POLICY

Community Engagement Policy

1 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to give effect to the community engagement principles provided in the Act and to provide guidance on the requirements and processes for staff when undertaking community engagement.

The community engagement principles are:

- a community engagement process must have clearly defined objective and scope;
- participants in community engagement must have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation;
- participants in community engagement must be representative of the persons and groups affected by the matter that is the subject of the community engagement;
- participants in community engagement are entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement;
- participants in community engagement are informed of the ways in which the community engagement process will influence Council decision making.

2 Scope

This policy applies to Councillors, Council staff including senior managers, contractors and consultants when undertaking community engagement on behalf of Council.

The policy applies to planning, design, implementation and evaluation of community engagement activities as directed by Council, recommended by staff or legislated by the Victorian *Local Government Act 2020* including:

- Community Vision;
- Council Plan;
- Asset Plan;
- Financial Plan;
- Other engagement processes as determined, which may include but are not limited to:
  - o The making of local laws;
  - o Budget and policy development;
  - o When decisions of a strategic nature, where community input will inform outcomes, are required – including for strategies, projects, assets and/or services which directly impact the community.

The policy 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.

3 Background

Section 55 of the *Local Government Act 2020* requires a Council to adopt and maintain a community engagement policy.

A community engagement policy must:

- be developed in consultation with the municipal community; and
- give effect to the community engagement principles; and
- be capable of being applied to the making of Council's local laws; and
- be capable of being applied in relation to Council's budget and policy development; and
- describe the type and form of community engagement proposed, having regard to the significance and complexity of the matter and the level of resourcing required; and specify a process for informing the municipal community of the outcome of the community engagement; and
- include deliberative engagement practices which must include and address any matters prescribed by the regulations for the purposes of this paragraph and be capable of being applied to the development of the Community Vision, Council Plan, Financial Plan and Asset Plan; and
- include any other matters prescribed by the regulations.

4 Definitions

Council	means Hindmarsh Shire Council
Act	means *Local Government Act 2020*
Community	means the people who have a stake and interest in Hindmarsh Shire and includes people who live, work, study or conduct business or are involved in local community groups or organisations in the municipality
Deliberative engagement	means engagement that is measured, considered and has the involvement of others.
Community engagement	is a planned process with the specific purpose of working with individuals and groups to encourage active involvement in decisions that affect them or are of interest to them.

5 Community engagement

Council will call for different levels of engagement, having regards to the significant, complexity and anticipated level of impact of what is being proposed, and the stakeholders we need to target.

Council operates under five levels of public participation:

1. **Inform:** providing the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.
2. **Consult:** obtaining public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.
3. **Involve:** working directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.

4. **Collaborate:** to partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and identification of the preferred solution.
5. **Empower:** to place final decision making in the public.

5.1   Type of community engagement

Community engagement may include multiple levels of public participation, both at different stages of the process and because different stakeholders will chose to engage at different levels. The type or form of engagement practices undertaken can be broadly described as either deliberative or participatory.

5.1.1   Deliberative engagement

Deliberative engagement involves the highest three levels of public participation, 'involve', 'collaborate' and 'empower'. Deliberative engagement allows for discussion and the possibility of consensus. The key features of a deliberative process are to come to a decision after considering all information and prioritising and weighing solutions. Deliberative engagement can be scaled to fit the size and impact of the project.

Examples of deliberative engagement practices are:

- Working with advisory groups;
- Proposals and ideas are discussed by a panel of community members;
- Participants are asked to consider and prioritise ideas;
- A representative group participates in a series of sessions of information exchange in order to reach consensus.

Projects most suited to deliberative engagement include those where the outcome will have far-reaching or long term effects and issues where there is considerable community concern or division about the alternatives.

5.1.2   Participatory engagement

Participatory practices take place at the first two levels of public participation, 'inform' and 'consult' and involve one-way information exchange either from Council to community or community to Council. Participatory engagement typically occurs when feedback is invited on ideas, alternatives or draft documents.

Examples of participatory practices are:

- Surveys;
- Polls, idea gathering;
- Submissions.

5.1.2.1   Submissions process
On matters where the only form of community participation is an invitation to make submissions, and engagement on the matter was formerly governed by section 223 of the *Local Government Act 1989,* Council will make the information available to the community for 21 days and invite the community to make submissions to Council with their feedback.

6 Statutory requirements

Some elements of community engagement are directed by statutory requirements. Under the Act, Council has a statutory obligation to develop a long term Community Vision, Financial Plan and Asset Plan, as well as a four-year Council Plan.

Under the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*, Council has a statutory requirement to develop a four-year Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan. Council has an obligation to ensure the community has an opportunity to participate in the development of these plans.

