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In a climate of austerity, what can we do to make Newcastle a city where people can feel, with justification, that fair decisions are being made?

The city faces some tough choices about how we work, what services are provided and to whom, how we look after our most vulnerable citizens, how we give people the best start in life. These decisions are to be taken at a time when the public sector is shrinking. The UK finds itself in economic recession, with the prospect of slow growth for many years to come. At times like this, how can we avoid people feeling that they have been treated unfairly?

Our starting point is that Newcastle – like all cities across the UK and beyond – has significant inequalities in wealth and incomes, quality of life, life chances, health and wellbeing. For example, there is a 14 year gap in life expectancy between the most and least prosperous wards of the city. 72,000 of Newcastle’s people live in neighbourhoods that are among the 10% most deprived areas in the country. We believe that a more equal society would be a fairer society. But fairness cannot wait on equality. As we work towards eliminating inequality we need to take fair decisions along the way. Indeed, fair choices would seem to be a prerequisite for equality. What should guide us in making these choices? And how can we avoid creating groups of people who feel they are being treated unfairly, excluded and forgotten?

In a democratic society, all citizens need to be able to be involved in these debates. This report is about the city, not just the council. But our elected city councillors have the primary responsibility for making decisions about our local resources, within the limits and framework set by national governments. Faced with the challenges of making hard decisions with shrinking resources, the leadership of Newcastle City Council has sought advice from a Fairness Commission. The Fairness Commission is a group of individuals with a variety of experiences, from within the city and beyond. We do not claim to be representative of the people of the city, nor can we dictate policy or demand action. Rather, our approach has been to define some principles which we hope will improve decision-making, and provide guidance on how those principles might be applied to real decisions facing the city.

In an unfair world, no-one can guarantee that every decision will be accepted as fair by everyone. But we believe that, through decision-making based on principles and evidence, Newcastle can become known as a place that delivers:

- **Fair share**
  Where people can expect fair outcomes and a fair share of services, according to their needs.

- **Fair play**
  Where people can have confidence that decisions are made in an even-handed, open and transparent manner, according to evidence.

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1 Association of Public Health Observatories (APHO) – www.apho.org.uk
• **Fair go**
  Where people have opportunities to participate, and a chance to fulfil their aspirations for the future.

• **Fair say**
  Where people feel included in their city, communities and neighbourhoods, given a fair hearing and an effective voice in decision-making.

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Professor Chris Brink
Chair: Newcastle Fairness Commission
What is the Newcastle Fairness Commission?

The idea of setting up a Fairness Commission was first considered in Newcastle back in Autumn 2010, by councillors on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This work was then accelerated in May 2011, when a new Labour administration took over the political leadership of the council, with a manifesto which committed to launch a Fairness Commission. The Leader of the Council, Cllr Nick Forbes, launched the commission at the State of the City event in July 2011.

Disparities breed resentment and mistrust. The perception that some are gaining access to advantages and opportunities denied to others is an unhealthy and dangerous situation. For communities to thrive people must feel they are being treated fairly and have equal chances to enjoy a good quality of life. We can choose another way, and strive to make inclusion, equity and fairness cornerstones for the construction of a better city.

Cllr Nick Forbes, Leader of Newcastle City Council, launching the Fairness Commission, July 2011

The Fairness Commission was established by the council with the aim of:

- Setting out a strong set of principles of how the concept of fairness could be given practical effect in Newcastle, in a way that would secure broad endorsement from across the city.
- Critically assessing evidence of the degree of fairness, cohesion and equality within Newcastle; informing and making use of the proposed Newcastle Future Needs Assessment.
- Identifying the critical policies and ‘Civic Contract’ that would need to be put in place to create and secure a fairer city, and to challenge us all to implement them.
The Fairness Commission consisted of 18 people from local and national organisations including charities, foundations, health, education, faith groups and business. It was chaired by Professor Chris Brink, Vice-Chancellor of Newcastle University. Members contributed on a personal and voluntary basis. A full list of commission members is listed in an appendix, which also records our thanks to some of the many people that contributed to our work.

We began our work in October 2011, at a meeting in Ouseburn with the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council. We committed to produce a report by the Summer of 2012. Four further meetings were held in December, March, April and June in a range of venues across the city.

We also organised five working groups to consider five big issues within our report:

1. The principles of fairness
2. Fair public services
3. Citizenship
4. Public attitudes to fairness
5. Wealth and income

In January 2012 the council held a special cabinet meeting, which involved around 100 residents, including some commission members, in a debate about the principles of fairness. A background paper published for that event, and a series of working documents put out on the Fairness Commission’s website http://www.ncl.ac.uk/socialrenewal/fairnesscommission/ in April, provided interim reports of our work.

The work of the Fairness Commission does not exist in isolation. It complements other initiatives such as the development of council priorities, the Newcastle Future Needs Assessment and the Living Wage Advisory Panel. In particular, at the same time as launching the Fairness Commission, the council created a new drive to improve public engagement and consultation – called let’s talk Newcastle. The commission has benefited from evidence generated through that initiative, which in its first year has involved over 8,000 residents in debates about the future of the city. The commission makes some recommendations in this report about how this excellent initiative can be extended further.

Two influential reports commissioned by the Regional Institute for Local Governance on Environmental Justice and Practice and Policy in Fairness in Education, also complement the work of the Fairness Commission. These two reports from researchers at Newcastle University provide in-depth research on issues of fairness in environmental and education policy, and demonstrate the way in which the principles developed by the Fairness Commission could aid...
understanding of complex policy areas, and help to clarify recommendations for making decisions that would be seen as fair. In their report on Environmental Justice and the City, Simin Davoudi and Elizabeth Brooks argue that the environment plays a critical role in people’s lives and should be accessible to all and distributed fairly. The evidence of the report shows that environmental borders such as poor air quality, the impact of contaminated land and unsightly environments tend to fall disproportionately on more deprived people. At the same time deprived communities have less access to environmental benefits such as green spaces and allotments. In Fair or Foul? Towards Practice and Policy in Fairness in Education, Karen Laing and Liz Todd argue for an integrated, collaborative approach to educational reform that engages with the community.

From the outset the Fairness Commission was clear that its aim was to develop a set of principles of fairness and small number of recommendations, that could be used as a tool to guide the work of the council and other organisations within the city, and inform decision making. The commission could have taken the easy way out - come up with high level principles, and left it to the council to apply them to the most difficult choices. Or we could have gone to the other extreme, and come up with firmly expressed recommendations about specific issues. This approach would have tied the hands of the council in making choices and being democratically accountable for them. We have taken a position in the middle of these approaches. We have tried to provide guidance on how the principles of fairness might be applied. We set out the factors that will need to be balanced, without coming to a single judgement about the right balance in each case. We hope in doing so we are also highlighting the range of tough decisions that are faced day-to-day at a local level.

