

Campaigning together Toolkit



Start here

1 Planning your campaign

Whether you are campaigning against the closure of local public toilets, or for a change in government policy on social care, the key to successful campaigning is knowing what you are trying to achieve from the beginning.

This sheet aims to help you identify exactly what it is you are campaigning on, and to split your campaign up into realistic and manageable chunks. Approaching the various elements of a campaign is often more successful, and certainly less stressful, than trying to attack a whole issue all at once.

Know what you're campaigning on

So, you want to do something, and you want to do it now. But where to start? Ask yourself the following questions before you proceed:

- Are there any other local or national groups already working on this issue? Can you join their campaign, or work with them to develop your own?
- Is your issue local, regional or national? Who do you need to influence to get things to change? It's no use writing to your local council if it has no powers on your issue. Your local park benches are probably not the concern of the national government.

Target decision maker	Issue
Local council	<i>A particular shop or service</i>
Your MP	<i>An organisation, company</i>
The Government	<i>The police, public utility</i>

(For help identifying whether an issue is local, regional or national, see our pages on campaigning ahead of the General Election)

What do you want to achieve with your campaign?

Get something opened/closed	<i>A change in attitude/culture among a particular audience</i>
Moves in favour of a particular policy/legislation	<i>Moves against a particular policy/legislation</i>
Raise awareness	<i>A public commitment by elected figures</i>
Research to be carried out	<i>Something else</i>

What resources or expertise to you have in your group, and how can you use this in the campaign? Do members have experience with the press, designing posters, organising events, writing letters, public speaking or meeting with public figures?

Breaking down your campaign

It's easy to want everything to change all at once, to demand action now, rather than in the longer term. But often it's much more effective to campaign for small steps, on the way to a particular goal in the long term. Once you've achieved one or two small things, you are already on the way to getting what you want overall.

Yarlton older people's group was concerned about the lack of secure places for older people to rest on the local high street. Older people often became tired in the main busy shopping street, and without anywhere to rest would often fall or have to go home without finishing their shopping. Some feared going out at all. The group set itself the following small goals, in order to have benches installed:

- Carry out a survey of older people shopping in the high street, to gather evidence about the problem. Also survey how many benches there are, and other opportunities to rest without having to buy anything.

Aim: *To gather evidence that this really is a problem, and back-up material for approaching decision makers.*

- Write letter to local council member for planning, and to council planning office, with research findings, requesting a meeting and calling for benches to be installed.

Aim: *To highlight the issue to relevant decision makers in the council, and to ask for benches.*

- Draw up a petition to be signed by local shopkeepers and providers of services for older people, making the point that more benches could mean more older people shopping.
- Circulate the petition, and send completed copies to above decision makers, to back up initial letter.

Aim: *To generate awareness of the problem among the business community on the high street, which in turn might generate discussion in local Chamber of Commerce and similar.*

- Make specific request, by letter, for four benches to be installed, and propose the most convenient and effective locations.
- Suggest sources of funding, such as the local business community.
- Ask for responses to the proposals, and offer assistance in drawing up alternatives.

Aim: *To make a specific call for action, and to show older people want to be stakeholders in any solution.*

- Contact local media, (TV, radio and newspapers) with the findings of the research, and with contact details of older people willing to talk about their experiences.

Aim: *To raise wider awareness of the issue, and to put pressure on decision makers to introduce the benches.*

- If the campaign is successful, contact decision makers to thank them for listening, contact the media to praise the work as an effective partnership between older people and the council.

Aim: *Praise where praise is due helps to improve relationships for future issues of concern.*

How can you break your campaign up into similar small goals? Draw up a list of small steps to achieve, and add a realistic timescale for achieving them.

Test your campaign ideas

Once your campaign is broken down into elements, it is often worth testing your ideas. In your older people's group, consider measuring your plans against one or both of the following tried and tested criteria.

The 'SMART' test

Is your campaign idea:

Strategic Is it core to your campaign, or a diversion? If achieved, will it contribute to your wider aims?

Measurable How will you know when you have achieved your aim? Is there a particular event or decision you are looking for? For example, how will you measure an increase in awareness on your issue?

Achievable Do you have the capacity in your group to carry out the campaign? Do you need to join forces with others to make it more effective?

Realistic Are you campaigning on an issue that can actually be influenced? Are you asking for too much at once? Can your campaign be broken up into yet more manageable and achievable chunks?

Time-based When do you want to achieve your aim by? Have you allowed enough time for decisions to be made? What will you do if the aim is not achieved by your target date?

The 'SWOT' test

Strengths What are the key positive elements of your campaign? Do you have particular public support, or evidence to back up your case? What expertise do members of your group have that can be used?

Weaknesses What is needed to achieve your aims, that you currently lack? How can you access media help, IT support, finance or another element to strengthen your campaign?

Opportunities What external factors are working in favour of your campaign? Is there already a media 'buzz' on the issue you can exploit? Do you have support of a local MP or celebrity? Is there a date or anniversary you can use as a hook for your campaign?

Threats What are the core arguments against your campaign? Who is likely to oppose your point of view, and how can you answer their arguments effectively? What external barriers do you face: finance, government policy?

Research

If you are to convince policy makers or the general public about your campaign, you have to provide evidence, opinion and other information to back up your case. It's worth putting together a briefing containing the key information about your campaign, the back-up evidence and quotes from older people and supporters.

Help the Aged has a policy and research department that produces reports and surveys on a range of issues relevant to older people. We have statistics, case studies and information on both national and local issues. Contact us to discuss your needs. Much of our research can also be found online at www.helptheaged.org.uk. Try typing your issue into our search engine to see what information we have available.

Surveys There are few more effective ways of making your case than collecting up-to-date, local information on your issue of concern. Consider carrying out your own simple survey to find out the needs of older people, assess the availability of services or gather opinions. Remember, you need

to gather information from lots of people to make your research credible.

