

Client

Wollongong City Council

Project

Review of Community Consultation Policy

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

In November 2008, a Community Consultation Policy was adopted by Wollongong City Council's Administrators on behalf of Wollongong City Council (henceforth referred to as Council in this report). This policy was implemented from February 2009.

This policy is subject to an annual review process - a process that is currently occurring. As part of this review, Council sought the services of an independent consultant to conduct an external assessment of how well its policy framework is operating in practice. In March 2010, Wollongong City Council appointed Elton Consulting to undertake this independent assessment.

The outcomes of Elton Consulting's assessment are contained within this report. In addition to providing an analysis of Council's current practice, this report provides a comparison to current good practice models for community consultation in local government. It aims to give Council a clear picture of the effectiveness of its current community consultation policy and practice and recommendations for improvements.

1.2 Community Consultation Policy

Wollongong City Council's Community Consultation Policy (the policy) aims to *"guide how consultation takes place between the community and Council"*. It does this by identifying what community consultation means in the context of local government, by identifying opportunities for consultation and by enunciating a set of principles to guide the design and implementation of community consultation by Council.

The policy identifies community consultation as *"a term that describes the ways in which Council interacts with the community and the processes and practices that Council uses to:*

- *Notify the community about Council services, facilities and plans;*
- *Listen to the community about their concerns and aspirations;*
- *Seek feedback from the community about existing and future Council business; and*
- *Inform decisions that are in tune with the best interests of the community."*

As the level of government closest to the community, Councils are often expected to engage in a dialogue with local communities with regard to a number of issues, services and developments. Not all of these issues, services and developments are within the ambit of the responsibility of local government. By identifying when Council will consult, Wollongong City Council has set clear parameters for when and why Council will engage in a consultation process. These are:

- *To provide information or give advice to the community*
- *To seek feedback or comment*
- *To encourage participation or collaboration.*

In the policy, Council acknowledges that consultation with the community will not always bring agreement on issues or decisions. Furthermore, Council recognises that there will be times it will not be able to consult, but rather will be able to *inform* or notify the community. This report will not assess Council's decision-making with regards to these matters. However, a key element of good practice in consultation is being clear about how, when and why an organisation will consult. Further, providing clarity to consultation participants regarding about the level of consultation they can expect and their level of influence. In this way, Wollongong City Council's policy reflects good practice.

2 Assessment

2.1 Assessment Criteria

The principles enunciated in the Community Consultation Policy have been used as the basis for the assessment criteria used in this report. These principles are:

- *Encourage community interest, involvement and participation in Council activities*
- *Build a positive relationship between the community and Council*
- *Build community knowledge and understanding of issues and Council processes*
- *Build community confidence and trust in Council*
- *Use the most appropriate consultation method or option*
- *Continuous improvement in the way Council consults with the community*
- *Reduce risk to the community and Council*
- *Dedicate sufficient resources and time for effective and efficient consultation with the community*
- *Avoid over consultation with the community*
- *Provide the whole community with an equal opportunity to be involved in consultation*
- *Be clear about the purpose and process of consultation*
- *Make sure consultation feeds into an appropriate decision making process.*

These are used in the assessment process to measure whether Council's current consultation activities accord with Council's own principles.

The policy also identifies a range of new and ongoing consultation opportunities for Council to use to engage with the community. One of the measures used in the assessment is whether Council is accessing all of the identified opportunities to consult with the community:

New Opportunities

- *Neighbourhood Forums*
- *Community Leaders meetings with Administrators*
- *Community Forums*
- *Independent Hearing and Assessment Panel*
- *Electronic Opportunities e.g. online poll*

- *Integrated Customer Service.*

Ongoing Opportunities

- *Public Hearings*
- *Public Access Forum*
- *Reference groups*
- *Kiosks*
- *Communication opportunities*
- *Improvements in complaints handling.*

The policy also identifies that some opportunities for consultation will arise as a result of a particular project or initiative, whereas other consultation activities will occur regularly as a means of informing and seeking feedback from the community.

Regular consultation activities provide an ongoing dialogue for Council with the community. They are important relationship building tools. By providing a regular connection with the community, they open up the potential for discussion of larger issues.

Project specific consultation activities are undertaken in response to a particular activity, project or issue over a set period of time.

Consultation activities undertaken by Wollongong Council were then analysed using the following matrix:

• **Relationship of the activity to Council's Community Consultation Policy**

This area assesses how the consultation activity meets Council's own policy. In particular, this area considers the Council's community consultation principles. Most of the principles apply to every consultation activity. This analysis will explore which principles are those most appropriate to the activity at hand. The relationship between the activity and other relevant policies are also examined.

The following principles are applicable to all consultations and so are considered at the end of the analysis across the whole spectrum of consultation activities:

- Use the most appropriate consultation method
- Dedicate sufficient resources and time for effective and efficient consultation with the community
- Avoid over consultation with the community
- Provide the community with an equal opportunity to be involved in consultation
- Be clear about the purpose and process of consultation
- Make sure consultation feeds into an appropriate decision making process.

- **How well the activity met Council's needs**

This section of the assessment considers the purpose of the consultation activity and whether it is appropriate to what Council is trying to achieve

- **How well the consultation activities met the community's needs**

This section of the assessment considers whether the consultation process delivers a benefit to the community and whether it is accessible to the community

- **Good Practice**

This section of the assessment analyses how well the activity currently meets good practice requirements and where there may be gaps. In assessing against good practice, a variety of documents and processes are referenced. The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) is referenced in this report. This peak body provides internationally recognised standards and benchmarks for community and public consultation and engagement. Many councils across Australia have based their community consultation policies and practices on IAP2 standards and use IAP2 definitions. For more information on IAP2 go to: www.iap2.org

- **Recommendations**

This section of the assessment explores ways in which Council can improve its practice in regard to each activity and its relationship to the policy

As part of the information collection process, a survey was issued to the Chairperson and Co-Chairperson of each Neighbourhood Forum. Of the 11 surveys issued 7 were received back. The results of this survey appear in the table below.

2.2 Consultation activities undertaken in 2009

In 2009, Council undertook the following consultation activities:

- Neighbourhood Forums
- Community Leaders Meetings with Administrators
- Community Forums
- Independent Hearing and Assessment Panels (IHAP)
- Public Hearings
- Public Access Forums
- Reference Groups, Committees

- Kiosks.

Council also enhanced a range of processes to enable better community consultation via some of its business functions, these included:

- Electronic consultation opportunities
- Integrated customer service
- Communication opportunities
- Improvements to complaints handling.

These two sets of activities are analysed below. From this analysis, it is clear that Council undertook each activity described in the policy.