The commission worked independently from the council, although it had opportunities to involve city councillors in working groups and seminars. We were very aware of the challenges the council faces in leading the city through a difficult time – in the economy, and with the risk of tensions arising from cuts to public spending. Both these reports can be found on the Fairness Commission website: www.ncl.ac.uk/socialrenewal/fairnesscommission

The commission has based its work on an understanding of what the council is aiming to achieve, encapsulated in four clear priorities:

- **A working city** - creating a new generation of good quality jobs in a range of sectors, and helping local people develop the skills to do them.
- **Decent neighbourhoods** - working with local people, businesses and community organisations to look after each other and the environment.
- **Tackling inequalities** - tackling discrimination and inequalities that prevent people and communities fulfilling their true potential.
- **A fit for purpose organisation** - a council that leads our city by enabling and empowering others to achieve.
Despite drawing on evidence from *let’s talk Newcastle*, from debates and focus groups, we do not regard this report as having itself been subject to full consultation within the city. Our recommendations are our own, and cannot yet be described as ‘owned’ by the city council. Nor can we claim that they represent a consensus of opinion within Newcastle. We recommend that the city council now takes this debate forward, as a continuous and permanent debate with the people of this great city, and to continue to strive to make Newcastle a ‘city of fairness’.

**Other Fairness Commissions**

Newcastle is not the only place that has set up a Fairness Commission. For example, commissions have already reported in Islington, Liverpool and York and are underway in Sheffield. The common interest in this approach stems from a need to respond to new challenges facing local government – local authorities have new powers and responsibilities (for example for public health and the economy), while simultaneously having to manage large budget cuts.

Each fairness commission has adopted a slightly different approach to the challenge set by their councils. The commissions we have looked at include different mixes of people from the local public, private, and community and voluntary sectors. Some are very much council-led while others, like Newcastle, are independent from the local authority with no formal representation from elected members or council officers.

Those commissions that have completed their work differ in the kind of recommendations they make. For example, the final report of the Islington Fairness Commission makes recommendations for practical actions such as requesting major employers in the borough publish pay differentials or passing a by-law banning payday loans. This differs from our own approach which has focused on the principles of decision-making, rather than very specific recommendations for action.

During the period of our work, Newcastle has hosted visits from two chairs of other fairness commissions. Professor Richard Wilkinson, chair of the Islington Fairness Commission, and Dr John Sentamu, the Archbishop of York. These visits have helped us learn from the experience of other places, while setting out a distinctive approach suited to the circumstances we face here in Newcastle.

Once a number of places have delivered fairness commissions, we believe that it will be desirable to conduct an evaluation to draw out common themes, and identify issues that are relevant to the country as a whole. This could help challenge national policy, in areas where local actions alone cannot deliver fairness.
What difference could this report make?

The Newcastle Fairness Commission was determined to take a principled approach, and to be robust in our analysis of the nature of fairness and its implications. The principles are, we hope, intellectually robust. They have been subject to challenge from prominent academics working in the fields of political and social science. We have been aware from the start that this could make it an academic exercise, and we have tried to avoid such an outcome. We believe the ideas communicated here can be applied in a practical way, and we would like that to be the case. Also, in order to secure the commitment of the wider population, principles need to be well communicated, and they need to be debated. No doubt there will be wide ranging differences of view to be aired and considered.

We believe that the approaches to decision-making set out in this report can make a big difference to Newcastle. In looking back at this report in a few years’ time, we hope people and organisations can say:

- Tough decisions have not been avoided, but where they have been taken, the reasons for them have been discussed and explained, and the evidence and principles behind a decision are clear and understandable
- That even if they have been disadvantaged by a change in policy or resources, they have had their opportunity to state their case, and alternatives have been identified and discussed
- That everyone’s interests – even the most marginalised and excluded – have been taken into account, and that the needs of the most vulnerable in society have been given the greatest weight
- Everyone who could have helped to address unfairness has engaged with this civic priority, and has made a contribution commensurate with their role.

These are difficult standards to hold to. But if they are met, Newcastle truly will be a fairer city.
Newcastle - a fair city?

Part of what will make Newcastle a fair city is a state of mind where the question of fairness becomes an ever-present test on all we do. When we ask that question across the board, it is clear that Newcastle still has some way to go before it could lay claim to being a city of fairness. It can, however, in the shorter term, become a city for fairness. To begin with, we should take account of where we fall short. The council has committed to work with other partners to create a Newcastle Future Needs Assessment to provide a fuller analysis of the challenges facing the city. Here are some examples of circumstances we have to confront in providing for fairness.

• Unemployment in the North East is 11.3%, compared to the national rate of 8.2%.
• The 2010 Index of Multiple Deprivation ranks Newcastle as the 40th most deprived local authority - 72,000 people in Newcastle live in neighbourhoods that are among the 10% most deprived in the country; concentrated in Byker, Walker and Walkergate in the east and Benwell and Scotswood and Elswick in the west.
• Poor families pay on average a £1,000 annual ‘poverty premium’ for the most essential goods and services such as gas, electricity and insurance. It is estimated that 30% of homes in Newcastle suffer from fuel poverty, including Elswick (52%), Walker (49%) and Westgate and Benwell (40%).
• The Newcastle Debt Compact helped 667 people in 2010-2011. Information from Newcastle Citizens’ Advice Bureau highlights that the value of priority debts that they advised on in 2010-2011 increased by 39%. The number of clients presenting debts to government bodies increased markedly – the number of council tax debts were up by 60%, magistrates fines were up 36% and the number of benefit overpayment debts increased by 79%.
• In November 2011, 16.5% of working age people in Newcastle (nearly 34,000) relied upon social security benefits paid by the Department of Work and Pensions, including Incapacity Benefit, Jobseeker’s Allowance, and Disability Living Allowance.
• 30.5% of children in Newcastle, and over half of the children living in Westgate, Walker, Byker and Elswick, are classed as living in poverty - compared with 21.3% nationally.
• Life expectancy in Newcastle is lower than the England average. Women in Newcastle live on average 1.3 years less than the England average, and men in Newcastle live on average 2.1 years less than the England average.
• There are large differences in life expectancy between different geographical areas of the city. Female life expectancy at birth ranges from 73.7 to 88.5 years, a difference of 14.8 years. Equivalent male life expectancy at birth ranges from 68.8 to 83.1 years, a difference of 14.3 years.
• Major contributors to the gap in life expectancy between Newcastle and England in men are lung cancer (18.6%), circulatory diseases (16.4%) and other cancers (15.3%), and in women are lung cancer (26.9%), respiratory diseases (14.5%) and circulatory diseases (14.1%).
Turnout in Newcastle for the 2012 local elections followed the national pattern in being disappointingly low – just 33%, the lowest in nearly a decade, and well down on the 41% of a year earlier.

Clearly, times are tough for many of the citizens of Newcastle. There is evidence, however, that the city council is not automatically being blamed for social issues such as those outlined above, and that in general people consider not only matters of wealth and income to be important, but also how they are treated and how much they are being listened to. Encouragingly, in the most recent residents’ survey, 75% of people agreed that Newcastle City Council treats all types of people fairly. 77% of people agreed that in the last year they had been treated with respect and consideration by their local public services all or most of the time – 5% said rarely or never. This provides a good platform for a shared emphasis on fairness.
The commission acknowledged from the outset that fairness is a subtle and contested concept, as indeed are related concepts such as justice, equality or tolerance. One of our earliest conclusions was this is not only unavoidable but also healthy, since it is part of the ongoing attempt to implement fair decision-making. However, we should not fall into endless arguments about what fairness means. The commission therefore set itself the challenge of setting out a small number of principles which would anchor our discussions and recommendations. We wanted these principles to be intellectually rigorous, useful for decision-making, and formulated in plain English. Our goal has been to say neither so much that the topic becomes muddled nor so little that it becomes oversimplified.

