

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY 2011-12

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

GOALS

WHAT DOES THIS STRATEGY COVER?

The scope of Hutt City Council's Community Engagement Strategy is:

- interaction between Hutt City Council and the community undertaken for democratic decision-making
- ongoing engagement with the community, in the spirit of partnership.

This strategy outlines our community engagement philosophy and commitment to the community. It summarises at a high level:

- our community engagement goals
- the main types of community engagement Hutt City Council undertakes
- how community engagement relates to the decision-making process and how Hutt City Council considers how to involve the public in decision-making
- our approach to community partnerships
- our commitment to engaging Māori as a Treaty partner
- key opportunities for improving our community engagement.

WHY DOES COUNCIL HAVE A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY?

You cannot have 'government by the people' if the people are not involved when it comes to decisions that will affect them. While elected representatives make decisions on our behalf, they don't know what everyone thinks on every issue. Adding your voice assists elected members in their decision-making.

These principles are embodied within the Local Government Act 2002. The Act places very specific requirements on Council to be aware of and have regard to the views of its communities when performing its functions and to encourage people affected by or interested in an issue to present their views to Council.

Hutt City Council has been gradually improving its community engagement practices over time. These practices, and the principles that underpin them, are being formalised and agreed with the community, through this strategy. This will ensure they form part of the bedrock of the way Hutt City Council does business.

VISION

To empower the communities of Hutt City to participate meaningfully in shaping Hutt City's services, facilities and policies, helping to make Hutt City a great place to live, work and play.

PRINCIPLES

The foundation of Hutt City Council's commitment to community engagement is embodied in the following principles

INVOLVING – Hutt City Council will reach out to a wide range of people to have their say

Accessible – The ways we engage are accessible – in terms of method, location, timing, information and communication

Inclusive – Methods are inclusive of our community, including reaching out to those who are marginalised or seldom heard

Appropriate – We will tailor our approach to the issues and circumstances, and the people we want to engage – engage in their way

Proactive – Communities will be engaged as early as is possible and sensible

GENUINE – Hutt City Council will undertake meaningful, open engagement in good faith

Transparent – We will be honest about the scope and purpose of engagement, how feedback is taken into account, and how it affects our business and decisions

Necessary, useful and purposeful – The purpose of our engagement will be clear and take account of previous engagement and scope for genuine input into decision-making

Integrity – We will engage honestly and respectfully with our communities and always in good faith

Open minded – We will take on board what we learn from community engagement when doing our business, forming proposals and making decisions

SUSTAINING – Hutt City Council will foster long term beneficial connections with our community

Build relationships and trust – Our engagement will foster longer term links and trust between Council and the community

Responsive – Council will always respond to community engagement, including letting residents and ratepayers that engage with Council know what is decided and why

Respectful – Council will be respectful to our community before, throughout and following community engagement

Mutually beneficial – Communities will feel their engagement with Council is worthwhile

GOALS

What Hutt City Council wants to achieve for and through community engagement

Decision-making – Decision-making that productively involves the community

Community engagement processes that support positive relationships between Council and the wider community

Listening to what people say in a fair and objective way

Making it as easy as possible for local people and other stakeholders to participate in, and have a say in, the development of the city

Gaining and sustaining the trust of our community by consistently demonstrating Council's desire to meet their needs and understand their perspectives

Meeting the requirements of legislation and ensuring that Council's statutory obligations surrounding consultation are met

Consulting effectively – balancing consultation processes with available resources

Community Partnerships – Empowering and supporting the community

Assisting and empowering the community to help itself

Nurturing existing beneficial community partnerships

Redeveloping our community partnership approach for community development activities in line with the Asset Based Community Development framework

Exploring additional community partnership opportunities as a productive means of city and community development

Engaging with Māori – Waiho i te toipoto, kua i te toiroa

Fully engaging with and fostering our new strategic relationship with the Port Nicholson Block Settlement Trust

Maintaining and nurturing our existing relationships with local Māori organisations within the city

Involving mana whenua and our local Māori organisations early in the decision-making process

Reaching out to and providing opportunities for Māori in general to contribute to our decision-making

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement is much broader than consultation, although consultation is encompassed within it. Community engagement includes the full range of community participation in decision-making - from being provided with information only right through to Council supporting community initiatives.

The different degrees of community engagement relate to the extent that decision-making powers (and implementation) are devolved to the community, or conversely, held with Council.

At a high level, there are five main types of community engagement that Hutt City Council undertakes with the community. These are summarised here.

Although each type of community engagement has its place in Council, this strategy does not prescribe the type of community engagement that must be employed in specified circumstances. The range of Hutt City Council activities and types of decision is too varied for such an approach.

