

## BACKGROUND

This Community Engagement Council Policy commits to engaging the community, to seeking opportunities to inform the community, develop community partnerships and seek community input into decision making.

This Policy reflects the community's aspirations in Wollongong 2022: Our Community Strategic Plan to become a connected and engaged community.

Council will engage with the community in:

- building relationships and trust;
- seeking input into the design of services and policies;
- keeping the community informed about projects and plans;
- seeking joint ownership of solutions.

Council encourages the community to actively engage and work together with us to make decisions for our city.

## OBJECTIVE

Council aims to engage with the community in line with Council's:

- Community Vision
- Community Goals
- Organisational Values

## POLICY STATEMENT

Wollongong City Council is committed to engaging the community in an effective, timely and transparent manner so their views can provide input into decision making. Council will actively encourage the participation of community members who may be affected by, or are interested in a decision. The method of engagement will be appropriate to the project and the needs of the affected community.

Council recognises its obligations under the Local Government Charter (section 8 and throughout the Local Government Act 1993) as they relate to consultation, participation and engagement.

## WHAT IS ENGAGEMENT?

Engagement is about asking the community to help Council make better decisions.

Engagement allows us to benefit from the local knowledge of the community, creating shared visions and commitment to solutions. Each engagement will be designed according to the needs of the project and the needs of the directly or indirectly affected community. For each engagement the community will be offered a variety of ways to be informed and have their say.

Council acknowledges that the level of input the community can have into decisions will vary according to the project. Council's promise to the community is outlined in the attached *Level of Engagement* table.

## PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT

Council is committed to the following principles of open and effective engagement:

- **Good governance**

Council is committed to engaging the community as a core component of good governance and effective decision making. It will seek to build increased confidence and trust with the community.

Council will seek to improve community satisfaction through engagement which is timely and clear and open about its purpose and the level of input the community can have to decision making. Council will avoid duplication or over-consultation through use of effective planning and engagement techniques.

Community feedback will be used to continuously improve the services Council provides.

- **Accessible and inclusive**

Council will offer a variety of ways the community can be kept informed and have their say.

Council will actively encourage the participation of community members who may be affected by, or are interested in a decision. The method of engagement will be appropriate to the project and the needs of the affected community.

Council will work with the community to encourage involvement in engagement, especially with children and young people, people of non-English speaking backgrounds, indigenous Australians and any other community members who need support in engaging.

## PROCESS OF ENGAGEMENT

The decision to engage and the methodology used will be made by conducting the following analysis.

- **What decision has to be made?**

Community engagement is a process whereby the community can provide input into a decision making process. The decision to be made will be the key determinant of how each engagement is designed. Council will take a cross-divisional and multi-disciplinary approach to designing engagement processes.

- **Stakeholder analysis**

Council defines community as all people and groups who are interested in the future of Wollongong. This includes government and non-government agencies, community groups, businesses, residents and visitors.

Council will target engagements to stakeholders directly and indirectly impacted by a decision and those likely to be interested in a decision.

- **When will we engage?**

Council will assess the level of interest and impact a plan or project will have on the community to determine the level of engagement that will be undertaken. The levels of engagement and our promise to the community are outlined in the attached table.

Council will meet or exceed all legislative obligations for engagement methods and durations.

Council will consider the appropriate timing and duration, including the availability of community members and cultural sensitivities, in planning engagements. Council notes that its program of works, finance and other constraints will influence timing.

- **How will the community participate?**

Council offers a variety of ways for the community to participate in engagement to be accessible to a wide range of needs. The range of activities offered will be determined according to the needs of the specific project, location and the needs of the stakeholders targeted. The *Levels of Engagement* table outlines a number of methods Council currently uses but other method will be offered when appropriate.

- **What will happen to the community's feedback?**

Council considers all submissions received during an engagement or exhibition period. Closing dates and times will be clearly advertised to the community. Late submissions will be accepted if possible, dependent on reporting deadlines.

Council accepts community feedback in the form of written letters, emails, surveys and feedback forms. Council also uses workshop techniques to gain community feedback. Petitions will be accepted and must clearly state the request being made on each page. Signatures must be in the original handwriting of the signatory, be legible and include a valid address. Submissions from organizations, groups or companies will be considered as one unless containing multiple signatures.

Submissions can be made available for public inspection. Community members may request that Council suppress their personal information from their submission.

An analysis of feedback will be undertaken and a report prepared. A summary of community feedback will be included in Council reports to form an element of the decision making process.

- **How are decisions made?**

Council values community input into decision making processes. Council will consider community feedback along with other key considerations including:

- Council policies, resolutions and policy statements

- Financial impact

- State and Federal legislation

- Technical and professional assessment and industry best practice

- Quadruple bottom line: Economic, Environmental, Social and Governance assessment.

As a Local Government Authority, decisions are made by the elected Council or by Council officers under delegated authority.

