

**Your voice in  
Scotland:  
A practical  
guide to  
influencing  
politicians in  
Scotland**



# Your voice in Scotland: A practical guide to influencing politicians in Scotland

## Welcome

Politicians play key roles in shaping law, public funding and policy priorities.

As a charity we're always looking to build relationships with parliamentarians across the UK to deliver change for the coeliac community. You can play a huge part in helping to do this.

Talking to elected representatives can feel intimidating – especially if you've never done it before.

This toolkit is here to help you feel confident, understand who does what, and share your experiences clearly and respectfully with elected members and local candidates.

## Your voice matters!

Elected representatives rely on people in their communities to share real-life experiences and explain what's working and what isn't. You are not bothering politicians by contacting them – engaging with constituents like you is part of their job. Ultimately, they are accountable to voters in their local area, and a letter or conversation from a constituent tends to be given far more weight than contact from a national organisation. Your voice is incredibly powerful.

## You don't need to be an expert

Being honest, respectful, and clear about what matters to you is more than enough. Your strength is your lived experience and passion for the cause. This guide and attached resources will help to support your conversations

**"When volunteers share their experiences with local politicians, they turn statistics into real world stories. Amidst all the noise of politics, it is your voice that helps Coeliac UK highlight what truly matters to people with coeliac disease – and in doing so, helps drive meaningful change."**



Tristan Humphreys, Head of Advocacy & Public Affairs, Coeliac UK



First Minister,  
John Swinney  
MSP



Campaigners outside Holyrood following a parliamentary reception in October 2025

# Parliaments across the UK

The UK is made up of four nations: England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Power is not all held in one place – some decisions are made centrally, and others are made closer to where people live. This is called devolution.

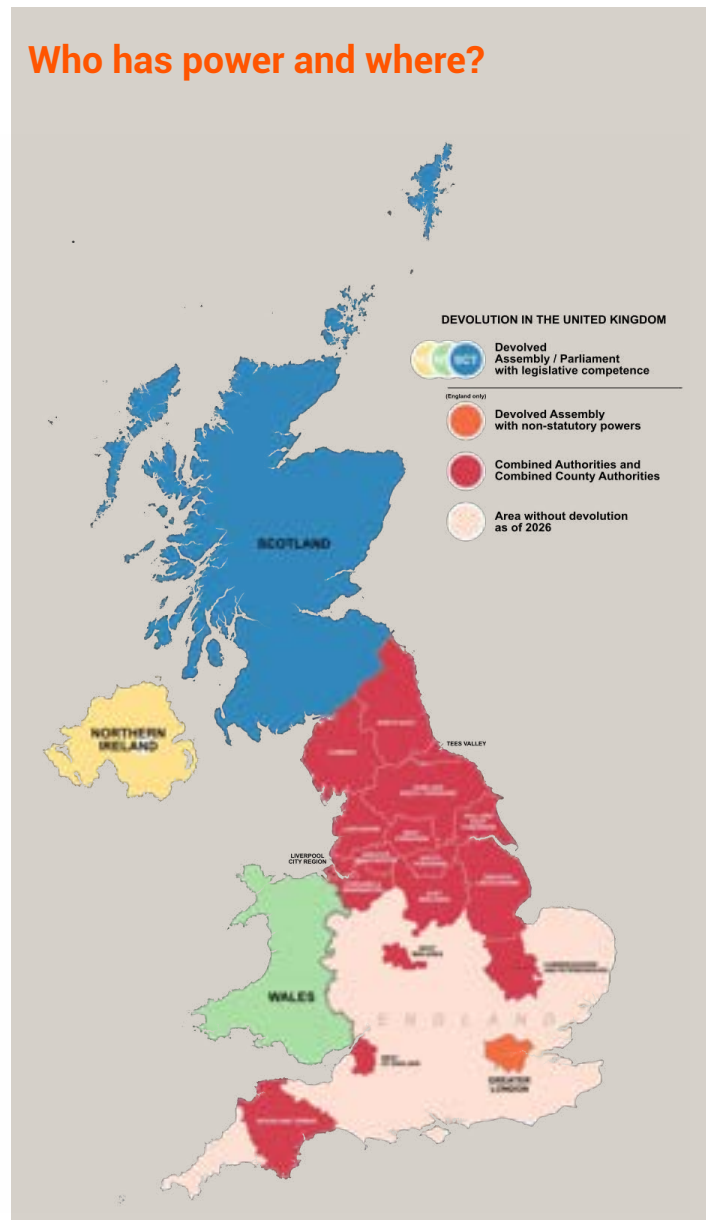
## What is devolution?

