

# Making the point

A speaker's good practice guide for effective public meetings on ageing.

## Why we want this good practice

Everyone has points of view. Older people are no different, except they have had longer to form those views and could have a lot of issues to speak about. Some exceptionally gifted people can simply open their mouths and effectively articulate a great point on a subject of choice. But most of us need some time to prepare what we want to say – either mentally or in writing – and may need to pluck up some courage to speak in a public meeting. To be honest, we can sometimes feel intimidated by other people who seem more knowledgeable or who monopolise the conversation.

We want all older people who attend our forums and other public meetings to contribute fully through confident communication. And we want **our** forums to be places to which older people look forward to coming because they know it will be a worthwhile experience. We also want officials – whether from central or local Government – or other service providers, to come to our meetings knowing they will be treated courteously whilst hearing useful, practical, and challenging contributions.

## How you can use this good practice

We have prepared some general principles that we want to underpin our meetings, and which we expect will help people speak up with confidence and make their point. We have briefly illustrated them in separate text boxes. We have also included the following five **Handy Guides** to putting those principles into practice:

**Good Meeting Etiquette:** A good meeting is down to all who participate. This guide explains some of the different ways to do that, and some ideas to help you to think about how you can contribute.

**Making the most of officials:** This guide will give you an insight into how a Government policy officer will approach your meeting; understand a policy maker if you want to influence them!

**Making meetings inclusive:** Here are some simple steps for those organising meetings to ensure they are accessible to the widest the number of people.

**Limbering up for a public meeting:** We all know practice makes perfect. Here are some fun ice breakers to get a group relaxed and prepared for the serious business of a public event.

**Preparing to share at a public meeting:** Some brilliant advice on how to prepare yourself to make a powerful contribution to a public meeting.

## Making a good point – the essentials

You can make any ordinary meeting, into an extraordinary meeting

### Places to make your point

There are many places where older people have opportunities to make their voices heard. These can include public meetings with local authorities or at conferences; face to face with professionals; with other older people's organisations, or at facilitated workshops. There are a lot of organisations who are interested in what you have to say

In 2011 the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) asked for views on their new strategy for preventing fire deaths and other accidents amongst older people. FRS discussed the strategy at a number of regional older people's forums. The real life experiences and practical observations which were shared, led to further significant improvements in what was already regarded as a good strategy. This is an example of local people making a difference to a national strategy.

### Issues to speak about

Subjects of interest to older people will probably have benefits for the wider community; so don't underestimate the value of making your point. Older people might speak out about issues that they think require Government attention and action, pointing out where policies are not working well in practice. Specifically this might include action that helps people avoid getting isolated in their communities, promotes healthy active ageing, improves local transport arrangements, or enables better access to local health services. Or they could involve people coming together to turn a local problem into an opportunity.

Local residents in Grassington in Yorkshire lobbied tirelessly for a replacement for their static library which had been replaced by a mobile service. Led by two parish councillors and a local GP, the community developed the Grassington Hub to provide a library service manned by the Library Service and volunteers, bookings for local events, and a credit union. It also houses a Telemedicine Centre through which patients can meet consultants from the hospital serving the area.

### Making an effective contribution

There are some key skills that enable meetings to run smoothly and achieve great results. The more people who seek to employ these well, the more effective your meeting will be.

- **Stay calm.** There are many issues people rightly feel strongly about. But you need to make sure that what you say isn't lost through how you say it. Breathe slowly, and reassure yourself that people will want to hear what you have to say.

- **Speak confidently.** Prepare your ideas before you come either drawing on your experience or on other sources of information.
- **Plan what you have to say.** Think of a good first line, a good last line, and try to keep the piece in the middle as short as possible. Shorter contributions are more memorable, make more impact, and give more space for others to contribute.
- **Listen well.** Show this courtesy to others and they are more likely to reciprocate. Asking for clarification if needed, and summarising another contribution shows you're listening and value what you hear.
- **Don't put people off.** You may be talking but is anyone listening? There are some guaranteed ways to ensure other people in a meeting switch off.

### **How to make sure no-one wants to listen to you**

- Make sure you go off topic and talk about issues not on the agenda;
- Keep repeating yourself, thereby wasting other people's time;
- Talk constantly when other people are speaking before it's your turn;
- Ignore the chair when they ask you to bring your comments to a conclusion.

### **The golden rule**

Whatever part you play in a meeting, remember that the other people there will want to get much the same results from it as you. They will want a chance to speak, to be heard, to be appreciated for the work they have put in, and to see their work make a positive difference. They will want to leave the meeting feeling good about it, having learned something, contributed something, and having something to think about or do. Treat them as you would like to be treated. And remember – you are a massive store of experience, perspective, knowledge and empathy.

**Make your point, make it well, and make a difference.**