



Community Engagement Policy 2025-29

1. PURPOSE

The Whitehorse community is full of people with different life experiences, skills, and backgrounds.

Council values everyone's participation and wants to hear different opinions, thoughts and views so that Council can make informed decision that impact the community. This policy sets out Council's commitment and approach to engagement including legislative requirements.

2. OBJECTIVES

- To engage with our diverse community, key stakeholders and internal staff in an inclusive, representative, genuine and appropriate way to inform key decisions, actions and strategies.
- Effectively engage locally about initiatives, programs, projects and policies that have an impact on the community now and into the future.
- To comply with the requirements of the Local Government Act 2020.

3. SCOPE

This policy applies to all forms of community engagement by Council and consultants acting on behalf of Council including but not limited to:

- Development and review of key strategic documents/plans such as the Community Vision, Council Plan, Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan, Financial Plan and Asset Plan.
- Making of Local Laws
- Making amendments to the Planning Scheme or deliberating on planning applications under the Planning and Environment Act 1987
- Development of Council policies, strategies and advocacy that directly impact the community

- Construction of and upgrades to Council facilities, places and spaces.

4. DEFINITIONS

Community engagement is a purposeful, inclusive two-way process that actively involves individuals and groups in decisions or actions that may impact them. It is distinct from general marketing, communications, or statutory notifications, which are governed by specific legislation and serve different functions.

5. POLICY

Why do we engage?

Community engagement is about harnessing a range and diversity of views and opinions, experience and expertise within our community to help Council make better, more informed decisions.

The benefits of effective community engagement include:

- Ensuring our community and key stakeholders can contribute to and influence decisions and actions that directly affect them.
- Assisting Council to understand the aspirations, priorities and concerns of the community which in turn informs our strategic planning.
- Assisting Council to deliver services, programs and infrastructure that meets the specific and evolving needs of our community.
- Helping to improve connections and understanding between Council and our community.
- Enhancing accountability of Council and developing trust and building relationships with the community by having more open and transparent decision making.
- Contributing a stronger sense of belonging and connection in the local community.
- Informing and building evidence for Council's advocacy agenda.
- Recognising that our community and key stakeholders are active citizens with agency who can contribute to decisions that impact them.

When do we engage?

Council will engage with the community and key stakeholders during various stages, including the planning stage, of initiatives, programs, projects and policies that have a direct impact on the community.

Council officers will consider other legislative requirements as listed in the table below (under Related Policies & Legislation) when determining when to engage, including Gender Impact Assessments.

Levels of engagement

Council will use the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum to define the levels of engagement and the amount of influence participants can expect to have in the process.

All levels of engagement on the spectrum play an important role when engaging with the community. IAP2's 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 (IAP2 2021).

Inform	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding Council's decisions and/or intentions.
Consult	To obtain public feedback on ideas, alternatives and/or proposals to inform decision making
Involve	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public issues and concerns are consistently understood and considered.
Collaborate	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including development of alternatives and the identification of preferred solutions.
Empower	To place final decision making in the hands of the public and build capacity in the community to lead change.

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Who do we engage?

For the purposes of this policy, Council defines the Whitehorse community as including everyone who lives, works, studies, plays, visits or invests in the City of Whitehorse.

Council recognises that each person is unique with their own identities, racial and cultural backgrounds and life experiences. Council also recognises that there are groups in the community, including:

- Children
- Young people
- Ageing people
- Digitally excluded people
- Diverse/multicultural people
- People with a disability
- People with diverse abilities and requirements
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- LGBTIQ+ people

who may need to be supported and provided different resources to be able to engage with Council. Council will explore ways to improve engagement with these groups based on each project's requirements, this may include use of translated materials and /or translators, attending advisory committees and outreach to local community groups/organisations.

How do we engage?

Council's Engagement Calculator (found in the Community Engagement Guide) will guide the amount/level of engagement.

Depending on the initiative, project, program, policy or plan, different engagement activities will be planned so that the most relevant and effective community engagement process is implemented. Project officers are responsible for developing and maintaining an Engagement Plan with support from Community Engagement Advisors.

To support engagement and communication with our diverse community, Council will aim to have all communication in plain language.

We recognise English is a second language for many community members. Interpreters are available when requested and material will be translated as recommended by Council's Community Engagement Advisors. To further support this, our Your Say platform offers translations into 15 different languages.

Council will give the community enough time to take part in any engagement activity.

Council will facilitate suitable times for engagement activities when scheduling consultations. The amount of time given will depend on how big or complex the project is and how many people are impacted.

Usually, Council will allow two to four weeks from the time we inform people until the deadline for feedback. All engagements should conclude by early December and avoid reopening until mid-January. Experience shows that during this period, community responsiveness decreases as people are on holiday or preparing for the festive season. Some projects may have legal requirements that Council will also consider.

All engagements above an 'inform' level must have a presence on Council's official online engagement platform, Your Say Whitehorse.

