Open Council Policy Contents Policy

"a guide to experimental policy making."

Contents

Introduction

Because Open Council Policies are uniquely experimental it is felt that it is necessary to provide some background information and guidelines for members who may be encountering our policies for the first time or are keen to create a policy.

The content of Open Council policies remains at the discretion of participating members there are however certain characteristics that contribute to the unique style and presentation of an Open Council policy that should be laid out as guidelines for prospective policy makers or readers. That is the purpose of this document.

Improvisation

Improvisation is not only the operational methodology of the Open Council generally but is also a crucial and recommended technique in experimental policy making. Thoughts, observations, everyday situations, encounters with the powers that be, opinions, jokes and life experience generally are all perfect materials to improvise with and the experimental policy framework has been developed specifically to provide a place to gather, improvise with and display these thoughts before they float away.

Re-imagination

The core function of the Open Council Experimental Policy Strategy is to pretend the world is different and the best way to do this is to employ the technique of re-imagination. This means taking something that already exists and is preferably prominent in the everyday life of the members, and imagining a whole new function for it and then presenting through the Open Council. For example, the Public Archery policy has been made by re-imagining particular objects in our environment that are familiar to everyone, the Following policy re-imagines a simple everyday activity like walking to work, the Singing Sirens policy re-imagines the police force and all the policies together and the Open Council as a whole is a re-imagining of a community organisation. By using this technique our policies can provide a space to reflect on the world around us and the powers that be in our city. When making Open Council Policy remember: it doesn't have to be true but if you can imagine it then its real.

Humour

Humour has a key part to play in Open Council Policy and should be encouraged. The brand of humour frequently used in Open Council Policy is often subtle and mainly grounded in the absurd nature of the re-imagined ideas presented in an experimental policy. Humour is also a great way to gain and sustain the members interest in a policy and can also break down barriers to participation.

Humorous ideas often stem from the initial re-imagining but more opportunities to employ humour can be found in the policy concept, the title and slogan, and most commonly in the combination of an image and caption.

Voice

When making an experimental policy it is a good tip to think of the Open Council as a character that you are writing for. This character is called the Open Council voice. Use the Open Council voice to articulate your policy.

The voice is what gives your policy an air of power and writing with the voice provides the opportunity to put yourself in a position of power but remember, it's not about you its about the members!
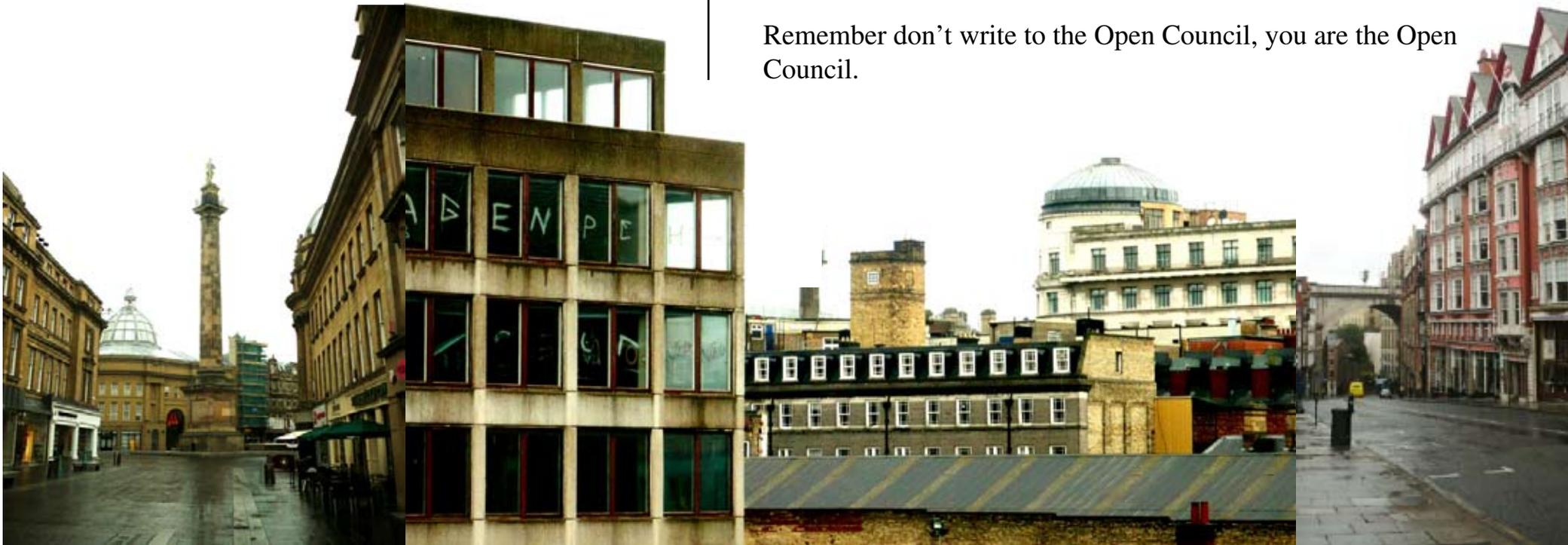
Material for an Open Council voicing can be found in many places but the best source of power jargon is thought to be the news media.

