REPORT: Community Engagement and Communications Policy Review

AUTHOR: Transition Project Corporate Communications
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TRIM REFERENCE: ID17/1213

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of the overall policy review Dubbo Regional Council requires new policies adopted for Community Engagement; Media Protocols; and Corporate Image.

Furthermore, as a result of the report *Engaging our community with better communication* presented to Executive Staff in February 2017 which endorsed the use of new and more flexible communication techniques and requested a strategy to better engage our community through communication, a Community Engagement and Communication Plan has been developed to provide a framework for an ongoing conversation with the community driven through the Communications and Stakeholder Engagement branch.

The Plan and associated policies provide an appropriate framework to guide community engagement and communication and ensure organisation wide key messages are delivered to the community in order to improve the core performance areas of Community consultation and engagement and informing the community as defined in the Local Government Community Satisfaction Survey first conducted for Dubbo Regional Council in September 2016.

ORGANISATIONAL VALUES

Customer focused: The Community Engagement and Communications Plan and associated policies were developed in response to findings in the 2016 Community Satisfaction Survey which identified informing the community and community consultation and engagement as improvement areas. The Policies have been written to support open and transparent communication with customers.
Integrity: The Community Engagement and Communication Plan establishes minimum standards and which Council will formally commit to.
One Team: By reviewing Policies that apply to the whole organisation the Community Engagement and Communication Plan encourages team work and consultation across the organisation with all internal stakeholders.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

New Council policies for Community Engagement and Communication, Media Protocols and Corporate Image are recommended for adoption, superseding the policies of the former Dubbo City and Wellington Councils.

RECOMMENDATION

1. **That the report of the Transition Project Corporate Communications, dated 7 July 2017 and the Community Engagement and Communication Plan attached as Appendix 1 be noted.**
2. **That the draft Community Engagement and Communication Policy attached as Appendix 2 to the report of the Corporate Communications Supervisor dated 7 July 2017 be adopted for the purposes of Public Exhibition for a period of 28 days.**
3. **That the draft Media Protocols Policy attached as Appendix 3 to the report of the Corporate Communications Supervisor dated 7 July 2017 be adopted**
4. **That the draft Corporate Image Policy attached as Appendix 4 to the report of the Corporate Communications Supervisor dated 7 July 2017 be adopted.**
5. **That a further report on the outcomes of the Public Exhibition of the draft Community Engagement and Communications Policy be considered by Council.**

Andrew Woodcock
Transition Project Corporate Communications

BACKGROUND

Effective and open communication is integral to ensuring Dubbo Regional Council meets the needs and expectations of the community.

Since the amalgamation of Dubbo and Wellington councils on 12 May 2016 Council has been operating under interim protocols in relation to communication and community engagement.

The Dubbo Regional Council Communication and Engagement Plan (the Plan), **Appendix 1**, has been developed to guide open, honest and transparent communication between Council and the community and ensure there are opportunities for community consultation and participation in Council's decision making.

The Plan and the associated policies provide the parameters for Council's ongoing communication and engagement. It establishes minimum standards which Council will formally commit to and defines the responsibilities and accountability for Council representatives and staff in informing and involving the community.

The Plan and policies also contribute to Dubbo Regional Council meeting a key deliverable of the merger reform process of having consistent, systematic engagement with the community delivered and continued.

REPORT

Community Engagement and Communications Plan
The Dubbo Regional Council Communication and Engagement Plan (the Plan), **Appendix 1,** has been developed to guide open, honest and transparent communication between Council and the community and ensure there are opportunities for community consultation and participation in Council's decision making.

In developing the Plan it is acknowledged that many interactions with Council occur in informal ways as well as through more structured formal communication. The same principles should apply to formal and informal community engagement and communications as both are key drivers of community satisfaction.

This Plan describes a framework for successful Community Engagement and the primary methods Council will use to inform the community. Community engagement and communication are defined in the Plan as:

Community engagement is the process of Council and groups of people working cooperatively around an issue prior to Council determining a decision or a direction on that issue.

