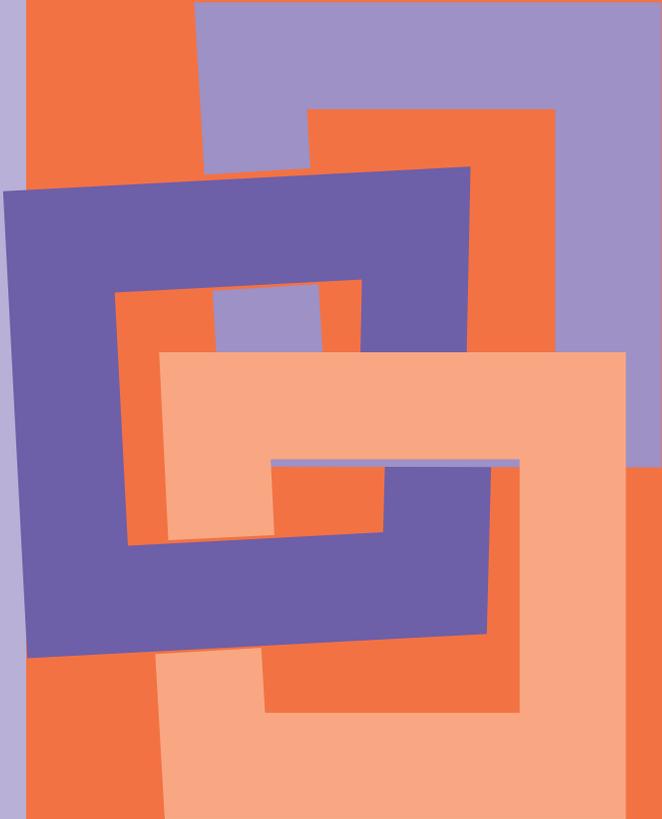


# Information Note

## A GUIDE TO ASKING YOUR MSP OR COUNCILLOR - AND OTHER PEOPLE - FOR SUPPORT



# A guide to asking your MSP or Councillor - and other people - for support

## About the project

Local People Linking is a project delivered by Outside the Box that raises awareness of older people's right to have a good life. The starting point is hearing about and responding to people's lived experiences in their communities.

- The project supports older people from a diverse range of communities to develop and share information about accessible activities and services happening in their area.
- We bring groups together to learn from each other and develop new opportunities so that older people are able to continue the things they enjoy doing.
- We run Learning About Rights sessions, where people explore what human rights mean to them or for the people they know and support.

## About this publication

Sometimes things in our community don't work as well as they should, or we can see a gap in services that people need. In our Local People Linking project we have been talking with people about what issues affect them. All of the people we spoke to said that they wanted to make things better in their local communities, but lots of people didn't know who to contact.

MSPs and Councillors are good people to contact on many issues.

- They are people who are often part of making decisions on issues.
- MSPs and Councillors have knowledge on who to contact for help.
- They have a lot of experience of taking up issues on behalf of other people and can give good advice.

MPs (Members of the UK Parliament) are also a useful source of help and information, particularly on issues that affect the UK as a whole. However, for this guide we have chosen to focus on MSPs and Councillors.

This guide has tips on how to ask an MSP or Councillor to help you or help a group you belong to.

- It explains what MSPs and Councillors do, and who else can help.
- It shows which issues that affect many older people are dealt with at national and local levels.
- It shows you how to find out who represents you.
- It has tips to support people to have productive contact with their MSP or Councillor.
- There are case examples to show how people asked a Councillor or MSP to help them.

Some issues can be taken up with other bodies in Scotland such as Health boards and through community health and social care partnerships. The tips on how to have meetings with people in formal roles will be useful in these conversations too.

Most of the issues that people raised during this project are dealt with in the Scottish Parliament or in Councils. There are other issues, such as employment law, that are dealt with in the Parliament at Westminster.

## Who is responsible for what?

### Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs)

The Scottish Parliament makes laws on a wide range of issues that affect Scotland and the people living here.

The Scottish Government is accountable to the Scottish Parliament.

There are 129 Members of the Scottish Parliament.

- The MSPs are elected to represent people in an area.
- They contribute to debates and vote on laws and other matters. They can ask questions and raise issues in the Parliament.
- They also do a lot of work in Committees, for example looking in detail at the planning stage of new laws and reviewing the progress and impact of changes.

