

	Community Liaison and Communications Policy
	Strategic

1. Purpose

To ensure that Warrumbungle Shire Council (Council) conducts appropriate community engagement and communication which, at a minimum, meets legislative requirements and encourages community participation in Council’s decision making.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all Council operations and functions. This extends to all Council representatives and staff involved in the process of community engagement and communications.

3. Associated Policies, Legislation and Documents

ASSOCIATED POLICIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications Policy • Media Policy – Councillors • Privacy Management Plan
ASSOCIATED LEGISLATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Privacy Act 1998</i> (Cth) • <i>Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979</i> (NSW) • <i>Local Government Act 1993</i> (NSW) • <i>Local Government (General) Regulation 2021</i> (NSW)
ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Engagement Strategy • Community Strategic Plan

4. Definitions

Term	Definition
Communication	A process for informing the community about Council services, programs and decisions. Communication may be formal and structured or informal and less structured to meet the needs of a particular audience. Communication is a vital component of community engagement.
Community	All stakeholders including but not limited to residents, ratepayers, interest groups, organisations and individuals with an interest in the Warrumbungle local government area and the services, functions and future direction of the Warrumbungle Shire Council.
Community engagement	The process of WSC and groups of people working cooperatively around an issue prior to WSC determining a decision or a direction on that issue. Engagement can include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gathering and provision of information • Consultation • Participation

5. Policy Statement

Council recognises that effective community engagement and communication has benefit to Council and the community. Such benefits include:

- Better outcomes through understanding needs and views of the community and customers.
- Outcomes that are broadly supported by the community.
- Increased satisfaction with Council services, operations, staff and elected officials.
- Increased awareness, understanding and acceptance of decisions made.
- Development of solutions to local issues through Council and community partnerships.
- Increased community understanding of Council processes and responsibilities.

Community engagement planning will be informed by the Public Participation Spectrum developed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) which outlines five levels of public participation: inform; consult; involve; collaborate; and empower. These five levels are explained further at clause 10.

Council will consider the level of impact and complexity of a project prior to conducting a community engagement process and prepare a community engagement plan and determine appropriate methods for engagement that align with the determined level of impact.

Council will utilise Council owned channels and platforms to inform the community of opportunities for community engagement and to communicate Council services, programs and decisions.

6. Principles

Council will:

- Inform the community about Council's decision-making processes about long term planning, asset management and service delivery.
- Ensure that participation processes are clear about the decision to be made and the level of influence the community can have on the decision.
- Communicate clearly the context and objectives of community engagement processes.
- Provide community members with all appropriate and relevant information about the background to the issue, including existing policies, legislative requirements, opportunities and constraints.
- Use community engagement methods appropriate for the targeted community groups.
- Ensure allocation of adequate resources, including time and skills as well as funding, to participation processes.
- Be respectfully curious about community views and perspectives, free from bias.
- Where appropriate, report on, consider, respond to and act on community input received as part of Council's decision-making processes.

7. When Council should engage

Different issues under consideration by Council will have varying requirements for community engagement. Council representatives and staff are responsible for determining if, and to what extent, community engagement is required as appropriate to their role and function.

Council will undertake a formal community engagement process in the following circumstances:

- Where there is a legislative/statutory requirement.
- When Council resolves to undertake community consultation.
- On issues that have the potential to affect the delivery of services or facilities that contribute to community well-being, growth and prosperity.

- When identifying and understanding the needs and priorities of the community for the purposes of strategic planning.
- To monitor and evaluate community satisfaction with Council or Council services.

Under the *Local Government Act 1993* (NSW) Council is required to publicly exhibit certain information for a set period of time. Notification in respect to Development Applications is governed by the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (NSW). Any statutory obligation must be adhered to.

8. Preparing a Community Engagement Plan

Council staff will ensure the following steps are followed when planning and undertaking community engagement:

1. Define the project.
2. Determine the level of impact and influence.
3. Determine type of participation.
4. Review stakeholder and select appropriate engagement methods (participation methods must consider accessibility for intended audience).
5. Develop timeframe and resources.
6. Consider feedback, reporting and evaluating.

Council's Communications team is to be informed of new community engagement programs and will provide advice on preparing and implementing engagement plans.

9. Compliance with Council Policy and Respective Legislation

To comply with Council Policy and respective legislation the following special considerations apply:

9.1 Submissions

In circumstances where Council requires members of the public to make written submissions all submissions received will be regarded as public and available for general access unless the writer specifically requests that they want their personal details to be suppressed.

Written submissions include correspondence received in person, email, completion of online form or other paper-based submission form.

Submissions must be addressed to the General Manager.

9.2 Surveys

Use of surveys including online surveys, polls and questionnaires are to be undertaken in line with the *Privacy Act 1998* (Cth) and Council's Privacy Management Plan. This includes:

- Securely storing recipients' personal information.
- Disclosing how and why personal information is being collected and how it will be used.
- Clearly identifying the survey as being undertaken by or on behalf of Warrumbungle Shire Council.
- Developing and publicising any terms or conditions for the award of participation incentives.
- When utilising online collection tools action should be taken to restrict multiple entries from the same user.
- Telephone surveys must be completed in accordance with the 'do not call register'.

The result of customer surveys undertaken by individual branches are to be forwarded to Council's Communications team to maintain a central repository of survey results.

The Communications team is to provide assistance to other branches in respect of the development of customer and community surveys where necessary.

9.3 Public Exhibition

Tenders and changes to Council policies must go on public exhibition in accordance with the requirements of the *Local Government Act 1993* (NSW) and the *Local Government (General Regulation) 2021* (NSW). Council may resolve to place other documents on public exhibition and invite public submission from time to time.

10. Level of Engagement

Council will call for different levels of engagement depending on the issue, and its immediate or long term impact on the community and at different stages of a project.

The five levels of engagement outlined in the International Association of Public Participation Spectrum shown below will be utilised:

- **Inform.** To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.
- **Consult.** To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.
- **Involve.** To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.
- **Collaborate.** To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.
- **Empower.** To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.

The identified level of engagement and its financial implication for each project will be noted in Council Business Papers. The level will be determined in consultation with the appropriate Manager and Director.

11. Responsibilities

Council is responsible for reviewing the Policy from time to time to ensure it complies with the Legislation and is achieving the Council's intent.

Council Managers and staff undertaking community engagement and communication are responsible for:

- Informing the Communications team of information being communicated to the community or undertaking community engagement.
- Preparing communications plans as part of planning processes for projects that impact the community.
- Undertaking training and development in community engagement to build capability.
- Advising all relevant internal stakeholders (such as Customer Service, Communications, Executive staff) before commencing community engagement, a communication plan or campaign.
- Complying with Council policies.
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Communications team is responsible for:

- Maintaining organisational accountability for Community Engagement and overseeing compliance with Council policy.
- Maintaining a register of customer and community surveys undertaken by branches and divisions across Council.
- Providing advice and assistance in the development and implementation of community engagement and communication plans.

12. Getting Help

The staff members who can assist with enquiries about this Policy are:

Position/s: Manager Corporate Services

Department: Corporate Services within Corporate and Community Services

13. Version Control

Review Date: By September 2025

Staff member responsible for review: Manager Corporate Services

Policy Name	Version	Resolution	Date
Community Liaison and Communication Policy	1	335/1920	19 March 2020
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