



# Community Engagement Strategy

2018–2022



# Council values and statements

## What we value

'Living and Loving the Tweed'

We look after people and our places, explore all opportunities, and are proud of our passionate approach.

We care about each other, choose to be here, and are in this together.

We have conversations where everyone can contribute, and we are willing to have a go.

We put back in to make a difference, so that our Tweed community is even better tomorrow than it is today.

## Vision

The Tweed will be recognised for its desirable lifestyle, strong community, unique character and environment and the opportunities its residents enjoy.

## Mission

Working with community and partners, provide leadership in facilitating and delivering services that manage growth sustainably, create opportunity and enhance the value of our civic and natural assets for this and future generations.

## Statement of acknowledgement of the Bundjalung Aboriginal Nation

We wish to recognise the generations of the local Aboriginal people of the Bundjalung Nation who have lived in and derived their physical and spiritual needs from the forests, rivers, lakes and streams of this beautiful valley over many thousands of years as the traditional owners and custodians of these lands.



## Message from your Council team

**At Tweed Shire Council, we value and share the community's passion and pride in the Tweed, and are committed to working together to make better decisions.**

The *Community Engagement Strategy 2018–2022*, aims to help Tweed residents, local communities and Council's other stakeholders understand how and when Council will engage with them, how they can raise issues with Council, and how they can have a real say on decisions that affect their future.

It also reflects the demands being placed on local councils – through both legislative changes and growing community expectations – to provide more opportunities for people to become involved in all aspects of their work.

The Strategy draws on the enthusiasm of both the elected Council and its Executive Leadership Team, who are determined to deliver better community engagement by applying the latest ideas and techniques, and to make this one of Council's top priorities.

We welcome the experience, imagination and common sense approach that the people of the Tweed can contribute to guiding Council's work. Community engagement must be a two-way process – an ongoing conversation between Council, residents and other stakeholders that enables everyone to contribute their views and ideas.

The Strategy will be complemented by an 'Engagement Toolkit', available on Council's website. This toolkit will provide detailed guidance on how the principles and techniques outlined in the Strategy will be implemented.

'Living and Loving the Tweed', the Tweed's adopted *Community Strategic Plan 2017–2027*, highlights 'Making decisions with you – we're in this together' as one of its key themes. That is the spirit underlying this Strategy.



**Councillors (left to right):** Reece Byrnes (Deputy Mayor), Ron Cooper, Chris Cherry, Katie Milne (Mayor), James Owen, Warren Polglase and Pryce Allsop.

**Executive Leadership Team:** General Manager – Troy Green; Director Engineering – David Oxenham; Director Community and Natural Resources – Tracey Stinson; Director Planning and Regulation – Vince Connell; Executive Manager People, Communication and Governance – Suzanne Richmond; and Executive Manager Finance, Revenue and Information Technology – Michael Chorlton.





# Council's commitment to an engaged community

**This Strategy is a guiding framework that sets out a whole-of-Council commitment to community engagement. We will ensure that residents, businesses and community organisations:**

- are well informed on issues and decisions that could significantly affect their future
- are given a range of opportunities to raise issues and have their say, in a way and at a time that suits them
- can be certain their views and advice have been genuinely considered before Council decisions are made
- receive feedback and explanations about Council's decisions.

Council has adopted the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) definition of engagement.

**Community engagement is the process of involving people in the decisions that affect their lives.**

If we get this right, we will leave a legacy for the generations to experience the same joys of living, working and visiting the Tweed as we do. As a Council, we must work hard to encourage all sections of the community to help us make better decisions.

Over time, effective community engagement will bring about a change in culture. It will build mutual trust and closer working relationships between Council, the people and communities of the Tweed, and other stakeholders.

Local people, visitors, businesses and community organisations provide the 'ground up' perspective that Council needs to improve its planning, services and performance overall. Council wants to learn from their experience and ideas.

Ultimately, Councillors must fulfil their role as elected leaders and make the final decisions. Our responsibility is to work in the best interests of the Tweed as a whole, and to consider a broad cross-section of views. However, from time to time we will make decisions that some people find hard to accept. Our goal is to achieve a broad consensus wherever possible, but engagement cannot always lead to complete agreement.

