



Council Policy 2.58

Policy Title	Community Engagement Policy
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Approved by	Council
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Corporate Plan Strategic Action	2.1 An organisation centred on good governance and community participation. 2.1.7 Maintain effective communication processes to promote community participation and engagement.
Due date for review	February 2012
Keywords	Community, Engagement, Consultation

Disclaimers:

1. *This policy may not be current as Council regularly reviews and updates its policies. The latest controlled version can be found in the policies section of Council's intranet or contact Council's Policy and Risk Management Coordinator for a hard copy of the latest version. A hard copy of this electronic document is uncontrolled.*
2. *Where there is a delegation identified in this policy, the reader will need to confirm if an alternative delegation exists in any Register of Delegation. To the extent that there is any conflict perceived between the delegation/s identified in this policy and of those contained in a Register of Delegation, then the delegation/s in the Register takes precedence. The Chief Executive Officer will, if necessary, be the sole arbiter in resolving any issues of conflict.*

1. PURPOSE

Council is committed to community engagement and will facilitate the participation of the community at a number of different levels. The purpose of this policy focuses on enhancing and directing Council's community engagement processes in order to:

- Demonstrate Council's commitment to connect and stay connected with all residents and communities in the region;
- Harness the views in the community, gain stakeholder 'buy in', develop and maintain productive partnerships;
- Provide a mechanism to facilitate the incorporation of the community's needs into policy, planning, service delivery and inform Council's decision-making generally;
- Monitor the effectiveness of Council's direction and programs;
- Develop Council's Community Plan and other matters in broad strategic terms;
- Assist Councillors and residents to engage directly and fulfil the Councillors' role to:
 - represent the current and future interests of the residents;
 - ensure Council achieves its corporate and community plans;
 - provide high quality leadership to the community;
 - participate in Council meetings, policy development, and decision making,
 - be accountable to the community for the Council's performance.
- Promote Council as accountable, effective, efficient and sustainable, in accordance with the local government principles¹ of:
 - "democratic representation, social inclusion and meaningful community engagement"; and
 - "transparent and effective processes and decision making in the public interest".

This policy is not to restrict Councillors in engaging with the community in informal settings, but provide a structured framework for undertaking formal community engagement.

The policy also complies with section 4 of the *Local Government Act 2009* and regulation 130 of the *Local Government (Finance, Plans and Reporting) Regulation 2010*.

2. SCOPE

This policy will apply across all areas of Council operations and all staff and elected representatives have responsibility for engaging effectively with the community. This policy will also inform the processes used to develop and amend Council's community plan, which then informs Council's Customer Service Statement, Corporate Plan and other strategic documentation and links to Council's Complaints Management, Customer Service and Communication Plan.

The policy also acknowledges that different techniques of engagement are suitable for use in different circumstances and draws upon the International Association for Public Participation's (IAP2) Public

¹ See s 4 *Local Government Act 2009*

Participation Spectrum framework², which has been recognised as describing 'best practice' community engagement. This framework, however, is not designed to limit community engagement techniques.

To avoid the perception of giving an advantage to elected Councillors during an election period, no engagement activities will be scheduled during the caretaker period that involves political issues or Councillor involvement.

3. DEFINITIONS

Community engagement is the broad term that includes a range of activities to inform, consult, involve, collaborate or empower the community to provide a mechanism for people to influence what happens in Council. It is a two-way process that:

- involves citizens, communities and other stakeholders in the areas of policy development, planning and service delivery; and
- incorporates their aspirations, concerns, needs and values into Council's decision making processes.

An **Engagement Plan** documents how the policy principles will be achieved, the activities that are planned and the measures used to determine success.

The **Caretaker Period** is the time starting on the day when public notice of the holding of the election is given and ending on the close of the poll.

The **Community Engagement Reference Panel** is the group established to provide an overarching and corporate perspective to community engagement activities. Members are appointed by the Chief Executive Officer, having regard to their community engagement experience and in accordance with the Terms of Reference.

IAP2's **Public Participation Spectrum** assists with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in engagement activities. The Spectrum shows that differing levels of participation are legitimate depending on the goals, timeframes, resources and levels of concern in the decision to be made. However, and most importantly, the Spectrum sets out the promise being made to the public at each participation level.

