

INFLUENCING LOCAL DECISION MAKERS IN SCOTLAND

Different campaigns will have different targets, or decision makers.

When you begin to plan your campaign, you'll need to decide which decision makers you'll want to target. This will vary across campaigns as different organisations, people, or groups all have different levels of responsibility in your area. It's a good idea to find out more about your decision makers, before you think about the tactics you might use to influence them.

Here we've explained more about the different decision makers in your area, and some top tips for arranging and attending meetings. This list isn't exhaustive – you may think of other bodies or organisations in your area that may be responsible for the issue you're campaigning on.

Top tip

You can find out who your MSPs are and their contact details at www.parliament.scot

1. Your MSPs

MSPs are elected to represent the interests of constituents like you in the Scottish Parliament and can be useful in influencing local decision makers, or getting publicity for your campaign. You are represented by eight MSPs in total; one constituency MSP and seven regional MSPs.

In your local area your MSP can:

- Attend a meeting or launch event to show support for a campaign (you'll need to ask them quite far in advance).
- Express concern on your behalf to local organisations, such as your local health and social care trust.
- Visit a local service, or MS Society group event to learn more about living with MS.

Whether it's more appropriate to contact your MSP or your MP depends on the sort of issue you are campaigning on.

The Scottish Parliament has powers over areas such as health, social work, local government, housing and transport; on these types of topics you should contact your MSP. Other topics such as welfare (at

present), energy, and employment are reserved to the UK Parliament; on these topics it's best to contact your MP. For more information about who to contact visit www.parliament.scot/visitandlearn/12506.aspx. Your MSPs can also be influential in the Scottish Parliament – if you think your MSPs can help with an MS Society campaign contact scotlandcampaigns@mssociety.org.uk to let us know.

Top tip

You can find out who your councillor is, and their contact details, at www.writetothem.com

2. Your MP

MPs are elected to represent the interests of constituents like you in the UK Parliament and can be useful in influencing or getting publicity for your campaign if it is a UK wide issue or is outside the devolved power of the Scottish Parliament.

In your local area your MP can:

- Attend a meeting or launch event to show support for a campaign (you'll need to ask them quite far in advance).
- Express concern on your behalf to local organisations, such as your local authority.
- Visit a local service or MS Society group event to learn more about living with MS.

Your MP can also be influential in the UK Parliament – if you think your MP can help with an MS Society campaign contact campaigns@mssociety.org.uk to let us know.

3. Your local council

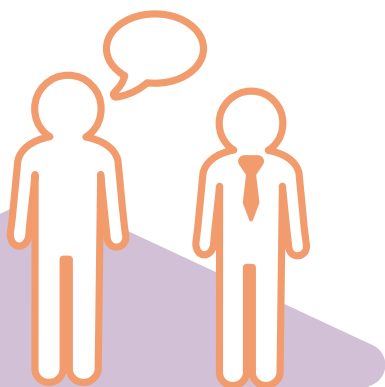
Your local council is responsible for providing services such as leisure centres, local parks and looking after the local environment you live in. They are also responsible for community planning.

Some of the reasons you might get in touch with your local council are:

- Influencing a decision that is about to be made, for example, on accessibility of a council facility.
- Fighting for new services to be offered.
- Challenging a decision that has already been made.

Your local councillor, elected to represent your ward, has a duty to represent your views and make the relevant staff member at the council aware of your concerns. Speaking to your councillor can be an effective way to put pressure on the local council.

As well as writing to councillors, calling or emailing, you could arrange to meet them in person or attend a council meeting. You can find out more by visiting your local council's website. All council websites can be found at www.gov.scot/About/Government/councils



4. Health and social care in Scotland

Local health boards

There are 14 regional health boards in Scotland. They are responsible for delivering health services and improving the health of the population. This includes primary care, community based care and acute hospital care.

Some of the reasons you might get in touch with your local trust are:

- Influencing a decision that is about to be made, for example, on health services that are being delivered in your area.
- Fighting for new services to be offered.
- Providing feedback and suggestions on how services can be improved.
- Challenging a decision that has already been made, such as the closure of a day centre.

All health boards provide opportunities for the public to become involved through groups such as Public Partnership Forums, patient councils and consultations. Information on all the NHS Scotland health boards can be found at www.scot.nhs.uk/organisations/ and by going to the Get Involved section on your local health boards' website.

Integrated Joint Boards

The NHS and local council care services should work together to ensure that those who use services get the right care and support whatever their needs.

Integrated Joint Boards bring together local councils, NHS, third sector, patient groups, and others to design and deliver services. You may find it useful to get in touch with your local council or NHS board to find out about how to raise issues with your local integrated Joint Board.

Patient Opinion

To give feedback on services you can visit www.patientopinion.org.uk. All health boards in Scotland use this platform. Whoever you are, your story will be passed on to the right person within the health board and you will receive a response.

Before approaching a decision maker

- Check if they're the ultimate decision maker on this issue, or if they will need to influence someone else. This will help to make sure you speak to the right people. If you're not sure – ask!
- Think about what you want them to do. Do you want to ask them to agree to your campaign aims straight away, or would you like to invite them to meet with you or attend an event to find out more about your concerns?
- Think about any barriers there might be – why might a local decision maker not wish to support your campaign? How might you change their mind?
- Speak to the MS Society campaigns team if you aren't sure who to approach or how to approach them.

Approaching decision makers

- You can approach them via phone, email or letter.
- Remember your key messages. Stick to your one issue and explain the outcome you'd like to see.
- Include personal stories or evidence to back up your campaign aim if possible.
- Include your full contact details so they're able to reply.

Meeting decision makers

- Explain your issue and the outcome you'd like to see. Keep discussions focused on your issue and how they can help.
- If people disagree with your position, remember it isn't personal – try to understand why and present your case for change clearly and confidently.
- Your decision maker won't expect you to be an expert, but they will want to know why you think this is an important issue for local people.
- Take any evidence you may have, and bring a copy for the decision maker to keep.
- Follow up with a letter or email thanking them for their time. Use this as an opportunity to remind them of any actions you, or they, agreed to take.