



## UNITE GUIDE TO CAMPAIGNING IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

A guide on how to plan, implement  
and win workplace campaigns

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## UNITE REPS CAMPAIGNING TOOLKIT

Published by Unite

Joint General Secretaries Derek Simpson and Tony Woodley

Unite  
128 Theobald's Road  
Holborn  
London WC1X 8TN  
020 7611 2500

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## ■ INTRODUCTION

This guide aims to give Unite members the skills and knowledge to plan, implement and win workplace campaigns.

Trade unions have a proud track record in campaigning to improve the terms and conditions of our members. All the major improvements in employment legislation -- including health and safety, race discrimination and the national minimum wage -- are as a direct result of trade union campaigning. These long and hard-fought national campaigns are only one side of campaigning. Just as important are the campaigns being run inside workplaces up and down the UK and Ireland.

### Local Government

Local government workers are under constant threat of budget cuts and the ideologically driven privatisation agenda and need to be able to defend their pay and pensions. But it's not just members' terms and conditions that we need to protect, Unite is determined to defend the services that local communities rely on. The union's national campaign to protect public services will be strengthened by local government members' local activity, which put together will make a real difference.



# ■ PLANNING YOUR CAMPAIGN

## What is your aim?

A campaign is 'an organised course of action for a particular purpose'. Basically, you are aiming to achieve a goal. Decide what you want to achieve and write a short 'mission statement' – yes, it's an irritating phrase, but you do need to define precisely what you are trying to achieve. By discussing your aims at the beginning of your campaign – and sticking to them -- you will be less likely to get sidetracked into tackling other issues.

## Building a campaign team

Getting people involved in a campaign increases the chances of success. If a campaign is run by too few individuals, they run the risk of 'burning out', while colleagues who have not been involved will feel excluded. Involve as many people as possible early on, this gives everyone a sense of ownership of the campaign. Call a campaign meeting and invite as many people as possible/sensible to come along – even people who are not your usual activists. Is it appropriate to involve other unions and groups? Share the activities among your team.

## Timescale

### How long should your campaign last?

It's hard to know how long a campaign will take. But it's advisable to set yourself a date for your campaign to end. It is easier to get support from colleagues if they know it's for a given period.

Take some time to brainstorm your campaign and draw up a time line - a diary of events and deadlines.

## What will you need?

materials such as leaflets, posters and stickers all take time to produce. Work out when you will need your materials and then work backwards to establish deadlines. Nothing happens by magic: if you want to produce an A5 flyer (that's a fairly small leaflet) it takes time to write, design and print.

Don't re-invent the wheel – you may be able to use some of the materials available on the Unite website [www.unitetheunion.org/localauthorities](http://www.unitetheunion.org/localauthorities)

There are many tried and tested campaigning tools that you can use to generate interest in your campaign. Choose from the campaigning mix. Or you may create some new ideas that will suit your campaign and help others in the future.

## Campaigning mix

- Leaflets
- Posters
- Stickers
- Placards
- Demonstrations
- Family days
- Air balloons
- Petitions
- E-mail communications
- On-line surveys
- T-shirts, baseball caps etc
- Internet – such as blogs and social networking sites
- Postcards
- Media: press releases
- Letters to the local press
- Calls to phone-in programmes
- Letters to MPs
- Parliamentary Early Day Motions, parliamentary questions
- Visible presence at fairs, country shows
- Parliamentary/council lobby
- Photo opportunities – posh phrase, it only means setting up something to support your campaign which will make an interesting picture
- Direct action

- Adverts (£££)
- Community/coalition building
- Open meetings
- Gaining support of local papers
- Gaining support from other organisations and other interested parties like service users, tenants, local community organisations and networks

## Events

Are there any events happening over the course of your campaign on which you can piggy back: for example, finance committee meetings or main council meetings open to the public. Protesting outside meetings is a great way of gaining local media coverage. Remember, you are allowed to give out leaflets and campaign material on a public right of way, (such as pavements outside of local authority buildings) as long as you are not causing an obstruction.