4. CONTENT

4.1 Community Engagement

Communities within the region have both common and unique perspectives. Council will use different community engagement techniques and communication mechanisms depending on the distinctive features of the audience, the issue or project. The Public Participation Spectrum framework³ matches the engagement purpose, goals, promise made to the public and appropriate techniques. The framework outlines an engagement approach across a wide spectrum including methods that could be used to inform, consult, involve, collaborate with or empower the local community to engage in issues of a substantive and important nature. The spectrum offers a degree of flexibility from which to choose, adapt or create an approach that offers a best fit for the community and the decision being made.

A broad range of activities are recognised as community engagement under IAP2. Community engagement in this context includes a number of activities not immediately recognised as

² <http://www.iap2.org.au/sitebuilder/resources/knowledge/asset/files/36/iap2spectrum.pdf>

³ Developed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)

community engagement. Examples of current activities include regular advertisement in local newspapers, Council's webpage, and use of social media.

Public Participation Spectrum framework⁴

Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Goal: To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives, opportunities and / or solutions.	Goal: To obtain Public feedback on analysis, alternatives and / or decisions.	Goal: To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	Goal: To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	Goal: To place final decision- making in the hands of the public.
Promise to the Public: Council will keep you informed.	Promise to the Public: Council will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge your concerns and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	Promise to the Public: Council will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	Promise to the Public: Council will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	Promise to the Public: We will implement what you decide.
Techniques to Consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media Release • Media Advertising • Fact sheets • Newsletter • Rate Notice Insert • Letterbox Drop • Web Site • Information Displays • Social Media (Twitter, Facebook, UTube) • Vocation Presentations • Procurement Seminars • Letters • Phone calls • other 	Techniques to Consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council Meetings • Public Meetings • Seek Submissions • Community Information Sessions • Public comment • Reference groups • Surveys • other 	Techniques to Consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councillor Engagement Activities • Workshops • Deliberate polling • other 	Techniques to Consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spring Bluff Trust • Advisory Committees • Toowoomba Community Gardens • Consensus building • Participatory decision making • Facilitated community meetings • Youth Council • other 	Techniques to Consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporatisation / Controlled Entity (Empire Theatre, Jondaryan Woolshed, Economic Development Board, Toowoomba & Golden West) • Election / Ballots • Delegated decisions • other

⁴ © 2004 International Association for Public Participation

4.2 Responsibility for Managing Community Engagement

The responsibility for managing community engagement crosses all of Council's functions and the manager responsible for particular activities will also be responsible for managing community consultation associated with that activity. Co-ordinators and specialist advice will be provided by the Community Engagement Reference Panel.

4.3 Engagement Plan

Each significant community project will be supported by a specific Engagement Plan which will be developed having regard to the principles and techniques identified in this policy and Council's Community Engagement toolkit. The engagement plan will be submitted to the Community Engagement Reference Panel for approval prior to implementation. Generic engagement plans may be developed for routine or less simplified projects. The Manager Governance and Administration will co-ordinate the general (non project based) engagement program for Councillors. Where the engagement plan forms part of a strategic or significant project, the project plan (which will include a engagement sub-plan) will be approved by Council.

4.4 Principle Based Approach to Community Engagement

Council will take a principle based approach to its community engagement activities. This will provide consistency and cohesion and facilitate the alignment of Council's performance reporting requirements under the *Local Government Act 2009*. All engagement will be structured around the following principles:

- **Integrity:** Council will be open and honest about the scope and purpose of engagement and how the input will be used to inform Council decisions;
- **Inclusion:** Council will maximise opportunities for a diverse range of values and perspectives from across the region to be freely and fairly expressed and considered;
- **Deliberation:** Council will establish sufficient and credible information for meaningful dialogue, choice and decisions and develop a common understanding which appreciates respective roles, responsibilities and obligations;
- **Influence:** Council will provide people with a genuine opportunity to have input and influence the outcomes of any engagement process;
- **Timeliness:** Council will engage with the community in a timely manner;
- **Foresight:** Council will engage with the community not only to learn about and respond to present needs, but also to gain a better understanding of the community's perspective on emerging issues that may affect the community's preferred future;
- **Flexibility:** Council is committed to using the engagement approaches that are appropriate to the circumstances; and
- **Mutual Respect:** Council recognises the diversity within the region and the importance of tailoring engagement activities to suit the different needs within the community. Council will endeavour to encourage all participants to understand and tolerate different perspectives.

