



# Communications and Engagement Policy

<b>Policy No:</b>	1.3
<b>Approved by Council:</b>	March 2022
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<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	Director Environment, Development & Community Services
<b>Strategic Plan Reference:</b>	1.1 A Council that engages with and enables its community

### 1. POLICY STATEMENTS

- 1.1 Council acknowledges that effective communication and engagement are essential foundations of a strong community and promote active citizenry, participation, and a healthy democracy.
- 1.2 Council also recognises that good communication and engagement underpins our democratic system of government. It improves service delivery, manages expectations, informs Council's policy development and enhances community participation in government.
- 1.3 Engagement enables a closer relationship between Council and its community through an active exchange of information and ideas promoting shared understanding, innovation and decisions which better represent the interests of the broad community.
- 1.4 Council seeks to demonstrate transparent, honest, open and accountable leadership. We will engage the community's talent, knowledge and resources to help encourage and support a safe, healthy and connected community.
- 1.5 Council involves community in interest- and issue-based engagements; consultation for changes to service delivery, policy and strategy development; infrastructure and capital works projects; to seek solutions for issues; and legislative requirements.
- 1.6 Council's engagement projects will seek input from community members and stakeholders when designing appropriate participation methods.
- 1.7 Engagement projects are underpinned by the promise that the information shared is ethically motivated and that the public's contribution will inform recommendations presented to Council.
- 1.8 The outcomes of how the public's contribution has affected decisions will be communicated back to participants.
- 1.9 Major decisions will continue to be subject to debate and a vote at Council Meetings.
- 1.10 This policy has been developed to provide a consistent approach across Council to communicate and engage with the community.
- 1.11 This policy will contribute to the improvement of knowledge and skills of staff, and coordination of communications and community engagement.
- 1.12 The community expects that Council will listen to its views, priorities, needs and expectations and be provided with opportunities for participation. Councils are accountable to their communities and that accountability depends on people's understanding of Council's role and decision-making processes.
- 1.13 The information provided by Council to the community during engagement projects will be ethical, accurate and honest, and will provide the community with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.

### 2. DEFINITIONS

- 2.1 **"Communications"** means the provision of one-way information to advise the community and stakeholders about a project, initiative or issue. It can also involve two-way dialogue with community and stakeholders to achieve a particular outcome.
- 2.2 **"Community"** means all residents, ratepayers, landowners and members of the public including individuals, groups, visitors, organisations, government and business. There may be subcommunities within a larger community with particular needs and interests.

## Communications and Engagement Policy 1.3

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- 2.3 **"Engagement"** is an expression representing the variety of methods used by Council to inform, consult, and involve the community in the development of policies, services and infrastructure within the Council.
- 2.4 **"Public Participation"** means the involvement of those affected by a decision in the decision-making process.
- 2.5 **"Stakeholder"** means a person, group or organisation who may be affected by (directly or indirectly), by have a specific interest in, or influence over, a council decision or issue under consideration. Includes people, organisations, businesses or agencies within or external to the municipal area.

### 3. OBJECTIVE

- 3.1 Council aims to make sure its strategies and processes will:
  - 3.1.1 promote the contribution Council makes to the quality of life for ratepayers and residents;
  - 3.1.2 keep ratepayers and residents informed about services and opportunities provided by Council;
  - 3.1.3 manage Council's reputation by promoting Council's role and maintaining good relationships with the media;
  - 3.1.4 build a sense of place through the positive promotion of Kingborough and life in the municipality;
  - 3.1.5 use a variety of methods to communicate and to provide information in formats that accommodate the needs of all residents, ratepayers and consumers;
  - 3.1.6 engage and listen to Kingborough's residents and consumers through effective engagement;
  - 3.1.7 encourage ratepayers and residents to participate in Council's engagement projects;
  - 3.1.8 develop and maintain a Council approved framework for engagement practices and principles based on procedural fairness, transparency and accountability;
  - 3.1.9 support staff to engage with community members and stakeholders through training, expert advice and the provision of simple and effective tools;
  - 3.1.10 provide a clear and consistent approach to engagement, which supports stakeholders and community members involvement in projects relevant to them, ensuring they can contribute to decision-making;
  - 3.1.11 analyse and report outcomes of engagement activities; and
  - 3.1.12 focus on collaboration when addressing contentious issues.
- 3.2 Council's communication and engagement strategies will also assist Councillors and employees to work more effectively through positive two-way communications with the community.

