



WAVERLEY
COUNCIL

Community Engagement Policy





Policy owner	Communications, Culture and Events Department
Approved by	
Date approved	
Commencement date	
TRIM Reference	
Next revision date	This policy will be reviewed every four years as part of the review of the Community Strategic Plan, or as required in the event of legislative changes or requirements.
Relevant legislation/codes	Local Government Act 1993 Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (EPA) State Records Act 1998 Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998
Related policies/procedures/guidelines	<u>Waverley Community Strategic Plan 2018-2029</u> Waverley Community Engagement Strategy 2020 <u>Waverley Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan 2019-2021</u> <u>Waverley Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2017-2021</u> <u>Waverley Community Participation Plan 2019</u> Records Management Policy 2010 Community Engagement Guidelines (internal)
Related forms	

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1. Background

Community engagement is a planned process of working with the community to shape the decisions or actions of Council in relation to a problem, opportunity or outcome. An engaged community is a community that is and feels part of the process.

Council has a responsibility to work with our community to determine services, infrastructure, programs and improvements. By working together, we can ensure we have agreed Council priorities that balance competing interests within Council's budgetary and other constraints.

The Community Engagement Policy was developed in accordance with Council's integrated planning and reporting framework and will help Council deliver on Goal 10.1 of the *Waverley Community Strategic Plan 2018-2029*, to 'engage the local community in shaping the future of Waverley'.

Below is the hierarchy of Council's Community Engagement set of documents:



Engagement documents explained:

The Community Engagement Policy sits underneath the Waverley Community Strategic Plan and sets the guiding framework for engagement, provides clarity on what Council defines engagement to be, outlines how we will conduct engagement, and what our roles and responsibilities are.

The Community Engagement Strategy and Community Participation Plan then sit underneath the Policy. The Community Engagement Strategy provides more in-depth information about when and how the community will be informed and can be involved in projects. The Community Participation Plan has a similar purpose, specific to local planning matters.

1.1 Definitions

Community Engagement:	A planned process for working with the community to shape the decisions or actions of Council in relation to a problem, opportunity or outcome.
Engagement:	All activities undertaken to get community feedback and provide information on Council projects, initiatives, and services.
Community:	All stakeholders, audiences, community groups, businesses.
Stakeholder:	Anyone with an interest in or who is impacted by a project.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this Policy is to provide a guiding framework for Council's external community engagement activities.

The Policy affirms Council's commitment to community engagement that is open, accountable, inclusive and representative of our community.

The objectives of this policy are to:

- set a principles-based framework for external community engagement across Council
- position Council as a trusted organisation in touch with community needs.

3. Scope

The Policy sets out values and principles to guide external community engagement planning, delivery, and evaluation.

This Policy applies to:

- Council employees and contracted third parties undertaking community engagement on behalf of Council
- Council-led and Council-partnered initiatives (including public-private partnerships) that will effect change to any public place, asset, or service and/or impact members of the Waverley community
- coordinated community engagement with neighbouring councils and SSROC on regional issues.

The Policy acknowledges the role of Councillors as representatives of their local communities and the issues that are important to them.

For processes and procedures relating specifically to community participation in local planning matters, please refer to the Waverley Community Participation Plan (CPP). The CPP outlines how and when Council will involve the community and receive input across various planning processes and decisions.

4. Policy Content

4.1 Council's Statement of Commitment to Community Engagement

Council will engage with the community in an inclusive, transparent, and accountable way, to make fair and equitable decisions that reflect the needs of the community.

4.2 Council's Community Engagement Principles

The following **principles** guide and shape our approach to community engagement activities:

Principle	Commitment
1. Build relationships	We will engage in an honest, open and respectful way to build strong relationships and trust within our community.
2. Right to be involved	We believe that our community members have a right to be involved in decisions that affect them. We are committed to ensuring those who are impacted by/have an interest in a decision or initiative of Council, will have fair and equitable access to participating in the decision-making process.
3. Build capacity	We will work to build the capacity and opportunity for each stakeholder to genuinely participate in decisions that affect them.
4. Clarity of purpose	We will engage with our community with clarity around what the project/initiative/decision is and what the purpose of the engagement process is.
5. Accessible and inclusive	Information and engagement activities will be offered in a range of accessible formats to enable fair and equal access to participation.
6. Timely	We will engage early enough for participation to be meaningful. We will provide enough time for the community to provide input. Engagement timelines will be considered from inception of the project and built into the project timeline and project plan.
7. Tailored	We will use a range of engagement and communication methods that suit the purpose of the project and reach stakeholders. The level of influence of stakeholder and community will be appropriate for the nature, complexity and level of impact of the decision being made.
8. Strategic	We will collaborate across Council to ensure our engagement activities are approached in a strategic way to avoid duplication and inefficiencies. We will be conscious of the time of year and other consultation projects when planning our engagement.
9. Transparent and accountable	We will provide all relevant information to ensure the community can participate in engagement activities in a meaningful way. We will report back to participants on how their input affected the final decision or outcome.
10. Representative	We will make every effort to notify stakeholders and community of Council engagement to ensure a representative sample of the community are able to participate.