It is doubtful whether any set of principles of fairness could ever be comprehensive, and we make no such claim. There will always be more that can be said on the topic of fairness. However, we are confident that the principles we propose are robust and fit for purpose.

3 Principles of fairness

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1 Fairness is a fundamental concept in its own right

Early in our deliberations we realised that the moment you say 'fairness' people tend to have their own view of what it means or identify related notions. For example, many would equate fairness with equality. There is currently an active discussion on the relationship between equality and societal wellbeing, arising in part from Wilkinson and Picketts' recent book The Spirit Level. These authors have argued very convincingly that the incidence of social problems is higher in less equal societies. This has an impact on everybody, including those who are more affluent. The Spirit Level provides evidence to support what many of us have long believed, namely that there is a sound business case for equality. Yet we quickly concluded that we cannot simply equate fairness with equality. The reason for this is simple: even when we acknowledge that inequalities exist, we still hope to take fair decisions. We care about inequality mainly because we think it is unfair. But to address this unfairness we may need to take steps that treat people unequally; for example by giving more to those most in need.

We came to the conclusion that fairness is a primary concept, and regarded as intrinsically good in its own right. It is related to concepts such as equality, social justice, democracy, tolerance, good citizenship and social cohesion. It is not, however, the same as any of these. In each case there are valuable connections to be made. For example, one of the 20th century's most influential philosophers, John Rawls, argued that justice is essentially a matter of fairness. In general, we would say that the concept of fairness stands on its own. Usually to say that something is unfair is enough to condemn it; we do not need to explain what is bad about unfairness by reference to some other value.

We could say that fairness will flourish best where conditions of equality, social justice, democracy, tolerance, good citizenship and social cohesion exist, and that all of these remain, and should remain, common goals of civil society. However, that still leaves us with the task of understanding and implementing fairness itself.

2 We distinguish four dimensions of fairness

- Fair outcomes (Fair share)
- Fair process (Fair play)
- Fair opportunity (Fair go)
- Fair participation (Fair say)

The topic of fair outcomes typically arises in the context of allocation of resources. The question here is whether everybody got their fair share, or their just deserts.

Fair process relates to the notion of even-handedness. The question is whether there has been fair play. Were the decisions reached without fear or favour? Was the process the same for all? Was it free from bias and undue influence?

Fair opportunity relates to the idea of a level playing field. The question is whether people have had, or will have, an equal chance to realise their full potential. We say that everybody can have a fair go when nobody has disadvantages or opportunities greater than any other.

Fair participation is about being heard when you have something to say, being able to participate in decisions that affect you, and having the opportunity to make your own contribution to society. It is about having a fair say in the choices that are made.

We believe that these four dimensions of fairness deserve our attention in equal measure. People are more likely to accept unequal outcomes if they feel they have been fairly treated, while unequal treatment could sour the taste even of a fair outcome. Attention to process is therefore important, both for reasons of substance and for reasons of perception. This has to do with dignity as much as with justice. Fair opportunity, in turn, can be seen as an essential part of the search for justice and equality, and a strategic investment in the future.

Fair participation unpacks into a number of requirements: that everybody who has a voice should be heard; that the excluded should be listened to; and that participation in civic life is part of the exercise of civic responsibility and the reciprocity between the individual and other people in society.
This is the substantive principle relating to the notion of fair outcomes. In an unequal society some have more and some have less, and consequently some can satisfy their own needs and some cannot. We argue that those who are most disadvantaged should receive greater benefit, and that more effort should go towards creating opportunities for them. The consequence of this principle is that a fair distribution may be an unequal one. An unequal allocation of resources would be regarded as fair if it gives more where more is needed, and an equal distribution could be regarded as unfair if makes no distinction between need and plenty.

There are some important caveats to the principle that those who need more should get more. Wilfully self-inflicted need, for example, would not excite our sympathy to the same extent as need inflicted by circumstances beyond the control of the needy. The test is that the need must be genuine. There is a difference between genuine needs and superficial desires, such as those created by a consumerist society. Needs can be distinguished from desires because needs are objective while desires are subjective. Further, needs are generally more urgent than desires. Genuine needs would be those related to what someone would require to lead a minimally decent human life in 21st Century Britain, such as food, clothes, housing, education and healthcare. This is sometimes called a social minimum.

We may distinguish between general needs, common to all, and special needs, specific to some individuals or communities. Many of the needs for which the council caters are general to the population, such as maintaining a clean environment, safeguarding community health, or providing and maintaining a transport system. Because these needs are general, we would think that fairness requires them to be provided in roughly equal measure to all. There are many cases, however, of special needs: the sick, the disabled, or those disadvantaged by circumstances beyond their control. In such cases fairness demands an unequal distribution.

In an economically constrained environment, fairness may require redrawing the boundaries between general and specific needs, so that the idea of universal provision fits alongside the principle that those who need more should get more. This is sometimes called progressive universalism: an important principle for public services which is discussed later in this report.
4 Privilege should not buy priority, but need might deserve it

This is the substantive principle relating to the notion of fair process. As a rule we want everybody to be treated the same. We do not want the privileged to have any inherent entitlement or priority as regards services or facilities common to all. We accept that in an open market money can buy better quality or better service, as for example going first class on the train. If, however, there is a train crash, we would not want the ambulance automatically to head for the first-class carriage. It should attend first to those whose injuries are the worst.

A more general version of this principle is that fairness is often a matter of applying the right and relevant criteria to decisions or resource allocations. In the train crash example, the right criterion is medical need, not wealth or social status. In appointing someone to a job the right criteria are ability and suitability, not for example race or gender or family connections. In the process of resource allocation, for example on education, health, housing etc, there are likely to be a variety of criteria that is relevant and the fairness with which the allocation is done will depend on the right criteria being identified and then stuck to.

5 Ability should be able to access opportunity regardless of circumstance

This is the substantive principle relating to the notion of fair opportunity. For opportunity to be fair it must be more than just available; it must be accessible. It is not enough to say that the door of opportunity is open to all, if some are hampered from walking through it because of circumstances beyond their control. It is fair to take special measures to overcome circumstances that may hamper access to opportunity, because not only the individual but also society stands to benefit from it.

6 The perception of fairness is as important as the substance of it

This is the substantive principle relating to the notion of fair participation. To be clear: we are not arguing that unfairness is acceptable as long as people don’t see it as unfair. Our principle simply says that fairness, like justice, must not only be the case but must also be seen to be the case. This requires a culture of participation, where everybody is engaged enough to be able to form a judgment on whether outcomes, process and opportunity have been fair. Often the disempowered and the vulnerable, by the very nature of their position, are least engaged and therefore most prone to a default perception of unfairness. We should make greater effort to address perceptions of unfairness where they are most likely to arise. This means finding ways of ensuring that all voices are heard, including – perhaps especially - those that are at the margins of society.
7 There is nothing inherently unfair about making choices

If fair decisions about allocating scarce resources are to be taken in a context where not everybody can get what they want, or perhaps even what they deserve, we must be clear about the legitimacy of such decision-making. The principle we put forward here is that there is nothing inherently unfair about an elected body making deliberate choices about resource allocation. Again, there are a number of caveats. First, the process of decision-making must be clear and transparent. Second, the decision-makers must have a democratic mandate for their strategic goals. This is no small matter. Promoting strategic goals typically means you will allocate your resources in such a manner as to advance those particular goals, and not others. A democratic mandate is necessary to make that fair.

