



CONSULTATION POLICY

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 WHY WAVERLEY COUNCIL IS COMMITTED TO WORKING WITH ITS COMMUNITY

One of our key organisational values is openness. In our value statement we state that:

“We value community input and participation” and

“We inform our community about our services and how they can be accessed”

We are also committed to working with all sections of the community and all relevant stakeholders and involving them as early as possible in any consultative process. If this occurs, the community can take joint responsibility for creating a quality of life and environment we envisage for ourselves.

Council has a long history of consulting with and encouraging community participation in its decision making process. We have conducted many successful consultations including landmark consultation processes such as the Bronte Catchment Citizens Jury, the Community Indicators Projects, the Bondi Junction Strategic Plan and Waverley Together as well as consultation with the Bondi and Districts Chamber of Commerce. While many of our processes have been best practice, others have been more ad hoc. We need a structured approach to consultation that the organisation as a whole can use. The community must be systematically consulted on issues of importance, which impact on it both in the short and long terms. These issues can range from Strategic Plans and Plans of Managements to program development, reviewing services and local road closures.

The aim of this policy is to ensure our commitment to consulting with our community is translated into action by staff across Council. The policy will also provide a guide as to the level and type of consultation expected.

We believe it is important ***to know what our community wants and ensure they know what we are doing***, particularly if our activities have an effect on them.

1.2 WHAT IS COMMUNITY CONSULTATION?

Consultation is a way of seeking the community's views and opinions so they can be considered and included in our policies and decisions. It is important to make the distinction between consultation and participation. Consultation generally does not transfer decision making power to those being consulted, while participation may transfer components of this responsibility in some circumstances.

This policy deals with consultation. The elected Council will retain all its decision making power but will, through ongoing, structured and well managed consultation take into account the views, needs and opinions of our community.

The most common ways we provide information and consult are through the Precinct System, the Bondi Junction Town Centre Management Committee and the Bondi and Districts Chambers of Commerce, the Major Events and Community Safety Committee, our weekly Council Column in the Wentworth Courier, the Access Committee, the Multicultural Advisory Committee, surveys, displays, public meetings, focus groups and inviting submissions. While the choice of techniques is significant, more important is when and how they are used in the decision making process. The most significant characteristics of good consultation are:

- Timing - consultation is an essential component of decision making. As soon as we know that we need to make something happen, we need to ask ourselves “How will we get the community’s views and preferences on this?” and “How will we maximise the ways in which the community can have their say?”. You also need to inform any other staff members whose input or help you may need as early as possible.
- Openness and transparency - consultation must occur early on and throughout the decision making process. When consultation is introduced half way through a process, the community will feel as if we have tried to shut the process to them. We need to make sure people know what is happening early on and we need to work together to achieve the best outcome for the Waverley area. People need to know why and how they are being consulted, what is negotiable and what the outcomes are and when and how they will be implemented. Involving the community and stakeholders as early as possible will help ensure an environment of trust and make for a smoother process.
- Adherence to good practice - each consultation is designed to meet the specific demands of a situation. There is no template for good consultation. The most important thing is to adhere to the fundamental principles - see section 3.

Consultation is an important process. It ensures that Council is informed about the views of the community, it enables valuable input into its activities and policies and it demonstrates a constructive relationship with the people who make up our community.

Even a good consultative process will not always result in consensus decision making. It may highlight a diverse range of opinions, needs and community expectations. We must be open in the way we communicate about our decision making and the information we provide to the community about the outcomes of consultation and how these will be used. Council will frequently make decisions in the wider public good that individuals may not agree with. A good consultative process will enhance Council’s ability to make the best decision for the community as a whole.

