

Age UK concerns about the Lobbying Bill

1. Lack of clarity about what constitutes campaigning ‘for election purposes’

At what point does campaigning on policy issues become campaigning ‘for election purposes’? For example, if we are campaigning to keep the Winter Fuel Payment in the run up to the next General Election, and a PPC or Party Leader endorses our policy stance, does that become campaigning ‘for election purposes’? Would our position imply an endorsement of that party? Would any campaigning *after that point* count towards the spending limit?

2. Spending Limits

Under the proposed Bill we would not have been able to deliver key activity around our Care in Crisis campaign, particularly the Mass Lobby of Parliament, if it had been planned in the year running up to a General Election. If social care became a key focus of debate in the run up to the General Election (as it did in 2010) and our campaigning was considered ‘for election purposes’ then all campaign activity co-ordinated by the 70+ strong Care and Support Alliance, of which we are a member, would be regulated. The combined spend of all the staff members who worked as part of the coalition would have brought us over the spending limits.

3. Potential impact on local partner activity

Our expenditure to support individual Age UK’s to host hustings etc. in a General Election campaign rarely exceeds a few hundred pounds. However, if staff costs are included, any local partner would be regulated, and could spend no more than £5000 to employ campaigns staff in the year before a General Election. Campaigning forms a small part of their role, but this restriction could further limit local partners’ ability to take part in our campaigns and reduce opportunities for older people to campaign on local and national issues.

4. Constituency issues

In the past we have bought adverts in local papers targeting Party Leaders and key Cabinet members’ constituencies on specific policy issues. If the cost of this activity exceeded £5000 we would not be able to deliver any further campaigning activity in that constituency.

How activity is interpreted is also of concern. During the last Age UK General Election campaign we carried out several campaign actions in Westminster including the unveiling of a Billboard and a photo shoot with older people outside Parliament. A billboard van then drove around Parliament for a day and the campaign imagery was projected onto the Houses of Parliament. All of this activity was to promote our national General Election campaign and the crucial issues of concern to older people. As it took place in Westminster, would it count towards the spending limit of constituency activity in Westminster, despite being intended as part of the national campaign? This would severely limit our ability to campaign around the Houses of Parliament.

5. Reporting requirements

In order to meet the reporting requirements under the proposed Bill we would require clear guidance about which activities constitute campaigning 'for electoral purposes' so that we can identify relevant staff costs. For example, do 'staff costs' include 'on costs' or just basic salaries? Would we need to calculate proportions of staff costs that contribute towards campaigning? E.g. if our Chief Executive spoke on the Today programme in support of a campaign for 10 minutes would those costs need to be declared?