But democratic systems can also be exploited to deliver unfair outcomes. Equal votes and majority rule can still deliver decisions that treat minorities and individuals unfairly; an outcome often referred to as the tyranny of the majority. Therefore there should be safeguards of some kind, and these are commonly framed in terms of guaranteed rights and freedoms. There may also be a conflict of values between legitimate local and national democratic interests, and examples where local politicians are constrained in implementing locally fair decisions because of national or international laws and regulations. We see examples every day where our local and national politicians are disagreeing about what is fair and unfair, and both aiming to represent the will of the people.

8 It is fair to balance current need against future benefit, including to future generations

Fair decisions will balance the interests of current and future beneficiaries, including those not yet born. Investment in the future benefit of all may decrease the resources available to meet the needs of the present. The attempt to create fair opportunities would be a case in point. We may, for example, decide to invest more in developing the skills of young people, even when that decreases the budget for adult education. Such a decision needs to be taken with due consideration, but it should not be considered as unfair just because there is no immediate apparent benefit, even when there is immediately apparent need. Actions to secure sustainable living and environmental justice, particularly in response to climate change, are examples of where the interests of current and future generations are debated.
As a related concept, where decisions are made on the basis of a balance between current and future needs, it is important to guard against commitments to the future being reneged upon. People who have traded off current for future benefit will understandably regard it as unfair if those commitments to future benefit are not subsequently delivered, or are changed on a unilateral basis without their influence.

Some may wish to add to the third principle (that those who need more should get more) a further caveat, namely that those who need more deserve more only once it is clear that they have genuinely tried to avoid need, and to make a contribution commensurate with their abilities or resources. Such a condition is sometimes called Beveridgeite, after William Beveridge, whose 1942 report became the foundation of the British welfare state. This can sometimes be portrayed as a distinction between the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor.

We reject this distinction on the grounds that it too readily defines individuals as undeserving, without recognising the underlying reasons why people do not, or cannot, avoid placing themselves in a position where they are in need. Individuals are a product of wider social, economic and community influences, and these can interact to limit personal responsibility. In other words, the fact that someone’s own actions have created additional needs does not absolve society from the requirement to help. Nevertheless, we recognise that the concept of what people ‘deserve’ underpins many people’s understanding of fairness, and will have an impact on the perceptions of what constitutes a fair allocation of resources.

We propose a more positive approach. Instead of giving society a mandate to deny resources to those whose needs are self-inflicted, we would reinforce that everybody has a responsibility to contribute to civil society in a manner commensurate with their own ability and resources. This would include the responsibility of not wilfully making yourself a burden or a cost to others. We invoke this principle, for example, when we expect people to lead a healthier lifestyle, and not to inflict a burden of public health problems on society through, for example, smoking, substance abuse or lack of exercise. We may encourage them to change their ways. But we do not believe it is right to withdraw support entirely if they do not.
10 Benefit for all should be contributed to by all, and hardship caused by none should be shared by all, according to their abilities and resources

Our last principle spells out a relationship of reciprocity between the individual and others in society. Namely, we should all help to build a better society, and we should all contribute to facing hardship. We could, for example, say that everybody should contribute to public goods available to all, even if not everybody chooses to use them, such as sports fields or libraries. Likewise, we could make it explicit that all should share hardship even when that hardship does not affect everybody. For example, if the river floods, leaving some people homeless but others unaffected, it would still seem fair that the homeless receive emergency help at public expense. Just as a fair distribution may be an unequal one, fair contributions from individuals may also be unequal, depending on ability and resources. For example, a fair tax system sets higher rates for those with higher wealth and income.

We believe that these principles will be a useful toolkit for the city and the council to make choices and engage with citizens over difficult issues.

They will also be helpful for elected councillors to explain how decisions have been made at a time of declining resources. If the city consistently benchmarks its discussions and decisions against the principles of Fair share, Fair play, Fair go and Fair say, then it can make more well-judged decisions. A key theme running through the principles is that fairness cannot ever be ‘just about everyone having a fair share’ – even if this were possible. Fairness is also defined by how people feel about decisions and how far they perceive they have been engaged in decisions that affect their lives. The evidence of the commission is that the earlier people are involved in different areas – such as assuring community cohesion – the more positive the outcome is likely to be. The city has a strong record of engagement – such as let’s talk Newcastle – and it is important that it builds on this track record with existing organisations and establishes strong partnerships with the community and voluntary sector. Creating the opportunities for more active citizens will lead to improved policy. The principles will also be helpful to citizens, and civic groups, in understanding on what grounds the city can make choices.
This section of the report looks at how public services can be delivered in a fair manner, and be seen to be fair. A working group of the Fairness Commission considered how public service delivery is likely to change in Newcastle. The group looked at what can and cannot be changed at local level. It considered specific examples of how local powers, duties, levers and resources could be used to secure fairer outcomes for citizens through the delivery of public services.

Bearing in mind the principles established in the previous section of this report, there are some important trade-offs that have to be balanced in the provision of public services. One of these is the question whether services should be targeted or universal.

This section of the report then goes on to consider how the principles of fairness could be applied in practice to some tough decisions which the city will face in the years ahead.

Progressive universalism

Most choices about public service, policy and delivery require the interests of different groups of the population to be balanced. We also have to take into account that we don’t start from an equal distribution of service outcomes: some people live more prosperous, healthier and higher quality lives than others. So how do we judge how services should be balanced under these circumstances?

There are generally choices to be made between:

• **Universal services**: the same service is available to everyone, regardless of income or need. We regard it as fair to provide universal services in some contexts. Examples include bin collection, or emergency support from the health service.

• **Targeted services**: services are only provided to those in the severest need, or who are not in a position to provide for themselves. Examples include some welfare benefits, and social care for the elderly.

There are problems with both these approaches, and both can lead to unfair outcomes. Universal services can be expensive. They can also leave serious inequalities unaddressed, by spreading support too thinly across the population. Services which are intended to be universal can sometimes become skewed towards those who are best able to advocate for a better level of service, with others excluded. This is sometimes called *middle-class capture*.

Targeted services give most help to those who need them most. But they can be seen as unfair to those just above the threshold for help, who lose out through no fault of their own. This is sometimes referred to as the *squeezed middle*, who can feel unfairly treated as a result. Targeted services can also be more complex and administratively expensive to deliver, requiring means-tests that can themselves be seen as unfair, or obtrusive. In addition, by reserving services for those most in need, the general public can become unfamiliar with the value of those services, and less ready to support them. Services that only support the poor can quickly become poor services.
One way to help with this tension is to apply the principle of **progressive universalism**. This combines aspects of both universality and targeting. It suggests providing services to the whole population, so everyone benefits to some degree. But it achieves a progressive approach, by providing services more intensively to those who need them most. The concept was used by Professor Michael Marmot in his study of health inequalities, arguing that ‘actions must be universal, but with a scale and intensity that is proportionate to the level of disadvantage.’

Progressive universalism requires careful consideration of needs and assets. Need will be defined differently according to the nature of the service. Social and economic disadvantage can often be an indicator of need, but other issues – such as age or disability – can also give rise to needs. The city council has placed a particular emphasis on needs assessment. We welcome this as a vital requirement to delivering fair public services.