However, the section on decision-making does outline some of the high-level factors Council takes into account when considering what type of community engagement is suitable for a specific proposal or issue.

Information – Supports all types of community engagement and keeps people informed about such things as decisions, services and local events.

Consultation – Can be used when there is a decision to make about something or when there are a number of choices about the details. Most of the proposals Hutt City Council considers involve consultation.

Deciding together – Local people are involved in deciding which option to choose, but it is Hutt City Council that will act on the decision. A good example of this is the Walter Nash Park playground in Taita. Locals helped design the playground that Council built.

Acting together – Decisions and implementation are made in partnerships between local people or agencies and Hutt City Council. The intended beautification around the Waiwhetu Stream is a good example of this in action. Locals have not only contributed to the development of the vision but will also be involved in actively developing the area.

Supporting community initiatives – Independent groups are empowered to develop and carry out their own plans. Council's role is primarily supportive or facilitative. A lot of the work of Hutt City Council's community development team involves supporting community initiatives.

DECISION-MAKING

Hutt City Council is involved in a wide range of activities, from setting policies on gaming in the city, developing and enforcing local regulations and promoting tourism right through to the delivery of services and infrastructure like libraries and roads.

In most of these activities, the kinds of decision range from setting longer-term strategy to minor operational matters. In general terms, these decisions usually involve the first three types of community engagement – information, consultation and deciding together. In many cases, the same decision or issue may involve different types of community engagement at different steps in the decision-making process.

It is important that the community and Hutt City Council have a common understanding of the decision-making process and how Hutt City Council decides when and how much to engage the community.

This section outlines:

- Hutt City Council's general decision-making process and how it relates to community engagement
- the key factors Hutt City Council generally takes into account when forming a community engagement plan for a specific proposal or decision.

