



LOCAL INFLUENCING TOOLKIT



Photo credit: Jim Ballard

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INTRODUCTION

Services for homeless people and other vulnerable groups face their biggest challenges in a generation. Following the 2010 comprehensive spending review, local authorities are cutting new contracts, reviewing existing funding arrangements, and reconsidering what level of local service provision is now sustainable.

Similarly, the cuts to welfare benefits, most significantly housing benefit, and the uncertain economic conditions raises the risk that more people will become homeless, or unable to move out of homelessness.

This situation is not entirely grave. This new environment also offers some opportunities for local services to demonstrate how their services represent essential provision. While we see any rise in homelessness as unacceptable, if the changes by central government contribute to an increase, the argument for preserving homelessness services will become all the stronger.

Services must also show how they are the natural and credible partner to deliver services previously kept in house by local authorities, health and criminal justice. While some local areas may cut indiscriminately, many will be keen to work closely with 3rd sector organisations and the private sector to ensure support remains for vulnerable people within our communities.

To that end, this toolkit offers a range of resources to support local campaigning. Along with support from Homeless Link to enable local collaboration and improve intelligence of risks and opportunities, these tools can help to promote the concerns of your clients and the benefits of your service locally.

Without question, the coming years will be tough for the homelessness sector and the clients we work with. However, the enduring ingenuity and commitment of providers can preserve the vital support we provide. We must fight to end homelessness, and ever more, it is our sector who must lead this fight.

CONTENTS

This toolkit covers the following:

- Making your approach/contacting your local MP and councillors
- Client involvement in the local influencing process
- Campaigning guidance
- Telling the story through the media

WHY GET INVOLVED WITH LOCAL INFLUENCING?

- While the homelessness grant has been sustained, the outcomes of the Emergency Budget in June and the Comprehensive Spending Review in October 2010 nonetheless point to real issues ahead for homelessness services and the people they support.
- With decision making devolved to a local level, it is important that we do all that we can to keep homelessness on the political agenda locally.

- With the severe cuts in public expenditure, and in the context of the removal of the ring-fenced Supporting People funding and insecure funding regimes for homelessness projects, it is critical that we raise awareness of the work that you do and put forward concrete evidence of the difference you make to the lives of homeless people.
- The General Election saw the greatest influx of new MPs into Parliament since the Second World War. This is an opportunity to influence a new group of people early on in their political career and ensure that homelessness is on their agenda.

USING THE HOMELESS LINK MANIFESTO

All member organisations received copies of our manifesto, *Ending homelessness together: 10 Years, 10 Steps, 1 Ambition*, which sets out ten steps to ending homelessness. This document was launched on 2nd February 2010 with support from the three main political parties. At a national level we will continue to seek political support across the three main parties and from the Coalition Government on ending homelessness and supporting the ambition to end rough sleeping by 2012. However, it is at a local level that you can make a difference by building relationships with your local councillors and MPs.

The ten issues identified in the manifesto were ones raised in consultation with homelessness services and service users. We ask members to invite local stakeholders to read the manifesto and to convey what you feel are the most important aspects of it. Where possible, we encourage members to link these aspects back to their own experience and practice and provide the opportunity for your MPs and councillors to hear about your work and to hear directly from people who have experienced homelessness.

If you would like additional copies of the manifesto, please contact policy@homelesslink.org.uk or download it from our website www.homeless.org.uk/manifesto

Some strong summary points to make from the manifesto are:

1. Build on the ambition to end rough sleeping in our country by 2012.
2. Develop a national picture of 21st century homelessness and create the strategy to tackle it.
3. Ensure a well promoted, effective and welcoming Housing Options and Advice Service, for all who need it in every area.
4. Prevent homelessness during life transitions, e.g. leaving care or discharge from hospital, prison and the armed services.
5. Ensure that no one is left destitute and excluded from basic support in 21st Century Britain.
6. Tackle the deep social exclusion of people with multiple needs.
7. Deliver top class access for homeless people to the right mental health, drug and alcohol support.

8. Build on the sector's Places of Change approach by extending support for positive activities, learning, skills and employment.
9. Reform how housing benefit, tax and other benefits work to support the journey into work and prevent homelessness.
10. Increase housing supply and make better use of existing accommodation, halve the number of empty homes and strengthen the offer of the private rented sector.

KEEP US INFORMED...

Please let us know about any activities you are engaged in, including meetings or events that you set up and any press coverage.

Please email either:

- Jacqui McCluskey, Director of Policy and Knowledge, jacqui.mccluskey@homelesslink.org.uk,
- Alice Evans, Head of Policy Analysis alice.evans@homelesslink.org.uk or
- Ben Knox Head of Marketing and Communications ben.knox@homelesslink.org.uk

LOCAL ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES

Voluntary organisations are crucial to supporting local democracy in a number of ways:

- Holding local government and public service providers to account by providing evidence and expertise
- Raising awareness of issues by bringing it to the attention of policy makers and other decision makers
- Enabling client groups to participate in decision making that impacts on their lives
- Providing and promoting candidates
- Providing practical experience on local strategic partnerships (LSPs) boards and panels

However, as most relationships between voluntary agencies, councils and councillors exist outside formal structures of partnerships, we recommend members build relationships with as many local stakeholders as possible. Visiting your local MP and local councillors, or holding an event and inviting them to visit you is the most effective way to get them to listen, engage in a conversation and debate about your concerns. However, it may only be possible to, or you may prefer to, make contact by phone or letter.

Homeless Link will provide guidance notes for specific campaigns for you to lobby your local representatives effectively. Please let us know if you need any specific support with a letter to a local representative.

FIND YOUR LOCAL REPRESENTATIVES

You have several elected representatives at different levels of government. You can find out who your local MP, local councillors, MEPs (and London Assembly members if appropriate) are by visiting www.writetothem.com. There are other similar websites (such as www.theyworkforyou.com); however, this site gives you the full range of local stakeholders.

Simply type in your postcode and you will get details of all your local elected representatives.

WRITE TO YOUR LOCAL REPRESENTATIVES

The most effective way to lobby your MP and councillors is face to face, whether at a small meeting at their office or at a larger public event. However, this is not always possible and writing a letter or a phone call can also be an effective way to present your concerns to your local representatives.

MPs and MEPs

MPs have public contact details so their constituents can get in touch. In most cases you can write, phone, fax or email. UK Parliament's directory of MPs lists all available addresses. <http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/mps/>

If you want more information on your local MP, follow the link to [They Work for You](#) where you will find information on his/her interests and voting history. There is also other information that might help you to identify where/with whom to focus your activity in the first instance.

Telephone

Calling with a simple question might get a faster response than writing. You will talk to a relevant office or have to leave a message. Phone the House of Commons switchboard on 020 7219 3000 and ask for your MP by name. If you do not know their name, then phone the House of Commons Information Office on 020 7219 4272 (check number) or visit [Writetothem](#) as described above.

Letter

You may also contact your MP through their local constituency office. Addresses and contact numbers will be listed in local libraries, town halls, personal website or through the House of Commons Information Office.

Email

The majority of MPs now have email addresses that you can write to. We recommend using Write to Them – an easy to use system to send a letter to your MP.

[Writetothem](http://www.writetothem.com) (www.writetothem.com)

Click on the link for your local councillor, MP or MEP and complete the online form. You have the option to write to all councillors and MEPs or just to specific individuals. Guidance on how to ensure your letter counts is included at the top of the online form and is repeated below:

- Please be polite, concise and to the point; if you abuse your Councillor/MP/MEP you devalue the service for all users, and undermine your chances of having your points accepted.
- Use your own words; the system blocks copy and pasted identical messages.
- It's a waste of time writing to Councillors/MPs/MEPs other than your own; your message will be ignored. Remember for MPs that their two concerns will be their own personal policy interests (such as housing benefit, or if they are ministers, their ministerial brief) and the needs of their constituents. If you are asking about an issue that falls outside of those two areas, it is wasted time and effort.
- Guidance is provided on when Councillors/MPs/MEPs can help you – and when they can't.