4.5 Engagement Categories

Council's engagement activities can be subdivided into five (non-exclusive) categories:

- Ongoing Community / Councillor Engagement;
- Engagement linked to routine Council activities;
- Engagement concerning a specific local issue or significant project;
- Engagement around strategic issues; and
- Statutory Compliance.

4.5.1 Ongoing Community / Councillor Engagement

A number of opportunities will be supported to allow residents, Councillors (as a group) and the broader Council organisation to engage, both in a formal and informal way.

An annual Engagement Action Plan will be developed that will provide a schedule of planned informal activities for the ensuing twelve month period. The annual Engagement Action Plan will focus on providing an opportunity for Councillors and residents to engage directly to assist in fulfilling the Councillors' role to:

- represent the current and future interests of the residents;
- ensure Council achieves its corporate and community plans;
- provide high quality leadership to the community;
- participate in Council meetings, policy development, and decision making,
- be accountable to the community for the Council's performance.

The annual Engagement Action Plan will not include engagement on specific projects or routine engagement undertaken by staff as provided for under this policy.

The Engagement Plan will include opportunities for Councillors and the Community to engage by:

- **Meeting with residents on a regular basis, throughout the Council area.**

Council will establish an informal and ongoing forum for Councillors to engage with residents generally. It is expected that Councillors will play a pivotal role in the engagement activities and Council would approve the engagement plan. The establishment of community access activities will provide the opportunity for Councillors and members of the public to work together to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood, considered and directly reflected in the alternatives developed. Following the meetings, feedback should be provided on how public input influenced the decision making.

- **Attendance at local events.**

Councillors may attend local events to engage with residents directly and demonstrate Council's commitment to connect and stay connected with all residents and communities in the region. This could be an opportunity to harness community views, gain stakeholder 'buy in', develop and maintain productive partnerships and monitor the effectiveness of Council's direction.

- **Involvement with regional, community and governmental organisations.**

Council may actively promote the availability of Councillors to attend meetings of regional, community and governmental organisations (e.g. Progress Associations, Lions Clubs, etc) to speak generally about Council services or specific issues.

More formal avenues for community engagement include:

- **Presenting a petition to Council.**

Written petitions can be addressed to the Council about any issue within the Council's jurisdiction. Petitions must be in legible writing or type written and contain a minimum of ten signatures and include residential addresses. Petitions may be referred, by the Council, to a committee or an officer for consideration and detailed report to Council. Where the petition is received by the Chief Executive Officer, it will be presented to the next ordinary meeting of Council as correspondence.

Further information on presenting a petition to Council is available on Council's website.

- **Making a submission.**

When the Council is considering certain matters, for example development applications and the making of local laws, the proposals are advertised in local newspapers. Submissions on these matters are invited from members of the community.

Submissions should be addressed to the Chief Executive Officer.

- **Participating in:**

- *A deputation to a Councillor briefing session*

With the prior permission of the Mayor and Chief Executive Officer, a member of the public can address Councillors personally, or on behalf of a group of residents.

- *Council's Question Time*

Question Time is available prior to the commencement of the Ordinary Meeting of Council. Persons wishing to submit a question should give at least three working days written notice of the question to the Chief Executive Officer. (Enquiries can be directed to the Co-ordinator, Council Business - telephone 46 88 6356).

- *Advisory Committees and Working Groups*
An advisory committee or working group is sometimes established to include the community representatives to provide advice on specific projects. Members are appointed by the Council, or Mayor and Chief Executive Officer jointly generally following a public call for expressions of interest.
- *Community Surveys*
Community surveys are sometimes conducted by Council to determine community attitudes to Council's performance on specific issues. Council encourages residents to become involved in these opportunities.

Council also will engage with the community by:

- Producing:
 - a range of information bulletins, publications and brochures.
 - regular information sessions through the print or electronic media.
 - issue papers on matters of community concern.
- Conducting regular or special purpose public meetings.

