

REVIEW OF ADVISORY COMMITTEES

ATTACHMENTS:	1. IMPLICATIONS 2. COUNCIL REPORT 26 OCTOBER 2015
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CITY STRATEGY LINK:	6.1.1 A COUNCIL THAT IS OPEN, ACCOUNTABLE AND REPRESENTS ITS CONSTITUENTS
MEETING DATE:	23 OCTOBER 2017

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To consider a review process to be completed in August 2018 which engages current advisory committee members in advising Council on the format proposed for each advisory committee.

2. OFFICER'S RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

1. **Recognise the valuable contribution to Council decision making of many community members through Council's advisory committees;**
2. **Engage advisory committee members, and support staff, in reviewing the proposed mechanism for accessing knowledge and expertise from the community on important issues or topics relative to their function with a report to be provided back to Council by August 2018;**
3. **Recommend that the Multicultural Services Advisory Committee retain its current status;**
4. **Recommend that the following committees explore formation as a reference group, consider efficient and effective means of attaining broader community membership with relevant expertise and undertake a review of their Terms of Reference:**
 - 4.1 **Access Steering Committee**
 - 4.2 **Cultural Events Committee**
 - 4.3 **Global Friendship Committee**
 - 4.4 **Willoughby Seniors Advisory Committee**
 - 4.5 **Bicentennial Reserve and Flat Rock Gully Advisory Committee;**
5. **Recommend that the Bicycle Advisory Committee explore alternative engagement mechanisms to ensure cycling-related matters are effectively dealt with by the Traffic Committee and Council operations;**
6. **Recommend that members of the following committees, and support staff, explore alternative and more effective mechanisms for accessing community expertise and knowledge. As well as reference groups, these mechanisms could involve other**

ways of coming together such as community panels, focus groups or citizens juries:

- 6.1. **Natural Heritage and Bushland Advisory Committee (incorporating the former Griffin Reserves Advisory Committee)**
- 6.2. **Sustainability Reference Group**
- 6.3. **Willoughby Symphony Orchestra and Choir Advisory Committee**
- 6.4. **Companion Animals Committee**
- 6.5. **Heritage Advisory Committee, and**
- 6.6. **Willoughby Park Centre Committee.**

3. BACKGROUND

A report on Council's advisory and management committees was provided to Council at its meeting held on 26 October 2015. The report followed two Councillor workshops held in September 2015 with an independent facilitator, to consider a review process on Council's advisory committees. Attachment 2 provides a copy of the report.

The review process was undertaken by Council as the purpose for some of the advisory committees had changed over time, many were becoming operational in nature and because community members, Councillors and officers were devoting considerable time to the committees.

On 26 October 2015, Council deferred the report to a meeting in early 2016. At its meeting on 8 February 2016, the Council deferred the report until a decision on the merger proposal was known.

At its meeting held on 25 September 2017, Council resolved to consider the review process on advisory committees at its meeting on 23 October 2017. To that end, Councillors received a briefing on 3 October 2017.

The focus of this report and review is on Council's advisory committees. As a way of providing a context, it is worth noting that Council supports several types of committees that report their minutes to the Council:

- **Advisory committees** are committees created by Council resolution to provide advice and support to Council on specific topics of interest through regular meetings. There is no delegation given to these committees.
- **Management committees** have a delegation from the Council to undertake a specific role in relation to a Council asset. Council supports two management committees: Haven Amphitheatre Management Committee and Castlecrag Community Centre Management Committee.
- **Statutory committees** are those required by legislation to be maintained by the Council. Examples are the Audit, Risk and Improvement Committee and the Traffic Committee.

Council is also represented on a range of boards, external committees and external organisations which is the subject of a separate report on this agenda.

4. DISCUSSION

Advisory committees have been an important and historically favoured tool of community engagement and community participation at Willoughby City Council. The committee review process has sought to assess the role of these committees in the now, broad spectrum of engagement possibilities that are currently practised to attain specific advisory input into matters or broader consultation and engagement with the community. The advisory committees were established to seek the former, namely expert advice.

Review process over the next 10 months

This report recommends a direction to advisory committees for attention over the next 10 months (until August 2018). Committee participants are asked to explore over that time the proposed and/or most effective mechanism for accessing community knowledge and expertise on important issues or topics. The key criteria and guidance are contained in the following parameters.

Principles

The review process has been and continues to be guided by these principles:

1. Broaden the number of community members providing input, knowledge and expertise;
2. Identify efficient, effective and targeted mechanisms for best use of community member, Councillor and staff time and expertise.

