

Community Engagement Policy

Policy Number: COM-01

Responsible Department(s): Communications, Engagement and Events

Other Relevant Policies: None

Other Relevant Procedure(s): None

Policies superseded by this procedure Public Consultation Policy 2020 adopted on 28 January 2020

Approved by: Council

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Next Review:

Version Control

Version:	Effect Date:	Description of Changes:	Approver:
1.0	28/01/2020	Code adopted	Council - Res 10/20
1.1	21/04/2020	Addendum added to provide consistency with Public Access and Public Consultation (Notice 2/2020)	Council - Res 47/24
2.0	09/09/2026	Policy Review in line with release of Minister for Local Government's Community Engagement Charter and subsequent changes to the Local Government Act 1999 (SA)	Council – Res 214/26

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Council is committed to giving people across the Adelaide Hills the opportunity to meaningfully take part in open conversations about initiatives and decisions that matter to them, and to making sure Council decisions reflect the voices of our community.
- 1.2 Community engagement undertaken by Adelaide Hills Council is informed by legislative and regulatory requirements, including the *Local Government Act 1999 (SA)* (the Act) and the Minister for Local Government's Community Engagement Charter (the Charter). These requirements are given effect through Council's Community Engagement Policy.
- 1.3 *Section 50A of the Act* provides that the Council must prepare and adopt a community engagement policy. The policy must be consistent and comply with any requirements specified by the Charter.
- 1.4 This policy is intended for use by all council employees, elected members, contractors and volunteers involved in the design, delivery, or evaluation of community engagement activities.
- 1.5 This Policy is a guide to staff and should not be read as mandatory, except where there is a legislated obligation. Staff should always use their discretion and judgement when conducting consultation and ensure the consultation is appropriate in the circumstances.

2. OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 The objectives of this policy are:
 - 2.1.1 To demonstrate the accountability and responsibility of the Adelaide Hills Council to its community and stakeholders.
 - 2.1.2 Ensure that the Council meets its legislative obligations regarding public consultation by:
 - Meeting mandatory requirements in the Act and the Charter.
 - Using appropriate and cost-effective engagement methods which are relevant to the specific circumstances of each decision, activity or process.
 - Providing for participation by the local community, key stakeholders and interested parties, wherever possible and appropriate.
 - Using feedback to enhance decision making.
 - Insofar as is reasonable, providing information to our community about how community views have been taken into account and reasons for decisions or actions of council.

3. DEFINITIONS

- 3.1 **“Communication”** the imparting or exchange of information between the Council and the community to produce a greater understanding.
- 3.2 **“Community”** a general term for the people who live, work, study, own property, conduct private or government business, visit or use the services, facilities and public spaces and places of the Adelaide Hills Council. A community may be a geographic location (community of place), a community of similar interest (community of interest), or a community of affiliation or identify (such as an industry or sporting club).
- 3.3 **“Stakeholders”** are recognised as individuals and organised groups that have an interest in a decision or proposal or may be directly or indirectly affected by a decision that has been made or is being proposed. Business owners, retail outlets, State and Federal Governments, community groups, Local Government and not for profit organisations are all considered stakeholders. Stakeholders may also be individuals, groups or organisations who have a role to play in policy development and program or service delivery.
- 3.4 **“Community engagement”** is the process of seeking input or feedback from the community or stakeholders regarding a decision that may affect them. This includes any activity where council provides information on a decision or invites comment on a matter. For the purposes of this policy, community engagement and public consultation are one and the same.
- 3.5 **“Public consultation”** see community engagement above.
- 3.6 **“Public notification”** For the purposes of the Local Government Act 1999, public notice is given if a notice is published:
- in the Gazette; and
 - on a website determined by the CEO.
- 3.7 **“The Act”** is the Local Government Act 1999 (SA).
- 3.8 **“The Charter”** is the Minister for Local Government’s Community Engagement Charter published in the South Australian Government Gazette on 11 December 2025.

4. SCOPE

- 4.1 The purpose of this Policy is to fulfill council’s statutory obligations under section 50 and 50A of the Act and the Minister for Local Government’s Community Engagement Charter published in the South Australian Gazette on 11 December 2025.

