DRAFT REPORT ON COMMUNITY CONSULTATION POLICY REVIEW

PRECIS
Council has sought an independent assessment and review of its Community Consultation Policy.

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the community in the current Neighbourhood Forum boundary areas of NF1 and NF2 be consulted about a proposed boundary change.
2. That Council further develops e-consultation techniques
3. That Council update the Community Leaders Meeting with Administrators Charter to become the Neighbourhood Forum Leaders Meeting with Administrators Charter.
4. That Council continue to support and promote Neighbourhood Forums.
5. That Council promote Public Access Forums to encourage broad participation by community members.
6. That the Community Consultation Policy be updated:
   - to differentiate between consultation opportunities and support mechanisms;
   - to be reviewed every two years.

BACKGROUND

The Community Consultation Policy, Neighbourhood Forum Charter and Community Leaders Meeting Charter were adopted on 28 October 2008 after a review of the 2005 Community Engagement Policy and 2007 Community Engagement Options report. The Policy, Neighbourhood Forum Charter and Community Leaders Meeting with Administrators Charter were developed after two community consultation processes undertaken in 2008. These key documents govern Council’s consultation approach and processes and consider the community’s needs in a period without elected representation.

At the October 2008 meeting Council resolved to adopt the Policy and Charters for implementation in February 2009 and conduct a review after 12 months.

In March 2010 Council appointed Elton Consulting to undertake an independent assessment of how well Council’s policy framework is working in practice.

PROPOSAL

The Community Consultation Policy sets out Council’s definition of Community Consultation, benefits, and describes when and why we will consult the community. The Policy also adopted key principles that guide and assist the design of all consultation activities. The Policy also outlines a number of key consultation activities that Council will use when working with the community. These activities were divided in New Opportunities, Ongoing Opportunities, Regular Consultation Activities and Project Specific Consultation.

Council’s Engagement Team collated data on how and when Council used each of these opportunities in the period January-December 2009. This data was supplied to Elton Consulting along with the Community Consultation Policy, Neighbourhood Forum Charter and Community Leaders Meeting Charter.
Elton Consulting used the following assessment framework:

- Relationship of the activity to Council’s Community Consultation Policy: in particular relationship to the principles of engagement in the policy;
- How well the activity met Council’s needs;
- How well the consultation activities met the community’s needs and good practice.

Both the internally produced data report and Elton Consulting’s Review are attached to this Council report.

The following recommendations are being made as part of this report:

1. **That the community in the current Neighbourhood Forum boundary areas of NF1 and NF2 be consulted about a proposed boundary change.**

Concerns have been raised by members of Neighbourhood Forum 2 about the appropriateness of their current boundary. Is it therefore recommended that the community of Neighbourhood Forum 1 and Neighbourhood Forum 2 be consulted about their boundary. This is discussed in the Report on implementation of Community Consultation Policy 2010, attached.

2. **That Council further develop e-consultation techniques.**

E-consultation is an emerging opportunity to allow inclusive consultation especially with groups that are traditionally considered hard-to-reach. E-consultation is an option in the current Community Consultation Policy. Council is currently making active use of its website as part of all consultation activities, with details of projects and plans and surveys being available online. Elton Consulting have recommended we continue to develop this opportunity with particular emphasis on moderated forums and possible presence on social networking sites. It is recommended that Council react proactively to this feedback and consider what types of e-consultation will meet both Council and the community’s needs.

3. **That Council review the membership of the Community Leaders Meeting with Administrators.**

The current membership of this meeting is not aligned with the Charter. It is recommended that the Charter be updated to reflect current practice as per Policy Impact statement below.

