

Community Consultation Policy

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BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Waimate District Council began a complete review of its strategic planning for the future in 2002 and continued developing these plans within the new frameworks that resulted from the adoption by Parliament at the end of that year, of the new Local Government Act.

The basic function of Council was defined in that Act as to maintain and enhance the Social, Cultural, Environmental and Economic well-being of the Community.

The Council will fulfil this function and commits to:

- providing a vision for the future
- taking a holistic approach to sustainable development, including recognising the links between people, the environment and the economy
- encouraging community led initiatives in the areas of economic and social development, environmental protection, and community involvement in decision making
- providing for partnerships - both between and within different sectors of society
- having a long-term view - considering the impacts of current actions on future generations

This makes consulting effectively with its community a key priority for Waimate District Council.

In order to achieve the strategic objectives it has set, Council must encourage the community to take decisions and actions that move the District towards those objectives.

This Community Consultation Policy sets out:

- the principles on which the Council will base its consultation with its community,
- the approach it will take to community involvement in decision making,
- and a range of community consultation types which will guide Council in selecting what specific consultation methods to use in a particular situation.

The policy also contains a detailed set of Community Consultation Guidelines that set out:

- how to locate each specific community consultation type on the range,
- the communication methods available and how they relate to the range of consultation types,
- a checklist for ensuring that Council's community consultation principles are taken account of in each individual project or process.
- the Special Consultation Process that will be used whenever full consultation is required in accordance with the Local Government Act 2002, and in line with the Council's Significance Policy

This document will guide Councillors and staff on Council's community consultation expectations for projects and operational activities as well as being a useful "how to" guide on interacting with the community.

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COUNCIL'S APPROACH

The Council is committed to:

- helping the District's diverse communities to contribute to the development of the District
- act in partnership with the community to give voice to community hopes and aspirations
- recognise that Council power comes from the community and that the Council is answerable to the community for what it does
- listen to the community and be willing to change in response to community needs
- mediate between conflicting interests for the public good

These commitments represent a range of relationships that Council has with its community - from service provider to advocate on the national stage, from representative organisation to regulator and from a supporter to a leader of the community.

In deciding how it will consult with its community, Council must bear all of these different relationships in mind. Each different relationship will place different demands on Council, and will require different approaches to, and types of, consultation.

Council recognises that it is undertaking a continual process of learning and trying to improve its ability to respond to the community. The overall approach and principles set out below are intended to shift Council further along the learning process.

Council's approach is based on the following key tenets:

- Community Consultation is a part of the Democratic Process
- Community Consultation is reliant on people being able to participate
- Community Consultation Leads To Effective Implementation Of The District's Goals
- Community Consultation Provides A Community Resource
- Council Needs To Support And Respond To Its Community

- Council Consults With Its Community At Several Different Levels

Community Consultation is a part of the Democratic Process

Communicating and interacting effectively is an essential part of local government and democracy in today's environment. Council recognises that its mandate to act comes from the community, and that community consultation processes are key to identifying community needs and aspirations.

Modern communities are extremely diverse, and the way people receive information is equally diverse, demanding that local government use a range of methods to inform residents of its actions, and to engage them in its decision making processes and initiatives in order to build more cohesive, healthy and peaceful communities.

Council also recognises the value of community consultation in its own right and in terms of its contribution to democracy. Providing the community with information and opportunities to participate leads to a greater understanding of how the democratic process works. This leads to citizens identifying more closely with democratic institutions, a higher level of participation in those institutions and generally a more healthy community.

Community Consultation is reliant on people being able to participate

Council cannot assume that the majority of the population read the daily newspaper, or even vote. To inform them of Council actions and invite them to participate in Council decision making processes and activities requires comprehensive communications strategies drawing on a wide range of methods and techniques.

Innovation is key in achieving a high level of involvement. Council must look to utilising methods that are in tune with its ever-changing community.