# ■ COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Communicating is central to any campaign. If nobody is aware of your campaign then you will not win it. You will probably have several audiences with whom you will need to communicate:

## **Internal**

Your members and other employees. How will your campaign team keep the wider membership on board? Make sure to gather email addresses to communicate quickly and cheaply. You can use staff notice boards, newsletters and hold regular open meetings.

## **External**

Local, regional and national media.

## **Why use the media?**

Using the media is the most effective way of getting your campaign message to a wider audience. Local authority employers will be concerned at keeping a positive public profile. You will have better bargaining power if your campaign has strong public support.

Brand damage is a powerful tool, but be careful not to encourage libellous action through your campaign. You cannot use an organisation's logo on your materials unless you have their permission.

# ■ CREATING MEDIA INTEREST

## How do you make your campaign a story for the media?

Think about the audiences. If your local authority is making unwelcome changes or cuts in service highlight the effect this will have on the local community – how will service users suffer? Use examples that people can understand. For example £100,000 spent on a management consultant equates to three front-line housing officer posts. Think about who else will be interested and share your concerns.

## Using research

You could try surveying tenants, service users or staff about the way they view a service. For example, your story could lead with: 'Over eighty per cent of people asked in Manchester want their refuse service to remain under local authority control, according to new research from Unite the union'. You may also have access to information about money being wasted. It is very useful for Unite's Research department to have an overview of what is happening across the country. Email Sian Errington, Unite's policy and research officer for the Local Authorities government sector: [sian.errington@unitetheunion.org](mailto:sian.errington@unitetheunion.org) with what is happening in your patch. The union can then use this information to create national media interest.

## Media outlets

Direct your message to the appropriate media outlet. Eighty per cent of adults read their local paper, so its importance cannot be over estimated. Most national stories are handled by the union's communications department. But there is no reason why you shouldn't try to gain some local/regional coverage. Unite communications department can offer you advice. And remember, you have the advantage of knowing better than anyone else just which media makes an impact in your area.

- Newspapers - national, regional and local
- TV and radio - visuals and available spokespeople
- Specialist/ trade press for local authorities and councillors
- Consumer press
- On- line media
- News agencies



# ■ NEWS RELEASES

Journalists, particularly on regional papers, rely on news releases to get information for stories. By writing a news release it will allow you to sharpen your message and to set out the facts in the order of importance which you and the union believe is appropriate. In turn, this should guide the journalist in how the story will be told. So, with careful planning the story will be told 'our' way.

## What to include in a news release

- **Get to the point straight away** - in the first paragraph tell **WHAT** is happening, **WHEN** it is happening, **WHO** it involves and **WHERE** it is happening. Ideally, you tell **WHY** it is happening in that first paragraph. But you may need to move on to paragraph two for an explanation of the 'why'..
- **Remember the basics** - the date, a headline, say it is from Unite, a quote from a relevant spokesperson. Don't fuss too much over the headline – if something clever occurs to you, fine: otherwise, make it simple. Clever people at the local newspaper will make up their own headlines anyway: that's what they're paid to do.
- **It is essential that you include a contact name and telephone number** – for someone who will actually handle media phone calls, rather than ignore them. Make sure details in the press release are accurate and you can substantiate any points you make. If they are opinion, put them in a quote and attribute it to someone. Check with your Regional Officer about whether talking to the media will jeopardise your job. It may be better to have a Unite Officer as the official spokesperson for the union.
- **Look at the Unite website** – 'latest news' section to see examples of press releases. There's nothing wrong with plagiarism: it's often called research.

