

## Community Engagement Policy

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Directorate	Corporate Services		
Responsible Officer:	Manager Communications and Customer Service		
Policy Type:	Discretionary		
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### 1. 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 activities which enhance opportunities for the community 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 decision making and when changes to services or infrastructure are required.

This policy:

- outlines the principles that 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;
- promotes consistency of approach across all Council departments; and
- seeks to improve Council's engagement processes and outcomes by reporting back to the community.

### 2. Background

The Council Plan 2017-21, developed in early 2017, outlines the strategic objectives and key priorities Council will focus on for its four year term. This policy supports the objective of 'An open and effective Council' 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".

Council's policy and 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.

# Greater Dandenong Policy

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This Policy replaces the former Community Engagement Policy and reflects the intentions of the Council Plan 2017-21.

## 3. Scope

This Policy applies to all Council staff, contract workers, consultants and all people who engage with the community on behalf of the Greater Dandenong City Council. It also provides a guide to Councillors.

The Policy is supported by a planning framework (the '*Community Engagement Planning Framework*') that provides guidance and procedures for undertaking high quality community engagement.

## 4. Council Policy

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

Council will:

- ensure that the purpose of engagement is genuine and transparent;
- conduct all engagement activities using the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum;
- employ various techniques and approaches to maximise community participation and provide respectful 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 the different views and needs of participants;
- undertake evaluation processes to ensure continuous improvement with consultation activities;
- report back to the community in a timely manner and outline how feedback was considered and/or incorporated into the final outcomes; and
- ensure all activities undertaken are in accordance with Council's Privacy and Personal Information Policy.

## 5. Human Rights and Responsibilities Charter – Compatibility Statement

All matters relevant to the Victorian Human Rights and Responsibilities Charter have been considered in the preparation of this Policy and are consistent with the standards set by the Charter. The Community Engagement Policy and Planning Framework will ensure that stakeholders across the City of Greater Dandenong have an opportunity to participate in public life and inform decision making, consistent with Section 18 of the Charter.

## 6. Engagement Process

### 6.1 What is Community Engagement?

Community engagement is the process by which Council provides opportunities for public involvement in Council decision making, community strengthening and capacity building. Engagement occurs in various forms with increasing levels of involvement and is demonstrated by the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum.

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 the Policy aims to maximise community participation and contains a range of engagement techniques that can be used to gain 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 levels used in the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum are:

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

## 6.2 Why do we engage?

Council conducts community engagement activities to improve its strategic planning and service delivery and to better understand the needs and aspirations of the community. Engagement provides a number of benefits to both Council and the community including:

- transparency, integrity and increased trust in Council processes and decisions
- better 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 as part of the development of various corporate and statutory planning documents.

## 6.3 Who do we engage with?

Greater Dandenong City Council seeks to engage with its entire community and key stakeholders. The community can be defined for the purposes of this policy as people who live, work and play in the City of Greater Dandenong. Our key stakeholders can be defined as 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 is different for each consultation and this is determined by using a matrix as outlined in the Community Engagement Planning Framework.

## 6.4 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 engage 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. Where statutory requirements for community engagement are mandated, there may also be 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 have circumstances that require an advisory committee, an 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 via advertisement to the broader community according to an endorsed selection criteria.

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.

## 6.5 How do we engage?

### **Create**

The planning stage of any consultation is when Council will create a project plan which will determine the purpose of its engagement, the objectives it hopes to achieve, who will be engaged and how.

### **Engage**

The engagement process will be conducted according to Council's overarching objectives as stated in section 4 of this policy.

### **Communicate**

The results of all consultation activities will be reported back to the community and key stakeholders in a timely and accessible manner to ensure the process is open and transparent.

### **Evaluate**

Evaluation is a key component of any engagement process to ensure continuous improvement. All community engagement activities undertaken by Council will be required to undergo an evaluation to determine the success of the project 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.

## 7. Roles and Responsibilities

Community engagement and the implementation of this policy is the responsibility of all Council service areas, teams and employees as appropriate to their roles. Councillors are responsible for the review and endorsement of the policy and the accompanying planning framework.

## 8. Related Documents

The following have been prepared and endorsed by the City of Greater Dandenong:

### **Plans**

- Council Plan 2017-21
- Community Wellbeing Plan 2017-21

### **Policies**

- Diversity, Access and Equity Policy
- Privacy and Personal Information Policy
- Language and Communications Policy

## Framework

- Community Engagement Planning Framework
- Community Development Framework

## 9. References

- *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006*
- *Local Government Act 1989*
- *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*

## 10. Definitions

The following definitions apply in the reading of this policy:

<b>Community Engagement</b>	Community engagement is the process of involving the community in decision making processes, relationship development or capacity building.
<b>Community</b>	People who live, work and play in Greater Dandenong
<b>Key stakeholders</b>	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