relatively new Member. Hon. Members should be mature and sensible enough to resolve such matters among themselves. I see that the Liberal Democrat Whip is in his place and has heard the exchanges. I am sure that he will use his good offices to ensure that there is no recurrence.¹⁵

Following the making of the *Parliamentary Constituencies (England) Order 2007*, the Speaker reiterated this ruling in his statement about the duties and responsibilities of Members of Parliament, at the beginning of the 2007-08 Session:

As Members, we are aware that the boundary commissioner is looking constantly at constituency boundaries. Hon. Members have a duty to look after the constituents who elected them. Those boundaries do not change until the next election, so we must obey the convention of not involving ourselves with another Member's constituency until that time.¹⁶

2. Issues outside a Member's parliamentary responsibilities

A further difficulty occurs with matters which are outside a Member's parliamentary responsibilities. This is dealt with in House of Commons Information Office Factsheet, *You and Your MP*, which states:

Many people think that their MP is there to solve all their problems for them: this is not the case. MPs are there to help only with those matters for which Parliament or central government is responsible. Problems often arise with work carried out by central government departments and your MP will be able to help you with such areas as:

- Tax problems involving the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise Departments (but not the council tax which is paid to your local authority);
- Problems dealt with by the Department of Health such as hospitals and the National Health Service (but not problems with the social services department of your local authority);
- Problems dealt with by the Department for Work and Pensions such as benefits, pensions and national insurance;

¹⁵ HC Deb vol 272 22 February 1996 cc519-520

¹⁶ HC Deb 6 November 2007 c2

- Problems dealt with by the Home Office such as immigration and matters such as school closures and grants which are dealt with by the Department for Education and Skills (but not day to day problems involving schools which are run by their governors and your local education authority).

Your MP is not there to help you in private disputes with neighbours, with an employer, with family matters or with companies who have sold you faulty goods; nor, for example, can they interfere with decisions made by courts.

Constituents often take a problem to their MP because they do not know who else could help them. MPs are very generous at giving help and advice and will often have a local councillor at their constituency surgeries to help those constituents whose problems are connected with the services provided by local authorities such as dustbins, housing repairs or public lavatories. If you feel that your problem really concerns the council rather than central government, then you should contact your local council or councillor. Your local library or town hall should be able to provide you with your councillor's name and contact information. If your problem is of a more general nature or you are uncertain where to go for advice, then your nearest Citizens Advice Bureau will be able to guide you. Alternatively, your council may run its own general advice centre or be able to direct you towards an independent centre.

Your MP will try to be as helpful as he or she can but, since he or she has around 67,000 constituents to look after and his or her Parliamentary duties to attend to, this will place limits on the amount of time which can be spent in the constituency. It is then important that they spend their time dealing with problems that relate to them, rather than diverting queries that should have been taken elsewhere.¹⁷

a. Councils

Probably the most usual instance occurs when the constituent is complaining about some difficulty which arises from the action or non-action of a local authority. Edmund Marshall says in this case, "he should refer that problem to the local councillor(s) for the ward in which he lives".¹⁸ However, Members are sometimes reluctant to do this, especially if the councillors concerned are of a different political party from the Member. They are also sometimes reluctant to be thought of as "fobbing off" a constituent. On the other hand, it might be argued that MPs' already considerable workload of cases would be reduced if this convention were more often applied. There is also in many parts of the country a split (in some cases 3-way, into county, district, and parish/town council) of responsibilities, which may make onward reference difficult. Some Members routinely take a councillor with them to advice sessions or surgeries to facilitate this transfer.

b. Legal and private disputes

The Member is sometimes asked to intervene in what is essentially a private dispute between neighbours, with an employer, or family matters. In these cases, it is generally best for the Member to remain detached. He or she may, after all represent both parties, and the

¹⁷ House of Commons Information Office, *You and Your MP*, Factsheet M1, October 2005, pp3-4, <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/upload/m01.pdf>

¹⁸ Edmund Marshall, *Parliament and the Public*, 1982, p16

Member's involvement should possibly be confined to providing information on where and how the constituent can further his or her case or get advice.

c. Scottish Parliament; National Assembly for Wales and Northern Ireland Assembly

Devolved matters are the responsibility of the Parliament and assemblies, and should properly be raised with a relevant MSP, AM, or MLA. There is, however, a certain amount of trimming round the edges, and an aggrieved person can of course write to whichever representative he or she chooses. The Scottish Parliament *Factfile* on this issue states:

Your MP represents you at the UK Parliament. You can approach your MSPs about reserved matters although you may find it more effective to speak to your MP instead. He or she may be better placed to act on your behalf and to provide a response on reserved matters.

