



Council Policy Manual

WEST WIMMERA SHIRE COUNCIL

COUNCIL POLICY	
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY	Policy No:
	Adopted by Council: 17 February 2021
	Next review date: February 2025
Senior Manager:	Director Corporate and Community Services
Responsible Officer:	Business Performance Manager
Functional Area:	Corporate Services
Introduction & Background	<p>West Wimmera Shire Council recognises that the involvement of the community in making decisions and plans is fundamental to good governance. Council values the experience and expertise of members of our community and recognises the value of that experience and expertise in decision making.</p> <p>This policy establishes a clear standard of engagement, having regard to the significance, complexity and anticipated level of impact associated with decisions made regarding major projects, policies, strategies and service planning.</p> <p>Council is committed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • offering opportunities for the community to contribute to the decisions made by Council • effective communication of information between Council and the community • ensuring effective community representation in the decision making process • decision making that is transparent and works in the interest of the community, considering our diverse stakeholders • ensuring effective community engagement planning.
Purpose & Objectives	<p>The objectives of the policy are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulate Council's commitment to engage with our community on decisions and development of plans and policies that affect them



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve understanding of community and stakeholder engagement within Council and the community • Outline how community engagement is integrated into Council activities in order to support decision making and strengthen relationships and partnerships. 	
Scope	<p>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 <i>Local Government Act 2020</i>.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>The policy does not apply to community engagement processes that are subject to prescribed processes imposed by other Victorian legislation such as land-use planning applications or other Council processes such as service requests or complaints.</p>	
Definitions	Community	<p>Refers to the people who have a stake and interest in the West Wimmera and includes people who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Live, work, study or conduct business or are involved in local community groups or organisations in the municipality • Visit, use or enjoy the services, facilities and public places located within the municipality
	Community engagement	<p>Community engagement is a planned process with the specific purpose of working with individuals and groups to encourage active involvement in decisions that affect them or are of interest to them.</p>
	Consultation	<p>The activity of seeking input on a matter.</p>
	Deliberation	<p>Deliberation is an approach to decision-making in which</p>



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		stakeholders consider relevant facts from multiple points of view, converse with one another to think critically about options before them and enlarge their perspectives, opinions, and understandings.
	IAP2	The International Association for Public Participation – an international association which seeks to promote and improve the practice of public participation throughout the world. IAP2 provides templates and methodologies based on global practice and research.
	Process	A relationship between key steps, activities, tasks, policies and / or resources.
	Public participation	A term used by IAP2 meaning the involvement of those affected (interested or impacted) by a decision in the decision-making process. We use the term interchangeably with Community Engagement, Stakeholder Engagement or Consultation.
	Stakeholder	An individual or group with a strong interest in the decisions of Council and are directly impacted by their outcomes.

Policy Details

1.	<p>Principles of community engagement</p> <p>Council adopts the following principles and commitments which will inform all community engagement processes. These principles are set out in Section 56 of the <i>Local Government Act 2020</i>.</p> <p>Council has built on these principles to describe our commitment which reflects the values and expectations of the West Wimmera community as determined in consultation with the community.</p>
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Principle	Our Commitment
The community engagement process has a clearly defined objective and scope.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community engagement is planned by clearly identifying the purpose, scope and objectives of the community's participation, in the community engagement plan. • We will communicate the reasons for engagement with participants.
Participants in community engagement will have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will ensure the community has the information necessary to participate meaningfully in the engagement activities. • We will endeavour to provide information that is objective, relevant, timely and easy to understand.
Participants in community engagement will be representative of the persons and groups affected by the matter.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will identify the people, communities and stakeholders who are affected by and interested in the topic of engagement. • We will reach out to our community to involve and hear from participants that represent the affected and interested groups.
Participants in community engagement are entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will reduce physical, social and cultural barriers to participation. • We will consider the needs and perspectives of all groups that may want to be involved in the process. • We will seek to obtain the views of a broad cross section of the community, especially when there is a quiet majority. • We will allow sufficient time for review of information and participation in varied engagement activities.



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	<p>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"> • We recognise the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) as the international standard for effective community engagement. We will be guided by IAP2 recommendations. • We will inform participants of the level of influence they will have, as described in the IAP2 spectrum's promise to the public, and we will ensure they know the outcomes of any decisions made.
<p>2.</p>	<p>Level of Community Engagement</p> <p>Council will call for different levels of engagement, having regard to the significance, complexity and anticipated level of impact of what is being proposed, and the stakeholders we need to target.</p> <p>This policy adopts the International Association for Public Participation's (IAP2) <i>Public Participation Spectrum</i> to guide the range and extent of participation at each of the five levels. The five levels of engagement outlined on the IAP2 spectrum shown below will be utilised where appropriate to meet our commitment to the community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform: To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions. • Consult: To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions. • Involve: To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered. • Collaborate: To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and identification of the preferred solution. • Empower: To place final decision-making in the hands of the public. <p>The levels of community engagement will be identified on the IAP2 spectrum at the project planning stage following an analysis of the desired outcomes (see Appendix A). The community engagement plan will identify the most appropriate communication tool and timeframes to ensure the particular target group(s) are well informed of both the issue and the engagement opportunities.</p>	



3. Type of community engagement

Community engagement may include multiple levels of public participation, both at different stages of the process and because different stakeholders will choose to engage at different levels. The type or form of engagement practices undertaken can be broadly described as either deliberative or participatory. Many of Council's community engagement projects are likely to include both types of practice.

- Deliberative engagement

Deliberative engagement take place at the highest three levels of influence on the IAP2 spectrum, 'Involve', 'Collaborate' or 'Empower'. Deliberative engagement allows for discussion and the possibility of consensus if needed. The key features of a deliberative process are to come to a decision after considering all information and prioritising and weighing solutions. By its very name, 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. Some projects may require skilled facilitators to ensure a fair and equitable process.

