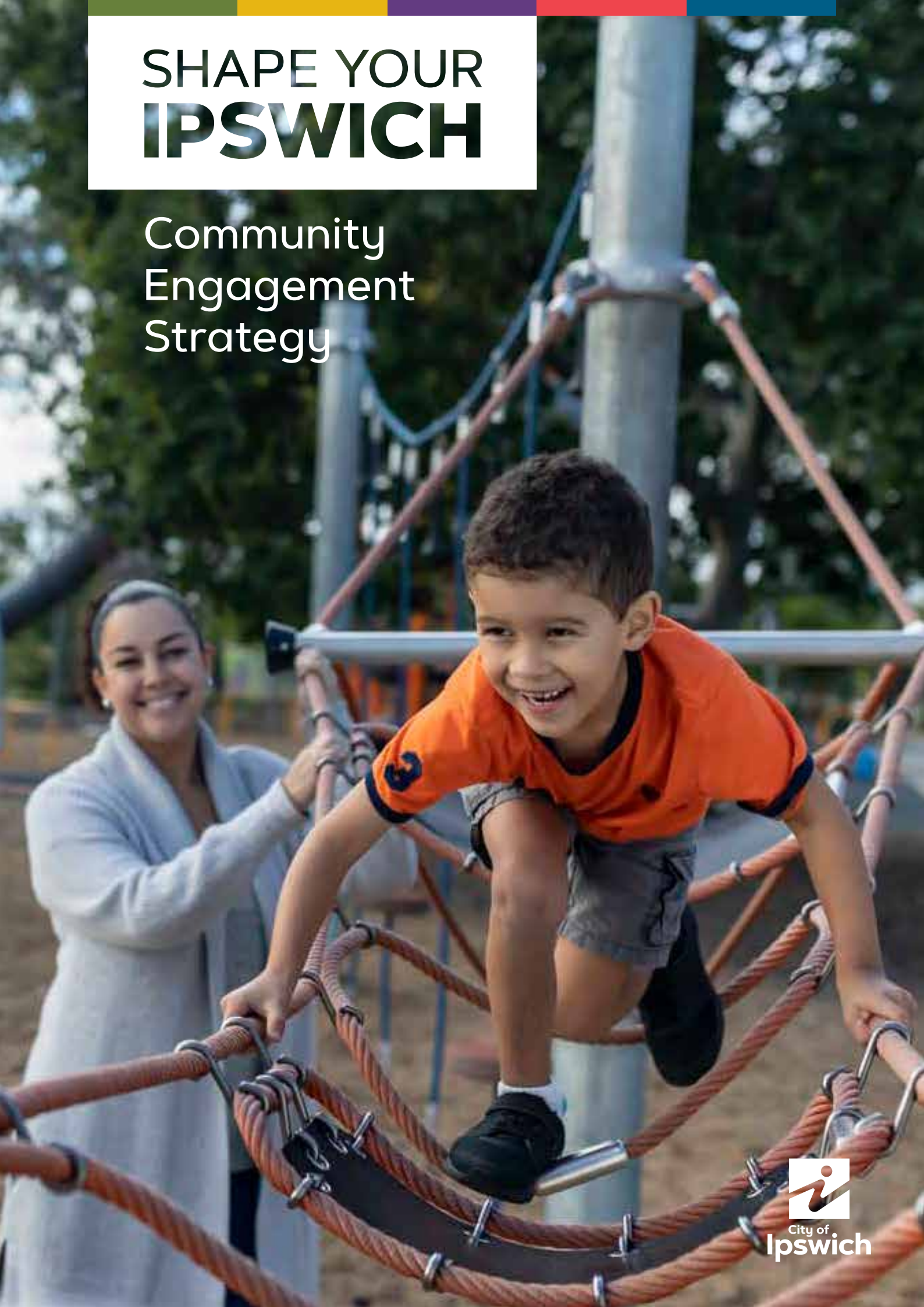


# SHAPE YOUR **IPSWICH**

## Community Engagement Strategy



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Ipswich City Council respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners as custodians of the land. The Traditional Owners whose earth, winds and water we share, and have had a deep spiritual and cultural connection to country for thousands of years. We pay our respects to their elders, past, present and emerging, as the keepers of the traditions, cultures and stories of a proud people.

