

Compact

**Between Newcastle's voluntary
and community organisations
and Newcastle City Council**

Consultation and Liaison Code of Practice

**Agreed June 2003
Refreshed November 2007**

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1. The aim of this code

- 1.1 This Code of Good Practice aims to improve consultation and liaison between Newcastle City Council (the Council) and voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) in Newcastle upon Tyne. It includes the main considerations that came from consultation carried out by working groups set up by the Council and the voluntary and community sector.
- 1.2 Newcastle City Council recognises that voluntary and community organisations have an important role in helping it to achieve its objectives, and the Council can play a positive role in supporting the work of VCOs and in promoting volunteering. VCOs, as independent, not-for-profit groups, bring particular value to Newcastle and fulfil a crucial role that is distinct from statutory agencies and the private sector. This role includes:
 - enabling individuals to contribute to public life and the development of communities by providing opportunities for voluntary action;
 - helping people get involved in the design and delivery of services they use; and
 - acting as advocates for people who otherwise find it difficult to have their needs or views heard.
- 1.3 By doing this VCOs promote equality and diversity. They help to alleviate poverty, improve people's quality of life and involve people who face social exclusion. Getting the mechanisms for consultation and liaison right, within the Council's wider responsibilities for community participation and democratic renewal, is an essential part of ensuring the relationship works well.
- 1.4 In this way the Code underpins the Compact between Newcastle's voluntary and community sector, which the Council published in March 2001. It is based on a shared vision of the mechanisms which the Council and VCOs should use to ensure they are working together for the benefit of communities in Newcastle. The Code is intended to help both the Council and VCOs, by helping to develop effective consultation and liaison methods and structures that should result in sound policy decisions that support well delivered services and programmes.
- 1.5 For working relations between the Council and VCOs to be effective, the Council needs to be well informed about the views of VCOs on matters that concern them and VCOs about the Council's policy and planning intentions. This is especially true if the Council is considering introducing new policies that will affect all or part of the voluntary sector, but it is also true of ongoing working relationships.
- 1.6 However, the Code also recognises that VCOs are not one organisation, but hundreds, and often do not have a single view on any given topic or proposal.
- 1.7 The Code applies to all the Directorates of Newcastle City Council and to its corporate functions. The Code also applies to the full range of VCOs in Newcastle.

2. Background - the wider context of how the Council consults with its stakeholders

2.1 Fundamentally the Council is accountable to the residents of Newcastle through its **Councillors**. Councillors are responsible for representing their communities and bringing their views into Council decision making. There are several ways that residents and other stakeholders can put their views across to Councillors, including through their surgeries, Ward Committees and Area Committees. More information about the Council's decision-making structures is given in appendix 1.

2.2 To plan and deliver its services effectively, the Council consults with a wide range of outside interests to make sure that it considers the experiences of and the impact of proposals on its 'stakeholders', meaning local residents, businesses, VCOs and people who work in and visit Newcastle. The Council carries out this consultation in various ways, including through its Residents Survey, Tenants Compact arrangements, its citizen's panel 'Speak Up' and user satisfaction surveys about specific services. Staff who have regular contact with stakeholders, in particular local communities, also feed back views to other officers and to Councillors.

2.3 This Code of Practice fits within the wider context of the Council's Community Engagement Strategy¹ (July 2007), Council committees and other consultation structures by setting out the specific approach to consultation and liaison between the Council and VCOs in Newcastle. The code covers:

- When the Council should seek to involve VCOs in its decision making; and,
- How the Council should involve VCOs when it seeks to do so.

Comment: Suggest removing, as now somewhat out of date.

3. The importance of effective consultation and liaison between the Council and voluntary and community organisations in Newcastle

3.1 Within its wider responsibilities to consult and involve stakeholders, the Council recognises the value of VCOs as a source of opinion and expertise. VCOs can offer their knowledge and experience on behalf of the people and causes they work for. They can also provide case studies and models of new organisational ways of working and innovative practices in delivering services.

3.2 Effective consultation and liaison with VCOs:

- Builds involvement in local democracy;
- Provides a means for reflecting the needs and wishes of a wide range of communities, especially those who face discrimination and disadvantage;
- Shows the Council's commitment to openness and accountability;
- Leads to planning and delivery of better services;
- Supports partnership working; and
- Helps identify problems and risks at an early stage so they can be properly dealt with.