1.3 WHY DO WE CONSULT?

We consult because:

- **We want our community involved in the process** - it is their fundamental democratic right to have a say in things that will affect their lives. By including our community we acknowledge them as partners and stakeholders. It is a way of building and maintaining a good working relationship with our community.
- **We want to know what people think** - we need to know what our community thinks about an issue before any decision is made. Through this approach we can ensure their concerns are addressed. It also helps eliminate misinformation and the difficulties misinformation can cause in the community.
- **We want to make sound decisions by tapping into the valuable knowledge our residents have** - through this we can enhance the quality of our decisions and the quality of life for our residents and build on our social capital.
- **We have a legislative obligation** - we are required to consult with our community by the *Local Government Act 1993* and the *Local Government*

(Community and Social Plan) Regulations 1998. The Local Government Act provides the legal framework for an effective, efficient and open system of local government in NSW. One of the purposes of the Act is to

“encourage and assist the effective participation of local communities in the affairs of local government”.

The Local Government Act states that a local council has several charters, among them:

“to provide directly or on behalf of other levels of government, *after due consultation*, adequate, equitable and appropriate services and facilities for the community.”

“to have regard to the long *term and cumulative effects* of its decisions”

“to facilitate *the involvement of councillors, members of the public, users of facilities and services and council staff in the development, improvement and co-ordination of local government*”

“to keep the *local community* and the State government (and through it, the wider community) *informed* about its activities”.

Effective consultation results in good government, good management and a good relationship with our community.

Community consultation can also:-

- be used to make future-focussed strategies
- be specific to a particular locality (as with Bondi Junction)
- bring together different sorts of planning (social, environmental, asset)
- allow both community and technical input
- be used in Council’s everyday on-going activities
- link Council’s planning to regional, state and other initiatives

It allows for translation of a vision into specific actions.

2. POLICY STATEMENT, POLICY OBJECTIVES AND BEST PRACTICE PRINCIPLES

2.1 POLICY STATEMENT

Waverley Council is committed to consulting fully with its community. This may include residents, people who work or study in the area, property owners, other relevant stakeholders and government/non-government departments and organisations. We consult because:

- ⇒ we want to know what our community thinks about issues that affect them;
- ⇒ we want to access and use the knowledge and experience of our community to make good decisions; and
- ⇒ we want to ensure our community is informed and has had input into the decisions we make as this will ensure the outcomes are effective and sustainable and gives residents a strong sense of local ownership.

2.2 POLICY OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this policy are:

- To provide a framework for consultation in Council.
- To make consultation an integral part of our activities.
- To set up mechanisms to ensure we consult with our community in accordance with best practice principles.
- To develop community involvement in our decision-making by improved consultation.
- To support participatory and deliberative democracy principles.

2.3 BEST PRACTICE PRINCIPLES

In order to achieve our policy objectives we need to recognise and accept certain best practice principles. These principles include:

- Acting fairly, consistently and being flexible in all our dealings with members of the community.
- Being honest and transparent in all our contact with our community. Explaining clearly at the beginning of the process the parameters and how the information/feedback from the consultation/s will be used in the final document/decision.
- Accepting members of our community as legitimate partners and stakeholders who need to be consulted. This also means ensuring that one group/viewpoint doesn't dominate the process, this may include using skilled facilitators and making sure to include harder to reach/less well represented groups. Strategies that may help include: approaching relevant staff with appropriate networks, providing child care, interpreters, approaching local non- government organisations etc.
- Communicating clearly, honestly and at the earliest time when we are consulting.
- Listening effectively to the input of community members and encouraging their contribution.
- Either acting on the input we have received or explaining how and where in the process the input was considered. This is particularly important if the outcomes/decisions are not those expected by the majority of the consultees (or the most vocal).
- Reporting back in a timely manner on the progress of matters which were the subject of consultation and informing participants when to expect this information.
- Dealing with community criticism in a non-defensive way and not taking criticism personally.

- Using evaluation forms at the end of meetings/focus groups to ascertain if participant's expectations were met and to implement any changes that may be required into future sessions. (See Consultation Guide)
- Undertaking to evaluate our consultation process regularly to ensure it is representative, and meets community needs and best practice standards.

3. THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

For more information on how to go about consulting our community, see "Consulting our Community – A Short Guide". (Attachment 1)

3.1 WHEN TO CONSULT

We need to consult where our decision and any subsequent action will affect our community. Some of these decisions and the action which results occur when we:

- Change existing policy or introduce policy
- Develop programs, look at program funding and evaluate programs
- Assess or review community needs
- Change or set new priorities in program development and funding
- Develop a new plan (eg a new DCP or LEP)
- Review how services are delivered or strategies for improvements in service delivery are introduced
- Identify gaps in services
- Address access and equity issues in planning and service delivery
- When proposing to upgrading a community facility

3.2 WHAT TO CONSIDER

There is a range of issues to consider when thinking about what consultation is needed. Some of these are listed below:

- How new the issue is – generally the newer the issue the wider the consultation needs to be.
- The complexity of the issue – the more complex the issue, the more parties it will involve and the wider the consultation needs to be.
- The magnitude or severity of the issue – the more people it will affect, the wider the consultation needs to be.
- The best and most appropriate method/s to use when undertaking the consultation.
- The point in the decision making process at which the consultation is occurring – generally more people need to be involved in the initial stages compared to the latter stages.
- The available resources (including funds, time, personnel).

3.3 STEPS

Good consultation needs to be well planned. Attachment 1 'Our Short Guide to Consulting our Community' provides a step by step approach to all consultation. This approach includes:

- Developing a Consultation Plan.
- Publicity and preparation – including distribution of information, translations etc.
- Formal consultation
- Analysis of outcomes and preparation of a report.

- ❑ Feedback to participants and other parties and informing participants when this will occur – which allows respondents time to respond.
- ❑ Adoption of recommendations and decision making.
- ❑ Informing participants of the decision (including reasons for the action/s taken).
- ❑ Preparing an evaluation of how successful the consultation was (in terms of achievement of goals set out in the beginning) and assessing if further consultation will be required.

3.4 SELECTING WHO TO CONSULT – LISTENING TO ALL THE VOICES

When deciding who to consult these issues need to be considered:

- ❑ Who is likely to be affected by this matter?
- ❑ Who is interested in this matter?
- ❑ Who are the potential stakeholders? – Some of the people we may need to listen to include:
 - ❖ Precincts
 - ❖ People who have already expressed an interest in the matter
 - ❖ Councils Community Committees eg. Council's Access Committee, the Bondi and Districts Chamber of Commerce and other staff who have knowledge of the issue
 - ❖ Regional consultative forums and networks e.g. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Forum
 - ❖ Local agencies and other community groups
 - ❖ Community activists
 - ❖ Government departments
 - ❖ Other Councils.

Make sure to consider ALL relevant stakeholders, particularly harder to reach groups (such as people with disabilities, young people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds) and how these will be involved in the process.

Council's Community Service staff or the Community Liaison Coordinator may be able to assist in identifying relevant community groups, networks or forums. Be sure to involve any staff you may need assistance from as early as possible.

3.5 HOW TO CONSULT

We can use several methods to consult. These are discussed in more detail in our Consultation Guide. They include:

- ❑ Inviting written comments and submissions and posting information on council's website.
- ❑ Through precinct meetings
- ❑ Establishing working parties
- ❑ Undertaking surveys
- ❑ Conducting focus groups
- ❑ Conducting workshops
- ❑ Holding Citizens Juries
- ❑ Approaching established groups or committees, such as the Bondi and Districts Chambers of Commerce, Liquor Accord members, the Major Events and Safety Committee.
- ❑ Responding to complaints
- ❑ Holding public meetings
- ❑ Establishing email groups and on-line public forums

Consider the benefits and constraints, relevant to your project, of each method. For example, if you are relying on written responses, which is generally cost effective, it assumes that your target group has a certain level of English language skills and literacy. If you expect written responses by email, where responses can be gathered quickly, you are assuming that everyone has internet access and relevant programs for downloading material you may want to send them.

Mechanisms such as public meetings are generally not as effective as more structured methods such as working parties and workshops. Public meetings are generally called when there is a draft proposal or proposal to consider. Often participants at public meetings do not feel the empowerment that comes from being included in the formulation of the proposal.

