

## Communication & Consultation Policy

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<b>AUTHORITY</b>	Corporate Services
<b>CONTACT OFFICER</b>	General Manager

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## 1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 The Communication and Consultation with the Community Policy provides an overview of the consultation process and a framework for effective community consultation.
- 1.2 Council views communication as an essential element of Local Government. It improves service delivery, anticipates issues, develops partnerships, manages expectations, informs Council Policy development, and enhances community participation in Council issues.
- 1.3 The community expects that Council will keep it informed about programs, services, initiatives and matters which affect their benefits, rights and obligations as citizens.
- 1.4 The accountability of Council for decision making is enhanced, not diminished, by any consultation.
- 1.5 The objectives of this Policy are:
- i. To promote community involvement and public accountability in Council business by providing opportunities for the community to participate in decisions of both present and long term interests to their local area.
  - ii. To create and foster a consultative culture within the council organisation.
  - iii. To set forth and outline the commitment of Council to effective communication to ensure that Council's planning and decision making processes are inclusive of and responsive to community points of view, in a consistent and comprehensive format.
  - iv. To strengthen Council's mandate at dealing with other organisations such as Federal and State Governments.

## 2 SCOPE

The Communication and Community Consultation Policy will apply to Council elected members, staff, contractors and consultants of Council.

Council will regularly review the Policy to improve understanding of an adherence to the Policy and ensure it is in line with best practice.

## 3 DEFINITIONS

- 3.1 For the purposes of this policy, the following definitions apply:

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Act</b>	<i>Local Government Act 1993 (NSW)</i>
<b>Consultation</b>	A process of two-way, informed communication between Council and the community on an issue prior to Council making a decision on that issue.
<b>Community</b>	Council broadly defines the community as those who have an interest in or are affected by the workings of council and may include but is not limited to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>i. Residents and ratepayers;</li><li>ii. Business owners and operators;</li></ol>

- iii. People who work in the Local Government area;
- iv. Visitors (including tourists and shoppers);
- v. Government agencies;
- vi. Users of Council services;
- vii. Local Community groups and associations.

## **4 POLICY STATEMENT**

### **4.1 Corporate Objectives**

4.1.1 The Communication and Consultation with the Community Policy is linked to implementing the Council's vision and mission, as outlined in the Management plan. Council's mission highlights community involvement as one of the key features of the relationships between the community and Council.

### **4.2 Why and when to Communicate and Consult**

4.2.1 Council will communicate and consult with the community with the aim to:

- i. Identify the community's views, needs, ideas and concerns;
- ii. Increase community awareness of Council's services, activities, issues, processes, and decisions which may affect them;
- iii. Improve the community's understanding of the role of Council;
- iv. Encourage new and innovative ideas and solutions;
- v. Ensure that Council services are provided in a way that is consistent with the community's values and priorities;
- vi. Encourage and foster positive community involvement in issues which affect them and the community in which they live;
- vii. Obtain cooperation in the implementation of decisions;
- viii. Encourage Council to utilise the knowledge of the community in developing programs and services;
- ix. Ensure that programs, policies and services are appropriate to the needs of the local community and are effective in their delivery;
- x. Generate a greater sense of community;
- xi. Portray a positive image of Council;
- xii. Increase confidence and accountability in Council's decision making;
- xiii. Improve staff morale through better communications leading to better delivery of service both internally and externally.

- 4.2.2 Council has a statutory obligation to consult with the community. Statutory consultation requirements are contained in the Local Government Act and Environmental Planning and Assessment Act.
- 4.2.3 The Local Government Act, 1993 states in part: “A Council has the following Charter:
- i. *To provide directly or on behalf of other levels of Government, after due consultation, adequate, equitable and appropriate services and facilities for the community and to ensure that those services and facilities are managed efficiently and effectively;*
  - ii. *To facilitate the involvement of Councillors, members of the public, users of facilities and services and Council staff in the development, improvement and coordination of Local Government.”*
- 4.2.4 There is also the need for Council to consult with the community beyond legislative requirements. These include:
- i. In response to community interest;
  - ii. To help it identify community needs;
  - iii. When it believes that community input will enhance its decision making.
- 4.2.5 Some of the common Council issues that require consultation are:
- i. Major projects;
  - ii. Service delivery;
  - iii. Policies and Policy changes;
  - iv. Strategic plans;
  - v. Financial reporting and other reporting regulations.

