



Don't cut us out!

Information about Mencap's *Don't cut us out!* campaign and what you can do to stop cuts to social services in your area.

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Across England, people with a learning disability are being failed by the social care system.

People are losing the services that are important in their lives, such as day centres, transport and short breaks for carers. They are losing the help with getting washed, dressed and fed. They are losing their independence, choice and control over their lives. This is unacceptable.

Mencap is fighting hard to challenge the cuts in social care funding, but we know that local groups are in the front line of the campaign against cuts. That's why we are starting a nationwide campaign that will further strengthen local campaigning efforts to improve the social care system and secure the level of funding needed to improve services.

This booklet is designed to help local groups campaign against cuts in their local communities. It provides information on how local authorities are cutting services and highlights a range of

campaigning tools that have already been used by local groups across England.

We need to know what is going on in your area, including your local campaigns, so we can show the government what is really happening.

Mencap is here to help and we are always happy to offer advice and guidance. Please contact the campaigns team with any questions.

Good luck with your campaign!

Dan Scorer

Senior campaigns and policy manager

“As someone with a learning disability, I think social care services being cut to save money is a load of rubbish. At the end of the day, it is us who need the care, not them. Writing a letter to your council or local MP will make them realise that it's not OK to keep cutting funding. You could get together with other people and organise a demonstration outside your local council building or even 10 Downing Street. You can get in touch with the Mencap campaigns office to find out what else you can do.



“When you start to get results, like a letter back from your MP, it can make you feel proud that you have done something. I received a letter from my MP, saying that he was going to take up my request about public transport services with the local authorities. The more involved you get, the more you can get out of it. You could even get to meet famous people!”

Joe Stonard

Mencap campaigner

About cuts and social care



Social care services are designed to help people be independent and healthy

What are social care services?

Social care services are the care and support provided by the local authority to an individual, to help them to be independent and healthy throughout their life. They focus on helping people with day-to-day tasks like getting out of bed, cooking a meal, shopping, caring for a family, having a shower and getting around.

The care and support system includes a wide range of services, such as home adaptations, housing support services, transport, day care, care homes and support for carers.

What are local authorities?

Local authorities are a type of local government. They are also known as councils.

When we refer to a local authority in this booklet, we are talking about the local authority that is in charge of social care in your area. These local authorities are usually county councils, unitary authorities or London boroughs.

Make sure you are targeting the local authority that is responsible for social care before you begin campaigning. You can check this by visiting the local government section of www.direct.gov.uk

Why are services being cut?

Over the last ten years, local authorities have been given a greater role in deciding what social care services people with a learning disability are entitled to. This has meant they have gained greater authority to cut services.

There are a number of reasons why local authorities are cutting social care services.

Some local authorities are cutting services to replace them with better ones, as part of the modernisation of adult social care in their area. These local authorities have made the tough decision to change and cut the services that they deem to be outdated or even institutionalised, and have put in place new and improved services to provide a higher standard of care.

However, not all local authorities are cutting services for good reasons.

Many local authorities are cutting services to save money. Even though funding for learning disability services has increased, it is still not sufficient – because the costs of providing services are rising, the number of people with a learning disability is increasing and, in general, local authorities have less money to spend on services. This means local authorities are looking for ways to save money, including cutting services and reducing the number of people who receive them.

Some local authorities are working hard to minimise the impact of spending cuts on social care services, but Mencap is aware of some that are choosing to cut services so they can spend the money on other things, such as collecting rubbish or road improvements, because they do not believe the needs of people with a learning disability are important.

Social care and human rights

For many adults with a learning disability, the violation of their human rights is seen as a normal part of their everyday lives. The lack of respect for the human rights of people with a learning disability is rooted, in large part, in a lack of funding for the services and support that are needed to ensure that they have the same opportunities and choices as other citizens.

The current funding crisis in adult social care directly threatens the success of the government policy on independent living, the stability of the social care system, and the human rights of people with a learning disability.

The care and support system needs to actively promote human rights for people with a learning disability by offering genuine respect for individuals' choices and real protection against potential abuse.

How and why cuts are made



Many people rely on social care services for support with everyday tasks

Cuts to social care services are made in a number of ways, and local authorities are using a range of tactics to minimise the public attention they receive.

Eligibility criteria

What are eligibility criteria?

Local authorities decide who is allowed a social care service. They use eligibility criteria, based on each individual's needs, to work out who is entitled and what services they can receive. They look at the individual's independence, health, safety and wellbeing. After an assessment, they put people into one of the following groups:

1. **Critical** People whose lives would be at risk if they do not have support are classed as having critical needs.
2. **Substantial** People who cannot look after themselves or their health without support are classed as having substantial needs.
3. **Moderate** People who need support to do many things and to keep safe and healthy are classed as having moderate needs.
4. **Low** People who are quite independent if they have some support are classed as having low needs.

Local authorities are changing their eligibility criteria

Local authorities say they do not have enough money to meet everyone's needs and have to limit the number of people entitled to receive a social care service as a result.

Most local authorities do not fund services for people with moderate or low needs and some no longer fund services for people with substantial needs. These cuts put people's health and wellbeing at risk.

Challenge the changes to eligibility criteria

Local authorities must be reasonable. Decisions must be based on an individual's need and not on how much money the local authority has to spend.

When a local authority changes its eligibility criteria, it must give people a new assessment. It must also hold a public consultation.

If a local authority does not have enough staff or facilities to continue a service, the council must try to find another service for individuals who are affected by this.

What you can do

First, you must do your research. It is important to understand what decisions have been made and why. Find out how to do this on page 11.

Some local groups have successfully campaigned against local authorities that have tightened eligibility criteria to save money.

