COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

Introduction

This policy aims to give the community a clear view of the importance of consultation in democratic governance. It also aims to be a practical document that will assist Council to undertake effective consultation in Cottesloe.

Every Council report includes a section on consultation to ensure that proper attention has been given to this area of decision making. This policy fosters a consultative culture and ensures that the consultation genuinely reaches people affected by a decision and they have every opportunity to have input on Council decision making.

1. Definition of Consultation and Democratic Governance

Consultation for this document is defined as a process of two way, informed communication between Council and the community on an issue prior to Council making a decision.

Democratic governance involves community participation and input into governance and decision making. Consultation is a vehicle for obtaining this input as it enhances the decision making process. It fulfils a need to ensure that views can be identified and communicated. Consultation does not over-ride Council's responsibility to make decisions and its accountability for its decision making. It does not imply government by referendum.

2. Aim

The aim of the consultation policy is to create and foster a consultative culture in the Town of Cottesloe.

3. Key Principles

The following principles form the basis of the consultation policy.

3.1 Inclusiveness

- Consultation will encourage 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.
- Affected groups and interested parties can select their own representative to work with Council.
- Consultation will be sensitive to the needs of particular groups to maximise their capacity to contribute.
- Council will actively seek out people for consultation.

3.2 Focus

- Consultation will be purpose driven.
- Consultation methods will be appropriate for the task.
- A clear statement on the consultation process will be provided.

- A clear statement will outline the role of Council and the role of participants in the consultation process.
- Internal coordination will ensure Council ownership of the consultation.

3.3 Responsiveness
- Council will understand, consider and respond to contributions from all participants.
- Consultation will be transparent and accountable. All people involved will have a clear understanding of how their feedback and comments are to be used.
- Council will maintain openness, consider advice and alter the course of actions if required.
- Council will respect the diverse range of interests that may be represented during consultation.
- Council will make reasonable attempts to resolve conflicts, if they arise, and reach a suitable solution.

3.4 Provision of Information
- Information relating to consultation will be readily available to allow participants to make informed and timely contributions.
- Information relating to consultation can be accessed easily by everyone involved before key decisions are made.
- Relevant 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.

3.5 Implementation and Evaluation
- All consultation will be evaluated after the decision making is complete.
- Participants will receive feedback about inputs received and how the final decision was reached.
- If a difference occurs between the input and the final decision the reasons for this will be clearly documented and communicated.
- As part of its commitment to the effectiveness of consultation, Council's decision making process will be evaluated once a final decision has been made.

4. Levels of Consultation

The principles are general to all consultation processes, but there are clearly different levels of consultation to meet different requirements.

Democratic local government, with its very broad charter, needs to consult across all levels. This may range from consultation on the future use of a specific site in the Town of Cottesloe, to consultation on the community's view of a state-wide issue which impacts on the community and therefore requires a Council position.

The levels illustrated in Table One indicate different approaches to consultation. These general principles will be used to develop specific strategies.

5. Tools of Consultation

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

6. Consultation Matrix

The Council and the community need to determine which tools are appropriate at different levels of consultation. The template for the matrix appears as Table Three.

6.1 Table One

Examples of the different levels of decision making requiring different approaches to consultation are:

Site specific	Matters about a particular site, such as a change in use or sale of property. Excluding matters to be decided under the Planning and Development Act.
Area improvement	Matters that affect people in a neighbourhood, or precinct, eg change in local service delivery, traffic management plans, precinct plans and significant planning initiatives.
Service planning for the entire Town of Cottesloe	To develop or improve a service that would see a significant change in the level of service. The service could have an impact on the whole of the Town of Cottesloe.
Policy development	To develop or improve policies for Council's position on particular matters. Policies may affect the whole of the Town of Cottesloe. Does not including internal operating procedures.
Key strategic issues/ major development facilities	Projects of such a size that impact on the finances or future of the Town of Cottesloe eg aquatic facility or beachfront redevelopment.
Strategic Plan for the Town	Establishing the decision making framework of Council.