No matter which method you use you need to check the special needs of group participants, e.g., working parents may need child care if they are to attend meetings or workshops, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may need interpreters. You also need to consider where the consultation will be held and if you need to “go to them” rather than holding the meeting in council facilities, this is particularly important for harder to reach groups. Issues such as accessibility of the venue/room, lighting, what is available in the room (such as computer equipment & do you know how to work the equipment) microphones etc. also need to be considered.

If you are holding a meeting or running a focus group, you need to consider whether an external facilitator will be required or whether a council staff member can run the session. Generally, the more contentious the issue, the more likely you are to need an external facilitator. This will ensure that Council is not seen to be trying to influence the outcomes or direction of the meetings.

3.6 RESOURCES

The cost of consultation should be budgeted into any project that requires consultation. This may be as simple as the printing of leaflets, putting an ad in the paper or booking security for an after hours meeting. Our commitment to consultation needs to be acknowledged in making resource allocation decisions. Good consultation is integral to good decision-making and good government and needs to be considered at all stages of a project.

4. CONSULTATION STRATEGIES

Each consultation needs to be designed to ensure that it is the most appropriate to the issue under consideration.

Spreading the Word

Some methods are good for just letting people know something is happening and telling them how to get more information, others can also include information about the issue as well. It depends on how the consultation is being done and the resources available. Among the ways we can let our community know what is happening are:

- Advertising in the Council Column
- Advertising in the Local Papers such as the Wentworth Courier, BEAST (Beaches of the East), Jewish News, Horizon (Russian)

- Using local and ethnic radio stations such as Bondi FM and other community radio and television stations
- Distributing fliers to households
- Placing fliers in local shops
- Including information on the back of precinct fliers.
- Putting up notices on our notice boards - Council Chambers, our Libraries, our Bus Shelters, the Pavilion, and the Mill Hill Centre.
- Writing to schools, clubs, child-care centres, and community activity organisers - eg. through the Pavilion, the Mill Hill Centre, the libraries.
- Writing to or emailing our precinct convenors and secretaries
- Putting an article in Waverley in Focus
- Including the information on our Internet site in "Issues For Comment"
- Including material in the rate mail out or other regular mail outs.
- Using existing networks such as informing staff members who sit on various committees such as the Access Committee, the Multicultural Advisory Committee and any external committees.

Any information you distribute should include as many of the following as possible:

- A contact name and their function in Council
- An address where people can send their views
- A fax number
- Council logo
- A phone number where they can get clarification on the issue and what is happening - for big projects this may be different people.
- An E-mail address (yours or Waverley Council's)
- Council's Internet address where more information can be found - if information is available on the Internet
- Other places where information/plans/displays are available
- The date (deadline) by which feedback is required.

When advertising a public meeting or focus group include information on what will be provided at the meeting (such as lunch, child care, interpreters) and if help in getting to the venue (transport) is available.

Opportunities For People to Tell Us What They Think

The more channels we provide for people to tell us what they think, the more chances we give our community to have an input. This can be offset by the time and effort it will take to make a meaningful analysis of responses that have come in different formats. To minimise this, it is a good idea to give the community some direction as to what you are seeking from them - such as the top three concerns, the most important aspect to be addressed, the most preferred option etc. This will depend on the purpose of the consultation. You may for example ask people to fill in a survey, and then conduct focus groups to devise strategies to address the issues identified in the survey. Tell people what will happen and what stage you are up to.

People can have input by:

- Writing submissions (via mail, fax, E-mail)
- Completing a survey or structured questionnaire
- Attending meetings (precinct or public)
- Participating in focus groups or workshops
- Phoning in.