You will get more information about the Parliament and MSPs at [www.parliament.scot](http://www.parliament.scot)

### Scottish Government

The Scottish Government is the body that runs the country, for example by setting policies and allocating money for services that are used by the public. Most of the detailed work is done by civil servants who are accountable to the Ministers for that topic.

The First Minister and all the other Ministers are also MSPs.

You can find out more and see who the Ministers are and the topics they deal with at [beta.gov.scot/about/who-runs-government](http://beta.gov.scot/about/who-runs-government)

## **Councillors**

Once a law has been passed or a new strategy is decided, it is often up to local Councils to decide how to implement it in their area. The staff who work for the Council then put those decisions into effect when they deliver services.

- Councillors are elected to represent the people in an area.
- They debate issues and work in Committees.
- They also talk to other organisations that deliver services or have other roles that affect people in the area they represent.

Some Councils have a Councillor who is the Champion for a group of people or issue and works to benefit everyone in that situation across the Council area. For example, in Scottish Borders there is a Champion for Older People.

## **Who is responsible for what?**

It's important to have an understanding of who is responsible for what. This is useful to give you an idea of where to get started if you want to ask someone to help you with an issue. Below is an overview of the issues that came up most often in Local People Linking.

**“Build up the relationships with the Councillors and MSPs. Write and say ‘congratulations and we’re looking forward to working with you’ after they are elected. Send them your annual report. Invite them to things. Some will just want the photo but others will be interested in what you do and be a good source of help for the group and your members.”**

## Health

### National level

The Scottish Government sets the overall policies on health care and on promoting good health for people.

The Government is responsible for the National Health Service in Scotland.

There are 24 Health Boards – the regional ones that deliver services in that area and some national ones such as the Ambulance Service and the bodies that lead on quality standards and training for the NHS.

The Health and Sport Committee at the Parliament deals with health matters.

Doctors and other health professionals are also accountable to their own professional bodies, such as the General Medical Council.

The Scottish Health Council is the main way for the public to feed in to health services.

### Local level

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**“I think that over the years we’ve helped the Councillors and MSPs be more aware of equalities issues, what it means for people as we live day-to-day.”**

## Transport

### National level

The Scottish Government sets the overall policy for transport.

It sets the rules for licensing and regulating public transport providers.

It deals with the arrangements to make bus services cheaper for people who use them, including free bus passes for older people.

### Local level

Bus and train services are run by those transport providers.

The bus provider and the Council talk to each other about bus routes.

The Council is responsible for bus stops and shelters.

The Council may give money to community transport schemes and support them in other ways.

## Social care

### National level

The policy for social care is set by the Scottish Government.

Care providers are regulated by the Care Inspectorate. You can check their assessment of any care service, and can also raise concerns with them.

The Health and Sport Committee at the Parliament also covers social care.

### Local level

Councils are responsible for the implementation of national policies and good practice.

In most places this is now part of the Health and Social Care Partnership.

Social care services are delivered by providers. The first point if you have a question or concern is usually to talk to the care provider.

Many of the services that people use are paid for by the Council. Here, you can also raise concerns with the Council and ask them to follow up.

## Racism, stigma

### National level

The Scottish Government sets policies on these issues and says how public bodies in Scotland should respect people and provide equal access to services.

The Equality Act is an Act of parliament that provides a legal framework to protect people from discrimination; in communities, by public bodies and at all levels of society [www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act-2010/what-equality-act](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act-2010/what-equality-act)

The Ministers for Equalities are also the people who lead on issues affecting older people.

The Equalities and Human Rights Committee at the Parliament deals with a range of equality matters.

### Local level

Councils and the NHS – and all other public bodies – are responsible for ensuring that the services they provide respect and are available to everyone.

Councils and the NHS often require the organisations they fund or commission (buy) services from to meet equalities good practice.

**“It would help if we had more support from our MSPs and Councillors on tackling stigma.”**

## Connecting people and reducing social isolation

### National level

The Scottish Government has developed a national strategy to promote social connections and reduce social isolation and loneliness.

The Ministers for Equalities take the lead on social inclusion.

### Local level

Many local groups and services that help people have more social connections are paid for by Councils.

Councillors, Council workers and people in voluntary and community organisations will know about local groups and activities in the area.

