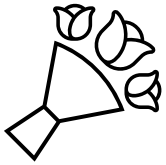
#GriefIsHardEnough #FixTheFEP toolkit for engaging MPs

QUAKER SOCIAL ACTION

Your guide to campaigning for change with your MP

About this toolkit



This toolkit will **support you** to campaign for positive change for bereaved people facing unaffordable funeral costs.

It will give you the tools to **influence your MP to support #GriefIsHardEnough #FixTheFEP** and help secure national change.

What's included:

- What is the #GriefIsHardEnough #FixTheFEP campaign?
- Why should I meet with my MP?
- How do I reach them?
- How do I prepare and what do I say?
- What do I ask them to do?
- What next?

What is the #FixTheFEP campaign?

Quaker Social Action's (QSA's) **#FixTheFEP** campaign is **calling on the Government to make the Funeral Expenses Payment (FEP) in England & Wales available to more people to reduce stress and debt for bereaved people.**

People who receive an income-related benefit can apply for the FEP but 'family tests' mean that thousands of people are not eligible for a payment. The Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) tries to find someone else in the family who is not getting one of these benefits who the DWP thinks can take responsibility for the funeral costs. This often doesn't reflect reality though and just leaves the applicant without any financial support for the funeral.

Scotland has a different payment, the Funeral Support Payment (FSP), which is simpler and easier to access. It's estimated that 40% more people can get a payment in Scotland than can get the FEP in England and Wales.

QSA are calling on the DWP to make the FEP eligibility criteria the same as the criteria for the FSP in Scotland. This would mean:

1. **Regardless of where someone lived in the UK, they would get the same help.**
2. **Everyone on income-related benefits would be able entitled to a funeral payment.***
3. **Thousands of people would find it easier to pay for funeral costs.**
4. **A simpler application process that didn't ask intrusive questions.**

* A small number of people still wouldn't, for example if the person who died didn't ordinarily live in the UK.

Why should I engage with my Member of Parliament (MP)?

Your MP's job is to listen to you, raise your concerns and represent your views in Parliament. They can be a an important lever for change and can put pressure on the government in many ways, for example by:

•Asking questions in parliament

•Speaking out in debates

•Proposing changes to bills

By talking to our MPs, **we can have our voices heard and push for positive changes.**

Doing this by sharing individual stories works. **Sharing your personal experience** of how the Government failed you by denying you a Funeral Expenses Payment **is a powerful way of showing change is needed.**

Why a meeting?

A face-to-face meeting with an MP is far more powerful than just writing to them because it is more affecting hearing someone's experience in-person. It is the **single most impactful thing you can do to engage your MP**. It could be the difference between them backing the campaign and supporting our calls for change or just adding it to their already very long 'to-do' list. You won't have to go to Westminster!

MPs also help with 'casework', where individuals ask them to help solve personal difficulties. It's an important part of an MP's job but different to campaigning for change nationally which is what we're focusing on here.

Arranging a meeting with your MP

How to arrange a meeting with your MP

Email your MP to ask for a meeting. Their assistant may suggest booking a specific time or encourage you to come to your MP's next constituency surgery (meeting). MPs are usually in their constituencies on Fridays, but this can vary. If you can't meet in person, many will also arrange a video call.

How to get their email address

Enter your postcode on the parliament website to get your MP's email address. It should be on the 'Contact information' tab but, in the rare case it's not, email our Down to Earth influencing lead, Lindesay Mace, at lindesaymace@qsa.org.uk.

What to write

We've drafted a template email to help you, with highlighted sections that you need to fill in. However, if you can, we encourage you to edit the rest of it too - to build a relationship with your MP **it's best if it sounds like it's coming from you** and says a little about your personal experience:

- MPs are very busy so **keep it brief**, you can go into more detail in the meeting.
- Don't worry, you're not expected to be an expert on the issue.
- Everyone is human, so **keep it polite**. They are much less likely to respond to rude emails.

You may not hear back quickly or be able to meet them straight away. Be patient and polite but persistent. **If you don't hear from them within two weeks**, email or phone their office again.

Preparing to meet your MP

Keep us posted!

Once you have a meeting secured tell lindesaymace@qsa.org.uk so we can help you prepare if you need. E.g. we can advise if your MP has previously taken actions or made statements it would be helpful to reference.

Looking after your wellbeing – the most important thing!

Try not to be daunted by the fact you're speaking to an MP, they want to hear from you, and **you are the expert of your experience**.

However, consider what might make it easier for you, especially if you might find it challenging talking about issues related to your bereavement. For example:

- **Take some notes** with you to help you focus on what you want to say.
- If you think you'll need support in the meeting, **you could take a friend or relative with you**.
- **It's OK to be emotional.** If you feel upset, you can ask to take a break. If you feel unable to continue, you can leave and ask to rearrange the meeting. They will understand.
- Think about **which parts of your story** you're prepared to share with your MP.
- **Your MP might ask to share your story in parliament.** This could help raise the profile of the issue, but **you don't have to agree**. You can say no or ask them to share your story without your name. You can also think about it and email them later.