2.3 Consultation mechanisms

2.3.1 Neighbourhood Forums

Relationship to the Policy	Meets Council Needs	Meets Community Needs	Good Practice	Recommendations
<p>Consultation Type New opportunity Regular consultation activity</p> <p>Purpose Provide information and/or give advice Seek feedback and comment Encourage participation or collaboration</p> <p>Principles Neighbourhood forums present an excellent opportunity for Council to <i>build a positive relationship with the community over time</i>.</p> <p>The responses to issues and requests also presents an opportunity to <i>build community confidence and trust in Council</i>. It appears that Council officers generally report back to the Neighbourhood Forums in a timely manner. However, there does appear to be a lack of a clear reporting system for issues that occur over a long period of time (i.e. span more than one</p>	<p>The Neighbourhood Forums (NFs) provide an appropriate, 'place based', ongoing consultation activity for Council. Although many of the issues being raised through the forums for Council do appear to be issues that could be raised via Council's Customer Service Centre, this may detract from the 'consultative' value of the forums by giving them too much of an 'operational' focus.</p> <p>Survey results Respondents felt Neighbourhood Forums do meet Council's needs as they provide Council with the opportunity to hear about local issues affecting local residents. However, they identified that there is a disconnection between this opportunity existing, and Council actually using it – i.e. to reflect on the issues raised and the community's priorities.</p>	<p>This approach works well as people often view their communities as geographically based. However one limitation of this model is that it only recognises 'place' spatially. It does not, however, recognise place as being defined by culture, interest or interest. Therefore, there may be community members who do not connect with their neighbourhood area as their community. The variety of other issue, activity and asset based consultation mechanisms would go some way to offsetting this issue.</p> <p>Survey results 43% of Neighbourhood Forum Chairs and Co-chairs surveyed were undecided as to whether the Forums are a consultation activity that meet their communities' needs. The remaining 57% agreed or strongly agreed that the Forums met the needs of the local community. Most respondents identified the main <i>function</i> of the Forum as being a pipeline for community issues to be communicated and brought to the attention of Council. However, only 43% of respondents felt that the Forum facilitated two-way</p>	<p>This mechanism is already exhibiting many features of good practice, providing an informal, face to face opportunity for community members to interact with Council staff and each other.</p> <p>Things which could elevate it further include demonstrating the 'take up' of local issues reported at Neighbourhood Forums to make community consultation part of real decision-making.</p> <p>In line with both good practice and community feedback, the employment of a 'Plain English' expert to communicate on behalf of Council, to make their priorities and processes more accessible would improve consultation outcomes by ensuring community friendly communication materials.</p>	<p>That Council implement a system for following up on and reporting back on long term issues raised by the Neighbourhood Forum for which there is no immediate response.</p> <p>That Council ensure that hard-to-reach groups are aware of, and feel comfortable, accessing neighbourhood forums.</p>

<p>meeting cycle). This may negatively impact this process. Once this process is further clarified, the forums will provide an enhanced opportunity for Council to <i>build community knowledge of issues and Council processes</i>.</p> <p>Neighbourhood Forums are governed by a Charter that delineates the roles and responsibilities of the forums and Council. From the information provided from Council, and through the survey, the forums are operating in accordance with the Charter.</p> <p>There appears to be some differentiation between the role of the forums as defined by Council and the expectation of forum members. This is further discussed in the “Meets Community Need” section.</p>		<p>communication between Council and the community. Instead, some Chairs identified that in reality, Neighbourhood Forums provide community members with an opportunity to make their voices heard amongst their peers, to discuss and debate local issues.</p> <p>Respondents also identified that Neighbourhood Forums are not well attended by all age groups within the community (they are mainly attended by people over 50 years of age), meaning the views of younger people are not represented at meetings and therefore issues are skewed.</p> <p>Some respondents felt disgruntled with the lack of follow-up to local issues raised at Neighbourhood Forums, calling the Forums “window dressing” for community consultation, where issues are not followed up by Council members. Other respondents identified the burden of administrative costs and processes on the volunteers running the Neighbourhood Forums. The results of the survey can be found at Appendix B to this report.</p>		
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2.3.2 Community leaders meetings with Administrators

Relationship to Policy	Meets Council Needs	Meets Community Needs	Good Practice	Recommendations
<p>Consultation Type New opportunity Regular consultation activity</p> <p>Purpose Provide information and/or give advice Encourage participation or collaboration</p> <p>Principles This activity appears to be predominantly aimed at <i>building a positive relationship between the community and Council.</i></p> <p>The meetings are governed by the Community Leaders Meeting with Administrators Charter. These meetings appear to be operating in accordance with the Charter with the exception that 'community leaders' as defined by the Charter include community organisations and local business representatives. Currently, the 'community leaders' that attend the meetings are only the Chairpersons of the Neighbourhood Forums.</p>	<p>The meetings provide a contained and manageable opportunity for senior staff and the Administrators to meet with the Neighbourhood Forum Chairpersons to discuss issues. However, much of the discussion has focussed on process issues regarding the Neighbourhood Forums rather than broad ranging community issues.</p> <p>The agenda is often comprised of issues that could be raised with Council through the Neighbourhood Forum process and as such, this may not be the most efficient way for Council to use the Community Leaders meetings.</p> <p>Further, there may be other issues that are important to other sectors of the community that Council does not hear about because those sectors do not have a 'leader' at the table.</p>	<p>While the meetings may meet the needs of the community members that attend the meetings, there is a risk that the closed nature of the membership means there are sections of the community that are not represented in these meetings. It may also be that the opportunity for community members to work cooperatively and develop local solutions across diverse community groups is undermined by the limited membership of this group. This risk is reflected in the meetings' narrow agenda which mainly focuses on issues that could be raised through the Neighbourhood Forum process.</p>	<p>This engagement activity does not attain good practice status as it is limited by a number of procedural issues. To reach good practice, Council needs to reconsider both the composition of the participant group and the aims of this activity.</p> <p>In line with the Charter for this activity, Council needs to reconsider the definition of "community leader" and look to define it more broadly. This will help Council to look beyond residents it is already in contact with to create an inclusive opportunity for the whole community and ensure that certain sectional interests are not being neglected. One method by which Council could broaden current participation could be an open expression of interest process by which residents could be nominated and supported by other community members to take part in the meetings.</p> <p>This engagement activity would benefit from a clearly defined purpose and set of objectives, to differentiate it from Neighbourhood Forums and to yield useful data to Council. This is consistent with Council's aim to <i>be clear about the purpose and process of consultation.</i></p> <p>It may be useful to undertake a study into current community groups, sectors and interests or an LGA-wide survey to understand community issues and use the findings of this to inform agenda setting.</p>	<p>That Council ensures that the leaders meeting process undertaken aligns with process outlined in the relevant Charter.</p> <p>That Council expand the definition of community leadership and thus increase the involvement of a broader set of community representatives.</p>

