



Communication and Engagement Strategy
Special Rate Variation -
Continuation of the Environmental Levy
July 2018

1. Introduction

Ku-ring-gai Council is committed to engaging its community on matters that affect them. This is reflected in Council's Community Consultation Policy that highlights, in particular, the important connections between elected representatives, staff and the community, and the potential benefits derived by using these connections to make better decisions. This approach is in line with the increased use of participatory democracy techniques by leading international, Federal, State and local government agencies.

Through its communications and engagement practices, Ku-ring-gai Council actively seeks the involvement and input of all relevant sectors of the community in its decision making and is committed to employing methods to ensure maximum reach and participation.

This strategy outlines how Council will communicate and engage with its community regarding the proposed Special Rate Variation (SRV) for the permanent continuation of the Environmental Levy. By delivering this Strategy, the community will be informed about the proposed SRV and provided with a range of opportunities to provide feedback, to inform Council's application to IPART.

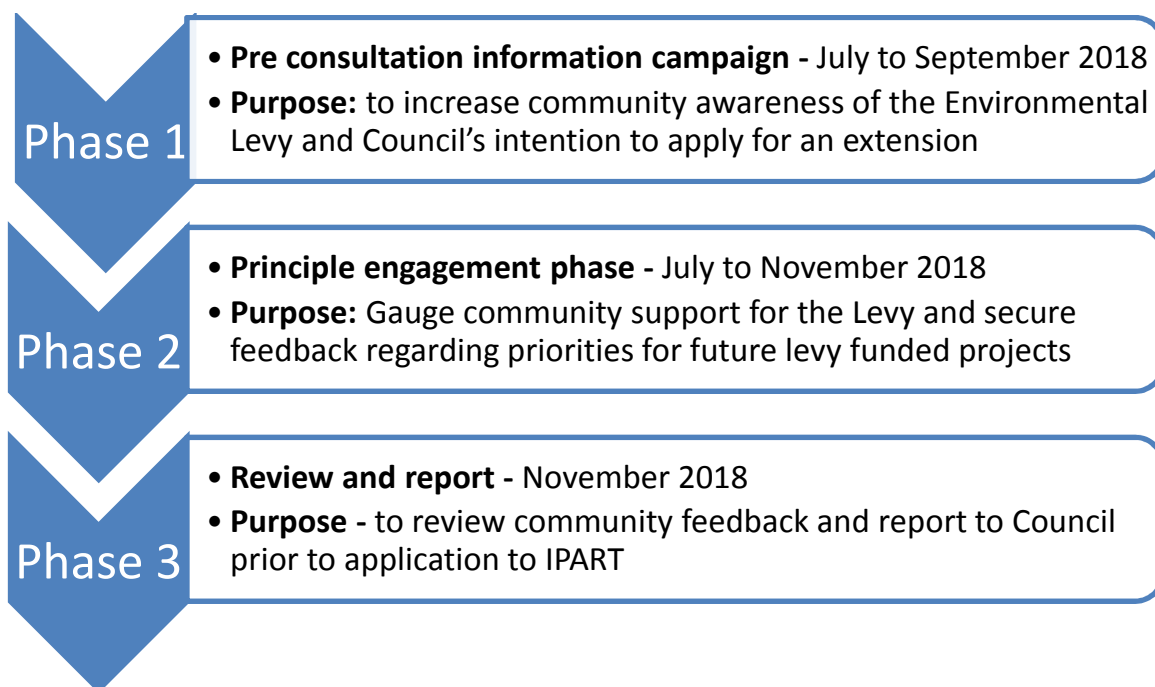
2. Strategy objectives

The objectives of the Strategy are to:

- 1) **Inform** the Ku-ring-gai community about the proposed extension of the Environmental Levy, including:
 - What the Levy has funded and could fund in the future
 - Why the Levy is needed
 - Where the Levy has helped support environmental outcomes in Ku-ring-gai
 - The impact on services and rates with a continued Levy, a reduced Levy and no Levy
- 2) **Consult** the community:
 - To gauge support for a continuing Levy, reduced Levy or no Levy
 - To gauge support for a permanent Levy, should there be support for a continuing Levy
 - Ensure the level of the proposed Levy is appropriate
- 3) **Involve** the community:
 - To help Council prioritise environmental works and programs that should be funded by the Levy, should it continue

3. Engagement process overview

The engagement process occurs over three phases between July and November 2018, as outlined below. The consultation will be undertaken by staff in Council's Communications and Environment and Sustainability teams, with support from a specialist market research and community engagement consultancy.