Charging

Charging for services is another way of making cuts to social care. When local authorities charge for services that used to be free, Mencap believes they are making cuts, because the individual has to pay the costs if they don't want to lose the service. Some individuals who had to pay for services in the past believe that any increases to these charges are also cuts.

Local authorities decide who will be charged and how much. All local authorities introducing charges, or increasing current charges, are required to hold a public consultation. Charging should be fair, transparent and in accordance with the government's guidelines.

Who can be charged?

Local authorities can only charge people with a learning disability if they have sufficient income or capital assets. Charging policies vary considerably across the country and it is common for people to pay different rates for identical services, depending on where they live. This is what is often known as a postcode lottery.

Local authorities have to assess each individual to make sure that anyone who pays charges has enough money left to live their life. The mobility component of Disability Living Allowance and money from paid employment cannot be included as an income. Local authorities have to bear in mind the added expenses that are a result of an individual's disability. Local authorities can only charge the individual, not their family.

What happens if you are unable to pay?

If you are being charged for an assessed need, the local authority cannot withdraw the service if you are not able to pay. However, it could choose to take you to court to claim charges.

Mencap recommends that you ask for information on the charging criteria and how to stop the charges if you think you should not be paying for services. You can also ask for advocacy support from your local authority. Alternatively, you could appeal against the decision, following the appeals process. If you go through the appeals process and the local authority continues to charge, it may be necessary to seek legal advice or complain to the local government ombudsman.

Services that can incur charges

- Residential care
- Home care services such as cooking, cleaning and personal hygiene
- Day care
- Transport

Free services

- Services under the Mental Health Act
- Intermediate care services
- Community equipment and minor adaptations to equipment
- Advice about services
- Advocacy

“My son has a learning disability and needs a high level of social care.

“Our local authority decided to introduce charges for some of my son's services, which he could not afford. He faced losing all of his care services as a result. This was an extremely upsetting time for him.

“We knew that the local authority was in the wrong. We were determined to make them change their minds, and began a campaign. Gentle and kind persistence paid off and the local authority has stopped charging my son for his services.”

Michael Bennett

What you can do

You must understand what has happened and whether the local authority has acted correctly. Get a clear understanding of the reasons for the decisions by asking for a hard copy of the charging policy. Find out how to do your research on page 11.

Local groups have campaigned against charging because people with a learning disability often have to drop out of the services they receive because they cannot cover the costs. For tips on campaigning, go to page 10.

Day centres

In the last few years, the government has encouraged local authorities to modernise adult day care services because many were outdated or institutionalised. Local authorities have started to take people with a learning disability out of day centres and involve them in community-based services, including those providing education and training.

The government's guidelines state that local authorities must have alternative services in place and undertake public consultations before they cut any day care service.

Mencap is generally supportive of the modernisation of day services based on person-centred care. However, we are worried that many

day services are being closed prematurely when no robust alternative is in place, leaving many people with a learning disability at home with nothing to do. Mencap is also concerned that some local authorities are not consulting with service users, families and staff on proposed cuts.

What you can do

Before you begin any campaign on a cut to day services, including the closure of a day centre, you must find out exactly what is going on.

Contact your local authority and ask them to give you the reasons behind their decision to cut the service. Find out which services are going to replace the day centre. If the local authority has failed to put plans in place, this could form a major part of your campaign. It is also useful to find out if the local authority has held a public consultation, or if it plans to hold one, because this is a major requirement and could form part of your campaign.

Residential care homes

Like day care services, residential care homes have seen a push towards modernisation. Since the Community Care Act came into force in the 1990s, residential care for people with a learning disability has changed substantially. There has been a movement away from institutionalised care homes with large numbers of residents towards small care homes in the community. The government has

“Mencap is very much aware that, in these difficult financial times, spending cuts are necessary for all local authorities, but we do not think it is right that the most vulnerable children and adults bear the brunt of service cuts.

“Having meaningful and good-quality care should not be seen as a luxury. It is essential to people's wellbeing, therefore it should be a human right to be able to access good-quality services.”

Tatu Delaney

Mencap regional campaigns officer



Changes to care homes have a big impact on people's lives

made it clear that local authorities must have alternative plans in place before closing a residential home or relocating any resident.

Local authorities also have to be proactive about seeking and considering the views of residents and their families when deciding where to relocate them. They are expected to hold a public consultation on any closures and should work closely with the local partnership board to evaluate the best plans to put in place. The local partnership board is a group of people who work with local authorities to represent the views of people with a learning disability, their families and carers, and voluntary organisations.

Many local authorities have closed residential care homes to make way for new and improved services. However, some have used unfair tactics to close a care home and failed to listen to what residents and their families want.

What you can do

Find out why the residential home is being closed or an individual is being relocated. When is the planned date for closure? Where are the individuals being relocated to? Has the local authority held a consultation? Is the council acting fairly?

Mencap strongly recommends that you contact the

local social services department to find answers to these questions and talk through the process. If you believe that the local authority's plans are wrong for an individual, it is important that you tell the local authority as it may not be aware of specific problems.

Other cuts

Eligibility criteria, charging and cuts to day centres and residential care homes are not the only examples of how local authorities have cut adult social care services for people with a learning disability.

Many individuals and families have told Mencap about a wide range of social care cuts, including cuts to home care assistance, respite care services and specialist services such as dieticians and chiropodists. All these cuts can have a huge impact on an individual's life, limiting their choices and independence.

What you can do

As for the other types of social care cuts, it is incredibly important to do your research. You must know as much as possible about what is happening and why. This knowledge can help a campaign succeed.

Campaigning tips

Introduction

There is no right way to campaign! Each campaign is different and you will find some campaigning tools more successful than others.

