


COUNCIL POLICY

Community Engagement	Adopted By Council:	24/09/14	
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CONTEXT

The genuine and productive engagement of the community is an essential component of local democracy and a requirement of the *Local Government Act 2020*. In the interests of making well-informed decisions whilst maintaining accountability, trust and transparency, Council is committed to engaging the community in its decision-making processes in a consistent and strategic manner.

SCOPE

The Community Engagement Policy applies to all Councillors and officers of the Borough of Queenscliffe. This Policy should be applied to all community engagement undertaken by Council.

PURPOSE

The Community Engagement Policy has the following purposes:

- a) to outline Council's commitment to engaging with the community;
- b) to provide guidance to the organisation in undertaking community engagement and consultation activities;
- c) to inform the Queenscliffe community about Council's approach to community engagement and consultation; and
- d) to foster high quality engagement practices across the organisation.

PRINCIPLES

The *Local Government Act 2020* outlines a number of key principles for Council community engagement that must be considered by a Community Engagement Policy. These include:

- a) a community engagement process must have a clearly defined objective and scope;
- b) participants in community engagement must have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation;

- c) participants in community engagement must be representative of the persons and groups affected by the matter that is the subject of the community engagement;
- d) participants in community engagement are entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement;
- e) participants in community engagement are informed of the ways in which the community engagement process will influence Council decision-making.

These principles are applied as three broader principles of functionality, accessibility and transparency in Section 3 of this policy, *How Council will consult*.

DEFINITIONS

The following definitions help describe what Council aims to achieve through good engagement and consultation processes.

Community engagement

Community engagement is the participation of both Council and the local community in problem solving, information gathering and local decision-making. The Borough of Queenscliffe uses public input to make better decisions through community engagement processes.

Community engagement can take many forms, from providing information to residents through to a long-term collaboration on a project.

Consultation

Consultation is a component of community engagement. It is the process by which information is exchanged between Council and the community prior to a decision being made. Consultation allows Council to receive advice or input that better informs or guides decision-making. Consultation activities may also involve or empower the community directly in making decisions.

Deliberative engagement

Deliberative engagement is a form of community engagement that provides participants with the opportunity to consider an issue in detail before providing input as part of a collaborative process.

Stakeholder

A stakeholder is a person or organisation who has a direct interest in the outcome of a plan or project. Stakeholders are typically identified during the development of a community engagement strategy, though they can also become apparent at a midpoint of the engagement process.

Public participation spectrum (IAP2)

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) spectrum defines five different levels of community involvement in decision-making. These levels are:

- IAP2 Level 1 – *Inform*:** Provision of balanced, objective and timely information to the public.
- IAP2 Level 2 – *Consult*:** Obtain feedback on options and alternatives, to listen, acknowledge and seek to understand concerns and opportunities.
- IAP2 Level 3 – *Involve*:** Work directly with the community throughout the decision-making or project process to ensure that public issues and concerns are consistently understood and considered.
- IAP2 Level 4 – *Collaborate*:** Partner with the public in each aspect of decision-making to incorporate feedback and advice, including the development of alternatives and identification of the preferred solution.
- IAP2 Level 5 – *Empower*:** To place final decision-making in the hands of the public and its elected representatives.

IAP2 terminology as defined above may be directly referenced when discussing community engagement strategies and approaches. Council will also consider the IAP2 levels when planning engagement strategies, as outlined in 1.2.5. Note that general references to “consultation” in this document and by Council refer to the prior definition and not to IAP2 Level 2 – *Consult*. Where Council wishes to refer to IAP2 Level 2 – *Consult*, it will clearly outline the nature of that reference for clarity.

POLICY

1. When Council will undertake community engagement

- 1.1 Council has an ongoing responsibility to listen to residents and meaningfully respond to their feedback. However, some projects, plans and services also require dedicated community engagement to ensure members of our community have the opportunity to provide input and direction to major decisions of Council.
- 1.2 Council projects vary in size, scope and impact on our community. Accordingly, whether Council undertakes engagement activities will also vary based on the size, scope and impact of these projects, as will the format of this consultation. In many cases, strategies and approaches will be informed by the IAP2 spectrum.
- 1.2.1 According to the content and size of a project, Council activities are categorised into one of six categories, including:

Category One: Matters that are significant ‘one-off’ issues

For example: The temporary closure of a sporting facility for maintenance.

