



GWYDIR SHIRE COUNCIL
**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
STRATEGY**

2022/2026



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT TO COUNTRY

Council acknowledges the traditional owners of the land, the Kamilaroi People and pays its respect to Elders both past and present.



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MESSAGE FROM GENERAL MANAGER

Max Eastcott

THANKS TO OUR COMMUNITY

Thank you to the people who contribute their views, ideas and reflections to help shape our community. We seek your ongoing involvement and participation in conversations, activities and workshops showcasing the principles and practices of community engagement. We appreciate your time and your interest and look forward to fostering a deeper relationship with our community on important matters that require your collaboration.

SOME OF GWYDIR SHIRE COUNCIL STATISTICS



References for statistical information are: ABS – Census 2021

COUNCIL STATEMENTS AND VALUES

Our Vision

To be the recognised leader in Local Government through continuous learning and sustainability.

Our Mission

To ensure that the Council's long term role is viable and sustainable by meeting the needs of our residents in a responsible caring way, attract sustainable development while maintaining the traditional rural values, character and culture of our people.

Council Core Values

1. For Our Community and Visitors

We will provide a safe, clean and healthy environment in which all people have the opportunity to participate in and share in the Council's services and facilities.

2 For Our Community Committees

We will seek their opinion in relation to the services in which they assist us, offer relevant and timely support, and recognise their valuable contribution.

3 For Our Staff

We will create an atmosphere of team support, which encourages frank and honest communication, and the use of common sense and innovation in a safe and friendly working environment with the aim of efficiency.

4 For Our Councillors

We will treat all Councillors equally and ensure that they are provided with accurate and timely advice and expect that they will treat each other and the staff with due respect.

BACKGROUND

With lively communities, creeks and rivers that run right through town, natural wonders like Cranky Rock, the Glacial Area and Horton Falls and an abundance of walking trails – Gwydir Shire is a nature lovers paradise. Our Shire is vast in size yet small in population, with a geographical spread of over 9,000 square kilometres. The Gwydir Shire community are invested in the decisions that affect where and how they live. To live in Gwydir Shire is to be connected. To be part of a genuine community that values resilience, sustainability, opportunity, creativity, collaboration and forward thinking.

This Community Engagement Strategy outlines our approach to engaging with the community and stakeholders. It provides transparency and clarity for all stakeholders so they can understand their role in the decision-making process.

The Integrated Planning and Reporting framework is built on the principle that all members of the community have a right, and a responsibility to contribute to their community's future. It is an intent of Gwydir Shire Council to engage with our community, using effective engagement practices, on major issues and plans affecting the future of the shire and activities that have a significant impact on the community.

The framework aims to shape change focused on the shire and community priorities developed through broad and representative community participation. It helps improve the experience of all participants involved in community engagement to achieve the highest quality of process and results.

While engagement does not replace the final decision-making of the elected Council, community engagement plays an important role ensuring the final recommendations made by staff are equitable and well-informed.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

“Any process that involves the community in problem solving or decision making and uses community input to make better decisions”

Definition of community engagement IAP2

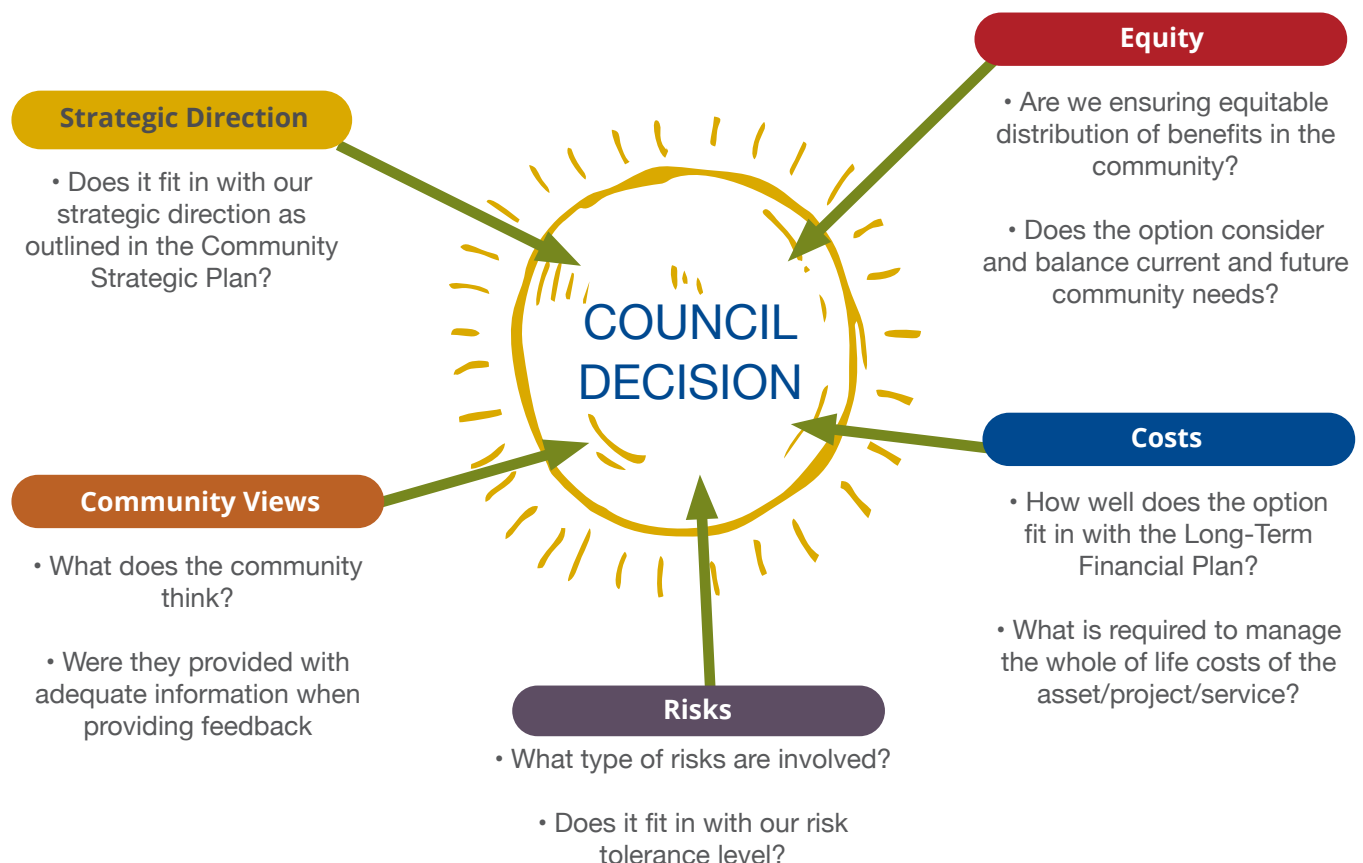
Principles & Values Guiding Engagement

Effective and meaningful engagement is at the heart of local government and the integrated planning and reporting (IP&R) process. It helps our communities shape their own futures and helps inform the vision and direction of council.