# INTRODUCTION

*Shape Your Ipswich* is Ipswich City Council's Community Engagement Strategy and is our vision and commitment to meaningful engagement with the community on issues affecting the city, and on local issues that significantly impact on the community.

This strategy is based on the principle that community engagement is the foundation of sustainable decision-making, and is mutually beneficial to the community and council. It guides the delivery of community engagement processes across the organisation and builds a consistent, transparent and effective approach to engagement with the Ipswich community – placing the Ipswich community at the heart of everything we do.

## DEFINITIONS

**Community** A group of any size whose members reside in the same locality, share common characteristics (e.g. age, sex, ethnic origin, faith), interests and/or causes. People can belong to several different communities at any one time.

**Community Engagement** The process by which community and council work together to facilitate community input into council decision making.

**Community Engagement Framework** The suite of council documents which outlines council's vision and commitment to engagement with the community, detail the community engagement roles and responsibilities across council and the various community engagement processes, tools and resources.

**Council** The Ipswich City Council, being the local government area for the City of Ipswich, and includes all Councillors, employees of Ipswich City Council (full-time, part-time, temporary and casual) and consultants and contractors engaged by or acting on behalf of council.

**International Association of Public Participation (IAP2)** The prominent international organisation advancing the practice of public participation and community engagement.

**Ontario Public Engagement Framework** The public engagement approach utilised by the Government of Ontario, Canada. The Ontario Public Engagement Framework is similar to the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum, developed by the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2).

**Project/Initiative/Activity** A planned undertaking (including strategy and policy development) that builds, enhances and maintains council assets or enhances council services in order to achieve a desired outcome, within a defined scope and funding requirements.

**Stakeholder/s** A person, group of persons, organisation or group of organisations that have or feel they have an interest, or can affect/be affected by an issue or decision.

# WHY ENGAGE?

Irrespective of where you live in Ipswich, council believes that community members are best placed to identify and understand the challenges that affect them and potential solutions. Diverse perspectives help council develop a balanced understanding of community experiences and ensures that decision-making is well-informed.

*Shape Your Ipswich* is the start of a continuing conversation with residents and stakeholders in the community to further build a culture of high-quality community engagement at Ipswich City Council to achieve meaningful outcomes across the city.

Ipswich is South East Queensland's fastest-growing city, with an estimated population of 210,000<sup>1</sup> which is projected to rise to 520,000 by 2041.<sup>2</sup>

Our rapid population growth and new developments are helping to shape the dynamics of the city. While council embraces this, such growth and the physical size of our region brings its own set of unique challenges, and highlights the importance of communication and connection. Now, more than ever, it is critical for council to consistently and effectively engage with the community, and to provide the community with opportunities to engage with council.

Honest and respectful conversations are needed to debate and decide the best responses for Ipswich as we grow to a population of half a million people.

The rise of digital information and communication technologies makes possible a new environment for community engagement to occur. This strategy intends to harness the benefits of online community engagement whilst retaining the best of print and face-to-face consultation, purposefully engaging with as many people as we can, being inclusive and aiming to connect with those hardest to reach.

Community engagement is a legislative requirement under the Queensland *Local Government Act 2009* to ensure *democratic representation, social inclusion and meaningful community engagement* in government decision making.<sup>3</sup> Further, in some instances, particular methods of community engagement are required in accordance with specific legislation,<sup>4</sup> and the implementation of such methods will be aware of this Community Engagement Strategy.

This strategy defines community engagement as *the process by which community and council work together to facilitate community input into council decision making*. It outlines council's commitment to providing a process for transparent, respectful and authentic communication between the community and council.

<sup>1</sup> As per Ipswich City Council's internal modelling undertaken in March 2018.

<sup>2</sup> The State of Queensland, Department of Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning (2017) *Shaping SEQ: South East Regional Queensland Regional Plan 2017*.

<sup>3</sup> *Local Government Act 2009 (Qld)*, s 4(2)(c).

<sup>4</sup> For example, the *Planning Act 2016 (Qld)*.

