

Diversity, Access and Equity Policy

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1. POLICY OBJECTIVE (OR PURPOSE)

This policy describes the nature of diversity and the way Council seeks to support its diverse community through engagement, communication, service delivery and advocacy.

It formalises Council's acknowledgement of, and respect for, the diversity of backgrounds, abilities, values, beliefs, and lifestyles of all residents. It also outlines the approach that Council will adopt to acknowledge and respect the diversity of this community:

- in planning and delivering services and infrastructure in a way that takes account of the needs and circumstances of all residents
- in creating opportunities for all people to participate in the social and economic life of this community
- in setting a standard of fairness, inclusion, and transparency in all aspects of its conduct.

2. BACKGROUND

Diversity makes us all unique. Council recognises diversity as an essential feature of all people and communities, which should be acknowledged, respected, and celebrated.

This policy recognises that diversity is inclusive of, but not limited to:

- age
- gender
- physical, mental, visual, sensory, or intellectual ability
- mental or physical health
- income or educational level
- birthplace or cultural identity
- language and communication requirements
- religious or other beliefs
- family structure and conditions
- sexual orientation or status, and gender identity.

Many people experience exclusion due to impairments affecting mobility, communication, or self-care; financial or housing insecurity; lack of educational or employment opportunity; limited family or social support; family violence and/or abuse; and other socio-economic conditions. Others face discrimination on the basis of their ethnicity, ability, sex, gender identity and other attributes. Many residents experience multiple forms of vulnerability or discrimination, which interact upon each other and aggravate disadvantage.

In response, Council acknowledges differences among members of the community and adapts its services and amenities to meet their diverse needs. Council will conduct its service planning and provision to help reduce inequality and improve social, economic, and civic opportunities for residents.

3. SCOPE

This policy applies to all Councillors, Council staff, contract staff and volunteers.

It guides Council's efforts to address discrimination, promote inclusiveness and partnership, and foster community participation in social, civic, and economic life. It applies to Council service planning and delivery; the development of infrastructure, open spaces and community facilities; engagement and consultation with residents; advocacy; and other Council functions.

It commits Council to meeting its requirements under all diversity, access and equity-related legislation. In some instances, legislation may stipulate how Council must deliver specific services, such as regulatory, building, occupational health and safety and planning services.

4. POLICY

This policy emphasises the importance of access, partnership, advocacy, language and communication, acknowledgement and celebration of diversity, community and civic participation, the development of inclusive places and spaces, and the involvement of residents in service planning and delivery.

Council will seek to achieve this by:

- enhancing its capacity to identify and respond appropriately to diversity
- providing opportunities for participation in decision-making to residents and adapting services and programs to their diverse needs
- addressing barriers which impede access and opportunity for residents.

In order to address disadvantage, inequality, inequity and marginalisation, certain community members will require focus and priority support. Throughout the duration of this policy Council commits to hosting celebrations, advocating with service providers and peak bodies to promote inclusion, and implementing programs and services to support the community, including:

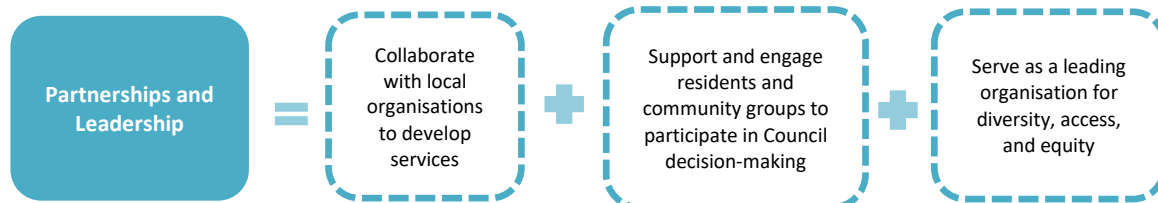
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- children
- family type and composition
- older people
- people from diverse cultures
- people identifying as Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Intersex Queer (LGBTIQ+)
- people living in conditions of socio-economic disadvantage
- people with physical, mental, emotional, or other disabilities
- refugees and People Seeking Asylum
- victims and survivors of family violence
- women
- young people.

