

Community Engagement Policy

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1. POLICY OBJECTIVE (OR PURPOSE)

Council is committed to thorough, transparent and meaningful community engagement that will inform responsible decision-making for the benefit of the community. This policy outlines Council's role in providing the community with the means to express their expectations, aspirations and ideas. The policy should be applied to projects, activities, plans or processes where the input of community stakeholders can make a valuable contribution to Council's decision-making and when changes to services or infrastructure are required.

This policy:

- meets the requirements of the *Local Government Act 2020*
- outlines the principles which guide community engagement
- sets out how and when community engagement activities are undertaken by Council
- aims to ensure engagement methodology is based on the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Public Participation Spectrum
- applied deliberative engagement principles in appropriate circumstances
- promotes a consistent approach across all Council services
- outlines the process of reporting engagement outcomes back to the community
- ensures diversity in participation and community viewpoint is supported and encouraged.

2. BACKGROUND

Council first adopted a Community Engagement Policy in 2013. A review of the policy took place in 2018 and was subsequently adopted by Council.

The Council Plan outlines the strategic objectives and key priorities for Council during its four year term. This policy supports its objective of 'An open and effective Council' and in particular the priorities of 'A Council connected with the community, providing an effective voice on their behalf' and 'Decision making which is transparent and accountable'.

This policy and its operational guidelines are consistent with, and based upon, the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum, a best practice approach to community engagement that allows for different approaches. This spectrum has been retained as the core foundation for this policy.

3. SCOPE

This policy applies to all Council staff, contract workers, consultants and others who engage with the community on behalf of the Greater Dandenong City Council and serves as a guide to Councillors. The policy is supported by a planning framework (the '*Community Engagement Planning Framework*') that provides guidance and procedures for undertaking effective community engagement.

This policy will be applied to all community engagement activities conducted by Council including those that may be required:

- under the *Local Government Act 1989* and the *Local Government Act 2020*
- for the making of Council's Local Laws
- in relation to Council's budget and policy development.

4. RESPONSE TO THE OVERARCHING GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLES OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2020

Background

Section 9 of the *Local Government Act 2020* states that a Council must in the performance of its role give effect to the overarching governance principles. This policy gives effect to these by:

- complying with the relevant law (section 9(a) of the Act);
- giving priority to achieving the best outcomes for the municipality, including future generations (section 9b of the Act). This policy ensures that in relation to community engagement practices, Council Officers are compliant, act with integrity and act in the best interests of Council and the community.
- the economic, social and environmental sustainability of the municipal district, including mitigation and planning for climate change risks, is promoted (section 9(c) of the Act). This policy has no impact on the economic and social sustainability of Council but has considered climate change and sustainability in its preparation (see section 8 of this policy).
- innovation and continuous improvement has been pursued (section 9(e) of the Act). This policy has provision for evaluation, monitoring and review (see section 10 of this policy).
- collaboration with other Councils and Governments and statutory bodies has been sought (section 9(f) of the Act). A number of other Council and best practice model policies were consulted in developing this policy.
- transparency of Council decisions, actions and information is ensured by the enactment of this policy (section 9(i) of the Act).

In giving effect to the overarching governance principles, a Council must also take into account the community engagement principles (section 56 of the Act), the public transparency principles (section 58 of the Act), the strategic planning principles (section 89 of the Act), the financial management principles (section 101 of the Act), and the service performance principles (section 106 of the Act).

This policy adheres to all of the required community engagement principles as outlined in section 56 and operates in conjunction with Council's Public Transparency Policy and Conflict of Interest Policy. It has no financial impact on Council and the resources required to manage and administer it are allocated from existing resource budgets.

5. POLICY

Effective community engagement contributes to increasing the capacity of the community to participate in decision-making, the democratic processes of local government and improved knowledge. Council is committed to community strengthening and supports inclusive and engaging participation by all stakeholders.

Council will:

- ensure that the purpose of engagement is genuine and transparent
- conduct engagement activities using the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum
- employ techniques and approaches to maximise community participation including deliberative engagement practices where required
- provide realistic and accessible opportunities within reasonable timeframes
- provide information that is clear, easy to understand and accessible to all people

- value all participants' knowledge, expertise and experience and respect their diverse views and priorities
- undertake evaluation processes to ensure continuous improvement with consultation activities
- report back to the community as soon as possible after a Council decision and explain how feedback was considered and/or incorporated into the final outcomes
- ensure all activities undertaken are in accordance with Council's Privacy and Personal Information Policy and Public Transparency Policy.

