

# Community Engagement Policy

## 1 Purpose

Community engagement refers to the broad manner in which the views, aspirations and values of the community are communicated to ensure they are effectively able to inform, influence and assist in the decision-making of Council.

A suite of methods and techniques are available to ensure that community engagement and participation is effective. This policy seeks to create the framework in which these operate and sets the direction for the policy's implementation.

The range and scope of decisions made by Council is broad, involving various degrees of complexity and requiring varying levels of expertise and accountability.

The purpose of this policy is to support the decision-making capacity of Council by:

- Ensuring access to information that is relevant to the issue at hand
- Providing mechanisms for ensuring the views, values and vision of those likely to be affected by the decision are available to decision-makers
- Balancing the right of all members of the community to be involved in the decision-making process with the need for this process to be accountable, efficient and fair
- Ensuring that it is clear that, ultimately, the decision-making authority of the Council rests with the community's elected representatives;
- Providing for increased levels of community participation in decision-making where appropriate.

## 2 Policy

There is no universal model of community engagement. For Council, the following general principles will apply to all community engagement.

### 1. Flexibility and Responsiveness

It must be flexible and the techniques must be appropriate to the target group. Account should be taken of language, literacy, cultural barriers and accessibility considerations. Additional resources may need to be provided, where appropriate, to allow disadvantaged groups to participate. Information and relevant documents must be available in simple and clear language.

### 2. Timing

The timing of any engagement is critical; it should be a priority consideration in the early stages of any planning or decision-making process and should be built into decision-making action plans and timetables. In addition, adequate time must always be provided for response by the community.

### 3. Transparency

The engagement process must be transparent and should be clearly laid out at the beginning so that participants know at which stages of the process they will have the opportunity to participate. Participants need to be aware of how their input will be used in the decision making process. Adequate feedback should be provided to participants.

### 4. Inclusive

Efforts should be made to identify and involve all interested parties or stakeholders. Participants should also represent a cross-section of the individuals in the community being consulted.

### 5. Effective

All engagement should include clear objectives and performance measures in order to determine whether it has been successful.

## 6. Enhancement

Community engagement should enhance and not frustrate the decision-making process and should be designed for this purpose.

## 7. Social Justice

The abovementioned principles notwithstanding, community engagement should take into account the Principles of Social Justice as identified by the NSW Government. These are defined as:

- **Equity** – there should be fairness in decision-making, prioritising and allocation of resources, particularly for those in need. Everyone should have a fair opportunity to participate in the future of the community. The planning process should take particular care to involve and protect the interests of people in vulnerable circumstances.
- **Access** – all people should have fair access to services, resources and opportunities to improve their quality of life.
- **Participation** - everyone should have the maximum opportunity to genuinely participate in decisions which affect their lives.
- **Rights** – equal rights should be established and promoted, with opportunities provided for people from diverse linguistic, cultural and religious backgrounds to participate in community life.

## 3 Implementation

There are numerous elements that need to be considered to determine the appropriate scope and scale of engagement and these issues will be addressed in associated procedural and process documents. However, the primary steps can be identified as having regard to the need to:

1. Determine the potential level of impact of the issue
2. Determine the appropriate level or scope of participation
3. Decide on an engagement method or methods, and
4. Prepare, implement and evaluate an engagement strategy/plan

Different projects, issues or proposals require different levels of community engagement.

The level of community participation that is appropriate depends on the level and scale of impact as discussed above, and will be determined having consideration of:

- The urgency of the issue and the time available for deliberation and decision-making
- The availability of resources (including staff, facilitation skills, venues, technology and financial resources)
- The needs of accountability, transparency and equity, and
- The improved decision-making and information flows that might emerge from greater levels of participation

## 4 Definitions

**Community:** Includes all the people who live, work, study, own property, conduct private, community organisation or government business, visit or use the services, facilities and public spaces and places of the Coffs Harbour local government area.

**Consultation:** The way the views of particular stakeholders or the wider community are sought in order to improve outcomes.

**Participation:** Active processes in which the community is involved in formulating plans or influencing outcomes.

**Engagement:** Broad activity that encompasses both Consultation and Participation.

## 5 Key Responsibilities

Position	Directorate	Responsibility
Mayor	Council	To lead Councillors in their understanding of, and compliance with, this Policy.

General Manager	Executive	To lead staff (either directly or through delegated authority) in their understanding of, and compliance with, this Policy. To approve resources to develop, implement and review this Policy.
Directors	All Directorates	To communicate, implement and comply with this Policy.
Group Leader Community and Cultural Services	Corporate Business	To ensure (directly or through delegation) the distribution and communication of the Policy to specified persons. To ensure (directly or through delegation) the approved Policy are available in hard copy and electronically on Council's website.
Group Leader Organisation Development	Business Services	Facilitate the provision of regular training to all Council officials on their role and responsibilities in relation to this Policy and related procedures.
Council Leaders	All Directorates	To implement this Policy and related procedures. To lead staff in their understanding of, and compliance with, this Policy.
All Council officials	Council	To comply with this Policy and related procedures.

## 6 References

- Local Government Act 1993 8A
- Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 (GIPA Act)
- Coffs Harbour City Council Submission Policy

## 7 Details of Approval and revision

- **Approval date: 14/09/2017**
- **Responsible Section: Community Planning & Performance**
- **Superseded policies/procedures:**
- **Next review date: 14/09/2021**

### Table of amendments

Amendment	Authoriser	Approval ref	Date