4.3 Our community

The Waverley community includes any individual, group or organisation that is impacted by, or has an interest in, the decisions or initiatives of Council, such as:

- ratepayers
- residents
- business owners
- visitors
- government agencies
- community/non-profit agencies.

They may also be referred to as stakeholders.

Within these groups, we have a diverse range of interests such as arts, culture, environment, sport, recreation, community services and schools.

Our community is diverse, with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, people with disability, younger people, older people, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as well as people experiencing homelessness. Council is committed to ensuring all groups within the community have fair and equal access to participate and have a say.

More information relating to our community is outlined in Council's Community Engagement Strategy.

4.4 Why we engage with the community

Community engagement is a collaborative process that connects Council with the community in the sharing of ideas, skills, knowledge, expertise, and experience. There are a broad range of benefits to effective and authentic community engagement. Engaging with the community:

- ensures the community can exercise their democratic right to have a say in decisions that affect them
- increases the effectiveness of Council's decision-making processes
- ensures we are providing the services and infrastructure the community needs
- builds the capacity of the community to be active in shaping the future of Waverley
- develops strong relationships and partnerships with our community, leading to a shared understanding of our community's needs, aspirations, and priorities
- mitigates and reduces risks associated with not understanding community sentiment
- builds the reputation of Council as a trusted organisation within the community
- helps direct Council's advocacy efforts
- meets Council's legislative requirements.

4.5 When we will engage with the community

The scale, extent, and methods of engagement will be determined by the number of people who will be affected, the nature, complexity, and impact of the matter being considered, and the resources required.

Council will hold community engagement when:

- the decision is anticipated to have an impact on the social landscape, economy, or natural or built environment
- an interest in or expectation for consultation has been expressed by the community
- information is needed by Council on community needs, priorities and values to ensure planning is appropriate and responsive
- Council identifies there is a need or has a statutory obligation to do so.

The determination of whether it is an open, LGA-wide engagement process, or specific to identified community stakeholders, will depend on the following:

- the type and scope of the project
- expectations expressed from the community
- identifying who is impacted by the project
- discretion of Council staff and/or Councillors
- the extent to which the project needs to adhere to safety or certain types of regulations.

In addition to seeking community input where Council is required to do so by law, Council may seek community input when:

- changing an existing or introducing a new policy, plan or strategy
- assessing or reviewing community needs
- changing or setting new priorities in the allocation of the budget
- developing or reviewing programs and services
- proposing to upgrade existing or introducing new public infrastructure such as facilities and parks.

There will be circumstances where Council may not consult with the community, or only consult with a sector of the community as relevant to the project, including when:

- immediate action is required to rectify or remediate an issue
- technical or other expertise is the primary input to guide the decision
- Council is responding in an emergency where public health and safety are at risk
- decisions relate to the Council's day-to-day business operations
- legal, commercial or confidential restrictions are involved
- the community has already had input through prior engagement.

In such instances where Council does not consult with the community, we are committed to informing the community of the decision and the rationale behind it.

In addition to community input, Council decisions are also influenced by factors, such as:

- the feasibility of the ideas or feedback presented to Council
- budgetary and other constraints or technical elements of the options being considered and expert advice
- other authorities and Government departments
- regional and peak bodies with which Council is affiliated.

4.6 How we will engage with the community

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to community engagement. The level of influence the community will have and the range of engagement methods Council uses will depend on the nature of the matter being considered and the diversity of stakeholders involved. This is outlined in greater detail in Council's Community Engagement Strategy.

The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) has developed a Public Participation Spectrum which depicts five increasing levels of community influence, ranging from 'inform' through to 'empower' (see the diagram below).

The spectrum sets goals and a suggested promise to the public for each level of engagement.

Council adopts this model when determining appropriate community engagement that is aligned with best practice.



Pictured: Adapted IAP2 public participation spectrum

4.7 How Council makes decisions

Community participation does not replace decision-making functions of Council, rather it informs and guides it.

The *Local Government Act* sets out the following principles that apply to decision-making by Council (subject to any other applicable law):

- councils should recognise diverse local community needs and interests
- councils should consider social justice principles
- councils should consider the long term and cumulative effects of actions on future generations
- councils should consider of the principles of ecologically sustainable development
- council decision-making should be transparent and decision-makers are to be accountable for decisions and omissions.