Category Two: Matters that change the current arrangements/uses on a single site

For example: Any significant redevelopment of a community facility.

Category Three: Matters impacting on an area or neighbourhood

For example: Traffic management proposals/solutions, streetscape proposals.

Category Four: Service planning matters which have impacts across the municipality

For example: Ongoing changes to the garbage service.

Category Five: Major plans which have impacts across the municipality

For example: Development of strategies relating to residential/industrial land use, open space planning or economic development.

Category Six: Major projects or issues with municipality-wide impacts

For example: Development of a new community centre.

1.2.2 Category one projects that are temporary in nature, involve unavoidable works, or where community input cannot meaningfully impact a necessary project, will not require community engagement. In these cases, Council will ensure the community is informed of the project, its importance and its impact on residents.

1.2.3 For category two and three projects that are beyond the scope of minor improvements and where Council can reasonably respond to community feedback, Council will undertake community engagement.

1.2.4 Category four, five and six projects will involve community engagement, unless there is no ability for the community to meaningfully affect the outcome (for example, Victorian Government-mandated service changes beyond Council's control, such as the introduction of additional waste services).

1.2.4.1 Examples of major plans for which Council will conduct engagement include:

- planning and financial management;
- community vision;
- council plan;
- financial plan;
- revenue and rating planning; and
- asset planning.

1.2.4.2 In line with the *Local Government Act 2020*, Council will ensure deliberative engagement practices are used in the development of Council's Community Vision, Council Plan, Financial Plan and Asset Plan.

1.2.5 As the project category number increases, Council will consider greater levels of community engagement along the IAP2 spectrum.

1.3 Council has statutory community engagement responsibilities and makes decisions under a wide variety of Victorian and Australian legislation. In many instances the legislation sets standards and provides minimum requirements in regard to notifications and referrals.

2 When Council might not undertake community engagement

2.1 Community engagement is not always necessary or relevant for Council activities. This is particularly true for operational decisions, and as such, this policy applies predominantly to matters requiring a decision by Council and the development of Council policy or strategic direction.

2.2 Council recognises that there might be some circumstances where community engagement is not be possible, and there might be occasions when Council does not engage on a matter due to circumstances beyond its control.

2.2.1 Consultation might not take place when:

- the Council Plan or existing Council Policy mandates a particular course of action;
- there has been prior community consultation and the context and environment remains essentially unchanged;
- the Council must make a decision quickly in the interests of the Borough e.g.: public safety, community benefit;
- the Council is bound by legal, commercial or legislative constraints and/or considerations such as statutory requirements, funding requirements or policy requirements of other levels of government;
- the issue relates to internal operational matters; and
- there are critical incidents or emergency management events which pose an immediate risk and require an immediate response and action by Council.

2.2.2 In addition to these circumstances where Council will not consult, there are many day-to-day matters that do not require Council to consult. These are not included in this policy.

3 How Council will engage with the community

Council's community engagement activities should at all times consider the three core principles of functionality, accessibility and transparency.

3.1 Community engagement should have a clear purpose and function.

3.1.1 The purpose of community engagement is to gather meaningful information or feedback from the community. Engagement should therefore be designed in a way that allows the community to provide useful information to Council.

3.1.2 When planning community engagement, Council should consider what information it is seeking, and which stakeholders or community members should be consulted. The proposed level of community involvement should respond to these requirements.

