POLICY

C021 Community Engagement

1   Purpose

Hindmarsh Shire Council (**Council**) recognises and values the vast knowledge and experiences within our diverse communities and is committed to placing the community at the heart of what we do.

We strive to develop communities that are resilient, connected and engaged. Effective and meaningful community engagement plays a critical role in enabling this future, where equitable access to participatory decision-making is essential to a strong community.

The Community Engagement Policy outlines Council's commitment and approach to community engagement practice and gives effect to the Community Engagement Principles provided for in the *Local Government Act 2020*. It details the principles that guide our work towards delivering sustainable outcomes for our communities: through shared problem-solving, open dialogue and meaningful participation.

Effective and meaningful community engagement has real benefits for both Council and the community. Better identifying the priorities, needs and aspirations of our community will assist Council to improve its strategic planning and service delivery. A regular two-way conversation ensures Council is transparent, accountable and informed in its decision making which will demonstrate integrity, build trust, develop strong partnerships and create sustainable outcomes.

2   Scope

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:
    - The making of local laws;
    - 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.

Whenever Hindmarsh Shire Council is planning, delivering a project, or making a decision that significantly impacts the way our community experiences the Shire or their interaction with our organisation, the community must have the opportunity to meaningfully participate in that process.

3   Background

Community engagement occurs for a variety of reasons and across a broad range of Council areas, such as community planning, service delivery, infrastructure design, strategies, plans and more. You can see when we are required by law to engage in the Legislative Requirements section. Hindmarsh Shire Council uses the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum of Engagement to guide our planning.

The IAP2 Spectrum is a useful, widely recognised tool that identifies five levels of participation. For each level there is a corresponding goal, commitment and role for Council and the community in the process. There may often be more than one level of engagement used across a project, depending on the stage, scope, timeline and stakeholders involved, as well as the influence and impact identified.

	INFORM	**CONSULT**	**INVOLVE**	**COLLABORATE**	**EMPOWER**
Goal	To provide our community with objective and clear information that lets them know when something is happening, or about to happen.	To seek and consider community feedback on alternatives, proposals and/or decisions we need to make.	To work directly with our community throughout the process to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are understood, considered and incorporated where appropriate.	To partner closely with our community in identifying alternatives, developing solutions and co-designing a jointly agreed outcome.	To place final decision making in the hands of our community, build their capacity to identify solutions and lead or deliver change.
Our commitment to community	We will keep you informed.	We will listen to and acknowledge your concerns and aspirations and provide feedback on how your input influenced the decisions.	We will work with you to ensure what we've heard is directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how your input influenced the decisions.	We will work together in co-designing solutions, and as much as possible, incorporate your advice and proposals into the decisions.	We will work alongside you to realise your decisions and aspirations.
The role of community	Listen	Contribute	Participate	Partner	Partner or lead

Engagement type	Informative	Consultative	Deliberative	Deliberative	Deliberative
Methods	Media release, advertisement, newsletter, social media post, website, public notice.	Surveys	Workshops, advisory committees.	Facilitated workshops	Community panel, deliberative workshops and focus groups.

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.

Stakeholder   An individual or group that has an interest in any Council decision or activity, including Traditional Custodians and Aboriginal communities, other tiers of government and government agencies, businesses, educational institutes, not-for-profits and philanthropic organisations, visitors, residents, advocacy groups, children, ratepayers and renters, emergency services, culturally and linguistically diverse people and many more.

5   Community Engagement Types

5.1   Deliberative Engagement

Deliberative engagement is a process used to reach an outcome or decision for complex issues. The process typically occurs over a period of time and brings together a real mix of voices to work through and consider issues in a supported environment. Deliberative engagement involves the highest three levels of public participation, 'involve', 'collaborate' and 'empower'.

It is an inclusive and transparent process in which participants are provided with:

•   a clear purpose from the outset of what will be achieved and why
•   relevant evidence and background information to analyse
•   sufficient time to explore, assess and discuss options
•   practical support to enable participation in the process

It should enable a diverse range of people in our community to be highly involved, including those most impacted by the decision.

Examples of deliberative engagement practices are:

• Working with advisory groups;

- Proposals and ideas are discussed by a panel of community members where 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.

We will undertake **deliberative engagement** for:
• Community Vision (10 years)
• Council Plan (4 years)
• Financial Plan (10 years)
• Asset Management Plan (10 years)
• Projects and policies where deliberative engagement is determined to be the most effective process to reach an outcome or make a decision.

5.2   Consultative Engagement

Consultative engagement involves one-way information exchange from the 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.

We will undertake **consultative engagement** for:
• Budgets
• Making or changing a local law
• Acquiring or selling land
• Leasing Council land
• Council policies that have a direct and significant impact on the Community
• Strategies, service planning and projects whose level of complexity does not necessitate deliberative engagement.

6   When Council will Engage

6.1   Circumstances that Trigger Engagement

Council will promote opportunities for the community to actively participate in the following processes:

- Where a proposed change to Council activities or strategic direction may significantly affect the community in terms of the economy, lifestyle, environment, wellbeing or amenity of the municipality.
- When developing new or reviewing existing policies, strategies or plans.

- When introducing a new service, discontinuing an existing service or substantially changing or reviewing a service that may significantly affect how services are provided.
- Proposals for changing the way in which public space looks, is used or enjoyed.
- The community raises an issue with Council for a decision (or outcome) and there are likely to be competing community interests.
- Planning and development of major projects and capital works, including public buildings, centres or other infrastructure.
- Any circumstance where Council needs more information or evidence to make an informed decision.