### 4. SCOPE

- 4.1 This policy applies to the implementation of Council's Strategic Plan and the development of Council strategies and policies and the delivery of infrastructure, major projects, and service delivery to benefit Council communities.
- 4.2 The General Manager and the Director Environment, Development and Community will be accountable and responsible for the review and promotion of this Policy.
- 4.3 All Councillors and Council employees are responsible for the implementation of this policy.

### **5. PROCEDURE (POLICY DETAIL)**

- 5.1 Systems, resources, and tools will be put in place to ensure staff and councillors understand and are able to implement this policy and related strategies and frameworks.
- 5.2 Council will regularly review and maintain a Communications and Engagement Framework and develop a supporting Annual Priority Action Plan.
- 5.3 The Framework and related tools provide the methodology for communication and engagement planning and are underpinned by a core set of values and principles that establish the standard and tone of Council's communications and engagement projects. The Framework will also identify longer-term objectives to support continuous improvement of Council's communications and engagement.
- 5.4 The Priority Action Plan will identify projects which actively support communications and engagement activities through a combination of methods incorporating both media, marketing and engagement activities.
- 5.5 The Framework and Action Plan will align with the key corporate objectives as outlined in Council's Strategic Plan.
- 5.6 In determining performance measures for communication and engagement activities, the Framework will focus on both internal and external target audiences.
- 5.7 For Council's internal audiences, the Framework will support informed employees who are aware of Council's values, strategies and methods and who have access to appropriate information to support their work.
- 5.8 For Council's internal audiences the Action Plan will make clear the focus of strategic communications and engagement effort each year of the Plan.
- 5.9 For Council's external audiences, the Framework will support communications aligned with Council's corporate standards in a clear, professional, and accessible manner whilst offering value for money.
- 5.10 The Framework will also help officers to ensure that Kingborough's residents, ratepayers and consumers are well informed about Council's policies, infrastructure and services and can fully participate in the democratic process.

### **6. GUIDELINES**

- 6.1 The Corporate Communications and Engagement Framework supports effective communication and engagement by councillors and staff through addressing in detail the why, who, what, how and when of communications and engagement.
- 6.2 Why - Establishes why we are communicating or engaging. Are we informing or are we learning? This first stage is identification of project objectives, details and associated matters. The communications and engagement processes follow the same framework; supported by specific templates to assist staff in developing the appropriate methods for their activity. When developing an engagement project, the Community Engagement Model and level of community involvement will be defined during this first step.
- 6.3 Who - Identifies who we need to inform, or listen and learn from. A Stakeholder Analysis identifies affected stakeholders and target audiences, informing appropriate communication and engagement plans. As well as identifying stakeholders and the level of their interest, staff are supported to consider if there is any priority order in which stakeholders need to be engaged. Consideration will be given to existing reference groups and/or advisory committees currently working with Council, and ratepayer and community groups within the municipality.

## Communications and Engagement Policy 1.3

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- 6.4 How - Identifies the channels of communication and the engagement methods that will be used for each project. This is achieved through the Stakeholder Analysis and the preferences indicated by the participants.
- 6.5 What - Clarifies what we are saying and what information the community and stakeholders need to know. Key messages for external communication and engagement projects will be developed in alignment with key priority areas identified in the Strategic Plan. All communications and engagement messages will adhere to the guiding principles and ensure the community are provided with honest and accurate information. They will also include a clear scope and will define the 'what is negotiable', and 'what is not', for engagement projects. Internal communication will keep councillors and staff informed of council decisions, policies and achievements.
- 6.6 When – Details activities for each project through a targeted communications and/or engagement plan that includes the timing, activity, audience, location, required resources, responsible officers and evaluation methods.
- 6.7 Evaluate - Guides how we evaluate each communications and engagement plan's implementation to see how effective they have been.
- 6.8 Report - Demonstrates to participants that their views have been heard and that their time and input is valued. A critical process which must be established, and the community advised upfront, so participants can understand how their information will be used throughout the project. Closing the loop is essential in building trust and transparency in the decision-making process.

### **7. COMMUNICATION**

- 7.1 All employees and Councillors will be briefed on this policy as required.

### **8. LEGISLATION**

- 8.1 The following legislation should be considered in conjunction with this policy:
  - 8.1.1 Local Government Act 1993 (Tasmania)

### **9. RELATED DOCUMENTS**

- 9.1 The Communications and Engagement Framework
- 9.2 Priority Action Plan – Communications and Engagement

### **10. AUDIENCE**

- 10.1 The Communications and Engagement Policy applies to all Councillors and employees.
- 10.2 The policy is publicly accessible via Council's website.