Keeping The Community Updated

Those consulted need to know what has happened and how their input has been used in the process. If second and third round consultation is undertaken (generally only for major long term projects), this needs to happen after each round, to ensure that we are still on track with our plans. The way updates are provided will depend on how many people are involved, and how long the process is taking. For example if a lot of people are involved in a long term process, updates may be given at precinct meetings – if it is a short term process, the local media may have to be used. If we are dealing with a small number of people, we may keep a database of their postal addresses and send them a short letter.

If people are left out half way through the process they are likely to think the consultation was tokenistic and become sceptical about other consultation we may undertake in the future.

Second Round Consultation

Ideally, with major long term projects second round consultation should occur to ensure that we are delivering what was agreed to in the first round of consultation, and that we are responding to community input.

It is highly unlikely that one round of consultation will achieve all the information exchange that needs to occur. Second round consultation may be as simple as displaying final drafts or plans, or as complex as conducting workshops to address specific questions and issues. The time available and number of people involved again dictates whether it can be done as part of a precinct meeting or we need to conduct special meetings or letter-box drops.

5. LEVELS OF CONSULTATION

5.1 CONSULTATION FOR LONG TERM PROJECTS (PROJECTS LIKELY TO INFLUENCE COUNCIL'S DECISIONS FOR 3 YEARS OR MORE)

Council should ensure that the community is aware that a large and significant document/plan is being prepared which will influence decisions for a considerable period in the future. It should be made clear that what is decided at this stage will influence Council's budget and priorities over a number of years. The community should know that even if they have no immediate concerns, this is an opportunity for them to influence Council's actions for the next 3 years and they should be encouraged to participate for this reason. It is important to search for common ground. Participants should also be informed if there are options, which can be traded off. For example, they may not want a large car park built in their neighbourhood but you may be able to reframe this as resulting in less congestion on their streets.

A wide publicity campaign that extends beyond the Council Column is needed. Information should be disseminated through various means such as clubs, schools, shops, notice-boards, childcare centres, WAYS, the Pavilion, local media, the Internet, Libraries, the Mill Hill Centre, Shopping Centres etc. Ideally focus groups or workshops should take place in these locations to ensure various groups are targeted - eg parents and families through the schools and child care centres, young people through WAYS and the surf clubs, seniors and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds through the Mill Hill Centre and the Library. If time is short, these locations should be used to distribute invitations to events where

details will be given and opinions sought (such as public meetings, focus groups or precinct meetings) with more discussion taking place at Precinct meetings. However, this can disadvantage some groups and give an incomplete picture. It is important to think about ALL the groups and stakeholders that may be affected or may have comments on the topic or plan and remember that, although a good resource, people who attend precinct meetings may not be representative of these.

Ideally several chances should be given to people to participate. For example precinct meetings - which focus on local concerns - and meetings in central places - such as Council Chambers or the Library that focus on wider concerns.

In the first round of consultation the main aims should be issue identification and goal setting. A lot of education and information giving will be necessary, as the community is unlikely to be familiar with the structures and procedures of Council. This can be addressed in the long term by providing information in plain English - on how Council is structured and how it functions - on the Internet, in special publications or lectures/information sessions. At the moment there is no systematic way in which people can find out about how Council works, and they need to know this if they are to contribute as equal partners. Drafts should be prepared that incorporate the professional, technical and legal knowledge of Council officers and the views and needs of the community. Consideration should also be given to providing information in one or more community languages and keeping informed about emerging groups.

Second round consultation is necessary for long term planning and this should happen once drafts have been widely circulated and people have had time to consider issues of interest. Second round consultation should be undertaken to fine-tune document or plans. Specific strategies should be discussed, altered and negotiated in order to achieve the overall goals of the community. By the end of second round consultation participants should know the details of plans and strategies that will bring about the results decided upon.

At times third round consultation may be necessary if some issues cannot be agreed on, or if time is needed for people to choose between options.

5.2 CONSULTATION ON PROJECTS LIKELY TO TAKE 1-3 YEARS

Consultation for projects likely to take one to three years will have its basis in plans and policies that have been produced as a result of long term consultation. In this case first round consultation may be a restatement of the goals and objectives that exist in long-term plans. Consultation for projects in this time frame may need only a publicity campaign that states our goals – and how we established them - and ask people to respond if they disagree. We may find that the community still agrees with those goals and we need to concentrate our consultative efforts in how to achieve them in the most efficient and equitable way.

