COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

POLICY NUMBER:	79 (C)
NAME OF POLICY:	COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY
DATE OF NEXT REVIEW:	June 2025
DATE APPROVED:	23 February 2021
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
REFERENCES:	Local Government Act 2020
	Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006
	Equal Opportunity Act 2021
	Planning and Environment Act 1987
	Disability Act 2016
	Privacy and Data Protection Act 2004
	Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008
	Emergency Management Act 2013
	Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act 1986
	Road Management Act 2004
	Other relevant legislative instruments
	IA2 Public Participation Spectrum

INTRODUCTION

Community engagement is critical to the operation of Council and strengthens its relationship with the community. This policy is also an important part of Council's transition to the new Local Government Act 2020 ('the Act') which promotes the importance of community engagement.

In developing this policy, Council undertook a significant community consultation and engagement project to review previous engagement activities, hear community preferences for engagement and communication and seek insight into the development of this document. Those findings have shaped the development of this policy.

Hepburn Shire Council recognises the strong commitment of our citizens and stakeholders to public participation. We embrace this commitment and its important role in contributing to Council decision making.

DEFINITIONS

The Act	Local Government Act 2020 (VIC)
Council	Hepburn Shire Council
Councillors	Elected representatives of Hepburn Shire Council
Council employees	Employees of Hepburn Shire Council
Hepburn Shire citizens	Residents and ratepayers of Hepburn Shire Council
Community led engagement	Forums, community group meetings and other gatherings that consider the subject matter of community engagement projects and provide feedback in a form consistent with engagement activities and feedback sought.
IAP2	International Association of Public Participation
Strategic Planning	A strategic plan involves setting a long-term vision and direction. This will be supported by detailed plans which outline how the vision and direction will be achieved.
Integrated Strategic Planning and Reporting Framework	The framework information has been designed to assist councils as they implement the Strategic Planning Principles of the Act and to take an integrated approach to planning, monitoring and performance reporting. Its purpose to help achieve best practice for councils and better outcomes for communities.

	It includes the development of The Community Vision, Council Plan, Financial Plan and Asset Plan required under the Act.
Stakeholders	Community groups, businesses, health and community service organisations, Council advisory group members, schools and education institutions, Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation and First Nations organisations, users of Council services and facilities, people who work in the Shire, people who visit the Shire.

SCOPE

This Policy is applicable to all Hepburn Shire Council Councillors, employees, volunteers, and contractors working for the Council. The policy applies to all community engagement projects undertaken by Council except where processes are governed by legislation and regulations other than the Act, and other Council policies and procedures.

PURPOSE

This purpose of this Community Engagement Policy is to:

- State Council's commitment to community engagement.
- Outline how Council will engage with the community.
- Provide the framework for the planning and review of engagement projects that promotes continuous improvement and transparency.
- Meet Council's obligations under the Act.

OBJECTIVE

The objectives of this policy are to:

- Strengthen the relationship between Council and the community.
- Recognise the creativity and expertise of Hepburn Shire citizens and stakeholders in identifying strengths and challenges, as well as developing solutions for our community.
- Raise awareness of Council's community engagement practices and the different types and levels of engagement required for different projects.

- Build a framework for planning and ongoing continuous improvement in community engagement.
- Provide Council employees with the framework (to be complemented by an associated procedure) and confidence to plan and execute community engagement projects.
- Create a collaborative environment where all participants in community engagement including Hepburn Shire citizens, stakeholders, Councillors and Council employees feel valued and respected.

LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

The Local Government Act 2020 (VIC) (the Act) sets out the requirements for the development of this Community Engagement Policy. The Act requires that the Community Engagement Policy:

- Gives effect to the Acts community engagement principles.
- Can be applied to the making of local laws, budgets, strategies, and policies.
- Describes engagement to be used based on the complexity and significance of the subject matter – along with the resources available.
- Outlines deliberative engagement practices to be used when developing Council's Community Vision, Council Plan, Financial Plan and Asset Plan.

The Community Engagement Principles outlined in the Act require that, when undertaking community engagement projects, Council must:

- Provide a clearly defined objective and scope.
- Provide objective, relevant, and timely information to inform participants.
- Ensure participation is representative of affected persons and groups.
- Provide reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement.
- Inform participants about how the process will influence Council decision making.

