



International Council on Social Welfare

Building Effective ICSW National Councils Dakar Senegal October 2010

Abstract

This paper provides background on the role, function and key elements of successful ICSW National Councils. It explores the need for councils to identify clear values, goals and purposes. The paper provides a checklist to support councils in being more effective.

1. WHY HAVE NATIONAL COUNCILS?

The goal of social development could be characterised as improved human well-being. Social development involves many sectors including housing, agriculture, social welfare and transport. Action in one sector impacts on action and/or the level of development in other sectors.

This inter-relatedness and inter dependence is obvious in multi-sectoral programmes. Despite this the inter-relatedness is often ignored in practice as is demonstrated by many failures of worthwhile projects (e.g. wells creating deserts, marketing projects without transport routes). We need ways to help make sure that action in one sector is complemented and reinforced by action in other sectors. This will produce better results.

Social development involves a broad range of organisations with different histories, objectives and methods and a wide range of people with different experience, skills and ideas. Much of the effort of this diverse range of people must be separate and often specialized. The actors will also at times be in competition and conflict due to both organisational and philosophical divergence.

However, the organisations and practitioners who comprise the social development sector do have some common goals. They face many similar problems and issues. The sector has interests which can only be advanced through joint effort to clarify, define and pursue these interests. Commercial rivals collaborate in business associations. Trade unions collaborate through national associations. Thus social organisations also need a mechanism for collective action.

1.1 The Benefits of Collaboration

National Councils aim to provide the mechanism for collective action. Collaboration among those involved in social development can produce a wide range of benefits: for the practitioners; for the sector; and for the people and communities for whom social development efforts exist. Some examples of these benefits include:

- Comprehensive and reliable needs assessment through sharing of varied experiences, perspectives and data.
- Efficient use of resources through avoidance of duplication of effort and by learning from each other's failures and successes.
- Improved development and application of skills through joint training courses, working groups and seminars, sharing techniques and approaches based on experience.
- Development and promotion of policies and standards for the sector which lead to improved service quality.
- Increased public awareness of government social policies.
- Increased government awareness of priority issues and objectives that have been developed by the sector.
- New development opportunities and programmes resulting from combined experience, skills and resources.
- Improved planning through the establishment of common resource banks and information systems.

2. ORIGINS, STRUCTURE AND MEMBERSHIP

National Councils bring together all or most of the organisations involved in social development activity in their country. A National Council's membership will include most of the national-level agencies operating in the fields of social welfare, human services, community development and social policy

National Councils are often called 'umbrella' or 'peak' councils because they 'cover' the whole social sector in their goals, their programmes and their members. They are national in scope and are not limited to any particular area or sector.

2.1 Origins of National Councils

National Councils can have a variety of origins. They can be established by:

- Non governmental agencies within a country
- The national government ministry responsible for social affairs
- Combined efforts of NGOs and government arising from informal collaborative arrangements.
- Key individuals in leadership roles in social development who have heard of or seen councils operating elsewhere.

- Pressure for a collaborative structure either to handle an emergency or crisis situation in a country, or to respond to a major external initiative for assistance to the country's social development.

2.2 Structures of National Councils

There are common or typical council structures. The form may differ from country to country but it is usual to find that a council has the following key structural features:

- **A membership of independent organisations** with equal membership rights. The members may or may not be divided into different categories (by geographic areas, function, target group, level of operation - there are various models).
- **A governing body** which is representative of the membership, elected by the membership regularly and directly accountable to the membership.
- **A secretariat**, which implements council activities and programmes. The size of secretariats will differ. It may be comprised only of paid staff. It may have a large number of volunteer staff. It may be one integrated unit, or it may coordinate different "sub secretariats" split up geographically or functionally.

2.3 Membership of National Councils

There are three areas in which membership differ between National Councils:

- The council has only non-governmental (NGO) or voluntary agency members, or alternatively has a mixture of NGOs and Government Ministries/Departments.
- The council has only national level organisations as full members. Alternatively it has members from all levels (e.g. including local community groups)
- The council includes all sectoral coordinating (or umbrella) bodies as members such as coordinating bodies in aged, disabled and health areas

2.4 Roles of National Councils

The overarching aim of National Councils is to promote and facilitate social development through goals and practices based in equity and justice that will improve the well being of all people in society. The particular roles of National Councils, which describe their special contribution to the social development process, are:

- **Coordination:** to create and foster collaboration among sectors of society and social development agencies. The National Council provides processes and mechanisms for cooperation for social development.
- **Service:** to facilitate and initiate measures which support and enhance the capacities of social development agents – whether governmental, NGO or community.
- **Innovation:** to utilize the collective experience, knowledge and skills of the social development sector to develop and promote new ideas and practices which advance the purpose of social development.