This will include a range of traditional methods such as meetings, surveys, mailouts and brochures, together with new and developing methods including emerging electronic media and public facilitation techniques, and a shift away from giving emphasis to the written word.

Accordingly, the Council has developed a written Communications Strategy that is

included later in this Volume of the LTCCP.

It is important that the Council endeavours to engage its citizens on their terms and in a way they are comfortable with, in order to increase participation. This means responding to requests by the community, and participating in their networks and processes.

Community Consultation Leads To Effective Implementation Of The District's Goals

Effective community consultation also makes good practical sense. A community that feels involved will become unified and motivated to further the District's strategic objectives, reducing impediments to achieving goals and completing successful projects. This in turn is likely to be more cost effective.

The greater the effort put in to trying to hear and resolve peoples concerns and issues at the beginning of a process, the less likely it is that there will be vociferous objections borne out of lack of understanding as the process progresses.

Effective community consultation also increases the opportunities for communities to take actions themselves to create a sustainable District.

Community Consultation Provides A Community Resource

Another benefit that occurs through effective community consultation is the identification and utilisation of resources that exist in the community. Members of the community possess skills and knowledge that can be drawn on by the Council to improve its own knowledge or implement different parts of projects or strategies.

The community also performs work that in some cases the Council already knows about and relies on. Without effective consultation, Council could be duplicating this work or not assisting it as far as it could.

Extensive networks are also prevalent within certain areas of the community that can be used to consult more effectively with that sector. This is certainly the case in Waimate, particularly in the social sector and the Maori community where groups are closer to the community than Council. Another example of this is in the coastal and rural communities where residents have a store of local knowledge that can

be, and has been, used to make a valuable contribution to improved environmental management or to support Civil Defence.

Council Needs To Support And Respond To Its Community

In addition to Council proactively seeking consultation, the community will often initiate consultation with Council, either in response to some Council initiative or as part of a community initiative. Council needs to have the ability to respond to these approaches in a measured way.

This may be a low key response initially due to short-term commitments, with a more detailed response (possibly projects, partnerships or other initiatives) being worked into the Council's future work programme.

Council needs to be able and willing to listen to unsolicited feedback from the community rather than limiting consultation to more formal processes and mechanisms. Councils need to meet the community on their terms and where they are.

Council Consults With Its Community At Several Different Levels

Council must be, and be perceived as, a good corporate citizen, working to become closer to the community and recognising that the full range of consultations it conducts with its residents contribute toward building an ongoing relationship (or damaging a relationship if it gets some of them wrong).

This means that alongside clearly identified "communication" or "partnership" projects and activities, priority must also be given to getting other consultations right. These include things such as day to day customer service dealings, making accessible and understandable advice and information relating to the Council, and being responsive to difficulties the community experiences in accessing Council's services.

This requires Council to equip all staff with the appropriate skills and knowledge to be able to contribute positively to Council's community consultations and that processes are tailored to the community's needs rather than the Council's.

The Chief Executive is charged with examining the organisation on an ongoing basis

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in order to ensure staff are appropriately equipped and trained and that processes are developed with a customer (community) focus.

Council's approach then is to effectively consult with its community to:

- enable local communities to influence the district's direction and to better provide for their own wellbeing
- enhance decision making and community input into it
- identify the needs and aspirations of the community
- provide services (including being an advocate) that better meet residents needs and aspirations
- communicate and achieve the District's strategic objectives
- improve implementation of District projects

BROAD PRINCIPLES

The principles that will direct Council's approach to community consultation are:

Being inclusive

This means that:

- Consultation processes set up by the Council will be run in a way that encourages participation by, or provides information to, those who have an interest or are affected by the particular activity or project.
- Efforts will be made to identify all those who may have an interest and devise the most appropriate consultation methods to reach them.
- Specific focus will be given to reaching groups that have traditionally not been involved.
- Council will recognise that many people are restricted in their ability to participate because of the busy lifestyles in today's society. Attention will be given to this when designing processes for consultation.
- A focus will also be placed upon selecting methods and places most suitable for those people or groups who have not traditionally communicated with the Council.
- Council will respond to approaches from all parts of its community and try to tailor its response in the most appropriate way for the section of the community concerned.
- Council will shift away from giving emphasis to the written word in community consultation processes.

