

The manifesto statement below was jointly produced by SMK, NCVO and the NCVO Campaigning Effectiveness Advisory Group

The right to campaign is essential to a healthy democracy and a vibrant civil society

Democracy is stronger when people feel able to stand up for what they believe in and speak out on things they feel passionately about.

Society is stronger when people come together to take social action; when they are able to get involved in debates about issues that are important to them, and to help find solutions that will remake society, strengthen communities, and transform lives.

From small, grassroots projects seeking to create change in their neighbourhood, to global action to make poverty history – and everything in between – campaigning brings energy and passion to public debates and ensures that a wider range of voices are heard, including the voices of the disadvantaged and dispossessed.

We therefore call on politicians of all parties to support campaigning and advocacy by individuals and organisations because of their vital role in promoting active civic engagement and strengthening democracy, and in particular to:

1. Respect the independence of voluntary and community organisations, including their right to campaign in support of their cause and in the interests of their beneficiaries, irrespective of any funding relationship.
2. Demonstrate their commitment to this by ensuring that the Charity Commission's guidance on campaigning (CC9) is upheld and fully adhered to, by both charities and the Commission itself.
3. Facilitate lawful protest and peaceful assembly, including the right to protest around Parliament:
 - In the wake of HMIC's report 'Adapting to Protest' in November 2009, we want to ensure that the recommendations are put into practice and closely and independently monitored, so that protests are policed in a proportionate, legitimate and accountable way, and
 - removing legal restrictions on campaigning and freedom of assembly, for example repealing section 132-138 of SOCPA