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Advice note

**How to Lobby
& influence**



**LOC SUPPORT UNIT
ADVICE NOTE #8**

Available on line at www.locsu.co.uk
Or call 020 7207 8156

Advice note

How to Lobby and influence

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If we are to gain influence, then we need all LOCs to develop the skills to get noticed.

Key issues

The key issues are the importance of regular sight testing and the need to develop local extended eye care services in the community.

Building links

We need greater emphasis on maintaining and building strong links across a broad range – political parties, charities and institutions that have influence over policy making at national, regional and local level.



LOCs have to get noticed, and local political activity will pay dividends in the long term. LOCSU is able to provide guidance on how to engage locally with MPs, with other eye health stakeholders and with the media.

National Lobbying



The Eye Health Alliance, comprising the optical bodies, LOCSU, and vision charities, is our joined up national lobbying team. It has a presence at political and NHS conferences, and takes every opportunity to brief Members of Parliament on the importance of high quality eye care in the

prevention of eye disease and blindness and to promote better understanding of visual impairment and social inclusion.

What can be done locally?

Local lobbying has never been more important. A general election within the next 18 months makes this a good time for political engagement at all levels. Also, we need to ensure that optometry has the mechanisms to significantly increase the number of locally commissioned services.

Influencing locally

Most LOCs will have a range of contacts in the PCT or Health Board. If not, now is the time to start cultivating them.

You need to decide who to target— the Director of Public Health, Chief Executive, Chairman or some of the Non-Executive Directors? Do any LOC members have any connections with any of them – for instance providing their eye care? If you have an Optometric Adviser they should be brought in to your planning and asked to help?

Similarly the Council? The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has the right to be consulted about changes to local health provision. You could lobby the Committee Chairman, and individual local Councillors to support community eye care development.

Further lobbying advice, as well as information about key messages, will be sent to the profession as it becomes available and will be posted on the LOCSU website.



Lobbying your MP A practical guide

History

In 2006, with the GOS contract under threat, the profession lobbied a very large number of MPs, and did so very effectively. **We now need to run a focused programme of lobbying MPs, and the Candidates of the other two main parties. Our messages will be those that come from the UK Vision Strategy** (This will be available shortly). In Scotland Wales and N. Ireland this will have to be planned with care as Health policy is a matter for their Parliament/Assembly.

Working together

Ideally this will be carried out by all wider sector, LOCs, local blind societies and low-vision groups working together. Targeted messages which echo all parts of the UK Vision Strategy are being evaluated and will be available shortly.

Practice visits

We suggest that you organise for your MP be asked to visit an optometric practice in their constituency, and that this be repeated with the other party candidates. This will provide appropriate focus and photo opportunities.

Alternatives

If a convenient time cannot be found for a visit, arrange to meet with your MP, or invite them to attend part of an LOC meeting to take part in a discussion about eye care. Or you could visit them at their party offices or wherever the MP holds advice surgeries. Again the team will need to be representative, and led by a constituent or a practitioner with a practice in the constituency. Offer to contact the local press and provide photographs along with a positive account of the meeting.



Local Involvement Networks (LINKs) aim to give the public a stronger voice in how their health and social care services are delivered and in England have replaced Patients' Forums earlier this year.

They are a conduit for communities and have a range of powers to effect improvements in local services. Once they are up and running (most by the end of this year), they will be able to:

- Ask for information, make reports and recommendations and get a reply within a set amount of time
- Refer issues to the Council Overview & Scrutiny Committee
- Be able to carry out spot-checks to see if services are working well (carried out under safeguards)
- Investigate specific issues of concern to the community

LINKs can have influence, and can be an excellent way to highlight the need for enhanced optometric services in the community and to promote it to commissioners.