The meeting

It will likely only last about 20 minutes and may be shorter but you may cover a lot in the time, so it will be helpful to be able to refer back to what was said. **Take something for making notes.** You could even record the audio of the meeting on your phone if you want, but it's best to ask first.

What should I talk about?

Start off by introducing yourself and telling them you've come to discuss unaffordable funeral costs and the government support available. (It's best not to assume they'll remember this!)

Your experience – this is the most important part e.g.:

- The fact you were unable to get a Funeral Expenses Payment from the DWP despite being in receipt of a qualifying (income-related) benefit.
- Explain why you feel it was unreasonable for the DWP rules to say that another family member should take responsibility for the funeral. E.g. why was this not appropriate or possible?
- Share your experience of trying to get the money from elsewhere. How long did this take? Do you still have money to pay off e.g. money you borrowed or to the funeral director.
- What was the impact on you and your wellbeing of being denied the FEP and then having to find a way of accessing money from elsewhere? Did it impact the funeral choices you made?

What should I talk about?

Key information

e.g. an estimated 40% more people can access the Funeral Support Payment in Scotland then can get the Funeral Expenses Payment in England, Wales & Northern Ireland.

How a Funeral Expenses Payment would have helped

How does it make you feel knowing that if you lived in Scotland you would likely have been able to get a payment?

Talk about #GriefIsHardEnough #FixTheFEP

Tell them about QSA's **#FixTheFEP campaign** and that it's important to you as someone who has previously been bereaved and had to arrange a funeral.

Leave them with something to read

If you let us know about your meeting beforehand, we can send you a printed copy of a detailed briefing about the Funeral Expenses Payment so they have some more in-depth information.

Summarise

In the last couple of minutes, summarise what you have discussed, the feedback the MP has given, and ask them to **commit to the below follow up actions** to support the campaign.

What should I ask my MP to do?

Your MP can be influential in many ways. There are lots of things you could ask them to do, but here are **our top two suggestions**:

Ask your MP to write to Torsten Bell MP, the Minister for Pensions, who is responsible for the Funeral Expenses Payment. As they are busy you can offer to send them our template if that would be helpful. Obviously, if your MP *is* Torsten Bell then just ask him to do 2 & 3 below!

When they write to Torsten Bell MP, ask them to:

1. **Share our briefing paper** setting out the issue (we can provide this too!).
2. **Ask him meet with us**, **Quaker Social Action**, to discuss the problems with the FEP and our proposal for how it should be changed. (If we were granted this meeting it might be possible for you to attend too, though this would depend on the Minister. If you think you might be interested please let us know).
3. **Ask him to consider reviewing and reforming the eligibility criteria of the FEP** to ensure more bereaved people can get financial support.

Ask your MP to contact Lindesay Mace at Quaker Social Action.

QSA are building relationships with MPs who support our call for change to the FEP eligibility criteria. **We would like to keep in touch about the campaign and ways they can support it.** E.g. assisting MPs to ask questions in parliament, attending a roundtable (a meeting to discuss the issue and explore solutions) or securing a debate in Westminster Hall.

Ending the meeting

What will they do & by when?

Whatever your MP agrees to, ask when they will do it or when you can expect to hear about their discussions with their colleagues. E.g. when will they write to the Minister or contact Quaker Social Action. **Be clear that you're going to follow up and will be expecting action.**

Take a photo!

If you're happy to, ask if you can post about the meeting on social media. Ask if you can take a photo with your MP and for a quote to go with it. Make your MP aware that we might share it too. If the MP has staff with them, you can ask them to **take the photo, or take a selfie**!

You might not get the response you want at your first meeting, or in your first email reply. It takes time to bring an MP with you – they may need to go on a bit of a journey to understand the issue.

Don't be disheartened if it doesn't go the way you want and **remind yourself that you have done something amazing**. You've used your voice to highlight an issue you care about to your MP.

After you've met with your MP:

THANK YOU!

Thank your MP for their time

A day or so after the meeting, email your MP to thank them for their time and note some key points that were discussed **as well as a summary of what they agreed to do and by when.**

Share feedback with QSA

We're working hard to make sure every MP knows who we are. **Your feedback on the meeting**, insight into their thinking and details of any agreed actions and timeframes **helps us in our policy work.** Please email lindesaymace@qsa.org.uk.

We will also keep you informed of the campaign's progress.

Share your meeting on social media

Social media posts are great for raising awareness and encouraging others to meet their MP. Please tag us and use our hashtags #GriefIsHardEnough #FixTheFEP.

Bluesky: @quakersocialaction.bsky.social
Facebook & Instagram: @quakersocialaction

To share with more people in your area, send the photo to your local paper with details about the campaign.

Follow up with your MP

Hopefully during your meeting, you will have agreed a timeframe for your MP to take action and deliver on their commitment to you.

If you don't hear from them to confirm that they have done what they said they would, please follow up and check in around the agreed time.