Local Councillors

Local councillors' details are typically available on your local council's website and in local libraries. You can also use Writetothem to contact your all or some of your local councillors (see above).

Homeless Link will provide guidance notes for specific campaigns for you to lobby your local representatives effectively.

MEET YOUR LOCAL REPRESENTATIVES

Face to face meeting

The incumbent MP is likely to hold regular surgeries for people in the constituency to meet them about their concerns. In most cases, you'll need to phone the office of the MP to book a slot. If you are not able to attend a surgery, you can arrange a separate meeting. Identify yourself as a constituent and state whether you are speaking as an individual or on behalf of a group.

Preparing for and attending a meeting

We suggest you choose one policy to emphasise from our manifesto or other issue you are particularly concerned about. In addition you may want to inform your chosen representative of the current situation in relation to the funding of your project, and to seek their support for your work.

We have provided some tips on meeting politicians in Appendix 2.

After the meeting

After a visit, it is important to write to the individual to thank them for their time, reiterate your issues and confirm any actions you agreed. In general, it is worth sending regular updates such as press releases and annual reports. Always remind MPs of past contact you may have had with them.

Hold an event

Many organisations hold events over the course of the year and invite their local elected representatives. Examples of events that are usually popular with local representatives are a special service at your place of worship, a fundraiser, video messages from your client group etc. Whatever you are organising, try to get your candidates and clients involved. Remember that photo opportunities are a useful way for MPs to obtain publicity. This may be mutually beneficial to your service as well, but consider how this might be perceived by your clients, colleagues and external partners. Consider whether it would be appropriate to offer a photo op as part of associated media work.

CLIENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE ELECTION PROCESS

Seeing a project first hand is an excellent way of demonstrating the value of your project or service.

ENCOURAGING CLIENTS TO MEET WITH CANDIDATES

There are many ways to get service users to meet with candidates.

Holding a Speakout

A Speakout is a way for homeless people to communicate with and influence people and organisations who make decisions that affect their lives. Homeless people are often excluded from decision-making processes. Times of change, such as the introduction of new government policy, are ideal times for homeless people to organise Speakouts to tell their local representatives exactly what the impact of their policies will be on their lives and to offer alternative solutions. You can find out more about how to organise a Speakout in Appendix 1.

Visits to projects MPs, MEPs and local councillors

Seeing a project first hand is an excellent way of demonstrating the value of your project or service. If you do manage to set up a project visit with your local representatives, it is crucial that they have the opportunity to meet and speak directly to service users. Hearing directly from people who have experience of homelessness and who are attempting to turn their lives around can be inspiring, memorable and can have a major lasting impact.

Prepare for the meeting by ensuring that service users are willing to speak to representatives (as well as having had appropriate support to prepare) and that representatives in turn get the chance to speak to people with a range of experiences and stories. It can be all the more impactful where service users can talk about the difference your project has made to their lives.

TRUSTEE INVOLVMENT IN LOCAL INFLUENCING

Trustees must think strategically about how they can survive turbulent times and, crucially, how they can work to protect services through a range of local connections.

ACEVO has produced a useful guide for trustees in the new era of localism. The key points are reproduced here:

Review your model of delivery. It's time to look for models and frameworks that can be replicated rather than a service that is the same for everyone regardless of need.

The future will be user led with proven results, not just activity for its own sake. If you think about making a journey through London – you'll use a variety of transport, but can use your Oyster card in all of them. How are you going to offer a journey for service users that might involve different providers / services, but is seamless both to the funder and the user? And how can you ensure that the whole journey is undertaken rather than a part of it – because it won't do to have people start and not complete.

If payments are only going to be made on results, how will you adapt now to survive this? Who and where can you get other funding from? Have you considered diversifying your work to see if you can make any money? Have you looked at the social investment bonds and bank that the Government are trying out? Or considered sheltering yourselves as a sub contractor with a larger organisation that has plenty of work contracts?

If you have something new or special that you know works, the Government are keen on the “**right to bid**” which will allow you to bid for funds rather than waiting for them to tender out a service. Now is the time to act and make your case to funders and commissioners.

Finally, **make sure everyone is marketing your service.** In a competing world where service users will have choice, it will be critical that everyone knows what you do, and the quality of service you offer, whether they're funders, commissioners, users, families of users or anyone who comes into contact with them.

You can download the full document on our website:

<http://www.homeless.org.uk/surviving-cuts>

TRAINING FOR BOARDS

Homeless Link has a range of board training resources available through Engage to Change. The assessment tools will help you to identify the relevant skills required and assess whether your trustee board needs support in developing its local influencing skills.

The sessions are as follows:

- **The sector and our organisation:** This looks at the development of the sector and how recent key political, economic changes have affected the organisation.
- **Our Service:** This looks at what the service does and our ambitions for it (and the people who use it), including how users of the service are involved in its development.
- **Your role as a Board:** This section can be delivered as one module focusing on both the functional and strategic roles of the Board or can be split into two sessions covering functional operations and influencing and partnerships. It includes a board self appraisal framework.
- **Risks – how do assess and manage them?:** This session looks at the different types of risk to your organisation and how the organisation records, reports and manages risk?
- **Joint Working to Support Vulnerable Adults:** This session aims to highlight the pitfalls of a lack of service integration for vulnerable people and gives participants an understanding of the “every child matters” and every adult matters” agendas.
- **The journey of the service, the change plan:** This involves discussion about how the organisation knows when it is successful and looks at delivery against the Places of change approach and the Rough Sleeping Strategy.

The sessions are designed to be delivered either as short stand alone sessions of around an hour, as part of a Board away day or in combination for longer sessions and there are a number of delivery options that can be considered.

Further information about the programme and the Engage to Change for Boards resources are now available free of charge and can be down loaded here:

<http://www.homeless.org.uk/board-resources>

WRITE TO YOUR LOCAL MEDIA OUTLETS

The letters pages of local newspapers are keenly read by all local representatives so this is an excellent way of getting your concerns in front of your candidates.

Either following a face to face meeting with a local representative or any event at which candidates were present, think about writing a letter or issuing a press release to the local paper or radio station telling them how the meeting went, comparing the views of the different representatives etc. If you use social networking sites or if you are a member of Homeless Link, share the experience with others.

You can find a template press release in Appendix 4.

CAMPAIGNING GUIDANCE

The voluntary sector is regulated in its campaigning activity by the Charity Commission; campaigning around general or local elections is no exception. The Charity Commission provides advice on the do's and don'ts of political campaigning.

The law makes a distinction between charitable purposes and charitable activities. A charity must be established for a charitable purpose, and, as a general principle, charities may undertake campaigning and political activity as a positive way of furthering or supporting their purpose. Charities can never engage in any form of party political activity. They must remain independent and politically neutral.

You can read their advice on their website or in Appendix 5 of this document.

EVIDENCING THE IMPACT OF YOUR WORK

Increasingly, local policy makers and partners, as well as those that may fund you, are keen to see the difference that you make to the lives of your service users. Just providing outputs, as in the numbers of people that you see each day, is no longer likely to be enough when talking about the needs of your clients or demonstrating your impact.

It is therefore important that you collate and utilise your data in a way that tells a story about distance travelled by individuals as a result of the service you provide. You could collect hard data such as the numbers of people housed or maintaining housing as a result of the support you provide, but softer outcomes are also important, such as improvements in health, well-being, confidence and engagement.

