SCS-017 Community Engagement Policy

TRIM Reference:	D26/83214	Due for Review:	September 2036
Responsible Officer:	Coordinator Communications and Community Engagement		

1. Purpose

This policy explains how Council involves the community in decisions that impact them.

It follows the Local Government Act 2020, which says people must have a chance to share their views on local priorities and the future of their community. We go beyond what the law requires so we can work better with our community.

We value different views and experiences, and we commit to listening to our community.

This policy sets a clear and consistent way for Council to engage. It explains the big picture. It does not include every detail about how we do engagement. The Community Engagement Framework shows how we plan and run engagement in practice.

We developed this policy with input from our community.

2. Policy Principles:

Our Community Engagement Policy is informed by First Nations knowledge, ensuring connection to Country and culture shapes how we engage from the outset.

Message sticks have traditionally been used to share important information, build relationships and strengthen understanding between people and communities. We use this concept to guide our approach to engagement.

We developed the following principles through the creation of message sticks for Wadawurrung, Gulidjan and Gadubanud Countries. Our message sticks are physical representations of messages carried across time and place.

Just as message sticks carry messages, stories and responsibilities, this policy carries the values that shape how we engage with our community.

Message sticks are carriers of knowledge, responsibility and connection. The values they represent shape our engagement principles:

- **Communication, trust and understanding**
  We communicate clearly, openly and respectfully, ensuring people understand the purpose, process and potential influence of engagement.
- **Connection to Country and community**
  We build and sustain relationships that honour Country and recognise the deep and ongoing connection people have to land, waters and community.
- **Stories and responsibility**
  We listen deeply and value lived experience, ensuring that community knowledge informs and shapes decisions.

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- **Ask, and work together**
  We ask permission and engage in ways that are inclusive, culturally safe and respectful.
- **Accountability and responsibility**
  We close the loop with community, demonstrate how input has influenced decisions, and remain accountable for the commitments we make.

Local Government Act 2020 Community Engagement Principles

These principles are set by law and must be included. We still choose how we use them in our work.

Local Government Act 2020	Principle	Council's commitment
Principle 1	A community engagement process must have a clearly defined objective and scope	• Create engagement plans that follow this policy. • Provide enough time and funding to plan and carry out engagement. • Clearly define what is in scope, what is out of scope, and what cannot be changed.
Principle 2	Participants in community engagement must have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation	• Give clear information that is timely, accurate, fair and easy for everyone to access. • Create chances for people to meet, learn, share information and take part in meaningful discussions when appropriate.
Principle 3	Participants in community engagement must be representative of the persons and groups affected by the matter that is the subject of the community engagement	• Identify stakeholders early so Council understands which groups may be affected by a decision or plan. • Use communication methods that are easy to access so the right people know about how to influence Council decisions. • Include diverse voices and experiences, such as children and young people, older people, people of all genders, people with disabilities and carers, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, people from different cultural backgrounds, and LGBTIQA+ people. • Conduct a Gender and Equity Impact Assessment (GEIA) where needed to support participation.
Principle 4	Participants in community engagement are entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement	• Look for barriers to participation, such as accessibility needs, information formats, communication methods, language or timing. • Create plans that respond to these barriers and help more people take part.

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		• Make respect, inclusion and safety a priority for everyone involved in or affected by engagement.
Principle 5	Participants in community engagement are informed of the ways in which the community engagement process will influence Council decision making	• Choose the right level of engagement using the IAP2 Framework. • Explain how community views will be used in the decision-making process, and what decisions need to be made. • Share what was learned and what actions or decisions came from the engagement. • Clearly explain what cannot be changed. • Share what decisions we made and why. • Share information and outcomes in a clear and respectful way.

3. Scope

This policy applies to all community engagement done by Council or by people working for Council, including consultants and volunteers. We use this policy when work by Council or other agencies affects our community.

We will engage with community on:

- Strategic plans (Community Vision, Council Plan, Health and Wellbeing Plan, Financial Plan, Asset Plan and Road Management Plan).
- Making local laws
- Budget development
- Certain land transactions (when selling, exchanging, buying, or compulsorily acquiring council land)

We may also engage on:

- Council policies, strategies and plans that affect the community
- Potential changes to Council services or Council-owned public assets
- Major capital works projects not subject to a legislated process under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*
- Plans developed in collaboration with other agencies that may impact the community (for example emergency management plans)

This policy does not apply to engagement governed by other legislation, like planning permit applications and planning scheme amendments under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*.

4. Policy

Our commitment

We will engage with the community to help us make better, fairer decisions.

We will engage when:

- our decisions may affect people, services, or public places
- people or groups care about the issue

- community input can influence and improve the outcome
- the law or Council requires it

We may not engage when:

- we have recently asked about the same or a similar topic
- people cannot influence the outcome because of legal, technical, legislative and / or safety reasons
- the project has little or no impact on the community
- we are not the decision-maker
- we cannot share information because it is confidential

If we cannot engage, we will:

- share clear information, and
- explain why people cannot influence the decision

How we choose the level of engagement

We choose how to engage based on:

- how much the decision affects people
- how much influence engagement has on the result
- how complex or risky it is
- any legal requirements
- the time and resources we have

We use the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2 Spectrum) to guide this.

We write an engagement plan for each project.

Sometimes, sharing information is the best way to engage.

Our minimum standards

When we engage, we will:

- share clear and easy-to-understand information
- give people a fair chance to have their say
- allow enough time for feedback
- review and consider all feedback
- provide ways for people to speak directly to Council when needed
- tell people how their input influenced the decision

We will also ask for feedback and keep improving how we engage. We work respectfully with First Nations communities. We know this takes time and strong relationships. We engage early and follow cultural practices. We take responsibility for learning and understanding, so we do not place the burden on First Nations people. The Community Engagement Framework and Country Plans give us guidance on how to do this work.

