COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

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Policy type	Council
Adopted by	Council
Responsible Director	Director Corporate Governance and Performance
Responsible Officer	Manager Communications Marketing & Advocacy
Date adopted	24 May 2023
Scheduled for review	This policy will be reviewed four years from the date of adoption, or sooner if required.

PURPOSE

Council recognises the important role that our community plays in shaping Moira Shire.

The purpose of this policy is to outline Councils commitment to providing the community with opportunities to actively participate in engagement activities which will influence decision making of Council.

The policy also outlines and formalises our community engagement practices and provides the tools to conduct effective and consistent engagement with the community to better inform future planning of services, setting budgets and developing policies and strategies.

SCOPE

This policy provides direction on formal (including legislated) and informal community engagement activities undertaken by, or on behalf of, Council.

This policy applies to all community engagement activities undertaken by Council, including work undertaken by consultants, contractors and volunteers.

EXCLUSIONS

This policy does not apply to projects where there is no decision to be made that may impact our community such as projects that are operational in nature.

The policy also does not apply to community engagement processes that are subject to prescribed processes imposed by other Victorian legislation such as land-use planning applications or other Council processes such as service requests or complaints.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this policy are to:

- articulate Council's commitment to engage with the community on decisions, delivery of projects, and development of plans, policies and strategies that affect them;
- improve understanding of community and stakeholder engagement;
- outline how community engagement is integrated into Council activities in order to support decision making and strengthen relationships and partnerships.

This policy also support Council's commitment to:

- promoting the development of Moira Shire;

- educating and informing communities on the services Council delivers; and
- engaging with communities in order to develop better relationships, premised upon informed decision-making and a relationship of trust.

DEFINITIONS

Accessibility	Accessibility means identifying and eliminating obstacles and barriers to ensure anyone can access or use places, services and information, regardless of their ability, location, culture, time, resources or other differentiating factor.
Community	A group of people who reside in the same geographical area or have a common interest, background, affiliation or membership.
Community Engagement	Involving our community in decisions that impact and interest them. Community engagement can take many forms including information sharing, to direct community involvement in decision making.
Community Engagement Framework	Includes the Community Engagement Policy, Community Engagement Guidelines and Community Engagement Planning template.
Community Engagement Plan	A template for Council staff to use to ensure that an engagement process addresses the community engagement principles of the *Local Government Act 2020.*
Stakeholder	An individual or group with an interest in the decisions of Council and are directly impacted by their outcome. They can also be part of the community.
Communication	Imparting or exchanging of information or ideas by speaking, writing or through other channels or mediums.
Consultation	The activity of seeking input on a number of options or a pre-determined recommendation to assist Council to make informed decisions.
Participatory Engagement	Participatory practices take place at the first two levels of influence on the IAP2 spectrum; '*Inform*' and '*Consult*' and involve one-way information exchange either from Council to community or community to Council. This engagement typically occurs when feedback is invited on previously prepared ideas, alternatives or draft documents. Examples of participatory practices are: • surveys; • polls, ideas gathering; and • submissions. Participation at this level can be very broad.
Project	For the purposes of this policy, project also means a plan, strategy, policy, program, service or decision that has an impact on the community.

Deliberative Engagement	Deliberative practices are conducted in the '*Involve*', '*Collaborate*' and '*Empower*' levels of influence on the International Association for Public Participation spectrum (IAP2 spectrum). This form of engagement involves bringing together a group of representative community members to consider evidence and diverse perspectives to weigh up the various options and come to a judgement on the way forward and develop a set of recommendations. Examples of deliberative engagement practices are: • working with Advisory Panels; • online proposals and ideas, discussed by a panel or community members; • participants asked to consider and prioritise ideas and options; and • a representative group participating in a series of sessions of information exchange. Council will undertake deliberative engagement in the following circumstances: 1. where it has a legislated obligation (including Community Vision, Council Plan, Financial Plan and Asset Plan); or 2. where it resolves that it wants its decision-making on a matter or initiative to be informed by this model of community engagement. This form of engagement does not replace or take away from the decision-making powers of elected representatives or delegated officers.
Partnership	This occurs when two or more people or organisations work together to realise or achieve a goal.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Responsibilities for implementing this policy are shared as follows:

Party/parties	Roles and Responsibilities
Councillors	• Have asound understanding of the Community Engagement Policy • Help identify issues that would benefit from community engagement • Promote participation in engagement activities • Review the findings of engagement programs and consider the results as part of the decision making process • Balance the range of stakeholder views and concerns on an issue when making a decision

Party/parties	Roles and Responsibilities
Executive Leadership Team	• Have a sound understanding of the Community Engagement Framework • Champion better practice community engagement through policy, process and leadership • Uphold the principles of the Community Engagement Policy • Monitor implementation and compliance with this policy
Managers/Supervisors	• Manage areas of responsibility to ensure community engagement is consistent with the Community Engagement Framework
Staff	• Undertake actions which make community engagement activities consistent with the Community Engagement Framework • Allow enough time in their project timeline to properly develop and implement the engagement process • Ensure participants have the information they need to participate effectively • Encourage discussion and understanding of all viewpoints • Uphold the principles of the Community Engagement Policy
Internal Working Group	• Monitor implementation, compliance and effectiveness of policy • Reporting non-compliance of this policy
Community Members	• Be respectful of our engagement processes, our Councillors & staff and other community members and stakeholders • Participate constructively in engagement programs and activities • Share local knowledge, experience and expertise
Representative Bodies and Advisory Committees	• Bring a representative voice to Council processes • Strengthen relationships between community members and Council. • Encourage and promote community engagement opportunities among networks • Share information among networks

POLICY

Engagement Principles

Council is committed to meaningful, principled and inclusive community engagement. Council's principles for good community engagement are to:

- actively seek the input/opinion of relevant stakeholders for projects before they are put into effect;
- use engagement to assist Council to make informed decisions;
- demonstrate strong leadership with decision-making, reflecting what is best for the municipality in the 'big picture';
- prioritise engagement with those stakeholders who are directly affected by any project; and
- seek the input of a range of stakeholders that reflects the make-up of the municipality.

This policy also supports the community engagement principles set out in Section 56 of the *Local Government Act 2020* detailed below.

Principle
Principle 1: A community engagement process must have a clearly defined objective and scope.
Principle 2: Participants in community engagement must have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation.
Principle 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.
Principle 4: Participants in community engagement are entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement.
Principle 5: Participants in community engagement are informed of the ways in which the community engagement process will influence Council decision making.

Approach to Community Engagement

Council's approach to community engagement is guided by:

- the *Local Government Act 2020;*

- The Victorian Government's Public Engagement Framework 2021-2025 which is underpinned by the principles of being meaningful, inclusive, transparent, informed, accountable and valuable; and the

- International Association for Public Participation's (IAP2) Public Participation Spectrum.

The IAP2 Spectrum sets out five levels of engagement. These levels of engagement are set out in the following table.

	Level	Goal	What Council will do	Community role	Activities that we use
LOW LEVEL — Participatory Engagement	**Inform**	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	We will keep you informed.	Listen	- Social media posts - Print media - Direct Mail - Onsite signage - Information sessions - Community News - Updates on Council website - Public meetings
	Consult	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	Contribute	- Surveys / Polls - Focus groups - Drop-in sessions - Submissions - Public meeting
MID LEVEL — Deliberative Engagement	**Involve**	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	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.	Participate	- Working/Reference Groups - Advisory Groups - Workshop - Deliberative Polls
HIGH LEVEL	**Collaborate**	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and identification of the preferred solution.	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decision to the maximum extent possible.	Partner	- Advisory Committees - Participatory decision making - Deliberative Processes
	Empower *	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.	We will implement what you decide.	Lead or Partner	- Ballots - Juries - Deliberative process

* The Empower level on the spectrum has limited application in local government as the elected Council is the decision-making body; this also applies if a Council is under Administration. Most community engagement will occur in the levels of Inform to Collaborate where community advice, solutions and proposed recommendations are considered in formulating recommendations to Council.