- 3.1.3 Engagement objectives should be made clear to participants, so that the community understands why Council is engaging and how consultation activities may influence a final decision of Council.
 - 3.1.4 Effective community engagement requires representative participation. Steps should be taken to ensure participants are not limited to a small demographic or group, excepting situations where only a small demographic or group is affected by consultation (for example, consultation on a Disability Action Plan may prioritise engagement by people with a lived experience of disability).
 - 3.1.5 Engagement activities should, where appropriate, include demographic checks that allow Council to identify when one part of the community is underrepresented in the responses it receives, and to conduct further outreach to those groups.
 - 3.1.6 Council may also choose to proactively engage with affected groups directly in order to ensure their views are considered. In particular, Council is committed to actively engaging with the Wadawurrung Traditional Owners, whose connection to Country and traditional knowledge should be reflected in Council's work and practices.
- 3.2 Community engagement should be accessible to everyone.
- 3.2.1 Community engagement should be as inclusive as possible. When larger numbers of residents take part in engagement, Council gains a better understanding of how different groups and parts of our community feel about a project, policy or service.
 - 3.2.2 Community engagement activities should prioritise methods that allow everyone to participate, and do not create unreasonable barriers that limit participation in community engagement.
 - 3.2.3 Consultation methods should include options that are not time-dependent (such as surveys or written responses that can be completed at any time), are available to residents without internet access (providing offline options for online consultation) and provide clear information about where participants can go for assistance completing consultation. Council will work to ensure consultation activities are accessible to people with disabilities.
 - 3.2.4 Ensuring community engagement is accessible will, in many cases, require multiple methods to be deployed at once. Whatever methods are selected, Council will aim to limit unreasonable barriers to participation.
 - 3.2.5 Consultation activities should also include relevant information to inform participation. While acknowledging that available information and plans may be less developed in early stages, relevant materials should be made available to participants wherever possible.

3.2.6 Debate, differing views and conflict are often part of the community engagement process. Council will work to create an environment of trust where different opinions can be expressed in a mutually respectful and constructive way.

3.2.7 Council will regularly review its community engagement methods to ensure new opportunities to increase participation are identified.

3.3 Community engagement should be open and transparent.

3.3.1 Participants will be better able to engage with Council when they understand the purposes and outcomes of an engagement. Engagement and consultation activities should provide information on what kind of data is being collected and how it will be used by Council to inform decision-making.

3.3.2 Council will ensure community engagement begins as early as possible in a project's lifecycle, particularly for major projects. Early engagement allows participants to provide broader feedback and ensure drafts and frameworks are developed in line with community expectations.

3.3.3 Community engagement also includes responding meaningfully to feedback that has been collected. After a decision has been made following a period of community engagement, Council will publish information about how feedback was used to inform or guide decision-making.

4 Methods and approaches to community engagement

4.1 The methods used for community engagement will be selected to suit the project's category, scope, available resources and other considerations external to Council.

4.2 When selecting engagement methods, consideration should be given to the three principles outlined in Section 3. This may require multiple methods to be deployed simultaneously.

4.3 Community engagement may include, but is not limited to, one or more of the below activities:

- Surveys
- Open house presentations
- Town hall meetings
- Written submissions
- Working groups
- Interviews
- Direct or active engagement with affected stakeholders
- Other methods as identified by Council

4.4 In situations where Council does not have the resources or capacity to manage an aspect of community engagement internally, tasks may be delegated to external providers under the supervision of Council Officers.

- 4.5 Community engagement and consultation activities should be advertised in accordance with the project's category, scope, and available resources. Advertising may include, but is not limited to, one or more of the below methods:
- Directly contacting stakeholders
 - Notices in newsletters and Council publications
 - Email communication to community engagement participants
 - Posted or delivered print material
 - Notices on Council's website
 - Newspaper advertising
 - Posts or advertising on Council social media
 - Media releases
 - Other methods as identified by Council
- 4.6 Where a specific statutory obligation exists regarding community engagement methods and advertising, Council will comply with these requirements. In the event these obligations conflict with general practice, Council will defer to its statutory obligations.

5 Reporting

- 5.1 The Borough of Queenscliffe Council will report Council's Community Engagement Activity annually, as part of its end of year Annual Report.
- 5.2 Council will aim to continually improve its community engagement practices to ensure they meet the needs of Council and the community.
- 5.3 The community will be regularly informed of Council's community engagement activities and related continuous improvement initiatives through its usual communication channels.
- 5.4 As outlined in 3.3.3, Council will report on the results of individual consultation activities as part of the community engagement process.

END