

Setting Governing Policy

The following provides an overarching background to the setting of individual Governing Policy.

Purpose: The purpose of Hepburn Shire Council is to help bring about and administer the needs and wellbeing of its municipality. Achievement of high performance to our purpose is reflected in Council's vision - *Our Council: the desired state of community recognition of Council*.

Setting Tone: Council is the critical social system charged with leadership responsibility for setting the strategic direction and maintaining oversight of Hepburn Shire. In this role the culture, behaviour and actions of Council are highly visible to our municipality and other stakeholders.

As such, the *'tone at the top'* displayed by this social system can directly impact on community recognition through the culture and behaviour of the organisation.

Council is the highest level decision-making cohort in the organisation. At the apex of this decision-making is Governing Policy: *the direction from Council of what their intentions are in terms of governance* – 'tone from the top'.

Councillor Code of Conduct: Ethics and public accountability are essential features of effective local government. They refer to the culture, processes, structures and rules that ensure those in public office act in the wider public interest, rather than their own self-interest. They are an essential feature of good governance. Ethics are the rules that define the conduct of councillors in order to ensure that the public is treated fairly and with equality. Sound ethics help councillors make better decisions in the public interest, as well as help people evaluate the decisions taken on their behalf by Council.

Governing Policy: Governing policies act as guidelines for the CEO and Executive in the development of matching Managing (Council) Policy and Procedures - through which to run the organisation.

Core Values: Core values support the vision, shape the culture and reflect what Council values. They are the essence of the organisation's identity, and the principles and beliefs that underpin the decision-making processes.

Culture Setting: Culture is both a risk and an opportunity. If not taken seriously by Council it can lead to the destruction of community values - *the non-negotiable core principles or standards that the community's citizens wish to maintain* - and community respect for Council.

Culture is also a key organisational capability and fundamental to an organisation's long-term sustainable success and helps characterise the Shire in its community. It is crucial to the achievement of the Council Plan and other strategic goals, and is critical to the well-being of our CEO and his staff. Positive and aligned corporate cultures can motivate employees to perform and engage with their work, align behaviours to common values and purpose, share knowledge and insights, be more productive and responsive, and build trust. Organisational culture is the responsibility of the CEO.

As Council we have a duty to care. The collection of Governing Policy represents the guiding principles that lay down a desired governance framework that can help our people understand the difference between right and wrong, and our community better understand the role of Council.

Governing Policy - Community Engagement

Community engagement refers to the processes by which local government provide opportunities for the community to participate in and influence its decision-making.¹

Community is defined as the entire population of a municipality which is made up of many different local and shared interest groups and individuals.²

Councils make decisions about a diverse range of community needs, such as recreational facilities, planning and waste disposal. To cater for these needs, transparent and well-managed public participation can help to better inform local government policies and their translation into effective strategies, programs and projects. The real-life experiences of community stakeholders can make a valuable contribution to decision-making, and an open and deliberative process can enhance stakeholders' perceptions of the credibility of a decision. Conversely, inadequate public participation can alienate sections of the community and undermine trust, and is more likely to result in poorly informed decisions.³

Council believes that participative governance provides the best outcomes for the municipality, and supports new opportunities to consult and involve its communities. However, Council recognises that it is ultimately accountable for decision-making.

That Council:

- 1.1. Reinforces democratic values and strengthen local democracy by:
 - Consultation, with feed-back, on issues which impact on the local community;
 - Providing full and clear information to the community through regular newsletters, proactive use of the media, reports and publications;
 - Providing opportunities for input through council advisory and special committees, specialist groups, focus groups, and public submissions;
 - Provide for the community to meet with the mayor and councillors.
- 1.2. In reinforcing these democratic values:
 - Increases citizens' knowledge about a community and/or the issue being addressed;
 - Encourages citizens to co-create additional knowledge and understanding - and applying that knowledge;
 - Uses that knowledge to improve the community or address the identified problem;
 - Creates future opportunities for citizens to engage each other;
 - Ensures that these opportunities and effective communications becomes a regular and on-going component of the community engagement process;
 - Ensures clarity and honesty about the process, and provide a public record of the sponsors, outcomes, and range of views and ideas expressed;
 - Promotes in all actions and at all levels – *Our Council*.
- 1.3. Promotes the use of open public submissions, including:
 - Inviting submissions from the community on critical areas of council decision-making;
 - Providing a standard template for submissions (that imposes no bias on input);
 - Ensuring that all public submissions are made accessible to the community on receipt.

¹ Adapted from: Bradford, Alison, 2016, Community engagement and local government, Masters by Research thesis, School of Management, Operations and Marketing, University of Wollongong

² Good Governance Guide

³ VAGO, 2017, Public Participation and Community Engagement: Local Government Sector, Victorian Auditor-General's Report