



Community Engagement Policy

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Responsible officer	Manager Community Planning
Policy owner	Senior Community Engagement Officer

1. Introduction

Melton City Council recognises that the involvement of its municipal community in making decisions and plans is essential to good governance. Community engagement provides opportunities for the municipal community to be involved in planning and decision-making because understanding the needs, aspirations, challenges, and concerns of the community improves the planning and delivery of services. Melton City Council acknowledges the diversity of its municipal community whose experience and expertise is valued by Council.

Good community engagement supports the building of respectful relationships. It can also result in community strengthening and capacity building. Hearing from a range of perspectives strengthens decision-making, while encouraging ownership and belonging from all sections of our community. Furthermore, it ensures transparency, integrity and trust in Council processes.

2. Purpose

The purpose of the policy is to provide the direction and principles for Council's whole-of-organisational commitment to high-quality, rigorous, consistent, and well-evaluated community engagement and community participation processes that contribute to Council decision-making.

This document is designed to ensure satisfactory compliance with the *Local Government Act 2020* (the 2020 Act) in its legislated community engagement principles and its operational provisions as at the date of this policy.

The policy also includes provisions which are not currently required, but will come into effect in the future. It is noted that the *Local Government Act 1989* (the 1989 Act) currently still applies to some Council engagement. Future changes to requirements are scheduled in legislation.

This document forms part of Melton City Council's Community Engagement Framework, which consists of:

- Community Engagement Policy (this document)
- Community Engagement Guidelines
- Community Engagement Toolkit.

The aim of the Framework is to increase the ability of employees, Councillors and communities to reach higher levels of productive engagement by:

- Setting out the Community Engagement Principles outlined in the Act and understanding the principles and practices that underpin and support good engagement;
- Realising Council’s commitment to inclusive and respectful engagement and decision-making processes in the organisation and the municipal community;
- Establishing consistent, coordinated and transparent processes for Council’s community engagement activity;
- Providing a framework for understanding and planning engagement; and
- Increasing the participation of the municipal community.

This policy provides the core values underpinning our approach to community engagement. Detailed advice on engagement practice, planning, and implementation is provided in the Community Engagement Guidelines.

3. Scope

This policy applies to all facets of Council operations, as well as day-to-day business activities. This policy applies to the planning, design, implementation and evaluation of community engagement activities as directed by Council, recommended by staff, or legislated by the 2020 Act. Community engagement is the responsibility of all Council service areas, teams and employees. It also applies to contractors and consultants undertaking work on behalf of Council.

Further, it defines the principles underpinning Council’s engagement activities, the role of Council staff and consultants responsible for engaging with the community on behalf of the City of Melton, and the mechanisms which Council will use to engage the municipal community.

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

This policy does not affect or in any way detract from any requirements under the common law.

4. Definitions

Word/Term	Definition
2020 Act	Refers to the <i>Local Government Act 2020</i>
1989 Act	Refers to the <i>Local Government Act 1989</i>
Collaborate	Partner with the community in each aspect of the decision, including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.
Municipal Community/	The 2020 Act defines the “municipal community” as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • people who live in the municipal district of the Council; • people and bodies who are ratepayers of the Council; • traditional owners of land in the municipal district of the Council; • people and bodies who conduct activities in the municipal district of the Council;
Community Engagement	For the purposes of this document: all primary data collection occurring within, or in relation to, the City of Melton community.