6.2   Circumstances where Engagement will be Limited

There are times when Council's level of engagement with the community and key stakeholders will be limited. In certain circumstances, Council may only be able to inform the community and stakeholders of Council's decisions and actions.

Examples include when:

- Council is not the lead agency
- an immediate resolution is required
- specialist or technical expertise is required
- an initiative involves confidential or commercial information
- there are clear and defined legislative responsibilities that must be met
- developing or reviewing internal policies and procedures
- there is a risk to public safety.

7   Legislative Requirements

Elements of our community engagement work are guided by Victorian Government legislation which sets specific engagement requirements for some Council activities. These statutory requirements usually relate to long term strategic council planning and budgeting, amendments to the planning scheme, development of public health and wellbeing plans, local law making, land acquisition and sales, electoral reviews and some road changes.

The *Local Government Act 2020* outlines a set of overarching principles and requirements to guide the engagement approach of councils. Other relevant legislation is listed in the References section of this document.

8   Community Engagement in Practice

The planning stage for all engagement activities is critical to ensuring successful and authentic engagement with our community and key stakeholders. The engagement process should be tailored to each project or decision being made, based on the levels of complexity or public impact/interest.

Plan	
Define the engagement purpose, objectives and scope	Understanding the purpose and the objectives of the engagement is a critical first step in the planning process. Here we determine the reasons why we are engaging and what we are trying to achieve. Careful consideration is also given to: • the level of engagement required (IAP2 Spectrum)

	• what the community can influence (negotiables and non-negotiables) • how the results will be used (engagement outcomes) • when the engagement is required (timeframes) • how will the engagement process be monitored and evaluated (Evaluation).
Understand the level of Impact/Interest	Community and stakeholder analysis are undertaken to ensure engagement is representative and inclusive of those who are impacted/interested in the project or decision. Consideration is given to: • barriers to participation and how these can be addressed and overcome • reasonable support is provided to participants to enable meaningful and informed engagement • participants are entitled to feel valued, respected and welcome, regardless of gender, age, ability, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation.
Design appropriate communication and engagement methods	The communication and engagement methods used to facilitate participation are fit for purpose based on participants' needs and the information being conveyed. The timeframes for the engagement activities allow participants to understand and consider the information provided and make a fully informed contribution. A variety of engagement methods can be used throughout the engagement process.
Do	
Implement the engagement	Conduct engagement activities that are meaningful, genuine and respectful. Invite previously identified stakeholders to participate and ensure participation is accessible and inclusive.
Provide clear, timely communications	Provide clear, jargon-free information to participants to explain the initiative and consider translated information if required. Allow sufficient time to review the information and provide feedback.
Share	
Closing the loop with the community	Following the engagement process we will report back to the community and stakeholders the results and outcomes of the engagement process. This will be done in a timely, accessible and informative manner so that participants understand how their involvement influenced the process, and therefore the outcome or decision. If the engagement process is lengthy it is important that regular project updates are provided to ensure the community remain engaged.
Inform the decision-making process	After the consultation process is complete and all feedback has been collated and reviewed, a report is prepared for Council that articulates the consultation methodology and outcomes and how it informs the project or decision being made.
Evaluate	
Measuring outcomes	Evaluation of the engagement process is planned at the beginning of the project, so we are aware of what the outcome will be measured against. The evaluation process will be tailored to the scale and complexity of the engagement and will consider several elements including: • the engagement objectives were met • engagement outcomes were achieved • participants were representative of the stakeholders identified based on impact/interest • the communications and engagement methods were appropriate.
Sharing evaluation outcomes	Reflective practice allows us to refine and continually improve our community engagement practices. We will reflect on what did and didn't work objectively and realistically and produce an evaluation report to share observations and recommendations.
Improve	
Continuous improvement and capacity building of Council officers	We will take the lessons learnt throughout the project capturing them in an accessible format. Ideas for improvement of engagement will be shared across the organisation and inform future versions of this Policy and Council's broader engagement framework.

9   Roles and Responsibilities

The design, delivery, reporting and evaluation of community engagement is the responsibility of employees as appropriate to their role and function.

The application of principles and processes outlined in this policy is effectively the responsibility of line management across the breadth of Council service areas and teams. Councillors are responsible for adopting the Community Engagement Policy and for championing our commitment to community engagement in their interactions with the Hindmarsh community. It is also a requirement of the *Local Government Act 2020* that the role of the Mayor is to lead engagement with the community on the development of the Council Plan (s18c).

10   References

Related documents	Legislation
Add Related Documents	*Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* *Disability Act 2006* *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* *Gender Equality Act 2020* *Local Government Act 1989* *Multicultural Victoria Act 2011* *Planning and Environment Act 1987* *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014* *Public Administration Act 2004* *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* *Road Management Act 2004* *Subordinate Legislation Act 1994*

11   Document Control

Community Engagement Policy		Policy Category		Council
Version Number	1.1	**Policy Status**		Adopted
Approved/Adopted By	COUNCIL	**Approved/Adopted on:**		6 March 2024
Responsible Officer	CEO	**Review Date**		6 March 2027
	Date	**Version**	**Description**	
Version History	February 2021	1.0	Initial Policy	
	March 2024	1.1	Updated policy	