



# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY



**NOVEMBER 2009**

© Sutherland Shire Council



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>PART 1: PRELIMINARY .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Purpose.....	1
1.2 Objective .....	1
1.3 Application .....	1
1.4 Definitions .....	2
<b>PART 2: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT .....</b>	<b>3</b>
2.1 Community Engagement Framework .....	3
2.2 Why engage?.....	4
2.3 When Council will engage.....	4
2.4 How Council will engage.....	5
2.5 Relevant Legislation and Guidelines.....	6
2.6 Community Involvement .....	6
<b>PART 3: ADMINISTRATION .....</b>	<b>7</b>
3.1 Related and Associated Council policies .....	7
3.2 Implementation .....	7
3.3 Responsibilities .....	7
3.4 Review .....	7
3.5 Privacy .....	8
3.6 Duty of Care.....	8

# PART 1: PRELIMINARY

## 1.1 Purpose

Sutherland Shire Council has a long standing commitment to engaging with its community in its planning and decision making. The purpose of this Policy is to define council's commitment to community engagement, and in doing so, ensure that Councillors, council officers and the community apply this to their own role.

## 1.2 Objective

Sutherland Shire Council is committed to empowering its community to actively engage in civic life, to be involved in the decision making process and to take responsibility for providing solutions to their own concerns. The principles of governance it operates by include:

- community satisfaction
- management by fact
- continuous improvement
- ethics

Community engagement is at the core of council's commitment to:

- integrated planning and outcomes
- working towards a sustainable community through its leadership and in collaboration with the community

In its engagement processes council is committed to:

- building partnerships with the community and valuing their input in decision-making processes
- a high quality, disciplined and consistent approach to community engagement
- community engagement based on mutual respect, diversity and the need to work together to improve the environment and lifestyle of current residents and future generations
- listening, respecting and valuing the views of others

## 1.3 Application

The Policy applies across all council functions.

# PART 1: PRELIMINARY

## 1.4 Definitions

Council defines community engagement as the ways in which the community takes part in shaping the Shire, its own needs and the services and facilities of council.

Council has a key role to play in providing the opportunity for community engagement to occur. The nature of the interaction will depend on the:

- significance of the issue
- scope of community influence required
- level of community interest
- diversity of stakeholders
- level of council knowledge that exists

Community engagement is not a substitute for decision making. It is part of the democratic process and council's decision making.

For the purpose of community engagement, the community is defined as:

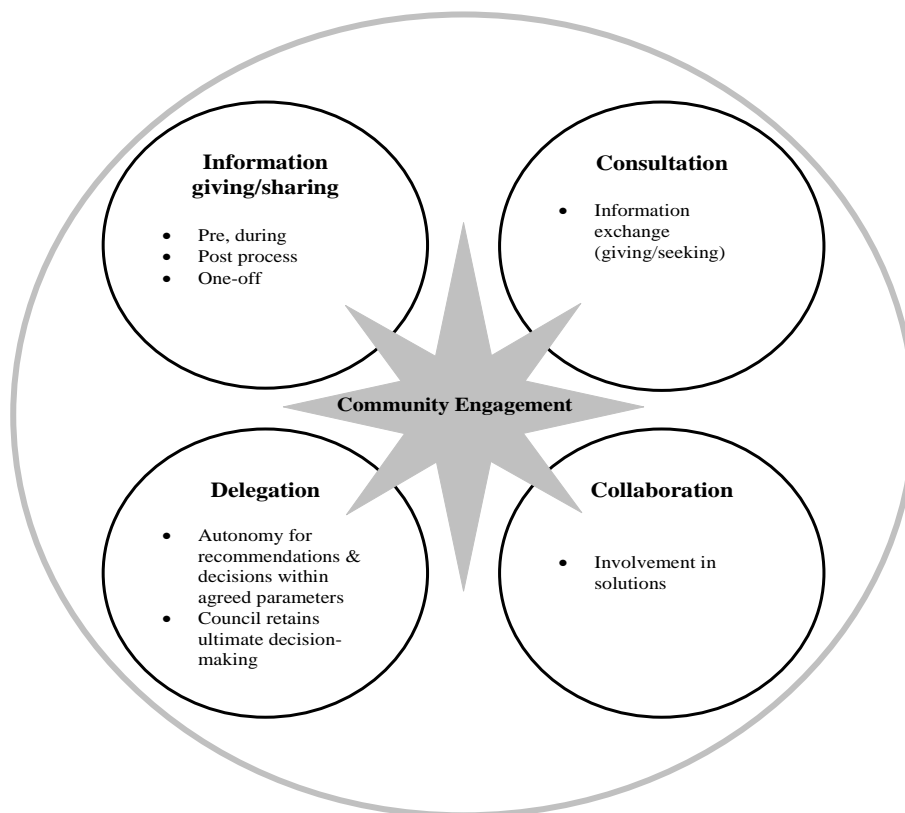
- children, young people and adults who live in the Sutherland Shire including resident ratepayers and non-rate paying residents
- non-resident ratepayers
- community based and volunteer agencies
- special interest groups
- local businesses
- individuals who work in the Sutherland Shire
- individuals who visit the Sutherland Shire
- government agencies who have an interest in the Sutherland Shire

# PART 2: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

## 2.1 Community Engagement Framework

The *Community Engagement Ring* describes the relationship between council and the community. It depicts the multiple facets of engagement which are not hierarchical and not mutually exclusive. These facets of engagement may be used in combination, and in any one project it is possible that a mixture of engagement types would be required. The *Community Engagement Ring* represents a flexible relationship which could change based on the potential level of influence the community may have on council's planning and decision making. Levels of influence may vary based on council's intent for engagement and community need.

