

Is lobbying really effective? A field experiment of local interest group strategies to influence elected representatives in the UK¹

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**Paper prepared for presentation to Panel 30-10: *Alternative Forms Of
Political Participation In Cities* at 2009 Annual Meeting and
Exhibition of the American Political Science Association, Toronto,
ON, Canada, 3-6 September, 2009**

¹. We thank our funders, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) and NWIEP who supported the project, *Rediscovering the Civic: Achieving Better Outcomes in Public Policy*. We thank Frank Baumgartner and Don Green for their comments at the design phase as well as our research colleagues, Sarah Cotterill, Margaret Holmes, Hisako Normura, Graham Smith, Gerry Stoker and Corrine Wales. We thank Grant Jordan for his comments on an earlier version of this paper.

Abstract

This paper argues that studies of lobbying have tended to neglect the measurement of the influence of interest groups. This major gap in the field comes from the difficulty of making an inference because lobbyists select their target and strategies based on the likelihood of success. In these circumstances observational studies find it hard to show that the effort of lobbyists causes an outcome. When done correctly, experimental studies can make such an inference. This paper presents the design and initial findings from such a cluster randomised controlled trial of lobbying of local councillors in England and Wales, where the councillors randomly receive different letters from interest groups recruited into the study. We report descriptive statistics and regressions with clustered standard errors on different measures of councillor response.

Introduction - the problem of influence and lobbying

With a tradition and line of thinking reaching back to Madison, scholars have long speculated on the influence of interest groups, and whether particular kinds of tactics are likely to win over policy-makers. What interest groups do matters for democracy, whether it is helping get into the pluralist heaven of representing the public interest through competing for policy-makers' attention or the establishing the elitist hell of limited public debate and skewing outcomes under by well-organised groups. In fact, the community power debate of the 1960s and 1970s represented the high point of attempts to uncover the influence of interest groups on the policy process, with the two camps clearly demarcated. Famously, this debate fell apart and imploded over competing accounts of power and influence. Even the pluralists recognised that it was not possible to know whether the participation of an interest group in the policy-making process was the consequence of its resources and skill or the willingness of the policy-maker to listen to that particular group (cf. Lukes, 1974²). In more modern language, these academics hit the problem of selection: it is not possible to know the strength and direction of the causal arrow because the values on the independent variable are more usually observed often when the public decision-maker is willing to listen to and respond to the interest group. The use of interest group resources and tactics may then be the consequences of the preferences of the power holder rather than the other way round.

As Mahoney (2007) observes, interest group scholars have often avoided studying influence. This is probably due to the sheer difficulty of making an

². Re-issued in 2005.

inference because of the selection problem alluded to above. Added to that is difficulty of relying on self-reports, both of studies of advocates and of the policy-makers themselves, making it difficult to generate valid results as self-ascribed influence may be over-estimated, both by the interest group and by the policy-maker. For example, Baumgartner and Leech (1998) use a self-report measure of the effectiveness of different tactics, but they note that this “pose[s] serious reliability risks.” (Baumgartner and Leech, 1998: 156). This highlights the problem of generating effective measures both of influence and of policy outcomes related to the influence of the group. The main exception to this has been the literature on PAC contributions.

This neglect created a major gap in the literature and it means that scholars have failed to answer one of the key question about interest groups, making other questions, such as organisation, size, membership, policy style, opposition, over-studied by comparison. Our remedy was to offer the experimental method as a potential way to address the question of influence as we can randomise the tactics lobbyists use. We in effect held constant the type of interest group and lobbyists' decisions whether to lobby or not so that any response we measured depended on the difference in the treatments we applied. In this way, we sought to build on other field experiments as applied to citizen acts of participation (e.g. Green and Gerber, 2008). The difference with these citizen-based studies is that we randomised the strategy the interest groups used, which raised a series of operational and ethical issues, but nonetheless created what in our view is a pioneering study of interest groups, which helps to uncover whether resources devoted to a more professional lobby are effective or not.

In this paper, we review extant studies of the influence of lobbying and of the likely instruments lobbyists are likely to use. We then detail our methods, discuss the initial results, and draw out the implications for the study of interest groups.

Studies of lobbying

In earlier account of interest groups it might have been possible to observe whether a group was an insider or outsider was a way to ascertain its influence. But this debate, though useful in thinking about interest groups, is now not such a helpful starting point, largely because most groups are assumed to aspire to insider status, with insider strategy and tactics as the means to getting access (Grant, 2000). Because of the consensual style of policy-making of western democracies, it is hard to find any group that has not been ushered into decision making structures (Grant, 2004). As a result we think it is relevant to study strategies and tactics lobbyists use to see whether they are effective or not.

