

## **Policy**

Upper Hunter Shire Council is committed to promoting the effective participation of our community in planning, decision making, operations and communications.

The Community Interaction Policy outlines Upper Hunter Shire Council's commitment to ensure that the range of interactions between council and community members are conducted in a timely, consistent, inclusive, proactive and professional manner and reflect the criteria set out in the Community Interaction Matrix.

This policy is intended to cover both the day to day interactions between Council and the community on operational matters and issues of strategic importance for the community. The operational area will be managed through an integrated response system that delivers consistent, timely and fair outcomes for community members. Strategic projects and processes will all incorporate a structured, planned approach to selecting and implementing the types of interaction that will lead to the best possible outcomes for the community.

## **Background**

The Local Government Act Section 7 states that one of the purposes of the Act is to provide a legal framework for an open system of local government in NSW. The Act is also intended to encourage and assist the effective participation of local communities in the affairs of local government.

Community members, councillors and staff work together in a variety of situations and contexts, in regards to a broad range of community, commercial and personal matters.

The purpose of this policy is to provide a clear and consistent framework to guide these interactions. The policy will be complemented by a package of practical tools to assist community members and council in these interactions.

## **Objectives -**

- Ensure that community interaction is coordinated and integrated in a consistent manner across Council and utilises the most effective methods and technologies.
- Ensure timely and effective communication with the community on all relevant matters
- Establish, maintain and strengthen partnerships between council and community members
- Outline the requirements for project management of community consultations
- Ensure meaningful community engagement in consultative processes
- Ensure that council decisions are well informed, consider community views and result in the best possible outcomes for the Upper Hunter Shire community.
- Provide a framework and practical tools to guide all council and community interactions
- Build a network of community contacts

## **Principles of Community Interaction**

Upper Hunter Shire Council considers that meaningful and effective community interaction:

- Is based on the belief that those who are affected by a council's decision have a right to be involved in the decision making process within the constraints of the legislative framework;
- Seeks the input and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision;
- Seeks the input of participants in determining how they participate;

- Provides participants with the information required to participate in a meaningful and effective way;
- Recognises that the community may hold a diversity of opinions regarding commercial, community and domestic concerns;
- Communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.

### **Procedures**

Upper Hunter Shire Council will ensure that all legal requirements are met in relation to consultation and notification as per State and Commonwealth Legislative and Regulations.

Reports and business papers prepared for the information and consideration of Upper Hunter Shire Councillors will indicate the procedures and implications for community interaction.

The Community Interaction Matrix will be used to determine the appropriate format and protocols for all community interactions and covers both Councillors and staff.

The Communications Officers will participate in the planning of all major projects which incorporate a community consultation and engagement component. The Communications Officer will liaise with staff to advise on the most appropriate method/s for community interaction, and assist staff in the use of the Community Interaction Matrix and accompanying Community Interaction Tool Kit.

### **Community Interaction Matrix**

The Community Interaction Matrix, is a framework to guide community members, councillors and staff in all areas of interaction. The Matrix will provide clear advice on time frames, formats and lines of communication.

The framework maps the pathways for routine council processes, statutory obligations, planning, one off events and critical incidents. The framework indicates the minimum levels that will be used in planning and delivering activities and projects that fall within Council's legislative responsibilities.

### **Community Interaction Toolkit**

The Community Interaction Toolkit includes practical assistance in determining the appropriate level and form of community interaction and outlines the tasks and protocols required to complete the selected approach. The toolkit will include advise on how to incorporate new and innovative approaches into community interaction activities.

The Toolkit will be updated as required outside of the policy review process, to ensure accuracy, currency and relevance.

### **References**

Customer Service - POLICY - Standards - Service  
 Customer Service - POLICY -Complaints Handling  
 Governance - POLICY - Model Code of Conduct

This Policy was adopted by Council at its meeting held on 26 September 2011.

### **Review Date**

October 2012 by the Director of Corporate Services

Authorised by:.....  
 Steve Pryor, Acting General Manager

11 October 2011  
 Date