6.2 Table Two

• Advertisements in the local newspapers	Advertisements in the local papers are an important means of advising the community about the matter under consultation and how the community might have input.
• Web Sites • Online 'Have your say' consultation	Information will be placed on the Internet at www.cottesloe.wa.gov.au
• Cottesloe Council News	Cottesloe Council News is the regular publication of Council. It can carry articles on a policy or issue. If it is used for consultation, then the article must inform and encourage feedback. The newsletter is an important vehicle to report the results of other consultations.
• Write a letter	This is a personally addressed letter to all affected households. It outlines issues and invites comment. It always indicates where the comment should be directed within Council.

• Ratepayer groups	Ratepayer groups such as SOS are a valuable means of receiving feedback on a range of issues.
• Media release	This involves issuing media releases and conducting interviews with local journalists. If it is part of the consultative process, the Council spokesperson should always indicate to the media representative that feedback from the community is valued. The media release will be made available to local newspapers.
• Survey • Deliberate Polling	This is a statistically correct survey of particular attitudes, beliefs or information. It may be done by phone, written survey or door knock of individual households.
• Letterbox drop • Fact Sheets	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. These will only be used in the affected area.
• Personal briefings	These are held at the request of a member/s of the local community to discuss a particular issue with a responsible officer. Personal briefings may include the Mayor and/or Councillors.
• Focus groups/review groups • Advisory Groups	These are discussion groups of around 15-20 people, usually led by a trained person (facilitator). The participants are invited because they are residents or because they have a particular interest, involvement or stake in the subject being discussed. The group may comprise professionals or residents with particular skills and competencies relevant to the issue. The purpose is to find out the range of opinions that exist on a particular topic. Focus groups cannot measure how widely those various opinions are held in the community.
• Information session • Public Meetings	This may be held at a community venue, on site of the matter under consultation, or at Council offices. Invitations will be sent by one or more of the following methods: • advertising in local papers • letterbox drop • media.

6.2   Table Three

	Ad in paper	Webpage	News letter	Letter	Ratepayer Group	Media Release	Survey	Letter drop	Personal Briefing	Focus Groups	Info Session
Site Specific	2	3	3	2	3	4	5	4	3	5	5
Area Improvement	2	2	2	3	2	4	5	4	3	3	5
Service Planning	1	1	2	4	2	3	4	4	3	2	4
Policy Development	1	1	1	4	1	2	3	3	3	3	4
Key Strategic Issues – Major Projects	1	1	1	4	1	2	3	3	3	2	3
Strategic Plans	1	1	1	4	1	2	2	3	3	2	3

1 – every time

2 – will in most circumstances

3 – may depending on the program

4 – on the odd occasion

5 – in the rarest of circumstances

7.   Scoping a Project for Community Consultation

A successful consultation requires the following steps:

7.1   Research

- Identify the range of issues that may be involved.
- Identify any policies or strategic plans of Council that may impact on any of these issues.
- Identify issues that are core to the consultation.
- Identify any residents' groups that may have an interest.
- Remember that the existence of such a group is a reflection of a past perceived failure by Council to address residents' concerns. Understand what those failures have been.
- Establish responsibilities of Council in relation to each of the identified core issues.

7.2   Setting the Framework for the Consultation

- Define the purpose of the consultation.
- List the specific aims of the consultation.
- Define all internal stakeholders who may have an interest in the consultation.
- Define all external stakeholder groups or individuals that need to be included.
- When an issue is likely to be controversial always include an independent expert who can develop credibility with both sides.
- Using the consultation matrix define the most appropriate entry point to reach audiences. Is it a policy, a major project or a strategic plan? Or does it relate to locality, a specific site or a neighbourhood issue?

7.3   Plan the Consultation Processes

- Using the matrix identify how to reach each of the audiences.
- Establish the order to reach them.
- Prepare a realistic timetable for consultation.
- Establish a budget for the consultation process.
- Prepare initial information on which to base consultation.
- Circulate information or provide access points for all identified stakeholders.

7.4   During the Consultation

- Keep the community focussed, acknowledge side issues, always returning to the purpose of the consultation process. Be flexible to emerging or unplanned ideas that contribute positively to outcomes.
- When consultation has been completed advise all participants on the outcomes.

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