

ITEM 6 POLICY REVIEW: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT COUNCIL POLICY

Council's Community Engagement Policy outlines the principles, commitments, levels and process for engagement to guide Council's elected members, staff and consultants when engaging with our community. This Council policy has been reviewed in accordance with the rolling program for review of policies.

This report seeks Council's endorsement for the draft Community Engagement Policy to be placed on public exhibition.

RECOMMENDATION

Council endorse the draft Community Engagement Council Policy to be placed on public exhibition from 12 May to 11 June 2021.

REPORT AUTHORISATIONS

Report of: Sue Savage, Manager Community Cultural + Economic Development
Authorised by: Kerry Hunt, Director Community Services - Creative and Innovative City

ATTACHMENTS

- 1 Draft Community Engagement Policy 2021

BACKGROUND

Council's Community Engagement Policy (the Policy) enables an informed and consistent approach to involving our community in decision making. The current Policy was endorsed by Council in July 2018 following engagement with internal and community stakeholders. The Policy was written in plain English and graphically designed, including images and diagrams to make it more community friendly.

The Policy details Council's principles, commitments, levels and process for engagement to guide Council's elected members, staff and consultants when engaging with our community. The Policy outlines Council's commitment to providing a diverse range of opportunities for our community to share feedback and join the conversation on Council's projects and plans. The Policy highlights Council's role in effectively planning engagement activities and keeping our community informed.

PROPOSAL

It is proposed Council endorse the draft Community Engagement Policy to be placed on public exhibition from 12 May to 11 June 2021. Following the exhibition period, submissions will be reviewed and an updated Community Engagement Policy prepared and submitted to Council at its meeting of 19 July 2021 to be considered for adoption.

Initial engagement has been undertaken with internal and external stakeholders to inform the revised Policy. Key changes include:

- Details to highlight the engagement process is not always linear
- Addition of commitment to learn, improve and build our capability
- Addition of 'where we will engage'
- Removing reference to school holidays creating more flexibility
- Increasing our commitment to life of project communication and providing updates on the outcome of engagements
- Additional methods added throughout
- Using plain English in IAP2 levels of engagement table

- Reference to DAs in Councillor's role
- Additional related documents added including Aboriginal Engagement Framework

CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

Targeted internal and external consultation has been undertaken in review of the Policy. Stakeholders were targeted to provide feedback on the Policy based on their role in community engagement, or prior interest in the Policy. Stakeholders included Councillors, Director Community Services, Director Infrastructure and Works, Manager Community Cultural and Economic Development, Communications and Marketing Manager, City Culture and Activation Manager, Manager Infrastructure Strategy and Planning, Infrastructure Strategy Manager, Building and Facilities Planning Manager (Acting), Transport and Stormwater Services Manager (Acting), Manager Project Delivery, Design and Technical Services Manager, Manager Open Spaces and Environmental Services (Acting), Capital Program Manager (Acting), Manager Property and Recreation, Recreation Services Manager, Commercial Business Manager, Council Reference Groups, Neighbourhood Forums and respondents to engagement for the last review of the Policy.

Through an online engagement survey and focus group discussions, stakeholders were asked to share ideas on what is important about community engagement, how to improve existing practices and feedback about key elements of the Policy.

Feedback from stakeholders highlighted the importance of sharing information and updates with our community, outlining that community engagement is not always a linear process and clarifying the range of methods selected from at various levels of engagement.

PLANNING AND POLICY IMPACT

This report contributes to the delivery of Our Wollongong 2028 Goal 4: "We are a connected and engaged community". It specifically delivers on the following:

Community Strategic Plan	Delivery Program 2018-2022	Operational Plan 2020-21
Strategy	4 Year Action	Annual Deliverables
4.1.1 Provide residents with equitable access to information and opportunities to inform decision making	4.1.1.1 Ensure an effective community engagement framework that connects the community to Council decision making	Deliver a diverse range of community engagement opportunities to inform and guide development and delivery of Council business

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

The draft Community Engagement Policy has been informed by an initial phase of engagement, with a second phase planned during public exhibition. Effective engagement promotes collaboration and improves the efficiency of service delivery.

RISK MANAGEMENT

This draft Community Engagement Policy provides guidance on Council's engagement principles and practices to mitigate social, reputational and legislative risks.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The draft Community Engagement Policy will be delivered within existing operational budget.