### **4.3 The Process of Consultation**

- 4.3.1 Forbes Shire Council will conduct consultations with the local community when issues involving decision making or Policy formulation are deemed, by appropriate Council officers or the elected Council, to be of specific interest to the community; and/or when issues arise that may have a significant immediate or long term impact on the local community.
- 4.3.2 The process of consultation involves but should not be limited to:
- i. Clarifying the purpose;
  - ii. Identifying who will be involved;
  - iii. Establishing the timeframe;
  - iv. Determining the resources required;
  - v. Planning the process;
  - vi. Implementation;

vii. Providing follow up to all parties on decisions or actions;

viii. Evaluating consultation.

4.3.3 Where public consultation in any form is to occur, sufficient staff and financial resources will be allocated to enable the consultation process to satisfy the relevant predetermined objectives.

4.3.4 It is a mistake to assume that any consultation process should lead to a consensus and that it has failed if it does not do so.

4.3.5 Council in considering the view of its citizens, will act upon resident and/or community views where possible, however in the final instance, all members of the community must accept that having considered all possible aspects, that the final decisions rests with Council. The community should be aware that there are a number of factors, which also need to be considered when the final decision is made.

4.3.6 Consultation is an important element, but it is not the only one. Council has limits to its power and has statutory duties that it must fulfil.

## 4.4 Communications Strategy

4.4.1 A communications strategy has been developed as a guide that outlines the strategies that underpin any form of Council's communication and consultation with the community. The main aim of the communications strategy is to provide guidelines and instruments to increase the level of public understanding, awareness and participation in Local Government.

4.4.2 Council's overall objective in its communication strategy is to provide a strategy to improve internal and external communications flowing to, from and within the Council.

4.4.3 Consultation with the community may take many forms. The form chosen will depend on the issue to be considered.

4.4.4 Any or all of the communication strategies summarised below can be used as part of the consultation process. It should be noted that while the provision of information does not, on its own constitute consultation; it can be usefully employed as part of the overall process.

i. Undertaking a customer satisfaction survey annually to measure overall customer attitudes to learn about what customers think about the areas where Council is performing well and the areas where Council needs improvement.

ii. Developing protocols for handling customer enquiries and complaints and maintaining opportunities for feedback.

iii. Continually review and improve systems which will assist the processing and provision of information and service delivery.

iv. Continuing to provide information on council's issues, decisions, services and activities through a variety of measures including advertising in local newspaper, publishing a regular newsletter, issuing media releases, placing on public exhibition documents relating to Council activities and establishing Council's publications on its website.

v. Maintaining access to information for members of the public (subject to the conditions under the Local Government Act 1993, Freedom of Information Act 1991, Privacy Act 1988 and subject to Council's other duties of confidentiality and privacy).

4.4.5 The strategies used will depend on:

- i. Who the stakeholders are;
- ii. What the purpose of the consultation is;
- iii. The availability of resources;
- iv. Timeframe; and
- v. The advantages and disadvantages of each method.

## 4.5 Evaluation

4.5.1 The objectives of this Policy are to ensure well-coordinated and effectively managed communications which are appropriate for the information and communication needs of the Community and which contribute to the advancement of Council's objectives and priorities. This can only be determined through monitoring and evaluation.

4.5.2 In order to evaluate the effectiveness of communication and consultation programs (including cost-effectiveness), and to make improvements or adjustments as needed, the performance of communication products should be monitored and the results measured against objectives set in the Business Management Plan.

## 5 VARIATION

5.1 Council reserves the right to vary the terms and conditions of this policy subject to a report Council.

## Revision History

Version	Adoption Date	Authorised by	Approved by	Revision Date
V1	15/02/2007	General Manager	General Manager	15/02/2009

## Change History

Version	Change Details
V1	Initial Policy

## Related Documents

Title
<i>Code of Conduct</i>