Being open, honest and responsive

This means that:

- Community consultation processes will be transparent.
- Council will listen to all views put before it.
- Council will be clear about the opportunities for input and the process for any decision making.
- Council recognises the need to set clear expectations to the community about what they are able to influence and what decisions have been made and what other issue and considerations the Council must take into account.
- Participants will be informed about the information gathered in the particular process and any decisions taken based on that information.
- Processes will be devised in order to be as flexible and responsive as possible to the needs of participants.
- Diverse points of view will be heard and respected.
- Consultation processes will be integral to decision making rather than just an add on. Council will be genuine in its dealings with the community.
- Where Council is responding to the community it will be honest and clear about what it is prepared to do. It will make clear on what basis and to what extent it is prepared to work with the community.
- Council will set about changing its own processes so that it is better able to respond to the community.
- Council will bring its own issues to the consultation process if it has any, recognising that it is often a stakeholder itself rather than just an impartial decision-maker.

Timely processes

This means that:

- Council will endeavour to allow sufficient time in its community consultation

processes for people to receive and absorb information, as well as adequate time to become involved in those processes and respond or participate.

- Where Council has been approached by the community, it will respond as soon as it is able to.

Consulting with a clear purpose

This means that:

- Council will clearly state in relation to each community consultation process, the subject matter of the process, what the aim of the exercise is, what outcomes are being sought and the role of both the Council and the participants in the project.

Providing sufficient information to allow citizens to participate to the level they desire

This means that:

- Information for community consultation processes will be accurate, user friendly and accessible.
- As much information as possible will be made available in various forms and levels of complexity to suit participant's level of interest, prior knowledge and understanding.
- Information will be made available before opinions are sought and decisions made.

Being innovative in its approach to community consultation

This means that:

- The Council will look to use new ways of communicating with its community as appropriate to complement traditional methods and try to break through to audiences not usually reached.
- It will be flexible in accepting feedback from people in forms that suit them rather than those that suit the Council.

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Meeting statutory requirements

The Council will follow statutory processes for consultation and community consultation where these are set down. The Council will use statutory processes as bottom lines and will endeavour, where it does not compromise the statutory process, to use additional methods and processes. However, information may be withheld from community consultation processes where there is reason to do so under the Privacy Act 1993 or the Local Government and Official Information Act 1987 (for example where it is commercially sensitive).

Taking a practical approach

This means that:

- The Council will consult with the community when the community asks for it, where community input is valuable to provide direction or advice or where it is necessary to progress a project or activity that is legally required.
- The District and Council are bound by resource constraints and will try to target resources to community consultation in the most effective and efficient manner. Costs and benefits will be analysed and presented to Council in deciding whether to undertake community consultation processes and the scope and extent thereof.

Learning and improving processes via experience

This means that:

- The Council will endeavour to learn from consultation processes it has been involved in and use this knowledge to improve future processes.
- The Council will look to use benchmarking to record how successful particular processes are and build a profile of what methods and tools are more likely to be successful with particular audiences.
- Council's aim is to provide an empirical guide to selecting the best tools and methods for the best results and the most efficient and effective use of resources.

SUPPORT OF EXISTING PROCESSES AND STRUCTURES

Council will provide assistance and support to existing organisations and structures in the community in order to reach the community. Existing organisations will be supported to locate and identify groups who may not currently have a direct relationship with Council.

RESOURCING OF COMMUNITIES

Participation in Council processes brings with it costs. These can be in the form of time spent, travel costs and resources used in communicating, holding meetings or organising events. Costs can often fall on a small number of people in the community.