- 4.2 This policy applies to decisions, activities and processes undertaken by the Council, a delegate of the Council or a person exercising power on the Council's behalf, where public consultation is required to be undertaken in accordance with the Act, the Charter, or this policy. A reference in this policy to 'Council' includes a reference to a delegate or other person exercising power on the Council's behalf.
- 4.3 The Chief Executive Officer is responsible for the implementation and application of this policy, and where necessary reporting the outcomes of consultations to the Council. The specific delegations made under this Policy are outlined in Part 8 of this policy.
- 4.4 This Policy does not apply where the Council is exercising powers and functions under any other Act. Where there are consultation requirements under other legislation, e.g. the *Planning, Development and Infrastructure Act 2016*, those specific processes take precedence over this policy.
- 4.5 Council recognises that there may be occasions where community engagement may be desirable, but there is no statutory requirement to undertake consultation. For these occasions this Policy does not apply.
- 4.6 Local Government Act 1999
- 4.6.1 Under Section 6 of the Act a council is established to provide for the governance and management of its area at the local level and, in particular:
- a. To act as a representative, informed and responsible decision-maker in the interests of its community; and
 - b. To provide and co-ordinate various public services and facilities and to develop its community and resources in a socially just and ecologically sustainable manner; and
 - c. To encourage and develop initiatives within its community for improving the quality of life of the community; and
 - d. To represent the interests of its community to the wider community; and
 - e. To exercise, perform and discharge the powers, functions and duties of local government under [the Local Government Act 1999] and other Acts in relation to the area for which it is constituted.
- 4.6.2 Section 8 of the Act (Principles to be observed by a council) outlines the performance of its roles and function including but not limited to:
- a. Provide open, responsive and accountable government;
 - b. Be responsive to the needs, interests and aspirations of individuals and groups within its community;
 - e. Seek to facilitate sustainable development and the protection of the environment and to ensure a proper balance within its community between economic, social, environmental and cultural considerations;
 - f. Seek to provide services, facilities and programs that are adequate and appropriate and seek to ensure equitable access to its services, facilities and programs.

- 4.6.3 The Council recognises that community engagement can result in diverse views in relation to a particular matter or proposal. The Council will endeavour to consider relevant facts and circumstances, weighing and balancing competing considerations where necessary, before making a determination. The final decision in matters will rest with the Council, as the collective elected representatives of the community.

5. POLICY STATEMENT

- 5.1 The preparation and adoption of this policy fulfil the council's obligations to prepare and adopt a policy under section 50(A) of the Act. The following principles in the Charter have been considered in the preparation of this policy:
- Community members should have reasonable, timely, meaningful and ongoing opportunities to gain access to information about proposed decisions, activities, processes of councils and to participate in relevant processes.
 - Information about issues should be in plain language, readily accessible and in a form that facilitates community participation.
 - Participation methods should seek to foster and encourage constructive dialogue, discussion and debate in relation to proposed decisions, activities and processes of councils.
 - Participation methods should be appropriate having regard to the significance and likely impact of proposed decisions, activities and processes.
 - Insofar as is reasonable, communities should be provided with information about how community views have been taken into account and reasons for decisions or actions of councils.
- 5.2 In relation to the matters listed below under Public Consultation Categories, the Council will comply with its legislative obligations under the Act, the Charter and this policy. For each of the matters listed, refer to the mandatory minimum community engagement steps to be undertaken shown in Table 1 in Part 7 of this Policy. There are matters that require public notification and/or community engagement under the Act that do not feature in the Charter. In these circumstances, we will follow the requirements as set out in the relevant sections of the Act.
- 5.3 Council may, in its absolute discretion, determine in relation to a matter for which it is required by the Act and/or the Charter to follow its community engagement policy, to undertake a step or steps in addition to those set out in this policy. However, council is not required to consider and/or determine whether or not to undertake any additional step or steps in relation to such a matter before taking any action or making any decision in relation to such a matter.
- 5.4 Council may, from time to time, alter or substitute a new policy, following public consultation.

6. PUBLIC CONSULTATION CATEGORIES

6.1 The Charter addresses minimum mandatory community engagement activities for matters where the Act requires public consultation to be undertaken.

