



George Town Council

Community Consultation Policy

Policy No. 13 - Version 3

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Introduction

The George Town Council's Mission Statement is:

"We commit to lead, work with, support, listen and respond to our community.

We will enhance our natural resources and heritage to provide lifestyle choices, preserve our environment and foster economic prosperity for the benefit of current and future generations."

Community consultation and engagement enable the Council to involve the community in its decision-making processes.

The process provides elected members and Council staff with the opportunity to:

- listen to the community;
- consider a range of options and develop ideas together; and
- build a shared understanding of an approach.

Consultation ensures that:

- the community is aware of, and can contribute to, the development and review of policies, plans and services;
- the community's satisfaction with the Council's policies, plans and services is considered; and
- Council is open and accountable in its decision making, resource management and expenditure.

Council recognises that whilst there are existing channels for community input into the Council's activities and whilst the Council has adopted supportive policies and practices, this is not always enough. Further canvassing of the community is required to ensure concepts and plans are appropriate and responsive to identified needs.

The Community Consultation Policy provides a broad framework for effective consultation processes. It does not replace existing avenues for community involvement but is designed to complement them.

This Policy is available to the public via the Council website, or in paper form on payment of a reasonable charge.

Policy Statement

This policy provides a series of principles to guide consultation processes used by the George Town Council to encourage and support community involvement in local government decision-making. All community consultation and engagement is to be undertaken in accordance with the principles of this Policy.

Statement of Principles

The following principles, which Council believes are central to effective community consultation, underpin this policy:

- **Sincere intent:**
 - Council will identify the consultation process and plan to be adopted and be clear about what can change and what can't be achieved through each consultation.

- All participants will contribute in a similar spirit of openness and trust to maintain the integrity of an objective and unbiased consultation process.
- **Clarity:**
 - Council will clearly state the decision to be made and the purpose of the consultation.
 - Relevant and accurate information will be readily available, having regard to the scale of the issue being considered.
- **Inclusiveness and Diversity:**
 - Council will encourage participation from people who live, work, visit or support the George Town Municipality to ensure inclusive and equitable representation in the engagement process.
 - All affected parties will be identified.
 - Barriers to participation will be minimised.
- **Timeliness:**
 - Council will ensure sufficient time is allowed to consult effectively.
- **Transparency and Feedback:**
 - Council will listen to all input and ideas.
 - Council will provide feedback that reports on how information gathered during the consultation process was used to inform the outcome.
- **Accountability:**
 - Community consultation occurs at many levels of engagement. Council has a responsibility to effectively and efficiently manage resources.
 - Council will seek to balance advantages of community consultation with the community impact and scope of each project and circumstance, relevant legislative requirements and the cost of community consultation.
- **Evaluation and Review:**
 - Council will evaluate and review its community consultation framework to ensure it is responsive to the views and aspirations of the community.

Link to Strategic Plan

Community consultation is integral to achieving Council's mission as outlined in its Strategic Plan.

George Town Council Strategic Plan 2012-2017

Goal 1 - To be a responsible, accountable local government by enhancing our reputation within the community.

Strategy: Acknowledge and communicate the roles and responsibilities of Council in advocating for and representing the community.

Objective: Conduct community consultations in accordance with Council policy.

Related Internal Documents

- George Town Council Personal Information Protection Policy No. 2
- George Town Council Customer Service Charter Policy No. 8
- George Town Council Right to Information Policy No. 28
- George Town Council Risk Management Policy No. 33

Legislation

The following legislation should be considered in conjunction with this policy:

- Local Government Act 1993.

Definitions

Community – Includes all people who live, work, study, own property, visit or support the George town Municipality

Consultation – Is a planned process that Council chooses that seeks to inform the community and draw out opinions and comments from the community. It supports the involvement of residents, businesses, stakeholders and other community members in decision-making processes.

Engagement – Refers to a broad range of practices whereby the community has a level of influence on the decision that is being made. Council will determine the level of engagement most appropriate for the purpose.

Scope of Policy

This Policy applies to Councilors, all Council staff, Council contractors, agents and consultants acting on behalf of the Council.

Application of Policy - Intent

Council understands the spectrum of community engagement approaches to contain:

Informing

- Goal - To key stakeholders and members of the community with objective and balanced information to assist in understanding the problems, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.