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Types of Engagement

Council uses the IAP2 five main types of engagement. Each type gives the community a different level of influence in the decision. A First Nations lens shifts the IAP2 Spectrum from "levels of engagement" to "ways of working" based on respect, relationships and shared responsibility.

Inform: We share clear information early and explain why it matters to Country and community. (fact sheets, website updates, social media posts).

Consult: We ask the community for feedback, ideas or opinions so we can understand what people think. We take the time to listen properly (surveys, submissions, quick polls).

Involve: We work with the community during the process so all ideas help shape the options and solutions together (workshops, drop-in sessions, focus groups).

Collaborate: We partner with the community to explore options, test ideas and share decision making where we can (co-design sessions, working groups).

Empower: We support community to have a direct role in making recommendations or decisions on major plans or issues about their community (deliberative panels, community reference groups).

5. Roles and Responsibilities

Community engagement is everyone's responsibility. This includes Councillors, Council staff, contractors and consultants who work for Council.

6. Implementation Monitoring and Compliance

We will use and review this Policy alongside the Community Engagement Framework. Following it helps us meet our legal responsibilities and support better outcomes for the community.

7. Definitions

Community Engagement	Sharing information and asking people for input that can shape decisions. It is a planned process where Council works with community members and stakeholders to help guide actions or decisions on an issue or opportunity.
Community Development	Helping the community lead their own ideas and take action on what matters to them. We support them and build their skills so they can make change. The Community Engagement Policy works with the Community Development Policy. Together, they help us work with the community to get better results.
Community	People who live, work or visit Surf Coast Shire who engage as an individual speaking for themselves and their own interests.
Country	The lands, waters, skies, plants, animals, and places that First Nations peoples are connected to through culture, family, history, and responsibility. Country is a living part of First Nations identity and wellbeing.

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Deliberative Engagement	Using a process that helps people learn, think carefully and give well-informed views when Council develops the Community Vision, Council Plan, Financial Plan and Asset Plan. Deliberative engagement has these key features: • Real engagement with the community. • Good representation of different community groups in the process. • Showing clearly how we considered all views. • Providing clear, accessible information so people understand the issue, the decision-making process and how much influence they have. • Being open and transparent throughout the process.

8. Related Procedure

Community Engagement Procedure

Capital Works Engagement Policy. This policy replaces the Capital Works Policy. All community engagement requirements for capital works projects now sit within this policy.

Child Safe Workplace References

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Documents

- Surf Coast Shire Communications and Community Engagement Strategy 2022-25
- Surf Coast Shire Council Plan (inc. Health and Wellbeing Plan) 2021-25
- Community Vision
- Surf Coast Shire Child Safe Organisation Policy
- Surf Coast Shire Public Transparency Policy
- Surf Coast Shire Community Development Framework and Action Plan 2022-24
- Surf Coast Shire Governance Rules
- VAGO Public Participation in Government Decision Making
- Privacy and Data Protection Policy
- Community Engagement Framework (draft in progress)

Relevant Legislation

- Child Safe standards
- Equal Opportunity Act 2010
- Gender Equality Act 2020
- Health and Wellbeing Act 2008
- Local Government Act 1989
- Local Government Act 2020
- Subordinate Legislation Act 1994
- Public Administration Act 2004
- Road Management Act 2004
- Planning and Environment Act 2007
- Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006

Other References

- International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)
- Paleert Tjaara Dja, Let's make Country good together 2020-2030 - Wadawurrung Healthy Country Plan
- Meerreengeeye ngakeepoorryeeyt (meaning, Our Country, far seeing) - Eastern Maar Country Plan
- International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum of Public Participation

9. Privacy Statement

The Surf Coast Shire Council (Council) is committed to protecting your privacy and is bound by the Information Privacy Principles in the Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic) (PDP Act). Any personal information requested will be held in confidence and is being collected by Council for the purposes of informing Council business. We will not disclose your personal information without your consent, except where required or authorised to do so by law. Our privacy policy is available on our website and or contact Customer Service. If you wish to alter any of the personal information you have supplied to Surf Coast Shire, please contact us by sending an email to info@surfcoast.vic.gov.au.

Principles	Applicable to policy	If yes, provide details
Governance Principles	Yes	This policy helps Council make clear and fair decisions. It explains how we

(Consideration of the Governance Principles under s.9 of LGA 2020)		include the community and stay accountable.
Community Engagement (Consideration of Community Engagement Principles under s.56 LGA 2020)	Yes	This policy follows the community engagement principles. We plan our engagement, include the right people, share clear information, and show how feedback shapes decisions.
Public Transparency (Consideration of Public Transparency Principles under s.58 of LGA 2020)	Yes	This policy supports open and honest communication. We share information and tell people how we used their feedback.
Strategies and Plans (Consideration of Strategic Planning Principles under s.89 of LGA 2020)	Yes	This policy requires us to engage the community when we create key plans like the Council Plan and Financial Plan.
Financial Management (Consideration of Financial Management Principles under s.101 of LGA 2020)	Yes	This policy makes sure people can have a say on the budget and how we spend money.
Service Performance (Consideration of Service Performance Principles under s.106 of LGA 2020)	Yes	This policy helps us improve our services. We listen to feedback and use it to make things better.

10. Document History

Version	Document History	Approved by – Date
1	*Amended*	*Council Resolution –*

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