Engagement can include:
- Gathering and provision of information
- Consultation
- Participation

Communication is a process for informing the community about Council services, programs and decisions. Communication may be formal and structured or informal and less structured to meet the needs of a particular audience. Communication is a vital component of community engagement.

The Plan describes Council's commitments in regards to undertaking community engagement and communications and describes the respective processes and responsibilities of staff.

Community Engagement Policy
The draft Community Engagement Policy, **Appendix 2,** supersedes the policies of the previous Dubbo City Community Participation in Council Decision Making Policy and Wellington Community Engagement Policy.

The draft Policy recognises that effective community engagement and communication has benefit to Council and the community. Such benefits include:

- Better outcomes through understanding needs and views of the community and customers
- Outcomes that are broadly supported by the community
- Increased satisfaction with Council services, operations, staff and elected officials
- Increased awareness, understanding and acceptance of decisions made
- Development of solutions to local issues through Council/community partnerships
- Increased community understanding of Council processes and responsibilities

The draft Policy commits Council to engaging the community in the following circumstances:
- Where there is a legislative/statutory requirement
- When Council resolves to undertake community consultation
- On issues that have the potential to affect the delivery of services or facilities that contribute to community well-being, growth and prosperity
- When identifying and understanding the needs and priorities of the community for the purposes of strategic planning
- To monitor and evaluate community satisfaction with Council or Council services

This draft Policy is recommended for Public Exhibition as it relates to interactions with the Community beyond operational functions.

Media Protocols Policy
The draft Media Protocols Policy, **Appendix 3,** supersedes the policies of the previous Dubbo City Council Media Protocols Policy and Wellington Council's Media Policy.

This draft Policy formally recognises the Mayor and the General Manager as the official spokespersons of Council with authority delegated to Committee Chairs, Directors and managers on a case by case basis dependent on the nature and complexity of the inquiry.

The Policy objectives are:

- Provide guidelines relating to the authorisation of Council spokespersons;
- The roles and responsibilities for Council staff in terms of media management and the pro-active promotion of Council's services, events and activities;
- Ensure the media receives accurate information in a timely manner;
- Ensure the community and other stakeholders are kept abreast and informed about Council decisions, developments, policies and major projects;
- Ensure media spokespersons are skilled and feel confident to communicate with print, online and broadcast media.

Dubbo Regional Council has a productive relationship with local media and this policy will continue to support the provision of information to the media and timely and accurate responses to media inquiries.

Corporate Image Policy
The draft Corporate Image Policy, **Appendix 4,** supersedes the policy of the previous Dubbo City Council Corporate Image Policy. The former Wellington Council did not have a similar policy.

This policy protects Dubbo Regional Council's brand and ensures it is represented in a professional, unified, consistent and positive manner.

The draft Policy references the Brand Guidelines previously adopted by Council and describes the appropriate use of the corporate logo, use of other Council brands and facilities logos, managing the corporate brand and the use of the internal Graphic Design services to ensure consistency, adherence to Brand Guidelines, compliance with this policy and value-for-money production of promotional and information material and collateral.

SUMMARY
The Dubbo Regional Council Communication and Engagement Plan has been developed to guide open, honest and transparent communication between Council and the community and ensure there are opportunities for community consultation and participation in Council's decision making.

It is supported by Council Policies for Community Engagement, Media Protocols and Corporate Image to provide guidance to Council staff when undertaking community engagement, interacting with the media or developing communication resources.

Together, the Plan and the Policies provide a consistent framework to deliver improved community engagement and communication for the community leading to improved community satisfaction in these areas.

Appendices:
1 DRC Community Engagement and Communication Plan - draft for FPC
2 DRC Council Policy - Community Engagement and Comunication
3 DRC Council Policy - Media Protocols
4 DRC Council Policy - Corporate Image