There are a number of issues involved when looking at resourcing communities to participate. Participation in the democratic process is one of the rights of citizenship, similar to the exercise of voting. People are encouraged to exercise these rights but traditionally are not paid to do so. Conversely, people can often face barriers to participation that cost them either financially or in other ways. Reasonable steps should be taken to minimise these barriers where possible.

Payment for participation also raises questions of impartiality. If Council were to pay a community member for work done in relation to a process, that payment could be seen as carrying with it obligations of an employer/employee or principal/consultant relationship. Other members of the community might question the impartiality of the community member or the process.

There is still a need however for Council to ensure that community participation is not prohibited by cost. In the past people have not been able to participate in community consultation processes because of travel costs or not being able to afford child-care while a parent attends a meeting. Council needs to make sure that processes are setup in such a way as to minimise barriers to participation.

Council will resource community participation on the following basis:

- Council will resource community consultation on a project by project basis. Specific projects or processes that have community consultation components will be examined through the communications planning process to see what level (if any) of community resourcing is required. Council will determine the level of resourcing through the Annual Plan or LTCCP as appropriate.
- Where it has made provision in the Annual Plan or LTCCP, Council will consider providing resources for processes in a range of ways:
 - paying for venues for meetings,
 - providing refreshments at meetings,
 - Provision of equipment necessary for the project or process,
 - printing and distributing materials associated with the project or process (including those generated by the community) and
 - paying for use of community newsletters,
 - providing childcare facilities where appropriate
 - reimbursing costs of travel to specific meetings where such costs in the opinion of the Chief Executive or nominee are frequent, and a barrier to participation,
 - other reasonable costs associated with a project or process as determined by the Chief Executive or nominee.
- Council will not pay community members for their input into a process or project.
- Council will consider requests for resourcing from the community.

TYPES OF COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

Council has all manner of different contact and consultations with its community ranging from enquiries made at the customer service counter to statutory consultation processes



and formalised partnership arrangements. The types of consultation and the levels of communication, as well as opportunities for community involvement and participation can be set out and described as a spectrum of community consultations. Below is a range of community consultation types that would be likely to be used for different project and activities at different times in Waimate. (Refer to the Diagram above).

It is likely that community consultation types at the right hand side of the range will use a number of the methods of community consultation associated with the community consultation types on the left of the range.

Published Information

This is typically one way communication where information is presented or provided and little or no comment or debate is sought. The Council talks and communities are able to listen if they wish. Useful where the Council wants to let communities know something is happening or keep them informed in respect of specific issues. Information is often provided in conjunction with other types of consultation as well. It is important that information provided deals with issues honestly and is not propaganda.

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Improving Understanding

An extension of information; improving understanding usually involves more detailed information designed to lead to changes in behaviour. Information is provided and there can be an interactive exchange of questions and further information.

Discussion

This is two way communication where information is presented and/or questions are asked and comment is requested.

It is often investigative and designed to gather information for a project or activity.

Council asks for limited input with no substantial debate. The Council listens to the feedback it receives and may or may not make changes.

Intended as a way to enhance Council decision making, discussion is useful at the start of an consultation exercise or throughout an ongoing process. It is important that community expectations are not raised too high so that participants think their input will be acted upon solely.

Consultation

Consultation is a genuine, active two-way communication that presents information, identifies issues and options to participants, and allows sufficient time and opportunity for a response. Council may have draft proposals already formulated but listens to input and is genuinely willing to change existing proposals.

The whole consultation process is undertaken with a view to gathering community feedback and ideas and incorporating those into Council's decision-making process.

Consultation is often part of a legal process and has been the subject of judicial definition which states that "consulting involves the statement of a proposal not yet finally decided upon, listening to what others have to say, considering their responses and deciding what will be done."

(McGechan J, Wellington Airport v Air New Zealand, High Court, 1983)

Participation

This is two-way active consultation between Council and its communities.

Communities are involved in the process right from the conceptual and issue identification stages. Communities are empowered to a certain extent and are able to advise on what they want. Council and communities resolve issues together.

