

Councillor Call for Action

1. What is a Councillor Call for Action?

Councillor Call for Action (CCfA) is a process for a councillor to act on behalf of residents to resolve a local issue of concern, acting **as a last resort** for people who cannot get issues resolved through any other means. Ward councillors should be looking to identify CCfAs in their community, but CCfAs can also be raised by local people directly with their ward councillors or with the Scrutiny Team. It will still be up to councillors to recognise whether an issue is a CCfA and whether it is appropriate to champion that issue.

The decision to raise and champion a CCfA lies with you as the councillor. The CCfA, alongside proposals which will require a much wider range of agencies to formally cooperate with scrutiny in the future, is intended to provide greater emphasis to the work undertaken by you in your community as community advocates and champions, and to further increase the accountability of public service providers to local communities.

CCfA is a legal requirement from 1 April 2009 and councillors are under a **duty** to consider requests from members of the public on certain issues.

2. What's new about the CCfA?

What distinguishes the CCfA from items and topics already raised by councillors for consideration by scrutiny is:

- **Any** member can raise a CCfA issue for scrutiny to consider
- The focus of the CCfA is on **neighbourhood** or **locality** issues and specifically the **quality** of public service provision at a locality level.
- The CCfA represents a genuine local **community** concern (based on local councillors' judgements) and
- It is a **persistent** problem which the local councillor has been **unable to resolve** through local action and discussion with relevant services and agencies.

Scrutiny reviews resulting from CCfA will be undertaken by scrutiny committees which will include councillors from the affected locality. There is an expectation that any scrutiny reviews resulting from CCfA on the **ward-based scrutiny issues** will be 'short and sharp', focused reviews - it is important that the public see this as a responsive and un-bureaucratic process which delivers tangible outcomes.

3. What is expected of you?

Essentially Councillor Call for Action (CCfA) is a recognition of the work you undertake as a ward councillor in taking up local issues on behalf of your community. You are expected to identify issues of local concern and act with and on behalf of your community to resolve those issues. It is up to you using this guidance to decide:

- Which issues you take forward as CCfAs and champion;
- When an issue should be referred to Scrutiny; and
- When to reject an issue.

It is a matter of judgement which requests you agree to champion and as a local councillor you are accountable to your local community for these judgements. Championing a request will mean taking the issue up on behalf of the resident(s) concerned and trying to resolve the problem by liaising with council officers, and/or outside agencies.

Councillors deal with issues of concern on behalf of their constituents as an everyday part of their constituency case work. The CCfA is not intended to add additional bureaucracy to these ward councillor requests, which will continue to be dealt with in the same way as they are now. If you are uncertain about whether a request might be appropriate, the Scrutiny Team can provide advice and assistance to you and to the member of the public making the request.

4. Checklist for Councillors using a CCfA

A. Initial consideration and actions

1. Discuss with other ward councillors (check their actions and intentions and whether they can help).
2. Take steps to resolve the issue through existing mechanisms such as contacting Council Officers (including the Scrutiny Team), or liaising with other organisations, or securing consideration of the matter by the Area Committee, or checking whether it can be fed into an existing or review already being undertaken.
3. If the issue is resolved, inform the resident of the outcome and the steps taken, including any difficulties or learning points.
4. If the issues remain unresolved, consult the Scrutiny Team and if appropriate formally request that the item be considered by the relevant Review Committee.

[A flow chart of the CCfA process is provided as Appendix 2 and takes you through each step of the process].

Reject if it is any of the following:

1. An individual complaint

2. An issue relating to an “excluded” matter such as planning or licensing matter or another issue where individuals or entities have a right of appeal (other than a complaint to the Ombudsman)
3. Vexatious, discriminatory or not reasonable.
4. It is being used as a “second bite of the cherry” e.g. where a previous call-in has failed, or a petition has already been considered.

Accept if it is:

1. An issue of genuine local concern; and
2. Other avenues for resolution have been followed, and
3. You believe that this is now the most appropriate way to deal with it.

How does CCfA fit with the Scrutiny Work Programme?

Currently scrutiny members can put an item on the relevant Review Committee agenda using the arrangements set out in Protocol 1. These arrangements remain unchanged. The public have the opportunity to suggest topics and reviews through contacting the Scrutiny team or by contacting their local councillor.

The aim of Scrutiny is to be as strategic as possible, championing issues on behalf of the community so it is possible that a CCfA topic may already be included in a Review Committee work programme.