2.3.3 Community forums

Relationship to Policy	Meets Council Needs	Meets Community Needs	Good Practice	Recommendations
<p>Consultation Type New opportunity Regular consultation activity</p> <p>Purpose Provide information and/or give advice Seek feedback and comment</p> <p>Principles These forums and their interactive nature encourage community interest, involvement and participation in Council activities. By being open and providing direct access to Council staff in regard to projects, they also build a <i>positive relationship between the community and Council.</i></p> <p>Community forums provide an excellent opportunity to inform community members about projects and issues thus <i>building community knowledge and understanding and of issues and Council processes</i></p>	<p>Community forums (the forums) provide an efficient means by which Council can provide a substantial amount of information to a large number of community members.</p> <p>The forums appear to be very well attended with an average of 30 participants per forum.</p> <p>Council's use of the forums in 2009 was appropriate to the issues that were being canvassed. That is, issues that would have been assisted by the use of visual displays with Council's technical staff available for discussion. These issues included consultation on the draft DCP and LEP, Corrimal Revitalisation Study and the North Beach Bathers Pavilion.</p>	<p>This 'two way' mechanism enables Council to engage in a dialogue with the community regarding various projects.</p> <p>The format of using displays with staff members in attendance enables the provision of complex data in an easy to understand manner.</p> <p>It enables the community to 'come together' to discuss an issue while also making provision for one on one discussions with Council staff.</p> <p>The conversational style of these events is designed to make community members more comfortable. The informal nature of the forums makes them accessible to residents as they are a less intimidating form of consultation.</p>	<p>This is a new opportunity introduced by Council to address community concerns that there were not sufficient opportunities to provide feedback on specific projects. This response is an example of good practice, and consistent with Council's goal of <i>continuous improvement in the way Council consults with the community.</i></p> <p>This consultation activity is generally good practice, as it encourages authentic two way dialogue, is broadly accessible for the entire community and recognises a community interest in providing input on significant projects.</p> <p>Broad provision of information regarding the project prior to the forum can allow better preparation by the community and allow for more informed and positive dialogue.</p> <p>Good practice requires the careful definition of the extent of community input and influence over the project. This is an important part of establishing trust with the community, managing expectations and ensuring a transparent and accountable consultation process.</p> <p>Having technical experts and</p>	<p>That Council provide information regarding issues for discussion in a timely fashion.</p> <p>That Council broadly disseminate information to ensure that those people who are unable to attend have an opportunity to be informed.</p> <p>That Council provide alternative feedback channels to ensure that those people who are unable to attend have an opportunity to provide feedback.</p>

			<p>Council staff at hand to listen to community feedback and answer any questions is very good practice as it provides direct access to people that can answer questions and respond to enquiries.</p> <p>In line with IAP2 core values, it is important that after each forum Council 'closes the loop' in terms of reporting back to the community the outcomes of the consultation and the impacts that this feedback has on the subsequent decision making process.</p>	
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2.3.4 Independent Hearing and Assessment Panel (IHAP)

Relationship to Policy	Meets Council Needs	Meets Community Needs	Good Practice	Recommendations
<p>Consultation Type New opportunity Project specific consultation</p> <p>Purpose Seek feedback and comment</p> <p>Principles Given events in recent memory regarding the handling of complex and contentious Development Applications by Wollongong City Council, the predominant principle that the IHAPS service is to <i>build community confidence and trust in Council</i>. By providing an independent monitor, IHAPS also <i>reduce risk to Council and the community</i>.</p> <p>This process is also governed by the IHAP policy. The policy provides a statement of procedure for the purpose, objectives, implementation and recording of IHAPS. Without access to detailed information regarding each specific process, this report is unable to indicate whether IHAPS are operating strictly according to policy but on the information provided, they appear to be doing so.</p>	<p>This consultation activity meets the need of Council to ensure they provide <i>transparency and probity in the development application assessment process</i>. The independent nature of the Chair and panellists ensures that Council is kept at 'arms length' from the review process. While Council ultimately determines the outcome of hearings, the IHAP provides an independent evidence base for Council regarding the applications.</p> <p>The statement of procedures provides clear parameters in which the IHAP can be accessed and this ensures that it cannot be used vexatiously.</p>	<p>This process works well for the community as it provides an independent process by which the assessment of development applications can be heard. There are clear rules and procedures to ensure fairness and to make the process as efficient as possible.</p> <p>It provides an opportunity for community members with interests in the development application to be heard and have their point of view considered by the panel.</p> <p>Although outcomes from the IHAP may be contentious with the community, the process is clear and appropriate to purpose.</p>	<p>The Wollongong IHAP operates within the scope and regulation provided by s.231 of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979. These would be considered the best practice guidelines for the operation of the panel. The IHAP is currently meeting almost monthly with its meetings advertised widely and in particular to those directly affected.</p> <p>In the Best Practice in Development Assessment for Local Government Guidelines (May 2005) IHAPs are recognised as a useful tool for managing unresolved objections. Further, in its review of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Amendment Bill 2008, the Local Government and Shires Association recognises the independence of IHAPs: "There is a proper and hearing by truly independent persons – not staff...there is a public report with reasons and a recommendation. If the Council refuses a recommended application, and there is an appeal, an order for costs against council may be awarded if the decision supports the IHAP recommendation".</p>	<p>That Council continue to operate its IHAP process as it does currently.</p>

2.3.5 Public Hearings

Relationship to Policy	Meets Council Needs	Meets Community Needs	Good Practice	Recommendations
<p>Consultation Type Ongoing opportunity Project specific consultation</p> <p>Purpose Seek feedback and comment</p> <p>Principles Public Hearings are legislatively required. They also meet the principles of <i>building community knowledge of Council issues and processes</i> and <i>reducing risk to the community and Council</i>.</p>	<p>These consultations meet Council's needs by enabling Council to meet legislative requirements under the Local Government Act (1993) Amendment (Community Land Management Act) 1998 and the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act (1979).</p>	<p>Public Hearings meet the need of the community by providing a clear process by which certain development applications are referred to a public hearing, thus providing an opportunity for public interest concerns to be aired and heard. Other consultation activities operate prior to the hearing to inform the public of the plans prior to the hearing. This is an important mechanism that enables the community to engage fully in the Public Hearing process.</p>	<p>Wollongong City Council is operating in accordance with ss.29 and 40A of the Local Government Act (1993), s.57 of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act (1979).</p> <p>The IAP2 warns that these processes can create an 'us and them' situation. This is at particular risk of occurring if there are imbalances of knowledge in the room.</p> <p>Operating information sessions prior to the public hearing ensures that participants are working from an informed perspective enables greater understanding and ultimately a better outcome.</p>	<p>That Council continue to meet its legislative requirements. Further, that Council continues to engage in additional information giving processes prior to public hearings occurring.</p>