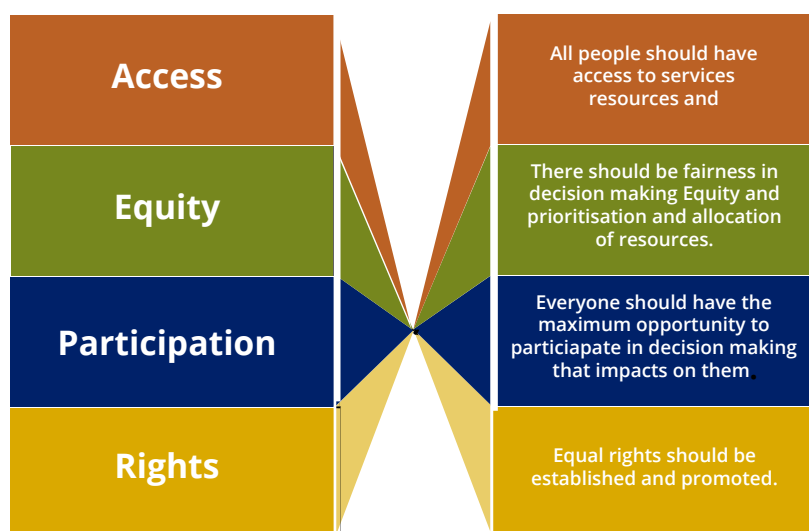
Community participation is a guiding principle of effective and accountable local government. We are required to engage the communities that we serve – the people, organisations and businesses that have an invested interest in the future of Gwydir Shire and are impacted by the decisions made by Gwydir Shire Council.

The Community Engagement Strategy (this document) is a framework for how we will engage communities in the decisions made at Gwydir Shire Council. It outlines the legislative requirements, guiding principles, approaches and processes we use to ensure our engagement is clear, accountable, meaningful, inclusive and accessible to the diverse community that we serve. It describes the role communities play in our decisions about projects, policies, strategies, programs and services.

COUNCIL DECISION MAKING CRITERIA



Our Community Engagement Strategy has been developed around the Social Justice Principles.



Council's community engagement principles aim to ensure that our engagement:

- 
 Has a clear purpose, objective and approach
- 
 Is easy for the community to access and participate in
- 
 Is clear and simple
- 
 Builds trust and understanding
- 
 Is meaningful, authentic and adds value
- 
 Is evaluated and improved



LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENTS

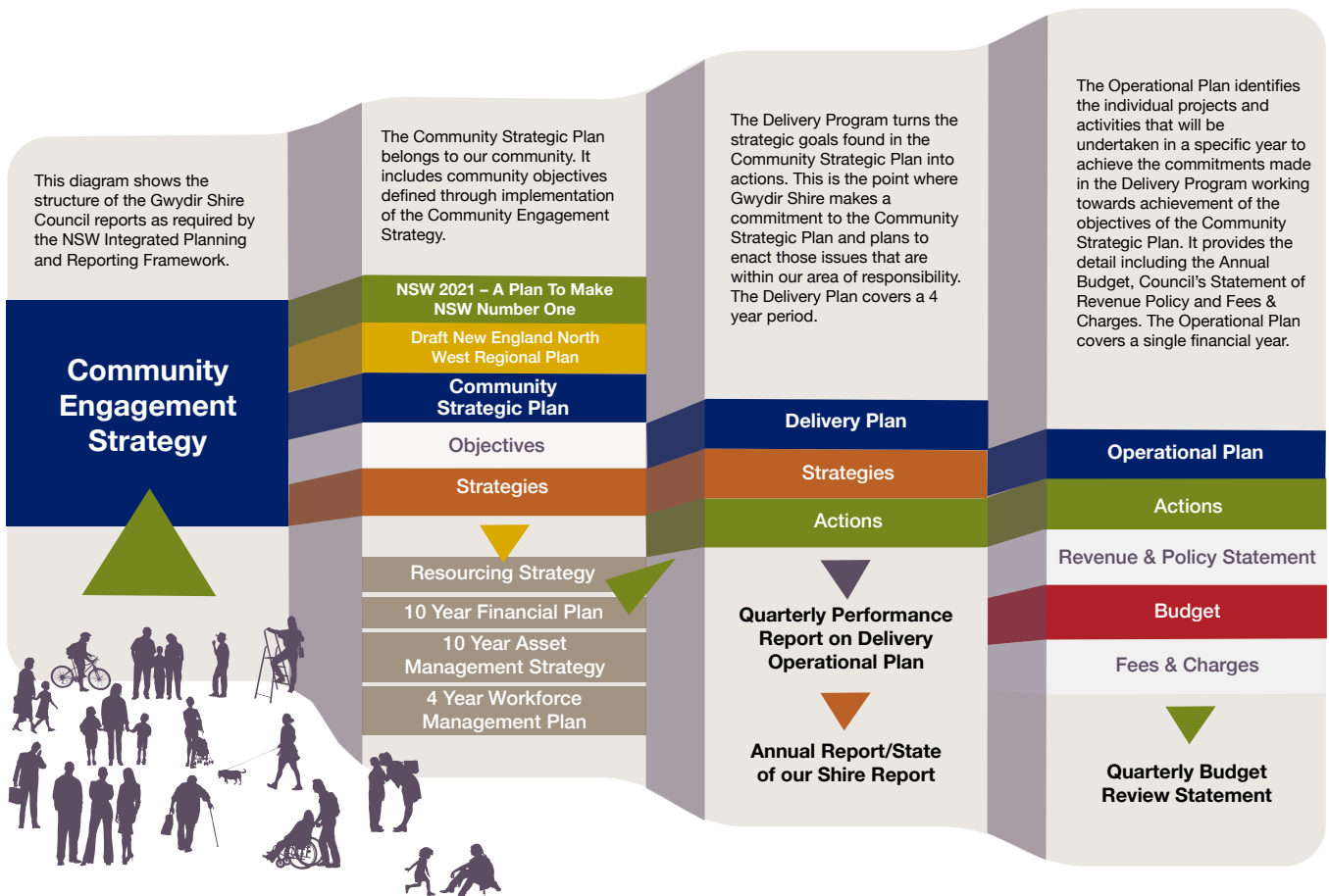
Gwydir Shire Council has a legislative obligation under the Local Government Act 1993 to ensure that we plan strategically using the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework for the provision of effective and efficient services and regulation to meet the diverse needs of the local community.