The internet Certainly the fastest and cheapest way of finding the information you need, but sometimes there is too much information and it's difficult to identify what is most relevant to your campaign.

Try searching for mentions of your issue in a web search engine like www.google.co.uk. Take some time to browse your search results and try different combinations of words in your search. You never know what you might turn up. If you type 'pensions' into the search engine, you may reveal too many pages of information that are not relevant to your specific campaign. Try to be a little more specific.

Examples of searches: *pensions, older people, poverty, pensions and council tax, campaign on pensions reform, pensions too low.*

Other good websites to search:

www.bbc.co.uk Likely to produce lots of news stories on your issue, going back more than five years. Also has magazine and 'how-to' articles on a range of issues relevant to older people.

www.epolitics.com Good for official government and other political party positions on various issues, will also help you find other websites that might help.

www.directgov.gov.uk Contains latest on government policy and statements regarding all issues to do with the community and citizenship.

www.statistics.gov.uk The National Statistics Office is an excellent source of quantitative data, which is likely to be very useful for your campaign. Has a really useful search engine.

Your local library Not only will your local library give you access to the internet and have shelves of books on a range of subjects but, behind the counter, libraries often have lots of statistical information on local issues. The library will also hold the names and addresses of local councillors, contact details for decision makers at the local council and full details of all local planning proposals and consultations. Most librarians are trained to help customers track down the information they are looking for: all you need to do is ask. It's worth setting aside half a day, and a stack of coins for the photocopier, to explore your issue at the library.

Media

2 Using the local media

Getting your message out to newspapers, television news, the radio or on the internet can be a great way to raise awareness of your campaign, gain support and put pressure on decision makers.

Campaigns by older people, especially on the local issues that affect them, make great stories. Working with the media is not difficult, but you do need to understand what journalists are looking for, how to approach them and how to 'sell your story'.

This sheet aims to help you use the media to bring attention to your campaign, and to put pressure on decision makers in order to achieve your aims.

5 things the media can help you do

- Highlight your campaign and the reasons why people should support it.
- Put pressure on local decision makers, who are often elected by, or responsible to, readers and listeners of local news, and will be keen to please them.
- Recruit new supporters, and even funds, to your campaign.
- Publicise a specific event, or campaign action such as a petition.
- Raise the profile of your older people's group and recruit new members.

What makes a story?

To you, your campaign for equal rights for older people is the most important issue in the world. But to busy news editors, your campaign has to compete with a dozen other stories for coverage. To increase the chances of your campaign getting 'picked up', you should ask yourself: what is newsworthy about this issue?

- **Is it local?** Local media love local stories, especially if they feature local people undergoing hardship or completing heroic acts.

- **It is current?** Newspapers cover issues that are happening now or in the next few weeks, not something that happened months ago.
- **Is it new?** What is different about what you are doing? Have you launched a new campaign, are you trying a new tactic, or responding to new proposals?
- **Is there conflict?** The media like differences of opinion. Controversy gets coverage, so look for the angles that will excite.
- **Is it relevant?** The national media is unlikely to be interested in your local issue, your local paper probably won't cover a national campaign. Read, view or listen to a few editions of the media you want to target, think about who it is aimed at and consider why it would be interested in your campaign.

The journalist:

Never misses a good story They do read everything sent to them, and know a good story from a poor one.

Is lazy Don't make the journalist work too hard, otherwise you'll reduce your chances of coverage. Your press release should cover all the issues, in a short sharp way. Follow it up with detailed information if asked.

Values contacts If you've worked with a journalist before on a good story, they're likely to want to hear from you next time.

Is deadline-conscious If a journalist needs information by Friday afternoon, they mean it. You risk losing coverage if you can't meet their deadlines.

Different media, different needs

It is worth remembering that 'media' means more than your local paper. If you target your campaign messages at different types of media, you might get coverage through a range of outlets, increasing the number of people who receive your campaign messages.

TV news Local news slots are often very short, taking place towards the end of national news bulletins. That means they have very little time to

tell a story, but do have a huge audience. You increase chances of coverage if you can provide something to film. Footage of people having meetings doesn't make good television, but a demonstration does. You should also make it clear you have older people, who have been affected by the issue, who will talk on camera.

Radio Presents plenty of opportunity because local radio often has a mix of music, talk shows, news and features. You will need someone confident enough to do recorded interviews, and able to handle a live radio debate. Radio is always very keen to cover the controversial issues that matter to local people.

Local newspapers With lots of pages to fill, often on a daily basis, local newspapers offer probably your best chance of coverage. Local papers want news about what its readers are doing. If you are campaigning on a national issue, you'll need to show what local people are doing on the issue, or how they have been affected. If you can offer something for journalists to photograph, you increase your chances of coverage.

Letters pages Local papers and magazines will take well argued, interesting and funny letters from readers. Make them as short and sharp as possible, and relevant to the publication's readers.

Others Think of other media you can approach about your campaign. Is there a website that covers local issues, a parish magazine or a newsletter aimed at patients, older people, shoppers or parents? Target your message at their readership.

Writing a press release

A press release, sometimes called a 'media release' or just 'release', is your most effective way of introducing the media to your campaign, issue or story.

It is a short statement, often no more than a page, with the key message of the campaign, a few relevant quotes, some back-up information and contact details for more information.

Releases should be sent, by email or by post, to the news editor, forward-planning desk or other contact at the media outlet you are targeting.

Read through our sample press release, and have a look at our Top Tips, before adapting the release to your own campaign.

PRESS RELEASE Date: 6 June 2005

Hornchurch older people stage poverty protest

Dozens of Hornchurch older people will gather outside the Town Hall this weekend for a protest calling for their poverty level pensions to be increased. Members of the Hornchurch Older People's Forum will stage the protest from 12 noon, on Saturday 12 June, ahead of a public meeting on pensioner poverty inside the town hall.