The following policy statements reflect the approach that Council will adopt to acknowledge and respect the diversity of backgrounds, values, beliefs, circumstances and lifestyles of residents.

4.1 PARTNERSHIPS AND LEADERSHIP

Council supports the opportunity for participation in community life for all residents. To achieve this, Council will:

- Collaborate with local organisations to develop more effective, accessible services and programs for diverse and vulnerable communities.
- Support and engage residents and community groups to participate in Council decision-making, noting that service provision and planning are improved where residents have an opportunity to communicate their views.
- Serve as a leading organisation which repudiates discrimination, bullying, harassment, and violence; acknowledges the benefits of diversity; and extends equal opportunity to its staff in recruitment, promotion, and training.



4.2 ADVOCACY

Council will represent the needs of the whole community, advocating to all levels of government and a variety of public and private institutions for funding and services to address the needs of diverse groups and individuals. To advocate on behalf of all residents, Council will:

- consult with the community to seek guidance in identifying issues for advocacy
- advocate for resources to redress disadvantage in Greater Dandenong
- advocate for the development of built environments, open spaces and streetscapes that are accessible to all and appealing to diverse groups
- advocate for funding for programs to ease financial hardship, alleviate housing insecurity, prevent family violence, advance gender equality, reduce unemployment and prevent discrimination.



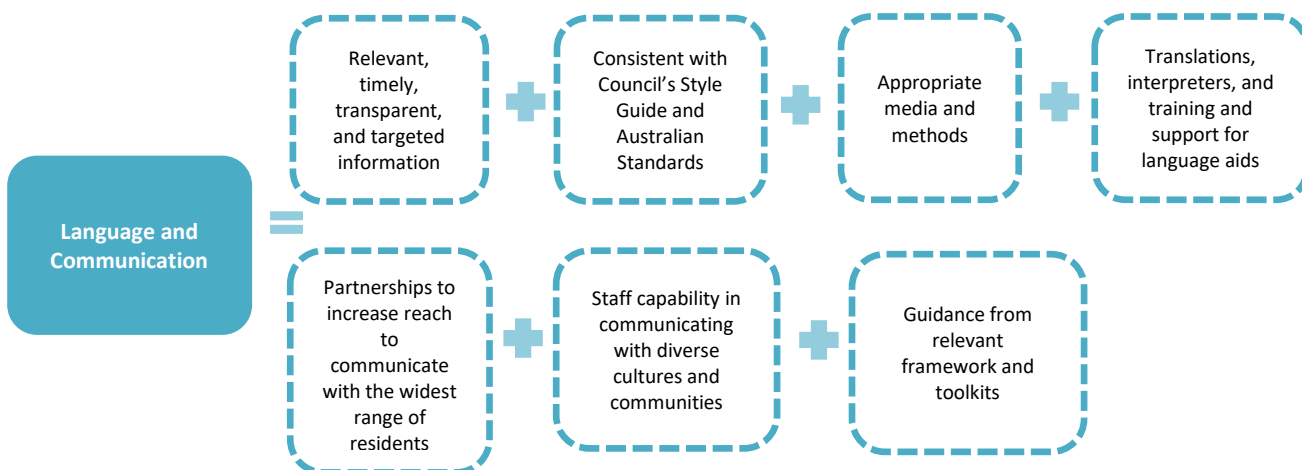
4.3 LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Access to information is the right of all residents, contributing to an engaged and inclusive community. Accordingly, it is important that residents are aware of the sources of information available to them, and informed of Council services, programs, events, and facilities.

Council's communication with residents should be simple and concise and accommodate a variety of personal circumstances. These include, people with limited formal education, limited English fluency or literacy, having specific requirements associated with a disability, and the language preferences among many cultural groups. It also includes the needs of recent migrants who may favour family and social networks, culturally specific media, community leaders and migrant service providers as sources of information. In addition, Council will seek the guidance of residents, community organisations and community leaders, in shaping its approach to communication.