6.2 The Charter establishes different categories of public consultation for matters as follows:

- **Significant – Annual business plan and rating policy**
 - o Adopting an Annual Business Plan - section 123(3)(b) of the Act.
 - o Changes to basis of rating, declaring differential rates, imposing a separate rate, service rate or service charge, or changing the basis on which land is valued for the purpose of rating - section 151(5)(e) of the Act.
- **Significant**
 - o Representation reviews - section 12(7) of the Act.
 - o Consider a change of status of council or name change – section 13(2) of the Act.
 - o Development and review of Strategic Management Plans - section 122(6) of the Act.
 - o Changes to use of differential rating- section 156(4a)(b) of the Act.
 - o Revocation of classification of land as community land - sections 194(2)(b) of the Act.
 - o Community Land Management Plans - adoption - section 197(1) of the Act.
 - o Community Land Management Plans – significant amendments - section 198(3) of the Act.
 - o Alienation of community land by lease or license - section 202(2) the Act.
 - o Making of By-laws – section 249(1) of the Act.
- **Standard**
 - o Opening hours and place of principal office - substantial changes - section 45(3) of the Act.
 - o Community Engagement Policy - section 50A(6)(b) of the Act.
 - o Council behavioural support policies - section 75F(6) of the Act.
 - o Access to meetings and documents - section 92(5) of the Act.
 - o Power to make orders - section 259(2)(b) of the Act.
- **Local**
 - o Carrying out commercial activities – Prudential Requirements – section 48 of the Act.
 - o Proposed permit or authorisation for alteration or use of a road for business purposes when there are works and traffic impeded for more than 48 hours (with a detour in place) or where no detour will be available - section 223(1) of the Act.
 - o Proposed planting of vegetation on a road – significant impact - section 232(b) of the Act.

- **Inform**
 - o Opening hours and place of principal office – minor changes - section 45(3) of the Act.
 - o Proposed permit or authorisation for alteration or use of a road for business purposes when there are works and traffic impeded for less than 48 hours and the council ensures that a detour is in place - section 223(1) of the Act.
 - o Election information - section 13A (2) of the *Local Government (Elections) Act 1999*.6.3

6.3 The table in Part 7 of this policy sets out the engagement activities that Council will generally undertake to meet the requirements of each matter for which public consultation must be undertaken in accordance with the Act and the Charter.

7. CHARTER ENGAGEMENT REQUIREMENT

- 7.1 Council will comply with the minimum mandatory public consultation requirements for each category of matters set out in the Charter.
- 7.2 The following table sets out the engagement activities that Council will generally undertake to meet the public consultation requirements in the Act and the Charter.
- 7.3 In circumstances where more than one engagement activity is specified, there is no obligation on Council to utilise all engagement activities in respect of each Charter requirement.
- 7.4 The examples provided in the below table are non-exhaustive and Council may, but is under no obligation to, consider or determine to utilise different approaches that are not specified in the table depending on the particular matter Council is engaging on.

Table 1: Mandatory community engagement requirements

Charter requirement	Mandatory minimum actions to achieve Charter requirements	Charter Category					General engagement activities
		Significant - ABP and Rating Policy	Significant	Standard	Local	Inform	
Website	Publish information about the matter that can be easily found on a council website.	X	X	X	X	X	Information published on a website maintained by Council.
News publication	Publish information about the matter in a local news publication (print where available, but otherwise digital) that circulates in the council area and is not produced by the council.	X	X				Information published in a print or digital newspaper, community newsletter or other (non-council) publication circulating in the area of Council.

Consult with the whole council area	Consider appropriate forms of notifications to the council area. Consider whether additional information or notification should be made available to the community to bring their attention to the matter and to support participation.	X	X	X			- Information published on a social media platform maintained by Council. - Information available at council customer service centres / libraries at Stirling, Gumeracha and Woodside. - Consider if roadside and/or site-specific signage would be suitable for this engagement.
Invite submissions	Provide information about how the community can make a submission, including timeframe.	X	X				Engagement material provides information about how the community can make a submission, including the minimum 21 day timeframe for submissions.
Explain decision-making process	In material prepared explain what the council proposes to do, why it proposes to do it, and what it seeks to achieve. Explain how community feedback will inform the council's decision.	X	X				- Engagement material explains what the Council proposes to do, why it proposes to do it, and what it seeks to achieve. - Information published explains how feedback received will be taken into account by the Council or the person or body with delegated authority to make the proposed decision or undertake the proposed activity or process, before making a decision.
Seek and consider feedback from the community –	Consider how best to invite feedback from the community. Provide a minimum community engagement	X	X				- Feedback will be invited via: - Written submissions (email or letter). - Completion of a survey or feedback form. - Attendance at Council or public meeting, workshop or community forum.