There are differences in strategy according to whether groups wish to change the status quo, the choice to expand conflict or 'go negative', and whether to be visible or not (Baumgartner et al., 2009: pp. 192-194³), which affect our research because the lobbying letters are asking for something to change. However, we do not regard the typical groups we study at the level as being highly strong on that dimension as they do not want to change the system. Instead, there is a range of tactics interest groups use their resources to lever influence and achieve their ends. There are different preferences between the USA and Europe in their tactic of choice. For example, the US groups rely more on campaign contributions

³. Forthcoming (all page numbers for Baumgartner et al 2009 are for draft version).

(Watson and Shackleton, 2003). There is a large and lively debate about the relative importance of cash contributions versus all other lobbying tactics, given that if contributions are an effective tactic then this produces and reflects inequalities between lobbyists. However, access to large sums of cash may not be the key to success, with some writers arguing that “one of the best single predictors of success in the lobbying game is not how much money an organization has on its side, but simply whether it is attempting to protect the policy that is already in place.” (Baumgartner et al., 2009: p. 12). This line of argument is supported by other research e.g. by Lohmann (1995), which found that interest groups with preferences in line with the decision-maker's got free access, while other lobby groups had to pay contributions. Regardless of the importance of cash contributions, we decided in our work not to consider this as a tactic partly because it would be feasible and/or sustainable for the small typically unfunded groups we were studying, but also partly because of the ethical and perception problems of bribery or corruption which run counter to the aim of the overall research programme to enhance the civic sphere and healthy democracy.

Aside from cash donations, other tactics include direct and informal contact, involvement in policy formulation, presentation of research findings, litigation, protests, constituent influence (e.g. letter writing campaigns), testimony at hearings, and the strategic use of information to influence policy choice. Leaving cash donations out of the list of tactics, then Milbraith (1963) and Berry (1977) (quoted in Baumgartner and Leech, 1998: p. 156) rate the effectiveness of different tactics, with direct or personal contact rated top, and letter writing and presentation of research results rated next.

In spite of the importance of informal contact between interest groups, we focus in our study on letter writing campaigns. Some of this was that letter writing would go with the grain of what citizen interest groups were already doing; interest groups already spend time making formal representations to policy-makers, such as writing letters. The tactic may work as an entrée to direct face-to-face contact. Some of the reason for this was around resources - financial, capacity and time, and skills. There are significant differences between the resources and capacity of different types of groups to undertake their lobbying efforts: Some can afford lobbying efforts costing millions of dollars for a single lobbying campaign. Others operate on a shoestring, if they operate at all.” (Hall and Deardorff, 2006: p. 80). Clearly groups with more resources are at an advantage in conducting campaigns in all sorts of ways, compared to small citizen interest groups typically with very few resources, including some of the overstretched groups in our study, one which did not have e-mail access. In the UK, voluntary organisations with annual incomes under £10,000 made up 56 per cent of all registered charities in 2006, and it was estimated that of the 600,000 organisations in the not-for-profit sector in 2002 (including registered charities and others), up to 360,000 were community-level organisations with small amounts of income, not registered as a charity (Richardson, 2008). Letter writing is a simple and low cost tactic that any group can use. It does not require the group to have significant time to devote to seeing up to seventy different politicians, or have the capacity to undertake its own research, finance litigation, or organise protests.

The relationship between effective lobbying tactics and what lobbying organisations actually do is a complicated one. Hall and Deardorff (2006) argue

that even professional lobbyists “behavioural patterns often appear anomalous when viewed in the light of existing theories” (p. 69). This suggests that the ability even of the most professional lobbyists to act effectively is severely limited. Mahoney (2007) did not find a strong relationship between the frequency with which an organisation uses a particular technique and the perceived effectiveness of that technique. In nearly all cases organisations rated the effectiveness of the method higher than their use of the method. Two of the lobbying methods, membership on advisory boards and participation in regulatory negotiations, were considered quite effective but used very infrequently. Her explanation is that the more effective tactics tend to be more costly and time consuming or hard to access and the least effective are easier to do and access. Taking these constraints on action in account also led us to focus on letter writing as one area where a lobbyist would be able to vary aspects relatively easily (e.g. compared to somehow obtaining membership of advisory boards) in the course of a campaign.

