



**Listening**

**to you...**

**...our community engagement strategy**

**Waikato**



**DISTRICT COUNCIL**  
Te Kaunihera aa Takiwaa o Waikato

# Listening to you...

## our Community

# Engagement Strategy

Outlines a plan of action that Council are will undertake to enable your views to be heard more clearly when you want to have a say about the things we are doing.

This strategy has been under development since 2012 and is the result of you telling us you wanted

more effective and more relevant ways to have input into Council's decision-making.

The Community Engagement Strategy has a life of three years after which we'll review it, with your input and feedback welcome, to see if we are on the right track.



# Why have we developed this strategy?

The Local Government Act defines the purpose of local government as being to 'meet the current and future needs of communities for good-quality local infrastructure, local public services, and performance of regulatory functions in a way that is most cost-effective for households and businesses'. It also requires councils to 'give consideration' to the views and preferences of people affected by their decisions.

And while councils have always given consideration to the views of its residents through consultation, we accept this is a very formal process and tends to come at the stage when decisions are already drafted.

Engagement comes at the pre-drafting stage and allows you to be involved at the earliest stage of the decision-making process.

We want to make engagement easier for everyone in the community so we've developed this strategy in order to become more responsive and better at listening to you.

## We want to:

- **be clearer about who to engage with, when and how**
- **include a diversity of views in our decision-making process**
- **ensure we invest in engagement to get the best bang for our buck**
- **improve relationships with all people and groups in the Waikato**
- **meet all legal obligations**
- **include our Treaty partners.**

# What does the strategy cover?

- **Our main goal**
- **Underpinning principles**
- **The actions we are committed to undertaking**
- **How we will measure the Community Engagement Strategy's effectiveness.**

At the end of this document is a glossary to help clarify any jargon we use.

Appendix One outlines the process we followed to develop this strategy.

Council has also adopted a Significance and Engagement Policy which identifies the degree of significance attached to particular issues, proposals, assets, decisions and activities. (See our website).

This strategy has been developed, based on your feedback, to:

- **enable us to make better informed decisions**
- **make it easier for you to have your say when you want to**
- **make options for having your say clearer**
- **be more efficient in our systems and processes.**

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**Our main goal is to make it easier for you to have your say and for us to hear and understand your views before decisions are finalised.**

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# Principles that underpin our community engagement strategy

The Waikato District Council exists through statute. This statute includes having elected members making cost-effective decisions for the current and future needs of the people who live here. It specifically states that councils should 'give consideration' to the views and preferences of people affected by their decisions.

To do this really well benefits from having input from more minds, more experience and more diversity than we can ever have around the council's decision-making table.

Community engagement enables us to do this.

The principles we consider most important to achieve this are as follows.

## 1. We will be prepared

We will ensure we are prepared well in advance of formal decision-making processes on issues relevant to you and provide appropriate ways for you to hear and understand what is being proposed or planned at the earliest opportunity.

We will ensure the relevant history and purpose of the proposal are reviewed and then explained clearly.

We will do our best to ensure that different community engagement processes are 'joined-up' where possible - recognising that your time is limited and noting that 'joined-up' communication is more sensible.

## 2. We will be inclusive

We will make sure we have explored all reasonable avenues for contacting groups or individuals who may have an interest in an activity or proposal that is coming before the council. We will make sure our information is accessible

and available across the widest (and most cost-effective) and most 'fit for purpose' means.

We will make additional efforts to engage those whose voices may not normally get heard. This may include going the extra mile to maximise the opportunity for some groups to be heard.

We will develop and build relationships that enhance open dialogue and conversation.

## 3. We will be flexible, responsive, timely

We will provide different ways you can engage with us, and listen to you about the ways that work best for you.

We will do our best to respond in a timely manner.

## 4. We will be open, honest and respectful

We will be open to your ideas and constructive in our feedback. This includes being considerate of your views and weighing them as we consider our proposals.

We will do our best to be clear and will always be honest in the sharing of knowledge and process.

We will always respect your privacy.

## 5. We will be accountable

We will be transparent in our decision-making and you will be able to see how your input has had an effect.

We will communicate the outcome of our decision-making to you either personally or through appropriate, thoughtful means.

# Actions we are committed to undertaking

A strategy has actions that state how we are going to achieve the goal. Not all actions can be achieved at once as some take time to implement. The actions described below are staged to ensure we do things in the right order and maximise the opportunity we have to get them right.

While we are implementing the actions outlined below we will do our best to ensure that our principles still underpin any engagement activity we undertake.