Therefore, the first decision that we can make about who to contact is based on the subject matter involved. You may be accustomed to doing this already. For example, in the past you may have consulted your local Councillor, local MP, or both, about a housing or education matter. Now that the Scottish Parliament is in place, you have more representation and more choice (in addition to your local councillors, your MSPs and your MP, you have other representatives (MEPs) at the European Parliament).

The rest of this factfile describes what to do once you have decided that it is your MSPs that you should contact. There is more information on finding out who your MSPs are in the References section.

The situation is complicated by the existence of representatives who are elected on the basis of a regional list system, and therefore do not clearly represent a particular constituency. On this, the guidance is:

Your first decision is likely to be which MSP to approach from the eight that represent you. The Scottish Parliament feels that it is important to help people to decide which MSP to contact so it has developed Guidance on the Relationships between MSPs which has been included into the Code of Conduct for MSPs. This guidance is a useful point of reference for your dealings with MSPs. In summary, it says:

- All MSPs have equal status in the Parliament;
- All eight MSPs in each area (one constituency MSP and seven regional MSPs) have a duty to be accessible to the people of the areas for which they have been elected to serve and to represent their interests conscientiously;
- The wishes of constituents and/or the interests of a constituency or locality are of paramount importance;
- MSPs should not misrepresent the basis on which they are elected or the area that they serve;
- No MSP should deal with a matter relating to a constituent, constituency case or constituency issue without his or her constituency or region, unless by prior arrangement.

In short, you are free to approach any of the eight MSPs who represent you. Your wishes as the constituent are the principal concern, and you have the right to expect an MSP to take on a case (though it is for the MSP to judge how best to do so).

The Guidance envisages that in most circumstances, individual constituents will approach the relevant constituency MSP. If you decide to approach a regional MSP, he or she must inform the relevant constituency MSP at the outset. You can ask for this not to happen.

Some MSPs hold an official position, such as a Minister in the Scottish Executive or Presiding Officer. They are still your MSPs and can be approached as described above.¹⁹

There has been some friction between constituency and list Members in both Scotland and Wales over constituency etiquette and some indication that a 'free market' for constituents is developing.²⁰ The *Government of Wales Bill 2005-06* prohibited candidates from standing in both a regional list and a constituency at the same time. The National Assembly for Wales' Standing Orders (No. 1.13) require the Assembly to make a code or protocol, in accordance with section 36 (6) of the act, about the different roles and responsibilities of constituency and regional Members. The Government have not proposed similar changes in Scotland. The Northern Ireland Assembly uses the Single Transferable Vote means of electing its Members: there six Members of the Legislative Assembly, from various parties, are elected in each constituency.

The Department for Constitutional Affairs has produced guidance on handling of correspondence from Members of the devolved legislatures, which is available on the Department's website.²¹

d. Europe

Throughout the UK, representation in the European Parliament is on the regional list system. Though the European Parliament website is silent on the point, it is open to persons who wish to raise a matter with an MEP to contact any of their regional representatives.

