



# PITTWATER COUNCIL

<b>Policy – No 170</b>	<b>Adopted:</b>	<b>OM: 22.10.2007</b>
	<b>Amended</b>	<b>OM: 20.06.2011</b> <b>OM: 04.11.2013</b>
	<b>Revoked</b>	

<b>TITLE:</b>	<b>Community Engagement Policy</b>
<b>STRATEGY:</b>	<b>Community Engagement, Education and Awareness</b>
<b>BUSINESS UNIT:</b>	<b>Corporate Strategy and Commercial</b>
<b>RELEVANT LEGISLATION:</b>	Local Government Act 1993 Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009
<b>RELATED POLICIES:</b>	Privacy Management Plan (Policy 134)

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## **PURPOSE OF POLICY**

To outline the approach to community engagement that will be undertaken by staff, consultants and elected representatives of Pittwater Council.

## **POLICY OBJECTIVES**

- To confirm Council's commitment to conducting quality consultation and its willingness to actively engage the community in its decision making processes.
- To clarify the role that Council will take to engage residents in decision making.
- To ensure that Council meets its obligations concerning community engagement processes specified by relevant legislation.
- To develop a framework that ensures a consistent approach is undertaken by Council staff in relation to proposals and projects requiring community consultation.
- To create an organisational culture in which community engagement processes are seen in a context of best practice and good governance.
- To provide clarity for staff undertaking consultation and increase their capacity to effectively engage with residents.

## **POLICY STATEMENT**

Pittwater Council is committed to informing the community and involving them in decision making processes on issues that are important and that affect them. This policy recognises the enormous value of engaging the community and involving them in a dialogue which shapes and influences outcomes which the community supports.

An ultimate goal of community engagement is to strengthen trust between Council and the community and build confidence in Council's ability to plan and make decisions that will respond to present and future needs of the community.

Community engagement is always multifaceted and requires a standard of consultation that appropriately responds to the nature, complexity and impact of the issue/s involved. The range of methodologies utilised may be dependent on the resources that are available.

This policy emphasises that the community should be kept informed throughout the consultation process and receive feedback that demonstrates how their input has influenced decisions. It also recognises that the community also has the responsibility to avail themselves of the information and opportunities for input provided by Council if they wish to do so.

## **POLICY DIRECTION**

This policy identifies fundamental principles and core values that will guide Council's approach to community engagement. It provides clarity about the level of the community's participation in decision making and the processes that will be utilised to achieve this. It sets out the planning and reporting requirements when undertaking this work.

## **DEFINITIONS**

### **Community Engagement**

"Any process that involves the community in problem-solving or decision making and uses the community input to make better decisions" International Association for Public Participation (IAP2).

### **Consultation**

The act of discussing something with somebody or with a group of people before making a decision about it (Oxford Dictionary).

### **Community**

Community is a broad term used to define a group of people; whether they are stakeholders, interest groups or residents. A community may be a geographic location (community of place), a community of similar interest (community of practice) or a community of affiliation or identity (such as business or sporting clubs).

### **Level of impact**

The degree to which a community is affected by a decision.

### **Participation**

The degree to which a community is involved in decision making.

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK**

This policy forms part of Council's community engagement framework described as follows:

**Community Engagement Policy** - This policy provides the foundation upon which all community engagement processes will be developed.

**Community Engagement Procedures** – The procedures provide a step by step guide to completing community engagement plans which outline the consultation approach to be implemented.

**Community Engagement Toolkit** - The Toolkit provides guidance to staff about appropriate methodologies and identifies expected practice standards to be incorporated into all consultation activities.

Staff are expected to be familiar with the contents of each of these documents.

## **CORE VALUES**

Staff will conduct community consultation with Council's core values of Service, Respect, Leadership, Communication, Wellbeing and Integrity at the forefront of the community engagement process.

