

1. Definition

Council defines community engagement as:-

- *offering opportunities for people to influence what happens in our community through being active in informing decisions of Council.*

It is a two way process whereby aspirations, concerns, needs and values of citizens and communities are incorporated at all levels and in all sectors in policy development, planning, decision making, service delivery and assessment.

2. Objective

Section 130 of the *Local Government (Finance, Plans and Reporting) Regulation 2010* requires Council to adopt a Community Engagement Policy. The policy objectives are:-

1. To provide a framework that encourages a relationship with the whole operation of Council. It should be read in conjunction with the Community Engagement Guidelines.
2. To encourage community engagement practices that draw on the skills and wisdom of citizens in order to add value to decision-making processes. It should be emphasised however that the ultimate responsibility for decision-making rests with Council.
3. To provide a framework to engage with the community about preparing, reviewing and changing Councils long-term community plan.
4. To ensure that community engagement is clearly linked to the goals and objectives of the Corporate Plan.
5. To ensure that Council activities within the community are inclusive of all members of that community.
6. To foster collaboration and cooperation between Council and the community, including other spheres of government in the planning and implementation of programs and services for the Hinchinbrook area.
7. To increase the community's understanding of Council through improved relationships and communication.

3. Policy Statement

Community engagement is an important principle in the planning, policy development and decision making process of Local Government. Council believes that quality community engagement is essential to the foundation of good governance and to enhance the relationship between the community and Council.

Good governance is about collaboratively working with the community. To do this effectively, Council must ensure that the community is well informed about Council's planning, facilities, services, processes and structures. It means that Council must be open and accountable to the community, and provide ample opportunity for community feedback and involvement.

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This policy aims to guide and support elected members and Council staff in relation to appropriateness and level of community engagement to be used.

Council recognises that not all community engagement is formal or can be planned. Informal engagement in which both Councillors and Council staff are routinely involved is a valuable tool to encourage community participation in our decision making processes.

This policy recommends a flexible approach to exactly how the community is engaged. It recognises that different levels of engagement will be required depending on the complexity and sensitivity of individual circumstances.

4. Policy Principles

The Council will adopt the following community engagement principles from IAP2¹:-

- Integrity – when there is openness and honesty about the scope and purpose of 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 designing how they participate, when policies and services reflect their involvement and when their impact is apparent.

5. Benefits of Community Engagement

Involving the community prior to decisions being made by Council can have substantial social, political and financial benefits for all concerned. These include:-

- A broader understanding by Councillors and Council staff of community needs, concerns and priorities prior to decision-making.
- Expansion of community input into the development of Council's plans and policies.
- The development of appropriate and responsive policies and programs by Council which integrate economic, social and environmental issues.
- Increased likelihood that social and cultural considerations will be integrated with technical solutions.
- Increased ability and credibility of Council in representing and advocating for the interests of the local community with other government organisations.
- Increased community cohesion resulting from a reduction in Council/community conflict regarding decisions taken by Council.
- Commitment from the community to the decisions undertaken by Council through their involvement in discussion of issues and options.

¹ www.iap2.org.au

- Increased access of groups including Indigenous and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to discussions about Council initiatives which are likely to impact upon them.
- Community access to information underpinning Council decisions.

Community engagement does not replace the decision-making functions of Council. Rather these processes are designed to ensure that Council has access to a broad range of information about community needs, opinions and options prior to decisions being made. It also increases the likelihood that Council decisions are understood and supported by the community.

6. Policy Scope

Council will undertake the appropriate level of community engagement for / when:-

- It is required by legislation;
- Any issue that may have potential to impact on the health, safety or well being of community members;
- Policy development and / or implementation – having a direct impact on the community;
- Strategic Planning - this relates to the development of strategic plans for program areas of Council;
- New facility, program or service planning;
- Proposed changes that will have significant impact on users or customers of a Council program, service or facility;
- Monitoring customer satisfaction with Council's services, programs or facilities;
- A level of controversy or sensitivity relating to a particular matter.

In undertaking community engagement activities, the following process will be undertaken by the appropriate Senior Manager:-

- Each community engagement activity will be the responsibility of the appropriate Council Senior Manager;
- When planning community engagement, Managers should ensure that resources (human and financial) are effectively allocated and managed;
- Wherever possible, engagement activities should attract and reach a broad cross section of the affected community and use appropriate engagement methods;
- Wherever possible, we should involve community groups or individuals who are sometimes difficult to engage, e.g., young people, aged people, people with disabilities and Indigenous backgrounds;
- We will provide feedback to engagement participants on how their input influenced the decision.

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7. Related Policies and Legislation

Queensland Local Government Act 2009

Local Government (Finance, Plans and Reporting) Regulation 2010

Queensland Sustainable Planning Act 2009

8. Review

Council will formally review this policy after 2 years of operation.

9. Attachments to Policy

Attachment 1: Local Government (Finance, Plans and Reporting) Regulation 2010 Section 130

Attachment 2: Community Engagement Guidelines

Attachment 3: IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum

ATTACHMENT 1:-

Local Government (Finance, Plans and Reporting) Regulation 2010
Chapter 3 Financial sustainability and accountability
Part 3 Planning and accountability documents

130 Community engagement policy

- (1) A local government must prepare and adopt a policy (a *community engagement policy*) describing how the local government engages with the community about –
 - (a) preparing, reviewing and changing its long-term community plan; and
 - (b) any other matters mentioned in the policy relevant to establishing or reviewing the performance of its system of financial management.
- (2) The local government may, by resolution, change the community engagement policy.

