

Council Policy – Community Engagement

Responsible Directorate	Office of the Deputy Chief Executive Officer
Responsible Business Unit/s	Media and Communications
Responsible Officer	Manager Media and Communications
Affected Business Unit/s	All

Objective

The objectives of this policy are to:

- provide awareness of the Shire of Ashburton's (the Shire) principles toward community engagement and to set a framework for all community engagement activities conducted by the Shire.
- ensure Shire stakeholders are well informed about issues, strategies and plans that may directly or indirectly affect them.
- ensure Shire stakeholders have the opportunity to be involved in Council's decision making and policy development.
- seek the views of all stakeholders, selecting engagement methods that are flexible, inclusive and appropriate to those being engaged.
- provide members of the community with the opportunity to hear each other's opinions and to recommend appropriate solutions to community issues.
- ensure Council is meeting its legislative requirements regarding community consultation in all areas of its service delivery.
- recognise that there is diversity in the activities and projects Council undertakes and that the type of engagement should vary accordingly.

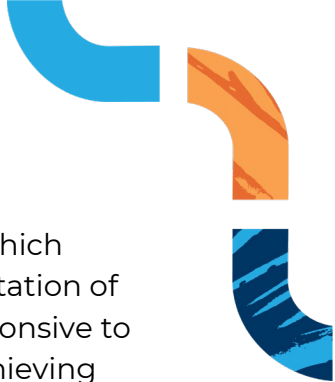
Scope

Applies to elected members, employees and community members.

Policy Statement

The Shire recognises that community engagement and the opportunity for communities to participate in planning for the future are vital in ensuring we meet our Strategic Community Plan objectives. Community engagement is not only good business practice but also important for good governance.

For this reason, the Council is committed to engaging with the community.



Community engagement is about involving the community in decisions which affect them, and it is critical to the successful development and implementation of acceptable policies and decisions and for improving services by being responsive to the needs of the community. Community engagement does not mean achieving consensus. However, it does involve seeking broad, informed agreement and the best possible solution for Council and the community.

The overarching principle is that the Shire will consult with our communities. Therefore, this policy applies not only to Shire's Strategic Planning processes but to all facets of our operations and projects.

Benefits of community engagement

There are numerous benefits from community engagement:

- Increased community awareness of Council's services, planning and programs,
- Increased awareness across Council of community views and the issues that should be considered as part of the decision-making process,
- Increased awareness of the needs, priorities, and diversity of the local community, which in turn ensures that Council's service provision and planning is well aligned with community expectations,
- Increased level of community ownership and acceptance of decisions,
- Council and the community working together to address local issues; and the potential for the Council to save time and resources.

Principles

The following principles underpin the Shire of Ashburton's approach to community engagement.

Be open and inclusive

- We recognise that community participation is an integral part of informed decision making,
- We promote and support opportunities for the community to actively participate,
- We encourage involvement from all stakeholders and will use engagement processes that are accessible and inclusive.

Create mutual trust, respect and be accountable

- We treat all stakeholders in the engagement process with respect and dignity,
- We will approach engagement from an impartial perspective,

- We will be accountable, accessible, and ethical in all dealings with the community,
- We will ensure a coordinated approach to community consultation to foster meaningful and effective engagement within the Shire.

Engage early and be clear

- Where possible we will seek early engagement and regularly involve the community in decision making,
- We will clearly communicate the objectives of the engagement process and provide community members with all available, relevant information as part of the consultation engagement process to ensure informed discussion,
- We will communicate the parameters of the engagement process to participants from the outset, including legislative requirements, Council's sphere of influence, conflicting community views, policy frameworks and context, budget constraints etc,
- We acknowledge that planning is a critical process to deliver successful outcomes and are committed to developing and implementing community engagement plans.

Consideration and feedback

- We are committed to demonstrating that we have considered all community contributions and relevant data, prior to making any decisions that affect the local community,
- We are committed to providing participants with feedback at key stages throughout the project and upon completion and how community input influenced the decision.

Skills and resources

- We recognise the skills required to undertake community engagement and will provide employees with opportunities for further skill development and training,
- We recognise that from time to time we may need to retain professional consultants to assist with certain engagement strategies.

Definitions

Nil

Relevant policies/documents

Council Policy – Communications and Media

Council Policy – Election Caretaker

Relevant legislation/local laws

Local Government Act 1995

Planning and Development Act 2005

Office use only				
Relevant delegations	Nil			
Council adoption	Date	11 October 2022	Resolution #	139/2022
Reviewed/modified	Date	20 August 2024	Resolution #	160/2024
	Date		Resolution #	
	Date		Resolution #	
	Date		Resolution #	
Next review due	2028			