CONCLUSION

Council is committed to involving our community in decision making processes. The Community Engagement Policy is a resource to enable a consistent approach to undertaking meaningful and effective community engagement. Through seeking feedback and engaging our community to join the conversation with Council, we will enable better decision making, strengthen our community and build trust.



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Acknowledgement of Country

Wollongong City Council would like to show their respect and acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Dharawal Country, Elders past and present, and extend that respect to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

We want to hear your views and involve you to find solutions to questions affecting our community and inform our plans. This process is called community engagement.

What is community engagement?

Community engagement is how we reach out and encourage you, the community, to talk with us about the plans, projects and policies we develop on your behalf. It is about seeking and listening to your feedback to help us make decisions. Through engagement, Council and the community benefit from sharing ideas, skills, knowledge, expertise and experiences.

Community engagement is important, it:

- Involves the community in decision making;
- Builds relationships and trust;
- Strengthens community;
- Builds a sense of belonging; and
- Keeps the community informed.

Our commitment to community engagement

We are committed to the following principles of community engagement:

1. We aim to be flexible

We will use a range of methods to give you opportunities to share feedback and join the conversation. We encourage feedback from you and all community members who may be affected by, or are interested in, a decision we make on the community's behalf.

2. We will be inclusive

We live in a diverse community and know it's important everyone's voices are heard. We also recognise the unique and significant contribution made by Aboriginal people to the local community. We will ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, children and young people, people with disability, and community members who need support, have appropriate access and opportunities to share their feedback and join the conversation.

3. We believe community engagement is important for good governance

We are committed to engaging with you, the community, as a core component of good governance and effective decision making. We value your ideas, views and local knowledge. Your feedback will be used to continuously improve the service we provide.

4. We aim to effectively plan each engagement

Through effective planning and engagement techniques we will avoid repeatedly asking the community to provide feedback about the same topic. You will be provided reasonable timeframes to share your feedback and join the conversation. We will continue to learn, improve and build our capability to engage effectively.

5. We will keep you updated

We are committed to letting you know your views, concerns and feedback have been heard and outlining why decisions were made. We will keep you informed about what decisions are made and provide updates on projects and plans.



Our process of community engagement

Each engagement will be tailored to the needs of the affected community and the individual project. We will undertake six key steps. The order these steps are taken can vary and may move back and forth, especially for complex projects.

Plan

Deciding to engage

Community engagement is considered when a change of service, activities or infrastructure is planned or when an issue is raised and requires a decision. For a long-term project or activity there is likely to be multiple stages of engagement. Community engagement isn't possible or necessary for all the work Council does, for example, emergency work or low-impact maintenance.

When planning an engagement we consider who to engage, how to engage and where to engage.

Who we engage

We define 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. We will target engagements to those who might be interested in, impacted or benefited by a decision.

How we engage

How we engage depends on the level of interest and impact a plan or project will have on the community. To support community participation, we will use a range of ways for people to be involved, including face to face and online.

Where we engage

We engage in many different settings. This can be in the community, at workshops or events, meetings of committees and groups, and using different online options like our Engagement website and social media.

Engage

This is when we talk with you, the community, about a project. We call this the engagement or exhibition period.

For each engagement process we will explain:

- What the engagement is about;
- Where to find out more information about the topic;
- How you can share your feedback and join the conversation;
- The timeframe to provide your comments;
- What happens to your feedback.

We accept community feedback in a variety of formats such as letters, emails, surveys, online tools, petitions and feedback forms. We also use face to face meetings and workshops to gain community feedback.

Submissions can be made available for people to read. You can request we remove your personal information from your submission.

Analyse

We read, review and analyse all feedback. An engagement report is written summarising what was said and presenting key themes. The report is provided to the decision makers and is one way community feedback informs the decision making process.

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Decision making

Your views, ideas and local knowledge are an important part of the decision making process. Other things we need to consider include:

- Budget or financial impact (so we can spend your money wisely);
- Legislation (State and Federal);
- Council policies and resolutions (endorsed by your elected representatives);
- Evidence provided by technical and professional assessment and industry best practice;
- Economic, environmental, social and governance impacts.

The diagram below shows how feedback is one of a number of considerations when a decision is made.