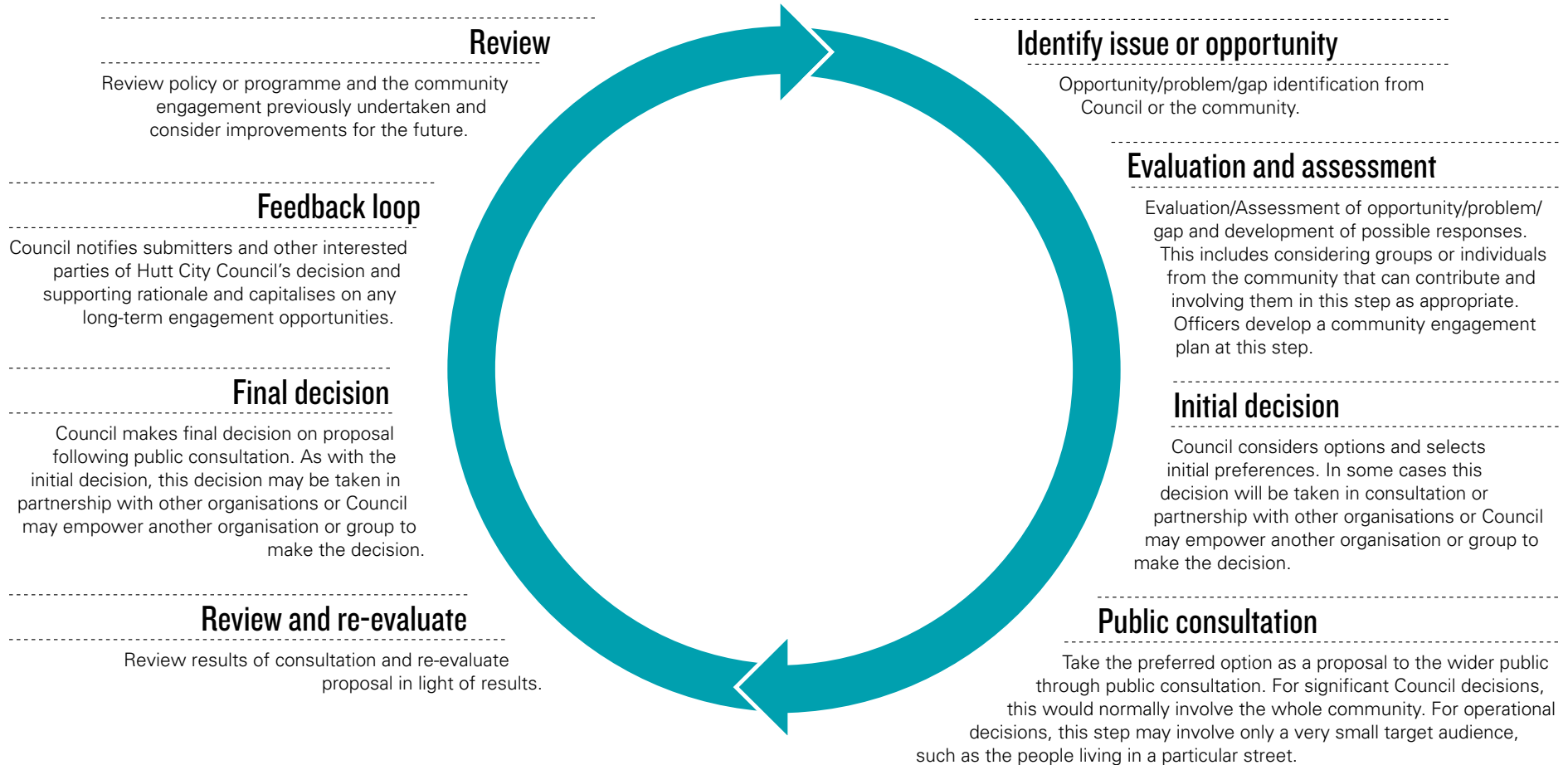
General decision-making process

Hutt City Council's general decision-making process is illustrated on the next page.

This process generally applies to strategic decisions made by Hutt City Council right through to operational decisions made by Council officers, although the nature of the engagement will vary accordingly. At most steps, Hutt City Council can undertake some type of community engagement.

It is important to note, however, that community engagement in decision-making may not mean negotiating or reaching agreement or consensus, nor in many cases is it intended to replace the decision-making responsibilities of the elected members of Council. Nor will all of the steps in the process be appropriate in all cases.

THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLANNING

Flexibility is critical to forming good engagement plans for individual decisions or proposals. Different situations will require different approaches to community engagement. Community engagement must also be balanced against available resources.

Listed in this section are the six key factors that Council considers when forming a community engagement plan. The collective impact of these factors is weighed up by Council at the evaluation and assessment stage of the decision-making process. This helps inform what type of community engagement is suitable and how much resource should go into community engagement, as well as some guidance on who could be engaged.

In addition to the high-level considerations noted here, practical guidance for staff on planning the specifics of their community engagement is available within Council.

1. Extent and nature of the decision or proposal

Is the impact city wide or is it limited to a specific area or customer group? The wider the impact of the decision or proposal, the wider the community of interest that needs to be engaged.

Conversely, changes with a significant impact on a specific area or customer base may involve very detailed but targeted community engagement.



2. Significance

How significant is the proposal or decision according to Council's Significance Policy? The more significant the proposal or decision, the more involved the relevant community or city should be in the decision-making process. Significance involves an assessment of a range of factors, from net cost to the level of public interest and controversy. An issue can be significant for a local community only, and not for the wider community.



3. Urgency

The more urgent the decision, the less involved the community can become. Some decisions must be made without any community engagement because of urgency. In these cases, Council usually goes quickly from the evaluation step to the final decision step in the general decision-making process. An example was Council's decision to contribute to the purchase of Baring Head.



4. Confidentiality

Most of Council's decisions can be made in the public realm with ample opportunity for community engagement. However, some Council business is sensitive or confidential, for example where decisions involve commercially sensitive third party information.

In these cases, Council may limit who it engages with or may not undertake any community engagement at all.



5. Partner involvement

The more a proposal or decision involves partners within the community for expertise, implementation or buy-in for success, the more involved the city or relevant community should be in the decision-making process. There are some decisions / proposals where success does not require any partnerships with the community. Many technical or infrastructural decisions fall into this category.



6. Legislative requirements

In addition to the above factors, which must be weighed, legislative requirements can play an important part in determining Council's community engagement, such as who is engaged, to what extent and at what stage in the process. In these cases, the decision-making and consultation requirements of the legislation must be adhered to.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

Mā tini, mā mano, ka rapa te whai

By many, by thousands, the object will be attained

Hutt City Council cannot by itself address the wide range of issues in the community, nor is it always best placed to deal with an issue or undertake action.

Hutt City Council often shares responsibility for an issue with the wider community, jointly developing and acting on plans. Council's Safer Hutt Valley work is a good example of acting together. The strategy is being jointly developed between the Hutt Valley's two councils, other public sector organisations, and importantly, the business sector and many community organisations.

At other times, Hutt City Council's most appropriate role is limited to supporting and helping empower the community itself. An example of this is Council assisting in the development of workplace travel plans at Wingate. These plans are owned, and are acted upon, by the businesses involved.

There are many groups and organisations within the community that offer a very wide range of work within the community, from community patrols to volunteer caretaking of part of the city's reserves.