So, if we accept the principle of progressive universalism as appropriate for Newcastle, what does this mean for how we might make decisions about funding? In an era of cuts, we will face a choice between:

- Make a cut (or increase charges) evenly across all service users
- Reduce access (or charge for) a previously universal service, or change it into a targeted service; or
- Reduce access to services more quickly as needs reduce (or increase means-testing of charges).

Progressive universalism means that the first choice isn’t necessarily fair, just because the cut is applied evenly. It will often leave the most vulnerable falling below a minimum level of service for their needs, and make it harder to tackle inequality. In some cases it will be fairer to target a universal service more clearly onto those who need it most, or even to take a formerly universal service and change the way it is provided.

**Testing the principles of fairness: examples of tough decisions on public services that need to be taken fairly**

Surveys of local priorities tend to get replies on the immediate ‘door step’ issues like waste collection or clean streets. This is not surprising; at any one time, over 30 times more people will benefit from environmental service than from social care, and people will naturally value services that are most visible to them. More detailed consultations which present evidence to people about the range of activities in their local areas generate a very different response. People then place greater weight on the ‘hidden services’, like care for the elderly and support for vulnerable young people, and take into account the contribution of services provided from other sources such as local shops, neighbours and family members. It is important that needs assessments take into account the totality of the local neighbourhood when identifying needs. The city council will have to

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balance these interests, and take decisions across the full range of services. They will also have to balance the demands of different services, all of which have their supporters, and people who will be disadvantaged by cuts. We believe that the principles of fairness provide the council with a toolkit for fair decision-making.

To begin with, Principle 7 says that taking tough decisions is not in itself an unfair thing to do. As to the fairness or otherwise of particular decisions, we give some examples here of how the principles may come into play.

In line with Principle 3, those who need more should get more, and Principle 10 suggests that hardship caused by none should be shared by all. This suggests a high priority should be placed on meeting the care needs of the most vulnerable older people. Principle 4 also identifies a need to apply the right and relevant criteria on a consistent basis, which in this case would include an assessment of care needs, and of ability to pay. Progressive universalism suggests a broad based approach, but with substantially more emphasis on those with the greatest needs.

Should providing resources for the care of older people be a greater priority than funding other services which are used by all residents? In 2012 the council started for the first time to charge for the removal of garden waste. Many residents saw this as unfair, because they had become used to a universal service paid for through their council tax (although in practice not all parts of the city received the service, and of course it was only of use to residents with gardens). In this case the decision – although controversial - could be justified as fair according to our principles. It raised resources which could fund the service, ensured that people who benefited from it made a contribution, and prevented other cuts from being made in services to residents in more need. Principle 6, however, warns that the perception of fairness is also important. The way the council brings people along in support – or at least an understanding – of these sorts of decisions will determine whether this principle is met.
Environmental quality varies across the city, with poorer neighbourhoods tending to experience lower standards than wealthier neighbourhoods. Environmental services, such as street cleaning, should benefit all parts of the city. But it will be fair to target them towards those parts of the city with the greatest need, in order to address a disproportionate impact on health and wellbeing. Regular assessment of environmental quality should be undertaken. It may not be enough to rely on people’s own judgements about the quality of their neighbourhood; since people can become accustomed to poor conditions in their neighbourhood, and simply lower their expectations; or in areas of poverty people may have other things to worry about and be more prepared to put up with poorer conditions.

Investment in the future, through environmentally sound policies, is advocated in Principle 8. Principle 9 is also relevant: it is fair to expect civic responsibility from all. So, in all parts of the city, measures to ensure community responsibility for the environment need to go hand-in-hand with council services.

Experience suggests that, if left to the market, bus services will underprovide certain neighbourhoods, for example more rural areas, or areas with low income. Principle 4 indicates that where there are groups of people who have no other means of transport and who otherwise might be prevented from accessing services, fairness will require an active approach by government to ensure a good level of service. To prevent these subsidies being allocated unfairly, they will need to be frequently evaluated on the basis of clear and transparent criteria, based on need.
Children who grow up in poverty are disadvantaged by the time they start school, compared with children from more affluent backgrounds. Evidence suggests that this disadvantage is set at a very young age, so that the support people receive in their early years can determine their future life chances. Principle 5 states that it is incumbent on us to create fair opportunity for all, and to counteract circumstances that may prevent access to opportunity.

All children should benefit from access to services which provide the social and emotional foundation they need to reach their potential but, to give children from poorer backgrounds a fair chance, it may be necessary to target additional early years support towards those children whose parents face the greatest difficulties supporting them. Our principles create a powerful case for early support and intervention for those young children who need it most.

This is a question about boundaries. Even when we accept that those who need more should get more, some may ask whether that principle should not only apply to ‘us’, rather than ‘them’. Principle 3 makes no such distinction. It is fair to provide support and resources to those seeking refuge, as some of those most in need and least likely to be able to meet those needs from their own resources. However, we also need to acknowledge that other people may perceive this as unfair.

Providing opportunities for people to express concerns and disagreement, and being open and honest about the allocation of resources, can help to address perceptions of unfairness which might otherwise emerge as tensions between communities. As Principle 9 states, it is also fair to expect civic responsibility from all, in both new and settled communities.
Principle 9 emphasises civic responsibilities, and anti-social behaviour is an example of an unfair burden on others in society. It is therefore fair and reasonable to levy sanctions in these circumstances.

These sanctions do, however, need to be proportionate, and determined through a proper process. They should avoid creating other unfairnesses and stigmatising a wider population. It is, for example, unfair to label whole communities, or young people in general, as anti-social.

Should we withdraw services from the small number of individuals and families whose anti-social behaviour impacts on their neighbours?

Culture is of universal benefit, and it is appropriate that it should be supported by society as a whole. But it also fair to challenge whether institutions which are exclusive in their audiences should continue to be supported by us all, including those who find them inaccessible. Principle 5 leads us to consider it fair that public subsidies are used to expand access, and are focused on cultural activities available to the widest numbers possible, with a particular focus on the most excluded communities. It is also fair to expect a substantial contribution from those who directly benefit from cultural institutions, balanced against the risk that higher prices can make access to culture less accessible to the general public.

Should the council subsidise cultural institutions when their audience is predominantly people from outside the city and wealthier residents?
Our principles place a high priority on access to resources, and it is fair to take an active approach to stimulating jobs and investment for the future. It is also fair to place particular emphasis on job creation which improves the prosperity of those at most disadvantage; by reducing unemployment and supporting better opportunities for the lowest paid. Sometimes these efforts can be seen as unfair by those who don’t immediately benefit, and the regeneration priorities of different communities can conflict. Principle 5 highlights the importance of providing opportunities for all. Businesses will locate in the places that make most business sense. To avoid this creating unfairness, it is right to intervene actively to maximise the opportunities created; through investment in skills, transports and support to find work. The principle of personal and civic responsibility also creates an expectation that people without work should actively seek out those opportunities.

Is it fair for people to expect that, in return for paying their council tax, they should receive an equivalent value in services from the council?

