



WAVERLEY  
COUNCIL

# Community Engagement Policy

Policy owner	Communications, Culture and Events Department
Approved by	
Date approved	
Commencement date	
TRIM Reference	
Next revision date	The review of this Policy and the Community Engagement Strategy will be aligned with the review of the Community Strategic Plan
Relevant legislation/codes	The NSW Local Government Act (1993) Local Government Amendment (Governance and Planning) Bill 2016 Environmental Planning and Assessment (EPA) Act 1979 State Records Act 1998 Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998
Related policies/procedures/guidelines	Waverley Community Engagement Strategy 2020 <a href="#">Waverley Community Strategic Plan 2018-2029</a> <a href="#">Waverley Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan 2019-2021</a> <a href="#">Waverley Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2017-2021</a> <a href="#">Waverley Community Participation Plan 2019</a> <a href="#">Records Management Policy 2010</a> Community Engagement Guidelines for Staff (internal)
Related forms	

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## 1. Background

Community engagement is a planned process with the specific purpose 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 Policy was developed in accordance with Council's Integrated Planning and Reporting framework.



The Policy will set the framework for Council to deliver on Goal 10.1 of the *Waverley Community Strategic Plan 2018-2029*, to 'engage the local community in shaping the future of Waverley'.

## 2. Purpose

The purpose of this Policy is to provide a guiding framework for Council's 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 values and principles-based framework for 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 community engagement planning, delivery, and evaluation.

This Policy applies to:

- all Council employees and contracted third parties undertaking community engagement on behalf of Council
- Council-led initiatives that will effect change to any public place, asset or service and/or impact members of the Waverley community.

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

## 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 Values and Principles

The following **values** underpin Council's commitment to community engagement:

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#### Values

1. We are committed to ensuring those who are impacted by, or have an interest in, a decision or initiative of Council will have fair and equitable access to participating in the decision-making process.
  2. We will carefully consider the needs and interests of all stakeholders, including Council.
  3. We will make every effort to notify and enable the involvement of all stakeholders affected by or interested in a decision.
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4. The level of influence of stakeholders will be appropriate for the nature, complexity and level of impact of the decision being made.
5. We will provide all relevant information to ensure the community can participate in engagement activities in a meaningful way.
6. We will report back to participants on how their input affected the final decision or outcome being considered.

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

Principle	Commitment
<b>1. Build relationships</b>	We will engage in an honest, open and respectful way to build strong relationships and trust within our community.
<b>2. Right to be involved</b>	We believe that our community members have a right to be involved in decisions that affect them.
<b>3. Build capacity</b>	We will work to build the capacity and opportunity for our whole community to genuinely participate in decisions.
<b>4. Clarity of purpose</b>	We will engage with our community with clarity around what the project/initiative/decision is and what the purpose of the engagement process is.
<b>5. Accessible and inclusive</b>	Information and engagement activities will be offered in a range of accessible formats to enable fair and equal access to participation.
<b>6. Timely</b>	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.
<b>7. Tailored</b>	We will use a range of engagement and communication methods that suit the purpose of the project and reach the key stakeholders.
<b>8. Strategic</b>	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.
<b>9. Transparent and accountable</b>	We will be open with information the community needs to be able to participate meaningfully and communicate how community input influenced the outcome.
<b>10. Representative</b>	We will aim to hear from all stakeholder groups, including those who face barriers to participation, to ensure we hear from a representative sample of the community being impacted by a decision or initiative.

### **4.3 Our community**

The Waverley community is taken to include any individual, group or organisation that is impacted by, or has an interest in, the decisions or initiatives of Council, including but not limited to:

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

Within these groups, we have a diverse range of interests including, but not limited to, 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.

### **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
- builds the reputation of Council as a trusted organisation within the community
- mitigates and reduces risks associated with not understanding community sentiment
- 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 consult the community where:

- 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.

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, parks, and playgrounds.

There will be circumstances where Council may not consult with the community, 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 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.

The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) is an international federation of member affiliates, which seeks to promote and improve the practice of public participation by incorporating individuals, governments, institutions and other entities that affect the public interest throughout the world.

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.

### IAP2'S PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SPECTRUM



The IAP2 Federation has developed the Spectrum to help groups define the public's role in any public participation process. The IAP2 Spectrum is quickly becoming an international standard.

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION					
	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision. We will seek your feedback on drafts and proposals.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work together with you to formulate solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

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## **4.7 How Council makes decisions**

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, or attend their local Precinct group to ask questions and make suggestions at any time. Council staff also present to Precinct groups on engagement projects.

In some instances, 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. The organisation will endeavour to meet the interests of the community to be involved in specific decisions and projects.

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.

Most major decisions are made by Councillors through formal Council and Committee structures, in-line with their democratic responsibility as elected representatives of the community.

For external planning processes and decisions, the external agency or organisation is responsible for undertaking sufficient community engagement in accordance with their engagement guidelines.

Further, Council may choose to advocate on certain external matters to represent community interests and provide feedback to the relevant agency.

## 4.8 Roles and responsibilities

Role	Responsibly
<b>Council</b>	The elected body charged with responsibility for making decisions on behalf of the community. Under specific circumstances Council may delegate decision-making to Council officers; or Council may override a delegation and call a matter to come before Council as and when it sees fit.
<b>Director, Customer Service and Organisation Improvement</b> <b>Executive Manager, Communications, Culture and Culture</b>	Responsible for overseeing implementation and review of this Policy.
<b>Directors and Executive Managers</b>	Responsible for ensuring staff comply with this Policy and make use of the support mechanisms and tools provided to guide implementation.
<b>Communications and Engagement team</b>	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.
<b>Council staff</b>	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 open, LGA-wide community engagement activities that are not targeted at closed groups should be approved by Council, or the Executive Leadership Team, or an individual Director 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. A risk assessment should be completed as part of the community engagement planning process.

### 4.8.3 Reporting

Results of all open, LGA-wide community engagement activities are to be reported to Council, the Executive Leadership Team or an Executive Manager. Where appropriate, a Community Engagement Summary Report will be published on Council's website ([waverley.nsw.gov.au](http://waverley.nsw.gov.au) or [haveyoursay.waverley.nsw.gov.au](http://haveyoursay.waverley.nsw.gov.au)), and distributed to the Communications and Engagement team, and relevant stakeholders (internal and external) in a timely manner, to ensure the community is informed of how their input has shaped the final decision or outcome.

This process should also be followed, where possible, for non-LGA wide, targeted and specific community engagement activities.

#### 4.8.4 Council staff participating in consultations

It is understood that Council staff are also 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.

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 process, 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 school holiday period, and the reduced capacity of the community to be involved. Council Officers will also be mindful of engaging over other school holiday periods throughout the year.

When Council is unable to avoid consulting during this period, the consultation period will be extended where possible (eg. commences in November or closes at end of January) to give people sufficient time to be involved and provide comment.<sup>1</sup>

## **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.

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