## Example of Unite press release:

Date: 20 February 2009

### **'CUT FLOWERS, NOT YOUTH SERVICES', UNITE URGES COVENTRY COUNCILLORS**

*Floral displays in Coventry appear to be more important than children and youth services, Unite, the largest union in the country, has said.*

*As the Conservative-controlled city council prepares to meet on Tuesday, 24 February to decide on whether to implement £660,000 of cuts to young people's services, Unite has highlighted the council's decision to restore £92,000 to the city's floral displays' budget.*

*'We should be nurturing the bloom of youth, not rose blooms', said Doug Nicholls, Unite National Secretary, Community and Youth Workers Industrial Sector. 'The council seems to have a distorted view of what is really important.'*

*If the council votes to prune children and youth services, it will mean the closure of the remaining 14 after-school clubs and 23 summer play schemes, possibly affecting 6,000 primary school children. Staff job cuts are also on the cards.*

*Unite is calling on the public to lobby councillors as they enter the Council House at noon on Tuesday, 24 February for what is expected to be a knife-edge decision.*

*Doug Nicholls said: 'It is time that the people of Coventry spoke with a united and democratic voice to demonstrate that these services, designed to inspire and care for young people and children in their local communities, can't be lightly discarded.'*

*The planned cuts to the Children's and Family Education Services, totalling £300,000 for the financial year 2009/10, are coupled with the £360,000 being axed from the Youth Service over a two-year period, (2007/09). The Youth Service gives support and advice on sexual health, drug and alcohol misuse, community cohesion and employment training.*

*Unite is calling on the council's new Chief Executive, Martin Reeve, who takes up his post on 1 April, to maintain front line services for children and young people, and enter into 'a meaningful dialogue' with the trade unions.*

- *On 14 February about 400 people joined a Unite demonstration to express their opposition to the cuts.*

*-ends-*

#### **NOTES TO NEWS EDITORS:**

**For further information, please ring: Unite xxx**

## When to send out your release

- Timing is crucial to the effectiveness of your campaign. Think strategically - you want to put maximum pressure on your employer.
- Check the deadlines for your targeted media. Earlier in the day is generally best, as regional papers often have early deadlines and regional broadcasters will want to get a recording set up in good time for their programme.
- If you are planning an event and want the media to report it, consider sending out a 'calling notice'. A calling notice should go out in advance of the event (ideally four to seven days in advance for regional media), and highlight the date of your event, where and what is happening, and the fact that the media can have access: e.g. "reporters, photographers and camera crews welcome"
- If you don't want the media to report the story before a certain time or day, highlight IN CAPITAL LETTERS at the start of the release an embargo date and time, e.g. "EMBARGOED until 00.01 FRIDAY 11TH AUGUST 2009". But use embargos sparingly: you'll normally only need them if you are issuing some detailed information which requires careful study by journalists. In particular, if you're responding to something which is already 'out there' – like a management statement, for instance – it would be foolish to seek to embargo your reaction.
- Make sure you (or whoever is contact and spokesperson) is going to be available to speak to the media when the news release is issued.

## Follow-up

- Once you've issued your news release, follow it up with a phone call to the news desk of each of the key publications/ broadcasters.
- Keep interested journalists updated on developments - building good contacts could help with your campaign or for future campaigns.

## Case studies and spokespeople

- One of the most effective ways to engage an audience and create sympathy for your campaign is to use case studies. People find it easier

to empathise with an individual's story.

- Before you send out any news release, pick a couple of members who would be willing to act as case studies and speak to the media. They do not have to be polished performers, but they do have to be open and honest and willing to tell their story.
- Decide who is going to be your spokesperson for the campaign and limit 'spokesperson' quotes and interviews to one or two people.
- Check with your officer about whether talking to the media will jeopardise your job. It may be better to have a Unite officer as the official spokesperson for the union.



# ■ MEDIA INTERVIEWS

A media interview can be the best opportunity you will get to put your case across to the public and win sympathy for your campaign.

## Preparation

- When the journalist calls you, find out everything you need to know about the interview request. When is the interview? Where will you need to be? If you can't do the interview yourself could someone else do it? What do they want to ask you? How long will it last? Will it be pre-recorded or will it go out live? Will there be any other participants, or will you be interviewed alone. Remember to take the journalist's contact details.
- Make sure they get your name and organisation spelt and pronounced correctly.
- Before the interview, gather your thoughts and identify the key messages you want to convey. Stick to one, and certainly no more than three, points you want to make. It may help to write down some snappy phrases - or 'sound bites' - to use in the interview. But once you've written them down, leave them in your pocket. Don't try to read comments, even for radio.
- Think of what an opponent might say to you, and how you would deal with your response, and strengthen any weak points. If you have time, you could practice with a colleague.
- Consider whether it will be beneficial for the campaign for you to do this interview. If it is something you are promoting then often it can be; however if you don't want the publicity (e.g. a sensitive stage in an industrial campaign), feel comfortable about politely turning it down.