¹ See <http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/core.nsf/a/engagementstrat?opendocument>

- 3.3 Consultation and liaison is not simply about a one-off event, such as a request for views on a particular policy or issue. The relationship between the Council and the sector is about a continuing exchange of views and information, and the existence of robust ongoing liaison mechanisms. This means the Council can reduce the need for special one-off consultations and is able to consider the views of the sector at a much earlier point in policy development.
- 3.4 This Code therefore treats consultation and liaison as all part of the processes that contribute to good information exchange between the sector and the Council.
- 3.5 However, the Council recognises the voluntary sector is composed of organisations, and therefore is not simply a short cut to consulting communities. VCOs can provide an effective way of consulting with particular groups of individuals. The Council may choose this method of consulting, but this is separate from consultation with the voluntary sector itself.
- 3.6 This Code therefore applies to consultation between the Council and VCOs themselves. The Community Engagement Strategy sets out the wider context of how the Council will involve communities in its decision making.

4. An effective framework for consultation and liaison between the Council and voluntary and community organisations

The Council's undertakings

- 4.1 The Council will adhere to its agreed model of participation when consulting with VCOs. The model is described in appendix 2. This Code applies mostly to the first three stages of the model; giving information, consultation and deciding together.
- 4.2 The Council will make sure there is a clear purpose for consultation with VCOs. The Council will only use consultation and involvement processes when there is a real opportunity for VCOs to influence the outcome. The Council will be clear when it is not possible to make a change, or when there are only choices about parts of a decision. Even where consultation and involvement is not possible, the Council will still keep VCOs properly informed about its decision making.
- 4.3 The Council will consult with VCOs on the areas outlined in Section 5 of this Code.
- 4.4 The Council will follow the principles of good practice described in section 6 of this Code.
- 4.5 The Council accepts the most effective way of keeping a continuous exchange of views with VCOs is through standing structures such as liaison committees and Forums, rather than through one-off consultation exercises.
- 4.6 The Council recognises that involvement in consultation and information exchange needs resources, which VCOs cannot always meet by themselves, and that VCOs sometimes need help from the Council to take part.

- 4.7 Where the Government sets timescales for policies or initiatives that make it difficult for the Council to meet its own commitments under this Code, the Council accepts responsibility for raising the matter with the relevant Government department or agency. Where appropriate the Council will work with VCOs to co-ordinate responses to such situations.
- 4.8 The Council recognises that in working with VCOs it is the bigger and more powerful partner, and that its attitudes and procedures in liaison and consultation need to be sensitive to these differences.

Voluntary and community organisations' undertakings

- 4.9 VCOs accept that where the Council is following this Code in seeking to consult them, it is their responsibility to respond appropriately.
- 4.10 VCOs recognise it is their responsibility to use their infrastructure - forums, networks, intermediary and umbrella bodies - effectively to get the most out of consultation and liaison with the Council.
- 4.11 When they are involved in consultation and liaison, VCOs will be clear about whether they are representing the views of their organisation based on their knowledge or experience - that is, acting as "expert witnesses", or whether they have specifically sought the views of particular groups they work with in drawing up their responses.
- 4.12 VCOs will have realistic expectations about what the Council can and cannot do.
- 4.13 VCOs who take representative positions within liaison and consultation structures accept that they must give due time and effort to carrying out their responsibilities.
- 4.14 VCOs accept their responsibility for pressuring the Government through their own national structures when the Government imposes time scales for policies or initiatives that make it difficult for the Council to meet its own duties on reasonable timing to the voluntary sector. Where appropriate VCOs will work with the Council to co-ordinate responses to such situations.
- 4.15 VCOs accept that being consulted does not necessarily mean the eventual decision will be what they wanted. In other words, the **process** of the consultation is different from the meaning of the **outcome**.

5. Deciding on issues that need consultation or liaison with voluntary and community organisations.

- 5.1 The Council is committed to consulting with VCOs on issues that are likely to affect them, in particular where the Council is proposing new roles and responsibilities for VCOs.
- 5.2 Taken in its broadest sense, almost all the policies and services of the Council could be seen as affecting some or all VCOs in Newcastle. This means that in general the Council must make sure that it includes VCOs properly in all its consultation and involvement activities, in line with the Community Engagement Strategy. In practice

Councillors and officers of the Council need to be clear when they should follow the terms of this Code in particular.