POLICY

Our commitment to community

Hepburn Shire Council promises to:

- Ensure community access to engagement processes is as broad as possible.

- Use simple and clear language when we communicate.

- Actively listen without judgement to what people say.

- Respect diverse views and request mutual respect between all parties.

- Value the creativity and expertise of the community in our decision making and problem solving.

- Ensure all contributions are recorded.

- Report back to the community on what we have heard.

- Base the engagement framework on community recommendations to the greatest extent possible.

- Provide feedback on where input has not been incorporated into the outcome and explain the reasons for our decision.

- Measure and assess the effectiveness of our community engagement practices and commit to ongoing continuous improvement and innovation.

What is Community Engagement?

Community engagement is an ongoing process of communication between Council and Hepburn Shire citizens and stakeholders about important projects and plans that will impact our community. The purpose of community engagement is for Council to hear the community's voice, unearth opportunities and explore challenges and solutions to inform Council decision making. Council values and respects community input.

Community engagement recommendations and findings, along with legislative requirements and Council's roles, responsibilities and resources are all important elements of Council decision making. Council will weigh and balance input regarding each of these elements to inform decision making.

Hepburn Shire Council has adopted the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum of Public Participation which is the industry standard for community engagement. The spectrum sets out 5 levels of engagement: inform, consult, involve, collaborate, and empower. The level of engagement required for each project will depend on the specific circumstances of each project and incorporate specific provision for engagement processes outlined in legislation or other Hepburn Shire Council policies and/or procedures. How Council determines what level of engagement is required for each project is considered later in this policy.

When do we engage?

Community engagement occurs with every interaction Council has with the community. It can happen formally through organised engagement activities, or informally through conversations and interactions with Council employees and Councillors. Engagement is usually formalised through a planned community engagement project for major projects and initiatives, strategic planning, changes in Council services or use of public facilities and spaces and other projects that will have an impact on the liveability, amenity, environment, economy or wellbeing of Hepburn Shire citizens and stakeholders.

There are some circumstances where we will not be able to engage. Some of these circumstances may include when Council is not the lead agency for a project, or when Council is responding to a natural, social or economic disaster and the timeliness of the response takes precedence.

Level of engagement

IAP2's Spectrum of Public Participation outlines the different levels of engagement. Each level has different objectives and levels of influence when seeking community feedback.

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.

Source: IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

Determining the level of engagement

For each project, Council will determine what level of engagement is required by completing the level of engagement matrix below. Council employees will consider each project's strategic importance, impact, complexity, risk, community sentiment, level of influence and project budget.

After consideration of these factors and scoring has been conducted the project will be allocated a low, medium, or high level of engagement. A low level of engagement aligns with the IAP2 Spectrum's *Inform and Consult* level. A medium level of engagement aligns with the IAP2 levels of *consult and involve*. A high level of engagement aligns with the IAP2 levels of involve, collaborate, and empower.

Level of engagement matrix

This matrix will guide how Council employees determine what level of engagement is required for an engagement project.

Level	Low	Medium	High
Strategic importance	The community engagement project does not relate to Strategic Planning and has limited scope and impact.	The community engagement project relates to supporting a strategic plan or public infrastructure or services.	The community engagement project relates to a strategic plan within the Integrated Strategic Planning and Reporting Framework under the Act or relates to a major project or initiative.
Impact	The subject matter of the community engagement project will have a low impact to a small group of people.	The subject matter of the community engagement project will impact multiple groups across the Council area. It will affect access to services and amenity.	The subject matter of the community engagement project will impact all Council residents. It will impact the future direction or long-term amenity of the Council area.
Complexity	The community engagement project is a single-issue matter that can be easily understood.	The community engagement project will require consideration of options and priorities. Some community education will be required.	The community engagement project will require broad engagement to unearth options and solutions for prioritisation. Community education will be required due to the breadth of the subject matter.

