

## COUNCIL POLICY

## BACKGROUND

Community Consultation is an essential part of Council's role in the planning and delivery of community focussed services. This Policy guides how consultation takes place between the community and Council. The Policy includes a number of consultation opportunities that seek to provide a range of ways in which ongoing conversations between Council and the community can take place.

## OBJECTIVE

Council aims to engage with the community in line with Council's:

- Vision
- Mission
- Values
- Corporate Goals

To achieve this, Council will continually improve its engagement performance through the establishment, implementation and evaluation of this Policy and supplementary procedures and tools.

## POLICY STATEMENT

Wollongong City Council recognises its obligations under the Local Government Charter (section 8 and throughout the *Local Government Act 1993*) as they relate to participation, consultation and engagement.

# STATEMENT OF PROCEDURES

## What is community consultation?

Community Consultation is a term that describes the ways in which Council interacts with the community and the processes and practices that Council uses to:

- notify the community about Council's services, facilities, and plans;
- listen to the community about their concerns and aspirations;
- seek feedback from the community about existing and future Council business; and
- inform decisions that are in tune with the best interests of the community.

## What are the benefits of community consultation?

As the community contribute funds to Council's services and facilities, Council needs to be responsive to the needs of the community that it serves. Through consultation the community can:

- learn about what the Council does or plans to do;
- express views on decisions that affect them;
- suggest how the Council may improve the way it plans for and provides services and facilities; and
- make Wollongong a better place to live.

## When will we consult?

Generally, Council will consult for one or more of the following reasons:

- to provide information or give advice to the community;
- to seek feedback or comment; and
- to encourage participation or collaboration.

Community consultation will not always bring agreement and it is important to remember that Council ultimately has the responsibility for making the final decision. Community consultation does however result in more informed decision making that reflects the needs and expectations of the community.

There are also times when Council will notify but not seek feedback from the community, these include:

- where there is an immediate risk to persons or property and time does not permit;
- where there has been a recent consultation activity that provided sufficient information to make a well-informed decision.

## What are Council's community consultation principles?

The following principles guide and assist the design, implementation and evaluation of Council's community consultation activities:

- encourage community interest, involvement and participation in Council activities;
- build a positive relationship between the community and Council;
- build community knowledge and understanding of issues and Council processes;
- build community confidence and trust in Council;
- use the most appropriate consultation method or option;
- continuous improvement in the way Council consults with the community;
- reduce risk to the community and Council;
- dedicate sufficient resources and time for effective and efficient consultation with the community;

- avoid over-consultation with the community;
- provide the whole community with an equal opportunity to be involved in consultation;
- be clear about the purpose and process of consultation;
- make sure consultation feeds into an appropriate decision making process.

### **How will community be consulted by Council?**

Council has developed a number of ways in which to engage with the community. The choice of opportunities used when delivering community consultation processes depends on the type of project or plan that Council is providing information or seeking feedback on.

The Wollongong Local Government Area is diverse and so our consultation opportunities need to be varied to enable everyone to be involved.

Council's consultation opportunities include:

#### ***New Opportunities***

- Neighbourhood Forums
- Community Forums
- Community Leaders' Meetings with Administrators
- Independent Hearing and Assessment Panel
- Electronic Opportunities eg: online poll
- Integrated Customer Service

#### ***Ongoing Opportunities***

- Public Hearings
- Public Access Forum
- Reference Groups
- Kiosks
- Communication Opportunities
- Improvements to complaints handling

Council's consultation methods and options can be broadly categorised into *regular* and *project specific* consultation activities.

#### ***Regular Consultation Activities***

Regular consultation is designed to enable the distribution and collection of information, and promote and seek feedback from the community regarding a range of issues including Council services and facilities. These are activities such as Neighbourhood Forums, Kiosks and electronic means including Council's website that take place at regular times and places.

#### ***Project Specific Consultation***

Community Consultation can also be 'project specific', where information is provided or feedback is sought on a particular project or issue. This includes methods such as Community Forums, Mediated Web Discussions and Independent Hearing and Assessment Panels.

Project specific consultation can provide an opportunity for the community and Council to collaborate or discuss a specific issue, activity or project. It may also be used to advise or inform the community of a decision or the progress of a project.

Council officers will be provided with a range of tools to assist them in selecting the most appropriate method of consultation when engaging with the community.

**Who does this policy apply to?**

This policy applies to Council's:

- Administrators;
- Staff;
- Volunteers;
- Consultants; and
- Contractors.

**How will Council's consultation activities be evaluated?**

Council's consultation activities will be regularly evaluated and reported to the community through Council's quarterly and annual reporting mechanisms.

This policy will be reviewed annually.

**Related Documents**

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following documents:

- Development Application Notifications Policy;
- Civil Works Notifications Policy;
- Public Access Forum Policy;
- Customer Service Policy;
- Customer Service Charter;
- Media Protocol.

## SUMMARY SHEET

<b>RESPONSIBLE DIVISION</b>	Community Cultural and Library Services
<b>DATE ADOPTED ON BEHALF OF COUNCIL</b>	28 November 2008
<b>DATE OF PREVIOUS ADOPTION(S)</b>	28 November 2005
<b>DATE FOR REVIEW</b>	July 2012