

COUNCIL POLICY	
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Responsible Officer/s:	Director Innovation and Performance

1. PURPOSE

1.1. The Communications and Engagement Policy provides guidance for Strathbogie Shire Council (Council) on internal and external communications and engagement. This includes the way Council communicates and engages with stakeholders and involves them in dealing with the challenges and opportunities that matter most. It is the process of working collaboratively with members of our community to make well informed decisions about major developments and strategic directions for the Strathbogie Shire.

1.2. The purpose of this Policy is to:

- 1.2.1. Demonstrate Council's commitment to continually improve the way it communicates and engages with people internally and in our communities;
- 1.2.2. Demonstrate Council's commitment to good governance; and
- 1.2.3. Provide direction to the Council's staff and elected members.

2. SCOPE

This policy applies to all areas of Council and provides a framework for Councillors, Council Officers and consultants and agencies acting on behalf of Council.

OBJECTIVES

- 2.1. The implementation of continuous quality Communications and Engagement strategies will lead to:
 - 2.1.1. Increased opportunities for Council to collaborate with its stakeholders;
 - 2.1.2. Increased capacity and participation by all sections of the community in engagement activities;
 - 2.1.3. Improved knowledge about the role of Council and the democratic decision-making process;
 - 2.1.4. Improved decision making by Council that better reflects the best interests of all sections of our community; and
 - 2.1.5. Improved community confidence in Council and the decisions that it makes
 - 2.1.6. Increased awareness about Council services and functions through an increase in the provision of consistent, timely and reliable information to the community and key stakeholders

3. POLICY STATEMENT

- 3.1. Communications and engagement are essential foundations of a strong community and promote mutual understanding, active citizenry, participation and a healthy democracy. Council recognises effective integrated communications and engagement supports decision making and enhances planning, service delivery and capital works.
- 3.2. Implementation of communications and engagement strategies enables a closer relationship between Council and our community through an active exchange of information and ideas, promoting shared understanding, innovation and decisions which better represent the interests of the broader community. Council will involve community in a variety of interest and issue-based engagements; including changes to service delivery, policy and strategy development; infrastructure and capital works projects; and legislative requirements.

5 PRINCIPLES

5.1. The Principles¹ that underpin Council's approach to Communications and Engagement are:

- **Clear Remit** – a community engagement process must have a clearly defined objective and scope;
- **Informed** - participants in community engagement must have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation;
- **Representative** - participants in community engagement must be representative of the persons and groups affected by the matter the subject of the community engagement;

¹ Local Government Bill Exposure Draft 2018.
<https://www.yourcouncilyourcommunity.vic.gov.au/31547/documents/68132>

- **Supportive and Inclusive** - participants in community engagement are entitled to support to enable meaningful and informed engagement;
- **Transparent and Accountable** - participants in community engagement are informed of the ways in which the community engagement process will influence Council decision making

5.2 The International Association Public Participation (IAP2) [Public Participation Spectrum](#) describes different levels of public participation that may be appropriate in a community engagement program. Differing levels of participation are legitimate depending on the goals, timeframes, resources and level of community interest. When approaching a community engagement activity, Council staff will consider what level of community involvement is required for each project.

5.3 The procedural implementations are documented in specific Strategies, Guidelines and/or Implementation Plans, maintained by the Innovation and Performance Directorate. These documents are reviewed in collaboration with internal and external stakeholders, as required.

5.4 While community engagement is not mandated in all cases, in some matters Council is bound by legislation to engage with the community. In these cases, Council will adhere to the legislative requirement as a minimum standard.

5.5 Major decisions will continue to be subject to debate and a vote at Council Meetings.

6 DEFINITIONS

Terms not defined in this document will be included in program specific guidelines.

COMMUNICATIONS

A process of reaching mutual understanding, in which participants not only exchange information, news, ideas and feelings, but also create a shared meaning.

COMMUNITY

A real or online group of people united by at least one common characteristic such as geography, shared interests, experiences, values or attitudes.

ENGAGEMENT

The many ways in which a council connects with community, and the community connects with a council to exchange views, ideas and information in the development and implementation of strategy, policies, programs and services.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The involvement of those affected by a decision in the decision-making process.

STAKEHOLDER

A person, group or organisation that may be affected by, have a specific interest in, or influence over, a council decision or issue under consideration.

7 RELATED LEGISLATION AND DOCUMENTS

[Local Government Act 1989](#)

[Strathbogie Shire Council Plan](#)

[Strathbogie Shire Council Liveability Plan](#) (Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan)

Community Engagement Strategy 2019 (under review)

Media Policy and Protocols 2019 (under review)

Social Media Policy 2019 (under review)

Customer Service Charter 2019 (under review)

8 CHARTER OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES ACT 2006 AND THE EQUAL OPPORTUNITY ACT 2010

The Council acknowledges the legal responsibility to comply with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 and the Equal Opportunity Act 2010. The Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 is designed to protect the fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens. The Charter gives legal protection to 20 fundamental human rights under four key values that include freedom, respect, equality and dignity.

8 FEEDBACK

Council staff and community may provide feedback about this document by emailing info@strathbogie.vic.gov.au.