# OUR VISION

Ipswich City Council prioritises listening, leading and caring for our community.<sup>5</sup> The community is well informed about the work of council, what projects council is seeking input on and how they are progressing. Community views are carefully considered and are always at the forefront of our minds.

The Ipswich community is at the heart of everything we do. We engage early and often to achieve outcomes that are community driven and enhance our city. Community members tell council about their local experiences because they are as passionate about Ipswich as we are.

## OUR GOALS

- To increase community participation in important decisions that impact on the liveability, social and economic future of Ipswich.
- To involve communities and stakeholders early to define problems, identify opportunities and create options together.
- To be a leader in community engagement, exploring new ways to engage people in the decisions that affect how we live, work, play and connect in the future.

<sup>5</sup> As articulated in Advance Ipswich 2015 and council's Corporate Plan 2017-2022, available at [ipswich.qld.gov.au/about\\_council/corporate\\_publications](http://ipswich.qld.gov.au/about_council/corporate_publications).

# OUR PRINCIPLES

Each community engagement process will have a different purpose, be at a different time and place, with different people, and will involve different interests. Council will carefully consider these differences and tailor our engagement to suit each situation, to ensure that we achieve genuine two-way engagement with a clear purpose.

The guiding principles of council's community engagement approach are:

- We know why we are engaging and we communicate this clearly
- We deliberately include as many people as we can
- We aim to be inclusive and connect with those hardest to reach
- We are sensitive to history and know the context
- Whenever possible we engage early on challenges and not just solutions
- We genuinely listen at every stage and we keep coming back
- We are relevant and purposeful

### **1. We know why we are engaging and we communicate this clearly.**

Community engagement is an integral part of all Ipswich City Council's work. We will be very clear with ourselves, our stakeholders and communities about why we are engaging, what we want to achieve and how people can get involved. We will be very clear about the extent that communities can influence outcomes and what council will do with their feedback and ideas.

### **2. We deliberately include as many people as we can.**

Showing respect for and knowing the community that council wants to engage with is essential to achieving quality outcomes. Council's aim is to hear the views and ideas of as many community members as is possible. This requires extra effort to build good relationships on the ground and using the right language for the right audience. Interested stakeholders may also include, among others, non-government organisations, advocacy groups, universities and think tanks.

### **3. We aim to be inclusive and connect with those hardest to reach.**

Diverse perspectives help council to develop a balanced understanding of community experiences. For this reason we reach out and adapt how we connect with diverse groups. Identifying possible alternatives to barriers that may limit the community's ability to participate in council activities is an important part of our community engagement planning.

### **4. We are sensitive to history and context.**

When engaging, it is important to understand what has happened in the past, at all levels of government, to avoid any obvious pitfalls and to build trust. Knowing the history and background to previous engagements will also prevent going over old territory, while being aware of any future opportunities for collaboration.

### **5. Whenever possible we engage early and often.**

Early engagement is essential for better outcomes because it brings more voices to the table to identify issues and ideas before options for solutions are developed. Engaging early on the challenges allows us greater opportunity to discuss, debate and decide on long term solutions. Providing the community with timely and accurate information about council initiatives is considered early in our project planning.

While council may not always be able to engage as early as we would like, we can make it clear when there will be opportunities for the community to have a say and what we will do with their feedback.

### **6. We genuinely listen at every stage and we keep coming back.**

Genuine engagement requires active listening. Council recognises that only communities who feel they have been genuinely listened to will be meaningfully involved. One of the most important elements of listening is considering what is said and responding in an appropriate and timely way by explaining what has happened as a result. This doesn't mean always agreeing but showing people how their ideas and participation have influenced outcomes and contributed to decision making.

### **7. We are relevant and purposeful.**

Council realises that not everyone has the time to attend public meetings or participate in focus group sessions, so if we want people to take part in engagement activities we need to capture their imagination, have a clear purpose and reach the maximum number of interested people.

Council will continue to explore new ways to engage diverse voices, in order to ensure that our engagement is both relevant and purposeful.