Council will do everything it can to ensure that its decision-making process is open, trustworthy and accountable, and that the reasons for our decisions are made clear to all concerned. Council reports and minutes of meetings will be available both online and in print at Council offices and reasons for decisions will be included in Council reports.

## Community stakeholders for engagement

The Tweed is a large and diverse local government area, and Council's efforts to engage with its constituents must respond to this diversity.

Council's responsibility is to ensure the wellbeing of the Tweed community as a whole. Within that community, we can identify different types of 'stakeholders' for this engagement strategy:

- Individual residents and ratepayers
- Non-resident ratepayers
- Visitors to the Tweed
- Businesses, industry and farming organisations
- Local resident, ratepayer and progress associations
- Community, sporting and environmental groups
- Neighbouring councils and regional organisations
- Government agencies and Members of Parliament (state and federal)



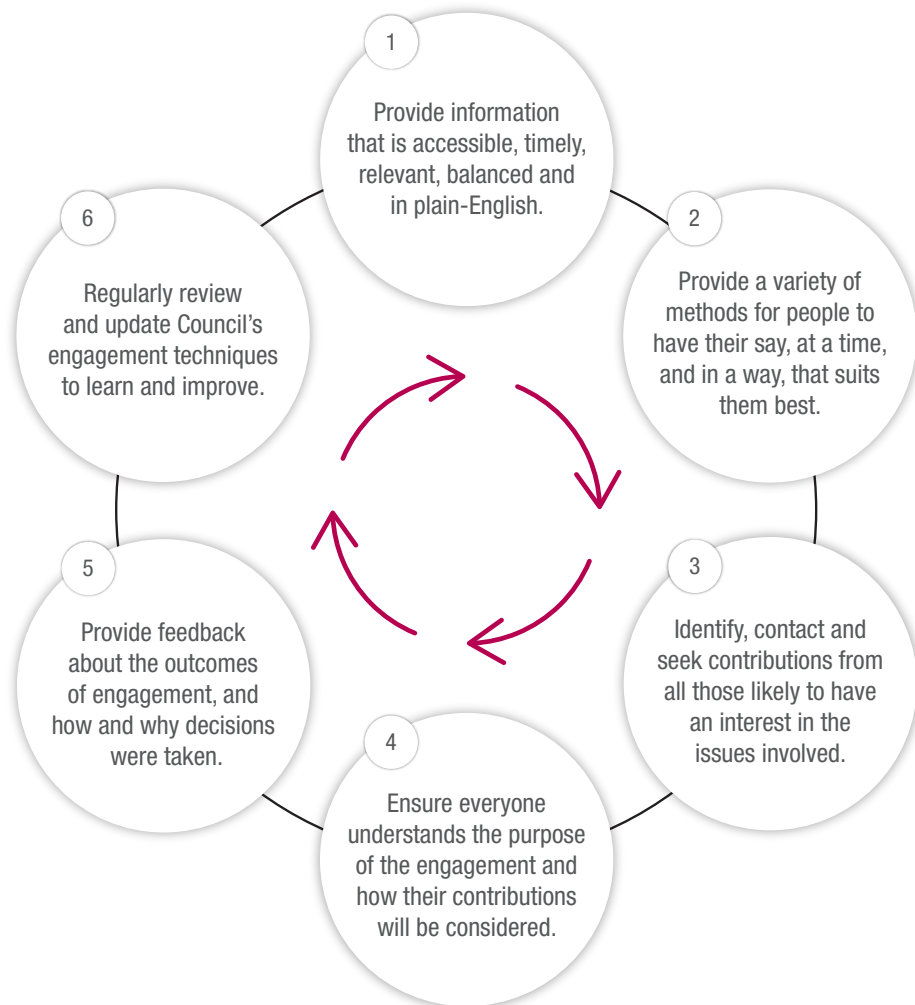


# Objectives and principles

**This Strategy has four main objectives. They are to:**

- 1 Continue to strengthen relationships with the community so that engagement activities are ongoing conversations rather than isolated events.
- 2 Give Tweed's diverse communities and stakeholders a greater voice in Council's decision-making, within practical limits of time and resources, to ensure that decisions are soundly based.
- 3 Ensure that people receive timely information that is free of bias, easy to access and understand, and helps them to make meaningful contributions on the issues that matter.
- 4 Promote a more deliberative approach to engagement that achieves a productive exchange of views and guides Council's activities.

