

POLICY NO.	M.21
POLICY SUBJECT	Community Engagement/Consultation Policy
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Introduction

This policy affirms the commitment of the Shire of Bridgetown-Greenbushes to community engagement and consultation.

The policy establishes a framework for timely and meaningful community engagement/consultation and communication to take place between Council and the Community. Council believes that early effective communication and consultation with the Community will lead to better decision-making, and more open, transparent and accountable governance.

Definition of Community Engagement, Consultation and Democratic Governance

Community engagement is any process “that involves the public in problem solving or decision making and uses public input to make decisions (as defined by the International Association for Public Participation).

Consultation for the purpose of this document is defined as a process of two-way, informed communication between the Council and the Community on issues prior to Council making decisions on those issues.

There is a difference between “engagement” and “consultation”. Consultation is the process where people respond to a proposal such as submitting written comments. Engagement goes beyond seeking views on specific decisions to having a dialogue with the community about key issues such as service delivery – this gives members of the community more of an active, participatory role.

Democratic governance involves community participation and input into Council’s decision making. Consultation is a vehicle for obtaining this input and it fulfils the need to ensure that the community’s views can be identified and communicated effectively.

Community engagement/consultation does not detract from Council’s ultimate role to make decisions and its accountability for its decision making. Instead it is intended to support rather than replace the role Councillors (and staff when acting under delegated authority granted by Council) have in receiving and generating ideas, and making its decisions. It does not imply government by referendum.

Aims of the Policy

The principal aim of the policy is to create and foster a consultative culture within the Shire of Bridgetown-Greenbushes.

The policy aims to allow the community an adequate and appropriate opportunity to:

- a) Respond to and comment on issues and proposals affecting individuals and groups within the community;
- b) Be kept informed on current issues and proposals that will potentially affect the community;
- c) Provide support and gain a sense of ownership of key Council functions and activities.

The policy ensures that the consultation includes people affected by a Council decision and that they have every opportunity to make an impact on Council decision making. It is intended to foster a consultative culture between the Council and the community.

The Policy objectives from the Shire and Council perspectives are to:

- a) Clearly define the levels of community consultation required on issues affecting the community;
- b) Detail the requirements for consultation for the related levels of community impact;
- c) Outline the process that will be undertaken in consulting with the community and in considering the related submissions.

Key Principles

The following principles form the basis of the consultation policy.

Inclusiveness

- Consultation will encourage the participation of people affected by or interested in a decision.
- Affected and interested parties will be given equal opportunity to participate in the consultation process.
- Consultation will be sensitive to the needs of particular groups to maximise their ability to contribute.
- Council will actively seek out people for consultation.

Focus

- Consultation will be purpose driven.
- Chosen consultation methods will be appropriate for the task.
- A clear statement about what the consultation is to achieve will be provided.
- A clear statement about the role of Council and the role of participants in the consultation will be made.

Responsiveness

- Council will consider and respond to contributions from all participants.
- Consultation will be transparent and those involved will have a clear understanding of how their feedback and comments are to be used.
- Council will maintain openness and will consider new ideas and alter the course of actions as appropriate.

- Council will ensure respect for the diverse range of interests that may be represented during a consultation.

Provision of Information

- Information relating to the consultation will be readily available to allow participants to make informed and timely contributions.
- Information relating to the consultation can be accessed easily by everyone involved.
- Information will be presented in an easily understood format.
- In some instances full details about an issue may not be fully disclosed to the public because of its commercially sensitive or personal nature.
- Unless mandated by or for a legislative requirement, Council will not count the public holiday periods of Christmas, New Year and Easter in public consultation periods.

Implementation and Evaluation

- Through Council, participants will receive feedback about inputs received and how the related decision(s) was reached.
- As part of its commitment to the effectiveness of the Policy, Council will welcome and act upon appropriate recommendations from the community for changes to the policy.

The Decision-Making Process

Elected members and the CEO are charged under the Local Government Act 1993 (The Act) with the responsibility to make decisions based on fact and the merits of the issue without fear or favour, and are accountable for their actions and decisions under law. Elected members are also accountable to the people in the community via periodic elections.

Their decisions may not necessarily reflect the majority view received from community consultation. However, they are bound to make decisions that are equitable, economically, socially and environmentally appropriate, timely and in accord with The Act.

Decisions must be made for the overall good of the Shire of Bridgetown-Greenbushes. The Act requires decision-makers to make decisions in the interests of “the good government of the district”. This responsibility from time to time puts decision-makers at odds with the expressed views of citizens from a local neighbourhood or community group who may, understandably, take a narrower view of the considerations at hand.