2.3.6 Public Access Forum

Relationship to Policy	Meets Council Needs	Meets Community Needs	Good Practice	Recommendations
<p>Consultation Type Ongoing Opportunity Regular consultation</p> <p>Purpose Encourage participation or collaboration</p> <p>Principles The ability for residents to attend a Council meeting and publicly raise and discuss matters that are of concern to them to help inform decision making falls under the principle of <i>encourage a community interest, involvement and participation in Council activities</i>. By encouraging attendance and participation in Council meetings, this consultation activity also <i>builds community knowledge and understanding of Council issues and processes</i>.</p>	<p>This activity meets the needs of Council by providing a forum by which Councillors are able to directly hear from members of the public in a formal setting. As much of the information that is received by Council from residents is managed by Council Officers, or summarised prior to being delivered to Councillors, the ability for Council to hear direct comments from residents is a crucial element of consultation in local government.</p>	<p>This process would meet the needs of the segment of the community that wishes to engage in the formal process of Council and feel that their issues are 'heard'. It also encourages participation in civic process which can lead to community members feeling more engaged with Council.</p> <p>The formal nature of this activity and the need to apply in writing to make a public address may discourage participation from socially isolated or disadvantaged individuals or groups within the community. Those who may particularly be excluded from this process include people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and people with a mental health issue.</p> <p>This mode of consultation may not be attractive to some young people, who may not be comfortable with or interested in this kind of 'traditional' consultation activity.</p>	<p>Council's public access forums provide a significant opportunity for community members to speak directly to and be heard by elected representatives without the intermediary of a Council officer.</p> <p>Community members are permitted to set their own agenda, which is positive and empowering for the community.</p> <p>This activity is an excellent component of a broader suite of consultation activities; however its limitations, such as the necessary time constraints, inflexibility of location, and the format, which requires the ability to speak publicly under pressure, may make this activity inaccessible or intimidating to some members of the community. Therefore it is important that a broader range of consultation activities are maintained which complement the Public Access Forum.</p>	<p>That Council promote the provision of an interpreter service at Public Access forums to encourage Culturally and Linguistically Diverse community members to attend and feel confident participating.</p> <p>That more information on public access forum process be disseminated to demystify the process and thus encourage a broader participation by community members.</p>

2.3.7 Reference Groups, Committees and Friends Groups

Relationship to Policy	Meets Council Needs	Meets Community Needs	Good Practice	Recommendations
<p>Consultation Type Ongoing opportunity Regular consultation</p> <p>Purpose Provide information and/or give advice Seek feedback and comment Encourage participation or collaboration</p> <p>Principles These groups provide Council with the means to <i>encourage community interest, involvement and participation in community activities</i> and assist in <i>building a positive relationship between the community and Council</i>. Having community members involved in designing events and projects and working directly with Council on issues, provides the opportunity to <i>build community knowledge and understanding of Council issues and</i></p>	<p>Although grouped together, these consultation mechanisms assist Council as follows:</p> <p>Advisory Groups and Committees and Reference Groups provide Council with access to a group of residents and interested parties that can be consulted in regard to particular issues. Events based committees such as Seniors Week and Australia Day provide Council with an insight into the wants and expectations of the community in regard to these events. Both of these assist Council by informing decision making and garnering community support for events and issues.</p> <p>Friends groups provide support for community assets and raise broader community awareness of the value of the asset. They also undertake fundraising and assist with the maintenance of community assets. These groups provide a means by which Council can work with the community to protect and enhance community assets.</p> <p>Bushcare Groups and the Food and Biodiversity Project Steering Group provide direct project support to Council by assisting with the maintenance of natural assets. Using</p>	<p>Advisory Groups and Committees and Reference Groups meet the needs of the community by providing an avenue for interested residents to become involved in providing information, advice and support to Council. These mechanisms can sometimes be frustrating for participants where Council's ambit of responsibility is not wide enough for their issue of concern or where participants overestimate the role and influence of the Committee.</p> <p>Due to (what are sometimes seen as) formal Committee structures and long term position holding, these groups can sometimes feel exclusive to new members.</p> <p>Friends groups appear to meet the needs of residents that wish to be actively involved in the preservation of community assets. These groups benefit the wider community by fostering community ownership of those assets. These activity based groups provide an opportunity for residents to participate in their communities in partnership with Council.</p> <p>The activity level of the Bushcare groups indicate that they meet a need for community members. In</p>	<p>Good practice requires Council to clearly define community roles, responsibilities and level of influence in these types of activities. Currently, Wollongong City Council is doing this well, particularly in regards to their Seniors Week, Multicultural and Access groups. Council is following good practice in completely briefing participants in regards to their level of influence. This means setting out exactly what the committee does and does not have influence over and also clearly what aspects of a project or issue are open for discussion.</p> <p>The provision of information prior to meetings is an important part of good practice. Well informed participants will lead to smoother and more productive meetings.</p> <p>One of the dangers of these activities is that they can become limited mechanisms which are neither useful to Council over time nor inclusive, and amount to supporting small, interest driven sectors of the community. The challenge for Council is maintaining them as active participatory groups.</p> <p>As per Council's policy principle, <i>continuous improvement in the way Council consults with the community.</i></p>	<p>That these activities be reviewed at each Council term in regards to their relevance and effectiveness.</p>

<p><i>processes</i></p>	<p>these groups as a consultation mechanism enables Council to understand community priorities in regard to the local natural environment and wider environmental issues.</p> <p>Resourcing these groups can sometimes be onerous for Council and the direct community and Council benefit may need to be reviewed in regard to the cost to Council of supporting these groups. Given that most groups with the exception of the Bushcare Groups (as a whole) and the Friends of the Botanic Gardens Group, groups average less than 15 members per group, it may be assumed that these are not a far reaching consultation mechanism.</p> <p>Having issue and/or asset based groups and committees rather than target group based committees reflects the diverse nature of the issues facing Council and is often a more effective way to connect with residents as people are more likely to engage in regard to an issue they are concerned with.</p>	<p>addition to fostering participation and an active role in the protection of the local natural environment, these groups also provide an opportunity for community members to access formal and informal environmental education.</p>	<p>Council should be constantly reassessing the efficacy and relevance of these groups to ensure it is dedicating resources to the most efficient and effective form of consultation.</p>	
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2.3.8 Kiosks