The principle of progressive universalism tells us that people should expect that some services are provided on a universal basis, irrespective of need. Many of the services provided in Newcastle, such as waste collection, leisure centres and public highways, will continue to be accessible to all. But it also reminds us that there are people with greater needs who should fairly receive more support than those whose needs are less. Principle 10 is clear that, while we should all make a contribution, it’s an important role of society to protect those in hardship, and for the contributions to this protection to come disproportionately from those who can afford most. In practice this means the spending by the city council will be heavily skewed towards the most vulnerable in society. It follows that it is unfair for people with more income and wealth, and fewest needs, to expect that they should receive a significant share of council resources.
Newcastle City Council’s intention to become a Co-operative Council requires partnership and a new relationship between citizens (local people) and the council. Within this context the Citizenship Working Group explored what it means to be a citizen in Newcastle, and how this partnership between state and citizens might develop.

A traditional interpretation of citizenship emphasises civil citizenship, political citizenship and social citizenship. ‘Citizenship’ can refer to members of a nation state, members of a modern welfare society, and more recently global (cosmopolitan) citizenship and cultural citizenship. Recent governments have emphasised active citizenship, linked to a view of rights and responsibilities of individuals towards the welfare of the community, rather than relying on the state to create the social and economic conditions for citizenship. Part of the recent political agenda is the encouragement of citizens to participate more in civic and public affairs, in the face of low turn-outs in elections and the growing alienation of people from politicians and the political system.

Debates across the political spectrum emphasise individual rights, the public and participatory aspects of citizenship, or the bottom up pro-active character of citizen participation, and the varying role of the state in enabling or enforcing these different approaches. There has been a long history of community participation and community-led initiatives in Newcastle and the group examined how this activity might be strengthened. The group’s work was strongly related to Principle 9, that it is fair to expect civic responsibility from all, and a contribution to society commensurate with ability and resources.

What does citizenship mean in Newcastle?

Citizenship in Newcastle should include everyone who lives in the city, regardless of their legal status or origins - there should be no outsiders. People can perceive themselves as citizens at a very local level (the West End), as residents of Newcastle, as British (for people who have had to apply for citizenship this was very significant), and as citizens of a country of origin - “I’m Jewish, Geordie and British”. We heard evidence though that people with the same background might perceive themselves differently, especially across generations, and people’s perception of themselves changes according to the context.

Some people can feel excluded and disempowered as citizens. They might not have access to resources to allow them to express themselves as citizens (young people, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic women), or might not have the same formal rights yet as other citizens (asylum seekers, young people), or might be made to feel that they are taking more out of society (as users of council services) than they are contributing (this view was expressed by both older people and women from the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic community).

People make a contribution to society in different ways and at different times in their lives, and this will be through a very wide range of formal or informal voluntary activity. People told us about their contribution within the family and their community as grandparents, as carers of other family members or...
neighbours, as activist members of the Elders Council or Occupy Newcastle, or the more structured involvement of people through voluntary organisations like the Tenants' Federation. Civic involvement does not only mean involvement in the activities of the Council, but the value of these diverse contributions was not felt always to be recognised or, in some cases, respected. We came to the conclusion that all forms of citizens' contributions are valuable.

There was general agreement that it is fair to expect everyone to make a contribution. Citizenship, fairness and responsibility, though, needs to apply to everyone – people with power, wealth and resources need to act responsibly and make a greater contribution as citizens too.

**Tackling barriers to citizenship and participation**

People make contributions and participate in different ways both formally and informally. We heard evidence about the barriers people experienced, including:

- Lack of focal points in the community that would provide opportunities for whole community involvement. People's lives at present are very compartmentalised (compared to the relatively recent past) and people live separated by factors such as income or housing, with little opportunity to mix with a wider range of social groups.
- People have less free time as a result of working patterns and caring responsibilities, and can find it difficult to make a contribution.
- Language and literacy skills.
- Digital exclusion.
- Forthcoming changes to welfare benefits that could limit further the amount of time people are allowed to volunteer without affecting benefits.

The need for access to resources to support citizen activity and engagement was stressed strongly. Voluntary and community organisations can be important in providing resources and helping people to build confidence, knowledge, expertise and skills that help them to make a contribution to society, and also provide a voice to enable people to contribute their views.

**The role of the council in supporting citizenship**

The council has made significant efforts to expand consultation and participation in its decision-making with initiatives like let's talk Newcastle, Udecide and Greening Wingrove, the use of social media as well as print media to communicate with citizens, more delegation of budgets to ward level, and more engagement at ward level. Community engagement programmes in deprived communities, for example Cowgate and Byker, have increased people's ability to participate as citizens and contribute to their communities.

Despite this progress, there can still be a lack of understanding of what the council does and is responsible for, and how people can become involved. The formal structures that the council uses to involve and engage people (for example, ward committees, communication processes) are not always accessible.
The Fairness Commission was asked by the council to consider the case for adopting a Civic Contract for Newcastle. A Civic Contract sets out the services and support that are provided by the public sector, and the contribution that is expected of members of the community—the rights and responsibilities of the citizen and the council. After considering the options and implications carefully, we recommend against the standard interpretation of a Civic Contract.

The commission found one current example of a borough-wide Civic Contract, from Westminster City Council, due to be implemented in 2012. This is described as a Civic Contract for residents, businesses and stakeholders guided by three principles of responsibility, fairness and opportunity and described as ‘a fair deal that works for both parties keeping taxes low and services good’. It includes some enforcement and sanctions, and there are suggestions that a lack of community engagement by individuals might lead to the withdrawal of services.

The Westminster example was felt by the commission to be punitive rather than empowering. More generally, expressing the relationship between individuals and their council in terms of a contractual obligation was not seen by the commission as an appropriate (or particularly understandable) expression of the relationship.

Instead, we recommend a more thoughtful approach, more embedded in communities and in keeping with the council’s existing emphasis on community involvement, empowerment and co-operation. The emphasis should be placed at neighbourhood level, in keeping with the circumstances of specific communities, rather than expecting a single contract to work across the city as a whole. The current development of Decent Neighbourhood Standards offers a good platform to build on. Other positive examples from outside Newcastle include the work with neighbourhoods in Manchester, and approaches being piloted by the Royal Society of Arts in Peterborough.

to people who are not familiar with them, do not understand them or know how to use them, or do not find them available at times or in places that suit them. People also sometimes had a cynical view that when consultation took place, things did not or would not change. There was positive support for bottom-up approaches, which the council had led and enabled.

For some people, their main interaction with or experience of the council, through receiving services, has been negative (and sometimes was felt to have been discriminatory) – ‘it does things to them rather than offers support’—and this affects their trust and confidence in the council’s other activities. Openness and transparency in the way the council acts and makes decisions was also seen as very important.
One of our Fairness Principles is that the perception of fairness is as important as the substance of it. There is evidence, from Ipsos Mori, that actual service delivery is only one part of what drives people's perceptions of services. It also matters that people trust the decision-makers and each other; whether they believe that processes have been fair; whether they feel people from different backgrounds get on in their area; and whether they believe they can influence local decision-making. If these aspects were to break down, people would not regard Newcastle as a fair city, and tensions between communities could make it increasingly difficult to deliver services with the support of the population.

It is therefore crucially important that the council and its partners are effective in seeking consensus around decision making and allocation of resources – while recognising that conflicting views are often inevitable, and not in themselves undesirable. It is important to challenge perceptions of unfairness appropriately and with sensitivity. At a time of cuts to public funding, it is even more important to invest time and patience in listening to people, and understanding their position – however challenging and uncomfortable that position may be. Doing that well will mean better decisions, more cohesive communities, and fairer outcomes.

