

Community Engagement Strategy

Adopted: 3 December 2014

About this Strategy	Page 1
Why do we have a Community Engagement Strategy?	Page 2
All about Horowhenua	Page 4
LGA Consultation Principles	Page 6
What is Council currently doing?	Page 7
What does this mean for you?	Page 8
Action Plan	Page 9

About this Strategy

As a Council, we are committed to making sure we effectively engage with our local people about what matters most to them. We need to make sure we have simple and valuable methods in place so that you can get your voice heard.

The Council's community engagement is also guided by legislation. A Bill is currently going through Parliament that will require Councils to have a Significance and Community Engagement Strategy.

This Strategy is our public commitment about what we will do in regards to community engagement and how we will do it. We want to improve the way we engage with the public and make it easier for people to engage with us – when they want to and on the issues that interest them.

We plan to:

- Take a clear and consistent approach to how we talk and engage with all people on issues big and small
- Make better use of the feedback you provide by incorporating it into all our work
- Strengthen our relationships with key stakeholders and community and neighbourhood groups
- Make a public commitment to improve how we engage in future and make sure we have what we need to meet that commitment.

Why do we have a Community Engagement Strategy?

As a Council, we are committed to engaging with the people of Horowhenua. We have developed this Engagement Strategy so that people are able to participate in and contribute to advancing the District. Engagement provides the Council with a strong base to develop a relationship with our communities. It provides the opportunity for Council to learn about diverse views, insights and issues by talking with as many of its residents and stakeholders as possible.

Engagement can be both proactive and responsive. It can happen in a number of ways, all of which provide a solid platform for engagement to occur. This includes:

- How the Council undertakes everyday services and activities
- The relationships that the Council develops and maintains with communities and sector groups
- The range of consultation processes it undertakes.

This Strategy also relates to the integrated approach that the Council takes as an organisation to continue building and strengthening its engagement with communities through all of these channels.

Council's community engagement occurs within a statutory framework, especially the Local Government Act (LGA) 2002. Section 10 of the LGA states that the purpose of local government is-

To enable democratic local decision-making and action by, and on behalf of, communities

The primary aim of the Community Engagement Strategy then is to ensure that the community is involved in ways that ensure that local residents and organisations, and the Council, can have confidence that decisions reflect principles of open democracy, are scrutinised by key stakeholders, and ultimately reflect good principles of decision-making.

Significance and Engagement Policy

This policy on significance and engagement outlines Council's general approach to determining the significance of proposals and decisions, and includes procedures, criteria and some thresholds the Council will use in assessing which issues, proposals, decisions and other matters are significant. It also lists assets Council considers to be strategic assets.

The policy also highlights when something is significant how it will engage with the community it serves in particular its commitment to applying best practice consultation.

The Significance and Engagement Policy exists to inform you about what you can expect from Horowhenua District Council regarding engagement and ways to influence and participate in the decision-making of the Council.

All about Horowhenua

The lower North Island District of Horowhenua is home to around 30,000 people, and covers just over 1,000km², from just south of Himatangi in the north to just north of the Otaki River in the south; it includes Levin as its main township, as well as Shannon, Foxton and Foxton Beach as larger settlements and many other smaller villages. Horowhenua is home to many beaches, rivers, lakes, forests and mountains, as well as farmland, bushwalks, gardens, parks, community facilities and a rich and diverse culture and heritage. We are conveniently located right on State Highway 1 and the North Island main trunk railway line.

Tangata Whenua

As a Council, we recognise the importance and special position of tangata whenua within the region, and the role iwi play within our community engagement processes.

Memorandums of Partnerships are becoming increasingly important as Council seeks closer and meaningful working relationships with the Māori community, to achieve effective consultation on a wide range of issues affecting our respective areas of governance.

Māori see people and the environment as closely inter-related and share with us a strong interest in maintaining and protecting the environment as well as developing the economic future of the area.

Through its decision-making processes, Council recognises the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi and kaitiakitanga, providing for the relationship of Maori and their traditions with their ancestral lands, water sites, waahi tapu and other taonga.

Council is committed to the continuing process of consultation with Māori in the District, and has worked with iwi on a number of collaborative projects including our prestigious Culture and Community Centre - Te Takeretanga o Kura-Hau-Pō.

Council currently has in place Memorandums of Partnership with:

- Muaūpoko Tribal Authority
- Rangitaane O Manawatu
- Ngāti Tukorehe
- Te Kotahitanga o Te Iwi o Ngāti Wehi Wehi

There are also other local iwi and hapu which have strong ties to the Horowhenua District, including Te Runanga o Raukawa, Ngāti Huia and Ngāti Whakatere. While Council does not currently have Memorandums of Partnership with these iwi groups, we recognise that they are also key stakeholders in the District, and are often involved in both formal and informal consultation.

Additional Stakeholders

- Culturally & Linguistically diverse groups
- Residents Groups and Associations
- Local businesses and business associations
- Farming/Rural community
- Trusts, Societies & Advocacy Groups
- Young people
- Education
- Seniors
- People with disabilities
- Health agencies
- Arts & Culture groups
- Sport and Recreation associations
- Religious groups
- Government Agencies (Department of Conservation, Fish and Game, Heritage NZ and Horizons Regional Council)
- Many others!

Consultation Principles

The primary aim of the Community Engagement Strategy then is to ensure that the community is involved in ways that ensure that local residents and organisations, and the Council, can have confidence decisions reflect principles of open democracy, are scrutinised by key stakeholders, and ultimately reflect good principles of decision-making.