When will Council Engage?

Council will consider the need to engage the community when a proposed project is likely to:

- have significant impact on quality of life in the region;
- impact on services or facilities for residents and ratepayers;
- have a significant budgetary impact;
- involve a level of conflict, controversy or sensitivity.

Council will also engage when it is a legislated requirement to do so.

Council's Community Engagement Guidelines and Community Engagement Planning template will guide staff through the process of when to engage as well as how we will address the principles of this policy and the *Local Government Act 2020* through the engagement process.

Who will Council Engage?

We will undertake engagement with the community and stakeholders who will be affected by a project. This can include anyone who lives, works, plays or visits the shire.

Engagement may also be with specific groups in the community, such as groups from a specific location of the shire, traditional owners, steering groups and advisory committees.

Accessibility and Inclusivity

Participants in a community engagement process are entitled to feel valued, respected and welcome, regardless of gender, race, age, ability, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and other features.

In undertaking any engagement, efforts will be made to ensure that our diverse communities can access, understand, and contribute their perspectives to the process in a way that is appropriate, productive, and respectful. Consideration will also be given to time and location of engagement activities to ensure accessibility.

Consultation techniques, processes and timeframes

Council will use different community engagement techniques and communication mechanisms depending upon the issue or project, its particular circumstance and the audience it needs to target.

Council's decision to engage the community will consider:
- the legislative, cultural, social and economic factors that may constrain meaningful public participation;
- the cost of engagement (including the demand it makes on community and staff time) should represent good value for ratepayers, given the scope and scale of the decision; and
- whether or not Council can obtain the community information it requires from another source, or previous engagement activity in order to maximise the use of limited resources and minimise the likelihood of consultation fatigue developing within the community.

Our method of engagement makes a big difference to who can participate and how we receive feedback from the community.

Council will commence communication and engagement as early as possible in a project where appropriate with the community and stakeholders and to ensure transparency and accountability on the activities of Council prior to decision making.

Occasionally our projects will apply different engagement methods at different stages. For example, we might involve or collaborate with our community to gather ideas at an early stage of a design project, and then consult with our community to finalise priorities and details.

As a general rule, a draft document that requires community feedback is to be exhibited for a minimum of 21 days unless otherwise indicated in this policy or set out in a statutory process.

Some examples of the minimum types of engagement methods are shown in the table below.

Project	Engagement activity level/s	What we will do
Community Vision	Collaborate	- Broad community engagement in the development of these documents, complimented by a deliberative engagement process.
	Consult	- Draft documents on public display and open for feedback for a minimum of 21 days.
Council Plan Financial Plan Asset Plan	Involve	- Broad community engagement in the development of these documents, complimented by a deliberative engagement process.
	Consult	- Draft documents on public display and open for feedback for a minimum of 21 days.
Council Strategies *Including the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan required under the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*	Consult	- Our engagement process for the development of Council Strategy will include methods for gathering information from the community to inform draft documents, this may include methods in the 'Involve' level of the IAP. - Draft documents on public display and open for feedback for a minimum of 21 days.
Council Budget Revised Budget	Consult	- Our engagement process for the development of the Council Budget will include methods for gathering information from the community to inform draft documents. - Draft budget document on public display and open for feedback for a minimum of 21 days.
Council policies including Governance Rules *Council will not undertake community engagement activities on policies that have little or no impact on the community.*	Consult	- Our engagement process for the development of a new policy may include methods for gathering information from the community to inform draft documents. - Draft policy (new or revised) on public display and open for feedback for a minimum of 21 days.

