

8.1.2 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY 2024-2028

FILE NO: 03.00498

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council adopt the Community Engagement Strategy 2024-2028 and remove the Community Engagement Strategy Policy from Council's policy manual.

REPORT:

Under the *Local Government Act 1993* - Section 406 Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R), the IP & R framework Council is required to review its Community Engagement Strategy (CES) within three months of the election of the new Council.

The CES is one of the documents that form part of the IP & R framework, the others include the Community Strategic Plan, the Annual Report and State of our Region report.

Under the IP & R framework Council must prepare and implement a CES based on the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) framework and the NSW Government's social justice principles for engagement with the local community. Council has used the definition of Community Engagement as defined by the IAP2 <https://iap2.org.au/about-us/about-iap2-australasia/>.

The CES is an integral part of Council's development of its updated Community Strategic Plan – with the engagement principles outlined in the strategy used to formulate Council's engagement processes with the community to seek the views of stakeholders to develop the plan; the community's long-term vision for the future of the region.

Council's CES has been reviewed and updated in line with the requirements outlined in the IP & R framework and the draft document was placed on public exhibition from 13 December 2024 to 28 January 2025. The standard 28 day exhibition period was extended as the document was placed on exhibition over the December – January period to fit within our IP & R timeline.

To raise awareness of the process, the following promotional activities were undertaken to support the exhibition period:

- Council's Facebook page (21k followers): 16, 24 December, 3 January
- What's News: 20 December, 10 January, 17 January - distributed to media and placed on the Council website
- Council notices: 21 December, 28 December, 4, 11, 18 and 25 January – promoted in The Western Advocate and placed on the Council website
- The draft Community Engagement Strategy was included as a feature tile on the front page of the BRC website linking to YourSay Bathurst for duration of exhibition period. During this period. Council's website had 22,853 active users.
- It was also the feature project on YourSay Bathurst for duration of the exhibition project. During the exhibition period there were 5,509 visits to the YourSay site and 174 new registrations.

There were 136 visits to the draft Community Engagement Strategy project during the exhibition and five submissions were submitted via YourSay. Of the visitors to the site, 111 visited a project or tool page; and 66 were informed i.e. they may have visited multiple pages or downloaded documents. Three of those who submitted feedback were new registrations to the site, that is, this is the first project they have provided feedback on via YourSay. The project report is provided at **Attachment 1**.

The submissions received are summarised below:

Submission 1:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good plan, covers breadth of strategy • Engagement methods benefit non-working people, fewer opportunities for those who work full time or have children to engage • Need to consider other engagement methods to increase reach in community
Submission 2:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wording and intent of the document is correct and sound • Council needs to commit to enacting the principles outlined in the strategy
Submission 3:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement levels are clearly explained, and the document sets out the principles and policies to be followed • Questions how the decision is made to determine the level of engagement • Consultation needs to be through the lifespan of the project - pre delivery, at defined milestones and closing the loop following project delivery to ensure Council receives feedback
Submission 4:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The importance of working with the community and harnessing these ideas early and informing decisions to create more community ownership of decisions • Need to promote more good news stories reflecting Council's broad role in the community (not just roads, rates and rubbish) • Need to consider how to ensure contact with Council on minor issues e.g. storm damage
Submission 5:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy to read and good statistics • Council needs to ensure it implements the processes outlined in the strategy and engage with the community on issues/projects

No changes have been made to the document and the following commentary is provided in response to the submissions:

There was commentary on several of the submissions that while the strategy was clear on the principles of engagement there were questions about its implementation and levels of engagement.

The Community Engagement Strategy sets out our principles of engagement at the highest level. It does not determine the level of engagement to be adopted by Council on various plans/projects/policies that will be the subject of individual community engagement plans. That is determined in reference to the strategy, and the engagement activities planned will be developed based on the size and scope of the project. Any one project may have various levels of engagement throughout a project.

Detail on the various stages of engagement through a project, and the way in which council will provide feedback and close the loop on projects will also be detailed in individual engagement plans.

Council is committed to working with the community and the engagement strategy provides the framework for this.

It is also important to note that Council has also articulated that engagement does not occur on all Council decisions, projects or activities. Part of good engagement practice is being open with the community that there can be and are limitations on engagement and where it comes into play in the council decision making process. There are times when Council makes decisions based on planning law, legislative limitations, budgetary constraints etc. and this may not reflect community sentiment or the results of an engagement process. Being open around the fact that we don't consult on everything in our strategy is a reflection of this.

Council's engagement strategy does not cover in specific detail how community members should report damage or other matters that are day to day operational issues. That is not the purpose of this strategy. These matters are dealt with by direct contact with Council via phone, email or the Contact Us form on the corporate website.

A review of the document internally also identified the need to correct information in the infographic to reflect a change in projected population growth and the major employer in the local government area.

The vision and mission included in the document reference those included in the current Community Strategic Plan (CSP). It should be noted. the new CSP is currently in development and if a new vision and mission is developed as part of this process, this will be reflected in an amendment to the Community Engagement Strategy following the adoption of the CSP later this year.

The survey was also used to gather information about how the community sources information about Council – as well as provide links to follow council on Facebook and to sign up to our recently introduced monthly e-newsletter.

Those who replied to the survey indicated they sought information about Council from a range of sources. All used Council's social media platforms, while four of the five also used Council's website, Council's recently introduced e-newsletter and local media. The Council's ratepayer newsletter was used by two respondents while one person suggested an increased use of letterbox drops for providing information.

The introduction of the e-newsletter in late 2024 helps increase the visibility of Council's activities, events, projects and good news stories with community members. It works in tandem with our digital platforms and distribution of information via local media and the quarterly ratepayer newsletter. The newsletter currently has over 400 subscribers and continues to grow.

CONCLUSION:

Following the exhibition period and the consideration of the submissions received, Council's Community Engagement Strategy is to be adopted and placed on the Council website as part of the suite of I P & R documents. Further, following the adoption of the strategy, the previous Community Engagement Strategy Policy will be deleted from the Council's policy manual.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Nil

BATHURST COMMUNITY STRATEGIC PLAN – OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES:

Objective 6: Community leadership and collaboration.

Strategy 6.1 Communicate and engage with the community, government and business groups on important matters affecting the Bathurst region.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:

02 **Consult** - to obtain public feedback on alternatives and/or decisions

ATTACHMENTS:

1. 1 Project Detailed Report Community Engagement Strategy 22 July 2016 To 20 January 2025 [8.1.2.1 - 6 pages]
2. BRC COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY 2024-2028 [8.1.2.2 - 16 pages]

MINUTE

RESOLUTION NUMBER: ORD2025-37

MOVED: Cr B Fry SECONDED: Cr N Packham

RESOLVED:

That Council adopt the Community Engagement Strategy 2024-2028 and remove the Community Engagement Strategy Policy from Council's policy manual.