

Elections 2007

Using the local press and media

Don't forget that your campaigning is an ideal opportunity to get carers' issues in the press, so if you are holding a set of hustings, or candidates are visiting your group or centre try and use this opportunity.

How do I find out the contact numbers for the local press and media?

You should be able to find telephone numbers for all your local newspapers, radio and TV will be in the Yellow Pages or in your local telephone directory. Many radio or TV stations and newspapers will have their own website.

Newspapers

The Newspaper Society has a links to local newspapers throughout Scotland.

<http://www.newspapersoc.org.uk/Default.aspx?page=1228>

These websites will have contact details. Alternatively a copy of your local paper will give you details of fax numbers and e-mail addresses for press releases.

Radio

Scotland Internet has a list of websites for local, independent, community and hospital radio stations at

<http://scotlandinter.net/radio.htm>. You can also find more details at

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Radio_stations_in_Scotland.

Television

Both BBC and STV have local offices throughout Scotland.

The BBC has local offices in Aberdeen, Dundee, Dumfries, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness, Orkney, Portree, Selkirk, Shetland and Stornoway. You can contact each office directly to highlight your local news release.

(<http://www.bbc.co.uk/scotland/aboutus/contact.shtml>)

Scottish Television broadcasts three local news programmes – North Tonight, Scotland Today and Borders News. For more information visit <http://www.stv.tv> and <http://www.itvregions.com/border>.

Press Releases

Send a press release to your local newspaper and radio station about your event. Below are some hints and tips on writing a press release.¹

Press releases should be:

- * **SHORT** - A press release is an outline of facts and opinions; it is NOT an essay.
- * **SHARP** - Use clear, strong everyday language. Keep sentences brief - one idea per sentence. Use short paragraphs - one or two sentences.
- * **TO THE POINT** - Don't get lost in detail. You don't have to explain everything. But you must explain anything that the uninformed reader won't understand.

Use A4 notepaper, headed if you have it. Type, double-spaced, with wide margins on one side of the paper. Make it fit on one page, or two at the most. If you do use more than one, don't run sentences or paragraphs from one sheet to the next.

¹ Media Toolkit – Suffolk Association of Voluntary Organisations (<http://www.savo-elearning.org/media/toolkit-1.htm>)

Write 'Press Release' and date in large print at the top. Include the name and title of the person for whose attention the release is.

Short quotes give life to your message, but they must be attributed to someone. Avoid jargon, clichés, unexplained abbreviations, confusing or misleading statistics, and any facts you're not sure of.

Embargo

Only issue an embargo if the story really needs it. For example Jean Bloggs is to be presented with an award at 12 noon, but she won't find out she's won until the event itself. The media should understand why the embargo is needed, but you can only request that they respect it. If you fear the press will spoil the surprise look at issuing 2 press releases ... the first to tease the story and tempt journalists into covering it, and the second to be issued when the award has been presented.

Heading

This should be a catchy, short title that sums up the story in a few words. Is it tempting to an editor deluged with news releases? Will it stand out in the editor's email inbox?

First paragraph

Make sure your sentences cover Who, What, Where, When, Why (and how, if appropriate) in your first paragraph. i.e.:

Members of Glasgow's Women's Forum	WHO
will occupy	WHAT
the city council chamber	WHERE
tomorrow (THURSDAY) afternoon	WHEN

WHY can follow in the second sentence or paragraph:

"Members of Glasgow's Women's Forum will occupy the city council chamber tomorrow (THURSDAY) afternoon.

Their action follows the council's refusal to give women the vote in Bolton."

Second paragraph

This should provide more information about the above.

Third paragraph / additional paragraphs

This paragraph could be a quote from someone involved who is willing to talk to the press if requested. The quote must add a new dimension, such as the personal side of the story. Alternatively it could be a quote from your spokesperson explaining the importance of the story in strong, authoritative language, e.g.:

"There are now 350 young people living rough in this borough, a vast increase since this time last year", said Janine Pearce of Anyplace Youth Housing Help. "Such figures dispel once and for all the myth that there are no homeless people in our area. They have nowhere to turn and urgently need our support."

ENDS

Write "ENDS" at the bottom of your press release.

Contact Details

Your name, title, telephone number and home or mobile phone should be included in clear, bold print at the bottom of the press release. Provide a contact number for when you are out of the office.

This can make the difference between your story being covered or not. Make sure you are going to be available when you send out the press release. There's nothing as annoying for a reporter as to be told "our spokesperson is away".

Additional Information for Editors

Describe your charity in a few words if this hasn't been covered in the press release above. Include your website address if you have one.

Other tips for writing a press release

Avoid the temptation to put your organisation's name in the first sentence of the press release - instead, concentrate on the issue and how it affects the reader, viewer or listener. Where appropriate use phrases like "the first ever", or "youngest", "oldest", "biggest". Remember the media get hundreds of press releases each day so your one needs to stand out.

You could try and "sell" the story in advance to a reporter, and let them know when you are going to issue a press release. Remember if you have Word you have a thesaurus you can refer to if you find you are repeating the same phrase or word a lot.

What Next?

Keep a copy of your press release, together with a record of where and when you sent it. Make sure your named contact knows this too.

Follow up the press release with a phone call, and if it hasn't been received, send another copy.

Campaign tip

Remember – MSP and local council candidates are hungry for publicity, if they are visiting you, or doing an event with you, ask them to help you get media coverage.

Writing to local newspapers

Use the letters page of your local paper to raise carer's issues during the election. Keep an eye on the coverage and write in about anything that's relevant to carers. It's often a much easier way of getting into the paper than writing a press release. You can also use the letters page to highlight events e.g. meetings with candidates that will be taking place.

Below is an example letter

Your name
Your address

Date

Dear Sirs

I am writing, as on one of xxxxx unpaid carers in xx District, to highlight of Scotland's Carers Manifesto 2007.

I care for [use this space to give some background on your caring situation]. I have been a carer for xx years and caring has had a significant impact on my life. [use this space to give details of the impact caring has had on your life e.g. you have given up work, you live on benefits, your health has been affected].

The Carers Manifesto calls for all candidates to support investment in unpaid carers, giving all carers a right to: good health; regular and appropriate breaks from caring; access to appropriate support and training; live free of poverty with opportunities to work and take part in lifelong learning, and for every child and young person with caring responsibilities, to have the right to be a child.

I think all of your readers will agree that these are rights that every citizen in Scotland should be able to expect. However, the reality for most carers in Scotland is very different.

I hope that your readers will all use the Scottish Parliament and local council elections to gather support and highlight these issues with candidates.

Yours faithfully

[your name]

Phone-ins

Often local radio stations will have phone-ins with candidates, ring in and ask a carer question!

Using the “What’s on” section in local media

Your 'What's On' listing needs will normally need to be submitted in writing to your local newspaper or radio station. Make sure you do this two weeks ahead of the event as these lists are usually compiled in advance. Last minute requests for publicity may be unsuccessful.

Contact your local newspaper and radio station for the relevant department. Some newspapers and radio stations also have opportunities to list your events on their websites.

When you submit your “What’s on” listing, remember to include all relevant information

Checklist

- ✓ Date of event
- ✓ Time of event
- ✓ Where is it being held
- ✓ What's it for (i.e. to raise the profile of carers issues in the area)
- ✓ If required, where can you get tickets
- ✓ Is there parking
- ✓ Is there disabled access
- ✓ Name and telephone number of person to contact for more information