2022

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Acknowledgement of Country

Council acknowledges the Wallumedegal of the Eora Nation as the traditional custodians of all land and water of the Hunters Hill local government area. Council pays respect to Elders past, present and future and extends this respect to all Aboriginal peoples living or visiting the Hunters Hill local government area.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Effective and meaningful engagement is at the heart of local government and the Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) process. It helps communities shape their own futures and informs the vision and direction of Council.

Every council in NSW is required to develop a Community Engagement Strategy (CES) to support development of plans, policies, programs and key activities. This includes those relating to IP&R, as well as strategic plans and programs required under other legislation.

This strategy does not replace the decision-making powers of elected Councillors or the General Manager, it does enhance the capacity of Council to make well-informed decisions that clearly demonstrate community buy-in and support.

Through feedback gathered during the public exhibition phase of the draft Community Engagement Strategy this document has additional focus on the importance of ensuring that as many community voices as possible are heard on a range of matters, whether they be considered low impact or high impact, the level of social awareness and understanding is not directly related to the number of people involved.

And finally, it is important to outline that Council will continue to ensure that all of the objectives and actions within the Integrated Reporting and Planning are undertaken with community priorities front of mind; that Council strive for broad ranging engagement activities in circumstances that dictate legislative minimums. That continuing to investigate best practice engagement be a standard that Council strives to achieve.

1.1 PRINCIPLES

Our engagement principles help shape how we interact, communicate and receive feedback from our community. We follow the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) core values to develop and implement our engagement programs, with our key principles being to:

01 Enable our community to be involved in decision making.

02 Enable our community to influence decisions.

03 Recognise the needs and interests of all participants.

04 Seek out those who could potentially be affected.

05 Support participants to design how they participate.

06 Provide all relevant information to enable participation in a meaningful way.

07 Provide as much information as possible, to as many community members as possible regardless of the size of the project, program or service.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

A number of objectives have been developed to ensure that Council is enabling the communication and engagement process, these include:

01 Supporting the community to understand what is being proposed.

02 Determining where financial priorities should be focussed.

03 Understanding what services the community use.

04 Gaining feedback from residents about what is important and where Council funding should be allocated.

05 Raising awareness about local issues.

06 Enabling feedback about the vision for the future.

07 Ensuring that transparent and independent engagement is used.

08 Building Council's reputation amongst the community for being transparent and a conduit for positive change, built on community need and perception.

All of these objectives show Council's commitment to engagement, which provides the community with genuine opportunities to inform projects, strategies, services and decisions.

Council will strive to use engagement methods that are statistically valid and transparent and reduce a reliance on methods that are considered non factual and open to uncertainty.

The flow on effect being that Council can then develop individual engagement plans for specific projects that reflect the principles and objectives outlined in this strategy in a more meaningful and transparent way.

2. STAKEHOLDERS

The following section highlights Council's need to identify all relevant stakeholders, determine the parameters about what engagement methods will reach these stakeholders and understand that there may be challenges and barriers to engagement.

2.1 IDENTIFICATION AND ANALYSIS

If Council is to effectively engage, it must have a clear picture of who it is engaging with. The diverse nature of the community highlights that a one-size-fits-all engagement approach will not work – Council must constantly employ a range of engagement methods.

The 2016 Census data outlines that Hunter's Hill Council is home to approximately 15,000 people who come from a variety of backgrounds/cultures and have a variety of interests and needs. There is a high proportion of people in the younger age groups (0-17 years) as well as a higher proportion of people in the older age groups (60+ years). We come from a variety of backgrounds. Over 26% of our community were born overseas; United Kingdom, China, New Zealand, Italy, South Africa, Hong Kong, United States of America, India, Greece and Malaysia being our top 10 places of birth outside Australia. And interestingly, 20% of our population speak a language other than English at home, including; Mandarin, Cantonese, Italian, Greek, Arabic, Spanish, French, Russian, Korean and Persian/Dari/Hazaraghi.

Approximately 6.5% or 1000 community members need help in their day-to-day lives due to disability. In the age group 85 and over there has been a significant increase in the need for support services. Analysis of the need for assistance of people in Hunters Hill compared to Greater Sydney shows that there is a higher proportion of people who need assistance with core activities.

Analysis of unpaid childcare compared to Greater Sydney shows that there is a higher proportion of people (over 30%) who provide unpaid childcare in Hunters Hill. This statistic is growing, so we can assume that family members, including grandparents are taking part in child minding at a higher rate than other council areas.

