

Elections 2007

Using the elections to raise the profile of carers

Often there is a great deal of apathy around party politics and elections, with the world-weary question 'why bother – it doesn't make any difference?'

For carers the Scottish Parliament makes a big difference. We have seen the publication of the Care 21: the future of unpaid care in Scotland, the recognition of carers' vital role in supporting health care, laws to support carers, recognition that carers health and training needs need to be addressed and, the implementation of NHS Carer Information Strategies to ensure that the NHS recognises and supports carers better. All the way through the development of these initiatives carers have been key players in influencing Members of the Scottish Parliament, Ministers, and Parliamentary Committees. The Scottish Parliament elections give us another opportunity to get our voices heard, and to start influencing the people who will be the decision makers in the next four years.

Carers represent 16% of the voting population in Scotland – an important section of the electorate. In nearly every constituency the numbers of carers are bigger than the sitting MSPs majority. Now is the time to make 'Carer Power' felt!

It is equally important to raise the profile of carers' issues at a local level and to gather support from candidates in the local government elections. In most cases, although the Parliament legislates for and introduces policy, it is local councils who implement and deliver services and support and, often allocate funds on the basis of local priorities. By gaining support and raising the profile of carers in your area, you can raise carers' needs higher up the political agenda and it a priority for local councillors.

What can we do?

MSP and council candidates want to come and meet people, to have the chance to influence them and lobby for their vote – use this opportunity.

Visits

Invite the candidates to visit your group or centre. Show them a copy of the manifesto, talk to them about the sections that are relevant to your area and your local concerns. Use the visit as a photo opportunity. Press release the visit to your local paper (see Section 4: Using the media).

Hustings

Hustings are when you invite all the MSP or council candidates to form a panel at a meeting of carers. You can ask them to speak about what their party will do for carers. There is then an opportunity for questions from carers to the candidates. Again – don't forget to double the impact by getting media coverage.

Other organisations will also run hustings, why not get a group of carers to attend – and raise carer issues?

Surgeries

You can visit your current MSP or councillor at their local surgery, present them with the manifesto – discuss with them about your local concerns. Details of MSP surgeries can be found at the Scottish Parliament website at www.scottish.parliament.uk. Details of your local councillor's surgery (and often your MSP too) will often be found in local newspapers, in GP surgeries, libraries and other local venues. You can also contact your local council office for details.

Letter writing

As a group, write to each candidate, enclose the manifesto, raise your own concerns, and ask them how they would improve life for carers in Scotland. Ask your members to write to them individually.