Relationship to Policy	Meets Council Needs	Meets Community Needs	Good Practice	Recommendations
<p>Consultation Type Ongoing opportunity Regular consultation and project specific</p> <p>Purpose Provide information and/or give advice Seek feedback and comment</p> <p>Principles General kiosks enable Council to have a presence across the wards and in doing so <i>build a positive relationship between the community and Council.</i></p> <p>Both project specific and general kiosks assist to <i>encourage a community interest, involvement and participation in Council activities</i></p>	<p>Kiosks meet Council's needs by connecting with communities in their local area and receiving feedback from residents who may not necessarily come into the customer service centre or contact Council otherwise. Kiosks provide another means by which Council gathers and responds to customer requests which may help to improve resident satisfaction with Council.</p> <p>By holding project specific kiosks in or close to the location that is subject to the project allows residents to picture the project 'in place'. This provides a less artificial consultation environment and may trigger feedback that residents would not provide if the consultation was to occur at Council's Civic Centre.</p>	<p>As Kiosks are held outside of usual Council business hours they provide an additional opportunity for residents to connect directly with Council. As they are often held in busy community meeting places such as shopping centres and markets, they also provide an opportunity for community members to connect with Council in environments in which they are comfortable and that are convenient.</p> <p>The local approach in the project specific context also means that those residents most affected, i.e. those that live, work or recreate close to the site in question are able to more easily access consultation.</p>	<p>Wollongong City Council is following good practice in regards to their deployment of kiosks.</p> <p>Kiosks are well advertised and easily accessible by local residents, as they are deployed at existing community events or in local areas for which the topic being discussed is relevant.</p> <p>This activity also allows community members the opportunity for direct interaction with Council staff and elected representatives.</p> <p>One way to add value to the kiosks would be to notify local community organisations of when and where kiosks will be held. Should a community organisation wish to organise their own stall to complement the Council kiosk, they will be able to take advantage of the community interest generated by the kiosk to promote their services.</p>	<p>That Council identify and capitalise on community partnership opportunities to work with local community organisations where appropriate by inviting them to take advantage of the interest that kiosks attract. This will increase value of kiosk activity to the community and will assist in the efficient use of Council resources.</p>

2.4 Enhanced Processes

2.4.1 Electronic Opportunities

Relationship to Policy	Meets Council Needs	Meets Community Needs	Good Practice	Recommendations
<p>Consultation Type Ongoing opportunity Project specific consultation</p> <p>Purpose Provide information and/or give advice Seek feedback and comment Encourage participation or collaboration</p> <p>Principles As it can be very flexible, e-consultation has the potential to <i>encourage community interest, involvement and participation in Council activities, build community knowledge and understanding of Council issues and Council processes.</i></p> <p>The use of e-planning and DA web-tracking while efficient for Council, should not be considered to be consultation as it does not provide an opportunity for a two</p>	<p>The use of electronic media to consult potentially provides Council with a highly cost efficient means by which to consult with a wide range of stakeholders.</p> <p>It also provides for multiple levels of consultation from information giving (RSS feeds), to simple 'yes or no' polls to complicated surveys. Council can also use e-consultation to facilitate and host community discussion on local issues.</p> <p>The immediacy of the online form allows Council to quickly and easily disseminate ideas and questions into the public domain for interested community members to respond to.</p>	<p>Council needs to recognise the limitations on e-consultation. These limitations include the potential to exclude people that do not have access to technology or are not able to use it for the purpose required. Groups affected by this may include people in low socio-economic demographics and older people.</p> <p>Alternately, e-consultation can increase access to consultation for other groups such as young people and people with disabilities.</p> <p>E-consultation is most useful when it is easy to understand and the technology easy to use.</p>	<p>Web consultation is becoming more common and expected by the community and will continue to increase in importance and frequency in the future. The Australian Government in their Web 2.0 draft report, encourages all Australian decision makers to <i>take much greater advantage of tools and practices to capture the expertise and experience of citizens, service users and front-line public service workers to enrich the knowledge from which public policy and service delivery decisions are made</i></p> <p>Good practice e-consultation has many of the features of good face to face communication – clear, easy to understand information which allows people to give meaningful feedback on issues of interest. Council should be using simple-to-use and intuitive online formats which allows all members of the community to easily provide feedback.</p> <p>Just like in face to face interaction, it is important that online forums are moderated by an active council voice. This ensures that misinformation is corrected, questions are answered and community members feel that their feedback is being actively heard and understood, not just being lost in a cyber-space void.</p> <p>Good practice e-consultation has the potential to widen the mix of voices and ideas in discussions and allow involvement by traditionally hard-to-access individuals. This includes young people, people with disabilities and people with transport and mobility issues, who may not be interested in or able to access more traditional face to face meetings.</p>	<p>That online consultation should continue to be used as a supplement to other consultation activities.</p> <p>That Council take an active role in moderation of e-consultation forums, rather than a passive role, to ensure online interaction takes the form of an active dialogue.</p> <p>That Council investigate the potential for Council presence on social networking sites.</p>

<p>way dialogue.</p>			<p>Offering a diverse range of online consultation mechanisms is useful to access and include a wide range of stakeholders. For example, while older people may be more comfortable with a traditional style survey online, social online media such as Facebook and Twitter can capture young people through familiar channels they use frequently. Mosman Council in Sydney uses Twitter.</p> <p>However, it is important to recognise the barriers which exist in e-consultation and work to overcome these and complement them with other forms of consultation.</p> <p>In terms of overcoming socio-economic barriers, this means having e-consultation access available at council facilities such as the library and the Council customer service office, so that people without access to personal computers are still able to engage via the internet with Council if they desire. Council already employs good practice to address inter-generational barriers to e-consultation, with the Seniors Computer Classes throughout the area, including the Bulli Seniors Computer Clubs.</p>	
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2.4.2 Integrated Customer Service

Relationship to Policy	Meets Council Needs	Meets Community Needs	Good Practice	Recommendations
<p>Consultation Type New opportunity Regular consultation activity</p> <p>Purpose Provide information and/or give advice</p> <p>Principles Although usually accessed for quite practical purposes, integrated customer service aims to <i>build a positive relationship between the community and Council</i> and to <i>build community confidence and trust with Council</i>. These are highly dependent on the responsiveness of staff and the ability to resolve issues and answer questions as quickly as possible.</p> <p>The Customer Service policy focuses on the importance of listening to customers as well as issuing advice. This is important if Council is viewing this service as a consultation activity.</p>	<p>This activity provides Council with an integrated way to work with residents and a way of measuring and recording its performance in regard to how it is working with its customers.</p>	<p>Provides a 'one stop shop' for residents to have their enquiries managed and to seek Council advice. This may be more convenient for some customers. However, it may also be seen to be keeping Council's technical staff at arm's length from resident enquiries.</p> <p>Council's customer service Charter explains clearly to residents what they can expect from Council and sets a standard of service for customers.</p>	<p>Integrated Customer Service is an operational function of Council. Whilst it does provide an opportunity for Council to speak with its customers, take and handle enquiries and provide information, it does not on its own, constitute a community consultation activity. It does, however, provide a consistent and welcoming connection between customers and Council.</p> <p>Integrated customer service does provide an opportunity for Council to advertise and encourage participation in other community consultation activities. Due to the large numbers of customers that are being reached through Integrated Customer Service (16,811 in person enquiries from 20 July to 31 December 2009 and 52,159 telephone enquiries between April and 31 December 2009), it is an excellent means by which Council can advance its consultation principle of <i>providing the whole community with an equal opportunity to be involved in consultation</i>.</p> <p>Integrated Customer Service could also be used to improve Council's consultation practice by 'closing the loop' on the outcomes of other consultations, for example, displays in the service centre or recorded updates played to customers whilst on hold.</p> <p>Most importantly, if customers have a positive experience through the Integrated Customer Service process, in that they feel listened to, that they receive timely information and that they are important to Council, that positive experience may encourage them to participate in other consultation activities.</p>	<p>That Council's Community Consultation Policy is changed to acknowledge that Integrated Customer Service alone is not a consultation activity, but that it is an excellent support structure to Council's other consultation activities.</p> <p>That Council investigate opportunities to use Integrated Customer Service as a feedback mechanism on the outcomes of relevant community consultations.</p>

