



COUNCIL POLICY

POLICY TITLE:	COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY
POLICY NUMBER:	051
INFOXPRT REF:	12464
DATE OF ADOPTION:	22 June 2012
TIME PERIOD OF REVIEW	1 Year
DATE OF NEXT REVIEW:	12 December 2017

OBJECTIVES:

Community Engagement is now part of the everyday life of local government and is viewed as a central principle in the planning and decision-making process. The aim of this framework is to describe how the community and Council may communicate more effectively with one another. Council will then be better positioned to make informed decisions about issues that affect the local community. In turn, the community will enjoy a council that is more accountable and in tune with its wishes.

Richmond Shire Council's Community Engagement Policy has been developed in order to provide community members with a clear understanding of the avenues available for communication between themselves and Council. Specifically, it will identify the varying levels and types of engagement to suit particular circumstances. It is intended that this framework will give the community a clear understanding of the engagement process.

This Strategy for community engagement will:

- Outline Council's commitment to a community engagement policy and strategy
- Define what Council means by engagement
- Describe effective ways of enhancing community engagement.

RELEVANT LEGISLATION:

Section 104(3)(d) Local Government Act, 2009

The principles of the Local Government Act, 2009 Section 2c) requires:

- *democratic representation, social inclusion and meaningful community engagement;*
and

1. Community Engagement

1.1 Definitions

Community

Community refers to all citizens, ratepayers, landowners and members of the general public (including all individuals, groups, organisations, government, industry and business) who have stake and interest in the Shire of Richmond.

Engagement

Engagement is defined as a process of two –way communication between Council and the community on an issue prior to Council making a decision on that issue. Consultation and participation are part of the engagement process.

1.2 What is Community Engagement

Community Engagement is a part of the continuum which includes:

- Information giving (communication)
- Information seeking (data collection/scoping)
- Information Sharing
- Participatory decision making
- Responding to community initiated issues
- Continuous research into communication methods.

Engagement with the local community is a regular and important part of Council's everyday services and involved the interaction of Council and stakeholders in a variety of settings and circumstances.

Whether it is as simple as a telephone enquiry, an over the counter discussion or a letter regarding a specific policy or project, all of these situations aim to better inform residents and engage with the local community.

Formal consultation processes are conducted for a variety of projects and Council activities and will take a number of forms depending on the desired outcome of the particular policy, project and/or activity and consideration of any relevant legislative requirements.

The methods of formal consultation can range from the public exhibition of a Council Strategy, plan or policy; focus group, social networking media, online or written surveys; workshops, e-forms, newsletters and media releases.

The use of particular consultation methods will depend on the purpose, timing and resources available.

1.3 How we will consult

Council will utilise a range of consultation methods to engage the community. This also includes ensuring that effective internal consultation occurs.

- Informed communication with Councillors is also important to achieve more effective consultation
- Councillors are a vital link between the local community and Council. The Chief Executive Officer must ensure that the Councillors are informed about policies and projects that Council are consulting on and the program for engagement with the community
- How Council will consult with the community will depend on the purpose, stage and desired outcomes of the consultation program for the particular policy or project. Where appropriate, consultation may occur as part of, though not limited to:
 - Planning the strategic direction of Council;
 - Developing Council policies and plans;
 - Changes to a site or facility that may have an impact on the community or service delivery; and
 - When issues are brought to Council.

- Some common forms of informing and engaging with the community that Council continue to use include, but not limited to:
 - Letters – are an effective method to provide information regarding the preparation and/or implementation of specific policies or projects. When informing the local community about specific consultation, they should include information on how and where people can obtain copies document and the way in which comments can be submitted.
 - Leaflets, Householders and Newsletters – are a way to provide information in an “eye-catching”, easy to read summary. They are used to highlight the main issues and let the local community know how to be involved in the consultation process. These documents are also a way to regularly keep the local community up to date via electronic means or post about the activities of Council;
 - Notices in Richmond State School Newsletters and media releases – can be used to regularly keep the local community informed about specific policies and projects. Media releases allow for more information to be provided while notices are to inform the local community about consultation events and specific details on the consultation of specific policies and projects.
 - Council email database, website and community Facebook site – is a valuable communication tool. It enables information to be provided to a large number of people which is cost effective and environmentally sustainable.
 - Surveys (electronic and paper) – This is a statistically correct survey of particular qualitative and quantitative data. The data may include individual’s attitudes, beliefs or information.
 - Public Meetings/ Information sessions – this may be held at a community venue, at the site of the matter under engagement, or at the Council offices. Invitations will be sent by one or more of the following:
 - Advertisement in local newsletter
 - Other Media outlets
 - Independent Consultants – These may be appointed by Council to either manage a consultation or engagement process or to provide independent advice on an issue.