Devolution means that some powers are passed down from the UK Parliament in Westminster to governments and parliaments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

This allows different parts of the UK to:

- Make decisions that reflect local needs
- Take different approaches in areas like health or education
- Be more directly accountable to people living there.

## Who has power and where?



Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh (top left), Northern Ireland Assembly, Belfast (top right), Senedd Cymru, Cardiff (bottom left), Houses of Parliament, London (bottom right)

## UK Parliament (Westminster)

The UK Parliament in London makes laws for the whole UK in areas that are not devolved.

These include:

- Defence and the armed forces
- Immigration
- Foreign policy
- Most welfare benefits
- The overall economy.

These are often called “reserved matters.”

## Devolved governments and parliaments

Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland each have their own elected institutions that make decisions in devolved areas (including areas like health and education.

Understanding who has the power to act is essential to making effective asks.

## Why this matters

Devolution means:

- who you contact matters –not every politician has the power to act on every issue
- Policies can vary across the UK, especially when it comes to health and education
- If you live in Scotland, you will be represented by an MP in the UK parliament and a member of the Scottish Parliament (MSP)
- Local voices can have real influence, especially at devolved level

As a volunteer, you don't need to master all of this – just remember: Different parliaments make decisions about different things

**You've got Mail!**

The average MSP receives

**Up to 800 emails a week!**

To make sure your email doesn't get lost in the noise, be sure to include your postcode and make your email personal to you

# Understanding the Scottish Parliament and the 2026 election

Based in Holyrood, Edinburgh, there are 129 members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs). The party with the largest number of MSPs usually forms a government. As such, the Scottish Government is responsible for proposing most bills to the parliament for debate and approval. The Scottish National party is currently the governing party in Scotland.

## What is the Scottish Parliament?

The Scottish Parliament (often called Holyrood) is Scotland's devolved legislature. It makes laws for Scotland, approves the Scottish Government's budget and holds the First Minister and Ministers to account.

The **Scottish Parliament** has powers over many key areas, including:

- Health and social care
- Education and training
- Justice and policing
- Environment and climate
- Housing and local government
- Some taxation powers

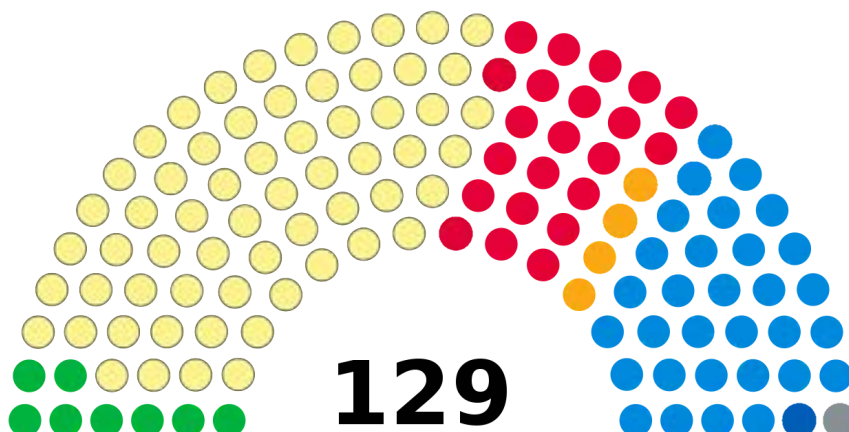
## Who Are Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs)?

Each person in Scotland is represented by:

- 1 constituency MSP
- 7 regional MSPs

This means:

- You have eight MSPs who represent you
- All MSPs can raise issues, ask questions, and meet constituents
- It is acceptable to contact more than one MSP about the same issue.



# Elections 2026

2026 is a big year for elections in Scotland. On the 7 May, voters across the country will go to the polls to decide who will represent them for the next 4 years. The results will decide who will be making decisions on a range of different policy areas that could impact people with coeliac disease.

## The Campaign

The campaign period offers a great opportunity to speak to candidates, raise awareness of coeliac disease and get commitments from members of the Scottish Parliament to champion the cause in the coming parliamentary term. Remember, they want your vote and they will be keen to hear what matters to you.

For more information on how the elections in Scotland work and to find out who's standing in your area take a look at the links below::

- [How the Scottish Parliament elections work](#)
- [Everything you need to know about elections in your area](#)

## How the 2026 Scottish Parliament Election will work

The Scottish Parliament election will take place on Thursday 7 May 2026. Scotland will use the Additional Member System (AMS), which combines:

- Local representation
- A more proportional overall result.