There are a range of outcomes tools that provide a practical way of measuring and comparing outcomes achieved by individual clients while receiving support services. They are becoming an ever more prominent feature of service provision in the supported housing sector and other areas. Central government departments, inspection bodies, commissioners and service providers themselves are increasingly recognising their value both in promoting and evidencing client change.

Homeless Link has produced some resources to help you understand the range of outcomes tools available, including a guide to help you choose a tool.
<http://www.homeless.org.uk/outcomes-tools>

DAY CENTRES

Day Centres are different from other services, however it is still essential that they measure outcomes and capture the important work that they do. Our outcomes resource for day centres will help you to decide on an appropriate tool.
<http://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/Outcomes%20Resource.pdf>

APPENDIX 1- HOW TO ORGANISE A SPEAKOUT

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: Why should you hold a Speakout?

A: To raise the issue of homelessness in the local area with local decision makers. Homeless people get an opportunity to participate decisions that impact on their lives and ensure that local elected representatives are aware of their issues.

Q: Who should be involved?

A: People with experience of homelessness, clients, residents, providers of services to homeless people, local elected representatives.

Q: What issues should it cover?

A: A Speakout is your chance to ensure that the key issues affecting homeless people are raised with your local MP and councillors from all parties. Our manifesto provides direction on some of the issues. You could run workshops before the main discussion on key issues and allow everyone to have their say.

CHECKLIST FOR GETTING IT RIGHT

Prepare service users

It is important that you spend time preparing and supporting your service users before the meeting. You should discuss with them the issues they want to raise and how best to approach the meetings so that you get your message across in a compelling way.

Time to organise

MPs and local councillors have pretty hectic schedules, so give them at least three weeks notice. Check what other events are happening locally, including key religious festivals to ensure that your event is not competing for their attention.

Access

Find a venue that is suitable for all, including people with disabilities and has good transport links.

Identify a chair/facilitator

You'll need a good facilitator, someone who can chair the event and ensure that everyone gets their say. Facilitators need to be impartial, bring out the solutions and agreed actions, and give useful feedback. You should probably identify the chair as early as possible as a good chair can be an attraction for the candidates, encouraging their attendance. It is helpful to take minutes and to either take photographs, or video and audio footage.

Agree format/speakers

You need to make sure that the relevant agencies that you want to influence have been invited. This might mean not only the local elected representatives, but also statutory service providers, such as the local council, police or the PCT.

Invite press

A Speakout is a great opportunity to make links with the local press. Invite your local journalists and broadcasters to cover it.

Learning lessons

Once the Speakout is over you need to sit down and learn some lessons from it. One good way of involving services users is PMI - Plus, Minus & Interesting: getting a group together after the event to list the positive, negative & useful things that you've learnt.

Note: Groundswell UK has published *The Speakout Recipe Book* which is a guide for homeless people who wish to organise a Speakout. Visit www.groundswell.org.uk

APPENDIX 2 - TIPS FOR GETTING YOUR MESSAGE ACROSS TO YOUR LOCAL REPRESENTATIVES

If you are a charity it is important that you remain politically neutral and independent and you MUST NOT give support to any one political party.

- Put some thought into your approach and why you want to see your local representatives. What are you doing that they would like to hear about? If you have a great photo opportunity, such as a new building, new service, new facility, registering homeless people to vote, etc., then offer it to the candidates. Think about how you put over your message and tailor it to each of the individuals, depending on what you know about them.
- Write to each of the candidates giving them information on your project and include any details and evidence you may have about the impact of the work you do. For example, the extent of service user involvement in your project and the number/proportion of service users:
 - engaging in meaningful activities
 - you have helped into education and/or training
 - you have helped into employment
 - you have supported with mental health and substance misuse problems.
- You could also ask each of the candidates about their views and policies on homelessness. You may want to use the Homeless Link manifesto as the basis of the issues you want to raise and/or as useful background information. The letter should offer the candidates an opportunity to come and visit your project.
- A key role you can play is to improve their knowledge on homelessness. You should decide whether you are prepared to provide concise briefings, case studies and local information and statistics. This should be available to all the candidates. See below for a list of resources you may want to refer to.
- Highlight the range of services you provide and the range of issues you work on will to help the candidates understand your work and the value of it. Candidates may not realise that the sector covers so many different agendas, such as mental health, substance misuse, employment and skills.
- Focusing on solutions and the difference you have made to homeless people's lives will be received more favourably than just focusing on problems. However, you may want to use the opportunity of the election to highlight the funding issues you are facing, especially given the wider economic context.

USEFUL RESOURCES

- Facts and figures on homelessness at www.homeless.org.uk/facts
- Homeless Link's Survey of Needs and Provision (SNAP) which provides a picture of the extent and nature of services for single homeless people in England. Our latest survey is due to be launched on 15th March 2010 and will be followed up by regional briefings. See www.homeless.org.uk/snap
- LAA toolkit – this can help you profile and evidence the work that your organisation does against the national indicators in your Local Area Agreement <http://www.homeless.org.uk/toolkits-and-handbooks>

APPENDIX 3 – ORGANISING A HUSTINGS

The Charity Commission Guidance states:

“If a charity is not comfortable engaging with a particular party, it should examine the reasons why. The trustees should make a decision based on whether such engagement would further or hinder the interests of the charity. For example, an event may be more manageable and more focused if all minority parties are excluded...it is also open to charities to decline to invite to a public meeting a representative from a political party which advocates policies which are in contravention of the charity’s objects, or whose presence or views are likely to increase the chance of public disorder or of alienating the charity’s supporters.”

If you have any doubts about who to invite, contact your Constituency Returning Officer via your local authority, or the Electoral Commission www.electoralcommission.org.uk for advice.

ABOUT HUSTINGS

A hustings is a chance to influence the future thinking of the candidates and of the audience in general. It is a great opportunity to raise the issues of homelessness and you should try to ask questions that do that.

Hustings are unlikely to significantly influence the course of the election overall. You may not be able to change the candidates’ minds at a hustings and you will be unlikely to get the main parties off their script.

STEPS TO MAKING YOUR HUSTINGS A SUCCESS

- Many of the same points as for a Speakout apply (See Appendix 1):
- Invite candidates to your hustings as early as possible, as they have extremely busy diaries during the election period
- Contact the candidates with an initial invitation, explaining the aims of the meeting and mentioning the provisional time and date. This should then be confirmed swiftly after the election is called with details of the other candidates who are being invited
- If a candidate is invited and refuses or is unable to attend, they may wish to provide a short statement to be read out
- Try to send short briefing materials about the issues the hustings will address
- Arrange for the meeting to be chaired by someone seen as fair and impartial. The chair needs to be firm, control length of time candidates speak for and ensure constituents stick to asking questions, rather than making statements
- Choose a venue central to the constituency or in a convenient alternative location to maximise attendance
- Be clear with candidates about how long they will be expected to speak for, how long the question and answer period will be and what time the meeting will finish
- Advertise widely and try to get publicity for the meeting out to as many people and in as many ways as possible.

You are not obliged by law to invite all the candidates standing in your constituency to the hustings meeting. If you want to limit the number of candidates that would be acceptable, but it is advisable to ensure that more

than one party is invited. All parties do not have to be represented every time a charity does any work which engages with political parties.

RUNNING THE MEETING/ FORMAT

You might want to consider the following structure:

- Welcome by the Chair, who also describes the way in which the meeting is to be conducted
- Brief introduction by the Chair of the candidates by name and party
- Short statement by each candidate
- Questions from the floor, allowing each candidate to respond
- Final few sentences from each candidate
- You may want to consider asking for questions as the audience arrive and ask them to write them down and submit them.
- Questions from the floor must be addressed to each candidate and they must be given the opportunity to respond. Questions should not be targeted at a particular candidate or their policies.
- After the event, write to candidates to thank them for taking part and after the election you can continue to build a productive relationship with your local MP.