More importantly it is possible to alter the level of professionalism or potential effectiveness of a letter in a way that is much harder to do with small unincorporated community groups which lack experience of lobbying, and whose members have varying abilities to articulate their case, build relationships, understand the decision making system and constraints facing decision makers (although these limitations may become apparent in time as the lobby progresses). This could be crucial in levelling the playing field when citizen interest groups are pitted against professional lobbyists who are “among the most experienced, astute, and strategic actors one can find in the everyday practice of [American] policymaking.” (Hall and Deardorff, 2006: p. 70).

Going back to the central problem of selection, we wanted to test whether effectiveness of an interest group was the consequence of the quality of its lobbying messages, or the predilections of the policy-maker for certain groups. Therefore, a core idea was to see if we could professionalise the tactic that groups used without professionalising the group. It is not necessarily desirable to increase the resources of small citizen interest groups or professionalise them, and in any case this would be hard to achieve in research and in real life. We wanted to see if it was possible to professionalise and increase the effectiveness of the lobbying by shoestring (low resource) groups without the groups losing some of their best selling points in terms of their lobbies, such as their closeness to their membership and for some, their lack of co-option into institutions.

Our next question was to define what an effective letter writing campaign would look like. There are argued to be several factors which (may) contribute to an effective lobby of this sort. These are that it comes from a credible source; frames the issue in a way that is consistent with lobbyists' values and goals; offers the policy maker private or 'costly' information that would otherwise be difficult for the policy maker to gather; summarises and processes a mass of publicly available information in a way clarifies the implications for the policy maker; contains emotive or symbolic appeals to commonly held values; outlines how current policy approaches lead to negative outcomes, and how an alternative approach would promote shared policy goals; and has a clear set of recommendations or 'ask'. These are shown in summary in Figure 1.

[FIG 1 HERE]

The existing empirical evidence on pressure group tactics is large and often contradictory (Hall and Deardorff, 2006). For example, it is not clear whether provision of costly information or emotive appeals are most effective, and under which circumstances. It may be the case that these two approaches are doing very different things: “symbolic or valence appeals [that] are unlikely to convey information that is difficult for policymakers to acquire for themselves.” (Baumgartner et al., 2009: p174). We have assumed these factors are additive, and that the use of more of them creates greater effectiveness rather than some things cancelling others out. We now look at each of these factors in more detail.

Lobbying must be from a credible source if the likelihood of policy makers responding is to be increased. For example, Druckman (2001) found that the credibility of the source of information has a significant impact on the chances for the successful framing of an issue. Gerber and Lupia's studies (1992) have discovered that the campaign process can provide information if the groups are credible and the campaign can thereby increase the informational efficiency of the electoral outcome. The voluntary and community groups in the study tended not to have some of the more obvious organisational bases for credibility, including simple things like having an office address, staff, and a website. Smaller organisations tend not to have written documentation, such as annual reports and accounts or even publicity leaflets that could offer a sense of security to decision makers that they are dealing with a legitimate organisation. There is a widespread concern about the degree to which community volunteers are representative, but no common understanding of what being representative might mean in practice.

The legitimacy and standing of community groups in the local community is an extremely controversial issue in nearly all areas in the UK, particularly when

they are arguing with other agencies for change to the status quo views (Taylor, 2005). Community groups have sometimes ambivalent relationships with their neighbours. The majority of the wider population are in a passive position in relation to the groups' work, neither actively involved nor users (Richardson, 2008). Neighbourhood-based community groups have been reproached because they are seen as not to be trusted to represent the diversity of local populations (Morrison, 2003). Unless groups are registered charities (and therefore subject to some light-touch regulation by the Charities Commission), they are not subject to any form of external regulation which may offer a source of credibility. Therefore the groups in the study faced an uphill struggle to demonstrate their credibility, and our experimental intervention also needed to deal with this challenge.

Some see much of the lobbying that goes on as an exercise in framing or issue definition (e.g., Baumgartner et al., 2002). Attempts to reframe the issue are attempts to change the nature of the argument, and frame the issue in a way that is consistent with lobbyists' values and goals. Several of the groups in the study wanted to undertake a campaign to re-shape a local debate already on the agenda to better serve their own needs and the needs of their members, for example to take account of 'missing' client groups in strategies to support vulnerable groups.

