
REPORT 3
(1215/52/IM)

COMMUNICATION AND PARTICIPATION PROJECT: DRAFT ENGAGEMENT POLICY

1. Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to:

- update the Committee on the progress being made on Phase II of the Communication and Participation Project
- present a draft Engagement Policy for the Committee's consideration for the purposes of formal public consultation.

2. Executive Summary

Officers have completed research to inform the Communication and Participation Project, and Phase II of the project is well underway. Improved relationships, communications and an updated engagement framework (including more diverse mechanisms for engaging with residents and communities) are contributing to addressing issues identified from the research.

A draft Engagement Policy (attached as Appendix 1) has been developed and is attached for the Committee's consideration. The Policy describes the expectations the public can have when they engage with the Council, be it through:

- the services, facilities and activities the Council delivers
- the relationships the Council encourages and supports between itself and communities as well as between communities
- the consultation the Council undertakes when a decision is to be made.

Initiatives are already underway to implement the Policy with the organisation's commitment to building relationships with communities. The guidelines that support the current Consultation Policy will be updated and officer training will be run on the new Policy. Officers also propose that a "Charter of Engagement Principles" be posted in all Council facilities, once a final Policy is adopted by the Council.

3. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee:

- 1. Receive the information.*
- 2. Agree to the draft Engagement Policy, attached as Appendix 1 to this report, for the purposes of formal public consultation.*
- 3. Agree to the Consultation Plan, attached as Appendix 2 to this report.*
- 4. Note that an Advisory and Reference Group Policy is planned as part of the implementation of the Governance Strategy, to be completed by June 2007.*

4. Background

The Communication and Participation Project was initiated in April 2005 as a result of:

- concerns expressed by elected members and members of the community about Council's consultation and participation practices
- a declining level of satisfaction with the amount the Council consults and the way it involves people in decision-making (from the February 2005 Residents' Satisfaction Survey).

Further issues were identified during the development of the Governance Strategy. A key issue identified was a perceived lack of public trust and confidence in the Council's decision-making. To help address this issue, the Council agreed it would aim to improve civic decision-making by increasing inclusiveness and enabling more active engagement in the decision-making process.

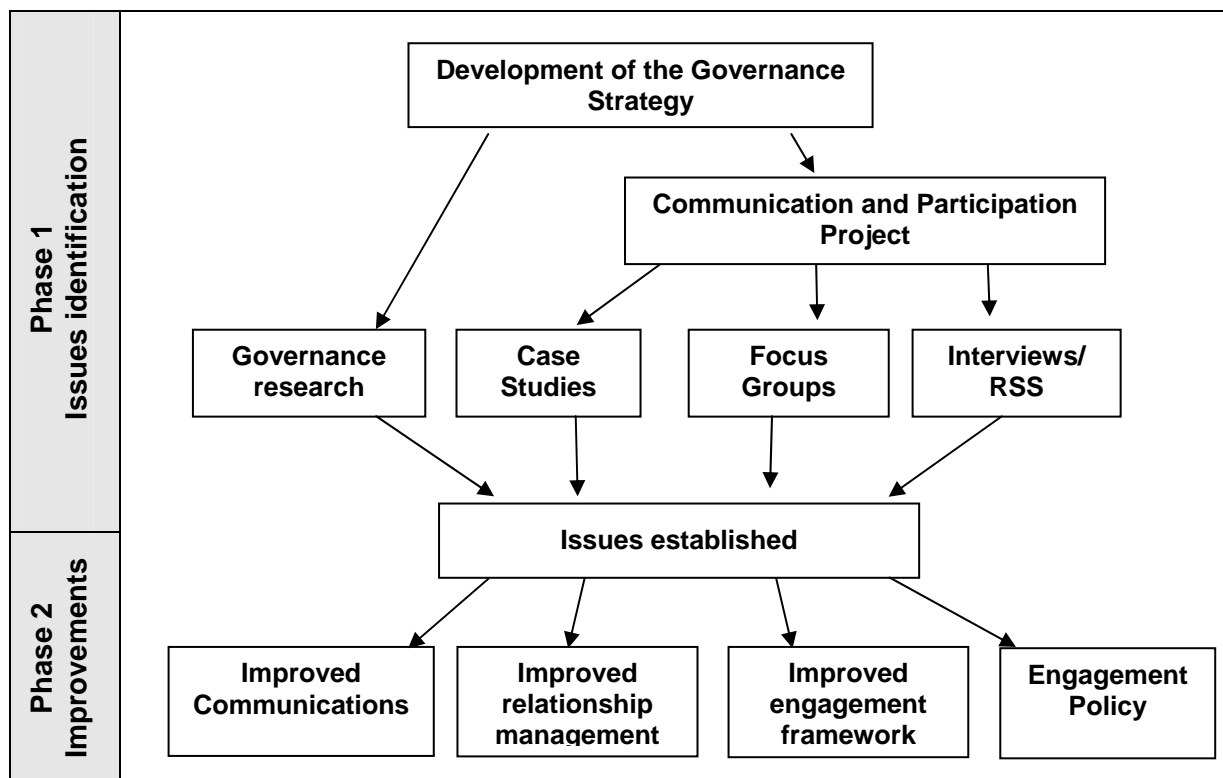
Members of the Council received a briefing on the Communication and Participation Project at the Elected Members' Session on 16 May 2006. Information was given on:

- research undertaken to understand different views on the Council's consultation processes
- key areas for change, identified from the analysis of this research
- the next steps to be undertaken in Phase II of the project.

A summary of the research and the areas identified for change is provided in Appendix 2.

5. Discussion

The following diagram outlines the process undertaken to date for the Communication and Participation Project.



5.1 Phase II: Improving the Council's consultation, communications and participation

The following key issues were identified as needing to be addressed from the research undertaken in Phase I (further information is provided in Appendix 2):

- increasing the responsiveness of the Council to comments and feedback received
- providing greater clarity around the Council's decision-making process
- providing further avenues for dialogue, including more convenient modes of participation
- ensuring the relevance of issues is well communicated
- recognising that new networks are important to encouraging increased participation.

It was also apparent from the research that residents are interested in being involved and having a say in the Council's decision-making processes. They have high expectations about the amount about which they will be consulted.

Phase II of this project is focused on the action areas identified as able to address these key issues:

- *Improved relationship management* – and its focus on developing and maintaining ongoing relationships between the Council and different community and sector groups

- *Improved communications* – both in terms of how the Council communicates with its residents on a day to day basis as well as the information it provides on the decision-making processes
- An updated *engagement framework* – which outlines the new and current mechanisms the Council will use to engage with people, enter into dialogue and obtain feedback
- An *Engagement Policy* – outlining what residents and communities can expect from the Council when the Council engages with them.

The following section describes what has been done in these areas in further detail.

5.2 Improved relationships

The Council actively encourages closer working relationships with communities and sector groups – including sports clubs, ethnic, cultural and community groups. The following recent changes have been undertaken to improve the Council’s relational capacity:

- the review of the Council’s City Communities business unit, with its focus on developing community networks in geographically defined communities (wards) as well as with communities of shared interest and ethnicity (including Maori, Pacific people, people with disabilities, ethnic groups, youth and seniors)
- the appointment of a Sports Liaison Officer who is building a network of sports and recreation groups.

Other ongoing relationships and networks continue to be maintained throughout the Council – through elected members, senior managers and business units.

5.3 Improved communications

The Council’s communications impacts on all of the Council’s engagement, as it affects the information, documentation and publications the Council provides both inside and outside of the decision-making process.

Council’s communications have been improved by:

- instituting the weekly *Our Wellington* page
- providing the update on decisions made by the Strategy and Policy Committee and the Council to the media and stakeholders.

A “Have your say” pamphlet is being developed to provide simple and clear information to members of the public on how they can engage with the Council and participate in its decision-making processes (e.g. through public participation, deputations, making submissions – including for such processes

as District Plan changes and notified resource consents). It will also provide advice on how best to present written and oral submissions.

Further information on how the decision-making process works and how people can get involved will also be provided via such mechanisms as the website, the *APW* and *Our Wellington* page.

Officers are also looking to provide weekly “consultation” updates on the website (and potentially in the *Our Wellington* page) to keep people informed of the progress of consultations. It will state:

- how many submissions have been received for currently open consultations
- numbers of submissions received for closed consultations, and what stage in the decision-making process these consultations are currently at
- upcoming consultations that will soon be open
- the outcome of consultation exercises undertaken in the past six months and the impact of feedback received on the final outcome.

5.4 Updated engagement framework

The updated framework includes new engagement mechanisms, which together with current mechanisms, help increase the openness, inclusiveness and convenience of the way the Council engages.

The engagement framework aims to ensure the Council:

- establishes and maintains ongoing relationships between itself and communities and sector groups
- obtains community views and information early in the decision-making process
- provides more opportunities for dialogue
- obtains views and information from a diversity of people (hard to reach groups as well as sectors in the community that may not otherwise engage)
- obtains both quantitative and qualitative information
- obtains both expert and general views and information.