To communicate effectively with residents and to accommodate their diverse circumstances and language needs, Council will:

- supply relevant, timely, transparent, and accurate information, in languages, formats and media appropriate to the needs of residents
- communicate in a way that is plain, clear, and concise
- select appropriate media, such as face-to-face discussion; social and other electronic media; the use of visual, audio or video content; hard copy resources such as brochures, cards, and posters; and others
- provide translations and interpreters, where required, to overcome barriers to communication for residents of diverse preferred languages
- work with key partners, including cultural media organisations, community leaders and service providers, to reach an appropriate range of residents and segments of the community
- help staff to reach the highest standards in communicating with residents, including the provision of formal training; language guidelines and toolkits; guidance in working with diverse cultures and communities; guidance in operating with translations, and interpreters; relevant language data; and other assistance in multi-cultural communication
- use the relevant frameworks and toolkits to guide communication and engagement with residents.

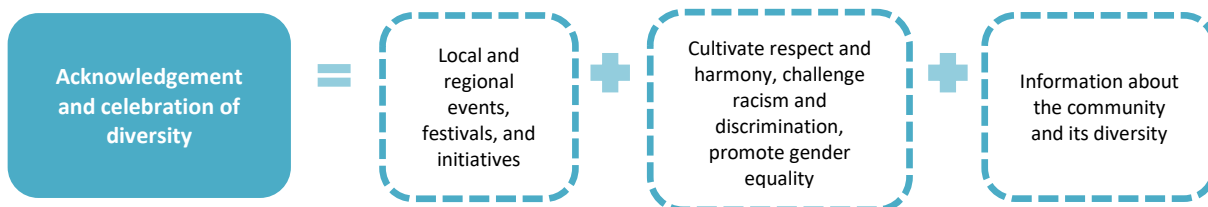


4.4 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND CELEBRATION OF DIVERSITY

Council seeks to create an inclusive community that recognises, values, and celebrates diversity, while rejecting discrimination and prejudice. Support for celebrations and festivals acknowledges these values and promotes the participation of residents.

Council will:

- advocate for, and support, local and regional events, festivals and other initiatives that promote pride, generate respect and foster inclusion
- work with the community to cultivate respect and harmony, challenge racism and discrimination, and promote gender equality
- disseminate accurate and timely information about the community and its diversity.

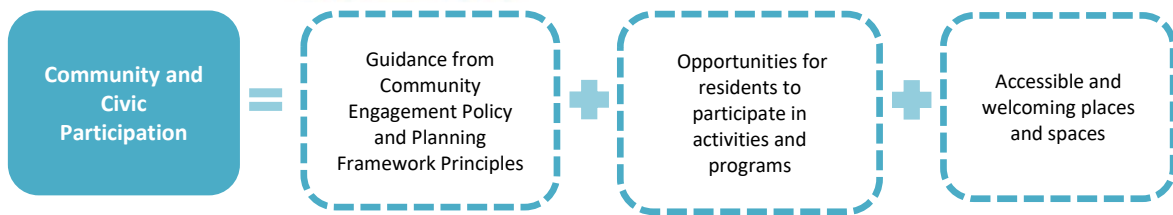


4.5 COMMUNITY AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION

All residents should have an opportunity to participate in civic life, enjoying the freedom to enjoy social opportunities, participate in learning and education, and engage in volunteering and employment. Council therefore strives to enhance the strengths of each individual, redress disadvantage, foster a cohesive community and provide the means for people to connect to others.

Council will:

- apply the principles outlined in the Community Engagement Policy and Greater Dandenong Community Engagement Planning Framework 2019 to guide engagement with the community when undertaking community consultations
- promote opportunities for residents to participate in Council activities and programs
- provide accessible and welcoming places and spaces that encourage residents to be involved in community life.



4.6 INCLUSIVE PLACES AND SPACES

Accessible built infrastructure and open spaces are essential features of a healthy and inclusive community. Infrastructure should be welcoming, safe and relevant to all people.

