



Sorell Council

Community Engagement Strategy

2012

Sorell Council's Community Engagement Strategy seeks to facilitate a cultural change in the way Council engages with the Community. It has been produced in response to community expectation and calls from local residents for greater input into Council decisions which directly affect them.

The strategy is designed to form the foundation for the way in which Council's community engagement is undertaken, ensuring a consistent approach which is in line with national and international best practice

What is community engagement?

Community engagement is about Council providing opportunities for the involvement of the community in issues and the creation of solutions that affect the municipality. It involves actively listening to and considering what the community has to say when making decisions.

The Local Government Association of Tasmania (LGAT)

...recognises that community engagement is vital to the democratic process and contributes to building balanced healthy communities.

Local Government understands community engagement embodies the core elements of access, information, consultation and participation.

Effective engagement centres around implementing processes which facilitate clear and effective two-way communication between Council and the community.

Engagement is about

- **Gaining Insight**

Engagement provides a forum for Council to gain insight into the local knowledge, skills and experiences of the community.

- **Making Better Decisions**

Gaining insight and information sharing assists council to make better decisions. The engagement process must seek opinion, not simply agreement for a position that has been pre-determined by Council.

- **Having An Informed Community**

Consistent communication, information sharing and feedback to the community demonstrates that Council takes the views and opinions of the community seriously. It also assists in managing positive stakeholder relationships.

Guiding principles

- Principle 1** **Relationship building** – Recognising the value and importance of developing and maintaining relationships between Council and the community.
- Principle 2** **Participation and involvement** – Actively encouraging all members of the community to participate.
- Principle 3** **Effective communication** – Timely and appropriate communication using a variety of methods.
- Principle 4** **Transparency** – Timely and transparent communication enabling access to information that is relevant and appropriate.
- Principle 5** **Considering the Results** – Ensuring that the views of the community are considered in the planning and decision making processes.
- Principle 6** **Feedback** – Providing means for stakeholders to obtain feedback.
- Principle 7** **Evaluation and review** – The way council engages will be evaluated and reviewed to ensure it is responsive to the views and aspirations of the community.

When is Community Engagement Required?

All Council projects, developments and decisions will be assessed in relation to their level of impact on the community. A community engagement plan will be developed subject to the level of impact and capacity for input. To ensure consistency across Council, all plans will be developed in accordance with this strategy and an agreed and formalised Community Engagement Procedure.

It is important to note, that community engagement is not limited to formally seeking input into projects, developments and decisions with major community impact. It is also necessary for informing the community of day-to-day business and standard operating tasks.

When engagement may not be appropriate or possible

There are specific areas of Council where Community Engagement will not be undertaken:

- When the project or development is bound by statutory obligations and / or legislation.
- Under the *Sorell Planning Scheme 1993* document, within the 'Permitted' section of development, consultation and community engagement is not required. Council must grant approval with or without conditions attached.

It is also inevitable that circumstances will arise where a decision needs to be made in an immediate timeframe in order to obtain an opportunity, address an immediate problem or the unequal allocation of resources.

When these immediate decisions do occur the community should still be informed.

How we will engage

How we engage will be determined by the level of impact and capacity for input of the project or decision.

We will engage on a number of different levels

- Inform Provide information to the community
- Consult Obtain community input
- Involve Work directly with the community throughout the process
- Collaborate Create partnerships with groups within in the community to be involved on an ongoing basis
- Empowerment To place final decision making in the hands of the community

We will use various methods of communication to engage

- Online Engagement (website etc)
- Electronic documents (e-newsletters etc)
- Paper-based Publications (Local newspapers, council Newsletter etc)
- In Person (meetings, committees, forums etc)
- Social Media (Facebook, Twitter etc)

Outcomes of Engagement

- Authentic conversations with the community.
- Gaining insight and understanding into the needs of the community
- Improving the profile of Council within the community
- Community appreciation of the opportunity to be heard
- Greater community satisfaction with council decisions
- Finding local solutions to local problems
- Improving the delivery of services and allocation of resources
- A more informed community
- Informed Council decision making

To ensure the successful implementation of this strategy, cultural change within council is paramount. It is imperative that councillors, management and staff are committed to the concept and are prepared to become increasingly open and transparent in the way they undertake Council business. Information needs to be provided in a timely and consistent manner. The way we communicate, both internally and externally, is critical to effective engagement.