Significant in the updated engagement framework are:

- the ongoing relationships established between the Council and communities, community groups and residents
- the new initiatives agreed to within the 2006-16 Long Term Council Community Plan (LTCCP):
 - a “civic network” – based on obtaining expert advice from networks created from groups and organisations around the city focused on the same topics/areas of interest
 - the e-Democracy programme, which includes establishing “e-Panel”, “e-Petitions” and “e-Public Participation” functions.

Further work is scheduled for developing the current advisory group network. An “Advisory and Reference Group Policy” will be developed prior to June 2007 which will include:

- a framework for effective advisory groups
- an identification of the gaps in the current network.

Reviews of the Pacific Advisory Group and Youth Council are currently underway, and will be completed before the end of the year.

5.5 Engagement Policy

The attached draft Engagement Policy provides principles for how the Council will engage with residents and communities. The Policy will replace the Council’s current Consultation Policy, adopted in 2001.

Through the Policy, the Council is seeking to achieve:

- greater community trust
- increased engagement from different communities and sector groups
- strengthened and improved interaction with and involvement from communities
- high quality decision-making.

The Policy development has been informed by the research undertaken through the Communication and Participation Project. As well as stating the principles the Council will adhere to in all of its engagement with the public, it includes additional principles applying to engagement that occurs through:

- the services, facilities and activities the Council delivers (section 3)
- the relationships it encourages and supports between the Council and communities as well as between communities (section 4)
- the consultation it undertakes when a decision is to be made (section 5).

Section 5 particularly relates to the engagement that happens as part of the decision-making process and the consultation obligations placed on the Council by the Local Government Act 2002 (LGA).

Officers recommend that should the draft Policy be adopted by the Council after the public consultation exercise, a charter of the Council’s “engagement principles” (see Section 2 of the draft Policy) should be published and made available in all Council facilities. This would raise awareness in the community around the Council’s commitment to engaging with community members, and what those members can expect from the Council.

5.5.1 Implementing the Policy

New engagement mechanisms and Council’s commitment to building relationships with communities contribute to implementing this Policy.

The current “Consultation Guidelines” for officers will be updated to support the new Policy. The guidelines will provide detailed information on how officers should make decisions around when to consult, who should be consulted and how. It will also outline the process to be followed when developing and undertaking a consultation, and the key contacts that should be talked to.

Training will also be run to ensure officers are aware of the Policy and its principles.

Apart from the new initiatives funded through the 2006-16 LTCCP, implementation of the Policy will be funded from within business as usual. With an enhanced focus on the early involvement of the right people (i.e. affected and interested persons), it is possible that the Council may end up needing to undertake fewer formal public consultation processes on draft plans, proposals and policies.

5.5.2 Plan for formal consultation

The research undertaken to date (particularly the interviews with regular participants and the feedback received from the focus groups for non-regular participants) has informed the development of the draft Engagement Policy.

The attached consultation plan (Appendix 3) consequently outlines a process focused on obtaining the views of the wider public, community groups and organisations and sector groups as well as those individuals and groups that participated in the earlier stages of this project.

It outlines the key messages of the proposed consultation process, identifies who will be sent a copy of the draft Policy, and provides a timeline for the consultation.

6. Conclusion

Phase II of the Consultation and Participation Project is underway and initiatives to address the issues identified have been or will be implemented.

The Committee is asked to consider approving the attached draft Engagement Policy for the purpose of formal public consultation.

Contact Officer: Adele Gibson, Policy Advisor

Supporting Information

1) Strategic Fit / Strategic Outcome

The Communication and Participation Project supports the Council's Governance and Social & Recreation Strategies – particularly in looking at how to improve participation in the Council's decision-making process and help build strong communities within the city.

As explained in the Policy, it will contribute to the Council meeting the following outcomes:

- *More inclusive*
- *More actively engaged.*

2) LTCCP/Annual Plan reference and long term financial impact

A number of projects that support the Communication and Participation Project were included in the 2006-16 LTCCP. These are:

- *C667 – Civic networks*
- *C668 – e-Democracy Initiatives*

3) Treaty of Waitangi considerations

Maori, both mana whenua and the wider Maori community, are specified in the draft Engagement Policy as a group the Council is committed to working with – both to foster involvement in democratic decision-making and build the capability of this community.

4) Decision-Making

This is not a significant decision – though it will impact on the way the Council operates when it consults, and on the expectations members of the public will have around their engagement with the Council.

