

Community Engagement Policy

October 2025

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Document Compliance

Council acknowledges the legal responsibility to comply with the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* and the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*. The *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* is designed to protect the fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens. The Charter gives legal protection to 20 fundamental human rights under four key values that include freedom, respect, equality and dignity.

Greater Dandenong City Council Policies comply with the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities, the *Gender Equality Act 2020*, the *Climate Change Act 2017*, the Child Safe Standards contained in the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005*, (Amended) the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014* and the Overarching Governance Principles specified in 9(2) of the *Local Government Act 2020*.

Acknowledgment of Country

Greater Dandenong City Council acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of this land, the Bunurong People and pays respect to their Elders past and present. We recognise and respect their continuing connections to climate, Culture, Country and waters.

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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 the community with the means 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 Council's decision-making and when changes to services or infrastructure are required.

This policy:

- meets the requirements of the Local Government Act 2020
- outlines the principles which 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 (now Engagement Institute) Spectrum
- applied deliberative engagement principles in appropriate circumstances
- promotes a consistent approach across all Council services
- outlines the process of reporting engagement outcomes back to the community
- ensures diversity in participation and community viewpoint is supported and encouraged.

2. BACKGROUND

Council first adopted a Community Engagement Policy in 2013. A review of the policy took place in 2018 and was subsequently adopted by Council. The Local Government Act 2020 moved from a highly prescriptive approach to consultation and exhibition periods, to a principles-based approach. In line with the new Act, this policy was reviewed and adopted by Council in February 2021. This new review ensures that this policy continues to meet the requirements of the Local Government Act 2020 and the principles of inclusive and transparent community engagement.

Furthermore, this policy is consistent with key priority areas set out in the Council Plan 2025-29 and based upon the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum. The IAP2 spectrum of public participation has been retained as the core foundation for this policy as it allows for different approaches to engage our community and enables Council to deliver *community engagement processes that capture and meet the needs and aspirations of our residents and business owners*.

3. SCOPE

This policy applies to all staff, contract workers, consultants and others who engage with the community on behalf of the Greater Dandenong City Council and serves as a guide to

Councillors. This policy will be applied to all community engagement activities conducted by Council including those that may be required:

- under the *Local Government Act 1989* and the *Local Government Act 2020*
- for the making of Council's Local Laws
- in relation to Council's budget and policy development.

This policy may be supported by internal procedures, guidelines or toolkits for effective implementation.

3.1 WHAT THIS POLICY DOES NOT COVER

While this policy guides Council's approach to community engagement, there are specific areas where it does not apply. These exclusions are based on legal or procedural requirements set out by legislations or existing Council frameworks. The following matters are not covered by this policy:

- Internal Council processes related to responding to service requests or handling customer complaints.
- Engagement processes that follow legal requirements under other Victorian laws, such as land-use planning applications.
- Statutory procedures that continue under the Local Government Act 1989, where those provisions have not been superseded by the Local Government Act 2020.
- Public involvement in formal Council meetings, including submissions, questions submitted in advance, and petitions. These are governed separately through Council's Governance Rules, which are publicly accessible.

4. POLICY

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

Council will:

- ensure that the purpose of engagement is genuine and transparent
- conduct engagement activities using the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum
- employ techniques and approaches to maximise community participation including deliberative engagement practices where required
- provide realistic and accessible 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 their diverse views and priorities
- undertake evaluation processes to ensure continuous improvement with consultation activities

- report back to the community as soon as possible after a Council decision and explain how feedback was considered and/or incorporated into the final outcomes
- ensure all activities undertaken are in accordance with Council’s Privacy and Personal Information Policy and Public Transparency Policy.

4.1 ENGAGEMENT PRINCIPLES AND COMMITMENTS

Community engagement provides opportunities for public involvement in Council decision making, community strengthening and capacity building. Engagement occurs in various forms with differing levels of involvement and is guided by the community engagement principles as set out in s56 of the *Local Government Act 2020*. These are:

Principle	Council’s Commitment
1. A community engagement process must have a clearly defined objective and scope.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop community engagement plans for all engagement processes in accordance with this policy.
2. Participants in community engagement must have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure all information relating to community engagement processes is provided as early as possible. • Identify and address all challenges related to participation in the community engagement plan, including gender impact assessments to ensure consultation is equitable. • In most cases, a community consultation period of at least four weeks is recommended. • A minimum consultation period of 10 business days may be sufficient in some circumstances. • The consultation period should be adapted as appropriate for the level of engagement and influence, taking into consideration whether: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ this is appropriate under relevant legislation, ▪ there is a need for a longer consultation period, after considering the: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – likely level of interest in the engagement matter – complexity of the information which