APPENDIX 4 - WRITING A PRESS RELEASE

GENERAL

A press release is a standardised way of communicating with journalists. If written well it will tell them what the story is at a glance. Journalists get hundreds of press releases a day, so it is critical to ensure they stand out from the crowd.

STRUCTURE OF A PRESS RELEASE

Journalists are less particular than they used to be, however, they do require a certain structure to a press release.

EXAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release: [add time, date and location] use if you want the media to release the story as soon as they receive it

Or

Embargoed for: [add time, date and location] use if you want to give journalists time to prepare and to ensure they don't use until a specified time

Headline: start with a snappy attention grabbing headline, but not too clever

Standfast: or secondary title describing key message

Photo opportunity: what is it, where is it, when is it and contact details

Para 1: summarise the story – who, what, where, when and why. All key information needs to be in this paragraph. Some people will read no further.

Para 2: put in more details to flesh out the story you have outlined in the first paragraph

Para 3: Quotes from someone relevant to the story. Don't try to cram too many points into one quote

Para 4: any extra additional information

Ends (always use this word to specify the break between the release and the notes to editors)

Notes for Editors:

Provide background information in case they run a longer story, often a boilerplate description of the company and its activities and or of the project.

Outline what you have to offer: pictures, photo call or interviewees

Outline any additional information, such as facts and figures

Contact: make sure you provide contact details for day and night. This can make the difference between a story being covered or not.

One of the best ways to influence the local debate is through the local media, generating stories in the press through press releases. We have drawn up a few simple guidelines for writing a press release.

TOP TIPS

- Know your media – read the relevant paper or magazine, listen to the relevant radio station so you know how they report stories, what type of stories they like. Ring them to check which journalists cover your issue and when their deadlines are. Introduce yourself and tell them what issues you work on
- Keep your press release short and to the point – preferably all on one page or possibly extending to two with notes
- Send your press release in the body of the e mail. Don't send it as an attachment and don't include logos
- Follow up on your release. Ring the news desk to check they have your release, whether they will be using it, and whether they have all the information they need
- Pick your time to ring journalists – not too close to deadlines as they won't have time to chat. You can find out their deadlines by ringing the newsdesk
- If the journalist isn't interested, ask why. It is useful learning for the next time.
- Don't be put off. There may be a whole host of reasons why the story isn't used. Often a bigger story suddenly emerges
- Often pictures help coverage

APPENDIX 5 – CAMPAIGNING GUIDELINES

GENERAL BACKGROUND

The law makes a distinction between charitable purposes and charitable activities. A charity must be established for a charitable purpose, and as a general principle, charities may undertake campaigning and political activity as a positive way of furthering or supporting their purpose. Charities can never engage in any form of party political activity. They must remain independent and politically neutral. Charities must always stick to their mission – the charitable purposes for which they are established. Campaigning and political activity can be legitimate and valuable activities for charities to undertake. However, political campaigning, or political activity, must be undertaken by a charity only in the context of supporting the delivery of its charitable purposes. When deciding whether to campaign, charities must be sure that they are furthering their stated purposes, and that they weigh the possible benefits against the possible risks as well as complying with the general law.

Charities are free to use whatever method they consider appropriate to communicate their message (within the law). However, they must ensure that their 'political activities' don't become the dominant means by which they pursue their charitable aims. If a charity only ever carried out political activity, it would have adopted a political rather than charitable purpose. A well-managed campaign can enhance a charity's work and impact, but you must consider how actions will or might be perceived by the public and supporters.

There are some simple common sense rules to guide your activities:

- As a charity, you **MUST NOT** give support to any one political party.
- You can engage with political parties and politicians but you **MUST** remain neutral and maintain public perceptions of neutrality.
- You should consider your reputation and how you are achieving your objectives.
- You must campaign on issues related to your organisation's objectives.
- You should always seek to maintain your reputation & demonstrate your independence.

But what can you actually do when campaigning in the run-up to the election? Again the guide here is common sense, but the Charity Commission does provide some examples. For further information see the Charity Commission's guidance on Charities and Elections (update January 2010), www.charity-commission.gov.uk/supportingcharities/elect.asp

Here are a few things that you need to know:

- Once an election has been called, charities that are campaigning will need to take special care to ensure political neutrality. For example, a charity must not provide funds or other resources to a political candidate
- A charity must never indicate to its supporters which candidate to support in an election.
- During an election period, the need for impartiality and balance is intensified, and charities must take particular care when undertaking any activities in the political arena
- A charity's policy position on a particular issue may be similar to that of one of the political parties. In this case it is entirely acceptable for you to continue to

campaign on that issue and to advocate this policy as long as you make clear its independence from any political party advocating the same policy, and does nothing to encourage support for any political party

- You are free to approach the candidates in an election, setting out the concerns of your charity and asking for candidates' opinions on them, with a view to promoting debate.
- However, you should be especially wary of associating, or becoming associated in the minds of the public, with a particular candidate or political party
- Any campaign is free to use emotive content in its publicity, however, you must consider the risk of controversy and potential bad publicity
- You must steer clear of explicitly comparing your charity's views on issues with those of the political parties or candidates taking part in the election. While you can attempt to influence public opinion on a particular issue if it furthers or supports your objectives, you must leave it to the electorate to make their own decisions about how to vote
- You are free to organise demonstrations and direct action that can simply be distributing leaflets or you can be involved in or organise demonstrations, marches or peaceful pickets. But you always have to weigh up doing so against the likely impact on your good reputation.

When it comes to dealing with the political parties and candidates themselves there are a wide range of things that you can do:

- Outline the policy of each political party but must steer clear of making explicit comparisons.
- Provide supporters and the public with information on party or candidates stance on relevant issues
- Provide supporters and the public with material to send to candidates
- Organise petitions (though of course you have to be able to show these are authentic)
- Supply briefing materials to politicians
- Publish views and articles from politicians (but you must consider range and scope of views and whether they might damage your reputation)
- Invite politicians to events, though you should always try to get as wide cross party coverage as possible and you must make sure not that you are not consistently working with just one political party.
- The basic rule of thumb is that you must have a clear understanding of how any activity will further the interests of your charity and ensure that your methods are well thought through and do not display, even inadvertently, party political support.

More detailed Charity Commission guidance on political campaigning can be found in its report **CC9 - Campaigning & Political Activities by Charities**
www.charitycommission.gov.uk/publications/cc9.asp

APPENDIX 6 – USEFUL INFLUENCING RESOURCES

Here is a selection of resources to help you with your local influencing:

Proving your worth to Whitehall (New Philanthropy Capital August 2010)

http://www.philanthropycapital.org/publications/improving_the_sector/improving_charities/proving_worth_whitehall.aspx

Quick Guide to Local Government (LGA)

<http://homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/LGA%20guide%20to%20local%20government1.pdf>

Local action: a handy guide for communities working with councillors (bassac and Urban Forum)

<http://www.urbanforum.org.uk/handy-guides/local-action-a-handy-guide-for-communities-working-with-councillors>

Guide to campaigning and influencing for trustees (NCVO)

http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/trusteeguide/campaigning?utm_source=260810&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=trusteeguide

Voicing your right to know: using Freedom of Information in campaigning (NCVO)

[http://homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/Your_right_to_know_0%20\(2\).pdf](http://homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/Your_right_to_know_0%20(2).pdf)

Scaling up for the Big Society (New Philanthropy Capital May 2010)

http://www.philanthropycapital.org/publications/improving_the_sector/improving_charities/scaling_up.aspx

Strategy & impact resources (NCVO)

<http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/strategy-impact>

Local Tender Support Project (NAVCA)

The support is available to all local charities, community groups and social enterprises in England and can help you to improve the quality of your tenders and your chances of being successful.

