



Council Policy

Community Engagement Policy

Department/Unit	People, Communications & Governance	First Implemented	16 Feb 2021	Review Date	July 2028
Origin	Coordinator Communications & Engagement	Reviewed	April 2026	Version	3
Authorising Officer	Endorsement by Council	Effective From	21 July 2026	Records Reference	E1287 E7367

Purpose/Objective

To affirm Mansfield Shire Council's (Council's) commitment to engaging with the community, and relevant stakeholders, about matters that affect them.

The Policy aims to strengthen trust and confidence in Council to make evidence-based decisions that benefit the Mansfield Shire community through the consistent application of a transparent process.

The Policy expands on the requirements defined in the *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act), in particular how Council will enact the community engagement principles; and define and apply deliberative engagement.

The intent of the Policy is to improve the quality and effectiveness of Council's community engagement and to strengthen trust and confidence in Council by undertaking the following:

- ▶ Ensuring transparency and accountability in Council decision making;
- ▶ Creating genuine opportunities for members of the community to participate in matters that interest and affect them;
- ▶ Ensuring the diverse needs of the community are taken into account in decision making; and
- ▶ Encouraging and supporting the community to participate in civic life by giving them a direct line to decision makers.

Scope

This policy applies to the planning, design, implementation and evaluation of community engagement activities as directed by Council or legislated by the Act.

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.

Council will engage the Mansfield Shire community and stakeholders on matters that both interest and affect them, including but not limited to:

- ▶ Substantially changing or reviewing a Council service, program or facility;
- ▶ Reviewing or proposing a new Council policy, plan or strategy;
- ▶ Capital works projects including Council owned public buildings, assets or other infrastructure.

The Act requires that councils prepare specific strategic documents, or conduct specific activities, in accordance with its endorsed community engagement policy.

The Community Engagement Policy will specifically apply to the following Council documents and processes as nominated in the Act:

- ▶ A local law (Section 73)
- ▶ The Community Vision (Section 88)
- ▶ The Council Plan (Section 90)
- ▶ The ten-year Financial Plan (Section 91)
- ▶ The development or review of the Asset Plan (Section 92)
- ▶ The budget or revised budget (Section 96)

Community engagement relating to Community Vision, Council Plan, Financial Plan and Asset Plan must be undertaken with consideration of **Deliberative Engagement** practices.

The Policy applies to all Council employees, Councillors, contracted staff, consultants, volunteers and other authorised personnel working on behalf of Council.

Where a matter is assessed to only impact or be of interest to certain stakeholder/s, Council may choose not to open public engagement on some or all aspects of the activity or project.

Policy Statement

Local Government Act 2020 Principles for Engagement

Council commits to the principles noted in s56 of the Act, in the design and delivery of its community engagement activities:

- ▶ A community engagement process must have a clearly defined objective and scope;
- ▶ Participants in community engagement must have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation;
- ▶ Participants in community engagement must be representative of the persons and groups affected by the matter that is the subject of the community engagement;
- ▶ Participants in community engagement are entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement;

- ▶ Participants in community engagement are informed of the ways in which the community engagement process will influence Council decision making.

Our engagement approach

Council will:

- ▶ Provide the community with meaningful opportunities for consultation, in line with the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation
- ▶ Actively promote engagements across various platforms to ensure the entire community is notified of proposals or projects that may impact and/or interest them
- ▶ Engage at a point where feedback can and will be meaningfully utilised and influence decision making and scoping of the proposal or project
- ▶ Engage using clear and transparent language that provides sufficient information and context
- ▶ Ensure adequate time is allowed for those impacted by/interested in decisions to provide feedback
- ▶ Consider how to provide feedback to the community on the outcomes of the engagement process, recognising that this will vary at different points through the project delivery process

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION	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.

Figure 1: IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

Community engagement must be planned and involve an objective assessment of:

- ▶ Internal (Council) stakeholders and external stakeholders;
- ▶ Reputational risk of the activity or project;
- ▶ Complexity of the activity or project;
- ▶ Level of influence the community will have on the activity or project; and
- ▶ Council project timelines and budget/resources.

This assessment will inform the appropriate level of engagement based on the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum illustrated in Figure 1 and the tools and activities selected.

Where a project has a higher complexity or the community has a greater degree of influence, Council may undertake more than one stage of engagement.

Our engagement process

Council aims to build the capacity of its staff to effectively plan, implement and evaluate community engagement programs, suited to the needs of their project or situation.

All community engagement activities or projects will follow a defined sequential process:

Prepare	Step 1: Determine how the community can influence the outcome Step 2: Identify Stakeholders
Design	Step 3: Prepare for community engagement, detailing information to be supplied, survey questions to be asked (where appropriate) and communications planned to reach community
Execute	Step 4: Implement community engagement activities
Evaluate	Step 5: Evaluate community engagement activities
Report	Step 6: Communicate community engagement results

The Community Engagement Guidelines provide further information for Council Officers on the design and implementation of community engagement.