There will be a diversity of views on most issues. Council and Shire Officers are wary of claiming to speak for the “community” and wary of those who claim to do so. Council and Shire Officers recognise that, on most significant issues, diverse views exist that need to be respected and taken into account by the decision-makers.

All community consultations will clearly outline from the outset any such constraints or limitations associated with the matter under consultation.

Consultation Framework

Levels of Consultation

Democratic local government, with its very broad charter, needs to consult across many levels which may range from consultation about the future use of a specific site in the Shire of Bridgetown-Greenbushes, to consultation on the community's views of a state-wide issue which impacts on the community and therefore requires a Council position.

The levels illustrated in Table One indicate that different approaches will be required to consultation.

Modes of Consultation

There are a number of ways in which the Council can commence a dialogue with the community. These are outlined in Table Two.

Consultation Matrix

The Council and the community need to determine which consultation modes are appropriate at which levels of consultation. The matrix at Table Three (presents the preferred mode(s) for each consultation level, and the related levels of certainty that the consultation mode will be undertaken.

Table One: Levels of Consultation

Consultation Level	Definition
Statutory Advertising or Notification	Under Council's Local Laws and Town Planning Schemes (TPS) there are a number of mandatory advertising or notification requirements. Examples include amendments to a TPS, "SA" uses under the Zoning Table of a TPS, consideration of development guide plans and amendments to or review of a Local Law.
Site Specific Planning/Development	Where standards or requirements stipulated under a TPS, Council Policy or Local Law are proposed to be varied in a specific, localised instance. Examples include setback reductions, building envelope alterations, development plans for Shire reserves, etc.
Area Improvement	Matters that affect people in a whole neighbourhood, e.g. traffic management.
Modifications to Service Delivery	Changes to Council functions or services e.g. extension of rubbish collection area, modification to opening hours of Shire facilities.
Policy Development	To develop or improve policies for Council's position on particular matters. Does not include internal "governance/administration" policies.
Key Strategic Issues	Projects of a size that will impact on a substantial proportion of the community and/or which will have far reaching financial implications, e.g. new subdivision or industry, extensions to Shire facilities.
Review of Strategic Community Plan	Expresses the community's vision and

Consultation Level	Definition
(both comprehensive review every 4 years and desktop review after 2 years)	priorities for the future and shows how the Council and community intend to make progress over a ten year period.

Table Two: Modes of Consultation

Consultation Mode	Description
Advertisements in Local Newspapers	Adverts in either or both of the local newspapers and/or “The Mailbag” community newspaper and Greenbushes Newsletter.
Notice Boards	A copy of all advertisements and other relevant notices are placed on all Shire Notice Boards.
Website	Information will be placed on the Internet at www.bridgetown.wa.gov.au
'Shire Bytes' Email Service	The 'shire Bytes' email service is a means for the Shire to circulate by an email group, the members of which 'opt-on' and 'opt-off' the email group. The emails occur only when specific information needs to be disseminated. This mode of consultation differs from the website as people need to access the website actively; while the email service accesses the people directly and automatically when information is to be sent.
Facebook Post	Posts on the official Shire Facebook page are made in real time, providing information on relevant issues and events. Only staff nominated by the CEO are authorised to create posts on the Shire Facebook page. The Shire will not post directly to any page other than the Shire Facebook page but can share the Shire posts to any community pages.
Written Notice	This is a personally addressed letter to all affected households, outlining the related issues and inviting comment.
Media Release	This involves issuing media releases and conducting interviews with local journalists. When part of the consultative process, the Council spokesperson will indicate to the media representative that feedback from the community is invited and valued. The media release will be made available to local newspapers.
Survey	This is a professionally structured and statistically correct survey seeking particular attitudes, beliefs or information. It may be completed by written or questionnaire survey of individuals, individual households or groups of households.
Bulk Mail-Out	This is a non-addressed leaflet or flyer that summarises the issues and invites feedback to Council. The flyer indicates how that feedback can be given.
Personal Briefings	These are held at the request of a member or members of the local community to discuss a particular issue with a responsible officer(s) and/or elected members.
Working Groups Including Members of Public	These are discussion groups of around 6-12 people, with membership determined by Council. The participants are invited because they have a particular interest, involvement or stake in the subject being discussed. The group may be comprised of Shire Officers, Councillors, professionals and/or residents with particular skills, competencies and/or knowledge relevant to the particular issue. The purpose is to find out the range of opinions and options that exist for feedback to Council's decision-making process.
Information Session or	This may be held at a community venue, at the site of the matter

Consultation Mode	Description
Public Meeting	under consultation, or at the Shire offices. Invitations will be sent by one or more of the following methods: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- advertising in the local papers- letterbox drop- media.
Formal Displays	A formal display area, placed in the Shire offices or other convenient local venue, showing plans, drawings, photos and / or related proposals and information for public inspection. Structured comment forms will be provided at the display for public completion and submission.