<http://www.navca.org.uk/localvs/lcp/tenders/tsp/>



LOCAL INFLUENCING TOOLKIT



Photo credit: Jim Ballard

December 2010

INTRODUCTION

Services for homeless people and other vulnerable groups face their biggest challenges in a generation. Following the 2010 comprehensive spending review, local authorities are cutting new contracts, reviewing existing funding arrangements, and reconsidering what level of local service provision is now sustainable.

Similarly, the cuts to welfare benefits, most significantly housing benefit, and the uncertain economic conditions raises the risk that more people will become homeless, or unable to move out of homelessness.

This situation is not entirely grave. This new environment also offers some opportunities for local services to demonstrate how their services represent essential provision. While we see any rise in homelessness as unacceptable, if the changes by central government contribute to an increase, the argument for preserving homelessness services will become all the stronger.

Services must also show how they are the natural and credible partner to deliver services previously kept in house by local authorities, health and criminal justice. While some local areas may cut indiscriminately, many will be keen to work closely with 3rd sector organisations and the private sector to ensure support remains for vulnerable people within our communities.

To that end, this toolkit offers a range of resources to support local campaigning. Along with support from Homeless Link to enable local collaboration and improve intelligence of risks and opportunities, these tools can help to promote the concerns of your clients and the benefits of your service locally.

Without question, the coming years will be tough for the homelessness sector and the clients we work with. However, the enduring ingenuity and commitment of providers can preserve the vital support we provide. We must fight to end homelessness, and ever more, it is our sector who must lead this fight.

CONTENTS

This toolkit covers the following:

- Making your approach/contacting your local MP and councillors
- Client involvement in the local influencing process
- Campaigning guidance
- Telling the story through the media

WHY GET INVOLVED WITH LOCAL INFLUENCING?

- While the homelessness grant has been sustained, the outcomes of the Emergency Budget in June and the Comprehensive Spending Review in October 2010 nonetheless point to real issues ahead for homelessness services and the people they support.
- With decision making devolved to a local level, it is important that we do all that we can to keep homelessness on the political agenda locally.

- With the severe cuts in public expenditure, and in the context of the removal of the ring-fenced Supporting People funding and insecure funding regimes for homelessness projects, it is critical that we raise awareness of the work that you do and put forward concrete evidence of the difference you make to the lives of homeless people.
- The General Election saw the greatest influx of new MPs into Parliament since the Second World War. This is an opportunity to influence a new group of people early on in their political career and ensure that homelessness is on their agenda.

USING THE HOMELESS LINK MANIFESTO

All member organisations received copies of our manifesto, *Ending homelessness together: 10 Years, 10 Steps, 1 Ambition*, which sets out ten steps to ending homelessness. This document was launched on 2nd February 2010 with support from the three main political parties. At a national level we will continue to seek political support across the three main parties and from the Coalition Government on ending homelessness and supporting the ambition to end rough sleeping by 2012. However, it is at a local level that you can make a difference by building relationships with your local councillors and MPs.

The ten issues identified in the manifesto were ones raised in consultation with homelessness services and service users. We ask members to invite local stakeholders to read the manifesto and to convey what you feel are the most important aspects of it. Where possible, we encourage members to link these aspects back to their own experience and practice and provide the opportunity for your MPs and councillors to hear about your work and to hear directly from people who have experienced homelessness.

If you would like additional copies of the manifesto, please contact policy@homelesslink.org.uk or download it from our website www.homeless.org.uk/manifesto

Some strong summary points to make from the manifesto are:

1. Build on the ambition to end rough sleeping in our country by 2012.
2. Develop a national picture of 21st century homelessness and create the strategy to tackle it.
3. Ensure a well promoted, effective and welcoming Housing Options and Advice Service, for all who need it in every area.
4. Prevent homelessness during life transitions, e.g. leaving care or discharge from hospital, prison and the armed services.
5. Ensure that no one is left destitute and excluded from basic support in 21st Century Britain.
6. Tackle the deep social exclusion of people with multiple needs.
7. Deliver top class access for homeless people to the right mental health, drug and alcohol support.

8. Build on the sector's Places of Change approach by extending support for positive activities, learning, skills and employment.
9. Reform how housing benefit, tax and other benefits work to support the journey into work and prevent homelessness.
10. Increase housing supply and make better use of existing accommodation, halve the number of empty homes and strengthen the offer of the private rented sector.

KEEP US INFORMED...

Please let us know about any activities you are engaged in, including meetings or events that you set up and any press coverage.

Please email either:

- Jacqui McCluskey, Director of Policy and Knowledge, jacqui.mccluskey@homelesslink.org.uk,
- Alice Evans, Head of Policy Analysis alice.evans@homelesslink.org.uk or
- Ben Knox, Head of Marketing and Communications ben.knox@homelesslink.org.uk .

LOCAL ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES

Voluntary organisations are crucial to supporting local democracy in a number of ways:

- Holding local government and public service providers to account by providing evidence and expertise
- Raising awareness of issues by bringing it to the attention of policy makers and other decision makers
- Enabling client groups to participate in decision making that impacts on their lives
- Providing and promoting candidates
- Providing practical experience on local strategic partnerships (LSPs) boards and panels

However, as most relationships between voluntary agencies, councils and councillors exist outside formal structures of partnerships, we recommend members build relationships with as many local stakeholders as possible. Visiting your local MP and local councillors, or holding an event and inviting them to visit you is the most effective way to get them to listen, engage in a conversation and debate about your concerns. However, it may only be possible to, or you may prefer to, make contact by phone or letter.

Homeless Link will provide guidance notes for specific campaigns for you to lobby your local representatives effectively. Please let us know if you need any specific support with a letter to a local representative.

FIND YOUR LOCAL REPRESENTATIVES

You have several elected representatives at different levels of government. You can find out who your local MP, local councillors, MEPs (and London Assembly members if appropriate) are by visiting www.writetothem.com. There are other similar websites (such as www.theyworkforyou.com); however, this site gives you the full range of local stakeholders.

Simply type in your postcode and you will get details of all your local elected representatives.

WRITE TO YOUR LOCAL REPRESENTATIVES

The most effective way to lobby your MP and councillors is face to face, whether at a small meeting at their office or at a larger public event. However, this is not always possible and writing a letter or a phone call can also be an effective way to present your concerns to your local representatives.

MPs and MEPs

MPs have public contact details so their constituents can get in touch. In most cases you can write, phone, fax or email. UK Parliament's directory of MPs lists all available addresses. <http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/mps/>

If you want more information on your local MP, follow the link to [They Work for You](#) where you will find information on his/her interests and voting history. There is also other information that might help you to identify where/with whom to focus your activity in the first instance.

Telephone

Calling with a simple question might get a faster response than writing. You will talk to a relevant office or have to leave a message. Phone the House of Commons switchboard on 020 7219 3000 and ask for your MP by name. If you do not know their name, then phone the House of Commons Information Office on 020 7219 4272 (check number) or visit [Writetothem](#) as described above.

Letter

You may also contact your MP through their local constituency office. Addresses and contact numbers will be listed in local libraries, town halls, personal website or through the House of Commons Information Office.

Email

The majority of MPs now have email addresses that you can write to. We recommend using Write to Them – an easy to use system to send a letter to your MP.

[Writetothem](http://www.writetothem.com) (www.writetothem.com)

Click on the link for your local councillor, MP or MEP and complete the online form. You have the option to write to all councillors and MEPs or just to specific individuals. Guidance on how to ensure your letter counts is included at the top of the online form and is repeated below:

- Please be polite, concise and to the point; if you abuse your Councillor/MP/MEP you devalue the service for all users, and undermine your chances of having your points accepted.
- Use your own words; the system blocks copy and pasted identical messages.
- It's a waste of time writing to Councillors/MPs/MEPs other than your own; your message will be ignored. Remember for MPs that their two concerns will be their own personal policy interests (such as housing benefit, or if they are ministers, their ministerial brief) and the needs of their constituents. If you are asking about an issue that falls outside of those two areas, it is wasted time and effort.
- Guidance is provided on when Councillors/MPs/MEPs can help you – and when they can't.