2.4.3 Communication opportunities

Relationship to Policy	Meets Council Needs	Meets Community Needs	Good Practice	Recommendations
<p>Consultation Type Ongoing opportunity Regular consultation activity</p> <p>Purpose Provide information and/or give advice</p> <p>Principles The primary purpose of Communication opportunities is to <i>build a positive relationship between the community and Council</i> and to <i>build community confidence and trust with Council</i>. With regards to specific issues and projects they may also be used to <i>encourage community interest, involvement and participation in Council activities</i>.</p>	<p>Communication opportunities in 2009 provided Council with a high level of positive or neutral stories in the local media. This is very important in Wollongong as Council works to rebuild its reputation and relationship with the community.</p> <p>There appears to be a high take up of media releases sent by Council which indicates that Council has a large degree of control over the messages being provided to the community through the media.</p>	<p>It is difficult to measure how communication opportunities directly meet the needs of the community other than providing information via media releases and Council publications. However, it is a key method by which Council communicates about and supports all other consultation activities.</p>	<p>Media releases and the provision of information via newsletters etc are in and of themselves not consultation activities as they are purely Council sending out information that the community cannot contribute to or impact in any way. They are, however, a key element of informing the community about why Council is undertaking certain consultations and why community involvement is important. As such, communication opportunities assist Council to be <i>clear about the purpose and process of consultation</i>.</p> <p>Further, these opportunities are a key means by which Council informs the community of when, where and how consultation will occur. In this way, they support the principles in the Community Consultation policy by <i>providing the whole community with an equal opportunity to be involved in consultation</i>. By using positive media opportunities to acknowledge those in the community that contribute to consultation, for example, Neighbourhood Forum participants or Friends Group members, Council can also encourage increased participation in community consultation processes.</p> <p>Good practice supports the use of communication opportunities to report back to the community on the outcomes of consultations. This is important to validate the experiences of those that have participated in consultations and also provide information to the wider community on the outcomes of the consultation processes.</p>	<p>That Council's Community Consultation Policy be changed to acknowledge that Communication Opportunities alone are not a consultation activity, but that it is an excellent support structure to Council's other consultation activities.</p> <p>That support should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertising consultation processes including details of the consultation and why Council is consultation on the issue • Promoting positive news stories about consultation processes and community members that participate within them • Providing feedback on the outcomes of consultation mechanisms.

2.4.4 Improvements to complaints handling

Relationship to Policy	Meets Council Needs	Meets Community Needs	Good Practice	Recommendations
<p>Consultation Type Ongoing opportunity Regular consultation activity</p> <p>Purpose Seek feedback and comment</p> <p>Principles By providing a pathway by which customers can provide direct input to Council regarding its performance, this activity aims to <i>build a positive relationship between the community and Council</i> and to <i>build community confidence and trust with Council</i>.</p>	<p>Provides Council with direct feedback and suggestions as to how to improve customer service.</p>	<p>This process meets the needs of community members by providing them with a process by which they can directly communicate with Council regarding their experiences with Council and suggestions for improvement. This however is an individual communication between a customer and Council as opposed to a 'community consultation' mechanism.</p> <p>That feedback is able to be given in a range of formats (in writing, in person or by telephone) is good practice as it enables use of a communication medium that the community member is comfortable with.</p>	<p>It is important from both governance and a community relations perspective that Council have a clear process for identifying where it is providing good service and for receiving information about how its services could be improved. However, the complaints and compliments process on its own does not constitute a consultation activity.</p> <p>The type and nature of compliment and/or complaint may also provide an insight into how Council is perceived by its residents and whether or not there are the requisite levels of trust between the community and Council to enable high quality community consultation.</p>	<p>That Council's Community Consultation Policy is changed to acknowledge that Improvements to complaints handling alone is not a consultation activity, but that it is an excellent support structure to Council's other consultation activities.</p>

3 Recommendations

It is clear from the above analysis that Council has undertaken all of the consultation activities listed in its community consultation policy. Many of these are operating at or very close to good practice, particularly in consideration of the level of resourcing Council has available to it and the level of influence of stakeholders.

From the data available from Council, it appears that all activities listed are being well accessed by the community and are meeting the needs of both Council and the community. In addition to the principles explored in the analysis, Council has obviously made a concerted effort to uphold the 'process principles' included in the Community Consultation Policy. These efforts include:

- *Use the most appropriate consultation method and options:* Council has developed a comprehensive range of options for consultation. These options are appropriately applied to different consultation contexts. For example, the use of kiosks to consult with residents about issues/projects where consultation outcomes benefit from the consultation occurring 'in situ'. The activities that Council has developed also allow for residents to connect with different levels of Council, for example Councillors via Public Access Forums. Council could easily expand the impact and reach of its existing consultation processes by better utilising e-consultation mechanisms. This is recommended both under the strategy in the analysis and also as an overarching recommendation of this report.
- *Be clear about the purpose and process of consultation:* The community consultation policy itself demonstrates that Council is clear about when and why it consults and what activities may trigger a consultation. Many of the consultation activities also have their own policies and statements of procedures to ensure consistency of purpose and process as activities roll out. To maintain its current good practice, Council needs to ensure that it continues to communicate the purpose of each consultation activity and the level of influence that can be exerted by residents and stakeholders to the community each time it consults.
- *Avoid over-consultation with the community:* Council's clarity regarding consultation purpose and process should assist in avoiding over consultation. Throughout the course of the analysis there was no information provided that

would indicate that over-consultation was an issue for Wollongong City Council or its communities.

- *Dedicate sufficient resources and time for effective consultation with the community:* Council has three community engagement staff that coordinate many of the consultation activities considered in this report. Additionally, Council makes technical staff available for consultation activities where they are required. Council also significantly invests in advertising its consultation processes and developing high quality collateral to support consultation activities (e.g. displays for Community Forums). This report has been mindful of the significant investment that Council has made to date in community consultation and as such, the recommendations made are sensitive to resource limitations.
- *Continuous improvement in the way that Council consults with the community:* Council undertakes an annual evaluation of the efficacy of its community consultation policy and compares how the policy is translating into practice. Council may further benefit from developing an evaluation framework for community consultation activities that provides direct feedback from participants on the consultation process as opposed to the outcome of the consultation.