4.5.2 Engagement Linked to Routine Council Activities

Council may engage with the community on issues that are linked with day to day operational matters to give or receive feedback on existing or proposed programs. Such activities will be action focused and will often involve Council support staff and local / district venues.

The objective of this engagement is to inform the community of Council's activities.

Examples include:

- Advertising Council's immunisation services at child care centres and schools;
- Undertaking a 'letter box drop' where water is to be disconnected for routine maintenance; or
- Placing a sign on a road prior to undertaking planned major reconstruction; or
- Conducting 'trade' night information sessions to inform local businesses how they can do business with Council.

4.5.3 Engagement Concerning Local Issues

Council will take a flexible approach on how it engages with the community on local issues. Such activities will be action focused and provide an opportunity to residents to give and receive information.

The objective of this engagement is to work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered. Council will work with residents to ensure that their concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.

Examples include:

- Holding an 'on-site' meeting where the local community would be informed and consulted to determine the needs of a local park before finalising a design; or

- Establish information booths at local shopping centres to engage with residents on local services.

4.5.4 Engagement Around Strategic Issues or Major Projects

Council recognises that benefits will flow from informed debate within the community. On significant issues, specific community engagement plans will be designed. These plans will be reviewed by the Community Engagement Reference Panel and form part of the project plan approved by Council. Councillors will be consulted to determine the nature and type of their involvement in the strategic issue. Councillors collectively may resolve to have engagement plans on very substantial issues affecting a large portion of residences formally approved by the full Council.

The objective of this engagement is to partner with the public in each aspect of the matter and including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution. Council will look to the residents for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and take into account their advice and recommendations in decisions to the maximum extent possible.

Examples include:

- A program that includes multiple elements and activities to determine the community perspective on the development of the City Centre Masterplan, or major infrastructure projects where the community could be informed, consulted, involved and partnered; or
- Engaging with the community before Council's intent on a issue is notified to other levels of government e.g. second range crossing.

4.5.5 Statutory Compliance

Notwithstanding the above, a number of pieces of legislation impose prescriptive obligations on Council in engagement over certain matters. These prescribed activities (e.g. advertising in a local newspaper) will be incorporated into the community engagement arrangements.

The objective is to comply with the legislative requirements in addition to the needs of the community and Council. Examples include:

- Advertising the dates of Committee and Council Meetings; or
- Undertaking a suite of activities required by the *Sustainable Planning Act 2009* in developing planning instruments.

4.6 Co-ordination and Review

The Community Engagement Reference Panel will provide an overarching role to:

- Develop and review community engagement policy as a corporate process.
- Promote the benefits and opportunities of effective community engagement to staff.
- Oversee and co-ordinate major community engagement activities.

- Maintain a record of major community engagement activities undertaken.
- Assist in the development of plans for specific projects and standard operating procedures for routine Council activities.
- Reduce competing and duplication of engagement effort.
- Review and evaluate community engagement outcomes.
- Make recommendations to the relevant Director, Chief Executive Officer or Council.

Review of community engagement activities for strategic issues or major projects undertaken with a specific community engagement plan will form part of the overall post project review. The Councillor Community Engagement Program will be reviewed annually prior to the new program being adopted by Council. The Community Engagement Reference Panel will monitor and review other routine community engagement activities on a continual basis as part of their charter.

Council may also facilitate the establishment of a range of partnerships between levels of government, business and community organisations. These partnerships will:

- Provide a flexible vehicle to respond to economic, environmental and community issues;
- Advocate to other levels of Government on issues of regional importance;
- Attract external funding to the region; and
- Undertake specific projects or activities of mutual benefit to the region and its communities.

5. RELEVANT LAW

Local Government Act 2009

Sustainable Planning Act 2009

Local Government (Finance, Plans and Reporting) Regulation 2010

6. RELATED POLICIES / DOCUMENTATION

Terms of Reference for Community Engagement Reference Panel

Community Engagement Toolkit (under development).

Entertainment and Hospitality Policy

Media Protocol

Event Support Policy

Customer Service Statement

7. RELATED FORMS

Community engagement checklist / template for a Communication / Project Plan (under development).

8. REVISION HISTORY

Policy Version	Approval Date	DM Reference
1.00	15 February 2011	3790494v2

9. CONTACT OFFICER

Position: Manager, Governance
Branch: Governance