7 Community engagement guide

As a guide, the lowest type of community engagement to be implemented for these plans is set out below:

MATTER	COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT APPROACH
Community vision	Deliberative engagement
Council plan	Deliberative engagement
Financial plan	Deliberative engagement
Asset plan	Deliberative engagement
Budget	Participatory engagement
Making of a local law	Participatory engagement
Acquiring or selling land	Participatory engagement
Leasing Council land	Participatory engagement
Other statutory and non-statutory plans, strategies or policies, service planning and capital works projects	Level to be selected depending on the complexity of the matter*

*when assessing what level of community engagement to undertake consideration must be given to the following factors:

- Level of community interest;
- Effect on the community; and

- Who or which part of the community the matter affects.

8 Community engagement planning, implementation and evaluation

To ensure effective community engagement, Council implements the following eight steps to design, deliver and complete community engagement.

1. **Clearly define the purpose and scope of the community engagement**

   1.1. Document the project purpose, scope, engagement objectives, timelines, and the decision to be made.
   1.2. Take into account relevant legislation in framing community engagement.
   1.3. Determine initial expectation of the level of participation outlined in clause 5.

2. **Understand stakeholder and community interests:**

   2.1. Identify the stakeholders, including community members where appropriate, who are affected by, interested in, or who can influence or inform the decision.
   2.2. Consider if there are barriers to participation that need to be removed to ensure an appropriate balance of views.
   2.3. Identify the preferred methods for engagement.
   2.4. Ensure that participants understand their role and level of influence on the decision making process.

3. **Design an appropriate community engagement process**

   3.1. Identify the stages of the engagement process and any negotiable or non-negotiable aspects.
   3.2. Ensure those who will be involved in the community engagement process have access to objective, relevant and timely information.
   3.3. Plan inclusive and accessible communications and methods to support engagement.
   3.4. Identify data requirements that are relevant and measurable, and how it will be analysed.
   3.5. Plan how the data collected will be managed and ensure compliance with Council's privacy policy.
   3.6. Identify the skills and resources needed to ensure effective community engagement.
   3.7. Document the approach and obtain authorisation.

4. **Deliver genuine and respectful engagement**

   4.1. Ensure all activities are inclusive and accessible.
   4.2. Be clear about the purpose and level of engagement.

5. **Review and interpret the engagement data**

   5.1. Collate and review the data from each engagement activity.
   5.2. Identify any limitations to the appropriate balance of information.
   5.3. Analyse the data to identify themes, priorities and preferences.

6. **Apply the outcomes of the engagement to inform the decision making process**

   6.1. Include outcomes of community engagement when preparing Council reports regarding subjects or issues that have been the subject of community engagement.
   6.2. Where appropriate, provide further opportunity for community input, for example to comment on a draft document.

7. Inform the community of the outcomes of the engagement

    7.1. Reporting of outcomes and updates will always be through Council's website "Have Your Say" engagement platform as well as provided directly to those who asked to be kept informed and have provided contact details.

    7.2. Outcomes of community engagement may also be included in Council's monthly newsletter.

8. Evaluate the community engagement process for improvement

    8.1. Assess whether community engagement objectives were achieved.

9   Responsibilities

Responsibilities for implementing this policy are shared as follows:

PARTY / PARTIES	ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES
Councillors	Ensure that matters under consideration are informed by the planned level of community engagement.
Executive leadership team	Consult with Councillors to establish the engagement process to be used. Champion better practice community engagement through policy, process and leadership. Monitor implementation and compliance with this policy.
Managers	Manage areas of responsibility to ensure community engagement is consistent with this policy.
Staff	Undertake to make community engagement activities consistent with this policy.

10   Human rights charter

This policy is consistent with the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006.*

11   Related documents

Hindmarsh Shire Council Public Transparency Policy

Hindmarsh Shire Council Privacy Policy

Local Government Act 1989

Local Government Act 2020

Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014

Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006

Public Records Act 1973

12 Version history

Community Engagement Policy		**Policy Category**	Community Engagement
Version Number	01	**Policy Status**	ADOPTED
Approved/Adopted By	COUNCIL	**Approved/Adopted on:**	
Responsible Officer	DCCS		
Version History	**Date**	**Version**	**Description**
	03 February 2021	01	Initial policy

Appendix 1 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN TEMPLATE

Project summary:

Item	Details
Project Name	
Project Manager	
Project Details	
Project Purpose	
Start Date	
End Date	

Engagement summary: *(please overwrite section in italics)*

Item	Details
Objective of engagement	*What is Council engaging on and why?*
Scope	*Who will the engagement be with? Who does it affect?*
Type of engagement	*Deliberative engagement or participatory engagement?*

Item	Details
Key stakeholders	*Who will be impacted by any decisions?*
Target audience	*Who will engagement be conducted with?*
Engagement design: • Method/s • Venue/s • Time/s • Location/s • Resources	*How will the engagement be undertaken?* *List, expand on and repeat to all planned activities…*
Purpose of engagement findings	*How will the information gathered be used? Information needs to be used in line with Council's Privacy Policy.*
Communicating outcomes of engagement	*How will the community be updated or informed on the outcome of the community engagement?*
Other relevant information	*May include stakeholders, multiple phases of engagement, questions, methods of promotion, etc*

Sign off and approval

_____   _____

Project Manager   **Date**

_____   _____

Director   **Date**