

CENTRAL DARLING  
*Shire Council*



Community Engagement Policy

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## **OBJECTIVES**

The Community Engagement Policy guides a consistent approach to engage with the community.

Engagement assists Council to:

- Better meet the needs of the community.
- Tap into local knowledge and expertise.
- Have a more informed community.
- Encourage and enable the community to participate in decision making.
- Ensure Council works on behalf of the people in the community.
- Meets the requirements of Legislations, Policies and Procedures.

## **AIM**

This Policy aims to:

- Gauge the needs of the community by ensuring residents are given equal opportunity to be included, informed and contribute.
- Reduce misinformation and/or miscommunication.
- Gather ideas and input from the community.
- Make decisions that will strengthen and improve the social fabric of the community.
- Reinforce community ownership in the decision-making process.
- Enable Council to make sustainable decisions.
- Enable Council to be transparent and equitable in all decisions.

## **PURPOSE**

To ensure that Council conducts appropriate community engagement and communication, which at a minimum, meets Legislative requirements and encourages community participation in Council's decision making.

## **CUSTOMER SERVICE CHAPTER**

The Council's Customer Service Charter sets out Council's service standards and is designed to strengthen the relationship with our customers and our community. It also allows us to enable a system for continued improvement to our levels of customer service.

**Our customers are...** any person or organisation that deals with Council.

**We will,**

- Accurately record and monitor your enquiry.
- Do what we say we will do.
- Be courteous and positive.
- Be punctual.
- Be personally accountable for answering your concern
- Treat you with the respect and honesty that you deserve.

**We will communicate by,**

- Responding to all written correspondence within 10 business days.
- Returning phone calls within two (2) business days.
- Maintaining our website with current and accurate information.

#### **You can help by,**

- Treating our staff with respect.
- Respecting other customers.
- Providing accurate and detailed information.
- Respecting the community in which we live.
- Working with us to solve any problems.
- Providing us with your feedback.

### **APPLICABILITY**

To comply with the Requirements of the Legislation and the Planning and Reporting Guidelines for Local Government in NSW, Council must have a strategy that sets out how it will engage with the community.

This Community Engagement Policy endorses the social justice principles of equity, access, participation, and rights and ensures that social, environmental, economic, and civic leadership considerations are adequately addressed in the community engagement process.

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

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

### **DEFINITIONS**

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

Engagement can include:

- Gathering and provision of information
- Consultation
- Participation

**Communication** is a process for informing the community about Council services, programs, and decisions. It may be formal, 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, interested groups, organisations, and individuals with an interest in the Council area and the services, functions, and future direction of Council.

## **PRINCIPLES**

The following principles will underpin Council's approach to community engagement and communication. Council will:

- Inform the community about Council's decision-making processes about long term 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.
- Clearly communicate the context and objectives of community engagement processes.
- Provide community members with all appropriate and relevant information about the background to the issues, including existing Policies, Legislative requirements, opportunities, and constraints.
- Use community engagement methods of 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 remarks; and
- Where appropriate, report on, consider, respond to and act on community input received as part of Council's decision-making processes.

## **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

A five-tier level of community engagement is used to guide Council's approach to conducting consultation.

### **1. Informing**

- Advising the community of a situation or proposal.
- Informing on a decision or direction.
- Providing advice on an issue.
- No response is required, although people are free to seek a further level of participation.

Tools for informing include:

- Council websites
- Information sheets and FAQs
- Media Releases
- E-Newsletters

- Advertising
- Councillor feedback to the community

## **2. Consulting**

- Undertaking market research to identify needs or issues
- Seeking comment on a proposal, action, or issue.
- Seeking feedback on a service or facility.
- Requiring a response, but limited opportunity for dialogue.
- Option for people to seek a further level of participation.

Tools for Consulting include:

- Council's online feedback forms.
- Exhibition periods.
- Surveys.
- Incoming records/Customer Service.
- Councillor interactions with the community.

## **3. Involving**

- Involving the community in discussion and debate.
- Ensuring informed input through workshops and information.
- Adopting a more personal and innovative approach through personal contact meetings/sessions that encourage participation.
- Involving at different times in the planning process (i.e. keeping informed and enabling further comment).

Tools for Involving include:

- Open forums at Council meetings.
- Public meetings
- Specific purpose consultations.
- Mediation.
- Councillor interaction with the community.
- Councillor and public workshops.