Project	Engagement activity level/s	What we will do
Selling or exchanging land	Consult	- We will give notice to the community of any proposal to sell, exchange or lease land, providing an opportunity for the community to provide feedback to the proposal. - In accordance with Section 114(2) of the *Local Government Act 2020,* the proposal will be on public display and open for feedback for a minimum of 28 days.
Acquisition of land *Purchase or compulsory acquisition*	Consult	- Council will ensure the procedure set out in Section 112 of the *Local Government Act 2020* (and the *Land Acquisition and Compensation Act 1986)* is followed. - For proposals requiring an engagement process under the Act, the proposal will be on public display and open for feedback for a minimum of 28 days.
Leasing land	Consult	- Council will ensure the procedure set out in Section 115 of the *Local Government Act 2020* is followed for proposals to lease Council land. - For proposals requiring an engagement process under the Act, the proposal will be on public display and open for feedback for a minimum of 28 days.
Proposing and Making of Local Laws	Consult	- Council will ensure the procedures set out in Section 73 & 74 of the *Local Government Act 2020* are followed for the proposing a local law and making a local law. - Before making a local law, we will publish a notice setting out what the objectives of the proposed local law are, and what the intended effect of the new local law will be. We will also let the community know how they can view a copy of the proposed local law, and how they can participate in the community engagement process. Our engagement process for these types of matters will include methods for gathering information from the community to inform draft documents (e.g. by hosting workshops or community engagement drop-in sessions). - We will also exhibit any draft documents for public feedback for a minimum of 21 days.

Project	Engagement activity level/s	What we will do
Road, Feature and Naming Proposals	Consult	- Council will ensure the process set out in the Naming Rules for Places in Victoria is followed in accordance with the *Geographic Place Names Act 1998.* - Naming proposals that require an engagement process will be on public display and open for feedback for a minimum of 30 days.
Projects where there is no opportunity for the community to influence Council decision making.	Inform	- We will keep our community updated with objective, relevant and timely information.
Projects that may have a low impact or risk rating (such as renewals of existing assets).	For these projects we will develop a Community Engagement Plan in consultation with the relevant Manager. This engagement plan may include several stages and levels of engagement, and may include methods under the 'inform and/or 'consult' levels of engagement.	
Projects that may have a medium-high impact or risk rating (such as major public space upgrades and major capital works projects).	For these projects we will develop a Community Engagement Plan in consultation with the Executive Leadership Team/Councillors. This engagement plan may include several stages and levels of engagement, and may include methods under the 'involve' and/or 'collaborate' levels of engagement.	

Other projects

Community Engagement is not just limited to these particular project types and may require a higher level of engagement depending on the project and the impact on the community.

Council's Community Engagement Guidelines and Community Engagement Planning template will provide further guidance in determining the level of engagement required for a particular project.

An engagement process may also be defined in another Council Policy or Plan, these include and may not be limited to the following:

- Complaint Handling Policy
- Community Strengthening Grants Policy
- Tree Management Plan
- Road Management Plan

Statutory Requirements

Submissions under Section 223 of the Local Government Act 1989
There may be other legislated projects that are still subject to the requirements of section 223 of the Local *Government Act 1989*. On these occasions the process will follow the requirements of that Act. These include:

- Change of systems of valuation
- Declaration of a special rate or charge
- Variation of a special rate or charge
- Rates rebates or concessions

- Concentration or diversion of drainage of land
- Powers over roads and traffic

Other Statutory Requirements

There may be other elements of community engagement that may be subject to other statutory requirements that are not specifically covered in this policy, which includes but is not limited to:

- *Planning and Environment Act 1987*
- *Road Management Act 2004*
- *Disability Act 2006*
- *Domestic Animals Act 1994*

Council will follow the process for involving the community as defined in these Acts and, where appropriate, apply methods of engagement from this policy through development of a Community Engagement Plan.