'Our members just can't get by on the meagre £79.60 a week state pensions we are provided with,' said Alan Johnson, chairman of the Forum. 'Older people are having to choose between buying healthy food or heating their homes. We can't afford to do both.' The group is calling on local Labour MP John Cryer to demand a significant increase in pensions from the Chancellor in his next Budget.

All members of the public are invited to witness the protest, and attend a public meeting from 12.30pm, which will feature speakers from the Forum, from Help the Aged and from the National Pensioners' Convention. Research by Help the Aged reveals more than two million older people receiving a state pension are living below the poverty line. Last winter 21,500 people over the age of 65 died as a direct result of the cold in England and Wales, many because they could not afford to heat their homes.

A spokesperson for Help the Aged said: 'Poverty amongst older people can and should be eradicated. The Government can afford to give pensioners more, and in the long term it will save the public purse in NHS admissions and other costs associated with poor health among older people.'

Photo opportunity: 12 noon sharp, Hornchurch Town Hall. Older people protest with placards for an end to pensioner poverty.

Contacts: Alan Johnson, Chairman, Hornchurch Older People's Forum, Tel. 123456789

Sally German, Secretary, Tel. 123456789

Top tips for effective press releases

- Get your main message, campaign demands or story into the first paragraph. Try to do it in no more than 60 words.
- Introduce a quote from a campaign representative early on. It gives the story a human focus, and shows you have people willing to talk to the media.
- Include some facts and figures, or evidence from a survey, to back up your messages.
- Avoid exaggeration ('the most important issue ever to face this country') and clichés ('leaves much to be desired', 'moving the goalposts', 'last-ditch effort'). A well-written release increases your chance of the campaign receiving coverage.
- Let media know if there are photos available, or if there are any opportunities to take some.
- Nominate two different people to speak to the media, and include contact details for both.
- Add a date, so busy journalists know your story is current.
- Try to get your whole release on to one page – it reduces the chance of pages being lost.

Contact details for your local media

Your local library should have a copy of *Willings Press Guide*, which lists contact details for most local and national media.

When you call your local paper ask for the News Editor. Contact the Help the Aged press team, on 020 7843 4570. We'd be pleased to supply any contact details we have, and help you publicise your campaign.

Ask a friendly newsagent if you can take contact details from the newspapers and magazines they sell. Buy the ones most relevant to your campaign for a closer look.

Politicians

3 Influencing politicians

Politicians, whether national or on your local council, are elected by and accountable to you. Many can have significant influence on the issues that affect older people, from the quality of local services to ushering in, or opposing, new legislation.

As figureheads for the local community, working with Members of Parliament (MPs), local councillors and others, can be a really effective way to achieve your campaign aims.

This sheet aims to help you lobby elected representatives, through letters, public and private meetings. Most of the ideas here can be adapted to your local political situation.

What do politicians do?

- Represent the interests of members of the constituency or ward that elected them.
- Have local influence as an elected public figure.
- Have influence in their local and/or national political party, if they are members.
- Have voting rights in the parliament or council to which they are elected, so they can vote in favour of or against motions and legislation. Can also influence these as they are debated and scrutinised.

Each of these functions provides opportunities for older people and older people's groups to campaign and influence change.

The many levels of British politics

It is worth understanding the different levels, and targeting your campaign messages at politicians that have the power to produce change at their level.

Westminster The national UK parliament is made up of Members of Parliament from across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. It passes legislation for the whole of the UK on overarching issues such as health, the economy, education, employment legislation and criminal justice. MPs can be lobbied to influence and vote in particular ways on national issues of concern to older people.

Local councils Your local authority, or council, is organised into two main levels:

- **elected politicians** are elected by local 'wards' to look after their interests at a local level, including issues such as planning, parks and utilities, anti-social behaviour, local public services. They make the political decisions that determine how a council is run.
- **local authority officials** are non-elected workers at the council, employed by it to carry out its day-to-day work. At senior level, such as chief executive, head of housing, head of social services, they can be influenced by campaigns.

You can find out the names and contact details of your elected council representatives from your local library, town hall or at websites such as www.upmystreet.co.uk, where you need to enter your postcode.

How to lobby politicians

There are a variety of ways of making sure your voice is heard by your elected representatives, and a number of channels have been created, such as public council meetings and MPs' surgeries, that give you the democratic right to be heard.

The most effective older people's campaigns use a variety of these tools, pitched at different political levels, in order to achieve their objectives.

Writing letters

One key way to lobby politicians is to write a well argued letter, outlining the facts and your concerns about a particular issue, and inviting action, as well as a response.

Elected politicians receive thousands of letters a week, but are expected to respond in some way to each one, so there's a good chance your letter will be read, at least by an assistant if not by the politicians themselves.

Reasons to write to an elected politician:

- Raise awareness of your campaign, and call for support
- Invite them to a particular event
- Invite their views on a particular issue
- Seek a meeting with them on a particular issue
- Ask them to take a concrete action in your favour.

Read through our sample letter to a local MP, and have a look at our Top Tips, before adapting the letter to your own campaign.

Bob Radcliff
12 Treetops Close
Greentown GT34 4JP
14 June 2005

Mrs Felicity Bell MP
The House of Commons
Westminster
London SW1A 0AA

Dear Mrs Felicity Bell

I am writing as one of your constituents, and as an older person concerned about age discrimination in employment.

You will know that currently any company can force an employee to retire at an age of its choosing, sometimes as low as 60 years old. As a 65-year-old, very much still active and very keen to stay working, I am concerned that the law does not offer me protection.

I believe the age of retirement should be based on the older person's choice, as well as their ability to do the job well, not an arbitrary age.

Greentown Older People's Forum, of which I am a member, is organising a public meeting on 15 August 2005 at Greentown Town Hall, at 6pm, its for local employers to discuss what older people can offer, and why they should not be discriminated against.

I am writing to ask if you will please attend this event, or send a message of support for the event and for our campaign.

This is a local campaign, calling for local businesses to set an example by having positive employment policies towards older people. Your support would be a significant bonus to our campaign.