Council will:

- seek to ensure equity, access, and the diversity of the community in the way open spaces, infrastructure and facilities are designed, used and operated
- encourage the shared use of facilities and co-location of services to maximise their use and improve access for all groups in the community
- consult with Greater Dandenong’s diverse communities when considering how public spaces, infrastructure and facilities are planned, designed, and delivered
- seek to update and renew infrastructure to a standard that meets formal accessibility requirements.



4.7 SERVICE PLANNING AND DELIVERY

Council provides programs and services which are equitable, accessible, high in quality, efficient and which respond to the needs of the community. These services are most effective, and more widely used, when they are designed in partnership with our community.

Council will:

- apply principles of access and equity to all service and program planning
- direct services and programs to the most disadvantaged residents
- consider opportunities for involving residents in the planning of services and facilities
- provide staff with training and guidance to promote access to services and the inclusion of residents in their planning and development.



4.8 CAPABILITIES

The availability of sufficient resources to enable Council to respond to the needs of the community and deliver equitable outcomes is an important consideration in this policy.

Council will:

- incorporate the principles of this policy into planning by Council business units
- provide staff with access to training about equity and access in decision-making and planning for a diverse community.

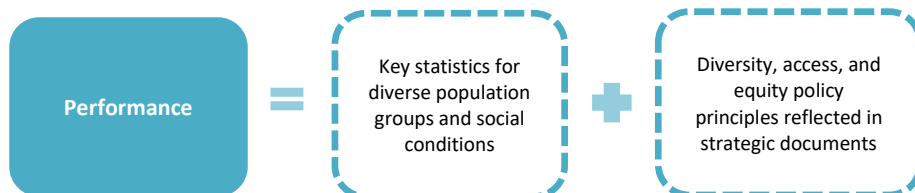


4.9 PERFORMANCE

Efficient, open reporting, coupled with rigorous and consistent review mechanisms, play an essential part in measuring Council's performance against these policy principles.

Council will:

- assemble and disseminate key statistics about diverse population groups and social conditions to its staff and residents
- incorporate principles of diversity, access, and equity into relevant strategic documents.



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

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

- seeking the best outcomes for the municipal community, including future generations (S. 9b). In particular, the policy seeks to ensure that all residents are accorded respect, and that considerations of their needs, preferences and circumstances influences the development of Council services, plans and policies
- addressing the economic, social and environmental sustainability of the municipal district, including mitigation and planning for climate change risks (S. 9c). The policy has no direct economic and environmental impact upon the community but contributes to social sustainability through the promotion of equal opportunity and participation, among diverse segments of the community
- ensuring the municipal community is included in strategic planning and strategic decision making (S. 9d). The policy emphasises participation in decision-making and engagement by the community, including residents of diverse genders, ages, abilities, cultural background, spoken languages, race and socioeconomic circumstances

- maintaining innovation and continuous improvement (S. 9e). The policy incorporates provisions to monitor activities to inform staff about the policy and its implications for their work, and to adjust such promotional efforts where required
- collaboration with other councils and governments and statutory bodies (S. 9f). This policy is based in part, upon an inspection of similar policies and plans among other councils
- supporting transparency of council decisions, actions and information (S. 9h and S. 58). Transparency is reflected in the preparation and content of this policy, which has been formed after consultation with the community, written in plain English to improve its accessibility, and will be disseminated to residents through appropriate media and means.

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 rights under the Charter are restricted or contravened by the enactment of any part of this policy.

It is considered that the policy is consistent with the rights outlined in the Charter, and in particular, that it advances the following rights, through its emphasis upon respect and consideration of social diversity in all aspects of Council conduct and in its consideration of engagement, inclusion and participation by all residents in our community:

- Freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief (S. 14)
- Freedom of expression (S. 15)
- Peaceful assembly and freedom of association (S. 16)
- Taking part in public life (S. 18)
- Cultural rights (S. 19).