Although there cannot be a definitive list of situations when this Code applies, the previous experience of both the Council and VCOs highlight several areas where specific consultation with VCOs is necessary or useful. These are set out below. Section 7 sets out what approaches to consultation are available when one of these circumstances applies.

- 5.3 Sometimes, because of financial constraints or because of Government directives, the Council's ability to consult and liaise with VCOs may be limited. However, even when this is the case, the Council should tell VCOs as soon as possible and try to find ways of involving them more fully later. At best VCOs may be able to make suggestions that help in such changes; at worst they will know that they may need to change their own planning because of these changes.

Major changes in services provided by the Council

- 5.4 When the Council is considering major changes in how it delivers a service, which will affect VCOs and/or the groups they work with, consultation with VCOs is vital. Because VCOs are involved in supporting and providing services to such a wide range of communities in Newcastle, it is likely that most major proposals around how the Council provides services will directly impact on some or many VCOs. The Council should not assume that simply because it has traditionally provided a service that VCOs will not have a direct interest in that area of work. In practice the services of most interest to VCOs are likely to be the main front-line services, such as Social Services, community development, housing, lifelong learning and environmental services.

Policy changes that may impact on the Sector

- 5.5 When the Council is considering major policy changes, which will affect VCOs, or the groups they work with, consultation with VCOs is vital. Again, because VCOs are involved in such a wide range of activities, the Council should not underestimate the policy areas that will impact on them or the groups they work with. In practice, policy areas of particular interest to VCOs are likely to be both strategic (for example the Regeneration Strategy, Equality Plan, etc.) and those that are specific to particular areas or services (for example the 'Everyone's Tomorrow' strategy for older people, Children and Young People's Plan, City Centre Action Plan, etc.).

Funding and Grant Aid Changes

- 5.6 Because many VCOs are dependent on Council funding it is essential the Council consults them on any changes of policy or practice in this area. This refers to general issues about how the Council plans and runs whole funding programmes; the requirement to consult and tell individual organisations about their own grant aid is already detailed in the Compact Funding Code of Practice.

Introduction of New Programmes

- 5.7 The Council regularly has to carry out Government programmes, most of which bring large budgets with them. Examples over the years have been the Urban Programme, City Challenge, the Single Regeneration Budget and the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund. These programmes are usually of great interest to the voluntary sector, both in making policy and plans for carrying out the programme, and in access to the funding.
- 5.8 VCOs understand the Council often works within difficult time constraints to carry out these programmes. However, it is still essential the Council brings VCOs into discussions about new programmes at the earliest possible opportunity. If this does not happen, important decisions could be made which would prevent the views of VCOs having any impact when the Council consults them.

Decisions that will have a direct financial impact on the Sector

- 5.9 Outside the grant aid structure, the Council may make decisions that have a direct financial impact on VCOs. The Council should take account of this in its planning and consult VCOs where possible. However, VCOs accept that some of these decisions will have such a broad impact across Newcastle that it would be unreasonable to expect the sector to be singled out for special consultation (a good example would be the annual setting of the Council Tax rates).

Setting up partnership mechanisms

- 5.10 Both the Council and VCOs are involved in several partnerships set up to plan and deliver services. These include the Newcastle Partnership, partnerships taking a lead on particular theme areas of work, such as Newcastle Health Partnership and those leading neighbourhood renewal in specific areas, such as the New Deal for Communities. It is crucial for the Council to consult VCOs on any new partnership it is involved in setting up during the planning stage. Support from the Council for ongoing consultation and liaison structures with VCOs will help in this process.

6. Principles of Good Practice

- 6.1 The Council's Community Engagement Strategy sets out the general principles covering consultation and involvement in its decision making. In addition, there are several specific principles the Council should follow if consultation and liaison with VCOs is to be meaningful and rewarding for both parties.

Independence of VCOs

- 6.2 The Council recognises the independence of the sector, as outlined in the Compact and accepts that sometimes VCOs will criticise, campaign against, or decline to support, a Council policy or practice.