Communicating community engagement findings

Council recognises that closing the loop by providing feedback to participants is important in respecting the partnership and maintaining ongoing engagement with the community.

Council will review engagement findings and, where appropriate – on larger more complex engagements such as community plans and masterplans, report to Council how community feedback impacted project delivery

Council Meetings are open to the public and are live streamed from a Council endorsed online platform (excluding confidential items). Decisions are recorded in Council minutes. Council information and minutes are published on Council's website.

Our measures of effective community engagement

The annual community satisfaction survey is a trusted measure of the efficacy of Council's overall community engagement activity.

Individual engagement's can be measured as effective or not by looking at whether feedback was obtained in a timely way, giving the community an opportunity to influence Council decision making

Council recognises the fact that some projects, depending on scale and nature, capture the community more than others.

The efficacy of Council's overall engagement activity will be measured against the number of projects that go to the community for engagement representing the number of opportunities the community have to influence Council decisions.

Definitions

Term	Definition
Accessibility	Undertaking community engagement in a manner that considers needs of individuals and specific groups of people – for example: Culturally and Linguistically Diverse, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, vulnerable, aged and disabled.
Community	People who live, work, visit or utilise services and amenities in the Mansfield Shire local government area. Can also refer to: ▶ community of place (based on geographic location eg. Woods Point community) ▶ community of practice (based on common interests and activities e.g. bike riding community) ▶ community of identity (based on an individual's shared perspective e.g. part-time residents, particular age groups etc.)
Consultation	The activity of seeking input on a matter. See also "Engagement".
Deliberation	Deliberation is an approach to decision-making in which a representative sample of the population or group who will be impacted, 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.

Term	Definition
Deliberative Engagement	A distinct approach to involving people in decision-making. It is different from other forms of engagement in that it is about giving participants time to consider and discuss an issue in depth before they come to a considered view. See also “Deliberation”.
Engagement	Engagement is a planned process with the specific purpose working with individuals and groups to encourage active involvement in a project. Engagement refers to a range of opportunities open to stakeholders and the community to participate in a project. The word implies a level of connection suggesting that all levels of engagement involve commitment to the relationships between stakeholders.
IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation	The International Association for Public Participation’s Spectrum which helps define the public’s role in any participation process.
IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum	The IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum is designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public’s role in any community engagement program. The Spectrum shows that differing levels of participation are legitimate depending on the goals, time frames, resources and levels of concern in the decision to be made. However, and most importantly, the Spectrum sets out the promise being made to the public at each participation level. The Spectrum is illustrated in Figure 1 and Appendix 1 – Community Engagement Guidelines.
Municipal Community	The <i>Local Government Act 2020</i> (Vic) defines the term “municipal community” as: <i>“(a) people who live in the municipal district of the Council; and (b) people and bodies who are ratepayers of the Council; and (c) traditional owners of land in the municipal district of the Council; and (d) people and bodies who conduct activities in the municipal district of the Council.”</i>
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.

Term	Definition
Stakeholder	An individual or group involved in engagement because of impact, interest or responsibility to deliver on an outcome. Can also refer to external organisations and other levels of government involved in a decision. Always includes internal decision makers and implementers of decision outcomes.

Responsibilities

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 on a project where the need for community engagement has been identified

Overall responsibility for the application of this Policy is held by the Chief Executive Officer.

Managers are responsible for ensuring their staff comply with the principles, practices and any associated procedures of this policy. Management and employees are to be familiar with, and competent in, the application of this Policy, and are accountable for the delivery of this policy within their areas of responsibility.

The Communications Department is the owner of this policy. Any reviews of this Policy must be made in consultation with the Coordinator Communications & Engagement and Manager People, Communications & Governance.

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References / Related P

- ▶ *Local Government Act 2020 (Victoria)*
- ▶ Caretaker (Election) Period Policy
- ▶ Media and Communications Policy
- ▶ Community Engagement Guidelines
- ▶ IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation
- ▶ Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee Inquiry into Community consultation practices (March 2026)

Gender Impact Assessment

The Community Engagement Policy has had a Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) completed and is compliant with the obligations and objectives of the Victorian Gender Equality Act 2020.

Implementation

This Policy is effective from 21 July 2026.

Review Date

This Policy is to be reviewed by July 2028

Authorisation to Implement Policy

Signed: _____

Councillor

Witnessed: _____

Chief Executive Officer

Approval dated: 21 July 2026

Mansfield Shire Council reserves the right to review, vary or revoke this Policy at any time.