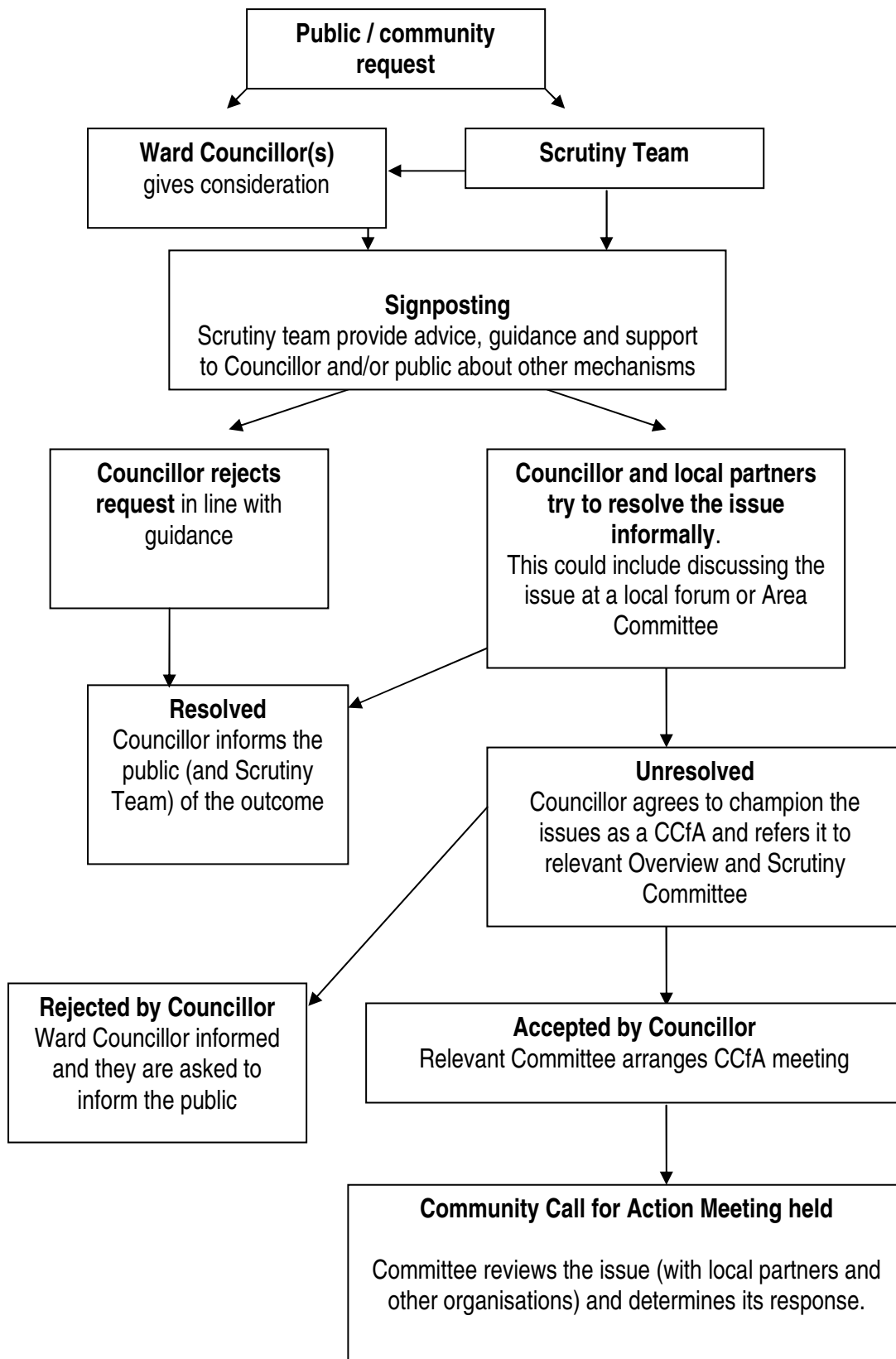
It is valuable for CCfA issues to feed into the broad scrutiny work programme, and vice versa. The purpose of CCfA is to give members more of a voice, and scrutiny itself is a member-led process. CCfA can sit comfortably alongside existing methods for placing items on the scrutiny work programme. CCfA should make the work programme more relevant and timely.

Each Review Committee has the power to deal with CCfAs within its terms of reference. The Review Committee will be asked to identify if a CCfA is appropriate for scrutiny ensuring that the issues scrutinised and reviewed are of genuine community concern.

The checklist for the Review Committee is attached at Appendix 3

The Review Committee receiving a CCfA will convene a meeting in the community affected, where possible, and aim to meet with all partners involved, gather evidence and identify appropriate recommendations. Relevant Ward councillors will be invited to take part in the meeting.

Councillor Call for Action Flow Chart



Consideration of a CCfA

The Committee should seek the attendance of relevant persons or bodies. The Chairman will provide a short introduction and the Council bringing the CCfA will be invited to outline their objectives and questions from other members. The discussion will be structured to focus on the issue raised.

Checklist for determining a CCfA

The Committee should review the actions taken to date to resolve the issue and all of the criteria set out in Appendix 1. It may determine that no action should be taken, for example because:

- The applicant is a vexatious complainant and the issue is being or has been dealt with under the Council's Complaints procedure¹.
- The issue is currently going through the complaints procedure, and it is appropriate for this to be concluded.
- Ward Councillors have not explored the issue fully and exhausted other avenues.

Alternatively, it may conclude that the public interest is best served by making a recommendation on request to another agency or body or referred to Cabinet for consideration. The Committee should endeavour where possible to identify an appropriate "resolution" of the issue.

Definition of a Complaint

For the purpose of the Council's procedure the Council accepts the Local Government Ombudsman's definition.

"An expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about the Council's action or lack of action or about the standard of a service, whether the action was taken or the service provided by the Council itself or a person or body acting on behalf of the Council."

¹ The Council's customer complaints procedure can be found at www.sunderland.gov.uk/Public/Editable/Themes/CityCouncil/corporate/complaints/customerprocedure.asp