Community Engagement Principles	The set of principles that guide each of our community engagement projects at the City of Melton. These include those prescribed in the 2020 Act and those developed in consultation with the Melton community.
Community Engagement Committee	This committee that develops, monitors, reviews and supports Council's Community Engagement Framework internally. The committee is made up of Council officers and is chaired by the Chief Executive Officer.
Consult	Obtain community feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.
Council	Melton City Council, including the Mayor, Councillors, Chief Executive and staff.
Deliberative Engagement	Deliberative engagement is a form of community engagement that requires participants to critically consider arguments and weigh-up competing demands in order to determine preferences for resolving public policy questions. It takes place at the highest three levels of influence on the IAP2 spectrum, 'Involve', 'Collaborate' or 'Empower' and engages a group of people who are representative of those affected by the matter under discussion. It requires a level of engagement that is measured, considered, and has the involvement of others. Deliberation can be scaled to fit the size, complexity and impact and of the project, as well as the organisational resourcing available to undertake the engagement.
Empower	Providing opportunities and resources for communities to contribute to solutions by valuing local talents and skills and acknowledging their capacity to be decision makers in their own lives.
Engagement	The process by which we seek to involve the community in decision making processes.
IAP2	The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) is the the peak body for the community and stakeholder engagement sector, and author of the IAP2 spectrum of public participation, which categorises engagement as Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate, Empower. Website – www.iap2.org.au
Inform	Provide the community with information, including balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the issue, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.
Involve	Work directly with the community throughout the process to ensure that community concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.
Participatory Engagement	Participatory practices take place at the first two levels of influence on the spectrum, 'Inform' and 'Consult' and involves 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.
Public Participation	Seeking and facilitating the involvement of those potentially affected by, or interested in, a decision, including policy, program and service provision.
Stakeholder	Someone who may be affected by or have a specific interest in the decision or issue under consideration.
Submission	A written response to a document made available for feedback during a public exhibition or consultation period.

5. Policy

5.1 Policy Statement

The role of a Council is to provide good governance in its municipal district for the benefit and wellbeing of the municipal community. In performing its role a Council must give effect to the overarching governance principles and the five groups of supporting principles, which include community engagement principles. Engagement is a two-way relationship between Council and community conducted in accordance with the community engagement principles. Council conducts community engagement activities to access the diverse knowledge of our community to better understand their perspectives, needs and aspirations and in order to inform decision making and achieve better outcomes. This knowledge improves Council's strategic planning, service delivery, and decision making.

5.2 Policy Rationale

The Community Engagement Framework outlines Council's approach to community engagement. It provides structure and guidance for Council's whole-of-organisational commitment to high quality, consistent and well evaluated community engagement processes that contribute to Council decision making, in order to:

- Give effect to the community engagement principles outlined in the 2020 Act;
- Gain a better understanding of the municipal community's perspective on emerging and existing issues that affect them currently and in the future;
- Consider the different needs and appropriate forms of engagement for different groups within the municipal community;
- Enhance civic engagement through assisting Council and its officers to understand, and be informed by, the views of the municipal community when making decisions on their behalf;
- Improve the policy or plan being developed, making it more relevant and practical to those affected by the decision;
- Increase the level of community ownership and acceptance of decisions affecting the municipal community;
- Build stronger community advocacy or support for a project or community issue;
- Ensure feedback is provided to the municipal community regarding the impacts of their input on Council decision-making.

Community engagement helps bring differing views together to work towards the best decision for the community. Effective community engagement seeks to ensure that the municipal community is well-informed about issues, strategies and/or plans that may directly or indirectly affect them. It also ensures that Council implements the community engagement principles across its service delivery areas and in relation to the key strategic documents outlined in the Act.

Council may not be in a position to undertake community engagement activities in situations where:

- A decision needs to be made quickly, for example, any issues relating to community safety or health; or
- A legal, commercial or legislative restriction makes consultation impossible; or
- A legal process, with or without its own consultation, is set out in legislation.

Through provision of this Community Engagement Policy, Council aims to deliver effective and consistent community engagement that appropriately informs Council decision making. This policy covers all engagement processes, including those delivered through its annual Community Engagement Program.

5.3 Policy Principles and Commitment

Melton City Council's approach to community engagement is based on the requirements of the 2020 Act and the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum of engagement activities: Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate and Empower.