5) Consultation

a) General Consultation

Appendix 1 outlines the research that has been undertaken in the development of this draft Policy. Further general consultation will be undertaken, as outlined in the attached Consultation Plan (Appendix 2).

b) Consultation with Maori

Mana whenua will be provided with a draft of the Policy as part of the formal consultation process.

6) Legal Implications

Council's lawyers have been consulted during the development of this Policy.

7) Consistency with existing Policy

The draft Policy will replace the current Consultation Policy.

Appendix 2

Summary of Phase I: Research and Key Findings

1. Research

Research was undertaken to fully identify the main concerns held with the Council's consultation and participation processes. Different research techniques were used to target individuals and representatives of groups falling into the following categories:

- regular participants in the Council's decision-making process
- people who have participated, but not regularly
- people who had never participated (not including voting in an election).

The research methods used were:

- *Interviews*

These targeted "regular participants" – particularly members of residents' associations and/or advocacy groups. Members from the Council's community boards and advisory groups and groups from different sectors (such as sports/recreation and environmental groups) were also interviewed.

- *Telephone surveys*

The August 2005 residents' satisfaction survey asked questions targeted at understanding:

- the level of public influence residents perceive they have in the Council's decision-making
- the reasons why they perceive they have little/no influence
- why they may choose not participate.

The majority of respondents (75%) were "non-participants" that had never participated in a Council participation, with the minority (25%) stating that they had participated.

- *Focus Groups*

Eight focus groups were run to obtain indepth information from non-regular participants (i.e. those who have never participated in a Council consultation and those that may have participated, but do not do so regularly). These people were asked for information on:

- their perceptions of the Council's consultation processes
- the barriers they experience to participating in a consultation process
- what would motivate them to participate.

Those that had participated were also asked to provide information on how they found the consultation experience.

Other research undertaken included:

- *Case studies*

Four high profile Council consultations¹ were analysed to determine how they had complied with the requirements of the Local Government Act 2002 and the Council’s Consultation Policy. In general, the studies show that the Council had been compliant, although minor improvements in the way each consultation was undertaken could have been made.

- *Review of Governance Trends*

Additional research into the trends currently driving governance both in New Zealand and worldwide has been undertaken. This includes research on participation rates, the perception of public trust in government, and the impact of managerial transparency and accountability requirements on government.

2. Analysis of findings – Key areas for change

The following key areas for change were identified from the research undertaken:

1. Increasing the responsiveness of the Council to feedback received

The perception provided in the research is that politicians do not listen and that consultation does not change the outcome of a decision. Both regular and non-regular participants perceive that decision-making can appear to be “fait accompli” and that other agendas determine the outcome of decisions.

What the Council can do:

- acknowledge different views and the feedback received in its deliberations
- ensure feedback is provided at the end of the process about the decision made and the impact of the feedback on that decision.

2. Providing greater clarity around the Council’s decision-making process

The research shows a limited awareness and understanding of the Council’s decision-making process. International research indicated this is a major contributor to declining participation – particularly from younger people. Both regular and non-regular participants also had negative perceptions of the process (i.e. as overly bureaucratic) and were unclear about their role in it and the influence they could have on a decision being made.

What the Council can do:

- clarify the process for people, making it clear when they are able to provide feedback, how they can provide their feedback and the scope of impact their feedback can have on the decision

¹ The consultation processes were: Music School Proposal on Jack Ilott Green, 2005/06 Draft Annual Plan, Chaffers Wharf Design Competition, and the proposal to establish an Arts Centre.

3. Providing further avenues for dialogue and new, more convenient modes of participating

The research highlighted people's changing expectations around being involved in the political process between elections. People have a higher expectation that their views will be sought during this period and that they will have opportunities to be involved in a dialogue with elected members and Council officers. People believed that the information they could provide would help the Council make a better decision.

The research also showed that people were more likely to be involved in "pressure activity" (i.e. attending demonstrations, signing petitions, lobbying elected members on particular issues) rather than in "politics" and "elections".

Ensuring consultation is convenient to the potential participant was also a recurring message.

What the Council can do:

- create opportunities for people to provide their views/enter into an ongoing dialogue about decisions being made
- provide different ways of engaging – which are less formal, more convenient and able to respond to issues
- involve people earlier in the decision-making process than they currently perceive themselves to be
- enable people to provide their input and feedback through means that are convenient for them, including web-based and face to face methods.

4. Ensuring the relevance of issues is well communicated

Research shows people need to be connected to what is being consulted on, and tend to participate because of the relevance of an issue. The research from non-regular participants talked about Council being "out of touch", distant, irrelevant and "faceless".

