



# Bellinghen Shire Council **POLICY**

Internal Use Only

External Use

## Community Engagement

Department: EHP, Engineering, Corporate Services  
Responsible Officer: Director Corporate Services  
Contact Officer: General Manager  
Date Approved by General Manager:  
Date Confirmed by SCC: N/A

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### 1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to outline Council's approach to engaging with our community.

This policy, as a component of the Bellinghen Community Engagement Framework seeks to enable the Bellinghen community to be actively involved in Council decision making and activities and to provide a comprehensive and transparent approach to consultation.

### 2. SCOPE

This policy applies to all facets of Council's operations.

It defines the principles underpinning Council's engagement activities and provides the broad framework for engagement.

Bellinghen Shire Council has considered public participation models in the formulation of this Policy. The approach outlined in this document is considered appropriate in a Local Government setting and is broadly based on the spectrum of public participation developed in the International Institute for Public Participation (IAP2).

Council engages our community(ies) in a number of ways:

**Provision of information:** We can provide the community with information to help them understand a situation or problem.

**Consultation:** We can consult with interested parties to obtain community feedback on alternatives / decisions.

**Involvement:** We can work directly with the community throughout a process to ensure that community concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.

**Collaboration:** We can also partner with the community in each aspect of a decision making process including the development of alternatives and identification of the preferred solution.

### 3. DEFINITIONS

*Communication* – Generally refers to the exchange of information from Council to our community. It also includes the exchange of information or views from our community to the Council.

*Community* – Includes all the people who live, work, study, own property, conduct private or government business, visit or use the services, facilities and public spaces and places of our Shire. The community can be referred to as stakeholders or be comprised of stakeholders.

*Consultation* – allows the community to provide comment and input. It is a process where input and or feedback is taken into consideration in Council’s decision making processes.

*Engagement* – A broader term which includes opportunities for participation by our community in decision-making. Consultation is one level of engagement.

*Provision of Information* – is letting people know what is happening with Council projects and processes.

*Stakeholder* – is a person or group who has or feels they have an interest or stake in a project or issue.

*Submission* – is a formal response to a public document made during a public exhibition period.

#### **4. POLICY STATEMENT**

Bellingen Shire Council recognises that community engagement and participation processes are an important part of local democracy. Effective engagement makes good business practice and is critical to good governance.

Our approach to community engagement is based on the Social Justice Principles of equity, access, participation and rights and is also underpinned by the following principles:

- Open and inclusive
- Trust respect and accountability
- Early engagement and clarity in the process
- Consideration and feedback
- Skills and resources

Council is committed to engaging with our community and recognises that a standard of consultation should be undertaken commensurate with the nature, complexity and impact of the issue(s) involved.

Community engagement is about involving our community in decisions which affect them and has a key role to play in the development and implementation of policies programs services and projects by being responsive to our community.

Community engagement involves seeking involvement, broad informed agreement and the best solution for Council and our community. It does not necessarily mean achieving consensus.

#### **5. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

Engagement is part of everyone’s role. Every staff member is involved in some way in engaging our community.

Directors, Managers and Team Leaders are responsible for ensuring that the appropriate level of engagement occurs in accordance with this policy.

#### **6. RELATED PROCEDURES**

Engagement is to occur in accordance with the Bellingen Shire Council Community Engagement Strategy and matrix within that document.

The Community Engagement Toolkit seeks to provide practical guidance for staff on methods they can use to consult with the community and a checklist of tasks that should be undertaken to ensure that the consultation process is consistent and appropriate in each situation. It also

provides a communications plan for effective communication of messages on projects Council is delivering.

*Note – this toolkit is still under development*

## **7. LEGAL PARAMETERS**

### **NSW Local Government Act 1993**

Section 402(4) of the NSW Local Government Act 1993 states;

(4) “The council must establish and implement a strategy (its “community engagement strategy”), based on social justice principles, for engagement with the local community when developing the community strategic plan.

### **NSW Environmental, Planning and Assessment Act 1979 and Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2000**

The Legislative provisions of the Environmental Planning & Assessment Act 1979 and Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2000 take precedent over this Policy. However, the legislative requirements are a minimum and a more comprehensive consultation process may occur in accordance with this Policy.

Council's Development Control Plan identifies community engagement and consultation for the Development Approvals process.

## **8. ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS**

This Policy forms part of Council's Community Engagement Framework. The Community Engagement Framework includes

- This Community Engagement Policy
- The Community Engagement Strategy
- The Community Engagement Toolkit