Understanding the community from a demographic perspective will ensure Council delivers projects, programs and services that meet genuine need.

2.2 CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

The barriers to communication and engagement are important to highlight. Being mindful of challenges and barriers can assist in addressing gaps and obstacles that reduce community input to important discussions.

The most common barriers of communication include; irrelevance to the receiver, lack of attention and interest, distractions, physical disabilities such as speech difficulties or hearing problems, differences in perception and viewpoint, and physical barriers to non-verbal communication.

2.3 TARGET AUDIENCE

It is important to ensure that the broader the access to community opinion, the better information and understanding will be for stakeholders to make informed decisions.

Council is mindful that there is a need for a greater sense of involvement to achieve a mutual sense of ownership. This can be achieved through identifying target audiences through the following avenues:

- Community members and organisations who have an active interest and have a strong view about, all phases of the discussion/project.
- Community members and organisations who may have particular expertise or an actual role on behalf of those who may be directly affected.
- Community members and organisations who will have a general interest in giving feedback or taking part in Council initiated projects.
- Groups and individuals who are not directly affected by the issue but have been encouraged to take an active interest by those who are affected.
- People who would normally feel excluded or under represented.
- Communities of interest whose activities might be affected by a proposal.

The Hunter's Hill Council community is an active and engaged group. Council has developed strong working relationships with many community groups and individuals.

Council will also develop and identify any partnerships between groups and individuals and any issues that may link or have past association with target audiences, such as the Gladesville and Hunters Hill Shopping Precincts.

2.4 INTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

A vital component of the community engagement process includes identifying and understanding internal stakeholders who will be impacted by or who have an interest in a decision. In addition, Council has a number of committees made up of staff, Councillors as well as external community members and they convene on issues relevant to specific topic areas. Internal stakeholders include:

- Councillors
- Council Committees, advisory groups and working parties

- staff
- contractors engaged by Council

2.5 EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

Council will engage with the following individuals/groups on various matters because our engagement aims to reach everyone in the community to ensure a range of views are heard:

- all residents
- precinct committees
- religious groups & organisations
- sporting groups
- chambers of commerce
- mainstreet committees
- schools
- childcare/long day care/family day care/preschools
- businesses
- environmental interest groups
- transport authorities
- local members of parliament
- neighbouring/other local councils
- community groups
- active industry groups or associations
- CALD groups
- community service organisations

- heritage/conservation groups/Hunters Hill Historical Society/Hunters Hill Trust
- families
- children (via school networks)
- youth
- elderly residents
- residents who have access issues
- disability and wellbeing support services
- health facilities and support services
- transport authorities and services
- vulnerable people
- those living in assisted care
- potential sponsors
- people who work or visit Hunters Hill

2.6 INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION

Hunter's Hill Council recognises that some members of our Municipality are more difficult to reach due to a number of barriers already discussed such as language and accessibility barriers.

Council is committed to addressing the gaps in inclusive participation by:

- Translating resources and information where necessary.
- Avoiding technical jargon and using language which is easy to understand, particularly in regards to planning matters.
- Providing language aids at Council events where necessary.
- Providing information in accessible formats.

- Ensuring a variety of engagement methods are made available; print, social media, direct mail, email, etc.
- Ensuring Council venues are accessible.
- Meeting the commitments outlined in the Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) and the Pedestrian Access Mobility Plan (PAMP).

There are groups that Council will ensure to recognise including our culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, particularly because diversity is vital in any community and with 20% of our community speaking a language other than English at home it is important that Council does more to seek the opinions of these residents.

Council has not previously translated our communication and engagement materials according to our demographic profiles. However, Council will ensure to work closely with CALD communities to better service their needs and understand their opinions regarding our projects, programs and services.

Hunters Hill also has vulnerable people in the community, who live, work and visit this area. This includes people who live in social housing, which represents 6.2% of renters compared to Greater Sydney which has 4.6% of renters in social housing. Other vulnerable people include low income households, the elderly, people living with disability, people experiencing homelessness and LGBTQI people.

Council also, importantly, needs to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Trait Islander peoples. Council is committed to working with the Indigenous community about matters relating to land, water, language, culture and cultural heritage.

3. METHODS TO GATHER FEEDBACK

Hunter's Hill Council strives to deliver meaningful, informed and genuine community participation to inform Council's decision making process.

To achieve this, Council must use a variety of methods to gather genuine and meaningful feedback.