Timing

- 6.3 Getting the timing right for consultation and liaison is crucial, because if this fails, everything else fails. There must be time for the consultation to be meaningful. Some key points the Council must consider include:

- Giving information with enough time for it to be read and reflected on;
- Giving notice of meetings in enough time to make it practicably possible to attend; and,
- Holding consultation early enough in the process for it to affect the outcomes.

6.4 The following is a list of acceptable timescales for consultation:

- For **written consultation**, wherever possible the Council should allow **8 weeks** for replies. Where the Council allows less than 8 weeks the consultation information should clearly explain why there is a shorter response time.
- When the Council invites VCOs to attend **consultation events**, wherever possible the Council should give at least **4 weeks'** notice.
- For meetings that are part of an ongoing consultation or liaison process, wherever possible the Council should give at least **1 week's** notice.

The Council should allow for holidays and other known timing difficulties and extend or change consultation timescales as needed.

6.5 VCOs understand that although the Council often works to difficult time constraints it remains the case that if it does not follow this part of the Code proper consultation will not have taken place.

Information

6.6 The Council must provide enough information to enable those VCOs it consults to make an informed judgement. The Council should ensure that information it provides for consultation:

- Is clearly written, following plain English standards;
- Is available in alternative formats where it is reasonable to do so;
- Presents a simple description of the issues the Council is seeking views on and any deadline for responses;
- Wherever possible, asks clear questions and presents fairly argued choices, avoiding a 'yes or no' format;
- Includes an explanation of limits on decisions, including any choices that cannot be considered and why, or any decisions that have already been made;
- Includes contact details where VCOs can seek more information or clarification about the consultation; and
- Includes a circulation list of those people the Council has sent the information to. This gives respondents valuable knowledge of whom else is involved, so they can confer and suggest other organisations who should be consulted.

Status of representatives

6.7 Where anyone from a VCO is acting as a representative in a consultation or liaison process, the Council and the VCO concerned should be clear about the mandate and status of the people involved. If they are formal representatives, it should be clear whom they represent, and how they are meant to seek views from and feed back to their constituency.

- 6.8 Wherever possible the Council will work with appropriate infrastructure networks and organisations to make sure that when it offers places for "voluntary sector representatives" they can be filled and supported appropriately. Where this is the case, the infrastructure network or organisation will be responsible for working with the Council to make sure the representatives have adequate support to fulfil their role properly.
- 6.9 Where the Council chooses to use a mechanism of its own for selecting such representatives, it must make sure there is total clarity about the status of individuals selected to play a part in such processes.

Support for consultation and liaison processes

- 6.10 For consultation and liaison to be effective, there needs to be some resource to support it. This is likely to include:
- Dedicated officer time;
 - Election expenses;
 - Costs of holding meetings;
 - Costs of information work (i.e. post, print, stationery);
 - Repayment of expenses for representatives; and
 - Costs of meeting access needs.

Of these the most significant is likely to be the cost of officer time.

- 6.11 While VCOs realise that it is not always the responsibility of the Council to provide resource support, the Council should recognise that without enough support, consultation and liaison will not work.

Feedback

- 6.12 The Council should give feedback following consultation to ensure that VCOs feel their contributions have been of value. This is less of an issue in ongoing consultation and liaison structures than in one-off consultations, but it is always an issue of some sensitivity. If consultation and liaison has taken place within a formal meeting setting, prompt circulation of accurate minutes is essential.

Access

- 6.13 The Council should make sure it takes action to ensure there is wide access to consultation and liaison. If the Council holds meetings or events:
- They should be in settings that are fully accessible for disabled people and easily reachable by public transport and, where possible, have parking nearby;
 - It should consider suitable timing given the target audience, for example school hours, school holidays, festivals and so on;
 - It should ask people to identify any other support needs they have (for example, childcare, BSL interpretation) and the Council should make reasonable efforts to meet these needs; and
 - Publicity and other information at the meeting or event should be available in large print formats and written in plain English.

Outside agencies or contractors

- 6.14 If the Council uses outside agencies or contractors to run consultation, it should ensure that they involve or tell the relevant staff in the Council. VCOs will find it difficult if their regular liaison contacts within the Council have no knowledge of a consultation or liaison process the outside agency or contractor is running.

