Community Engagement Policy

Policy Details

Policy Category	Council Policy
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Approval Authority	Council
Effective Date	15 April 2020
Policy Version Number	2
Policy Owner	Manager Economic and Community Development
Contact Officer	Cherie Schafer

Supporting documentation

Legislation	• *Local Government Act 2009* • *Local Government Regulation 2012* • *Planning Act 2016*
Policies	• Community Engagement Guidelines
Delegations	• Nil
Forms	• Nil
Supporting Documents	• Corporate Plan 2017 - 2022 • International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)

Version History:

Version	Adopted	Comment	eDRMS #
1	19/01/2012	Council Resolution 0112/027	
2	18/03/2020	Council Resolution 0320/015	

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Intent

Section 4 of the *Local Government Act 2009* details the local government principles and one of these principles is *"democratic representation, social inclusion and meaningful community engagement;"*. Accordingly this policy establishes guidelines to be followed when conducting community engagement activities, to align with Council's required standards and the expectations of the community.

Scope

This Policy applies to elected members of Council, all employees and any consultants engaged by Council.

Policy Statement

Community engagement is defined as "a way to improve communities by identifying and addressing local ideas, concerns and opportunities by involving the public in certain processes that affect them and their community".

Council acknowledges the diverse communities within its local government area, each with its own perspective, knowledge and priorities. It also recognises that there is not one right way to engage or one method of engagement that is, by default, better than any other.

Therefore it is Council intention to apply a wide variety of community engagement methodologies appropriate to the level of engagement, the complexity of the topic/project under discussion, and the desired outcome of any specific engagement.

However it should be noted that community engagement does not replace but rather informs the decision-making functions of Council and the responsibility for the final decision solely rests with Council.

Community Engagement Principles

Council endorses the following community engagement principles from the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2):

Principle	Definition
Integrity	when there is openness and honesty about the scope and purpose of the engagement.
Inclusion	when there is an opportunity for a diverse range of values and perspectives to be freely and fairly expressed and heard.
Deliberation	when there is sufficient and credible information for dialogue, choice and decisions, and when there is space to weigh options, develop common understanding and to appreciate respective roles and responsibilities.
Influence	when people have input in deciding how they participate, when polices and services reflect their involvement and when their impact is apparent.

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In addition to processes for the non-indigenous community, Council is committed to providing processes that are appropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, in order for them to participate in and contribute to community engagement in a meaningful way.

Public Participation

Public Participation Spectrum is a tool developed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2). It represents differing levels of participation across a continuum. The Spectrum moves from informing the public, which involves the lowest level of public participation, through to consultation, engagement and empowering, which requires the greatest degree of community participation, trust and delegation.

The further along the Spectrum, the process involves a greater commitment to the relationship between Council and participants from the community. Each of the levels is legitimate, depending on goals, time frames, resources and levels of interest in the decision to be made.

Community Engagement

Community Engagement for the purposes of this policy is applied in accordance with the differing levels of the Public Participation Spectrum framed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2).

The term is interchangeable with public participation for the purpose of this policy and covers the following activities:-

Level	Definition
Inform	To provide information to increase understanding of Council decisions, activities and issues and to increase access to services.
Consult	To obtain public feedback on proposals, usually putting forward options, alternatives which will be considered in arriving at a decision.
Involve	To work with the community throughout a process, incorporating ideas and concerns into the decision making and where they will be directly reflected in the final decision.
Collaborate	To partner with the community on each aspect of the decision making process seeking direct advice & ideas to formulate the decision.
Empower	To place the final decision-making in the hands of the community, implementing what is decided.

Community Engagement Triggers

Whilst Council can engage with the community on any matter at any time, the following instances describe when community engagement must be undertaken:

- It is a requirement under legislation. There are a number of legislative requirements and standards that apply to Local Government and its decision making.

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- It is a requirement under a funding agreement. Engagement may be an obligation attached to the receipt of Government funding;

The following situations describe when community engagement should be undertaken however this is not an exhaustive list:

- Council resolves to undertake community engagement on a matter or issue before determining an appropriate course of action.

- A council operated community service, facility, community focused policy or event is to be introduced, changed or discontinued, which may impact on the community.

- Introduction of a new development, service or program that may affect community members.

- There may be a potential impact on surrounding neighbours

- Council wants to monitor customer satisfaction with Council services and/or facilities

- There is a level of controversy or sensitivity about a certain matter or issue

Council will apply the relevant community engagement level appropriate to the issue, project or activity under consideration dependent upon its significance and complexity in accordance with the desired outcomes and objectives of the matter before Council.

Community Engagement Performance

When undertaking community engagement activities Council will, at the outset:

- establish the nature of the engagement;

- the objectives of the engagement;

- the time frame;

- the roles and responsibilities of the parties involved;

- the limitations and scope of the public participation.

Consultation with the community will occur in sufficient time to utilise the results in informing the decision making processes and early enough to help identify issues at the beginning of the process when major strategies, policies and decisions are involved.

The communications to the community will be clear about the timeframe and stage at which community and specific stakeholders' input will be required.

Community engagement tools employed will target community diversity and ensure that communities are demographically represented, socially included and meaningfully engaged in decisions that affect them.

Council will inform all stakeholders of the outcome of significant community engagement exercises in a timely and open manner.

Following each community engagement activity, a review of the performance will be undertaken to measure the effectiveness and any opportunities for improvement.

Whilst it is not possible to consult with the community on every issue, Council would like to ensure that the community is as well informed as it can be on major issues, plans and projects, and has opportunities through community consultation to enhance Council's decision-making.

Benefits of Effective Community Engagement

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Council is committed to "Working for Our Community" and through effective community engagement there are many benefits to be derived which include:

- A stronger democracy

- Greater accountability and transparency

- A stronger and more connected community

- More inclusive decisions and services

- Greater community ownership of decisions made on its behalf

- More effective and relevant decision making

Definitions

TERM	DEFINITION
Community Engagement	Is the process of sharing information and consulting members of the community about their views.
Consultation	Gaining community input, feedback or alternatives on Council matters.

Adopted by Council 18/03/2020 by Resolution 0320/015

Mark Crawley
Chief Executive Officer

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