Look through this booklet and think about what suits your campaign. The tips and advice we have included have been pulled together from the campaigns and experiences of local groups across England.

Mencap's regional campaigns officers (RCOs) and campaigns team are here to discuss your plan and help you pick the right campaigning tools for your campaign.

Campaign resources

As well as this booklet, Mencap has produced a selection of campaign resources, including fact sheets on consultations and cuts-specific campaign guides, which can be found on the Mencap website at **www.mencap.org.uk/know-your-rights**

For more information, contact your RCO or Mencap's campaigns team. You can find all our RCOs' contact details at the end of this booklet and on our website at

www.mencap.org.uk/campaigns/take-action/dont-cut-us-out/campaigns-your-area

Local and national cuts campaigns

Cuts to social care happen across England because there is not enough money in the social care system. Mencap is campaigning nationally to fight for more money to be put into social care for people with a learning disability. We are challenging the government and local authorities, but we need your help. Without knowing what is happening at a local level, we can't keep up the pressure.

Get in touch. Tell us what is happening in your area and what you are doing to campaign against this.

If we know what is happening across England, we can show the government patterns of social care cuts and demand immediate changes.

Contact Mencap's campaigns team:

Write to: **Mencap campaigns team**
123 Golden Lane
London EC1Y 0RT

Call: **020 7696 5462**

Email: **campaigns@mencap.org.uk**



Ask your friends and family to help you campaign

Before you begin your campaign

You must know as much as possible about what is going on before you begin campaigning.

What you can do

Contact your local authority's social services department and ask for information on the proposed changes or cuts.

If necessary, meet face-to-face with social care staff and ask them as many questions as possible.

Speak to other service users, families, carers and staff to see if they have more information.

Contact your local partnership board or local involvement networks (LINKs) to find out if they have been involved in making decisions and what their opinion is on the matter – they may be able to help you with your campaign. Your social services department can tell you how to contact your local partnership board or LINKs.

Search the internet for public records on meetings and decisions made by the council. You can also ask the local authority to provide this information.

Ask the local authority to give you a hard copy of its social care policy for service cuts. You can use this to find out if the local authority has failed to follow its own policy.

Research other local campaigns about similar situations for tips and ideas.

What to look out for

Has the local authority made any final decisions or is it still considering the options?

What was the background to the decision? Why has the local authority decided to cut the service? Is the local authority looking to improve the current service or cutting services to save money?

What are the important dates (for example, dates of meetings, deadlines for consultations, timescales for the proposed cuts to take place)?

Have any consultations taken place?

If yes, what were the findings?

If no, are any consultations still open or taking place?

What to think about when you have the information

Is the proposed change going to benefit the service user, or will it have a negative effect on their life?

Who will be affected by the cut and how?

Has the local authority been fair, reasonable and transparent in the actions it has taken?

Mencap can help

Mencap can help you find out what is going on. RCOs and the campaigns team can offer you guidance and support. We can also help you find out who you need to contact and how to do this.

Once you know as much as possible about what has happened and why, you will be able to inform and influence key decision-makers on the matter and have a greater chance of campaign success. If you believe that the local authority is still wrong in making the cuts, now is the time to begin your campaign.

Dealing with the local authority

The local authority is the body that makes the decision to cut a service. This means that your campaign should be about changing the decisions and plans made by the local authority. Most successful campaigns have been by local groups that have used campaign tools that targeted local authorities.

Who do I speak to in the local authority?

Each local authority has a department that deals with social care services, usually called the social services department. This is the department you should target. First, contact the head of adult social services, who often makes the final decisions.

Remember that local authorities generally want to help people and are happy to talk to the public. Being friendly and respectful to staff will help your campaign.

How do I find out what is going on?

Before you start campaigning, you must do your research to find out what the local authority is planning to do.

Contact the head of adult social services at your local authority and ask for information. The best way to do this is to write them a letter. There is an example letter on page 15.

If you do not get a reply within two weeks, call the office to find out whether they have received your letter.

The local authority may telephone you to discuss their plans. If they do, make sure that they write a letter confirming what they said on the phone. You may wish to show this to other campaigners, journalists or your MP.

Who else should I contact?

Get in touch with your local partnership board, which should be involved in making decisions on cuts. These boards have access to information that you may not have, so they are a great starting place when you are trying to find out what your local authority is planning.

In some areas, partnership boards have been ignored by the local authority and have joined with local groups to campaign against the cuts or other changes to services.

Mencap can help you deal with the local authority.

Our RCOs will know or can find out who to contact in your local authority. They will also be able to:

- guide you through your campaign
- give you support along the way
- put you in contact with other organisations
- help you with your research.

How do we lobby the local authority?

You can contact the local authority directly to tell them about your campaign and try to get them to change their plans. The best ways of contacting them include writing letters and meeting with officials.

Write to the local authority

You can write to the local authority on behalf of the campaign or as an individual.

Your letter must include:

- why you are writing
- opinion on the cut or change to a service
- what you want the local authority to do (the objective of your campaign)
- details of future public meetings (if any) (see page 18)
- contact details of the main campaigners
- any information you have collected
- information about any publicity stunt you are planning (see page 24).

You may wish to create a template letter and ask other campaigners to send it. If you can get a lot of people to send this letter, the local authority will see there is a lot of support for your campaign and

will be more likely to pay attention.

Meeting with the local authority's social services department

You may prefer to meet the local authority and discuss the plans face-to-face. Try to meet with the head of adult social care or other people with a senior post in the department as they will be able to give more answers to your questions.

You can visit them at the local authority with a small group of other campaigners or invite them to a meeting. Either way, make sure you give them plenty of notice and all the details of the meeting. You should tell the person you are meeting how many people will be attending the meeting and whether you are inviting any journalists.

