

COUNCIL POLICY

Community Engagement



Policy Name	Community Engagement
Policy Number	CS07
Responsible Section	Customer Experience and Engagement
Responsible Department	Corporate Services
Date Last Adopted	12 March 2024
Date of Next Review	March 2027
Applicable Legislation	Local Government Act 1999 Local Government Regulations 2013 Local Government (Public Health Emergency) Amendment Act 2020
Related Governance Documents	Communications and Engagement Framework
City Plan Theme	Economy – A city of opportunity. Community – A city that sounds community wellbeing. Placemaking – A city where people love to be. Leadership – A city confident in its leaders.

Purpose/Objective

This Policy outlines the principles to guide Council in engaging the community in its decision-making processes. It states Council's commitment to the requirements for public consultation as set out in the *Local Government Act 1999* ("the **LG Act**") and involving the community in shaping the future of the City.

Scope

This Policy applies to the Council and its employees, contractors, agents and/or consultants acting on its behalf when:

- the LG Act requires Council to consult in accordance with its Community Engagement Policy; and
- Council elects to undertake community engagement over and above relevant legislative requirements.

Where the LG Act requires Council to conduct consultation in accordance with this Policy, the minimum steps that will be taken pursuant to section 50(4) of the LG Act are:

1. the publication of a notice in a newspaper circulating within the area of the Council and on a website, as determined by the Chief Executive Officer, that describes the matter under consideration and invites interested persons to make submissions in relation to the matter within a period (which must be at least 21 days) stated in the notice; and
2. consideration by Council of any submissions made in response to a notice under paragraph 1 (above).

In some instances, the LG Act sets out additional requirements that Council must follow in undertaking public consultation (i.e. such as the manner of publication of notices and the need for public meetings). In these cases, the Council will ensure public consultation is conducted in accordance with any additional requirements.

Where legislation other than the LG Act requires public notification and/or community consultation on particular matters, the requirements of that legislation will apply in place of this Policy. However, when the Council elects to consult beyond the minimum statutory requirements of either the LG Act, or any other legislation, the requirements under this Policy will be applied.

Council may also undertake broader community engagement activities when it believes this will enhance its decision-making or its ability to deliver on the outcomes stated in the City Plan 2030.

A decision on whether to undertake broader community engagement will be determined by a number of factors including the impact on the community, the practicality of community engagement and the timeliness of delivery. Each engagement process will be considered on its individual merits.

When public consultation is **not** prescribed by the LG Act, or otherwise when Council elects to undertake community engagement above legislative requirements, the following is relevant:

- Council does not have a statutory obligation to undertake public consultation or community engagement;
- Council may choose to undertake or not undertake community engagement, at its absolute discretion; and
- Council's ability to make a decision (including to commence a project or activity) is not contingent on the Council first determining whether or not to undertake community engagement.

Principles

The Council will apply the following principles to community engagement:

Inclusive Decision-Making Process

Council recognises the importance of the community to be informed and have the ability to participate in decisions that affect them. The Council will endeavour to include the community in its decision-making processes, where appropriate, and will ensure that key decisions are explained in plain English.

Inclusive Engagement

Council believes that all parties with an interest in, or who are impacted by, an issue should have the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process. Council will use plain English and will offer engagement opportunities using interpreters and/or cultural advisers, as required.

Community-Oriented Service Delivery

Council believes that community engagement is fundamental in order for the Council to provide appropriate and well-informed programs and services to the community.

Transparency and Open Communication

Council is committed to ensuring that the community has access to relevant information so that it may participate in community engagement activities in a meaningful way. All of Council's engagement materials will use plain English, will be easy to find and will be accessible.

Genuine Engagement

Council will not engage beyond legislative requirements simply for engagement sake. Council will clearly communicate the aims and objectives of all community engagement activities and will apply an appropriate level of engagement to best serve the interests of the community and Council.

Effective Design and Management of the Process

Council will ensure that all community engagement processes are well designed using contemporary best practice approaches to fit the scope and nature of the project. Careful planning of engagement strategies and activities will ensure that a minimum of 21 days are available for the community to consider and respond.

Policy

1. Community engagement compliments, but does not replace, the decision- making functions of Council. Whether community or stakeholder opinion is divided or overwhelmingly in one (1) direction, while this is a relevant factor to take into account, the final decision-making power rests with Council or the Chief Executive Officer.
2. Council's community engagement activities falls into two (2) categories:
 - 2.1 legislative compliance, which refers to activities prescribed by relevant legislation, including the LG Act; and
 - 2.2 non-legislative matters, which involve instances where the Council has no statutory requirement to undertake public consultation, but determines to engage the community beyond its legislative requirements.
3. Appropriate approval will be sought for community engagement processes and programs as required by legislation, or in cases of non-legislative consultation activities.
4. The community will be provided with the information necessary to provide an informed opinion. Information provided to identified stakeholders will:
 - 4.1 be clearly presented and relevant;
 - 4.2 be readily accessible;
 - 4.3 clearly define the aspects of the matter, subject to community engagement;
 - 4.4 be provided with due regard to the resources available and to relevant legislation, Council Policies and Codes of Practice;
 - 4.5 clearly state that submissions received will be treated as public documents;
 - 4.6 provide contact details for further enquiries; and
 - 4.7 outline the decision-making process of the matter, subject to the community engagement.
5. Appropriate and timely opportunities are to be provided to the community for the purposes of gaining access to information and to be involved in community engagement programs.
6. Council may involve the community in its community engagement programs by inviting submissions and/or participation in engagement activities as it may deem fit for the requirements of the issue and/or project, subject of the community engagement.

7. To ensure confidence in the transparency and integrity of Council's consultation processes:
 - 7.1 all submissions for legislatively required community engagements must include a method of contact for the respondent. Collection of method of contact for non-legislatively required engagement processes is not mandatory but will be considered on the merits of each engagement;
 - 7.2 a copy of all submissions will be made available to Councillors;
 - a) Information may be removed or redacted from submissions where individuals are identified and where submissions may be considered offensive or defamatory; and
 - 7.3 reports to the Council will include a summary of the key themes raised in the submissions received.
8. Council commits to evaluating and continually improving its community engagement practices.

Availability of the Policy

This Policy will be available for inspection at the Council during ordinary business hours, at no cost. It has also been placed on Council's website – www.cityofpae.sa.gov.au.

Definitions

Community	Is any individual (or group of individuals), organisation, government or non-government entities with an interest in the outcome of the Council's decision.
Community engagement	<i>"Is about involving the community in decision making processes, which is critical in the successful development of acceptable policies and decisions in government, the private sector and the community."</i>
Submission	An opportunity for a member of the community to express an opinion in writing (including on Council's community engagement website) relating to an issue and/or proposal which will be taken into account in Council's decision-making process.