There is a long established interest in informational lobbying, from Milbraith (1963) onwards. In terms of effectiveness, Gerber and Lupia's work (1992) provides evidence that information can have powerful effects on behaviour, in this case voters were able to use interest group statements as cues about the impact of proposed policy changes, which effected voting patterns. There are two key aspects to informational lobbying: the provision of costly or private information; and the lobbyist making sense of public information. Offering policy

makers private or costly information that would otherwise be difficult for the policy maker to gather reduces costs for the policy-maker. An influential branch of the literature approaches lobbying as the strategic transmission of asymmetrically held information (e.g. see Potters and van Winden, 1992). Decision makers value information that would otherwise not be accessible (see Hall and Deardorff, 2006). The model of Potters and van Winden (1992) has a prominent standing in the formal literature on lobbying. In this model, informational lobbying - the use by interest groups of their (alleged) expertise or private information on matters of importance for policymakers in an attempt to persuade them to implement particular policies - is often regarded as an important means of influence. For local politicians, the decision makers in our study, their interest in re-election means that they were likely to be more responsive to information that could help in that, including information from citizen interest groups about what constituents' views and issues are (Mahoney, 2007).

When we look at public information, the hypothesis is that successful lobbying will summarise and process a mass of publicly available information in a way that clarifies the implications for the policy maker. Hall and Deardorff (2006: p. 74) focus on the transmission of “information that legislators require for their work in influencing legislation,” including policy analyses, research reports, and other expertly developed information as well as “political intelligence” (p. 74) that is designed to assist policymakers. The (disputed) argument is that legislators could reduce their level of uncertainty about policy choices by “adding lobbyists' signals to the multitude of cues” (Hall and Deardorff, 2006: p. 71) they already have, as well as the “expansive testimony, policy analyses, reports, publications, and other detailed materials” (p. 71) that lobbyists provide. However, some feel

that the more complete information for policy makers is not as valuable as the time to problem solve and “the capacity to use information. Cheap talk will not do” (Hall and Deardorff, 2006: p. 72).

In contrast to evidence about the impact of informational lobbying, there is also a line of argument that emotive or symbolic appeals can be effective, following ideas about the use of emotional intelligence in policy making. For example, one writer shows that although policy makers publicly express a preference for hard facts, in practice it is the symbolic material rather than statistics that they retain, such as stories of individual cases structured to articulate a particular set of commonly held social values (Westen, 2007). As stated above, we have assumed that emotive appeals are playing a different, but not mutually exclusive, function to the offer of information and so we use both in our intervention.

The different forms of argumentation used are an area where a research gap has been identified (Baumgartner and Leech, 1998). “An argument is a statement that links a policy goal with either a justification for the policy or a discussion of its implications” (Baumgartner et al., 2009: p. 388). Empirical work indicates that the two most frequently used forms of argument refer to a) problems with implementation or feasibility, for example outlining how current policy approaches lead to negative outcomes and b) how a policy promotes or inhibits a policy goal, and how an alternative approach would promote shared policy goals. Although frequency is not a reliable guide to effectiveness, we have also included these forms of argument in our study. Some have argued that these arguments are more attractive to unelected civil servants than politicians, but this case could be further tested.

Finally, the literature tells us that effectiveness of lobbying is partly dependent on the quality and clarity of lobbying request ('the ask'). This means that lobbyists need a clear set of recommendations, including alternative policy proposals to be successful. There is some evidence to suggest that defenders of the status quo have an advantage as they need to undermine the oppositions' proposals without justifying the status quo position. Whereas, challengers of the status quo need to work harder by outlining a viable alternative policy, and explain how this would work (Baumgartner et al., 2009). As we have described, the groups in the study were all status quo challengers. Feedback from umbrella groups we contacted to develop the study suggested that one of the identified problems that citizen interest groups had was an unclear or weak ask in their lobbying. A raft of 'resources' and support programmes for community groups to become more effective campaigners are being funded in the UK because of this gap. Clarifying the request the groups were making was therefore a key challenge for the study.

Lobbyists have a tendency to lobby people who are already supporters of their cause, and avoid their opponents (Hall and Deardorff, 2006). This is seen as apparently irrational behaviour and we wanted to overcome this irrational bias; randomisation of the local politicians who receive a particular intervention therefore helped to channel groups' energies in a more even spread across allies, enemies and people who have not decided.

Methods

The study was a cluster randomised controlled trial, where the units were experiments carried out within local government areas. The intervention was

comparable letter writing campaigns carried out by citizen interest groups to local elected members in English local authorities. The two treatments were differently worded letters that was sent by a lobby group to the councillors, which were generated from a random sample of half of all elected politicians - councillors - in a local government, which were then randomised into two groups.