1.4 Who we will consult

- Richmond is a variety of individuals and groups as previously defined (2.1). Richmond Shire Council is committed to encourage participation from various groups to ensure that we effectively engaging with the community as a whole.
- Government Departments and Agencies are key partners with Council in preparing and implementing a number of policies and projects. For projects with large scale infrastructure and other complex planning matters, Council will ensure that the relevant government departments and agencies are consulted to make certain that funding is available, proposals are supported and that they can be delivered to the local community in a reasonable timeframe.
- Most people do not associate only within the administrative boundaries of their local authority. Therefore, ongoing engagement and partnership with adjoining Councils is vital. This enables cross boundary collaboration to resolve issues and plan in the context of the wider community.
- Many residents and organisation have has varying experience and have different capability to participate in the consultation processes. Community groups, local organisation, advisory groups and societies often represent many local residents,

landowners, business owners and workers. Building partnerships allow for greater inclusion and can reach people that may not have otherwise participated.

- These groups include, but are not limited to:
 - Environmental Groups i.e. Landcare
 - Social Groups and Service Clubs i.e. RSL, Lions
 - Businesses, Chamber of Commerce and other business/commercial network groups;
 - Volunteer and Not for Profit Organisations i.e. Arts Council;
 - Community and Sporting Groups.

Using legitimate local groups and community organisations to reach individuals, particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds is an effective approach. This approach to community engagement is particularly valuable for more complex or technical consultations where individuals may not feel confident to express their views.

Council acknowledges that there is a need to specifically reach out to people who are less likely to participate in conventional methods of consultation or have been traditionally “hard to reach”. The Council continues to work hard to develop initiatives to improve community engagement with these groups.

Some of these groups include, but are not limited:

- Youth and Children (particularly the 13-15 age bracket)
- People with a disability
- People with carer’s responsibilities;
- Older People;
- People from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) backgrounds; and
- People from Culturally and Linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

It is expected that all consultation processes will ensure that specific consultation requirements as set out in relevant government legislation are adhered to. This may relate to how we consult with specific groups, the minimum length of time required for an exhibition and which individuals and/or groups we are required to engage with.

1.5 Principles for Effective Community Consultation and Engagement

Effective consultation should be a first thought, not an afterthought for the preparation of any strategy, policy or project of Council. Richmond Shire Council’s Community Engagement Policy is based around a set of principles to ensure that these are embedded in the consultation process that Council implements to effectively engage with the local community.

To be effective, consultation programs must be based on openness, trust, integrity, mutual respect for the legitimacy and point of view of all participants. How to effectively consult and engage with the local community will be considered in the initial stages of planning for any policy, project and/or activity of Council according to the following principles.

Richmond Shire Council’s seven principles for effective community consultation are:

- Inclusiveness and Diversity;
- Openness, Respect and Accountability;
- Leadership;
- Purpose;
- Feedback and Evaluation;
- Information Sharing; and
- Resourcing and Timing.

1.5.1 Inclusiveness and Diversity

- (a) Council recognises and values the diversity of its local community and the different strengths each group and individual brings to the implementation of Council projects and activities as well as the preparation of Council strategies and policies.
- (b) Council will work to promote equality of opportunity and empower people to have their voices heard through effective, appropriate and safe consultation practices. Council aims to proactively reach out to better engage with the whole community and seek to widen participation by taking steps to be accessible and inclusive.

To achieve this, Council will:

- Ensure that all consultation programs use accessible venues for participants and where possible, consultation methods facilitate equal access for individuals and groups;
- Seek to identify, empower and protect stakeholder groups and individuals that experience barriers to participation or have traditionally been challenging to engage (such as people with a disability, young children and people who speak a language other than English);
- Ensure written information provides reasonable opportunities for participation (e.g. providing translated information, large print, audio etc). All written materials should provide clear and easy to understand information, considering the differences of the intended audience (e.g. literacy and education levels; age; cultural background);
- Be positive in identifying the demographic and cultural changes that occur over time and be responsive to change. This means that Council will aim to anticipate the need for supporting new groups that arise from any demographic changes, aiding participation, and representation from the whole of the local community; and
- Seek to engage and empower communities and individuals from under - represented groups directly, particularly where they do not have the necessary infrastructure and groups to articulate and promote their interests.

