

Influencing decision-makers

Every campaign must have at least one 'target'. This section helps you to work out how to win them over!

Every campaign must have at least one 'target'. Your target is the individual, group, corporation or statutory body that can actually create (or prevent) the change that your campaign is about. Without a clearly identified target and a specific set of messages, your campaign will lack both clarity and impact. This might sound very basic, but it is remarkable how many campaigns lack a clear target point. If someone was to ask you 'who is your campaigning targeting and what is it you want them to do?' could you give a clear and simple answer?

Depending on the breadth and complexity of your campaign, there may be numerous targets, each of which you may have a different campaign message and objective:

- The general public (e.g. 'I want the public to do more recycling')
- A local authority (e.g. 'I want the council to provide more recycling facilities')
- A company (e.g. 'I want Company X to produce less waste')
- The Government (e.g. 'I want the Government to legislate to make companies waste less')

Further information

Perhaps the most detailed resource in this area is [Mark Lattimer's The Campaigning Handbook](#), which looks at how to influence local and central Government and corporations.

Local government

Even if your campaign goes beyond your local area, engaging with local government could be the route to success...

The best way to influence local government is to start long before you have any specific campaign.

Titus Alexander, Convener of [Democracy Matters](#), has written an in-depth guide, [Influencing Local Government: action guide](#), which is in the good practice section of this website, that covers how to:

- Build your power base: contacts and relationships
- Focus on power points: decision-making structures
- Take action: what to do when all else fails

The guide provides tips and advice on everything you need to know about influencing local government, from local structures to where and how you get the information you need. It also provides a table to help you identify who you need to influence and how.

Councillors

While many officers' recommendations are accepted by council committees, it can be hard to predict what way things will go. So you should ensure that you follow the issue as it passes through the council.

A local authority will usually be controlled by one political party or group, which holds a majority of seats on the council. The leader of that group then becomes the leader of the council (not the same as the local MP). The political power in the council sits in the leader's office.

In 'hung councils', whereon party has an overall majority, the leadership would actually be shared. In some cases, parties may form a coalition to achieve a

majority. However hung councils operate, lobbyists need to be aware of each of the parties' interests.

Theoretically at least, a hung council is good for lobbyists (as it is for small parties), in that it increases their potential to effectively lobby.

In summary, if your campaign is targeting a local council, do some research so that you understand where the power lies.

Local Council Scrutiny Committees

How to influence local council scrutiny committees and how they can help you win.

Local Council Scrutiny Committees has been written by Anna Semlyen, Campaign Manager, [20's Plenty for Us](#), City of York Councillor and Chair of Economic Scrutiny: @AnnaSemlyen1;

Scrutiny (a.k.a Task & Finish/Best Value Review) committees research public policy recommendations. They are formed from cross-party, back-bench elected local councillors. Members pick topics and “compare”, “challenge”, “consult” and “compete” between options. Scrutiny is the Local government equivalent of a Parliamentary Select Committee.

Scrutiny considers accountability, particularly on emerging public policy issues. A task group will consult and ask challenging questions of service users, stakeholders and experts inside and outside the council. They can invite national specialist witnesses, who can have more experience than local campaigners. Outsiders also have none of the “baggage” or previous positioning on the issue that locals may have. They can make comparisons with what other councils do. If done without any political party bias then this adds weight to their views. Having an expert also allows local campaigners to focus on the local and defer areas where they might feel disadvantaged to a national specialist.

Scrutiny members review the evidence and report the benefits, disadvantages and likely cost-effectiveness of policy options. These ideally have punchy recommendations and are presented to the Cabinet/Executive who make most of the decisions within the council's policy and budget framework. Through

scrutiny committees, councillors aim to ensure these are accountable and the best choices.

Campaigning with scrutiny is a second line option. Demand a scrutiny if asking the leader or cabinet directly (e.g. through a written request, petition or motion to council) hasn't yet worked or if existing policy should be challenged.

Scrutiny Can Help You To Win if:

- The local council has influence
- More direct requests aren't working
- You disagree with an existing policy
- The issue is complex and there's not yet an agreed evidence base of best practice.
- Your campaign expert/s can give evidence
- You want a neutral cross-party discussion.
- It requires significant funds.
- There is no great urgency. Scrutiny takes time – to register a topic, get it chosen, scoped, researched and a report written and presented.

Scrutiny Structures

Structures vary. City of York has five overview and scrutiny committees: Scrutiny Management; Health; Economic and City Development; Community Safety and Leisure and Culture. Plus ad hoc scrutinies as required.

Scrutiny Management does 'call ins'. In York's constitution, a minimum of 3 councillors can challenge ('call in') a cabinet decision. Scrutiny members ask questions of the cabinet member and officers (staff) before voting. Yet, even if a scrutiny committee disagrees, the cabinet retain ultimate power.

