

Document Information

Type	Council Policy
Mayor	(Governance to insert signature and name post adoption)
Date Adopted	Council Meeting date month year (Governance to complete post adoption)
Responsible Officer	Manager Governance and Communications
Review Period	At least once every 4 years
Version Number	TBC

Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) Statement

Status to be confirmed prior to adoption.

In accordance with the Gender Equality Act 2020, a Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) must be undertaken when developing or reviewing any policy, program or service.

Definitions

Term	Definition
Community	People who live, work, study, play, visit, own property or have an interest in Bass Coast Shire, including individuals, groups, businesses and organisations.
Community engagement	A planned process through which Council informs, listens to, involves or collaborates with the community to inform projects, policies, services, plans and decision-making.
Council	Bass Coast Shire Council, including the Mayor and Councillors, Council staff and people undertaking work on Council's behalf.
Deliberative engagement	An engagement approach that provides participants with information and time to consider an issue, hear different perspectives, discuss options and contribute to informed decision-making.

Term	Definition
IAP2	The International Association for Public Participation and its internationally recognised Spectrum of Public Participation.

Purpose

Community engagement helps Council understand the needs, priorities, experiences and perspectives of the people and communities we serve to support informed decision making

This Policy sets out Council's commitment to genuine and purposeful community engagement and establishes consistent expectations for when and how we engage, and how community feedback contributes to Council decision-making.

Our communities of Bass Coast bring diverse experiences, ideas and local knowledge. We value this contribution and are committed to providing meaningful opportunities for people to have an informed say in matters that affect them.

Scope

This Policy applies to planned community engagement undertaken or commissioned by Council, including engagement delivered by Councillors, Council staff, consultants and contractors.

It applies to the planning, design, delivery and evaluation of engagement associated with Council projects, policies, plans, strategies, services and significant decisions.

The Policy supports delivery of the Council Plan and is a key implementation action of the Communications, Engagement and Advocacy Strategy 2026-2029.

Together, the Strategy and Policy establish a clear framework for how Council communicates, engages and advocates on behalf of the community. While the Strategy sets the strategic direction, the Community Engagement Policy will provide the practical principles and expectations that guide how Council engages with our communities in its decision-making.

Every engagement is different. The approach taken will be proportionate and reflect:

- the scope and significance of the matter;
- the level of impact on the community;
- the level of influence the community can have;
- who is affected or interested; and
- legislative or statutory requirements.

Everyday interactions with Council through customer service, correspondence, complaints and general enquiries are important ways for our community to provide feedback but are not considered planned community engagement for the purpose of this Policy.

Where specific statutory engagement requirements apply, Council will comply with those requirements.

Objectives

This Policy aims to:

- establish a consistent approach to when and how Council engages with the community;
- provide meaningful opportunities for community to provide informed input where there is a genuine opportunity to influence an outcome;
- ensure engagement is purposeful, transparent, inclusive, respectful, impactful, coordinated, connected and adaptive;
- ensure community feedback is appropriately considered alongside other information available to Council; and
- ensure engagement outcomes are clearly communicated and, where appropriate, how community feedback influenced a decision.

Statement

Policy commitment

Council will engage with the community when people are likely to be affected by, interested in or able to influence a matter or as required by legislation.

We will be clear about the purpose of engagement, what the community can influence and how feedback will be considered.

Community engagement is an important input into Council decision-making, alongside other considerations such as legislation, Council strategies and policies, research, expert and technical advice, available resources, financial implications and social and environmental impacts.

Engagement does not mean that every view can be reflected in the final decision. Our responsibility is to listen; understand different perspectives and ensure community feedback is appropriately considered alongside the other information available to Council.

Our engagement principles

The following Bass Coast Shire Council principles guide how we plan and deliver community engagement:

Purposeful: We engage for a clear reason and where there is a genuine opportunity for community input to contribute to an outcome.

Transparent: We are clear about what is being considered, what can and cannot be influenced, how decisions will be made and how community feedback will be used.

Inclusive: We seek a diverse range of perspectives and make particular efforts to involve people who may experience barriers to participating or who may not usually engage with Council.

Respectful: We value people's time, knowledge, lived experience and contribution and provide engagement opportunities that are safe, accessible and meaningful.

Impactful: We analyse and use community feedback to inform decisions and clearly explain how engagement contributed to the outcome.

Coordinated: We plan engagement across Council to reduce duplication, build on what we have already heard and avoid unnecessary engagement fatigue.

Connected: We share engagement insights across Council so they can inform future planning, communications, advocacy and service delivery.

Adaptive: We tailor engagement to the community and the matter being considered, evaluate our approach and continue to improve how we engage.

Council's approach is also guided by the community engagement principles set out under Section 56 of the *Local Government Act 2020*

- a) a community engagement process must have a clearly defined objective and scope;
- b) participants in community engagement must have access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation;
- c) participants in community engagement must be representative of the persons and groups affected by the matter that is the subject of the community engagement;
- d) participants in community engagement are entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement;
- e) participants in community engagement are informed of the ways in which the community engagement process will influence Council decision making.

When we engage

Community engagement will generally be undertaken when:

- a project, policy, plan, service, decision or proposed change may significantly affect the community;
- community knowledge, experience or feedback will help Council understand an issue, improve an outcome or advocate to state and federal government and other bodies;
- Council is seeking community views to inform future planning or decision-making;
- another level of government seeks Council or community input on a significant matter; or
- Council is required by legislation to undertake community engagement.

Council may also engage on other matters where community input would provide value.