2.5 Functions of National Councils

The differences between councils are also reflected in their functions. Not all councils do the same things. However, councils are more similar in their actions than any other feature. The differences are frequently one of emphasis and degree in how a particular function is implemented, or in different balances among the functions the councils carry out.

Some of the differences between councils are:

- **Policy leadership and advocacy:** All councils play some role in developing social policies and advocating them to government, the public and other key sectors. However, for some councils, this is a major primary role and the council becomes a highly visible public policy lobby group. For others, it is only one among a range of functions and policy advocacy occurs quietly and more subtly. (The political culture of the country is one influence here, but is not always the determining factor).
- **Membership services and development:** Many types of council offer a range of NGO development programmes and other support services to their members, especially to NGOs providing social programmes. These include NGO management training, consultancy and advisory services, information resource banks, support for programme development, and assistance with donors. For other councils, this function is an incidental and occasional activity.
- **Fund raising and grant support:** This is one area, which often creates conflict about the role of a council. All councils involve themselves in promoting greater funding for social development and NGO work in particular. Some councils actively assist particular members to obtain funding. Others will provide general support and advice to all NGOs. A few Councils are directly involved in obtaining funds (grants or community fund raising) and then distributing the funds to NGOs. Many councils believe that a direct National Council role in grant-making is counter-productive to the coordinating function which is central to council's purposes.
- **Implementation of general programmes or projects:** This is another area in which strong differences of opinion occur. Most councils do run social programmes or projects. They may work with members to develop a new service on the basis that it is run by an existing member. Some councils will implement a new service but only as a pilot project for a limited time. A few councils have direct involvement in running one or more social development programmes or services. Frequently, this creates conflict with at least some members, who believe it places a council in a competitive role with them and detracts from the 'neutral' stance required for the effective promotion of collaboration and cooperation.

2.6 Key Elements of a Successful National Council

Experience in councils in all regions and many countries provide a set of key elements which are vital to the effective and successful functioning of a National Council. A National Council will:

- **Have a high degree of consensus around a small set of objectives**, which arise from and give reality to the council's purpose and identity.
- **Have a sound understanding of the social and organisational environment** in which the council exists – and its functions and programmes will be responsible to this environment.
- **Have good linkages and relationship with its member organisations**, which are actively involved in and committed to the council and its programmes.
- **Play a key role in a broader collaborative national network** which links across different social sectors and reaches all levels of social organisations.
- **Have an effective and open communication system** and efficient information services, which deliver appropriate, succinct, targeted and useful information to members and network.
- **Have a competent, committed, well-organized and democratic leadership team** of elected officers, committee members and staff.
- **Have flexible, efficient and action focused management structures** and processes, which provide the council with sound planning, decision-making and implementation capacities.
- **Have an adequate and diversified resource base** which provides reliable core-funding under council control as well as project funding. Resources will be utilized to the maximum through efficient and disciplined procedures and creative strategies.
- **Have inbuilt processes for organisational growth** and adaptation which ensure that there is a process of evolution to meet new challenges.
- **Have a well-balanced set of programmes** which reflect the interests of disadvantaged groups and the council itself. The programmes will advance equally the council's role of coordination, membership service and innovation. The programmes will be appropriate to the capacities and limitations of the council.

3. VALUES IN SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

3.1 The Values Arena for National Councils

Values are the principles we hold most important. They are the guidelines which we believe should be followed in all aspects of life. They reflect the qualities of what we consider "good". Our values are reflected in the goals we seek and promote. A person's most basic values are reflected in what they do in life, not only what they say.

In working for social development, the practices we follow and the programmes we develop arise from and reflect the basic values we hold and the goals we desire for society. Our actions also exert an influence on the values and goals of other people and institutions and therefore on the directions in which our society develops.

National Councils are at the interface of three arenas in which social values and goals are formulated and pursued. These arenas are: the arena of individual people, their families and their immediate communities; the arena of structures and institutions whose objectives and programmes are directly concerned with promoting and realizing social development; and the arena of society as a whole, most commonly defined today as the nation and state.

