



Speak up

A single voice can find it hard to be heard, but when we join our voices together, people in power listen. And every member's voice matters. By **Rhiannon Batsford**

Campaigning has always been an important aspect of TG. As one of the largest women's organisations in the UK, our voices united have the potential to make decision makers sit up and take notice when we call for change.

Need convincing? Back in 2010, the UK Payments Council planned to wholly abolish the cheque clearing system by the end of 2018. In response, TG members urged us to include an emergency mandate at that year's AGM allowing us to campaign against such a change. Concerns were raised at a personal level, and also as local small

charities that would struggle to function if they couldn't use cheques.

As a result of this and the ensuing campaign activity, including member petitions and representation by TGHQ at stakeholder discussion meetings, the decision was reversed and cheques survived as a payment method – the focus moved to exploring how cheques could be sustained as a payment method for those who needed them, while accounting for the natural decline in use overall.

Unfortunately, we cannot speak of such campaign successes as often as we would like. While we at TGHQ do what

we can, we are limited by how engaged our members are and how willing they are to follow up on what we ask of them. Equally, we know that members may need more guidance in campaign activity – but in order for us to know how to help, we need you to come to us and ask.

We know we have the potential for more. We have been pleased by the response from Guilds telling us about their banking experiences, which will serve us well in progressing our campaign for the finance sector to communicate more openly with small charities and local community groups

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to make sure their banking needs are met. So we thought this the ideal time for a brief refresher on why campaigns are important, and why TG campaigns depend on member support in action as well as words.

CAMPAIGNING FOR CHANGE

A campaign for change is a collection of activity centred around a central message. Our mandates are perfect examples of what a central message should look like: a short, specific call for change that identifies a problem and either a solution or a starting point for where a solution might be found.

But a campaign is more than just putting some sentences together. It needs points of action – things people can do to support the call for change and make decision makers pay attention. It then needs people to follow up on those points of action and show their commitment to the cause – lip service alone will not progress a campaign.

Campaigns for change also benefit from cooperation between interested groups that can share resources and ideas, and unite to form a stronger force for change. But to partner with other groups, there needs to be an incentive for them to want to work together.

Frequently, members ask us what TGHQ is doing in respect of campaigns. But the truth is, there is only so much we can do unless members play their part and act on the calls to action we put out – having a mandate on a topic doesn't carry much weight without a demonstration that members care about seeing change happen.

For last year's mandates on public toilets and cycling, we put out several calls to action for members, and asked for results to be fed back to us – but we have had no response regarding the cycling and not much more regarding public toilets. This has often been the case in the past when asking members to write in support of campaigns, or to research how their area is affected by an issue.

Support TG campaigns by researching your area, sharing your experiences and writing to those in power



TG's campaigning helped prevent the abolition of cheques

BEING A CAMPAIGNER

With many issues, it can be tempting to think that there isn't much you can do as just one person. However, every person who decides it's not worth bothering is one fewer person fighting for change. And change, ultimately, comes about because there are enough people making enough noise to prevent an issue being swept under the rug and ignored.

Being a member of TG, you already have a potential advantage: you are not just one person, but one of thousands belonging to a single group. And it is essential for all Townswomen to exploit that advantage if we are to remain a relevant campaigning force.

There are two key ways you can tap into the power of being part of a single group, with all its members calling for change on the same issue.

The first is a simple matter of numbers. TGHQ can contact people in power about issues, but we can only ever send one letter. If even a tenth of our members also sent just one letter each, that would be a significant number of letters being sent on the same topic – which would mean a significant number of people who feel strongly enough about the topic to want change.

The second is that a good campaign needs case studies: examples of people who have experienced the problem that needs to be addressed. TGHQ can compile case study documents, but only

if we have members' stories, experiences and knowledge to include. The more we have, the more patterns we can pick out to show that what might at first appear to be isolated incidents are in fact more common and in need of addressing.

This is also why we need members to follow up on our research-based calls to action. The only way we can know if an issue is commonplace throughout the UK, or if there are areas more or less affected than others, is through members letting us know how things are in their local area – you are much better placed to do so than TGHQ will ever be.

COMMUNICATION

At its heart, campaigns require communication between those involved. TGHQ uses the magazine, website and social media to keep members up to date with what is going on. We also do our best to provide guidance where it is asked for, and more general resources that we hope are of use to members.

We are aware that we may miss things, or that we may not have a resource that members would find useful. But we will only know about these things if members tell us what they are. You are always welcome to contact me at HQ for advice or to offer suggestions – preferably in writing, by post or email, as this makes it easier to ensure nothing is missed should anything need to be shared with Trustees. We also have a suggestion form in the Toolbox section of the Campaigns Hub of the website, as well as details on how you can share your campaigning activity with us for us to promote to other members and beyond.