Acknowledge the contribution and knowledge of committee participants

The contribution of many committee members over time is appreciated by the Council and forms the bedrock on which to build new forms and mechanisms.

A collaborative review period

Committee participants are asked to explore over a period of time, with Council officers, the specific methods that can yield better and more participative involvement. Community members with relevant expertise and knowledge are in the best position to identify mechanisms in specialised fields. Ample time is provided for this and Council is providing recommendations to guide some of those considerations..

Some committees are proposed to stay as they are

The Multicultural Services Advisory Committee is recommended to retain its current status as it is functioning well and stays abreast of contemporary issues it covers. A regular meeting is appropriate due to the steady volume of matters considered by the committee.

Some advisory committees to explore formation as a reference group

Several committees are asked to consider efficient and effective means of attaining broader community membership with relevant expertise and undertake a review of their Terms of Reference as a reference group.

A reference group is a standing type of advisory group which provides an ongoing dialogue between informed community members and the Council. Such groups can be focused on an issue, but still maintain the benefit of an ongoing exchange of information and knowledge between Council officers and Councillors and Council. They meet as required, often in response to milestones or proposed changes.

- *Access Steering Committee:* working in the areas of access and mobility issues, the advice is usually subject-based (a project or an initiative) that lends itself to attention when needed rather than as a group meeting at regular intervals. The Council could engage this reference group as issues emerge in policy and major projects.
- *Cultural Events Committee:* as a high-level reference group, this group is suited to tap into the diversity of the cultural community and provide advice and support on high-level events and cultural programs for the City.

- *Global Friendship Committee*: originally this group was convened to assist the Council to develop relationships with international cities of interest and assist with the development of exchange programs. Over time, as the City entered into formal 'Friendly City' arrangements, relationships have developed between community groups within Willoughby and the various international cities. Regular student exchanges are managed by Council's Youth Services or through the appropriate State Government agencies, for example, the Department of Education. Cultural exchanges are managed through Council's Multicultural Services. The role of a reference group could be to provide advice and assistance to Council regarding proposed formal agreements with new international cities that offer economic, cultural and educational ties as required.
- *Willoughby Seniors Advisory Committee*: the original focus of the group was with the introduction and bringing together of agencies funded by the Home and Community Care (HACC) Program, which after its introduction prompted a major change in the funding and delivery of aged and disability services. With changes in legislation and government service delivery models becoming more frequent, the group's expertise could best be utilised on advice and comment on specific issues for older people as they arise and according to a targeted approach. This advice could be supplemented with advice from service providers, referral agencies and others with first-hand knowledge of ageing issues within Willoughby through the Lower North Shore Sub-Regional Forum, held every two months and hosted by the Dougherty Centre. The Forum is an interagency meeting of service providers working under the Community Home Support Program (CHSP).
- *Bicentennial Reserve and Flat Rock Gully Advisory Committee*: the committee's work has become operational and confined to precinct management that can be done by officers. Its work as a reference group could be to support mechanisms for sporting groups and users to work with staff on multiple and complex operational issues in the precinct and the wider local environment. This need not be done through regular meetings but rather according to a timetable and imperatives driven by precinct users and participants.

Bicycle Advisory Committee relationship to the Traffic Committee

The Bicycle Advisory Committee can explore incorporation of cycling-related matters into the Traffic Committee. Matters can be readily put to the Traffic Committee by request from the public, transport user groups and organisations, as well as permanent voting members (NSW Police, Roads and Maritime Services, a representative of the Local Member and Council). Its meetings and agendas are public and Council officers provide a substantial technical report on matters on the agenda. Council employs a 'Sustainable Projects Officer – Transport'. This role directly manages the preparation of policy and plans for the bicycle network and bike related matters. Part of their role is to utilise their professional and community network in the development of these policies and plans.

Some advisory committees to explore alternative and more effective mechanisms for community participation

Council already has processes for general community consultation on plans, strategies and projects. The following committees are asked to explore mechanisms that use relevant expertise and knowledge on a particular subject matter in a way that extends community participation both in participation numbers and the breadth of expertise. As well as reference groups, these mechanisms could involve other ways of coming together such as community panels, focus groups or citizens juries.

A **community panel** is a way of bringing together a group of people with an interest and expertise in a particular subject. After an expression of interest to recruit participants, the groups can be used in various ways to express their views in a timely way according to the subject matter. This could be done by email, through a questionnaire, survey or a meeting, depending on the issue and time availability. It would enable participation by more members

of the community with relevant expertise and knowledge than can be accommodated by committees.

Focus groups are facilitated discussions of specific questions with a small group, used to gauge public opinion on particular issues. The focus group will normally comprise a selection of participants who have been specifically chosen in order to inform a gap in understanding of how a particular segment of the community feels about an issue. Focus groups are often employed to collect feedback from groups under-represented in general consultation.