## **4. Collaborating**

- Establishing a structure for involvement in decision-making (e.g. committees)
- Enabling ongoing involvement and keeping informed.
- Allocating responsibility in achieving initiatives.

Tools for Collaborating include:

- Council Committee structure.
- Councillor involvement in the Committee structure.

## **5. Empowering**

- Council elections.

Tools for Empowering include:

- Ballots

## **WHEN TO ENGAGE?**

Council must consult when:

- It is required by Legislation.
- It wants to identify community issues, needs and priorities.

Council should consult when:

- Any proposed changes will impact on current users or customers of a Council service or facility.
- Any proposed changes which will affect the right or entitlements of community members, including minority groups.
- There is potential impact on surrounds neighbours.
- It wants to monitor customer satisfactions with Council's services facilities.
- There is a level of controversy or sensitivity about an issue/concern.
- There is conflict among community members about an issue.

## **WHEN WILL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT OCCUR?**

Council will engage the community in the following areas:

- **Strategy Planning:**  
This refers to the development of Strategic Plans and Projects that inform the Delivery/Operational Plan.
- **Policy Development and Implementation:**  
This includes any Policy development that has a direct impact on the community.
- **Site Specific:**  
This refers to any changes to a site that may have impact on the community.
- **Service Planning:**  
This includes the development and/or improvement to a service.
- **Areas of improvement:**  
This refers to any improvement required to increase the quality of lifestyle of the community.
- **Legislative Requirements (including planning issues):**  
This refers to all prescribed plans and projects under the *Local Government Act (1993)* and other relevant Acts.

## **WHAT LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT WILL OCCUR?**

Council will call for all different levels of engagement depending on the issue, and the immediate or long-term impact of the community.

## **PROCEDURE**

The Council's Community Engagement Policy is used by staff to develop deliver, monitor, and evaluate community engagement for their projects and programs.

## **HOW WILL WE ENGAGE?**

Community engagement is about ensuring that the community has an opportunity to be involved in the decisions made by Council. Staff in preparing Engagement Plans will select the most appropriate tools and target groups.

These include:

- Online
- Community Opinion Group
- Council newsletter/Community Catch-up
- Social Media
- Councillors
- Community Groups
- Focus Groups
- Council Committees and Action Groups
- Advertising across print, television, and radio
- Letterbox drops
- Letter
- Petition
- Survey
- Site visits
- Personal briefings
- Media Release
- Email
- Telephone
- Community Events
- Community indicators and profiling data

## **WHO WILL WE ENGAGE WITH?**

Council will make every effort to ensure that all viewpoints are considered and will involve community groups and individuals, including those who can be difficult to reach.

This includes:

- Children
- Young People
- People with disabilities and/or Special Needs
- Women
- LGBTIQ+ Community (*Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, Asexual +*)
- Socially disadvantaged
- People from culturally and linguistically diverse populations
- People who are from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background
- Families
- Single parents



- Villages
- Stakeholders
- Councillors
- Council Staff.

## **PREPARING A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN**

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

- Define the project.
- Determine the level of impact and influence.
- Determine type of participation
- Review stakeholder and select appropriate engagement methods.
- Develop timeframe and resources
- Consider feedback and resources
- Consider feedback, reporting and evaluating.
- Compliance with Council Policy and Legislation.

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

### **1. Submissions**

In circumstances where Council requires members of the public to make written submissions, 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 forms.

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 the 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 the 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.

- Telephone surveys must be completed in accordance with the 'do not call register'.

The results of Customer surveys undertaken by individual branches are to be forwarded to Council's Record Management System to maintain a central repository of survey results. The Communications Team is to provide assistance to other branches in respect of the development of customer and community surveys where necessary.

### **3. Public Exhibition**

Changes to relevant Council Procedures, Policies, and Tenders must go on Public Exhibition in accordance with the relevant Legislation.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES**

Council Managers and staff undertaking Community Engagement and Communication are responsible for:

- Informing MANEX in respect of information being communicated to the community or undertaking community engagement.
- Prepare communications plans as part of planning processes for projects which impact the community.
- Undertake training and development in community engagement to build capability.
- Advise all relevant Internal Stakeholders (such as Customer Service), before commencing community engagement, communication plans or campaigns.
- Comply with Council's relevant Policies.