This report makes a number of recommendations specific to each consultation activity. Further the following general recommendations are made:

Recommendation 1: That Council review the Community Consultation Policy to identify which listed activities are true consultation and which are support activities.

Some of the activities listed in the policy as consultation activities are not strictly consultative in and of themselves. In particular, communication opportunities, improvements to complaints handling, integrated customer service are excellent and necessary support mechanisms for an effective consultation policy and practice. The activity recommendations suggest ways in which these three activities could provide further value to Council's existing community consultation program.

It is suggested that in this annual review Council consider their position in the policy as identified opportunities for consultation.

Recommendation 2: That Council develop an evaluation framework for the assessment of the effectiveness of its community consultation activities.

It must be noted that the only community members accessed during the development of this report were the Neighbourhood Forum Chairpersons and Co-

Chairpersons. Council will gain a greater insight into the impact of consultation across all of its principles if it were to develop an evaluation framework that included ongoing evaluation with consultation participants and also groups that do not access consultation activities. The findings of these evaluations would then be able to be considered in the annual review of Council's community consultation policy. This would give a deeper assessment on the impact and usefulness of consultation to community members, as opposed to only measuring whether processes occurred.

Recommendation 3: That Council further investigate the opportunities presented by e-consultation to enhance its ability to consult with the communities of Wollongong City

With a population of nearly 200,000, e-consultation provides an efficient means by which Council can access larger numbers of participants for consultations. As Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) develop and become increasingly used by residents to access services, ICT will become an increasingly accessible option for Council.

It is recommended that Council undertake research into the development of an e-consultation strategy which may include the following:

- **Moderated forums:** These present opportunities to create community dialogue on projects and community issues. Council would need to take an active role as a facilitator in these forums
- **Instant poll:** An online facility to gain quick feedback on particular topics. These are useful as precursors to other consultation activities or for topical issues.
- **Resident's panel:** This panel could comprise a representative group of residents who are able to be contacted electronically to participate in surveys, provide feedback and share information in their communities. If convened electronically, this would provide a resource efficient ready sample of residents for Council to consult with across a variety of issues. Council would need to continue to engage in other consultative activities.

Appendix A: Summary of Recommendations

Area	Recommendation
General recommendations	That Council review the Community Consultation Policy to identify which listed activities are true consultation and which are support activities.
	Council develop an evaluation framework for the assessment of the effectiveness of its community consultation activities.
	That Council further investigate the opportunities presented by e-consultation
Neighbourhood Forums	That Council implement a system for following up on and reporting back on issues raised by the community in a timely and efficient manner
	That Council ensure that hard to reach groups of aware of and feel comfortable accessing neighbourhood forums
Community leaders meetings with Administrators	That Council ensures that the leaders meeting process undertaken aligns with process outlined in the relevant Charter
	That Council expand the definition of community leadership and thus involvement with a broader set of community interests
Community forums	That Council provide information regarding issues for discussion in a timely fashion
	That Council broadly disseminate information to ensure that those people who are unable to attend have an opportunity to be informed
	That Council provide alternative feedback channels to ensure that those people who are unable to attend have an opportunity to provide feedback
	That Council implement a system for following up on and reporting back on issues raised by the community in a timely and efficient manner
Independent Hearing and Assessment Panel (IHAP)	That Council continue to operate its IHAP process as it does currently
Public Hearings	That Council continue to meet its legislative requirements. Further, that Council continue to engage in additional information giving processes prior to public hearings occurring.

Public Access Forums	That Council promote the provision of an interpreter service at Public Access forums, to encourage CALD community members to attend and feel confident participating
	That more information on public access forum process be disseminated, to encourage a broader participation by community members
Reference Groups, Committees and Friends Groups	That these activities be reviewed at each Council term in regards to their relevance and effectiveness
Kiosks	That Council identify and capitalise on community partnership opportunities to work with local community organisations where appropriate by inviting them to take advantage of the interests that kiosks attract. This will increase value of kiosk activity to the community and will assist in the efficient use of Council resources.
Electronic opportunities	That online consultation should continue to be used as a supplement to other consultation activities
	That Council take an active role in moderation of e-consultation forums, rather than a passive role, to ensure online interaction takes the form of an active dialogue.
	That Council investigate the potential for Council presence on social networking sites
Integrated Customer Service	That Council's Community Consultation Policy be changed to acknowledge that Integrated Customer Service alone is not a consultation mechanism, but that it is an excellent support structure to Council's other consultation mechanisms.
	That Council investigate opportunities to use Integrated Customer Service as a feedback mechanism on the outcomes of relevant community consultations
Communication Opportunities	That Council's Community Consultation Policy be changed to acknowledge that Communication Opportunities alone are not a consultation mechanism, but that it is an excellent support structure to Council's other consultation mechanisms.
	<p>That support should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertising consultation processes including details of the consultation and why Council is consultation on the issue • Promoting positive news stories about consultation processes and community members that participate within them • Providing feedback on the outcomes of consultation mechanisms
Improvement to Complaints Handling	That Council's Community Consultation Policy is changed to acknowledge that Improvements to complaints handling alone is not a consultation activity, but that it is an excellent support structure to Council's other consultation activities.

Appendix B: Summary of Neighbourhood Forum Survey Outcomes

TOTAL NUMBER OF SURVEYS DISTRIBUTED: 11

TOTAL NUMBER OF SURVEYS RECEIVED BACK: 7

1. What do you see as the main role of the Neighbourhood Forum?

- I see the main role of the Neighbourhood Forum as the exchange of information between the community and any other bodies e.g. Council, RTA etc.
- Enable residents and the Community to raise local issues
- Mechanism to consult with the Community
- Forums to represent the local Community to raise issues of concern
- To facilitate discussion amongst attendees of matter they see as of concern to the Community & act as a pipeline to The City Council regarding matters of community concerned which cannot be resolved with the Council by the individual
- The main role of the Neighbourhood forum is to work WITH Council on ALL matters relating to the Local Area of the Forum
- Neighbourhood Forums – especially in areas away from Wollongong CBD - supply Council with local, grass roots knowledge not known by maps or desk-top studies
- To bring to the Council's attention matters that affect the residents and require discussion/debate to obtain a balanced outcome
- To provide Council with insights and communication with local communities
- To foster an awareness of the role communities can play in improving the well being of local people.
- A communication channel between Council and residents/ratepayers.