## Housing

### National level

The Scottish Government sets the overall policies for housing, including ways to have the range and mix of housing that is right for the population.

It sets standards that companies building houses have to meet.

There are also standards for rented housing.

There is a national body for Housing Associations who provide social rented housing.

### Local level

Some Councils provide social housing for people to rent.

Most social housing is provided by independent Housing Associations. They have routes for tenants to be involved and feed in their views.

Councils are responsible for the policies and decisions about building new houses in the area.

They also manage decisions when people ask for permission to make bigger changes to their home.

Councils provide grants and other financial help in some situations when people need equipment or adaptations in their homes.

The Occupational Therapists -mostly based at Health and Social Care Partnerships- carry out assessments and give advice to people about living at home when they need some extra equipment.

The Fire and Police services have community staff who give good advice on ways to keep homes safe. These are national services but most people contact staff based in their local area.

## Finding who represents you

### MSPs

Every person in Scotland has eight Members of Scottish Parliament (MSPs) that they can contact:

- One MSP who represents people in a local area or constituency.
- Seven MSPs who represent all the people in a bigger region.
- You can contact any of them.
- It does not matter whether or not you voted for that person. Once they are elected the MSP represents everyone in that area.

The Scottish Parliament website has details of the current MSPs: [www.scottish.parliament.uk/mmps/constituency-maps.aspx](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/mmps/constituency-maps.aspx)

Look at the constituency map. You will be able to see information on the Regional lists and the local constituencies. You can then get the full contact details for each MSP, including their address and social media handles.

If you are not able to look up information online, you can contact Public Information by calling 0207 624 2993 and ask them for the names and contact details of your MSPs.

### Councillors

In your local area there will be three or four Councillors. You can contact any of them.

You can find out who your Councillors are by looking at your local Council website or by directly contacting your Council and asking them.

The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) also has information on the contact details for Councils. You can contact COSLA by calling 0131 474 9200 or by emailing [info@cosla.gov.uk](mailto:info@cosla.gov.uk).

Many Councillors can also be contacted on social media, like twitter or Facebook, too.

To find your MP (Member of UK Parliament), visit: [www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/mps](http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/mps)

## **Tips on contact with people who can help you**

### **Initial contact with your MSP or Councillor**

Most contact with MSPs or Councillors is done by email, phone or post.

- Try to be as clear as you can and don't be tempted into giving lots of information that isn't needed at this stage. Your MSP or Councillor is more likely to help you with your problem if they can clearly understand the situation.
- If they need more of the background or details later, they will ask you.
- Try to be clear what you are asking the MSP or Councillor to do. For example they might give you advice on what to do next, look into something for you, or contact someone about the problem.
- If you aren't sure about your letter or email, you can always ask a friend to look at it before you send it.

When you look at the list of MSPs on the Parliament website, if you see these images it means that your MSP can be contacted on twitter or Facebook. This is often a useful way to send a message to make instant contact.



## Meeting your MSP or Councillor

After you contact your local MSP or Councillor you might want to arrange to meet up with them to talk more about the issues you are experiencing. When we spoke to local people they told us that it is important to be as prepared as you can for your conversation so you can get the most out of it. These are their tips.

- Don't be worried about arranging this meeting – it is their job to meet with people like you.
- Bring a note of everything you want to discuss.
- Take a friend or advocate with you to help you feel less nervous.
- Try to arrive in plenty of time so you can go into the meeting feeling calm.
- Be prepared that you might not have lots of time to talk in detail so go with a written summary of the issue(s) you want to talk about.
- Go into the meeting with an idea of what the solutions to your problem(s) could be and what would help you.
- In the meeting be sure to agree clear actions, who will take them on and deadlines (if possible) so you all leave the meeting clear about what will be done next.

You may have a constituency office in your local area where you can reach your MSPs or Councillors. MSPs and Councillors also hold surgeries. Surgeries are a time and place when people can come and speak to MSPs and Councillors about any issues affecting them.

- You can find out the surgery details for your Councillors by searching for this on your Council's website.

- MSPs have their own websites with details of their surgeries and other ways to reach them. The pages at the Scottish Parliament website that tells you who your local MSPs are also has links to their websites.

## **Other sources of help**

You can contact the organisation that delivers a service or deals with an issue direct and ask to speak to someone about a problem or question. This is often the best first step to take.