Table Three: Consultation Matrix

The Consultation Matrix describes, for each Consultation Level, the Mode/Modes of Consultation that will be undertaken. The numbers 1 to 6 in each related cell indicates the levels of certainty that that mode of consultation will be undertaken for the level of consultation involved.

Consultation Level	Statutory Advertising or Notification	Site Specific Planning / Development	Area Improvement	Modifications to Service Delivery	Policy Development	Key Strategic Issues*	Strategic Community Plan Full Review*	Strategic Community Plan Desktop Review*
Mode of Consultation								
Advert in Local Newspapers	1	4	3	3	1	1	1	1
Notice Boards	1	4	3	3	1	1	1	1
Website	2	3	2	2	1	1	1	1
Shire Bytes and Facebook	2	4	3	2	1	1	1	1
Written Notice	2	1	3	3	3	3	6	6
Media Release	5	6	2	3	3	2	2	2
Survey	6	6	6	6	5	3	1	1
Bulk Mail Out	6	6	4	4	5	3	5	5
Personal Briefings	3	3	3	3	3	3	5	5
Working Groups (including Public Members)	5	5	4	5	3	3	5	5
Information Sessions	3	4	4	4	3	3	1	5
Formal Displays	3	5	3	3	2	2	2	5

* For key strategic issues and reviews of the Strategic Community Plan a specific community engagement plan is to be prepared prior to commencement

Levels of Certainty:

- 1 = every time
- 2 = in most cases
- 3 = depending on the program / issue
- 4 = occasionally
- 5 = rarely
- 6 = never

Consultation Process

The community consultation will involve the following process steps, which may vary depending on the levels of consultancy involved:

Research

- Identify the range of issues that are involved.
- Identify any policies or strategic plans that may impact on any of these issues.
- Identify the issues that are core to the consultation.
- Establish what the responsibilities of Council are in relation to each of the core issues that have been identified.

Setting the Framework for the Consultation

- Define the purpose of the consultation.
- List the specific aims of the consultation.
- Define the internal stakeholders who may have an interest in the consultation.
- Define the external stakeholder groups or individuals that need to be included.
- When an issue is likely to be controversial, consider engaging an independent expert who can develop credibility with both sides.
- Using the consultation matrix define the most appropriate approach to reaching the audiences involved.
- Holiday Period:
 - Council to take into account the ability for timely consultation during public holiday periods.
 - Council to take into account the possible low number of residents for exposure to critical consultation process during the December/January holiday period.

Plan and Initiate the Consultation Process

- Using the matrix identify the modes for reaching the audiences.
- Establish the process which will be used to reach the audiences.
- Prepare a timetable for consultation that is realistic, including avoidance of public holidays during the consultation period.
- Establish the necessary consultation budget.
- Prepare the information on which the consultation will be based.
- Ensure a quality and completeness review is performed on the information to be provided¹.
- Circulate the information and/or provide and advertise access points to the information for the identified audiences.

¹ Where relevant, Shire Officers must ensure that the information is fully compliant with legislation (i.e. a planning application can be approved in its submitted form) prior to commencing the consultation process. If the application is found not to be compliant it is to be deferred until additional / revised information is provided by the applicant to make it compliant.

Consideration of Submissions

- Formally acknowledge (either via letter or acknowledgement card) written submissions within 7 days of the end of the consultation timeframe.
- Summarise all submissions and present a report to the relevant Shire Officers and Elected Members.
- Once the related /Council decision is made, communicate the outcome to the community via a relevant communication media (e.g. newspapers, notice board, web site, Council Minutes), including direct to the community members who responded in writing.

Privacy of Submissions

Submissions received may be included within the official Council agenda and minutes, including personal information about the submitter's identity and location. Agendas and minutes are made available to the public and on Council's website. Authors of submissions that don't wish to have this information identified in agendas and minutes can request suppression of this information in their submission. In these situations the relevant Shire Officer may be required in the agenda item/report to provide information about the proximity and associated relevance of the contents of the submission.

Note the full copy of any submission, can be subject to access requests under the Freedom of Information Act.