I look forward to a response to this request, and confirmation of whether you will be able to attend our public meeting.

Yours sincerely

Bob Radcliff
Tel. 123456789

Email

Most elected politicians now also use email, though some still prefer to hear from constituents by letter. For example, if you would like to contact your Westminster MP by email, visit www.mpexchange.co.uk.

- Make it clear you are a constituent, living in the area the MP represents.
- Keep it polite, short and to the point. Type the letter if you can, and keep it to a single page.
- Explain in straightforward language what your issue is about, why it is important to you, and how you and other older people are affected.
- Make specific requests, which demand a response, and remind the reader that you are hoping for a reply to your letter.
- If relevant, ask for a face-to-face meeting to discuss the issue further.
- Get the name, address and salutation right.

Write to your Westminster MP at
The House of Commons, Westminster,
London SW1A 0AA.

For contact details of your ward councillor, contact your local authority customer services number or visit www.upmystreet.co.uk.

Using face-to-face meetings

All elected members of national parliaments are expected to hold 'surgeries' in their local constituency, which constituents can attend to meet their elected representative and talk to them about their concerns. Many local councillors also hold such sessions, individually or in political groupings.

Many elected politicians will also agree to face-to-face meetings, if the approach is right and the subject is particularly relevant to them or local constituents.

- Find out when your MP holds surgeries from the local council, library or Town Hall.
- Elected politicians are often busy, so you will only have a short time to speak with them. Organise your main points before you go into the meeting, and stick to the point.
- Make sure you make some specific requests as a result of the meeting; don't just use it to 'sound off'.

- After the meeting, write a short follow-up letter confirming what you talked about and listing any agreed actions. If the politician takes action, it's a good idea to write a letter of thanks.

Two members of Over-50s Forum Flintshire attended a meeting with the Welsh Minister for Older People, John Griffiths.

It was a real coup for Over-50s Forum Flintshire to have the Minister come to talk to them. He was very receptive to everyone's comments and very encouraging in his responses.

The members were able to explain how they are making the Strategy for Older People in Wales relevant to over-50s right across the county by linking up forums across Flintshire.

The Minister was very interested to hear how the county forum provides an opportunity for forums based in rural and urban areas to meet up and compare notes about issues that matter to them.

The meeting ended with Gerry Kitney, the forum's business manager, thanking the Minister for finding the time in his busy schedule to travel to North Wales and Cath Simpson for Help the Aged in Wales's mentoring and continued guidance on running Over-50s Forum Flintshire.

Using council meetings

All meetings by your local council, including special subject group and committee meetings, are open to the public, unless they are classified as 'exceptional'.

Attending meetings not only allows you to keep completely up to date with a particular issue, and find out exactly what is being said by elected politicians, but your very presence has an influential effect.

Unless specifically invited to do so, you and your older people's group will not be able to speak at council meetings. However, you may be able to meet particular councillors as they come out of meetings. You can also follow up council meetings with letters to those who spoke on your issue, or about your campaign.

Campaigners win Scottish public loos battle

The Inverclyde Elderly Forum sprang into action when its Scottish council closed public toilets.

'Three local toilets were closed without any consultation and this was very distressing to many of our members. We decided we could not sit back and let it happen,' said Nell McFadden, chairperson of the Forum.

The Forum collected 6,000 signatures in a petition and had placards printed with the message 'Save Our Loos.'

When the council met to discuss the issue, 15 members of the forum attended.

'We weren't allowed to speak, but by sitting at the back with our placards, we certainly made our message very clear.'

Nell then received a call to meet the leader of the council to discuss the issue. Soon after, one set of toilets was reopened – a victory for the community, and for Inverclyde Elderly Forum.

Public meetings

4 Using public meetings

There's nothing like a public meeting for getting local people fired up about the issues they are concerned about, drawing public and media attention to your older people's campaign and challenging decision makers about their policies.

Public meetings can take a lot of work to organise, and they are not without difficulties, but they can be really effective in creating support for your campaign.

This sheet aims to help you organise a public meeting, suggests some key points to think about in the planning, and advises how to make sure things run smoothly on the day.

Types of public meeting

Speaker meeting Representatives of campaign groups, charities and other organisations share a platform to speak on a particular issue, such as pensioner poverty or local amenities, and take questions from the floor.

Campaign meeting The public are invited to come to hear all about a particular campaign or issue, and how they can get involved. They may then be split into smaller groups, to draw up action points resulting from the meeting.

Older People's Question Time Like the BBC television show, local personalities, elected leaders, business and community leaders share a platform, and take questions from the floor. A chance to gather opinions on a range of issues affecting older people.

Hustings A specific type of meeting where political candidates, ahead of a local council, general or national election, are invited to outline why older people should vote for them, and to answer questions from the floor. (Hustings must operate according to the law: see below.)

Key things to think about

- **What do you want to achieve from your meeting?** To inform the public about an issue and gather support? To challenge elected leaders? To provide a forum for older people to express their views? A combination?
- **Who is your target audience?** The general public, older people, decision makers?
- **When will the meeting be?** Would an evening or weekend meeting be better attended? Have you left enough time to advertise the meeting, and to invite speakers? Does it clash with any other large event?
- **And where?** Is the venue accessible (see below)? Will it be at a central location? Do you have to pay? Will the room be big enough, or too big? How many chairs do you need? Has the room been booked?
- **Who will be responsible?** Have you appointed a chairperson? Who will market the meeting, let the media know, deal with speakers, provide refreshments?

Top tips for making the most of your meeting

- **Marketing** Give some consideration to how you are going to get people to attend. Will the media be interested? Produce some posters and leaflets for doctors' surgeries, hospitals, day centres, shops and other places where older people often go. Make the messages simple, and don't over-design. Include the date, time, venue, subject matter, main speakers and contact details for more information. Make it clear everyone is welcome.
- **Timetabling** Allow at least 10 minutes after the advertised start time for people to arrive, but then begin promptly. Plan your timetable so the audience doesn't get bored. Ask main speakers to speak for no more than 10 minutes, and make sure they stick to it. Allow plenty of time for questions. It is worth drawing up a strict timetable, allowing two hours maximum for the whole event, and giving each of the speakers a copy.