7. Models of Consultation and Liaison

- 7.1 There is no single best model for consultation and liaison. Instead there are various possibilities, each of which has its own strengths and which can be best used to fit some particular circumstance. This Code outlines several models, many of which have been used in Newcastle, and recommends that all be considered for use in the appropriate circumstances.
- 7.2 However regardless of the model, the Council should make sure it follows the principles set out in section 6 of this Code. In particular the Council should take account of the status of representatives and the need for enough resources for consultation and liaison.

Formal and Ongoing Liaison Structures

- 7.3 In this model the Council sets up a formal committee, with representatives from the Council and VCOs. The group meets on a regular schedule, has officer time assigned to support it and a clear remit. Examples of this model include the Compact Annual Review Group and the Social Services Informal Advisory Group.
- 7.4 This model works best when the Council as a whole, or one of its Directorates, and VCOs have a continuous overlapping area of interest, since it provides an effective and ongoing structure for the exchange of views. It also reduces the need for one-off consultation exercises since views can be fed into the policy development process at an early stage.

Voluntary Sector Representatives on Partnerships

- 7.5 In this model a partnership structure includes representatives of the Council and of VCOs, as well as representatives of other sectors or organisations. Examples of this include the Steering Group of the Newcastle Partnership and Newcastle Health Partnership.
- 7.6 This model is appropriate when there are broad issues to discuss that require input from many parties, and where decisions arising from discussion are joint ones. It has the same advantages as the joint committee described in 7.3, since it facilitates ongoing exchange of views and information, and early input into policy formation. The disadvantage of Partnership models is that they can sometimes be large and cumbersome, and they need excellent servicing and structuring to work well.
- 7.7 As with other structures, the status of voluntary sector representatives must be clear. If they are meant to represent a constituency, then the mechanisms by which they do so must be identifiable.

Forums and Networks

- 7.8 VCOs often use the model of a Forum, or Network, that brings together organisations (not individuals) who share interests in particular fields of work and policy. While VCOs do not usually set up Forums solely to liaise with the Council, in practice they provide an excellent mechanism for doing so, since they provide easy access to many organisations that share a field of interest. Where Forums have a structure behind them providing servicing and support, this is usually an efficient way of maintaining information exchange and early consultation. Examples of Forums the Council has used in this way include the Health & Community Care Forum (HCCF) the Regeneration Forum and the Voluntary Sector Youth Forum. Newcastle Council for Voluntary Service (NCVS) currently supports each of these Forums.
- 7.9 VCOs welcome the Council's use of Forums and Networks for liaison and consultation. However, the Council should continue to recognise that such Forums also have other objectives. The Council should also recognise that for them to work effectively, Forums need proper resources.
- 7.10 Effective Forums often also create sub-groups for more specialist work areas, which can also be good mechanisms for liaison and consultation on those areas. An example of this is the Contracting Sub-Group of the HCCF, which meets regularly with the Council to discuss issues of common interest around contracting of adult care services.

Time Limited Joint Working Groups

- 7.11 In this model the Council and VCOs meet with a brief to discuss a particular issue, which both sides assume will come to a conclusion and not need ongoing discussion. This is obviously a useful model when the subject is an initiative. Examples of this include the Working Groups set up to negotiate the Code of Practice on Funding and the Consultation and Participation theme of the Newcastle Plan.
- 7.12 As with all models, this needs good servicing mechanisms if it is to be effective, and preferably a clear remit and time-frame.

Committee Positions

- 7.13 Some Council committees offer places to VCOs to contribute to the business of the committee. This model is useful when VCOs have a continuing interest in the business of the committee.
- 7.14 If this model is used, the usual cautions apply about the status of representatives, in particular whether they are acting as "expert witnesses" or expected to relate to a particular constituency. There may also be some servicing need attached to the role. Again, this role may work better if it is attached to one of the umbrella bodies or Forum structures.

Open Meetings and Participatory Events

- 7.15 In this model the Council holds a meeting or event to explore a particular issue and invites VCOs with an interest in the issue. VCOs are particularly concerned that these events use participatory techniques and encourage the Council to use models such as "Whole Systems". An example of this was the consultation that led to the Community Participation green paper.