**Figure 1:** Tweed Shire Council's principles of community engagement





## Why we engage

**Because we want to, and we need to. It is about an ongoing conversation that enables everyone to contribute views and ideas, and ultimately leads to improved decision making.**

Tweed Shire Council is a big business that delivers more than 50 services, has around 700 staff, an annual operational budget of \$230 million and manages more than \$3.2 billion of assets.

We know that the Tweed's 90,000 people place a high premium on the quality of their environment and lifestyle and have shown that they want to be kept informed and involved in Council's work. Council needs their input to do its job properly.

### Legal requirement for a Community Engagement Strategy

Currently, councils across NSW are required to have a Community Engagement Strategy, based on social justice principles, when developing their Community Strategic Plan (CSP). This is part of the NSW Government 'Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework'.

The CSP is for a minimum of 10 years and sets out the community's needs, aspirations and priorities across the 'triple bottom line' of economic, social and environmentally sustainable development. Linked to the CSP is a Resourcing Strategy comprising long-term financial, asset management and workforce plans.

The CSP must be reviewed every four years by each incoming council. Tweed's current CSP *Living and Loving the Tweed* covers the period 2017–2027. Incoming councils must also adopt a 4-year Delivery Program to implement the CSP. Annual Operational Plans (budgets) flow from the Delivery Program.

For more information about Council's Integrated Planning and Reporting documentation visit [www.tweed.nsw.gov.au/IPRF](http://www.tweed.nsw.gov.au/IPRF)

In the near future, the requirement for a Community Engagement Strategy is to be broadened to cover all the council's plans, policies and programs, and for the purpose of determining its activities (other than routine administrative matters). This Strategy meets that new requirement.

At the same time, Government legislation imposes a number of specific requirements for engagement. These are explained in the boxes below.

With so much to do and so many people it is simply impossible to engage in detail on every decision and every project. Council must be careful to avoid 'engagement fatigue' that arises when there is too much information and consultation.

Also, we know that community concerns and priorities vary considerably from one part of the Tweed to another, and between different interest groups. As a result, the need for engagement may vary from place to place and group to group. For more complex cases, a specific Engagement Plan will be prepared to ensure that the principles and requirements of this Strategy are met.

### Statutory roles and responsibilities

This Strategy reflects the various requirements for community consultation and engagement set out in the Local Government Act. The Act defines the following roles and responsibilities:

- **Councillors** represent the collective interests of residents, ratepayers and the local community; and facilitate communication with the community
- The **Council** as a whole consults regularly with community organisations and other key stakeholders, and keeps them informed of its decisions
- The **Mayor**, as leader of the Council and as a community leader, promotes partnerships with key stakeholders; and together with the General Manager, ensures adequate opportunities and mechanisms for engagement between the Council and the local community
- The **General Manager** advises the Mayor and Council on appropriate forms of community engagement in different situations, and prepares a Community Engagement Strategy.



## When we engage

### **This Strategy applies to the following types of activity:**

- Strategic and corporate plans including the Community Strategic Plan and long-term Resourcing Strategy, 4-year Delivery Program, and annual Operational Plan (including the budget)
- Council policies, programs and projects that will have significant impacts on local people, community life, the environment, business and the economy
- Land-use and development plans, including the Local Environmental Plan, Locality Plans and Development Control Plans.
- All other matters where legislation requires community notification or consultation (subject to any processes or limits imposed by the relevant Act).

Wherever desirable and permitted, Council will seek to go beyond the minimum requirements and timeframes for engagement set out in legislation if that is necessary to ensure that all concerned have a fair and reasonable opportunity to contribute.

In particular, Council will aim to extend timeframes for engagement over the Christmas/New Year period, during school holidays, and when there are special events.

### **Engagement for land use planning and development control**

This Strategy applies to all Council's activities, including in particular precinct plans and environmental and land use strategies. However, in some aspects of land use planning and development control, Council's discretion over types and levels of engagement is limited by the Environmental Planning and Assessment (EP&A) Act.