Investigate local scrutiny structures and how to get your issue registered through your local Democratic Services Officers. Find them via the web or switchboard.

Case Studies

Since 2010 there have been many 20mph limits scrutinies in [*Hartlepool; Greenwich; Richmond Upon Thames; Brighton & Hove; Darlington; Manchester; Haringey; Warrington; City of London; Leicester;*](#) Islington and [*Gloucester*](#). Those italicised were pivotal for success of the 20's Plenty for Us Campaign for Total 20 - signed, mandatory, default, wide-area

20mph limits. As at September 2013 there are unfinished 20mph scrutinies in: Peterborough; Kirklees; Coventry; Hertfordshire and Oxfordshire.

Further info: Centre for Public Scrutiny <http://www.cfps.org.uk/>

Officers

Your first port of call in influencing a local authority to take notice of your campaign should be at officer level (i.e. staff at the council, who are non-elected, and non-political).

Lattimer suggests various things that you need to ascertain to get your voice heard:

- If you don't know who the relevant officer dealing with a particular issue, write to the head of department or Chief Executive and ask for the enquiry to be referred to the appropriate person.
- If you are campaigning on an issue that the local authority is already actively involved in, establish if and when any decisions will be made.
- Establish who will make the decision.
- Establish the process by which the decision will be made. For example, will there be a public consultation?
- Will there be an opportunity to appeal against decisions?

If you do want your views to get noticed, ensure that you study any relevant published papers (and if necessary use Freedom of Information Laws to get them). Write to the relevant officer and be clear about your views, present them with any facts you have, any local consultation you've undertaken, and provide an alternative scenario or solution to the one proposed.

If you do this well, rather than being seen as an opponent, the relevant officer may actually further solicit your views and even invite you on to relevant advisory committees.

On significant matters (especially those relating to policy), it is unlikely that an officer will be in a position to affect change. They would need to refer the matter up to councillors. In this case the officer can still be an important lynchpin as councillors may well ask the officer to make a recommendation to them.

Targeting MPs

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The Member of Parliament (MP) for a constituency actually does not have any formal power over the local council. However, they can be an effective voice to the council on your behalf. They can be especially useful in helping you to achieve press coverage.

If you are making a complaint about a local council, an MP's involvement could mean it is handled with greater care. MPs also raise issues in Parliament that affect their constituents e.g. by putting questions to ministers with relevant responsibilities. This will in turn have an effect at the local council level, as the Minister will probably ask a departmental civil servant to get more information from your council!

Don't forget about prospective parliamentary candidates too. To nurture a relationship with parliamentarians can take time, and so you do need to look beyond who has influence now, to who might have influence in 12 months.

Central government

Understanding the paths through the corridors of power can be vital to your campaign's success.

Bibi Van Der Zee's book [Rebel Rebel](#) examines lobbying parliament and provides a range of tips.

Case study

BritCits was formed in 2012 in direct response to the attack on British citizens and residents with non-European family members.

As part of their campaign, BritCits prepared a pack of case studies of those affected - currently standing at around 200 families. Many of these stories can be read on their [website and forum](#).

They lobby MPs and MEPs, and their packs contributed towards evidence at the recent All Party Parliamentary Group inquiry on family migration. They work closely with other campaign and community groups and attend meetings on this and related migration issues. They have built a self-supporting community where those affected can support each other, and share information on the various options available, such as legal options, free movement rights and local media. Their aim is to change the rules, whilst working with each family, one at a time, as they continue to work to raise awareness of these situations.

Influencing the House of Lords

The House of Lords is the second, upper, chamber of the UK wide Parliament. It is independent from, and complements the work of, the elected House of Commons.

Influencing the House of Lords has been written by Esther Foreman, [@SocialChangeAg](http://www.thesocialchangeagency.org)

The House of Lords is the second, upper, chamber of the UK wide Parliament. It is independent from, and complements the work of, the elected House of Commons. The Lords shares the task of making and shaping laws and checking and challenging the work of the Government. Its members are largely appointed and membership is broken down into Party, Life Peers, Excepted Hereditary Peers and Bishops. It has three main roles, making laws, in-depth consideration of public policy and holding government to account for its actions.

Although Peers have no constituency or obligation to respond to the public and only limited administration support, they have been the target for many intensive on and off-line public campaigns over the past few years. However what is a member of the House of Lords with no administrative support supposed to do with more than 500 emails a day? Research conducted in the House of Lords in 2011 discovered that the answer is that all too often they switch off. A campaigner should be wise to this, and spend some time developing a strategy to cut through the noise, which can be as simple as, one, two, three; message, momentum and mass.