7. RESPONSE TO THE GENDER EQUALITY ACT 2020

The *Gender Equality Act 2020* requires that Councils “...take positive action towards achieving workplace gender equality”. This policy explicitly advances this purpose, with its consideration of the needs, concerns and circumstances of women and men, in its emphasis upon positive efforts to engage women in community programs and activities, and in affirming the importance of the prevention of violence and respect for the rights of women and others in our community to respect and equal opportunity.

In addition, Part One, Section 1(a) of the *Gender Equality Act 2020* requires gender assessments when “...developing or revising any policy of, or program or service provided by, the entity that has a direct and significant impact upon the public” - a provision which takes effect on March 31, 2021.

The Diversity, Access and Equity Policy is a foundational document that supports the principles of the *Gender Equality Act 2020* and therefore should be considered in the process of determining the requirement for gender assessments.

8. CONSIDERATION OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND SUSTAINABILITY

This policy does not influence the generation of waste, pollution or greenhouse emissions, nor in any other manner hold the potential to adversely affect the environment, or exert an impact upon the Council’s Declaration of a Climate and Ecological Emergency, Council’s Climate Change Emergency Strategy 2020-2030, or Section 9C of the *Local Government Act 2020*, in relation to the overarching principle on climate change and sustainability.

9. RESPONSIBILITIES

Responsibility will rest with the Community Development Unit for informing Council staff and residents about the content and meaning of this policy. This may entail promotions on The Source, through the Council website, emails, presentations, print and social media and other means.

The Community Development Unit will also monitor levels of knowledge and understanding of the policy among staff and residents, if such steps are warranted.

10. REPORTING, MONITORING AND REVIEW

The Community Development Unit will report upon the details and outcomes of its efforts to inform residents about the policy, and apprise staff of its application and relevance to their work, with measures which may include, but are not limited to:

- the nature of efforts to inform staff about the policy and its importance
- levels of staff familiarity with the policy
- staff perceptions of its relevance and importance to their work.

11. REFERENCES AND RELATED DOCUMENTS

- Adopted at the Ordinary Council Meeting on 12 July 2021.
- Supersedes Diversity, Access and Equity Policy 2015

The following policies, strategies, procedures, legislation, or guidelines relate to the implementation of this policy.

Relevant Commonwealth legislation:

A variety of Federal laws support the rights of people of diverse circumstances or characteristics, seeking to deter or redress unfavourable discrimination, or vilification, on account of gender, age, disability, marital status, pregnancy or family responsibility, sexual orientation and identity, race, colour, national origin or ethnic identity. Among them are:

- *Age Discrimination Act 2004*
- *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*
- *Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act 1999*
- *Fair Work Act 2009*
- *Human Rights Commission Act 1986*
- *Human Rights (Sexual Conduct) Act 1994*
- *National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Act 2013*
- *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*
- *Racial Hatred Act 1995*
- *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*
- *Work Health and Safety Act 2011*
- *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012.*

Relevant State legislation:

Victorian Acts which seek to promote tolerance of diversity and prevent discrimination on the basis of various personal characteristics and circumstances, include:

- *Carers Recognition Act 2012*
- *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*
- *Disability Act 2006*

- *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*
- *Gender Equality Act 2020*
- *Local Government Act 2020*
- *Multicultural Victoria Act 2011*
- *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004*
- *Planning and Environment Act 1987*
- *Public Administration Act 2004*
- *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*
- *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001.*

Relevant Council Plans:

The following plans, strategies and policies developed and endorsed by the City of Greater Dandenong relate to the implementation of this policy.

- Imagine 2030 Community Plan
- Council Plan (2017-21)
- Community Wellbeing Plan (2017-21)
- Community Safety Plan (2015-22)
- Children’s Plan (2015-19)
- Disability Action Plan (2017-23)
- Springvale Community Hub Strategic Plan (2020-25)
- Community Engagement Policy (2021-25)
- Community Engagement Planning Framework 2019
- Reconciliation Action Plan (2021-23)
- Make Your Move Greater Dandenong Physical Activity Strategy 2020-2030
- Greater Dandenong People Seeking Asylum and Refugees Action Plan 2018-21
- Workplace Adjustment Guidelines.