Local Councillors

Local councillors' details are typically available on your local council's website and in local libraries. You can also use Writetothem to contact your all or some of your local councillors (see above).

Homeless Link will provide guidance notes for specific campaigns for you to lobby your local representatives effectively.

MEET YOUR LOCAL REPRESENTATIVES

Face to face meeting

The incumbent MP is likely to hold regular surgeries for people in the constituency to meet them about their concerns. In most cases, you'll need to phone the office of the MP to book a slot. If you are not able to attend a surgery, you can arrange a separate meeting. Identify yourself as a constituent and state whether you are speaking as an individual or on behalf of a group.

Preparing for and attending a meeting

We suggest you choose one policy to emphasise from our manifesto or other issue you are particularly concerned about. In addition you may want to inform your chosen representative of the current situation in relation to the funding of your project, and to seek their support for your work.

We have provided some tips on meeting politicians in Appendix 2.

After the meeting

After a visit, it is important to write to the individual to thank them for their time, reiterate your issues and confirm any actions you agreed. In general, it is worth sending regular updates such as press releases and annual reports. Always remind MPs of past contact you may have had with them.

Hold an event

Many organisations hold events over the course of the year and invite their local elected representatives. Examples of events that are usually popular with local representatives are a special service at your place of worship, a fundraiser, video messages from your client group etc. Whatever you are organising, try to get your candidates and clients involved. Remember that photo opportunities are a useful way for MPs to obtain publicity. This may be mutually beneficial to your service as well, but consider how this might be perceived by your clients, colleagues and external partners. Consider whether it would be appropriate to offer a photo op as part of associated media work.

CLIENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE ELECTION PROCESS

Seeing a project first hand is an excellent way of demonstrating the value of your project or service.

ENCOURAGING CLIENTS TO MEET WITH CANDIDATES

There are many ways to get service users to meet with candidates.

Holding a Speakout

A Speakout is a way for homeless people to communicate with and influence people and organisations who make decisions that affect their lives. Homeless people are often excluded from decision-making processes. Times of change, such as the introduction of new government policy, are ideal times for homeless people to organise Speakouts to tell their local representatives exactly what the impact of their policies will be on their lives and to offer alternative solutions. You can find out more about how to organise a Speakout in Appendix 1.

Visits to projects MPs, MEPs and local councillors

Seeing a project first hand is an excellent way of demonstrating the value of your project or service. If you do manage to set up a project visit with your local representatives, it is crucial that they have the opportunity to meet and speak directly to service users. Hearing directly from people who have experience of homelessness and who are attempting to turn their lives around can be inspiring, memorable and can have a major lasting impact.

Prepare for the meeting by ensuring that service users are willing to speak to representatives (as well as having had appropriate support to prepare) and that representatives in turn get the chance to speak to people with a range of experiences and stories. It can be all the more impactful where service users can talk about the difference your project has made to their lives.

TRUSTEE INVOLVMENT IN LOCAL INFLUENCING

Trustees must think strategically about how they can survive turbulent times and, crucially, how they can work to protect services through a range of local connections.

ACEVO has produced a useful guide for trustees in the new era of localism. The key points are reproduced here:

Review your model of delivery. It's time to look for models and frameworks that can be replicated rather than a service that is the same for everyone regardless of need.

The future will be user led with proven results, not just activity for its own sake. If you think about making a journey through London – you'll use a variety of transport, but can use your Oyster card in all of them. How are you going to offer a journey for service users that might involve different providers / services, but is seamless both to the funder and the user? And how can you ensure that the whole journey is undertaken rather than a part of it – because it won't do to have people start and not complete.

If payments are only going to be made on results, how will you adapt now to survive this? Who and where can you get other funding from? Have you considered diversifying your work to see if you can make any money? Have you looked at the social investment bonds and bank that the Government are trying out? Or considered sheltering yourselves as a sub contractor with a larger organisation that has plenty of work contracts?

If you have something new or special that you know works, the Government are keen on the “**right to bid**” which will allow you to bid for funds rather than waiting for them to tender out a service. Now is the time to act and make your case to funders and commissioners.

Finally, **make sure everyone is marketing your service.** In a competing world where service users will have choice, it will be critical that everyone knows what you do, and the quality of service you offer, whether they're funders, commissioners, users, families of users or anyone who comes into contact with them.

You can download the full document on our website:

<http://www.homeless.org.uk/surviving-cuts>

TRAINING FOR BOARDS

Homeless Link has a range of board training resources available through Engage to Change. The assessment tools will help you to identify the relevant skills required and assess whether your trustee board needs support in developing its local influencing skills.

The sessions are as follows:

- **The sector and our organisation:** This looks at the development of the sector and how recent key political, economic changes have affected the organisation.
- **Our Service:** This looks at what the service does and our ambitions for it (and the people who use it), including how users of the service are involved in its development.
- **Your role as a Board:** This section can be delivered as one module focusing on both the functional and strategic roles of the Board or can be split into two sessions covering functional operations and influencing and partnerships. It includes a board self appraisal framework.
- **Risks – how do assess and manage them?:** This session looks at the different types of risk to your organisation and how the organisation records, reports and manages risk?
- **Joint Working to Support Vulnerable Adults:** This session aims to highlight the pitfalls of a lack of service integration for vulnerable people and gives participants an understanding of the “every child matters” and every adult matters” agendas.
- **The journey of the service, the change plan:** This involves discussion about how the organisation knows when it is successful and looks at delivery against the Places of change approach and the Rough Sleeping Strategy.

The sessions are designed to be delivered either as short stand alone sessions of around an hour, as part of a Board away day or in combination for longer sessions and there are a number of delivery options that can be considered.

Further information about the programme and the Engage to Change for Boards resources are now available free of charge and can be down loaded here:

<http://www.homeless.org.uk/board-resources>

WRITE TO YOUR LOCAL MEDIA OUTLETS

The letters pages of local newspapers are keenly read by all local representatives so this is an excellent way of getting your concerns in front of your candidates.

Either following a face to face meeting with a local representative or any event at which candidates were present, think about writing a letter or issuing a press release to the local paper or radio station telling them how the meeting went, comparing the views of the different representatives etc. If you use social networking sites or if you are a member of Homeless Link, share the experience with others.

You can find a template press release in Appendix 4.

CAMPAIGNING GUIDANCE

The voluntary sector is regulated in its campaigning activity by the Charity Commission; campaigning around general or local elections is no exception. The Charity Commission provides advice on the do's and don'ts of political campaigning.

The law makes a distinction between charitable purposes and charitable activities. A charity must be established for a charitable purpose, and, as a general principle, charities may undertake campaigning and political activity as a positive way of furthering or supporting their purpose. Charities can never engage in any form of party political activity. They must remain independent and politically neutral.

You can read their advice on their website or in Appendix 5 of this document.

EVIDENCING THE IMPACT OF YOUR WORK

Increasingly, local policy makers and partners, as well as those that may fund you, are keen to see the difference that you make to the lives of your service users. Just providing outputs, as in the numbers of people that you see each day, is no longer likely to be enough when talking about the needs of your clients or demonstrating your impact.

It is therefore important that you collate and utilise your data in a way that tells a story about distance travelled by individuals as a result of the service you provide. You could collect hard data such as the numbers of people housed or maintaining housing as a result of the support you provide, but softer outcomes are also important, such as improvements in health, well-being, confidence and engagement.