- **At the meeting** Make sure you know who the candidates are, and how to spell/pronounce their names. If inviting questions from the floor, ask for them to be kept short and to the point. Don't let questioners ramble. Try to keep a balance of questions, and ensure there is a spread of questioners (age, gender, ethnic background).
- **Making decisions** Try to plan for some kind of outcome from the meeting. Is there a particular decision you would like the audience to discuss, or straw poll you can carry out? Can people sign up to the campaign, or volunteer to help? Can you write a letter 'from the meeting' to the local paper, or a politician?
- **Access** Check that the venue is served by public transport, for travel to and from the meeting. If possible, offer help to those for whom travel is difficult. Make sure your venue is fully accessible to disabled people and those with limited mobility. Ensure the venue is wheelchair-accessible, and has accessible toilets.
- **Difficulties** By their nature, public meetings come with some risks. What will you do, for example, if your main speaker pulls out? Or if too few people turn up? Remember, too, that a public meeting means anyone can attend – that includes people who will disagree with your campaign, or who have political views you find difficult. A strong chairperson is essential.
- **After the meeting** Write to speakers and other helpers to thank them for attending. Consider writing a letter or press release for the local press about what took place and what was decided. Ensure the momentum of the meeting is continued to the benefit of your campaign.

Public meeting checklist

- Speakers invited and confirmed
- Venue accessible
- Venue booked
- Posters and leaflets distributed
- Media informed
- Chair appointed, and timetable drawn up
- Refreshments organised
- Plan B arranged, in case of difficulties
- Thank you letters sent after meeting

The election hustings

A hustings is a particular type of public meeting, where election candidates come to tell an audience why people should vote for them. Hustings are a great way to challenge politicians on what they and their parties will do for older people on a local and national level. Legal procedures must be observed at hustings, to ensure each candidate is treated equally. The benefit is that it provides as full a picture as possible for older voters to make up their minds.

- Whether it is a local or national election, you must invite every election candidate (not just those from the three or four biggest parties). That means also inviting ones whose views you find difficult. (Some candidates may not come, but you must at least invite them.)
- Questions from the floor must be addressed to each candidate, and each must be given the opportunity to respond. Questions should not be targeted at a particular candidate, or their policies.
- You must ensure you do nothing that could be perceived as supporting a particular candidate's election campaign, so be careful with the colour of your posters, the phrasing of marketing material and avoid using any political logos on posters and leaflets.

(You can get the contact details for election candidates from your local library, town hall or the Returning Officer for the election, whose details will be published in the local press.)

Campaign tools

5 Key campaigning tools

There are lots of different ways of getting your campaign messages heard, and lots of ways of putting pressure on politicians and decision makers.

This sheet offers a few tried-and-tested campaign tools, which you can adapt to your older people's campaign.

The petition

What is it? A campaign demand, or series of demands, that is circulated widely and signed by as many people as possible.

How is it used? Completed petitions can be sent to the decision makers responsible for that particular issue, showing how many people feel strongly about it. If your group collects a high number of signatures, it will make a media story – especially if you can stage a presentation of the

petition to the person you are petitioning. Petitions are also a great way of raising awareness of your campaign, and with the permission of people signing, collecting contact details to send more information.

How to go about it? Draw up a short statement, demand or series of demands, but no more than a paragraph. It should be clear, and easy for someone to quickly decide if they agree or disagree. Too long or complex, and you risk losing signatures because people are too busy.

Provide space for people to sign, add their name, address and email and to indicate if they would like more information about the campaign. Photocopy as many copies of the petition as you need, and distribute them among group members, in supportive shops and other places.

Petition against the closure of Brentford Post Office

To: Charlie Chalk, Manager
Royal Mail
Brentford and Warster Region
Sussex BN23 343

As you are the officer responsible for the management of post office branches in the Brentford area, we are writing as concerned individuals to ask if you would please reconsider the closure of our post office.

Many older people use the post office every day to collect pensions, buy stamps and cards to send to relatives and pay bills, sometimes just to get outside the house. If the Brentford branch closes, some older people will have to travel more than eight miles, on unreliable public transport, to reach the nearest alternative branch.

As many older people are frail, and have very little money to spend on public transport, closure of the branch will bring enormous stress and difficulty. Please do reconsider the closure of this branch.

Signed

Name

Address

Email

Please keep me informed about this campaign

Decide on a final date for the petition, when it will be presented or sent to the decision maker you are targeting. Enclose a covering letter, outlining why you are giving them the petition, and outlining your campaign in more detail.

Don't forget to let the media know about your petition when it is launched, and how many signatures you have collected at the end.

What are the risks? You collect only a handful of signatures, indicating only a few people agree with or support your campaign. If you are working with the media, this could work against you.

The publicity stunt

What is it? Some kind of public demonstration, sketch or action that is likely to attract media and public attention to your campaign.

How is it used? Stunts can be fun to organise and carry out, and a very effective way of getting media coverage for your campaign messages. A public demonstration or vigil outside the town hall, with your older people holding placards, makes a good image for the newspapers and television news.

How to go about it? If you can be creative with your stunt and make it relevant to your campaign, you increase the chance of getting it covered.

A few ideas to get you started:

- As a group, spend the £71 weekly pension amount on food, toiletries, etc and pile the goods into a single shopping basket on the high street. Ask passers-by to guess how much it all cost, then start a discussion with them about poverty pensions for older people.
- Dress up as bits of older rubbish, and hold a vigil outside the local Chamber of Commerce, showing how older people are 'thrown on to the scrap heap' by employers once they reach 60 or 65.