Service providers will have details of how to contact them in the information they give to the public.

- For people who use a service regularly, such as someone getting a care at home service, this will be in the information you got when the service started.
- For services that people use occasionally, such as a Health Centre or library, the contact details will be in the building or on their website.

There are also many organisations and groups that support individual people when they need help to change something by taking up issues on behalf of people affected. There is a list of some of the main sources of help on the issues that older people told us later in this booklet.

The tips we have here on how to contact someone and how to plan for a meeting will also be useful when you are in touch with any organisation.

## Case examples

### Transport

Public transport is an issue that comes up in almost every Learning About Rights session. People shared how unreliable buses are and how difficult it is to get about if you do not have a car, especially if you have a disability.

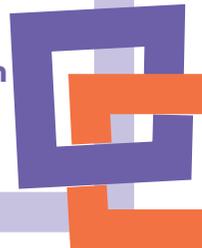
**“Access to transport is very difficult if you are disabled - you have to phone ahead to get on a train and sometimes there is no space for you on the bus if someone is already using the disabled space.”**

**“The buses stop really early so you can’t go out after 7pm. That doesn’t help our rights to keep in touch with friends or to get out to things that we enjoy or want to learn more about.”**

The East Renfrewshire Disability Alliance (ERDA) successfully campaigned for more wheelchair accessible taxis to be available across the area.

Communities in the area contributed to consultations from the Scottish Government on proposed changes to free bus passes and on new rules that could bring more bus services to areas that do not have a current service. They used this as an opportunity to make the point that public transport and community transport are very important to stop older people – and others – becoming socially isolated. Good transport is also part of preventing poor consequences for people’s mental and physical wellbeing.

**“We decided to invite our local MSP along to our group to talk about the issue of public transport across the area. He shared how he had spoken with lots of constituents about the transport issue and**



**helped calm some concerns by sharing the Scottish Government's announcement that everyone in Scotland aged 60 and over will continue to be entitled to free bus passes."**

## **Housing**

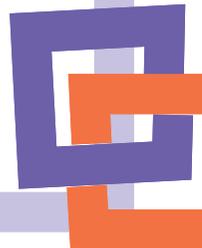
Many of the people we spoke with have needed to change or adapt their home to make it more suitable for them as they get older. This can be quite time-consuming and expensive as people aren't always aware of what the council can do for them.

**"There is no clear information from the local authority about how you get adaptations made in your house if you are caring for someone or if you need them yourself."**

## **Health and Social Care**

People living in a rural area of the local authority because of issues related to their care got in touch with the Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) to share why they found it difficult to get information and ask questions. This resulted in plans to provide more face to face outreach sessions in community locations and the HSCP decided to hold a regular drop-in session in that location.

People in one area told us that there is no direct public transport to the Health Centre and how difficult it is to get to their local hospital. Ideally people need an improved transport service but it was important to the groups we spoke with to raise awareness with health service staff to stop allocating early morning appointments since there is no affordable mode of transport to get to early morning hospital appointments. The group have written to their local Councillor who said she is gathering as many examples from people as she can so at least



people feel they are contributing to the evidence that might one day lead to a change.

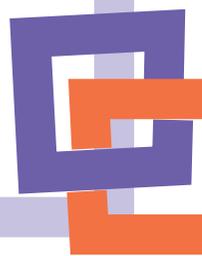
**“We had good support from a care service but then staff changed and it went downhill. I tried to talk to them and to the person at the Council but was getting nowhere. I talked to my MSP at a carers’ event and he took it up. My advice to other people is to keep a log of every phone call and letter. It helped that I could give a copy to the MSP.”**

**“We met one of our MSPs at a Carers’ event. She is really easy to talk to and said we should get in touch if we ever have any problems.”**

### **Library services**

Groups have told us about the importance of libraries for equal access to useful information—including on how to get informed on their rights and how to find people who can help. Libraries are an important social space for communities, to bump in to friends or connecting with people from your local community.

Some local libraries have been closed meaning community halls have become more expensive since a Trust took over the running of these services. There is a contract between the Council and the Trust, so it is still public money that pays for the service. People have tried to raise the issue with the Trust but feel they have not got anywhere. They are now going to raise it with the Councillors and with their MSP as they are sure that this also affects other people in the area.