ATTACHMENT 2:-

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT GUIDELINES

PURPOSE:

To provide direction for Council's community engagement activities.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all facets of Council's operations including Council's corporate, land use and financial planning and our day to day business activities. It defines the principles underpinning Council's engagement activities, the role of Councillors and staff in engaging with the community, and the mechanisms which Council will use to engage the community.

ENGAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

Council has decided to take a principle based approach to its community engagement activities. This approach provides consistency, cohesion and facilitates the alignment of our performance reporting requirements under the new *Queensland Local Government Act (2009)*. Each principle seeks to clarify the purpose of why Council engages with the community and guide how that engagement occurs.

These principles are:-

- timeliness: council will engage with its community in ways that are timely, open to all, easily understood and not overly bureaucratic or resource intensive;
- information and feedback: the community has the right to be well informed on issues and receive feedback from council on how its input has been used to inform council decisions;
- mutual respect: council's goal is one of inclusive involvement. All voices matter, all opinions are valued and considered;
- action learning: council is committed to the development of innovative engagement approaches, learning from each engagement experience, and using such learning to improve our approaches to engagement;
- foresight: council engages with its community not only to learn about and respond to present needs, but also to gain a better understanding of our communities' perspective on emerging issues that may affect our preferred future.

ENGAGEMENT CONTEXT

In broad terms Council's engagement activities will be subdivided into four categories:-

1. Statutory Compliance

As an example, under the new *Queensland Local Government Act (2009)* Council has a statutory obligation to develop both a long term community plan and a five year corporate plan. Similarly the new *Sustainable Planning Act (2009)* will require Council to engage with the community in the development of its statutory land use plan.

Council will meet its statutory obligations by ensuring that citizens have the opportunity to:-

- a. participate in developing a vision for the region's future;
- b. have input into developing and monitoring priorities for action in the community and corporate plans; and
- c. comment on the development of, and changes to the statutory land use plan.

2. Engagement around strategic issues

By their very nature these engagements will concern regional issues. On these issues Portfolio Councillors will involve the community through the establishment of advisory panels and taskforces or through special one off meetings or other appropriate engagement activities designed to generate dialogue and ideas.

Councillors, Senior Managers will be consulted to determine the nature and type of their involvement in the strategic issue.

3. Engagement concerning local issues

Council will take a flexible approach on how it engages with the community on local issues with the Portfolio Councillor playing a pivotal role. Engagement activities will provide an opportunity to give and receive information and may include the establishment of working or project groups or community meetings. Such activities will be action focussed and will often involve council staff.

4. Engagement linked to day to day council business

Council staff in consultation with the Portfolio Councillor will identify and manage community engagement activities associated with council's core business and projects approved in Council's budget. The responsible Department will establish the most appropriate engagement technique at the project planning stage and will then be responsible for providing information to the community on the issue and facilitating the community involvement.

ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Council recognises the full spectrum of engagement activities from informing through consulting and involving to collaboration and empowerment as advocated by the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2). (See Attachment 3).

Council will use different community engagement techniques and communication mechanisms depending upon the issue or project, its particular circumstance and the audience it needs to target.

The need for, and type of community engagement to be undertaken will be determined at the project planning stage following an analysis of the desired project outcomes. The project plan will also identify the most appropriate communication tool to ensure that the particular target group(s) is well informed of both the issue and related engagement opportunities.

At the planning stage the project team will also consider whether or not it can obtain the community information it requires from another source, or previous engagement activity in order to maximise the use of limited resources and minimise the likelihood of consultation fatigue developing within the community.

PARTNERSHIPS

As an integral part of this policy council will facilitate the establishment of a range of partnerships between all levels of government, business and community organisations. These partnerships will:-

- provide a flexible vehicle to respond to economic, environmental and community issues;
- advocate to other levels of Government on issues of local importance;
- attract external funding to the Shire; and
- undertake specific projects or activities of mutual benefit to the Shire and its communities.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Councillors and staff play complementary roles in engaging with the community. Council will decide the high level strategic issues on which it will engage the community. These issues will be linked to an identified corporate plan priority, or a significant emerging Shire issue.

Councillors have responsibility for engaging with their local communities; and council staff have responsibility for engaging the community in their day to day business activities and on agreed projects and place making activities. In doing so staff will consult with the appropriate councillor(s) in order to establish the engagement technique(s) that will be used.

DEVELOPING ENGAGEMENT CAPACITY

In order to develop a culture of engagement across the organisation Council will:-

- provide community engagement training for councillors and staff;
- modify its report format to include a section titled 'community engagement' which details the proposed engagement strategy to be undertaken within the context of the report;
- establish performance indicators appropriate to the level of community engagement undertaken to measure engagement outcomes; and
- identify new and emerging information, communication, and knowledge management technologies and explore how they could be used to better engage the community.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REGISTER

Council will establish a community engagement register to record its engagement activities.

This will assist in developing a system of governance that mitigates the risks of duplication and over consultation, records activities undertaken, and allows the community to see at any time what consultation is being planned or is actually occurring.

Establishment of the community engagement register will assist Council meet its reporting obligations to State Government.

COMMUNITY COMMITTEES

From time to time Council may establish community committees that will:-

- have a specific terms of reference;
- explore a major strategic or local issue;
- have a defined timeframe;
- report at least once every six months to Council;
- be chaired by a councillor;
- identify staff resources to act as project officer and secretary to the taskforce or panel.

ATTACHMENT 3:

