



## **4. COMMUNITY LIAISON**

Policy 4.10

Community Engagement and Communications Policy

**Version 1**

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### **4.10 Community Engagement and Communications**

#### **PURPOSE:**

To ensure that Lithgow City Council conducts appropriate community engagement and communication which, at a minimum, meets legislative requirements and encourages community participation in decision making.

This policy clarifies an open and transparent process for informing, involving and engaging the community and the role of Councillors, management and staff.

#### **OBJECTIVES:**

- To offer opportunities for the community to participate in the decisions made by council;
- To provide an effective two-way flow of information between Council and the community;
- To ensure local decision-making is transparent and works in the interest of the community and considers its many and diverse stakeholders; and
- To ensure that effective internal processes and controls exist within Council to ensure good governance and effective community representation.

#### **POLICY:**

Lithgow City Council recognises that effective community engagement and communication has benefit to Council and the community. Such benefits include:

- Better outcomes through understanding needs and views of the community and customers;
- Outcomes that are broadly supported by the community;
- Increased satisfaction with Council services, operations, staff and Councillors;
- Increased awareness, understanding and acceptance of decisions made;
- Development of solutions to local issues through Council/community partnerships; and
- Increased community understanding of Council processes and responsibilities.

Community engagement planning will be informed by the Public Participation spectrum developed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) which outlines five levels of public participation; inform, consult, involve, collaborate and empower.

Council will consider the level of impact and complexity of a project prior to conducting a community engagement process and prepare a community engagement plan and determine appropriate methods for engagement that align with the determined level of impact.

Council will utilise Council owned channels and platforms to inform the community of opportunities for engagement and to communicate Council services, programs and decisions.

## **1 LEGISLATION**

The following legislation is applicable to this policy:

- Local Government Act, 1993
- Local Government Amendment (Planning and Reporting) Act 2009
- Local Government Regulation (2005)
- Environmental Planning and Assessment Act, 1979 and Regulation
- Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009
- Freedom of Information Act, 1982 (Federal)
- National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 (NPW Act)
- Copyright Act 1968
- Defamation Act, NSW 1974
- Privacy Act, 1988
- Lithgow City Council policies
- Lithgow City Council Code of Conduct
- Workplace Surveillance Act.

## **2 COUNCIL POLICIES**

The following Council policies should be referred to in conjunction with this policy:

- Policy 4.6 Customer Service Policy
- Policy 4.8 Consultation with indigenous people
- Policy 7.5 Notification of Development Applications
- Policy 9.10 Councillor Workshops and Briefing Sessions
- Policy 9.12 Media and Social Media Policy

## **3 COMMUNITY STRATEGIC PLAN**

This policy supports the sentiments expressed by the community during the preparation of the *Community Strategic Plan ~ Our Place, Our Future* that "Council focuses on strong civic leadership, organisational development and effective governance with an engaged community actively participating in decision making processes affecting their future".

- GL1 Our Council works with the community

- GL1.1 our community is involved in the planning and decision making processes of Council.
- GL3 We are all valued citizens
  - We provide prompt, knowledgeable, friendly and helpful advice.

#### **4 SCOPE**

This policy applies to all Council operations and functions. This extends to all Council representatives and staff involved in the process of community engagement and communications.

#### **5 DEFINITIONS**

**Community Engagement** is the process of Council and groups of people working cooperatively around an issue prior to Council determining a decision or a direction on that issue.

Engagement can include:

- Gather and provision of information;
- Consultation; and / or
- Participation.

**Communication** is a process for informing the community about Council services, programs and decisions. Communication may be formal and structured or informal and less structured to meet the needs of a particular audience. Communication is a vital component of community engagement.

**Community** refers to all stakeholders including but not limited to residents, ratepayers, interest groups, organisations and individuals with an interest in the Lithgow Local Government Area and the services, functions and future direction of Lithgow City Council.

#### **6 PRINCIPLES FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

As part of this commitment, Council has adopted the following principles which provide the framework through which all community engagement will be considered and delivered:

1. Council's community engagement activities are based on the belief that those who are potentially affected negatively or positively by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process.
2. Council recognises that in a system of representative democracy, it is neither practical nor possible to undertake extensive community engagement on every issue, however, when a decision has the potential to impact the local community significantly, Council will seek out and facilitate the involvement of those potentially affected by or with an interest in a decision.
3. When undertaking community engagement, Council staff will present their views and professional recommendations in an open and respectful manner to

inform the community and assist in the achievement of a knowledgeable outcome from each engagement opportunity.

4. All materials and methods developed by council to support community engagement will be genuine, unbiased, understandable and appropriate to ensure the community can participate in a meaningful way.
5. When undertaking community engagement (consultation and higher on the spectrum), Council's commitment is that the community's contribution will influence the decision. Council will also communicate to engagement participants, where practicable, how their input can and did affect the decisions.

These principles are adapted from the International Association for Public Participation Core Values for Public Participation (IAP2 © 2007 [www.iap2.org](http://www.iap2.org)) and are reflective of the philosophy of the NSW Local Government Amendment (Planning and Reporting) Act 2009.

When undertaking community engagement and communicating with the community Council will:

- Inform the community about Council's decision-making processes with regard to strategic planning, asset management and service delivery;
- Ensure that participation processes are clear about the decision to be made and the level of influence the community can have on the decision;
- Communicate clearly the context and objectives of community engagement processes;
- Provide community members with all appropriate and relevant information about the background to the issue, including existing policies, legislative requirements opportunities and constraints;
- Use community engagement methods appropriate for the targeted community groups;
- Ensure allocation of adequate resources, including time and skills as well as funding, to participation processes;
- Be respectfully curious about community views and perspectives, free from bias; and
- Where appropriate, report on, consider, respond to and act on community input received as part of the Council decision making process.

## **7 WHEN COUNCIL SHOULD ENGAGE**

Different issues under consideration by Council will have varying requirements for community engagement. Council representatives and staff are responsible for determining if, and to what extent community engagement is required as appropriate to their role and function.

Council will undertake a formal community engagement process in the following circumstances:

- Where there is a legislative/statutory requirement;
- When Council resolves to undertake community consultation;
- On issues that have the potential to affect the delivery of services or facilities that contribute to community well-being, growth and prosperity;

- When identifying and understanding the needs and priorities of the community for the purposes of strategic planning; and / or
- To monitor and evaluate community satisfaction with Council or Council services.

Under the Local Government Act 1993 Council is required to publicly exhibit certain information for a set period of time. Notification in respect to Development Applications is governed by the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979. Any statutory obligations must be adhered to. Procedures for the notification of Development Applications are detailed in Policy 7.5 – Notification of Development Applications.

## **8 PREPARING A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN**

Council staff will ensure the following steps are followed when planning and undertaking community engagement:

1. Define the project;
2. Determine the level of impact and influence;
3. Determine type of participation;
4. Review stakeholder and select appropriate engagement methods (participation methods must consider accessibility for intended audience);
5. Develop timeframe and resources; and
6. Consider feedback, reporting and evaluating.

## **9 COMPLIANCE WITH COUNCIL POLICY AND RESPECTIVE LEGISLATION**

To comply with Council Policy and respective legislation the following special considerations apply:

### **1. Submissions**

In circumstances where Council seeks written submissions from the public, all submissions received will be regarded as public and available for general access unless the writer specifically requests that they want their personal details to be suppressed.

Written submissions include correspondence received in person, email, completion of online form or other paper based submission form.

Submissions must be addressed to the General Manager.

### **2. Surveys**

Use of surveys including online surveys, polls and questionnaires are to be undertaken in line with the Privacy Act and Council's Information Management Policies. This includes:

- Securely storing recipients personal information;
- Disclosing how and why personal information is being collected and how it will be used;
- Clearly identifying the survey as being undertaken by or on behalf of Lithgow City Council;
- Developing and publicising any terms or conditions for the award of participation incentives;

- When utilising online collection tools, action should be taken to restrict multiple entries from the same user; and
- Telephone surveys must be completed in accordance with the 'do not call register'.

### **3. Public Exhibition**

Changes to relevant council procedures, policies, and tenders must go on public exhibition in accordance with the relevant legislation.

## **10 LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT**

Council will call for different levels of engagement depending on the issue, and its immediate or long term impact on the community and at different stages of a project.

The five levels of engagement outlined in the International Association of Public Participation Spectrum shown below will be utilised:

**Inform:** To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.

**Consult:** To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.

**Involve:** To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.

**Collaborate:** To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.

**Empower:** To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.

The identified level of engagement and its financial implication for each project will be noted in Council Committee Papers and Council Business Papers. The level will be determined in consultation with the appropriate Manager and Director.

## **11 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

There is a need to ensure that everyone in Council is aware of their responsibilities to ensure that Community Engagement and Communication is used successfully by Council.

Councillors should ensure that all new proposals that are brought to their attention have appropriate community engagement completed (or specified as part of the

project brief). Councillors should encourage a positive attitude to involving the community at the appropriate level.

The Executive Management Team should support the community engagement and communications process and encourage the appropriate level of engagement by all staff.

Council employees need to be aware of the importance of community engagement and staff directly involved in major projects should be trained to the appropriate level of the community engagement techniques and practices (or should have access to trained advisers).

A Councillor's role is to listen to the community and consider various views when making decisions at Council. Community Engagement provides valuable opportunities for Councillors to hear and understand the voice of the community and ensure that this voice is properly represented when Council meets and makes resolutions which impact the future of our community.

A Council staff member's role in Community Engagement is to organise and facilitate the discussion, record, provide feedback, evaluate the engagement and consider the community's views when making unbiased recommendations to Council or committees.

Both Councillors and Council staff are encouraged not to dominate or direct community discussions, nor to dismiss the community's input. Instead, Councillors

and staff should allow discussions to move forward in an open, respectful and inclusive way.

### Key responsibilities

Position	Responsibility
Mayor	To lead Councillors in their understanding of and compliance with this Policy and Procedures.
General Manager	To lead employees (either directly or through delegated authority) in their understanding of and compliance with the Policy and Procedures. To approve resources to develop, implement and review this Policy and Procedures.
Responsible Officer	As the "Principal Officer" under the Government Information (Public Access) Act (GIPA), The General Manager has delegated his/her responsibility to other Council employees as outlined below. The GIPA employees are responsible for making initial decisions regarding release of information within the time periods stipulated in the GIPA Act. In this function, the GIPA employees may deal with prospective applicants and liaise with organisation units regarding access to information.
Executive Management Team	To communicate, implement and comply with this Policy and related Procedures. To lead employees in their understanding of and compliance with this Policy and Procedures.
Corporate Strategy & Communications	Facilitate the provision of regular training to all Council officials on their role and responsibilities in relation to the Policy and related Procedures.
All Council employees	To comply with this policy and related procedures. Prepare communications plans as part of planning processes for projects which impact the community.

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