

Community Engagement and Consultation

The benefits of consulting with your community

Good consultation requires that processes be in place to give citizens the opportunity to express their opinions and provide information to inform the decision makers, prior to the decision being taken.

Consultation does not mean that local governments are bound to follow the majority position on an issue. Local government is not government by referendum. Rather, good consultation means that the Council knows and understands the range of community opinions about a particular issue, and can use this information to inform its decision.

There are costs – in both time and resources – to consultation. These costs should be identified and taken into account in decision-making, policy development and project planning processes. Less obvious – but equally important – are the costs which can arise out of *not* consulting. That is, the time and resources required to undo a decision that proves impossible to implement because consultation has not been carried out.

A local government should consult and engage its community and, in so doing, reflect the aspirations of that community. However, there are also occasions when a local government needs to demonstrate community leadership. This may arise because of information that has been available to the local government, or stem from a Council's perception of its role as a government elected to govern or from its understanding of its community built upon by considered consultation and engagement processes.