Rural groups raised how difficult access can be to nearby towns because bus services have been changed. They are now unable to get to the bigger library in town. Members of the group spoke to the Library Service who looked at ways to bring more services out to the smaller places which helped solve one part of the problem. People from this community are still in contact with Councillors and other services about ways to improve transport connections and are feeling more positive about getting changes.

**“The MSP’s constituency office is beside the shops. I’ve passed it for years and never thought to go in, but I did when we had a problem with funding from the Council for our group. The person there was very helpful and found out what was happening. She phoned back and gave me an update. I don’t know if the MSP herself was involved, or if just coming from her office made the difference, but either way it was a good result for us.”**

## Useful sources

### Citizens Advice Bureau

The Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) provides information and advice for individual people on a very wide range of problems and issues.

The website lets you find an office near you:

[www.cas.org.uk](http://www.cas.org.uk)

T. 03454 040506

You can also ask for advice on-line, if you prefer.

### Transport

Transport Scotland is the national transport agency.

- It links to the **Scottish Government on transport policy.**
- It links to the **organisations providing public transport.**
- It is responsible for the **national road network – the main roads across the country.**

It is responsible for ensuring that policy decisions about transport and service delivery take account of equality issues. This includes running the national concessionary travel scheme, which provides free bus travel for many older and disabled people.

[www.transport.gov.scot](http://www.transport.gov.scot)

Their website has links to organisations that promote the interests and views of people who use transport services, including equalities groups.

[www.transport.gov.scot/about/equality-matters](http://www.transport.gov.scot/about/equality-matters)

There is also information on the organisations that are responsible for planning public transport in each part of Scotland.

[www.transport.gov.scot/our-approach/strategy/regional-transport-partnerships](http://www.transport.gov.scot/our-approach/strategy/regional-transport-partnerships)

The Community Transport Association is the collective organisation for community-led transport schemes and services across the UK. You can find out about services that are in your local area.

They have lots of good examples of schemes that can give you ideas. This also lets you show other people that something that works in another area could work well in your area.

They are not able to give people support on individual problems around access to transport.

[www.ctauk.org](http://www.ctauk.org)

## Advocacy projects

Advocacy projects provide independent advice and support when people have problems with the services they use, especially health and social care services. They mostly support older people, people with disabilities: each project explains the people they support.

There are also projects that bring people together and take up collective issues.

The Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance shows local projects.

[www.siaa.org](http://www.siaa.org)

T. 0131 524 1975

## Care Inspectorate

The Care Inspectorate is the national regulator for care services in Scotland.

- They inspect and assess the quality of the care.
- They also make assessments of the overall arrangements in local areas.
- The help services improve what they do.
- They respond to complaints from the public.
- They take steps if the quality of care is not good enough.

The website helps you find a care service. It also explains how to get in touch with the Care Inspectorate if you have a question or want make a complaint about a care service.

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

T. 0345 600 9527

[enquiries@careinspectorate.com](mailto:enquiries@careinspectorate.com)

## Scottish Health Council

The Scottish Health Council is responsible for the involvement of patients and the public, as part of improving the NHS across Scotland.

They do not handle complaints about the NHS but will tell you about the process for that.

There are local offices - there are details on the website at the Contact Us page, or you can phone to ask for the local contact.

[www.scottishhealthcouncil.org](http://www.scottishhealthcouncil.org)

T. 0141 241 6308

## Social Isolation strategy

Scottish Governments national strategy to tackle social isolation and loneliness and build stronger social connections  
[www.gov.scot/publications/connected-scotland-strategy-tackling-social-isolation-loneliness-building-stronger-social-connections](http://www.gov.scot/publications/connected-scotland-strategy-tackling-social-isolation-loneliness-building-stronger-social-connections)

## Contact and more information

Local People Linking is funded by the Scottish Government as part of the Promoting Equality and Cohesion Fund.

### Contact

Please get in touch if you are interested in Learning About Rights sessions or any other aspect of the project.

Outside the Box  
3.10 The Whisky Bond  
2 Dawson Road, Glasgow, G4 9SS

T. 0141 419 0451  
jill.k@otbds.org  
www.otbds.org



There is more about what we do at [www.otbds.org](http://www.otbds.org)

outsidethebox



Scottish Government  
Riaghaltas na h-Alba  
gov.scot