To create the lobby we recruited local community and voluntary sector partners in each authority to deliver the intervention. We selected the authorities on the basis of variations in political control and location, and the availability of a comparable and credible interest group to do the intervention. We carried out eight experiments, which created a sample size of 248, i.e. eight local community groups or associations each in a different authority each with an average of around 60 councillors in total (of which half were randomly selected to make up the sample). We carried out power calculations to determine for different sample sizes.⁴

The local associations are unique to each locality, but similar in terms of their grassroots connections. Interest groups involved in the experiment included faith organisations, refugee/new migrant organisations, organisations working with black and ethnic minority groups, participatory arts organisations, disability/carers' networks and youth groups.

The letters outlined a real local issue of concern for the groups, and were adapted to that local issue, but followed a standard and consistent structure.

⁴. We originally calculated a sample size of 484 would be needed to show a difference of ten per cent between the groups with a power of 60 per cent at a .05 statistical significance. However, this calculation does not take into account the clustering of the data which depends on assumptions about the inter-cluster correlation (ICC) score, where even modest correlations can have a large impact of the effect size it is possible to show would be significance keeping the numbers constant. Using the helpful University of Aberdeen Health Services Research Unity sample size calculator (<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/hsru/uploads/files/calculationmanual.pdf>), we made some estimates of the increase in sample size needed when the intra-correlation coefficient (ICC) is assumed to be .01. The formula and the worked examples on the Aberdeen site show how modest increases in the ICC would lead massive increases in sample size needed.

There were two treatment groups receiving letters from the same local group. The research randomly allocated half of all the local politicians into these two groups so the only difference between the groups other than random error was the quality and level of professionalism of the letter they receive from a local association working with the researchers.⁵ The structure for both treatments is shown in Figures 2 and 3, which show the treatments and how they link to the literature as summarised in Figure 1. Treatment 1 contained weak, un-evidenced and not locally relevant versions of five of the eight factors in effective lobbying. It did not contain three of the eight factors (private information, values, alternative policy). It had only one reference to a weak and unclear request. Treatment 2 contained strong, evidenced and locally relevant versions of all the factors in effective lobbying. There were three references to a clear request, and two references to all other factors, apart from how current policy is failing or leads to negative outcomes which has one reference.

[FIGS 2 and 3 HERE]

Analysis

The analysis report the overall response rates; compared mean letter responses according in the two groups to see whether a more professionalised approach yielded a higher response; compared the quality of the responses in the two groups to see whether a more professionalised approach yielded a more helpful response. The responses from each authority are shown in Table 1.

⁵ We are greatly to Stephen Greasley from IPEG who performed the randomisation using SPSS random numbers procedure.

[TABLE 1 HERE]

Table 1 shows that the overall response rate was (arguably) extremely low at 18.5 per cent. It also shows that there was a considerable variation according to low authority ranging from 4.2 to 30.6 per cent.

Next we present the replies according to the treatments. The result in Table 2 is the perhaps counter-intuitive finding that the response to the weaker Treatment 1 was higher than for the supposed stronger Treatment 2. A t test of difference of means is significant at $p < .1$ ($t=1.3$, $p=.096$). The clustered nature of the trial present a full report at this stage on the statistical significance of difference, but it seems the less professionalised, information- and emotion-poor approach yielded a higher response than the professionalised, information- and emotion-rich approach. A clustered probit regression using clustered standard errors is the correct test in this circumstance. We control for the treatment and also the party of the respondent, excluding the two main parties on the grounds that the established power brokers may be tied into existing producer interest groups so more responsive to a citizen interest group. The Liberal Democrats, who form a large number of councillors in this variable, have traditionally performed this role. Thus we create a variable that take the value of zero for the two main parties and one for the Liberal Democrats and other Opposition parties. The dependent variable is the reply to the letter, making the treatment and the party variable the response terms. The results are presented in Table 3. The table shows that the information poor may have had more of a response, but is not statistically significant.

The number of responses is only one outcome. The quality of the responses is also clearly critical; fewer but constructive and supportive responses from appropriate decision makers may be of more benefit to the interest groups than a larger number of non-committal or unhelpful answers from politicians not in a position to assist. And ultimately the best measure of quality would be that the lobby succeeded. Both treatments contained a set of generic requests as a basis for outcome measurement: "We would very much appreciate the opportunity to collaborate. Please could you let us know: your position on [the relevant local issue]; how you would like to take this issue forward." Other outcome variables further down the chain of decision making, although more attractive in that they are concrete and observable, would be the result of a complex mix of institutional factors, and therefore could not be considered to be direct results of the intervention. A successful outcome to the lobby was not necessarily within the gift of all of the individual councillors. The initial response by telephone, letter or email was used in the analysis as the standardised outcome variable.