1.5.2 Openness, Respect and Accountability

- (a) Richmond Shire Council aims to ensure consultation processes and engagement with the local community is approached in an open and respectful manner with clear lines of accountability.
- (b) This does not mean that consultation will always lead to agreement or that decisions are subject to consensus; however, it should always lead to a better understanding of the issues, a mutual respect for the different points of view and contribute to secure workable solutions.
- (c) To maintain the integrity of all Council's consultation processes, it is vital that the outcome of any consultation is not predetermined. Council will ensure that all consultation with the community is conducted as openly as possible to preserve credibility with both the local community and of the document, project/or activity itself.
- (d) The understanding of project and consultation objectives, purpose and expectations of both Council and local community is essential; the agenda and process should be clear and any constraints should be considered from the outset of the project.

1.5.3 Leadership

- (a) Leadership is not about telling others what to do. Rather it is the ability to support and facilitate discussion through best practise consultation and engagement to

represent the wider community interests and ensure that recommendations do not only represent specific sectional interests.

- (b) Leadership involves taking the initiative for the activity and seeking support and partnerships. It also involves ensuring that consultation promotes the building of leadership within Council and the local community.
- (c) Effective and ongoing engagement with the local community aims to create strong partnership. This helps to build capacity between Council and the local community and creates a shared ownership and commitment to specific consultation processes.

To achieve this Council will:

- Ensure that all of Council's consultation processes and community engagement activities are conducted within the endorsed community engagement framework;
- Provide a well planned and resourced approach for all consultation processes and community engagement activities;
- Be prepared to tackle difficult issues and ensure that the consultation method chosen is flexible to facilitate discussion of these issues and employ good conflict resolution skills are required;
- Be active in developing and strengthening partnerships with all levels of government, service providers, and the local community. Council will also seek to better understand the strengths, aspirations and issues of the local community through the variety of consultation and community engagement activities;
- Assess the needs of the strategy and/or project and consult all relevant stakeholders and members of the local community. Where deemed appropriate, Council will conduct wider consultation in developing the future direction and purpose of any strategy and/or project; and
- Employ a logical methodology when trying to resolve and represent conflicting interests. Whether individuals, legitimate local community groups and/or other interested stakeholders all views deserve equal consideration.

1.5.4 Purpose

- (a) It is critical that a clear purpose is established for all community consultation activities. It provides a sound foundation for the planning, review and evaluation of all projects, and ensures that the types of consultation methods employed are appropriate to the project outcomes.
- (b) Having a clear purpose provides direction and guidance for the local community, key stakeholders and Council itself as to the rationale for the consultation being conducted.
- (c) When clearly communicated to all participants, it also provides realistic expectations, understanding and transparency of the consultation process.

To achieve this Council will:

- Provide a clear purpose statement for all community consultation and engagement activities. It is critical to consider how to engage with individuals and groups to whom the issue is most relevant; plan who should be involved, at what stage and set the parameters for how the information will be used.
- Conduct a thorough identification of key stakeholders with regard to the policy and/or project that is being consulted on
- Clearly communicate the specific purpose of the consultation to ensure participants have an understanding as to their participation and an expectation as to their involvement in the decision making process; and

- Ensure that the most appropriate method of consultation is being used for the prescribed purpose and develop strategies to ensure that purpose is achieved in an appropriate manner with participants and other stakeholders.

1.5.5 Information Sharing

- (a) Providing clear, “jargon-free” information in a timely manner is the basis of quality engagement and effective consultation with the local community and stakeholders. Well communicated information can motivate, increase interest and a willingness to be engaged in a specific project.
- (b) Critical to making informed decisions, information shared and gathered should be as accurate as possible and true. Information sharing must be reciprocal and relies on the involvement of participants in maintaining a flow of information and the commitment to be open to different views and issues.
- (c) Information can be provided in a number of formats such as written and verbal submissions; through group discussions, e-consultation; statistical information; maps and plans; graphs; photograph; and reports.

To achieve this Council will:

- Ensure participants have timely access to relevant information that is accurate and unbiased, providing opportunities for them to form sound opinions and decisions;
- Ensure that participants are provided with relevant background information prior to any consultation and the way in which information is shared between Council and the local community is appropriate to the particular project and is in place during the early stages;
- Provide information that is concise, written clearly and is in plain English. In particular, where the information is technical in nature, supporting explanatory information will be provided in an easy to read format;
- Endeavour to provide all reasonable opportunities for access to information in other formats, (e.g. large print, audio, electronically etc) and community languages;
- Consider a range of information and formats as well as written to encourage wide participation and engage with a new or previously disengaged groups and individuals; and
- Provide reasonable timeframes that accommodate effective information sharing, analysis and feedback.