### The Community Engagement Ring



Council is committed through its engagement processes to facilitating an informed and active community. Its role is to ensure that a meaningful relationship exists between the community and Council. More specifically that:

- appropriate techniques are used by council to ensure that the right level of engagement is achieved
- a genuine opportunity is provided for community members to become involved in local issues, council services, facilities or council planning and policy development
- community engagement will not always bring about agreement or make everybody happy with a decision.

# PART 2: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

## 2.2 Why engage?

Community engagement is essential to good governance and sound management. It enables council to:

- develop and maintain links with the community
- understand what the community needs, wants, thinks and hopes for
- work with the community to achieve desired outcomes
- keep the community informed and/or involved
- sustain ongoing dialogue with the community
- involve the community in finding solutions to local issues
- make the best use of limited council/local resources
- make well-informed and fair decisions for the good of all
- empower the community to take action on decisions
- improve council's services and products
- improve council's leadership
- meet legislative requirements

## 2.3 When Council will engage

Council will engage with the community when:

- developing council plans and policies which impact the Shire
- decisions on crucial operational, infrastructure or resource management matters are required
- it has limited understanding of the community's views and opinions on issues
- decisions are likely to have major impacts on a discrete community or the Shire as a whole
- decision would benefit from external expert advice
- the community presents a sound case for community engagement

Council may not engage with the community when:

- council is confident that current and accurate data or information is available to make an informed decision
- matters are administrative or routine management
- external timeframes imposed on council do not permit the inclusion of an engagement process
- decisions are imposed by external agencies
- there is an emergency situation

# PART 2: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

## 2.4 How Council will engage

Council is committed to a consistent, quality approach to community engagement. Its processes will include the following basic elements:

- projects will allow adequate timeframes to enable engagement processes to take place as early as possible and prior to decisions being made
- projects will include funds to cover the cost of community engagement processes
- processes will be tailored to actively encourage a broad cross section of the community to participate as well as identifying interested parties
- strategies to encourage individuals and groups who find it difficult to participate, as appropriate
- information in plain language and without the use of jargon
- participants will be advised that their involvement is voluntary and they can opt out at any time
- participants will be informed of the scope of the engagement process, its objectives, how their input will be considered and the level of influence they are likely to have on decision making
- participants will be provided with expert and technical information as required
- results of engagement processes will be analysed collectively and reported on equally
- participants will also be informed of non negotiable mandates and any existing issues
- participants will be kept informed throughout the process and will receive timely feedback on decisions and how they were made
- explanations of how state government policies impact upon council policies and actions

At times, council's choice in engagement technique may be prescribed by legislation.

# PART 2: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

## 2.5 Relevant Legislation and Guidelines

Community engagement is subject to the following legislation and state government guidelines:

- Local Government Act 1993
- Local Government Amendment (Planning & Reporting) Act 2009
- Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979
- Environmental Planning & Assessment Regulation 2000
- Crown Lands Act 1989
- Roads Act 1993
- Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998
- other legislation as applicable

Legislation often sets minimum standards for consultation. Our aim is to constantly exceed minimum standards.

## 2.6 Community Involvement

Council recognises that the implementation of this Policy requires the community's participation. Without the community's involvement the Policy will be ineffective. Council will promote avenues for community engagement and consider ease of participation to facilitate this.

# PART 3: ADMINISTRATION

## 3.1 Related and Associated council policies

Related council Policies:

- Administrative Provisions of Sutherland Shire Development Control Plan
- Access to Information Policy
- Code of Conduct for Councillors, Staff and Delegates of council
- Sutherland Shire Council Privacy Management Plan

With the exception of mandated statutory requirements, where there is a discrepancy between this Policy and a related council policy with respect to requirements for community engagement, this Policy will override all other policies.

## 3.2 Implementation

The Policy is supported by a range of tools under the umbrella of the Consultation Clearing House. These provide the framework to assist the organisation to undertake community engagement.

## 3.3 Responsibilities

This Policy applies to both elected members and council officers. It is the responsibility of all levels and divisions of council to implement this Policy. Council's executive and senior staff are responsible to ensure the implementation of this Policy. Council officers undertaking or commissioning engagement processes are required to adhere to this Policy and refer to the Community Engagement Guidelines in its implementation.

It is the responsibility of the Strategic Planning Unit to monitor the implementation of this Policy and call for a review of the Policy if required within the review period.

The unit is also responsible for providing the organisational framework to support the implementation of this Policy.

Council will consider and respond to the results of community engagement.

## 3.4 Review

The responsible officer for this Policy is the Manager – Strategic Planning. The responsible officer can be contacted for advice on the content or application of the Policy. This Policy shall be reviewed in the first year of every new council term.

# PART 3: ADMINISTRATION

## 3.5 Privacy

Council is committed to protecting the privacy of all participants of any community engagement process. Council's commitment is supported by its Privacy Management Plan which states how we will deal with personal information that is stored or received by the Council.

Consequently, in engagement processes Council will:

- only use personal information provided for the purposes for which it was collected and for any other authorised use
- not disclose personal information to a third party, without the individuals approval, and will take all necessary measures to prevent unauthorised access or disclosure
- ensure that personal information is not disclosed to other institutions and authorities outside Council except if required or authorised by law

## 3.6 Duty of Care

Council has a duty of care towards Councillors, officers and community members in its engagement.