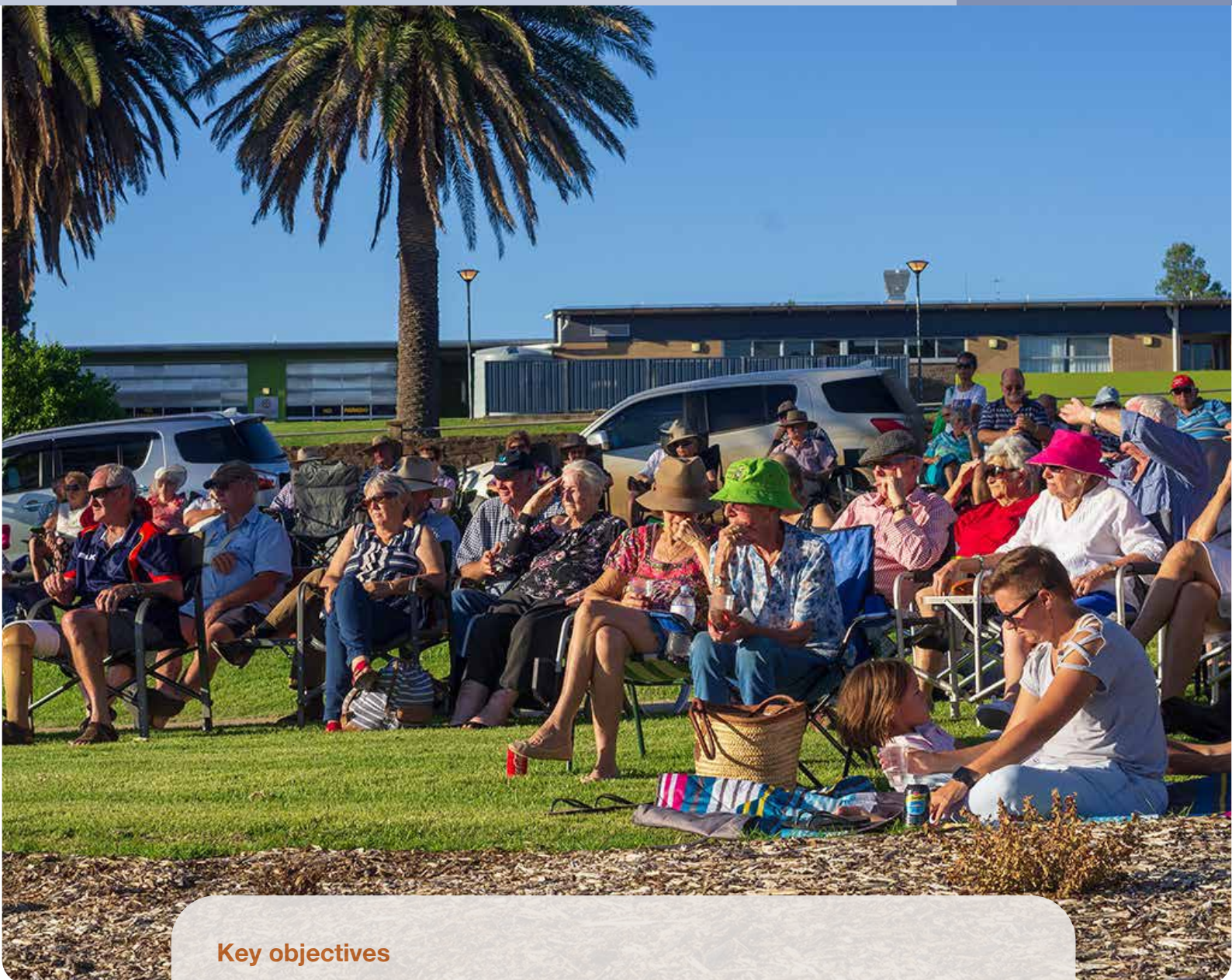
All councils in NSW are required to operate within the NSW Local Government Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) Framework. This framework was introduced to facilitate a strong and sustainable local government system by ensuring all local councils have in place strategic plans, underpinned by community priorities and supported by appropriate resources.

The IP&R Framework encourages councils to view their plans holistically to understand how they relate to each other, and in doing so, leverage maximum results.

Ultimately, it aims to provide greater accountability and transparency in local government, by strengthening councils' strategic focus, streamlining reporting processes and making it easier for the community to understand and track councils' progress on identified priorities.

Council's Community Engagement Strategy (CES) forms part of the integrated planning and reporting framework that all NSW councils must follow. This Strategy supports the development of all council plans, policies, programs and key activities whether related to the IP&R framework or other legislation.