## The interview

- Check your appearance in the mirror before you go on camera - not just your face.
- Be clear, concise and to the point. A five minute interview may be cut down to 30 seconds, so don't waffle and avoid making flippant comments. Generally, humour and sarcasm just don't work for anyone other than a real professional broadcaster. So stick to saying what you need to say in a straightforward way.
- If the interviewer makes any inaccurate statements in the question, put them right. But do it politely: 'I don't think most people would see the issue that way ...' or 'I think most viewers will recognise that this dispute is really about ....'. But if the reporter persists in getting it wrong, it may be necessary to be more firm. 'I'm not sure if you've fully understood what this is about ....'
- Try to keep your voice tone as positive as possible, and your body language open and honest - you want to appear reasonable and confident.
- Ask someone to tape the interview for you so you can review it and learn for the next time.
- Try to stand with or alongside some of your campaign branding – identification with the campaign is important.



## Facebook

Facebook is a very popular networking website. This is predominately used for social purposes by individuals to keep in touch with friends and family. However, increasingly the site is being used by organisations to inform people of their activities and canvas support for particular issues. For instance Unite nationally has a Facebook group. This allows the union to establish an online network of people who want to hear about forthcoming events and get behind the campaigns that the union is supporting. Recently, the union urged members to support the 'Fair Tips' campaign by urging their local restaurants and hotels to become fair tipping establishments. You too can set up a campaign group and use Facebook as a means by which to let people know where your next meeting or event will take place.

[www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)

## Twitter

This is fast becoming a popular resource for so many people, from celebrities, MPs and organisations. This website allows the user to post short messages (140 characters, the length of a standard SMS text message) to inform people of their latest news. Like Facebook, organisations use it to update followers of latest news and campaigning information. Again Unite uses Twitter in its national and industrial campaigning. This information allows the union to communicate instantaneously with interested parties and update them on news from the campaign.

[www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com)



# ■ LOBBYING LOCAL GOVERNMENT

## Local Councillors

It is important to get the support of your local councillors in your campaign. You can find out who your local councillors are, what political party they are and who sits on relevant committees by contacting your council's Information Office via your local authority website. Alternatively, the Direct gov website [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk) provides links to all local authority websites by simply typing in your postcode. This information can also be found by looking at The Municipal Year Book at your local library.

## Why it's worth lobbying

Lobbying is a great way for letting local councillors know what the impact their decisions have on you both as an employee, a resident of the borough and voter. For example, a local government pay freeze will impact on your ability to make ends meet, as well as your spending power in the local economy.

Also, the use of personal experience will make a councillor aware of the issue on a more human level, rather than just the figures and the policy. If the councillor supports your case then you are giving them ammunition for the case, if they do not support you then you are making them respond on an individual level rather than an abstract political level.

There are a number of means by which your local councillor can show support for your campaign:

- They can raise the issue on the council's agenda
- Writing in the local media their support for your campaign

Although your pay and terms and conditions are negotiated nationally with Unite and other trade unions meeting with the Local Government Employers, your local authority is a member of this national body so the more pressure they receive from individual authorities, the more likely they will be to change their position on issues such as a national pay freeze.

## Lobbying MPs

You should write to your MP to say you are a constituent (include your address on the letter so they know you live in their constituency).

Constituency MPs are a good means to bring matters to the attention of the Minister. An MP's postbag is a good barometer of issues affecting their constituents. If an MP raises an issue with a minister, they have to receive a reply. To find the name and address of your MP call the House of Commons information line on 020 7219 4272 or look at <http://findyourmp.parliament.uk/>. All MPs can also be written to at the House of Commons, Westminster, London SW1A 0AA.

