Communications & Engagement

Policy

October 2020

CENTRAL COAST COUNCIL

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POLICY STATEMENT

Good communication is about clearly conveying information between an individual or organisation and its stakeholders, including employees, community, customers, industry and government on matters of mutual interest to raise awareness and to inform.

Community engagement is a process, not an outcome. It is a process where the community has a role in the Council's decision-forming process. Taking into consideration community views, opinions and expectations is an important factor for many of the Central Coast Council's (the Council's) decision-making areas.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the Communication and Engagement Policy (the Policy) is to define a transparent pathway for the Council's communications and engagement processes that can be measured and reported in order to provide accountability for activities undertaken by the Council in a particular area. The Policy supports a commitment to open, transparent community engagement and two-way communication between the Council and the communities it serves.

The Policy aims to:

. Demonstrate the Council's commitment to continually improve the way it communicates and engages with residents in Central Coast community's;

. Provide direction and guidance for the Council's staff and elected members; and

. Demonstrate the Council's commitment to good governance.

SCOPE

The Policy applies to Councillors, employees, volunteers, as well as contractors who provide services for the Council.

COMMUNICATIONS

Communication is at the core of everything that the Council undertakes. In accordance with the Council's values; good communication and engagement is an important part of the Council's culture that serves in improving service delivery and assisting in informing, empowering and connecting with the local community.

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GUIDING PRINCIPLES – COMMUNICATIONS

The principles that underpin the Council's approach to communications:

.   *Timely and Clear Information* - Communicate timely and clear information about matters of broad community significance that are being considered by the Council;

.   *Two-way Communication* – All Council staff understand the importance and value of open two-way communication between the Council and community as being fundamental to effective decision-making and service delivery;

.   *Transparent and Accountable* - Transparent and accountable communication processes promote good governance; and

.   *Sustainable and Balanced Decisions* – Promoting the Council's sustainable and balanced decision-forming processes that recognise and integrate the community's communication needs and interests in the Council's decision-making process.

MEDIA RELATIONS

The Council's Office of the General Manager is responsible for coordinating, approving and dispatching all media releases, photo opportunities and media briefings following authorisation by the General Manager.

The Mayor is the official spokesperson on behalf of the Council and the General Manager is the official spokesperson for all operational matters.

While it is recognised that Councillors are able to speak to the media as a function of their role, it is also recommended that they advise the Office of the General Manager of any media interactions in order to brief the Mayor and create a Council-wide perspective.

On issues where there is a significant and ongoing involvement by a Councillor, with the agreement of the Mayor, the Office of the General Manager will contact the relevant Councillor/s to appear in media photographs in relation to issues, programs or services pertaining to the Councillor.

The General Manager may authorise Directors or Group Leaders to make public statements to the media.

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The following categories shall apply in relation to the determination of spokespeople:

Category	Type of Issue	Spokes person
1.	. Council Policy; . Issues of a political nature; and . Highly significant and/or sensitive matters or projects affecting the Council or the entire Local Government Area.	Mayor.
2.	Local matters.	Mayor or Delegate.
3.	Operational matters.	General Manager or Delegate.
4.	Technical matters.	General Manager or Delegate.

The Mayor is responsible for allocating public speaking roles at Council organised events requiring Councillor participation.

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

The Council will use a mix of digital, mail, print, radio and television media communication channels to ensure that the community and other relevant stakeholders are offered:

. Timely and clear information about matters of broad community significance that are being considered by the Council; and

. An appropriate opportunity for input.

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INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

The Employee Communication and Engagement Policy – January 2020 should be read in conjunction with this Policy, which empathises that Council staff communication be clear and respectful in order to promote effective workplace performance and staff relationship building.

The General Manager will ensure that employees receive timely and accurate information about matters that may broadly affect the community and/or their employment via various channels including, regular Staff Update newsletters and all of staff emails.

SOCIAL MEDIA

There is an expectation that councils will engage with community members more thoroughly and regularly, addressing issues promptly, maintaining transparency and remaining openly accountable for community-based decisions. Communicating with the community through social media platforms is an effective communication channel to meet these community expectations. This Policy should be read in conjunction with the Social Media Guidelines – October 2020.

Council's social media should be engaging to the community and relevant to the interests and topics of significance, at any given point in time. The following Engagement section in this Policy provides direction and guidance to council staff in order to effectively create engaging social media content for the Central Coast community.

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ENGAGEMENT

Effective engagement is central to understanding the aspirations, needs and priorities of the local community and integrating community input into how related local public services are planned and delivered. The Council will work collaboratively with people linked by the community they live in, special interest groups or affiliated stakeholders to address issues affecting their well-being.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES – ENGAGEMENT

The principles that underpin the Council's approach to engagement:

.   *Inclusive Planning* – The planning and design of engagement processes will adopt a whole-of-project approach and include input from the Council as well as from community groups, stakeholders and interested community members including hard-to-reach groups;

.   *Transparency* – Aiming to engage with the community (wherever possible) before a decision or change is made and being clear about the purpose for, as well as the level or form, of the engagement approach;

.   *Authentically Neutral Intent* – A primary purpose of engagement is to generate public views and ideas to help shape the Council's course of action or Policy path, rather than persuade residents to accept a decision that has already been made;

.   *International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)* – The Council is committed to applying the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum as a best practice framework for community engagement processes;

.   *Equitable and Accessible Participation* – Cooperative arrangements will be created to enable diverse engagement participants to come together to achieve shared goals;

.   *Capability Building* – Council staff and the community will develop skills and 'know how' to achieve positive social change and economic goals; and

.   *Empowerment* – The community will be supported to create partners, networks and/or a voice, in order to manage community-driven project outcomes.