Provide updates

We will let you know what the outcome of the engagement was, including how feedback was used and what decisions were made. We will provide updates on projects as they progress.

Evaluate

We will evaluate the effectiveness of our engagement activities and processes so we can continue to learn and improve the ways we engage.

Factors in decision making:





Application of this policy

This Policy applies to Council's:

- Councillors
- Staff
- Volunteers
- Contractors
- Consultants

Role of Councillors

Councillors are your elected representatives and have a role in community engagement. They meet with the community in a range of ways including sitting on reference groups and committees, and attending Council meetings, events and engagement activities, to hear your views, concerns and aspirations.

Councillors may attend opportunities set up by staff to talk with the community. At these community engagements the Councillors' role is to listen, discuss and record community feedback so it can be considered in decision making. Councillors may also engage with the community without Council staff involvement.

Councillors do not make decisions about Development Applications (DAs) and they are not allowed to attempt to direct, influence or pressure staff in an assessment or determination of a DA.

As a community member you're able to contact your Councillors directly. Their contact details are listed on Council's website.

Role of Council staff

Council staff are responsible for providing clear, professional and objective information to help the community understand a project. Council staff will engage in a respectful and genuine way to provide information on the ways the community can share feedback, how feedback will be reported and to share updates on projects.

The requirements to engage with you on matters that affect you are set out in the **Local Government Act 1993**.

Related documents

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

- **Works notification policies** – describes standard internal process for maintenance, tree management, chemical use, civil works and construction notifications.
- **Customer Service Policy**
- **Council Committees and Reference Groups**
- **Neighbourhood Forum Charter**
- **Wollongong Local Planning Panel Submissions Policy**
- **Code of Meeting Practice Policy**
- **Aboriginal Engagement Framework**
- **Community Participation Plan**
- **Petition Guidelines**
- **Privacy Management Plan Policy**
- **Public Access to Documents and Information held by Council Policy**
- **NSW Office of Local Government Policy and Legislation**

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Levels of engagement

The guide below shows the four levels of engagement Council has adapted from the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum. A range of factors are considered to determine the level of engagement for each project including the engagement purpose, level of impact, degree of complexity, timeframes and legislation.

The process of community engagement is a dynamic one which means there is likely to be movement back and forth through the different levels of an engagement process, especially for more complex projects. Whichever process is used, Council is responsible for the final decision.

LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT				
	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE
GOALS	To let the community know what we're doing.	To seek community feedback on what we're planning. To use community feedback to inform decision making.	To work with the community to understand their priorities and involve them in designing potential solutions.	To work with the community to understand their priorities and work together to decide on preferred solutions.
COMMITMENT	We will use a variety of methods to share information. We aim to make sure that information we share is accessible. We will share project updates.	We will provide opportunities for the community to share feedback that will be considered in decision making. We will provide clear information and give reasonable timeframes for the community to share feedback.	We will provide opportunities for the community to work with us to identify priorities. We will incorporate feedback into our plans as often as possible. We will provide updates on how community input influenced decisions.	We will work alongside the community to develop solutions together.
METHODS	Council's websites and online media channels 'Our Wollongong' - Council's Engagement website Council's newsletters Letters and emails Fact sheets Customer Service Community forums Information stand and information sessions	'Our Wollongong' - Council's Engagement website Public Access Forum Community forums Information stand Surveys and submissions Online engagement Independent Hearing and Assessment Panel	'Our Wollongong' - Council's Engagement website Community forums Information stand Reference and Advisory Groups Focus groups Workshops Online engagement Working groups	'Our Wollongong' - Council's Engagement website Focus groups Workshops Community forums Reference and Advisory Groups Online engagement Working groups

* adopted from IAP2



SUMMARY SHEET

Responsible Division	Community Cultural and Economic Development
Date adopted by Council	To be confirmed
Date of previous adoptions	23 July 2018, 8 April 2013, Previously titled "Community Consultation" 25 May 2010, 28 November 2005, 28 October 2008
Date of next review	To be confirmed
Responsible Manager	Engagement Coordinator
Authorised by	Manager Community Cultural and Economic Development





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We are a connected and engaged community

- Residents have easy and equitable access to information and play an active role in the decisions that affect our city.
- Our residents have an increased sense of community.
- Our Council is accountable, financially sustainable and has the trust of the community.