You should use your letter to set out what you wish to lobby them about. This should ensure that any reply offers an opinion on the issue from the MP, thereby allowing you to build up a database of support.

You may wish to continue the campaign by trying to attend one of their constituency surgeries where they meet members of the public about any issue you wish to talk about. These surgeries happen weekly and are normally advertised in your local paper, town hall and most MPs have their own website which will have details. Some MPs operate an appointment system for these surgeries; others just operate a turn-up and queue system.

Fridays are a good day to arrange a meeting with MPs as it is the day they usually spend in their constituencies. Remember, MPs like nothing better than to have their photo in the local paper; being seen to be doing something for constituents/potential voters is important for them.

The crucial addition to the lobbying you can provide is the personal dimension. You should always emphasise how the Government's and local councils policies are affecting you, your family and friends - especially if they have a vote in the MP's constituency. Also, the use of personal experience will make the MP aware of the issue on a more human level, rather than just the figures and the policy. If the MP supports your case then you are giving them ammunition for the case, if they do not support you then you are making them respond on an individual level rather than the abstract political level.

There are a number of means by which your MP can show support for your campaign:

- By writing to the relevant minister.
- By sponsoring an Early Day Motion (Unite's political unit can assist with this)
- By raising the matter by means of an adjournment debate.
- Writing in the local media their support for your campaign

### **Recruitment and Organising**

Unite has more members than any other UK trade union and our reputation for fighting for justice is growing.

Make sure that you capitalise on the campaigning you do by using it to recruit new members. Promoting a campaign within your workplace offers you a great opportunity to speak to non-members and demonstrates the relevance of Unite in the workplace. Encourage people to join online.

### **Using the union's resources**

Unite is the largest union in the country and has many resources to offer. Unite has a large Research department and a Communications department that is there to help you with your campaigning. To utilise the union the best place to start is with your Regional Officer. There are also a whole series of campaigning materials on the three big issues facing local authority workers: people, pay and pensions on the website [www.unitetheunion.org/pppcampaign](http://www.unitetheunion.org/pppcampaign)



## ■ EVALUATING YOUR CAMPAIGN

The obvious way to evaluate your campaign is to ask whether it achieved its goal. But apart from this simple question, you might also want to think about other areas. Did you build broad-based grass roots support? Did you raise the union's reputation in the media and among your members? Did you recruit new members? Have you made a difference? Should you continue? Take time to sit down with your key campaign team and learn from what worked and what you would do differently next time.

## ■ CONCLUSION

*"If we fight we may not always win, but if we don't fight we will surely lose."*

For an effective campaign you will need a good team of people working with you. Don't be over-ambitious; just take on what you believe can be achieved with the help of the people and resources available.

Good luck with your campaign

**Useful contacts and addresses:**

**Unite campaigns & communications department**

Unite communications department is a great resource with experienced campaigners and media experts. Key contacts and how they are relevant to you:

**Shaun Noble**

Press officer: Guidance on handling the media, assistance with press releases and distribution to media contacts

07768 693940

Shaun.noble@uniontheunion.org

**Ciaran Naidoo**

Press officer

07768 931315

Ciaran.naidoo@unitetheunion.org

**Pauline Doyle**

Head of campaigns

07976832861

Pauline.doyle@unitetheunion.org

**Liane Groves**

Campaigns officer: Guidance on campaigning, oversees national Unite campaigns, co-ordinates production of materials for national and sector campaigns

07793 661 657

Liane.groves@unitetheunion.org

**Mik Sabiers**

Website and activist journal, The Reporter  
0207 420 8932

Mik.sabiers@unitetheunion.org

**Amanda Campbell**

Editor the Magazine, the Landworker,  
Together

0207 420 8931

Amanda.campbell@unitetheunion.org

**Unite**

Unite  
128 Theobald's Road  
Holborn  
London WC1X 8TN  
Tel: 020 7611 2500  
[www.unitetheunion.org](http://www.unitetheunion.org)