3. Other issues

a. Planning

On planning issues, Edmund Marshall contrasted the constraints on ministers with the relative freedom of MPs:

While any appeal is handled by well-established procedures, possibly involving public inquiries, and it is not proper for Ministers to be involved in those procedures until they receive final reports and recommendations from their own inspectors, an MP can

¹⁹ Scottish Parliament, *You and Your MSPs*, <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/factfiles/ff4.htm>

²⁰ See evidence from Dr Jonathan Bradbury and Dr Meg Russell to Welsh Affairs Committee report *Better Governance for Wales* HC 551 2005-6 at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmselect/cmwelaf/551/551.pdf>

²¹ Department for Constitutional Affairs, *Handling Correspondence under Devolution*, Devolution Guidance Note No 2, <http://www.dca.gov.uk/constitution/devolution/guidance/dgn02.pdf>

always advise a constituent on how to go about making an appeal and may even wish to speak at any local public inquiry which is held to consider the appeal.²²

Nevertheless, there are obvious drawbacks to becoming involved in matters which may pit one constituent against another. The authors of *How Parliament Works*, which is a highly regarded guide to Parliament written by clerks, wrote the following:

A new MP is always warned by colleagues not to take up planning cases; planning has its own machinery at both local and national level, and the applicants and the objectors are usually all constituents; to favour one is to disadvantage another.²³

C. Raising matters relating to another constituency or Member in the Chamber

The Speaker has stated on several occasions that when issues relating to another constituency are to be raised, it is good practice for the Member concerned to inform the other Member(s) involved in advance.²⁴

Similarly, if a Member intends to put down Questions relating to another's constituency, it is proper to give advance notice to the Member concerned, although the Speaker has ruled there was nothing in the House's rules to debar such a practice.²⁵

It is obviously not possible to give such advance notification when speaking extempore, or when the Member had not intended to participate in a debate, or in replying to unforeseen interventions. In such cases, a *post-hoc* note to the sitting Member(s) would probably be an appropriate courtesy.

Another area is where Ministers intend to refer to other Members, often, though not necessarily always, in a constituency connection. The *Ministerial Code* states:

Every effort must be made to ensure that where a former Minister or a Ministerial colleague and/or a fellow MP is mentioned in a statement or report which prompts a Ministerial statement, he or she is given as much notice as is reasonably possible.²⁶

The previous edition of the *Ministerial Code* added a further sentence to this advice:

... The current practice is that those concerned should be given a copy of the report on the morning of the announcement.²⁷

²² Edmund Marshall, *Parliament and the public*, Macmillan, 1982, p12

²³ Robert Rogers and Rhodri Walters, *How Parliament works*, Pearson, 6th edition, 2006, p116

²⁴ See, e.g. HC Deb vol 349 10 May 2000 c841

²⁵ See HC Deb vol 367 26 April 2001 c474

²⁶ Cabinet Office, *Ministerial Code*, July 2007, para 9.6,

http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/upload/assets/www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/propriety_and_ethics/ministerial_code_current.pdf

²⁷ Cabinet Office, *Ministerial Code – A Code of Ethics and Procedural Guidelines for Ministers*, July 2005, para 7.4e, http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/propriety_and_ethics/publications/pdf/ministerial_code.pdf

D. Visiting another constituency

The Speaker has on numerous occasions dealt with complaints from Members that another Member or a Minister has visited their constituency without prior notification. This is a practice successive Speakers have deprecated. In 1995, Speaker Boothroyd further stated that there was no question of *permission* requiring to be obtained; all that as necessary was for the other Member to be *informed*.²⁸

Speakers' comments on this issue since about 1990 have all tended to emphasize the desirability of informing the sitting Member in *every* case, for example in November 2004 Speaker Martin made the following comments:

Derek Conway (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Will you confirm that there is a long-standing courtesy and convention in the House whereby a Member of Parliament who intends to visit the constituency of another MP lets them know of their intention? May I draw to your attention the fact that both the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary were in my constituency this morning, but they did not exercise a courtesy that I understood applied to the most exalted Members of this Chamber, as well as to we lowly Back Benchers?