National Councils are at the interface of these three arenas because of their position and roles within social development. Most councils deal with:

- **The interface between government and social agencies:** for example creating opportunities for collaboration, interpreting agency needs to policy makers, assisting government in policy development, and helping agencies understand government priorities.
- **The interface between communities and government:** for example, acting as advocates for community concerns and aspirations and helping communities to understand government objectives and utilize government services and resources.
- **The interface between social agencies and communities:** for example promoting dialogue and debate about community participation in development and implementation of social programmes; promoting or understanding research into community needs for use by agencies; and enabling disadvantaged groups establish their own organisations for advocacy and programmes.

3.2 The Challenge of Developing a Value Position

Councils need to review and critically reflect upon the values which confront them as agents of social development.

They need to formulate an explicit set of values, which will be the basis of their operations and programmes. Because they are a focal point of arenas and organisations with values in conflict councils need their own ‘value anchors’. Without “value anchors” they may find themselves drifting from one position to another depending on the changing influences.

If a council becomes identified solely, or even predominantly, with only one of the arenas we have identified, then it ceases to have an ‘interface role’. It will be regarded as the special agent of the arena with which it identifies. It will be regarded by the other arenas as a sectional force, biased against them. A council which becomes identified with one group of agencies within the social development arena loses its co-coordinating capacity within the sector as a whole.

3.3. Processes for Developing Value Positions

A National Council develops its value set and its social goals through communication, consultation and dialogue with its membership constituency and with all arenas and

sectors of society. This is not just seeking views and opinions. Nor is it a ‘census’ of opinion to determine majority views. It is a process of dialogue which involves openness to alternative perceptions of the world, investigation of different values and goals in order to understand them, promotion of exchange among agencies and sectors, and constructive discussion of different positions based on mutual respect.

Through consultation and dialogue a National Council will seek a number of things which will inform its own decision-making, such as:

- Identifying values and goals and approaches to development which may indeed be different and even at times in conflict, but which can actually co-exist in complementary ways within a broader framework.
- Identifying the obstacles which prevent the realization of different values and goals (sometimes we argue about what will happen “after”, more than we concentrate on working together to remove common obstacles to either of our desired goals).
- Identifying, or formulating basic value positions/value sets and broad social goals which constitute or create a framework within which apparently opposing positions may be seen as actually alternative paths to a same or similar end.

This process should not produce values and goals which are vague and meaningless. Nor should they produce a weak “lowest common denominator” position. It should result in essential values which are separate from immediate strategic considerations and special interests.

A council’s values and goals should be developmental. A council’s value set should be concerned with process as well as with end-goals. Social development is a process. The council’s values should be concerned with how society moves from where it is now to a position of increased well-being for its people. They should incorporate respect for genuine differences of position and influence even while challenging and pointing the way for change.

3.4 Developing a Value Position – some key issues

The values we hold, the social goals to which we are committed, are reflected in the positions we take and implement on specific social development issues. Whether or not we have a statement of values and goals, others will assess what our values and goals are by what we decide and do in practice about issues. And we actually formulate many of our value positions and goals by working through concrete issues.

Values are related to the role of being a ‘council’. Examples could include:

- > **Coordination and Collaboration** – What priority should be given to promoting coordination and collaboration in development planning and programming, given the competing agency interests? Should collaborative projects be given priority? Can collaboration be encouraged through making it a requirement?
- > **People’s Participation** – How does a council reconcile the goal of increasing participation in development planning and decision making with constant

pressures for “efficiency” and immediate results (participation usually takes time)? How much priority does a council give to supporting self-help and community groups, especially when there may be short-term conflict between their interests and those of established social agencies?

Issues which involve setting social goals which determine the framework for and directions of social development policy and practice in the country. Examples of these issues could include:

- > **Self Reliance** – Is self-reliance a feasible goal in a complex and interdependent world? How do you balance the advantage of ‘getting things going’ with external dependence, against the longer-term viability of programmes which are locally initiated and resourced? Can aid programmes be designed and administered so that they do allow and encourage self-determination and self motivation by recipients, and foster rather than destroy creative development of local resources?
- > **Meeting Basic Needs or Promoting Social Justice** – Should development programmes be directed at overcoming crisis poverty situations like providing basic needs supplements to the disadvantaged? Or should social programmes be focused on restructuring inequitable structures and relationships? Why are these objectives frequently in conflict? Are there ways around this?