Reasons for limited engagement

Council may be limited with the type of engagement it can undertake in the following situations:

- Where there is no opportunity for the community to influence Council decision making, such as when Council isn't the leading agency (e.g. other Government departments), or there is limited opportunity for community consultation to influence the outcome;
- specialist knowledge or expertise is required;
- work is commercial in confidence;
- work relates to operational matters;
- procurement processes being undertaken in accordance with Council's Procurement Policy; and
- where there is an unacceptable risk posed to our community if we do not take immediate action.

Council will continue to 'Inform' the community about these activities where possible and appropriate.

Election Period (Caretaker)

In accordance with Council's Governance Rules, Council will avoid public consultation activities while Council is in a caretaker role. The timing of these activities will be scheduled to be held before the election period or after the new Council is elected.

If special circumstances require public consultation, Council will justify to the community why it is necessary and how the risks of affecting voting at the election will be mitigated or prevented.

Implementation and evaluation

Council will ensure its Community Engagement Guidelines provide simple rules and strong incentives for community input into Council projects, supported by monitoring, evaluation, information provision and feedback and ensuring compliance with the principles in the appropriate Act.

Outcome of Consultation

Reporting to Council

When reporting to Council on the outcomes of a community engagement process, we will:
- provide any key data, evidence, or reports about community engagement, including reports provided by consultants.

- explain the purpose and scope of the community engagement that has been implemented.
- outline the engagement methods used, the details of who participated, an overview of findings, and any recommendations.
- provide reasons and evidence if the Council Officer recommendation is contrary to the views of our community and stakeholders. The reasons for this should be explained in the Council report drawing on evidence as appropriate.
- provide reasons for our decision making in reports to Council if a Council officer has made a decision that impacts the community under delegation.

Informing our community
At the end of a community engagement process, Council will report back to the community to advise of the outcome or decision that has been made and how its input contributed to their decision.

The methods used to inform the community of the outcome of an engagement process will be outlined in the specific Community Engagement Plan for the project, and will include, but not be limited to:

- publication on Council's website;
- posts on Council's social media sites;
- print media;
- direct communication with individuals or groups that have participated in the process or requested to be notified of the outcomes (e.g. phone, email or post); or
- formal in-person announcements (e.g. community meeting).

Complaints about community engagement

In circumstances where a community member wishes to make a complaint about a community engagement process or non-compliance with this policy, they can contact Council. Complaints will be dealt with in accordance with Council's Complaint Handling Policy.

Monitoring and review

An Internal Working Group consisting of representatives from Governance & Performance and Marketing Communications & Advocacy and other Council departments will monitor implementation, compliance and effectiveness of policy, with non-compliance of this policy reported to the Executive Leadership Team and Council via Briefing Report.

The policy will be reviewed every four years, or earlier if identified that a review is required in consultation with the community.

RELATED POLICIES

Complaint Handling Policy
Community Strengthening Grants Policy
Advertising Protocol
Governance Rules
Public Transparency Policy

RELATED LEGISLATION

Local Government Act 1989
Local Government Act 2020
Disability Act 2006
Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006
Equal Opportunity Act 2010

Road Management Act 2004
Privacy and Data Protection Act 2004
Planning and Environment Act 1987
Road Management Act 2004
Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008
Gender Equality Act 2020
Public Administration Act 2004

REFERENCES

Project Management Framework
Disability Access and Inclusion Plan
Gender Equality Action Plan
Victorian Government Public Engagement Framework 2021-2025

DOCUMENT REVISIONS

Version	Summary of Changes	Approved by	Date
1	Original Policy adopted	Council	24 February 2021
2	Review - Policy rewritten to be more prescriptive on the engagement level and methods, provide enhanced detail on statutory requirements, reasons for limited engagement, Election (Caretaker) period considerations, monitoring, reporting and complaints.	Council	24 May 2023