Participation can involve resourcing communities to run parts of the consultation process themselves and can also involve liaison groups and partnership agreements.

Partnership

Partnership can be either a formal contractual agreement relating to shared responsibility and/or funding for a specific project, or an agreement to work together in less formal ways on a project or to achieve common ends.

Devolution

This is where decision making is carried out by the community with Council's support. The community is often the initiator of a particular process or issue and has a high degree of ownership and involvement in the resolution of issues.

Council resources the community so that they are able to input and undertake the involvement necessary to run a process, make decisions or manage projects depending on the particular issue. This can also involve partnership arrangements. Council will look to hand over management or decision making as well as responsibility to communities where this is appropriate.

Responsibility for outcomes, processes and decisions goes hand in hand with the concept of devolution.

GUIDING CONSULTATION PROCESSES

The Council's principles and approach to community consultation have now been set out. The next step is ensuring that the processes Council initiates adhere to these.

The steps to achieving this are contained in the following Community Consultation Guidelines. This set of guidelines sets out the consultation methods that are available. It provides a model for locating a particular project on the range of consultation types. The guidelines also set out methods that may be appropriate for each type of consultation. Within these guidelines, Council's bottom line requirements for consultation processes will be stated and which consultation processes will need to be met in order to proceed. The guidelines also provide a checklist for use in preparing communications plans to ensure that all of Council's principles have been considered and applied to a specific process or project.

CONSULTATION GUIDELINES

POSSIBLE CONSULTATION METHODS

The Waimate District Council has identified a number of ways in which it can consult with the Community as a whole, specific groups and/or individuals as is appropriate to the matter under review.

These include:

Surveys

Surveys will be held periodically in order to provide a controlled overview of community attitudes towards the Council, its service levels and specific issues.

The usual method is likely to be by contract telephone services, and can be costly, whilst achieving only limited coverage and providing for simplistic responses, rather than more in-depth opinion.

Referenda

Full referenda are uncommon but have the benefit of affording everyone a direct opportunity to provide their view.

There are problems though with using this method. It is expensive and takes significant time to prepare and execute. Also, to be effective, it must include all landowners and residents and these can be difficult to identify at any one point in time.

Submissions To The LTCCP/Annual Plan

Submissions to the LTCCP and Annual Plans are an effective method as there is considerable publicity when the submission period occurs and many citizens are considering similar submissions at the same time.

Another advantage is that any matter may be submitted upon, rather than requested responses on an already determined issue.

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Public Submissions Sought On Specific Issues Or Policies

Where an issue arising needs to be dealt with more urgently than in the routine LTCCP submissions occurring in March/April each year, a more specific consultation may be undertaken.

This method may also be used, where an issue is of such importance, that the community would benefit by considering it separately

Workshops Held With A Community Panel

The Community Panel is a representative group of citizens that provide a perspective on Council planning from the view of a wide cross-section of ratepayers and residents.

This type of workshop is widely advertised, and although known key stakeholders are invited individually, the general public are encouraged to attend. This kind of meeting can be used to gauge the community's view of an issue.

Workshops Held With Special Focus Groups

The Council's Special Focus Groups are made up of representatives of groups and organisations that have roles to play in each of the Social, Cultural, Environmental and Economic aspects of well-being. They differ from the Community Panel by representing group rather than individual's viewpoints.

Can bring together parties from many different sectors, who have issues in common, to create a knowledgeable group to inform Council.

Direct Discussions With Affected Interest Groups And Individuals

Can take a range of forms, from formal meetings, right through to informal discussions with your local Councillor. Council undertakes to listen to the message, irrespective of the method of delivery.

Public Meetings, Often With Draft Intentions For Discussion

Provides an opportunity for a widespread cross-section of the community to meet, the public can be informed and conversely the public can inform Council. The meeting may have some structure, to ensure that important topics are dealt with in the time available.