1.5.6 Feedback and Evaluation

- (a) Closing the “consultation loop” and informing participants as to how their opinions and information have contributed to the preparation and decision of Council is vital.
Providing participants with feedback is important in respecting the partnership and maintaining ongoing engagement with the local community.
- (b) The views and comments of participants specific to the consultation process itself is a valuable learning tool. Candid evaluation at the conclusion of each consultation program will ensure that Council continues to improve how consultation is carried out in the future. It should include questions regarding the values of the process; whether the state objectives and purpose was clear and achieved and whether the methods used were suitable.

To achieve this Council will:

- Aim to include details about the evaluation component in the planning of the project. This will ensure that issues are given due consideration in a

methodical manner and where appropriate changes be made to the strategy and/or project to reflect the needs and priorities expressed by the local community;

- Clearly outline and communicate the evaluation/feedback mechanisms and decision-making process with participants at the earliest possible stage of the project;
- Use feedback and evaluation to review and improve the planning, design and delivery of community engagement and consultation practices;
- Provide regular project updates and/or feedback on how decisions were made in a timely manner. Within a reasonable timeframe at the conclusion, Council will ensure that the results and reports are made available in a range of formats and in a variety of venues as determined at the commencement of the project; and
- Provide, where appropriate, opportunities for feedback through a variety of means. These could include written submission via post or mail; feedback forms; verbally through meetings, workshops or web based methods, such as discussion boards or e-forums etc.

1.5.7 Resourcing and Timing

- (a) Building capaShire may take time, particularly in engaging those who are “hard to reach” and disengaged. Council and the local community may require time to develop relationships, and the consultation methods and approach must consider this.
- (b) It is important that participants have a realistic idea of how much time consultation is likely to take in the overall preparation and implementation of the specific project. Timing of consultation also ensures quality feedback and engagement with the local community. To gain the maximum participation possible, the local community should be advised of any consultation at the earliest possible stage of the project. It is important that the timing of any consultation process must consider previous, current and future engagement activities to avoid “consultation fatigue” by the local community.
- (c) The specific financial cost involved in conducting consultation must be understood when planning any consultation process or activity.

To achieve this Council will:

- Provide the necessary resources and support to ensure the principles of the Community engagement Policy are implemented;
- Ensure that the Community Engagement Policy is regularly reviewed and evaluated to ensure best practise community engagement and consultation methods are being considered;
- Identify what skills are required to devise and conduct consultation and engagement activities and to provide opportunities for staff training to effectively engage with the local community through the use of best practise community consultation methods.

2. Conclusion

Whichever method of community engagement is chosen, the process needs to be open, responsive, inclusive, consistent and accountable.

Council needs to make a concerted, regular effort to confer with all parties for whom there are issues which may be of interest or concern. There is a need to recognise that different methods may have to be employed to reach different groups or individuals, and for variations

in circumstance. Council should guard against the possibility of being unduly swayed by vocal or influential minorities.

Satisfactorily engagement also requires that the community is given adequate time and opportunity to respond during any consultation process. Council must meet its obligation giving prompt and effective feedback and flowing through with any undertakings it gives. The Community Engagement Policy is an evolving document. It will be reviewed regularly to ensure the strategy and allocation of resources reflects current best practise and current legislative requirement.

A phone call to the Richmond Shire Council during business hours (8.20am to 5.00pm) can provide details of how to contact a specific Councillor and/or the appropriate Council officer. All phone calls and associated issues are logged on a customer tracking system for action and follow up.

RICHMOND SHIRE COUNCIL'S CONTACT DETAILS

Telephone	07 47 413277 – 24 hour service – leave a message after 5.00pm and before 8.20am (after hours emergency contact available by phoning this number.
Write a letter	To the Chief Executive Officer or Mayor PO Box 18 RICHMOND Q 4822
Email Council	enquiries@richmond.qld.gov.au
Post Comments to	Richmond What's On – Facebook page Councils website www.richmond.qld.gov.au

IMPLEMENTATION

This Policy will commence from the Approval Date (see Section 6). This Policy replaces all other Community Engagement Policies of Richmond Shire Council (whether written or not).

This Policy will be made available to all corporate staff on Council's intranet site/network, and to all outdoor staff at the Depot and via their supervisor/coordinator. Council reserves the right to vary, replace or terminate this Policy from time to time. This Policy will typically be reviewed when a review has been deemed appropriate by organisational processes (e.g. audit recommendations), or when legislative requirements change.

APPROVAL

Adopted at the Council Meeting held on 8 December 2015.

Reviewed and Adopted at the Council Meeting held on 6 December 2016.