There are a range of outcomes tools that provide a practical way of measuring and comparing outcomes achieved by individual clients while receiving support services. They are becoming an ever more prominent feature of service provision in the supported housing sector and other areas. Central government departments, inspection bodies, commissioners and service providers themselves are increasingly recognising their value both in promoting and evidencing client change.

Homeless Link has produced some resources to help you understand the range of outcomes tools available, including a guide to help you choose a tool.
<http://www.homeless.org.uk/outcomes-tools>

DAY CENTRES

Day Centres are different from other services, however it is still essential that they measure outcomes and capture the important work that they do. Our outcomes resource for day centres will help you to decide on an appropriate tool.
<http://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/Outcomes%20Resource.pdf>

APPENDIX 1- HOW TO ORGANISE A SPEAKOUT

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: Why should you hold a Speakout?

A: To raise the issue of homelessness in the local area with local decision makers. Homeless people get an opportunity to participate decisions that impact on their lives and ensure that local elected representatives are aware of their issues.

Q: Who should be involved?

A: People with experience of homelessness, clients, residents, providers of services to homeless people, local elected representatives.

Q: What issues should it cover?

A: A Speakout is your chance to ensure that the key issues affecting homeless people are raised with your local MP and councillors from all parties. Our manifesto provides direction on some of the issues. You could run workshops before the main discussion on key issues and allow everyone to have their say.

CHECKLIST FOR GETTING IT RIGHT

Prepare service users

It is important that you spend time preparing and supporting your service users before the meeting. You should discuss with them the issues they want to raise and how best to approach the meetings so that you get your message across in a compelling way.

Time to organise

MPs and local councillors have pretty hectic schedules, so give them at least three weeks notice. Check what other events are happening locally, including key religious festivals to ensure that your event is not competing for their attention.

Access

Find a venue that is suitable for all, including people with disabilities and has good transport links.

Identify a chair/facilitator

You'll need a good facilitator, someone who can chair the event and ensure that everyone gets their say. Facilitators need to be impartial, bring out the solutions and agreed actions, and give useful feedback. You should probably identify the chair as early as possible as a good chair can be an attraction for the candidates, encouraging their attendance. It is helpful to take minutes and to either take photographs, or video and audio footage.

Agree format/speakers

You need to make sure that the relevant agencies that you want to influence have been invited. This might mean not only the local elected representatives, but also statutory service providers, such as the local council, police or the PCT.

Invite press

A Speakout is a great opportunity to make links with the local press. Invite your local journalists and broadcasters to cover it.

Learning lessons

Once the Speakout is over you need to sit down and learn some lessons from it. One good way of involving services users is PMI - Plus, Minus & Interesting: getting a group together after the event to list the positive, negative & useful things that you've learnt.

Note: Groundswell UK has published *The Speakout Recipe Book* which is a guide for homeless people who wish to organise a Speakout. Visit www.groundswell.org.uk

APPENDIX 2 - TIPS FOR GETTING YOUR MESSAGE ACROSS TO YOUR LOCAL REPRESENTATIVES

If you are a charity it is important that you remain politically neutral and independent and you MUST NOT give support to any one political party.

- Put some thought into your approach and why you want to see your local representatives. What are you doing that they would like to hear about? If you have a great photo opportunity, such as a new building, new service, new facility, registering homeless people to vote, etc., then offer it to the candidates. Think about how you put over your message and tailor it to each of the individuals, depending on what you know about them.
- Write to each of the candidates giving them information on your project and include any details and evidence you may have about the impact of the work you do. For example, the extent of service user involvement in your project and the number/proportion of service users:
 - engaging in meaningful activities
 - you have helped into education and/or training
 - you have helped into employment
 - you have supported with mental health and substance misuse problems.
- You could also ask each of the candidates about their views and policies on homelessness. You may want to use the Homeless Link manifesto as the basis of the issues you want to raise and/or as useful background information. The letter should offer the candidates an opportunity to come and visit your project.
- A key role you can play is to improve their knowledge on homelessness. You should decide whether you are prepared to provide concise briefings, case studies and local information and statistics. This should be available to all the candidates. See below for a list of resources you may want to refer to.
- Highlight the range of services you provide and the range of issues you work on will to help the candidates understand your work and the value of it. Candidates may not realise that the sector covers so many different agendas, such as mental health, substance misuse, employment and skills.
- Focusing on solutions and the difference you have made to homeless people's lives will be received more favourably than just focusing on problems. However, you may want to use the opportunity of the election to highlight the funding issues you are facing, especially given the wider economic context.

USEFUL RESOURCES

- Facts and figures on homelessness at www.homeless.org.uk/facts
- Homeless Link's Survey of Needs and Provision (SNAP) which provides a picture of the extent and nature of services for single homeless people in England. Our latest survey is due to be launched on 15th March 2010 and will be followed up by regional briefings. See www.homeless.org.uk/snap
- LAA toolkit – this can help you profile and evidence the work that your organisation does against the national indicators in your Local Area Agreement <http://www.homeless.org.uk/toolkits-and-handbooks>

APPENDIX 3 – ORGANISING A HUSTINGS

The Charity Commission Guidance states:

“If a charity is not comfortable engaging with a particular party, it should examine the reasons why. The trustees should make a decision based on whether such engagement would further or hinder the interests of the charity. For example, an event may be more manageable and more focused if all minority parties are excluded...it is also open to charities to decline to invite to a public meeting a representative from a political party which advocates policies which are in contravention of the charity’s objects, or whose presence or views are likely to increase the chance of public disorder or of alienating the charity’s supporters.”

If you have any doubts about who to invite, contact your Constituency Returning Officer via your local authority, or the Electoral Commission www.electoralcommission.org.uk for advice.

ABOUT HUSTINGS

A hustings is a chance to influence the future thinking of the candidates and of the audience in general. It is a great opportunity to raise the issues of homelessness and you should try to ask questions that do that.

Hustings are unlikely to significantly influence the course of the election overall. You may not be able to change the candidates’ minds at a hustings and you will be unlikely to get the main parties off their script.

STEPS TO MAKING YOUR HUSTINGS A SUCCESS

- Many of the same points as for a Speakout apply (See Appendix 1):
- Invite candidates to your hustings as early as possible, as they have extremely busy diaries during the election period
- Contact the candidates with an initial invitation, explaining the aims of the meeting and mentioning the provisional time and date. This should then be confirmed swiftly after the election is called with details of the other candidates who are being invited
- If a candidate is invited and refuses or is unable to attend, they may wish to provide a short statement to be read out
- Try to send short briefing materials about the issues the hustings will address
- Arrange for the meeting to be chaired by someone seen as fair and impartial. The chair needs to be firm, control length of time candidates speak for and ensure constituents stick to asking questions, rather than making statements
- Choose a venue central to the constituency or in a convenient alternative location to maximise attendance
- Be clear with candidates about how long they will be expected to speak for, how long the question and answer period will be and what time the meeting will finish
- Advertise widely and try to get publicity for the meeting out to as many people and in as many ways as possible.

You are not obliged by law to invite all the candidates standing in your constituency to the hustings meeting. If you want to limit the number of candidates that would be acceptable, but it is advisable to ensure that more

than one party is invited. All parties do not have to be represented every time a charity does any work which engages with political parties.

RUNNING THE MEETING/ FORMAT

You might want to consider the following structure:

- Welcome by the Chair, who also describes the way in which the meeting is to be conducted
- Brief introduction by the Chair of the candidates by name and party
- Short statement by each candidate
- Questions from the floor, allowing each candidate to respond
- Final few sentences from each candidate
- You may want to consider asking for questions as the audience arrive and ask them to write them down and submit them.
- Questions from the floor must be addressed to each candidate and they must be given the opportunity to respond. Questions should not be targeted at a particular candidate or their policies.
- After the event, write to candidates to thank them for taking part and after the election you can continue to build a productive relationship with your local MP.