Council's 'Statement of Respect' promotes the collaborative relationship that Council aspires to have with its community:

*"Pittwater Council promotes and strives to achieve a climate of respect for others and civic pride; valuing and protecting our unique environment, both natural and built, for current and future generations".*

## **PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING COUNCIL'S APPROACH TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

The following principles will underpin Council's approach to all community engagement activities:

### *Commitment*

Community engagement will be conducted in a way that demonstrates a genuine commitment to quality consultation with the community and a desire to hear the community's views and aspirations.

### *Coordinated*

Community engagement strategies will be well planned and directed towards getting a better understanding of the community's views on issues of importance to them.

### *Timely*

Community engagement must seek to engage stakeholders at the earliest stage possible and continue to keep them informed and involved throughout the process.

### *Inclusive*

Community engagement will be designed so that the broadest cross-section of the community is involved, especially those that are hardest to reach. Particular strategies may be required to gain involvement of those where barriers exist to their participation (e.g. young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people from a culturally and linguistically diverse background or people with a disability).

### *Clarity*

Consultation objectives should be well defined from the outset. The role of the community in the decision making process should be made clear and there should be recognition of the ultimate decision making responsibilities of elected representatives.

### *Transparent*

Information provided to the community will be comprehensive and provide objective, balanced content about the issue/s involved with any particular project.

### *Engaging*

Different methodologies will be utilised and delivered in a way that engages those participating. Innovative methodologies including electronic and on-line technologies will be implemented where possible to encourage participation and engagement of the community.

### *Meaningful*

Consultation activities will provide opportunities for meaningful dialogue and input from key stakeholders.

### *Accountable*

Strategies should be incorporated into community engagement plans to ensure that Council staff provide feedback to the community about the progress of the project or plan and which also demonstrate how their input has influenced the decision-making process.

### *Evaluation*

Planning for community engagement will also include steps to evaluate the effectiveness of the engagement process and its outcomes.

Council's principles are consistent with the social justice principles of equity, access, participation and rights as prescribed by the Local Government Act 1993.

## **BENEFITS OF ENGAGEMENT**

There are numerous benefits that result from engaging the community to shape Council decisions. These include:

- A better understanding of the community needs, wants and concerns
- A strengthening of the relationship between Council and its community
- Further transparency in decision making
- Better outcomes which match community aspirations
- Increased trust in public administration

## **WHEN TO ENGAGE?**

A range of triggers will necessitate engagement of the community in decision making processes.

These may include:

- A need to inform a community about matters that will affect them
- Legislative requirements
- Complex issues and multiple stakeholders
- Issues of significant importance across the Local Government Area (LGA)
- A difficult history related to a project and a need to build trust and respect
- A need to involve the community in seeking solutions
- A desire for the community to be part of a vision for the Pittwater area

## **LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENTS**

There will be occasions when community engagement practices must comply with statutory requirements within legislation. This may include:

- Minimum periods of time for public exhibition (usually 28 days, not including public holidays)
- Statutory obligations to consult the community
- Requirements for consultation to be conducted in a way that is consistent with social justice and broad engagement principles such as equity, access, participation and rights
- Specification about who should be consulted
- Requirement for documentation that sets out the how consultation will be undertaken

Staff should ensure that they are familiar with any statutory requirements concerning consultation.

## **WHAT DETERMINES THE LEVEL OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION?**

The community's involvement in decision making will vary greatly according to the nature of the project. For most matters the final decision will be made by Council's elected representatives. Community members and key stakeholders however, have a vital role in voicing concerns, shaping ideas and concepts within projects and informing the final decision.

The Public Participation Spectrum outlined as follows, clearly sets out the level of public participation according to the role the community will have in shaping decisions.

## **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SPECTRUM**

Pittwater Council's approach to community engagement is informed by the internationally recognised "Public Participation Spectrum" developed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) which outlines five levels of public participation. When planning for community engagement Council staff will need to determine the most appropriate level of participation depending on the nature and complexity of the project/issue.

The following provides a description of the entire public participation model but it must be recognised that Council performs a specific role. Many decisions whilst informed by community input will ultimately rest with Councillors, the community's elected representatives. Accordingly, Council will most commonly conduct community engagement processes at the Inform, Consult and Involve levels of participation.