Examples of deliberative practices are

- working with advisory groups
- online proposals and ideas are discussed by a panel of community members
- participants are asked to consider and prioritise ideas
- where a representative group participates in a series of sessions of information exchange in order to reach consensus.

Projects most suited to a deliberative approach include those where the outcome will have a far- reaching or long-term effect, and issues where there is considerable community concern or division about the alternatives.

- Participatory Engagement

Participatory engagement takes 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.

Examples of participatory practices are

- Surveys



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Polls, ideas gathering ○ Submissions <p>Participation at this level can be very broad, including by stakeholders who choose to track the project but offer no direct input.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Submissions Process <p>On matters where the only form of community participation is an invitation to make submissions, and engagement on the matter was formerly governed by section 223 of the <i>Local Government Act 1989</i>, Council will continue to proceed in a manner modelled on section 223 of the <i>Local Government Act 1989</i>.</p>																		
	<p>Legislative Environment</p> <p>Some elements of community engagement are directed by statutory requirements. In accordance with the <i>Local Government Act 2020</i> Council has a statutory obligation to develop a long-term Community Vision, Financial Plan and Asset Plan, as well as a four-year Council Plan. Under the <i>Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008</i> Council has a statutory requirement to develop a four-year Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan. Council will meet its statutory obligations by ensuring the community will have an opportunity to participate in the development of these plans.</p> <p>As a guide, the lowest type of community engagement to be implemented is set out below:</p>																		
	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr style="background-color: #c6e0b4;"> <th style="text-align: left; padding: 5px;">Subject</th> <th style="text-align: left; padding: 5px;">Community Engagement Approach</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Community Vision</td> <td style="padding: 5px;">Deliberative Engagement</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Council Plan</td> <td style="padding: 5px;">Deliberative Engagement</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">10 year Financial Plan</td> <td style="padding: 5px;">Deliberative Engagement</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">10 year Asset Plan</td> <td style="padding: 5px;">Deliberative Engagement</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Annual Budget</td> <td style="padding: 5px;">Participatory Engagement</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Making of Local Law</td> <td style="padding: 5px;">Participatory Engagement</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Acquisition or Sale of Land</td> <td style="padding: 5px;">Participatory Engagement</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Other matter (i.e Capital projects, service plans, strategies or Council policies)</td> <td style="padding: 5px;">Dependent upon complexity of the matter</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Subject	Community Engagement Approach	Community Vision	Deliberative Engagement	Council Plan	Deliberative Engagement	10 year Financial Plan	Deliberative Engagement	10 year Asset Plan	Deliberative Engagement	Annual Budget	Participatory Engagement	Making of Local Law	Participatory Engagement	Acquisition or Sale of Land	Participatory Engagement	Other matter (i.e Capital projects, service plans, strategies or Council policies)	Dependent upon complexity of the matter
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4.	<p>Community engagement planning and review</p> <p>To ensure effective community engagement, Council implements the following eight steps to design, deliver and complete community engagement.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Clearly define the purpose and scope of the community engagement: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1. Document the project purpose, scope, engagement objectives, timelines, budget and the decision to be made. Identify any risks. 1.2. Take into account relevant legislation in framing the community engagement. 1.3. Determine initial expectation of the level of participation on the IAP2 spectrum. 2. Understand stakeholder and community interests: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2.1. Identify the stakeholders who are affected by, interested in, or who can influence or inform the decision. 2.2. Understand how stakeholders are affected, the nature and intensity of their interest, and capacity and willingness to participate. 2.3. Consider if there are barriers to participation that need to be removed to ensure an appropriate balance of views. 2.4. Identify the preferred methods for engagement. 2.5. Ensure that participants understand their role and level of influence on the decision-making process. 3. Design an appropriate community engagement process: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3.1. Identify the stages of the engagement process and any negotiable or non-negotiable aspects. 3.2. Plan inclusive and accessible communications and methods to support the engagement. 3.3. Identify data requirements that are relevant and measurable, and how it will be analysed. 3.4. Plan how the data collected will be managed and ensure compliance with Council's privacy policy.
5.	<p>Informing the community of outcomes</p> <p>Council shall inform all participants of the outcome of any community engagement processes they have been involved in.</p> <p>Council shall make these outcomes publically available to a level of detail in alignment requirements of the <i>Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014</i> and any other relevant legislation.</p>



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6.	Charter of Human Rights	
	<p>This policy is deemed to be consistent with the <i>Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006</i>, in particular:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • S.13 – not to have their privacy interfered with • S18 – to take part in public life, by having the opportunity to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Participate in the conduct of Council decision making; and ○ Have access to Council and Council information. 	
7.	Roles and responsibilities	
	Responsibilities for implementing this policy are shared as follows:	
	Party	Roles and responsibilities
	Councillors	<p>Ensure that matters under consideration are informed by the planned level of community engagement.</p> <p>Balance the range of stakeholder views and concerns on an issue when making a decision.</p>
	Senior Management Group	<p>Consult with councillors to establish the engagement process to be used.</p> <p>Champion better practice community engagement through policy, process and leadership.</p> <p>Monitor implementation and compliance with this policy.</p>
	Managers	<p>Manage areas of responsibility to ensure community engagement is consistent with this policy.</p>
	Staff	<p>Undertake to make community engagement activities consistent with this policy.</p>



APPENDIX A

IAP2 SPECTRUM OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

IAP2's Spectrum of Public Participation was designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that define 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.

	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 concerns and aspirations are understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of a preferred solution.	To place the 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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