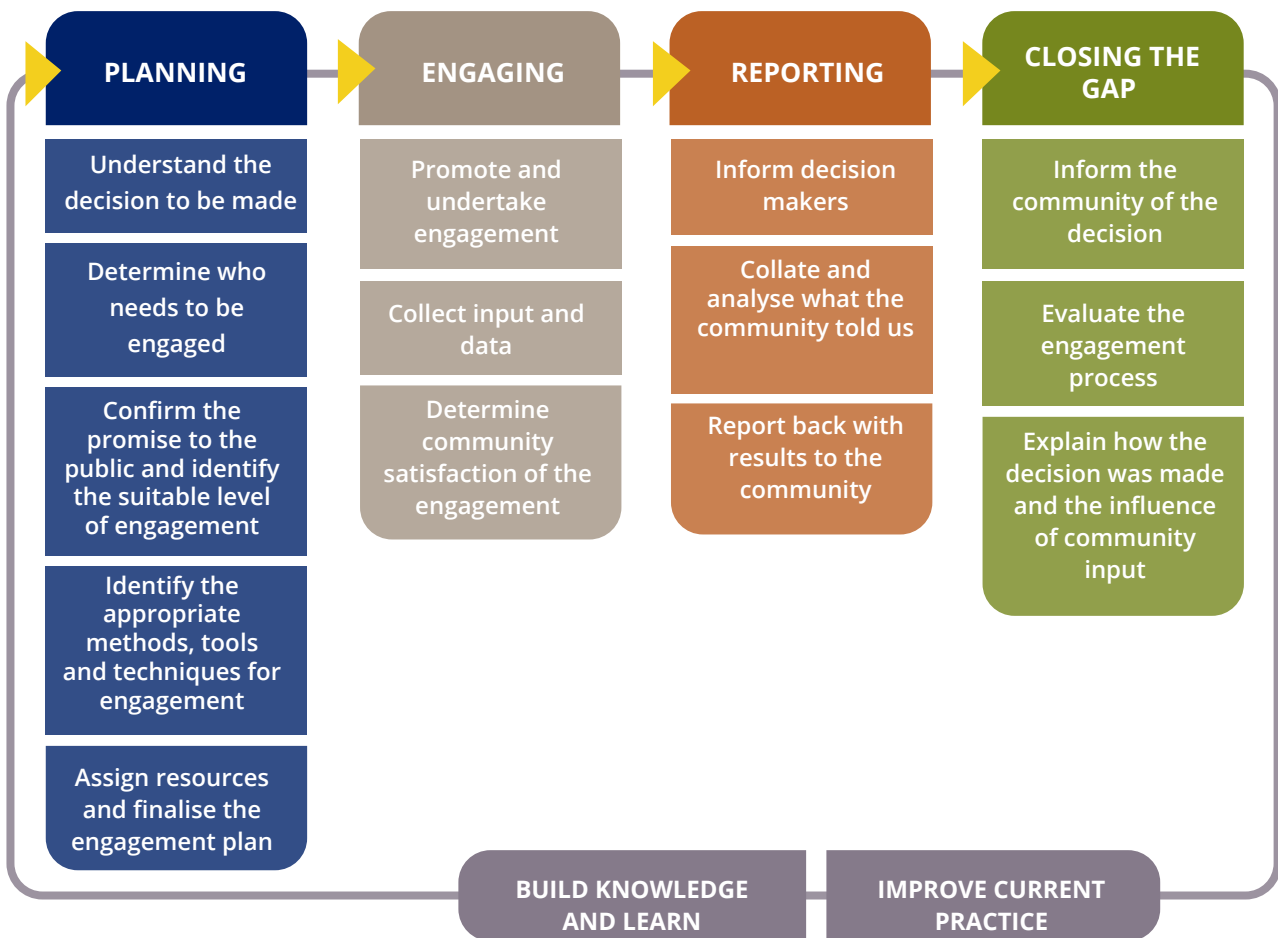
Key objectives

The Community Engagement Strategy will guide how we plan and undertake engagement activities. Successful engagement programs are underpinned by careful preparation and thorough planning. Every project or scenario is different and requires scoping and planning to reflect its unique context and constraints.

We use the IAP2 public participation spectrum to determine the most suitable level of participation for each project, considering who the project will impact, how much impact the project will have and how interested the community might be in the project.

While some circumstances will only require or allow engagement at an informing level, others will require a more in-depth level of engagement and a greater level of influence on the outcome. The communication and engagement methods are then designed to support the identified level of engagement.

Gwydir Shire Council follows the below process when implementing community and stakeholder engagement. This ensures a planned process that is consistent and aligned with our principles for community engagement.



CHALLENGES TO ENGAGEMENT RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

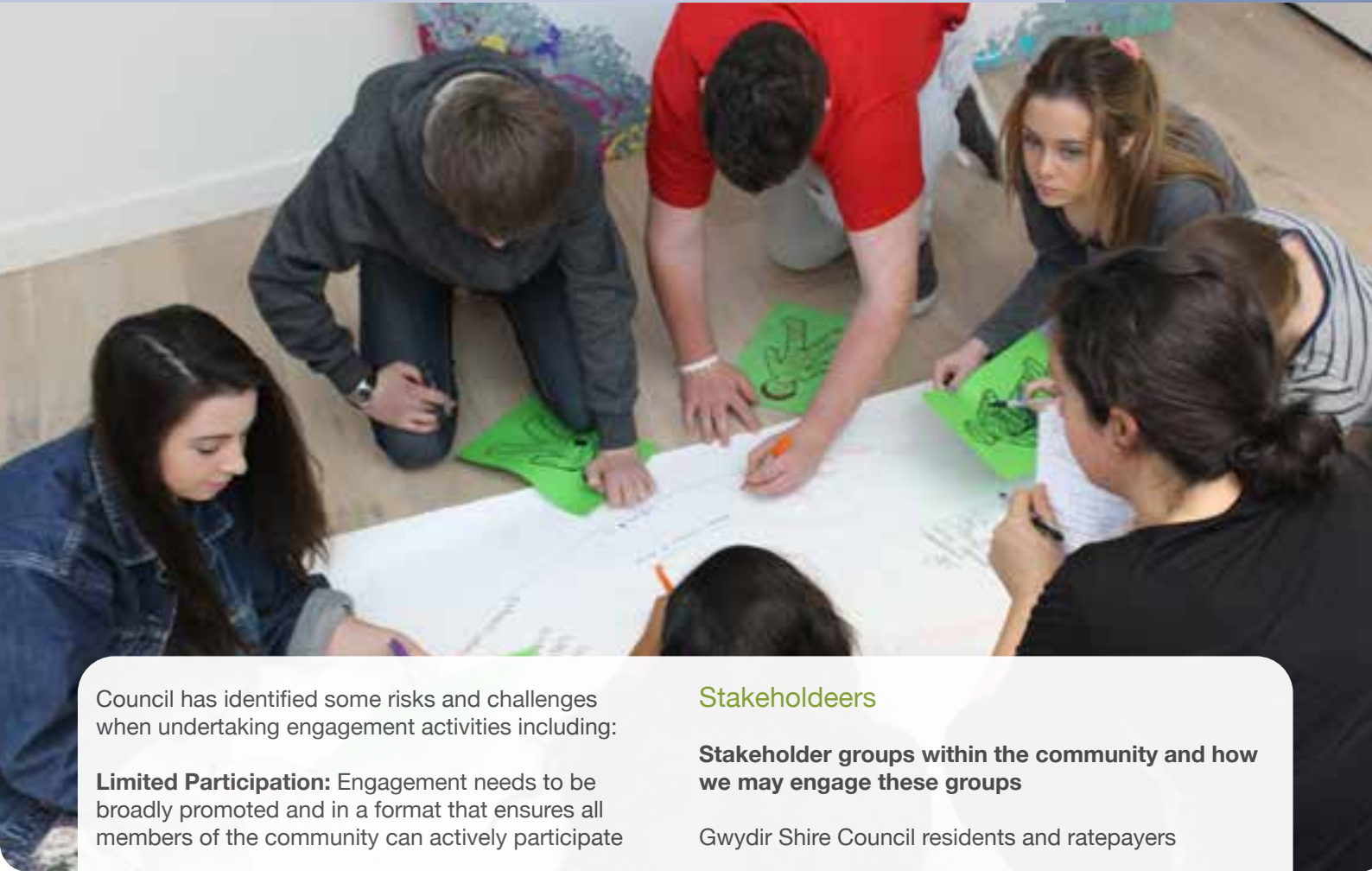
It is often challenging to involve the community in planning processes, being a Shire that is small in population yet geographically vast is one of those challenges. But it is important for the long-term success of the Community Strategic Plan that as many community members as possible are involved in its development.

