This guide provides members interested in engaging with local parliamentary candidates in the build up to the General Election with tips on how to lobby effectively. Whether or not you have previous experience of lobbying politicians, this guide provides you with ideas about how you can participate effectively, helping candidates improve their knowledge of dentistry and oral health and ensuring the voice of the profession is heard.

The BDA has published a manifesto for the General Election, Smiles all round, which is available on the BDA’s website at www.bda.org/manifesto. A copy has also been included in your March edition of BDA News. It outlines important areas in which the BDA believes the next government must make progress. The BDA has also posted copies of Smiles all round to every Prospective Parliamentary Candidate (PPC) in the country.

We hope that the manifesto proves to be a useful tool as you lobby your local candidates. It points to the issues facing dentistry nationally, providing a context against which you can highlight particular local concerns.
1 Getting started

The list below will help you be prepared for when you do make contact with your candidates. It is worth remembering that they will be extremely busy in the build up to the Election, so you will want your thoughts and arguments to be well organised, to help you present a clear and concise argument that they can easily digest.

Before you to decide how you want to engage, ensure that you:

- Find out who your candidates are. All parties will list their PPCs on their respective websites, typically including background information on each candidate. You can find out who your current MP is by visiting:

  http://findyourmp.parliament.uk/

  Another helpful source of up-to-date information can be the independent survey and polling news blog, UK Polling Report, which you can view at:

  http://ukpollingreport.co.uk/guide/

- Familiarise yourself with your copy of the BDA’s manifesto, Smiles all round. It can be downloaded via the BDA’s website at: www.bda.org/manifesto. If further printed copies of the manifesto would be useful to you, please contact the BDA’s Public Affairs Officer Laura Brandon at: laura.brandon@bda.org or by phone on 020 7535 5874.

- Consider the dental issues affecting your local area, and how they align with the key points in the manifesto. The ability to articulate your concerns clearly but succinctly will help you get your point across.

- Consider common interests with other local health professionals locally, and think about the possibility of a joint approach to a candidate that demonstrates the breadth of local concerns. There is strength in numbers and a jointly-endorsed message may be heard more sympathetically.

- Contact the BDA. Members of the public affairs team can provide further information and guidance to all members seeking to get involved. If you find after reading this guide that you’re still unsure about who to approach, the team would be happy to provide advice. The BDA would also like to hear if any of your local candidates show a particular interest in dental and issues, so do make sure
you drop us a line if you find such an individual. Contact BDA Public Affairs Officer, Laura Brandon at laura.brandon@bda.org or by phone at 020 7535 5874.

2 Choose your approach

Depending on the degree of lobbying you wish to undertake, this list can provide you with ideas and suggestions for how to get your voice heard by your PPC. Lobbying your candidate can incorporate a range of approaches including:

• taking the time to discuss issues with candidates at the door

• writing to your candidate directly

• writing a letter to your local newspaper

• making your views heard at a public meeting

• requesting a one-to-one meeting

• holding local hustings

Taking the time to discuss issues with candidates at the door

Catch them if you can! One or more of your local PPCs may just knock on your door providing the perfect opportunity for some crucial one-to-one contact. You might not have a lot of time, so try to stick to one issue that is a particular priority. If you find the candidate particularly receptive, you might even challenge them to commit to the manifesto’s priorities.

Writing to your candidates directly

A straightforward approach that simply involves putting pen to paper (or fingertips to keyboard) to introduce yourself and the relevant issues in writing. The BDA has written to all PPCs directly, but letters from individual constituents, by email or post, can serve as an effective reminder that the BDA’s interests are relevant on their own doorstep. Enclose a copy of the manifesto, highlight local issues and remember to include contact details for the BDA in case the candidate wants further information.

Writing a letter to your local newspaper

This provides an opportunity to voice your views publicly. As with writing directly to your candidate, ensure you are

Top tip – Each candidate’s level of knowledge of dentistry will vary. It can help to determine their level of interest by asking them if they have received any letters concerning dentistry in the area, then let the conversation stem from there.

In this crucial election year, your voice counts more than ever.
clear and concise, and emphasise the impact of the issue you identify on patients and dentists alike.

**Making your views heard at a public meeting**

Most candidates will at some point attend and speak at a public meeting, allowing you another possibility to voice your views and/or concerns in a public arena. This is an ideal opportunity to highlight any local issues which might resonate with other members of the audience. In a forum where others will be raising a diverse range of issues, it's important to make a strong point that can be understood and supported by other members of the audience, who could be patients, other health professionals or even other dentists.

**Requesting a one-to-one meeting**

Although candidates will be busy campaigning, they will be keen to secure your vote and hear about local experiences. Speaking to local candidates, or even visiting local surgeries, can help bring issues alive for candidates. Such meetings provide an opportunity for a more in-depth conversation, across a range of concerns. They also allow you to ask candidates to pledge their support for the six priorities in the BDA's manifesto if they are elected.

The BDA has already met with a number of PPCs to discuss the current state of dentistry. If your candidate is receptive to your representations and you think it would be useful for them to be contacted by the BDA, then let us know and we'll try to back up your success by engaging with them at a national level.

**Holding local hustings**

Local hustings are meetings that provide a platform for candidates to debate policy with a local audience in an effort to win their vote. Organising hustings requires considerable time and energy, so may be an option only for those with previous experience to consider. There are strict guidelines in place on how to run local hustings and you need to be thorough in your research before you even book a venue. Public hustings must ensure complete political neutrality. BDA Public Affairs Officer Laura Brandon can provide further guidance to those who particularly interested in getting involved at this level. Contact Laura at laura.brandon@bda.org or by phone at 020 7535 5874.

Top tip – ensure that you feedback to the BDA’s Public Affairs Team who has pledged their support or is receptive to our priorities. This will help us establish who we could work with once a new Parliament is convened.