- Local Environmental Plans (i.e. rezoning and alternative use) and Development Control Plans (which may include Council's Locality Plans) must be advertised for a minimum of 28 days and submissions considered. Wherever possible and desirable, Council will seek to extend this timeframe and also use additional forms of engagement in accordance with this Strategy.
- Some development types are classified as 'Exempt' or 'Complying' Development, and either do not require approval or may be assessed by private Certifiers rather than Council staff. In these cases there can be little or no consultation.
- Consultation on Development Applications (DAs) is carried out in accordance with legislative requirements and Council's Development Control Plan. The amount and type of consultation varies according to the minimum legislative requirements, with consideration given at times to the scale and anticipated impacts of each proposal.
- The majority of Council determined Development Applications are one of three categories; Not notified, Notified or Advertised in accordance with Council's Development Control Plan. Whilst on exhibition, any member of the public can make a written submission in relation to the proposal which is given consideration as part of the merit assessment process in accordance with the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act.
- For some Development Applications Council is not the consent authority. Where this is the case submissions can be made to the consent authority which can be either a regional planning panel or State Government Department.

Since 1 March 2018 the new Environmental Planning and Assessment Act has been in place, with regulations and other details still being finalised.

# How we engage

**This Strategy groups different forms of community engagement, based on the International Association of Public Participation spectrum of *inform, consult, involve, collaborate and empower*. It highlights some methods and criteria for use and is supported by Council specific examples and explanations of methods. An ‘Engagement Toolkit’ will further support this Strategy and provide detailed guidance on how Council engages.**

In most cases a combination of techniques will be needed to ensure the engagement process is accessible, well-balanced and trustworthy, and reaches all the people whose input is required to achieve a successful outcome. The different engagement methods are explained in the next table.

Several new forms of engagement are proposed, particularly to promote a more deliberative approach and constructive exchange of views.

Council understands a large percentage of the community still prefer written communication, printed documents and face to face engagement, and will continue to provide these engagement options as much as possible.

An important trend that Council needs to embrace is the growing preference of many people for on-line information and engagement. Websites and social media offer the potential to reach many more people quickly and efficiently – allowing people of the Tweed to have their say in a way and at a time that suits them best.

Some sections of the community require more customised engagement approaches to ensure matters such as cultural sensitivity, venue and location accessibility and times of engagement are considered.

So engagement can never be a simple, ‘one size fits all – tick the box’ exercise. The scope, timing and type of engagement will vary according to the circumstances of each issue under consideration or decision to be made.

## Your Say Tweed and social media

Council’s Engagement Portal – Your Say Tweed [www.yoursaytweed.com.au](http://www.yoursaytweed.com.au) will become Council’s major channel for disseminating detailed information on current issues and decision-making processes, and for receiving feedback an submissions from individuals and interest groups. Council will seek to register many thousands of people to the online Tweed Panel which will make it possible to run the on-line focus groups and citizen panels mentioned below.



## The Community Engagement Network

Tweed’s award winning Community Engagement Network (CEN) is a group of more than 20 employees from office and field-based roles, and different Council services. Its members support specialised technical staff in meeting their needs to undertake engagement and have completed community engagement training in accordance with the principles set out by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2).

The CEN has become a trusted resource to improve face-to-face communication between Council and the Tweed community. Expansion of the CEN, with training of more staff and Councillors in IAP2 principles, will be an important factor in implementing the new Engagement Strategy.





The table below explains the stage of engagement, methods and explanations and provides general criteria for use and local examples. Other methods may be used as appropriate.

**INFORM – Making sure that people can learn about Council's activities that interest them**  
 Experience shows that in many cases accurate information is all that people want, especially if they feel that they can trust Council to work in the community's best interests – to prepare good plans, make sound decisions and deliver projects to an expected standard.

Method:	Explanation:
Customer Contact Centre	First point of customer contact receives an average of 8000 calls and 5000 walk-ins per month.
Your Say Tweed	<a href="http://www.yoursaytweed.com.au">www.yoursaytweed.com.au</a> – Council's online portal dedicated to engaging with the community. Information pages providing the Tweed community with a single online source to have their say on Council's active engagement projects. The site allows users to subscribe to the site or project specific to have their say and be kept informed.
Council website	<a href="http://www.tweed.nsw.gov.au">www.tweed.nsw.gov.au</a> – receives an average of 45,000 visits a month.
Social media	Council has launched into its social media space ( <b>Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Google+, YouTube, LinkedIn</b> ) in 2017 which will strengthen and support our ability to inform and consult and provide alternative methods and new audiences to engage with Council's 50 services.
Email subscriptions/Electronic Direct Marketing (EDM)	Electronic subscription services for a range of information including Tweed Link, media releases, job alerts, DA notifications, Council agendas and minutes and more. This also includes a range of e-newsletters for topics of interest and direct marketing opportunities.
Tweed Link	For over 20 years now the Tweed community has relied on the award winning Tweed Link – Council's weekly newspaper printed weekly and distributed by the Tweed Valley Weekly and Tweed Daily News. A trusted and traditional method to inform the community.
Media releases and advertising	Regular media releases are issued to more than 1000 subscribers. Advertising opportunities are used in traditional publications like newspapers, industry publications and TV/radio as well as digital marketing campaigns for social media and websites.
Site signage	Permanent or temporary - information, education and historical signage, works projects, development proposals, and site and way-finding signage.