At Gwydir Shire Council we are continually reviewing our methods of engagement with the aim of improving our processes so that we can

reach every member of the community and work toward breaking down barriers to participation.

Managing Risk

It is important that risks continue to be monitored, assessed and managed once the engagement activity has started. Plans should be put in place to reduce the likelihood and or impact of a potential risk.



Council has identified some risks and challenges when undertaking engagement activities including:

Limited Participation: Engagement needs to be broadly promoted and in a format that ensures all members of the community can actively participate

Accessibility: Engagement needs to take place in accessible locations across the Shire and use both digital and traditional face-to-face methods

Resource and Timing Constraints: Council must ensure there are a range of opportunities and sufficient information available to encourage high levels of participation from the community

Lack of Internal Engagement: Invoke early conversations with staff around opportunities for involvement

Consultation Fatigue: Ensure engagement is meaningful and staggered in a way that reduces the risk of the community and key stakeholders feeling overwhelmed

Scope Creep and Expectations: Providing context and scope to help manage community expectations and defining the aims of engagement

Failure to engage hard to reach groups: To reach certain groups such as young people, families and minority groups a targeted approach to engagement is needed.

Stakeholders

Stakeholder groups within the community and how we may engage these groups

Gwydir Shire Council residents and ratepayers

State and Federal Members

Relevant government agencies (including NSW Department of Education, Department of Communities and Justice, NSW Health, Office of Local Government, Destination NSW, Transport NSW, Department of Planning and Environment, NSW Police, NSW Fire and Rescue, State Emergency Service NSW, NSW Rural Fire Service, Namoi Joint Organisation of Councils)

Community-centred committees (including Vision 20/20, Wyallda Chamber of Commerce, Gwydir Youth Advisory Committee, Disability Inclusion Access Committee, Naroo Hostel Advisory Committee, North West Theatre Company, Bingara Lions Club, Wyallda Rotary, Wyallda Apex)

Interest and industry groups (including Central Northern Regional Libraries, Arts North West, Local Emergency Management Committee, Australian Rural Roads Group, Norther Slopes Landcare Association, Gwydir Learning Region)

Community groups (including Wyallda Historical Society, Bingara District Historical Society, Bingara Special Events Committee, Wyallda Events Committee)

Local business community.

ELECTED OFFICIALS AND COUNCIL ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

ROLE	RESPONSIBILITIES
The Mayor	<p>Along with the General Manager, ensure adequate opportunities and mechanisms for engagement between the council and the local community</p> <p>Promote partnerships between the council and key stakeholders</p> <p>To act as the spokesperson for the council to promote engagement on council priorities and key strategic plans such as the Community Strategic Plan</p>
Mayor and Councillors	<p>Promote engagement on key strategic plans and priorities through communication, support, and participation in community engagement for the development of the integrated planning and reporting framework</p> <p>Participate in the development of the integrated planning and reporting framework including the Community Strategic Plan</p> <p>Participate in community engagement activities alongside council staff</p> <p>Endorse the Community Strategic Plan on behalf of the community and approve the remaining Integrated Planning and Reporting documents like the Delivery Program and Operational Plan</p>
General Manager	<p>Oversee preparation and delivery of the integrated planning and reporting framework and endorsement of these documents by the elected council</p> <p>Ensure that the community is given sufficient information that allows them to participate in the integrated planning and reporting process in a meaningful way</p> <p>Advise on the appropriate form of community consultation on the strategic plans, programs, strategies and policies of the council and other matters related to council</p>
Council staff	<p>Work with and support the General Manager in the development of key strategies and plans and engage the community</p> <p>Implement the Community Engagement Strategy and provide timely information to the General Manager in relation to community views obtained during the engagement process</p>



Implementation & Engagement Tools

Consultation Feedback

A range of engagement techniques have been successful in raising awareness and when seeking input and feedback that inform the development of our Community Engagement

Strategy and other strategic plans, policies, programs and strategies including:

Digital surveys and suggestion box	Community meetings
Social media channels	Newspaper articles
Staff newsletters	e-newsletter
Advertisement	Notice board
Deliberative panels	Community newsletter and mailouts
Rate notice flyer	Mayoral column
TV and Radio	YouTube videos
Use of QR Code technology	Face to face and one-on-one discussion