Minimum levels of engagement

The Local Government Act 2020 and other legislation sets out some minimum levels of engagement for key decisions which are summarised below:

Type of decision	Level of engagement*
Community Vision	Deliberative engagement (Collaborate – Empower)
Integrated Council Plan (including Council's Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan, Financial Plan, and Asset Plan)	Deliberative engagement (Involve – Collaborate)
Making a Local Law	Participatory engagement (Consult)

Buying Council land	Participatory engagement (Inform)
Selling Council land	Participatory engagement (Consult)
Leasing Council land	Participatory engagement (Inform)
Making amendments to the Planning Scheme or deliberating on planning applications under the Planning and Environment Act 1987	Participatory engagement (Consult) unless within exemptions under the Planning and Environment Act 1987
Other services, facilities, strategies, plans and policies	To be determined based on the scale, complexity and anticipated impact of the decision

*Depending on the decision's significance, complexity, and potential impact, a higher level of engagement may be required.

Exemptions

Consultation will not occur in circumstances which relate to operational matters, confidential or commercial in confidence information, or when Council must make emergency or safety related decisions.

Engagement principles

The Local Government Act 2020 (the Act) principles are legislated and guide all community engagement processes at Whitehorse.

Principle	What this means at Whitehorse City Council
Inclusion, access and constructive participation	<p>Participants will be representative of the persons and groups affected by the matter at hand.</p> <p>Council will work with the community to remove barriers to participation and ensure access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation.</p>

	<p>Council will ensure the process is conducive to constructive conversation between the community and Council.</p>
<p>Clarity of purpose and scope</p>	<p>The engagement process will have a clearly defined objective and scope.</p> <p>Participants in engagement processes will be informed of the ways in which the community engagement input and feedback will influence Council decision making and Council will share the results and outcomes of the process with the community.</p>
<p>Transparency, Informative and Clear</p>	<p>Participants will have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation.</p> <p>Participants are entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement.</p> <p>Ensuring that those participating in the community engagement activity understand the scope of the engagement, the decision-making process and any constraints on the process.</p>
<p>Integrity, Caring and Responsiveness</p>	<p>Approaching engagement with honesty and clarity and communicating results in plain English.</p> <p>The potential impacts of a project on the community will be identified, discussed and addressed within the scope of the engagement process.</p> <p>Challenges and opportunities related to participation in engagement opportunities will be identified and addressed.</p> <p>Input is responded to in a timely and constructive manner.</p>

	Officers are responsible for undertaking appropriate evaluation of engagement activities as part of their engagement plan.
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Deliberative engagement

Deliberative engagement is a particular 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.

Deliberation is one form of ‘high influence’ community engagement. The expectation is that Council will implement the recommendations to the greatest extent possible. However, it does not replace or take away from the decision-making powers of elected representatives.

Council will undertake deliberative engagement:

1. Where it is a legislative requirement (including Community Vision, Council Plan, Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan, Long Term Financial Plan and Asset Plan).
2. Where Council resolves that it wants its decision-making on a matter or initiative to be informed by this model of community engagement.
3. Where the matter has a certain level of complexity and/or significance to the community.

Reporting back to the community (closing the loop)

Transparency and accountability are central to our community engagement process. Council is committed to reporting back to the community about what we’ve heard and how feedback informed our decisions. Updates and engagement outcomes are the responsibility of project teams and will be provided via Your Say Whitehorse and other Council channels.

Further information and guidance about consulting with the community can be found in Council’s Community Engagement Guide.

6. RELATED POLICIES & LEGISLATION

Our engagement approach is primarily driven by the requirements of the Victorian Local Government Act 2020 (LG Act 2020). All engagement should consider addressing human rights and reducing discrimination. The following table presents key links, including but not limited to:

Legislation	How it relates
Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006	Recognises every individual's right to freedom of expression, participation in public life and to have their privacy maintained
Victorian Planning and Environment Act 1987	Sets minimum consultation requirements for planning permit applications and changes to the Planning Scheme
Victorian Subordinate Legislation Act 1994	Sets minimum consultation requirements for making local laws
Victorian Public Administration Act 2004	Promotes high standards of public service, integrity, and good governance
Victorian Equal Opportunity Act 2010	Promotes inclusive workplaces where everyone can participate free from discrimination
Victorian Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005	Sets clear standards in relation to protecting the safety of children (and their involvement in public life)
Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014	Provides for responsible collection and handling of personal information in the Victorian public sector. Outlines a set of principles that regulate the handling of personal information known as Information Privacy Principles.
Gender Equality Act 2020	Requires that defined entities promote gender equality and consider the impacts of gender equality on policies, programs and services that impact community.

Disability Act 2006	Provides the framework for addressing barriers and discrimination and attitudes and practices. It also governs the development of disability action plans.
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As we deliver engagement in line with this Policy, we will also consider other related Council policies and strategic documents, including:

- Media Relations Policy
- Privacy Policy
- Child Safe Standards
- Child Safety and Well Being Policy
- Children and Young People (0-25 years) Consultative Framework
- Gender Equality Action Plan

Internal Use Only

7. REVIEW

Responsible Manager: Manager Communities, Engagement & Integrated Planning

Date Adopted: TBC April 2025

Date of Next Review: April 2029

This policy has been reviewed for Human Rights Charter compliance.

FOR Policies listed on Council’s website, Section 8 Should be omitted

8. APPENDICES

(Includes Checklists and Procedures)