



## Lobbying Councillors in Manchester about Cuts

Manchester councillors do not want to cut services. They are faced with a series of extremely difficult decisions about what to keep and what to cut and there is no purely logical way of deciding what should be kept. How does one judge the importance of a library against an advice service or a community centre? In the end it is about a balance of competing interests and ideas and principles and about who gets heard, it's a democratic process with politicians at its heart.

All kinds of people and organisation are constantly trying to influence councillors and that becomes even more frenzied at a time of cuts. Lobbying is a way of influencing councillors and promoting your cause. It's one of the key ways that councillors find out about what is going on and what is valued by their constituents. Most Councillors appreciate being lobbied and see it as an important part of their job.

### Effective lobbying

There are a number of approaches that increase the chances of your lobbying being effective.

#### **Volume**

Generally it's more convincing if you hear about the same issue from several people especially if each of them has taken the time to talk or write to you in their own words.

#### **Repetition**

It's often not enough to say things once. Councillors get pulled in many directions and if you want your issue to be at the top of their minds then make sure you keep regular contact and let them know that you will be following up.

#### **Relevance**

Councillors are more likely to support issues that impact on their constituents, the people in their ward or on issues that they are particularly interested in or take a lead on. Tailor your approach for each councillor by finding out what you can about them before you meet or contact them.

#### **Evidence with impact**

It's not about the quantity of evidence, councillors don't have time to read large amounts, it's about the quality. Come up with something that will stay in the mind, a few choice statistics, a stunning case-study, a picture that says it all, a quote that goes to the heart of the issue. Give them a story that they will want to tell others.

#### **From the horse's mouth**

Perhaps the most effective tactic of all is for councillors to hear directly from the people who will suffer or benefit from the proposed change. It's hard to ignore when someone is telling you their experience and the difference it has made or will make.

## **Creating a relationship**

In the end almost all councillors want to do the right thing and it's your job to help them understand why what you are proposing is the right thing. You need to try and establish a relationship of trust where they are predisposed to believe that what you are telling them is accurate and considered. As well as telling them what you think, listen to what they have to say, and then create an ongoing discussion.

## **Ask for something**

Be as specific as possible about what you want. Ask for it clearly but be prepared to negotiate. You may want to start with something easy and then follow up later with something more challenging. Councillors won't know what you want them to do unless you tell them.

You can ask for all kinds of things: signing a petition; speaking on your behalf to a member of the executive; talking about an issue at a scrutiny committee; voting at a council meeting; obtaining information; visiting your organisation; talking to users of your service. However, make sure you ask them for something that they have the power, time and resources to do. A local councillor, who is not a member of the Council Executive, has very limited formal power. Don't forget that many backbenchers have a full or part time job in addition to their Councillor role so make sure your request is concise and realistic.

## **Targeting Councillors**

Some councillors have more power than others. The most powerful councillors are the 9 members of the executive (including the leader of the council Sir Richard Leese), each of which takes the lead on particular issues. Identify the executive member with the lead on the issue you are concerned with.

Other councillors vary in power depending on the level of respect they are held in by more powerful councillors and their role on key committees. Find out who are the more powerful councillors by talking with other people more experienced in lobbying, or by using your social networks to find someone who has a contact with a 'friendly' councillor who will give you the low down.

Find out more about the councillors you want to target by googling them and looking at the Councillor Register of Interests.

## **Lots of ways in**

Some of the ways you can contact councillors are:

- Emailing them
- Asking a question of the Executive
- Arranging a meeting
- Inviting them to visit your organisation
- Inviting them to talk to a group of the people who use your service
- Meeting them at a surgery
- Writing a letter/postcard
- Phoning
- Asking to speak at a scrutiny committee
- Creating an e-petition on MCC's website
- Replying to the Leader's Blog
- Talking to Councillors attending a Full Council Meeting

## Lobbying and the Law

Lobbying has been in the news recently because of the Lobbying Act however this only applies to campaigning around a parliamentary election. Charity Law forbids charities from furthering the interests of a specific political party. Campaigning in line with the charitable purposes of a charity is permitted.

## Sources of information

- Asking a question of a Executive Member  
[www.manchester.gov.uk/info/200033/councillors\\_and\\_decision-making/5972/ask\\_a\\_lead\\_councillor\\_a\\_question](http://www.manchester.gov.uk/info/200033/councillors_and_decision-making/5972/ask_a_lead_councillor_a_question)
- Leaders blog  
[www.manchester.gov.uk/blog/leadersblog](http://www.manchester.gov.uk/blog/leadersblog)
- List of Councillors and their interests  
[www.manchester.gov.uk/manchestercouncillors](http://www.manchester.gov.uk/manchestercouncillors)  
[www.manchester.gov.uk/downloads/download/5102/the\\_register\\_of\\_members\\_interests](http://www.manchester.gov.uk/downloads/download/5102/the_register_of_members_interests)
- Executive Members  
[www.manchester.gov.uk/info/200033/councillors\\_democracy\\_and\\_elections/3195/the\\_members\\_of\\_the\\_executive](http://www.manchester.gov.uk/info/200033/councillors_democracy_and_elections/3195/the_members_of_the_executive)
- Scrutiny Committees and ddates  
[www.manchester.gov.uk/info/997/councillors-committee\\_membership](http://www.manchester.gov.uk/info/997/councillors-committee_membership)
- Guide to Scrutiny Committees  
<https://www.manchestercommunitycentral.org/macc-guide-oversight-and-scrutiny-committees>
- Guide to E-Petitions  
[http://www.manchester.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/13718/petitions\\_scheme](http://www.manchester.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/13718/petitions_scheme)

## About Macc

Macc is Manchester's local voluntary and community sector support organisation. We exist to encourage support and develop voluntary and community groups and individuals to have a real influence over the places and communities in which they live. We do that by

- supporting voluntary and community groups to develop and improve
- lobbying, campaigning, influencing and representing the voice of groups
- supporting local people to get involved with groups through volunteering, giving and employment

Macc provides a number of services that support the voluntary and community sector in the city of Manchester:

- **Capacity Building Team** - supports and strengthens voluntary and community groups in the city. We provide training, telephone support, online resources and face to face meetings to assist groups in building their skills, knowledge and practice.
- **Policy and Influence Team** - supports a strong, collective voice from Manchester's voluntary and community sector. Our aim is to ensure that the voluntary and community sector has opportunities to influence public affairs and is supported and engaged in order to make the most of its contribution to the life of the city. We share information, linking organisations and providing opportunities for people to come together and network. We build relationships between the voluntary and community sector with other sectors including the private and public sectors, working with elected members, officials, the City Council, NHS, GM Police, business leaders and other relevant stakeholders.
- **Volunteer Centre Manchester** - helps people who live in Manchester to find suitable and relevant volunteering opportunities. We also support voluntary and community groups to find, manage and support volunteers.

All our services can be accessed through our Manchester Community Central website [www.manchestercommunitycentral.org](http://www.manchestercommunitycentral.org) which includes a wide range of free resources, news, events, job and volunteering opportunities from across the city.

Macc is a Charity Registered in England and Wales No 1145921 and a Company Limited by Guarantee 7788593

Macc, Swan Buildings, 20 Swan Street, Manchester M4 5JW  
Tel: 0161 834 9823  
Email: [info@macc.org.uk](mailto:info@macc.org.uk)