If you are having trouble getting someone at the local authority to meet with you, you may wish to contact your MP or local press to encourage the local authority to attend. This would also raise publicity for the meeting.

After the meeting, you may wish to write to the local authority to remind them of what was discussed and anything you have asked them to do.

Do not be surprised if you have to have more than one meeting. Local authorities have a policy to follow and may have to go away and seek advice before they can give you answers to your questions.

The rest of this section suggests some other ways of campaigning, which you can do as well as talking directly to the council.

“The community-based adviser and I were contacted by a group of service users and carers who were concerned about the council’s policy on care for non-residential day services. We set up a meeting and were able to advise them of their rights in respect of the fairer charging guidelines and the requirements they place on the local authority.

“They quickly formed a local campaign network and, supported by Mencap staff, began to lobby and challenge councillors and senior council officers. At present, five families have formally entered the local authority’s complaints procedure and are considering possible legal action.

“This is just one example of how people can take action when they have the right information and support and are prepared to campaign. There is now a committed group of campaigners in the area willing to stand up and be counted.”

Tony Johnson

Mencap RCO



Put your opinions in a letter to the local authority

An example letter to the council. This is not based on a real case.

Head of adult social services
Essex County Council
County Hall
Market Road
Chelmsford
CM1 1QH

12 March 2012

Dear Sir

I am writing to you about the proposed cuts to adult social care services for people with a learning disability in the area.

It has come to my attention that Essex County Council is planning to close the Roman Adult Day Care Centre in Colchester. I am deeply concerned about the proposals I have heard and hope that you can inform me of the facts of the case.

I would be grateful if you would share with me the council's plans for Roman Adult Day Care Centre. If you are planning to cut the service, please also let me know what alternative plans and services the council intends to put in place for the people who currently attend the day centre.

I would also like to know whether the council intends to carry out a public consultation on the proposals. If so, I would be grateful if you would give me the deadlines for this consultation.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully



A. Name (example name)

Getting your MP involved

You may wish to get your member of parliament (MP) to help your campaign as they may be able to put pressure on the council to change its decision. The first thing to do is to contact your MP and tell them about your campaign.

Write to your MP

The best way to contact your MP is to write to them. All MPs have the same address:

[Name] MP

House of Commons

Westminster

London SW1A 0AA

In your letter, introduce yourself and explain why you are campaigning on the issue. For example, tell your MP if the cut affects you, your friend or a member of your family.

If you do not know who your MP is, you can find out by entering your postcode on the <http://findyourmp.parliament.uk> website.

Tell your MP:

- what is happening
- where it is happening
- when it will happen
- who will be affected
- why it matters
- what you want your MP to do.

Ask your MP to contact you and let you know what he or she has done about it.

Remember to keep your letter short and to the point. MPs receive lots of letters daily and do not have much time to read and respond to them.

Enclose any information that you feel would help them understand your campaign – for example, a newspaper article, a letter from the council, a leaflet or even a copy of a petition.

MPs are supposed to reply to every letter they receive. If you do not get a reply, write again and remind them that you have already written.

Meet your MP

Your RCO at Mencap can help you get in touch with or arrange to meet your MP. If you do not get a response from your MP, contact your RCO or the campaigns team, who will be happy to help.

It might be useful to meet your MP to discuss your campaign. You should contact their office to arrange a meeting – do not turn up to your MP's office without an appointment as this will give a bad impression of your campaign.

Once you have arranged your meeting, make sure you prepare for it. This will make the meeting as productive as possible. Send your MP all the information you have before your meeting, so they understand your campaign.

“There is no substitute for local campaigning – it’s the most effective and immediate way to try to make improvements to our local communities. That’s why I rely on residents in my constituency to make me aware of the issues that matter most in their neighbourhoods. I’ll always do my best to respond effectively, because that’s the very cornerstone of local democracy. That is why local campaigns – to improve the lives of the people I work for – are such an important part of my work as an MP.” **Robert Buckland MP**

Make sure you know exactly what you want to ask your MP and what you want them to do for the campaign.

It can be good for MPs when members of the public hear about them helping people, so a meeting could be a good chance for you to get your campaign in the press.

You could ask your MP to visit you and other campaigners in the constituency. You may wish to invite your MP to visit the service that is being cut and meet people who use it. Take a camera with you and take photographs of the MP and other people who attend the meeting. You could use these photographs throughout your campaign, or give them to the local newspaper to use.

After meeting your MP, write to them again, thanking them for their time and reminding them what they said they would do for you. You may wish to tell your MP about future meetings and events that you have organised, and update them on any developments.

Other ways to involve your MP

There are many other ways to get your MP involved in your campaign:

You can ask your MP to meet with the council to represent your views and find out exactly what is going on. As this will attract attention from your local media, you should speak to your MP about organising press coverage. For example, ask your MP if they will be sending out a press release or inviting a journalist to the meeting.

Remember to invite your MP to any meeting or event that you organise. If he or she is able to attend, they will learn more about the campaign as well as attracting more media coverage. MPs are extremely busy, so give them plenty of notice before any event and provide them with as much information as possible.

MPs can raise local issues in parliament, through debates and parliamentary questions. If your MP is interested in raising the issue of cuts to social services in parliament, Mencap's parliamentary team can give you some guidance.



Meet with your MP and voice your concerns

Campaigning against cuts to social care forms part of Mencap's wider social care campaign. Mencap's parliamentary team is working to build support among MPs to campaign for more funding for the social care system, as well as raising the profile of current failures in the system.

If you get your MP involved, we would like to know what happens and how they help your campaign. This will provide valuable information for our parliamentary team and help them find MPs who want to do more for Mencap.