# OUR APPROACH

**Community engagement is a process of involving the community in decision-making. This ranges from sharing and consulting, to deliberating and collaborating with the community.**

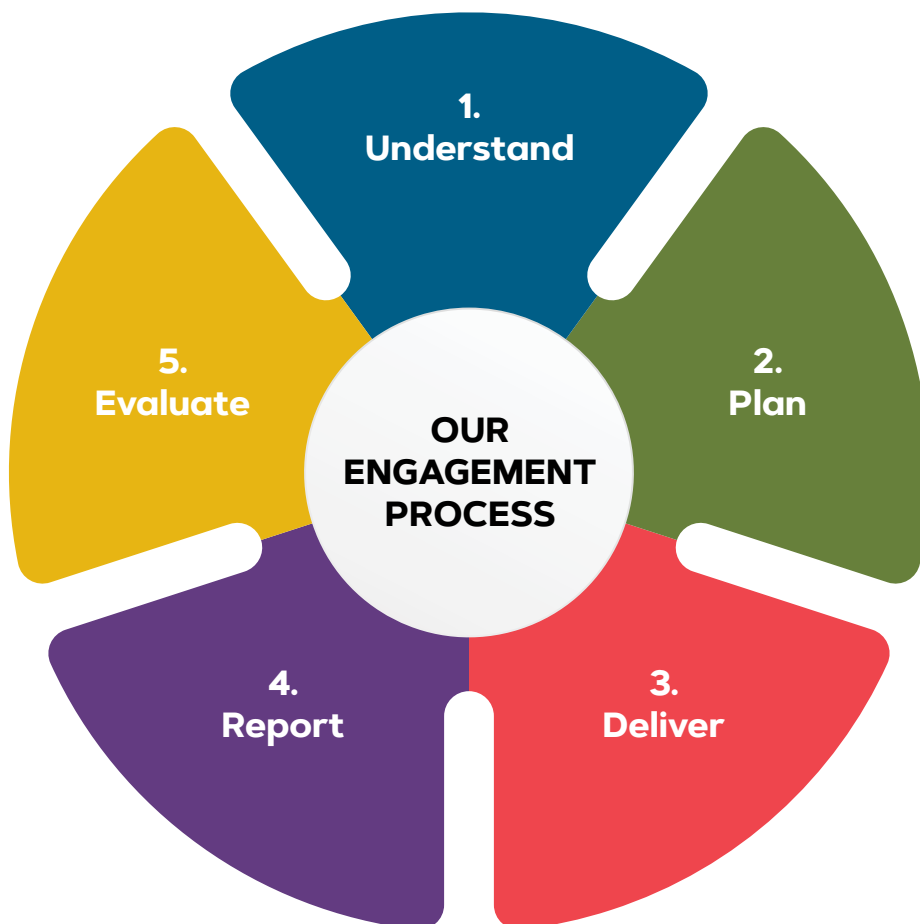
Ipswich City Council has a clear process for designing and delivering community engagement. This process has five key stages: understand, plan, deliver, report and evaluate as shown in the below figure.

Council uses the Ontario Public Engagement Framework<sup>6</sup> to help identify the appropriate form of engagement depending on the goals, time frames, resources and levels of impact in the decision to be made.

While different types of problems or projects will require different community engagement approaches, it is vital to engage with the community early in the process. By identifying community interests, issues and concerns from the outset, we can optimise the benefits and minimise impacts.

Different stakeholder groups might be engaged at different points of the community engagement process on any particular project, depending on their level of interest in a particular topic. Some people and organisations will want to work in partnership to develop solutions, while others may only want to be kept informed of developments. Further, multiple methods may be used throughout the individual life of a project. What is vitally important is to determine what aspects of the project the community can influence and to ensure the various stakeholder groups are clear about their role in the decision-making process.

When projects are not circumscribed by other regulatory or legislative requirements, the community and stakeholders should have an opportunity to influence the shape and direction of the project within the engagement process.







<sup>6</sup> Government of Ontario, Canada, available at [Ontario.ca/page/public-engagement](https://ontario.ca/page/public-engagement).



# FORMS OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Recognising that no two issues are the same and that different issues will seek the input of the community and stakeholders to varying degrees, council applies the Ontario Public Engagement Framework. The Ontario Public Engagement Framework guides the level of influence that community and stakeholders will have in a decision making process.