Engagement Process

What is Community Engagement?

Community engagement provides opportunities for public involvement in Council decision making, community strengthening and capacity building. Engagement occurs in various forms with differing levels of involvement and is guided by the community engagement principles as set out in s56 of the *Local Government Act 2020*. These are:

Principle	Council's Commitment
1. A community engagement process must have a clearly defined objective and scope.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop community engagement plans for all engagement processes in accordance with this policy.
2. Participants in community engagement must have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure all information relating to community engagement processes is provided as early as possible. • Allow a minimum of 28 days for participants to provide feedback. • Identify and address all challenges related to participation in the community engagement plan.
3. Participants in community engagement must be representative of the persons and groups affected by the matter that is the subject of the community engagement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify key stakeholders and groups that will be affected by the project in the early planning stage. • Select appropriate communication methods and recruitment activities to reduce barriers to representative participation. • Employ deliberative engagement practices for the development of key strategic documents including the Community Vision, Council Plan, Long Term Financial Strategy and Asset Plan.
4. Participants in community engagement are entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and minimise barriers to participation and levels of support required including but not limited to accessibility, language and digital literacy. • Ensure community engagement plans explain how any identified barriers will be addressed.

<p>5. Participants in community engagement are informed of the ways in which the community engagement process will influence Council decision making.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate the level of influence community members will have at the commencement of any process. • Ensure timely and regular feedback throughout the process to keep participants informed. • Provide responses at the conclusion of each process as to how the feedback received was used to influence the outcomes.
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The Greater Dandenong City Council uses the IAP2 framework as the basis in delivery of all its consultation projects. The Community Engagement Planning Framework that supports this policy aims to maximise community participation and contains a range of engagement techniques that can be used to achieve the most effective outcomes.

The Framework includes a set of guidelines for different methodologies and tools for a variety of outcomes across the range of the IAP2 spectrum. This is complemented by a risk assessment to assist with defining the level of community engagement required.

The IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum is designed to assist with the selection of an appropriate level of consultation. These levels are:

Inform	<i>To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding Council's decisions and/or intentions.</i>
Consult	<i>To obtain public feedback on ideas, alternatives and/or proposals to inform decision making</i>
Involve	<i>To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public issues and concerns are consistently understood and considered.</i>
Collaborate	<i>To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including development of alternatives and the identification of preferred solutions.</i>
Empower	<i>To place final decision making in the hands of the public and build capacity in the community to lead change.</i>

A project may involve one or more of the above levels of consultation depending on the complexity of the project and the decision which needs to be made. Legislative requirements can also restrict the level at which Council engages.

Why do we engage?

Council conducts community engagement activities to improve its strategic planning and service delivery while fulfilling its requirements under the *Local Government Act 2020*. These activities help to better understand the needs and aspirations of the community and provide a number of benefits to both Council and the community including:

- transparency, integrity and increased trust in Council processes and decisions
- a more well-informed community

- increased community involvement
- community ownership
- improved levels of satisfaction with Council decisions and processes
- improved service planning.

Council is also required to undertake legislated consultation processes in developing various corporate and statutory planning documents.

Who do we engage with?

Greater Dandenong City Council seeks to provide opportunities for engagement to our community and key stakeholders, those who live, work and play in our city. Our key stakeholders also include groups and individuals who have an interest in the decisions of Council and are directly impacted by their outcomes but do not necessarily reside or work within the city.

The target audience may be different for each consultation, depending on who may be impacted, and Council will seek to ensure they are adequately represented in the engagement process.

When do we engage?

Council will engage with the community and key stakeholders during the planning stages of projects which have a direct impact on the community. Council may also involve the community in matters regarding changes to services, changes to infrastructure, Council's Budget and strategic plans.

There are some circumstances where Council is mandated by legislation to engage with the community and this may include clear direction about the methods that must be used. Council is committed to complying with such requirements as a minimum and undertaking further community engagement where issues are of a sensitive or complex nature.

Council may also be presented with circumstances that require an advisory committee, advisory board, reference committee or working group to monitor contract performance or provide a forum for discussion of key management and strategic direction issues. The membership and terms of reference of such groups may be determined by contractual requirements or by advertisement to the broader community according to endorsed selection criteria.

Exemptions

Consultation will not occur in circumstances which relate to operational matters, confidential or commercial in confidence information, or when Council must make emergency or safety related decisions.

How do we engage?

Plan

The planning stage of any consultation will involve the creation of a project plan which will determine the purpose of engagement, the objectives Council hopes to achieve, who will be engaged and how this can be done most effectively.