The Strategy includes a set of Community Engagement Principles to guide its community engagement. These principles are based on best practice and, while they are consistent with the consultation principles in the Local Government Act, they inform a broader set of engagement practices. The principles say that when the Council engages with local residents and organisations the nature of this should:

- Be fairly informal and not too bureaucratic
- Seek the views of interested and affected people
- Seek the views of the people who it does not normally hear from
- Give people relevant and honest information in a way that suits them
- Use plain language
- Make it easy for people to give their views to the Council
- Engage in the community by going to where people are and not always expecting them to come to the Council
- Involve people right through the decision making process
- Give people time to think about the issues and respond to them
- Be clear about the process being used and the levels of influence that people have
- Undertake the engagement with an open mind. (The Council expects other people involved in the engagement to also have an open mind)
- Be receptive to new ideas
- Give people involved in the engagement a response to the issues they raise
- Undertake the engagement in a cost effective way.

What is Council currently doing?

While this is Horowhenua's first Community Engagement Strategy, it does not mean that we are not already engaging with our communities and key stakeholders.

Long Term Plan and Annual Plan

Council is responsible for producing a 10 Year Plan (the Long Term Plan) every three years, with an Annual Plan produced in the years between Long Term Plans. During these processes, Council consults widely with our communities through a Special Consultative Process. This can include public meetings, submission forms, summary documents and online engagement.

Project specific consultation

Council also consults on specific projects with groups directly impacted. For example, the environmental advocacy and community groups, local iwi and neighbouring landowners were consulted with during recent construction of a Water Treatment Plant.

Community Wellbeing Structure

Council operates a comprehensive Community Wellbeing and Engagement Framework, which has three different levels of regular engagement. This includes a high level, Subcommittee of Council (incorporating Councillors, Central Government representatives, Iwi and community agencies), publically advertised Community Wellbeing Forums and sector specific network groups (Youth, Disability, Education and Older Persons). This structure provides a strong foundation for the future engagement requirements of Council.

Resident Satisfaction Survey results

Council also undertakes an annual Resident Satisfaction Survey, which provides local people the opportunity to provide feedback of the variety of services and facilities Council provides. The findings of this survey are then incorporated into Council's operations, to ensure we are constantly evolving with the needs of our communities.

What does this mean for you?

Horowhenua District Council is committed to working towards effective engagement in partnership with Horowhenua residents.

1. Engage at the beginning
We will begin engaging with our communities when projects are still in their initial stages, with flexibility for adaptation still in place.
2. Listen first and seek to understand
We will collect and reflect on what we hear from Horowhenua residents as we begin to develop projects and proposals.
3. Te Tiriti o Waitangi/Treaty of Waitangi
We will engage with our Māori communities and ensure their views are appropriately represented in our decision-making.
4. Seek diverse perspectives
We will seek and use the rich diversity of insights from Horowhenua residents to ensure these are reflected throughout all stages of development.
5. Enable growth in the Horowhenua District
We will engage in a way that gives Horowhenua residents opportunities to contribute to the growth of the district.
6. Give and earn respect
We will give respect to everyone we engage with and work to earn the respect of the people who engage with us.
7. Trust
We will work to build trust and credibility for engagement with our residents.
8. Transparency
We will provide all relevant information to help people understand a proposal, be open and clear about the engagement process.
9. Feedback
We will communicate how our consultation processes have influenced our decision making.
10. Monitor
We will monitor and evaluate how we engage with the public, and adapt to incorporate what we have learnt from past projects.

Action Plan

Change Goal	Actions	Success will look like:
All Council departments utilise positive and meaningful consultation methods	<p>Annual community engagement training is held for appropriate staff.</p> <p>The Council continues to consult in accordance with the consultation principles of the Local Government Act and the Council's Community Engagement Principles.</p>	<p>People have trust in Council's decision making and there is an increase in the percentage of residents who are satisfied with the way Council involves them in decision making.</p>
Tangata Whenua feel engaged and valued throughout all consultation processes	<p>Memorandums of Understanding are maintained and developed with local iwi</p>	<p>There is a measureable increase in responsiveness by Māori to Council initiated consultation and participation processes.</p> <p>Relationships become characterised as more 'long term' rather than 'one-off' engagement with key Māori stakeholders.</p>
Older people are well connected and able to take part in everyday community activity.	<p>Support a forum for older people to ensure views of this sector are understood.</p>	<p>Older people report that Council services are appropriate for their needs.</p>
People with a disability are well connected and able to take part in everyday community activity.	<p>Support a forum for people with a disability to ensure views of this sector are understood.</p>	<p>People with a disability report that Council services are appropriate for their needs.</p>
Decision-making processes reflect the views of young	<p>Presentations are made to Youth Council on</p>	<p>Youth Council views are integrated into Council</p>

people.	relevant issues.	decision-making.
Council commits to best practice in the Community Engagement sphere	<p>Council will review the Engagement Policy and Public Commitment every three years. These will be amended and confirmed through public consultation as part of the Long-Term Plan.</p> <p>An annual Resident satisfaction survey is conducted, to monitor how we are improving in the ways we serve our communities.</p>	Any changes in the needs of our communities are responded to in a timely and efficient manner.
Engagement methods evolve to include current best practice.	Online submissions and feedback are available through our website and Social Media channels.	Residents can use a variety of tools to engage with Council, to suit their needs and preferences.