	<p>needs to be processed and understood</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - level of impact of what is being proposed ▪ the time required to communicate the engagement opportunity widely ▪ this is an update or phase of an engagement matter that the target audience is already familiar with.
<p>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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify key stakeholders and groups that will be affected by the project in the early planning stage. • Select appropriate communication methods and recruitment activities to reduce barriers to representative participation. • Employ deliberative engagement practices for the development of key strategic documents including the Community Vision, Council Plan, Long Term Financial Strategy and Asset Plan.
<p>4. Participants in community engagement are entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and minimise barriers to participation and levels of support required including but not limited to accessibility, language and digital literacy. • Ensure community engagement plans explain how any identified barriers will be addressed.
<p>5. Participants in community engagement are informed of the ways in which the community engagement process will influence Council decision making.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate the level of influence community members will have at the commencement of any process. • Ensure timely and regular feedback throughout the process to keep participants informed. • Provide responses at the conclusion of each process as to how the feedback received was used to influence the outcomes.

4.2 ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

The Greater Dandenong City Council uses the IAP2 spectrum of public participation as the main framework in delivery of all its consultation projects. The IAP2 Spectrum aims to maximise community participation and contains a range of participation goals and engagement promise to the community to achieve the most effective outcomes.

The IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum is designed to assist with the selection of an appropriate level of consultation. The framework is highlighted in the table below:

IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation



IAP2's Spectrum of Public Participation was designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any public participation process. The Spectrum is used internationally, and it is found in public participation plans around the world.

		INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION 				
		INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL		To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
	PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	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.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

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A project may involve one or more of the above levels of consultation depending on the complexity of the project and the decision which needs to be made. Different engagement tools and methods can be used at any stage of the IAP2 spectrum to ensure meaningful participation and feedback. These tools can be tailored to fit the specific needs and context of each stage, whether through public meetings, surveys, workshops, or digital platforms. Legislative requirements can also restrict the level of the spectrum at which Council engages.

The IAP2 framework is complemented by a risk assessment process to assist with defining the level of community engagement required and an internal framework which includes a set of guidelines for different methodologies and tools for a variety of outcomes across the range of the IAP2 spectrum.

4.3 WHY DO WE ENGAGE?

Council conducts community engagement activities to improve its strategic planning and service delivery while fulfilling its requirements under the *Local Government Act 2020*. These activities help to better understand the needs and aspirations of the community and provide a number of benefits to both Council and the community including:

- transparency, integrity and increased trust in Council processes and decisions
- a more well-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 in developing various corporate and statutory planning documents.

4.4 WHO DO WE ENGAGE WITH?

Greater Dandenong City Council seeks to provide opportunities for engagement to our community and key stakeholders, those who live, work and play in our city. Our key stakeholders also include 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 may be different for each consultation, depending on who may be impacted, and Council will seek to ensure they are adequately represented in the engagement process. Also, Council considers inclusive and accessible principles in accordance with its Diversity, Access and Equity Policy in determining who we engage.

4.4.1 Children and Young People

Greater Dandenong is a child safe organisation that is committed to empowering children and young people to have a say on decisions that impact them. The rights of children and young people to be informed and to participate in decision making are legislated by the Victorian Child Safe Standards and supported by the Victorian Child Friendly Cities and Communities charter.

The Community Engagement team, in partnership with Child Safe and Child, Youth and Family, will work to ensure the organisation upholds the Child Safe Standards through the design and implementation of age-appropriate engagement methodology.

4.5 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 involve the community in matters regarding changes to services, changes to infrastructure, Council's Budget and strategic plans. Before reaching out to our community, we will make sure our

questions are truly new, so we don't repeat topics with the same groups within a two-year span. We will rely on existing information whenever possible, respecting everyone's time and input. Engagement should be purposeful and proportional, only taking place when there's something new and meaningful to discover or discuss.

There are some circumstances where Council is mandated by legislation to engage with the community, and this may include 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 be presented with circumstances that require an advisory committee, 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 by advertisement to the broader community according to endorsed selection criteria.

4.5.1 Exemptions

Council values all feedback received when engaging with the community. However, Council may exempt or defer community engagement when it may not be appropriate, including:

- during the caretaker/election period in the lead-up to Council elections
- when it conflicts with local laws, the Local Government Act, or other Victorian or Commonwealth laws or regulations.