Examples:	Criteria:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small-scale development proposal or infrastructure project</li> <li>• Routine maintenance to community facilities</li> <li>• Minor plan or policy update</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Straightforward issue involving relatively few people</li> <li>• Little or no risk of controversy or conflict with community values</li> <li>• Minimal impacts on individuals, community life or environment</li> </ul>

**CONSULT AND INVOLVE – Actively seeking people's views and exchanging information between Council and the community**

These forms of engagement are necessary to ensure Council is kept up-to-date on issues that are (or may become) controversial, and that people can make their views known on matters of concern, and be sure that those views will be fully considered.

Method:	Explanation:
Community Engagement Network (CEN)	Resource support for engagement activities – an award winning initiative of 20+ Council staff that are IAP2 trained and supported in the principles of Community Engagement. The CEN supports the organisation by assisting with trained resources and staff capacity to increase the opportunity and collaboration for face-to-face engagement at events and activities across the Tweed.
Community Conversations	Locality based community forums and round-tables held at least every 6 months (total of six or more per year) in different parts of the Shire (Tweed Heads and urban surrounds, Tweed Coast, Murwillumbah and villages/rural/hinterland districts) to discuss current or emerging issues, to exchange information between Council representatives and local people and organisations, and to foster ongoing networks and conversations.
Community Roundtable – Stakeholder Forums	Closed group roundtables with official business, environment and resident and ratepayer groups – a structured, six-monthly meeting between Councillors, official resident and ratepayers groups and representatives of these organisations from across the Tweed.

## CONSULT AND INVOLVE (continued)

Method:	Explanation:
<b>Tweed Panel</b>	The online group of registered users on Council's engagement portal – Your Say Tweed. The Tweed Panel is an easy email registration and a way for community members to stay informed and contribute at a time and in a way that suits them.
<b>'Drop-in' events, 'shop-fronts' and site meetings</b>	Opportunities for individual members of the public to speak one-on-one with council representatives at a community event, a 'shop-front' display or a site meeting.
<b>Submission to items On Exhibition</b>	All items 'On Exhibition' provide the opportunity for any member of the public to make a submission to have their say on a particular matter.
<b>Surveys and opinion polls</b>	Formal surveys are statistically representative and completed electronically or in-person. Quick/ opinion polls are also useful to provide a snapshot of a view at a point in time.
<b>Community Access Sessions</b>	Community Access sessions give people the opportunity to address Councillors informally on items being considered by the Planning Committee or a full Council meeting. Individuals or groups may make an appointment to address the meeting and provide supporting written information. As a general rule each speaker is allowed 5 minutes. Complex issues may be referred to a Council workshop instead.

Criteria:	Examples:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significant risk of controversy or conflict with community values</li> <li>• Likely significant impacts on individuals, community life, economy or environment</li> <li>• Complex issue or issues involving multiple community groups and/or other stakeholders</li> <li>• Decision-making would benefit from substantial community feedback</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Strategic Plan and Resourcing Strategy (modest update)</li> <li>• 4-year Delivery Program</li> <li>• Local Environmental Plan (minor change)</li> <li>• Locality Plan (limited impact)</li> <li>• Substantial development, community facility or infrastructure project but with relatively limited impacts</li> <li>• Policy change with limited implications</li> </ul>

## COLLABORATE AND EMPOWER – *Bringing people into the decision-making process*

In some cases engagement may need to go further, and representative groups of people and organisations will be established to actively collaborate with Councillors and/or Council staff in the preparation of plans and policies, the design and implementation of projects, or the management of a Council program or facility. The most important form of democratic empowerment in local government is, of course, the 4-yearly election of Councillors.