First, get the story right. As an individual advocate or organisation, it is no good arguing something is wrong. A three-part story works best: explain the situation you, or your effected beneficiaries, will be in if the bill becomes law, then explain why this is a problem and provide an alternative. Make the story personal, write it in the first-person and make it compelling. Above of all, keep it relevant and be clear about what you want to happen. This is often what Peers are missing and need to hear. They sometime have formal policy briefings on the topic, and see what's written in the newspapers, but unless you provide the human insight, how are they going to hear personal experiences or understand the real-life consequences of what they are debating? This is key in turning your advocacy into a compelling case.

The next stage is to create momentum. You're likely to be one of many voices shouting for attention and some are louder and closer than others, so you need to make sure that you get heard in both houses. This is where you will need to build your advocacy role. Find the people who understand the problem and also understand Parliament. Go and talk to the House of Lords; do your research on interests, voting patterns, find common interests, pick the phone up, drop them an email, go and visit them. They are often closer, and more accessible than you think.

The third stage is to consider whether you need to create public mass to penetrate the Lords. Online campaigning tools such as change.org and [gov.uk e-petitions](https://gov.uk/e-petitions) really help. But once the campaign has got going it is all about getting in front of the people that matter – the decision-makers. By all means use the mass-email technique to raise your profile and demonstrate support. But alone it's as likely to frustrate peers, as it is to engage. Back up your story with policy, by explaining what's happening, the impact if it happens and what should happen instead. Remember to advise Peers why you are contacting them and be explicit as to whether the representation is on your own behalf, somebody else, and or part of a campaign.

Message. Momentum. Mass. Put these together and connect with peers and you have the power to change things.

Resources:

- www.parliament.uk/lords
- www.cofe.anglican.org/about/bishopsinlords
- <http://www.crossbenchpeers.org.uk/>

- <http://www.lordsoftheblog.net>

Corporations

Individuals can be powerful, even against large corporations. Remember that David won his battle against Goliath!

In the [Campaigning Handbook](#), Mark Lattimer discusses the power that large corporations hold. He argues that while multi-national companies in particular are hugely powerful and are perceived to have considerable influence on policy-making, he also argues their hold on power is fragile.

He notes that companies are vulnerable to action from a range of interests, including:

- Company directors
- Shareholders
- Sources of finance
- Suppliers
- Competitors
- Employees
- Consumers

Lattimer points out that it is action by consumers, especially environmentalists, which have brought about many of the recent successes in campaigning against companies.

Interestingly, he also argues that while campaigners often criticise companies for being profit-orientated at the expense of ethics, "pressure groups must first understand companies as businesses: where a company's market is, who the competitors are, where the principle threats lie, where the money comes from, where the company sees its opportunities."

So, in practice rather than your message to corporations being about putting ethics ahead of profits, demonstrate to them how operating more ethically can be good for their profits! Many companies for example have adopted ethical or environmentally practices because of consumer demand, which is course very good for their profit position.

Campaigners do need to be careful about organising boycotts of companies. [The Protection from Harassment Laws](#) mean that companies could take out an injunction against you. For more information about this visit [Liberty's Your Rights](#) website.

Case study

Greenpeace

Greenpeace ran a 'Detox' campaign aimed at companies who are releasing dangerous chemicals into the environment during their manufacturing processes.

Targeting Adidas, Nike, Puma and H&M, Greenpeace underwent a number of exposing tactics and stunts which resulted in all four of the companies agreeing to 'clean up' by 2020.

Here you can see a publication called '[Dirty Laundry](#)' in which Greenpeace has named and shamed areas which are most affected by the toxic waste produced by the companies in question.

A word of warning about 'exposing' corporations however. Firstly you must know your facts and have done your research. If you leave holes in your argument it is more than likely that a corporation will find them and undermine your argument. Secondly, although this tactic has worked in these situations it is worth keeping in mind that this is a fairly aggressive way to campaign and sometimes a private conversation, backed up by evidence, can be hugely effective and avoid cornering your 'target', whether your target is government or a company. There are corporations who feel pressure not to "give in" to NGO's if publicly humiliated, as they feel it would be a slippery slope to further demands on them.

McLibel

One of the most well known and interesting campaigns against a major corporation has been 'McLibel'. It's especially interesting because it's 'David and Goliath' nature worked against the company – highlighting how individuals and small groups can be powerful, even working against large corporate interests.

[McLibel](#) is actually a colloquial term for a long-running court action, McDonald's vs Morris and Steel. Environmental activists Helen Steel and David Morris produced a pamphlet that was critical of the company, which prompted the company to sue them. Wikipedia refers to this as a case of a [Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation \(SLAPP\)](#).

While McDonalds eventually won the legal battle, arguably they lost the Public Relations (PR) war.