However, this causes an issue for the analysis of quality of response, in that any verbal response to a request can be considered suspect, more so in a politician's world where there is a high likelihood of pseudo- or symbolic agreement to secure (or avoid losing) electoral and public support. Early comments from colleagues offered hypothetical responses they considered at best, difficult to categorise, and at worst, typically British formulations of pseudo-agreement: 'I will help in any way I can'; 'My colleague is much more useful to you'; 'For you the door is always open'.

The analysis attempted to deal with these issues by creating a coding framework that allowed for a series of different types of response from the same

individual in order to see if a response was backed up by other (seemingly) helpful actions or comments, or they were just empty phrases. A coding framework for the quality and content of the responses was created based on the generic request combined with the nature of the actual responses received. The responses were then coded blind by two different coders that had not been involved in the experiment and had no knowledge of which group the councillor was in. Table 4 shows the results of the coding.⁶

[TABLE 4 HERE]

We probe the structure of these responses with factor analysis, in this case principle components, and present the rotated factors scores of the four factors that emerged with eigenvalues over one, shown in Table 5.

[TABLE 5 HERE]

Factor one loads heavily on the helping and meeting up factors which seem to go together. Factor two loads on the less helpful factors or commenting. Factor three seems to be a more general helping factor without a particular structure. Factor four does not have a particular interpretation. These factors, especially the first two, show a structure of the responses reflecting different kinds of behaviour on the part of elected politicians.

We then present regression results based on regressing the treatment and party variables on these scores. Table 6 contains the results. In all cases the

⁶ Two coders carried out the exercise. For the moment we do not report intercoder reliability or a reconciled dataset, but present the analysis one coder's work.

treatment variable is negative suggesting the poor letter had more of an effect, but that in all three regression the coefficient is not statistically significant. We cannot conclude there has been an effect of the treatment on the quality and content at this stage of our research.

[TABLE 6 HERE]

Discussion and Conclusion

The low level of response is notable. Indeed, several groups approached to take part in the study refused on the grounds that lobbying politicians was a pointless activity as they were unlikely to respond. Categorising this as a low response rate presumes one or both of two things. One, that councillors usually respond to correspondence and therefore this is anomalous against some form of average or benchmark. Two, that councillors ought to respond to correspondence and therefore this is an unacceptable response rate when set against their obligations to constituents. There is little concrete data on existing or historic levels of councillor responsiveness, but there are many strong clues about low levels of responsiveness to citizens that can be seen in ongoing policy concern to create a new breed of councillor who will take on a 'community leadership' role (e.g. see Foot and Newman, 2006; James and Cox, 2007), and UK-based Inquiries and Commissions into the lamentable state of local democracy (CLG, 2007; Power Inquiry, 2006). One of the recommendations of the independent Councillors Commission (CLG, 2007, p.68) was that:

“In order to maintain confidence in local councillors, Local Authority Standards Committees should be empowered to suspend and claw back part of the basic allowance on the limited occasions where councillors are measurably failing to fulfil their role description”.

Included in Councillors role descriptions is actively seeking out citizens' views, taking these into account when considering policy and taking decisions, feeding back to constituents the decisions that affect them, helping community groups understand local governance, and dealing with constituents' enquiries and concerns (p31).

As to whether councillors have an obligation to respond, there is no legal duty to respond to constituents' letters. The legally enforceable Code of Conduct for councillors was revised in 2007 and deals with intimidation, confidentiality, registration and disclosure of interests. The Code's stated general principles of public life including accountability to the public for actions, openness, and the preservation of public confidence through leadership, but not does not specifically cover responding to lobbying requests or correspondence. Ultimately the claim is about the effective operation of local democracy, and to a lesser extent about basic 'professionalism' and politeness. There were clearly some potential common objections to the democratic claim, including 'this does not affect my electoral ward', and 'I do not have responsibility for this policy area'. The apparently 'stronger' Treatment 2 attempted to overcome these potential objections by emphasising the relevance of the problem in all councillors' electoral wards, and the possible inputs that could be made by elected members in both strategic decision-making and 'backbench' positions. A responsive local

councillor should, in any case, be able to refer a citizen group on to the most appropriate person as a minimum. The low response finding reinforces what is already known about the need for a new breed of local politician.

The other notable initial finding is the counter-intuitive result that the weaker treatment may have generated the highest number of responses as well as a better quality of response. We plan to increase the number of observations to have a higher powered test the statistical significance of our results. However, even where the results are not significant, they all point in the same direction. At the very least, they do not show a positive effect of the stronger treatment, which is the standard hypothesis of the lobbying literature. There are several other avenues worth exploring if the same pattern holds (with the 'bad' letter doing better than the 'good' letter).

