



Policy Owner: Director City Strategy

Category: 5. Our Civic Leadership

1. STATEMENT OF INTENT

- 1.1 North Sydney Council is committed, both in principle and in practice, to engaging on matters affecting the North Sydney community. Council will engage the community when issues involving decision making or policy formulation are deemed, by Council officers or the elected Council, to be of specific interest to the community, and/or arise that may have a significant immediate or long-term impact on the local community.
- 1.2 Council is required under the *Local Government Act 1993* to inform the community of particular issues that potentially affect their way of life.
- 1.3 The objectives of this Policy are to:
 - a) provide an understanding and communication of the principles of effective community engagement by establishing standards in the planning and practice of engagement;
 - b) ensure that Council maintains the highest possible standards in accordance with its *Open Government Policy* by providing opportunities to participate in decision making on issues of interest to the community; and
 - c) strengthen Council's mandate when dealing with other organisations such as Federal and State Governments, and private sector organisations.

2. ELIGIBILITY

This Policy applies to all Councillors and employees of Council, and external consultants employed as representatives of Council, who organise and/or convene community engagement activities in any form, including the Development Application approval process.

3. DEFINITIONS

- 3.1 Community - broadly refers to any specific socially or geographically defined sectors of the North Sydney community that may have an interest in or be affected by the workings of Council. These may include:
 - a) Residents and ratepayers/land owners

- b) Business owners and operators
- c) People who work in the local government area
- d) Visitors (including tourists and shoppers)
- e) Government agencies
- f) Users of Council services
- g) Local community groups and associations (including sporting, church and charity groups)

3.2 Engagement - is the process of purposeful and timely information exchange between the Council and the community, where input/feedback is gathered through consultation mechanisms and is taken into consideration in Council's decision-making processes.

4. PROVISIONS

This Policy is linked to implementing Council's vision, mission and core values. The following provisions outline the elements of good engagement that must be observed by Councillors, employees and consultants when engaging the community.

4.1 Basis for Community Engagement

Community Engagement will be undertaken by Council where significant policy development or change is proposed, where decisions of potential interest to or impact upon the community are to be made and/or where such is mandated by State Government legislation.

4.2 Guiding Principles

4.2.1 Focus and Commitment - Council will ensure that rationale behind engagement is clearly stated. A 'Statement of Intent' will be developed for all open consultation processes, which scopes the planned consultation and outlines Council's commitment to the process and consider sustainability issues related to the project. The 'Statement of Intent' includes information on the purpose, topic, timeframes and resource requirements of the consultation process.

Council will engage with affected parties before making decisions. Where decisions have already been made before consulting the community it is imperative that the community is informed of the reasons why the decision was made.

4.2.2 Resourcing - Council will ensure that any proposed project has adequate resourcing, including sufficient staff and financial resources to enable the engagement process to satisfy the relevant predetermined objectives. Resourcing will be factored into project planning and budget preparation.

The level of community engagement undertaken relates directly to the level of community involvement required, and should always be appropriate to the nature, complexity and impact of the issue or project (including plan or strategy).

- 4.2.3 Timing - Council will undertake community engagement at the appropriate stage in the life of a project. The engagement process will be timed to ensure that the community is able to help identify issues and provide comment and opinion that contribute to the decision-making process; by endeavouring to allow a reasonable period for public response during a period of consultation.

The *Local Government Act 1993* requires councils to publicly exhibit certain types of plans and policies for a set period, generally a minimum standard for exhibition is 28 days. Other types of documents may be exhibited for less than 28 days, in accordance with the appropriate level of community involvement required.

The *Environmental Planning and Protect Act 1979* (EP&A Act) requires councils to public exhibit planning policies and development applications for a set minimum period. Generally planning polices will be exhibited for a minimum of 28 days¹. Development application exhibition periods range from 14 to 28 days depending on the application type.

- 4.2.4 Inclusiveness, Accessibility and Diversity - all affected and interested parties will be encouraged to participate in engagement opportunities. Council will endeavour to ensure that the groups or individuals invited to participate in the consultative process are representative of the overall target group, and that communication strategies are designed to reach the appropriate sections of the community and attract the broadest range of community interests. Council will take into account the diversity of the community by being sensitive to the needs of particular individuals or groups to maximise their ability to contribute.
- 4.2.5 Provision of Information - Council will provide appropriate information to participants that is accurate and unbiased, and that will provide opportunities for them to form sound opinions and decisions.

Council undertakes to provide information in plain English, without the use of technical terms or jargon; where information is technical in nature, supporting explanatory information will be provided. Where appropriate, information will be provided in languages other than English or alternative formats including audio and electronic formats.