## How voting works

Voters receive two ballot papers:

1. One to choose a constituency MSP
2. One to choose a political party or independent for the region

## After the vote

After votes are counted:

- MSPs are confirmed (129 in total)
- A First Minister is chosen by the Parliament

This period matters – early priorities are often set quickly so this is a good opportunity to follow up with your new MSPs.

**A new parliament means there will be lots of new politicians elected and this gives you a great opportunity to build a relationship with your next local representative and ensure coeliac disease is on their agenda**

# Engaging your local candidates

Your local candidates are competing for your vote. This is your chance to make them earn it. You can use our handy resources to guide your conversations with local candidates, and we would encourage you to ask them to sign up to our **pledge card** to show their support.

There are many ways to engage with your local candidates. We've listed a few of them below. Remember, however you engage with your local candidate, be polite, be genuine and explain clearly why this matters to you and what you want them to do about it. It's important not to be seen to endorse a particular candidate or party so be sure to reach out to all the candidates.

## Writing to a candidates

- **Introduce yourself clearly:** Say who you are, that you're a local constituent or volunteer, and why you're getting in touch. If you're a volunteer with a local group, you may like to write a joint letter from the whole committee. This can add extra weight to your correspondence.
- **Be concise and focused:** Stick to one or two key issues rather than a long list and be sure not to mix it up with different policy issues or party political arguments (See our Manifesto).
- **Explain why it matters:** Briefly describe the local impact or personal relevance. Sharing your own personal story can be the difference between the letter or email standing out from the many template letters they will receive.
- **Ask a clear question or request:** This could be signing our pledge card, arranging a meeting or visit to the local event
- **Be polite and respectful:** Courtesy increases the chance of a response, even if they disagree.



## TOP TIPS

- **Personal messages are much more effective than template or copy and paste letters.**
- **Include your postcode to show you are a local voter.**
- **Don't worry if you don't receive a reply immediately. Campaign periods are very busy.**

# Inviting them to an event

Inviting candidates to a local event like a coffee morning, meet up or a hustings can be a great way to meet candidates and raise the challenges facing people with coeliac disease.

- **Invite early:** Candidates' diaries fill up quickly, especially close to polling day.
- **Explain the purpose clearly:** What is the event, who will attend, and what will happen?
- **Highlight local relevance:** Explain why this matters for residents or constituents.
- **Be flexible:** Offer a few possible dates or formats (e.g. short visit or a virtual teams meeting).
- **Clarify expectations:** Let them know if they'll be asked to speak, listen, or answer questions.

## TOP TIPS

- **Be welcoming and professional, even if views differ.**
- **If multiple candidates attend, treat everyone equally.**
- **Follow up with a thank you email or letter after the event**

# Attend a local hustings

A hustings (or candidates' meeting) is a chance to hear directly from candidates and ask questions.

- **Prepare your question in advance:** Keep it short, neutral, and issue-focused.
- **Listen actively:** Pay attention to differences and similarities in responses.
- **Be respectful:** Challenging questions are fine, but tone matters.
- **Take notes:** This helps you share accurate information afterwards

## TOP TIPS

- **Relate your question to the local constituency ( you can find a link to a list of sample questions in the back of this guide).**
- **Avoid speeches— Clear questions get better answers.**
- **If you aren't called to speak, follow up by writing to the candidate later.**

# Connect with them via social media

Social media can be a useful way to follow candidates' views and engage publicly.

How to engage positively:

- **Follow their official accounts** to stay informed about their priorities and activity
- **Engage constructively:** Like, share, or reply with thoughtful comments or questions
- **Be factual and calm:** Public discussions are visible to others
- **Tag appropriately** when referencing them in posts related to local issues.

## TOP TIPS

- Avoid arguments or personal attacks—these reduce impact.
- Short, clear messages work best.
- If a conversation becomes detailed, suggest continuing by email or meeting.

## Final thought

Successful engagement is about building relationships. Being respectful, prepared, and locally focused will always give you the strongest voice when speaking with candidates. Reach out beyond just the candidate/candidates you agree with. We need champions across the political spectrum to ensure coeliac disease is given the profile it deserves.

**Important:** As a charity, there are certain rules we have to follow during election campaigns. So, whilst you can welcome the support of a candidate please avoid endorsing a particular candidate or encouraging others to vote for them. We want every candidate to back our work and would welcome all of their support.

## Useful resources

- **Pledge document**
- **Briefings**
- **Our Manifesto**
- **Sample questions**
- **Top 10 tips for engaging politicians**





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