As the make up of our community, legislation and other circumstances change we may find that goals and objectives agreed to may need to be redefined or altered. By the end of the first round of consultation we should be clear about what we want to achieve and the community must have been consulted about this. The second round of consultation will again be concerned with working out the specifics of plans and policies and their implementation.

5.3 CONSULTATION ON SHORT TERM PROJECTS (PROJECT TIMEFRAME OF 6-12 MONTHS)

If something needs to happen in the short term, it is likely that the plans and budget are set, and there are only some aspects of the project that are negotiable. Consultation should target those who will be immediately affected and should state from the beginning what has already happened and why, and how consultation can influence the plans at this stage.

Time availability and the number of people involved will determine how the consultation is undertaken.

5.4 CONSULTATION ON IMMEDIATE PROJECTS (PROJECT TIME FRAME OF 6 MONTHS OR LESS)

When something needs to happen immediately, it is challenging to consult with the community on a large scale. As with short-term project consultation, it should be made clear what has already happened and why, and what is still negotiable. In this instance it is unlikely that more than one round of consultation will be undertaken. It is therefore very important to ensure that:

- a) everyone who will be affected is aware of the issues
- b) there are several ways for the community to be consulted (eg. precinct meeting, public meeting, submissions, survey)
- c) information available is summarised and put out in Plain English, so that the community can contribute in a meaningful manner.

If nothing is negotiable, then the community needs to be told that and they need to be given detailed information about what will happen and when so that they know what to expect.

5.5 URGENT PROJECTS

In some cases there may be no time to conduct consultation. In order for advice to be classified as urgent the consequences of not consulting must outweigh those of consulting. Individuals/bodies being asked for urgent advice must be provided with the reasons as to why the matter is classified as urgent and what we hope to achieve in the limited time we have.

The advice is to be made public so that the community is aware of what will happen and when.

6. CONSULTATION PLANNING

There are a number of steps that can be taken to ensure the consultative process runs smoothly and produces the desired outcomes. Start planning as early as possible and contact relevant staff (such as Community Services or the Community Liaison Coordinator) if their help is required.

You can also check the Survey & Consultation site, which may help in planning your consultation. It may help you with who to contact for your specific project.

Ideally the first step in any consultation should be to set out clearly (even in one sentence) all or most of the following:

- The background to the consultation
- The purpose of the consultation and desirable outcomes
- Who is undertaking the consultation
- Who is being consulted and how they will be selected/invited to participate – include consultees responsibilities if any
- The methods used (ensuring they include specific strategies for involving disadvantaged groups) – should take into account the accessibility and appropriateness of the method to the relevant groups
- The limits to what is negotiable in the consultation and other ground rules – in some instances identifying what is outside the scope of the consultation.
- Assistance available to those participating and how these will be administered (e.g. Toll-free numbers, reply paid envelopes, interpreters, childcare, travel costs etc.)
- How the decisions or recommendations will be agreed to in the consultation
- Who will make the final decisions or recommendations from the consultation
- The time frame for the consultation and any restrictions on this – should allow all relevant parties to inform themselves and respond in the appropriate manner
- The time frame for the implementation of the recommendations arising from the consultation and
- Any restrictions on this timeframe – usually dependent on how many people/departments are involved in the final decision
- How and when feedback will be provided to participants and the wider community
- In what cases second round consultation will be undertaken (or if this is not possible the reason/s why not).
- The evaluation criteria (i.e., how will you know the consultation was successful).
- The consultation evaluation criteria.

These components can be set out and referred to as the Consultation Plan. This doesn't have to be a difficult job but it is an essential tool in ensuring good consultation.

More information on developing and using a Consultation Plan, including a Consultation Plan template, are included in Attachment 1 "Consulting Our Community – A Short Guide".