SHARE	<p><b>Council informs the community about its initiatives</b></p> 	<p><b>Commitment:</b> Ipswich community members receive information about council services, projects, plans or decisions in a way that is accessible to them</p> <p><b>Process:</b> This is one-way communication</p> <p><b>Examples:</b> fact sheets, websites, corporate documents, speeches, public presentations, media releases</p>
CONSULT	<p><b>Council gathers views from the community on an issue, policy, development or decision</b></p> 	<p><b>Commitment:</b> Ipswich community members have opportunities to weigh-in on a matter of interest</p> <p><b>Process:</b> Participants advocate for their views on a subject</p> <p><b>Examples:</b> surveys, focus groups, public meetings, interviews</p>
DELIBERATE	<p><b>Council works with the community in varying degrees of depth to identify an issue and/or develop solutions</b></p> 	<p><b>Commitment:</b> Ipswich community members are involved to varying degrees <i>From</i> Identifying and understanding issues; <i>To</i> Developing a strategy that council commits to deliver</p> <p><b>Process:</b> Participants find common ground and collectively arrive at an agreement</p> <p><b>Examples:</b> advisory panels, reference groups, consultative committees and workshops, deliberative forums</p>
COLLABORATE	<p><b>Council works with the community to define an issue and develop and deliver solutions</b></p> 	<p><b>Commitment:</b> Ipswich community members work with council to define an issue, develop solutions and share in the delivery of solutions</p> <p><b>Process:</b> Participants and stakeholders share decision-making and the implementation of solutions</p> <p><b>Examples:</b> working groups, joint projects, multi-stakeholder initiatives, partnerships</p>

In addition to the example forms of engagement outlined in the above table, council will use its online community engagement website *Shape Your Ipswich* ([Shapeyouripswich.com.au](http://Shapeyouripswich.com.au)) and other relevant and appropriate digital solutions to engage with the community.

# OUR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT JOURNEY AND PRIORITIES

Building a community engagement culture for the shared benefit of the organisation and the community requires sustained and consistent effort by all staff across Ipswich City Council. In order to achieve this, council is focusing resources on the following priorities:

## **1. Organisational awareness and capability**

Council has committed to building a culture of quality community engagement, working to build organisational awareness and capabilities through the implementation of training programs, tools, standards, processes and systems.

## **2. Knowing our audience**

Council is committed to ensuring that those who are interested or affected by a particular community engagement activity are included and engaged early. Considering our audience for each engagement activity, and how best to reach them, is part of our community engagement planning process.

## **3. Continual learning**

Council is committed to a process of evaluation and improvement as part of our community engagement planning processes. We will share our learnings and remain agile to changing demands, technologies and environments. We will regularly review our Community Engagement Framework and work to ensure that we are operating in accordance with best practice community engagement principles and techniques.

# WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM US

..... Wherever you live, work or play we will proactively engage with you so we collectively make the best decisions. ....

As part of this commitment you can expect to:

- Have a real say in how the city functions
- Have mistakes acknowledged and addressed
- Be able to see council's policy thinking on projects early in the pipeline
- Be given honesty around what is and isn't negotiable
- Be engaged on problems as well as solutions
- Be listened to, heard and provided opportunities to influence decisions that impact and/or interest you.

## REVIEW PERIODS

This strategy will be regularly reviewed alongside other related council documents.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In developing this Community Engagement Strategy, Ipswich City Council wishes to acknowledge the learnings we have received from other local councils and leaders in the field across all levels of government in Queensland and across Australia and internationally. We are grateful for the generosity of Mitchell Shire (Vic) and Northern Beaches (NSW) councils who shared their community engagement and digital transformation journeys with us.

This strategy draws from research into the Ontario Public Engagement Framework, and borrows heavily from Engage VicRoads. In the process of developing this strategy a variety of guidelines were reviewed including the Queensland Government's Online Community Engagement Guideline and Community Engagement Toolkit and resources produced by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2).

The collaborative input from across all Ipswich City Council departments has been especially valuable to the development of this strategy. We will continue to share and learn from others to advance our practice of community engagement.







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