## IAP2 Spectrum

Level of Participation	Public Participation Goal	Examples of projects requiring participation
Inform	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inform about a change to legislation.</li> <li>• Raise public awareness of a situation or proposal</li> <li>• Advise about a decision or direction</li> </ul>
Consult	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek feedback about a service</li> <li>• Seek comment on a proposal or issue</li> <li>• Identify needs and concerns</li> <li>• Collect data or technical information</li> </ul>
Involve	To obtain feedback public on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involve community to generate discussion</li> <li>• Seek views about proposal options</li> <li>• Identify solutions to difficult problems</li> </ul>
Collaborate	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a working group to define options and make recommendations</li> <li>• Share responsibility for achieving outcomes</li> </ul>
Empowerment	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elected representatives will make the final decision</li> </ul>

## PLANNING FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

A Community Engagement Plan must be completed for every project requiring community participation and consultation. Council's *Community Engagement Procedures* provides a step by step process to follow when planning for community engagement. Key elements of this process include:

Stages of Planning	
Defining the issues	What are the project objectives and desired outcomes?
Identify the level of impact a project may have on the community	Will it impact on a section of the community or the entire LGA?
Be clear about the scope of the community's input	What is the community to decide on?
Identify stakeholders	Who should be involved in the consultation process?
Decide on appropriate methods for consultation and communication	What will assist the community to be informed and have input?

The combination of all the steps undertaken in planning will determine the nature of consultation to be implemented. The design of consultation will be influenced by the level of participation required.

The development of a community engagement plan is intended to clarify the purpose and objectives of consultation and result in the development of a strategy that incorporates appropriate engagement techniques to maximise participation.

All community engagement plans will be reviewed by the relevant Business Unit Manager, or their delegate, to ensure that the consultation design meets the project objectives and to ensure that sufficient resources are provided for community engagement activities.

A completed copy of the plan must be forwarded to the Community Engagement Officer. The project team staff will also save a copy of the community engagement plan in the "Community Engagement Plan" folder within Council's electronic content management system.

A community engagement plan must be finalised in a timely manner so that appropriate resources can be allocated and communication strategies can be maximised.

Notice of any consultation activities will be given to the Office of the General Manager and Office of the Mayor and Councillors at the earliest opportunity.

## **REPORTING REQUIREMENTS**

All reports to Council where consultation is a desired outcome must incorporate detail about the intended methods of engagement with the community. This may include a copy of the completed community engagement plan as an attachment.

Details about plans for community engagement must also be included in any briefing to Senior Management where community consultation is intended.

## **PRIVACY IN COMMUNITY CONSULTATION**

It is likely that Council will collect personal information during the course of consultation efforts. Consequently, it is important to adhere to Council's Privacy Management Plan (Policy 134) which states that:

*"Council will advise the public in letters, on website, in advertising and at public meetings how any personal information that is collected will be handled".*

Unless indicated otherwise such personal information will generally be dealt with as follows:-

*Public Meetings:* Personal information collected at public meetings (e.g. contact details on an attendance list) will only be collected for the purpose of ongoing consultation on the issue by Council officers. Such information will not be made available for release to the public.

*Submissions:* All submissions received as part of a community engagement process will be considered in the public arena and as such the content of any submission will be made available in its entirety if so requested, unless confidentiality is requested in accordance with the provisions of Section 739 of the Local Government Act. Individual's personal details will not be handed on to a third party.

This process is in accordance with the principles outlined in the *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 (2000)*.

## EVALUATION

Effort is required to measure the effectiveness of community engagement practices.

<b>Stage of engagement</b>	<b>Performance Measures</b>
Planning	Adequate resources and expertise have been provided to implement consultation outlined in the community engagement plan.
Consultation	Participants have a clear understanding of the objectives of engagement and their level of involvement in decision making.
	There is a variety of means by which the community can have a say
Analysis	The mix of methods used in consultation have engaged key stakeholders
	Participation of stakeholders reflects the demographic profile of the community of interest
Results	Stakeholders have been informed about the results of consultation and can observe how their input has been considered

Evaluation of this policy should be undertaken every two years.