Writing with the Open Council voice allows us to experiment with models of power and community without leaving our desks. Every new policy written in 'the voice' makes the Open Council stronger and a greater diversity of speakers makes 'the voice' more meaningful. So when the moment comes why not say a few words as the Open Council?

For 'best practice' use these phrases as starting points:

The Open Council are proposing to.....................................
The Open Council believe that..
The Open Council is introducing a new scheme about.........
..................is an Open Council policy designed to...............
The Open Council is proud to announce..............................
Research commissioned by the Open Council has shown.....

Remember don't write to the Open Council, you are the Open Council.

Balance

The Open Council encourages re-imagining and pretending but it is important to balance this with a sense of reality and plausibility. For an example of this 'balance' members should refer to the Singing Sirens policy (pending) where the police have been re-imagined as an organisation capable of replacing the sirens on police vans with opera singers. This extraordinary idea is counter balanced in the mind of the reader by the knowledge that the scheme will only be used for non emergency call outs and with a small percentage of police vehicles. The Open Councils 'best practice tip' is to begin with a radical re-imagining then sprinkle with plausibility to keep members guessing.

In tandem with the balancing of extraordinary and plausible policy ideas there needs to be a vigorous adherence to ethical standards in terms of the content, tone and distribution of our policies. This will help us achieve the plausibility that is necessary to allow the Open Council and its members the freedom to play with power and the potential to expand. In practice this means that our policies must not set out to offend, mock or be overtly critical.

Participation

A key part of Open Council strategy is to create the 'impression of mass participation' in events and activities derived from our policies. The objective of this strategy is to create a framework in which the members can imagine and experiment with different forms of our community through experimental policies both as maker or receiver.

Our policies should always hint at opportunities for members to participate but what makes an Open Council policy unique is that the policy maker has the freedom to think up the event idea of their choice without the added pressure of actually having to make it happen.

It is standard practice to create fictional events to embellish your policy but on no account should reference to fictional events be used to trick members maliciously.

Why fictional participation?

It is felt that adopting a strategy of fictional participation is a far more efficient and cost effective way to achieve our goal of occupying a sustained presence in the mind of the members although real events are not ruled out altogether and may play a part in Open Council strategy in future.

Open Council

Location

The Open Council is based in Newcastle and the majority of members live here and in surrounding wards so it is important that our policies should all refer to our own environment in some way. An experimental policy can be about anything in the world and anything that you can imagine but it is important to mould these ideas into a shape that can be inserted into the collective imagination of the members. The recommended way of doing this is to always refer your ideas back to the people and places of our Newcastle.

Design & Layout

The Open Council believe that leaflets are the best way to get our policies out there. Our strategy is to design leaflets based on Newcastle Council leaflets (available from the Civic Centre) in both the look and language used to describe the policy. It is not necessary to copy an existing leaflet exactly but it is helpful to have something to work from. The Open Councils 'best practice tips' for leaflet making are:

> Visit the Civic Centre, go straight to the leaflet racks at the far end, take your time to examine all the leaflets, (no less than 10 mins) take some examples home to work with.

> Decide upon a snappy title that best describes your policy and include a tag line or catch phrase to go with it.
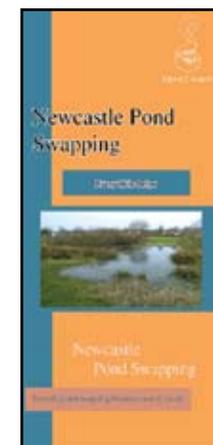
> Gather together some pictures to illustrate your policy and download the Open Council logo from the website.

> Start with the first page of the leaflet. This should include the policy title and tag line, a snappy image and the Open Council logo.

> Experiment with the layout and language to articulate your policy but remember to keep it simple and use the Open Council voice!

Official Open Council policies are created using graphic design software but if you don't have access to that you can make your policy leaflet by hand and we'll transfer it to a digital format for you, just send it in to:

makepolicy@opencouncil.co.uk

Open Council

"Pretend the world is different"