Let the media know what you are doing, and when is the best time to take photographs. Make it clear you have spokespeople who will talk to journalists.

Write to decision makers you are trying to influence to tell them why you are demonstrating. Prepare some leaflets and placards, to inform

passers-by about your campaign. Be prepared for some to disagree with you, or even laugh or be rude. Plan to be there as long as you need to be; there's no point in standing around in the cold once the press have got their photos and your point has been made.

If you are holding a demonstration on public property, you may need to write to the local police a few weeks before to inform them what you are doing and how many people are likely to participate. It is your right to protest peacefully and it is the police's job to facilitate it. Unless you are blocking the pavement or on private property, officers should agree a suitable place for you to make your point.

What are the risks? Few people are willing to join in the protest or stunt (a two-person vigil won't impress anyone).

Posters and leaflets

What are they? Printed materials featuring main campaign messages and demands.

How are they used? To attract people to your campaign, raise awareness of the issues and put pressure on decision makers to respond to your demands. Material can be placed in places where older people are likely to see them, such as day centres, hospitals, shops and libraries.

How to go about it? Decide what you want to achieve with your leaflets and posters.

- Attract people to attend a meeting
- Inform people about your campaign demands
- Attract new members to your older people's forum
- Ask for specific assistance or actions

Stick to a few key messages, related to the purpose of your material. No one wants to wade through acres of text; a few bullet points will do, with a striking headline and image. You want people to get in touch, so leaving some info out will encourage them to find out more.

Some design tips

- Create your posters and leaflets on computer. Few people take notice of hand-written material.
- Stick to one font in one colour; playing with typefaces may be fun but it makes your leaflet look busy and confused. Use clear fonts like Times or Arial, rather than swirly or cartoon fonts.
- Print on to coloured paper to make your material stand out from others.

Try to include a concrete action you would like the reader to take as a result of seeing your material – whether its getting in touch to find out more, writing a letter to a local politician or attending a meeting.

What are the risks? Your posters get taken down, or have others stuck over them. You'll need to return every few days to put new ones up. If handing out leaflets on the street, pick up any that are thrown on the floor – it doesn't look good for your campaign to be littering.

Surveys and research

What are they? A short questionnaire or survey, or background information, that supports your campaign demands. It could be research you carry out among older people, the general public, shoppers or door-to-door.

How are they used? Evidence is essential if your campaign is to be strong and credible. Your campaign against the closure of a bus route has more power if you can show how many older people will be affected, and get quotes from them to back up your case. Being able to show how high your Council Tax is, compared with other areas of the UK, shows your group has done its homework and should be taken seriously. Your research findings can be used in letters, leaflets, at public meetings and in press releases.

The process of carrying out the research can be a good way to raise awareness of your campaign and the issue you are working on, whether asking for help from librarians and others, or stopping people in the street to answer your questionnaire.

How to go about it? Be clear about the two or three key things you would like to find out. Don't give yourself piles of work finding out 'everything there is to know about pensions'.

If doing a survey, three clear questions, with yes/no or specific answers, is plenty. Your first question shouldn't be 'How do you feel about pensions?' but something like 'Do you think your state pension is sufficient to live on?'.

A credible survey needs as many responses as possible. Anything with fewer than 50 people interviewed should be called a 'straw poll' rather than a survey.

What are the risks? Your research findings don't support your campaign calls. Also, consider the health and safety aspects of older people carrying out a survey in a public place.

MAKEPOVERTYHISTORY

Over 100 million older men and women in developing countries live on less than one dollar a day, often forgotten by their governments and ignored in the aid budgets of the international community.

Help the Aged is one of almost 100 organisations involved in the **MAKEPOVERTYHISTORY** campaign.

We are working with other charities such as Save the Children, Oxfam and ActionAid, plus trade unions and campaigning groups, to put pressure on politicians and wealthy countries to help the millions of people who live in poverty.

The campaign is important because the promises made four years ago by the world's richest nations to halve world poverty by 2015 are not being met.

'2005 could be our last chance to end world poverty,' says Eleanor Barker, international manager at Help the Aged. 'With the UK hosting the G8 meeting of powerful world leaders as well as holding the presidency of the European Union, we have a huge opportunity to make a difference.'

Help the Aged wants to use the **MAKEPOVERTYHISTORY** campaign to improve the lives of older people in developing countries.

Our call for a universal pension

Aid money isn't getting to the poorest older people who need it most. This has to change. Help the Aged believes that pensions are an affordable and feasible way of tackling poverty. We believe that the Government should finance a pension to older people as part of the development funding it provides to developing countries.

'Providing older people in poor countries with a small regular income helps support whole communities and help those who need it most,' says Debbie Smith, campaigns manager at Help the Aged.

In South Africa, one of the few countries that gives its older people a pension, it has reduced the scale of older people's poverty by 94 per cent and that of the population as a whole by 12.5 per cent.

Doña Eulogia Gusman, 65, has lived her whole life in a small community in one of the remotest parts of Bolivia. She lives on her own, apart from her two grandchildren Lucia and Dania, who depend on her for food and shelter. Their mother died and their father abandoned them. Doña Gusman has to grow food to feed herself and her grandchildren. 'If there's no school the girls help me with the llamas,' she says. 'I find ploughing too hard. But I have to do it.'

In Bolivia, children are often left behind when their parents go to the cities to try to make a better living. Most earn only enough to keep themselves, and are unable to send money home. The burden of feeding and educating the children falls on grandparents.

After decades of farming Doña Gusman is exhausted, but there is no rest in sight. 'How can I stop?' she says. 'I would have nothing to live on.'

Life for Dhanesara, an 80-year-old widow, is a constant struggle. She lives alone in Madhopur village in Varanasi district of Uttar Pradesh, India. Her eyesight has deteriorated, she has hearing problems, and depends on neighbours to take her to the doctor. Because of her health, she has had to give up work as an agricultural labourer.