A limited number of specific issues which the council believes to be of critical importance and high priority at that time. These are not necessarily the most “popular” issues of the moment (e.g. the latest international Year of...) Indeed such priority issues may well be things which much of the social sector/ society is ignoring for one reason or another, but which should not be ignored. For example:

- > In developed countries it is difficult to get serious discussions of ‘North/South’ issues at a time when social welfare is under threat at home. North/South issues tend to be seen as a question of aid, at best. Yet there are many links between North/South issues and the future of social welfare. Do we wish to preserve the current form of social welfare if it depends on continuing economic systems which exploit developing countries? What are the alternatives for a most just world in North and South?

4. PURPOSE AND IDENTITY

There is a saying that “if you don’t know where you are going, how will you know if you have arrived?” Another side of the same issue is “if you don’t know where you are going you are unlikely to arrive”. When we are talking about a group of people going somewhere together, it is also likely that unless we all know where the group is going then we are likely to end up in different places.

4.1 Setting Goals

Setting goals is about determining where we are going. A goal is a statement of something we want to achieve, a position we plan to reach. Goal setting is the process of clarifying, deciding, and starting what we want to achieve.

The pressures generated by the unique position of National Councils makes goal setting particularly important. For example:

- Councils usually have a very diverse membership, with differing and sometimes conflicting aims. Unless the council's own purpose and aims are clear and widely accepted it is likely to be pulled in different directions.
- A council needs a strong and cohesive constituency to support its role, otherwise it has no legitimacy. The diversity of a council's membership requires goal setting processes which create the consensus necessary for support to be developed and maintained amidst a variety of interests.
- Councils operate at the interface of different arenas and sectors of society. To preserve their unique role and position councils have to be able to withstand pressure from various sectors. A council's integrity as an organisation depends on there being broad consensus on purpose.
- Organisations are affected by special events. An U.N International Year can become a dominant issue. Popular attention may dictate an interest in an issue. A sharp change of government policy can change the focus of the NGO sector. National Councils are vulnerable to such pressures and can divert their attention from on going programmes.
- Because councils have broad concerns across the whole field of social development there is constant pressure for them to take up a wide range of issues. This is sometimes used as a way of preventing internal conflict. I.e. do everything so everyone is partially satisfied. Clarity of purpose and reviewing of goals can help avoid diffusion of effort.

There are different levels and types of goals. Goals can range from the general to the specific in content, form, open-ended (or broad) to closed (or targeted) in scope. They can be either process or outcome focused. They can be long, medium or short term in their time-frame.

At the most general level, it is what we will call the "purpose" of the organisation. Sometimes this is called the mission statement. It defines its role and in general terms how this will be pursued. Statements of purpose or mission are rarely precise or specific; they do not say "we will do this, there, then". However they are still goals, they describe an organisation's purpose and tend to remain constant for longer periods than its more operational goals.

At the next level is what we will call "Aims" – they are often called "organisational goals". These are more specific statements of what the organisation plans to achieve towards its purpose. Aims are the kind of goals that are found in three year plans, giving targets for achievement in each major area of activity, and for each year of the plan or programme.

The final level of goals is what we will call “objectives. These are short term, very specific goals which serve as” stepping stones” toward achievement of the Aims. Effective objectives need to be *SMART*:

SMART Objectives

Specific:	What precise objective do you intend to achieve?
Measurable:	Will you be able to measure or observe your results?
Achievable:	Given the resources and skills available to you, are you convinced that the objective can be achieved by your organisation and its allies?
Realistic:	Given the context and the size of the problems, is it possible?
Time-bound:	When is your objective going to happen?

Goals are a key factor in giving an organisation the cohesion and identity it needs to survive and grow.

- They provide the framework for the development of the organisation’s programmes
- They are the basis for determining what type and scale of resources the organisation requires
- They provide the framework for resource allocation and priority setting among the organisation’s activities.
- They are a public statement of the organisation’s intentions, and therefore a key factor in raising support and in creating networks and alliances.
- They provide the basis for evaluation of the organisation’s activities and accountability to its constituency

4.2 Establishing a Strong Sense of Purpose

How does a National Council create useful goals and ensure that these contribute to a strong sense of the council’s purpose? What are the key factors in effective goal- setting?

Things which will help achieve these key attributes include:

- Council personnel (officers, volunteers and staff) keeping in close contact and dialogue with the council’s membership and other networks. They are up to date with current social issues and activity. The council must be close to those people, agencies and needs for which it exists. (In the commercial world one key attribute of successful companies is that they are ‘close to the customer’).
- There must be the fullest involvement of all personnel, members and networks of the council in the processes of goal setting and review. Initiatives must be sought and welcomed from the “bottom up” and (from all sides), as well as from those in leadership positions. All members should be consulted and given opportunity to comment on proposed goals and directions.