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.

4.6 HOW DO WE ENGAGE?

Council's approach to community engagement is grounded in attentive listening and proactive outreach. We value feedback from a variety of sources, not limited to formal communication or engagement channels. This includes input received through social media groups, online comments, mainstream media such as radio talkback, and customer complaints.

To ensure that our engagement efforts are meaningful and produce tangible results, we implement a structured, step-by-step process. Each stage is designed to build upon the previous one, fostering genuine participation and collaboration. The following stepwise plan outlines exactly how we engage:

4.6.1 Plan

The planning stage of any consultation will involve the creation of a project plan which will determine the purpose of engagement, the objectives Council hopes to achieve, who will be engaged and how this can be done most effectively. Engagement activities will be designed to be age appropriate and reference to cultural sensitivities.

4.6.2 Engage

The engagement process will be conducted according to the principles outlined in the *Local Government Act 2020* and Council's overarching objectives as set out in section 4 of this policy. The type of consultation undertaken will depend upon the target audience for the consultation, the size and complexity of the process, and the level of resourcing required.

Two approaches are used by Greater Dandenong City Council:

- a. **Participatory engagement** – This represents the lower two levels of the IAP2 spectrum, inform and consult. This involves broad consultation techniques and will be used when Council is seeking feedback on draft documents such as the Budget or specific strategies and plans.
- b. **Deliberative engagement** - This will involve engagement activities which provide opportunities for participants to weigh up evidence and have considered discussions over a period of time before making a decision. This approach is an example of the top levels of the IAP2 spectrum and seeks to involve, collaborate or empower. It will be used when required by legislation for key strategic documents including the Community Vision, Council Plan, Long Term Financial Strategy and Asset Plan, and in other instances where it is determined to be the best model of engagement.

In both participatory and deliberative engagement processes, a wide array of methods can be employed to involve stakeholders. These approaches may include public forums, workshops, surveys, drop-ins/pop-ups and collaborative decision-making sessions, each designed to foster dialogue, gather diverse perspectives, and encourage active involvement.

4.6.3 Communicate

To meet the needs of our diverse communities, all engagement information will be developed in clear and simple English, and access to interpreter and translation services will be promoted and made available on request. Also, submissions in languages other than English will be encouraged. The results of all consultation activities, and their influence on Council decisions, will be reported back to the community and key stakeholders in a timely and accessible manner to ensure the process is open and transparent. This will be done in a number of ways including the use of social media, Council's corporate website, print media and direct contact with participants.

4.6.4 Evaluate

All community engagement activities undertaken by Council will be required to undergo an evaluation to determine the success of the project, identify improvement opportunities and provide recommendations for future consultations.

4.6.5 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.

5. RESPONSIBILITIES

All Council Officers involved in undertaking community engagement are responsible for ensuring that any community engagement plans and associated activities are compliant with this policy. This also applies to external consultants and contractors engaging the community on behalf on Council.

6. REPORTING, MONITORING AND REVIEW

Reporting	Council will be notified of policy breaches.
Monitoring	No formal monitoring required under the Act.
Review	The Policy will be reviewed after four years by Council's Strategic Communication and Engagement team.
Stakeholder Engagement	Stakeholders from across Council will participate in the review process, including teams responsible for any related Council policies or procedures. Community consultation will also occur.

7. REFERENCES AND RELATED DOCUMENTS

Legislation

[Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006](#)

[Gender Equality Act 2020](#)

[Climate Change Act 2017](#)

[Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 \(Amended\)](#)

[Freedom of Information Act 1982](#)

[Local Government Act 2020.](#)

[Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014](#)

[Public Records Act 1973](#)

Related Council and Other Policies, Procedures, Strategies, Protocols, Guidelines

- Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy
- Climate Change Emergency Strategy and Action Plan 2020-30
- Council Plan (The Plan) 2021-25, including the Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan
- Diversity, Access, and Equity Policy, 2021
- Gender Equality Action Plan 2021-25
- Information Privacy and Health Records Policy
- International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Public Participation Spectrum
- Privacy and Personal Information Policy
- Public Transparency Policy

Administrative Updates

It is recognised that from time to time, circumstance may change leading to the need for minor administrative changes to this document. Where an update does not materially alter this document, such a change may be made administratively. Examples include a change to the name of a Council department, the change to an existing policy or document referred to in this policy and minor updates to legislation and the like which does not have a material impact. All changes or updates which materially alter this policy must be by resolution of Council.

Date	Update