Local government defenders might well argue that our results merely show the prosaic truth that demands on local politicians have substantially increased in the last decade, with a rise in the number of internal organisational and party political demands, leaving less time to actually represent the people who voted them in. It may be the case that the weak treatment was easier to process as it made fewer cognitive demands on councillors. Another avenue is that it may be the case that offers of private and public information are off-putting to local decision makers as they downgrade the expert status of the local politician. At the core of the informational lobbying argument is a presumption that the lobbyee will welcome (alleged) external expertise or information as an aid to policy-making. Our initial results seem to suggest the opposite. Perhaps the ongoing battles over legitimacy between politicians as beleaguered staff carriers of representative democracy, and the upstart interest groups of participatory power,

may overshadow decision-makers' commitment have working with lobby groups to enhance democratic decision making processes. We look forward to the next phase of the research where we will test these propositions.

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FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure 1: Summary of the literature on effective lobbying

<i>Factor in effective lobbying</i>	<i>Label given to factor</i>
Lobby comes from a credible source	Credible
Frames the issue in a way that is consistent with lobbyists' values and goals	Framing
Offers the policy maker private or 'costly' information that would otherwise be difficult for the policy maker to gather	Private information
Summarises and processes a mass of publicly available information in a way clarifies the implications for the policy maker	Public information
Contains emotive or symbolic appeals to commonly held values	Values
Outlines how current policy approaches lead to negative outcomes	Bad policy
Outlines how an alternative approach would promote shared policy goals	Alternative policy
Has a clear set of recommendations or 'ask'	Ask

Figure 2: structure of Treatment 1 in relation to the literature

<i>Treatment 1 - Letter structure</i>	<i>Link to literature by label</i>	<i>Nature of treatment</i>
Brief description of group/organisation. Why the group is writing.	Credible Ask	No evidence of the legitimacy and credibility of the group. A weak ask.
Brief overview of strategic priorities.	Public information	No detail of relevance to lobby.
Description of groups' work.	Credible	Weak version of why group is credible, not including facts or evidence.
Wider impacts for society and/or the local area of the issue, and/or people's attitudes in the UK.	Bad policy	Problems asserted but not referenced or evidenced. Not locally relevant.
Statements about the value of voluntary and community groups' roles in relation to the issue, not referenced.	Framing	Framing is done without specific reference to the group.
Generic ask i.e. outcome measure.	n/a - measurement	
<i>Summary</i>		
Contains weak, un-evidenced and not locally relevant versions of five of the eight factors in effective lobbying. Does not contain three of the eight factors (private information, values, alternative policy). One reference to a weak and unclear ask.		

Figure 3: structure of Treatment 2 in relation to the literature

<i>Treatment 2 - Letter structure</i>	<i>Link to literature by label</i>	<i>Nature of treatment</i>
Why the group is writing, including goals that will benefit the local authority and area.	Alternative policy Ask	Clear formulation of how lobby request would deliver outcomes. A clear ask.
Acknowledgement of work the local authority has already done, but brief overview of need for further work. Need for all parties to play a role.	Bad policy Framing Public information	Gaps in policy outlined using locally relevant evidence. Contribution of all stakeholders outlined.
Statement that group has ideas or proposals and summary of possible policy outcomes of proposals. Overall benefits to communities.	Alternative policy Ask	Clear formulation of how lobby request would deliver outcomes. A clear ask.
Acknowledgement of any existing activity by politicians and statements about need to work together.	Ask	A clear ask
What role the group wants to play in future, how they can contribute, or what skills they can offer.	Private information Framing	Private information explicitly stated. Framing done in relation to the lobby group.
Boxed example of groups' work highlighting their capacity, membership or skills and track record, and issues for members.	Private information Credible Values	Evidence to support claims of group's credibility and ability to contribute. Case study example to make an emotional appeal to values.
Summary of strategic and policy links in local area. Summary of societal impacts and research showing benefits of work, including references.	Public information Values	Detailed public information summarised using locally relevant evidence. Appeal to values made using referenced evidence.
Description of organisation highlighting its strengths, membership numbers etc.	Credible	Strong statement using evidence of why the group is credible.
Generic ask i.e. outcome measure.	n/a -	

Summary

Contains strong, evidenced and locally relevant versions of all the factors in effective lobbying. There are three references to a clear ask, and two references to all other factors (apart from how current policy is failing or leads to negative outcomes).