- **How will the process be evaluated?**

The community's satisfaction with engagement services will be evaluated through its bi-annual Community Survey. Participants in engagement activities may also be given the opportunity to complete an evaluation form. Council encourages feedback about services through its customer relations unit.

## ROLE OF COUNCILLORS

Councillors have an active role to play in engaging the community in order to understand their concerns and aspirations and consider these in decision making. The community can contact their Councillors "to discuss and contribute their views and ideas" (Councillor Guide, DLG, 2013)

Councillors will be invited to engage with the community through Council staff led processes. The role of both Council staff and Councillors in these engagements is to facilitate discussion, listen and record community feedback in order for it to be considered in decision making. Council staff are responsible for providing clear, unbiased information to assist the community in understanding the project and process of having a say, and reporting on feedback received. Councillors can also seek to create their own opportunities to engage the community without staff involvement.

## APPLICATION OF THIS POLICY

This Policy applies to Council's:

- Councillors
- Staff
- Volunteers
- Contractors
- Consultants

## EVALUATION OF THIS POLICY

Council's engagement activities will be regularly evaluated and reported to the community through Council's quarterly and annual reports and Delivery Program Progress report.

This Policy will be reviewed early in each new Council term.

## RELATED DOCUMENTS

This Policy should be read in conjunction with the following documents:

- **Civil Works Notifications Policy** - describes a standardised notification process for civil infrastructure construction and maintenance projects across the local government area.
- **Public Notification and Advertising Procedures** - this appendix to the Wollongong Development Control Plan sets out a standardised notification and advertising process for development assessment and determination. It sets out criteria for assessments to be referred to the Independent Hearing and Assessment Panel.
- **Customer Service Policy** - sets out Council's commitment to delivering quality customer service to the community, to effective complaint handling, and providing the organization with information to inform continuous improvement.
- **Customer Service Charter** - identifies the minimum standards the community can expect from Wollongong City Council. It explains how information can be obtained and outlines how the community can provide feedback for improving services.
- **Reference and Advisory Group Charters (various)** - set out the purpose, recruitment and meeting practices for a variety of special interest topic reference and advisory groups. These groups consist of community, Councillor and Council staff members.
- **Independent Hearing and Assessment Panel Charter** - the panel is used to add value and improve decision making in relation to development assessment in specific situations. It provides an independent forum for stakeholders (applicants and objectors) to present and discuss issues relating to controversial development proposals.
- **Public Access Forum Charter** - provides community members with an opportunity to address Councillors prior to an ordinary meeting of Council, acknowledging that consultation and contribution to the decision making of Council enhance the quality of Council's decisions.

LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT *				
	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate
Goal	Clear communication from Council to the community to assist their understanding of decisions that have been made.	Council seeks feedback from the community on draft plans, services, projects or policies. The community has an opportunity to have their say before a final decision is made.	Council works with the community to understand issues and involves community members in designing possible solutions.	Council will offer opportunities for members of the community to work with us to understand issues and develop a range of solutions. We will work together to make a decision on a preferred solution.
Promise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We will use a variety of communication methods to keep the community informed.</li> <li>We will strive to ensure that information about Council services and plans is accessible and readily available.</li> <li>Council will provide community updates and information on decisions.</li> <li>Council acknowledges that sometimes it has to inform the community on decisions the community cannot change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Council will provide opportunities for the community to provide feedback on plans and projects that will be considered in decision making.</li> <li>Council is committed to providing clear information about how and when the community can have their say and how feedback will be used.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Council will provide opportunities for the community to work directly with Council to ensure we understand aspirations, opportunities, and concerns and that these are incorporated as often as possible into plans.</li> <li>We will provide feedback on how community input influenced decisions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Council will partner with the community on the development of alternatives and solutions.</li> </ul>
Techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Council's website and online media channels</li> <li>Council newsletters</li> <li>Letters and emails</li> <li>Fact sheets</li> <li>Customer service</li> <li>Events and festivals</li> <li>Kiosks and information sessions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Public Access Forum</li> <li>Ward meetings</li> <li>Community forums</li> <li>Kiosks</li> <li>Surveys and submissions</li> <li>Online engagement</li> <li>Communication channels</li> <li>Independent Hearing and Assessment Panel</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ward meetings</li> <li>Community forums</li> <li>Kiosks</li> <li>Reference and Advisory groups</li> <li>Focus groups</li> <li>Workshops</li> <li>Online engagement</li> <li>Communication channels</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus groups</li> <li>Workshops</li> <li>Reference and Advisory groups</li> <li>Online engagement</li> <li>Communication channels</li> </ul>

\* Adapted from IAP2

## SUMMARY SHEET

Responsible Division	Community Cultural and Economic Development
Date adopted by Council	8 April 2013
Date of previous adoptions	Previously titled "Community Consultation" 25 May 2010, 28 November 2005, 28 October 2008
Date of next review	8 April 2016
Prepared by	Engagement Coordinator
Authorised by	Manager Community Cultural and Economic Development