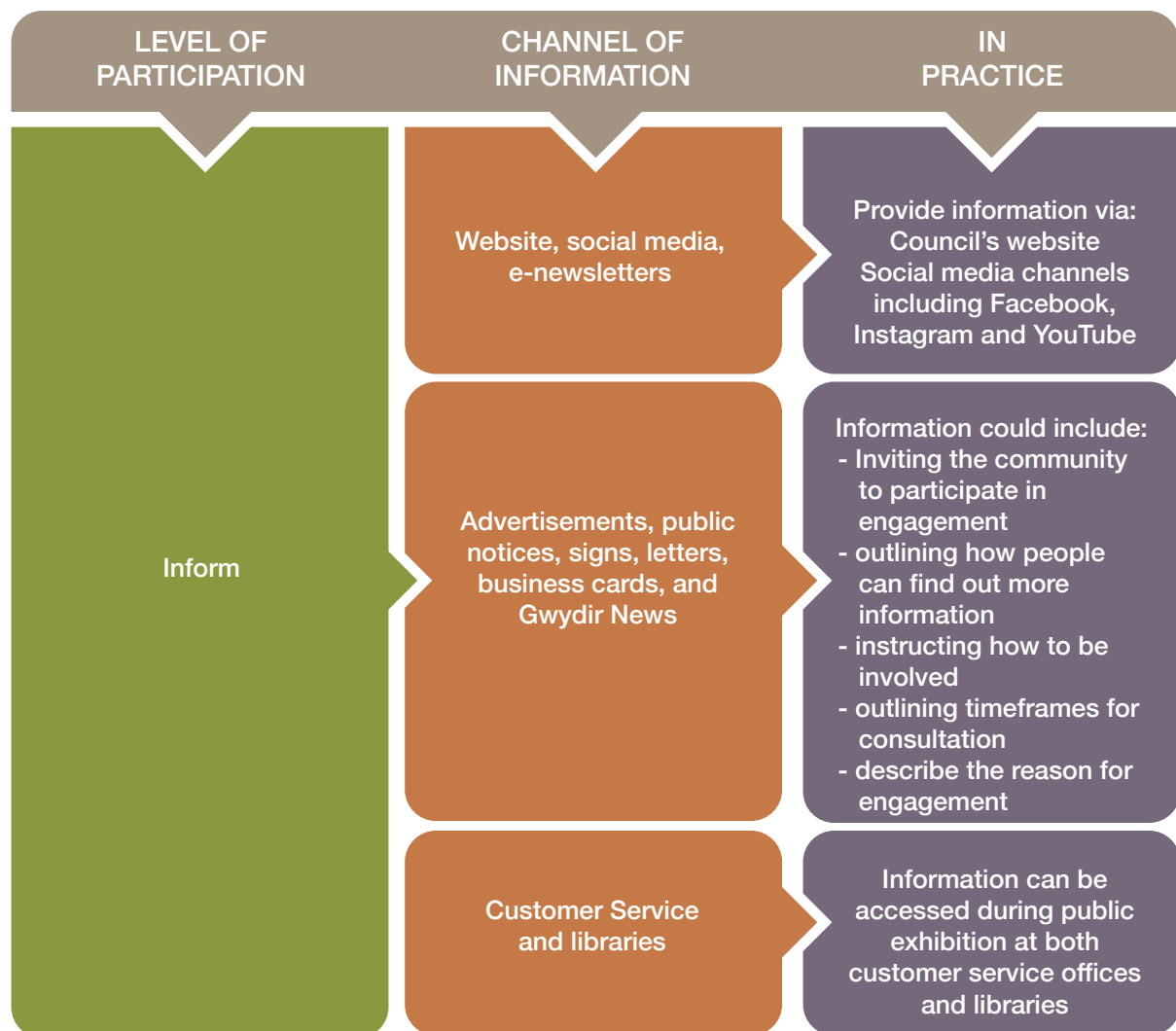
HOW WILL WE ENGAGE THE COMMUNITY?

Phase Once – Review and Plan Engagement

Inform

The elected council and staff have an important role in establishing an environment where effective communication can happen. Communicating helps various stakeholders to share, understand and support the end result or decisions that guide the delivery of services across the Shire.

It is the provision of one-way communication, where Council provides balanced and objective information. This can also include educating or advising the community on Council services, facilities, issues and activities to enable the community to actively participate in the decision making process.