## Action 1 – Databases enhanced

Enhance the existing databases to include specific interest groups and submitters for any current and anticipated community engagement activity.

This database will use existing information and will be grown over time to include new interest groups. It will be updated on a regular basis.

## Action 2 – Processes developed

- (a) Specific interest groups will be contacted so they have the opportunity to be made aware of matters that may be of interest to them. This may include regular newsletters, emails, social media or other forms of engagement.
- (b) A process will be established for receipt and acknowledgment of all community engagement inputs – this includes informal and formal inputs.

## Action 3 – Opportunities provided

A range of opportunities to provide your views will be provided and promoted every time an issue requires engagement with you.

Our Significance and Engagement Policy outlines the type of issues and engagement opportunities that may be considered.

These include such things as web forums, pamphlet drops, advertisements, submission processes, council 'Open Days' in your area, fronting up at your meetings, suggestion boxes in places you frequent and events that are targeted to your needs.

## Action 4 – Duplication will be avoided

Where possible we will first check other relevant projects, activities or issues and consult once to ensure that we are making efficient use of your time.

Consideration will be given to timing of engagement activity so, where possible, it can be joined up with other activities.

## Action 5 – Communication established

Feedback or engagement with us on projects, activities or issues to any community engagement process will be available online or on request (unless confidentiality is specifically requested).

## Action 6 – Feedback

The outcomes/decisions resulting from our community engagement will be provided to participants (assuming they are named) and made publicly available on our website or on request.

# Measuring the effectiveness of our strategy

Our goal is to **make it easier** for you to have your say and for us to hear and understand your views before decisions are finalised.

Waikato District Council can only assess how well we are progressing towards this goal if you provide the feedback.

There are three ways we will measure this strategy and whether or not we are achieving our goal.

## Annual residents' survey

How well we are doing this will mostly be on a case-by-case basis although a more general question will be asked of all residents such as:

- do you think Waikato District Council has provided you with sufficient opportunities for your views to be heard on matters that are important and of interest to you?

## Follow-up participant surveys

With regard to discrete issues or place-based proposals and activities, the Council will be taking action to ensure that the principles of this community engagement strategy are met.

For example: Waikato District Council has provided online and hard copy feedback forms, online and hard copy surveys, held public meetings for your views to be heard on important issues like Psychoactive Substances, Gambling Policy and Local Alcohol Plans. Were you interested in these? If you were do you think it was easy to have your views heard? And did your views get acknowledged?

## Numbers of views that have been received

The number of participants in a process is a good way to measure engagement noting that 'participants' does not equal 'submitters'. Sometimes an input to a process is by making a comment by phone or to a staff member. (See action 3 - Opportunities provided)



## Glossary

**Strategy:** a strategy is a plan of action designed to achieve a long-term or overall aim.

**Consultation:** a formal statutory process asking for feedback on a specific proposal or plan. Consultation may provide options for consideration. It will involve a formal submission process.

**Engagement:** a two-way process that involves dialogue between citizens and the council to consider an idea and/or create a proposal. It is a conversation and does not necessarily have any formal submission process. Engagement is also the way we describe a whole range of processes that enable us to listen to your views of which consultation is a subset.

**Community:** any grouping of people with an agreed or potential interest in a particular proposal.

**Specific interest groups:** any group of persons who have an interest in common which is relevant to a council project, activity or issue. They do not need to be formalised in any way.

**Key stakeholder:** generally a more formalised version of a 'specific interest group'.

**Place-based:** specific to a community that has been defined by location.

**Information:** material that enhances understanding, awareness or clarity and does not invite feedback.

**Joined up:** characterised by coordination and coherence of thought; integrated.

**Fit for purpose:** well-equipped or well suited for its designated role or purpose.

## Appendix One: Process we followed to develop the strategy

A community engagement project concept was formulated in 2012, based on feedback and analysis received from our 2011 and 2012 Customer Needs Surveys. And preferred consultation methods identified through feedback received from Councillors, Community Boards, Iwi, staff and members of the public through the development of our 2012-2022 draft Long Term Plan. The purpose of the project was to develop a strategy and terms of reference in response to gaps in our consultation process and other engagement experiences.

As part of the project a community engagement working group was established (which included representation from our rural community, Federated Farmers, Community Boards and Committees, Iwi representation, Councillors and staff) who met during 2012 and 2013 to brainstorm the perceived and real issues of community engagement and how to best serve our communities going forward. The feedback we received identified common areas of concern and has informed our approach in developing the Community Engagement Strategy.



# Waikato



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