There will be circumstances where consultation is not appropriate or there is little opportunity for the community to influence an outcome. This may include routine operational matters with minimal community impact, emergency or public safety responses, matters requiring specialist or technical expertise, confidential or commercially sensitive matters, clearly defined statutory responsibilities, or where the scale and cost of engagement would be disproportionate to the decision being made.

Where there is little or no opportunity for influence, Council will focus on keeping the community informed rather than consulting.

How we engage

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to community engagement.

Council will choose an appropriate level and method of engagement based on the significance and complexity of the matter, its likely impact, the level of community influence and the people who need to be involved.

We will use the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum - Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate and Empower - to help determine and communicate the appropriate level of community participation (Appendix 1).

We will provide a mix of online and in-person opportunities where appropriate and use accessible formats and clear language to support participation. While social media platforms are a key tool used by Council to promote engagement opportunities and outcomes, it is not generally used as a feedback tool. Feedback on Council's social media posts will be monitored and may be included for consideration if relevant/add value. Feedback on external social media posts will not be monitored or captured for consideration.

We will aim to meet people where they are by engaging in places and spaces they already use and by providing opportunities at times and in formats that recognise different circumstances and needs.

We will actively encourage our community to sign up to our online engagement platform to be informed directly about engagement opportunities that interest them.

Our community includes anyone who lives, works, studies, plays, visits, owns property or has an interest in Bass Coast Shire. Depending on the matter, engagement may involve the whole community or focus on particular locations, groups or stakeholders.

When planning engagement, we will identify those most affected or interested and consider barriers that may prevent people from participating. We will make reasonable efforts to hear from a diverse range of people -in addition to those who regularly participate in Council engagement.

Council will provide a reasonable opportunity for participation within the available timeframe, taking into consideration legislative requirements, urgency and project circumstances.

Engagement with First People's will be undertaken in accordance with Council's First Persons Framework and supporting First People's engagement guidance, recognising cultural authority, self-determination and the distinct role of Traditional Owners.

Community engagement and decision-making

Community engagement provides Council with valuable information about community experiences, priorities and perspectives to inform decision making

Decision makers may also need to consider:

- legislation and regulatory requirements
- Council strategies, policies and previous decisions
- research and data

- expert and technical advice
- financial and resource implications
- social, economic and environmental impacts
- population, demographic and service-use information.

Council will clearly communicate the role community engagement will play in a decision and will not create an expectation of influence where there is little or no opportunity for the community to change the outcome.

Unless specifically stated otherwise, community engagement is not a community vote. Feedback is considered collectively to understand community views, experiences, priorities and concerns along with other factors.

Deliberative engagement

Deliberative engagement provides participants with greater opportunity to explore information, discuss different perspectives and contribute to considered decision-making.

In accordance with the *Local Government Act 2020*, Council will apply deliberative engagement principles when developing the:

- Community Vision
- Council Plan
- Financial Plan
- Asset Plan.

Council may also use deliberative engagement for other matters where the scale, complexity or community impact warrants a more involved approach.

Feedback and closing the loop

Council will provide reasonable opportunities for people to contribute feedback in formats appropriate to the engagement.

Feedback will be reviewed and analysed and the key findings provided to relevant decision makers.

We will close the loop by communicating the outcome of engagement, the decision made and, where appropriate, how community feedback influenced that decision.

We will also provide updates where engagement relates to a longer-term project or initiative.

Collecting, managing, analysing and reporting community feedback are undertaken in accordance with legislative obligations, policies and internal processes

Related Legislation, Associated Information and Resources

Legislation

- *Local Government Act 2020 s55 - Community engagement policy*
- *Gender Equality Act 2020*

Associated Information

- Communications, Engagement and Advocacy Strategy 2026-2029
- Privacy Policy
- Social Media Policy 2020
- Data Breach Policy

Resources

- International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum of Public Participation

Revision History

Date	Version	Revision Description	Administered

Appendix I

IAP2 - Levels of engagement

We align our engagement activities with the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum of Public Participation (table below).

LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT					
	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
GOAL	To let the community know what we're doing and why.	To seek community feedback on what we're planning which may include their preference for different options. To use community feedback to inform decision making.	To work with the community to understand their priorities and involve them in designing potential solutions.	To work with the community to understand their priorities and work together to decide on preferred solutions.	To place final decision making in the hands of the community.
COMMITMENT	We will use a variety of methods to share information. We aim to make sure that information we share is accessible. We will share project updates.	We will provide opportunities for the community to share feedback that will be considered in decision making. We will provide clear information and reasonable timeframes for the community to share feedback.	We will provide opportunities for the community to work with us to identify priorities. We will incorporate feedback into our plans where possible. We will provide updates on how community input influenced decisions.	We will work alongside the community to develop solutions together.	We will implement what you decide.
TIMING	A Council decision is imminent or has recently been made	There is a proposal, concept, set of options, or draft to share.	A proposal, concept or draft is being developed.	Scoping of issues and opportunities at the start of a project.	When Council has delegated decision making to the community.
METHODS	Information sessions Community engagement reports	Surveys and submissions Listening posts Ideas boards Mapping tools Engage platform	Community meetings Pop-up engagement Interactive online tools, such as question-and answer forums	Workshops Focus groups Reference groups Advisory committees	Deliberative Polls Referendums

	Council meeting minutes Online and traditional media Engage platform E-Newsletters Letters and emails Fact sheets		Focus groups Workshops Working groups Advisory Committees Reference groups Community panel	Community panel	
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