

HOW TO LOBBY AND CAMPAIGN

National lobbying is organised and carried out by CBA in York, so this briefing focuses on the local level.

1 WHO TO LOBBY

a) The person who makes the decisions

- i) The cabinet member: whilst technically the decision may be for the Council cabinet or the Council as a whole, the person with the power is the cabinet member with responsibility for the policy area concerned. Identify who this is, and try to find out about him or her. For example, have they visited the project, site or building you are concerned about? Have they shown interest in similar issues before? Which party are they from?
- ii) The Leader of the Council: where the buck stops, but the issue may be seen by him or her as 'below their pay grade' and they may refer you to the cabinet member.
- iii) The Council as a whole: it may be the decision is referred to the Council Meeting as a whole (often by opposition councillors): if it gets to this stage you have probably lost, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't try!

b) The people who advise on the decisions

The Council's professional officers are very influential and produce the reports on which the decisions are based, usually with recommendations as to the course of action they think appropriate.

c) Other people who may be influential and can help:

- i) Your ward councillors, especially if they are of the same party as the cabinet member
- ii) The chair of any council backbench scrutiny panel or committee if there is one of relevance
- iii) Your MP: whilst it is a local level issue in which the MP has no formal say, he or she may be prepared to take it up for you as part of building a support campaign
- iv) Local press: speak to the reporters on the newsdesk and try to get them interested: if there is a local campaign there will be a local story.
- v) Local residents who may be interested and willing to help you - the more the merrier and helps spread the workload.

2 WHAT TO SAY

a) Do your homework

- i) Why is the Council doing (or not doing) what it is? Build your arguments to meet theirs.
- ii) Do be realistic: success will usually involve a degree of compromise. Campaigns that just say 'no' rarely succeed.
- iii) So try to develop an alternative that answers the council's policy objective and that you can live with. Not always possible, but the best route to follow if you can.
- iv) Work up your pitch in writing and prepare a short presentation with a short briefing paper. Practice your pitch before you try it for real, ideally to critical friends who don't know much about the issue (which will be the case at the start for most of those you want to influence), for feedback.

3 WHERE TO SAY IT

- a) Informal meetings: ask to see the officers and the cabinet member or leading councillors referred to above, ideally on your 'turf' rather than in the council buildings, preferably at the facility under threat.
- b) Advice surgeries: go to your own ward councillors' and MP's surgery: check if you need an appointment.
- c) Invite visitors to see what you are concerned about, especially the local press: ask them to bring a photographer and, if they do, think about organising a stunt for the camera.
- d) Formal Council meetings: some councils provide opportunities for residents to make formal presentations at meetings where decisions are to be taken: find out if this is the case where you are, and if so ask to go. Stick to the rules, e.g. time limit for speeches, and practice beforehand.
- e) Residents' forums: some councils hold local semi-formal meetings for residents to raise issues. Find out if this is the case for you and, if so, what the rules are.

4 HOW TO SAY IT

- a) Stay calm and nonconfrontational. If you get angry, you will not get your points over and the councillors will not listen.
- b) Be clear about what you want them to do: don't ask for something that is outside their powers: e.g. the MP cannot overrule the Council but he/she could write to the leader of the Council or cabinet member for you, to press your case.
- c) Always ask for a follow-up report from the councillors about what they promise to do for you: and follow-up yourself with a note to them setting out what you understand they have agreed to do.

5 OPEN DAYS AND STUNTS

These are used to raise the profile of what may otherwise be seen to be an esoteric issues:

- a) Open days (if it is a facility not generally open to the public) are a good way of getting support. But plan ahead: this needs careful organisation, e.g. insurance? refreshments? And remember that the public won't know much about the issue. Is there anything hands-on they can do? Avoid jargon in showing them around. Keep details of who comes, including and especially emails and mobile phone numbers, so you can keep them informed of your campaign and what they can do to help you.
- b) Stunts: the only limit is your imagination! But remember the purpose is to draw attention to, and support for, the campaign. Don't cause a public nuisance but do generate public amusement. Fancy/period dress is a possible idea. Inform the local press and organise the event/stunt to match their deadlines: there is no point in putting a lot of effort into something just after their weekly deadline as it won't be reported.
- c) Organise your own protest meeting: invite the councillors and the opposition on the Council to attend: but try not to let it get out of hand: you need a good chairperson to keep order.

6 IT'S ALL ABOUT VOTES

Perhaps a slightly cynical overstatement, but don't forget this. Local politicians rely on votes, so the more you can spread the message and maximise the support the better.

a) Letters: ask the public to write to the councillors and to the local press letters page.

They may need some guidance (3 main points at most) as to what you want them to say. Some will need a standardised letter they can top and tail with their own details.

b) Email: you can use email for this as well: track down the councillors' emails, they may be on the Council website.

c) Petitions: less effective than letters, but a good way still of building support. Make sure your petition form includes spaces for mobile numbers and emails as well as names and addresses, so you can report back and get people more engaged.

d) New media: if you have teccy supporters, you need a website, on line petition, and use Twitter, Facebook and email to spread the campaign.

e) Tell CBAL what you are up to, so we can also spread the message for you.

7 AND FINALLY....

Campaigning is hard work, but it can also be great fun too. You will encounter setbacks, but don't be discouraged. Don't give up until the very last decision has been made: 'play to the final whistle', not the first goal!

*Andrew Dismore
Chair of Trustees
CBA London*