Method:	Explanation:
<b>Project reference groups</b>	Groups of community and stakeholder representatives, independent experts and councillors/ council staff established to put together detailed proposals for a particular project, policy or plan, and (through the chairperson) to advise Council directly on the best way to proceed.
<b>Citizen panels</b>	Deliberative face-to-face forums for in-depth consideration of a specific issue by a representative cross-section of people (independently selected from the Tweed Panel within a specific locality or across the Tweed as required), in order to provide council with a well-informed, representative and balanced community view on how the issue should be addressed.
<b>Advisory committees</b>	Formal committees comprising Councillors, community representatives and expert individuals that meet regularly to consider matters within their terms of reference, and that may be given some delegated authority from Council under the Local Government Act.
<b>Election of Councillors</b>	As legislation under the Local Government Act, Council elections are held every four years.
<b>Polls and referendums</b>	Under the Local Government Act, Council may choose to seek the community's views on any issue through a non-compulsory poll of electors' opinions, or it may hold a 'constitutional referendum' on certain electoral matters (e.g. use of wards, the number of councillors), in which case voting is compulsory and the result is binding.

Criteria:	Examples:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High risk of controversy or conflict with community values.</li> <li>• Major potential impacts on community life, economy or environment</li> <li>• Highly complex issues or issues involving multiple community groups</li> <li>• Decision-making requires input of considered community expertise and advice, either one-off or ongoing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Strategic Plan (major update)</li> <li>• Local Environmental Plan (major change)</li> <li>• Locality Plan (major impact)</li> <li>• Major development or infrastructure project</li> <li>• Provision or management of major community facility/event</li> <li>• Policy issues or changes with far-reaching implications</li> </ul>



## Implementing the strategy

**The *Community Engagement Strategy 2018–2022* builds on the progress that has been made since Council first adopted an engagement strategy in 2010. It incorporates a number of fresh ideas and innovative approaches to boost the quality of Council's efforts to genuinely engage with the Tweed community over the next four years and beyond.**

Successful implementation of the Strategy will require some re-allocation of resources and professional development opportunities for staff and Councillors. This will take place progressively, and the Strategy will be reviewed in 2022, however can be reviewed and updated before that as determined by Council.

### What's new?

- Introduction of 6-monthly Community Roundtable – Stakeholder Forums between Council and official resident and ratepayer groups, business and environmental organisations from across the Tweed.
- Locality based public community forums and round-tables held at least every 6 months across Tweed Heads and urban surrounds, Tweed Coast, Murwillumbah, villages/rural/hinterland districts. These will ensure that Councillors and staff are kept up-to-date with current and emerging issues, whilst improving relationships and building mutual trust.
- Establishment of the online 'Tweed Panel' on Your Say Tweed for community members to join and have their say at a time and in a way that suits them.
- An Engagement Improvement Panel will be established to monitor progress and advise the Council, Mayor and General Manager on implementation, in line with their statutory responsibilities. The Panel will be a sub-committee of the Audit, Risk and Improvement Committee.
- A review of the scope, operation and effectiveness of Advisory Committees to determine whether any changes, additional or alternative committees are required to help achieve the objectives of this Strategy. This will include support for IAP2 community engagement training for all committee members.

### Other actions include:

- A detailed Engagement Toolkit will be prepared and published on Your Say Tweed to provide more detailed guidance on the use of different engagement techniques.
- Further development of Council's online engagement portal – Your Say Tweed. The home of the Tweed Panel and a central place to disseminate information, receive feedback, showcase projects, host forums, on-line focus groups and conversations as a new means of tapping local knowledge and expertise, and obtaining well-informed and balanced advice on issues.
- Establishment of specialist provider panels in: 1) Facilitation of engagement and deliberative processes and 2) survey design and market research. These providers will assist on engagement from small focus groups to large forums, as well as project specific and community surveys.
- Greater use of engagement tools on Council's social media channels.
- Second intake of staff representatives to join the Community Engagement Network.
- Review of internal procedures and processes to deliver improved customer experiences in relation to engagement submissions and provide clearer explanation of linkages between Council's various strategies.
- Focus Council's content and digital strategy to align its traditional, online and social media communications and engagement with locality based needs and expectations.





**TWEED**  
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