Consulting

- Goal – To obtain feedback from the community and key stakeholders to enable a broader understanding by Councillors and Council staff of the local needs, concerns and priorities prior to decision-making.

Participation

- Goal - To work directly with the community during the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood, to maximise the extent of incorporation of community advice

and recommendations into formulation of solutions and to enhance community ownership of decisions and outcomes, and community commitment to the decisions made.

Application of Policy - Consultation Methods

The decision regarding what method of consultation is to be used will be based on clear criteria and might include, but is not restricted to:

Public Submission

- Public submissions may be called for on specific issues or proposals. Advertisements will be placed in appropriate news media, identifying the issues and calling for comments.

Locality/Community Meetings

- Locality/Community Meetings are useful strategies where there are issues or proposals that affect residents living in a particular area, or specific interest groups which can easily be identified. Such a strategy would include the preparation of a discussion paper which would be circulated to the participants prior to the meeting.

Conferences

- In general, a conference would only be used when the issue is broad and has implications for the majority of the Community. The process allows Council to specifically target key interest groups in the Community by personal invitation. A conference is a major event and should be advertised in the local paper with good lead times and accompanied by press statements.

Workshops

- Workshops are more tightly structured than conferences. They are a useful strategy when the issue or proposal to be discussed requires some ideas, work or lateral thinking from participants.

Application of Policy - Consultative Planning Considerations

The level of community consultation undertaken relates directly to the level of community involvement required. This should always be appropriate to the nature, complexity and impact of the issue, plan or strategy. Where a decision about a particular issue can be delayed to allow time for community consultation this should occur, if it is appropriate. Any consultation undertaken by the Council will be completed before a decision is made.

Council will not be in a position to consult in situations where:

- A decision needs to be made quickly, for example when public safety is at risk
- A legal, commercial or legislative restriction makes consultation impossible
- The decision concerned involves routine operational matters

In these events the Council will endeavour to provide information relating to the reasons why Council could not seek community consultation on the issue.

In some circumstances, the Council will carry out initial communication and notification procedures for regular services, and may become aware through responses received that the community or key stakeholders have strong views concerning the issue. As a result, further consultation processes may be used to work with the community to resolve the issue(s).

Consultation does not mean sharing the responsibility for the decision. Consultation is the gathering of information, views, and opinions in order that the decision made by Council is informed and well considered. Sound analysis and judgment is required to determine when a consultation process is appropriate and when it is not.

Application of Policy - Consultative Process

When consulting with the community, Council will clearly set out the purpose and nature of the consultation. Specifications will include:-

- The reason for entering into consultation;
- Background information (discussion paper to outline issues, range of options and meeting dates);
- The time limits for the consultative process;
- The identification of residents targeted in the consultation;
- The mechanisms to be used for consultation; and
- The timelines for the outcome of the consultation.

Council recognises that each issue or proposal will require its own separate process and the precise form of consultations may vary according to the particular characteristics of each issue.

Application of Policy - Communication & Feedback

Council recognises the importance of providing residents who participate in any consultative mechanism feedback on the outcome of the consultation, whether this is the final report, a summary of the inputs from consultation, or, preferably, both.

As a minimum, Council will advertise on a monthly basis in the local print media, informing the community on consultative processes being undertaken or proposed, including:

- Decisions of the Council of general community interest, including any outcomes of consultative processes.
- Progress reports on the implementation of previous Council decisions.

Council will also include in its monthly advertisement details of any draft policies under consideration where Council determines the subject matter to be of significance to the community. Council will, through the advertisement, invite comment on the proposal prior to further consideration.

Application of Policy - Petitions

Consultation on an issue may be commenced by the community on the presentation of a petition to the Council. The level and type of consultation shall be determined by the Council in accordance with the Local Government Act.

Implementation of Policy

This Policy rescinds Council's previous Community Consultation Policy No. 13.

This Policy shall be reviewed every two years by the General Manager and the Executive Team to ensure its continued suitability and effectiveness against relevant legislation and the requirements of AS/NZS ISO 31000-2009 and Council's Risk Management Strategy.

Responsibility

Responsibility for the operation of this policy rests with the General Manager.