APPENDIX 4 - WRITING A PRESS RELEASE

GENERAL

A press release is a standardised way of communicating with journalists. If written well it will tell them what the story is at a glance. Journalists get hundreds of press releases a day, so it is critical to ensure they stand out from the crowd.

STRUCTURE OF A PRESS RELEASE

Journalists are less particular than they used to be, however, they do require a certain structure to a press release.

EXAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release: [add time, date and location] use if you want the media to release the story as soon as they receive it

Or

Embargoed for: [add time, date and location] use if you want to give journalists time to prepare and to ensure they don't use until a specified time

Headline: start with a snappy attention grabbing headline, but not too clever

Standfast: or secondary title describing key message

Photo opportunity: what is it, where is it, when is it and contact details

Para 1: summarise the story – who, what, where, when and why. All key information needs to be in this paragraph. Some people will read no further.

Para 2: put in more details to flesh out the story you have outlined in the first paragraph

Para 3: Quotes from someone relevant to the story. Don't try to cram too many points into one quote

Para 4: any extra additional information

Ends (always use this word to specify the break between the release and the notes to editors)

Notes for Editors:

Provide background information in case they run a longer story, often a boilerplate description of the company and its activities and or of the project.

Outline what you have to offer: pictures, photo call or interviewees

Outline any additional information, such as facts and figures

Contact: make sure you provide contact details for day and night. This can make the difference between a story being covered or not.

One of the best ways to influence the local debate is through the local media, generating stories in the press through press releases. We have drawn up a few simple guidelines for writing a press release.

TOP TIPS

- Know your media – read the relevant paper or magazine, listen to the relevant radio station so you know how they report stories, what type of stories they like. Ring them to check which journalists cover your issue and when their deadlines are. Introduce yourself and tell them what issues you work on
- Keep your press release short and to the point – preferably all on one page or possibly extending to two with notes
- Send your press release in the body of the e mail. Don't send it as an attachment and don't include logos
- Follow up on your release. Ring the news desk to check they have your release, whether they will be using it, and whether they have all the information they need
- Pick your time to ring journalists – not too close to deadlines as they won't have time to chat. You can find out their deadlines by ringing the newsdesk
- If the journalist isn't interested, ask why. It is useful learning for the next time.
- Don't be put off. There may be a whole host of reasons why the story isn't used. Often a bigger story suddenly emerges
- Often pictures help coverage

APPENDIX 5 – CAMPAIGNING GUIDELINES

GENERAL BACKGROUND

The law makes a distinction between charitable purposes and charitable activities. A charity must be established for a charitable purpose, and as a general principle, charities may undertake campaigning and political activity as a positive way of furthering or supporting their purpose. Charities can never engage in any form of party political activity. They must remain independent and politically neutral. Charities must always stick to their mission – the charitable purposes for which they are established. Campaigning and political activity can be legitimate and valuable activities for charities to undertake. However, political campaigning, or political activity, must be undertaken by a charity only in the context of supporting the delivery of its charitable purposes. When deciding whether to campaign, charities must be sure that they are furthering their stated purposes, and that they weigh the possible benefits against the possible risks as well as complying with the general law.

Charities are free to use whatever method they consider appropriate to communicate their message (within the law). However, they must ensure that their 'political activities' don't become the dominant means by which they pursue their charitable aims. If a charity only ever carried out political activity, it would have adopted a political rather than charitable purpose. A well-managed campaign can enhance a charity's work and impact, but you must consider how actions will or might be perceived by the public and supporters.

There are some simple common sense rules to guide your activities:

- As a charity, you **MUST NOT** give support to any one political party.
- You can engage with political parties and politicians but you **MUST** remain neutral and maintain public perceptions of neutrality.
- You should consider your reputation and how you are achieving your objectives.
- You must campaign on issues related to your organisation's objectives.
- You should always seek to maintain your reputation & demonstrate your independence.

But what can you actually do when campaigning in the run-up to the election? Again the guide here is common sense, but the Charity Commission does provide some examples. For further information see the Charity Commission's guidance on Charities and Elections (update January 2010), www.charity-commission.gov.uk/supportingcharities/elect.asp

Here are a few things that you need to know:

- Once an election has been called, charities that are campaigning will need to take special care to ensure political neutrality. For example, a charity must not provide funds or other resources to a political candidate
- A charity must never indicate to its supporters which candidate to support in an election.
- During an election period, the need for impartiality and balance is intensified, and charities must take particular care when undertaking any activities in the political arena
- A charity's policy position on a particular issue may be similar to that of one of the political parties. In this case it is entirely acceptable for you to continue to

campaign on that issue and to advocate this policy as long as you make clear its independence from any political party advocating the same policy, and does nothing to encourage support for any political party

- You are free to approach the candidates in an election, setting out the concerns of your charity and asking for candidates' opinions on them, with a view to promoting debate.
- However, you should be especially wary of associating, or becoming associated in the minds of the public, with a particular candidate or political party
- Any campaign is free to use emotive content in its publicity, however, you must consider the risk of controversy and potential bad publicity
- You must steer clear of explicitly comparing your charity's views on issues with those of the political parties or candidates taking part in the election. While you can attempt to influence public opinion on a particular issue if it furthers or supports your objectives, you must leave it to the electorate to make their own decisions about how to vote
- You are free to organise demonstrations and direct action that can simply be distributing leaflets or you can be involved in or organise demonstrations, marches or peaceful pickets. But you always have to weigh up doing so against the likely impact on your good reputation.

When it comes to dealing with the political parties and candidates themselves there are a wide range of things that you can do:

- Outline the policy of each political party but must steer clear of making explicit comparisons.
- Provide supporters and the public with information on party or candidates stance on relevant issues
- Provide supporters and the public with material to send to candidates
- Organise petitions (though of course you have to be able to show these are authentic)
- Supply briefing materials to politicians
- Publish views and articles from politicians (but you must consider range and scope of views and whether they might damage your reputation)
- Invite politicians to events, though you should always try to get as wide cross party coverage as possible and you must make sure not that you are not consistently working with just one political party.
- The basic rule of thumb is that you must have a clear understanding of how any activity will further the interests of your charity and ensure that your methods are well thought through and do not display, even inadvertently, party political support.

More detailed Charity Commission guidance on political campaigning can be found in its report **CC9 - Campaigning & Political Activities by Charities**
www.charitycommission.gov.uk/publications/cc9.asp

APPENDIX 6 – USEFUL INFLUENCING RESOURCES

Here is a selection of resources to help you with your local influencing:

Proving your worth to Whitehall (New Philanthropy Capital August 2010)

http://www.philanthropycapital.org/publications/improving_the_sector/improving_charities/proving_worth_whitehall.aspx

Quick Guide to Local Government (LGA)

<http://homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/LGA%20guide%20to%20local%20government1.pdf>

Local action: a handy guide for communities working with councillors (bassac and Urban Forum)

<http://www.urbanforum.org.uk/handy-guides/local-action-a-handy-guide-for-communities-working-with-councillors>

Guide to campaigning and influencing for trustees (NCVO)

http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/trusteeguide/campaigning?utm_source=260810&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=trusteeguide

Voicing your right to know: using Freedom of Information in campaigning (NCVO)

[http://homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/Your_right_to_know_0%20\(2\).pdf](http://homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/Your_right_to_know_0%20(2).pdf)

Scaling up for the Big Society (New Philanthropy Capital May 2010)

http://www.philanthropycapital.org/publications/improving_the_sector/improving_charities/scaling_up.aspx

Strategy & impact resources (NCVO)

<http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/strategy-impact>

Local Tender Support Project (NAVCA)

The support is available to all local charities, community groups and social enterprises in England and can help you to improve the quality of your tenders and your chances of being successful.

<http://www.navca.org.uk/localvs/lcp/tenders/tsp/>