

**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, transparent 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
- 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 with Council and the community to:

Revitalise community participation and consultation by:

- Re-establishing a flexible neighbourhood-based community forum network and providing support and consultative pathways for representative community groups
- Allowing citizens and community groups to directly address Council

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
- Does not use 'commercial in confidence' as an excuse to hide the reasons behind public decisions
- Ensures community assets are not removed without full community consultation and the approval of Councillors
- Ensures that decisions that disrupt the lives and neighbourhood amenity of residents, such as the decision to host Supercars, are taken only after full and open public discussion

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
- 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
- Maintaining Councillors rights to call in development applications
- Opposing the introduction of a Local Planning Panel that will usurp Newcastle Council's planning powers

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

- Reviewing Council's organisational structure
- 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
- Increasing the skills and expertise of Council staff and reducing the use of consultants

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

Adopted March 2020

For more information about Newcastle Greens policies visit www.newcastlegreens.org.au/policies or contact our Councillors