Some people – those with the most resources, and access to power – tend to have ways to make themselves heard more readily than those who feel less confident and more excluded. This can also distort decision-making. We do not believe the answer is to dismiss the views of articulate and active people, but rather to take active steps to also hear the voices of the most excluded, and to support them in making their own voices heard. More emphasis needs to be placed on the process of decision-making, as much as the decision itself. If people feel they have been fairly listened to and treated, even if they get less than they wanted or expected, the outcome is more likely to be seen as fair. This in turn can generate a win-win situation, rather than the traditional approach which identifies winners and losers. The process itself can be a positive outcome.

Earlier intervention and earlier engagement with communities is central to perceptions of fairness. But sometimes we need to consider situations in which a long-standing sense of unfairness and injustice has already taken root. Perceptions and narratives of unfairness exist within and across communities. These may be bubbling near the surface for some time (and can pass through generations), and may only receive attention when factors trigger more visible displays of unrest, including riots, violent public disorder, and the escalation of day-to-day conflict between communities. At elections, or where significant changes are taking place in the environment, polarised stances gain public support, increasing community tensions and escalating perceptions of unfairness.

We heard evidence that Newcastle City Council has an acknowledged track record of excellence in community cohesion work and engagement with
communities, both in preventative work (through the Cohesion Framework) and in monitoring and responding when incidents do occur (through the ARCH system of reporting of racist incidents and hate crimes). Following the riots in other parts of the country in August 2011, the Riots, Communities and Victims Panel was set up by the government to investigate its causes. The Panel visited Newcastle to learn from experiences within a city which, despite having many of the characteristics of communities that were affected by the riots, had generally remained calm. It is, however, important not to draw the conclusion that Newcastle’s communities are stable and relatively unaffected by serious tensions. There is still scope to broaden the methods and approaches to engaging with communities, and more will need to be done in this area as cuts take hold, the economy remains stagnant, and social pressures increase.

The council should acknowledge that it will rarely have all the necessary insights and evidence on which to take decisions on behalf of communities, and this should be acknowledged openly as a starting point for addressing concerns and improving service delivery and practice. There is no substitute for active and visible work with the communities themselves, identifying and working on tensions before they escalate. The council needs to make space for people to express themselves in the language they use, so that the issues can be openly raised. People will feel strongly, and they should feel able to express those feelings. Support mechanisms need to be identified and put in place for communities and facilitators, helping those who ‘sit in the fire’ - including councillors, who have a vital leadership role in these circumstances.

Community development work, youth work and community policing are all key resources supporting active and cost-effective engagement with communities. Within the current climate of economic restraints it is crucial that these resources are funded effectively and strategically, to enable the work with communities to be further developed. Disinvestment of this support could prove a false economy, if perceptions of unfairness are then built, and impact across the full range of services.
Earlier in this report, we set out some of the stark inequalities that exist within Newcastle. These reflect inequalities in the wider society, and the UK’s position as one of the most unequal economies in the developed world. But they are particularly apparent in larger cities, including Newcastle, which host some of the most affluent communities, and also the most deprived. In a market economy, greater control over resources means better chances to secure a good quality of life. Inequality of wealth and income damages health, wellbeing and life chances, and disparities breed resentment and mistrust.

The Fairness Commission held a successful seminar with Professor Wilkinson, co-author of the influential book The Spirit Level, which provides compelling evidence of the connection between income inequality and measures of the quality of life and social progress. Professor Wilkinson urged the Fairness Commission to promote campaigns for greater equality, as the principal long-term solution to unfairness. There is considerable support from the Fairness Commission for this position. But we also need to reflect the reality that we live in an unequal society, and find ways of making fair decisions which reflect this reality. That is not to legitimise the status quo, but rather to acknowledge that campaigning for greater equality nationwide needs to work alongside practical measures to use local powers and responsibilities to make a difference within our own city.

Newcastle’s strategies to promote economic growth need to be accompanied by measures to ensure fair access to new opportunities. The largest concentrations of economic activity are focused in a relatively small city centre. There are good opportunities for encouraging growth in the city centre, and in doing so we create opportunities that can benefit the whole region. But we should accompany this strategy with a concern about who is accessing those opportunities. Many of Newcastle’s most deprived neighbourhoods are close, in geographical terms, to the city centre, but too often feel detached from the jobs and opportunities it is generating. To make the biggest contribution to fairness, the council’s ‘Working City’ priority (on which they are consulting in parallel with the work of the Fairness Commission) could enhance its focus on approaches to economic growth that help ensure that the benefits of growth can be more widely enjoyed. These will include:

- Active efforts to avoid the double-dip recession creating long-term mass unemployment, by helping people into work and to access new skills.
- Opportunities for working people on low wages to increase their income, by championing training and development in the workplace, including apprenticeships, and by making progress towards a living wage. In parallel with the Fairness Commission the city council set up a Living Wage Advisory Panel, which has now reported with a series of recommendations aimed at promoting and implementing a living wage for Newcastle.
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7 Wealth and income

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- Strategies for economic and financial inclusion, including debt advice programmes, tackling loan sharks, supporting credit unions and providing support for people on welfare benefits (including many facing significant cuts
in support), preventative financial planning, and pension advice. We heard evidence that cuts in these services were leaving them badly stretched at a time when people need more support than ever.

- A focus on particular groups that are at greatest risk of exclusion from new opportunities, including young people struggling with the transition from education into work, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic women, excluded older people, and people from communities in which employment rates are low.

- Applying the council’s fair procurement policies to support the smaller firms within the city in securing contracts with the public sector, and by commissioning services from smaller voluntary organisations and social enterprises close to the community.

A fair deal for Newcastle?

Fairness cannot be delivered without crossing the boundaries of Newcastle. It depends on how Newcastle itself is positioned within the economy and society of the UK as a whole, and how scarce resources are distributed between different areas. The north east region starts off with a higher level of public spending than the average for the UK – as a result of funding formulas which allocate spending according to levels of deprivation, among other variables. Most of the difference is explained by higher welfare and social payments, focused on people with the lowest incomes. Cuts to public sector budgets are having a profound impact on the distribution of resources around the country. They reflect decisions made at national level, and reflect value judgements about how different populations should be supported with different levels of income, and whether – and if so how – resources follow need.

The map opposite, produced by the council’s Director of Finance and Resources, Paul Woods, shows the distribution of cuts to local budgets across the country. An analysis of this data is outside the remit of the Fairness Commission. However, we reproduce this data to illustrate an important point: that, however fairly people are treated within Newcastle at a time of cuts, Newcastle needs to ensure it gets a fair deal relative to the rest of the country.
Change in local government funding 2010 - 2013

Key

Cumulative change £ per person

- 0 to 10
- 0 to -10
- 10 to -25
- 25 to -50
- 50 to -75
- 75 to -100
- 100 to -125
over - 125

Figures include revenue grants, additional council tax freeze grant, and New Homes Bonus allocations.
A fairer Newcastle does not depend on implementing a series of recommendations from a commission. It is much more about the culture and practices of our city and its institutions. Nevertheless, in the course of our work the commission and its working groups have generated a number of ideas and proposals which we think will be helpful in underpinning this necessary cultural change. The most significant are recorded below.

