

Newcastle Greens Policy on
Local Democracy, Collaborative Leadership and
Open Government

An open, responsive, community-focussed council

Newcastle Greens believe that deepening local democracy and rebuilding trust between Newcastle City Council and the community should be a top priority. Without this, we further entrench diminished local democracy, and divisions between Council and the community.

We believe that the best way to address these issues is to:

- Create a more open, responsive and community-focussed council;
- Ensure that Council has an organisational culture that is genuinely committed to local democracy through its focus on active citizenship and public participation;
- Help make community participation in decision-making more inclusive and diverse; and,
- Improve Council's consultation structures and processes by establishing leadership that is truly collaborative.

Newcastle Greens have a long and proud history of defending, advocating and enriching local democracy in our city. We are committed to establishing a sense of common purpose that is the bedrock for creative and productive collaboration in everything Council does with and for the community.

Newcastle Greens will work to:

Revitalise community participation and consultation by:

- Developing a Council Democracy Policy that expresses Council's commitment to the principles of local democracy.
- Re-establishing a flexible neighbourhood-based community forum system, and providing appropriate systems of support and engagement for representative community groups.
- Reviewing Council's website to make it faster, more accessible, and easier to use.

Develop Newcastle City Council as an open, accountable organisation that:

- Facilitates active citizenship, community empowerment, and accountable governance that relies on community participation as a fundamental prerequisite in decision-making.
- Ensures significant community assets are not removed without appropriate community consultation and the approval of Councillors.

Improve Newcastle City Council's customer service systems by:

- Reviewing Council's Customer Service Charter, adding appropriate accountability measures.
- Establishing clear and workable systems to facilitate prompt communication between Council and the community.

Create open, transparent and accountable Newcastle City Council meetings by:

- Opening currently closed Councillor workshops to the community.
- Improving dialogue between community members and the Council by using workshops and briefings, allowing members of the public to address Council meetings on agenda items, and improving the Public Voice system to make it more user-friendly.
- Ensuring that webcasts of Council meetings are posted on the Council website for easy and ongoing public access.
- Providing publicly available resolution tracking and reporting for Council decisions.

Strengthen the accountability and democracy provisions in Newcastle City Council's Code of Conduct by amending the Code to ensure that it:

- Prioritises the public interest over the interests of the Council administration.
- Strengthens and clarifies requirements for disclosure of donations, conflicts of interest and gifts.
- Strengthens the accountability, transparency, open government and community right-to-know provisions of the Code.

Affirm the role of Councillors as elected representatives of the community by:

- Developing a Charter of Local Representative Democracy.
- Ensuring Councillors have the right to call in development applications.

Ensure that Newcastle City Council's governance systems and structures facilitate a responsive, inclusive and open organisational culture by:

- Reviewing Council's organisational structure.
- Removing the ability of Council staff to vote in working group and committee meetings.
- Minuting all meetings between Council staff and the community.

Recognise the essential role and value of Newcastle Council staff by:

- Ensuring Council is a model employer that sets high standards to the community in its workplace relations practices.
- Ensuring that Council's recruitment policies establish the need for Council staff to have appropriate qualifications for the position for which they are employed.
- Reviewing the use of consultants to maximise appropriate in-house expertise.

Advocate for the recognition of local government in the Australian Constitution.