Without her social pension she would have nothing – it is her one and only source of income. She tries to stretch the money out throughout the month, but often has to depend on neighbours for food and provisions; her son's family is too poor to look after her. Dhanesara's pension ensures her survival: 'If I did not get this money, I would die lying here on my cot and nobody would bother about me,' she says.

Take action!

Consider what your older people's forum can do to raise the issue of pensioner poverty, and put pressure on politicians to take decisive action to ensure older people in the developing world get a fairer deal.

- Hold a **MAKEPOVERTYHISTORY** evening for local older people, their families and others. Discuss the issues facing older people in the poorest countries of the world, and how a simple social pension could bring whole communities out of desperation.
- Organise representatives of your forum, or even your whole group, to join the national

MAKEPOVERTYHISTORY demonstration on 2 July in Edinburgh. Full details available at www.makepovertyhistory.com.

- Wear your **MAKEPOVERTYHISTORY** armband, already sent to your forum or group. This signifies that you support the campaign and are taking action.
- Write a letter from your forum asking your local MP to put pressure on the Government to end older people's poverty in the developing world. Adapt our sample letter, and don't forget to let us know what response you get.

Bob Radcliff
12 Treetops Close
Greentown GT34 4JP

14 June 2005

Mrs Felicity Bell MP
The House of Commons
Westminster
London SW1A 0AA

Dear Mrs Felicity Bell

Older people are some of the world's poorest, but they often go forgotten. We want to see older people in developing countries given the chance to look after themselves and their families. I am asking you to support the Help the Aged call for a pension for all older people in developing countries.

Giving older people even a small regular income will not only give them access to health care and basic support services, but also help the millions of dependent children whose sole carers are their elderly grandparents.

Help the Aged is joining forces with other charities and campaigning groups to run the **MAKEPOVERTYHISTORY** campaign, which is calling for Third World debt to be dropped, better trade agreements for poor countries and more and better aid. This year I'll be one of millions of others who are joining them to try to **MAKEPOVERTYHISTORY** and ask politicians to honour the promises they made in 2001 to halve world poverty by 2015.

We need politicians to publicly support the **MAKEPOVERTYHISTORY** campaign, and the Help the Aged call for the government to finance a pension as part of the development funding it provides to developing countries. Please table questions in the House of Commons to Hilary Benn, Minister for International Development, asking him what evidence his department has that UK aid is reaching the poorest older people.

Please also ask how the poorest older people will be included in future strategies to reach the Millennium Development Goal of halving developing world poverty by 2015. Please do absolutely everything you can to help us persuade our Government to deliver crucial changes on trade justice, debt and aid. We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely
Bob Radcliff

Older people and poverty: the facts

- 70 per cent of the world's older people live in developing countries
- 100 million older men and women in developing countries live on less than one dollar a day
- Six million children are cared for by their grandparents in Sub-Saharan Africa
- In developing countries, at least half of people in their 60s, around one-third of people aged 70–74, and one-fifth or more of those aged over 75 still work to provide for their families.

Adapt our **MAKEPOVERTYHISTORY** petition, and hold a stall at the local library, or even in the high street, to raise awareness of the campaign.

MAKEPOVERTYHISTORY for older people: petition

We the undersigned are calling on our Government to do all it can to **MAKEPOVERTYHISTORY** for the 100 million older people across the world living in poverty. Poverty will not be eradicated without an immediate and major increase in international aid.

Paying even a modest pension to people in developing countries can raise some of the poorest people and their families out of dire poverty. We want to see the Government finance a pension to older people as part of the development funding it provides to developing countries. It will provide older people with the small regular income they need to support themselves and their dependants, often young children with no one else to turn to.

We need to take action now to fight for fairer trade, better aid and dropping the debts of developing countries, so that the poorest people can start to rebuild their lives.

Key dates

2 July: The national **MAKEPOVERTYHISTORY** march. Hundreds of thousands will march through Edinburgh in support of the campaign.

1 October: International Day for Older People.

Resources

www.mph4op.org.uk Visit the Help the Aged **MAKEPOVERTYHISTORY** website, where you can view and download more information about the campaign, case studies, facts and figures and sample letters and petitions.

The Help the Aged Campaign Toolkit If you don't already have this essential guide to campaigning for older people's groups, you can get your copy from Debbie Smith, Campaigns Manager, Help the Aged.

White armband Wear your armband, showing you support the **MAKEPOVERTYHISTORY** campaign. You can get your band from any Oxfam shops, or send a cheque made payable to 'Christian Aid Ltd', with your full postal address, stating how many bands you would like, to Christian Aid, PO Box 95, Aldershot, Hampshire GU12 4BR. You can order two types of band by post, a cotton band and a silicon band: each costs £1.

Postcards Download a **MAKEPOVERTY HISTORY** campaign postcard to send to Prime Minister Tony Blair to deliver policy change on trade justice, debt and aid. Go to www.makepovertyhistory.org/docs/Letter_to_Tony_Blair.pdf

Supplement If you missed your copy of the Help the Aged **MAKEPOVERTYHISTORY** supplement, in the March 2005 edition of *Activate*, you can download it from www.helptheaged.org.uk, or write to Debbie Smith at Help the Aged, 207-221 Pentonville Road, London N1 9UZ

Among the organisations partnering Help the Aged in the **MAKEPOVERTYHISTORY** campaign are:

Oxfam – www.oxfam.org.uk

Christian Aid – www.christianaid.org.uk

End Child Poverty action group – www.endchildpoverty.org

ActionAid – www.actionaid.org.uk

Unicef – www.unicef.org.uk

WaterAid – www.wateraid.org.uk

General Election

Ahead of the General Election, it is worth remembering that older people are a significant electoral force. There are over 11 million older people (over 65) in the UK. Two out of three voted in the last General Election.

At each election, candidates fall over themselves to win the 'grey vote'. During the election campaign, and in the voting booth, older people have a great opportunity to ensure politicians and political parties listen to their views and look after their interests.