Document Circulation

- 7.16 In this model the Council circulates a document about a proposed policy or practice change, and invites comments from VCOs. This can be a useful model, but works best when the Council works with a Forum or umbrella body to ensure the circulation is appropriate. In addition, if the issue is an important one, VCOs may prefer to give a co-ordinated response rather than, or as well as, several individual ones. Examples of documents the Council has circulated for consultation are Community Care Plans, and the Equality Policy.

Consulting Umbrella Groups

- 7.17 In this model the Council seeks the views of an umbrella organisation whose remit includes liaison within the voluntary sector, or some part of it. Examples of such organisations include NCVS, Newcastle Tenants Federation or Newcastle Disability Forum. This is helpful when the Council needs a quick response on an issue.
- 7.18 VCOs recognise there are times when this is a suitable procedure. However, the Council should recognise that, without carrying out specific consultation on the issue, umbrella organisations do not speak for all VCOs in their field of work. Instead they can give an "expert witness" view based on their contact with their members, and their knowledge of relevant policy issues.

Focus Groups

- 7.19 Focus Groups are a standard consultation model where the organisation commissioning the consultation brings together people and seeks their views on an issue in a structured way. The Council has not traditionally used this method to consult specifically with VCOs, although VCOs have taken part in focus groups on particular issues, for example Best Value reviews of specific services and the Audit Commission led Comprehensive Performance Assessment of the Council. Generally VCOs prefer the methods previously described, since they include a form of representation. If the Council chooses to use Focus Groups to consult VCOs specifically it should be clear about how it has decided to select participants.

Questionnaires

- 7.20 This method involves sending questionnaires to concerned parties to seek their views on particular issues. The Council often uses this method to seek the views of the general population, although it has not traditionally done so to seek the views of VCOs specifically. If the Council were to use questionnaires to reach VCOs, it should consider using the membership of umbrella bodies or Forums as a means of directing the consultation. The Council would also need to consider the right design of the questionnaire for its target audience and identifying proper resources for the compilation, analysis and feedback of results.

Consulting Individual Organisations

- 7.21 Sometimes the Council may consult, formally or informally, with one or more individual VCOs. In general, VCOs recognise that sometimes this may be suitable, particularly where the Council needs a speedy response, or where one or a few organisations have a main interest in the issue concerned. If the Council uses this method, it should be clearly justified, and not simply a convenience.
- 7.22 All the methods the Code describes have a potential place in consultation and liaison between the sector and the Council. However, experience in Newcastle has led both the Council and VCOs to view the first four as being the most effective – Formal Ongoing Structures; Representation on Partnerships; Use of Forums and Joint Working Groups.

Appendix 1: Council structures and decision-making

1. The Council's Constitution

- 1.1 The Council is composed of 78 Councillors, three for each of the Council wards. Voters elect one-third of Councillors three years in four. Councillors are democratically accountable to residents of their ward - their 'constituents'.
- 1.2 Newcastle City Council agreed a new constitution in May 2002. This sets out how the Council works, how it makes decisions and the procedures which exist to make sure the Council is efficient, open and accountable to local people. The law requires some of these processes, while others are a matter for the Council to choose.
- 1.3 Because of the Local Government Act 2000, the Council had to adopt one of the three forms of executive arrangements allowed by the Government. Following extensive public consultation in the summer of 2001 the Council selected the leader and cabinet model from May 2002.

2. The full Council

- 2.1 All Councillors meet as **the Council**. Here Councillors decide the Council's major policies and set the budget each year. The Council meeting is the public forum for debating key issues facing Newcastle. It appoints:

- The Leader, Deputy Leader and members of the Executive;
- The Leader and Deputy Leader of the Opposition; and
- The regulatory and non-executive committees of the Council, advisory committees, ward committees and Scrutiny Panels.

Deleted: .

- 2.2 Citizens may present petitions and deputations to the Council meeting. They may also ask questions at public question time.

3. The Executive

- 3.1 The full Council appoints an Executive, consisting of the Leader and other chosen councillors. It is the part of the Council that is responsible for most strategic decisions. Individual Executive members do not have decision-making powers. Decisions have to be made collectively by the Executive or by an Executive committee, or by an officer where they have been given delegated powers to do so.