For these reasons, engagement with the community in the spirit of partnership is a crucial part of helping the community and Hutt City Council make the city a better place to live, work and play. It also strengthens our relationship with the community and means Council is better able to work with the community when making decisions.

While community partnerships are an important part of our business across Hutt City Council, they are a particularly important feature of our community development work.

ENGAGEMENT WITH MĀORI

Waiho i te toipoto, kua i te toiroa

Let us keep close, not far apart

Council has an obligation to take into account the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and to recognise and provide for the special relationships between Māori and their culture, traditions, land and taonga.

The Local Government Act 2002 acknowledges the Crown's responsibilities under the Treaty of Waitangi and the responsibility to maintain and improve opportunities for Māori to contribute to local government decision-making processes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The obligation to consult includes recognising those who have mana whenua status. Within Hutt City, this rests with Taranaki Whānui, represented by the Port Nicholson Block Settlement Trust.

Council will also consult the Wellington Tenth Trust as a Mana Whenua Trust and with Te Runanganui o Taranaki Whānui ki te Upoko o te Ika a Maui as a mana whenua organisation.

In fulfilling its obligations, Council will also consult other Māori within Hutt City, including the city's seven marae – Korāunui Marae, Te Mangungu Marae, Wainuiomata Marae, Te Kakano o te Aroha Marae, Waiwhetu Marae (also known as Arohanui ki te tangata), Te Tatau o te Po Marae and Keriana Olsen-Kokiri Marae.

STRATEGIC RELATIONSHIP

Council has a memorandum of understanding with the Port Nicholson Block Settlement Trust. This memorandum confirms the strategic relationship between the parties and the opportunity for the Trust to contribute to Council decision-making and be a provider of leadership with Council for the city.

The memorandum provides the following guiding principle for the Trust and Hutt City Council:

- The parties work together in partnership to ensure the mutual benefit and success of the relationship.
- The sustainable prosperity of Hutt City is important to both parties.
- Each party recognises the autonomy, authority and responsibilities of the other to represent their communities' interests.
- The Trust acknowledges the autonomy, authority and responsibilities of Council when acting in its regulatory capacity and when discharging its legislative obligations.
- The principles embodied in the Treaty of Waitangi will guide this relationship. In practical terms this means:
 - partnership: acting reasonably, honourably and in good faith to ensure the strategic relationship has integrity and respect, in the present and for the future of Hutt City
 - participation: recognising that both parties can contribute, for mutual benefit, in deciding the future of the city – working towards and achieving the parties' visions and
 - protection: actively protecting the taonga of Taranaki Whānui and safeguarding cultural concepts, values and practices to be celebrated and enjoyed for all Hutt City residents.

The memorandum also provides specifically for engagement between the Trust and Hutt City Council on:

Council planning and policy processes

– The Trust will have input into the various planning processes of Council, in particular the Annual Plan and Long Term Plan.

The Trust will make significant contributions to reviewing the District Plan of Council. This will include commentary on all matters relating to mana whenua representation, sites of significance and rules, protocols, objectives and measures that are required.

Resource Management Act 1991 and other legislation

– The parties will work together to achieve the purpose of legislation in relation to local government decision-making.

The Council will ensure matters are presented to the Trust in a timely and informative manner, which in turn will assist the Trust in the exercise of its Kaitiakitanga for Hutt City.

Culture and heritage – Council will ensure ceremonial, interpretation and naming opportunities are presented to the Trust so as to retain and protect Māori culture and heritage throughout Hutt City, as deemed by the Trust to be of significance.

The Trust, as the mana whenua representative, will provide cultural support to the Mayor, councillors, Chief Executive and other officers as mutually agreed.

OTHER ENGAGEMENT WITH MĀORI

While Hutt City Council will take special care in its relationship with mana whenua, it must also reach out to the wider Māori community and provide opportunities for Māori to contribute to Council's decision-making.

The key to this will be to foster and maintain strong relationships with Māori organisations within the city – in particular, Te Runanganui o Taranaki Whānui ki te Upoko o te Ika a Maui and the city's seven marae.

The foundation of these relationships will be built on:

- open and honest communication between Council and Māori
- promoting tikanga Māori (Te Atiawa protocol) throughout Council
- providing opportunities for Māori to contribute to our decision-making
- providing quality advice and support for capacity and capability strengthening
- maintaining the right of tangata whenua to be represented and vote at meetings of Hutt City Council committees and subcommittees.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Hutt City Council's community engagement practices have been an area of focus in the past few years and have steadily developed in that time.

