**Campaigning On Issues**

How does a Community Council decide which issues it will consider and how to pursue them?

You will be presented with a large variety of issues and problems. Some will affect a single member of the community, others the entire community and beyond. Your Community Council must try its best to make a balanced decision on what issues it will tackle and how.

• Start by applying the “community benefit” test. Your actions should be directed towards securing the most positive results for the greatest number of local people, so long as the minority is not adversely affected When faced with a number of issues, give first and most attention to those that affect the most people and on which you can realistically have a positive effect.

• Begin by gathering information. Decisions made without information, by prejudging the issue or by making assumptions, are bad for your community and your reputation. Find out the key points and then find out what local people feel about it.

• Base your Community Council’s position on the views of or benefit to the majority of citizens. The Community Council can play a role in making sure local people have access to balanced information and discussions to inform their views

• Be honest and realistic about whether you can do something about the issue. What influence can you have on the issue and those involved and what action can you take to bring about change? Can you secure professional advice on technical aspects that would help you make your case? Research the person or organisation you want to influence – how can you engage with them to reach the desired outcome for the community?

• Decide what results you want. Be specific. Know why you want each of these results and exactly how they will meet the conditions above about benefit to the community.

• Figure out how to reach these objectives and monitor your activity. Assess how you can tell when you have achieved your objectives.

• An issue does not need to have only two opposing sides. Could your Community Council be an independent mediator bringing opposing factions together?

• Avoid allowing the Community Council to become the vehicle for any campaign that is not the evident will of the majority of community. When and if that is established, maintain that position and do not let your Community Council become the venue for constant debate about the issue’s merits. Nor should any single issue overwhelm your meetings.

• When you have determined the official position of your Community Council on an issue, you should not alter it unless there is a material change in evidence or circumstances.

• A community councillor who becomes publicly associated with a particular position in a way that may be seen to prejudice the Community Council on an issue must declare their interest to the Community Council and not take part in any activity associated with it.

• You may choose to appoint a special committee to co-ordinate your action on a particular issue with appropriate delegated authority. Make sure the committee has a clear remit and set clear instructions on what it may do or not do without the prior approval of the whole Community Council.