BARCALDINE REGIONAL COUNCIL
POLICY

SYSTEM: Professional Governance

POLICY TITLE: Community Engagement Policy

POLICY NUMBER:

ADOPTED: **16 September 2015**

PURPOSE: To enhance the relationship between the Council and community through quality community engagement.

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1. Outline

Community engagement is an important principle in the planning, policy development and decision making process of Council. Council believes that quality community engagement is essential to the foundation of good governance and to enhance the relationship between the community and Council.

2. Background

This Policy affirms Barcaldine Regional Council's commitment to community engagement as reflected in its mission statement-

To provide excellence in local government through extraordinary service to our citizens

It provides a set of principles to guide community engagement practice drawn from internationally   accepted community engagement principles - the International Association for Public Participation (iap2) framework.

Meaningful community engagement is a process that:

- is planned, resourced and effectively promoted to those likely to be interested or affected;
- takes into consideration the diversity of the community;
- clearly articulates the level of influence the community has on the decision making process;
- provides a range of accessible opportunities for community participation; and
- provides timely feedback to participants and the broader community showing how community input has been considered and what final outcomes have been determined by Council.

The *Queensland Local Government Act 2009* outlines the in-principle need for local government to engage with the community and to encourage and assist participation, in particular, Section 4 (c) "democratic representation, social inclusion and meaningful community engagement".

3.   Scope

This policy applies to all facets of Council's operations including:
- Corporate governance
- Economic Development
- Provision of Infrastructure
- Community services
- Environment and Heritage Protection

This policy defines the principles underpinning Council's engagement activities, the role of Councillors and employees in engaging with the community, and the mechanisms which Council will use to engage the community.

4.   Policy Statement

Barcaldine Regional Council recognises that community engagement and participation processes are a vital part of democracy. Effective engagement is good business practice and critical to good government. For this reason Council is committed to engaging with all of its communities and residents.

The benefits of effective engagement include:
- Council and community working together to address local issues and together achieve better outcomes;
- an effective level of community ownership and acceptance of decisions affecting the Council;
- an effective level of community awareness of Council's services, planning and program delivery;
- an effective level of awareness across Council of community views and the issues that should be considered as part of decision making;
- an effective level of awareness of the needs, priorities and diversity of the local community, which in turn ensures that Council's service provision and planning functions are aligned appropriately;
- the added value of tapping into and drawing upon community expertise, knowledge and experience to optimise Council decision-making;
- the potential for time, resource and cost savings as a result of better alignment of community needs to services; and
- a positive community perception of Council's decision-making processes

5.   Policy Principles

Effective community engagement is built on trust, respect and goodwill. Council has a commitment to community engagement that is governed by a set of principles that underpin good engagement processes. The principles are described below:

Integrity and transparency - Engagement involves trust and transparency.   The levels of community influence will be clearly communicated. Consultation and higher forms of engagement must be genuinely purposeful and not tokenistic. Council will carefully consider, and accurately portray, the community's role in the decision making process and reflect back how the community has influenced decisions.

Open and inclusive – Council encourages involvement from a wide cross section of the community using engagement processes that are accessible and inclusive;

Mutual respect - Council's goal is to ensure that all voices matter, all opinions are valued and considered. It recognises that both the community and Council are responsible for outcomes.

Timeliness - Council will engage with its community in ways that are timely, open to all, easily understood and not overly bureaucratic or resource intensive.

Well Planned – Engagement requires informed judgement and planning in its approach and implementation in order to be effective, practical and suitably resourced. Consideration will be given to ensuring that sufficient timeframes and adequate resources are allocated to engagement processes;

Foresight - Council engages with its community not only to learn about and respond to present needs, but also to gain a better understanding of our communities' perspective on emerging issues that may affect our preferred future.

Accountability - Council will seek community engagement to enhance its decision-making. However Council is ultimately responsible and accountable and it will accept its responsibility to make the final decision.

6.   Policy Strategies

Engagement around Strategic Issues

By their very nature, these engagements will concern strategic and/or region wide issues. On these issues, Council could involve the community through the establishment of advisory panels and taskforces or through special one-off conferences or other appropriate engagement activities designed to generate dialogue and ideas. Councillors will be consulted to determine the nature and type of their involvement in the strategic issue.

Engagement concerning Local Issues

Council will take a flexible approach on how it engages with the community on local issues. Engagement activities will provide an opportunity to give and receive information and may include the establishment of working or project groups, forums or community meetings. Such activities will be action-focussed and will always involve Council employees.

Engagement Linked to day to day Council Business

Council staff in consultation with Councillors will identify and manage community engagement activities associated with Council's core business and projects approved in Council's budget.

Engagement Activities

Council recognises the full spectrum of engagement activities as contained within the iap2 Spectrum of Public Participation, ranging from informing, consulting, involving, collaborating and empowering.

Council will use different community engagement techniques and communication mechanisms depending on the issue or project, its particular circumstance and the audience it needs to target.

The need for and type of community engagement to be undertaken will be determined at the project planning stage following an analysis of the desired project outcomes. The project plan will also identify the most appropriate communication tool to ensure that the particular target group(s) is well informed of both the issue and related engagement opportunities.

At the planning stage, the project team will also consider whether or not it can obtain the community information it requires from another source, or previous engagement activity, in order to maximise the use of limited resources and minimise the potential for consultation fatigue developing within the community.

Roles and Responsibilities

Councillors and staff play important roles in engaging with the community.

Council will decide the high level strategic issues on which it will engage the community. These issues will be linked to an identified corporate plan priority or a significant emerging issue and will be recorded in a register of community consultations.

Councillors have the responsibility for engaging with local communities; and Council employees have responsibility for engaging the community in their day to day business activities and on agreed projects and place-making activities.

Community Advisory Boards

From time to time Council may establish community advisory boards that will:

- be established by Council resolution;
- have specific terms of reference;
- have a defined time frame;
- report back to Council after each meeting;
- be chaired by a suitable qualified external individual or Councillor or employee;
- identify staff resources to act as project officer and secretary to the taskforce or panel.