Contact Mencap's parliamentary team by emailing campaigns@mencap.org.uk or calling **020 7696 5613**.

Holding a public meeting

It can be a good idea to have a meeting to get together with everyone who is interested in your campaign. It is easier and quicker to speak to everyone at the same time.

Public meetings are useful if:

- you do not have much money to spend on things like websites, flyers and leaflets
- you do not have much time before the decision will be made
- you know that lots of people will be interested in what you want to campaign about.

Preparing for your meeting

Make sure everyone knows about the meeting and people with a learning disability can take part. You could make a poster to tell people about it. The poster should say what the meeting is about, where it will happen and the date and time of the meeting.

Hold the meeting in a place that everyone can get to. Make sure the building is accessible.

Choose someone to be in charge of the meeting. The person in charge is usually called the chair. This can be someone who knows a lot about the campaign or someone who is good at timekeeping and making sure everyone gets their say.

You could invite someone to speak at the meeting. It is best if this is someone who knows a lot about the issue. You may wish to invite a member of the council to share the local authority's opinion on the cuts.

If you have a petition or other useful information about your campaign, bring it along.

How Mencap can help

The first thing you should do is speak to your RCO at Mencap. They can help you to organise your meeting, including arranging speakers, inviting guests, finding a venue and publicising the event. They will also be able to help you to work with the



Your RCO can help you arrange a meeting

press and organise photographs of the meeting, which you can use afterwards.

Contact members of your regional committee and invite them to your meeting. You may wish to ask them to speak at the meeting. If so, make sure they are properly prepared for the event.

Remember to tell Mencap's campaigns team about your meeting as they may also be able to help – for example, by providing posters, banners and presentations. If you have time before your meeting, you may wish to ask the campaigns team to advertise the event using Mencap's internal communications.

Email campaigns@mencap.org.uk

or call **020 7696 5462**.

Making the most of your meeting

You need someone, other than the chair, to write notes about what happens at the meeting.

This will help everyone remember what was said and decided.

If you want people such as local councillors or MPs to know about your campaign, make sure you invite them to the meeting. Your RCO can help you with this.

If you want to use newspapers, radio and television to tell people about the campaign, invite journalists to the meeting. Ask them well before the meeting date, especially if you want them to send a photographer.

If you think another meeting would be a good idea, arrange a date for this before the meeting ends.

During the meeting, decide exactly what you are asking for. Does everyone agree? To make the campaign work well, you should agree about what you want.



Working with the media

Using the media, including newspapers, television and radio, is an important part of campaigning. It is one of the best and cheapest ways to make sure everyone hears about your campaign. There are a number of things you can do to get the media interested in your campaign.

Write your own press release

A press release is the story you send to the media to tell them about your campaign.

A press release should be short, clear and get the message across quickly.

When you write a press release, you need to put the most important information first. You can do this by including the following in the first paragraph:

- What is happening?
- Why is it happening?
- When is it happening?
- Where is it happening?
- Who is involved?

Expand on these points in each paragraph and include a short quote from someone who is

closely involved in your campaign, such as someone who uses the service, a family member or an important person like your MP. Make sure you have permission to use their quote.

Use simple language and avoid long, complicated words and sentences.

Most importantly, make sure you include your contact details and the date so the journalist knows that the story is new, and who to call for more information.

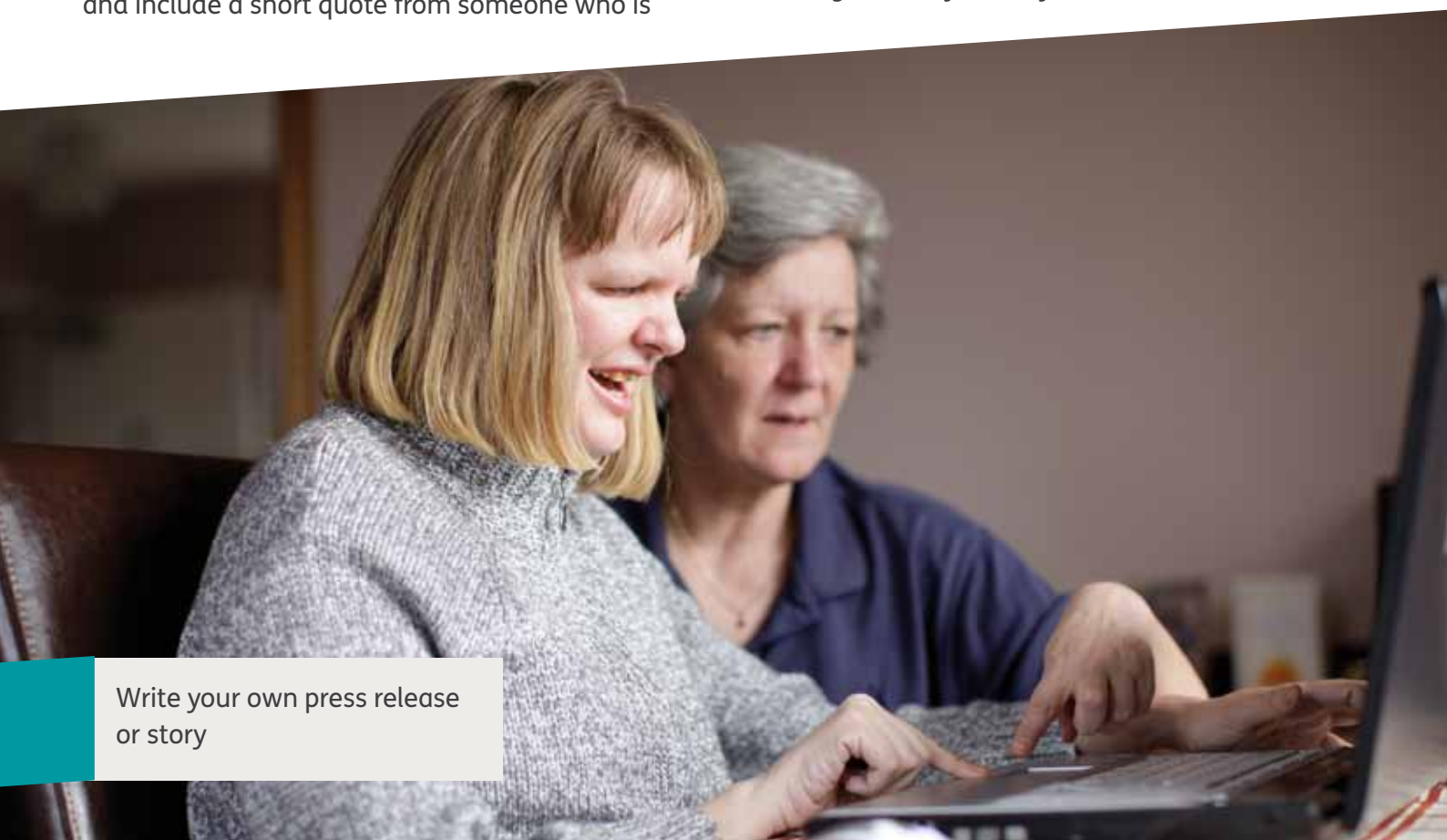
What makes a good story?