4. Underpinning best practice principles

The engagement approach adopted for this project will be robust and transparent and will ensure, where reasonably practicable, that all community stakeholders have the opportunity for comment and input. Our approach is underpinned by two key principles:

1. NSW Social Justice Principles

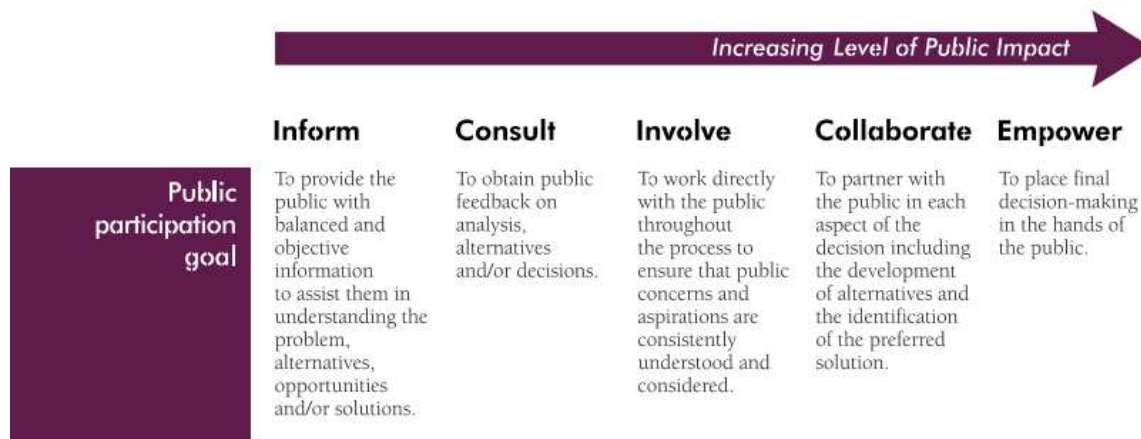
- **Equity** - There is fairness in decision making and prioritising and allocation of resources.
- **Access** – All people have fair access to services, resources and opportunities to meet their basic needs and improve their quality of life.
- **Participation** – Everyone has the maximum opportunity to genuinely participate in decisions which affect their lives.
- **Rights** – Everyone's rights are recognised and promoted.

2. International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) spectrum

The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) spectrum illustrates that a variety of engagement techniques will reflect the IAP2 spectrum including:

- **Inform** We will keep you informed.
- **Consult** We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.
- **Involve** We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.
- **Collaborate** We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.

IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation



5. Stakeholders

The primary focus for this engagement process will be residential and business ratepayers as they pay the Environmental Levy. These broad groups have a wide range of needs and capabilities and as such, it is important that a range of communication and engagement techniques be employed for maximum reach and participation.

6. Delivery

Phase 1 – exhibition and adoption of IP&R documents (May – June 2018)

Council's Draft Community Strategic Plan, Draft Delivery Program 2018–2021 and Operational Plan 2018 – 2019, and Draft Resourcing Strategy 2018 – 2028 were publicly exhibited for 29 days from 11 May to 8 June 2018. Copies of the exhibition documents were made available at Council's Customer Service Centre at Chambers and Council's four (4) libraries as well as being available on Council's website.

Notification of the exhibition included a local newspaper advertisement within Council's dedicated corporate advertisement section as well as information on Council's website homepage with direct links to a dedicated page explaining the exhibition and documents. Council also emailed all participants who attended community consultation sessions on the Community Strategic Plan as well as Council contacts across departments from mailing lists etc.

The suite of information on the SRV for the permanent continuation of the Environmental Levy contained in these documents met the criteria in which IPART will assess the Special Rate Variation application, as articulated in the *'Guidelines for the preparation of an application for a special variation to general income'* (October 2018).

Council adopted all the Plans at its Ordinary Meeting of 26 June 2018. No submissions were received from the community on the sections of the Plans containing information on the SRV application for the permanent continuation of the Environmental Levy.

Phase 2 - Pre consultation information campaign (July – September 2018)

This purpose of this phase is to increase awareness of the Environmental Levy in advance of the consultation phase and the opportunities available for the community to provide feedback on the continuation of the Levy. The community will be informed about how Levy funds have been used to create positive outcomes for the Ku-ring-gai environment and its community.

ACTIVITIES / TASKS

- 1) **July rates notice:** containing information about the current Environmental Levy programs and works and their outcomes; the current amount paid by ratepayers; and Council's intention to apply for a permanent Environmental Levy. The notice will also invite the community to learn more about the Environmental Levy and to have their say on its future, with a webpage for residents to obtain further information and register to have their say.
- 2) **Environmental Levy roadshow:** appearing at libraries, shopping centres, local markets and the Wildflower Garden festival, a series of display panels will provide information to the community on the current Environmental Levy programs and works and their outcomes. The opportunities available for the community to provide feedback on the continuation of the Environmental Levy will be communicated and registrations will be taken for those interested in participating in the engagement process.
- 3) **Digital communication campaign:** this will include a video, website information and social media posts, promoting what the Environmental Levy delivers and how the community can get involved in the subsequent community consultation.