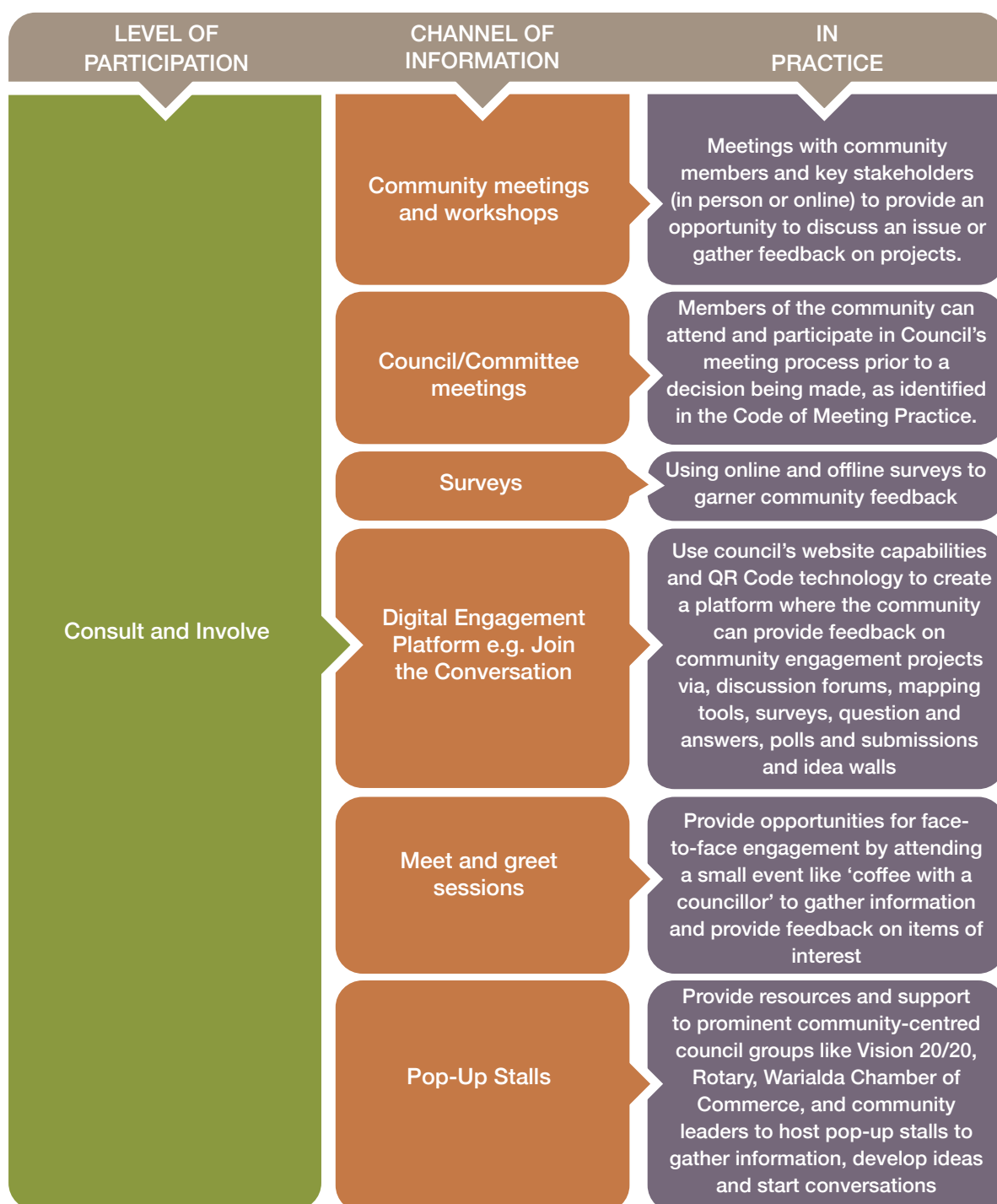


Phase Two – Developing Ideas and options and starting conversations

Consult & Involve

Effective decision making relies on input from a range of sources including the community, professional advisors, Government stakeholders and others. In this area of the spectrum, Council asks and listens to the community.

Council obtains feedback from the community regarding views, solutions, alternatives and proposals to inform and influence the outcome of Council decisions and actions. We will make use of local knowledge and expertise in planning and implementation ensuring meaningful engagement takes place.



Phase Three – Refining ideas/suggestions into Strategy

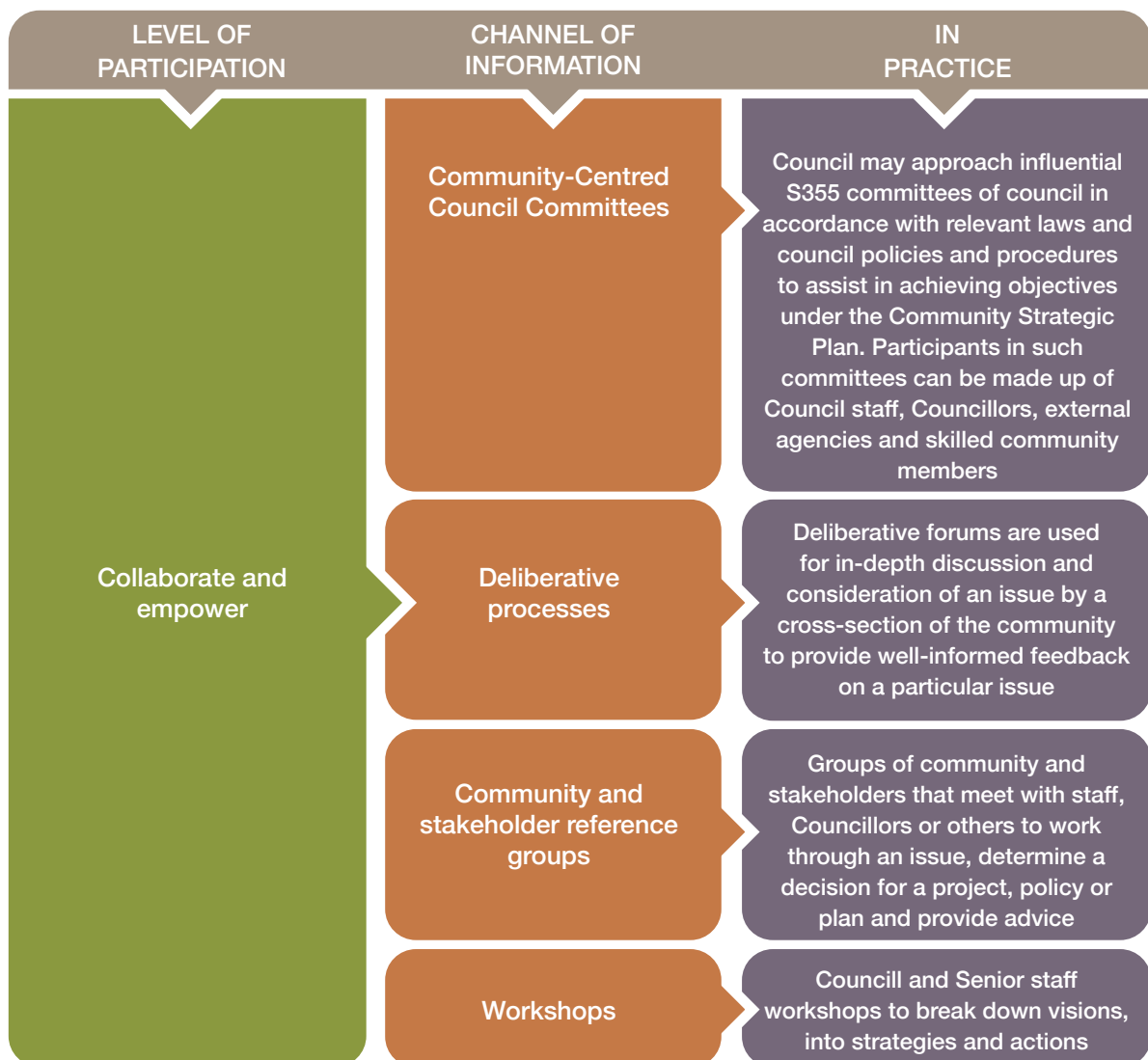
Collaborate and Empower

In this area of the spectrum networks, government agencies, organisations, businesses, key stakeholders and community members work together to identify preferred solutions and alternatives once issues and interests are well understood, leading to an agreed outcome.