Level	Low	Medium	High
Risk	No or limited risks identified	Some risks have been identified – but are able to be offset with appropriate mitigation strategies.	Multiple risks have been identified. Mitigation strategies have been developed, but the risks have not been adequately offset.
Community sentiment	There has been a small number of citizen or community group enquiries or sentiment expressed in past interactions.	Some interest and/or sentiment has been expressed by Hepburn Shire citizens or stakeholders in past interactions, media reports or other engagement activities.	There is a large degree of interest or sentiment expressed by Hepburn Shire citizens or stakeholders. The subject matter is controversial, and no common view has been reached. The subject matter has been raised by multiple interactions, media reports and at other engagement activities.
Influence	A decision has been made that is being communicated by Council.	Council is seeking input and feedback from community on identified options. The influence relates to the refinement and prioritisation of those options. Council will consider the feedback of Hepburn Shire citizens and stakeholders in decision making.	Hepburn Shire citizens and stakeholders are asked to unearth options and solutions and prioritise their importance through an iterative engagement process. The findings will form Community recommendations to be considered by Council. Council will provide feedback on what recommendations were adopted and those that were not.

Level	Low	Medium	High
Budget	The project can be readily funded through existing budgets.	The project may require external funding or may require change to existing budgets.	The project will have a material effect on budgets.

Scoring

Once a Council employee has considered each factor, and whether a high, medium, or low circumstance best relates to their project, they will allocate a score for each factor Low=1, Medium=2 and High=3. They will add the score of each level together and determine the level of engagement based on the scale below.

Scale

The scale below indicates whether a Low, Medium or High level of engagement is required, what level of public participation on the IAP2 spectrum aligns with each level and what engagement activities might be appropriate under each level.

Score range	Level of engagement indicated
7-12	**LOW LEVEL** This level of engagement is usually indicated a decision has already been made and Council is communicating it to Hepburn Shire citizens and stakeholders. This level of engagement aligns with the *inform and consult* level in the IAP2 spectrum. Possible engagement methods for the *inform and consult* level might include updates through the Participate Hepburn site, Council's website, Councils Facebook page, newsletters, emails, letters or phone calls.
13-17	**MEDIUM LEVEL** This level of engagement is usually indicated where options and alternatives have been unearthed and engagement focuses on refinement and prioritisation. However, it is broad enough to extend to more in-depth engagement process where early rounds of engagement are used to unearth options and solutions, with following rounds refining options and preferences. This level of engagement aligns with the *consult and involve* levels of the IAP2 spectrum. Possible engagement methods suitable for the *consult* and *involve* levels might include surveys, workshops, pop ups, listening posts, information sessions and focus groups.
18-21	**HIGH LEVEL**

Score range	Level of engagement indicated
	This level of engagement will be suitable for projects that sit within the Integrated Strategic Planning and Reporting Framework outlined in the Act or will impact the future direction or long-term amenity in the Council area. This level of engagement requires significant resources to enable communications, facilitation, analysis, and engagement.
	This level of engagement aligns with the *involve, collaborate, and empower* levels of the IAP2 spectrum. Engagement activities might include committees, panels, community reference group, facilitated or deliberative workshops, deliberative polling and ballots.

Resourcing

After the level of engagement has been determined Council employees will identify the budget and resources that are available to undertake the project. If the resources are not sufficient Council employees will work with their Manager and the Executive team to determine if other resources might be made available, or if the project will be shaped by the budget and resources at hand.

Deliberative engagement

Deliberative engagement is generally considered to be a more in-depth form of community engagement that harnesses the community's creativity and expertise to unearth community priorities and solutions. A small, but representative group of the community will develop a deeper understanding of the subject matter and work together to reach a representative or common view.

When will we use deliberative engagement?

The Act requires that deliberative engagement practices be used in the development of the Community Vision, Council Plan, Financial Plan and Asset Plan. Other circumstances where deliberative engagement might be used include where there is a complex problem facing the community that needs to be that requires a decision with broad community ownership to be reached, outside expertise is needed to inform participation and decision making, the decision will require participants to weigh and balance priorities against each other and make trade-offs.

Deliberative engagement practices

- **Define the community's role:** We will ensure that a small but representative group of Hepburn Shire citizens who are taking part in deliberative engagement have a clear understanding of the purpose of the project, the questions that are being asked of them and the level of influence their recommendations will have on Council decision making.

- **Iterative process:** Prior to conducting deliberative engagement Council will seek broad input from the community to provide participants with insight into community views and priorities and inform the framing of the deliberative process.

- **Informed:** Participants will be provided with a broad range of information to inform their deliberations.

- **Representative**: Participants in deliberative engagement will be representative of the population of the Council area to the maximum extent possible.