Journalists like something new and interesting to write about.

Stories about local people work well. Any personal stories you use must be good examples of the points you want to make in your campaign.

If you get an important person involved in the campaign, such as your MP or a local celebrity, you are more likely to get media coverage.

A story has to be relevant to its audience, so use local facts in your press release if you can. For example, mention how many people with a learning disability live in your area.

A photograph of two women sitting at a desk, looking at a laptop screen. The woman in the foreground has blonde hair and is wearing a grey sweater. The woman behind her has grey hair and is wearing a blue shirt. They are both pointing at the screen, which is partially visible on the right side of the frame.

Write your own press release or story

If you want the media to take an interest in your story, you should:

- link your story to something that is happening nationally or something that another organisation is doing
- get your timing right – for example, write letters to local newspapers when a new law comes in or when your local council makes changes that affect your campaign
- offer to talk to local radio about your campaign – for example, you could talk about a demonstration you will be holding or a petition you have organised.

Photographs

Almost every newspaper page will have a photograph. Space is often allocated to stories based on the quality of the photograph rather than the words. Strong pictures are likely to encourage editors to feature your story.

If you are planning to use photographs with your press release, remember to get permission from the people who are in them.

Journalists usually receive photographs by email, as digital images. These images are large, so it is best not to send them at the same time as the press release. Instead, write in the press release that photographs are available; if the newspaper is keen to use them, they will contact you.

Who to contact

In most areas, there are daily and weekly local newspapers, local independent radio stations and regional BBC radio and television stations.

It is worth reading, watching and listening to your local media to see which topics they are particularly interested in and the kinds of articles or programmes they focus most attention on.

When to contact the media

To increase your chances of getting coverage, you will need to target the right media at the right time.

Weekly newspapers

These are the free weekly newspapers delivered in different towns across the country. They are great newspapers to target as they are most likely to cover your story and they tend to have big circulations.

It is best to contact the newspaper on the day it is published, or the day after. For example, if your weekly newspaper is published on a Wednesday, it is best to get in touch on a Wednesday or Thursday for the following week's issue.

Daily newspapers

Any publication that people pay for is much harder to get coverage in than a free publication, so you will need to think innovatively to get coverage. This might involve offering them an exclusive on your story.

Radio

Radio is a great way to gain exposure – so make sure the journalist knows you are happy to give interviews about your story.

You should contact your radio station at least 24 hours before you would like your story to be on air.

Television

For television coverage, you must make sure your story has a visual element that the journalist will be able to film.

Ideally, you should get in touch a week before you would like your story to be covered, or at least two or three days before.

Monthly magazines

Aim to contact magazines at least three months before the publishing date.

Sending your press release out to the local media

You can find the contact details for your local newspapers at **www.mysociety.org** or in your local telephone directory.

If you don't have a particular person in mind, call the publication and ask to speak to the news desk. Explain why you are calling and then ask for an email address, postal address or fax number so you can send your press release through. Journalists tend to prefer to receive press releases by email.

After you have sent the press release, call the journalist. Check they have received it and ask if they would like any more information.

Preparing for media interviews

Find out as much as you can about the interview.

- Where will it be?
- Who will ask the questions?
- What might the questions be?
- If it is for television or radio, will it be a live interview or recorded for use later?
- Are they interviewing anyone else, such as someone from your local council?

Be prepared. Think about the three main points you want to make.

It is a good idea to make a note of the types of question you think the journalist might ask, and practise some answers before you have the interview.

This guide is for local groups only

If you work for Royal Mencap Society, Mencap's PR team will liaise with the media on your behalf. If you are a member of a local group and need more support with press work, you can also contact Mencap's PR team.

Call: **020 7696 5414**

Email: **media@mencap.org.uk**



Use the media to help your campaign

Demonstrations and publicity stunts

A demonstration or publicity stunt can be a good way to show how many people support your campaign. It can take a long time to organise a demonstration, so it is important to decide if it would help your campaign. Speak to your RCO if you are unsure.

You will need lots of people to join in the demonstration to make sure it has a big impact. Make sure everyone knows when and where it will be. Talk to the media before the demonstration so they can send people to write about it and take photographs.

Demonstrations can include handing leaflets to people in a shopping centre, holding a rally outside the town hall or an organised march down the high street.