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IAP2'S PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SPECTRUM

Community engagement goes beyond consultation. It extends to the way the Council communicates and engages with residents in local communities and how the Council involves them in dealing with the challenges and opportunities that matter most.

INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
Public Participation Goal	**Public Participation Goal**	**Public Participation Goal**	**Public Participation Goal**	**Public Participation Goal**
To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision, including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.
Example Methods	**Example Methods**	**Example Methods**	**Example Methods**	**Example Methods**
. Fact sheet . Website information	. Survey . Comment form . Focus group	. Workshop . Working group . Representative committee	. Co-design . Co-production . Community of practice	. Collective impact . By decision of Council.

WHEN TO ENGAGE WITH THE COMMUNITY

The Policy is intended to promote planning for engagement as part of any Council project's design. Emphasis is placed upon the benefits of planning for engagement as part of the initial whole-of-project planning stage to better manage the timeframes, cost and resources associated with engagement activities.

The Communications and Engagement Toolkit available on the Council's intranet provides staff a resource to assist with designing, planning and managing engagement processes. The toolkit is comprehensive and includes an engagement methods matrix and various templates. A commitment to whole-of-project planning for engagement is intended to support good project outcomes for the Council and Central Coast.

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The Council may offer an opportunity for communications and engagement when:

. Reviewing existing strategies and proposing a change in strategic direction;

. Substantially changing or reviewing a service, program or project;

. Proposing a new policy or strategy;

. Proposals for changing the way in which public space looks or is used;

. Making rules or regulations that govern the use and enjoyment of public space;

. Major strategic projects;

. Urban redevelopment proposals, such as structure plans, to significantly change the existing amenity or characteristic of an area; and

. Capital works projects including public buildings, centres or other infrastructure.

Opportunities for communications and engagement may also arise when:

. The community raises an issue with the Council for a decision (or outcome) and there are likely to be competing community interests;

. The proposed change is likely to generate an emotive community reaction (strong and mixed views);

. The Council needs more information on which to make an informed decision; and

. An issue may significantly affect the community in terms of economy, lifestyle, environment or amenity of the local community.

MEASURING THE ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Community members are interested to know how their feedback will affect the final decision. Feedback about the final decision may use the structure: what we asked; what you said; and what we did. This simple, user-friendly structure is illustrated below and demonstrates:

.   The clear purpose of the consultation;

.   That community feedback was heard and acknowledged; and

.   How community feedback informed the final decision made by Council.

What We Asked?	What You Said?	What We Did?
.	.	.

The timely and accessible provision of a transparent and objective assessment of the engagement process maintains positive community interest and momentum around a Council engagement program or activity.

The Council uses a variety of reporting formats and staff are encouraged to select a report format that is consistent with the engagement approach used in the community engagement program or activity. A report may, for example, use the format of:

.   A letter to the stakeholders involved in the community engagement program;

.   A draft strategy, plan or policy that is - open for public comment;

.   An 'at a glance' overview key findings and next steps;

.   A corporate report format;

.   A video; and/or

.   A Council report.

Council staff will be supported by the Office of the General Manager when required. However, it is the responsibility of Group Leaders and Directors to ensure project team complete the whole-of-project planning and implementation, including reporting.

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CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Implicit in this Policy is a commitment to the Policy's Guiding Principles and continuous improvement to further promote an organisational culture of community engagement. Hard-to-reach groups will be included in all of the Council's engagement planning.

Implementation will be supported by the Office of the General Manager through:

.   The online Community Engagement Toolkit and resources;

.   Staff support in the whole-of-project planning stage and implementation, when needed;

.   Development of a consultation register to track community engagement programs;

.   Capacity building through partnership in engagement program development; and

.   IAP2 training for key personnel.

STANDARDS (INCLUDING RELEVANT LEGISLATION)

This Policy was developed in accordance with:

RELEVANT LEGISLATION

.   Local Government Act (1993) Tas and;
.   Local Government (General) Regulations 2015.

RELATED POLICIES/DOCUMENTS

.   Central Coast Council Values;
.   Customer Service Charter - April 2019;
.   Code of Conduct of Councillors – January 2019;
.   Employees Code of Conduct – July 2019;
.   Employee Communication and Engagement Policy – January 2020;
.   Information and Communication Technology Guidelines – December 2018; and
.   Social Media Guidelines – October 2020.

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RELATED FORMS/TOOLS

.　　　Central Coast Council Values

.　　　IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum; and

.　　　Intranet Toolkit - Communications and Engagement.

EVALUATION PROCESS

This Policy is reviewed when any of the following occur:

.　　　The related information is amended or replaced;

.　　　Evidence that the Policy no longer meets the needs of Council; or

.　　　Other circumstances as determined from time to time by the General Manager.

Notwithstanding the above, this Policy is to be reviewed at intervals of no more than two years.
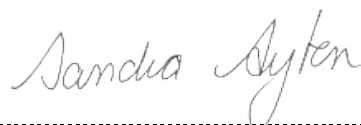
CHANGES TO POLICY

This Policy is to remain in force until otherwise determined by the General Manager.

SANDRA AYTON
GENERAL MANAGER

Date of approval:　19 October 2020

Approved by:

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