### Fair share

Where people can expect fair outcomes and a fair share of services, according to their needs.

In the context of an unequal society, favour local economic strategies which benefit a wider range of people, and expand opportunities to those with the lowest levels of wealth and income, by:

- An active approach to creating the best conditions for a working city, generating wealth in areas with the greatest growth potential, but also taking steps to ensure economic opportunities are accessible to all.

- A range of measures to improve the income and wellbeing of people in low paid work; by encouraging learning and development at all ages, responsible and flexible employment practices, and advocating reductions in the pay ratio between the highest and lowest paid within companies, taking into account the report of Newcastle’s Living Wage Advisory Panel.

- An emphasis on financial inclusion, including enhancement of debt advice services - pushing the boundaries of what is possible in regulating abusive loan sharks, and supporting community credit unions as a means of including marginalised communities.

- Advocating a fair tax and benefit system. To the limited extent decisions on tax and benefits are made at local level (for example, through the new local responsibility for Council Tax Benefit) adopt clear principles of fairness on which decisions about entitlements are to be based, and obligations fairly and sensitively enforced.
Fair share | Fair play | Fair go | Fair say

**Fair play**
Where people can have confidence that decisions are made in an even-handed, open and transparent manner, according to evidence.

The council should use its role as a democratically mandated civic leader to re-shape services and act as a role model and leader for the promotion of Newcastle as a fair city. In particular:

- In responding to cuts, the council should be prepared to consider greater targeting on the basis of need, including for services previously regarded as universal. But in doing so it should ensure that it works on the basis of a clear and transparent needs assessment, an open dialogue with communities, and a genuinely consultative process which considers and illustrates the full range of options. Only then will the final decision be considered fair.

- Ensure that the hidden services, for the most vulnerable people, are better understood, and prioritised in competition with the doorstep services that are more familiar to everyone.

- In keeping with the commitment to be a Co-operative Council, the council should push decision-making, power and responsibility as far as possible towards neighbourhoods – while giving them the support necessary to take control of their own priorities. In doing so, rather than listening most to those who speak loudest, Newcastle should turn up the volume on the voices of those in most need.

- Make a greater effort to develop the potential of older people as contributors to the economy and society, to maintain their independence through learning and active aging, and ensure that older people are involved actively in decisions about the services they need and demand.

- Provide opportunities for the more direct involvement of service users in the design of council services, and encourage suppliers to demonstrate their social outcomes, as an integral part of the value for money assessment.
Newcastle should transform the way its citizens are supported to engage in civic life, by:

- Recognising and celebrating different types of active citizenship and participation.
- Increasing innovation at a local level in forms of democratic engagement, building on, but significantly improving, the governance arrangements at ward level to make them engaging and exciting for a wider range of individuals.
- A renewed drive to encourage voter registration and increase the number of voters - with a target to significantly increase the numbers of votes cast in the next council elections in 2014, and in the general election.
- Promoting diverse forms of active and responsible citizenship through education in schools, through adult education, and in the workplace.
- Prioritise the expansion of engagement, participatory and neighbourhood programmes (such as let’s talk Newcastle, Participatory Budgeting and Decent Neighbourhoods Standards) to those communities with least access to resources, in order to build capacity in those communities and to tackle barriers to engagement.
- Continue to invest in building capacity and providing facilities and resources in deprived communities, but give priority to developing community independence and self-reliance and individuals’ ability to take on responsibilities.
- Refresh and re-adopt standards in public life, to commit to honest and transparent governance of the city, and look for ways to refresh the ethos of high quality public service.
At a time when individuals and communities run a greater risk of exclusion, Newcastle should adopt a range of measures which give people a stake in society, prevent people from falling through the cracks, and ensure people are not left without hope and support, or a sense that their voice is ignored. Measures could include:

- An emphasis in policing, community safety and social care to combat crime, abuse, addictions and isolation taking place behind closed doors, leaving their victims afraid and unable to participate in society.

- A drive to encourage universal access to digital public services by a specific date in the future, either in the home, or through supportive use through libraries and customer service centres.

- Active engagement with communities to prevent the escalation of tensions, to bring people together in an environment which can deal constructively with difficult debates.

- Work to avoid people falling through the emerging gaps in the welfare system, through active promotion of welfare rights, help to find work and skills, and a stronger partnership between public agencies to ensure the most vulnerable including children, elderly and disabled people – are not left without hope and support.

- Celebrate and support the role of carers, who with great personal commitment give their time in the support of others in need.
Commit to testing the fairness of every significant decision made about the city, applying principles and evidence, explaining how decisions have been made and who they affect, and introducing measures which address any unfairness revealed by the fairness test.

Develop an overview of the work of fairness commissions and equivalent initiatives around the country, to identify common issues, and help promote a national debate about fairness, identifying barriers that exist at national as well as local level.

In line with the council’s commitment to look ahead to 2016 in planning its future decisions, funding and priorities, reconvene the Newcastle Fairness Commission in 2016 to evaluate whether Newcastle has indeed become a fairer city over this period.
Conclusion

We have tried in this report to provide the city council with a toolkit for fair decision-making, rather than ask them to endorse a list of prototype decisions.

The toolkit we offer consists of a set of principles, a set of examples, and a range of considerations on public services, citizenship, public attitudes to fairness and matters of wealth and income. Our aim has been to influence the way the council thinks, rather than to tell them what to do.

We are well aware that other fairness commissions chose a different course, and delivered a set of quite specific recommendations. Our decision not to follow that path hangs together with the view we reached on the nature of fairness.

We concluded that fairness is not about single-issue activism or special pleading. There are many examples of thoroughly deserving causes, where on simple grounds of compassion and humanity, the commission could easily have made special recommendations. Yet in the cause of building a fairer city we believe the best route is to bolster the processes and uphold the integrity of fair decision-making by those elected to this task, rather than take the task away from them. Fairness in the city, in our view, is essentially about how the elected decision-makers carry out their mandate, in concert with the citizens they represent, along the four dimensions of fair outcomes, fair process, fair opportunity and fair participation.

Fairness is also about coherence and consistency. Of course we must always be ready to respond to exceptional circumstances by exceptional measures. And, as articulated in the body of this report, we believe that fairness may require unequal outcomes in cases of need. In the main, however, people would like to know that decision-making is not capricious, but grounded in a world-view with which they are in broad agreement. We have tried to bridge the gap between a world-view and active decision-making by articulating a set of principles of fairness.

People would also like to know that the issue of fairness is always alive in the collective mind of the decision-makers. Hence our recommendation that the city council should apply a fairness test to all they do. Large organisations are already accustomed to all decisions passing a number of checks, for example regarding finances, or risk, or health and safety. We believe that fairness should become another such check, applied across the board on a regular basis.

Finally, we want this to be a step along the way to a fair city, not an end point. Over the next few years the city will face unprecedented challenges. We can only address those challenges by coming together as a city – with a commitment to work together on the basis of common values of fairness. We encourage this report to stimulate a wider debate: within the council and other public sector organisations, businesses and workplaces, religious and secular institutions, families and communities.

Our aspiration to become a fair city will only come to pass if we keep these debates going, listen and respect the views and opinions of others, and commit to work together to build a better Newcastle.
Appendix: Commission members

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