The General Election is for candidates for the Westminster Parliament. The Welsh Assembly and Scottish Parliament, and the Northern Ireland Assembly, have their own elections.

The Help the Aged challenge to the next government

Help the Aged has published its own agenda, calling on the next government to do more for older people. Forums might like to use them as a basis for their own campaigning ahead of the election.

- **End discrimination** Age discrimination must end in all areas of our lives, and our human rights must be protected. Mandatory retirement ages should be abolished and Disability Living Allowance should no longer be denied to people over 65.
- **Improve health and social care services** Free personal care should be provided for all older people, as is already the case in Scotland. The most vulnerable must be protected from elder abuse. Investment is needed in preventative health services, to help older people stay healthy for longer.
- **Make poverty history in the UK** The basic state pension should be lifted to a decent level.
- **and throughout the world** Poverty will not be eradicated without a major increase in international aid. In order to meet world targets for reducing poverty, the Government should finance a pension for older people as part of the development funding it provides to

developing countries. Even a modest pension can raise the poorest older people and their families out of dire poverty.

- **Warm, dry homes** Every pensioner should have the right to free central heating and home insulation, as is already the case in Scotland.
- **Crime** Older people should be protected from criminals such as bogus callers, by a ban on doorstep selling.
- **Transport and services** Free, full-fare transport should be provided for every older person.

What issues are important to your older people's forum? The election is your opportunity to highlight and campaign on both local and national issues of concern.

- **Local and national issues** The General Election is often fought on the big national issues, with parties campaigning on subjects such as the economy, education, the health service and housing. But don't forget, in this election you will be electing your local Member of Parliament. If elected, his or her job will be to represent people from your area on the issues that matter to you. You should be clear which issues an MP can influence at a local level, and which issues are decided at Westminster. You should then target your lobbying and campaigning messages accordingly.
- **National issues** Overarching policies on the economy and Council Tax levels, education, health, social care, pensions, employment, discrimination issues, new legislation, immigration and Europe.
- **Local issues** These are the issues your MP may have direct influence on as a representative of the constituency: post offices, shops and amenities, transport quality and cost, crime and safety, local amenities and local health services.

Take action!

Consider holding an older people's forum concentrating on the General Election. What action do members want to take to encourage older people to vote, to challenge Prospective Parliamentary Candidates (PPCs), and to highlight issues of concern to older people?

Use the Help the Aged **Challenge to the next government** to draw up your own older people's manifesto. Send a copy to each of your local election candidates, challenging them to sign up to your demands.

Hold a 'hustings' for PPCs, where older people have the opportunity to ask questions of candidates on issues that concern them. Book a central venue, ensuring it has access for disabled people. Let the local press know, and send out information to all local older people's groups, community centres, libraries, doctors' surgeries and the local hospital.

Don't forget, you must invite all candidates. Use the following questions to start you off:

- What will candidates do to ensure older people have enough weekly income to allow them to eat healthy food, heat their homes and enjoy a fulfilled life?
- What legislation will candidates introduce to tackle discrimination against older people in the workplace?
- What proposals do candidates have for improving transport services for older people?

Write a letter to each of your PPCs to see what they and their parties are pledging for older people in this General Election, and to challenge them to improve their policies on older people's issues.

Bob Radcliff
12 Treetops Close
Greentown GT34 4JP
14 April 2005

Mrs Felicity Bell MP
The House of Commons
Westminster
London SW1A 0AA

Dear Prospective Parliamentary Candidate,

I am writing ahead of the forthcoming General Election to ask you, as a parliamentary candidate, what policies you will introduce to promote the interests and needs of the UK's older people.

There are more than 20 million people over 50 in the UK, and 11 million of us are over 65. In the last election, 70 per cent of older people voted – that's more than 7 million votes. I'm sure you will agree, it is in your interests as a candidate to listen carefully to the needs and opinions of older people in the run-up to this election.

[Use this space to highlight, to your local candidates, the national and local issues that most concern your older people's forum.]

I look forward to your response and your assurance that you and your party will tackle age discrimination, poor health and social services, improve housing for older people and provide improved local amenities for us. Your responses will help to inform how I cast my vote.

Yours sincerely
Bob Radcliff

Before election day

- Ensure older people in your area can use their vote.
- Organise transport for those who might find it difficult to get to the polling station (parties sometimes provide this, if asked).
- Ensure older people know about proxy voting (whereby someone votes on their behalf) or voting by post. Information can be obtained from your local council, or visit www.aboutmyvote.co.uk. Proxy and postal votes need to be sent at least six days before the election takes place. For more information about voting options for older people, see the Help the Aged General Election website at www.helptheaged.org.uk.

Resources

Help the Aged General Election website Visit our microsite for information about the General Election, how to highlight your issues to election candidates, how to make the most of your vote, and for campaign tools including sample letters.

Taking the lead Get your copy of our election leaflet, outlining Help the Aged core calls on candidates, ahead of the election. Also available as a poster.

How to use your vote Download or send off for our factsheet about voting options for older people, and how to encourage and support older people with limited mobility to exercise their right to vote.

The Electoral Commission

www.aboutmyvote.co.uk

Helpline: 0800 3280 280

Email: info@electoralcommission.org.uk.

BBC Politics website

Links to all major political parties, and to other political websites.

www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/81344.stm

Fighting for disadvantaged older people in the UK and overseas,

WE WILL:

COMBAT POVERTY wherever older people's lives are blighted by lack of money, and cut the number of preventable deaths from hunger, cold and disease

REDUCE ISOLATION so that older people no longer feel confined to their own home, forgotten or cut off from society

CHALLENGE NEGLECT to ensure that older people do not suffer inadequate health and social care, or the threat of abuse

DEFEAT AGEISM to ensure that older people are not ignored or denied the dignity and equality that are theirs by right

PREVENT FUTURE DEPRIVATION by improving prospects for employment, health and well-being so that dependence in later life is reduced

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