The following principles underpin Melton City Council's approach to community engagement:

Policy Principle	Council's Commitment
<p>The community engagement process has a clearly defined objective and scope.</p>	<p>All community engagement is planned by clearly identifying the purpose, scope and objectives of the community's participation, in the community engagement plan.</p> <p>Council will clearly communicate the reasons for engagement with participants.</p>
<p>Participants in community engagement will have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation.</p>	<p>Council will ensure the community has sufficient information to enable meaningful participation in the engagement process.</p> <p>Council will endeavour to provide information that is objective, relevant, timely, accessible, and easy to understand.</p>
<p>Participants in community engagement will be representative of the persons and groups affected by the matter.</p>	<p>Council will identify the people, communities and stakeholders who are affected by and interested in the topic of engagement.</p> <p>Council will involve and hear from participants that represent the affected and interested groups of the matter under discussion.</p>
<p>Participants in community engagement are entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement.</p>	<p>Council will consider the needs and perspectives of all groups that may want to be involved in the process.</p> <p>Council will seek to obtain the views of a broad cross section of the community.</p> <p>Council will endeavour to reduce the physical, social, and cultural barriers to participation.</p> <p>Council will allow participants sufficient time for review of information and participation in varied engagement activities.</p>
<p>Participants in community engagement are informed of the ways in which the community engagement process will influence Council decision making.</p>	<p>Council will identify the appropriate level of engagement for each project according to the IAP2 Framework.</p> <p>Council will inform participants of the level of influence they will have, as described in the IAP2 spectrum's promise to the public.</p>

Policy Principle	Council's Commitment
	Council will inform communities about issues and provide feedback as to how input has been used to inform Council decisions.
Be inclusive, listen and create partnerships	Council will provide opportunities for diverse members of the community to participate. This includes considering engagement opportunities with regard to gender, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) background, Aboriginal &/or Torres Strait Islander descent, and people with a disability. Council will listen to and respect differences of opinion.
Be purposeful and authentic	Council will seek purposeful engagement and regularly involve the community in ways that are timely, open and easily understood as genuine opportunities for the community to influence a decision.
Be innovative and continuously improve	Council is committed to learning from each engagement experience to improve its approach and to seek new ways to engage the community.

5.4 Charter of Human Rights

This policy has been assessed against the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 as being consistent with that Act and, in particular, as promoting the rights of members of the Community:

- Not to have their privacy interfered with (section 13); and
- Take part in public life (section 18), by having the opportunity to:
 - Participate in the conduct of Council affairs; and
 - Have access to Council and Council information

5.5 Level and Type of Community Engagement

Levels of Community Engagement:

The five levels of engagement outlined on the IAP2 spectrum will be utilised to meet our commitment to the community.

This policy utilises the International Association for Public Participation's (IAP2) *Public Participation Spectrum* to guide the range and extent of participation at each of the five levels. The five levels are Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate, and Empower.

Council will call for different levels of engagement, depending on the significance, complexity and anticipated impact of the issue under discussion, along with the stakeholders to be engaged.

Types of Community Engagement:

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

Deliberative Engagement

Deliberative engagement is a form of community engagement that invites participants to critically consider arguments and weigh-up competing demands in order to determine preferences for resolving public policy questions. It takes place at the highest three levels of influence on the IAP2 spectrum, 'Involve', 'Collaborate' or 'Empower' and engages a group of people who are representative of those affected by the matter under discussion. It requires a level of engagement that is measured, considered, and has the involvement of others. Deliberation can be scaled to fit the size and impact of the project.

Participatory Engagement

Participatory practices take place at the first two levels of influence on the spectrum, '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.

Submissions Process

On matters where the only form of community participation is an invitation to make submissions, engagement on the matter is governed by section 223 of the Local Government Act 1989. Council will continue to proceed in a manner modelled on section 223 of the Local Government Act 1989.

Matters of Council that continue to require a Hearing of Submissions process under Section 223 of the Local Government Act 1989 are listed in the Community Engagement Guidelines.