- The purpose and major aims of the council must always be the focus of every aspect of the councils work and life. Every activity, however small, should be related to achieving the council's purpose and one or more of its aims. People must be able to understand how their contribution, whatever it may be, has significance. And they must have opportunity to communicate their ideas on how the council's purpose can be better advanced.
- The council's purpose needs to be continually affirmed and 'rehearsed,' both within and outside the council. This includes things such as taking time at each Annual Meeting to emphasize why the council exists and how its programmes serve this purpose. And ensuring that all new members and contacts are introduced to the council's purpose and aims, how this have been developed and pursued over time (Council history). What are the future plans?
- The council needs to celebrate its achievements and successes, deal constructively with its failures and mistakes and create incentives which generate commitment to the council and its purpose. Success and achievement are great reinforcers of a sense of purpose, but they have to be given recognition. Failures and mistakes can also be positive if they are faced openly and learnt from. The old saying that "an organisation which never makes a mistake never does anything" is very true.

If these approaches are followed then the council can be sure it has the basis for effective goal setting and the creation and maintenance of consensus around its purpose and aims.

5. TWELVE KEY QUESTIONS (A Checklist for all organisations)

1. WHY DOES OUR ORGANISATION EXIST?

This question raises the issue of the overall GOALS and purpose of the organisation, in this case a National Council. This question should not have to be debated every time we meet or discuss a new programme or activity. However, it is relevant to every new development. It is a question which should always be in the back of our mind. It is one of the criteria to use in deciding whether or not we should take up a new programme (or stop doing an old one).

2. WHAT DOES OUR GROUP WANT TO ACHIEVE?

Here we are concerned with the specific OBJECTIVES of the proposal under discussion. Can we specify not only generally why we want to do something (which Q.1 answers), but the concrete results we wish to achieve by doing this particular thing. Objectives are targets which can be measured as to whether or not they have been achieved. This question should be asked of every action proposal a council undertakes.

3. WHAT CAN WE USE TO MAKE IT HAPPEN?

This question focuses on RESOURCES. Resources are not just money; they include people's time and skills, the use of facilities and equipment, etc. When we plan to do something it is important to ask whether we have the resources we need to achieve the objectives. We might have some and need to obtain others. It is no use resolving to do

something if we do not have the capacity to achieve it. Good intentions by themselves are not effective. This question is also interesting because, like several others which follow, it asks what can WE do? Often we decide something should be done and then decide ‘someone else’ should really provide the means for doing it. If we say we want to make something happen we are responsible for our own contribution to making it happen.

4. HOW DO WE DO IT?

This is the issue of STRATEGY. What lines of action are we going to initiate that will lead to our objectives being achieved? This is not just a question of ‘detail’ which can be left to staff of a sub-committee ‘to work out’. The general ‘how’ question should be part of our decision to do anything. If we cannot think of at least one or two ‘how’s’ then perhaps we should not be pursuing this objective. We can of course ask a committee to look at ‘how we do it?’ and report back, but then a final decision on ‘what we want to do’ (Q.2) should wait for the committee’s report. Looking at ‘how’ may lead us to change our idea of ‘what’ we want to do. Also this question of ‘how we do it’ should include deciding who, precisely, is to be responsible for answering the ‘detail’ questions 5, 6 and 7 and that they are equipped to find these answers – unless the body deciding how is also going to decide the details itself.

5. EXACTLY HOW DO WE DO IT?

We now move from strategy into TASK ANALYSIS. Often when we have spent a long time discussing what we want to do and how we are going to do it we feel, and act, as if ‘well that’s achieved’. But of course we have only taken the first steps. Every strategy contains tens and even hundreds of detailed tasks, all of which have to become part of our daily schedule. Analyzing these tasks and planning them, is a tedious business, but what we want to achieve has no chance unless these tasks are both feasible and implemented properly. It is amazing how often we leave ‘the details’ to chance. We take for granted they will be carried out. We do not think how details need to be adjusted to achieve our objectives. Yet “tactics are where we live or die” as an old military saying goes.