In local government the elected Council is responsible for making policy, strategic and

budget decisions. As such, empower has limited application and refers to community development and community capacity building initiatives whereby Council provides opportunities and resources for communities to contribute their skills and talents.

Community members in this area of the spectrum are empowered to become more involved in building their own future to foster and sustain positive change.



Phase Four – Evaluate the process and level of public participation

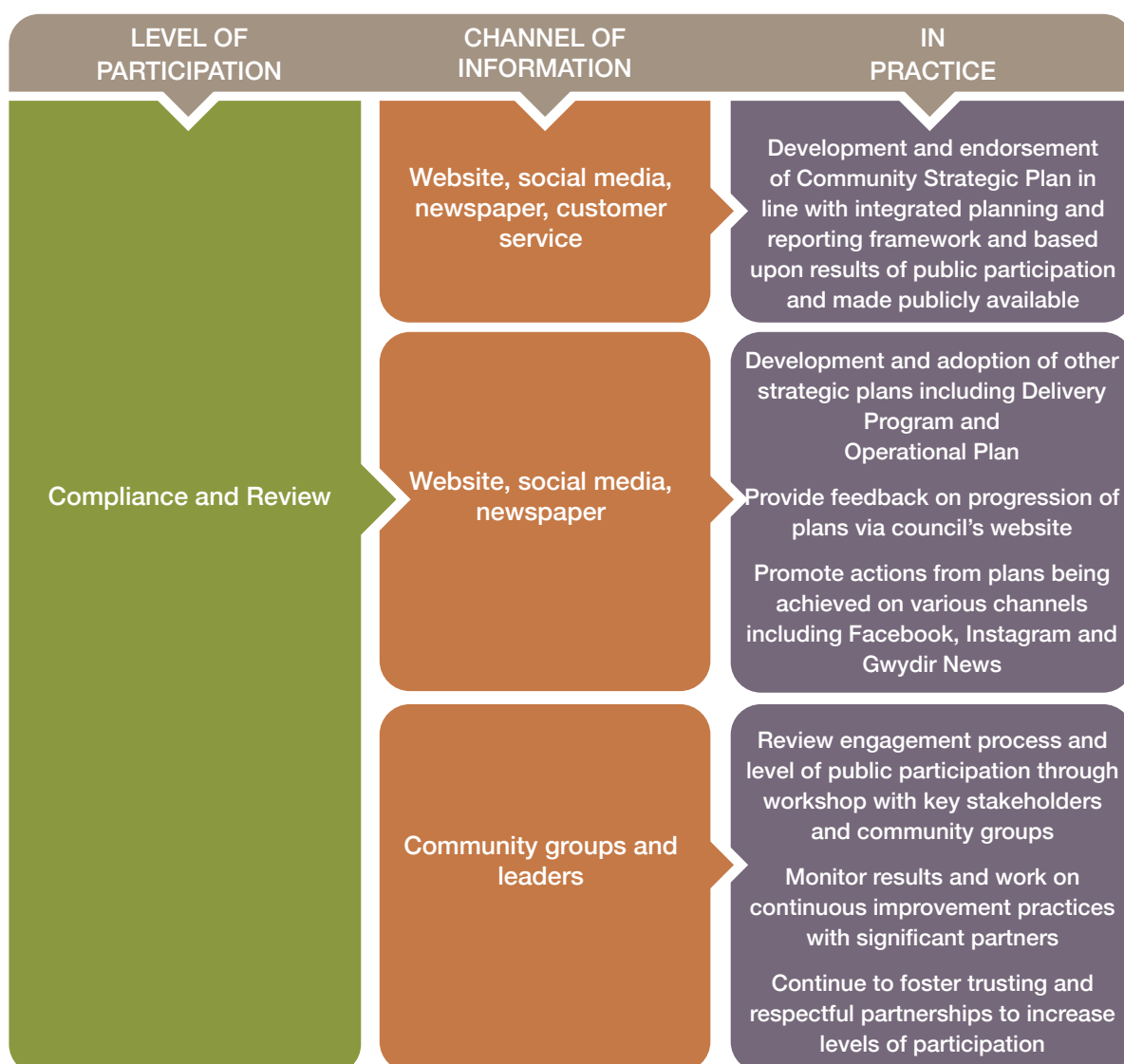
Assess the level of Impact

The level of community input is directly related to the nature, complexity and the expected level of impact on the community due to the issue, plan or project presented. Not all issues require public participation. The community will become involved according to its perception of the seriousness of the issue.

It may be necessary to re-evaluate the level of impact and vary the engagement activities and level of public participation due to a misalignment or change in the situation. It is also important to gauge the receptiveness of the organisation to community feedback and the resources that will be available.

There are three levels of impact that can affect public participation

- **Low** – Small change or improvement to a facility or service at the local level. Little effect on the community. Low or no risk of controversy
- **Medium** – Loss of or significant change to a facility or service at the local level or less significant impact across the Gwydir Shire Local Government Area (LGA). Potential for controversy.
- **High** – Significant change that is considered of high value across the Gwydir Shire (LGA) or a large part of the Shire. Highly controversial issue or project.



EVALUATION AND MEASUREMENT

To measure and evaluate the effectiveness of our engagement, we assess:

-  participation levels in engagement activities, considering the nature of the project
-  the quality of responses in terms of relevance to the program or project
-  assessment of relevant engagement methods appropriate to stakeholders
-  verbal and written feedback from the community on the effectiveness of engagement activities
-  achievement of the identified engagement principles and objectives within the Community Engagement Strategy
-  Inclusive community representation

These evaluation results will be used to improve future engagement strategies and methods.

This strategy will be reviewed within three months of local government elections, as part of the broader review of the Community Strategic Plan, or as required in the event of legislative changes or requirements.