Mr. Speaker: We are all equal in this matter, and regardless of whether it is the Prime Minister, the Home Secretary or any other Cabinet Minister, the usual conventions must apply when they visit a constituency. I expect that convention to be abided by.²⁹

Indeed, Ministers visiting other Members' constituencies are subject to guidance given in the *Ministerial Code*:

Ministers intending to make a visit within the United Kingdom must inform in advance the MPs whose constituencies are to be included within the itinerary. Similar courtesies should be extended when UK Ministers are visiting the constituencies of members of the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and the Northern Ireland Assembly.³⁰

However, before recent times, this convention appears to have been slightly different. Dorothy Keefe, who compiled *Working for an MP* in the 1970s, stated:

When speaking in another Member's constituency, a Member should write a note to the sitting Member (if they are of the same party) asking if he has any objection.... Ministers' Private Offices should inform all Members...irrespective of party. There is a rather greyer area where shadow ministers are concerned, but it might be wiser, as a matter of courtesy, to inform Members of all parties when these visits are made.... There is no hard and fast rule concerning Members of opposing parties.³¹

²⁸ HC Deb vol 255 21 February 1995 c159

²⁹ HC Deb 9 November 2004 c720; see also HC Deb 25 October 2007 c439

³⁰ Cabinet Office, *Ministerial Code*, July 2007, para 10.9, http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/upload/assets/www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/propriety_and_ethics/ministerial_code_current.pdf

³¹ D Keefe, *Working for an MP*, ed. of 1985, p17, and *ibid*, ed. D Inns, 1992, p21

E. Ministers raising constituency issues

The particular case of Ministers and their raising of own-constituency issues is also covered in the *Ministerial Code*:

6.4 Where Ministers have to take decisions within their departments which might have an impact on their own constituencies, they must take particular care to avoid any possible conflict of interest. Within departments, the Minister should advise their Permanent Secretary and, in the case of junior ministers, their Secretary of State of the interest and responsibilities should be arranged to avoid any conflict of interest.

6.5 Ministers are free to make their views about constituency matters known to the responsible Minister by correspondence, leading deputations or by personal interview provided that they are acting as their constituents' representative and not as a Minister.

6.6 Ministers are advised to take particular care in cases relating to planning applications in their constituencies or other similar issues. In all such cases, it is important that they make clear that they are representing the views of their constituents, avoid criticism of Government policies and confine themselves to comments which could reasonably be made by those who are not Ministers. Once a decision has been announced, it should be accepted without question or criticism.

6.7 Particular care also needs to be taken over cases in which a Minister may have a personal interest or connection, for example because they concern family, friends or employees. If, exceptionally, a Minister wishes to raise questions about the handling of such a case they should advise their Permanent Secretary and write to the Minister responsible, as with constituency cases, but they should make clear their personal connection or interest. The responsible should ensure that any enquiry is handled without special treatment.³²

F. Local precedence

Members of Parliament have no particular precedence.³³ Questions sometimes arise about precedence at civic and other functions, particularly in relation to a Member *vis-a-vis* the Lord-lieutenant of a county and the mayor of a city or town, or the chairman of its council.

The general rules on this are that the Mayor has precedence over everyone but the Royal Family in his/her own civic premises, and, after the Lord-lieutenant, anywhere else in the city or town.³⁴ This applies in respect of a Royal visit to a District, but is varied in the case of a Royal visit to a county, when the order of presentation to the Royal visitor provides that the chairman of the County Council should take precedence over district and borough council

³² Cabinet Office, *Ministerial Code*, July 2007, paras 6.4-6.7, http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/upload/assets/www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/propriety_and_ethics/ministerial_code_current.pdf

³³ Privy counsellors have precedence in general terms following peers' eldest sons and preceding the judiciary and baronets, but this is unlikely to have any local significance

³⁴ *Debrett's Correct Form*, 1999, p293

chairmen/mayors. Members of Parliament are then presented after these dignitaries, and the district chief executives, but before the Chief Constable.³⁵

The holder of the mayoral office may, of course, *offer* primacy to a distinguished guest, including an MP, but that is a matter for the mayor or chairman involved. A Lord-lieutenant, being the Queen's representative, has precedence, together with the High sheriff, in his own county, including over the chairman of the county council.

There may also be a local protocol in operation to regulate local precedence,³⁶ and in some cases it is possible these may affect the precedence of the Member of Parliament.

³⁵ Paul Millward, *Civic ceremonial*, 5th edition, 1998, p89, quoting Sovereign's ruling embodied in HO circular 63/1988

³⁶ *ibid*, see appendix 2-3 for examples (not, in these examples, affecting MPs)