Council's decision-making functions are subject to various statutory requirements and common law principles. Council must give appropriate consideration to matters required by statute and not act under the dictation or instructions of others. In exercising all decision-making powers, whether discretionary or otherwise, Council must act in good faith and in accordance with the proper purpose for which the power was granted.

In some instances, such as local planning matters, Council is legislatively and/or legally required to engage with the community. In these cases, Council will treat the legally required level of community engagement as the minimum standard. This is outlined in more detail in Council's Community Participation Plan (CPP).

Delivery of community engagement beyond legally required levels will depend on the decision to be made (or project/service to be delivered), the community's interest to participate, the need to understand the community's view, and the opportunity for the community to influence the decision.

Community engagement can become subject to lobbying through organised mass responses.

Council staff will mitigate this by ensuring all stakeholder groups are provided with the opportunity to participate and provide feedback. Community feedback, as well as all relevant information (such as technical feasibility, budget, environmental factors), will be provided to Council to ensure the most appropriate decision for a project is able to be reached.

Council invites the community to engage on specified topics when conducting formal community engagement, rather than generally inviting the community to open their own topics. However, all community members are welcome to contact Customer Service, Councillors directly, submit a Petition (as outlined in Council's Petition Policy), speak at a Council meeting, or attend their local Precinct group to ask questions and make suggestions at any time. Council staff will also offer to present to Precinct groups on all relevant engagement projects.

4.8 Roles and responsibilities

Role	Responsibility
Councillors	Councillors are the elected body charged with making decisions on behalf of the community. Under specific circumstances Councillors may delegate decision-making to Council officers; or Councillors may override a delegation and call a matter to come before Councillors.
Director, Customer Service and Organisation Improvement Executive Manager, Communications, Culture and Events	Responsible for overseeing implementation and review of this Policy.
General Manager, Directors and Executive Managers	Responsible for ensuring staff comply with this Policy and make use of the support mechanisms and tools provided to guide implementation.
Communications and Engagement team	Responsible for providing advice and assistance to staff in implementing this Policy, including ensuring relevant resources and tools are up-to-date and readily accessible.
Council staff	Responsible for adhering to this Policy and making use of the support mechanisms in place to guide implementation.

4.8.1 Approval to engage

All community engagement activities will be approved by Council, or the Executive Leadership Team, or the General Manager or an individual Director, as well as the Communications and Engagement team prior to being undertaken.

4.8.2 Risk management

The financial, legal, social and reputational risks of engagement activities and their outputs must be identified and mitigated in the planning stages.

4.8.3 Reporting

Results of community engagement activities are to be reported to Council, the Executive Leadership Team or an Executive Manager preferably as a Community Engagement/Consultation Summary Report. This will be published on Council's website (waverley.nsw.gov.au or haveyoursay.waverley.nsw.gov.au) and/or distributed to stakeholders (internal and external) in a timely manner, so they are informed of how their input has shaped the final decision or outcome.

Council staff will inform the community on the relevant Have Your Say project page that the information they provide as a submission may be public as part of an attachment to the Community Engagement/Consultation Summary Report. Council staff will give the community the opportunity to withhold or redact identifying details from a submission so their identity is not public by requesting this in their correspondence/submission.

4.8.4 Council staff participating in consultations

Council staff can also be members of the Waverley community, and often identify as stakeholders impacted by decisions of Council. In the spirit of maintaining an impartial approach to public service, it is important that any recommendations presented to Council for consideration are based on community sentiment. Staff who live in Waverley can provide public feedback in a personal capacity. In such cases, staff are required to comply with the provisions of the Code of Conduct in relation to Conflicts of Interest. Staff who make submissions should not be involved in the evaluation of those submissions.

To ensure internal stakeholders are involved in the engagement process, their professional feedback and expert advice in their role in Council will be built into the internal engagement and assessment processes, and not through the community consultation function, ie. not through the Have Your Say Waverley community-facing project pages.

4.8.5 Records management

Council staff must maintain all records relevant to administering this Policy in Council's record-keeping system.

4.8.6 Consultation exclusion periods

We will endeavour to not engage the community between 20 December and 10 January due to the summer holiday period, and the reduced capacity of the community to be involved. Council Officers will also be mindful of engaging over other significant days, such as religious days and school holiday periods throughout the year.

When Council is unable to avoid consulting during this period, the consultation period will be extended where possible to give people sufficient time to be involved and provide comment.¹

¹ In line with what Council has adopted for planning processes and decisions in the Waverley Community Participation Plan (CPP)2019.

5. Review of Policy

- 5.1 This policy will be reviewed every four years as part of the review of the Community Strategic Plan, or as required in the event of legislative changes or requirements.