Engage

The engagement process will be conducted according to the principles outlined in the *Local Government Act 2020* and Council's overarching objectives as set out in section 4 of this policy.

The type of consultation undertaken will depend upon the target audience for the consultation, the size and complexity of the process, and the level of resourcing required.

Two approaches are used by Greater Dandenong City Council:

Participatory engagement – This represents the lower two levels of the IAP2 spectrum, inform and consult. This involves broad consultation techniques and will be used when Council is seeking feedback on draft documents such as the Budget or specific strategies and plans.

Deliberative engagement - This will involve engagement activities which provide opportunities for participants to weigh up evidence and have considered discussions over a period of time before making a decision. This approach is an example of the top levels of the IAP2 spectrum and seeks to involve, collaborate or empower. It will be used when required by legislation for key strategic documents including the Community Vision, Council Plan, Long Term Financial Strategy and Asset Plan, and in other instances where it is determined to be the best model of engagement.

Communicate

The results of all consultation activities, and their influence on Council decisions, will be reported back to the community and key stakeholders in a timely and accessible manner to ensure the process is open and transparent. This will be done in a number of ways including the use of social media, Council's corporate website, print media and direct contact with participants.

Evaluate

All community engagement activities undertaken by Council will be required to undergo an evaluation to determine the success of the project, identify improvement opportunities and provide recommendations for future consultations.

Enhance

Feedback and recommendations received through the evaluation stage will be used to enhance Council's future activities, improve overall engagement and influence policy reviews.

6. CHARTER OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES ACT 2006 – COMPATIBILITY STATEMENT

The *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* has been considered in relation to whether any human right under the Charter is restricted or interfered with in any way by enacting any part of this policy. It is considered that this policy is consistent with the rights outlined in the Charter.

7. RESPONSE TO THE GENDER EQUALITY ACT 2020

The *Gender Equality Act 2020* has been considered in the preparation of this policy. This policy aims to actively seek out the knowledge, perspectives and experiences of all gender groups on all Council activities as outlined in section 4 of this policy. This policy ensures all community members are able to take part in the planning and development of Council's services, policies and programs. No particular groups that are based on gender are considered to be impacted either positively or negatively by this policy.

8. CONSIDERATION OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND SUSTAINABILITY

Council's Declaration on a Climate and Ecological Emergency, Council's Climate Change Emergency Strategy 2020-2030 and the requirements of the *Local Government Act 2020* in relation to the overarching governance principle on climate change and sustainability have been considered in the preparation of this policy but are not relevant to its contents. The policy is administrative in nature and Councillors have been provided access to electronic formats of the policy so that hard copies are not required.

9. RESPONSIBILITIES

All Council Officers involved in undertaking community engagement are responsible for ensuring that any community engagement plans and associated activities are compliant with this policy.

10. REPORTING, MONITORING AND REVIEW

Evaluation of all community engagement processes will allow for the ongoing review and improvement of this policy. These evaluations will enable Council to better identify barriers to participation and any areas of our community who are continually under-represented. The success of this policy will be measured by the quality of Council's engagement processes and the satisfaction of our community in how we engage with them.

11. REFERENCES AND RELATED DOCUMENTS

Legislation and References

- *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*
- *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*
- *Gender Equity Act 2020*
- *Local Government Act 1989*
- *Local Government Act 2020*
- Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006
- International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Public Participation Spectrum

Related Council and Other Policies, Procedures, Strategies, Protocols, Guidelines

- Council Plan
- Community Wellbeing Plan
- Diversity, Access and Equity Policy
- Information Privacy and Health Records Policy
- Privacy and Personal Information Policy
- Public Transparency Policy
- Community Engagement Planning Framework
- Community Development Framework

12. APPENDIX 1: RELEVANT SECTIONS FROM THE *LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2020*

The *Local Government Act 2020* sets out a list of key strategies and documents Councils must engage with the community on:

- development or review of the Community Vision (s88)
- preparation and adoption of the Council Plan (s90)
- development, adoption, and review of the Financial Plan (s91)
- development, adoption, and review of the Asset Plan*
- electoral structure review (s16)
- governance rules (s60)
- proposing and making a local law (s73)
- budget or Revised budget (s95 and s96)
- compulsory acquisition of land (s112)
- selling, exchange or lease of land (s114 and 115)
- substantial changes or review of a Council service or program
- new, or changes of, adopted Council policies and/or strategies
- capital works projects including public buildings, centres and other infrastructure