- 4.2.6 Responsiveness and Feedback - Council will provide regular updates to

¹ Some planning policies may have their notification requirements reduced to 14 days or none at the discretion of any State Government approval under the EP&A Act 1979

participants during the engagement process and at the project's conclusion detailing the outcomes of the engagement process, where possible and appropriate. Responsible staff will at the conclusion of the engagement process prepare a report to Council providing rationale for any recommendations made as a result of the engagement outcomes.

- 4.2.7 Evaluation and Continuous Improvement - All engagement activities conducted by and on behalf of Council will include an evaluation component, where possible and appropriate. Outcomes will be used to better inform future Council decisions. Evaluation summaries will be available on request.

4.3 Community Engagement Protocol

The *Community Engagement Protocol* associated with this Policy provide Councillors, staff and contractors with a framework on when and how they should engage the community.

The Community Engagement Protocol also meets the Community Participation Plan requirements under Division 2.6 of the EP&A Act.

5. RESPONSIBILITY/ACCOUNTABILITY

5.1 The Elected Council is responsible for:

- a) Ensuring that, wherever possible, matters of potential significance or controversial impact on the local community, have been preceded by appropriate community engagement on the relevant issues;
- b) Supporting and encouraging community engagement appropriate to the needs of the project and/or issue, including attending and/or participating in activities where appropriate; and
- c) Approving adequate funding and/or resources to support community engagement activities.

5.2 Senior Management (MANEX) are responsible for:

- a) Ensuring that this Policy is implemented and applied by all Divisions of Council, by ensuring engagement activities are conducted using appropriate processes, methods and resources; and
- b) Determining community engagement needs are considered for all major projects and key issues.

5.3 Directors/Department Managers/Supervisors are responsible for:

- a) Overseeing all projects within their Divisions/Departments, and determining whether community engagement, in any form, may be

necessary for or beneficial to, its completion or presentation to Council, based on the provisions of this Policy and *Community Engagement Protocol*;

- b) Supporting staff/contractors to organise community engagement activities in accordance with the provisions of this Policy and *Community Engagement Protocol*;
- c) Ensuring each engagement is included in the Councillors' Diary and/or promoted via the Councillor Bulletin; and that the timing does not conflict with other key Council activities; and
- d) Maintaining an appropriate level of involvement in the engagement process.

5.4 Project Coordinators/Contractors are responsible for:

- a) Using the *Community Engagement Protocol* to prepare a project plan, including communication and evaluation method(s);
- b) Liaising with the Community Engagement Coordinator to identify and plan appropriate methods/techniques, timing and target group(s) according to predetermined objectives and other relevant factors;
- c) Referring to the consultation database to reduce duplication of resources or processes and avoid over consultation;
- d) Maintaining an appropriate level of community involvement in the decision-making process depending on the engagement needs and other constraints that may apply;
- e) Ensuring adequate feedback is provided to all participants and where appropriate, to the wider North Sydney community; and
- f) Evaluate project processes and outcomes-

5.5 The North Sydney community has a role in supporting the principles of community engagement and open government. The community is encouraged to actively participate in engagement activities and contribute to Council's decision-making processes.

5.6 Council's (Internal) Community Engagement Working Group, led by the Integrated Planning and Special Projects Department, made up of representatives from across all Council Divisions will assist in the implementing the guiding principles within the Policy. This Group is also responsible acting as 'Champions' supporting staff in using the *Community Engagement Protocol*.

5.7 Council's Community Engagement Coordinator is responsible for:

- a) Providing ongoing support and advice to staff/contractors in planning and undertaking methods of engagement, by assisting with the preparation of project plans;
- b) Liaising with the Communications & Events Department to ensure that all engagement activities are adequately promoted to the community;

- c) Ensuring Council's *Community Engagement Protocol* are regularly reviewed and meet best practice standards in local government; and
- d) Identifying training needs and development opportunities for staff in engagement processes and methodologies; working with the Workforce Planning Department to organise and deliver appropriate training.

6. RELATED POLICIES/DOCUMENTS/LEGISLATION

The Policy should be read in conjunction with the following Council policies and documents:

- Code of Conduct - Contractors, their Staff and Business Associates
- Community Engagement Protocol
- Development Control Plan
- Disability Discrimination Policy (staff policy)
- Open Government Policy
- Organisational Sustainability Policy
- Precinct System Policy
- Written Submission Guidelines: Information Sheet

The Policy should be read in conjunction with the following documents/legislation:

- Local Government Act 1993
- Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979

Version	Date Approved	Approved by	Resolution No.	Review Date
1	16 February 2009	Council	61	2012/13
2	18 February 2013	Council	61	2016/17
3	25 June 2018	Council	214	2020/21
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