5.6 Statutory Requirements

Some elements of community engagement are directed by statutory requirements. Under the 2020 Act, Council has a statutory obligation to develop the following strategic documents in consultation with the community:

- A long term Community Vision
- The four-year Council Plan
- Financial Plan
- Asset Plan
- Revenue and rating planning
- Planning and financial management

Under the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 Council has a statutory requirement to develop a four-year Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan. At Melton City Council, the Municipal Public Health Plan is incorporated into the four year Council Plan, creating the Council and Wellbeing Plan.

Council will meet its statutory obligations by ensuring the community have an opportunity to participate in the development of these plans.

Matter requiring engagement	Level of engagement required
Annual budget	Participatory engagement
Revenue and rating plan	Participatory engagement
Community Vision	Deliberative engagement
Council Plan	Deliberative engagement
Financial Plan	Deliberative engagement
Asset Plan	Deliberative engagement
Making of a local law	Participatory engagement
Selling of land	Participatory engagement
Leasing of land	Level to be selected depending on the complexity of the matter
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

Those matters where the level of engagement is not specified in the table above should seek advice from Council's Community Engagement staff.

As outlined in the 2020 Act, the Mayor will lead the engagement with the municipal community for the development of the Council Plan. This may include activities such as:

- Opening specific community engagement events;
- Championing the importance of the engagement and their influence on Council decision-making.
- Other roles as required.

5.7 Informing the community of outcomes

Reporting of outcomes and updates will always be available online through Council's Melton Conversations engagement platform, as well as provided directly to those who have provided contact details and provided input, made a formal submission or asked to be kept informed.

All outcomes of Council decisions made at Council meetings are also publically available on Council's website via the meeting minutes, with the exception of items that are considered to contain confidential information on the grounds provided in section 3(1) of the *Local Government Act 2020*.

A summary of engagement projects and their outcomes are published in Council's Annual Report.

5.8 Application of Policy

The process of community engagement strengthens local democracy by providing opportunity for the community to have their voices heard. Community engagement does not necessarily mean achieving consensus, however it does involve seeking broad input from a representative sample to inform the best possible solution for Council and the community.

Council will apply community engagement methodologies appropriate to the circumstances and desired outcomes of any specific engagement, as per the Community Engagement Guidelines. Council will measure the effectiveness of Council's engagement activities and processes and maintain a record of Council's community engagement.

Under the 2020 Act Council must undertake formal deliberative engagement processes for the following strategic documents:

- A long term Community Vision
- The four-year Council Plan
- Financial Plan
- Asset Plan.

Other key policies are required to undertake formal engagement processes as required, including:

- Annual Budget
- Revenue and Rating strategy
- Review of local laws.

5.9 Training, Resources and Capacity Building

Internal training and information-sharing opportunities are provided for staff and Councillors involved in community engagement. The Community Engagement Guidelines provide advice on the steps necessary for undertaking a successful engagement project. Other resources are available via the Community Engagement Toolkit and will be continuously reviewed, improved and expanded to provide the tools necessary for staff to develop and maintain best practice in community engagement.

6. Monitoring and Evaluation

Council commits to monitoring processes, performance measurement and evaluation to understand the overall level of success of the policy and associated engagement projects.

7. Responsibility /Accountability

7.1	<p>Manager – Community Planning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible for this policy
7.2	<p>Executive and Managers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of implementation and adherence of this policy
7.3	<p>Staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adhere to and implement the policy
7.4	<p>Consultants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adhere to the policy
7.5	<p>Community Engagement Committee</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal consultancy and advisory role, including policy review

8 References and links to legislation and other documents

Name	Location
Local Government Act 2020 (Vic)	www.legislation.vic.gov.au
Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic)	www.legislation.vic.gov.au
Local Government Act 1989 (Vic)	www.legislation.vic.gov.au