A publicity stunt is when you do something that gets people's attention, like releasing lots of balloons. It will probably mean you get into newspapers or on television. Talk to the media before the event so they can send journalists to write about it and take photographs.

What to think about before you start

Ultimately, it will be your local group that is responsible for the event, so you must be well prepared. Speak to your Mencap RCO as demonstrations and publicity stunts can be difficult to organise. Your RCO can help you publicise the event and provide guidance along the way.

Tell Mencap's campaigns department about your plans. You may wish to ask them for help with inviting important people, including MPs, and increasing media attention.

Think through the event in advance. How will it work? What time must people arrive? Who will talk to people who want to know what is going on?

Who is bringing things like banners and other props, and how will they get them there?

What might go wrong and how will you deal with that?

Remember to be creative and keep it simple.

Street stalls

Street stalls are a great way of attracting attention as well as communicating with potential supporters. Good places include shopping centres, railway stations and football stadiums. It is a good idea to set up a stall where a large number of people will walk past and see you.

Check with the people who are in charge of the public place, or the local police, to make sure you have permission to be there. Be careful not to drop litter where you have your stand as this can give people a bad impression of your campaign.

Street stalls provide a good opportunity to get signatures for a petition, attract media coverage and find people who may wish to join and help the campaign. It is important to be as visible as possible. You may wish to use posters, balloons or a gimmick, such as fancy dress, to attract people's attention. This can be done on the smallest of campaign budgets. Make sure you have petitions and information ready so you can talk to people. People will want to talk to you, so you should be fully prepared.



Use a petition to get the public involved

Organising a petition

A petition is a list of the names of people who support your campaign. It is a way of getting the public involved and showing how many people support the campaign. Anyone can sign a petition, not just people who are working on your campaign.

By signing a petition, people who want to help but do not have time or money to give to the campaign can still show their support.

Designing the petition

A well-designed petition will get more signatures. A petition should start with a short title or headline summarising the campaign. Catchy headlines can attract attention.

Under the headline you should include a statement that gives more information about the campaign. Make sure you say what the petition is supporting, for example 'We want Golden Lane Council to stop

its plan to cut all day services. Please sign our petition.' This must be short and easy to understand. Finally, under the statement you need to allow space for people to write or type their name, address and email address. There is an example of a petition on page 27.

People do not have to give their address or email address. However, your local authority may want to contact anyone who signs the petition to confirm that they intended to sign it. This is why you must include a data protection statement on each sheet of your petition. There is an example data protection statement on page 27. Do not be put off by this, as most people who sign petitions understand that you will be presenting it to the people you are lobbying.

If you want more information about data protection or other aspects of petitions, contact your Mencap RCO or the campaigns team.

Getting people to sign your petition

Try to get as many people as possible to sign your petition. There are a number of ways that local groups have got people to sign their petitions in the past.

Make your petition widely available

Petitions that are widely available get a lot of signatures.

As well as asking people to sign a printed petition, you could put your petition on a website, or send it to people by email. Online petitions are becoming very popular because it is very quick for people to add their name.

Go to the public with your petition

You may want to go to a public place where you can get lots of signatures for your petition. Good public places include shopping centres, football stadiums and train stations. Be prepared for questions about the campaign; people like to know why they are signing a petition.

Take your petition everywhere with you

Get all campaigners to take the petition everywhere they go. Remember to take your petition to public meetings or events that you organise. Use every opportunity to tell people about your petition and ask them to sign it.

Advertise your petition in the media

Tell the press about your petition. They may write a story about how you are seeking signatures and advertise how to sign the petition.

What to do with your petition

Once you have got your petition signed, you can send copies of it to your local authority, as they make the decisions to cut services.

It is best not to send your petition to the local authority if you have not managed to get many signatures. Collecting signatures can take time, so be patient and wait until you have collected a large number before presenting the petition to the local authority.

If you have a lot of signatures, you may wish to send copies to your MP, who may decide to raise the matter with the government because of the amount of support. You should also contact your local media to let them know how many signatures you got.

Finally, **make sure you keep a copy of the petition**, in case the local authority loses its copy, or you want to contact the people who signed it at a later date.

Mencap's campaigns team is here to help and can give you more tips on designing your petition and getting signatures.

Please also let us know what happens after you present your petition. We want to know what works well (and what doesn't) so we can help other local groups.

Email campaigns@mencap.org.uk or call 020 7696 5462.

An example petition to the council.

Don't cut us out!

Golden Lane Council plans to cut all day services for people with a learning disability. If the local authority cuts all day care services, lots of people will find themselves very isolated from their community. People with a learning disability have the right to be part of the community and to participate in meaningful and engaging activities during the day.

Please sign our petition to call for Golden Lane Council to stop its plan to cut all day services!

Name	Address (including postcode)	Email

By signing this petition, you are publicly expressing your support for the campaign, and agreeing to the sharing of your personal information with Golden Lane Council and other stakeholders for the purpose of this campaign. They may wish to contact you regarding the campaign.

You are also giving consent to Mencap to contact you about this campaign and any of its other work. If you do not wish to be contacted by Mencap about any of its other campaigns or work, please contact us.

Posters and leaflets

Posters and leaflets are a good way to get important information to a lot of people. They are useful if you are trying to get people to support a petition or to publicise a meeting.

Start by talking to your RCO, who can give you guidance. Mencap's campaigns team can give you some examples of good posters and leaflets that you can use.

Posters

A good poster has a small amount of important information. It tells people:

- what you are campaigning about
- how it affects the people you are campaigning for
- how they can get more information and get involved.

Good posters have a campaign name or headline that grabs people's attention.

Use pictures to tell a story and colours to attract attention.