Phase 3 – Staff and community consultation (July– November 2018)

The purpose of this phase of engagement is to:

- a) Gauge community support for the continuation of a permanent Environmental Levy
- b) Secure feedback from staff and the community regarding priorities for future Levy funded programs and works, should it continue

A number of engagement mechanisms will be employed and supported by promotion in local newspapers, on Council's website, in e-newsletters and on social media. Those who expressed an interest during the second phase of the community engagement will also be targeted to participate.

ACTIVITIES / TASKS

1) Staff consultation on draft 10 year Environmental Levy program

A series of staff workshops will be conducted to inform the development of a draft 10 year Environmental Levy program, to be presented to the community for their feedback as part of the consultation process. Staff workshops will be conducted across the themes of energy, biodiversity, water and catchments, community engagement and community education, and sustainable transport and community recreation.

2) Recruited, representative survey

A sample of approximately 500 randomly selected residential ratepayers will be recruited and surveyed by an independent market research company to gauge support for the permanent extension of the Environmental Levy and to obtain feedback on the priorities for future Levy funded programs and works, should it continue. Participants will be provided with an information pack regarding the Levy prior to the completion of the survey, to ensure they have some degree of knowledge when providing their opinion.

3) Recruited consultation workshop

A sample of approximately 30 people will be recruited from those participating in the representative survey. These individuals will attend a consultation workshop facilitated by an independent consultant. Attendees will receive a stipend for their attendance. The three hour workshop will cover:

1. A presentation of current Environmental Levy programs and works and their outcomes
2. A presentation on options for the future of the Levy, namely, a continued or reduced Levy and no Levy, including the impacts on rates under these scenarios and the implications on service levels / programs
3. A presentation on the permanency of the Environmental Levy
4. A vote on the attendee's preferred option (continuation of Levy / reduced Levy or no continuation of the Levy) and the permanency of the Levy
5. Prioritisation exercise – to inform Council's plan for future Levy programs and works, should the Levy continue

4) Opt in consultation workshop

Facilitated by Council staff, this workshop will have the same structure and content as the recruited workshop but be open to any interested community or business member. A stipend will not be paid for attendance.

5) Online engagement platform

Using Council's 'OurSay' online engagement facility, Council will create a consultation page to gain further (resident and business) ratepayer feedback with:

- i) A suite of information on the Environmental Levy and the Special Rate Variation application
- ii) an online survey (based on the representative survey)
- iii) an opportunity to provide an email submission
- iv) registration for the opt-in workshop

The online engagement platform will be promoted widely through Council's various communication channels. In addition, a letter will be sent to every Ku-ring-gai business ratepayer inviting them to have their say through the online engagement platform, considering business ratepayers were not surveyed through the representative, residential ratepayer survey.

6) Printed survey

Based on the online survey, a printed copy of the survey will be available for completion and return at Council libraries and the customer service centre, designed for those without access or skills to complete the survey online.

Phase 3 – Review and report (November 2018)

The purpose of this phase of engagement is to review community feedback and liaise with the Council's executive and Councillors prior to seeking final Council approval to proceed with the application to IPART for the SRV for the permanent continuation of the Environmental Levy.

ACTIVITIES / TASKS

1) General Manager and Directors briefing

Following the main community consultation phase, Council's executive will be provided with an overview of the community consultation process and a summary of the community consultation results, in preparation for the Councillor briefing.

1) Councillor briefing

Following the main community consultation phase, Councillors will be provided with an overview of the community consultation process and a summary of the community consultation results. Councillors will also be provided with an opportunity to provide feedback on the 10 year Environmental Levy program that will support the IPART application; based on the outcomes of staff and community consultation.

2) Report to Council (on or before 30 November 2018)

The outcomes of the community, Councillor and staff consultation will be reported to Council, prior to Council notifying IPART of its decision to apply for a Special Rate Variation (due by 30 November 2018).

7. Community engagement review

A review of the communication and engagement will be undertaken to ensure continuous improvement. This will involve:

- Emails to all who contributed, thanking them for their involvement in the process and outlining the impact their participation had– that is, ‘closing the engagement loop’ as per Council’s Community Engagement Policy
- Post engagement evaluation survey – sent to email database to gather feedback on process
- Post engagement staff debrief
- Lessons learnt document – to be shared internally