Our commitment to in-depth, meaningful community engagement can be seen, for example, in the development of our CBD vision and the consultation plus workshop held in 2007 which involved more than 200 members of the public helping to establish Hutt City Council's priorities.

These efforts have paid dividends, as a 2010 survey showed that 90% of residents were satisfied with Council's consultation and engagement with residents and the publicity provided.

Despite this, there is always room for improvement. The communities' expectations are also evolving and Hutt City Council must keep pace with them.

This section outlines the seven key areas Hutt City Council has set itself for improvement in the next five years (2011-2016).

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLANNING

Community engagement planning is crucial to good community engagement practice and decision-making. Without planning, Hutt City Council may miss opportunities or not get the reach into its community that could be achieved.

The high-level factors that officers should consider when determining how much to involve the community have been highlighted

earlier in this plan. However, this requires internal supporting material and changes to internal decision-making processes.

A community engagement toolkit or kete will be developed in-house to provide assistance to staff. This will provide practical guidance and tips to staff.

Hutt City Council's internal decision-making process will also be reviewed, taking into account the Community Engagement Strategy.

FEEDBACK LOOP

Closing the feedback loop is crucial to sustaining long-term community engagement. When Council gets back to residents, businesses and community organisations that have made the effort to have their say on an issue, civic dissatisfaction and apathy are minimised. Letting people know what has been decided and the reasons for that decision is basic community engagement practice.

Hutt City Council is very effective at closing the feedback loop for many larger projects, such as Council's vision work, the Annual Plan and bylaw reviews. This practice is not universal, however. This presents Council with an opportunity to improve our basic community engagement practice meaningfully in many cases.

Council also has an opportunity to maximise the longer-term opportunities that can be leveraged from community engagement on a proposal or issue. Many individuals and groups involved in areas of mutual interest become known to Hutt City Council through community engagement on decision-making. However, these contacts are sometimes lost.

COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

The pace of change in communications technology and use is staggering. As at 2009, 80% of people in New Zealand used the internet, with email usage at 72%. Thirty seven per cent of people used social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter. Cell phone ownership was almost universal in working-age adults.

As people and organisations adapt to and find new ways of using their phones and the internet, new community engagement opportunities open up.

Councils around the world have started using these tools, finding new ways to inform and open up the decision-making process and get closer to their communities.

A small survey of the tools now available shows a staggering range, from blogs, web and phone polls, e-petitions, webcasting of Council meetings, and video and YouTube submissions through to social media engagement using Twitter and Facebook.

Hutt City Council, as part of our Smarter City drive, wants to ensure we continue to keep pace with technology and our customers' expectations.

Systems such as Facebook, Twitter and online surveying will potentially assist us in engaging with a younger demographic and will also help us to reduce the costs of engagement.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Hutt City Council is developing a community development framework that considers local assets as the primary building blocks of sustainable community development.

This framework is modelled on the Asset Based Community Development approach, which builds on the skills and strengths within local communities, the power of community groups and the supportive functions of local government and other agencies, drawing upon existing community strengths to build a more sustainable future.

ENGAGEMENT WITH MĀORI

There are three priority areas for improving our engagement with Māori in the next five years:

- Fully engaging with and fostering our new strategic relationship with the Port Nicholson Block Settlement Trust.
- Involving mana whenua and our local Māori organisations earlier in the decision-making process. For example, engaging mana whenua on Council's Annual Plan prior to finalisation for public consultation and engaging our local marae early on issues into which they have insight and on which they can help us determine solutions.
- Getting Māori in general involved in the decision-making process, including looking at ways of engaging that make it easier and more appealing for Māori to have their say.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT COORDINATION

A constant stream of issues is being worked through or considered at Council at any time. The result is usually that there is a constant stream of issues on which the community is being engaged. This can often mean community engagement resources are employed in an isolated and limited way and that the public is constantly bombarded with consultation.

If community engagement, and particularly public consultation, activities were more coordinated, there would be more opportunities to undertake more significant community engagement activities or raise the profile of community engagement in a cost-effective manner and reduce consultation fatigue. For example, shared publicity and promotion and shared public workshops.

INTERNAL INFORMATION SHARING

Hutt City Council receives a lot of information about community concerns, views and activities from formal consultation and engagement activities as well as informal everyday engagement with the community.

This information is often held with an individual or team and is not shared with others in the organisation. If this information can be better shared within Council, it can mean:

- this information is used to its fullest advantage
- the same or similar information is not re-sought from the community – saving Council resources and the community's time
- Council is more internally connected.

To help achieve a greater use of existing information, Council has recently put in place a system that records important community engagement events, helping staff to identify where community engagement has taken place and where further information can be found.