You should think about where the posters are going to go and how many you will be putting up. You will waste campaign funds if you produce too many.



Leaflets

Leaflets give you the opportunity to provide people with more information on your campaign.

A leaflet should:

- be short and easy to read
- tell people about your campaign
- tell people what you want
- tell people how they can get involved
- tell people who produced the information.

You may wish to use photographs and real stories to help people understand the problem. A good campaign name or headline on the leaflet can grab people's attention. Make it clear who is running the campaign and give contact details so people can get more information or get involved.



E-campaigning

Campaigning, like everything else, has found success on the internet. Local groups and Mencap have used websites, social networking sites and emails to reach a wider audience.

E-campaigning sounds harder than it really is, and can be very effective for campaigns that do not have much money. Mencap's RCOs and campaigns team can offer valuable advice and support if you want to take part in e-campaigning. They will also be able to show you where to begin and give you examples where e-campaigning has worked well.

Websites

Websites can be a great way to raise the profile of your campaign and get more supporters. Websites can be costly and difficult to manage, but when done well they have a huge impact on a campaign.

Before you set up a website, do your research. Speak to other local groups that have a website, discuss your plans with your RCO, and find websites that you would like to use as a model. Go to www.mencap.org.uk to see how a website could look.

Social networking

Social networking sites are websites run by other companies that allow the general public to use them for free. These include Facebook, Bebo, MySpace and Twitter.

Some social networking sites allow you to set up webpages on the site to promote a campaign or issue. One great example of this is Mencap's presence on Facebook. These webpages allow you to find supporters and communicate with them on a regular basis. For example, you can use them to invite people to a public meeting, to ask people to write to your MP, or to fundraise for the local group. A major benefit with social networking sites is that they are normally free.

Emails

Emails are a great way to contact supporters and the general public without spending money on postage. They also allow you to reach an audience very quickly. Local groups have used emails to advertise meetings and publicity events. They have also used emails to get individuals to contact their local council to highlight a campaign.

You can collect email addresses on petitions, at meetings or by promoting your own email address on leaflets and posters. You will need to access your email account on a daily basis.

Remember that not everyone has access to the internet. E-campaigning should be carried out alongside other campaigning.

Telling Mencap about your campaign

Your campaign forms part of Mencap's national campaign to improve social care services for people with a learning disability.

Mencap lobbies the government to make improvements to social care services. We are taking every opportunity to tell the government about any wrongdoings and highlight the problems faced by those who use services.

This is where we need your help!

If we don't know about cuts in your area, Mencap is missing out on great opportunities to show the government that the current system is failing in some places.

We need you to tell us what is happening in your area so we can spot patterns in cuts to social care. It also means we can highlight examples of failures at all levels of the government.

The examples we have of cuts to social care allow us to show the government that there is a strong link between the lack of funding and cuts to social care services.

Was your campaign successful?

This booklet highlights some of the campaigning tools used by local groups in the fight against social care cuts.

Mencap would like to know how your campaign went and which campaigning tools you used. Knowing about successes and failures of local campaigns allow RCOs and the campaigns team to give better support and guidance to other local groups. You can contact the campaigns team through your RCO or directly.

Write to: **Mencap campaigns team**
123 Golden Lane
London EC1Y 0RT

Call: **020 7696 5462**

Email: **campaigns@mencap.org.uk**

Find your Mencap RCO

North West

Blackburn
Blackpool
Bolton
Bury
Cumbria
Lancashire
Manchester
Oldham
Rochdale
Salford
Stockport
Tameside
Trafford
Wigan
Contact number: 07958 127 889

Calderdale
Cheshire East
Cheshire West and Chester
Halton
Kirklees
Knowsley
Liverpool
Rotherham
Sefton
Sheffield
St Helens
Warrington
Wirral
Contact number: 07957 714 560

North East

Darlington
Durham
Gateshead
Hartlepool
Middlesbrough
Newcastle
North Tyneside
Northumberland
Redcar and Cleveland
South Tyneside
Stockton
Sunderland
Contact number: 07930 399 283

Barnsley
Bradford
Doncaster
East Riding
Hull
Leeds
North East Lincolnshire
North Yorkshire
Wakefield
York
Contact number: 07717 702 112

West

Birmingham and Solihull
Black Country
Coventry and Warwickshire
Herefordshire
Shropshire and Telford
Staffordshire and Stoke
Telford and Wrekin
Worcestershire
Contact number: 07881 917 843

Bristol
Cornwall
Devon
Dorset
Gloucestershire
Somerset
South Gloucestershire
Wiltshire
Contact number: 07946 607 559

East

Derbyshire and Rutland
Leicestershire
Lincolnshire
Northamptonshire
Nottinghamshire
Contact number: 07984 630 004

Bedfordshire
Cambridge
Central Bedfordshire
Essex
Hertfordshire
Luton

Norfolk
Peterborough
Southend-on-Sea
Suffolk
Thurrock
Contact number: 07960 453 592

South

Berkshire
Bracknall Forest
Buckinghamshire
Oxfordshire
Reading
Slough
Surrey
West Berkshire
Windsor and Maidenhead
Wokingham
Contact number: 07990 568 216

London (West)

Barnet
Brent
Croydon
Ealing
Hammersmith and Fulham
Harrow
Hillingdon
Hounslow
Kensington and Chelsea
Kingston Upon Thames
Lambeth
Merton
Richmond Upon Thames
Sutton
Wandsworth
Westminster
Contact number: 07810 183 552

London (East)

Barking and Dagenham
Bexley
Bromley
Camden
City of London
Enfield
Greenwich

Hackney
Haringey
Havering
Islington
Lewisham
Newham
Redbridge
Southwark
Tower Hamlets
Waltham Forest
Contact number: 07789 720 406