4. Non-executive functions

- 4.1 These are functions that cannot be exercised by the Executive or a Committee of the Executive. This includes functions that **by law** have to be carried by politically balanced committees, and those that the Council can **choose** to treat in this way. The Council has set up separate committees to either make these decisions or to make recommendations to the Council, covering areas such as planning, licensing, employment and the constitution.

5. Scrutiny Panels

- 5.1 There are 5 Scrutiny Panels together with a Scrutiny Management Committee who support the work of the Executive and the Council as a whole. They fulfil the **overview and scrutiny** function within the Council, of both executive and non-executive functions. They make reports and recommendations that advise the Cabinet and the Council as a whole on its policies, budget and service delivery. They can also 'call-in' some decisions. But neither Scrutiny Panels nor full Council have the power to change a decision that conforms to the policy and budget framework. A Scrutiny Panels can only ask the decision-maker to reconsider or ask the Council to ask the decision-maker to reconsider. The decision-maker is then free to decide what further action to take.

6. Council Officers

- 6.1 The Council has people it employs, called 'officers' who give advice, carry out decisions and manage the day-to-day delivery of its services. Some officers have power to make decisions for the Council. Some officers also have a specific duty to ensure the Council acts within the law and uses its resources wisely. A code of practice governs the relationships between officers and Councillors.

7. The Lord Mayor

- 7.1 At its Annual Meeting, the Council elects from its members a chair and deputy chair, who have the titles of **Lord Mayor** and **Deputy Lord Mayor** respectively (the latter commonly known as the Sheriff). The role of the Lord Mayor, and in their absence the Deputy Lord Mayor is to act as the 'first citizen' and ambassador for Newcastle, upholding and promoting the Council's constitution and attending such civic and ceremonial roles as the Council and he or she decides appropriate.

8. Citizens' rights

- 8.1 Citizens have several rights in their dealings with the Council. Some of these are legal rights, while others depend on the Council's own processes. Where members of the public use specific council services, for example as a parent of a school pupil or as a council tenant, they have added rights.
- 8.2 The Council welcomes participation by its citizens in its work. For further information contact the **Head of Democratic Services** at the Civic Centre, or by telephone on **0191 211 5159**, by e-mail to **ian.poll@newcastle.gov.uk**, or by fax to 0191 211 4942. More information is also available on the Council's Internet site - www.newcastle.gov.uk

Appendix 2: What the council means by community engagement

In July 2007, the Council published its Community Engagement Strategy. The purpose of the Strategy is to put residents at the heart of the Council's decision-making processes and ensure that all sections of the community have the opportunity to get involved. The Strategy sets out the principles and model of participation the Council has adopted in its approach to involvement.

The Council believes that community engagement is '... not just about getting agreement to decisions by local authorities and other public bodies, but involving local communities in identifying problems and opportunities ... and in taking action for change.'²

Comment: This quote does not appear to be in the Community Engagement Strategy, but I think it should remain in here anyway.

The Council recognises that community engagement can mean different things to different people, communities, services, and in different situations. Therefore, it will use different methods according to what is most appropriate for particular activities and situations. The main forms of community engagement are as follows:

- **Information**
Information supports all other stages of participation. It keeps people informed about decisions, services and local events.
- **Consultation**
Consultation is used when there is a decision to make about something or when there are several choices to make about the details. For example, the Council might consult about whether to start a new service. Or, if it knows it is going to start the service, the Council might consult about the details, like where to have the service and when it should be open.
- **Deciding together**
This is when other people or agencies are involved in deciding which options to choose, but it is the Council that will act on the decision.
- **Acting together**
This is when decisions are made by partnerships between other people or agencies and the Council. Those involved in deciding also take part in carrying out decisions.
- **Supporting local initiatives**
This is when independent groups get help from the Council to develop and carry out their own plans.³

For more information about, or to receive a copy of the Community Engagement Strategy, please contact the Council's Performance and Improvement Unit on 0191 211 5037. The Strategy is also available on the Internet at:

<http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/core.nsf/a/engagementstrat?opendocument>

² Taken from *Participation Works - 21 Techniques of community participation for the 21st century*, New Economics Foundation.

³ The model of 5 stages of participation was developed by David Wilcox, who has given the Council permission to use it. *Guide to Effective Participation*, David Wilcox, email:david@partnerships.org.uk or phone 0207 600 0105.