2. We are interested in how well you think the Neighbourhood Forum is currently performing this role.

- I think our community is certainly giving information, I would say that the members would say we require more “real” information in return
- The effectiveness of the forum is limited by the response of some Council officers
- More secretarial support from Wollongong City Council is required. Wollongong City Council needs to consult at the planning stage
- I can only speak for Neighbourhood Forum 1 which is the northernmost outpost of Wollongong Council, an isolated area where the Neighbourhood Forum has always been very strong dealing not only with Council matters but also RTA, Integral Energy, CityRail, Government or police – in fact there is a police report at every meeting
- Neighbourhood Forums would work better if we had support from every department in Council – by working together much can (and has) been achieved.

3. Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements, by marking the relevant box.

	I strongly agree	I agree	I neither agree nor disagree	I disagree	I strongly disagree
a) The Neighbourhood Forum meets my needs as a community member	1	2	3		
b) The Neighbourhood Forum meets the needs of our local community	1	3	3		
c) The Neighbourhood Forum meets our Council's needs	1	2	2		
d) A wide range of voices from within our community are being heard by Council through the Neighbourhood Forum	2	2	3	1	
e) Council's priorities and decisions are clearly communicated through the Neighbourhood Forum		3	2	2	

4. Please indicate how well you think the Neighbourhood Forum:

	Very well	Well	I'm undecided	Not well	Not very well
f) Provides an opportunity to raise issues with Council	3	3		1	
g) Provides an opportunity to discuss local issues with other residents	5	2			
h) Fosters local solutions to local issues	5	3	1		
i) Encourages two-way communication between Council and the community		3	4		
j) Encourages connectedness and cohesion among residents	2	3	2		
k) Acts as a way to pass information on to Council	4	3			
l) Promotes local community-driven activities and events		3	3		

Suggestions for improvement

1. Do you have any suggestions for improving the Neighbourhood Forum?

- I think more promotion of the forums is needed. I am certain the community at large is completely unaware of the forum's existence. The members of our forum are largely middle aged and older. We certainly need the views of younger people.
- Improved administrative support
- Forums should be involved in the planning process
- Wollongong City Council needs to improve the consultative process
- I think the present structure is suitable, however in our particular case the opinions of the Coalcliff & Stanwell Park residents should be obtained as to their perspective of the relevance of Neighbourhood Forum 2 to them in view of a perceived community of interest with Neighbourhood Forum 1
- Arranging for Managers of each Council Department to address NF's advising the role of that department and what the local community can do to advise and assist with local knowledge
- Notifications be sent to NF's when localized issues are available/updated on Council's website
- Better marketing and advertising of NF's in localized areas
- I don't have a magic solution but something must be done to engage younger age groups, e.g. the 25- 50 years bracket
- Providing an modicum of secretarial support
- More frequent meetings – co-ordination and administration with time for agenda items that are assembled by convenors/coordinators

Other comments

2. Do you have any other comments?

- I don't think that a box ticking exercise will give you a full enough picture of Neighbourhood Forums. I think a meeting with Neighbourhood Forums Chairs would give a much clearer picture
- This survey is designed to assess the forums and what is needed is an assessment of how Council officers regard the forums. I fear that we are seen by some as a bit of a nuisance who add to the workload. I think that some officers are not appreciative of the grass roots knowledge of those who attend the forums
- To assist communication between Council and Neighbourhood Forums and residents/ratepayers at large, two things are needed:
 - Engagement of a highly skilled "plain English" expert to prepare easily understood versions of Council communications without weakening their legal force
 - More robust and extensive administrative support for Neighbourhood Forums
- Wollongong City Council has made decisions without referral to the Forums (such as the Parking Meter fee regime)
- Council needs to emphasis to staff that Neighbourhood Forums are here for convenient communication in the Community & should be seen by them as a very relevant community activity, rather than a nuisance over looking community well being as sometimes seems to be the case
- Neighbourhood Forum 1 is the northernmost area of Wollongong, and isolated area with about 8,000 residents. Helensburgh is the main town supporting the outlying suburbs of Stanwell Park, Stanwell Tops, Darkes Forest, Maddens Plains and Otford. Many residents are of the opinion the area is forgotten by Wollongong council. The Forum attendees vary between 25 and 250 attendees depending on Agenda items

– not all residents attend every meeting but are kept up to date and have input on all matters through Agenda, minutes, electronically and through our two local monthly and bi-monthly local papers. Not only are residents represented but most local clubs – sporting, aged, youth and business organizations have input to proceedings at Neighbourhood Forum 1 Council matters dealt with at the meetings include concerns on infrastructure, drainage, roads, footpaths, pot holes, garbage, bad intersections, parks and toilets. Planning and Development matters are also dealt with if the need arises to gain the best possible outcome for the area.

- There are concerns at the moment that Neighbourhood Forums are just 'window dressing' for Council's so called Community Consultation – if marketed and used by Council more (workshops, kiosks, etc. included in Forum), they could prove a most cost-effective way of consulting with the community.

Appendix C: Neighbourhood Forum Survey

As the Chair/Co-Chair of the Neighbourhood Forum in your area, Wollongong City Council is keen to hear your perspectives on the Neighbourhood Forum network. We invite you to participate in this short survey.

The survey form should take approximately 10 minutes to complete. All the information you provide will be treated as strictly confidential and no individual will be identified in reporting to Council.

Please return your completed survey to Elton Consulting (georgie@elton.com.au or fax 02 9387 2557) by close of business, Tuesday 23 March 2010. This survey forms part of a review of Wollongong Council's Community Consultation which is currently being undertaken on behalf of Council by independent engagement and research firm, Elton Consulting.

Role and objectives of the Neighbourhood Forum

3. What do you see as the main role of the Neighbourhood Forum?

4. We are interested in how well you think the Neighbourhood Forum is currently performing this role.

5. Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements, by marking the relevant box.

	I strongly agree	I agree	I neither agree nor disagree	I disagree	I strongly disagree
a) The Neighbourhood Forum meets my needs as a community member	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) The Neighbourhood Forum meets the needs of <i>our local community</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) The Neighbourhood Forum meets <i>our Council's needs</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) A wide range of <i>voices</i> from within our community are being heard by Council through the Neighbourhood Forum	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e) <i>Council's priorities</i> and decisions are clearly communicated through the Neighbourhood Forum	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please indicate how well you think the Neighbourhood Forum:

	Very well	Well	I'm undecided	Not well	Not very well
f) Provides an opportunity to raise issues with Council	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g) Provides n opportunity to discuss local issues with other residents	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h) Fosters local solutions to local issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
i) Encourages two-way communication between Council and the community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
j) Encourages connectedness and cohesion among residents	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
k) Acts as a way to pass information on to Council	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
l) Promotes local community-driven activities and events	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Suggestions for improvement

6. Do you have any suggestions for improving the Neighbourhood Forum?

Other comments

7. Do you have any other comments?