

POLICY STATEMENT

TITLE: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

Category:	Strategy 8.7.2 of the Corporate Plan states that Council will: <i>Establish a community engagement framework to gather community feedback, build relationships and allow input into council decision making.</i>
Endorsed by Council on:	6 August 2009
Responsible Department:	Alan Rogers Project Director, Partnerships and Engagement
Reference No.:	19

POLICY PURPOSE:

To provide direction for Council's community engagement activities.

DEFINITION

Council defines community engagement as:

an ongoing dialogue with our community to identify civic issues and opportunities, assist with planning and inform decision making.

POLICY OUTCOME

Communities partnering with council to improve services and create a sustainable region.

POLICY 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 Bill (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

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 Bill (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. assist in 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 Council and Portfolio Councillors will involve the community through the establishment of advisory panels and taskforces or through special one off conferences or other appropriate engagement activities designed to generate dialogue and ideas. *Local councillors will be consulted to determine the nature and type of their involvement in the strategic issue*

3. Engagement concerning local or divisional issues

Council will take a flexible approach on how it engages with the community on local issues with the divisional 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, divisional forums 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 local 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)

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) are 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 regional importance;
- attract external funding to the region; and
- undertake specific projects or activities of mutual benefit to the region 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 regional issue.

Councillors have responsibility for engaging with their local and divisional 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 local 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
- establish a network of community engagement practitioners to share information and experiences.
- 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 to measure engagement outcomes
- 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. The register will also contain a record of the membership and the minutes of all council taskforces and advisory panels.

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

TASKFORCES AND ADVISORY PANELS

From time to time Council may establish taskforces and advisory panels that will:

- be established by Council resolution;
- have a specific terms of reference;
- *explore a major strategic or regional issue;*
- have a defined timeframe;
- report at least once every six months to Council;
- be chaired by a suitably qualified external person or councillor (with no councillor chairing more than two panels or taskforces);
- *identify staff resources to act as project officer and secretary to the taskforce or panel*

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

Sunshine Coast Regional Council Corporate plan 2009-2014

Community engagement is identified as a priority in Council's corporate plan under the Great Governance theme.

Emerging priority 8.1 *Ethical and accountable decision making* identifies two key strategies which aim to improve council's community engagement approach and better align council's business activities with community expectations. These strategies are:

- 8.6.1 Develop a community plan that sets long term directions and aspirations for the future of the region
- 8.6.2 Establish a community engagement framework to gather community feedback, build relationships and allow input into council decision making

Sunshine Coast Regional Council Community engagement toolkit

In order to provide guidance for staff a community engagement toolkit has been developed as a technical manual. The manual provides assistance in the planning, undertaking and evaluation of community engagement activities.

RELATED POLICIES AND LEGISLATION

Queensland Local Government Act 1993
Queensland Integrated Planning Act 1997
Queensland Local Government Financial Standard 2005
Queensland Local Government Act 2009
Queensland Sustainable Planning Bill 2009

REVIEW OF THE POLICY

Establishment of a cross departmental team

In order to ensure that the actions detailed within this policy are undertaken, information is coordinated and new opportunities grasped as they emerge council will establish a cross departmental project team charged with monitoring and reporting on the implementation of this policy. This team will be coordinated by the Project Director Partnerships and Engagement and will meet quarterly or as required.

Formal review

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