- **Recruitment:** Participants in deliberative engagement will be selected via a dual process of selection by random invitation and an expression of interest process.

- **Transparent:** Engagement findings, and how they were used in the development of plans or decision making are made available to the community.

- **A common view:** Participants in deliberative engagement work together to develop a position that represents a common view. Although it may not be a consensus view, all participants have the right to be heard.

Level of engagement for deliberative engagement

Deliberative engagement will usually sit across the involve, collaborate, and empower levels of engagement on the IAP2 spectrum. Possible deliberative engagement methods might include online deliberative polling, deliberative mapping, deliberative facilitated workshop and deliberative conference.

ENGAGEMENT PLANNING

Council promotes a consistent approach to planning for engagement projects. Councils planning for engagement projects will support the framework for continuous improvement. Considerations of the planning process will include:

- **History:** Previous plans or studies that have been conducted regarding this project or subject matter and their recommendations.

- **Context:** Legislative requirements relevant to the project. Related regional, state, or federal government strategies. Where the project or subject matter sits within the Councils strategic planning framework. Local interest and coverage regarding the project or subject matter.

- **Participants:** Identification of citizens and stakeholders that will be impacted by this project or subject matter. Identification of any accessibility issues or barriers to participation for identified citizens and stakeholders. What communication methods and engagement activities best suited to identified citizens and stakeholders. What information will be required to assist Hepburn Shire citizens and

stakeholders that participate. Whether there is an opportunity for community led engagement. Target for the number of participants to take part in engagement.

- **Purpose:** Why Council is engaging with Hepburn Shire citizens and stakeholders. What information and feedback Council needs to inform decision making or plan development?

- **Budget and resources:** Budget for the project. Internal resources allocated to the project. Whether the project will be carried out internally or by external consultants.

- **Timeframes for completion:** Legislative or grant deadlines. Council deadlines. Specific tasks and deadlines.

- **Key messages:** Purpose. Timelines. Information to assist with participation in the engagement process. Participation opportunities.

- **Level of engagement:** Level of engagement to be undertaken identified through completion of the level of engagement matrix.

- **Level of influence**: What level of influence will community feedback and input have on Council decision making?

- **Risk:** Identification of risks and mitigation strategies.

REVIEW AND REPORTING

Council is committed to community engagement practices that are transparent and evolving through continuous improvement. Council's report template for items presented to a Council meeting include a section on community and stakeholder engagement.

Council's regular review and improvement requirements will relate to projects that have a level of engagement at inform or consult per the IAP spectrum. Community engagement projects that have been determined to have a level of engagement of involve, collaborate, or empower will be reviewed both during and at the completion of the project.

Milestone review:

A milestone review is a status update on the progress and effectiveness of the community engagement project to date, and whether it is meeting its purpose, goals, and deadlines.

A milestone review will be conducted during the rollout of a community engagement project. The milestone review will occur at an appropriate point of the community engagement project and consider participation rates, effectiveness of engagement activities, whether sufficient feedback has been received and identification of opportunities for improvement during the project.

Project review:

A project review is an assessment of the project which occurs at completion. It considers the effectiveness and outcomes of the project and lessons learnt.

At the completion of each community engagement project a review will be conducted to assist Council identify areas for improvement. This project review will form part of the content of Council reports to be considered at Council meetings. The project review will consider:

- **Community satisfaction:** Feedback from participants about their satisfaction with the community engagement process and outcomes.

- **Engagement activities:** Accessibility, achievement of purpose, quantity and quality of feedback received.

- **Participation:** Number of participants, demographics of participants, barriers to participation, suggestions for future improvement.

- **Communication:** Methods, frequency, reach and effectiveness.

- **Level of engagement:** Was the identified level of engagement (IAP2 spectrum) reached. If yes, project indicators that demonstrate this. If no, why?

- **Transparency:** Summary engagement report, including actions and recommendations published on Participate Hepburn website.

- **Employee and community experience:** Feedback from Council employees and community to determine if they felt safe and supported during the project.

Reporting

Outcomes of milestone and project reviews will be reported through Council reports to ordinary meetings.

IMPLEMENTATION

This policy will be placed on the intranet, Council's website and provided to all new employees and communicated to all existing employees.

REVIEW

In line with the Policy Framework this policy will be reviewed every four years (once per every Council term) or earlier if required by legislation or Council resolution.