Special Workgroups Or Sub Committees Created By Council For Specific Areas Of Interest

Gives Council the ability to form a group that can work knowledgeably and effectively to research issues, or to be an agent for change.

In order to make these processes work, the Council has:

- Developed expertise in Survey preparation
- Created Work Groups and subcommittees
- Constituted and implemented a Community Panel
- Prepared the constitution of special focus groups covering organisations relating to each of the Social, Cultural, Environmental and Economic aspects of community well-being
- Generated an on-going list of Organisations and Special Interest groups within the District
- Established communication and involvement protocols with local Maori groups
- Developed an approach for the Special Consultative Process

HOW WILL COUNCIL APPLY THE DIFFERING METHODS OF COMMUNITY CONSULTATION?

The key to finding which method of consultation will suit each issue, lies in identifying the affected parties.

For each issue that arises, Council will therefore be interested to determine if the people affected are for instance, in a particular geographical area, of a particular age group, members of a particular club/society, operating within a particular culture or industry or if the issue affects all of our residents. Once the affected parties are identified, Council will then choose from the range of consultation methods, the method best suited to reaching our target group.

Consultation is not a “one size fits all” exercise, Council will seek to assess the success of each method of consultation that we conduct, so that we are continually refining our consultation skills, and finding methods that suit the Waimate Community.

A special case arises when the issue is “significant”, as defined by Council’s significance policy (Volume 4, LTCCP). Where an issue is large enough, affects the Districts strategic assets, or affects any group within our Community very strongly, then the issue may be considered significant. In the case of significant issues, a formal process is followed, whereby Council will produce an analysis of the issue, and detail all the various options for resolving it and the costs. The options will then be published for public submissions and hearings before any decision can be made.

Refer to the diagrams on following pages for the method to be used to assess the methods of consultation to be used.

Diagram 1

Shows the overall questions that have to be asked when trying to determine the best methods to employ.

They begin at the highest level of consultation first as the decision to employ, for example, the Special Consultation Process makes it redundant to consider lower level approaches.