What the Council can do:

- ensure the relevance of decisions is explained – which may mean different messages for different groups
- ensure the consultation enables a diversity of views to be captured – particularly from traditionally "hard to target" groups, the views of the "silent majority", and sectors that may not normally be heard from

5. Recognising that new networks are important to encouraging increased participation

The research showed that people are highly influenced by their immediate communities and social networks. People are increasingly involved in advocacy (i.e. single issue movements such as Green Peace and Amnesty International) or leisure based networks.

The non-regular participants discussed the importance of family and social networks on how they understand issues, and whether or not they will respond to those issues. It was also clear that media had a strong impact on people's understanding of issues.

What the Council can do:

- build and maintain relationships with different communities – engaging with them on different issues – both helping new networks develop as well as supporting current networks

CONSULTATION PLAN FOR THE DRAFT ENGAGEMENT POLICY

1. Consultation Focus

The formal consultation process for the draft Engagement Policy is focused on obtaining comments from the general public, community groups and organisations, and different sector groups.

2. Objectives

The objectives of the consultation on the draft Engagement Policy are to:

- obtain feedback from a representative cross-section of Wellington's residents and ratepayers, community groups and organisations
- start providing increased information about the Council's decision-making processes
- start raising the profile of the availability of new mechanisms for engaging with the Council.

3. Key Messages

Key Messages are:

- The Council is responsible for making many decisions on behalf of communities. The Council wants to ensure communities have the opportunity to make their views known and to understand they have a genuine ability to influence the decision.
- The Council wants to encourage more diverse participation – particularly from individuals and groups it may not usually hear from.
- The Council wants to encourage more active involvement from its communities, particularly at an earlier stage in the decision-making process.

4. Target Audience

Feedback from representatives of residents' organisations, advocacy groups and interested residents has already been received and taken into account in the development of this Policy.

This formal consultation process is intended to encourage a wide range of responses from Wellington's community. All of those who participated in providing initial information and feedback will be given the opportunity to provide further comments on the draft Policy. Additional groups and organisations will also be targeted – including groups from different sectors and communities.

Those groups that will be sent a copy of the draft Policy include:

- Community boards
- Mana Whenua – Wellington Tenth Trust and Te Runanga o Toa Rangatira
- Federation of Residents and Progressive Associations
- Residents' and Progressive Associations
- All of the individuals and groups interviewed as part of the research process
- The Council's advisory groups
 - Disability Reference Group
 - Pacific Advisory Group
 - Youth Council
 - Environment Reference Group
 - Road Safety Reference Group
- Sports groups and organisations
- Disability Forum mailing list
- Ethnic Forum mailing list
- Pacific Island Forum mailing list
- Wellington Ethnic Council
- Wellington Council of Churches
- Retailers Association
- Wellington Chamber of Commerce
- Property Council.

5. Consultation Techniques

The documents prepared for the consultation include:

- a draft Engagement Policy
- a freepost submission form that sets out questions asking for people's views of the aims and objectives of the Policy and which projects/services they would most like to see implemented.

These documents will be:

- provided directly to all of the identified stakeholders
- posted on the Council's "Have Your Say" section of the website, which will include the ability for people to submit their views online
- available at the Council's libraries, service and recreation centres.

Officers will meet with the community boards and advisory groups to obtain feedback on the draft Policy.

Consultation on the draft Policy will be publicised via:

- media releases
- an article in "Our Wellington"
- an article in the Council's *APW* newspaper
- the Mayor and Chief Executive's radio interviews on The Breeze and Newstalk ZB
- Council on Samoan Capital Radio

- displays at the Ethnic and Pacific Island fora
- the 499 4444 radio ad.

Written comments on the proposal will be invited and submitters will also be given the opportunity to make an oral submission. Submitters will receive advice that their written submission has been received.

6. Consultation Evaluation

Written and oral submissions will be summarised and analysed. The result of the consultation will be reported back to the Strategy and Policy Committee.

All submission writers will be notified of the results of consultation.

7. Consultation Programme

DATE	TASK/TIME/PEOPLE
21 September 2006	Strategy and Policy Committee considers the consultation document.
28 September 2006	Consultation begins
28 September 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consultation document and submission form on the Council's website - Document sent to stakeholders, libraries, and service centres. - Information on the consultation published in the "Our Wellington" page
18 November 2006	Consultation ends
23 November 2006	Strategy and Policy Committee hears oral submissions
7 December 2006	Submissions analysed and summarised into a report for the Strategy and Policy Committee to consider adopting the Policy.