Question 6. and 7. are directly related to question 5. The answers to these three questions have to be decided interdependently. Each task requires certain skills and knowledge. Each task takes a certain amount of time. How these questions are answered makes a very real impact on whether a project or activity lives or dies

6. WHO WILL DO IT?

In deciding exactly how an objective is going to be achieved we have to establish ASSIGNMENTS – who is going to do the various tasks (Q.5). This requires deciding who has the skills, time and interest needed for each task and whether there is a proper balance between all the people involved. A balance of the skills and experience is needed as is a proper sharing of the workload. If one person is given enough tasks for two people then we destroy either the person or the project (or both!).

7. WHEN WILL WE DO IT?

No plan to achieve anything can be regarded as serious until we set deadlines and make a proper TIMELINE. We use the timeline not just to set targets for achieving our objective

but also to work out the stages or steps needed along the way. Everything we intend to do has to be fitted in to the timeline. If our plans have been based on the assumption that John will do task 'A' which takes two days and then do task 'D' because they both need his skills, but we forget that Sephiwe will need four days for tasks 'B' and 'C', then we are headed for a problem. A timeline can help prevent things like this.

8. ARE WE DOING IT?

This is not as simple or as silly as it sounds. It points to the need for MONITORING of progress as our plans/strategies are implemented. Are the resources we need becoming available? Are tasks getting done on time? Is everyone managing with their assigned tasks or does someone need assistance? At a general level it is often possible to report positively that "the programme is being implemented", but when examined closely you find that although certain things are indeed happening, the programme (the objective) is in a lot of trouble because other important things are not happening. A lot of energetic activity gives the impression of progress but can easily be an illusion. Just because I am busy does not mean I am achieving the objectives. 'Monitoring' is about checking whether the tasks which should be being implemented are being implemented, at the correct time, in the best way, in the right place, etc. Monitoring has to be done systematically, regularly and objectively. If it is done in this way it serves us as a good alarm system if things start to do wrong (so we can correct them), or as an encouragement that things are progressing well.

9. HOW DO WE REALLY FEEL ABOUT IT?

This is our SELF ASSESSMENT of the programme or activity. We have our monitoring data about whether tasks are being achieved and targets met, but what does our experience and our intuition tell us? Is everything positive or are there some worrying concerns that do not show up in the data? Is this work useful and a contribution to 'why our group exists'? Are we finding it difficult or are we managing quite well? Colleagues need to share their own thoughts and feelings because these are important factors in our work.

10. DID WE ACTUALLY DO IT?

This comes at the end of the programme or work, or it can also come at the end of particular stages or sections of the timeline. It is concerned with EVALUATION of the activity. This may be done by internal or external evaluation. What were our objectives, have these been achieved? Important issues here include what 'indicators' we are using that tell us whether our objectives are being met and how we measure them? Did we establish evaluation criteria at the same time as we set our objectives, or are we making these now? (We need to be careful that our criteria and indicators really measure results and not just tell us what we want to hear).

11. SO WHAT?

After we have evaluated our activity in terms of whether it achieved its objectives we can ask what CONCLUSIONS we draw. This goes back to Q.2 – what were our objectives, were they really appropriate and useful? Now that we have achieved them what has

actually changed? In terms of why we are in existence (Q.1) what have we really achieved? Sometimes we can establish a programme, implement it well, meet all our targets and still not be sure that progress has really been achieved. In asking ‘so what’ we need to bring together the results of our monitoring, our self-assessment and our evaluation. Plus we have to ask not only what WE think, but what others also think, especially those who were supposed to benefit.

12. NOW WHAT?

Finally we pose the issue of RECOMMENDATIONS. Having done it, evaluated it, drawn conclusions – what lessons do we learn that we can use to improve, adjust, and build upon for the future? These may be a direct result of this particular activity, or they may have arisen indirectly from our observation of related issues during this programme. In preparing recommendations we also have to carefully consider how these will be considered and decided upon. How will we begin to translate them into action? Do they raise questions about ‘why we exist’? And so the questions begin again!

Hopefully this outline shows how a fairly basic framework – a check-list of questions, can be useful in shaping and assisting how a council goes about its functions. This check-list can be used in a number of ways including:

- Make a wall-poster of the 12 Questions and hang it in your office and committee meeting room.
- If your council has an organisational manual, and/or a policy manual, include it in this.
- When preparing policy, programme or project proposals use it as a checklist, either yourself to make sure you have thought about all the issues raised, or even in the written presentation of your proposal showing how your proposal answers each question, or when answers will have to be given later in the implementation.
- Make a wall-chart which lists these questions along one side, and all your current major activities on the other side and keep a check on how each activity is going against the questions.
- Use the check-list to review your overall programme of activities regularly, even use it to report progress in your Annual Report.