significant matters	period of 21 days to enable the community to provide feedback. Include a summary of community engagement feedback to the council ahead of the decision.						- Consider promoting opportunities to make submissions at a pop-up engagement activity or community event. - Community Engagement Outcomes Report presented to a Council meeting for consideration by Council ahead of decision . - Community Engagement period open for a minimum of 21 days.
Public meetings	Hold a public meeting where the community is invited to provide submissions (written or verbal) on the matter. The public meeting may be part of a council meeting or a separate event.	X					Invite community to a public meeting either as part of a Council meeting, or a separate event, to provide written or verbal submissions on matter.
Council meeting invitation	Invite people who have made a written submission to attend a council meeting to speak to their submission before the decision is made.		X				People who made written submissions will be invited to attend a council meeting to speak to their written submission (email, letter or feedback form) before decision is made.
Seek and consider feedback from the community	Consider how best to invite feedback from the community Provide information about how community feedback will inform the council's decision. Ensure an appropriate period of time is provided to enable communities to provide feedback.			X	X		- Feedback may be invited via: - Written submissions (email or letter). - Completion of a survey or feedback form. - Attendance at Council or public meeting, workshop or community forum. - Consider promoting opportunities to make submissions at a pop-up engagement activity or community event. - Information published indicates how

							feedback received will be taken into account by the Council, person or body with delegated authority to make the proposed decision or undertake the proposed activity or process (if delegable). Community Engagement period open for a period of 21 days or such other period as determined by Council.
Consult with local community	Consider appropriate forms of notifications to the area within the council affected by the council decision or action. Consider whether additional information or notification should be made available to the local community to bring their attention to the matter and to support participation.				X		- Consider information published on a social media platform maintained by Council. - Consider information published in targeted letters or leaflet drops for effected residents. - Consider signage in a local location e.g. reserve, shopping centre, library or community centre. - Consider pop-up / drop-in engagement activities at a local venue or reserve.
Information to the whole council area	Provide information to the whole of the council's community if it may be directly affected by the council decision or action.					X	- Information published on a social media platform maintained by Council. - Council e-newsletter and/or Courier newsletter column. - Consider signage in prominent locations e.g. roadside, major reserves, shopping centres, libraries and community centres. - Consider pop-up information sites or sessions.
Information to local	Provide information to the local community that may be					X	Consider Information published on a social media platform maintained by Council

community	directly affected by the council decision or action.						• Consider information published in targeted letters or leaflet drops for effected residents. • Consider signage in a local location e.g. reserve, shopping centre, library or community centre.
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8. DELEGATION

- 8.1 The community engagement activities in this policy are general in nature, to meet the minimum mandatory requirements in the Act and Charter.
- 8.2 Specific engagement activities to be undertaken in relation to any particular decision, activity or processes shall be determined on a case-by-case basis, by:
- Council, by resolution;
 - The CEO;
 - A delegate with the power to undertake community engagement under the Act, the Charter or this policy; or
 - A delegate with power to make the relevant decision or undertake the relevant activity or process that requires community engagement under the Act, the Charter or this policy.
- 8.3 Council, the CEO or a delegate is not required by this policy to undertake, or to consider or determine whether to undertake, any optional or additional engagement steps or employ optional or additional engagement methods. Such a decision is at the absolute discretion of the decision maker.
- 8.4 The Chief Executive Officer has the delegation to:
- Approve, amend and review any procedures that shall be consistent with this Policy; and
 - Make any legislative, formatting, nomenclature or other minor changes to the Policy during the period of its currency.

9. REVIEW AND EVALUATE

To ensure Council continues to meet legislative requirements and undertakes effective community engagement, this policy will be subject to periodic evaluation and review.

This policy will be scheduled for review within 3 years from endorsement, or as required when there is a significant change to relevant legislation. A report will be provided to Council upon completion of this review.

10. AVAILABILITY OF THE POLICY

- 9.1 This Policy will be available for inspection at the Council's Offices during ordinary business hours and via the Council's website www.ahc.sa.gov.au. Copies will also be provided to the public upon request, and upon payment of a fee in accordance with the Council's Schedule of Fees and Charges.