Table 1: Responses to both treatments by local authority

<i>Reply</i>	<i>Blackburn</i>	<i>Bolton</i>	<i>Bristol</i>	<i>Cambridge</i>	<i>Cheshire</i>	<i>St Helens</i>	<i>Stockton</i>	<i>Sunderland</i>	<i>Total</i>
No	87.5	83.3	69.4	70.0	82.5	95.8	71.4	89.5	81.5
Yes	12.5	16.7	30.6	30.0	17.5	4.2	28.6	10.5	18.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	32	30	36	20	40	24	28	38	248

Table 2: reply by treatment

<i>Reply</i>	<i>Information-poor letter T1</i>	<i>Information-rich letter T2</i>	<i>Total</i>
No	78.2	84.7	81.4
Yes	21.8	15.3	16.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	124	124	248

Table 3: probit regression of intervention on reply to letter

VARIABLES	Reply
Intervention	-0.263 (0.166)
Not main party	0.334*** (0.0801)
Constant	-0.872*** (0.154)
Observations	248

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 4: response to letter coding according to category

	No.	No.	No.
Quality of help			
0	233.0	2.0	235.0
1	9.0	2.0	11.0
2	0.0	2.0	2.0
Total	242.0	6.0	248.0
It's not my problem			
0	235.0	6.0	241.0
1	7.0	0.0	7.0
Total	242.0	6.0	248.0
Suggested other contacts			
0	233.0	5.0	238.0
1	9.0	1.0	10.0
Total	242.0	6.0	248.0
Referral to officer committee			
0	234.0	5.0	239.0
1	8.0	1.0	9.0
Total	242.0	6.0	248.0
Referral to fellow councillor			
0	230.0	4.0	234.0
1	12.0	2.0	14.0
Total	242.0	6.0	248.0
Willingness to take up the issue			
0	235.0	3.0	238.0
1	7.0	3.0	10.0
Total	242.0	6.0	248.0
Willingness to meet			
0	233.0	2.0	235.0
1	9.0	4.0	13.0
Total	242.0	6.0	248.0
Met in person			
0	240.0	6.0	246.0
1	2.0	0.0	2.0
Total	242.0	6.0	248.0
Further discussion			
0	235.0	2.0	237.0
1	7.0	4.0	11.0
Total	242.0	6.0	248.0
Comment on the issue			
0	233.0	3.0	236.0
1	9.0	3.0	12.0
Total	242.0	6.0	248.0
Information about			
0	239.0	5.0	244.0
1	3.0	1.0	4.0
Total	242.0	6.0	248.0
Offer personal support			
0			
1			
Total			

Table 5: rotated factor scores on responses to lobbying

	<i>Factor 1</i>	<i>Factor 2</i>	<i>Factor 3</i>	<i>Factor 4</i>	<i>Uniqueness</i>
Quality of help	0.6158	0.0729	0.5455	0.3267	0.2252
It's not my problem	-0.0164	0.8923	0.0323	-0.0342	0.2013
Suggested other contacts	0.0798	0.8639	0.1493	0.3267	0.1183
Referral to officer committee	0.0587	0.1258	0.7150	0.0418	0.4678
Referral to fellow councilor	-0.0236	0.4090	0.7036	-0.1250	0.3214
Willingness to take up the issue	0.1991	-0.1736	0.5597	0.4266	0.4349
Willingness to meet	0.8327	0.0586	0.1975	0.1161	0.2507
Met in person	0.7643	0.0923	-0.1712	-0.3161	0.2781
Further discussion	0.8282	-0.0831	0.0545	0.3293	0.1959
Comment on the issue	0.4397	0.2405	0.0702	0.5799	0.4077
Information about council policy	0.0601	0.3072	0.0093	0.7917	0.2751
Offer personal support	0.3833	-0.1674	0.3971	0.4326	0.4802

Table 6: Linear regression of intervention on saved factor scores

VARIABLES	<i>Factor 1</i>	<i>Factor 2</i>	<i>Factor 3</i>	<i>Factor 4</i>
Intervention	-0.0670 (0.144)	-0.0631 (0.146)	-0.0761 (0.109)	-.0246 (.1507)
Not main parties	0.152 (0.136)	0.0638 (0.173)	-0.0637 (0.0837)	-.1890 (.1092)
Constant	-0.00816 (0.119)	0.0141 (0.123)	0.0555 (0.0886)	.0641 (.1649)
Observations	248	248	248	248

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1