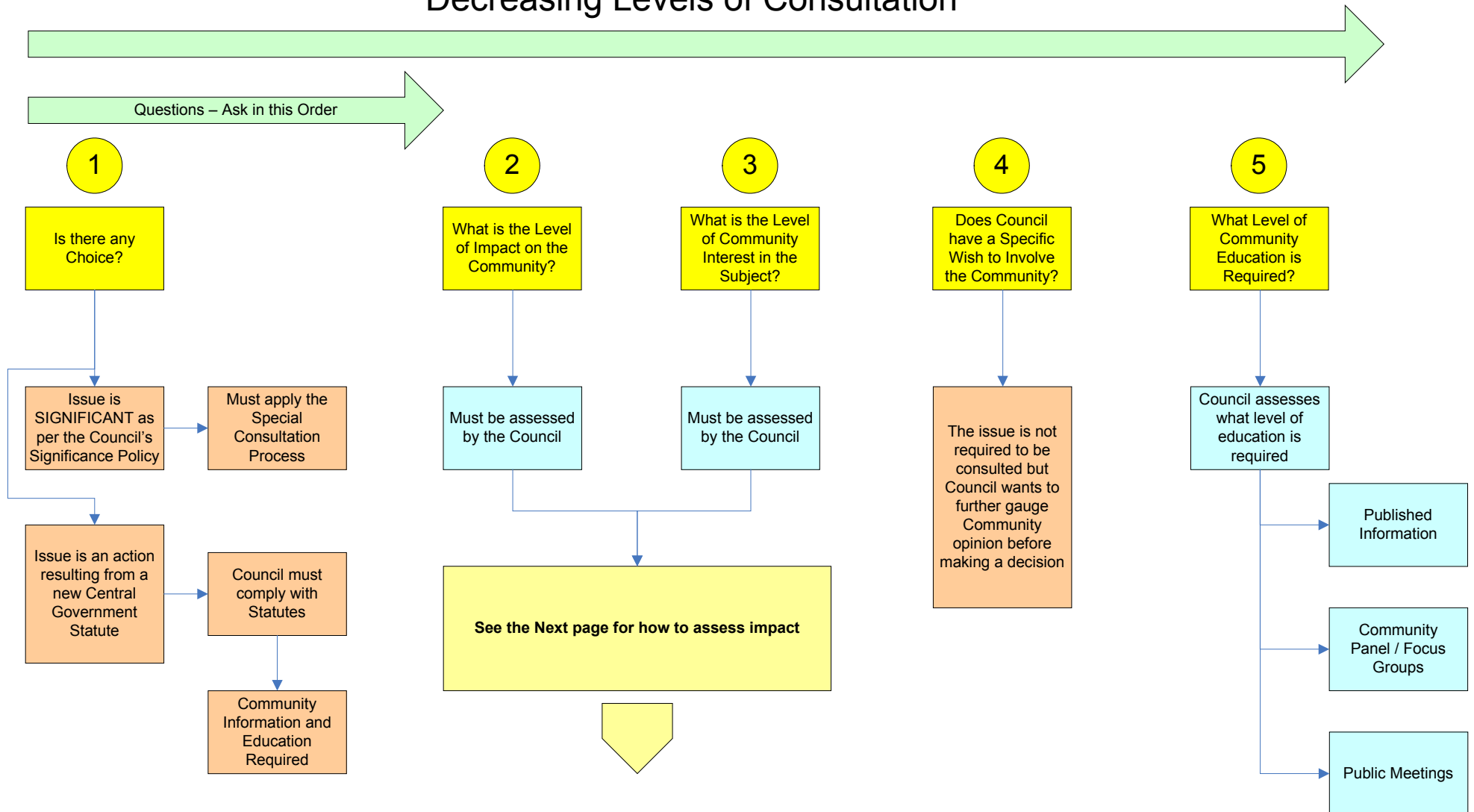
Diagram 2

Shows the questions to be answered when considering such matters as the probable impact on the community.

There are usually no definite answers so the approach is to ask each question and whenever answers lean towards the strong need for High Level of consultation end of the spectra, then the more detailed consultation methods should be used.

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Decreasing Levels of Consultation