Citizen juries bring together groups of randomly selected individuals in the community over a few days in order to concentrate on, and thoroughly examine, a particular issue. A range of information and professional advice is provided, often at the request of the jury, to assist these deliberations. Citizen juries are resource intensive, but very representative and the deliberations result in high quality community feedback.

- *Natural Heritage and Bushland Advisory Committee (incorporating the former Griffin Reserves Advisory Committee):* community members could provide technical advice to staff in the preparation of reserve action plans and Plans of Management when required as part of the input prior to placing plans out for community consultation. A number of methods or techniques could be used to convey the expert input. Alignment with other Council processes in formulating plans and responding to feedback is encouraged.
- *Sustainability Reference Group;* as an existing reference group, the group could review its methods of considering technical expertise and advice on environmental initiatives across a greater range of topics. With Council's strong focus on environmental sustainability, there is ample scope for targeted community participation and expertise that supplements and complements the staff expertise.
- *Willoughby Symphony Orchestra and Choir Advisory Committee:* The committee was formed to provide input and support to Council officers in delivery the of the WSOC program. Since the engagement of Dr Nicholas Milton as Artistic/Creative Director and Chief Conductor, and a restructure of the Performing Arts business unit, operational matters are managed by the Willoughby Symphony Orchestra and Choir Coordinator with the assistance of volunteers. What could be considered is a regular meeting with staff, volunteers, players and representatives of the Choir. The Choir have a well organised, established committee that manages their operations. Standard community engagement processes can be used to gauge feedback and help determine future programs.
- *Companion Animals Committee:* the original mandate of this committee was to provide Council with advice, guidance and recommendations on the implementation of all facets of the *Companion Animals Act 1998* in Willoughby and, in particular, the implementation of a *Local Companion Animals Management Plan* for the City. Both of these tasks have reached completion. Mechanisms that can provide broad-ranging feedback on specific events, policies or initiatives could be designed to advise Council on a range of topics as and when needed.
- *Heritage Advisory Committee:* This committee was established prior to the creation of the City's comprehensive Heritage Conservation Strategy through the *Willoughby Local Environmental Plan 1995* (now 2012), detailed Willoughby Development Control Plan heritage controls and guidelines and the Council heritage advisory service. Further, Council now employs a specialist heritage architect for expert advice and research on the built environment. Council's local history library provides a major source of historical information for the community. Mechanisms such as a community panel, focus groups or reference groups could be employed to harness greater input and feedback on topical issues or events.

- *Willoughby Park Centre Committee:* Willoughby Park Centre is staffed by Council officers who conduct programs on site and liaise with users. A major redevelopment of the Park was recently completed. Both these suggest a committee is not needed for routine operational decisions as standard community engagement mechanisms can be used to gauge user requirements or perceptions. Future participation and engagement could be focused on targeted strategies based on specific projects or plans or emerging single issues.

5. CONCLUSION

With uncertainty over merger proposals over, Council can undertake its deferred consideration of advisory committees. The review of these committees has a focus on expanding the number of community members with the relevant expertise and experience to provide advice as required to Council and to ensure the best way of utilising such expertise in a most effectively and timely way. A collaborative process is proposed over a period of time, giving ample opportunity for the existing committee members to work with officers to expand the spectrum of engagement opportunities for expert and passionate community members in Willoughby.

IMPLICATIONS	COMMENT
City Strategy Link:	6.1.1 A Council that is open, accountable and represents its constituents
Business Plan Objectives, Outcomes/ Services	A number of Council units support advisory committees. Such support is one of several community engagement methods that officers use.
Policy	Council's <i>Advisory Committees Policy</i> is related to the subject matter of the report. It focuses on the operation and composition of advisory committees.
Consultation	Council hosted a community consultation on advisory committees in late 2014 and early 2015 on the <i>Have Your Say Willoughby</i> website. Nine advisory committee members participated, as well as 53 community members. Results obtained were inconclusive.
Resource	Operational resources such as staff time and budgets (refreshments, travel, room bookings, minutes and agendas) are devoted to supporting advisory and management committees. Councillors and community members also devote time to participate on committees and consider committee reports at Council meetings.
Risk	A risk is that continuation of current committee structures will limit resources that can be applied to other community engagement processes that would engage more people and a greater range of community views and expertise.
Legal	Not applicable.
Legislation	Not applicable.
Budget/Financial	This is within approved budget.

[Attach 2 Improving the use of Advisory Groups in Council Decision Maki...](#)