4. **That Council continue to support and promote Neighbourhood Forums to encourage a broad community representation.**

The Elton Consulting report recommends promotion of Neighbourhood Forums to hard to reach communities as current participation does not reflect a broad cross-section of the community, a trend which has been raised by Neighbourhood Forum Convenors in their feedback. Concern was also raised that not enough of the community know about the Neighbourhood Forums. It is recommended that Council partner with the Neighbourhood Forums in effective promotion. Some Neighbourhood Forums have requested administrative or secretarial support. Council is currently focussing on reducing its operating costs, in particular administrative costs to assist in maintaining and renewing the city’s infrastructure. In this climate it is not considered appropriate to incur additional costs in providing regular administrative and secretarial support. Council acknowledges that Neighbourhood Forums are volunteer groups so proposes the following support to assist them. Council sends an Engagement Officer to ten meetings per year and responds to action items from meetings. Council is proposing to work with the Neighbourhood Forums to develop guidelines and processes that will assist meet Neighbourhood Forum needs and minimise administrative pressure. Council will offer training on effective meeting practices to Neighbourhood Forum Chairs and Co-Chairs which will assist in formulating these guidelines. Council will partner with Neighbourhood Forums to jointly conduct community consultation on specific high priority projects. Council has resolved to amend the tenure of the Chair and Co-Chair positions after requests from the current position holders. Annual elections will continue to be held but each position can be held for up to 3 years.
5. Council promote Public Access Forums to encourage broad participation by community members.
Elton Consulting recognises the Public Access Forum as a significant opportunity for community members to speak directly to Council. They recommend promotion of the forum to encourage broad participation. Council will actively promote the Public Access Forums and consider option for broadening participation.

6. That the Community Consultation Policy be updated:
- to differentiate between consultation opportunities and support mechanisms;
- to be reviewed every two years.

It is recommended that the Community Consultation Policy be updated as per Policy Impact statement below.

CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION
Data on Council’s consultation activities has been reviewed internally and provided to Elton Consulting for an independent assessment. Elton Consulting offered Neighbourhood Forum Chairs and Co-chairs an opportunity to complete a questionnaire results of which are included in Elton Consulting’s Report.

PLANNING AND POLICY IMPACT
Changes to both the Community Consultation Policy and Community Leaders Meeting with Administrators Charter are recommended as part of this review.

Community Consultation Policy: Elton Consulting have recommended the Policy identify which activities listed are true consultation and which are support activities and change the Policy to reflect this. Elton have also recommended that Council develop a framework for assessing the effectiveness of community consultation activities. The current Community Consultation Policy nominates an annual review, however this report recommends a two year review process. Community participation in engagement activities is a Key Performance Indicator in Council’s Management Plan which will be reported on quarterly and in the Annual Report. It is proposed to amend the Community Consultation Policy to designate Communication Opportunities, Integrated Customer Service and Improvements to Complaints Handling as Support Mechanisms. It is also proposed to amend the Community Consultation Policy to reflect a two year review process. An amended Policy is attached to this report.

Community Leaders Meeting Charter: The current Community Leaders Meeting with Administrators Charter states that membership will include a community leader from the following groups: Neighbourhood Forum representatives, Illawarra Business Chamber; Representatives from other community organisations be invited. In practice this meeting has to date only included Neighbourhood Forum representatives. Due to the size of the meeting and range of topics raised this membership is considered appropriate. It is important therefore that the Charter reflect this practice accurately. It is proposed that the amended Charter be renamed the Neighbourhood Forum Leaders Meeting with Administrators Charter. A copy is attached.
Neighbourhood Forum Charter: The Neighbourhood Forum Charter will need to be updated to reflect changes to the tenure of Chair and Co-Chair positions. It is recommended that this change be made after consideration of the proposed boundary change.

RISK ASSESSMENT
Council continues to consult the community to inform, seek feedback and work together on making better decisions. It is recommended that Council continue to use good practice methods while adhering to established principles and standards in order to engage the community and improve two-way communication and decision making.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS
There are no additional budgetary costs associated with this report. All costs of current and proposed consultation options can be undertaken within the existing budget via review, restructure and efficiencies. Major Council projects may allocate project funding to provide additional resources to the team to allow appropriate consultation on that project.

CONCLUSION
Elton Consulting concluded that Council has undertaken all of the consultation activities listed in its Policy and that many of these are operating at or very close to good practice. Elton Consulting has recommended some changes to the Policy and listed above and that some practices be enhanced, especially in the provision of e-consulting.

ATTACHMENTS
Report on Implementation of Community Consultation Policy 2010
Report: Review of Community Consultation Policy, Elton Consulting
Proposed amended Consultation Policy
Proposed amended Community Leaders Meeting with Administrators Charter