To maintain proactive and best practice community engagement Council will explore and utilise contemporary and traditional tools of engagement and be open to new and innovative ways to engage. Engagement techniques will be selected based on the project scope and level of community impact. Engagement methods will be tailored to encourage as much participation as possible.

3.1 ENGAGEMENT OPTIONS

Generally, Council aims to keep the community informed of opportunities for engagement through the following methods:

- digital approaches such as email, newsletters and social media.
- advertisements and articles in the media
- information and displays in our service centres, The Yarn and community facilities/buildings
- Council's newsletter and eNews
- mailing lists related to specific topics.

More specifically, engagement is about an ongoing conversation. It takes many shapes and forms through a variety of channels, including (but not limited to):

- stakeholder meetings
- focus groups
- precinct Meetings
- posters
- storyboards
- community events and festivals
- pop-up information sessions
- front line staff through our Customer Service Centres
- website
- visual preference surveys
- media releases
- Town Hall or public meetings

- social media
- advertisements
- surveys (print, online and telephone)
- video and YouTube clips
- eNews
- public notices
- walk or bike tour
- pilot projects, including place making events
- youth workshops
- facilitated workshops

3.2 LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENTS

There are legislative requirements about the mandatory level of engagement for some Council matters, including:

- setting rates/special rates
- integrated planning and reporting (including the Community Strategic Plan, Delivery Program, Operational Plan, Long Term Financial Plan, Asset Management Plan)
- Local Environment Plans (LEPs) and Development Control Plans (DCPs)
- Local Strategic Planning Statement (LSPS)
- masterplans
- Plans of Management (PoMs)
- Council meetings
- Development Applications (DAs)
- local policies (defined within the NSW Local Government Act as policies concerning approvals and orders).

These matters require:

- public exhibition of no less than 28 days
- public notice of no less than 42 days (local policies, PoMs, etc)
- notification in Council's Business Paper
- advertisements (website, print)
- Councillor Briefings and bulletins
- formal approvals from State Government Ministers, e.g., Minister for Crown Lands when dealing with plans of management
- formal approvals from State Government Departments.

Each of these options gives community members an opportunity to gain further information/understanding about particular topics as well as the opportunity to have their say. In circumstances where there is a public exhibition period of 28 days this gives community members an opportunity to have time to understand the matter and formulate a more considered response.

The Office of Local Government have also advised Council that consideration needs to be given to Council's Community Participation Plan. The Community Participation Plan was developed to guide Council's LSPS. The Department of Planning and Environment recognise that community participation delivers better planning results for the people of NSW. This Community Engagement Strategy shares the same principles of community participation.

3.3 DETERMINING SIGNIFICANCE

Following on from understanding legislative requirements, determining the significance of a matter is sometimes an exercise in judgement. Council must assess how a proposal, decision, issue or matter may affect people, services, facilities and infrastructure.

Significance will be considered as a continuum - ranging from day-to-day matters, right up to those with what may be considered high impact and very high significance. It is important to clarify that often what may initially be considered a small or low impact issue, can in fact have a high social impact.

This leads to questions about how to determine the significance of a project, program or service if there isn't already a legislative requirement about minimum community engagement and notification.

Council's approach to determining significance is to consider:

- The number of people affected (even if small numbers of the community are involved or affected there may be a large impact), the degree to which they are affected and the likely impact of a decision.
- Whether this type of decision has a history of generating wide public interest within the local area.
- The impact of the decision on intended service levels, including the start/stop of any activity or project.
- The degree to which a decision or proposal can be reversed should circumstances warrant.

When Council has decided what level of significance a matter has, it will consider how it should engage with the community. Engagement is also a continuum; at one end of the spectrum Council can simply forward information to the community and at the other end of the spectrum the community is empowered to make a decision.

3.4 PROVIDING INFORMATION

At a minimum, Council will provide the following information when conducting engagement:

- What is being proposed?
- Why is it being proposed?
- What the options and consequences are for the proposal?
- If a plan or policy or similar document is proposed to be adopted, a draft of the proposed plan, policy, or other document.
- If a plan or policy or similar document is proposed to be amended, details of the proposed changes to the plan, policy, or other document.
- What impacts (if any) may occur if the proposal goes ahead?
- How submitters and participants can provide their views.
- The timeframe for consultation and engagement.
- How submitters and participants will be informed about the outcome.

3.5 REASONS FOR COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

When developing engagement processes, Council needs to consider the various reasons why community members may wish to be involved in the planning process.