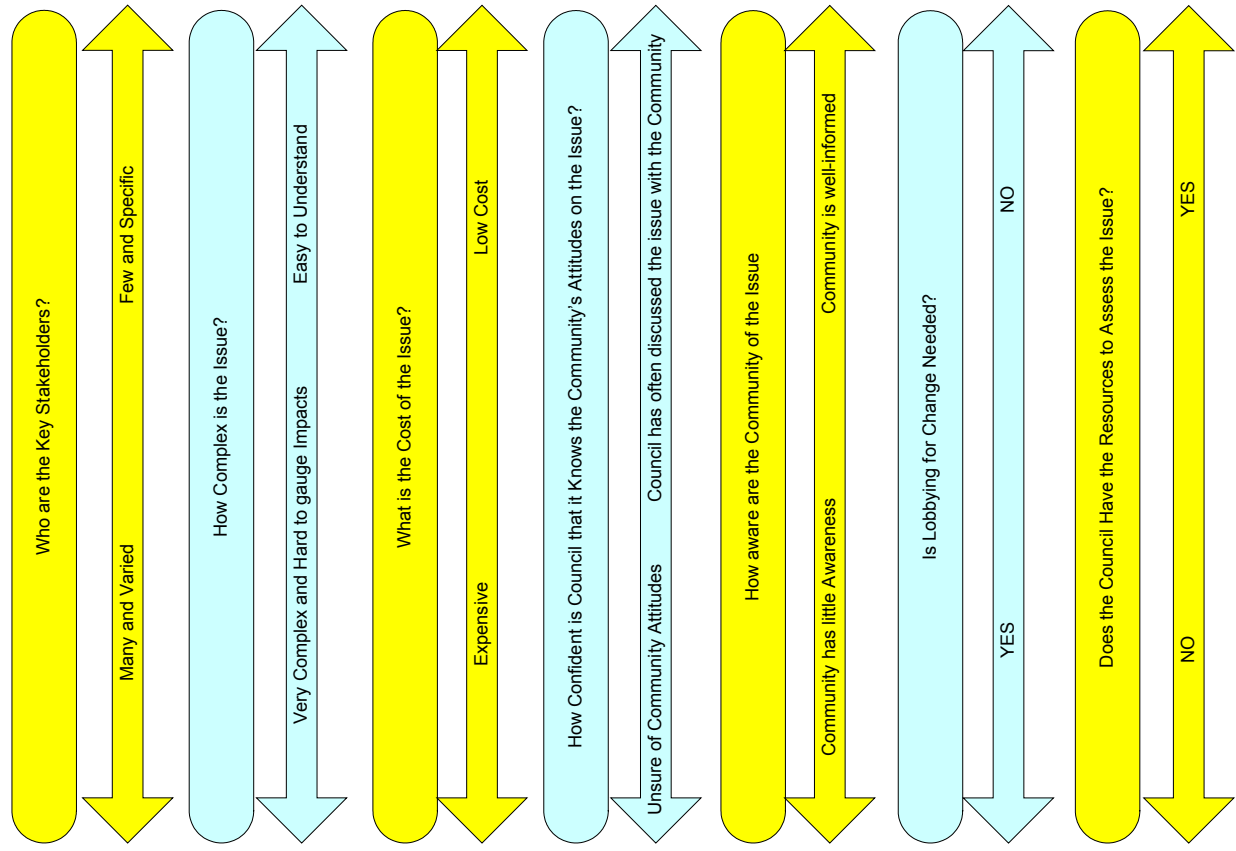
Assessment Chart

Strong need for High Level of Consultation

Weak need for a High Level of Consultation

Special Consultation Process
Referenda
Surveys

Community Panel
Focus Groups
Discussions



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THE SPECIAL CONSULTATION PROCESS

The Special Consultation Process is used when any significant decisions are to be addressed by the Council.

It is a process by which the Community is assured that it has a say in choosing an option for the future.

The Local Government Act sets out some basic requirements for such a process but leaves it up to each Council to decide the details of how it will be implemented within their District. Waimate has introduced a 5 stage process which gives the Community a full opportunity to make its opinions known at all stages of the decision-making process.

The 5 Stages of the Special Consultation Process

Stage 1

Obtain basic ball-park costs associated with any proposals already identified for the matter under consideration. Usually a specific proposal lies at the centre of the consultation but other options may also be apparent at this stage. However, no options are yet excluded from further consideration at this stage.

Stage 2

Obtain initial public input from its community panel and/or special focus groups on possible options to add to ideas already put forward by elected members and Council staff.

The Council then workshops the proposal(s) to determine the primary options to be considered in consultation with the Community at large.

The major funding options are also determined by the Council for each identified proposal and identified options.

Stage 3

Prepare consultation documents outlining the options and impacts in accordance with the Local Government Act.

Options must cover all sensible alternative actions from proceeding with the initial proposal through to abandonment of any action. These documents must outline each practical option, the costs associated with it, the impact on the Community of that option socially, culturally, environmentally and economically, and other relevant information such as scheduling and risks.

Stage 4

The Council then issues the proposals for public comment and submissions using all applicable communications methods that will assist in reaching the maximum number of citizens. The period allowed for submissions will typically be four weeks.

The Council will receive submissions and hold hearings including oral submissions from anyone who requested the ability to do so.

The Council will then produce a short-list of options and refer these to staff for any further information required to complete the decision-making process.

Stage 5

Detailed costings of the short-listed options will be obtained by the staff and the Council decision to proceed with the preferred option takes place.

Council's decision is publicly notified.