Some examples include:

- Some people will have 'place-based' interests - they are concerned for the future of their particular suburb/area.
- Some will share a common interest, such as a business group, or a sporting organisation.
- Others will share common needs, for example people who need child care or public transport.
- Some will be motivated by negative experiences with Council and will want to address specific issues.
- Some will be motivated by other concerns, for example, to sustainability or good governance.

Considering peoples motivations can assist greatly with any engagement framework. Addressing any issues people have had with Council in the early planning stages can greatly reduce time spent later on in the project.

3.6 IAP2 SPECTRUM

The IAP2 (International Association of Public Participation) Spectrum is commonly used in all levels of government, not for profit, businesses, charitable organisations, etc, and has been recommended as a baseline tool for all councils in developing their Community Engagement Strategy.

In summary, IAP2 provides an engagement framework that can be adapted to any project and shows that differing levels of participation are legitimate depending on the goals, timeframes, resources and levels of concern in the decision to be made.

The levels of participation are outlined below:

01 INFORM
Typically means that a decision has been made or action is needed so the community and stakeholders are provided with information.

02 CONSULT
The community can provide feedback on the issues, options and decisions.

03 INVOLVE
The community's concerns and feedback are reflected in decision-making.

04 COLLABORATE
The community and Council partner in decision-making towards a common goal.

05 EMPOWER
The community and stakeholders have final decision-making power.

The table over page highlights a number of Council's major engagement activities and a level of engagement which will meet or better legislative requirements. This table is not definitive and simply outlines some of our major activities and the minimum engagement of 'inform and consult' that we will undertake in relation to each one. Council will always strive to inform, consult, involve, collaborate and empower in a meaningful way across all activity areas.

Activity	IAP2	Notification/ engagement	Minimum level of communication	Approval, adoption, endorsement
DAs	Inform, consult, involve	Varies depending on DA type	Public notice on Council's website	Approval under delegated authority or Planning Panels.
General policies	Inform, consult	No minimum notification period	Council Agenda, Business Paper available online	Adoption
Activities requiring submissions to the Sate Government	Inform, consult, involve	State Government department/s, extensive community consultation and exhibition periods	Council Agenda, Business Paper available online, advertisement in newspaper, website, eNews, receipt of community feedback to be included in submissions	Approval and adoption
Significant policies (LSPS, Housing Strategy, etc)	Inform, consult, involve, collaborate	State Government department/s, extensive community consultation and exhibition periods	Council Agenda, Business Paper available online, advertisement in newspaper, website, eNews	Approval and Adoption
Plans of Management	Inform, consult, involve, collaborate, empower	Crown Lands, extensive community consultation and exhibition periods up to 42 days	Council Agenda, Business Paper available online, advertisement in newspaper, website, eNews	Approval and adoption
Masterplans	Inform, consult, involve, collaborate, empower	28 day exhibition	Council Agenda, Business Paper available online, advertisement in newspaper, website, eNews	Approval and adoption
Key land use planning documents (S.7.11, VPAs)	Inform, consult	28 day exhibition	Council Agenda, Business Paper available online, advertisement in newspaper, website, eNews	Approval and adoption
Fees and charges	Inform, consult	28 day exhibition	Council Agenda, Business Paper available online, advertisement in newspaper, website, eNews	Approval and adoption
Integrated Planning & Reporting	Inform, consult, involve, collaborate, empower	28 day exhibition and extensive community engagement	Council Agenda, Business Paper available online, advertisement in newspaper, website, eNews	Approval and adoption

4.0 MEASUREMENT & EVALUATION

Capturing feedback about different engagement approaches and activities, for example, community satisfaction surveys and exit surveys from engagement events, provides Council with data and responses to matters affecting both individuals and the entire community.

Monitoring and reviewing Council's engagement activities and methods provides an avenue to identify areas for improvement and to realise objectives more efficiently. Council will use a variety of evaluation methods to assess its progress including:

▶ Undertaking quarterly and annual audits to check progress against the objectives identified in this strategy

▶ Reviewing the Engagement Strategy annually to ensure best practice and legislative requirements

▶ Undertaking a community satisfaction survey at the commencement of each term of a new Council

▶ Monitoring feedback and participation rates in a variety of engagement activities

4.1 WHERE TO GET FURTHER INFORMATION

There are a number of supporting resources available to gain further information or to clarify the commonly used directions outlined within this policy:

- Your Peak Body for Engagement | IAP2 Australasia
- Community Engagement Strategy - Office of Local Government NSW
- Division of Local Government - IP&R Manual March (nsw.gov.au)
- Community Participation Plan (nsw.gov.au)